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Processes of Governing
in
European Networks

by

Hester Kan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

September 2010

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines processes of governing in European co-operation networks.
I critique the argument that co-operation networks provide a depoliticized space for exchange and learning, by examining how the nature of the network polity, politics and policy is shaped by the interrelations among actors and institutions involved. I analyse how actors engage in European network processes from the national level. Moreover, I explore the collective dynamics among network members within their shared network surroundings. The research design used in-depth interviews with individual network actors, as well as the distribution of a questionnaire across network members at large. The research compared two networks in the domain of public services (The European Public Administration Network and The Public Employment Services Network) using two countries involved in both networks (The UK and The Netherlands) as case studies.

I argue that although co-operation networks are informal and intergovernmental in status, network processes are political in nature. The findings reveal that processes take place in a politicized context: European network processes are linked into the national organisational territories of network actors that are involved in national institutional coordination, which shape the institutional capability of network actors as well as steer the national impact of network activities. Second, processes are characterised by struggles among actors. National actors pursue double level games, strategically balancing the pursuit of both their national organisational as well as their European network interests. Collectively, actors compete over the coordination of network processes which take place in a context of political proceedings and divisions of power among network members. The struggles among actors in relation to their institutional territories affect the heart of network processes: processes are characterised by contestation over the objectives and outcomes of network activities.

The findings challenge the argument that learning and co-operation is the practice in European network governance, by demonstrating the inherently political nature of European network processes. Furthermore, the findings provide critical input into Europeanisation debates by drawing attention to double level games and hierarchies as ongoing fundamental features of European governance.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXAMINING PROCESSES OF NETWORK GOVERNING

In this thesis I examine processes of governing, with the focus on network governing in the EU. I argue that European network processes are political in nature: network processes take place in a politicized context, and are characterised by struggles among actors and contestation over the objectives and outcomes of network processes. This study contributes to the network governance literature in general, and primarily to the literature on European network governance and debates within European governance on Europeanisation.

With regard to the literature on network governance, my contribution consists of providing understanding of network *processes* in order to critically assess notions that networks offer a depoliticized space that fosters processes of a neutral nature. Networks are predominantly characterised as being self-organised and informal, with network members being equal and in a heterogenic relationship and processes fostering collaboration and a common purpose (see Rhodes, 1992, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Sorensen and Torfing 2007). As research has mainly concentrated on assessing the formal institutional features of networks, there is so far insufficient understanding of the characteristics of network processes in practice.

In this thesis I provide a dynamic account of how the nature of network processes is shaped by the interrelations among actors and institutions involved. I explore network processes in a holistic manner, following the distinction made by Bähr and Falkner (2007) that governance is concerned with polity, politics and policy. This implies that I examine both the nature of the institutional territory of networks (polity), the role divisions among actors (politics) as well as the nature of policy steering (policy). I explore how network processes are linked into the various institutional territories of actors, the struggles taking place among actors and how network processes are contested in nature. I build on recent empirical studies on the functioning of partnerships, stressing how hierarchical steering and power differences come into play (see Taylor and Balloch, 2001; Rummery, 2002; Whitehead, 2007).

1.2 EMPIRICAL FOCUS: PROCESSES IN EUROPEAN CO-OPERATION NETWORKS

The empirical focus of this thesis is on European networks, contributing to the literature on European network governance. The territory of the EU is particularly relevant for exploring European network processes, as the interrelations among actors and institutions unfold in a highly politicized environment. EU governance is characterised by multi-level governance, involving both national and European actors (Hooghe and Marks, 1999).

In this research the focus is on informal and intergovernmental co-operation networks among civil servants in the domain of public services reform. The existence of co-operation networks has remained relatively overlooked within European network governance research. Until now research has focussed on networks that are embedded in formal modes of governance, being the legislative, distributive or learning procedure (see Esmark, 2007). In particular the latter procedure, which applies to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), has received much attention within European governance research during the last decade (see Trubek, 2000; Pochet, Porte and Room, 2001; Carmel, 2003; Radaelli, 2003; Zeitlin, 2005; Büchs, 2007). The OMC embodies the shift to 'softer' modes of governance, with the emphasis on fostering convergence through learning on an intergovernmental basis rather than the pursuit of common policy on the basis of a supranational EU mandate (Jacobsson, 2004; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010).

Co-operation networks mirror some of the features of the OMC, but are distinct in nature: they operate in policy domains where no formal EU mandate exists for intervention. These networks are composed of civil servants of various rankings, accompanied by the Commission and aim to foster co-operation among its members. The specific focus is on two co-operation networks in the field of public services: the European Public Administration Network and the Heads of Public Employment Services Network.

My contribution to the literature on European network governance is to provide insight into the characteristics of European networks in practice. I critically assess notions that informal European networks provide a depoliticized space for exchange and learning among civil servants who are concerned with advancing common goals

rather than their own interests and organisational mandates. Exploring European network processes, I examine how processes are linked into the various national organisational territories of actors, the struggles taking place among actors and how European network processes are contested in nature. Although the study of governing processes takes place within the context of co-operation networks, the findings will be of relevance to other informal networks operating within the EU, notably within the context of the OMC.

I contribute to debates on Europeanisation by reference to the analytical approach that is taken in this research. This approach analyses and assesses how European policies and actions impact on the national level and has been very influential within research on the OMC (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; Zeitlin, 2005). In recent years new approaches have given input to Europeanisation debates by paying attention to how national actors strategically influence processes from the national level (Kvist and Saari, 2007; Büchs, 2008; Verschraegen, 2009).

I build on this bottom-up approach, by examining the engagement of national actors in depth. However, I do not only examine the objectives and strategies of actors in European networks but extend the level of analysis to how these are coordinated and facilitated from the national organisational level. I examine how actors are simultaneously involved in managing both their national organisational as well as their European network interests, approaching individual actors to be involved in a double level game following the influential concept of Putnam (1988).

The study of individual agency is important in its own right, but more crucially to acquire understanding of how the interactions among network actors are shaped. Although I do not examine the interactions between actors on an individual basis, I examine in this research the collective dynamics among network actors. Here we engage on relatively unexplored territory of research within European network governance. In this thesis I explore the struggles among actors over coordination, the divisions of power among network members as well as the nature of network proceedings.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

This all leads us to the questions this research aims to answer:

What are the key characteristics of European networks in practice, how are they shaped and what are their implications for our understanding of European network governance?

- *To what extent are European network processes embedded into and steered from the national organisational territories of network members?*
- *To what extent do actors pursue their own interests and struggle for power?*
- *To what extent are European network processes contested in nature?*

I examine these questions adopting a case study design, using qualitative methods. The research questions are addressed by treating each network as a case study, and I conducted document analysis, in depth interviews, and a network questionnaire in order to access interpretations and perspectives of network members with a view to understanding network processes on the actual meanings of network members themselves.

Empirical analysis is first of all concerned with the analysis of the formal processes as have been agreed by network members in the EUPAN and HOPES network. This has been conducted on the basis of document analysis. I analysed network documents, examining how network procedures, objectives and role divisions have been formally laid down by network members. Against this background the heart of analysis takes place, concerned with analysing the actual interactions among network members together.

The analysis of informal processes begins by examining how network members give meaning to their individual network engagement, concerned with how they view the general purpose of the network, their objectives and network strategies, as well as their modes of national institutional coordination, national institutional capability and implementation on the national level. Data collection took place on the basis of in depth interviews with network members involved. Case studies were selected for this purpose, which are concerned with the UK and the Netherlands. These countries

contrast in their attitudes towards EU membership at large as well as general structures and modes of national governance, factors that are drawn into the comparative analysis of network agency. The meanings of other network members are brought into analysis as well, in order to contextualise the views from the case studies. Data collection took place on the basis of a questionnaire, which has been distributed across the networks at large. Although I do not offer a holistic analysis, I examine two crucial aspects of network engagement of other members: the objectives they pursue as well as how they view the impact of their network activities.

From the analysis of individual agency, we turn to the analysis of the collective dynamics among network members, examining the struggles over coordination, divisions of power among network members, and the nature of network proceedings. The data are primarily based on the views of actors from the UK and the Netherlands, and are subsequently contextualised by the views of other network members as expressed in the network questionnaire.

1.4 RELEVANCE FINDINGS FOR EUROPEAN NETWORK GOVERNANCE DEBATES

My findings are relevant for debates on European network governance in three ways. First of all, I assess the nature of co-operation networks and broaden current institutional differentiations of European networks by locating co-operation networks within current classification schemes. I discuss the main features of co-operation networks, and the validity and relevance of divisions between informality and formality in distinguishing modes of governance.

Second, I provide understanding on the particular determinants that come into play in shaping network processes on the micro level. I offer insight into the network engagement of actors from the two case studies -the UK and Netherlands- concerned with how they pursue their interests and strategies and how these are shaped. Furthermore, I give insight into the collective dynamics and processes in both the EUPAN as well as HOPES network. Besides the focus on single cases, I also provide understanding of network processes on a deeper level. On the basis of a synthetic analysis I compare the engagement of both countries as well as the processes in the two networks, examining how we can explain differences and similarities that arise.

Third, I provide theoretical perspectives on the overall nature of European network processes, assessing the nature of the polity, politics and policy. I assess the extent to which European network processes take place in a politicized context with reference to theoretical perspectives on networked governance and multi-level governance. I critique notions of networked governance and point out how hierarchical steering comes into play with national institutional territories involved in shaping and steering network processes.

Furthermore, I assess how European network processes are characterised by struggles among actors, with reference to theoretical perspectives on the strategic behaviour of individual actors as well as debates on the intergovernmental and supranational divisions of power. I critique the notion that individual actors are equal and involved in networks without organisational mandates. Instead I assert that actors pursue double level games. Notions that the relations among actors are characterised by consensus and informality are assessed and challenged for not taking into account the actual meanings of actors as well as existing divisions of power among network members. With actors collectively competing over ownership of European networks, I point out that network coordination is not static, but needs to be approached as a shifting balance between intergovernmental and supranational steering.

Finally, I assess how European network processes are contested in nature and the conceptual implications of this. I critique the dominant emphasis on the formal objective of learning within European network governance and argue that actors use networks as platforms to pursue other objectives beyond the objectives that have been formally agreed. This implies that the conceptual map on network objectives is broadened, incorporating concepts as showcase and uploading. In terms of outcomes, I critique the notion that a lack of congruence or 'misfit' between the European and national level determines the actual processes of impact. Instead I shed light on the role that actors play in steering processes of implementation on the national level, determined by their own national organisational agendas.

1.5 CHAPTER STRUCTURE OF THESIS

This thesis is structured as follows. The next and second chapter is concerned with outlining the conceptual and analytical approach on networks I adopt in this research. The chapter begins by introducing the concept of networks in the broader field of governance. From here I outline the conceptual and analytical focus on networks as processes, outlining a holistic approach covering the polity, politics and policy of network processes. I assert that the institutional territory of networks needs to be approached from an open institutionalist perspective, incorporating the role of other institutional arenas notably the organisational premises of network members. How actors manage this wider institutional territory is the subsequent focus of attention, adopting an actor-centred approach. I approach individual actors as being involved in double level games whereas collectively the struggles among actors need to be explored. The struggles among actors in relation to their broader institutional environment touch the heart of network processes of network governing, impacting on the direction of policy steering. I put forward that research needs to examine potential contestation over objectives, as well as examine how actors steer the impact of network processes.

In the third chapter this conceptual and analytical perspective will subsequently be applied to the territory under empirical focus: the European Union. I will introduce my focus on European network governance within the larger field of European governance, zooming in on the specific institutional arrangements that are the focus of this study: European co-operation networks. I outline the overall analytical perspective I take on European network processes, as well as apply my perspective on the polity, politics and policy of European network processes.

In the fourth chapter I outline the methodology and case studies of this thesis, concerned with the reasons for adopting a qualitative methodology, the choice and underlying motivations for the case studies, the specific methods that are adopted in relation to the analytical perspective of this thesis as well as an overview of the conduct and design of empirical research.

From here we move on to chapters five and six that form the core of this thesis: the empirical data of the two co-operation networks under study, demonstrating the extent

to which European network processes take place in a politicized context, are characterised by struggles among actors as well as contestation over objectives and outcomes. The fifth chapter is concerned with the European Public Administration Network, and the sixth chapter with the Heads of Public Employment Services Network. Within the framework of formal agreements among network members, I will present the findings of individual network engagement of my case studies -the UK and the Netherlands- subsequently contextualised by the views of network members at large. In the remaining part I address the collective dynamics among network members, on the basis of the views of actors from the UK and the Netherlands as well as those of network members at large.

From the analysis of case studies individually, chapter seven is concerned with a synthetic analysis of these. By comparing network engagement of actors from the UK and the Netherlands as well processes of the EUPAN and HOPES network, a deeper understanding is provided how individual agency and the nature of European network processes are shaped and how we can explain the differences and similarities that arise.

In chapter eight I move back to the level of theory, offering theoretical reflections on European network processes on the basis of the findings of this thesis. The chapter examines how co-operation networks fit into schemes of institutional differentiation within EU governance, followed by a theoretical assessment of the nature of network processes in these and the implications for wider EU governance.

Chapter nine is the final chapter of this thesis and is concerned with an overall conclusion. I offer an overall assessment of the contribution of this thesis and discuss the implications for future research within EU network governance as well as for European policymaking and governing.

CHAPTER 2: NETWORKS AS GOVERNING PROCESSES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I outline my conceptual perspective on networks within the broader context of governance. In this thesis I approach networks as processes of governing, which processes take place in a politicized context and are characterised by struggles among actors and contestation over the content of network processes.

The chapter will commence by approaching networks in the larger context of governance research. I will highlight my conceptual perspective on governance, taking a holistic, dynamic and political approach. Holistic as I approach governance from the various dimensions of polity, politics and policy, following Bähr and Falkner (2007). Dynamic as I do not view governance and the dimensions of governance to be a static phenomenon, but as a process of governing. Political, as I regard the nature of governing processes to be defined by the interrelations among actors and institutions involved.

From here, we subsequently move to the specific objects of analysis in the field of governance: networks. I will assert that networks are a contested concept. The starting point of this research is to regard networks as an institutional arrangement. Rather than conceptualising networks on the basis of its formal institutional features (see Torfing and Sorensen, 2007) however, I approach networks as a process which needs to be empirically investigated in order to expose its nature. Crucially, by examining the interrelations among actors and institutions, I place politics at the heart of network governance and challenge normative conceptions of networks as a 'neutral' space.

The core of the chapter is concerned with conceptualising the nature of network processes. In line with my approach on governance, I examine network processes from a holistic perspective, following the dimensions of the polity, politics and policy. Starting off with the polity, the institutional territory of network processes, I criticise the literature for taking a decontextualised approach; viewing networks as self-organised and consisting of institutional boundaries (Rhodes, 2000, 2007; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Torfing, 2007). Instead I approach processes to be taking place in a

politicized context, with various institutional arenas involved in steering network processes. The main emphasis is placed on the role of the organisational territories of network actors.

This broader polity does not stand on its own however, but needs to be understood from the perspective of actors who manage and steer the polity with their own agendas and strategies. In essence, individual actors are approached as being involved in a double-level game, following the influential concept of Putnam (1998), simultaneously managing both their network as well as organisational interests. Collectively, network actors are involved in struggles, competing over the coordination and ownership of network processes.

Finally, I examine the nature of the policy dimension of network processes. This is concerned with how struggles among actors in relation to their broader institutional environment affect the content of network processes as well as its outcomes on policy. This dimension has so far remained relatively unacknowledged, with networks predominantly examined as institutional entities on the basis of its policy and politics features. With regard to the nature of policy steering, the dominant notion is that network processes foster a 'common purpose' and network actors collectively 'support' the implementation process (Torfing, 2007). Contrastingly, I put forward that network processes need to be regarded as contested. Research needs to examine how actors might pursue their own objectives and implementation modes beyond those formally agreed, competing with each other over the direction of network processes.

For now, I begin with outlining my conceptual approach on governance.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING GOVERNANCE AS A PROCESS

During the last decade the concept of governance has emerged as a ubiquitous concept, used in various academic disciplines as well as in policymaking arenas. The meaning of governance is contested however. Different disciplines have their own approaches on governance (see Pierre, 2000; Kjaer, 2004) and generally do not problematise the lack of conceptual clarity. Governance is predominantly defined in terms of 'coordination' and 'steering'. Pierre (2000: 3-4) for example defines

governance as 'sustaining coordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives such as political actors and institutions, corporate interests and transnational organizations'.

The dominant focus of governance research has been on examining and assessing the formal institutional features of governance. This has provided us with theoretical models of governance, but not so much with an understanding of *governing processes*, the actual reality of governing on the ground. So far governance has been approached as a 'neutral' activity, concerned with coordination and management of actors and institutions. Much more emphasis needs to be placed on how power comes into play in processes of governing, and how processes are shaped by the interrelations among actors and institutions involved. To approach and examine governing as a political activity is all the more important as the 'neutral' nature of governance has been exploited in arenas of policymaking and politics. It has proved a useful vehicle in taking politically sensitive agenda's forward.[1]

This thesis is concerned with examining governing processes, and exposing the political reality of governing. As my concern is with the dynamics of governing, I do not attempt to define governance as such. Instead I provide a conceptual lens on how to conceptually approach governance. I take the starting point that governance is concerned with 'polity', 'politics' and 'policy', as outlined by Bähr and Falkner (2007). Polity is concerned with the institutional territory of governance, comprising the rules and procedures and institutional modes of steering. Politics is concerned with actors and constellations and role divisions among them. Policy on the other hand refers to objectives, activities and outcomes. It is about modes of steering towards outputs.

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[1] For example Clarke and Newman (1997) argue how within the context of the UK changing processes of governance involve the remaking of state power and its extension through new means. Political agendas in relation to governance are not only bounded to the national level, but also cover international arenas. Hewitt de Alcantara (1998) demonstrates how since the 1990s international lending organisations have used the concept of governance for ideological persuasion of a social political agenda that fell beyond their economic mandate.

The approach of Bähr and Falkner is useful as it provides a holistic conceptual map of governance, covering the various aspects governance is concerned with. I am however critical about the static and apolitical assumptions underlying their approach which mirror the prevailing stance in the governance literature. The distinction between polity, politics and policy provides a good analytical starting point, but in practice these three dimensions should not be treated as separate but be regarded as intertwined. This counts in particular for politics. Rather than a separate dimension, politics cuts through the other two dimensions, as the rules, actor constellations and policy steering are subject to political battles. In essence, what is ignored is the active role that actors themselves play in shaping governance.

This implies that rather than something 'static', containing fixed political, policy and polity features, governance needs to be approached as a *process*. Actors are actively involved in shaping the rules, objectives and actor constellations of governing. They do so in relation to the institutional arenas that are involved in governing. With actors and institutions shaping processes of governing, the implication is that governing is not a neutral but a political activity. The purpose of this research is to examine how the political nature of governing processes unfolds in practice. This will be pursued in the context of specific objects of analysis in the field of governance, concerned with networks.

2.3 CONTESTED TERRITORY OF NETWORKS

Networks are often equated with the emergence of governance (Rhodes, 2000). They are regarded as prominent features of governance in contemporary societies. Networks are viewed as the appropriate coordination mode for dealing with a social and political world, a world which has become more fragmented, complex and dynamic (Kooiman, 1993, Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). The essential characteristic of networks is that they are centred on trust and cooperation rather than price competition as in markets or administrative orders as in hierarchies (Thompson et al 1991: 15.). Networks are often regarded as a response to the failings of market forms of coordination, like markets themselves they have been approached as a response to the shortcomings of coordination through bureaucratic hierarchies (Rhodes, 1997; Stoker, 2000).

The conceptual territory of networks is contested. Networks have been conceptualised in various domains, giving rise to concepts varying from 'social networks', 'economic networks', as well as 'policy networks' and 'governance networks'. Here I limit myself to networks that have a role in governing and contribute to public policy. Within these boundaries a coherent body of literature on networks, with scientists communicating in the same 'space', is lacking too however. One of the reasons that the concept of networks is contested is that its roots are diffuse, grounded in the literature on 'policy networks'.

Within the literature on policy networks various conceptions exist on the notion of policy networks. Although some scientific traditions already approached policy networks in the sphere of a change in governance, the dominant notion was to define policy networks as a form of interest representation. In this approach networks are regarded as a specific type of relationship between interest groups and the state, marking a distinction from the pluralist and corporatist approach (Marsh, 1998; Börzel, 1998). Whereas pluralism and corporatism in essence define a specific type of relationship between interest groups and the state (either no fixed relationship, or preferential treatment), networks are concerned with various modes of relationships that differ across sectors in the polity.

These days governance has encapsulated these different traditions, as well as added new meanings due to different disciplinary approaches within governance. For scientists in public administration, networks are regarded as a form of steering towards outputs. As a mode of governance they are generally distinguished from public administration relying on hierarchic steering and new public management models concerned with market steering (Bovaird, 2003). Covering the relationships between various actors in the provision of public services, governance is referred to as being about 'networked governance' (Glendinning, Powell and Rummery, 2002). Empirically, networks have been translated into partnerships, referring to interagency, interprofessional, collaborative or joined-up working in the field of public services (Balloch and Taylor, 2001: pp. 6-7).

On the other hand, political scientists regard networks as a new form of structuring authority and power. Networks are regarded as structures comprising a wide variety

of actors from state institutions to organized interests in a given policy sector (Pierre and Peters, 2000: 19-20). Torfing (2007: 5) defines governance networks as 'a relative stable, horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors who interact through negotiations that take place within a relatively institutionalised community which is self-regulating within limits set by external agencies and contributes to the production of public purpose'. Rather than the perspective of networked governance, characterising the entire polity of public services provision, political scientists approach networks as specific institutional arrangements (Esmark, 2007; Torfing, 2007).

2.4 APPROACHING NETWORKS AS PROCESSES OF GOVERNING

Conceptually approaching networks in this research, my starting point is to approach a network as an institutional arrangement, following the approach within political science. However, in my research I equally draw on research that is carried out within the field of public administration. Within the context of research on the working of partnerships, extensive empirical research has been carried out that provides crucial insights into the actual working and processes of governing. This is all the more important for this research, as in the examination of actual governing practices lies the contribution of this thesis.

My contribution is not so much concerned with refining a definition of networks as an institutional arrangement as is provided by Torfing: in my view, this definition should be a *starting point* of research rather than the end for the following reasons. First, currently networks are conceptualised as fixed institutional entities. This gives us a description of the formal institutional features of networks, such as the composition of members, the formal objectives and rules that are in place. But it does not provide us with understanding how the features of networks are shaped in practice, concerned with the nature of actual network *processes*. In this thesis I approach networks as processes, emphasising the dynamic nature of governing and examining the actual interactions taking place.

My contribution therefore is concerned with shedding light on the role of actors and institutions in shaping network processes. By doing so I will expose the political

nature of network processes, examining the politicized institutional context in which processes take place, uncovering the struggles among actors and how network processes are contested in nature. This is of crucial importance within the literature on network governance as current definitions tend to depoliticize processes: networks are conceptualised as self-organised and informal, with actors as autonomous, equal and interdependent and policy steering concerned with fostering co-operation and deliberation towards a common purpose (Rhodes, 1992, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Torfing, 2007). These neutral notions do not do justice to how politics comes into play in network governing. The existence of power and power relations is notably absent within the network governance literature (Koppenjan, 2007). Similarly, within the context of partnerships, the existence of power has been insufficiently addressed (Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Glendinning, Powell and Rummery, 2002; Davies, 2007).

Current neutral notions on network governance are often rooted in strong normative ideas. This needs to be understood in the context of ideological changes in politics and society, with networks put forward as fitting into a new form of politics, moving beyond the 'old' ideological commitments to the market and the state. Network governance appears to signify a move towards pragmatic solutions to policy problems, as well as a collaborative and integrative orientation (Clarke and Glendinning, 2002: p. 33). Whitehead (2007: p.7) points out that within the UK the emergence of partnerships have been accompanied by the construction of a political ideal, or idyllic political structure. As such, networks often carry normative connotations, implying that there is a discrepancy between formal, abstract models and empirical reality. This stresses the need for more critical research on the actual governing practices within networks.

Examining network processes, I offer a holistic and critical perspective on the nature of network processes. My perspective is holistic as I examine network processes from different angles, looking at the nature of its polity, politics and policy. Most attention has so far focussed on the institutional features of networks, conceptualising networks as an institutional architecture. I equally draw attention to examining the processes that take place inside networks and the objectives that actors aim to achieve. My perspective is critical as I examine not only the formal properties of the institutional territory, actor constellations and objectives of networks, but how these are steered by

actors in practice. My particular contribution lies in shedding light on how objectives need to be approached as contested, rather than as agreed and given.

In the remainder of this chapter I will outline my perspective on the three central dimensions that are distinguished in this thesis: the polity, politics and policy of network processes. By exploring the politicized context in which network processes take place, the struggles among actors as well as contestation, new objects of analysis are being drawn into research. Starting off with shedding light on the polity of networks, the important role of the national organisational background of network actor is drawn into the scope of analysis.

2.5 THE POLITY OF NETWORK PROCESSES

Networks are predominantly approached as self-organising entities, offering a relatively institutionalised environment in which interactions take place (Rhodes, 2000, 2007; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Torfing, 2007). Interactions within the network polity are characterised by horizontal steering with negotiations taking place on an informal and co-operative basis.

In my view these notions of the network polity are problematic on two points. First, the network polity is conceptualised as being 'closed', to be consisting of institutional boundaries. In essence, network processes are approached in a decontextualised manner, not doing justice to how network processes take place in a larger institutional context and how this context is politicized. Rather than approaching networks as closed entities, in this thesis I take an open institutionalist perspective on the polity of networks, examining the connections of networks to other institutional arenas and the role they play in shaping and steering network processes.

Here we touch on my second point of critique on conceptualisations of the network polity: current conceptions of the picture of network steering are too simplistic, with network steering characterised as being horizontal, shaped by the interactions among actors within the network territory who engage on a so-called equal basis. This overlooks how other modes of steering come into play, and how network processes are steered from 'outside' the network polity. The complexity and role of this institutional context requires examination, and an open perspective is needed on the

various forms of steering that come into play beyond horizontal network steering, including hierarchical steering.

In this thesis I draw particular attention to how networks are embedded into and steered from the organisational territories in which network actors are positioned and from which they engage in networks. This implies not only a new perspective on the network polity but also that new objects of analysis are being drawn into network analysis, which I will elaborate on below.

2.5.1 INVOLVEMENT OF THE ORGANISATIONAL TERRITORIES OF NETWORK ACTORS

A key characteristic of networks is that they can comprise different actors from various organisational backgrounds. This implies that actors engage in networks from different institutional settings with different interests and objectives at heart. Much more attention needs to be given to the importance of this institutional link than has so far been given within the network governance literature. Within the context of empirical research on partnerships in the field of public services this link has been explored however, demonstrating how the different backgrounds of partnership participants impact on the unfolding of processes of governance.

The focus here has been on different aspects. First of all, it has been emphasised how communities, which as a group play a crucial role in partnerships, are wrongly treated as a homogeneous group. Instead communities consist of different actors with different backgrounds in terms of sex, race and income which impact on the participation of actors (Mayo and Taylor, 2001). Secondly, it has been emphasised that professional identities matter in governing. Actors who are well established in their profession, notably senior figures in key public bodies, bring with them a 'significant institutional and personal clout' to partnerships. They can act on decisions and commit financial resources (Craig and Taylor, 2002: p. 140).

These notions are important and emphasise how actors cannot be assumed to be equal, but that their different backgrounds matter for how governing processes unfold. Actors engage in networks from different institutional settings with varying organisational agendas. These structures and agendas impact on how network actors

are facilitated and steered in their network engagement. Ultimately, these different organisational entities shape network processes as a whole. The nature of the network polity therefore needs to be understood from this broader institutional perspective.

In this research I aim to shed new light on how the nature of the organisational background of actors matters. Within the context of partnerships this organisational background has so far been largely confined to professional identities, such as health-care, police or welfare professionals. In this research I will examine organisational backgrounds that are more complex and political in nature, concerned with policy arenas that are embedded in political agendas and strategies.

For the purpose of research enquiry, an adequate conceptual approach is needed on how to approach and systematically compare the organisational background of actors and the role it plays towards steering network processes. In this thesis, I approach the role of the organisational territories of network actors in steering the network polity from the perspective of two dimensions which correspond to the nature of policy arenas: institutional capability and institutional coordination.

Firstly, there is a broad form of influence, which I term the 'institutional capability' of network actors. This concept has been developed within the terrain of European network governance, concerned with how the system of collective action is able to respond to challenges, transform such responses into decisions of a political nature, implement such decisions and subsequently learn from experience. The concept of institutional capability addresses how actors differ in institutional backgrounds, concerned with organisational factors such as resources, organisational structures, and knowledge and awareness within organisations (Sacchi and Ferrera, 2005; Kröger, 2006).

Institutional capability has so far been conceptualised as 'property' of actors, rather than how it enhances the status and strategies of actors in network processes. Empirical research in the context of partnerships demonstrates however how important this is. In the operation of partnerships power imbalances have been exposed due to differences in knowledge and resources among partnership members (Rummery, 2002: p. 238; Craig and Taylor, 2002: p. 140). In this thesis institutional

capability is conceptualised as being concerned with organisational politics and power. In particular I analyse the political commitment the organisation gives to network engagement on the one hand, and how this is reflected in organisational policies and resources. Furthermore, I explore how network members experience their organisational origins and whether they are supportive towards the engagement in network activities or not.

Second, a more direct form of organisational involvement needs to be explored, concerned with the role of organisations in institutionally coordinating network activities. Instead of assuming that actors operate within networks on their own terms, I will examine how network actors operate on the basis of organisational instructions. More in particular I examine how organisations differ in the motives and purpose of coordination, as well as the internal institutional channels of coordination.

The involvement of various individual organisations in network processes has implications for network steering. It implies that network processes should not be approached as being solely about horizontal network steering, but that an open perspective is needed for how hierarchical steering might come into play, with the authority and power of certain organisations superior to others. Within the partnership literature Whitehead (2004) has put forward a similar view, demonstrating the existence of hierarchical steering in network processes. His focus is on the role of the state in partnerships, and how key public sector bodies have been able to colonise partnerships due to their management capacities and legal standing.[2] He speaks of the existence of hidden hierarchies, or shadow hierarchies. Although my point does not just refer to the state, but to all network members, the underlying idea is the same: the authority, power and roles of different institutional backgrounds beyond the network polity needs to be taken into account in order to understand the development of network processes.

[2] Whitehead focuses in this research on partnerships in the field of urban renewal and the single regeneration budget

2.6 THE ROLE OF ACTORS IN NETWORK PROCESSES

So far I have addressed the polity of network processes, emphasising its institutional link to the organisational territories of network actors. This wider institutional territory does not stand on its own, but is managed and steered by network actors themselves. This requires a different conception of 'politics' and actors than the dominant notion in the network literature, the topic of this section.

Within network governance research neutral conceptions on network agency have dominated so far. Network members are assumed to be 'autonomous', 'equal' and 'interdependent' (Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). In sum, the relations among actors are approached as being of a 'heterogenic' nature (Whitehead, 2004), with each actor sharing the same 'horizontal' position of power and authority, each playing a theoretically equal role.

These neutral conceptions of network agency are problematic as they disguise the actual differences in power and status among actors. Empirical research in the partnership literature has demonstrated that power imbalances are the practice despite ruling principles of equality (Taylor and Balloch, 2001; Glendinning, Powell and Rummery, 2002).

Furthermore, and emphasised in this thesis, these conceptions ignore how actors *exercise* power in networks. This implies that actors are actively steering governing processes, pursuing their own objectives and strategies. As such, network processes are characterised by struggles among network members. These struggles are concerned with actors interacting on an individual basis, as well as actors collectively engaging with each other and need to be understood within the particular institutional context in which interactions take place. Here I shed light on both the individual as well as collective level of agency, starting off with the role of individual actors.

2.6.1 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: TWO-LEVEL GAME

So far the development of networks has predominantly been explained with reference to institutionalist approaches (Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). In this thesis I take however an actor-centred approach, with individual actors playing an active role in

steering network processes. Here I share the same starting point as Crouch (2005), who argues that actors engage in institutional arrangements as institutional entrepreneurs. Crouch asserts that rather than actors being subjected to their institutional environment, they are actively engineering and recombining institutional elements leading to recombinant governance.[3] I have a different view on the nature of these processes than Crouch, which in my view is more complex than as envisaged by Crouch.

First of all, the behaviour of actors needs to be interpreted on the level of actors themselves, and is derived from a complex constellation of beliefs, rational calculations as well as irrational motives. The account of Crouch however is solely based on rationalist thought. He follows the influential approach of Scharpf (1997), who argues that actors are guided by a rational analysis of the goals that are to be achieved in their games, while anticipating those of others and their likely moves. The assumption is that there is an objective idea of a rational course of action with actors disposing of perfect information and being guided by self-interest. This implies that actors are capable of calculating their moves and overseeing the consequences of their actions. In my view this is too simplistic as it ignores individual beliefs and overvalues the role of the ratio. Furthermore, network participants might not be capable of or in search of anticipating the actions of other actors. As is pointed out by Hay (1998), actors rely instead upon incomplete information in assessing current configurations of constraint and opportunity and on more or less informed projections regarding the strategic motivations, intentions and likely actions of other significant players.

This is all the more relevant due to the nature of activity actors are involved in, which covers more aspects than Crouch envisages. Crouch proposes that actors are involved in *institutional* engineering. His view reflects the dominant focus in network research, concerned with approaching networks as an institutional architecture. Taking a holistic view on networks in this thesis, actors are not just involved in

[3] The study is based in the field of the evolution of capitalist systems within the stream of divergence, but Crouch suggests that his theories are equally applicable to social and political systems.

institutional engineering but their interests are broader and encapsulate engineering the objectives of and actor constellations within networks.

Finally, and crucial for the positioning of this thesis, Crouch does not address how the behaviour of actors needs to be understood with reference to the institutional environment in which they engage. He addresses how actors target their strategies at the institutional polity but does not acknowledge how the behaviour of actors is in itself shaped by the institutional environment in which they engage, and how actors are involved in strategic action. In essence, the relationship between actors and the institutional environment is dialectically related (Hay, 1998). Hay argues that strategic action yields two effects: 1) direct effects upon the structured contexts within which it takes place and within which future action occurs and 2) strategic learning on the part of actors involved, enhancing awareness of structures and the constraints/ opportunities they impose, providing the basis from which subsequent strategies might be formulated. This implies that the institutional context shapes actors' behaviour and is itself the target of the strategies of actors.

This institutional territory is not just confined to the institutional network context but is more complex however as it consists of various institutional arenas and levels. As I have outlined earlier, I approach the polity of networks as an institutionally open process. In particular I emphasised the crucial role that the organisational territories of network actors play in network processes. This implies that actors are not only managing and steering the shared polity, in this case the network polity, but are also managing and steering their own organisational territory. In essence, actors need to be approached as being involved in a double level game, simultaneously managing both their organisational as well as their network interests.

The notion of actors involved in a two-level game has originally been developed within the field of international relations (Putnam, 1988). Putnam developed the concept of double level game diplomacy in order to explain the conditions in which actors negotiate and adopt international agreements. Actors play games with their fellow negotiation partners on the international level in order to advance their national position, while negotiating acceptance on the domestic level in relation to national political actors.

Although the stakes in voluntary network participation might not be equal in political weight to those of international agreements, empirical investigation is needed on how actors' interests might be equally targeted at both the outgoing political arena as well as their individual organisational premises back home. The theoretical lens of two-level game is therefore useful in approaching the general position of individual actors in network processes, and how they play out their stakes. In this thesis I will examine the balance that actors draw in defending their organisational interests on the one hand and promoting network interests on the other.

2.6.2. COLLECTIVE STRUGGLES

So far I have addressed the role of actors in governance on an individual basis. Ultimately, the nature of individual agency impacts on the development of network processes at large, with individual actors steering processes with their own aims and strategies. However, network processes are not only shaped by strategic action on behalf of individual actors as Hay suggests but they are furthermore shaped by the dynamics of actors as a *collective* within the shared network surroundings. In this thesis I examine both the collective relations, as well as the actual interactions taking place among network members.

The collective relations and internal cohesion among network actors has occupied much initial network research. Concepts developed range from policy communities, issue networks, advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities (Marsh, 1998; Sabatier, 1993; Haas, 1992). Policy communities consist of a limited number of people meeting frequently and are dominated by economic and professional interests, whereas issue networks are a loose alliance of interest groups and individuals within a specific policy field. Advocacy coalitions are coalitions of organisations linking together in advocacy; epistemic communities consist of a limited number of people defined by shared beliefs and engaged in sharing knowledge.

These concepts shed light on the formal institutional features of relations, but not so much on how network members give meaning to actual relations in practice. More crucially, there has been insufficient attention for the existence of possible divisions of power among network members. This goes further than divisions of power on an

individual basis as so far has been stressed, but is concerned with divisions of power among groups of actors. Its existence has so far been unrecognised within the network literature, but research within the context of partnerships has exposed that this needs to be taken into account. Here it has been demonstrated how certain groups are systematically excluded or treated in a marginalized manner opposed to other groups within the operation of partnerships. A notable example is concerned with systematic marginalisation of the black community (Balloch and Taylor, 2001). This raises questions of how and why this happens in governing processes and how it might work out differently in the case that will be examined in this thesis.

In terms of interactions, the dominant assumption is that within these various institutional settings actors are involved in consensus-seeking, or at the very minimum seeking an adequate balance between consensus and conflict (Koppenjan, 2007). Furthermore, there is the notion that actors are involved in deliberation, with all participating actors able to contribute equally to a collective decision. The problem with these notions is that there is insufficient attention for the actual processes of consensus-seeking and deliberation, and the internal struggles in these processes.

Within the context of local social inclusion partnerships, Davies (2007) has explored actual collective processes of deliberation and offers a critical assessment in terms of the feasibility of realising these formalist network notions. In his view there are structural limitations in achieving equality between actors who are radically unequal from the start, in this case public sector managers versus community representatives. He points to differences in cultural and material resources, and how power relations are rooted in language and other forms of communication. Attention for the collective dynamics is thus of vital importance for the understanding of the unfolding of network processes and will be empirically examined in this thesis.

In this thesis the starting point is that the collective dynamics among network actors is characterised by struggles, essentially targeted at the coordination of network processes. Within the network literature various approaches have been distinguished to differentiate forms of network coordination, concerned with an instrumental, interactive or institutional approach to network management (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997; Rhodes, 2000). The three approaches differ in what they view as

the essential coordinating mechanism. For the instrumental approach the coordinating mechanism is concerned with central steering, the interactive approach coordination is done through dependency and cooperation among actors and in the institutional approach it is about rules and structures. The common ground of these approaches is that the coordination and management of network processes is perceived to be a technical and apolitical affair. What is disregarded is how actors collectively struggle over the coordination and direction of network processes. This will be examined in this thesis.

2.7 POLICY STEERING OF NETWORK PROCESSES

So far we have examined the polity and politics of network processes, looking at the open institutional territory of network processes and the struggles among network actors across this broader territory. Finally, and moving to the heart of network processes, I address the 'policy' dimension of network processes, concerned with the objectives, nature of activities and outcomes that are fostered in networks.

Although it can be argued that this dimension touches the essence of network processes, there have not been many empirical studies to make sense of the processes that are fostered inside networks. The analytical locus is on how networks operate on the basis of the formal objectives that are in place. Conceptually, actors are regarded to be engaged in networks in order to produce a *common* public purpose. In terms of implementation, the dominating assumption is that network governance promotes joint responses and ownership for decisions and that all actors *support*, rather than hamper, the implementation of processes (Torfing, 2007: pp. 11- 13).

These notions do not do justice to how the struggles among actors in relation to their broader institutional environment impact on processes of network governing and its subsequent effects and outcomes in terms of policy. This links into our discussion on the strategic action on behalf of individual actors as well as struggles among actors as a collective. These struggles are aimed at the objectives and content of network processes, with actors aiming to strategically steer its direction in line with their own interests.

This implies that despite the presence of formal objectives in place, actors might pursue their own agendas and objectives which are not necessarily synchronous to the formal objectives that have been agreed among network actors. Instead of placing sole emphasis in research on the formal objectives that are in place, the focus of examination needs to be on whether and how the nature of network processes is contested.

Within the context of research on public-private partnerships the validity of this notion has been confirmed. Here it has been demonstrated that private actors have different 'internal' goals than the shared goals among partnership members. Private actors have their own motivations to engage in partnerships, and subsequently pursue a different agenda than public bodies involved. Their concern is to make and show a profit, whereas the public sector is driven by whatever objectives government chooses to set (Rummery, 2002).

In this thesis, I not only examine how actors pursue different objectives than the formal ones agreed, but also expose the nature of individual objectives. So far the dominating assumption is that network processes foster objectives of a functional nature, objectives that can be linked to concrete policy objectives. I will however equally examine how actors pursue goals that are more political in nature, being concerned not so much with achieving concrete outcomes, but with using networks as platforms to exert influence in various ways, as well as enhancing the status of the network member in question.

Although the emphasis in this thesis is on how the struggles among actors in relation to their broader institutional environment impact on *processes* of network governing, I will equally examine the subsequent *outcomes* in terms of policy. Network outcomes can be examined on various levels. In this thesis I will limit my focus to how network members experience the impact of their activities on their own organisational level. Rather than assuming that all actors support implementation in an equal and active manner, I will examine how actors individually steer the implementation of network processes. In my view implementation should not be approached as a common cause, but as being dependent on individual agency, shaped by actor's individual agendas and political strategies.

