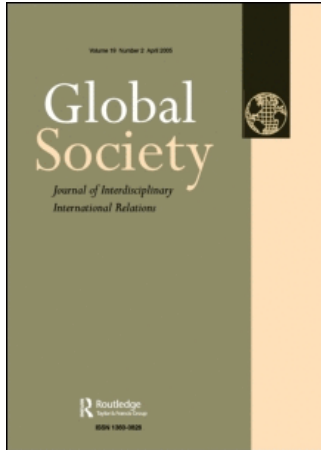


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Epistemic Communities, Epistemes and the Construction of (World) Politics

ANDREAS ANTONIADES¹

See human beings as though they were in an underground cave-like dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. (Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII)

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of epistemic communities in the construction of world politics. In order to do so constructivism is chosen as the framework for analysis. The logic of this choice is based on the consideration that, if one excludes the approach that the "universe" of world politics is divinely given and once and for all fixed, constructivism, as far as we know, is the only remaining explanation of the structure and function of this "universe". In other words, as long as one agrees that the existing *reality* of world politics is not divinely given and thus definite, the only alternative approach to this "reality" is that it is humanly constructed and thus transformable.

The article combines the argument of the social construction of reality with a power/knowledge approach to social reality. In this context it is argued that epistemic communities, by being an integral part of the knowledge/power equation, and by having an authoritative claim on knowledge, exercise decisive power in the "interaction game" of the construction of (world) politics.

In the first two sections of the article the concepts of reality and epistemic communities are defined. In the third section a two-level model of epistemic communities' action is developed, aiming at illustrating their role in the construction of world politics. In particular two types of epistemic communities are distinguished: a holistic, and an ad hoc one. Furthermore, two interactive levels of their action are observed: a cognitive and a practical one. The last section addresses the issue of the relationship between the *epistemic* and the *political*.

The article is based on a normative claim: the social responsibility of knowledge. Traditionally the normative school of thought in International Relations

1. Drafts of this article were presented at the "International Relations Theory" Graduate Workshop at the LSE, and at the BISA annual conference 2001. I am grateful to the participants in both these events for their comments. I would also like to thank Dr Diane Stone and a second anonymous reviewer of *Global Society* for their valuable comments, and "Bodossaki Foundation" for the financial support of my research. Needless to say, any remaining mistakes are my own.

was driven by the aspiration of changing/ameliorating the "human condition". Such endeavours led (and always lead) to questions such as "amelioration for whom?", "in whose terms?", "according to whose ideas and visions?". The article considers these questions to be the starting point and not the end of a normative enquiry. Its underlying logic is that the idea of a teleological human history is based on a linear and monolithic conceptualisation of progress, and the idea of a unitary science functioning independently from the human condition should be abandoned. The human condition is a condition of choices; and these choices are not divinely given but are created through the historical struggle of human beings with their own limits and constraints.

The Socially Constructed Reality

The argument about the social construction of reality² signifies that *reality* is a system of intersubjective assumptions and definitions, which has been produced and is reproduced through social interactions. It is also claimed that no matter whether an objective reality "out there" exists or not, it is approachable only through social definitions. In other words, individuals do not respond to the (probably existing objective) reality directly, but through socially constructed thought frameworks. The following paragraph elaborates briefly on the nature of structures and identities a socially constructed reality.³

With regard to the *structures* of social reality, these are considered to be

2. See Peter Burger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967); Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics", *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1995), pp. 71–81; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); John Ruggie, *Constructing the World Politics: Essays on International Institutionalisation* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 11–36; Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1997), pp. 319–359; Joel Charon, *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, an Interpretation, an Integration*, 6th edn (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1998), pp. 42–44. See also Nicolas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Nicolas Onuf, "Constructivism: A User's Manual", in Vendulka Kubalkova, Nicolas Onuf and Paul Kowert (eds.), *International Relations in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Peter Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination", *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), pp. 21–26. A powerful statement on the same issue, from a philosophical standpoint, is made by John Searle. See John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995). For the same argument see also Burkhart Holzner, *Reality Construction in Society* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing, 1968); Jeffrey Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in IR Theory", *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (1998), pp. 324–348; and Stefano Guzzini, "A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations", *European Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2000), pp. 147–182.

