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Joel Krieger
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being. The “new environmentalism” assumes the dependence of social systems on the “health” and resilience of natural systems, and the growing intersection between environmental issues and sustainable development is evidenced in both policy and popular circles, and to varying degrees and extents, in the scientific community.

From the perspective of national decision-making, the problem is managing internal pressures and transformations due to changes in population, resources, and technology. Policy-making procedures are gradually being put in place by many nations in response to the challenges posed by environmental degradation. The prominent repertoire of policies and instruments to support the natural environment includes taxes on polluting products or processes, subsidies by the state to firms tied to pollution reduction, permits tied to units of previous pollution emission, auction by the state for permits to pollute, restrictions on legal limits to pollute and/or restriction on price increases tied to production restriction, payments for pollution damages, and victim property rights for pollution damages supported by compensation.

The adoption of policy does not necessarily lead to implementation. Countries may have policies in place but no mechanism (or intent) to follow up. It is also important to signal a nontrivial policy principle, namely, polluter property rights preventing any limits to pollution. Increasingly, however, environmental rationality in national decision-making may alter the power differentials among actors and interests. This situation may benefit the weaker parties in civil society by providing greater leverage over decision-making and an enhanced ability to add their issues to the national agenda.

Overall, the evolution of environmental problem solving may be construed as a process of learning. Still, most arrangements remain remedial rather than preventative, coordinating policies to regulate emissions rather than addressing the underlying conditions (sources) that give rise to emissions.

[See also Multilevel Governance; and Nongovernmental Organizations.]

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Nazli Choucri

**EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES**

Epistemic communities are networks of knowledge-based communities with an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within their domains of expertise. Their members share knowledge about the causation of social or physical phenomena in an area for which they have a reputation for competence as well as a common set of normative beliefs about what actions will benefit human welfare in such a domain. In particular, they are a group of professionals, often from a number of different disciplines, who share these characteristics:

1. Shared principled beliefs. Such beliefs provide a value-based rationale for social action by the members of the community.
2. Shared causal beliefs or professional judgment. Such beliefs provide analytic reasons and explanations of behavior, offering causal explanations for the multiple linkages among possible policy actions and desired outcomes.
3. Common notions of validity: intersubjective, internally defined criteria for validating knowledge. These allow community members to differentiate confidently between warranted
and unwarranted claims about states of the world, and policies to change those states.
4. A common policy enterprise: A set of practices associated with a central set of problems that have to be tackled, presumably out of a conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence.

Each characteristic must be present for an epistemic community to exist. In conjunction, they contribute to the broader social cachet and influence of the group. Internal beliefs about causal factors and validity, according to intracommunity standards, provide the glue for collective action among the individuals of the community. The warrants of their claims, according to external social standards, provide the political legitimation for their continued involvement (Haas 2004).

“Epistemic communities” is a concept applied by constructivist scholars of political science to focus analytic attention on the process by which states formulate interests and reconcile differences of interest. Epistemic communities are a principal channel by which consensual knowledge about causal understandings is applied to international policy coordination and by which states may learn through processes of international cooperation.

John Ruggie introduced the term *episteme*, borrowed in turn from Michel Foucault, to describe the overarching perspective through which political relationships are visualized and understood during historical eras. The winter 1992 issue of *International Organization, “Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination,”* focused on the actors responsible for articulating and aggregating knowledge-based understanding in areas of security, environment, and international political economy. It also developed the now-standard four-element definition of an epistemic community provided above.