2.8 CONCLUSION

Rather than a static institutional arrangement, I have defined networks in this chapter as a process that is shaped by the interrelations among actors and institutions and is therefore political in nature. The nature of network processes has been conceptually approached in terms of its polity, politics and policy.

The polity, the institutional territory of network processes, has been approached from an open institutionalist perspective, with networks being institutionally linked to other institutional and political arenas. The inclusion of these premises is of crucial importance for the understanding of how network processes are externally being steered and shaped. Emphasis has been placed on the role of the organisational territories of network actors themselves, playing a role in framing the institutional capability of actors as well as actively coordinating network engagement.

Actors play a crucial role in managing and steering this broader institutional territory. Individually, actors are approached as being involved in double level games, strategically managing their network as well as organisational interests. Collectively, the locus of examination is placed on how actors struggle over power and compete over the coordination and direction of network processes. This all implies that neutral notions of agency and conceptions of consensus seeking are challenged and replaced by notions of how power and struggles come into play.

Finally, I have stressed the importance of examining how the struggles among actors in relation to their broader institutional environment impact on processes of network governing, and the subsequent effects and outcomes in terms of policy. I have put forward that the nature of network processes needs to be approached as contested, and that research needs to examine how the objectives and outcomes of policy steering are steered by network actors themselves.

Whereas in this chapter I have outlined my theoretical perspective on network processes in general, in the next chapter this perspective will be applied to the empirical territory of this research: the European Union.

CHAPTER 3: NETWORK PROCESSES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

So far I have elaborated on the concept of networks in general, without specifying its territorial and functional nature. In this chapter I will address the empirical focus of this thesis, concerned with networks operating in the context of the European Union. The specific focus is on co-operation networks that have emerged in the domain of public services. The aim of this chapter is to conceptualise these networks in the context of European governance and outline the conceptual perspective on European network processes.

The first task of this chapter is to position the empirical objects of analysis in the broader context of EU governance. I will shed light on the essential characteristics of EU governance, concerned with a multi-level polity, political struggles among a wide variety of national and European actors as well as contestation of EU policy steering. Subsequently zooming in on networks, I will assert that networks are a contested concept within EU governance. Some regard the EU polity at large to be governed by networks, based on the conception of networked governance (Schout and Jordan, 2006). Others and the view I take –in line with my previous discussion in chapter two- regard networks as a distinct institutional arrangement that can exist in the context of various modes of EU governance (see Esmark, 2007). The different concepts in use will be clarified, concerned with modes of governance, networked governance and networks.

I will point out that networks have so far been studied within the context of formal modes of European governance, concerned with the legislative, distributive or learning procedure. In the last decade most attention has been paid to networks in relation to the learning procedure, in particular with regard to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Relatively overlooked however are institutional arrangements, which operate beyond the scope of formal modes of EU governance. These are informal and intergovernmental networks, operating without a formal political or legal mandate. A prime domain is the domain of public services where various co-operation networks exist between delegates of member states accompanied by the

Commission who come together on an informal basis though often in a structured setting. Here we engage on exciting new territory of research, which will be under empirical focus in this thesis. The particular focus in this study is on two co-operation networks: the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN network) and the Heads of Public Employment Services Network (HOPES network).

These co-operation networks will however not be approached and analysed as static institutional arrangements on the basis of their formal institutional features. Instead this research examines the characteristics of European networks in practice. This is all the more crucial as European networks, both within the context of the OMC as well as the networks under study, are meant to offer a depoliticized space in which policy issues are discussed. So far there is however insufficient understanding on the nature of the actual processes within these networks, and how these are shaped by the complex interrelations among actors and institutions on various levels. This is the task of this research and in the remainder of the chapter I outline the perspective I take on examining European network processes.

I begin with providing an overall overview of my perspective and contribution to debates on European network governance and Europeanisation in particular. This is concerned with an expansion of recent bottom-up approaches on individual agency, examining the wider role of the national institutional territories that are involved. Second, and in terms of the collective dynamics among network members, I examine and assess formal notions of deliberation, informality and consensus-seeking by uncovering the actual processes taking place.

From here I outline my perspective on the particular dimensions of network processes I distinguish in this thesis: the nature of the polity, politics as well as policy steering of European network processes. With regard to the European network polity I assert that research needs to explore how European network processes take place in a politicized context, examining how processes are embedded into and steered from the national organisational territories of network actors. In terms of politics, I approach national actors to be managing this wider institutional territory by pursuing double level games, placing the locus of examination on how actors strategically balance their national organisational interests as well as European network interests.

Exploring processes on the collective level, I examine how actors give meaning to notions of informality and the existence of power divisions among network members. In terms of the actual interactions, I examine how the Commission and member states struggle over the coordination and ownership of European network processes. With regard to policy steering, this research challenges formal notions of learning and places the analytical focus on examining how actors steer objectives in practice, exposing potential contestation. For now, I begin with shedding conceptual light on European governance at large.

3.2 CONCEPTUALISING EUROPEAN PROCESSES OF GOVERNING

The dominant theoretical approach on the EU has been concerned with explaining the forces behind European integration, with intergovernmentalism and functionalism the main competing strands within this debate. Whereas intergovernmentalists argue that integration is driven by nation states guarding their sovereignty, functionalists see underlying economic and technological developments that necessitate supra-national cooperation as the driving force. During the last decade a shift has occurred from explaining European integration to examining European governance, focussed on how the EU operates and impacts on the national level (Marks and Hooghe, 1996; Kjaer, 2004).

As governance in general terms is a contested concept due to the existence of different approaches, this is arguably even more so in the context of the EU where the study of governance takes place on an institutional terrain that is complex and consists of multiple levels, comprises a wide range of actors and is characterised by high contestation across policy domains.

Conceptualisations of the overall nature of European governance have been dominated by conceptions of ‘networked governance’ (Eising and Kohler Koch, 1999; Jordan and Schout, 2005). The underlying logic holds that due to the various interlinkages between actors and institutions, the entire European polity is marked by governance through networks. Recently, these notions have come under criticism, with European governance being characterised by a combination of different modes of governance covering the entire range between markets and hierarchies (Börzel,

2010). Börzel sheds light on the complexity of European governance, and that is also the starting point of this thesis.

In this thesis I do however not attempt to conceptualise European governance as a whole. In my view the nature of EU governing, and the various forms of steering Börzel refers to, need to be assessed on the micro-level within a particular policy domain and considering the specific actors and institutions involved. My particular focus is on how governing takes place within the context of a specific institutional arrangement, concerned with European co-operation networks. In order to contextualise these networks however, it is importance to shed brief conceptual and analytical light on the essential characteristics of European governance, in terms of its 'polity', 'politics' and 'policy'.

3.2.1 THE POLITY OF EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE

An essential characteristic of the institutional territory of European governance is that governing takes place across multiple institutional levels. This has become embodied in the concept of 'multi-level governance'. The roots of this concept lie in the notion that the sovereignty of individual states has become diluted in the European arena by collective decision-making and by supranational institutions (Marks, Hooghe and Blank, 1996). These days the approach of multi-level governance highlights how various levels of governance are involved in governing in the EU, including the local, sub-national, national or European level. Whereas the main focus in the multi-level governance approach is on the distribution of power in decision-making, the concept of Europeanisation has been brought forward in order to assess what the EU does and how it affects different institutional levels.

The Europeanisation approach takes multi-level governance as the starting point, and examines how actions on one institutional level affect other institutional levels. Europeanization is referred to as processes of construction, diffusion, and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in

the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003: p. 30).

Taking on board both the multi-level governance and Europeanisation approach, in my view the European polity should be approached in a more complex manner. The European polity and its effects are predominantly approached from a top-down perspective, starting from the European level. Less attention is paid to how 'lower' levels of governing are involved in shaping 'higher' levels of governing, notably the role of the national institutional level in steering European level processes which has received attention recently (Kivst and Saari, 2007; Büchs, 2008). Secondly, whereas within the Europeanisation literature the main focus is on formal institutional levels of governing, in this thesis I draw equally attention to institutional arenas which are informally involved. Finally, instead of placing emphasis on the formal institutional aspects of the European polity, I aim to approach the European polity in a dynamic manner, by examining how national and European actors play a role in steering the nature of institutional processes. This leads me to conceptualising the 'politics' of European governance.

3.2.2 THE POLITICS OF EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE

One of the most characteristic features of the European political system is that it is a system without government. There is no delegation of political power to a directly responsible top decision-making authority at the European level (Kohler-Koch and Eising, 1999). Although member states are the most central political actors, European institutions are involved in all areas of decision-making, with varying powers across policy domains. Politically, actors are related in complex patterns of horizontal and vertical interdependency which patterns vary across different decision-making modes (Borras, 2007).

Whereas the political system of the EU and the nature of political struggles in driving integration has received much scientific attention (see Hix, 1999), within European governance understanding of the role of actors and how they steer governing processes is still in its infancy. European governance is often approached as an institutional affair, essentially treated in a depoliticized manner. Governance

arrangements should not be regarded as neutral however, but as the result of complex political struggles among a wide variety of national and European actors.

Marks and Hooghe (1999) point out how choices for governance are at the heart of the main competing political programs in the EU. Institutional goals are highly connected to choices in the sphere of policy goals and are strategically intertwined by actors in political programs. They argue that the roots of political divisions date back to the Single European Act at the end of the 1980s when the creation of a single European market was initiated. European integration has politically been driven by two opposing projects competing with each other for support, the neo-liberal project and the project for regulated capitalism. The neo-liberal project regards national governance as the strategic institutional mode to support their policy goals of international market competition, whereas the project of regulated capitalism is more supportive of supranational governance in order to deepen the European Union and increase its capacity for regulation. These projects have had varying levels of support, different institutional barriers and alternate levels of success so far. Their example illustrates how the direction of EU governance is subject to political decision-making, which is equally valid for more specific governance arrangements within the EU.

Furthermore, and emphasised in this thesis, actors play a crucial role in actual European governing, with processes defined by struggles among actors. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, actors are involved in strategic action (Hay, 1998), and compete for power and struggle over the objectives and outcomes of European governance. This not only takes place an individual but also a collective basis.

3.2.3 EUROPEAN POLICY STEERING

This leads me to conceptualising the ‘policy’ dimension of European governance, concerned with how actors steer the objectives and outcomes of EU governing. Within the conventional Europeanisation approach, policy steering is examined and explained from the perspective of a discrepancy between European ideas and policies and those on the national level. The notion of ‘goodness of fit’ between the European and the domestic level determines the degree of pressure for adaptation generated by

Europeanization on the member states. The lower the compatibility between European and domestic processes, the higher the adaptational pressure (Börzel and Risse, 2003: pp. 60-62).

This approach has come under criticism in recent years, as it does not take account of how actors shape processes from the national level, pursuing their own agendas and objectives irrespective of the need for European intervention (Büchs, 2008). In essence, the steering of the content of governing needs to be regarded as highly contested. First of all, governing takes place in a context of high contestation over values. How actors compete over values has so far however been given marginal attention in European governance research (Borras 2007). Furthermore, and stressed and explored in this thesis, the actual purpose and outcomes of governing need to be regarded as contested, as actors steer the content of European governing processes and compete over its direction.

3.3 MODES OF EU GOVERNANCE

So far I have shed light on the nature of EU governance in general. EU governing does not however occur through the same modes or institutional and political logics. Traditionally, EU governance has primarily taken place through legislative means. In the last decades this so-called Community method has been complemented by other modes of governing (Wallace and Wallace; Marcussen and Torfing, 2007). New differentiations have been proposed on how EU governance can be characterised. Here the differentiation of Esmark (2007) will be followed, who distinguishes three modes of governance: the legislative, distributive and the learning procedure.

The legislative procedure is largely synonymous with the original community method, which is concerned with the EU regulatory model as mainly applied in the internal market. The distributive procedure or programming method is concerned with a form of multi-level governance as is found in the field of regional policy. Finally, the learning procedure is concerned with policy coordination and benchmarking. This latter procedure has received much scientific attention during the last decade, symbolising ‘new modes of governance’ in the EU.

According to Sabel and Zeitlin (2010) a fundamental shift in EU governance has taken place, with legislative steering increasingly being replaced or complemented by governance modes that place emphasis on learning and deliberation among actors within a common framework. They classify this as 'experimentalist governance' or 'directly deliberative polyarchy'. It is directly deliberative because it uses the concrete experiences of actors in problem-solving and polyarchic because it is a system in which the local units learn from, discipline and set goals for others (2010: p. 6).

A specific institutional design has come to embody the learning procedure, concerned with the Open Method of Coordination. The OMC is concerned with policy coordination on the basis of learning and benchmarking in a framework of incentives, action plans, and reporting mechanisms.[4] Extensive discussions have taken place on its main characteristics, its roots, legal features and social and democratic underpinnings (see Trubek, 2000; Pochet, Porte and Room, 2001; Carmel, 2003; Radaelli, 2003; Zeitlin, 2005; Büchs, 2007). The underlying notion is that European convergence is achieved on the basis of soft policy coordination via discursive regulatory mechanisms. This is concerned with mechanisms as joint language, the building of a common knowledge base, the strategic use of comparisons and evaluations, the systematic diffusion of knowledge and social pressure (Jacobsson, 2004).

The OMC has implications for the development of European Social Policy, as it significantly expands the number of policy areas that are drawn into EU governance. Because of the close link with legitimacy, member states have always restricted the European level competence in social policy (Leibfried and Pierson, 1995). The areas

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[4] The Open Method of Coordination was initiated at the Lisbon Summit in 2001, and has been applied to different policy areas over time. Although varying in strength and format, in essence they are meant to share common features, as summarized in the Lisbon Summit Conclusions (2000):

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

that were already covered by the EU are generally work-related policy domains, such as the areas of equal treatment, working conditions and working rights (see Geyer, 2000). The rationale for intervention could here be directly linked to one of the prime aims of the EU: the promotion of freedom of movement across the EU. With the OMC new policy areas, where the emphasis on national sovereignty is strong, have been drawn into EU governance such as employment, social inclusion, pensions, health, innovation and environment.

3.4 NETWORKS BEYOND THE LEARNING PROCEDURE

It is this mode of governance, the learning procedure, which is often related to the emergence of networks in the EU. In line with the general discussion in the previous chapter, the emergence of networks in the EU is widely regarded as a result of growing interdependencies between actors and institutions, as well as the changing nature of policy problems which are characterised by their uncertainty as well as being 'wicked' in nature, crossing separate policy domains (Kohler- Koch and Eising, 1999; Jordan and Shout, 2005; Marcussen and Torfing, 2007; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010).

Furthermore, the emergence of networks needs to be regarded as the outcome of political decision-making. In 2001 the Commission published a White Paper on Governance, in which it outlines its intentions with regard to promoting good governance concerned with fostering openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. Specifically, it calls for action for a more systematic and proactive approach to working with key networks to enable them to contribute to decision shaping and policy execution (Commission, 2001)

Although networks are often associated with new modes of governance its relationship is contested however. According to Jordan and Schout (2006:6) there is, as yet, no common definition of 'new modes of governance' on what their use in the EU entails. However, they regard the crucial point about new modes of governance 'that they seek to build upon the EU's existing capacity to achieve its policy goals not through legislating or creating and/ or altering markets, but via more networked forms of (multilevel) governance'. This view is disputed by Esmark (2007:255) who regards

network governance as the institutional setting for a functionally specific mode of governance. This is helpful, as the focus on the EU polity as a whole shifts to how networks are used as distinct institutional arrangements in the context of specific legislative, programming or learning procedures. This is the stance that will be followed in this thesis.

So far empirical research on networks has been conducted in the context of one of the three formal modes of governing (see Marcussen and Torfing, 2007). However, and of crucial importance for the positioning of this thesis, relatively little attention has been paid to the existence of networks that are operating outside the institutional boundaries of the legislative, distributive or learning procedure. These are networks in policy domains where formal EU competence is lacking, and national sovereignty is still in place. In this thesis I focus on the domain of public services, where a distinctive form of institutional arrangements has emerged. [5]

Traditionally, member states have been reluctant to transferring powers on public services policy to the level of the EU. Public services are intertwined with the wider national institutional and political system and its values. Their national sovereignty is safeguarded as public services are an important electoral asset for politicians. Despite the strong emphasis on national sovereignty, within the EU the national and European level has become increasingly 'interwoven' (Kvist and Saari, 2007).

Although there is no provision of public services in terms of policy within the EU, the European Union has over recent years become more involved in public services in two ways. The first way is concerned with the competence of the EU in other areas that impact on public services at the national level, in particular concerned with the internal market and competition policies of the EU. Secondly, public services has also entered the EU agenda in its own right under the terminology of services of general

[5] The domain of public services is not exclusive in fostering informal networks. Another example is the field of migration policy, where informal clubs and working groups of co-operation have developed between migration control officials and civil servants since the 1980s. These networks have had a significant influence on future debates on European integration in this field (Guiraudon: 2000).

interest, which debate is mainly driven by concerns about the scope of liberalization and subsidiarity.

Furthermore, and crucially for the positioning of this thesis, member states themselves have decided to co-operate together in the domain of public services. Institutional arrangements on an intergovernmental basis have emerged, which define themselves as co-operation networks. Although it is easy to capture these arrangements as 'new' and fitting under the umbrella of so-called 'new modes of governance', the roots of co-operation between EU member states in the domain of public services reform go back to the 1970s (D'Orta, 2003). However, co-operation has certainly been strengthened and formalised in recent years, also in response to the Lisbon Strategy and the Open Method of Coordination. European co-operation networks in the domain of public services are the networks under focus in this research. The case studies in this thesis are concerned with a network in the domain of public administration - European Public Administration Network- and a network in the domain of employment - the Public Employment Services Network.

Although co-operation networks have not yet been formally defined, in essence the two networks are similar institutional arrangements. The networks are informal and don't act on the basis of a formal legal or political mandate as the networks Esmark (2007) refers to. Co-operation networks have the format of an association in which all EU member states accompanied by the Commission take part. Both networks have the purpose to foster co-operation and exchange in the particular policy domain that is shared by its members. The membership of both networks consists of director-generals of member states, with civil servants of different rankings operating on other levels of the networks. Both networks operate on the basis of structured high-level meetings and working groups.

Co-operation networks are distinct institutional arrangements, but do relate to and resemble the learning procedure. First of all, the networks operate in relation to or are institutionally embedded within the OMC. As I will discuss in the empirical analysis, discussions within the EUPAN network often refer to the broader agenda on the

Lisbon Strategy[6], and the operations of the HOPES network are embedded within the European Employment Strategy. More crucially, co-operation networks share essential features with the learning procedure. The OMC is meant to provide a new space for policy reforms that is meant to avoid politicisation over values, while dealing with sensitive issues such as competitiveness and the diverging values regarding the model of capitalism in Europe (Radaelli, 2003). The provision of a depoliticized space is equally an essential feature of the co-operation networks that are the focus of this study. These networks are meant to offer an institutional environment within the EU to discuss issues on public services reform, but to do so on a more neutral rather than political ground, with actual interactions led by civil servants rather than politicians.

There is so far however insufficient understanding on the actual network *processes* in these networks. Uncovering network processes is of crucial importance in order to understand how politics comes into play in these networks, examining the complex interrelations among actors and institutions on both the national as well as European level. This is the task of this thesis. Although the theoretical perspectives will be developed within the context of co-operation networks, they should equally shed light on network processes within the context of other procedures, notably the learning procedure.

3.5 ANALYSING EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

In this research I examine how national actors engage in network processes from their own national institutional territories as well as the dynamics among actors as a collective within their shared European network surroundings. I build on recent approaches that have been developed in OMC studies on processes of Europeanisation.

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[6] At the Lisbon Summit (2000) the Lisbon Strategy, social-economic agenda of the EU till 2010, was lined out with the goal 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.

The dominant focus has been concerned with analysing the outcomes of the OMC on the national level with a wide range of studies conducted across various policy areas covering different countries (see De La Porte and Pochet, 2002; Zeitlin, 2005). In recent years this approach has come under criticism for taking a top-down approach, with new approaches not only assessing how European actions impact on the national level but also examining how national actors strategically influence processes on the European level (Kvist and Saari, 2007; Büchs, 2008; Verschraegen et all, 2009). The new focus has been on the various responses national governments exert in their engagement on the national level, examining their objectives and strategies. In this thesis I examine the objectives and strategies of national actors, while extending the scope of analysis towards the role of the national institutional territories in influencing and directly steering network engagement of actors. This will be discussed in the upcoming discussion on the network polity.

Ultimately, the nature of individual agency impacts on the development of network processes at large, with national actors steering processes with their own aims and strategies in relation to their national organisational territories. Network processes are furthermore shaped by the dynamics of actors as a collective within their shared European network surroundings. Research on the actual interactions among actors is crucial for the understanding of processing of governing within the EU, but has so far remained largely unexplored territory. The formal notion is that network processes are characterised by notions of informality, deliberation and consensus-seeking (Overdevest, 2002; De la Porte and Nanz, 2004; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010). These notions are problematic as they depoliticize interactions, and do insufficiently assess how processes unfold in practice and the struggles that are taking place. The characteristics of network processes in practice are examined in this thesis.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline my analytical perspective on European network processes in more detail following the distinction of polity, politics and policy. I will examine the nature of the institutional territory of European networks, the struggles among national and European actors that are taking place across this territory as well as how these struggles are targeted at the content of network processes. I begin with outlining my perspective on the polity of European network processes.

3.5.1 THE POLITY OF EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

In the previous chapter it has been stressed that the polity of networks is predominantly conceptualised in a decontextualised manner. Networks are approached as having institutional boundaries, and the focus of research is on the internal conditions of these institutional entities. In this thesis I examine how European network processes take place in a politicized context, exploring the role of other institutional arenas in steering European network processes.

Within the field of the OMC, research has demonstrated how the OMC has informal links of diffusion of ideas and actor connections with other institutional levels, for example international organisations as the OECD as well as the World Bank (see Noaksson and Jacobsson, 2003; Maier-Rigaud, 2006). In this thesis I place emphasis on how European networks are embedded into the national organisational level, examining the role of the national organisational territories of network actors in shaping and influencing European network processes.

I address the concrete role and functions of the national institutional territories of European network members on two levels. First of all, the national organisational territories of actors exert a broad influence in how actors perceive the facilitation of their network engagement. This is concerned with organisational experiences with the political commitment, the policies, resources and attitudes towards network engagement, touching on the national institutional capability of actors.

The concept of national institutional capability has been developed and applied within the context of the OMC (Ferrera and Sacchi, 2005). Ferrera and Sacchi analyse the impact of the OMC on the national institutional capability of Italy in two policy domains. They assess that the impact within the field of employment has been significant, whereas in social inclusion the impact has been relatively minor. The analytical focus has however been on how involvement in the OMC impacts on national institutional capability. In essence, Ferrera and Sacchi follow the conventional Europeanisation approach, assessing the impact of European processes on the national level in a top-down manner. Here, I take a bottom-up perspective, exploring how the institutional capability of national organisations enhances the power and strategic capability of actors in their involvement in EU governing. I will

make an analytical distinction between the political commitment the organisation gives to network engagement on the one hand, and how actors experience the organisational attitudes and support around them on the other.

Furthermore, I examine how national organisations exert a more direct role in steering European network processes, by being involved in the coordination of network activities. Within EU governance research, the study of national coordination has so far been restricted to involvement of national actors in formal modes of EU governance. Kassim (2003) has asserted how member states differ in coordination modes, with some member states having centralised comprehensive structures of coordination whereas others coordinate in a more decentralised and selective manner. These modes of coordination are influenced by the political stance of member states towards Europe and the features of their wider political and administrative system. So far insufficient attention has been paid however to how national actors involved in voluntary networks might coordinate their activities on the national level. The dominating assumption is that actors engage without any institutional baggage. In this thesis, the boundaries of coordination research in EU governance are opened up, exploring whether and how member states institutionally coordinate their network engagement.

All in all, I aim to acquire understanding of the role of national organisational territories in shaping EU network processes, and how member states differ among each other in their institutional capability as well as strategic power. This implies that questions are raised on the notion that networks are about horizontal steering. Esmark (2007) asserts that these notions need to be redefined in order to accommodate the co-existence of horizontal steering with hierarchical steering taking place from the national level. In his view, European network steering takes place in the shadow of national hierarchical steering. This line will be followed here. The concrete nature of national steering will be subjected to empirical examination, exploring the specific functions and roles of the national organisational territories involved.

3.5.2 THE ROLE OF ACTORS IN EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

The nature of the polity of European network processes can however not be understood without reference to the behaviour of European network members themselves. The starting point is that national actors play a crucial role in managing and steering the institutional territory of European network processes. In chapter two the approach on network agency was outlined from the perspective of actors being involved in a two level game, following the concept of Putnam (1988). Applying this to the context of the EU, I see actors as simultaneously involved in managing both their domestic and European network interests.

The institutional and political context of European networks offers a different stage than envisaged in international agreement negotiations by Putnam. The co-operation networks under focus have a different nature and focus: they are networks that are voluntary in character with a relatively open and undefined purpose. The political stakes are not high, with network members not being faced with domestic electoral concerns. However, the essential point that actors' behaviour cannot be understood with reference to European factors alone is a valid one. Domestic factors are equally, and as will be argued here, more crucial in explaining network engagement.

The notion of actors involved in a 'two level game' offers us an analytical lens, through which we can understand and compare the general position and motives of network actors. Regarding the involvement of national actors in European network processes, empirical investigation is needed on how network members place either more emphasis on defending national interests or on promoting European network interests. The prime concern for promoters of European network interests is to enhance their status as network member among their European peers, demonstrating goodwill to be active for the common good. Defenders of national organisational interests on the other hand are more concerned with defending their national organisational agenda and position. In essence, this divergence follows the classic divide between realist motives and institutionalist motives for co-operation (Keohane, 1994). For realists, co-operation is about power and pursuing individual interests. For institutionalists, co-operation is about pursuing common interests in a context of growing interdependence. The two are not mutually exclusive however. Network

participants can engage with a European network orientation, but still have their own network agenda.

This all implies that national actors do not engage as equal participants in European network processes, but vary in national institutional baggage and the subsequent interests they pursue in network processes. Network processes are furthermore shaped by the collective dynamics among network members. Within the context of new modes of governance, and in particular the OMC, the ruling notion is that actors are involved in deliberation and consensus-seeking on an informal basis (Overdevest, 2002; De la Porte and Nanz, 2004; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010). The emphasis in deliberative theories is on reasoning, persuasion and normative appeals in democratic politics, rather than collective decisions being a simple aggregation of interests. In essence, actors are not so much pursuing their own interests but fostering consensus and a 'higher truth'. Unaddressed however is how politics comes into play in the actual interactions taking place. In this thesis I examine how actors give meaning to their relations in practice including the existence of possible divisions of power as well as how actors struggle over the coordination of network processes.

First of all, I examine how actors give meaning to notions of informality and internal differences among network members. So far knowledge is in its infancy on what is taking place in actual gatherings among actors within European networks, and whether member states engage as equal participants or not. Ballester and Papadopoulos (2008) have addressed this issue within the context of the OMC and measured attendance among countries in peer review sessions within the European Employment Strategy on a quantitative and longitudinal basis. They demonstrate that member states differ in actual attendance and their attitude to be active in hosting and organising activities in the network. As they measure attendance of member states on a quantitative basis, they are however unable to explain the nature of internal differences and how these are grounded in inequalities in capabilities and power. This goes further than divisions of power on an individual basis, but is concerned with divisions of power among groups of member states. Within the OMC, recent empirical research has demonstrated how new member states are less active and influential than older member states due to a difference in language skills and

expertise (Horvath, 2009).[7] It is a matter of empirical investigation whether these power divisions are reproduced in the specific networks under study.

Second, I explore the actual interactions among actors, concerned with how actors struggle collectively over the coordination and direction of network processes. The struggles among national and European actors have been widely debated in terms of the balance between intergovernmental and supranational power in the EU (see Sandholtz and Sweet, 1997; Branch and Ohrgaard, 1999). These assessments do not address however how the distribution of power among actors in a policy domain is not necessarily static and fixed, but might be a continuously shifting balance with national and European actors competing over ownership of power.

Looking at co-operation networks, the fact that these networks are intergovernmental networks in a formal sense does not imply that the Commission, taking part in these networks, might not seek control over coordination. On the contrary, the starting point in this thesis is that the struggles between the Commission and member states over the coordination of network processes needs to be explored. Specifically, research needs to address how the competing actors differ in their agendas, power and institutional capabilities and the various interests they pursue.

3.5.3 POLICY STEERING OF EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

At the heart of actors' struggles is competing visions on the direction of network processes and the particular outcomes that are to be pursued. This implies that European network processes need to be approached as being potentially contested. Herewith I challenge conceptions of policy steering, where the analytical focus centres on the formal objectives that are in place rather than how objectives are steered by actors in practice.

In substantial terms, the formal objective of 'learning' has predominantly been the starting point of analysis. The concept of learning refers to reforming policy through transferring experiences from other countries and has become synonymous with the

[7] These findings are brought forward in the context of operations of the Social Protection Committee within the fields of social protection and social inclusion.

rise of new modes of governance within the EU. It has been regarded as an inherent aspect of the emergence of governance through soft law over hard law, been classified as the third leg along with the legislating and distributing procedure and more specifically regarded as a prime feature of the OMC (see Trubek, 2003; Zeitlin, 2005; Esmark, 2007).

In my view current conceptualisations of the nature of learning are problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, learning is predominantly conceptualised as a functional activity, with policy reform as the prime drive. Learning is approached as a technocratic activity with processes marked in well defined stages, defined by problems, lessons and the transfer of solutions. These conceptualisations are inspired by the literature on policy sciences and learning.[8] Insufficient attention is paid to how network processes are influenced by discourses and values in their broader institutional environment. As has been put forward in the context of the OMC, there is a tension between actors involved in open deliberation within the OMC and the ruling master discourses of achieving economic competitiveness in the EU (Carmel, 2003; Radaelli, 2003). Furthermore, network members themselves battle over values, despite being formally involved in 'co-operation' and 'learning'. As Borras (2007) points out, contestation is an inherent to European network processes.

Learning therefore needs to be regarded as a political activity, as it touches on values and policy objectives. Furthermore, learning can be a cover for other stakes involved.

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[8] Attention for learning emerged within the field of policy sciences from the 1940s onwards, initially focussing on 'spontaneous processes', introducing concepts as learning, diffusion and convergence (see Bennett, 1991a and b). The literature changed its perspective in the 1980s and 90s. The focus shifts to active engagement from the side of governments and the policy content of learning processes. The main concern is on clarifying the learning process in conceptual terms, bringing up concepts as lesson-drawing (see Rose, 1993) and policy transfer (see Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). An influential definition comes from Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) who point out that policy transfer, emulation and lesson drawing all refer to a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/ or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/ or place. This body of literature influenced approaches on learning in the OMC, with concepts as cross-national learning and policy transfer adopted and accompanied by new concepts as peer review, benchmarking and deliberation.

Actors might say that they are involved in learning, but in reality pursuing their own agendas. This touches on the point which is emphasised in this thesis. The narrow focus on learning implies that there is no attention for other objectives that actors might pursue in networks beyond those that have been formally agreed. As has been stressed in the previous chapter, how actors steer network processes with their own objectives is an important focal point in the empirical examination, exposing potential contestation in network processes.

In recent years this research agenda has already received input, in particular from OMC related research. Here the concept of 'uploading' has been added. The concept of uploading has been introduced in order to explain the role of national actors in shaping European processes. This was a reaction to the dominant 'top-down focus' within the Europeanisation literature as has just been discussed, neglecting the active role that national actors play themselves in the development of new modes of governance. The concept of uploading refers to how national actors are not only engaged on the European level with the intention to 'download' or 'take' from the European to the national level, but are also actively involved in 'shaping' European processes by 'uploading' their own models and policies.

Within the field of the OMC and social policy at large, various studies have demonstrated that governments use uploading as part of their strategies in their involvement with the OMC (Kvist and Saari, 2007; Büchs, 2008; Verschraegen et al, 2009). Verschraegen et al (2009) analyse the involvement of the Belgian government in different fields in European social policy from the combined analytical perspective of downloading and uploading, demonstrating that the Belgian government involved in both. Kvist and Saari (2007) extend their analysis to a large number of member states and point out how member states have different views and responses to European actions in the field of social protection. The nature of internal differences in views and responses varies across areas of intervention in social protection.[9] In terms of theorising uploading, Büchs (2008) introduces a new theoretical approach on

[9] Kvist and Saari (2007) analyse the impact of European developments and responses of national governments in four different areas of social protection: policy processes including the OMC; the interplay between internal markets and social policy; the EMU and enlargement.

analysing actors' strategies within the OMC, with uploading as a key strategy alongside 'invited dutifulness' (the OMC used as providing legitimacy for already planned national reforms) and 'ignorance' (inactivity with regard to OMC). She makes the point that empirical research so far suggests that invited dutifulness and uploading have been the main strategies used by governments.

How actors give meaning to uploading in their involvement of co-operation networks will be an important point of focus in this research. However in addition, an open outlook is taken to explore the pursuit of other objectives beyond learning and uploading. By examining objectives that actors pursue in practice, I aim to broaden the conceptual map of network objectives and enrich current conceptions on policy steering within European network governance.

In line with my perspective that the locus of examination needs to be on how actors pursue their interests simultaneously between the national organisational as well as the European network level, a distinction will be made between the pursuit of European network objectives on the one hand and individual objectives on the other. Whereas the former is concerned with pursuing objectives that are concerned with fostering common goals among network members together, the latter is concerned with pursuing objectives that are concerned with national organisational agendas.

Although the emphasis in this thesis is on how the struggles among actors in relation to their broader institutional environment impact on processes of network governing, I equally examine the subsequent outcomes in terms of policy. It is beyond the scope of this research to explore how network processes link into the wider space of European policymaking, but I will examine how network members experience the impact of activities on the national level. I explore the different ways in which actors steer the impact of network outcomes themselves in line with my perspective set out in the previous chapter. This can be concerned with either implementation in national policy, but also more unconventional modes beyond policy reform concerned with using network engagement for domestic political purposes.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have introduced the objects of analysis of this research, concerned with European co-operation networks. Here we engage on exciting new territory of research, as the existence of institutional arrangements beyond the scope of formal modes of governance has so far remained unexplored. Rather than analysing co-operation networks as static institutional arrangements, here I aim to analyse European network processes, and expose how these are shaped by the complex interrelations among actors and institutions.

Within a larger context of European governance, I have outlined my conceptual perspective on European network processes. I have asserted that research needs to explore how European network processes take place in an institutional context which is politicized in nature, examining how network processes are embedded into and steered from the national organisational level. The role of actors has been approached from the perspective of how they individually pursue double level games as well as are engaged in collective struggles. The nature of policy steering is addressed by a critical approach on learning, shifting the locus of analysis from the formal objectives in place to how national actors steer the objectives and impact of European network processes.

The unfolding of the nature of European network processes is a matter of empirical investigation. This will be conducted by studying the complex interrelations between actors and institutions on the micro-level. In order to start the empirical exploration of processes in European co-operation networks, an appropriate methodology and analytical perspective is required and case studies are to be selected. The next chapter will be concerned with this, setting out the case for a qualitative methodology and analytical perspective that addresses the various components of actors and institutions, whereas the selection of case studies will be concerned with two member states: the UK and the Netherlands.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDY SELECTION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

So far I have outlined my conceptual perspective on network processes in general and towards the objects of analysis of this thesis -European co-operation networks- in particular. In the upcoming chapters the findings of empirical research will be presented, demonstrating how processes in both the EUPAN and the HOPES network are political in nature. The function of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodology that underlines the empirical research of this thesis. Furthermore, I will set out the analytical perspective and address the selection of case studies.

I begin by discussing the methodology that is adopted in this thesis. I have chosen to adopt a qualitative methodology, primarily based on ontological and epistemological considerations. The emphasis in this research is placed on exploring the meanings of actors themselves on the very processes they engage in and shape themselves. I aim to get a holistic and in depth understanding of the individual meanings of actors on how they perceive the various aspects of their individual network engagement and the collective interactions around them.

The specific objects of analysis is the next subject I address in this chapter. This is first of all concerned with exploring the formal network processes, as have been agreed upon by network actors together. Against this background, the analytical locus is first on individual agency, analysed in its national organisational context. The various objects of analysis are concerned with objectives that actors pursue, their network strategies, their modes of national institutional coordination, their national institutional capability as well as national modes of implementation. The collective dynamics among actors will subsequently be analysed on the basis of the power struggles among national and European actors, the power divisions among national actors as well as the context of network proceedings in which interactions take place.

Having outlined the analytical perspective, we move on to the actual methods that are adopted to answer the research question. The methods are threefold: document analysis, in depth interviewing, and the distribution of a questionnaire. The function

of each method will be outlined in relation to the specific objects of analysis of this thesis. The function of document analysis is to shed light on the formal agreements among network members, on the procedures, aims and role division of the network. Against this background, the main analytical focus -the exploration of informal processes among network members- will be subjected to empirical investigation. The prime emphasis is on the acquisition of data from interviewing in order to provide an in depth analysis of the individual meanings of actors on their agency and the collective dynamics among network members. The data from the case studies will subsequently be contextualised by the views of all network members through the distribution of a questionnaire across the networks at large.

As the prime focus is on analysing individual meanings of actors, the selection of case studies is justified. I concentrate on the UK and the Netherlands since they scientifically contrast on two prime features that will be drawn into the analysis as explanatory variables: 1) their general stance and commitment towards EU membership 2) the national modes and structures of governance. The UK has primarily been classified as a Eurosceptic nation, whereas the Netherlands has been known for its positive stance towards Europe. The political culture of the UK places emphasis on hierarchical or coordinated steering, whereas the Netherlands places emphasis on consensus-seeking and deliberations, incorporating a wide spectrum of interests into policymaking.

Finally, we turn to the design and conduct of the process of empirical research, where I discuss both the process of interviewing and the questionnaire distribution along a number of lines. These are concerned with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each method, the implications of the role of the researcher in the process of data collection, followed by an overview of the design, the nature of the sample, modes of access, the process of data collection and modes of data analysis. For now, I commence with setting out the case for a qualitative methodology.

4.2 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

In this thesis a qualitative methodology is adopted. The choice for a qualitative methodology is primarily based on ontological and epistemological considerations.

First of all, ontologically I regard the nature of European networks and their processes as socially constructed. This implies that in order to acquire knowledge of network processes and its political nature, analysis needs to focus on the meanings network members themselves attach to the very processes they engage in, and their own role within this. The emphasis on people's lived experiences and locating the meanings people place on events, processes and structures are an essential characteristic of qualitative data (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 3).

This is related to my epistemological stance, concerned with critical realism. Critical realism shares features with both the interpretivist as well as the positivist epistemology. The positivist stance follows the logic of natural sciences, based on the idea that reality can be studied objectively. In the interpretivist position the stress is on the understanding of the world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants (Bryman, 2001: 264). Critical realism suggests that there is a 'real world' out there, but emphasises that outcomes are shaped by the way in which that world is socially constructed (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). I take the starting point that certain institutions structure agency and can be externally distinguished, but how actors socially construct and give meaning to their environment needs to be analysed on the basis of the interpretations of actors. This implies that we can distinguish European co-operation networks and national organisational institutions independently of the network members who engage in these, but the emphasis in this research is first and foremost on how actors interpret their institutional environment as well as their own behaviour within this.

Besides ontological and epistemological reasons, the choice for a qualitative methodology also derives forth from how research in the domain of European network governance has advanced so far. The objects of analysis are concerned with European co-operation networks, and its exploration has so far remained largely unexplored territory. Knowledge of the prime characteristics of this mode of EU governance is not yet available, let alone of the very nature of its processes, which is a common weakness facing research on all modes of EU governance. In methodological terms this implies that we are not starting off with a set of theoretical considerations, from which we can deduce a hypothesis that must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny as is the case with research of a quantitative nature. Instead, I aim to induce

knowledge from the field, acquiring understanding of network processes, in order to solidify and enrich my theoretical framework, which can provide the basis for later hypotheses. This is a prime function of qualitative research (Bryman 2001: 8).

4.3 OBJECTS OF ANALYSIS

This thesis is concerned with exposing the political nature of European network processes by exploring the complex interrelations among actors and institutions involved. In order to conduct our empirical investigation, an adequate analytical perspective is needed on European network processes.

First of all, the analytical locus is on the formal network processes. Although the main empirical focus is on exploring how network processes unfold in practice, these informal processes need to be understood against the background of any formal agreements that might exist among network members with regard to the purpose, role division and proceedings of the network. Formal processes frame the network agendas of actors and impact on the strategic manoeuvring space among actors. Against this background, the perspective that will be taken on the informal processes among actors is twofold: both on the role of national actors in the context of their national organisational territories as well as the collective dynamics among national and European actors within the shared European network surroundings.

With regard to the analysis of individual agency, the overall perspective is concerned with how actors position themselves in a two-level game as has been outlined in the previous chapters. More specifically, I analyse the various aspects of individual agency concerned with the objectives of actors and their network strategies. Furthermore, and exploring the national institutional territories of network members, I examine institutional coordination modes, the institutional capability of actors as well as modes of implementation.

Ultimately, the nature of individual agency impacts on the development of EU network processes at large, with individual actors steering these processes with their own aims and strategies. However, the political nature of European network processes is furthermore shaped by the dynamics of actors as a collective. Addressing the

various aspects that shape the collective dynamics among network actors, I analyse the political struggles among national and European actors, the power divisions among national actors as well as the context of network proceedings in which these interactions take place.

