

# **DECENTRING EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES: MEANING-MAKING, CONTESTATION AND CONTINGENCY IN ADVISORY GOVERNANCE**

Claire A. Dunlop  
Senior Lecturer, Department of Politics  
University of Exeter, Exeter, UK, EX2 4NA  
[c.a.dunlop@ex.ac.uk](mailto:c.a.dunlop@ex.ac.uk)

Epistemic communities are central actors in advisory governance. But analysis of them often tends to focus more on the barriers that limit their influence than on how their beliefs can change the policy debate over time. This paper suggest one way to develop the approach is to recover its early constructivism by adopting a 'decentred' analysis that focus on policy-making as a process as opposed to something with a settled end product. Decentred theory's three key themes (Bevir, 2013) – the centrality of: meaning-making and language in policy-making; political contestation of meaning; and contingency of the political world – are all analytical spaces that have been opened in some way by these main approaches to epistemic community analysis. Before outlining the decentred approach and its analytical foci, we locate its core themes in the epistemic communities literature underlining the appropriateness and feasibility of applying ethnographic tools to produce micro-level accounts and push for more constructivist analyses of epistemic communities. The value of the decentred approach is illustrated using empirical research from the advisory governance of bovine tuberculosis (BTB) in the UK. It concludes with some early reflections on the uses and limitations of a decentred account for the BTB case and briefly discusses the use of a decentred approach to epistemic communities for policymaking.