By analyzing epistemic communities, constructivist scholars gained leverage in understanding the processes of social construction and collective learning. Epistemic communities are associated with distinctive patterns of social change that involve persuasion and learning. If, as argued by constructivist scholars, contemporary international relations is characterized as a setting of complexity and uncertainty, particularly under contemporary circumstances of complex interdependence, increasing globalization, and the emergence of new technical issues on the international agenda with which traditional decision-makers are habitually unfamiliar, then state interests are often unknown or incompletely specified. International relations then becomes a matter of applying embedded and institutionalized beliefs about the nature of problems and the appropriate means of collective response rather than the process of resolving rationally formulated state preferences, as is argued by many current theorists of international relations. Changes in information processing are likely to follow well-publicized shocks or crises. Only at such times are decision-makers likely to recognize major anomalies and pursue new policy patterns. During subsequent, less revolutionary, periods, these new doctrines, or orthodoxies, assume the status of taken-for-granted assumptions, or dogma, that persist until called into question again by external stimuli. Because of the disjointed-equilibrium nature of policy change, an evolutionary focus on institutional learning and path dependence may provide an appropriate model by which to understand the international recognition and response to global change. Such a research program may provide better understanding of factors that influence the introduction of new policy frames, collective understandings, or doctrines, as well as illuminate the mechanisms of lock-in and identify those factors that may influence the degree of irreversibility of national and collective actions.

Epistemic communities are one of the principal actors responsible for aggregating and articulating knowledge in terms of state interests for decision-makers and disseminating those beliefs internationally. In a broader political context, epistemic communities provide one of the major channels by which overarching regime principles, norms, and rules are articulated for the international community and disseminated internationally. While epistemic communities are the principal agents responsible for
articulating such principles, norms, and rules, the extent to which they become more deeply diffused and embedded internationally has to do with the political influence of epistemic community members: their ability to persuade others, their ability to consolidate bureaucratic influence in important institutional venues, and their ability to retain influence over time. State interests and decisions to deploy state power are, thus, identified subject to consensual knowledge.

The epistemic community literature is now over twenty years old. The epistemic-communities concept initially was favorably received in international relations because it provided a means for focusing on the ideational component of politics as well as allowed for agency in theorizing about governance and policymaking. Studies of the European Union, in particular, have analyzed the role of various epistemic communities in shaping EU directives as well as in building a broader sense of European identity. Since the initial response to epistemic communities, analysts have developed a variety of clarifications, refined hypotheses, pursued further empirical work, and provided empirical confirmation of the broad predicted social patterns associated with epistemic communities.

Reception. Initial critiques of epistemic communities by political scientists called for a clearer theory of the state (Milner) and more attention to the role of domestic politics in mediating the reception of transnational epistemic communities, as well as a clearer metric by which epistemic communities could be recognized and consensus within an epistemic community could be measured.

Critical voices were sounded from the social-studies-of-knowledge literature regarding the degree of political autonomy enjoyed by epistemic communities, and science-based arguments in general, for public policy. Critics questioned the political consequences of such ideas and also the potential implicit political bias in the research programs pursued by epistemic-community members. The critics feared that epistemic communities might be antidemocratic and antiparticipatory by depoliticizing expertise, and critics also feared the consequences of expert-based advice. Also, because epistemic communities are responsible for simplifying a complex and ambiguous policy environment, critics felt that analysis should be focused on the resolution of contention within the knowledge space of the epistemic community rather than on its consensual beliefs. Relatedly, because epistemic knowledge includes that which epistemic communities agree about as well as that about which they disagree and remain uncertain, critics called for closer attention to the degree to which epistemic knowledge contains large amounts of contestation as well.

Many of these points, however, were explicitly acknowledged in the initial formulation of the epistemic community research program—namely, the political nature of all policy debate. The epistemic community argument was that, normatively, epistemic communities ultimately provide better advice than other modes of policy advice, because expert advice is likely to be warranted. Unlike other organized interest groups active in politics and policymaking, epistemic communities have internal beliefs that make them more likely to provide information that is politically untainted and therefore more likely to “work,” in the political sense that this information will be embraced and followed by political authorities concerned about the need to be impartial. Epistemic communities’ advice is also more likely to be technically effective, in the sense of obtaining the desired goals while balancing economic and technical trade-offs, than other negotiated approaches to policy-making based on political compromise.

Analytically, the epistemic-community approach provided a clear causal pathway by which ideas came to inform political practices. This is superior to conventional approaches to the study of politics, which are unable to provide credible explanations for how ideas influence politics, or the conditions under which ideas are likely to be influential.