4.4 OBJECTS OF ANALYSIS AND METHODS

Having outlined the specific objects of analysis, we now turn to the specific methods that will be adopted in relation to the objects of analysis of this thesis. The methods that I use in this thesis are threefold: document analysis, in depth interviewing, and the distribution of a questionnaire. The prime emphasis is on the acquisition of data from interviewing.

Each method has its own function towards the objects of analysis of this thesis. The analysis of formal processes is the first focus of empirical research. As these are laid down in network documents, the choice of method is here concerned with document analysis. The focus is on documents of the EUPAN and HOPES network, which are documents for internal network use, though publicly accessible online.[10] The focus of analysis is on how these documents make reference to the status and procedures of the network, the purpose of the network as well as role division in terms of network coordination and whether there are any contestations in these references. The nature of analysis is to a certain degree a literal analytical exercise, rather than a thorough hermeneutic analysis or content analysis (see Scott, 1990: 31-32).[11] In this research the meaning of the document findings is explored on the basis of how these words are operationalised or referred to by actors in practice.

From the analysis of formal processes, we move on to the analysis of individual agency. This is the prime analytical focus of research, as an essential contribution of

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[10] For HOPES network see: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=105&langId=en , for EUPAN network see: http://www.eupan.si/index.php?id=137

[11] The hermeneutic task involves interpretative understanding of texts, appreciated within the specific social and cultural context in which they have been created. Content analysis on the other hand assesses the significance of particular items within the text through quantitative techniques, with the number of times an idea is used as a measure of the importance of the idea to the author of the document.

this research is concerned with providing understanding of how individual agency is embedded in the specific national organisational territories involved. As I aim to base this understanding on the actual meanings and experiences of network members involved, interviewing has been chosen as the main source of data collection. The interviews are aimed at acquiring data on the various aspects of network agency: how actors give meaning to the general purpose of the network, their objectives and network strategies, modes of institutional coordination as well as institutional capability and network impact on the national level.

Interviewing is conducted with a selected number of network members, of which the specific selection of case studies will be addressed in the subsequent section. These data will subsequently be complemented and contextualised by the views of all network members. The aim is to offer broader reflections on whether the essential outcomes of the case studies are valid for network members overall. In order to acquire responses from all network members, the choice of method is concerned with the distribution of a questionnaire across the two networks at large. Here the focus is not on all aspects of network agency, as aspects such as institutional engagement and strategic behaviour are hard to measure through a questionnaire but require teasing out through the use of in depth interviews. However, the questionnaire addresses two prime aspects of network engagement that can be measured: the views of actors on their network objectives as well as the national impact of their network activities.

Finally, the analysis of the interactions among network members is based on the meanings of individual actors on the collective dynamics among network members. This is concerned with the views from the case studies on the essential political aspects of network processes: the political struggles over coordination, divisions of power among network members as well as the political nature of network proceedings. However, as with the analysis of individual agency, these views will be contextualised by the views of all network members, derived from the questionnaire.
An overview of the different methods in relation to the objects of analysis on network processes and the objects of analysis is provided in Table 1.

Focus of analysis	Objects of analysis	Methods
Formal Processes	• Formal status and procedures • Formal aims • Formal role division	Document analysis
Individual Agency	• General purpose • Objectives • Network strategies • National institutional coordination • National institutional capability • National impact	In-depth interviews Questionnaire
Collective Dynamics	• Political struggles over coordination • Divisions of power among network members • Political nature of network proceedings	In-depth interviews Questionnaire

Table 1: Overview analytical perspective and methods

4.5 SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES

As previously pointed out, the prime emphasis in this thesis is on the analysis of individual meanings of network actors on both their individual agency as well as the collective dynamics around them. In order to provide a holistic and in depth analysis

of the meanings of network members on their involvement in European network processes, case studies are to be selected. Case study research is to capture cases in their uniqueness (Hammersley, 2000). The analysis of a limited number of cases allows us to acquire understanding of the individual engagement of network members in detail.

Case studies are selected with the purpose to engage in comparative analysis. Comparison has been described as 'the engine of knowledge', as the comprehension of a single case is linked to the understanding of many cases because we perceive the particular better in the light of generalities (Dogan and Pelassy, 1990: 8). By comparing, the emphasis shifts from description to explanation and that is its prime purpose for this research. By comparing the engagement of individual network members, I do not only aim to acquire understanding of two individual cases but also aim to gain a better understanding of the factors that come into play in shaping the particular nature of the interests that actors pursue in their engagement in European networks. Furthermore, the two case studies and the analysis of their network engagement serve the purpose to shed light on the nature of network processes at large.

In this thesis the case study selection is concerned with a limited number of network members, as in depth analysis is only possible on the basis of a limited number of cases (see Landman, 2008). The cases are selected on the basis of two criteria that are to be drawn into the comparative analysis of individual network agency: the general orientation and stance towards EU membership on the one hand and modes and structures of national governance on the other. Both factors are expected to impact on how double level games are played out, concerned with how national actors simultaneously manage their interests on both the EU level, as well as on the national organisational level. Whether countries place more emphasis on the defence of national organisational interests or the promotion of European network interests is likely to be shaped by the broader national agenda with regards to EU involvement. Equally, the behaviour of actors and their modes of network engagement will mirror patterns of modes and structures of governance on the national level.

To make comparative analysis a worthwhile exercise, two network members are selected which contrast on both these criteria. A 'most different systems design' is thus adopted (see Landman, 2008: 70-75).[12] As I aim to rule out major intervening factors such as the state of development of public services, or duration of EU membership, two countries are selected that are relatively equal to one another. The UK and the Netherlands are chosen as cases for this purpose. Both countries have a long-standing experience with being involved on the European scene and are both advanced in their reform of public services in relation to other countries. [13] However, the countries contrast in their attitudes towards being involved in the EU. The UK has primarily been classified as a nation that is more sceptical and less embracing of European co-operation, whereas the Netherlands has been known for its positive stance towards Europe. These differences are deeply rooted, with the Netherlands as one of the founders of European co-operation embracing the European idea from the start, while the UK reluctantly entered Europe as a last resort two decades later (Young, 1999). The Netherlands on the other hand has stimulated the notion of European co-operation as an integral part of government policy since it co-launched the European project. It has to be said though that in recent years the reputation of the Netherlands has come to be known as a more eurosceptic one.[14] However, so far there is no evidence to suggest that these public sentiments are mirrored in a major shift in government policy or a change in attitudes among public officials.

Second, both countries differ in their modes and structures of national governance. The political culture of the UK places emphasis on hierarchical or coordinated steering: the administrative structure has a unified centre of authority and politically governments operate by majority rule. It has been classified as being on the majoritarian end of the scale, whereas the Netherlands has been placed on the proportional system end (see Lijphart, 1999). In contrast to the UK, the political

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[12] This contrasts to a 'most similar systems design', where instead of comparing cases with contrasting variables, the focus is on comparing cases which share common features.

[13] Even though the actual impact has been very different due to variations in institutional and political mediation of ideas, both countries have been active in following main reform trends concerned with introducing managerial principles into their public services along the lines of New Public Management (see Bouckaert and Pollit, 2000).

[14] This is in particular due to the rejection by the Dutch public of the European Constitution in 2005.

culture of the Netherlands places emphasis on consensus-seeking and deliberations, incorporating a wide spectrum of interests into processes of policymaking. There is less tradition of hierarchical or coordinated steering than in the UK, as is reflected in the main features of the administrative as well as the political system. There is no strong administrative centre with individual ministries operating in a largely autonomous manner and coalition governments are the norm (see Kickert et all, 1995; Bekke et all, 1996; Bouckaert and Pollit, 2000).

Of further -and more pragmatic relevance- to the conduct of empirical research is my own linguistic affiliation with the case studies under investigation. This is of crucial importance to acquire responses from actors, which reflect individual meanings rather than formal observations from their side.

4.5 DESIGN AND CONDUCT OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

So far I have provided a justification for the use of a qualitative methodology in this thesis, followed by the objects of analysis, the functions of the specific methods as well as the selection of case studies. The remaining task of this chapter is an overview of the design and conduct of the empirical research. I will address the design and conduct of interviewing, subsequently followed by the questionnaire. With regard to both methods, I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the method in question, the implications of the role of the researcher in the process of data collection, followed by an overview of the design, the nature of the sample, modes of access, the process of data collection and modes of data analysis. Before going into the design and conduct of the specific methods in question however, I will first shed brief light on the course of the empirical process at large and the role of each method within this.

4.5.1 THE OVERALL PROCESS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

As I have emphasised previously in this chapter, the prime focus of empirical research has been placed on the conduct of interviews with officials who are engaged in the two networks under study. This was the start of my empirical research in 2005. At that time my intention was to contextualise these data through the use of participant observation: attending meetings and observing the actual behaviour of network members, specifically focussing on those actors from the UK and the Netherlands. I

had already gained access to the network and lined up several meetings, when due to personal circumstances I had to suspend my research and cancel these engagements.

Returning to my research, I re-engaged with the field through follow-up interviews as well as establishing new contacts. Unfortunately I was not capable of pursuing the route of participant observation any longer, and chose for an alternative method in order to confirm that the experiences of the Netherlands and the UK with processes in the two networks were not outlying but reflective for other network members. This was concerned with the distribution of a questionnaire across all network members of the two networks.

Compared to participant observation, the drawback was that I would not gain understanding by personally observing processes going on and be able to offer methodological reflections on a method which is relatively new in the field. However, the benefits of the questionnaire proved to be far greater than expected, as I acquired 'hard' data which were not so much dependent on personal interpretation as is the case with participant observation but the wordings of members themselves. Crucially, I acquired more substantial data on both individual network engagement as well as the overall nature of network processes than expected. In essence, the change in the methodological course due to personal limitations, proved to be of beneficial value for the data collection and analysis of this research. The specific design and conduct of both interviewing as well as the questionnaire distribution will be outlined below.

4.5.2 DESIGN AND CONDUCT OF INTERVIEWING

The prime benefit of interviewing is that the researcher is offered a close picture of processes going on at ground level as viewed by the participant in question. The length of responses is generally long and concerned with in depth accounts of actors' meanings. The drawback of this method however is that access to interviewees and willingness for participation needs to be secured. Also, there are concerns with safeguarding the confidentiality of interviewees and using the interview material in empirical analysis. Furthermore, and of a different nature, there are issues with my own role as interviewer in the process of data collection. In my view the interviewer

plays a role in constructing knowledge as opposed to simply obtaining objective facts or pure authentic accounts of subjective experience (see Silverman, 2001: 32).[15]

I have taken each of these issues into account in terms of both the design as well as conduct of research. With regard to the design of the questions, I have framed the questions in a manner that supports the prime objective of approaching the accounts and meanings of actors themselves as closely as possible. For this purpose, questions are formulated in an open manner, so as to acquire the meanings of actors themselves on the various aspects of their network engagement rather than interpreting too many own meanings into the formulation of questions. A standard format of questions is followed on the basis of the various objects of analysis, fed into a semi-structured form (see appendix 1). Where needed, in order to enrich the accounts of experiences of actors, probing questions have been asked in order to tease issues out.

With regard to the selection of interviewees, the sample in this research is a targeted one, concerned with those actors in the UK and the Netherlands who are either involved in meetings of Directors-General or working groups in the EUPAN network or the HOPES network. In both networks I did not have essential problems in acquiring access. Initial access has been acquired through the use of intermediaries, such as experts in related networks or operating in government in general. Further acquisition of contacts has occurred through the so-called snowball method. This implies that actors passed me the contact details of fellow network members during the interview process itself.

The actual data collection has taken place in the time period of 2005-2008. The first span of data collection took place in 2005, and the second in 2008. Although this long time gap was not motivated by scientific but personal considerations, it proved to be of value in terms of the quality of the data collection. I managed to do follow-up

[15] Silverman discusses three different views on the relationship between the interviewer and the production of knowledge. The positivist view entails that interviews are about ascertaining facts or beliefs out there in the world. The emotionalist approach is not concerned with obtaining objective facts but with eliciting authentic accounts of subjective experience. The constructionist view however regards the role of interviewer as taking part in the production of knowledge, as the interviewee in interaction with the interviewer constructs his views on a certain issue.

interviews with some of the actors. Although I could not opt for a comparison across time periods, I acquired more in depth information of their individual network agency and their institutional conditions. Furthermore, I gained deeper understanding of the nature of the collective dynamics among actors and could grasp a better realist account of the essence of processes going on.

In total, I conducted 26 interviews from actors engaging in the two networks. Within the EUPAN network I conducted 14 interviews, of which 9 were core interviews, 2 follow-up interviews and 3 interviews with other relevant actors related to the EUPAN network. Within the HOPES network I fulfilled 12 interviews, of which 9 were core interviews and 3 follow-up interviews. On top of this, I conducted a number of interviews with actors from both the UK, NL as well as operating on the EU level in order to acquire a better contextual understanding of the overall institutional context in which these specific network processes take place. The main data cited here are derived from the specific interviews from the EUPAN and the HOPES network. The confidentiality of interviewees has been ensured by referring to actors as 'representatives in relation to specific network functions', rather than naming them in person.

Every interview has been transcribed and in the Dutch case translated, coded and analysed on the basis of the various objects of analysis. Translation of Dutch interviews has been carried out for the use of text quotes in this research. However, I am aware that this process is not without implications for research. Analysis on the basis of translations can be problematic as translated words might not necessarily be equivalent in meaning and carry the same connotation or value as the original words. Bearing this in mind, although the English quotes are provided in this thesis, in the actual analysis I have stayed close to the original text.

As the comparative focus is on comparing the two countries rather than individual actors within a single country, in the analysis of the interview data I have focussed on identifying commonalities among actors within either the UK or the Netherlands. For this purpose the interview data have been analysed both individually, as well as compared through grouping the data. The analysis of the data has been facilitated by the use of NVIVO.

4.5.3 DESIGN AND CONDUCT OF QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTION

The prime benefit of using a questionnaire in research is that the researcher can reach a larger target group than in interviewing. There are however more drawbacks to this method in acquiring meanings of actors on network processes on the ground. The length of the questionnaire needs to be limited in order to secure responses. As with interviewing, there are issues with access and willingness for co-operation. More crucially, the length of responses will not be long as is the case in interviewing, providing us only with the essence of meanings rather than elaborate accounts in detail.

Furthermore, even though the role of the researcher is less pronounced than in the direct interaction between individuals in interviewing, it is still encapsulated in the design of the questions, which are influenced by his or her view on the world. Van Maanen (1983: 9-10) describes this process as figuratively putting brackets around a temporal and spatial domain of the social world. He points out that this map cannot be considered as the territory, because the map is a reflexive product of the mapmaker's invention.

I have taken these issues into account in the design and conduct of the questionnaire. These need to be seen however in the light of the purpose of this questionnaire. This is not concerned with acquiring the length of responses as those provided by interviewing, as my aim is to contextualise the meanings derived from the case studies. From the responses of the questionnaire I aim to establish whether the findings, on which I base my argumentation, are valid for other network members beyond the case studies. The questionnaire is a good means to achieve this, as I can reach out to the network at large.

With regard to the content of the design of the questionnaire I have aimed to take the meanings of network members themselves as a starting point. The questions have been based on a pre-analysis of the outcomes of the interview data from the case studies. The questions have both been designed in a structured manner as well as an open manner (see appendix 2 and 3).

The questionnaire was distributed in 2008. Gaining access proved to be difficult and occurred through different channels in both networks. With regard to the EUPAN network I did not gain access through formal Presidency channels, approaching the Presidency in charge of coordination at that time, due to its coinciding with the distribution of a network questionnaire on their own premises. I acquired access through my own established connections within the network, supplying me with their list of contacts. In the HOPES network, I managed to get access through formal channels, the Commission DG Employment. The Commission facilitated the distribution of my questionnaire as well as proved supportive in sending out a reminder.

All in all, from both networks I got responses from almost half of the countries, involved in the networks. In the HOPES network this was concerned with responses from 12 countries, whereas in the EUPAN network 13 countries participated, offering a total of 24 responses with more members per country co-operating. Every questionnaire has been coded and analysed on the basis of the objects of analysis in this research. As the function of this method is to contextualise the data from the interviews of our case studies, I have focussed in the data analysis on identifying the essence of commonalities or contestation in views within the network at large and compared these with the data provided by the case studies. The analysis of the questionnaire data has been conducted through the means of Excel and NVIVO as well as manual analysis.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have set out the case for a qualitative methodology, incorporating the selection of case studies, the choice of methods in relation to the specific objects of analysis that are chosen as well as outlined the conduct and design of empirical research. It has become clear that emphasis is placed on the acquisition of data on the basis of the meanings of actors themselves on their involvement in network processes. Particularly, I aim to get a holistic and in depth analysis of individual agency and the meanings of individual actors on the collective dynamics among network members. This justifies the selection of case studies, which are concerned with the UK and the Netherlands in this thesis.

The specific methods that are used in this thesis are concerned with document analysis, interviewing of actors from our case studies and the distribution of a questionnaire across network members at large. This involves the collection of a wide range of data, designed and conducted in order to acquire understanding of the political nature of network processes, on the basis of the actual meanings of network members themselves. These meanings will be placed at the centre of my next chapter, in which I will outline the outcomes of the empirical research of this thesis. I will start off with my first network, which is the European Public Administration Network.

CHAPTER 5: THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION NETWORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with examining the actual nature of European network processes, going beyond the formal analysis of institutional properties of networks. In this chapter I will engage with the core of this thesis: the empirical analysis of network processes in European co-operation networks. Whereas the next chapter will be concerned with the Heads of Public Employment Services Network, this chapter will focus on processes in the European Public Administration Network. Although the EUPAN network is an informal co-operation network consisting of civil servants, the findings demonstrate that network processes of the EUPAN network are political in nature: processes take place in a politicized context, are characterised by struggles among actors and contestation over objectives and outcomes.

The chapter is structured as follows. I begin by outlining the formal processes of the EUPAN network, the main operating principles as have been agreed among network members. Although the focus in this chapter is on exploring how agency and the interactions among actors unfold in practice, these need to be understood against the background of any formal agreements that might exist among network members with regard to the purpose, role division and proceedings of the network.

From here we move on to the analysis of the informal processes, the actual interactions among actors themselves. In order to understand the collective dynamics among actors, we first need to address individual network agency, examining the behaviour of network members from individual member states. The findings of the case studies will be presented, demonstrating that members from both countries pursue their own interests, agendas and strategies and play double-level games, which need to be understood with reference to their national institutional and political background. In essence, members from the UK and the Netherlands engage in different manners in the EUPAN network: the UK engages as a defender of national interests, whereas the Netherlands is equally involved in promoting European network interests. This becomes clear in the different aspects of their network agency,

concerned with how they view the general purpose of the network, the content of their aims, strategies and coordination modes, their institutional capability and also how they steer the impact of the network on the national level. The findings of the UK will be outlined first, followed by the Netherlands. The findings of the case studies will subsequently be contextualised by the results from the questionnaire of all network members, in order to examine whether the results of the case studies are reflective for other network members. Although I do not offer a holistic analysis like I have done with the case studies, the findings confirm that network members pursue their own interests and agendas, in relation to their national institutional territories.

This finding has implications for the nature of network processes as a whole. Ultimately, it is the interactions among individual members pursuing their own interests in relation to their national organisational territories as well as the institutional network context itself, which shapes the political nature of network processes at large. The overall collective dynamics among EUPAN network members is the remaining focus of analysis of this chapter. This will be analysed on the basis of meanings of both British and Dutch representatives, contextualised by the views of all network members.

In terms of the collective dynamics among EUPAN network members, the findings expose struggles between the Presidency and Commission over control of coordination and among member states about the direction of coordination in general. Network processes take place in a context of divisions of power among EUPAN network members, with the main division line between old and new member states. Furthermore, the institutional context in terms of proceedings of the EUPAN network is political in nature. Although relations among EUPAN members are regarded as informal and consensual, conflicts exist and are often masked. Despite its informal status, the internal proceedings of the EUPAN network are formally structured.
For now, I commence with analysing the formal processes of the EUPAN network.

5.2 CODIFICATION OF NETWORK PRINCIPLES

Within the EUPAN formal processes have been codified in a so-called Handbook, which can be regarded as a ‘constitution’ of network principles. In this Handbook the

purpose, role division among members as well as the procedures of the network have been laid down. They are described as regulations, in an apolitical manner. The construction of the Handbook needs to be regarded as the outcome of a political process however. First of all, the Handbook has codified practices, which have developed over three decades of interactions. Thus they have been shaped by internal battles over values and power. Secondly, the Handbook itself has been subjected to a process of political negotiations, with members having reached a formal agreement in December 2007.[16]

The Handbook and its principles are important for the empirical analysis, as it provides the background against which the actual interactions among network members take place. In essence, it will have an impact on how the political nature of network processes unfolds, framing the agendas of members and the strategic manoeuvring space among members. Here, I will outline how the purpose, role division and formal procedures have formally been specified.

5.2.1 STATUS NETWORK AND PROCEDURES

The EUPAN network has its roots in the 1970s and is defined as an informal network of the Directors General responsible for Public Administration, both in EU Member States, as well as the European Commission and observer countries (Handbook, p. 8). Co-operation has always taken place on an informal basis, but internal procedures have become more formalised over time. The features of internal proceedings are described in detail in the Handbook.

The network operates on three levels: the level of ministers, the level of DG's and the level of working groups. There are three fixed working groups: Human Resources Working Group (HRWG), the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG) and the E-Government Working Group (E-Gov). Meetings at all levels are guided by an agenda, meeting documents and minutes and are chaired and coordinated by the Presidency and the extended Trojka.[17] The principal output of meetings are resolutions in which

[16] The EUPAN Handbook was approved by the Directors General in 2007 in Lisbon, after a process of negotiations during both the Finnish and Portugese Presidency in 2006 and 2007.

[17] The extended Trojka consists of the country of the Presidency as well as the two previous and two upcoming countries of Presidency and also the European Commission.

new intentions and working directions are laid down. Besides resolutions, meetings are guided by mid-term working programmes, which are adopted for two years.

The Handbook approaches the EUPAN network on its own terms, and fails to specify how the network is institutionally embedded into EU policymaking. The network is informal and not formally related to the learning procedure and the OMC. However the Handbook states that network members aim to support the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, 'by contributing to the efficiency and customer orientation in European public services' (ibid, p 12). [18] The network has institutional connections in another sense, which are not mentioned in the Handbook. At the time of writing, the EUPAN network is involved in structured interactions with European trade unions.[19] This takes place in the framework of a test phase for informal social dialogue, with EUPAN acting as a representative of the employers in the domain of public administration.[20]

5.2.2 OBJECTIVES

Whereas the proceedings of the EUPAN network are described in great detail in the Handbook, the formal aims are defined in a less specified manner. A mission for the EUPAN network is worded as follows: 'To improve the performance, competitiveness and quality of European public administrations by developing new tools and methods based on the exchange of views, experiences and good practices among EU member states, the European Commission and observer countries, in the field of public administration' (ibid, p.11). The sharing of practices between different public administrations is described as one of the most important benefits of EUPAN

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[18] At the Lisbon Summit the social-economic agenda of the EU till 2010 was lined out with the goal 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.

[19] The trade unions are represented by a single trade union delegation called Tuned. Tuned is a co-operation agreement between the two leading trade unions in the domain of public administration, European Public Services Union (EPSU) and the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI).

[20] Informal exchanges between EUPAN and the trade unions started in the early 1990s, taking place on an ad hoc basis. In 2007 a two-year test phase was agreed on co-operation in the framework of informal social dialogue.

and is translated into the different work domains of the three working groups.[21] These goals are defined in a relatively open manner. This implies that network actors are not bounded by a detailed network purpose; providing space for members to steer the content of the actual network aims in their own manner.

5.2.3 ROLE DIVISION

With regard to the role division among members, the Handbook concentrates on the divisions of power within member states. The Handbook does not specify divisions of powers among member states. Member states are therefore approached as equal members, except for coordination. Coordination takes place on the basis of rotating Presidencies. The country that presides over the Council of the EU coordinates the network, assisted by the extended Trojka.[22]

Various types of actors are listed to play a role in different levels of the network: ministers, Directors General and national experts. Whereas ministers are responsible for 'broad political steering', the DGs are the main network actors, 'providing further guidance for EUPAN by setting specific targets for the Network and by reacting to reports from working groups'. National experts are involved in working groups, working out EUPAN activities and reporting to the DG's (ibid, 13-16).

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[21] The focus of the HR working group is on 'discussing and sharing experiences on all issues related to the HRM policies of central government administrations and some general strategic matters concerning government reform and change'. The Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG) has as its mission 'to contribute to improving the quality and efficiency of the European public services, by developing tools and sharing good practices between Member States. The main goal is to introduce quality management and the customer orientation in public administration'. An important focus within this working group is on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) – an organisational tool for self-assessment evaluation that has been set up by the working group - and the organisation of 'Quality Conferences for Public Administration in the EU' every year. The e-government working group has the overall objective 'to facilitate and carry out the exchange of views, experiences and good practices among the Member States in the field of e-government, in particular with regard to public administration aspects of e-government '.

[22] The European system of rotating Presidencies has been abolished when the Lisbon Treaty came into force in 2009. However, within the EUPAN network this is still in place, demonstrating the intergovernmental nature of the network.

Although the presence of the Commission, represented by the Personnel and Administration Directorate-General, is stated in the central mission of the EUPAN network, the Handbook refers to its role only at the margins without any detailed description. The Handbook states that its main role is 'to help identify working areas which complement the activities undertaken by the Community institutions and advise and provide expertise' (ibid, p. 14). This role description is an open one, which implies that its manifestation comes down to how the Commission strategically uses its power in practice.

5.3 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: THE UK

So far I have addressed the formal processes within the EUPAN network, outlining how the status and procedures, purpose and role division have been specified within the EUPAN Handbook. It has become clear that although procedures are well defined within the EUPAN Handbook, the concrete aims of activities and the role division between national and EU actors are open for interpretation. This implies that members are given space to steer these with their own agendas, with the actual outcomes relying on the power and strategic manoeuvring of members in network processes.

The analysis of how members engage individually and collectively is therefore of crucial importance for the understanding of network processes in practice. This will be addressed in the remainder of this chapter. The exploration of network processes starts off with analysing individual agency, examining the behaviour of individual member states. Here I focus on the involvement of two network members: the UK and the Netherlands.

I begin by with examining the UK. Actors involved in the EUPAN network work in the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office coordinates policy and strategy across government departments. Among others, its role is to coordinate and strengthen the civil service and set and regulate standards for services across the public sector.[23] British members of the EUPAN network are based in various units on different levels within the Cabinet Office. Representatives who are involved in DG meetings work in management functions whereas the representatives who are involved in the IPSG

[23] See: www. Cabinetoffice.gov.uk

working group and the e-government working group work as (senior-) policy officials.

The findings of this case study demonstrate that individual agency is about the pursuit of own agendas and interests which are shaped and steered from the particular national organisational premises involved. Instead of referring to formal processes as have been laid down in the Handbook, network members from the UK predominantly define their role with reference to their own national organisational premises. With regard to their overall position in terms of double level game, members from the UK present themselves to be defending national organisational interests, rather than actively promoting the development of common European network activities. This is in line with the general Eurosceptic stance of the UK.

Network activities do matter for UK members though and actors present themselves as actively engaged. In their mode of engagement, they aim to influence processes and activities from the perspective of their own national organisational positions and concerns. This comes through in how EUPAN members pursue their own objectives and strategies, coordination, facilitation and implementation modes. Here I will expose the nature of each of these. First, I explore how members from the UK give meaning to the general purpose of the network.

5.3.1 GENERAL PURPOSE NETWORK - UK

Members from the UK do not refer to the Handbook when giving meaning to the general purpose of the networks. Their views are however in line with the formally defined purpose of the network, and they regard the purpose of the network to be concerned with sharing and exchanging information. Their meanings go further though, defining the focus of the network in practice. The substantial focus of the network is regarded to be on practical, procedural matters, rather than policy issues. Furthermore, UK members have their own normative perspective on how these issues should be dealt with. Government should operate as effectively and efficiently as possible, avoiding being an ‘unnecessary burden and cost on the productive sector’ (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1: General purpose – UK

'The purpose of EPAN I would see it as a useful forum to discuss common issues around public administration, exploring new ways of thinking, share best practices and information. The hope is that this will benefit all countries and help raise standards of service and needs of customers are met. That is what they hope to do' (UK representative IPSG).

'Our working definition of what the Public Administration Network is, is about central government employment, not the policy issues. The network tends, well from our perspective, to concentrate more on employment issues rather than policy issues. […] The contribution is to make sure that we have efficient public services. They are practical contributions, not policy ones' (UK representative DG level).

'So we should have efficient and effective central government which consumes as small a section of national wealth that we can. So our contribution is be as efficient and effective as possible and to ensure that in taking forward our work we are aware of the need not to impose an unnecessary burden and costs on the productive sector. If you insist on 17 different employment regulations plus a social insurance system, which adds 45 % to the costs of hiring a person, we don't meet the Lisbon objectives. […] that everything we look at are clearly related to Lisbon objectives' (UK representative DG level).

5.3.2 OBJECTIVES - UK

This thesis stresses that the analytical locus should not only be placed on the formal aims that are in place, but that analysis needs to examine how members steer processes with their own aims and expose potential contestation in network processes. Moreover, an open perspective is needed to examine other objectives than learning that are pursued. The findings confirm this notion and demonstrate that the dominant focus on learning in the European network literature does not correspond to actual reality, but that the content of processes is contested. UK members use the EUPAN network as a platform to pursue a range of other objectives beyond learning, concerned with uploading and showcase. In essence, their agenda is oriented towards defending their national organisational interests. Their concern is not so much with the pursuit of European network objectives, but with objectives that support the agenda of their organisational units and the UK government at large.

Here I expose the various meanings that UK members give to uploading in the context of their involvement in the EUPAN network, varying from influencing the policies of other counterparts, to influencing EU policy in general and influencing EU competence in the field of public administration. Uploading is not the only other objective on the agenda however. UK members use the EUPAN network furthermore as a platform to provide a showcase, concerned with showing own successes to others, but also showing being involved in the EU in general. This objective has so far received far less attention within debates on EU governance, so here we engage on innovative territory. I commence with looking at the objective of learning.

Learning

The first aim that is shared among members from the UK is concerned with learning and sharing information. The EUPAN network is regarded as very useful in order to get in touch with expertise from other countries on similar working areas, also from the point of view of scarce resources (see Box 5.2). However, it is emphasized that British members feel that they share more information with others, than they receive back. They regard the UK as more advanced than others in the field of public administration (see Box 5.3). This finding indicates that countries are not equal participants versus each other in the process of learning.

Box 5.2: Learning - UK

'For the e-government EUPAN is best practice sharing, it's also informing people from other member states about best practice in the UK […] so I presented this, and that bit that we were doing in this particular policy area and after the presentation it was obvious lots of member states said ah yes, we are actually thinking of doing the same thing, the Finnish representative asked after the presentation because he was going to his director and minister to talk about this very subject, so it is two ways. We are using the information from other member states and hopefully member states use our information as well, I think this is a very beneficial practice' (UK representative e-Government WG).

'What I think is good is it is an opportunity to hear what other countries are doing. We might not have the time or funds available to explore. For example procurement, the Italians they wanted to go away and look at that. They had the time and resources to look at it in detail. We are pleased that they have done that because we are interested in what they have got to say than doing it ourselves. If other countries will

say the same about us, UK looking at customer satisfaction methodology, everybody is interested in that' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.3: Learning- UK

'[…] I think we feel that we are taking ideas to EUPAN rather than receiving a lot of ideas that we then bring back into the UK' (UK representative DG level).

'I think for some of the other member states like the UK and some others who are more advanced in thinking about these areas, the challenge for the network is to add value to them because at the moment it can be a little one sided in terms of us putting information in, putting material in but not getting quite so much of value back' (UK representative IPSG).

Uploading

Besides learning, British members furthermore pursue objectives that can be classified as uploading. Here it becomes clear how network activities matter for British members. They aim to influence the policies of other counterparts while also influencing EU policy directions in general. Representatives give examples of themes where the UK policy line is promoted within the EUPAN network, in order to change the mindset of other countries but also to use the EUPAN network to influence the EU agenda at large, in line with their own issues and perspectives. This is done in order to defend the interests of the UK, reasoning that the UK is dependent on the actions of others to achieve its goals. A prime example is the agenda of 'better regulation' (see Box 5.4). Also, UK members aim to influence EU competence in the domain of public administration, aiming to keep this of an informal nature. With regard to social dialogue with the trade unions, the UK is adamant to keep these relations on an informal basis rather than a formal one (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.4: Uploading - UK

'One of our themes is about diversity and alternative working practices, employment of people who can't work. [...] This theme is a key issue for us. It is one where we think in many ways our approach differs of most other member states. If we are going to have directives, which we will have about gender equality, we actually think that the quality of the sort of directives will probably be better if we can persuade people about other ways of thinking. So part of it is just to try encourage on colleagues to see that other things are possible. […] So it is about just trying to open people's mind' (UK representative DG level).

‘I mean it’s [better regulation- HK] a very important agenda for the UK government within the UK, and as a consequence, where we can we’ll take opportunity to progress such agenda across Europe’ […] ‘Part of the impact for us, is that we are getting onto the European agenda what we want to get on the European agenda which is better regulation. So better regulation it is about, the impact on us it is a way of getting co-operation across European on a key priority for us. Because whatever we do in the UK about better regulation, if there is no comparative work at European level […]’ (UK representative DG level).

Box 5.5: Uploading - UK

‘But we wouldn’t not want to do it, because we are committed to playing a part in Europe, we are committed to getting more British involvement in Europe. It is preventing to slide towards formality and competence and reducing subsidiarity on which there are always pressures today’ (UK representative DG level).

About the meaning of informal social dialogue: ‘Well, if you want it as blunt as is Hester, it is as limited discussion at the European level as we can get away with. […] And, discussion that doesn’t place requirements on the national states to do something in a particular kind of way I think in our view is very important that we keep the terms in our administrative matters, the handling of administrative matters it is important that we keep that we keep these matters as much as handled at a national or even a small local level. […] I think it is a network in which we share ideas, very comfortable with that, I think that is healthy, but a network that starts to establish obligations that the separate countries have to meet I think I would see that as quite a troubling development to be honest’ (UK representative DG level).

Showcase

Besides learning and uploading, UK members also pursue goals, which are not so much concerned with pursuing concrete outcomes, but with taking the opportunity for providing a showcase. Network members actively seek opportunities to increase their status as a network member among others. This is about reputational politics, in order to influence and persuade other member states to follow the British stance on issues.

Members from the UK are eager to show own successes to others, in order to get recognition and approval and increase the status of the UK among other European countries (see Box 5.6). Furthermore, UK members regard the EUPAN network as a platform to showcase involvement in Europe in general. Here actors take on board the

political agenda, as has been set out by Prime Minister Blair in 1997 to change the inward-looking mindset of the UK civil service. This implies that British members aim to show a positive attitude towards involvement in EU events, in particular aiming to increase the status of the UK in the eyes of other nationalities (see Box 5.7).

Box 5.6: Showcase - UK

'So sharing ideas and experiences, it is an opportunity for healthy debate on issues we don't always agree on. It is a chance to spotlight what we are doing and getting recognition and approval. Again what I said on customer methodologies, that is something that we are already doing and 6 months IPSG [talking in the frame of UK Presidency-HK] gives us the chance if you like to show off a bit because we think we are ahead of quite a lot of other countries in these areas. So we are leading a way, gives us the chance to get credit for that, hopefully.'

Talking about putting a certain item on the agenda during the UK Presidency:
'Well, because it is generating a lot of interest and solid recommendations come out of it. Frankly, it would look good for us. If after the Presidency we can have some legacy in the end […] Then people will say: The UK was doing something, they weren't just very passive. We'd rather be active and have something to show for our efforts' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.7: Showcase- UK

'Also it is important despite what other member states would say of us at the moment- we are pro-European as a country, we are keen to be an active player […]. We also particularly the prime minister in 1997- he detected the typical arrogant UK civil service approach to Europe which is 'we know what we are doing, you might suggest something but we think it is okay what we are doing', that was a step change in the UK approach. We are all encouraged, all departments, civil servants to play a full part with our counterparts overseas.' [...] 'And the other advantage for the UK in the context, I mean when I started, it was just the new Labour government, Blair just got in and there was a new approach to Europe, quite important especially for the UK to be seen at these sorts of events and taking a major sort of role in them, so importing the positive, that we are there and not negative and destructive really' (UK representative DG level).

5.3.3 NETWORK STRATEGIES - UK

Besides the pursuit of individual objectives, this thesis stresses the importance of examining how members pursue their own network strategies. Unpacking network

strategies in actual practice, I differentiate between three dimensions of strategic behaviour: the degree of active participation, the network role and position versus others as well as modes of exerting influence.

The first line of strategy is concerned with the degree of active participation. UK members define themselves as active, though only on issues which are regarded to be of national organisational interest. This implies that members are not necessarily involved with all the issues being discussed in the network but that they choose to follow and promote issues in the network, that are on their own political agenda (see Box 5.8).

Secondly, and in terms of network role and position versus others, UK members regard their role as strong in the network and their presence as a prominent one. They define themselves as a leader, as a representative of the national good. This is demonstrated by the fact that they keep on pushing on certain arguments in order to defend the UK position. This touches on the third dimension; the modes of exerting influence can be classified as 'hard power'. UK members are active in national positioning and also in making alliances with other countries. Ahead of a meeting UK members can be involved in strategic interactions to advance a national position (see Box 5.9).

Box 5.8: Network strategies - UK

'Sometimes we see more fruitful discussions happening at one meeting and another we might not, we might not have this discussion because it is not of interest to the UK.' […] You have to balance it and at the present time we take on the EUPAN based on our sort of what's in it for us way of thinking. It is probably quite selfish but we do also take the opportunity what's happening in the UK and hopefully that is beneficial to other member states' (UK representative e-Gov WG).

'Well, I think for the moment with what is on the agenda and again I am talking here about IPSG, but you know IPSG engaged with the citizen and the work around the customer is very important and that is a priority for us […] 'So, we will not give the same degree of attention to every single aspect of what EUPAN does' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.9: Network strategies - UK

[…] 'But that's what you get sometimes at European meetings not everyone wants to say a lot about a certain topic. But I think on the whole we are strong, we have a strong role. I would like to think what we do, because basically, we see the benefits of the network, so we like to be as vocal as possible and try and you know get the discussion going, so, I think we hopefully, we play a positive role in the working group rather than just sit there in silence' (UK representative e-Gov WG).

'So my primary focus has just been to try and make sure that our discussions on social dialogue are terms that we are comfortable with which is why we have been discussing the importance of informal social dialogue rather than formal.
[…] Well, I mean, keep talking about informality, informality, keep inferring that we are not prepared to do things which are formal and we keep pointing out that there are significant difficulties with the concept such as total different definitions of what public administration is and the way in which public bodies are structured' (UK representative DG level).

'Delegates get the agenda hopefully they get it- well in advance of the meeting. X, Y and me will go through the agenda and work out our position of these points before we go. I assume other countries do the same. Some of these may ring each other up. That has happened before. If we see something on the agenda we don't like that much but we know that the Irish, or the Dutch have similar views we might ring them or email them beforehand' (UK representative IPSG).

5.3.4 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION - UK

The starting point in this thesis is that European network processes take place in a politicized context. Network processes do not develop in isolation, but what needs to be examined is how processes are shaped and steered by a wide variety of other organisational territories that come into play, notably the national organisational premises of network members. More specifically what needs to be explored is whether and how these organisational units are involved in coordinating network activities by formulating strategies of network engagement.

With regard to the involvement of the Cabinet Office within the UK in the EUPAN network, the findings confirm that coordination takes place, though not along conventional formally structured channels. Within the Cabinet Office coordination of

EUPAN activities takes place on an ad hoc and informal basis. UK members report that in principle they engage in the network on the basis of an individual mandate, without having to consult others in a formal manner. Members relate this to having adequate expertise but also to the informal status of the network (see Box 5.10). When coordination does take place with other British members of EUPAN, or with other experts beyond the network, its purpose is to inform each other and share expertise in order to develop national organisational positions and strategies. Actors want to ensure that they act within the general UK line and overall strategy (see Box 5.11). This finding demonstrates how the organisational premises of network members, in this case the Cabinet Office, do play a direct role in steering network agency. This involvement is in line with the emphasis that members of the UK place on the defence of national organisational interests.

Box 5.10: National institutional coordination - UK

'We just had a change of DG and he is looking at that very subject now, whether we should have more formal and more frequent meetings. At the moment we tend not to. We certainly brief the DG, obviously I brief him about what is going on in IPSG so that he is ready for the DG meeting and we will have informal discussion with some of the other representatives in the other groups but we don't formally get together' (UK representative IPSG).

'It's on the whole it is up to me because I have the broad sort of understanding of the strategic level of what we do here in the UK, so I can take that, and you know, I have the remit to take that' (UK representative e-Gov WG).

'As things currently stand, yeah, I've got quite a free hand actually, but I think if EUPAN became you know a more significant decision making network then I think it would inevitably, it would have an impact on how I dealt with things' (UK representative DG level).

Box 5.11: National institutional coordination - UK

But if I don't feel I know enough about an issue to make a decision, I'll be on the phone and say: Look what do you want me to do on this? That is the same with IPSG, I will not make a commitment for our presidency for joint activity with others that I am not in control of without checking them beforehand. So and on things like social dialogue my colleague who is responsible for UK government employment relations I talk to him before I go out and say: Look we still have the same line do we

on formal social dialogue? This is where I dig the hills and there are the red lines. So we agree what we are doing. In that sense I take instructions' (UK representative DG level).

