

**Community-building as a practice of professionalization:
Networks of EU affairs professionals in Germany**

by

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Epistemic communities are regarded as “networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain of policy-making”. They are supposed to share similar normative and principled beliefs, similar causal beliefs and similar notions of validity. Moreover, they are usually assembled around common “policy enterprises” to which their particular professional competence and expertise is directed to (Haas 1990: 3). In light of these aforementioned definitional elements put forwarded by Peter M. Haas, experts and professionals in EU policy-making and related “affairs” could be regarded easily as an “epistemic community” at first sight. However, although EU affairs professionals might share a common policy enterprise and similar beliefs and notions of validity, the various groups of experts and professionals are much too vague and diverse to be treated unanimously as a homogeneous “community”, neither in Brussels nor in national contexts of policy-making. Hence, without principally questioning the strong analytical value of the concept of “epistemic communities”, we would like to discuss in our contribution as to what extent this concept is fruitful to grasp the multi-faceted population of EU professionals and in what way the initial conception put forward by Haas and others should be further developed.

On the basis of a case studies on networking and community-building of EU professionals in Germany we would like to argue that we should not take the existence of epistemic communities for granted, but focus more carefully on attempts, strategies and practices of community-building. We claim that albeit all principal epistemic similarities of certain types of experts and professionals, “epistemic communities” do not just emerge “out of thin air”, but are created, formed, fostered and maintained actively through rituals of community-building, practices of networking and other practices of interaction. In fact, we claim that networking activities and practices of group-building constitute central elements of the establishment of a community of experts around similar topics and political enterprises. It also constitutes a vital element of the “professionalization” of a certain field of professional activity. If this, however, leads to the formation of a fully-fledged “epistemic community” remains an open question. In our case study we primarily focus on the group “Europa-Professionell”, a community of EU professionals from various fields of activity established by the “Europa-Union Deutschland” in 2009. This case study will be complemented by an exploration of networking activities of the “Europäische Bewegung Deutschland”, another big player in the field of EU affairs professionalism in Germany. The data derives from fieldwork that was undertaken within the framework of the project “The professionalization of EU expertise” funded by the German Science Foundation from 2012-2015 within the framework of the research group “Horizontal Europeanization”.

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