Epistemic-community members can be identified through cross-checking membership lists for international negotiations and consultations over time, through secondary literature (especially by journalists), and by interviews and related snowball techniques. Recurrent names are eligible candidates. Refining an identification of the consensual knowledge shared by an epistemic community’s
members can be accomplished by reading their publications (especially scientific ones with equations, which force precision) and open-ended interviews. The extent to which they feel that they are members of a common community can be ascertained through interviews and by observing snowball techniques, in which prospective members identify others with whom they believe they share beliefs. The combination of self-identified traits and externally confirmed traits (such as the application of consensus approaches to truth) defines the epistemic community. Because epistemic communities are defined by their shared beliefs, the extent of tolerable contestation and consensus is a matter of community belief, and it can be ascertained by the internal norms and practices of the epistemic community in question. The causal mechanisms by which the epistemic community exercises influence—learning—can effectively be pursued by process tracing, focused comparative case studies, counterfactuals (Tetlock and Belkin 1996), and alternative-hypothesis testing.

More recent methodological advances in network analysis and bibliometric studies offer fruitful techniques for identifying and representing epistemic communities, although not for tracking their influence.

**Refinements.** In response to the initial bout of responses in the literature, a number of refinements and clarifications to the original research program ensued, leading to a richer political understanding of the role of causal ideas in world politics (Dunlop). Refined and clarified assumptions include the following ideas: States are key juridical actors, and they act willfully. States are functionally differentiated, and they vary widely according to their state-society relations and the technical capacity of the state to formulate and enforce public policies in technical domains. States operate in a complex policy environment, so information about that environment is highly valued. Yet, knowledge is asymmetrically distributed within and among countries. Finally, while perceptions are socially constructed, political actors and social scientists are not subject to the same set of influences.

Stronger hypotheses about the mechanisms, effects, and variations of epistemic communities' influence also were developed. Epistemic communities are likely to be formed around substantive issues in which scientific disciplines have been applied to policy-oriented work and in countries with well-established institutional capacities for administration and science and technology. Only governments with such capacities are likely to see the need for the technical skills that epistemic-community members command, and such professionals would be attracted to governmental service only when they believe that their policy enterprise can be advanced. Crises or widely publicized shocks are probably necessary precipitants of environmental-regime creation, but crises alone are insufficient to explain how or which collective responses to a perceived joint problem are likely to develop. Epistemic communities, then, help identify cause-and-effect relationships, elucidate interlinkages among problems, help define the consulting state's or organization's interests, and help to formulate policy. Their aggregate effect depends upon the extent to which their ideas become embedded in influential multilateral institutions more generally: powerful countries and international institutions, and possibly nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which will then deploy their own influence to disseminate the shared ideas enunciated within the epistemic community. Overall, learning will occur in the policy system as new policy-relevant knowledge is identified and applied to a common problem.

The initial reception of epistemic communities' ideas is likely to occur in rich democratic societies, in which scientific capacity and the free flow of information within society are high. Other countries may also be receptive to epistemic communities' ideas, however, not as quickly. For instance, in the Mediterranean, the first adopters of epistemic communities and their beliefs were in Israel, Greece, France, and the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), while later adopters included Algeria and Egypt.

Clearer ideas about the disciplines and issues likely to generate epistemic communities have been
provided by the economic historian Paul David (Dasgupta and David). He provides some very suggestive work, pointing to the role of state capacity and the political economy of knowledge. Public acceptance of science—and, thus, the external authority enjoyed by an epistemic community, is a function of the cost of research and the relevance of that research to the core mission of the sponsoring agency. Thus, in areas in which the cost is relatively small and the relevance is far from the core mission of the sponsor, the independence of researchers and the epistemic community is greater and, thus, likely to be seen as more legitimate.

Treaties developed with a strong contribution from epistemic communities may enter into force more rapidly than those developed through other political mechanisms, because the social influence of epistemic-community members will accelerate ratification in domestic legislative venues.