'Because we in the UK we work under a general strategy and we work and I work to a chief information officer here for overall government IT projection in the UK, so I am privy to what is going in the UK at large, we do what we call annual reports, so we get information from departments about the latest developments they are doing, so I am aware of as much as possible of the work but in terms of specialists topics then I will approach departments and find out what the UK position is on certain topics' (UK representative e-Gov WG).

5.3.5 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY - UK

From coordination, we move on to the views of British network members on their national institutional capability. The starting point in this thesis is that organisations exercise a broader influence on network engagement and therefore network processes at large. Research needs to examine how actors experience the political commitment, resources and organisational support and attitudes around them.

The findings confirm that network engagement is shaped by the broader organisational context of network members and the political commitment the organisation gives to involvement in European network activities. Looking at the UK, EUPAN network members give an overall negative judgment on how they are facilitated by the Cabinet Office. The status and visibility of EUPAN is regarded as low within the Cabinet Office. Actors relate this to an inward-looking organisational outlook and the low commitment of the UK to involvement in the EU in general. Furthermore, the added value of network activities is regarded as not well recognised within the organisation, related to the fact that there is no EU competence within the field of public administration. Actors report of an overall organisational strategy of budget constraints, with EUPAN activities therefore placed at the margins and receiving low priority (see Box 5.12). However, although the political commitment to EUPAN in general is judged as low, the e-government area appears to be an exception. European involvement in this domain is regarded as important for the UK and here both administrative as well as ministerial support is present (see Box 5.13).

Box 5.12: National institutional capability - UK

'If I am being honest about it then it doesn't have a very high visibility or is accorded great importance within the UK. Which is part of the UK still has not tracked or understood and co-operated it into its way of operating, what it really means to be a member of the European Union. […] in terms of like public administration, people just don't care what happens in Europe really, their concern is about and they are struggling to do it, is to sort out the UK.[…] But when you have got resource constraints, when you have got less staff than you ideally want, you are under pressure, the temptation is to give a lower priority to things that are not immediately seen as important, almost inevitably, because there is no competence for it, if you were to say okay, what does the UK here have EUPAN in concrete terms the answer is very little because you know EUPAN can't change our life but that doesn't mean to say that it is not important but when people say are faced with having to make resource decisions and then they have got pressures it is not on the priority list which is regrettable but life' (UK representative DG level).

'Yes, I mean resources, are always, I mean for anyone working in public administration are always an issue but I certainly, I have not had any, I know I have always felt supported and it has not been an problem for me in terms of attending meetings. I think the question for EUPAN is to demonstrate that meetings are always of added value and I think one of the issues that will be looked at anyway is whether or not in terms of the way the network is organised we are as efficient and effective as we could be' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.13: National institutional capability- UK

'We have strong support our chief information officer, our CIO here, and we are starting to improve things here as well, like I said, it is always good to re-assess how you do things and that is what we are doing here and how we ah play our role and manage our role, more so with the European work. So yes, there is strong support by our CIO, there is support from our ministers as well because they, of course, signed up to the targets of our 2010 e-government declarations of Manchester and at Lisbon quite recently, so there is both the administrative and ministerial, political support for the work we are doing in Europe' (UK representative e-Gov WG).

5.3.6. NATIONAL IMPACT - UK

The final dimension of network agency is concerned with how network members make use of and implement outcomes of the EUPAN network at the national level. The starting point in this thesis is that research needs to examine whether and how

network members steer the impact of activities with their own agendas. Looking at the UK, actors indeed report on their own national experience and modes of steering. They conclude that the impact of EUPAN is limited in terms of subsequent changes in policy or ways of doing things (see Box 5.14). Actors do however refer to the value of learning from the perspective of engaging with new ideas and perspectives, reporting that network activities broaden the mindset of actors (see Box 5.15).

At first glance these overall findings are rather surprising. Whereas members from the UK are actively engaged in steering their own objectives, they take on a rather passive attitude when it comes to picking the fruits of their activities. However, we have to remind ourselves of the particular content of the UK agenda, which is mainly concerned with uploading and showcase. These objectives are not about aiming to reform domestic policy, but are concerned with influencing others within the EU and pursuing reputational politics.

Box 5.14: National impact- UK

'And, in terms of how useful that work is. I have mixed views about how useful it is. But it doesn't have a big impact on our thinking, in the UK government. So, you know, we don't derive a lot of value from it to be honest. On the other hand, it is helpful, I think it is a good thing to do for the European government to you know share best practice and talk about the common issues around administration' (UK representative DG level).

'It is difficult for me having spent relatively short time to see any long lasting impact. That is not to say there aren't. I definitely think it is a useful network to have. But I can't of the top of my head think of any concrete good examples that have come out of it beyond sharing ideas and new learning experiences, which are valuable in themselves. But I can't put my finger on one policy that has come out of it that has been adopted right across Europe, across all member states' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.15: National impact- UK

I think it can be useful to the point of view where we are able, the discussion that we have and the process that you go through within EUPAN in thinking about a topic, can act as a catalyst as it were for new thinking. […] Where simply by brainstorming ideas with new colleagues you begin to see new perspectives' (UK representative IPSG).

> ‘Some aspects of benchmarking have been potentially useful. Seeing the way, different ways the different member states actually manage things and you can learn things from them by assessing the way in which we balance some […] ’ (UK representative DG level).

5.4 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: THE NETHERLANDS

From the UK, we move on to the Netherlands. Dutch members of the EUPAN network work in the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties). It is one of the thirteen ministries of Dutch Government. Among others, its mission is to ensure an effective and efficient public administration, promote public order and centralised management of the countries policy forces and promote the quality of civil service and coordinate management and personnel policy for all civil servants. [24]

Within their organisation EUPAN members work in various units and levels of the organisation. The representative who is involved in the DG meetings fulfils a managerial role whereas representatives from the IPSG and e-government working group work as (senior-) policy officials.

The findings of the second case study equally confirm that individual agency about the pursuit of own agendas and interests which are shaped and steered from the particular national organisational premises involved. Instead of referring to formal processes as have been laid down in the Handbook, network members from the Netherlands equally define their role predominantly with reference to their own national organisational premises. EUPAN members from the Netherlands engage however in a different manner in the network than the UK. Whereas members from the UK are engaged to predominantly defend national organisational interests, members from the Netherlands defend their national organisational interests while simultaneously engaging in the promotion of European network interests. The two are not mutually exclusive however. The motives of Dutch actors are not neutral, as Dutch actors promote European activities in line with their own preferences and concerns. This comes through in the objectives and strategies Dutch members pursue,

[24] See http://www.minbzk.nl/bzk2006uk/organisation

their coordination and facilitation modes and how they make use of the network. I first explore how members from the NL give meaning to the general purpose of the network.

5.4.1 GENERAL PURPOSE NETWORK - NL

Like their British counterparts, Dutch members regard the general purpose of the EUPAN network in line with what has formally been agreed among members, concerned with sharing knowledge and learning from each other. The overall aim is to improve national practices (see Box 5.16). Equally, their normative perspective is concerned with achieving effectiveness and efficiency in government operations, concerned with 'reducing administrative burdens'. Dutch members link the general purpose of the network to a commitment to the Lisbon Agenda (see Box 5.17).

Box 5.16: General purpose - NL

'It has a lot of aims and different activities but I think that in principle the member states regard EUPAN as an institute of knowledge sharing, learning from each other so trying to expose trends and making comparisons that enable the public administration managers to improve their own work at home, that is from the point of view of member states I think the most important goal' (NL representative DG level).

'The network is based on the usefulness you experience by the transfer of knowledge and the exchange of experiences and the building of contacts which you can subsequently put into practice the moment when it is needed. That's it' […] For us as working group counts: nationally matters have to be developed, that's what we bring in and that is what other people can make use of' (NL representative IPSG).

Box 5.17: General purpose - NL

'In that sense the Lisbon agenda is simply important [..] Because intrinsically we see that when you have a good public administration this has positive implications for businesses, because businesses work better when government functions better, when it is effective, is reducing its administrative burdens, when it is clear in legislation what it wants to achieve and how, that there is a clear connection so to say' (NL representative DG level).

5.4.2 OBJECTIVES - NL

Dutch members pursue their own objectives in the EUPAN network, confirming that the content of network processes is contested. Their agenda differs however from British members and needs to be understood in the light of their overall motives. They pursue a range of other goals besides learning, which are equally concerned with the pursuit of European network objectives and the promotion of common network activities. Dutch members aim to engage in developing policy and networking. Furthermore, Dutch members equally pursue goals of uploading and showcase, though in a different manner than their British counterparts. I begin by examining the objective of learning.

Learning

The first aim Dutch members pursue is concerned with learning and sharing information. Whereas British members reported on the value of the exchange of information in general, Dutch members emphasise the importance of acquiring new ideas to contribute to the development of national policy. Furthermore, they do not problematise the asymmetries in the process of learning like their British counterparts who criticized the imbalance in efforts versus benefits (see Box 5.18).

Box 5.18: Learning - NL

'My focus is in particular to look within the network whether there are interesting things we can take back to the Netherlands. On the other hand it is also important to use the network to inform others what we in the Netherlands are engaged with to acquire understanding and visibility to the developments in the Netherlands' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

'But for us as working group counts: nationally matters have to be developed, that's what we bring in and that is what other people can make use of' (NL representative IPSG).

Networking

Dutch members emphasise the importance of getting in touch with colleagues from abroad. The EUPAN network is regarded as a platform to acquire contacts and meeting people with the purpose to collect information about practices and

experiences elsewhere and also to discuss issues in less formal settings, in essence steering processes in a more informal manner (see Box 5.19).

Box 19: Networking – NL

'We benefit the most from what I would call the contacts [..] It was useful for us when we got in touch with people from other countries who were involved in comparative issues and then one contact is more useful than the other' (NL representative IPSG).

'An essential added value of this network is the social aspect. With more formal meetings in Brussels it is the norm that people come and go in one day, with very little interaction. Here a meeting is often spread out over two days, which gives you an evening to continue talking to each other about the issues. The social dimension is very important in this storey' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

Developing policy or other products

Unlike their British counterparts, Dutch members aim for concrete achievements, concerned with developing policy or other products both on the national and European level. However all representatives are dissatisfied about the imbalance between discussions and deliverables in the network, aiming to steer for more content and concrete deliverables (see Box 5.20).

Box 5.20: Developing policy or other products- NL

'A lot of issues have passed [on the network agenda] of which I have to say that eventually the practical meaning is relatively little and that is still the case and that is also due to the fact that the network has insufficiently succeeded to make material concrete and develop something'. […] 'On the same time you see that there is too little focus on the content, and too much on procedures' (NL representative IPSG).

'An important issue with regard to output is less studies per working group, that is a clear phenomenon that also has implications for the profile of such a working group because you can have interesting presentations internally but it is then very difficult to show your productivity to the external world.' […] 'In my view we should not talk too much about what a group should do, you just have to get on with it otherwise you don't spend your time [..] leading to questions about what are the concrete deliverables overall, it has become a talking group indeed' (NL representative e-Government WG).

Uploading

Like their British counterparts, Dutch members pursue objectives that can be classified as uploading. They equally aim to influence the policy of counterparts, EU policy directions in general as well as EU competence in the field of public administration. However, actors give meaning to this in a different manner. Whereas the British aim at exporting their own ideas and policies, the Dutch emphasise the importance of engaging in discussions and interactions with colleagues on issues and the problems they experience in dealing with different cultures and views.

Dutch actors aim to influence other member states on issues that are high on the Dutch political agenda, steering towards an EU that reflects Dutch preferences. One main area is concerned with corruption and integrity of government officials. Here actors talk about the need for engaging in discussions with other countries, and the barriers and sensitivities they have to confront (see Box 5.21). Similarly, Dutch network members aim to be involved in influencing EU policy. One common theme all representatives talk about is the issue of administrative burdens. The aim is that the European agenda eventually corresponds with the national one (see Box 5.22).

Furthermore, Dutch members aim to influence EU competence. They aim to prevent formal negotiations at EU level on public administration and to keep the nature of the EUPAN network informal (see Box 5.23).

Box 5.21: Uploading- NL

'We certainly want to initiate discussions with others. Also about ethics and about pension systems. On the same everybody knows how sensitive it is. There are countries that cannot get the word corruption out of their mouth so to say. That shows how complicated it is. That is a kind of tension I experience. That on the one hand I'd like to see continuity, important to develop things, to engage in substance others also benefit from. On the other hand there are all these different opinions, also different phases and cultures that make its realisation very difficult. And on the same time there are also the internal codes you have to take into consideration' (NL representative IPSG).

'With regard to integrity and anti-corruption, there is a lot of regulation countries have adopted, but there are actually very few countries that are concretely taking this on. In Brussels we call this sui vie, concerned with if there are complaints about

corruption or violations of integrity, do you take action or does it stay on the desk or it disappears in the bin. So it is one thing to pass legislation and outlawing various unethical practices, but the other side is the action you take to improve it. In the future it could be that within the network these discussions become more paramount' (NL representative DG level).

Box 5.22: Uploading- NL

'On the other hand there are things we are involved in and like to show to others while on the same time aiming to influence the European agenda. An important theme for us is about administrative burdens [..]. We think it is important to introduce this issue, as we want the European agenda eventually to correspond to the national agenda, in the sense that everybody is heading in a common direction without that everybody has to do the same thing, and besides it is important to develop some kind of standard, so it could be that you have a way of measuring which also gets accepted by other countries. The alternative is that in other countries things are developed in a completely different manner, and that at some stage you are confronted with a new European standard' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

Box 5.23: Uploading- NL

'The Commission obviously is in favour of formalisation of the network and the Commission belongs to the stream that also prefers a formal social dialogue so that one can make all agreements on the European level and we together with England and some Scandinavian countries are totally against this. In the Netherlands others have nothing to do with our ministry, so having employment conditions and juridical negotiations on the European level would be even more inappropriate […] We prefer to make a tailored decentralised approach more flexible but that is very different in countries' (NL representative DG level).

Showcase

Like the British, Dutch members aim to show their own successes to other network members. Dutch members talk about this in less explicit terms than their British counterparts however. Furthermore, unlike the British, they are not involved in providing a showcase for European involvement in general (see Box 5.24)

Box 5.24: Showcase- NL

You can regard it as preventive action, but on the other hand you can also be proud about what you have developed and that you can show this to others. There is indeed

the added advantage that one counteracts contradictory standards' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

5.4.3 NETWORK STRATEGIES – NL

Dutch members pursue their own network strategies. These are however of a different nature than those of British members and need to be understood in the light of their overall European network orientation. In terms of degree of active participation, Dutch members regard themselves as active members in the network like British members. However whereas members from the UK emphasise that they choose to be active on issues, which are of national interest, the Dutch do not define their involvement along these lines. Their approach can be defined as selective co-operation, co-operating on issues that are regarded as useful and are judged to be of quality (see Box 5.25).

In terms of their network role and position versus others, the Dutch define themselves as a leader, just like members from the UK. However, their approach is a different one. Whereas the British regard themselves as representatives of the national good, the Dutch regard themselves as representatives of the common good. Dutch members define themselves as active in taking a lead on agenda issues, on how the network is being run and as protectors of European standards. They regard their approach as the right one for the network as a whole, tending to talk in terms of what 'we' should be doing, when an individual view is expressed. Members expect others to follow, expressing some frustration that the network does not always pick up what has been initiated by the Dutch, with the Lisbon Agenda as an example (see Box 5.26).

Finally, the modes of exerting influence of Dutch members can be defined as soft power. Instead of national positioning and actively seeking alliances, Dutch members pursue institutional initiatives, engage in networking and regard themselves as having an open outlook towards other members (see Box 5.27).

Box 5.25: Network strategies - NL

'In general the new countries are talking a bit less than other countries, I think in general the Netherlands, England, Finland I mention now a few countries without

wanting to exclude others, a number of countries are just more active than others' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

'We do provide input quite a lot. We are reasonably active in the IPSG, occasionally we write contributions. [...] We have been very active on citizen charters by asking organisations to do a presentation sometimes and we have come up with concrete manuals and that was appreciated a lot' (NL representative IPSG).

'So we do more when we see more benefit in it and something useful is going on, and we cut back on our involvement till zero if nothing useful is going on, it is really unimaginable to have questionnaires they think we will bring forward to the BDG Group [unit Ministry, HK]. We don't dare to, that will give noise within the organisation if we send such peculiar questionnaire to the BDG, then they will think at Interior Affairs we have become completely mad so we simply don't co-operate. And then the Presidency is angry again but it needs to have some quality and in that sense these are informal networks so you can also cut back on your activities' (NL representative DG level).

Box 5.26: Network strategies - NL

I am a bit worried in the sense that it is too little about substance. I have brought that point forward in the network: how do we ensure that we can focus more on content and how do we organise the agenda according to that? I have tried to make this clear to others in 2 ways by showing which things work well and what doesn't' (NL representative IPSG).

'The Lisbon Agenda has become more important, the Dutch Presidency has started that. It is mentioned a lot by name, and it is very hard to materialise because it is about economic targets related to quality of service to the promotion of economic growth, that is a complex issue and that has not been picked up with much conviction [..] We could have pressed more on the substance of service programs and the quality of service that is offered within companies and concretely zoom into that' (NL representative IPSG).

Box 5.27: Network strategies - NL

'The influence I can exercise is dependent whether you are holding the Presidency or not and whether you are part of the Trojka, and this is not the case at the moment so our influence has clearly diminished, but furthermore it is dependent on your social contacts and whether you are able to arrange little clubs because it is an informal network so you can initiate a learning group or a smaller club of people and start

doing things [..] We do that, for example we have initiated a learning group reduction of administrative burdens in which countries join who also experience this as a problem and they will come up with a report to the DG Conference' (NL representative DG level).

5.4.4 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION – NL

Dutch actors do not coordinate their EUPAN activities on a formal basis along structured channels within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Instead coordination takes place on an informal and ad-hoc basis as in the UK. The purpose of coordination is a different one though. In the Netherlands the purpose is an informative one concerned with acquiring sufficient expertise on a certain topic (see Box 5.28). This differs from the UK where the purpose of coordination is more aimed at strategic defence, concerned with developing national positions and strategies. This is in line with the differences between the two countries in their overall motives of engagement. Unlike members from the UK, Dutch members do not solely aim to defend their own national organisational interests but aim to be active in promoting European network interests.

Box 5.28: National institutional coordination - NL

'I always aim to engage those colleagues that are most closely related in policy terms to a certain issue who can inform me, and that can vary from meeting to meeting and then I bring that in to the Presidency, when they are making a report. These are often questionnaires' (NL representative DG level).

'When others are involved, we engage them. [...] But we don't make a big circus out of it […]. We do prepare meetings and if it is really needed then it will reach the director. That was more the case when we were the Presidency, or immediately afterwards as certain issues had to be worked out, because then you have a more agenda setting role than now. Now it is a bit like, well, the country holding the Presidency does that a bit more. But we have just had a meeting about consumer satisfaction in the UK. Then we involve others who are engaged here in that too. So with certain issues we ask others, but not with every agenda item' (NL representative IPSG).

5.4.5 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY - NL

Within the UK the overall policies and organisational strategy towards involvement in the EUPAN network have been defined in terms of limited resources and the

attachment of low political commitment to EUPAN activities. Within the Netherlands facilitation is perceived to be more positive and confirms the overall picture of a more European orientation than the British. Actors judge that they are well facilitated in their work and that there is sufficient political commitment for being involved in European network activities. The EUPAN network is regarded as important for the organisation, due to the involvement of high officials and the general importance of European activities (see Box 5.29). However, the value and utility of activities needs to be justified and is not always recognised within the organisation at large. An inward-looking attitude is the norm (see Box 5.30).

Box 5.29: National institutional capability - NL

'We are well supported. Important is that you have facilities. And those we have on a sufficient basis. Also the preparation of meetings, the way that we as a team are involved in that is working well. During our Presidency we had a generous representation. In advance, and also afterwards. To the Trojka meeting I went alone, but to the IPSG we do go with two. That is just really useful. [..] Within the organisation we have to justify that we go with two people. So far it is going okay. But we don't know how it will go in the future. The further you are from your Presidency, that question comes up more often. But we consider it as very useful. It is a question that comes up at performance reviews. That we have to maximise our use of it' (NL representative IPSG).

'It is very important because let's say the highest civil servant, the DG is at the head of this network. At any rate the board takes good account of the importance of European affairs so there is capacity for this to get a good view on European developments and its relationship to national policy' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

Box 5.30: National institutional capability -NL

'There is the image: European activities are slow and bureaucratic and the question what are the concrete benefits of it? That is in itself a legitimate question. Well, from our side we demonstrate what we get out of it [...] That is what we emphasise and that is the truth. For us it pays off. [...] You have to emphasise that because it is not the first priority here, it is not the first thing people think of like well the IPSG is so important. Well, many times about international activities jokes are being made, like going on a trip or holiday those kind of things' (NL representative IPSG).

5.4.6 NATIONAL IMPACT - NL

EUPAN members from the UK reported positively on the mind-broadening effects of network activities but negatively about the overall impact on the national level. Looking at the Netherlands, actors here are equally positive about how activities broaden the horizon of actors towards new ideas and perspectives. Furthermore, and contrasting to the UK, they perceive the use and impact of the EUPAN network to be positive on the national level. Actors perceive a direct impact of new ideas on the policy issues they are themselves involved in, even though they recognise that this impact is not always visible for others (see Box 5.31). This finding is in line with how Dutch members give meaning to the objective of learning. Dutch members do specifically address the value of learning in relation to the development of policy. Furthermore, they attach general importance to the value of the development of policy or other products in network activities.

Box 5.31: National impact - NL

'Now and then we hear interesting things of which you say it is important to know more about that because we are in a comparative traject of development in the Netherlands where that kind of information can be important for [...] We take experiences with us in the development of our own policy' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

'It has been very useful for us when we got in contact with people from other countries who were involved in comparative issues and that is in essence what has been the biggest benefit for, and then one contact is more useful than the other [..] We have had a lot of benefit of the international conferences. We have a lot of benefit in our involvement in citizen charters, and we also have useful experiences in other policy domains here and there. [..] For us it pays off. I can imagine that the impact is not always visible for others, but it really is there' (NL representative IPSG).

'There are certain issues, such as diversity which is at the moment on the agenda in the Netherlands, how do we ensure that government has a more diverse work force with regards to women, minorities etc. That has been a trend in the UK and came up on the agenda during the UK Presidency and that has as a result that other countries start initiating it too, so in that sense there is really a trend inducing impact, not only with regard to good practices but also bad practices that are brought forward' (NL representative DG level).

5.5 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: OTHER MEMBER STATES

The findings of both case studies demonstrate that members from the UK and the NL each pursue their own aims and strategies, embedded and steered from within their national organisational premises. This finding is important for the understanding of individual agency and the two member states in question in particular, but ultimately is crucial to shed light on the nature of network processes within the EUPAN network at large. This highlights the importance to empirically demonstrate that the findings of the case studies are not incidental but that their essence mirrors the network engagement of other EUPAN members. For this purpose, as has been outlined in chapter 4, a survey has been conducted across all network members of the EUPAN network. The questions have been framed along the lines of the main findings of the case studies (see appendix 3). Although the results of the questions do not provide us with a holistic view and in depth meanings of network agency, the findings on both the pursuit of objectives and impact confirm that network members from other member states engage in network processes with their own agendas which are steered from the national organisational level.

5.5.1 OBJECTIVES - OTHER MEMBER STATES

Like the UK and the NL, network members from other member states use the EUPAN network as a platform to pursue a whole range of objectives, expressing their own priorities. The findings demonstrate that the formal objective of learning as well as exchanging information is indeed shared by network members to be a prime individual goal. However, members also pursue a range of other objectives (see Figure 1).

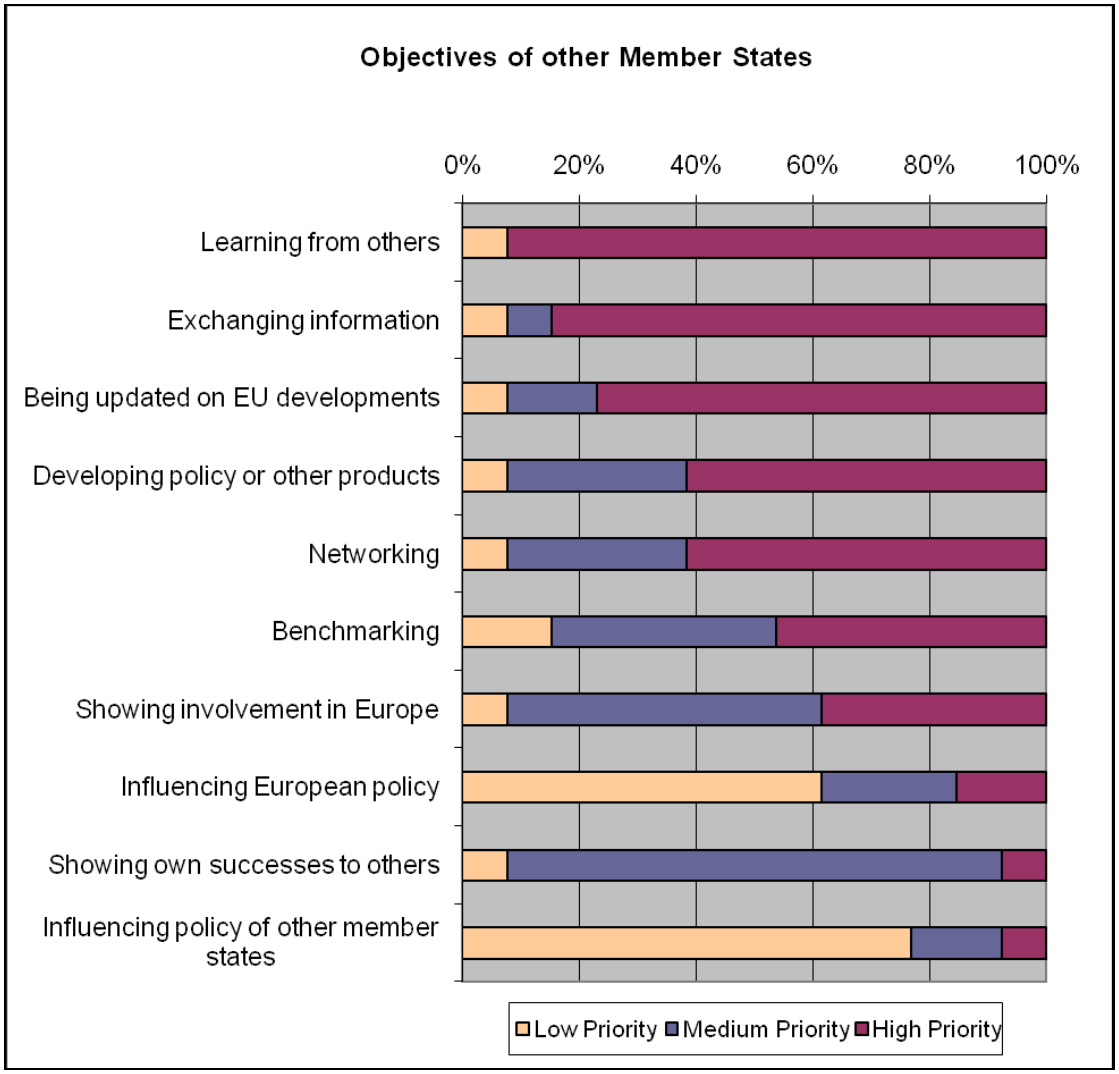

Figure 1: Objectives of other member states

Figure 1 summarises the objectives network members from other member states pursue. Where there is more than one respondent, I have averaged the responses by country.[25] High priority is given to the steering of common network objectives, with learning and the exchange of information on the top of the list. This is followed by objectives concerned with being updated on EU developments and benchmarking. Furthermore, the majority of EUPAN members give high priority to the EUPAN

[25] In some member states there was more than one respondent. Overall, the responses were very similar within a single country. In a few cases they did differ, requiring me to average the responses, opting for the mode response. However, the observations as illustrated in the figure are not affected significantly by how the responses have been averaged.

network as a platform to engage in networking as well as to develop policy or other products together.

EUPAN members also pursue objectives that are concerned with steering individual agendas, even though there is more differentiation among members in degree of priority attached. Like the Netherlands and the UK, network members from other member states are involved in uploading as well as providing a showcase. In terms of showcase, network members aim to show involvement in Europe as well as showing own successes to others. With regard to uploading, network members are involved in influencing European policy as well as influencing policy of other member states. Furthermore, they are involved in influencing EU competence. Like the UK and the NL, network members from other member states pursue their own agenda with regard to the institutional development of the network in general and the development of social dialogue in particular (see Box 5.32).

Box 5.32: Objectives – Other Member States

'The network should remain informal and intergovernmental and include informal social dialogue' (Slovenia HRWG working group representative).

'The present informal way seems to be effective and promising for the future. The steps made for a more formal social dialogue are also positive' (Italy representative HRWG).

'It should stay informal and intergovernmental, but should also develop better informal work forms with the unions (TUNED). Only if the exchange of ideas and views are kept really informal it will be real. As soon as it will start with formal standpoints, discussion will take over dialogue. Blocked positions will become even more blocked' (Sweden representative DG level).

'While not wishing to prejudge the outcome of the Test Phase on Social Dialogue, I feel that the diversity of administrative structures that exists across the central public administrations of 27 Member States would pose challenges for the implementation of a formal social dialogue' (Ireland representative DG level).

5.5.2 IMPACT - OTHER MEMBER STATES

EUPAN network members equally approach the impact of their activities in terms of mind broadening and impact on policy. The latter proved to be a divisive issue in our case studies, with members from the NL more positive on the impact on national policymaking than members from the UK. This division is reflected in the questionnaire responses, with some network members reporting a direct impact and others being more sceptical on the impact activities have made (see Box 5.33). Although network members report a variety of experiences, the bottom-line is that where impact had been made, this was concerned with the provision of ideas and knowledge for particular issues that had been on the national agenda at that time. This finding suggests that the conventional Europeanisation approach on explaining impact -with impact taking place in case of a 'misfit' between European and national practices- does not provide us with a sufficient explanation. Instead, the findings show that network members actively steer implementation processes, making use of European involvement to enhance their own national agendas.

Box 5.33: Impact – Other member states

'My unit (and me personally) was recently involved in reformatory activities regarding the civil service law (developing a new system of the civil service corps). During these activities, in various working teams, European best practices were presented and were taken into account. A lot of studies elaborated during HRWG meetings were used, e.g. […] (Poland representative HRWG).

'For example the developments in the CAF working group have a very direct link to the Finnish quality work as we promote the model for public sector organisations. Also the European Quality Conferences have concrete effects to national projects as link to these conferences we organise the selection of BP cases, national seminars, CAF training etc' (Finland representative IPSG).

'Mobility - we are in the process of changing legislation and we need information on how other countries have done it' (Romania representative HRWG).

'Some information collected in the working groups, for instance, a study that was carried out and has special interest for the Portuguese public administration is sent to the Secretary of State for Public Administration. […] But, in general, the work developed in the network has no impact on my country. This is an issue that has been

raised in the network meetings also by other MS as it is questioned the value, usefulness of the EUPAN outputs' (Portugal representative DG level).
'Supply of competencies and specially questions about diversity, demography and Knowledge Management. I don´t think that the work in HRWG has influenced Swedish central public administration in a more profound way. But it´s important to compare data and ideas with other countries and some reports from EUPAN and the member countries I hope have had some impact' (Sweden representative HRWG).

5.6 COLLECTIVE DYNAMICS AMONG MEMBERS OF THE EUPAN NETWORK

So far I have analysed individual agency in relation to its national organisational premises. The findings of both case studies as well as the questionnaire demonstrate that network members engage in network processes with their own objectives and strategies, shaped by their domestic institutional and political backgrounds. Ultimately, it is the interactions among these individual actors in relation to their individual organisational premises as well as the shared institutional network surroundings, which defines the nature of network processes at large.

In the remainder of this chapter the collective dynamics among network members within the EUPAN network will be addressed. Here I do not analyse the interactions of network members on an individual basis, but I explore the meanings individual members give to the overall collective dynamics among network members. This is based on the views of members from the UK and the NL, contextualised by the views of other network members as expressed in the questionnaire.

The findings demonstrate that EUPAN network processes are political in nature, taking place in a politicized network context, are characterised by struggles among actors as well as being contested in nature. Three themes will be discussed: 1) struggles over control of and the content of coordination 2) divisions of power among members of the EUPAN network, 3) the nature of EUPAN proceedings. I begin by analysing the political struggles over coordination between the Presidency and the Commission.

5.6.1 STRUGGLES OVER COORDINATION WITHIN EUPAN NETWORK

The distribution of power in EU governance is predominantly based on a formal assessment of how roles are divided. From this perspective the EUPAN network is defined as an intergovernmental network, coordinated by the Presidency. This is also in line with how coordination is outlined with the formal processes as laid down in the Handbook. However, this neglects how coordination works out in practice, concerned with the actual performance of Presidencies. More crucially it neglects struggles over coordination between the Commission and the Presidency and how the Commission pursues its own strategies. Even though the Commission is not the network manager in formal terms, it seeks control over coordination. Struggles over network coordination furthermore come to light in how members give meaning to the overall focus and direction of network processes. This is a contested issue.

With regard to the first point -the actual coordination practices by the Presidency- both British and Dutch members express the view that the changing face of the Presidency leads to inconsistent modes of coordination over time. Members agree that not every country has the same abilities, spirit and resources to be successful in this role. This has its impact on the functioning of the network and its continuity (see Box 5.34). Furthermore each Presidency eventually steers the network in its own manner and with its own aims and agenda items, rather than simply conforming to the agreed long-term network agenda (see Box 5.35). Other network members confirm these views (see Box 5.36).

Although powerful, the Presidency is however not the only network actor steering the network agenda: though formally an actor with no coordination role, in practice the Commission makes use of its special status to pursue its own European interests. Both British and Dutch members are ambivalent about its role. Actors express the view that in practice the Commission has various faces varying from being a peer, to having a special role as observer to being an actor with its own aims and strategies. Most members express how the Commission is steering the network in its own manner, having motives of regulation and pursuing their own European agendas. Although the Commission does not have competence with a capital C, they do claim ‘competence with a small capital’, as one actor puts it (see Box 5.37). According to members this is most pronounced on the issue of social dialogue, where the Commission aims to

establish formalisation of social dialogue (see Box 5.38). These views are predominantly confirmed by other members, who express that in practice the Commission acts as a special actor pursuing its own agendas (see Box 5.39).

Finally, members are divided over what the focus and content of network activities should be. The findings expose how the overall direction of network processes is contested. The rough division line is among those members who prefer activities to be concerned with discussions and exchanges and those members who desire concrete outcomes in the form of deliverables. This division is reflected in our case studies. British members place emphasis on the conduct of discussions and how this could be improved. Dutch members on the other hand are adamant that the focus in the network is not enough on achieving concrete deliverables (see Box 5.40). Other network members are equally divided on the direction and content of network steering (see Box 5.41).

Box 5.34: Coordination - EUPAN

It is very difficult to ensure good body and content to processes and to do that with a certain continuity. Yes, because every time you have different Presidencies. And one country is better in that than the other' (NL representative IPSG).

'The network functions better or worse, depending on the specific Presidency in charge or possibly a collection of Trojka countries, let's say the board and the Presidency countries who need to invest in the productivity during a certain Presidency. The extent to which there are achievements is very much dependent on investments. […[A Presidency of a big county simply hires consultants who write good reports and then you have a good kick off for such a meeting. But you also have countries which repeat a few old reports […] more weak Presidencies have been added with little resources and no strong starting point of governance […], (NL representative DG level).

Box 5.35: Coordination - EUPAN

'So we tend to agree [on items in the Medium Term Program, HK], and that is why we have the Secretariat. But nonetheless there is an element of each Presidency choosing' (UK representative DG level).

‘So the DG meetings, also here counts: every country has its own pet topics, you should not call it that way, it has a negative connation, but its own important points that it wants to address’ (NL representative IPSG).

‘Sometimes I have the impression he finds that a bit frustrating because when he [referring to DG representative, HK] sees the minutes, he doesn’t recognise them. He thinks this is another meeting, I didn’t attend this meeting. Because the power is all in the person writing the minutes, the Presidency at the time. I am sure when we write the minutes that other countries will have the same because they will think that the UK has their own spin on it or their own steer so I think it is a common criticism’ (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.36: Coordination - EUPAN

‘The rotating Presidency entails the principle of rotation of chairmanship as well as different styles with all its advantages and disadvantages’ (Luxembourg Representative IPSG).

‘The six monthly rotation and change of chair exposes EUPAN to the possibility of being chaired by an inexperienced chairperson with a consequent loss of effectiveness’ (Ireland Representative DG level).

‘The Presidency has the right to choose its own agenda (to some extent limited by the agreed MTP) and working methods, and these are not always fully equal with mine’ (Finland Representative HRWG).

‘There is not always a balance between the Presidency´s specific needs/ requirements / priorities and the needs/ requirements/ interests of the network as a whole’ (Cyprus Representative e-Gov WG).

‘Each Presidency should use the network to take up issues of its own interest within the ongoing medium term programme – still you may feel that some of the issues ly too far from the programme’ (Sweden Representative DG level).

Box 5.37: Coordination - EUPAN

‘The Commission has a very ambivalent role in relation to the network, it doesn’t run it because there is no formal competence at European level. So, they can’t tell us what to do. In one sense they are there as the, as the 28th member state, as the employer of the Commission, so if we are talking about performance pay then some of this is relevant to the Commission pay systems’ (UK representative DG level).

‘The Commission they are there, I always see them sort of as observers in a sense because it is unlike the other meetings where they are very much at the steering wheel. Here they act as observers and give insights […] they have the knowledge of what is going on in other places in the Commission so they have that additional insight which is very helpful’ (UK representative e-Gov WG).

‘For the member states the EUPAN network is a knowledge-sharing institute […], for the Commission well that has also motives of regulation. There are certain policy files […] There it is not about learning, but about informing and some negotiating how the member states need to get on with it’ (NL representative DG level).

‘The Commission has no competence as it is called, but you also have competence with a small capital in my view. They have no competence with a capital C, so they cannot issue instructions. They cannot tell us what to do, although they try to’ (UK representative DG level).

‘Actually it was organised that the Commission would take part as an independent actor […] that they would be a conversation partner on an equal basis. However that shifted now and then […] the distinction between the European and the national agenda was not always easily made by the Presidency and therewith the issues the Commission was involved in would get more attention that the issues that would happen in the member states’ (NL representative e-Gov WG).

Box 5.38: Coordination - EUPAN

‘Obviously the Commission wants to enter the road to formalisation of the network and the Commission belongs to the stream that also wants to create a formal social dialogue in order to make agreements on various issues on the European level’ (NL representative DG level).

‘Oh, they are desperate to promote it, I mean they are prepared, I don’t mind you recording this, because I have said it many times, they are prepared to not follow, to flaunt their own rules in order to have a public sector extra dialogue committee. The Commission at its worst comes out on an issue like this where there is desperation to get a dialogue going they are prepared to fund when they shouldn’t fund, they are prepared to break the laws they represent’ (UK representative DG level).

Box 5.39: Coordination - EUPAN

‘The Commission has a dual role in that it is a member of the Network and responds to questionnaires etc as a “civil service”. The Commission also has a regulatory role

in that it needs to ensure that Member States comply with relevant mobility provisions of EU legislation providing for freedom of movement within the EU' (Ireland representative DG level).

'The Commission should be regarded as a member among others. But an immediate impression is that the Commission occupies or tries to occupy somewhat of a privileged position' (Sweden representative HRWG).
'The commission should participate on equal terms as the other members of the network – i.e. being one member among us others. Sometimes though the Commission's standpoints seem to be more political than administrative. Its influence is becoming increasingly stronger. Sometimes you may doubt if it regards itself as a member of the network or as a change agent in direction of current EU-policies' (Sweden representative DG level).

Box 5.40: Coordination - EUPAN

'I mean sometimes it is, you know, difficult to see why a topic is being presented. [..] Perhaps what we should do it to be focused on having a much more dynamic discussion, a brainstorming session or workshops type approach as part of the meeting where you can really get under the skin of the project or the subject because at the moment, no topic tends to be discussed for an hour or so and with so many member states participating it is really quite difficult to do anything other than just touch on the surface' (UK representative IPSG).

'A lot of issues have passed [on the network agenda] of which I have to say that eventually the practical meaning is relatively little and that is still the case and that is also due to the fact that the network has insufficiently succeeded to make material concrete and develop something and that is true for knowledge management but also for other issues' (NL representative IPSG).

'An important issue with regard to output is less studies per working group, [...] leading to questions about what are the concrete deliverables overall, it has become a talking group indeed' (NL representative e-Gov WG).

Box 5.41: Coordination - EUPAN

'Currently, this is one of the critical issues in the network. The studies usefulness that are carried out by the successive presidencies are questioned for example' (Portugal representative DG level).

'There is a need to put in place measures to ensure that the work is focused on clearer and more concrete mandates, with specific tangible and intangible outputs/

deliverables to be produced within specific timelines. Discussions do not always lead to specific deliverables' (Cyprus representative e-Gov WG).

'Too much focus on deliverables' (Sweden representative IPSG).
'Discussion should be more dominant. Mutual learning is a main objective' (Sweden representative DG level).

5.6.2 DIVISIONS OF POWER AMONG EUPAN NETWORK MEMBERS

In formal terms, EUPAN network members are equal participants to one another. The Handbook does not specify any differences in role or status among member states, such as due to varying length of membership of the network. Instead of approaching network members as equal to one another however, the starting point in this thesis is that power differences among network members need to be explored.

The findings within the EUPAN network demonstrate that network members indeed do not participate on equal terms. Members from the UK and the NL report that this is in the first place due to the very nature of the network gatherings and the amount of people, concerned with plenary meetings comprising up to 30 people. Ad hoc attempts are made to experiment with new working methods, which foster more interaction (see Box 5.42).

Secondly, and more crucially, members express how differences in participation are due to a number of reasons concerned with inequalities in development and power: variations in resources, English language capabilities and experience of being involved in networks and the EU at large. The main division line among members is enlargement, dividing old and new member states. The bigger and in particular older member states are seen to be more institutionally capable and hold more status and power than members from smaller and newer member states (see Box 5.43). This is supported by the views of other network members (see Box 5.44).

Box 5.42: Divisions of power among EUPAN network members

'What we try to do, in addition to having the big table for 25, well 40 people, sit around, we break up throughout the day at least twice, into smaller groups because some people are more comfortable on a table like this with 4 to 6 people. We try to cater for different types of people. The meetings can drag on, if the person who is the

Presidency who leads the discussions doesn't stick to the timetable, you've got to be ruthless; you have got to chop people up. You have got to say: Thanks [Mr X] but we have to move on' (UK representative IPSG).

We are trying to do different things, different presidencies and different approaches not just sitting round in plenary sessions, so people recognise that having 27, 28, 29 people on paper with the Commission is not conducive to effective process meetings really. And so, different presidencies have tried to do things in a different way [..] having some working groups meetings and then coming back to report back the main things, rather than all sitting around having clearly something, it gives more people an opportunity to make contribution' (UK representative DG level).

Box 5.43: Divisions of power among EUPAN network members

'You tend to see a bit more of the Northern European countries speaking and few Mediterranean countries as well. I think the more Eastern side of Europe they might not necessarily come because it is difficult for them to because of resources and so on because of course you don't get your expenses paid for in this working group so it is a big commitment so you might not necessarily see as many members states as possibly you would like and sort of, the older European countries are the ones talking more' (UK representative e-Gov WG).

'The new accession states are still finding their feet. They don't take very much part in resolutions. [..]They just do not feel confident. They are not totally sure about the process yet, they are still learning as the new members in Europe. The Poles are starting'.

About which countries dominate the network: 'The big ones are Germany, France, Luxembourg, the UK, Ireland, Sweden and Holland and Italy. [..] Alliances and contacts are about goodwill, so you see all the old member states signing up to the new member states and being nice' (UK representative DG level).

'In general the new countries are talking less than other countries. I think the Netherlands, UK and Finland, to name a few countries without wanting to exclude others, are simply more active' (NL representative e-Gov WG)

Box 5.44: Divisions of power among EUPAN network members

'It is to be observed that some members are much more active than others during the meetings' (Luxembourg representative IPSG).

> ‘Personally I wish that the representatives of some of the newer member states will start taking a more active role in participating the discussions’ (Finland representative IPSG).
>
> ‘The use of an English only regime from 25/6 onwards (essentially since enlargement) has caused difficulties for some Member States. While all Member States can generally converse well in English, there are still underlying language concerns for some’ (Ireland representative DG level).

5.6.3 THE POLITICAL NATURE OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE EUPAN NETWORK

The final dimension is concerned with the nature of the proceedings of the EUPAN network, looking at the institutional context in which network interactions take place. In formal terms, the EUPAN network is informal in status and operations. The starting point in this thesis is that the informal nature of network proceedings needs to be critically assessed, examining how power is exercised in proceedings. Here we distinguish between the relations among members as well as internal network proceedings.

In terms of relations among network members, Dutch and British members describe them as informal, with consensus-seeking the norm. However they report how debates can be contentious, in particular in higher levels of the network, concerned with the DG meetings (see Box 5.45). Furthermore, underlying differences are not always exposed but intentionally covered up. Members report of getting in touch with lengthy documents in which the language is regarded as deliberately vague in order for all countries to agree on the content. According to members resolutions are often carefully worded for the same purpose (see Box 5.46).

Network proceedings are regarded as formally structured. Members describe the protocol of meetings as officious. One representative from the UK compares the proceedings to those of the UN. Meetings are structured on the lines of formal orders of seating, microphones and nameplates to be shown when speaking. Some members regard the formality of internal proceedings as an inhibiting factor for open discussion (see Box 5.47). The views of other network members reflect these ambiguities

between informality in relations and formality in network proceedings, as well as consensus-seeking as the norm but not always the practice (see Box 5.48).

Box 5.45: EUPAN network proceedings

'I think the higher you reach, the more important are the codes. Then there is quickly a sense of well we just have to find consensus. Yes, then those differences are covered up a bit. But with regards to those working groups, I have the impression that we can talk quite freely. […] It is a big advantage that we only speak English. That works reasonably well, it creates open communication' (NL representative IPSG).

'The group in general is informal and I think in many ways perhaps the more valuable time can be when the group breaks up and goes into informal sessions around coffee breaks and lunchtimes when you are able to do the one to one or smaller group discussion around a particular topic' (UK representative IPSG).

'The DG meetings are fairly diplomatic meetings […] There are however little issues about which we would need to battle, it is not such a circuit, it is more a circuit of discussing well this report says that this is a good method to be adopted but we don't think so as we tried this once before, so what the report says works well is not right at all' (NL representative DG level).

'It could be quite contentious in the end. We are not doing a review on our own we are using contributions from everybody else. […] So there might be a bit of friction, but I am sure these meetings being what they are like some kind of common ground will be reached that everybody can agree' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.46: EUPAN network proceedings

'So the resolution on social dialogue, the compromise was that we set up a working group. The ministerial resolution said something like that they agreed to ask their directors general to examine the possibilities and ways in which we can improve and make more effective social dialogue. Carefully worded, it doesn't mention formal social dialogue so everybody can buy into that' (UK representative DG level).

'Well lots of documents are a bit lengthy, and some of the language is quite difficult to understand because it is stuff that is written by a country where English is not their first language. So some of the vocabulary can be a bit vague, maybe deliberately so. Because the more vague the language, the easier it is for all the countries to agree it' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.47: EUPAN network proceedings

Yes, it is a formal meeting setting, a big long table. People have microphones and name plates and if they want to speak they turn the nameplate over and the chair says: we hear next from Luxembourg, and then France. It is like the UN. […]The protocol of the meetings can be a bit overtly officious. That's literally people have to sit at a certain place. Presidency has the top table, previous presidency sits to the left, next Presidency to the right, and all the countries are arranged in the order of the Presidencies. All this, I mentioned before, people putting their name label up when they want to speak. It can be a bit over the top, anyway' (UK representative IPSG).

I mean they are inevitably formal due to the fact that we have to grapple with the complications of language and so on. But the last meeting, the Lisbon meeting I thought, even with the formality there was, you know, there was some quite robust open discussion' (UK representative DG level).

'It is semi-formal in the sense that yes, it is formal to the extent that there is a presidency chair and each member state sits round a table and there is some formality about order of, but you have to have some formality in order to control the contributions to the meeting ah to chair the actual participation and process of the meeting […] I think the formality of the meeting does sometimes inhibit or restrict the degree to which you can talk about a subject or explore a subject because the meetings tend to be discussing a particular proposition and then you will contribute a particular, in relation to a particular point what it does not allow you to say well, actually I would just like to have a general discussion around this topic more informally' (UK representative IPSG).

Box 5.48: EUPAN network proceedings

'In the EUPAN network in always very friendly and consensual atmosphere' (Slovenia representative HRWG).

'eGov WG is very informal and consensual' (Finland representative e-Gov WG).

'It can be easier or more difficult to reach a consensus according to the issues that are at stake. But among the network there is always a concern to reach it' (Portugal representative DG level).

'There happen to be presidencies/countries who attempt to convince others to particular topics/solutions regardless different views of some other countries. But in general consensus and diversity are the fundamental rules in HRWG Group' (Poland representative HRWG).

> ‘As discussions are formal and seldom go in depth, it is hard to know if a consensus has actually been reached. This also depends on size and level of the meetings’ (Sweden representative HRWG).

5.7 CONCLUSION

The empirical findings in this chapter have demonstrated that network processes within the EUPAN network are political in nature: processes take place in a politicized context by being embedded and steered from the national organisational premises of network members, are characterised by struggles among actors and are contested in nature. These findings have been exposed by examining the complex interrelations among actors and institutions on both the national as well as European level.

In terms of individual agency, the findings demonstrate that network engagement matters for actors from the UK as well as the Netherlands. Actors from both countries pursue their own interests by strategically managing both their European network interests, as well as their national organisational interests. They do so in different manners however. Members from the UK present themselves to be defending national organisational interests. In their mode of engagement, they aim to influence processes and activities from the perspective of their own positions and interests. Actors are actively involved in uploading and pursuing reputational politics. They pursue their objectives through claiming leadership in the network, actively seeking alliances and are involved in coordinating their strategies and positions. Members from the Netherlands put more emphasis on the actual content of processes, aiming to promote European network activities in line with their own preferences. Dutch actors are actively involved in negotiations and discussions, while claiming to be representatives of the common good, guiding others in their vision of how European network activities should unfold.

Not only are members from the UK and the Netherlands engaged in the EUPAN network with their own interests, the findings of the questionnaire demonstrate that other network members equally use the EUPAN network to pursue their own pallet of objectives as well as steering the impact of activities on the national level. This is an

important finding for the understanding of the behaviour of network agency on its own terms, but more for its implications for network processes at large. Ultimately, it is the interactions among individual members with their own agendas and strategies in relation to their national organisational territories as well as the shared institutional network context itself, which shapes the nature of European network processes at large.

Here these interactions have been analysed in terms of the collective dynamics among EUPAN members as a whole. On the basis of the meanings of network members, the various dimensions of the nature of processes in the EUPAN network have been exposed. The findings demonstrate that network processes are characterised by inconsistencies and fluctuations in coordination due to rotating Presidencies; struggles between the Presidency and Commission over control of coordination and contestation over the direction of coordination in general. Network processes take place in a context of divisions of power among members and political proceedings of the EUPAN network. In terms of divisions among members, a significant finding is how power is divided among member states along the lines of enlargement, with actors from old member states regarded as more powerful than new member states. With regard to network proceedings, the informality of the status of network and the relations among network members masks the actual formality of network proceedings and the conflicts that do take place.

The overall conclusion we can draw is that even though EUPAN is an informal co-operation network consisting of civil servants, politicization, struggles and contestation are inherent features to the nature of its network processes. Whether this is equally valid for the Heads of PES network will be addressed in the next chapter, examining network processes in a different policy domain and different context of formal processes.

CHAPTER 6: THE HEADS OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES NETWORK

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of network processes in the second co-operation network: the Heads of Public Employment Services network. The HOPES network is a different network from the EUPAN network: it has its own focus and composition of actors and operates on the basis of a different set of formal processes. In this chapter I examine how network processes unfold against a different formal institutional background. I will demonstrate that in essence network processes are similar in nature: in both the EUPAN as well as the HOPES network processes take place in a politicized context, are characterised by struggles among actors and contestation over objectives and outcomes.

The chapter is structured as follows. I begin by outlining the formal processes of the HOPES network, the main operating principles as have been agreed among network members. We will see that whereas processes have been codified within the EUPAN network, this is not the case with regards to the HOPES network. Here formal agreements among members are lacking, and references to the procedures, purpose and role division are dispersed over various policy documents. This implies that informal processes are taking place against a more contested background, and the nature of these interactions will be the subsequent main focus in the chapter.

First of all, I address the nature of individual network agency. Within the EUPAN network, network members from both the UK and the Netherlands did not define their role with reference to the existing formal processes of the network, notably the Handbook. Instead network members defined their role predominantly with reference to their own national organisational premises. This is equally the case with members engaged within the HOPES network, even though network members do problematise the contested context they are engaged in. Significantly, modes of network engagement of members from the two countries are very similar in both networks. Like the EUPAN network, within the HOPES network British members place

emphasis on defending national organisational interests, whereas Dutch members present themselves to be equally involved in promoting European network interests. This becomes clear in the different aspects of their network agency, concerned with how they view the general purpose of the network, the content of their aims, strategies and coordination modes, their institutional capability and also how they view the impact of the network on the national level. The findings of the UK will be outlined first, followed by the Netherlands. The findings of the case studies will subsequently be contextualised by the results from the questionnaire of all network members.

The overall collective dynamics among HOPES network members is the remaining focus of analysis of this chapter. This will be analysed on the basis of the meanings of both British and Dutch representatives, contextualised by the views of all network members. The difference in formal processes implies that the collective dynamics within the HOPES network unfolds in its own unique manner. However, the essence of the findings is similar to the EUPAN network. The findings expose struggles between the Commission and public employment services over ownership of and the direction of coordination. Furthermore, network processes take place in a context of divisions of power among HOPES network members, with the main division line between old and new member states. Finally, the institutional context and proceedings of the HOPES network are political in nature. Despite its informal status, the internal proceedings of the HOPES network are formally structured. Although relations among HOPES members are regarded as informal and consensual, contentious debates do arise and are often covered.

For now, I commence with analysing the formal processes of the HOPES network.

6.2 ABSENCE OF NETWORK CONSTITUTION

In contrast to the EUPAN network, within the HOPES network members have not made a formal agreement with regard to the formal aims and role division of the network. There is not a single codified document that can be read as a network constitution. Instead, reference to the procedures, purpose and role division of the network is made indirectly in different document sources produced by the main actors in the network: either the Commission or the public employment services on the level of member states as a collective.

Most of the documents are not specifically produced as network documents confined to the HOPES network, but to PES actors within the European space in general. The documents are generally concerned with policy, outlining common visions on the European agenda of public employment services in general (Commission Communication, 1998; Commission Progress Report, 2001; Mission Statement EU/ EEA Public Employment Services 1998 and 2006).[26] The mission statements of public employment services as a collective are more specific than the Commission Communication on the concrete role of the network. However, all documents have in common that the institutional means to achieve policy visions is placed at the margins and is not being described in concrete detail.

This fragmentation in authoritative references for governance is important for the empirical analysis, as it provides the background against which the actual interactions among network members take place. In essence, it will have an impact on how the political nature of network processes unfolds, framing the agendas of members and the strategic manoeuvring space among actors. Here, I will outline how the status and procedures, purpose and role division are brought under attention in the various documents, exposing degrees of contestation.

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[26] With regard to contributions of the Commission, the Commission Communication (1998) is concerned with a call for concerted action on modernising the Public Employment Services as a contribution to the European Employment Strategy. It highlights the role of the Public Employment Services in the implementation of the Employment Guidelines and a vision on the challenges and solutions to the modernisation of public employment services in Europe. More directly addressing co-operation activities among PES, in 2001 the Commission produced a progress report on the first five years of European co-operation among PES. With regard to contributions of the public employment services themselves, the mission statements produced in 1998 and 2006 are concerned with highlighting the common work areas and objectives for the modernisation of public employment services in Europe. In these policy visions co-operation is promoted as an important tool to achieve common objectives regarding the modernisation of public employment services and its role in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. It is in this context that the HOPES network is referred to.

6.2.1 STATUS AND PROCEDURES HOPES NETWORK

In 1997 the HOPES network was initiated, establishing cooperation and European exchange on the level of the Heads of Public Employment Services.[27] The institutional structure of the network concentrates on the level of the Directors General, with meetings between DG's and their assistants taking place twice a year. Unlike the EUPAN network this network does not have fixed working groups that are institutionally linked to the DG meetings. Instead, ad hoc working groups are established.

This network is embedded in various EU structures and processes, due to the fact that employment has a prominent place on the EU agenda. Within the network itself, there is an institutional relationship with EURES.[28] EURES is concerned with the development of a European jobseekers portal and has as its purpose the improvement labour mobility across the EU. In broader institutional terms, the HOPES network is related to the European Employment Strategy. The Employment Guidelines refer to the Public Employment Services in a number of objectives and explicitly support their modernisation in a broad sense. [29]

6.2.2 OBJECTIVES

Although formal aims are not specified in a document with a constitutive nature as is the case in the EUPAN network, the existing European documents refer to two broad aims: sharing best practices and learning on the one hand and contributing to European policy on the other hand. As a co-operation network the HOPES network is therefore not only concerned with learning and policy transfer but also with an

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[27] Co-operation between PES at EU level has its formal roots in 1982, when MISEP (Mutual Information System on Employment Policies in Europe) provided a platform for exchange of information. This network still exists under the umbrella of the European Employment Observatory and is concerned with collecting labour market data in European countries.

[28] In 1994 EURES was created, which operates on its own but has been institutionally incorporated into the HOPES network since 1997

[29] The Employment Guidelines engage the public employment services in a number of areas, notably the development of service model for unemployed jobseekers, to provide support for specific groups in order to combat social exclusion, to make PES an effective part of local and regional employment policies as well the prevention and reduction of recruitment bottlenecks.

objective of vertical policy steering. The HOPES network differentiates itself here from the EUPAN network that had the conventional notion of learning as its core aim.

The first objective, concerned with sharing of best practices and learning, is referred to in the context of the exchange of information on operational issues that public employment services face on the national level.[30] The second objective, the contribution to European social policy, is a more contested one. The role of the public employment services in relation to the Employment Strategy is not specified. It is open to interpretation whether this is concerned with Public Employment Services formulating operational policy within the framework of the Employment Strategy or that Public Employment Services provide information to the Commission who subsequently decides on policy. This comes down to which actor coordinates vertical steering objectives: whether the Commission provides top-down steering, or there is bottom-up steering from public employment services themselves or possibly a combination of both. This leads us to the crucial issue of how the role division among network members has been formally defined, to which we turn in the next subsection.

6.2.3 ROLE DIVISION HOPES NETWORK

Although clarity on the role division between the Commission and member states appears crucial for the provision of adequate policy steering in the network, within the various discussed policy documents network coordination is not defined in concrete terms. It is in particular the role of the Commission where the documents reveal

[30] Without specific reference to the HOPES network, the Communication (1998: p.18) states that the Commission supports co-operation between European Employment Services in order 'to facilitate exchanges of information and best practices on operational issues of common interest and to develop common activities at EU level'. The Mission Statement (1998) drawn up by the public employment services in the member states states one of the foci of co-operation as the exchange of knowledge and experience on operational issues of common interest and where appropriate the development of common standards. In the following Mission Statement produced by the PES in 2006 the 'transfer of learning' is listed as one of the strategies to reach shared objectives. It subsequently lists 'sources of potential learning', giving an overview of spaces in which learning can occur. This is headed by the HOPES network, followed the EURES network, with subsequently more general activities such as benchmarking, working groups among others without a specific institutional basis.

inconsistencies; the language in the documents varies from a 'supportive and 'facilitative role' to more concrete descriptions of being involved in 'secretariat work' for the network and in 'many coordination and organisation tasks'. In terms of language, the steering power of the Commission has grown stronger over time.[31]

With regard to the member states, a distinction is made between the Heads of Public Employment Services themselves, assistants to the Heads and PES experts. The main role is placed on the assistants to Heads of PES who have a role in the preparation of the HES meetings and the implementation of the work programme. PES experts organised in the form of special working parties have a role in the implementation of the work programme.

All in all, the role division among member states and the Commission is poorly specified. This implies that both network members will enter the network space with their own strategies of steering. It is the power balance between the Commission and member states in practice that ultimately accounts for how network steering takes shape.

6.3 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: THE UK

So far I have addressed formal processes within the HOPES network, and how they have been covered in various documents in an inconsistent and fragmented manner. From here, we move on to the empirical heart of this research: how against this contested background the actual interactions among network members take place. In

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[31] Within the Commission Communication (1998), it is stated that the Commission *supports* co-operation between Public Employment Services in order to *facilitate* exchanges of information and best practices [..] and develop common activities at EU level. It mentions again its role as 'facilitator' in the frame of ad hoc working groups of PES experts. From this we would conclude that the Commission does not have a formal steering role within the network and that the network is co-ordinated by the Public Employment Services themselves.
Within the Progress Report (2001), the role of the Commission is formulated more specific and stronger in terms of being a co-ordinating actor though. It states: 'Mainly via DG EMPL/A3, the Commission actively *supports* the HES and its meetings. It is involved in *secretariat work* for the HES and in many *co-ordination and organisation tasks* regarding the implementation of the yearly work programme (p.6).

order to understand the collective dynamics among network members, we first need to address individual network agency. Here we focus on the involvement of two network members: the UK and the Netherlands.

I begin with the UK. British network members are based within the governmental organisation Job Centre Plus. Job Centre Plus is an executive agency and part of the Department for Work and Pensions. The role of Job Centre Plus is providing support to people of working age from welfare into work and helping employers to fill their vacancies. Among others, the organisation states as its key objectives to help unemployed workers and economically inactive people move into employment, pay customers the correct benefit at the right time, protect the benefit system from fraud, error and abuse and the provision of high-quality and demand-led services to employers to help fulfil job vacancies quickly.[32]
Representatives of Job Centre Plus operate on various levels of the HOPES network; the DG level, level of general working group activities, and specific working group activities of EURES.[33] They occupy positions within Job Centre Plus on both the managerial level and as (senior-) policy officials.

The findings of this case study demonstrate that individual agency is about the pursuit of own agendas and interests which are shaped and steered from the particular national organisational premises involved. Although British members do refer to the contestation of formal processes, they largely define their network engagement in line with their own interests and agendas, framed by their own national organisational background. The motives for engagement in the HOPES network mirror those of the EUPAN network. With regard to their overall position in terms of double level game, network members from the UK predominantly present themselves as defending their national organisational interests, rather than actively promoting the development of common European network activities.

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[32] See http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Aboutus/index.html

[33] Although EURES has its own purpose, representatives from this network have been interviewed and its data drawn into the analysis where concerned with national institutional modes of engagement, aiming to get a full picture of national institutional coordination as well as facilitation of network activities.

Members from the UK present themselves as actively engaged however. In their mode of engagement, they aim to influence processes and activities from the perspective of their own national organisational positions and concerns. This comes through in how HOPES network members pursue their own objectives and strategies, coordination, facilitation and implementation modes. Here I will expose the nature of each of these. We first explore how members from the UK give meaning to the general purpose of the network.

6.3.1 GENERAL PURPOSE HOPES NETWORK – UK

Whereas members within the EUPAN network did not refer to the Handbook while giving meaning to the general purpose of the network, members from the UK problematise the absence of well-defined formal processes in the HOPES network. They express that they themselves are not very clear about the general purpose of the HOPES network. It is put forward that there is no 'storyline' about why the Heads of PES network exists and what its main purpose is. Neither the Commission documents nor the Mission Statement of the Member States fulfils this role according to members (see Box 6.1).

Despite expressing unclarity, British members have their own views on the general purpose of the network. A distinction is made between objectives of 'vertical policy' and 'horizontal benchmarking practices'. The first one is regarded as the most important. Vertical policy is described as a top-down process with the Commission 'putting information down' and 'wanting to bring the PES into the broader European environment'. But public employment services themselves are regarded as having their own role to play. This is concerned with the provision of input of chief executives into high- level strategic debates on the EU level from a practical and delivery angle. The network fulfils therewith a link between the higher level European committees and the operational level (see Box 6.2).

The network is related to the Employment Strategy. Members from the UK have their own normative perspective on its purpose. The UK does not regard it as a strategy or plan that needs to be followed, but a framework that guides the macro-economic

policies that all EU countries can work within. Targets are not highly valued and regarded as 'areas countries wish to concentrate on' (see Box 6.3).

Box 6.1: General purpose - UK

'The public employment services network is still relatively new and therefore the paint is still relatively fresh and I think arguably its real purpose is still not fully defined. […] That one of the most important things a chair or an organization must do is to constantly spell out what the network is for. And, you find that really for many DGs it's a case of we must go to this EU meeting because that's what we must do. And, and some DGs simply don't… [..] And, and, and really, you know, err, what you need is a story line, you need to be able to tell people, this is what we are trying to do. Now the mission statement goes someway to providing the, the kind of, um, clearer objectives. But it doesn't provide the broader storyline about why we have a heads of PES network, what it's for, and how it needs to be used to get best value' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.2: General purpose - UK

'I think first and foremost for DGs it's about the commission putting information down. It's about giving them the macro, the macro picture.[..] But it is about the commission trying to ensure that the PES themselves are brought into broader EU environment. And that those top down information points, points of information or, or, or regulation are feed to them but at the same time, you've got the kind of horizontal best practice there, so that, err, they are getting something practical from the exercise as well [...] 'I think I would see its key purpose as providing the link between the higher level Employment Committee and Ecofin and the operational level, that the chief executive in the public employment service can have more of a say, more of an input into some of the high level strategy at EU level and it also keeps them in touch with what is going on so that they can see how EU policy and strategy potentially impact on their own national labour market and particularly how the national public employment services work within that. [...] I think that is really the main purpose, to influence the debate from a much more practical angle, a delivery angle and to inform the public employment services about what is going on so there is the link between the high level strategy policy and the deliverables' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.3: General purpose - UK

'The Strategy is poor use of language, because it is not really a strategy or a plan, it is more a framework. When one uses words like strategy or plan, like in national action plan, they suggest a strategic document something we work towards. That is actually

not in fact the UK understanding. We see it very much as a framework that guides the macro economic policies that now all EU 25 can work within. But we would not necessarily see particular guidelines or particular policy themes as absolutely necessary to follow' (UK representative DG level).

'Formally I guess it is set up because wherever they decided that we ought to have 70% labour market participation etc, etc. I can't remember the other 3 targets. And that is all very laudable, but I am not sure how useful it is [...] However, it does say that the areas on which we want to concentrate are high participation in the labour market, low unemployment and things like that. [..] I think the targets just say these are the areas on which we wish to concentrate' (UK representative PES working group).

6.3.2 OBJECTIVES – UK

The findings of the British case study confirm that the focus of analysis needs to go beyond the formal objectives that are in place. Like in the EUPAN network, network processes are contested in nature. Members from the UK use the HOPES network as a platform to pursue a range of other objectives beyond learning. Although taking place in a different policymaking and institutional context, the objectives are similar in nature: concerned with uploading and showcase. In essence their agenda is oriented at defending their national organisational interests, while promoting their positions and concerns in the network.

Here I expose the various meanings that members from the UK give to uploading in the context of their involvement in the HOPES network, varying from influencing the policies of other counterparts and influencing EU policy in general to influencing EU competence in the field of public administration. Furthermore, I examine how British members use the HOPES network as a platform to provide a showcase, concerned with showing own successes to others. I begin by examining the objective of learning.

Learning

The first aim is concerned with learning and exchanging information. Members from the UK emphasise the major value of the exchange of best practices, talking from various perspectives. One point of view is concerned with wanting to avoid 'reinventing the wheel', with policymakers being criticised for often adopting policies

that are already shown patently to fail elsewhere. 'Stealing ideas' is regarded as a much better method than inventing ideas. Furthermore, it is about finding out 'what works elsewhere' (see Box 6.4). Actors hold the opinion though that in principle there is not so much out there for the UK to learn due to its advanced state of public employment service. Learning is therefore confined to improving and finessing the UK public employment service (see Box 6.5). This finding demonstrates that countries are not equal versus each other in the process of learning, but that there is a hierarchy among members in terms of who learns what from whom.

Box 6.4: Objectives - UK

'The general UK view is that the real value of the EES is the exchange of best practice. By that we don't mean the soft option to legislation or policyhammer. We really mean that both in a domestic and EU/ international sense many policymakers are guilty of reinventing the wheel, of looking at policies that are already shown patently to fail elsewhere (UK representative DG level).

'And if you want to find different ways of doing things, then stealing ideas is often a much better method than inventing ideas. Cause you can find out what works elsewhere' (UK representative PES working group).

Box 6.5: Objectives - UK

'Your point I think, yes we could say what is there we can learn? But I would say there is a lot we can learn to finesse and improve the way we operate but within our own national context. [..]So I would say it is not that we can't or don't learn, I would argue that probably what we do learn is quite specific and we see where we are good and where we are not so good and we are prepared to admit that we are not as good in certain things then others are' (UK representative DG level).

Uploading

Besides learning, British members furthermore pursue objectives that can be classified as uploading. They aim to influence the policies of other counterparts and EU policy directions in general with their own perspectives on employment policy. This objective is regarded by the UK as a 'less tangible objective' and the 'least important'. At the same time it is described as 'a critical objective'. Network members put on a 'Foreign Office hat'. Just like other UK government departments, network members regard themselves as having a role to play in influencing other

member states and the broader debate in the European space about employment issues that are central to the Lisbon Strategy (Box 6.6).

Also, members from the UK aim to influence EU competence in the domain of public employment services, with the UK aiming to maintain its intergovernmental status. Members see it as an explicit objective to support the open method of coordination as opposed to regulation at the EU level. It is regarded by the UK as both a fundamental 'business' and a 'political' premise to promote 'a learning environment' instead of a 'top-down regulatory environment' in the sphere of employment (see Box 6.7).

Box 6.6: Objectives - UK

'So the PES network within the EES is a twofold tool if you want. The first is for us to use that as part of our radar that looks at other countries to see what they are doing to save our own policymaking the efforts and potential mistakes of others. But also broadly within the reform debate which links to the EES next to the Lisbon Agenda to try and influence other member states in their own thinking of their labour markets. [..] I think the influencing side like any private company is for directors and for our board the hardest to measure and therefore the least tangible and the therefore the least important. But it is quite critical and I say that with a kind of Foreign Office hat on if you like. If is important because there is a broader debate out there about the nature of labour market and it is a debate that is central to Lisbon and it is a debate not necessarily about unemployment, but about activity and employment. [...] Every department, Treasury, Department of Trade and Industry all have a part to play [...] (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.7: Objectives - UK

'We support at ministerial level the open method of co-ordination. It needs to be more than you know, simple words, if we are going to ensure, you know, we can create a learning environment rather than a, a top-down regulatory environment. [...] I think, it is an intention in the sense that any exchange of, of practice has a fundamental business premise but there is also obviously a political premise if you accept that the open method of co-ordination is a much better way to bring about coherency within the EU labour markets rather than regulation. And that, that is a basic premise of the UK I think' (UK representative DG level).

Showcase

Besides learning and uploading, British members also pursue goals, which are not so much concerned with pursuing concrete outcomes, but are concerned with taking the opportunity for providing a showcase. Members from the UK are eager to show own successes to others, in order to get recognition and approval and increase the status of the UK among other European countries. This is about organisational pride, reflected in the eagerness to invite a high number of visitors per year but also pride with regard to performance in the sphere of employment indicators. It is about taking a place in a certain reputational hierarchy; in this instance the representative places himself in line with the Danes, Dutch and Swedes (see Box 6.8).

Box 6.8: Objectives - UK

'I think they invite themselves. And that is fine. And we are prepared to host them. That is obviously outside the PES'. Asked what the reason is for this: 'I guess we are quite proud as an organisation, rightly or wrongly. There are some things we do well, the intervention regime and things like that' (UK representative PES working group).

'It one accepts that every department, Treasury, Department of Trade and Industry and myself all have a part to play in that then you will see time and time again the level of employment and unemployment are the tangible indicators for the normal public, both whether or not the EU is working. So we would argue that while we don't give all the right answers, we think we kind of getting there. We think that the Dutch, Danes, the Swedes are kind of getting there as well. We say that because the results more or less speak for themselves: low unemployment, high employment rates, good gender balance, a good balance between able and disabled people […]' (UK representative DG level).

6.3.3 NETWORK STRATEGIES – UK

British network members not only pursue their own objectives, they also pursue their own network strategies. Again, although framed by a different policy and institutional context, these are similar in nature to those pursued by British members within the EUPAN network. In terms of degree of active participation, members from the UK regard their country as an active player within the network, distinguishing itself from other network members in terms of preparation of and presence during meetings (see Box 6.9).

Secondly, and in terms of network role and position versus other network members, the UK presents itself as a leader within the network, as a representative of the national good. Actors justify this with reference to the strength of the evaluation system of the public employment service and the way the unemployment system is organised and run in general. UK members regard their role as stronger than other members due to differences in development in public employment service (see Box 6. 10).

Thirdly, the modes of exerting influence can be classified as 'hard power'. UK members are active in national positioning, and are involved in clever strategic manoeuvring during meetings. The UK position is regarded as different to positions of other countries, which they define as the Commission way and the Francophone way. According to British members the UK position also encompasses the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. The UK is active in making alliances with other countries (see Box 6.11).

Box 6.9: Network strategies - UK

'The debate is already prepared in the assistance meetings and that the documents you receive have almost a synthesis to them. You know, very few member states have the resources to read through some of these biblical tomes and there, you know, will just sit with their hands folded waiting for the next tea break. Those that do and DWP our Department for Work and Pensions and ourselves are one of them, do go through these documents' [...] (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.10: Network strategies- UK

'When you say leader, you can debate whether that is leadership but that is the way we run our program'. Whether that is the way the UK wants to present itself in the network:

'Yes, I think we think that. I am sure we think that. We think that is a good way of running an unemployment system because it prevents a lot of fraud and politically that is an important thing for us' (UK representative PES working group).

Whether leadership is an important aspiration within the network:

'Indeed. You're, you are absolutely right there Hester. And I mean that, that is my view on it [...] My view is that and the view of the persons in the working groups is that because we are measured, monitored, evaluated to the ninth degree in UK within the public employment service. Because we have a fairly robust system of evaluation

our data is pretty good. Many other PES don't have that history of evaluation, you know public money is there to be spent, there's not necessarily a direct correlation between input and output […] so I don't think it's too arrogant to say that we were in a leadership role within this particular group' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.11: Network strategies - UK

'Giving the objective, the UK position, if it's broader thing for example on third country nationals and on lines to take and also on handling whether to come in quickly and make a point upfront. Or to wait for others to make their point and come in, i.e. tactics

Whether he bundles this together in a UK position when he goes to a general meeting:

'Absolutely, it is a decided position'

What the subsequent room for manoeuvre is in a meeting:

'The room for manoeuvre will depend on which way the debate goes. We certainly hold on director's briefing points, unless it is a Whitehall policy position, I would try to ensure that we have 3 or 4 potential options depending on how the debate went. Usually there is the UK way, there is the Commission way, and there is the Francofrench way. Within the UK position I would include the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden. The Commission way is not always very understandable but always cleverly argued' [...]

'Our own director of JobCentre plus has aver the last couple of meetings been discussing with other directors general including the Dutch, German, the Irish about how ownership can be passed to or from the Commission

to the individual PES' (UK representative DG level).

6.3.4 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION – UK

Examining network coordination of activities within the HOPES network, the findings confirm that network agency needs to be regarded as a coordinated activity. In essence, network processes do not develop in isolation, but take place in a politicized context: they are shaped and steered by a wide variety of other organisational territories that come into play, notably the organisational premises of network members. Like their counterparts in the EUPAN network, British members within the HOPES network are equally involved in institutionally coordinating their network activities. However, the channels along which this occurs are of a different nature. Like the Cabinet Office, coordination is informal in nature within the premises of Job Centre Plus. Coordination is however of a more structured nature for network

activities within the HOPES network. Ahead of a DG meeting a consultation process takes place, which lasts about two months, involving heads of divisions on particular policy issues. Members involved in different activities -EURES and the DG meetings- regard themselves to be in good communication with each other.

The findings furthermore demonstrate that the purpose of coordination is concerned with developing specific network strategies, similar to the EUPAN network. The purpose of coordination is concerned with ensuring that members on different levels act within the UK strategy and also to develop national positions. For each meeting 'decided positions' and 'coherent briefings' on each agenda item are formulated. Again, this is contrasted to other countries, where DG's are seen to be not receiving strong instructions in advance (see Box 6.12).

Furthermore, British members of the HOPES network coordinate their activities with their colleagues in the Department of Work and Pensions who are involved in the EES network. These links between 'ministries and the players' is contrasted to other countries such as Germany, where 'there is very little communication between the two' (see Box 6.13).

Box 6.12: National institutional coordination - UK

'As soon as assistants' meeting is finished and as soon as we receive the initial draft agenda, I already go out to the policy leads with my early thoughts for the meeting and we will work up lines to take and UK positions from there. The preparation is a slow preparation if you like, it takes a good 2 months' Who are involved: 'It is across Job Centre Plus so it will involve the heads of divisions, or the heads of the directorates so for example vocational guidance will come under directorate for skills, and also directorate business development and management. In the Job Centre Plus are a number of different teams'. Whether they come together in a meeting: 'Usually it is done electronically and we meet if required. We work in different offices in the country so bringing people together is not very cost effective. We have a satellite'. If it is bundled together in a UK position for the general meeting: 'Absolutely, it is a decided position' [...] 'So what my DG gets is a coherent briefing for each agenda item. [...] I know many member state with DGs with just lots of paper but very little in the way of explanation or handling' (UK representative DG level).

Whether there is a view from EURES on what is going on within assistants and DG meetings and the representative informs them: 'Yes [...] We are part of the same international relations team in Job Centre Plus, so we, it all sits within the same team those responsibilities' (UK representative EURES).

Box 6.13: National institutional coordination - UK

How relations are with the ministry between PES and the Employment Strategy: 'I worked before on the EES and moved up one floor. I think it is generally good that we work closely [...] we will work closely together [...] to ensure that EU level and nationally the UK position is coherent'.

How important the connections are and whether there is lots of exchange:
'In the UK we do fairly well talking to colleagues. I think elsewhere including for example Germany the links between the ministries and the players are sometimes either tenuous or almost non-existent. There is very little communication between the two' (UK representative DG level).

6.3.5 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY - UK

From coordination, we move on to the views of British network members on their national institutional capability. The findings confirm that network engagement is shaped by the broader organisational context of network members and the political commitment the organisation gives to engagement in European network activities. British members within the EUPAN network reported negative experiences on how they perceived their facilitation within the Cabinet Office. Actors working in Job Centre Plus equally pass a negative judgment on how the organisation facilitates their involvement in the HOPES network and contrast this to other countries engaged in the HOPES network. The general organisational attitudes are perceived to be not supportive towards international engagements. There is an inward-looking mentality, described by one actor as 'the island mentality of the UK'. The focus of the UK is more on Commonwealth countries rather than the EU in terms of employment. Furthermore, foreign trips are regarded as 'jollies', as something expensive (see Box 6.14). This touches on the organisational policies of Job Centre Plus. Actors experience constraints from the limited amount of resources available and the dominant business ethos within the organisation. International engagements go through a tight cost benefit analysis. The benefits are not regarded as evident by the

organisation; the dominant picture is that information acquired on visits abroad easily gets lost. The concrete implications of a general budget cut by 15% during the time of fieldwork are that working group engagements have fully ceased (see Box 6.15).

Box 6.14: National institutional capability - UK

'We don't invest the same in terms of time and resources into the EURES that say the French employment service does, or indeed the German employment service does. Or the Italian employment service, so I don't think we make the same investment, or our senior managers make the same investment into EURES as important as perhaps those members do and that is just a reflection on the number of activities they do, the nature of their activities, the number of personnel they have, so again, that is my observation on it [...] it is entirely because of the focus of our customers has been less on ahm trying to find opportunities in other member states perhaps part of that ahm is inspired by an island mentality but there is also the fact that much of our emigration is liked to English-speaking countries, so you know large portions of people that do emigrate from the UK will be going to other English-speaking countries such as the States, New Zealand, Canada' (UK representative EURES).

How much importance, how much status is given to this network within the organisation: 'I think there is a big difficulty in that we are a very UK focussed operation and therefore foreign trips are seen as jollies, and therefore there is an amount of resistance to sending people even if though it is not especially expensive' (UK representative PES working group).

Box 6.15: National institutional capability - UK

'For our purposes and activity on the EU or international stage has to go through a fairly coherent cost/benefit analysis. […] The key objective was to when creating the international profile for job centre plus was to make sure there was a logical and rational link between international activity and between our actual business strategy and delivery. You'll know yourself having been on many study visits I'm sure, that it's very easy for information gleaned from these study visits to simply be lost'[...] The problem occurs that like many other organisations the business ethos has become so value for money orientated that it is sometimes difficult to actually do it. A case in point that highlights this is when I go to France, we have lunch, wine and sit there for 2 hours etc. In the UK you get sandwiches, if you are lucky a glass of orange juice. That sums up the different approach. I think the Dutch approach is more like ours. Using that as a metaphor one could argue which system is right. Our own system is about value for money trying to control over anything that doesn't deliver whereas the French can say that a lunch does deliver' (UK representative DG level).

‘Yes, I think we have stepped back a bit. We got quite a tough financial settlement in 2007 and therefore there was a re-prioritisation of what we ought to do and I think there was a view that Job Centre Plus especially could do less internationally while DWP make the policy, so we have less say in that if you like.’

Whether he agrees on the decision: ‘No, I feel very strongly that this was short-sighted to but […] I mean, I can see why they took the decision. It is not a decision I would have taken, personally I think it is unfortunate but I can see why they did it because we have to stave 15% of our budget. Over three years, that is a big cut. (UK representative PES working group)’

6.3.6 NATIONAL IMPACT – UK

The final dimension of network agency is concerned with how network members make use of and implement outcomes of the HOPES network at the national level. The findings confirm that British members steer the impact of activities in their own manner, as is the case within the EUAN network. Representatives of the HOPES network give meaning to the impact on their activities from the perspective of changes in (institutional) policy. They regard the direct impact of their activities on the organisation and national policymaking as limited. This is explained with reference to working in a large organisation, facing many internal barriers to transform policies. However network members themselves also bear responsibility, as a passive attitude once back home from European gatherings is the norm (see Box 6.16). Members from the UK express more positive views when it comes to the value of the exposure of new ideas and the impact it has on broadening the mind (see Box 6.17).