Multiple mechanisms of diffusion are possible through various international channels at different political scale, involving inducements, coercion, learning and persuasion, and market responses to price changes. Different mechanisms are likely to operate on different types of countries. Epistemic communities remain a necessary component for learning within a broader pattern of policy diffusion. For instance, in stratospheric ozone protection, the regulatory scheme arose from atmospheric chemists, but the new technologies to satisfy those regulations emerged through the interplay of multinational corporations, such as DuPont, ATOCHEM, and ICI; international institutions, such as the Montreal Ozone Protocol's technical advisory panels and the Montreal Ozone Fund; and NGOs, most notably Greenpeace. The appropriate factors by which international institutions may induce other actors to accept the epistemic ideas will vary according to the political and economic conditions in the target country. For instance, advanced industrialized societies are more responsive to public-education campaigns, whereas poor, developing countries respond to material incentives from capacity building. The key analytic point, though, is that without the involvement of epistemic communities to set the agenda and impart new ideas, the political dynamics of collective action are likely to be far more conventional and lack the potential for reflective learning by policymakers.

International organizations also play a role in popularizing and disseminating the ideas of epistemic communities as well as the individual influence of epistemic community members. IOs that are insulated from the influence of member states and that enjoy bureaucratic resources—such as an adept executive head, adequate budgets, and a professional staff recruited through merit—play a strong role in disseminating epistemic ideas (Murphy). They have a subsequent effect on other IO practices, international regimes, and state expectations, interests and practices. The mechanisms of influence by which IOs deploy epistemic ideas vary by target, however.

**Diffusion of Epistemic Communities' Literature.** Epistemic communities have been receiving increased attention since the original 1992 *International Organization* appeared. As of June 2011, the Google Scholar Internet search engine listed 3,305 citations and the Web of Science website listed 725 references to the introduction of the 1992 IO publication. Figures 1 and 2 show the growth over time of references to epistemic communities in ISI Web of Knowledge tracked journals. By country, citations were overwhelmingly in English-language journals (95 percent), with 2 percent in German, 1 percent in French, 1 percent in Norwegian, and between 0.4 percent and 0.3 percent in Spanish and Portuguese (see Figure 3.) Disciplinary interest has been quite varied, with political science accounting for 27 percent of the citations (see Figure 4). In comparative politics and policy studies, complementary approaches were developed that looked at the role of expert networks involved in policy-making, or policy communities, and extended global policy networks.

**Applications.** Efforts to apply the epistemic communities' research program have spanned a variety of topics, at times blurring the distinction between studying the role of expertise and studying experts' ideas.
Epistemic communities have been causally implicated in the form and persistence of international regimes, including nineteenth-century free trade (Bhagwati 1989), Bretton Woods (Ikenberry 1993), the New International Economic Order, and international environmental regimes.

Epistemic-community members have played a strong role in negotiating international environmental agreements. The hypotheses about the distinctive patterns of epistemic collective action were confirmed by numerous focused, comparative case studies of a wide array of multilateral environmental regimes. Members of the epistemic community that has dominated technical discussions in environmental regimes have subscribed to holistic ecological beliefs about the need for policy coordination subject to ecosystemic laws. Thus, they promote international environmental regimes that are grounded on policies that offer coherent plans for the management of entire ecosystems and that are sensitive to interactions among environmental media (such as air and water), sources of pollution, and contending uses of the common property resource, rather than being limited to more traditional policies for managing discrete activities or physical-resources spaces within fairly short-term time horizons. Epistemically informed collective action has a distinctively comprehensive form and is politically resilient, yielding patterns that are not associated with political dynamics involving any other sets of political actors. Moreover, epistemically informed treaties are more likely to be effective, because the regulatory standards fit the behavior of the socio-ecosystem being managed.

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**Figure 1.** Number of citations by year, 1992–2011.

**Figure 2.** Growth of overall number of citations, 1992–2011.
Further studies of international institutions refined the characteristics of formal international organizations that are likely to absorb the lessons of epistemic communities and to disseminate them. Design principles for international scientific panels were also identified (Haas 2004).

The EU has been a particularly ripe area for epistemic-community studies, not surprisingly, given the relatively high socioeconomic status of the countries and the multilevel governance structures that should be hospitable to epistemic community influences (Sabel and Zeitlin). To mention a few,
epistemic communities have been associated with negotiated policies for drug policy, monetary policy and the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), environmental policy, agricultural policy, and legal convergence.