These findings are in line with the content of the UK agenda, which is not only concerned with learning but mainly with uploading and showcase. These objectives are not about aiming to reform domestic policy, but are concerned with engaging in network activities for purposes that are concerned with exerting influence and increasing status and power.

Box 6.16: National impact - UK

‘I think the UK in the past has been guilty of taking not much notice except when there has been particular attention. I don’t think that there was policy, it is just the way any large organisation works. You can be sitting in the same building, working

for the same ministry on the same policy doing a different chapter and never speak to him. Expand that further to the EU level, it is very much the same. People will only become engaged if the subject matters, interests them and communicated properly. The chief executive goes home, packs their bags, buys some chocolate at the airport and that is it. He or she just folds the papers in a folder and off they go' (UK representative DG level).

'We have not got segmentation on board yet. What has had an effect on policy.. I can't think of one, but I suspect there are. I am not sure my vision is that broad. It is a good question, where is the proof? I don't know' (UK representative PES working group).

Box 6.17: National impact - UK

'When we do come together we get a lot of ideas and as I say by just going to a meeting like that you spend the first day understanding what they are doing in the Netherlands, how local government is involved in that and you start to say are there good reasons why we don't do that, can we change like that? It does hold up this mirror. I can't see how it becomes radical. [...] However, are these things valuable? Yes, I think they are really valuable because it sets my thinking on a lot of things, we can say that is worth trying, that is not worth trying' (UK representative PES working group).

6.4 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: THE NETHERLANDS

From the UK, we move on to the Netherlands. Dutch members of the HOPES network work within the Centre for Work and Income (CWI).[34] The CWI is an executive agency and is part of the Department of Social Affairs and Employment. It has as its mission to strengthen the economy by contributing to a good functioning of the labour market and increase levels of labour participation. It states as its main objectives to promote the transparency of the labour market, to stimulate the development and use of talent for the labour market and to prevent or shorten reliance on benefits and to provide services to employers. Furthermore, the CWI has a

[34] From 2009 the CWI organisation has merged with the UWV (Uitvoeringsorgaan Werknemersverzekeringen- Executive agency Employee Insurances) under the new name of UWV WORK Company. As data collection has taken place between 2005 and 2008, here reference will be made to CWI.

management objective of being an efficient, effective, client centred, responsive, innovative and transparent organisation (Year Report CWI, 2006).
Representatives of the CWI operate on various levels of the HOPES network; the DG level, level of general working group activities, and specific working group activities of EURES.[35] Dutch network members work within CWI on both the managerial level, as (senior-) policy officials and external advisers.

The findings of the second case study equally confirm that individual agency is about the pursuit of own agendas and interests which are shaped and steered from the particular national organisational premises involved. Network members from the Netherlands engage however in a different manner in the HOPES network than members from the UK and this is in line with the differences between the two countries within the EUPAN network. Whereas members from the UK present themselves to be defending their national organisational interests, members from the Netherlands defend their national interests while engaging as a promoter of European network interests. The motives of Dutch actors are not neutral however, as Dutch actors promote European activities in line with their own preferences and concerns. This comes through in the objectives and strategies Dutch members pursue their coordination and facilitation modes and how they make use of the network. We first explore how members from the NL give meaning to the general purpose of the HOPES network.

6.4.1 GENERAL PURPOSE HOPES NETWORK – NL

Within the UK, the absence of formal agreements among network members meant that British members were not clear about the general purpose of the network. The interpretation of members from the UK was twofold: concerned with objectives of vertical policy as well as horizontal benchmarking practices. Moving on to the Netherlands now, actors from the CWI have their own view on the general purpose of

[35] Although EURES has its own purpose, representatives from this network have been interviewed and its data drawn into the analysis where concerned with national institutional modes of engagement, aiming to get a full picture of national institutional coordination as well as facilitation of network activities.

the HOPES network, exposing how the general purpose is contested. Unlike their British counterparts, they regard the general purpose solely to be concerned with learning and exchanges of information. The HOPES network is regarded as a platform to share issues and problems, as all members are 'in the same boat', being accountable for organisational performances of their public employment service. The general purpose is regarded to be very practical instead of being concerned with abstract discussions of a strategic policymaking nature (see Box 6.18).

Box 6.18: General purpose - NL

'At that time a network was created to learn from each other, to promote exchange and a policy making that is more practically than strategically aimed […] I think that the prime goal is not particularly concerned with developing various policy lines but more to say, well we are all in the same boat and all have our own context but despite this we are all accounted for the same performance in the end of the day. So a very practical meaning was given to it: What are we doing now? What are our bottlenecks? How does one solve this? How can we share this? In fact it is about trying to answer questions with each other, what can I take with me as a learning organisation' (NL representative DG level).

'Up until now the aim was mostly to exchange information in a way that you hold a presentation. […] The idea behind the Peer Review project was that you have the opportunity for more in depth exchange of information because you really get the chance to ask each other all the relevant questions. […] At the same time we also have filled in questionnaires as peers about how we work in our countries. From those you want to get a general picture about how Early Intervention works in Austria, that in Germany the system works a bit different and that the Netherlands also does it in a slightly different way. That way you can see the advantages and disadvantages of the different systems' (NL representative PES working group).

6.4.2 OBJECTIVES – NL

Dutch members pursue their own objectives in the HOPES network. Their agenda differs however from the UK and although given meaning to in a different context is very similar in nature to the objectives pursued by the Dutch within the EUPAN network. Dutch network members place more emphasis on objectives which are concerned with the pursuit of European network objectives and the promotion of common network activities. Besides learning Dutch members aim to engage in

developing policy. However, Dutch members equally pursue goals of uploading and showcase, though in a different manner than members from the UK. We begin however by examining the objective of learning.

Learning

The first aim Dutch members pursue is concerned with learning and sharing information. They give meaning to this in terms of getting in touch with practices elsewhere and being able to compare problems and issues. Dutch members are keen to emphasise that learning is very important to them, distancing themselves from political aspirations (see Box 6.19).

Box 6.19: Objectives - NL

'It is actually two things. On the one hand you see that other countries deal with the same issues as the Netherlands. You recognize the same problems or advantages. But on the other hand, there are also differences. For example, in the Netherlands we have advocated that it should become obligatory for people who know that they will loose their job to register themselves immediately at the CWI. In the end this did not became the law, now we try to seduce people to register at the CWI as soon as possible, before they actually lost their jobs. It is interesting to compare our situation with Germany, where they do have this law, to see what the pros and cons of the law are in practice' (NL representative PES working group).

'This is definitely shared by my boss. Like this week, I went with Rens de Groot on a visit to Lithuania to see what is going on there. [...] We do not have to praise ourselves what we have realised. We can maybe also envy what has been built elsewhere. Even those countries can be inspiring'. [...] 'My boss is keen on learning. I have not caught him that he wanted to be the best. We are not occupied in this network with coalition making and positioning and that you need to have an opinion. You do not need to have an opinion' (NL representative DG level).

Developing policy or other products

Unlike their British counterparts, the exchange of information is not only regarded to be of national value, but also has the purpose to develop common products among European peers. Within the context of benchmarking, Dutch members aspire to select elements that can be picked up as a group together. Policies on competence for example have been developed by a limited group of countries in Europe, and Dutch

members aim to 'get more countries to join in'. This is explained with reference to being a 'learning organisation', but also to promote European mobility as part of working towards a European labour market (see Box 6.20).

Box 6.20: Objectives - NL

'One of the most important factors is the exchange of experiences. But we also try to stimulate the development of benchmarking, to see how everyone scores and if there are common elements we can work on together. For example, policies on competence have so far been used by a limited group of countries and in the upcoming time we want to get more countries to join in. The same goes for quality management [..] Part of it has to do with wanting to be a learning organisation, but there's also no denying that we are on our way to becoming an European labour market in which mobility is a very import aspect. Therefore having a Lingua Franca on policies on competence will help to promote the mobility process' (NL representative DG level).

Showcase and uploading

Just like the UK, Dutch members pursue goals, which are concerned with showcase and uploading. However, Dutch members refrain from stating these as explicit objectives, not wanting to be 'pretentious'. The Dutch are proud about the high number of visitors to their organisation, and the successes they can show to others. Furthermore, they aim to stimulate other countries in their practices and ways of thinking while also influencing European policy more broadly (see Box 6.20 and 6.21).

Box 6.21: Objectives- NL

'I don't want to come across pretentious by claiming that we are the best in Europe, but I do think that our experience in these issues has helped a few other countries to develop a way of thinking. […] And does that mean we lecture them? Like I said, I don't want to be pretentious and it is possible that Ministers from other countries come without knowing what to expect, but I think I can conclude from the numerous visits we had that there is a special interest in us'. On which aspect? 'Well, on almost every aspect people came from different places and often very far to hear about different aspects of the organization, such as IT, thinking on competence, services to the unemployed and employers, really a wide ranch of aspects' (NL representative DG level).

6.4.3 NETWORK STRATEGIES – NL

Dutch members pursue their own network strategies. Again these are of a contrasting nature to their British counterparts, but they are fairly similar to those pursued by the Dutch within the EUPAN network. The nature of strategies needs to be understood in the light of their overall European network position, placing emphasis on the promotion of European network activities and steering these in line with their own preferences.

In terms of degree of active participation, Dutch members present themselves as active members. This is equal to the participation of British members, but they differ in the role and position they pursue within the network as well as their modes of exerting influence. Whereas the British present themselves as representatives of the national good, the Dutch define themselves as representatives of the common good. Dutch members regard themselves as active in taking a lead on agenda issues and also how the network is being run. They present themselves as institutional initiators, mentioning examples of working group initiatives but also the initiation of new working methods such as the use of IT during meetings. Furthermore, the Dutch regard themselves as leaders of the PES in forming a political front versus the Commission with regard to steering the network. They regard their approach as the right one for the network as a whole, tending to talk in terms of what 'we' should be doing, when an individual view is expressed (see Box 6.22).

Their modes of exerting influence can be classified as soft power versus the hard power of the British. Instead of national positioning and pursuing alliances with other members, Dutch members pride themselves in taking an open outlook towards other countries. They don't want to show off being a frontrunner. Instead they talk of being open in their communication and showing own weaknesses, in order to encourage the development of relationships that are 'no longer purely business but friendship like' (see Box 6.23).

Box 6.22: Network strategies - NL

You said this project is an Austrian initiative?

'This was an initiative taken by [DG representative NL] who has proposed to start with the initiative. They were looking for someone to give the initiative a boost,

which I end up doing. Then they were looking for a country to act as a Reference Country and for that Austria presented itself' (NL representative PES working group).

'We are constantly initiating new methods. We used a PC as a tool during a meeting in the Netherlands. We also try to get more time and attention to discuss new developments amongst the members. During which we give special attention to newcomers and we attempt to really involve them. Although we try, if the agenda is heavily overloaded with the European Employment Strategy, than we don't get very far. We now also want to attempt to bring about more ownership, by creating working groups or the leadership of working groups. Of course we also have the benchmark project, which is a route that might also bring about more space' (NL representative DG level).

In what way are you able to set the agenda?
'We don't do that as much as we used to. Among other things it has to do with the change of leadership of the Commission, now we can create more moments to address issues in a different way. I do have to say that we have drawn up a new mission statement as a public employment organisation in the European Economic Space which aims to give a bit of direction to the working program that needs to be build within the network' (NL representative DG level).

Box 6.23: Network strategies - NL

But I can understand that the Netherlands differs in many respects from other countries. How does it deal with itself as a frontrunner?
'We do not want to show this off. Because one is open and communicates in an open manner, one attracts people that are willing to come and have a look. One of the standard elements of the meeting is that one country stands up and tells what is going on in this particular country. In fact that could mean the start for peer review, a means to look at a certain subject. My personal opinion is: We are an organisation in development. So much is happening in Europe, you have to be keen on what interesting things happen elsewhere or to send colleagues to it'.
How far is this your personal opinion or a shared one?
'This is definitely shared by my boss'.
Why is an open outlook so important for you?
'If we want to gain advantage from cooperation, we have to have an open window policy, trying to engage people in our processes and to show your weaknesses. Then relationships develop that are no longer purely business but friendshiplike. We invite people, that is how it works, we are very open' (NL representative DG level).

6.4.4 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION – NL

Whereas within Job Centre Plus network activities are coordinated among actors in order to define national positions and strategies, this is not the case for actors within the CWI. The differences between the two countries go further than is the case within the EUPAN network. Here the purpose of coordination was different -informative in the Netherlands and concerned with developing strategies and national positions within the UK- but the channels of coordination were both informal in nature.

Looking at Dutch actors involved within the HOPES network, all members operate largely as independent actors, not engaging within the HOPES network on the basis of a predefined organisational mandate. This is not problematised by actors as such, as network involvement is regarded as a matter of having sufficient expertise and being trusted by the wider organisation. When coordination takes place, this is concerned with consultation on an ad hoc and informal basis and has an informative purpose (see Box 6.24).

In terms of internal communication lines between members in the HOPES network and the European Employment Strategy, actors report that these are lacking. Whereas network members from the UK indicated the existence of short communication lines with colleagues on the EES, these links are virtually non-existent between the CWI and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. This is explained with reference to the institutional relationship of the Ministry towards the CWI, with the CWI not meant to have a policymaking role. Actors regard this as a 'mistake in the legislation', as in their view the Dutch public employment service has a role in formulating operational policy. European involvement of the CWI is hardly recognised by the Ministry (see Box 6.25).

Box 6.24: National institutional coordination - NL

How far do you receive instructions?

'I get all the freedom. They trust me as I have been in this sector for ages. In recent years I have done more work to involve my colleagues here. It is important for the organisation as a whole to build up a broad orientation but this is not easy' (NL representative DG level).

Is there something like a general international consultation where everybody is involved at a certain time to form a strategy before the meeting?
'X [referring to the DG representative] works like that. He seeks advice or help from a colleague if he feels he needs an expert opinion. […] He is generally responsible for the preparation of the DG meetings and he accompanies the DG there ' (NL representative PES working group).

What is your vision on the PES network in general and are you informed of the general meetings X [DG representative, HK] attends to?
'I am informed in a sense that I know when the meetings are held, and I also see the agenda and minutes of these meetings regularly. But I am not very closely involved. The meetings are important for EURES, they always speak for one hour or so about EURES in the meetings of the heads of PES, I know about that'.
When they talk about EURES in a general meeting, does X asks you for advise before the meeting?
'If EURES is on the agenda and X has no specific knowledge about the issue, X generally goes to Y [EURES manager] for more information' (NL representative PES working group).

Box 6.25: National institutional coordination - NL
How much does the ministry interfere?
'Not a lot. However I can give you an example that the ministry does do that. They last week asked us whether we were aware of the call for proposals from the Commission, on employment and incentive measures or something. This was the first time that they actively demonstrated that there is a connection between public employment service and the Commission. They feel a bit embarrassed that we are so late. This is growing. From our side, we have to respect within our formulation of plans what member states agree on within the framework of the European Employment Strategy'
What is the contact like between you and the ministry on this front?
'There is no contact. This is a little mistake in the legislation that we are supposed to make policy. We can now and then throw a stone in the water. We are practical boys and girls in our domain'.
But if you are not supposed to make policy, how is your input from this network to the policy process in the ministry?
'You have policy with a big capital and a small one. You have instrumental policy, strategic policy and operational policy. We do tactical operational policy. Not that we never do strategies' (NL representative DG level).

6.4.5 NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY - NL

Within the UK actors gave a negative judgment on their institutional capability, reporting of low political commitment, limited resources and inward looking organisational attitudes. As in the EUPAN network, Dutch members of the HOPES network do not experience direct constraints in their activities and political commitment of the CWI towards the HOPES network is regarded as sufficient.

However, actors are negative about the organisational attitudes towards involvement in European activities. International engagements are not very much in the picture; an inward-looking mentality persists. Like the UK, within the wider organisation foreign trips are generally seen as jollies for the individual in the first place, rather than of substantial value for the organisation (see Box 6.26).

Box 6.26: National institutional capability - NL

'It is important for the organisation as a whole to build up a broad orientation but this is not easy'.

What in your opinion are the barriers to achieve this?

'It is different things: languages, a general fear, bureaucracy but also being pigheaded. But I am working on this, and more people have become involved. It is something that my boss finds very important' (NL representative DG level).

'I have to say that it has not really become a practice just yet. That people say, you have been to other countries and what have you all heard there. Instead people ask whether I enjoyed it, but not very much in the sense of enquiries about the information I acquired abroad. […] Only if it is an issue we are occupied with at that moment, then people do ask' (NL representative PES working group).

6.4.6 NATIONAL IMPACT – NL

Within the UK actors failed to identify direct noticeable changes within the organisation in relation to their involvement on the European level. This was explained with reference to agency, organisational factors and the very nature of European network activities. Actors did however value the impact on broadening their mindsets by engaging in European activities.

Like their British counterparts, Dutch members give meaning to impact in terms of reflections on (institutional) policy. Along similar lines, they value getting in touch with new ideas in general, broadening their mental horizons. Contrasting to the UK

however, on the Dutch side network members talk in positive terms about impact on policy, experiencing a noticeable link between their network activities and subsequent changes around them, even though processes of change are slow and happen over time (see Box 6.27). This is in line with the emphasis Dutch members place on fostering European network activities, in terms of learning and developing policy. It once again reflects the underlying differences between both countries that were already exposed within the EUPAN network.

Box 6.27: National impact - NL

How do you experience that you can link your European work sufficiently to what is going on here?

'You have to be very patient, and to convince people over a longer period of time. But it does happen. Examples are ICT and multi-channelling and to match demand and supply. Matching demand and supply policy was previously dominated by formal education, now one has started to think more about competence. And here we took account of experiences elsewhere. We looked at the development of call centres like in Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Germany and the UK. […] You come across new things, you pass it on and then those elements will end up in new developments. For example, when we were developing our call centre or our service centre for employment clients, we approached colleagues in other countries who already had some experience. We visited them to see how they did it, to make sure we didn't make mistakes that could cause major problems. It was useful to broaden our horizons, to see things in the right perspective.'

Can you imagine that this information will be used in the policy making process by the CWI to the ministry?

'Yes, I think so. I mean, we have adjusted our policies before on the basis of the experience from other countries. For example, the Belgians had a lot more experience with using competence management as a method for job vacancies. Now you can see this developing at CWI in the Netherlands as well. We really use competence management more often as a method to help find a new job, in stead of the more old fashioned method of just using diploma's to measure people's skills. In that period we have visited CBA regularly to inform ourselves about the different aspects of the method and that did have an impact on the policy making process. That is correct' (NL representative PES working group).

6.5 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: OTHER MEMBER STATES

The findings of both case studies confirm that members pursue their own aims and strategies which are shaped and steered from their national organisational premises. That this finding is not incidental but mirrors the network engagement of network members from other member states is demonstrated by the outcomes of the conducted survey. Although it does not provide us with a holistic view and in depth meanings of network agency, the findings on both the pursuit of objectives and impact confirm that network members from other member states equally pursue their own agendas.

6.5.1 OBJECTIVES - OTHER MEMBER STATES

Just like the UK and the NL, network members use the HOPES network as a platform to pursue a whole range of individual objectives, with countries expressing their own priorities (see Figure 2).

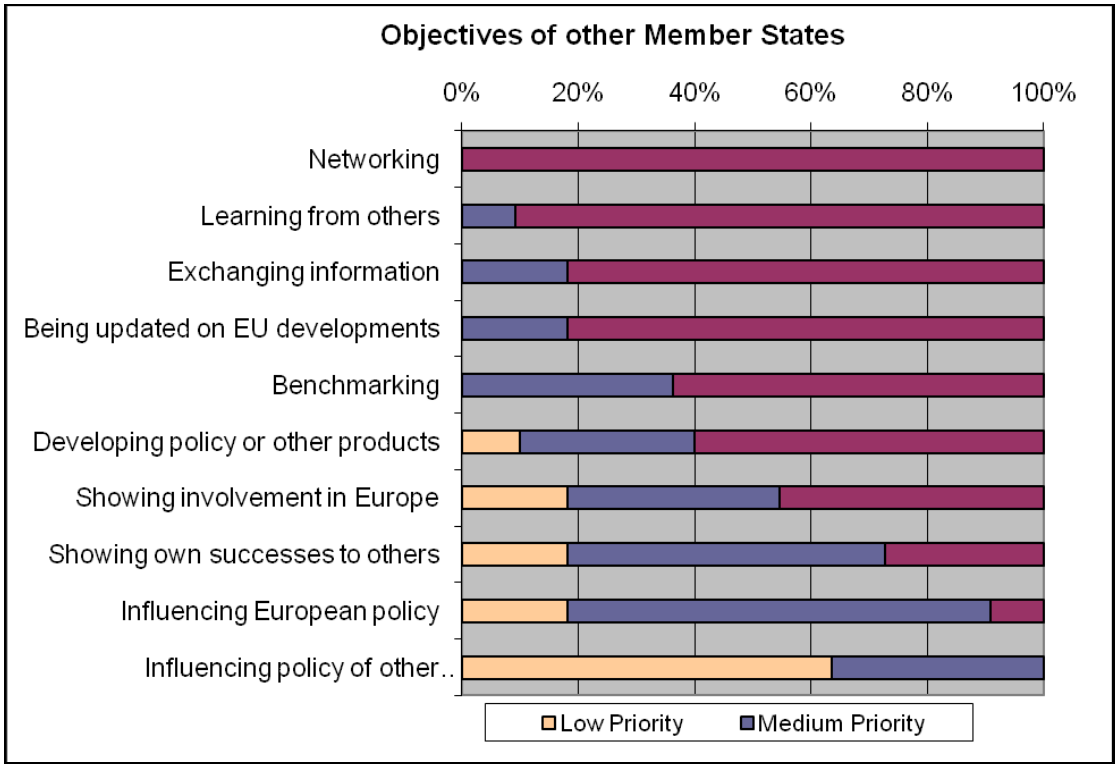

Figure 2: Objectives of other member states

Figure 2 summarises the objectives network members from other member states pursue. The findings demonstrate that network members give high priority to the steering of common network objectives. Although the formal objective of learning as

well as exchanging information is indeed shared by network members to be a prime individual goal, it is networking that comes top of the list. This is an interesting finding, as this is neither a formalised network aim nor did the UK or the Netherlands mention this as an explicit aim. With networking receiving a score of 100% high priority, this result indicates that this is an aim that is regarded as inherent to engaging in the HOPES network. Beyond these, members also pursue objectives concerned with being updated on EU developments, benchmarking and developing policy or other products.

Even though of less priority, members also pursue objectives, which are concerned with steering individual agendas. Like members from the Netherlands and the UK, actors from other member states are involved in uploading as well as providing a showcase. The findings demonstrate that members aim to show involvement in Europe as well as showing own successes to others. With regard to uploading, members are involved in influencing European policy as well as influencing policy of other member states. The essence of these findings mirror the outcomes of the survey conducted within the EUPAN network.

6.5.2 NATIONAL IMPACT – OTHER MEMBER STATES

HOPES network members equally approach the impact of their activities in terms of mind broadening and impact on policy. The latter proved to be a divisive issue in our case studies, with members from the Netherlands positive on the impact on national policymaking and members from the UK dismissive. This division is reflected in the questionnaire responses though most members come up with examples of policy issues where they experience the HOPES network to have made an impact (see Box 6.28). Although members report a variety of experiences, the bottom-line is that where impact had been made, this was concerned with the provision of ideas and knowledge for particular issues that had been on the national agenda at that time. As was equally demonstrated within the EUPAN network, this finding demonstrates that the conventional Europeanisation approach of impact in case of a discrepancy between European and national practices does not hold. Instead, members actively steer implementation processes, making use of European involvement to enhance their own national agendas.

Box 6.28: National impact – Other member states

'Changing ideas and good practices is always useful. Direct impact is not necessary expected' (Hungary representative DG level).

'Discussions with professional connections from the network helped us to go more into depth with some aspects of the way other PES are organised and some ideas will be adapted to our situation' (Belgium representative DG level).

'Development of position about flexicurity and PES. Positioning of the PES in Slovenia through this exercise' (Slovenia representative DG level).

'2 examples from past:
1) The introduction of the so-called other actors (external service providers) in PES as from 2003 and 2) the restructuring of the PES-system into the Danish version of a one-stop-system as from 1 January 2007 were both influenced very much by learning from other countries, e.g. UK and the Netherlands' (Denmark representative DG level).

'In the HOPES group has been approved a document concerning the new mission of PES. This document has been utilized to write the National Masterplan of the PES where is described the pathway to implement the quality of PES in the next years' (Italy representative DG level).

6.6 COLLECTIVE DYNAMICS AMONG MEMBERS OF HOPES NETWORK

So far we have analysed individual agency in relation to its organisational premises on its own terms. The findings of both case studies as well as the questionnaire demonstrate that network members pursue their own objectives and strategies, shaped by their domestic institutional and political backgrounds. Ultimately, it is the interactions among these individual actors in relation to their individual organisational premises as well as the shared institutional network surroundings which defines the political nature of network processes at large.

In the remainder of this chapter, the collective dynamics among network members within the HOPES network will be addressed. Like in the previous chapter with the EUPAN network, I do not analyse the interactions among network members on an individual basis, but I explore the meanings individual members give to the overall collective dynamics among network members. This is based on the views of members

from the UK and the NL, contextualised by the views of other network members as expressed in the questionnaire. The findings demonstrate that processes in the HOPES network are political in nature, taking place in a politicized network context, characterised by struggles among actors as well as are contested in nature. Three themes will be discussed: 1) struggles over control of and the content of coordination 2) divisions of power among members of the HOPES network, 3) the political nature of HOPES network proceedings. I begin by analysing the struggles over coordination between the Commission and the Public Employment Services.

6.6.1 STRUGGLES OVER COORDINATION WITHIN THE HOPES NETWORK

Unlike the EUPAN network, where roles in coordination are laid down in a Handbook, members of the HOPES network have not made a formal agreement on the role division among public employment services and the Commission. The role of the Commission in terms of coordination is unclear, as has been pointed out earlier in this chapter. The different documents in use expose inconsistencies with regard to the role of the Commission.

Despite this difference in formal basis, the two networks are similar in exposing struggles among member states and the Commission over control over coordination. The HOPES network produces however its own internal dynamics. Examining coordination of the HOPES network in practice, representatives from the UK and the Netherlands express strong views that in practice the Commission plays a dominant role in coordinating the network. The picture that is given is one of continuous struggles between the Commission and member states over ownership of the network. Various member states -including the UK and the Netherlands themselves- aim to stimulate a more active form of counter steering from member states in order to advance their own interests.

Representatives from both countries regard the interests of the Commission versus those of member states to be opposed to each other. Whereas the Commission is seen to be using the HOPES network as a ‘top down policy dissemination forum’, member states on the other hand aim to place emphasis on sharing best practices (see Box 6.29). That in practice processes are too Commission-centric and activities and

deliverables shaped according to the interests of the Commission is reproduced by other network members (see Box 6.30).

The power of the Commission rests on various factors, according to both the Dutch and British representatives. It holds ownership over the budget, it chairs the meetings and has a main role in deciding on the agenda. Crucially, it provides the parameters in which discussions take place. Part of the agenda is already fixed, concerned with the Lisbon agenda and the European Employment Strategy. Furthermore, the Commission pursues its own strategies. It uses its power in formulating the minutes, of which representatives from the Netherlands and UK are critical in its accuracy. Finally, the Commission can use its broader institutional power, with members reporting how the Commission is able to pursue other routes within the Commission 'to push contentious dossiers up' (see Box 6.31).

Looking at member states on the other hand, their essential weakness appears to lie in the absence of institutional power as a collective. Representatives describe how it has been the norm that the choice of topics and projects has so far been a matter of individual steering. Rather than deliberations among member states together, it has been a matter of individual member states doing their own lobbying to attract Commission funding. The incentive for individual member states is to attract funding for a project that is of domestic relevance, rather than of common interest to the network as a whole (see Box 6.32).

The power balance between the Commission and member states is a shifting one however. In recent years countries have managed to group together, with member states gathering around a particular project. These developments have to be seen in a broader context of active leadership from the side of the member states in recent years. Representatives from both the Netherlands and UK provide a picture of a countermovement from public employment services in providing network steering. The formulation of the mission statement in 2006 is presented as a prime example of collective force, encompassing a vision on public employment services in Europe. Furthermore, some member states, with the UK and Netherlands among them, have grouped together to engage in explicit discussions with the Commission on how ownership can be passed from the Commission to the individual PES (see Box 6.33).

Other network members express similar views that the power of public employment services has increased in recent years (see Box 6.34).

Box 6.29: Coordination – HOPES network

'Member states want to get more from these meetings […] So it is not to say that they are inherently bad or poorly run but that member states need to take more ownership from the Commission to make them better and really to turn them from simply a top down policy dissemination forum to a proper best practice forum. [..]But it is about the commission trying to ensure that the PES themselves are brought into broader EU environment. [..] I'm sure part of it is empire building, I'm sure part of it is about the broader influencing strategy of the commission' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.30: Coordination – HOPES network

'The Commission has strengthened its agenda setting and steering of the network during the latest 3-4 years. We want to focus on learning from others and of exchanging information whereas the Commission has its focus on the European dimension, e.g. achieving the Lisbon targets, introducing flexicurity etc' (Denmark representative DG level).

'It is more and more about policies and less about benchmarking and sharing good practices and any other necessary information' [...] 'The agenda has always been adopted, but the subjects are not always necessary or are covered too fugitively. The balance might be there for the representatives of the Commission, but not for most participants from member sates. [...] Less deliverables, more discussion recently' (Estonia representative DG level).

Box 6.31: Coordination – HOPES network

'Well again I think the commission has a budget and needs to spend it. And we, you know, have a kind of a usual public sector view of the world, which means that the money is there and we must use it.' (UK representative DG level).

'Part of that agenda is already fairly fixed, by that I mean Lisbon will figure high and updates on Lisbon will also figure at each of those meetings. So there are kind of set parameters'(UK representative DG level).

'We have got one umbrella: The EES with guidelines. One of those guidelines is the organisation of public employment service. That is what legitimises that the Commission is chair, and that you have themes, like how you deal with early action or the development of ICT' (NL representative DG level).

And in what respect do you find the Commission more dominant?
'They are more dominant in setting the agenda, for which they lean very much on those issues they see as politically relevant […] When I see what happened to the agenda setting process, before it was mostly done by assistants, whereas nowadays the agenda setting is done by the president of the European Council together with the Commission. Also there are many more meetings in one year, so you hardly have any time to properly prepare' (NL representative DG level).

'As long as you insure that the minutes are properly done and we know too that in those meetings minutes can be a little too wishy-washy and not sufficiently accurate, I think we have at least registered that' (UK representative DG level).

'The commission as you probably know is quite happy to push contentious dossiers up different routes, so one contentious issue at the moment is the extension of the EURES networks to third country nationals. Though that effectively has been pushed up Justice and Home affairs route rather than public employment service route and perhaps deliberately, perhaps by design, that means that we as a group need to be much more aware of what's going on in other DGs' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.32: Coordination – HOPES network

'I think previously, it was left up very much to individual member states to do their quiet lobbying and, and most of that, I think to be honest was to attract the necessary funding. […] It's basically a good funding mechanism for if you're doing something domestically anyway. I think there's a difference between attracting commission funding because, you know, you've got a nice little project and you want to keep somebody in employment. And the commission has deep pockets' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.33: Coordination – HOPES network

I think now what we have more is a coalition of the willing, or a development of the coalition of the willing where, um, member state are, um, grouping around them either like-minded or interested member states. And an example for it would, um, AMS Austria, which is leading with commission funding, a group of about ten member states on benchmarking' (UK representative DG level).

In what respect are you able to influence the agenda setting process?
'In the last years that has watered down a bit, but we hope that the current change of leadership within the Commission gives us a chance to change that. I do have to say that in 2006 we have decided on a new mission statement as public employment

services in the European Economic Space with the aim to give some direction to the working programs that we have started to build in the network. […] Now we want to show more ownership. We can do that by creating new working groups or leading others' (NL representative DG level).

'I think what we see past Lisbon our own director of Job Centre Plus has over the last couple of meetings been discussing with other directors general including the Dutch, German, the Irish about how ownership can be passed to or from the Commission to the individual PES. And in fact, this is going to be discussed at the next assistants meeting in March in Brussels and by that I mean, it's how to make the agenda more relevant to Public Employment Services, bearing in mind that obviously the Commission has a legitimate role in deciding the general direction…' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.34: Coordination – HOPES network

'The way towards an agenda setting that meets the interest of the Heads of PES is positive' (Germany representative DG level)

'More open and actively seeking greater involvement by member states' (Ireland representative DG level).

'The Commission is working more with the member States in many fields' (Italy representative DG level).

'Agenda items linked more to the Mission Statement' (Romania representative DG level)

6.6.2 DIVISIONS OF POWER AMONG HOPES NETWORK MEMBERS

Like the EUPAN network, there is no reference in documents of differences in status or roles among network members. Member states are supposed to be equal to one another. The findings within the HOPES network demonstrate however that network members do not participate on equal terms and this mirrors the situation within the EUPAN network. Members from the UK and the NL report that this is in the first place due to the very nature of the network gatherings, concerned with plenary meetings comprising up to 30 people. Ad hoc attempts are made to experiment with new working methods, in order to foster more interaction (see Box 6.35).

Secondly, and more crucially, members express how differences in participation are grounded in inequalities in development and power: variations in experience of being involved in EU networks, and inequalities in resources and language capabilities. Furthermore, members differ in power according to their position in the reputational hierarchy, relying on the length of involvement of a country in the EU or the seniority of people. The main division line among members is enlargement, dividing old and new member states. The bigger and in particular older member states are seen to be more institutionally capable and hold more status and power than members from smaller and newer member states (see Box 6.36). This is supported by the views of other network members (see Box 6.37).

Box 6.35: Power divisions among HOPES network members

'Well, if you take into account the changes that have taken place, the expansion of the EU has had the most impact on the network. When you have a group of 27 people at the table instead of 15, that has had a great impact and you have to start wondering if you want to continue working like that' […]

How do countries participate, are there rounds?

'That is hardly to be imagined with so many people. The last meeting was organised by us in Amsterdam and we had created a very special new working method. Such a meeting takes 1 to 1,5 day and if you then start round tables then you cannot give everyone speaking time. The last meeting we used the method of decision rule. All members had the disposal of a laptop' (NL representative DG level).

Box 6.36: Power divisions among HOPES network members

'I think probably one of the greatest areas of resentment is probably between big and small, or new and, well big and small, and new and old member states. Which is a fairly normal distinction there. But I think particularly the newer member states do feel partly aggrieved that the large member states do most of the talking. But then of course that's self-serving isn't it. Because if you're not talking other people are going to fill the gap' [...] Many meetings a table round produced absolutely nothing. Other times it would produce some pretty good debates but often amongst the usual suspects. New member states are very often quite shy. That will change of course. But we often don't get the appropriate input [...] They are willing to work together as if you like again, like-minded or similar situated PES, particularly on things like ICT where their own systems are or have been, generally quite odd and in many ways they're make that technological leap but within the context of their own labour markets [...] Many member state who you DGs with just lots of paper but very little, ah, you know, in the way of, of explanation or handling. And, and therefore you see a

number of the particularly the new member states where they may not have English, German or French. And therefore, you know, almost just sitting there…'(UK representative DG level).

'When you look back at the history of the European Union, we started off with 6 and expanded to now 27 member states. Some people still value their position in history. This may sound a bit cryptic. But I do sometimes get the feeling that some countries or people have a certain seniority that might influence debates. Also the participation rate of the new member state is still lower, as you might imagine. It is a challenge to stop that' (NL representative DG level).

Box 6.37: Power divisions among HOPES network members

'Not all the countries express their positions during the meetings' (Romania representative DG level).

'Activation of all members remains a challenge' (Germany representative DG level).

'In the Assistants meetings could wish a more active participation from the "new" MS' (Denmark representative DG level).

'Several member states have limited participation in discussions at meetings – perhaps due to language issues' (Ireland representative DG level).

'There will always be a difference between members, but, in my experience, this is not created by chairmanship or working methods' (Belgium representative DG level).

6.6.3 THE POLITICAL NATURE OF HOPES NETWORK PROCEEDINGS

The final dimension is concerned with the nature of HOPES proceedings, looking at the institutional context in which network interactions take place. Like the EUPAN network, the HOPES network is an informal network. Assesing notions of informality reveals however a picture of network proceedings that is more formal and more complex in nature. Here I distinguish between the internal network proceedings as well as the relations among members.

As is the case within the EUPAN network, the meeting setting within the HOPES network is described as formal, with members seated in alphabetical order. This is contrasted to the relations among network members themselves however and notions

of informality go further than relations within the EUPAN network are characterised. Both representatives regard the nature of actor relations as distinct, compared to other -higher level- networks in the employment domain at the EU level. Relations among members are described as very friendly, and as the Dutch representative puts it like 'all belonging to one family'.

Various explanations are given for the distinctive atmosphere in the HOPES network. First of all, the organisational background of actors and the focus of exchanges is seen to play an important role. Actors are all responsible and accountable for managing an executive organisation, and the focus of exchanges is on practical matters, on the policy and implementation side. This is contrasted to arenas such as the Employment Committee of the EES where the emphasis is on the political and policy side of issues. Furthermore, the close nature of relations is related to sharing an emotional relationship to a common cause. Both the UK and Dutch representative emphasise how network members share a deep commitment to unemployed people (see Box 6.38).

Consensus-seeking is regarded as the norm, but members remark that debates have become more contentious in recent years with regard to particular topics on the Commission agenda. Underlying differences are not always exposed but intentionally covered. Members remark that the contentious nature of debates is often not reflected in minutes, with the Commission putting its own stamp on it (see Box 6.39). The views of other network members reflect these ambiguities between informality in relations and formality in network proceedings, as well as consensus-seeking as the norm but not always the practice (see Box 6.40).

Box 6.38: HOPES network proceedings

'[..] It would have meant that rather than sit in alphabetical order for example, we could have sat in buddy teams. […] But the DG meetings compared other meeting like EMCO and SPC are remarkably informal. You can be forgiven for thinking that you were in a completely different world.' Is that because of existing relationships or is it just because of the content of the issues?

'I think, I think very much more the former. I think DGs have one thing in common and that is that they run businesses. as such they're like little boys with their racing cars. They're looking at what the latest model is…' […] Yes, in relation to the EES

this is very different here. You have two clear distinctive groups, you have the employment committee, which is very much the kind of the political, policy side of things, and we have the PES. And I think if you like it sums up the differences between them, between the policy and implementation side of things. The PES network is very much more a network of friends. People will pick up the phone and say have you got this or any advice on that. Practical nitty gritty stuff. They won't necessarily talk about influencing this or that, again it is much more tangible. People are more and more focussed on the customer service and improving the service that we provide to customers. They aren't just unemployed people, statistics. These are individuals who often have considerable difficulties and often need additional support, monetarily and emotionally to get them through that. It is how we as a PES try to move towards meeting these needs. We need to follow an individualised approach' (UK representative DG level).

'I am already for quite some time in all this. It has learnt me that we all belong to one family. That is not only due to our common agenda but also emotionally it feels like this. To mean something to people on the labour market is something that is shared by all people on all levels in this organisation world. We have entered the phase that we want to be very transparent to each other, not only want to tell each other the glamour stories but also want to expose our weaknesses' (NL representative DG level).

Box 6.39: HOPES network proceedings

How is the support of countries in this?

'They are all on one line, and find it very useful. You have to see this as a network where we all aim to enhance each other. We are not coming here to steal a march upon each other. Those are things you do see in the political domain, and on high levels of policy domains. There it is about being put in the right. Here it is about informing and convincing each other'. The atmosphere really is open and collegial ' (NL representative DG level).

'I think it becomes contentious over particular issues. […] The Commission has obviously its own agenda as it should do on sensitive issues such as migration and indicators [...] it will try to manoeuvre others to come to balance that decision in strategic terms as these meetings are not just happy chit chats. By doing that if it needs to provide a conclusion to a paper, it will take what it sees as the loose majority view. It doesn't necessarily mean hands up or pressing a voting bottom but it will try to come to consensus in minutes about what has been discussed. The problem is sometimes the Commission's interpretation of what happened in a meeting does not match the interpretation of either individual member states or minutes are so stripped

out of any passion. Like in minutes of the meeting in Amsterdam on migration you can be forgiven for thinking that there was no contentious debate, but there was contentious debate' (UK representative DG level).

Box 6.40: HOPES network proceedings

'Very good atmosphere, good respect for all the members' (Belgium representative DG level).

'A really friendly and open atmosphere' (Denmark representative DG level).

'As the participants in smaller circles always share important experiences in a very friendly way, it smoothens any disagreements that may occur' (Estonia representative DG level).

'The atmosphere is OK, more formal during the meetings and more informal outside the meetings. Rare conflicts have occurred when discussing policy sensitive issues' (Romania representative DG level).

6.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have examined network processes in the second case study: the HOPES network. These processes take place in a different context of formal processes than the EUPAN network. The main difference is that processes within the EUPAN network have been codified within a single document of a constitutional nature and that processes within the HOPES network are fragmented over various different policy documents. Processes therefore take place against a more contested background than within the EUPAN network. Examining the actual network processes, I have demonstrated that despite these differences in contexts, in essence the nature of processes is similar within both networks. Network processes are political in nature: they take place in a politicized context, are characterised by struggles among actors and contestation over objectives and outcomes. These findings are important as both networks are informal networks consisting of civil servants, and up till now there has been little understanding of how processes take place in environments which are supposed to be more 'depoliticized'.