Transnational diffusion of national policies and regulatory standards clearly bear the imprint of epistemic communities. Such studies include Keynesianism (Galbraith 1971a; Galbraith 1971b), public-health doctrines, accounting standards, legal doctrines and interpretations, pension reform, privatization, human development, and the Washington Consensus and macroeconomic responses to financial crises (Williamson and Haggard 1994).

National policy choice has been analyzed in terms of epistemic-community involvement, in particular epistemic communities' independence from broad political goals of the state and from domestic interest groups. Studies have looked at pension reforms in Sweden and economic reform in Latin America.

Epistemic communities have been subject to some conceptual stretching, including applications to include diplomacy and "appropriate behavior" (Cross 2011); religious actors and conflict resolution (Sandal 2010); and futurists (Cinquegrani 2002).

The ideational focus was absorbed into the broader constructivist research program developed in international relations and comparative politics, which looked at the role of beliefs and ideas in shaping state interests and practices, with epistemic communities serving as one of the mechanisms by which new ideas are developed and circulated (Katzenstein, Keohane, et al.). Analyzing epistemic communities continues to provide a key group of actors who are associated with a distinctive set of processes by which causal understandings shape actor interests and regime dynamic, amid constructivists' broader focus on other ideational forces, including norms, linguistic usage, and the like.

Research Frontiers. More recent publications in the epistemic-communities research program have been looking more carefully at the context in which epistemic communities arise and operate. Works published in the first decade of the twenty-first century try to clarify the institutional factors that shape or amplify ideational consensus and dissemination, and the factors that influence the creation of relatively impartial and usable scientific advice. They try to separate the causal mechanisms of social learning from other causal mechanisms that drive collective action.

The social construction of catalyzing crises remains undertheorized. While a crisis can easily be identified as a catalyst of change, we do not have a strong understanding ex ante of how or why actors recognize that a set of events constitute a crisis.

More attention can be paid to explaining which epistemic community will prevail and when. Most work has looked at instances in which one epistemic community was superseded by another, following repudiation by events. Little attention has been paid to reconciling contending knowledge claimants. While a number of hypotheses have been raised about the factors likely to influence the attractiveness of a particular epistemic community and its ideas to decision-makers at moments of crisis, these are all grounded on fixed, unitary state preferences. They do not take account of differential pressures within the state, and the case of the US decision to radially attack ozone depletion in 1985 in the face of steadfast opposition by top levels of the US administration serves as a powerful anomaly to such conventional hypotheses. One could ask why environmental scientists have tended to prevail over economists in all environmental issues other than climate change, or how Chicago School and Washington Consensus approaches have varied in their national uptake.

Additional research frontiers include a closer study of anomalous cases of failed epistemic communities—such as desertification and whaling—as well as the larger-scale dynamics by which social learning leads to broader understandings of world politics, interdependence, and identifying formation and reformation.

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Peter M. Haas

Equality and Inequality

The politics of the world in the early twenty-first century are beset by tensions arising from inequality. Whether it be within a country or between countries or both, the privileges and valuables enjoyed by some have provoked conflicts, violent and nonviolent, with those who are, or who feel themselves to be, less favored. These privileges and valuables—which may relate to prestige, respect, power, or wealth and income—are often distributed according to race, gender, religion, or culture. In 1990, inequality was cited as a basis for conflicts in nations as diverse as South Africa, the Soviet Union, the United States, and India. Unequal women’s rights were of particular political concern in Africa and the Muslim world. Unequal income among countries is a major source of global tensions. Inequality is especially important for understanding the ferment in the Middle East, where the oil wealth of some coupled with state-sanctioned racial and religious privileges saturate the popular outlook, providing an ever-present foundation for political and violent struggle.

Indeed, inequality, actual or perceived, is, throughout the world, the greatest motivating force in politics. The emphasis here is on inequality, rather than equality, simply because equality, literally, is not to be found outside of the world of mathematics. It means identity. When people cry out for equality, they are actually demanding equality with respect to some particular thing or things. They may not express their demands in terms of "equality." They merely demand more, or they may seek legislative or administrative action that they believe will give them more, of something they desire, whether it be an economic or a psychic good. But most of the time they have their eyes on how others in their reference group, or in other categories not far removed in status or monetary income, are