In terms of individual agency, the findings of both the case studies as well as the questionnaire have demonstrated that members engage in the HOPES network with

their own objectives and strategies, which are shaped and steered from their national organisational premises. This is an important finding on its own terms, in order to contribute to the conceptualisation of network agency but more crucially in terms of its implication for network processes at large. Ultimately, it is the interactions among individual members with their own agendas and strategies in relation to their national organisational territories as well as the shared institutional network context itself, which shapes the nature of network processes.

Significantly, the findings of individual agency within the HOPES network mirror those of the EUPAN network. Although members give meaning to their network engagement from their own experience within their particular network context, members from both the UK and the Netherlands pursue very similar agendas and strategies in both networks. Whereas members from the UK present themselves as defending their national organisational interests, members from the Netherlands are equally involved in promoting European network interests. This raises interesting questions on how these interests are shaped on the national level, and how we can explain equal patterns of engagement within singular countries. These issues will be explored within the next chapter in which I will compare and explain the engagement of the two countries across the two networks.

The overall nature of network processes within the HOPES network has been examined on how members give meaning to the collective dynamics around them.
Although the actual dynamics is unique, network processes share common features with the dynamics within the EUPAN network. The findings expose struggles between the Commission and public employment services over ownership of and the direction of network coordination. Furthermore, network processes take place in a context of divisions of power among members which mirror those within the EUPAN network, shaped by the division line of enlargement. Finally, the informal nature of the proceedings of the HOPES network has been critically assessed: whereas network proceedings are formally structured like in the EUPAN network, relations among members are viewed as being informal and consensual in nature even though conflicts are often masked or covered up.

Underlying these similarities between the two networks are differences in actual dynamics among actors as well as emphasis on struggles or contestation. They have been touched on in this chapter, but not explored by means of comparison. This task will be addressed within the next chapter. A synthetic analysis will be conducted on the basis of both the country case studies, as well as the two networks. By comparing these, we will gain deeper understanding of the factors that shape network processes, both in terms of individual agency as well as the collective dynamics among network members.

CHAPTER 7: A SYNTHETIC ANALYSIS OF NETWORK PROCESSES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Within debates on European network governance, there is so far little understanding on the nature of actual network *processes*, the actual interactions among network actors. This thesis demonstrates that European network processes are political in nature: network processes take place in a politicized context and are characterised by struggles among actors about the objectives and content of network processes. In the previous chapters these findings have been exposed by examining the interrelations among actors and institutions involved in processes of both the EUPAN as well as HOPES network. What has furthermore become clear from the empirical analysis, though not elaborated on in detail, is that national actors differ in their European network engagement. Furthermore, that network processes at large and the collective dynamics among actors differ across both European co-operation networks. It is these differences that will be examined in this chapter.

In this chapter we remain on the level of the analytical perspective and aim to get a deeper understanding of the forces that shape the interrelations among actors and institutions. The purpose of this chapter is to provide understanding on how we can explain the unfolding of European network processes, and in particular to explain how and why individual countries differ in their network engagement as well as how and why the collective dynamics among networks differs. This will be done on the basis of a synthetic analysis on two levels: the level of individual agency by comparing the two case studies, and the level of network processes by comparing the collective dynamics among network members in the EUPAN and HOPES network. On both levels, the similarities and differences will be discussed and explained.

I will commence with comparing the engagement of actors from the UK and the Netherlands, analysing and explaining differences of involvement in the two European networks under study. I will argue that network members from the two countries differ in their general motives and pursuit of interests. Whereas British network members are primarily concerned with defending their national organisational interests, Dutch members pursue their own national agenda but with

the focus on promoting European interests. By comparing involvement across networks, it will become clear that the differences in agency between actors from the UK and the Netherlands are equally valid for both the EUPAN and HOPES network. This implies that network agency is shaped by underlying national factors, which influence reaches across networks. The main factors are concerned with differences in political commitment towards engagement in the EU as well as national modes and styles of governance. I will highlight and explain the difference in general motives, but also discuss and explain the particular differences with regard to each individual aspect of network agency. These are concerned with objectives, network strategies, modes of national institutional coordination and national institutional capability as well as network impact.

From here, we move on to comparing and explaining the political nature of network processes of the EUPAN and HOPES network at large. In both networks the direction of coordination is contested. The networks differ however in the balance of power among the Commission and member states, the strategic manoeuvring space and internal dynamics. In terms of the power divisions among network members, the networks are similar. The main divisions go beyond individual power differences to collective divisions of power among old and new member states. Finally, I will compare the differences in network proceedings. Both networks share similar features in terms of their status and relationship towards EU policymaking, the degrees of conflict among members and the formality of proceedings. However they differ in nuances, which will be discussed and explained. I will finish the chapter with an overall conclusion.

7.2 EXPLANATORY UNDERSTANDING OF INDIVIDUAL AGENCY

Within debates on European network governance and Europeanisation, the understanding of individual agency is in its infancy. Rather than analysing the impact of European processes on the national level, much more emphasis needs to be placed on how individual actors shape processes from the national level with their own interests. In recent research it has become clear that actors pursue their own objectives, notably the uploading of own models (Büchs, 2007). However, more understanding is needed on other aspects of network agency, and how these are

embedded and steered from the national institutional level. The empirical findings of the EUPAN and HOPES network have demonstrated that actors not only pursue their own objectives, but also their own network strategies. Furthermore, actors are involved in institutionally coordinating their network activities from the national organisational level and actors differ in their national institutional capability. Finally, actors pursue their own modes of implementation. In essence, these findings expose that network agency is multifaceted and politicized in nature, with the national organisational territories involved in influencing and directly steering the network engagement of network members.

So far, light has been shed on the engagement of individual countries in individual European networks. Here I aim to provide deeper understanding of individual agency by exploring the factors that shape the various facets of individual agency. I will compare the engagement of actors in the UK versus the Netherlands in both the EUPAN and HOPES network, beginning by comparing the difference in their overall interest.

7.3 THE UK VERSUS NL – THEIR INTERESTS COMPARED

The findings demonstrate that both actors from the UK as well as the Netherlands pursue individual interests, playing their own double-level games. Beyond this essential similarity, it has become clear however that both countries reveal a different agenda in terms of general interests and motives for European network engagement. Intriguingly, although the EUPAN and HOPES network operate independently and consist of different national actors, actors in both countries pursue very similar motives. This indicates that the nature of interests transcends individual agency and specific networks and is rooted and shaped on the national institutional level.

In both networks actors from the UK engage by defending their national interests in their own right whereas actors from the Netherlands defend their national interests while placing emphasis on promoting European network interests. In essence, the UK pursues realist motives for co-operation, placing prime emphasis on the pursuit of individual interests whereas the Netherlands has equally institutionalist motives for co-operation, pursuing common interests (see Keohane, 1994). The agenda of

members from the UK is nationally oriented, with an emphasis on uploading its own models, pursuing and representing its own interests in the network. The Dutch agenda on the other hand is more European oriented, with Dutch actors presenting themselves as representatives and caretakers of the network and promoting their own visions on how European co-operation should unfold. An overall overview of the differences in the various facets of engagement is provided in the table below.

	The UK	**The Netherlands**
Objectives	Learning Uploading Showcase	Learning Developing policy Uploading Showcase
Network strategies	Active, though on issues of national interest Leader, representative of the national good Hard politics: national positioning, alliances	Active, though selective co-operation Leader, representative of the common good Soft politics: (institutional) initiatives and open outlook to others
National Institutional Coordination	Develop national positions and strategies Informal and structured channels	Informative Informal channels
National Institutional Capability	Limited resources Inward organisational outlook	Supportive policies Inward organisational outlook
National impact	Scarce impact on policy Mind-broadening	Impact on policy in areas of involvement Mind-broadening

Table 2: Comparative overview network engagement UK versus NL

Here I will discuss and compare each aspect of network agency individually, and explain how network agency is linked into the broader administrative and political

cultures of EU member states. Attitudes and political commitment to Europe appear to provide an overarching explanation for the differences between the two countries in network agency. The UK has primarily been classified as a Eurosceptic nation, whereas the Netherlands has been known for its positive stance towards Europe. This frames the general motivations and agendas of actors and also explains the nature of coordination, facilitation and use of network engagement. However national political and institutional factors also come into play, as will come to light in the detailed discussion of the different aspects of individual agency.

7.2.1 COMPARISON OF OBJECTIVES

The outcomes of empirical analysis of this research demonstrate that European network processes are contested in nature. This indicates that debates within European network governance need to move beyond the analysis of formal objectives and broaden its conceptual scope towards other -individually pursued- objectives. The findings demonstrate that actors from both the UK and the Netherlands pursue their own objectives. Furthermore, actors are not equal but differ in the objectives they pursue.

Actors from the UK and the Netherlands place different emphasis on the relevance of the pursuit of European network objectives versus individual objectives, in line with their diverging motives. Apart from the formalised objective of learning and exchanging information, actors from the UK do not pursue any other common objectives that are concerned with steering at the European network level. The agenda of the Netherlands on the other hand places emphasis on pursuing common network activities on the European level. Dutch actors pursue other objectives beyond learning notably the development of European policy.

Actors from the UK are on the other hand heavily involved in pursuing national objectives. In both networks their agenda is concerned with uploading own models, through export and exerting influence towards counterparts and directing European competence and European policy developments in general. Furthermore, British actors place emphasis on providing a showcase: both in terms of showing successes to others as showing that they are involved in the EU.

Despite the emphasis of the Dutch agenda on the steering of common network objectives, actors from the Netherlands are not involved in these activities without pursuing their own interests. Like actors from the UK they are involved in individual steering, through uploading and showcase. Unlike their British counterparts however, their intention is not so much concerned with defending their own national status and sovereignty but promoting their own vision on how the network should unfold. The difference is made clear in the domain of uploading: whereas the agenda of the UK is concerned with exporting policies, the Dutch agenda is concerned with exerting influence through engaging in network discussions (see Table 3 below).

		UK	**The Netherlands**
PURSUIT OF NETWORK OBJECTIVES	**Learning**	Learning and exchanging information	Learning and exchanging information
	Developing policy		Developing policy or other products
	Networking		Networking (EUPAN)
PURSUIT OF INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES	**Uploading**	Influencing policy counterparts through export Influencing EU policy Influencing EU competence	Influencing policy counterparts through discussion Influencing EU policy (EUPAN) Influencing EU competence (EUPAN)
	Showcase	Showing own successes to others Showing involvement EU (EUPAN)	Showing own successes to others

Table 3: Comparison objectives UK versus NL

A crucial factor in explaining the differences in objectives between the UK and the Netherlands appears to derive from the contrasting attitudes towards being involved in the EU at large. In essence, for actors from the UK networks are regarded as a vehicle to pursue and enhance their own status and interests. For actors from the Netherlands networks are also about promoting European co-operation and the development of EU

governance in general. This explains why Dutch actors place more emphasis on the steering of European network objectives, in comparison to their British counterparts.

7.2.2 COMPARISON OF NETWORK STRATEGIES

The empirical analysis of this thesis furthermore has elaborated on notions of 'strategic action' and demonstrated how actors pursue network strategies in practice. The findings demonstrate that actors from the UK and the Netherlands both pursue their own set of strategies and differ in terms of degree of active participation, their network role and position versus other members as well as their modes of exerting influence.

Both countries present themselves as active participants in both networks, but differ in the nature of their motivation in terms of what they pay their attention to. British actors choose to be engaged when it concerns issues that are of national interest and action is needed, either to defend or promote a certain position. Dutch actors on the other hand are selective in the activities they engage in, depending on how useful they are regarded within the organisation. Their motivation is not so much concerned with defending interests, but on how actors can make use of network input within their own organisation which is in line with their learning orientation.

Interestingly, both actors from the UK and the Netherlands present themselves as a leader towards other network members. The nature of leadership is however a different one, with actors from the UK regarding themselves as superior to others in terms of status, and institutional and policy models. Actors from the Netherlands on the other hand present themselves as representatives of the common good: taking a lead on network issues and steering institutional developments. Their truth is regarded as representative for the network as a whole, and is presented as such. When actors talk about their own objectives, they define them as issues for the network as a whole.

In line with their diverging network role, both countries pursue their own modes of exerting influence. Here I distinguish whether network members pursue strategies that emphasise aspects of soft or hard power. Whereas soft power refers to the ability to obtain what one wants through co-option and attraction, hard power is more

concerned with the use of coercion. These concepts have developed within the realm of international relations[36], but can equally be applied to actors involved within network governance.

The nature of strategies from British network members can be classified as hard politics, actively involved in national positioning, pursuing own agendas and making alliances. Dutch network members on the other hand are more involved in soft politics. They emphasise the initiatives they take within the network, both concerned of a policy and institutional nature. The outlook to others is presented as open and altruistic, with actors expressing the need for and giving examples of stimulating less active members to engage in discussions (see Table 4 below).

	UK	**The Netherlands**
DEGREE OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION	Active, though on issues of national interest	Active, though selective co-operation depending on usefulness
NETWORK ROLE	Leader, representative of the national good	Leader, representative of the common good
MODES OF EXERTING INFLUENCE	Hard politics: national positioning, alliances	Soft politics: (institutional) initiatives and open outlook to others

Table 4: Comparison network strategies UK versus the NL

An essential difference in the nature of strategies is that actors from the Netherlands defend their interests in a covert manner, whereas the UK is overt and explicit towards others about their own interests. These differences are reflected in how both countries have taken their position within the EU. The Netherlands is often assumed to be a true supporter of federal idealism, supporting European co-operation as an ideal on its own. As Andeweg (2002) remarks, this notion is however incorrect as it has always been involved -more covertly- with its own national interests. Motivations

[36] See for example Nye (2004) for theories on soft and hard power and the behaviour of the United States in particular or Leonard (2005) on the role of Europe in the world and its successful use of soft power.

are concerned with both economic as well as political strategic interests (Andeweg, 2002; Soetendorp and Hanf, 1998). Economically, involvement in the EU has been regarded as crucial for enhancing its own economy, with the Dutch economy being an open economy relying on trade with other countries. Politically, the Netherlands has always supported supranational institutions to counterbalance the power of big countries (France and Germany), out of fear for tendencies towards national protectionism.

The fact that the Netherlands has often been mistaken to be purely concerned with promoting federal idealism is not a surprise in light of the findings of this thesis. In their reports of their network activities, Dutch officials all place great emphasis on their own role in steering the development of the European network in question, talking as representatives of the common interest. Rather than talking in explicit terms about national agendas, they report about these from the wordings of common agendas for the network as a whole. National agendas are therewith more covert. Furthermore, the Dutch are known to present themselves as representatives for the common good. The roots of this are pointed to the strong legacy of moral Calvinism in public life. International idealism as a constant of foreign policy is regarded as a consequence of this, with public officials regarding themselves as missionaries in the world. As Andeweg (2002: p. 194) notes, this idealism often 'transforms the Dutch government into a Dutch uncle, wagging an admonishing finger at other nations'. The way actors from the Netherlands present themselves as a leader in both networks is in line with this picture.

Whereas the Dutch are covert about their own interests, the British talk in explicit terms about their own interests. In contrast to the position of the Netherlands, Forster and Blair (2002: p. 29) argue that the UK has not found it easy 'to pursue national goals in a communautaire way'. Forster and Blair point out that the style of the British when defending or advancing its national interests, is concerned with using parochial arguments whereas other governments manage to better link national projects to the concerns of other EU member states. For these reasons, the UK is often regarded as 'an awkward partner' on the European scene (ibid: p. 29).

7.2.3 COMPARISON OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION

The findings furthermore expose how European network processes are not institutionally bounded to the European level, but are linked into the national level. Individual agency needs to be understood within the context of the national institutional territories of individual network actors.

First of all, actors are involved in coordinating their activities from the national level. National institutional coordination is not just confined to engagement of actors in formal modes of EU governance (see Kassim, 2003), but equally applies to engagement in informal networks. From the views of actors from the Netherlands and the UK, it has become clear that there is however not one template for how countries coordinate their activities, with internal differences coming to light across networks. We can however distinguish an overarching sense of purpose when co-ordination takes place within each country. Whereas within organisations in the UK the purpose of coordination is to develop national positions, within organisations in the Netherlands the purpose of coordination is informative; to provide expertise on policy issues to each other when required. The modes through which coordination takes place is equal with regard to the EUPAN network; in both countries actors coordinate their activities through the use of informal channels on an ad hoc basis. The coordination of activities within the HOPES network offers however contrasting results: actors within the UK are involved in informal coordination but on a structured basis, whereas within the organisations in the Netherlands co-ordination channels are loose and ad hoc (see Table 5 below).

		UK	The Netherlands
NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION	**Purpose**	Develop national positions and strategies	Informative
	Modes	Informal/ ad hoc (EUPAN) Informal/ structured (HOPES)	Informal/ ad hoc (EUPAN) Informal/ ad hoc (HOPES)

Table 5: Comparison national institutional coordination UK versus NL

The general tendency in organisations within the UK is to opt for stronger coordination systems than by those in the Netherlands. This is in line with the general motives and strategies of both countries, with actors from the UK pursuing national positions and actors from the Netherlands being more concerned with steering developments on the European stage. The former will require more coordination than the latter, as the formulation of national positions involves internal political discussions and coordination within the organisation. This finding is also in line with the conclusions of Kassim, who classifies the UK to have the most ambitious coordination systems within the EU (2003). The difference in coordination structures is framed by their political stance towards Europe. Countries that have comprehensive and centralised strategies are concerned about the protection of state sovereignty, preferring 'less Europe' to 'more Europe' and an intergovernmental over a federal model of integration. States that have relatively weak coordination systems favour an ever closer union (Kassim, 2003: p. 102).

Furthermore, pre-existing national institutional structures shape how EU involvement is domestically coordinated. This is concerned with whether the idea of hierarchical coordination is integrated into the working of the political and administrative system or not. Comparing the UK and the Netherlands, conceptions of coordination are clearly different. In the UK the emphasis on unity at the centre of government generates a strongly positive conception of coordination, supported by the political

system of a single party government and a strong role for the executive (Kassim, 2003: p. 203-204). In the Netherlands, the conception of coordination is concerned with consensus, with the political system based on coalition governments and a weak role for the executive and ministerial autonomy the rule.

7.2.4 COMPARISON OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY

The national organisational territories of actors furthermore play a broader role by shaping the national institutional capability of network actors. The case studies reveal that actors from the UK and the Netherlands differ in their judgments on their national institutional capability. In particular, their views differ on the political commitment that is given to engagements in the two European co-operation networks. In contrast to the views from Dutch actors, within the UK all actors emphasise that they experience the constraint of limited resources for international engagements within their organisation. In particular actors in the HOPES network experience a direct impact on their own activities. Unlike EUPAN where network engagements as such have not been affected, within the HOPES network working group activities have been brought to a halt due to budgetary decisions.

Actors from the UK and the Netherlands share feeling constrained by organisational attitudes within their organisation in an equal manner. Both report of an inward looking orientation within their organisational premises, with the notion and value of European network engagements not widely shared across the organisation at large (see Table 6 below).

		UK	**The Netherlands**
NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY	**Political commitment**	Low political commitment Limited resources	Sufficient political commitment
	Organisational attitudes	Inward organisational outlook	Inward organisational outlook

Table 6: Comparison national institutional capability UK versus NL

The difference in political commitment is in line with the different interests the cases studies pursue and the positioning of both countries towards EU engagement at large. There are also other factors at stake, concerned with national modes of governance and its reflection in organisational policies. Actors in the UK emphasise the negative impact of the dominant business ethos, as the link between costs and benefits of international engagements is generally not recognised within the organisation. This finding demonstrates how actors on the ground are affected by a change in principles of governing, embodied by the paradigm of New Public Management (see Newman, 2001). This is not the experience of Dutch actors, who do not report on budgetary issues constraining their network engagements. Although managerial principles in central government administration have been introduced in Dutch discourses since the 1980s, it has not been implemented to the same extent as in the UK. A major reason for this is that its implementation has been obstructed by the consensual political system (Kickert, 2001; Kan, 2001).

Actors from the UK and NL express however equal views on the persistent inward-looking outlook in their organisation. This finding supports the general line of network engagement from the UK, with their position, agendas and strategies focussed on defending national positions and a low political commitment to involvement in Europe. For the Netherlands however where network agendas, strategies and outlook are more European-oriented, this finding does not fit into the general picture of their network agency. It is beyond the scope of this research to investigate the reasons for this, whether it is related to the particular type of networks and its status, the fact that activities take place on the European rather than the national level, or that it is an inherent phenomena for organisations to be 'inward looking'. One likely factor that seems to be further at stake is a methodological bias due to the sole reliance on views from network actors themselves. By nature they will give higher value to network activities than their colleagues who are not involved. Network members give meaning to its importance not only from the perspective of organisational relevance but also from the viewpoint of personal benefits.

7.2.5. COMPARISON OF NATIONAL IMPACT

The final aspect of network agency is concerned with the implementation of network activities. The conventional Europeanisation approach, explaining the impact of activities from the perspective of the compatibility with European requirements, is challenged by the findings of this thesis. The case studies both confirm that actors steer these processes in their own manner, in line with their own objectives for network engagement.

The case studies show however contrasting results in terms of how actors experience the impact of their activities. Actors from the UK tend to have a negative outlook on the direct impact their network engagement has on the organisation or policy developments within this. Actors from the Netherlands share a more positive outlook on the benefits they bring home, and all report on concrete examples of how the network has impacted on policy processes they have been part of. Actors from both countries are similar though in giving value to how being engaged in European co-operation networks holds a mirror to own engagements, broadening the mindset of the actor (see table 7 below).

	UK	**NL**
NATIONAL IMPACT	Scarce impact on policy Mind-broadening	Impact on policy in areas of involvement Mind-broadening

Table 7: Comparison of national impact UK versus NL

These contrasting findings are in line with the general motives and position of both countries in the co-operation networks. Actors from the UK approach networks primarily as a mode to defend its own positions and influence others, which implies that implementation of European input is not a matter of prime concern. Actors from the Netherlands places more value on co-operation on its own right with many common network objectives on its agenda, which explains a more positive outlook on using the network at home in policy making processes.

The findings of the case studies are in one sense however rather surprising: actors pursue a wide range of objectives but when it comes down to giving meaning to the impact they experience, they only report on reflections in ideas and policy. Actors do not report how the networks provide input to enhance legitimacy of policy in political debates. Neither do they report how the network has enhanced their domestic status. One of the reasons for this is that actors in both countries view the network as having no significant role within the domestic political arena, due to its informal and professional nature. Furthermore, the status of the network within their own organisations is perceived to be low, with internal communication of the network benefits not systematically provided across the organisations under study.

7.3. EUPAN AND HOPES NETWORK: COMPARING NETWORK PROCESSES

So far I have focussed on comparing the case studies on the level of individual agency. It has been demonstrated that actors from the UK and the Netherlands pursue their own interests, that these differences exceed individual network boundaries and are nationally rooted and linked into attitudes towards engagements in Europe, as well as broader pre-existing political and institutional factors.

The implications for network processes at large are that processes are shaped by a complex constellation of individual actors bringing in and competing with their own national institutional and political baggage. Network processes are furthermore shaped by the collective dynamics among network members. Within debates on European governance, more understanding is needed on how actors interact collectively in network processes with one another. From the empirical analysis it has become clear that European network processes are characterised by struggles among actors over the coordination of network processes, power divisions among national actors and that network processes take place in a context of political network proceedings.

In the remainder of this chapter I aim to gain deeper understanding of European network processes by comparing the collective dynamics among members of the EUPAN and HOPES network. The focus will be on the essential political aspects that I have distinguished in this thesis: the struggles over coordination, divisions of power

and the political nature of network proceedings. On each aspect the differences and similarities between the two networks will be discussed and explained. I begin by comparing the struggles over coordination in the two networks.

7.3.1 COMPARISON OF THE STRUGGLES OVER COORDINATION

Both networks confirm that conventional conceptions of the distribution of power among member states and European institutions along formal lines are too limited. An assessment in terms of intergovernmental and supranational power needs to be complemented by an evaluation of how coordination is subject to struggles among actors in practice. In both networks processes are characterised by struggles over coordination with the Presidencies or member states as a collective competing with the Commission over control of coordination. Furthermore, in both networks the direction of network processes is contested. Networks members have diverging normative conceptions on the achievable outcomes of network activities. The main division line is whether activities and its outcomes should be solely concerned with fostering discussions and exchanges or also creating concrete deliverables in the form of common products or policy. This touches the heart of the content of network processes, in particular within the HOPES network.

The networks differ however in the balance of power among the Commission and Presidencies, the strategic manoeuvring space and internal dynamics. In the EUPAN network the balance of power leans on the Presidency, whereas in the HOPES network this is on the Commission. Looking at the EUPAN network, the formal power of the Commission is defined in vague terms, with its role defined as ‘to help identify working areas which complement the activities undertaken by the Community institutions and advise and provide expertise’. In practice however the role of the Commission is contested, being a member with various faces, varying from being a peer, to having a special role as observer to being an actor with its own aims and strategies.

Particularly due to the latter, tensions exist between the Commission and other members within the EUPAN network. Although the Commission does not have formal competence with a capital C, it is regarded as having competence with a small

capital.[37] This is in particular visible in the domain of social dialogue, where the Commission is regarded as being far from a neutral arbiter between the employers of the EUPAN network and the trade unions, but seen to be pursuing ambitions of formalising the dialogue and extending its power in the field of public administration. However within the regular EUPAN meetings, these tensions are not at the foreground and affecting the coordination of the network in a profound manner. Instead the main issue in the EUPAN network is the impact of the fluctuation in Presidencies and their differences in power and institutional capabilities on the effectiveness and efficiency of network coordination.

Within the HOPES network the role of the Commission has become stronger over time, which has caused tensions within the network. The Commission is seen to be politicising processes by pursuing other interests than engaging in and promoting the exchange of information and learning. The Commission's agenda is regarded to promote the network as a platform for 'top-down policy dissemination, rather than a best practice forum'.[38] Although the formulation of the agenda is a co-responsibility of both the Commission and Presidencies, in practice the Commission's influence has grown stronger over time. It is regarded to privilege topics on the agenda that are on the EU employment agenda. Some members accept this role whereas others, notably the older member states, are aiming to reverse this situation in the form of counter steering, either through own initiatives or through dialogue with the Commission. Unlike the EUPAN network, where tensions among the Commission and member states affect the direction of network processes in a marginal manner, within the HOPES network political tensions among the Commission and member states touch the heart of network steering.

There are several reasons that account for differences in power balance and internal dynamics between the two networks. First, the networks differ in the degree to which network members have agreed upon and defined the purpose and role division of the network in a formal manner. Within the EUPAN network, members have formalised network procedures in a 'Handbook', which can be regarded as a kind of

[37] As phrased by the UK representative DG level EUPAN network
[38] As phrased by the UK representative DG level HOPES network

constitutional basis for network governance. In here the role division among network members in coordination have been specified. In the HOPES network rules have not been codified, with the purpose and role division covered in various documents in a fragmented and ad-hoc manner. This lack of formal clarity implies that frictions arise due to different visions among members on network rules. With the space for strategic manoeuvring not limited by constitutional agreements, actors will use this space and tensions can consequently become dominant in network processes.

The second reason is concerned with differences in power and institutional capabilities among actors in practice. Within the EUPAN network, power rests not only formally on the side of member states, but also in practice: the institutional base for running the network is located in the particular country of the Presidency in question. The Presidency (co-managed by the 'Trojka') chairs meetings, is responsible for the agenda and organisation of meetings and network management. Within the HOPES network the power of the Commission rests on various factors. The institutional base of the network is rooted within the Commission. It provides institutional support in the form of organising the main DG meetings, and chairs the meetings. This is related to the fact that the network is institutionally linked to the European Employment Strategy. The Commission therefore provides the parameters of discussion and holds the key to the provision of resources. The budgetary policy of the network acts in practice as a 'divide policy', encouraging individual member states to compete with each other for funding instead of encouraging collective initiatives.

The third reason is concerned with the institutionalisation of the network, how well rooted coordination practices are due to the duration of the network's existence. The EUPAN network has existed since the end of the 1970s, and emerged from initiatives among national governments themselves. The purpose and coordination of co-operation has developed as an intergovernmental affair, with the Commission's involvement marginal at the start. From the perspective of path dependency, the foundation principles and subsequent practices of intergovernmental cooperation imply that the balance of power is rooted and not as easy to change.
The HOPES network instead has only existed since 1997, and practices are therefore not rooted in the same manner. Actors dispute whether it was a sole initiative from the

Commission or that it was the initiative from member states.[39] The short duration of the existence of the HOPES network and lack of clarity on its roots and motives explains that there is more scope for competing ownership claims in the network.

7.3.2 COMPARING POWER DIVISIONS AMONG NETWORK MEMBERS

In both networks the findings demonstrate that network members are not equal but differ in power. Crucially, power is distributed along collective lines. In both the EUPAN and HOPES network actors give similar meanings to divisions of power. The main division line is enlargement, dividing old and new member states. The findings confirm recent notions in the literature on European network governance that network members from the bigger and in particular older member states are seen to be more institutionally capable and hold more status and power than actors from smaller and newer member states (Horvath, 2009). This is explained by actors with reference to a number of political and institutional issues: how countries rank in the reputational hierarchy, experience of involvement in networks and the EU at large, expertise and development of public service, competencies in English language skills, and institutional and administrative capabilities.

7.3.3 THE POLITICAL NATURE OF NETWORK PROCEEDINGS

From divisions of power among network members, we move on to the final dimension of network processes: the nature of network proceedings. Elaborating on notions of informality, both networks demonstrate that the nature of network proceedings is more complex and has formal features. Here we explore and compare three dimensions of the political nature of network proceedings: the status of the network and its relationship to policymaking, relations among network actors, and internal organisational proceedings.

With regard to the first dimension, both the EUPAN and HOPES network have an informal status, implying that there is no formal EU competence as such. In practice however, the networks are similar in being both politically embedded within EU policymaking though in different ways: the HOPES network explicitly in relation to

[39] As stated by UK representative DG level and NL representative working group

the EU employment strategy and the EUPAN network through different links to EU policy fields related to public administration. Furthermore, the status of the two networks is itself subject to political discussions and therefore to change. This applies in particular to the EUPAN network. At the moment the network is informal and also social dialogue is of an informal nature, but there are pressures to direct the dialogue towards a more formal status.

The second dimension of network proceedings is concerned with the relations among actors. Although the atmosphere differs across levels of the two networks, the two networks at large are indeed predominantly characterised as informal and consensual. However, in both networks conflicts exist and are often masked, either through minutes (HOPES network) or in the wordings of meeting resolutions (EUPAN network). Beyond these similarities, relations among actors within the HOPES network appear as less formal and more consensual than the EUPAN network. Within the EUPAN network actors describe relations as 'informal', but within the HOPES network actors are characterised as 'informal', and even as 'friends' and 'all belonging to the same family', notions that go beyond professional descriptions.

There are a number of reasons that account for these differences. First, the nature of the policy field is of importance. Within the HOPES network it is stressed that actors share an emotional commitment to the cause they are working for: helping the unemployed. This shared commitment appears to create a special bond among actors, which is not so much bounded to the HOPES network as such but the policy field of employment at large. Within the EUPAN network no mention of attachment to the cause of public administration is made. Here actors relate informal relations to the nature of the institutional network context they engage in collectively.

Secondly, the organisational background of actors differs and has an impact on the scope for conflict among actors. Within the EUPAN network, actors operate as actors involved in strategic policy within their own organisation, developing national strategies for public administration. Within the HOPES network on the other hand actors often work in executive agencies, engaged in operational matters of the public employment service. Formally they are not meant to 'do policy'. Discussions on

operational issues tend to be less politically charged than discussions on issues of strategic policy.

The main deviation from informality is concerned with the third dimension, the internal network proceedings. Network processes are often characterised to be fostering deliberation, but in both networks discussions are guided by protocols. Proceedings are structured in a formal manner, concerned with a chair, an agenda, table ranking and meeting documents. The EUPAN network proceedings are more formal than those of the HOPES network, which can be explained by two reasons. First, network processes are more institutionalised with the development of proceedings having expanded over three decades. This relates to the point made earlier when discussing the internal power dynamics on control over coordination. Secondly, proceedings have not only institutionally developed, but also gained in weight as the status of the EUPAN network has become more important in the context of discussions towards establishing formal social dialogue.

7.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the empirical findings of this research have been examined from the angle of a synthetic analysis. By comparing the case studies as well as the collective dynamics among network members in the EUPAN and HOPES network, I have highlighted the different factors that explain internal differences among network processes and the nature of individual agency in particular.

A comparison of the case studies has demonstrated that national differences in individual network agency exceed the boundaries of individual networks. Actors from the UK pursue similar interests and agendas in both the EUPAN and HOPES network, and so do actors from the Netherlands. In both networks the UK acts as a defender of national organisational interests whereas the Netherlands defends its national organisational interests while engaging as a promoter of European network interests. These different motives are rooted in underlying national attitudes towards engagements in the EU in general as well as several pre-existing national political and institutional factors.

Furthermore, and crucial for the understanding of European network processes, I have compared the collective dynamics in the EUPAN and HOPES network. It has become clear that both networks expose struggles over coordination, divisions of power among network members with network proceedings being political in nature. In essence, the two networks share very similar features, with the Commission and member states competing for control over coordination, divisions of power along collective lines among old and new member states as well as formalised political proceedings and the masking of conflicts among network members. The networks are unique however in how network politics is played out due to their individual substantial focus and organisational background of network members as well as differences in institutional network status and roots of proceedings.

Whereas in this chapter we have remained on the level of the analytical perspective of the empirical research, in the next chapter we go beyond the level of empirical analysis and provide theoretical reflections on the nature of European network processes at large.

CHAPTER 8: THEORISING EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous three chapters have exposed how European network processes are shaped by the complex interrelations among actors and institutions on both the national as well as European level. In this chapter I will move from the micro to the macro level, shedding theoretical light on European co-operation networks and the overall nature of their processes of governing.

First, I will address the type of institutional arrangements this research has focussed on, concerned with co-operation networks. I will discuss how co-operation networks can be located within current classification schemes of EU network governance. It will be put forward that we can add a fourth procedure to the threefold division of the legislative, distributing and learning procedure: the co-operation procedure. However, the significance of this institutional differentiation will be nuanced, as it will be outlined that the co-operation procedure does not foster a singular mode of governing across institutional arrangements, and that the classification of this procedure being informal versus the formality of the other procedures is incorrect as boundaries are blurred in practice.

Moving beyond the classification of co-operation networks, the heart of this chapter is concerned with theorising European network processes. I begin by offering an overall perspective on the contribution of this thesis towards debates on Europeanisation, expanding recent bottom-up approaches on individual agency as well as laying the foundations for critical approaches on the collective dynamics among network actors. From here, I discuss the 'polity', 'politics' and 'policy' of network processes. Beginning with the polity of European network processes, I assess conceptualisations on territorial boundaries as well as the nature of network steering. The findings demonstrate that network processes do not just take place on the European network level, but within a broader politicized context. Network processes are linked into other institutional arenas that, although not formally involved, play a role in shaping and steering network processes. The limitations of conceptions of network steering are

exposed as hierarchical steering comes into play in European network governing, notably through the involvement of the national organisational territories of actors.

The struggles among actors are played out across this wider institutional territory. In terms of individual agency, I assess the various faces of the network strategies which actors pursue and reflect on the nature of their interests. I put forward that double level game playing is not contained to high level diplomacy in international relations, but is equally the practice in network governance. In terms of the collective dynamics among actors, I critically assess the actual relations and processes among actors. Going beyond notions of deliberation, informality and consensus-seeking, I shed light on how actors' relations are characterised by various meanings on informality as well as by divisions of power among member states. The actual interactions among actors are characterised by struggles among actors, implying that divisions of power in EU coordination are not static along the formal lines of intergovernmentalism versus supranationalism but dynamic in nature.

Finally, and moving to the heart of network processes, I reflect on the nature of policy steering in European network processes. I assess how the nature of the network processes under study is contested, with actors collectively divided over the direction and content of activities and individual actors pursuing their own objectives beyond the formal objective of learning. The implication is that the conceptual landscape needs to be broadened, by adding alternative objectives beyond learning, concerned with the development of policy, networking, uploading and showcase.

The overall implication of contestation is that the outcomes of network processes are unpredictable. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to assess the impact of network processes on European policymaking, I do reflect on how actors experience the impact of their activities on the national level. At the national level actors play an active role in shaping outcomes themselves, demonstrating the limitations of achieving a common purpose and ultimately European convergence through network governing on an informal basis.

8. 2 THE CO-OPERATION PROCEDURE WITHIN EU NETWORK GOVERNANCE

The objects of analysis of this thesis are concerned with European co-operation networks. In chapter three it had been put forward that there is a gap in current classification schemes within research on EU governance. The conventional starting point is that there are currently three modes of EU governance, concerned with the legislating, distributing and learning procedure (see Esmark, 2007). Especially the latter has received much attention in the last decade, with the emergence of the OMC. This division overlooks however the existence of other channels of governing which are not formalised. The first task is locating co-operation networks as institutional arrangements into current classification schemes.

The fact that co-operation networks are informal and based on co-operation principles, is not a reason to disregard them, as this thesis demonstrates that in practice real governing processes take place, with implications for wider EU governance. In this respect it is appropriate to fill a gap in the institutional map of EU governance by adding a fourth mode of governing: the co-operation procedure. However, it would be incorrect to regard the co-operation mode as singular. Just as there are many different applications of the learning procedure -with different OMC formats existing across different policy areas- this thesis demonstrates that there are different formats of co-operation modes. The EUPAN and the HOPES network share many common features, but are very different in terms of membership composition, how procedures have been formalised and how the networks are institutionally embedded towards EU policymaking as have been outlined and discussed in chapter seven.

More crucially, the institutional divide with the co-operation procedure being separate from the other procedures on the basis of notions of informality versus formality is a problematic one. Although known as informal, the co-operation networks under study demonstrate that notions of informality and formality are not clear-cut when it comes to the actual status of co-operation networks. The HOPES network is informal but there is an institutional link to the European Employment Strategy, which operates on the basis of a formal mandate and is part of the learning procedure. The EUPAN network shows that informality is not set in stone, as it could acquire a more formal status in the context of social dialogue.

The institutional divide between informality and formality is furthermore problematic when considering the role of co-operation networks in European policymaking. Although with no formal policymaking role, they are both embedded into the wider EU policymaking machine. The networks are linked to formal policymaking channels provided through the involvement of the Commission. Above all, linkages exist on an informal basis. The outcomes of network interactions are not contained to the institutional territory of networks in question, but discourses and exchanges feed into the larger EU system in an unregulated manner.

Notions of informality are even more blurred when we consider the nature of actual network proceedings and network processes. Despite the informal status of co-operation networks proceedings are structured in a formal manner, concerned with a chair, an agenda, table ranking, meeting documents and structured outcomes as resolutions. The content of internal proceedings follows many features of the EU political system, most notable the rotating chairmanship in line with half-year EU Presidency terms.

Furthermore, although co-operation networks are informal in nature and comprising of civil servants, politics is inherent to actual network processes. This is the point I will expand on in the remainder of this chapter. I will reflect on the political nature of European network processes, first by shedding light on the overall perspective and contribution of this thesis followed by separate discussions of the network polity, politics and policy.

8.3 AN OVERALL PERSPECTIVE ON EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

In this thesis I have pointed out that the main analytical focus has so far been on the formal features of networks; describing and assessing the internal rules, the composition of members and the formal goals that are achieved (see Rhodes: 1992, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Sorensen and Torfing; 2007). In this thesis I have stressed the importance of moving the analytical focus beyond the formal processes of networks, examining the characteristics of network processes in practice.

Within the context of the EU, I have explored how European network processes are shaped by the complex interrelations among actors and institutions on both the European as well as national level. In my research, I have expanded the analytical perspective within current debates on Europeanisation. As I made clear in chapter three, in recent years attention has broadened from analysing the impact of European interventions on the national level to examining the role of national actors in strategically steering European processes from the national level (Kvist and Saari, 2007; Büchs, 2008; Verschraegen et all, 2009). The focus in this bottom-up approach has been on the various responses member states exert in their EU involvement.

The findings in this thesis have demonstrated that member states indeed pursue their own objectives and strategies within European networks. Furthermore and broadening the objects of analysis, the case studies have exposed how national actors differ in their institutional and political baggage and how this matters for the unfolding of European network processes. The national organisational territories are involved in institutionally coordinating and facilitating network involvement, impacting on the agendas and interests that actors pursue in networks as well as their institutional capability.

The findings have not only demonstrated that national actors strategically steer European network processes from the level of individual member states, but also exposed how the interactions among actors collectively unfold on the European network level. Here I have engaged on relatively unexplored terrain, critically assessing dominating notions that processes are characterised by informality, consensus-seeking and deliberation (Overdevest, 2002; De la Porte and Nanz, 2004; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010). Methodologically, measuring network processes is inherently problematic due to its dynamic character and its contested nature. Therefore the focus has been on the essential dimensions of the network dynamics with actors' perceptions approached from a critical realist perspective. I have demonstrated how network processes are shaped by struggles among European and national actors over coordination, power divisions among member states as well as the formality and conflicts in network proceedings.

Overall, the findings have exposed how European network processes are political in nature. I have demonstrated that European network processes take place within a politicized context, are characterised by struggles among actors and that its objectives and outcomes are contested in nature. These findings are not only relevant within the context of the co-operation procedure, but also shed crucial light on the characteristics of networks embedded in other modes of EU governance, notably the learning procedure and the OMC in particular. It highlights how politics comes into play in networks that are meant to provide a depoliticized space to discuss issues on sensitive policy areas.

In the remainder of this chapter, I offer theoretical reflections on the particular dimensions of network processes that I have distinguished in this thesis, concerned with the 'polity', 'politics' as well as 'policy' of European network processes. I begin by shedding light on the institutional territory of European network processes.

8.4 THE POLITICIZED CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

In this thesis I have demonstrated that conceptual notions of the network polity as self-organised and consisting of institutional boundaries (see Rhodes, 1992, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Torfing, 2007) are problematic. This research has exposed how European networks operate in a politicized environment. The findings reveal how European network processes do not just take place on the formal level of the European network polity but are embedded into the national organisational territories of actors that play a crucial role in steering European network processes.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis has exposed that institutional involvement is embedded even deeper into the national level, shaped by the broader national values and structures around organisations notably the commitment of member states towards the EU as well as national styles and modes of governance. This all suggests that the multi-level governance should broaden its institutional scope towards other institutional levels beyond the formal institutional levels of power, while assessing the different faces and functions of these arenas within governing.

Addressing the role of the national organisational territories of network members, I have first of all examined how actors perceive the impact of broader organisational factors on their network engagement, concerned with their institutional capability. In this research I have focussed on facilitating factors as the political commitment, resources and attitudes within the organisation towards network engagement. Taking a bottom-up approach, I have challenged existing approaches which conceptualise institutional capability as property (see Ferrera and Sacchi, 2004). Instead the institutional capability of actors actively impacts on how network engagement is facilitated and steered, and therefore how network processes unfold.

The case studies indicate that actors experience either direct constraints or benefits from the overall political commitment and organisational resources attached towards network engagement, as well as the organisational attitudes within the organisation at large. These differences are not only based on differences in commitment towards the EU and the specific networks in particular, but are also rooted in broader national values of governance. Actors relate the degree of national emphasis on principles of business management to how network activities -judged as difficult to measure on a cost-benefit ratio- are valued.

Second, I have demonstrated how organisations play a role in institutionally coordinating network activities. This is an important finding, as network actors are assumed to engage in networks without any organisational mandate. The involvement of national administrations in the coordination of EU engagement has so far been contained to formal modes of EU governance (see Kassim, 2003). The findings of this thesis suggest that coordination also takes place in informal modes of governance. The case studies indicate that the purpose of coordination is nationally determined, whereas coordination modes and channels are network dependent and differ across organisational units within individual countries. Coordination can also be absent however, with actors engaging in networks without any organisationally defined mandate. It could be argued though that national steering is still present here. No coordination is in essence a political choice: it is an organisational decision that network members engage in a ‘free’ manner.

Overall, I have demonstrated how networks are embedded and linked into the national organisational territories of actors, which are in different ways and with varying powers involved in steering the formal European network polity. Essentially, member states are not equally involved in network processes, but differ in authority and compete for influence on network processes. Although the findings are limited to two case studies, the conclusions have implications for existing conceptions on network steering. It becomes clear that the national organisational level is not so much linked to networks in a *network* manner, but that a *hierarchical* relationship applies. The notion put forward by Esmark (2007) that network steering takes place in the shadow of national hierarchical steering might have to be even formulised a bit stronger: hierarchical steering is not just a shadow of horizontal steering, but a real mode of steering that shapes the unfolding and development of network processes.

These findings have not only implications for theoretical perspectives on network steering but also for the European governance at large. Conceptualisations of the EU polity as being characterised by 'networked governance' are being challenged (see Jordan and Schout 2006). The findings of this thesis confirm that institutional linkages within European governance are much more complex (see Börzel, 2010), with different regulation mechanisms in place including the continued existence of hierarchies. Above all, this thesis has highlighted how different regulation mechanisms coincide within specific institutional arrangements that require examination on the micro-level.

8.4 ACTORS AND STRUGGLES

So far I have addressed the complex institutional territory of European network processes, and the various levels that are involved in governing. From here, we turn to the struggles among actors that are played out across this wider institutional territory. Here we engage on terrain which has been given less emphasis in research on multi-level governance within the EU. The emphasis in approach has so far been on a description and assessment of the various institutional levels that are involved, rather than on offering analytical tools to examine how actors manage this wider institutional territory, the processes that take place and how these shape the institutional territory accordingly. Here I will shed light on the role of actors in

shaping European network processes in relation to their institutional environment, examining both the individual as well as the collective level.

8.4.1 INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: DOUBLE-LEVEL GAMES

In the second chapter I pointed out that dominant conceptions on network agency are concerned with actors being equal, autonomous and in a horizontal relationship to one another (Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). In this thesis I have exposed the insufficiency of these conceptions, demonstrating how actors are unequal, pursuing their own objectives and strategies and differing in institutional and political baggage.

Particularly, this thesis has given input to notions of actors being involved in strategic action (see Hay, 1998; Crouch, 2005) by uncovering the various faces of the strategies that actors pursue in European networks. First, the case studies suggest that actors are not equal in their degree of active participation, but differ in the extent to which they are actively or passively involved in network processes. Furthermore, actors are selective towards the issues they participate in, framed by their own national organisational agendas.

Second, network members can differ in the roles and positions they take on versus other network members, varying from claiming leadership to taking on a more submissive or neutral position. In terms of leadership the case studies have shown that different forms of leadership can be pursued, either concerned with demonstrating leadership for the national good or the common good. This needs to be understood in the light of how actors pursue their interests, whether the focus is mainly on defending national organisational interests or promoting European network interests at the same time.

Furthermore, strategies can be concerned with the use of either soft or hard power. Although the use of soft and hard power is conventionally associated with the behaviour of nation states in the field of international relations (see Nye, 2004; Leonard, 2005), the findings demonstrate that these differences equally exist between actors engaged in an informal and ‘depoliticized’ network space. Whereas the use of hard power is expressed through national positioning and building alliances, soft

power is more concerned with exerting influence through common initiatives and being open towards others.

Besides the various faces of network strategies, this thesis has also demonstrated how the nature of strategic action needs to be perceived as dialectically related to their institutional environment (Hay, 1998). In line with my discussion on the network polity, this institutional environment is broader than the network environment and comprises the national organisational territories of network actors. This implies that actors do not only manage their European network environment but equally the national organisational premises they are based in. In essence, network members are playing double-level games.

The implication of the findings of this thesis is that double level game playing is not just contained to high level diplomacy in the field of international relations (see Putnam, 1988), but is also the practice in informal networks. The case studies show that actors from both countries strike their own balance between their national organisational versus their European network interests. Crucially, this study has found that the nature of interests transcends individual agency and specific networks and is rooted and shaped on the national institutional level. Network agency is linked into the broader administrative and political cultures of EU member states. This indicates that network agency is not just concerned with individual power but with national power.

More research is needed to examine whether and how other members pursue their own double level games. However, if we extend the conclusions of the case studies, the overall implication is that European network processes are shaped by individual actors competing with their own interests and agendas. Struggles among actors are played out across an expansive institutional territory that comprises the various national organisational arenas of network members themselves besides the shared European network surroundings itself. Here we touch on the interactions among actors as a collective, which I will address below.

8.4.2 COLLECTIVE DYNAMICS: POWER DIVISIONS AND COORDINATION STRUGGLES

Earlier on in this chapter, I pointed out that the collective dynamics among actors comprises so far a relatively unexplored terrain within EU network governance, characterised by notions of informality, consensus-seeking and deliberation (Overdevest, 2002; De la Porte and Nanz, 2004; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010). In this thesis I have examined the characteristics of actual processes, by exploring how actors give meaning to the relations among network members as well as the actual network processes taking place.

First of all, I have explored how the collective dynamics among actors is shaped by the relations among network members. Relations among network members are predominantly characterised as being of an informal nature within network governance (Rhodes, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). I have demonstrated that the nature of relations is more complex in practice. This thesis has found that actors' meanings vary from professional informality to identifying peers as 'friends' and even as 'family'. Meanings of informality differ among individual actors but in particular across networks. The synthetic analysis has made clear that a number of factors play an important role here, notably the organisational background of actors, the shared commitment and emotional attachment to the field, as well as the political weight of the status of interactions.

More crucially, notions of informality are problematic as the findings of this thesis have exposed significant divisions of power among members in both networks. As I pointed out in chapter three, recent research has challenged notions of equal participation by demonstrating how member states differ in their network engagement (Ballester and Papapoulos, 2008). Whereas the overview of Papadopoulos and Ballester provides us with a mosaic of individual differences of participation among the EU15 countries, these differences seem however to disappear under the umbrella of enlargement. In both networks, actors do not give meaning to differences among countries individually but among blocks of countries. This is concerned with divisions in power between members from old and new member states, confirming recent findings within the context of OMC research (Horvath, 2009). Members from the bigger and in particular older member states are seen to be more institutionally

capable and hold more status and power than actors from smaller and newer member states.

This division among old and new is not only due to differences in development such as experience with European networks and language skills, but a political construction. The drawing of boundaries between actors themselves and others needs to be regarded as an act of power (see Howarth and Griggs, 2007). In both networks actors construct boundaries by using dividing lines as 'old' and 'new' and 'big' and 'small'. As there is minor use of nuances (highlighting individual differences among new member states) and divisions insufficiently being problematised, there seems to be an element of institutional racism at stake.

Besides the relations among actors, this thesis has examined actual interactions among network members. The findings of this thesis have demonstrated that notions of actors being involved in deliberation and 'truth-seeking' are too simplistic. Assessing actual *processes* of coordination, the picture that arises is more complex. This thesis has found that network processes are characterised by struggles among actors. Although actors use conventional notions of relations being informal and consensual, the in depth readings of the two case studies reveal that power is at play here, with conflicts and divisions in networks often masked through the use of wordings in minutes or resolutions.

Crucially, this thesis has demonstrated that coordination and the division of power is a dynamic affair, characterised by struggles among actors on a continuous basis. This has implications for current conceptualisations of the coordination of EU network governance along the formal lines of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism (see Sandholtz and Sweet, 1997; Branch and Ohrgaard, 1999). The findings demonstrate that coordination cannot be defined as something static, but needs to be approached as a shifting balance between intergovernmental and supranational steering. Rather than co-operation networks following the intergovernmental model as is formally so, in practice the Commission competes alongside member states for the control over network coordination.

The role of the Commission as network manager has different faces according to different modes of governing (see Esmark, 2007). Even when the Commission is not the network manager in formal terms, the findings of this thesis suggest that it seeks control over coordination. The Commission is not only involved in building its own expertise as a neutral EU administration, but seeks to increase its power and expand its institutional territories.

Comparative analysis has exposed that the dynamics in struggles between the Commission and member states differs across networks, is subject to change and is dependent on the formalisation and institutionalisation of network practices, and the power and institutional capabilities of respective actors. The balance in power and its driving forces need to be assessed per network and across periods of time.

8.5 CONTESTED NATURE OF EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES

The struggles among actors affect the heart of network processes: the aims, nature of activities and outcomes that are to be achieved. Here we engage on relatively unexplored territory of research. So far networks have mainly been conceptualised as institutional architectures with the focus of analysis on the formal 'polity' and 'politics' features. Offering a holistic perspective, this research is equally concerned with 'policy', examining the very nature of the processes that are fostered through network governing. I place emphasis in this thesis on how the struggles among actors in relation to their institutional environment affect processes of policy steering, but will equally reflect on the effects and impact on policy outcomes. I begin by offering reflections on the processes of policy steering; pointing out that the direction of European network processes is contested.

8.5.1 DIRECTION OF EUROPEAN NETWORK PROCESSES CONTESTED

This thesis has exposed the limitations of networks fostering a 'common purpose' (Sorensen and Torfing, 2007), by examining the actual processes of policy steering taking place. Rather than network processes being directed at a shared purpose, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that the direction of the network processes under study is contested. Network processes are shaped by competing interests among actors collectively and among network members individually.

Contestation appears to be particularly dominant due to the nature of the networks under focus, concerned with co-operation networks. One of the inherent features of co-operation networks is that their purpose is open and undefined. Co-operation networks differentiate themselves in this sense from other networks that have a well-defined role towards public policy, such as being of an advisory or consultative nature, or concerned with policy development or policy implementation (see Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). Co-operation networks are in essence an empty defined space, with the activity focus therewith inherently contested.

The findings demonstrate that network members are divided over the direction of network processes, whether the focus should be on discussions and exchanges of information or on the development of policy in the form of deliverables. The main coordinating actors -the Commission versus the Presidencies/ member states- battle among each other over ownership and direction of network processes. Furthermore, and emphasised in this thesis, the findings demonstrate that individual actors do not just aim to be involved in the formal activities that have been agreed among network members, notably learning and the exchange of information. Rather, actors use networks as a platform to pursue a multitude of objectives. The nature of these objectives needs to be understood in relation to the complex institutional environment in which these are pursued, with actors simultaneously pursuing their European network interests as well as national organisational interests.

This all implies that the conceptual landscape needs to be broadened, doing justice to the multifaceted character and political nature of network processes. On the basis of the findings we can distinguish alternative objectives besides learning, concerned with developing policy, networking, uploading and showcase. Whereas learning, developing policy and networking are concerned with the promotion of common network activities; uploading and showcase are concerned with enhancing and defending the political position and status of a network member. I discuss each concept on its own, beginning with the conceptualisation of learning itself.

Learning

As I have pointed out in chapter three, learning has become synonymous with the rise of new modes of governance within the EU, notably the OMC (see Trubek, 2003;

Zeitlin, 2005; Esmark, 2007). Learning is at the foreground of this research, as co-operation networks are formally meant to foster learning. The findings show that learning is indeed an essential motive for actors to be engaged in co-operation networks. Network members give meaning to learning in various ways ranging from learning from others, the exchange of information among network members, benchmarking and being updated and informed on EU developments.

Although some findings about learning find resonance within the learning literature, there are many issues that cannot be adequately explained or discussed. This is due to a functionalist bias in the learning literature, prescribing technical procedures and ignoring the political nature of learning and the political context in which learning takes place. In essence the learning literature and how it is subsequently applied within EU governance is problematic, as it depoliticises interactions.

The resonating issues touch the core of theoretical approaches in the learning literature. Actors in both co-operation networks distinguish different objects of transfer, ranging from ideas to the transfer of policies (see Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Furthermore, actors separate between different stages of learning, from defining a problem to getting in touch with ideas and subsequent implementation (see Rose, 1991). Finally, actors talk about the contingency of learning, the importance of taking the difference in context into account when learning from others (see Rose, 1993).

However, these issues are at the margins of the broader picture of learning. This research demonstrates that learning takes place within a political context: the parameters of discussion are framed by broader European values whereas power and interests guide interactions. Although the ruling discourses fall beyond the scope of this research, it has become clear that both networks are embedded within a broader European policymaking context. Learning in EU co-operation networks is therefore

contextualised, opposed to being decontextualised and scientific (Noaksson and Jakobsson, 2003).[40]

Furthermore, actors from the case studies have pointed out that learning is not a process among equal partners. Instead, there is a hierarchy among network members in terms of who transfers and who receives knowledge. This appears to be not so much caused by actual differences in policy development, but by how actors perceive their own role in network processes, their authority and status among members as well as the nature of the interests that actors pursue. In essence, the motives of actors for engaging in learning are not necessarily concerned with policy reform. As has been put forward within the context of the OMC, actors are not so much seeking the truth, but seeking power (Radaelli, 2008). This research suggests that learning can be used as a cover for other stakes involved, implying that when actors say they are involved in learning, the actual motives -whether functional or political- need to be deconstructed.

Development of policy

The second objective is concerned with the development of policy. The development of policy appears to be a conventional concept in the domain of EU governance, with policymaking at its heart. However, here the concern is with a particular type of network process, unfolding in the institutional context of co-operation networks. Co-operation networks are meant to be informal and voluntary, lacking any formal mandate or role towards policymaking. Despite this, among network members the development of policy or other products is regarded as an important objective. The development of policy as an objective therefore implies that co-operation networks play a much bigger role in the arena of EU governance than so far has been presumed.

The contribution to policymaking differs however from conventional notions of policymaking. First, the co-operation networks are concerned with the development of strategic policy or operational policy. Especially the latter is usually not defined as

[40] This differentiation is used in a comparative study of modes of learning in the EES versus the OECD. Learning in the EES is here characterised as being contextualised (framed by the political context of the EU), whereas learning in the OECD is regarded as taking place in a more scientific and decontextualised environment.

policy, as this domain is viewed to be concerned with merely technical and practical issues. Secondly, the process of the development of policy is not defined as such. As the role of co-operation networks has not been formalised, how and through which European and national channels the development of policy takes place remains an open question which is beyond the scope of this research and requires further investigation.

Networking

Networking is a concept with an ambiguous relationship to the central concept of networks. On the one hand it is a distinct concept, with networking defined as an activity on its own terms: the establishing and enhancing of relations among network actors. The concepts of networks and networking are however mutually connected in several ways. Networking can be regarded as an activity or an objective for actors, which takes place within the confinement of the institutional boundaries of a network. On the other hand networking itself has an impact on how networks as an institutional arrangement unfold. This research demonstrates that there is a mutual connection in another way: actors themselves regard networks and networking as intrinsically linked. The survey results indicate that networking is regarded as an inherent aim to being involved in networks. The case studies suggest however that actors do not necessarily give meaning to networking as an aim in its own right, but more as a means in relation to other goals that need to be achieved. Networking can therefore be concerned with making alliances in order to strengthen one's bargaining position; it can be concerned with establishing professional relationships for developing expertise, or it can be concerned with socialising with peers in a similar policy domain.

Uploading

From concepts within the dimension of the pursuit of common network objectives we move on to the two concepts that are concerned with the pursuit of nationally defined objectives: uploading and showcase. Both touch on issues of power, status and exerting influence.

As I have put forward in chapter three, the concept of uploading has been introduced within the European governance literature in recent years in order to explain the role

of national actors in shaping European processes. This was a reaction to the dominant 'top-down focus' within the Europeanisation literature, which neglected the active role that national actors play themselves in the development of new modes of governance. The concept of uploading refers to how national actors are not only engaged on the European level with the intention to 'download' or 'take' from the European to the national level, but are also actively involved in 'shaping' European processes by 'uploading' their own models and policies. Within the field of the OMC, various studies have demonstrated that governments use uploading as part of their strategies in their involvement with the OMC (Büchs: 2008; Verschraegen et all, 2009).

The findings of this thesis confirm that uploading is not only confined to formal modes of EU governance, but is also on the agenda of the actors involved in networks of an informal and co-operative nature. However, the mixed responses in the survey have indicated that here we engage in a much more contested area, compared to the objectives that have just been discussed as part of network objectives. Uploading is therefore not a general strategy applied by all member states, but selected by a number of participants involved.

Actors give meaning to uploading in the form of influencing European policy, the influencing of policies of other member states and the influencing of EU competence in the policy domain in question. More essentially, uploading is pursued in different ways, depending on the overall motives for and strategies of network engagement. The case studies indicate that uploading can be concerned with promoting own issues and concerns through engaging in discussions and interactions with other network members, but that it can also involve the export or imposition of own positions and issues on others.

Showcase

So far all the concepts have been concerned with activities that involve the interactions of actors in various ways. The findings demonstrate however that current conceptualisations of actors' strategies are too limited: rather than only 'downloading' or 'uploading' policies, actors also pursue strategies that go beyond policy and are about shaping their own role as network members or members of the EU at large. This

implies the introduction of a new concept: showcase. Showcase is in essence about actors using networks as arenas to present themselves and their policies to others with the intention of enhancing their own status and power among their peers.

Showcase can be seen as the by-product of new forms of accountability within EU network governance. Mechanisms such as peer review within the OMC are intended to create openness and transparency, as national administrations need to justify their choice of policies to their peers. In essence, accountability is no longer about complying with a rule set down by the formal representative institutions, but about providing explanations about choices in public (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010). The emphasis is placed on knowledge and argumentations derived from rational motivations and evidence. Showcase implies that there is a political side to this accountability process and for being motivated to engaging in network activities in general: it is about reputational politics and enhancing one's status towards other member states.

The findings reveal that showcase has different faces. Actors aim to show their own successes to others as well as show involvement in Europe to their peers, both objectives receiving generous support by members in both networks. These findings have implications for future research, broadening the conceptual territory of network agency. More understanding is needed of the different faces of showcase in practice, but also how showcase is played out in different institutional territories within EU governance.

8.5.2 DIVERSE EFFECTS AND IMPACT ON POLICY

With individual actors pursuing a multitude of objectives and actors collectively divided over the direction of network processes, policy steering is a muddled process. The effects and outcomes of network processes are rather unpredictable. In essence, co-operation networks lead a life of their own within EU governance.

It has been beyond the scope of this research to investigate the wider impact of co-operation networks on EU policymaking processes. However the various meanings actors give to network processes indicate that it can vary from concrete contributions

in terms of development of (institutional) policy to the dispersal of ideas and discourses and effects from exertions of influence on behalf of individual actors.

This thesis has explored how individual actors give meaning to the impact they experience on the national level. Here we equally engage on terrain that is characterised by differentiation and unpredictability. National actors differ on how they experience the value of their engagement in co-operation networks, whether they experience impact at all and if so, whether this is concerned with concrete outcomes or individual experiences of mind-broadening on behalf of the network member.

In both networks a pallet of different national experiences is presented, but underlying these differences are many similar motivations. The general trend is that countries do not engage in topics because they are on the network agenda, but because they are first of all on the national agenda. Impact is experienced when discussions within the network can be linked into national debates, either providing new insights or reinforcing and legitimising institutional and policy paths already entered.
The findings confirm the value of a bottom-up approach within Europeanisation research. Impact needs to be analysed and explained from the point of view of how actors steer the national impact of activities with their own motivations, challenging the perspective of a 'misfit' concerned with a discrepancy between European ideas and policies and those on the national level (see Börzel, 2003).

Furthermore, these findings shed light on whether co-operation networks can contribute to achieving European convergence on the national level through soft means, as is the underlying assumption in the OMC (Jacobsson, 2004). This would imply that even intergovernmental networks that operate without a formal mandate, as is the case in the field of public services reform, would contribute to European integration. The diverse array of experiences with national impact suggests that this is an unlikely scenario when we consider the implications of processes in a short space of time. However, more research is needed to study the dynamics of processes over longer periods of time, and how the creation of common discourses and ways of thinking might lead to possible processes of convergence among countries.

8.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have provided theoretical perspectives on European network processes on the basis of the findings of this thesis. First, I have addressed the type of institutional arrangements this research has focussed on, concerned with European co-operation networks. I have put forward that we can add a fourth procedure to the threefold division of the legislative, distributing and learning procedure: the co-operation procedure. However, I have pointed out that the significance of this institutional differentiation is only of relative value, as the findings demonstrate that the co-operation procedure does not foster a singular mode of governing across institutional arrangements, and that the classification of this procedure being informal versus the formality of the other procedures is incorrect as boundaries are blurred in practice.

The heart of this chapter has been concerned with theorising network processes. Theorising the complex nature of network processes, this chapter has offered new conceptions and perspectives on both the institutional territory of network processes, the role of actors in managing this wider territory as well as the nature of policy steering in European network processes. First I have put forward that the European network polity needs to be conceptualised in a broader manner than solely the European network polity, as network processes are linked into and embedded in other institutional territories, notably the national organisational premises of network members. Their involvement and modes of steering implies that European network processes take place in a politicized context. Furthermore, it exposes the limitations of conceptualisations of the European polity as governed through networks, as the findings of this research demonstrate that these linkages are more complex with hierarchical steering coming into play.

The struggles among actors are played out across this wider institutional territory, with individual actors pursuing their own strategies and double level games. Extending the overall conclusions of individual agency to its implications for network processes at large, it becomes clear that European network processes are shaped by a unique constellation of individual actors bringing in and competing with their own national institutional and political baggage. Although this research has not addressed

interactions on an individual basis, it has uncovered how actors give meaning to network processes at large concerned with the overall dynamics among actors.

I have exposed how notions of informality, consensus-seeking and deliberation are problematic as these do not do justice to the complexity of actors' relations and the existence of divisions of power among network members. With actors collectively competing over ownership of European networks, the implication is that network coordination is not static, but needs to be approached as a shifting balance between intergovernmental and supranational steering.

Finally, I have reflected on how these struggles in relation to their broader institutional environment impact on processes of network governing and its effects and outcomes in terms of policy. I have put forward that the content and direction of network processes is contested, with actors collectively as well as individually competing with their own objectives. I have broadened the conceptual map on network objectives, by going beyond the formal focus on learning and adding other objectives concerned with developing policy, networking, uploading and showcase.
With actors steering processes with their own objectives, the implications for the outcomes of network processes are rather unpredictable, both at the European as well as national level. At the national level it has become clear how actors play an active role in shaping outcomes themselves, demonstrating the limitations of achieving a common purpose and ultimately European convergence through network governing on an informal basis.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 POLITICS INHERENT FEATURE OF EUROPEAN NETWORK GOVERNANCE

In this thesis I have provided insight into the characteristics of European networks in practice, by examining actual processes of governing. I have exposed the insufficiency of dominating notions within the literature on European network governance that informal networks are about fostering learning and co-operation among equal actors without organisational mandates. Instead, I have argued that European network processes are political in nature: network processes take place in a politicized environment and are characterised by struggles among actors and contestation over objectives and outcomes.

Even though the findings are derived from co-operation networks, which in legal terms are informal and politically carry less weight than European networks operating in relation to formal modes of EU governance, the validity of my argumentation has proved to be pervasive. Hierarchies, double level games and contestation are inherent features to EU governing processes, and informal co-operation networks are no exception. When actors engage in the EU, they become part of a wider institutional logic, characterised by the fundamental battles of interests among the Commission versus member states on the one hand, as well as the differences among member states in their own EU agendas on the other.

From the in depth analysis of the involvement of actors from the UK and the Netherlands, it has become clear that although actors perceive the stakes in the EUPAN and HOPES network to be not high, actors from both countries pursue their own double level games, strategically balancing the pursuit of both their national organisational as well as their European network interests. More specifically, national actors pursue their own objectives and network strategies, and differ in their political institutional baggage. The implication is that European network processes take place in a politicized context: processes are linked into the national institutional territories of actors, with the organisational arenas of network actors involved in institutional coordination, shaping the institutional capability of network actors as well as steering the national impact of network activities.

A similar conclusion holds when we look at network processes at large. Although both the EUPAN and HOPES network are intergovernmental and informal in status, processes are characterised by struggles among actors and contestation. Collectively, actors struggle over the direction and coordination of network processes. In both networks the Commission pursues its own interests, aiming to broaden its institutional power and competing with member states over control of coordination. Furthermore, below the cover of informality and consensus lie pressing differences in power among old and new member states, divided by duration in EU membership and experience with involvement in EU networks.

9.2 POLITICS AT THE HEART OF EUROPEAN NETWORK GOVERNANCE RESEARCH

These conclusions have important implications for debates within European network governance: an assessment of the existence of hierarchies, double level games, and contestation needs to be placed at the heart of the future research agenda. This implies that a more expansive research strategy is needed within Europeanisation research, involving a bottom-up analysis that examines not only the objectives and strategies of actors but also the role of the national organisational premises of network members. Furthermore, research needs to equally examine the collective dynamics among network members, exploring the struggles taking place over coordination, the divisions of power among network members and the nature of network proceedings.

The value of adopting a qualitative methodology has proved to be essential for the nature of this research activity, revealing the actual nature of network processes on the basis of the meanings and experiences of participants involved. In this thesis two case studies have been selected and examined concerned with the UK and the Netherlands. These countries differ in their institutional modes of national governance as well as attitudes and commitment to engagement in the EU, factors that were drawn as explanatory variables into analysis.

The case studies have shed light on the particular characteristics of network engagement of actors from the UK and the Netherlands, with actors from both countries pursuing interests in line with their own national organisational agendas. Actors from the UK are mainly concerned with defending their own national

organisational interests, involved in uploading its own models and positions. Members from the Netherlands are equally involved in promoting European network activities, aiming to shape the development of the network in line with their own preferences.

In this thesis the focus has been on two case studies and their particular features. However, the case studies also shed light on the general characteristics of network agency. The case studies indicate that the motivation for network agency is not so much concerned with advancing common goals but securing own interests. More case studies need to be selected for future research to compare how other member states pursue double level games, and how these are shaped by different institutional backgrounds and political agendas. This is not only of relevance to broaden comparative research within a single network, but also to explain patterns of national engagement across different networks.

A crucial issue for further examination concerns how countries compare in their agency across different institutional arenas, and whether they pursue similar interest and agendas in these. The case studies in this thesis have revealed that actors from the UK and the Netherlands pursue essentially similar interests in both the EUPAN and HOPES network. It could indicate that this is due to a particular mode of engagement related to the status of co-operation networks. But as neither the networks nor the actors from the co-operation networks are institutionally linked, it appears more likely that network actors pursue agendas by way they have grown institutionally accustomed to, shaped and rooted by national practices within government at large. More research is needed to explain these patterns, requiring in depth analysis on a comparative basis within the broader field of EU network governance.

In terms of networks and their processes, this research has focussed on two case studies. Both the EUPAN and HOPES network had been selected for their equal status as co-operation networks, their common institutional features and the shared policy domain of public services. In this research I have shed light on the particular characteristics of these networks, starting with a different set of formal processes. Whereas processes in the EUPAN network have been codified in a Handbook, within the HOPES network a constitutional document is lacking and reference to the

procedures, objectives and role divisions among actors is fragmented across different policy documents. Although each network produces its own unique dynamics among actors defined by their formal processes, the institutionalisation of the network and institutional and political factors in practice, in essence the processes in both networks share similar features. Both the EUPAN and HOPES network are characterised by struggles between the Commission and Presidencies over coordination and contestation over the direction of processes, divisions of power among members as well as formal proceedings and the masking of conflicts.

More case studies are needed to acquire understanding of whether processes in other networks can be characterised in similar terms. The impact of different institutional conditions –the informality/ formality of networks and being embedded in different modes of EU governance- needs to be explored. This is important to acquire deeper understanding into issues that have been brought to light in this thesis and require further exploration across the larger territory of EU network governance.

One significant issue that this research has revealed is the problematic nature of defining divisions of power along the formal lines of intergovernmentalism versus supranationalism. It has become clear that this cannot address and explain the actual power balance between member states and the Commission in practice, shaped by struggles within governing processes. More research is needed to understand how these battles are played out in other modes of EU governance, and how this can be explained. Furthermore, by comparing different cases we will acquire an overall assessment of the actual balance of power between European and national actors within EU network governance.

The three methods used in this study have proved to be very useful in examining the case studies as well as network processes at large. Document analysis has been essential for the provision of understanding of the formal processes of the two networks. The conduct of in-depth interviews was important to acquire insight into the views of network members themselves on their individual engagement as well as network processes around them. As this research was concerned with exposing political issues as struggles and contestation, this method proved to be vital in order to to tease out issues and acquire insight into the underlying issues going on. The third

method was concerned with the distribution of a questionnaire across all network members from both the EUPAN as well as HOPES network. This method proved to be very useful in getting access to the network at large and to collect data from a wide variety of actors. Although it did not foster in depth meanings like the interviews achieved, the method served its designed purpose: acquiring a general overview of the meanings of other network members in order to contextualise the views of actors from the two case studies.

Document analysis, interviewing and a network questionnaire have proved to be useful methods of research. Different methods can be adopted in future research however. I would suggest the use of participant observation in particular, which could offer knowledge on the nature of network processes from a different angle: not just the wordings of network members but observations of actual processes going on. Although this study has given profound insight into individual agency, I was unable to examine the actual interactions among network members on an individual basis as would be the case with participant observation. However, there are drawbacks to this method as well: gaining access to meetings in practical terms, and the overreliance on the interpretations of the researcher himself in the provision of knowledge in scientific terms.

9.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKING AND EU GOVERNING

This research does however not only have implications for research on European network governance; it equally has implications for EU policymaking and governing in practice. This touches the heart of what governance is all about. In essence, governance is a means to achieve certain goals, which have been formally established. However, this research has demonstrated that network processes are not just about achieving formally agreed aims. In practice, actors use networks as a platform to pursue a multitude of aims, motivated by their own agendas. The essential implication is that outcomes are steered towards different directions than have been aimed for.

With regard to European co-operation networks it has become clear that although co-operation networks are meant to foster exchange of information and learning, actors pursue many different aims beyond these. One significant finding is that despite the

absence of a formal policy mandate, co-operation networks do provide input to policymaking. This is concerned with the development of institutional policy. Actors give examples of how the networks in question have given input to processes of reform on the national level, both in relation to public administration and public employment services policy. Furthermore, it has become clear that network processes also feed into European channels of policymaking, either directly or more indirectly through the spread of ideas and discourses.

Whereas goals of learning and policy reform fit into formal approaches on aims in relation to policymaking, this research has demonstrate that actors do not just pursue functional aims that are about policy reform. Actors also use networks as a space to meet their peers, to network and to be informed on what is going on elsewhere and in the field of European policy. More crucially, actors pursue other goals to advance their own interests. These are first of all concerned with 'uploading' own models and exerting influence into the European space, by means of influencing the policies of other counterparts as well as European policy and European competence in general. Furthermore actors also use these networks as a platform to provide a showcase, to show own successes to others and also to show involvement in Europe.

These findings have important implications for policymaking in the field of other soft modes of governance, where the formal aim is not just concerned with learning and exchanges but intended at achieving policy reform. This is the case with the OMC, where processes take place within the context of a formal policymaking mandate. The procedures of the OMC reflect this, with both national and European actors involved in reporting mechanisms on the state of national policy and the provision of European guidelines and recommendations of reform. However, this thesis provides evidence in support of the view that without hard measures of enforcement, actors might equally use this space to pursue their own agendas and pursue other goals beyond those formally agreed. The implications for policymaking would be that the original goals are shaped according to the interests of the actual participants involved. It is a normative question that reaches beyond the scope of this thesis whether it is problematic when governance processes lead to different outcomes than those envisaged along formal lines. It depends on whether one places emphasis on the

benefits for actual network participants, for politicians involved, or ultimately the target group of policy.

In essence, this thesis has exposed the political reality of processes that are fostered in soft modes of governance to policymakers and governors. It highlights the complexity in steering governing processes. This is not only concerned with steering actual outcomes as I have discussed so far, but also with managing actual governing processes themselves. Rather than network processes naturally fostering deliberation and consensus among actors, this thesis has made clear that struggles among actors, the contestation of the content of processes and power differentials are an inherent aspect to network governing. These issues touch the heart of network processes, but are so far insufficiently acknowledged and addressed by actors involved and in charge of governing. In essence, management of network politics has largely remained off the network agenda as far as the case studies are concerned.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to provide detailed recommendations on the management of EU network processes, but an overall suggestion comes to light that struggles need to be more openly acknowledged and discussed within networks. The need for this has become clear from conversations with network members during my empirical research. Many actors expressed the wish for acknowledgment of the contested nature of network directions, looking for more open communication and debates in order to reach some common ground among actors within the network. This issue goes beyond the establishment of formal agreements on network goals, as this thesis has shown that this is an equally divisive issue within the EUPAN network, where processes have been codified, as in the HOPES network. Furthermore, many actors have expressed concern that network proceedings are too formal, hampering open and constructive debate. Less problematised by actors themselves but an issue that needs to be equally addressed in the governance of network processes are the divisions in power among network members. With regard to the deep divisions among older and new member states, this thesis has indicated that there might be an element of institutional racism at stake, suggesting that more equal participation needs to be promoted and fostered across network members.

This all implies that even though politics is an inherent feature to network processes as this thesis has revealed, the actual unfolding of network processes and degree of contestation, formality and conflict can be influenced by active network management. Achieving equal participation and processes free from conflict and interests might remain an ideal in network governance, yet these notions can still be an aspiration for those actors coordinating and participating in European network processes.

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APPENDIX 1: STANDARD FORMAT OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Aims

1) How do you view the purpose of this network?

2) What is the purpose for your country?

3) And for yourself?

Network strategies and processes

4) Can you describe what happens in meetings on this level? Who decides on the order of the meetings? Are rounds held that everyone can express their views? Who makes final decisions? How does one deal with disagreement?

5) Can you describe what happens elsewhere (working groups)?

6) What works well in this network and what not?

7) Can you give an example of an issue your country is highly involved in? Why is this issue of such importance and what are your aims of sharing it with European colleagues? How do you try to reach your goals? (Impact?)

Co-ordination and institutional facilitation

8) How do you prepare yourself for a meeting? How are you instructed to participate in these meetings and by whom? How do you define your objectives?

9) How do you experience your subsequent room for manoeuvre in a meeting?

10) How does your organisation constrain or support you in your activities?

Impact

11) How do you experience the impact of what you are doing?

12) How do you communicate your results and to whom?

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE EUPAN NETWORK

Questionnaire EUPAN network

Background and objectives

This questionnaire has been set up in the framework of research being conducted at the European Research Institute at the University of Bath. The European Public Administration Network is one of the European co-operation networks in the domain of public services that is the focus of this research. The research project aims to promote understanding of network processes, exploring how network members regard the purpose of their involvement in the network, how they experience how the network is being governed and whether the network has changed in recent years.

This questionnaire is addressed at members of the EUPAN network in order to collect their views and experiences with the network. As the input of responses is of crucial importance to the outcome of this research project, your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Please complete the questionnaire below and return it either by email or post to the following address:

H.Kan@bath.ac.uk

Hester Kan
Department of Social and Policy Sciences
University of Bath
Bath BA2 7AY
United Kingdom

Thank you very much for your co-operation in advance.

Questionnaire EUPAN network

Contact details

Name:	
Country:	
Position and organisation:	
Telephone number:	

Position in the network

Are you your country's general representative for the network?	
Are you your country's representative for a working group? Please specify which one.	

SECTION 1
YOUR AIMS AND COUNTRY INVOLVEMENT

In this section I am interested in the objectives you aim to achieve in the network and how you are engaged in the network

1) Which of the following objectives do you/ your country aim to achieve by engaging in this network? How would you rate its priority?

	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority
Exchanging information			
Learning from others			
Showing own successes to others			
Showing involvement in Europe			
Benchmarking			
Developing policy or other products			
Influencing policy of other member states			
Being updated on EU developments			
Influencing European policy			
Networking			
Others:			

2) Can you give an example of an issue that you are engaged in within the network and what impact it has had on your country?

SECTION 2
YOUR VIEWS ON NETWORK GOVERNING

In this section I am interested in your views on the governing of the network

3) What is your view on the role of the Commission and Presidency?
   a) Do the objectives of the Commission and Presidency differ from your own objectives?

      Yes/ No

      If yes, how do they differ?

   b) Has the role of the Commission and Presidencies changed in recent years?

      Yes/ No

      If yes, how has it changed?

4) What is your view on how activities and meetings are conducted and what have been the most significant changes in recent years?

	Works Well				*Works Not*
Agenda Setting	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Chairmanship	*Works Well*				*Works Not*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Institutional facilitation	*Works Well*				*Works Not*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Working methods	*Right*				*Wrong*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Balance between discussions and deliverables	*Right*				*Wrong*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Atmosphere	*Informal*				*Formal*
	1	2	3	4	5
	Consensual				*Conflictual*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Participation of members	*Equal*				*Unequal*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

5) What is your view on whether the network should stay informal and intergovernmental or formal and have social dialogue?

APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE HOPES NETWORK

Questionnaire European PES network

Background and objectives

This questionnaire has been set up in the framework of research being conducted at the European Research Institute at the University of Bath. The Public Employment Services network is one of the European co-operation networks in the domain of public services that is the focus of this research. The research project aims to promote understanding of network processes, exploring how network members regard the purpose of their involvement in the network, how they experience how the network is being governed and whether the network has changed in recent years.

This questionnaire is addressed at members of the PES network in order to collect their views and experiences with the network. As the input of responses is of crucial importance to the outcome of this research project, your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Please complete the questionnaire below and return it either by email or post to the following address:

H.Kan@bath.ac.uk

Hester Kan
Department of Social and Policy Sciences
University of Bath
Bath BA2 7AY
United Kingdom

Thank you very much for your co-operation in advance.

Questionnaire European PES network

Contact details

Name:	
Country:	
Position and organisation:	
Telephone number:	

Position in the network

Are you your country's general representative for the network?	
Are you your country's representative for a working group? Please specify which one.	

SECTION 1
YOUR AIMS AND COUNTRY INVOLVEMENT

In this section I am interested in the objectives you aim to achieve in the network and how you are engaged in the network

1) Which of the following objectives do you/ your country aim to achieve by engaging in this network? How would you rate its priority?

	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority
Exchanging information			
Learning from others			
Showing own successes to others			
Showing involvement in Europe			
Benchmarking			
Developing policy or other products			
Influencing policy of other member states			
Being updated on EU developments			
Influencing European policy			
Networking			
Others:			

2) Can you give an example of an issue that you are engaged in within the network and what impact it has had on your country?

SECTION 2
YOUR VIEWS ON NETWORK GOVERNING

In this section I am interested in your views on the governing of the network

3) What is your view on the role of the Commission?
   a) Do the objectives of the Commission differ from your own objectives?

      Yes/ No

      If yes, how do they differ?

   b) Has the role of the Commission changed in recent years?

      Yes/ No

      If yes, how has it changed?

4) What is your view on how activities and meetings are conducted and what have been the most significant changes in recent years?

	Works Well				*Works Not*
Agenda Setting	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Chairmanship	*Works Well*				*Works Not*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Institutional facilitation	*Works Well*				*Works Not*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Working methods	*Right*				*Wrong*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Balance between discussions and deliverables	*Right*				*Wrong*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Atmosphere	*Informal*				*Formal*
	1	2	3	4	5
	Consensual				*Conflictual*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

Participation of members	*Equal*				*Unequal*
	1	2	3	4	5
Comment					
Any significant changes					

5) What is your vision on the future of the network and the space that is being offered to discuss the direction this network should move towards?