3. In this article the terms "social reality" and "world politics reality" are used interchangeably. It should be underlined that the term social reality is not used to describe a "national reality", but any reality that is characterised by the principles of the structuration process. In this manner world politics reality is a social reality and that is why the two terms have been used interchangeably. Moreover, the distinction between a "national" and a "world politics" reality does not imply that these can be studied and understood in isolation from each other. World and domestic politics dialectically exist in a constitutive relationship. Wendt, as far as *constitutive relations* is concerned, notes: "To say X ... constitutes Y ... is to say that the properties of those agents are made possible by, and would not exist in the absence of, the structure by which they are 'constituted'". Wendt, "Constructing International Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 72 (footnote 6).

social—as opposed to material/natural structures.⁴ Social structures are not independent from the actions and perceptions of their agents. They are produced and reproduced by the interactions of these agents, while at the same time constrain and channel these interactions.⁵ As Giddens, developing the structuration theory⁶ argues, the constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena. Social structures are both the medium and the outcome of the practices they recursively organise. Finally, social structures could be seen as having three elements:⁷ shared knowledge, material resources, and practices (defined as institutionalised interaction processes). On the other hand, the *identities and interests* of the social units/agents are not conceived as natural, given and definite,⁸ but as dynamic products of social interaction. Therefore, identities and interests are conceptualised as processes, evolving through a structuration process.⁹

This brief outline of the argument about the socially construction of reality is necessary for the purposes of this article, provided the understanding of the nature of reality is a precondition for the understanding of the role and function of epistemic communities. The elucidation of the latter concept follows.

Epistemic Communities: Towards a Definition

The concept of “Epistemic Communities” was probably introduced into International Relations (IR) by John Ruggie in 1972.¹⁰ Ruggie “borrowed” the concept of “episteme” from Michel Foucault¹¹ and combined it with the concept of “epistemic communities” as used by Burkart Holzner.¹² He thus proposed epistemic communities to be *a cognitive level of international institutionalisation*. Ruggie argued that epistemic communities are based on interrelated roles that are developed around an *episteme*.¹³ Based on Holzner, he also argued that epistemic communities “delimit for their members, the ‘proper’ construction of reality”.¹⁴ Thereafter the concept of epistemic communities remained marginal in IR theory, at least until the late 1980s and early 1990s.

4. Alexander Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relation Theory”, *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1987), pp. 358–361; Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics”, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

5. Although all constructivists agree that the structures of reality and thus of world politics are social, not all of them agree on the ability of their reconstruction. For the different approaches see Timothy Dunne, “The Social Construction of International Society”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1995), pp. 382–383.

6. See Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press); Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

7. Wendt, “Constructing International Politics”, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–74; see also Robert Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory”, in R. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

8. For an opposite approach see Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th edn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), pp. 4–10.

9. Wendt, “Constructing International Politics”, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72; Charon, *op. cit.*, pp. 161–168.

10. John Ruggie, “Collective Goods and Future International Collaboration”, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66 (September 1972), pp. 874–893.

11. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970).

12. Holzner, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–71.

13. Ruggie, *Constructing the World Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

The landmark for the “re-entrance” of the concept in IR theorising is the publication of a special issue of *International Organization* edited by Peter Haas in 1992.¹⁵ The subject of the issue was “Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination”, and the contributors were suggesting that epistemic communities should be treated as an alternative approach to the study of international policy co-ordination and change, along with neorealism, neo-liberalism and dependency and post-structural approaches.¹⁶ Thus, epistemic communities were treated as an independent variable for the explanation of patterns of co-operation and policy change in world politics.

In the special issue of *International Organization* the concept of epistemic communities is defined by Haas as “a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area.”¹⁷ Therefore, epistemic communities are in substance communities of experts, associated with a particular domain or issue area. However, Haas adds four more defining features in the conceptualisation of epistemic communities: (a) shared normative and principled beliefs, (b) shared causal beliefs, (c) shared notions of validity, and (d) a common policy enterprise.¹⁸

This definition of epistemic communities has produced some controversy in the way in which epistemic communities should be conceptualised,¹⁹ and distinguished from other relevant agents, such as interest groups, advocacy coalitions,²⁰ advocacy networks,²¹ think-tanks²² and transnational networks.²³ Haas argues that the distinctiveness of epistemic communities lies in the fact that their members “have shared causal beliefs and cause-and-effect understandings. If confronted with anomalies that undermined their causal beliefs, they

15. *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 1992).

16. Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination”, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Emanuel Adler and Peter Haas, “Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program”, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), pp. 368–371.

17. Haas, “Introduction”, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

18. *Ibid.*

19. For the debate on technocracy and the new politics of expertise see Frank Fischer, *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise* (London: Sage, 1990); Claudio Radaelli, “The Public Policy of the European Union: Wither Politics of Expertise?”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (1999), pp. 757–774; Claudio Radaelli, “Networks of Expertise and Policy Change in Italy”, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1998), pp. 1–22; Giandomenico Majone (ed.), *Regulating Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996).

20. Paul Sabatier, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Revisions and Relevance for Europe”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1998), pp. 98–130; Paul Sabatier and H. Jenkins-Smith (eds.), *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

21. Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

22. Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (London: Frank Cass, 1996); Diane Stone, Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett (eds.), *Think Tanks Across the World: A Comparative Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

23. Thomas Risse-Kappen (ed.), *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-state Actors, Domestic Structures, and International Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); T. Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures and the End of the Cold War”, *International Organization*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (1994), pp. 185–214; Matthew Evangelista, “The Paradox of State Strength: Transnational Relations, Domestic Structures and Security Policy in Russia and the Soviet Union”, *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1995), pp. 1–38.

would withdraw from the policy debates."²⁴ In arguing so, Haas proposes "causal beliefs" to be the distinctive feature of epistemic communities, and he takes a clear positivist position on what the term *epistemic* implies.²⁵ Thus, although it is not clear in his definition, it could be argued that Haas considers the four defining features of epistemic communities to be in a hierarchical order, in which shared causal beliefs are at the top.²⁶ Along the same lines, Ernst Haas suggests that the epistemic communities framework applies only to specific fields of policy. He argues that epistemic communities "operate only in fields of policy where science matters. In the field of human rights ... [t]here are no epistemic communities. Science is irrelevant to that field. In environmental politics, it matters a great deal."²⁷

On this issue, other analysts, while not denying that epistemic communities are communities of experts, underline a "common enterprise" and a common vision/worldview that define these communities. Therefore, the "authoritative claim to knowledge" remains, but the emphasis is on the *purpose* rather than on the *method*. Sebenius, for instance, argues that "an epistemic community can be understood as a special kind of de facto natural coalition of 'believers' whose main interest lies not in the material sphere but instead in fostering the adoption of the community's policy project".²⁸ Stone notes that an "epistemic community is made up of a network of specialists from a variety of positions who share a common world view and seek to translate their beliefs into public policies and programmes".²⁹

Criticism of the epistemic communities framework has raised some important issues. Sebenius, for instance, notes that even in cases where both power and knowledge factors are taken into consideration in the explanation of international co-operation, as in the case of epistemic communities, these two factors are "often treated as competing alternatives or as analytically separable, rather than inherently bound together".³⁰ On the other hand, Jacobsen argues that "if the decision makers whom members of an epistemic community advise turn out to be themselves, then 'epistemic community' simply collapses as a concept".³¹ From a different perspective, Toke³² argues that "it is extremely difficult to find

24. Haas, "Introduction", *op. cit.*, p. 18.

25. Claire Dunlop may be right in arguing that Haas, by underlining the importance of "causal beliefs", does not aim at making a claim about how "truth can be achieved" but rather aims to rigorously define epistemic communities. See Claire Dunlop, "Epistemic Communities: A Reply to Toke", *Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2000), p. 138. But in the end Haas does make a claim to how "truth can be achieved" or at least what the 'epistemic' is about. For a similar point, see the (rather exacerbated) critique on "epistemic communities as legitimate bearers of truth" by David Toke. D. Toke, "Epistemic Communities and Environmental Groups", *Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1999), pp. 97–102.

26. See also Dunlop, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

27. Ernst Haas, "Science and Progress in International Relations: Conversation with Ernst B. Haas", available at: <<http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Haas/haas-con3.html>> (6 October 2001), p. 3.

28. James Sebenius, "Challenging Conventional Explanations of International Co-operation: Negotiation Analysis and the Case of Epistemic Communities", *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), p. 325.

29. Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 86–87.

30. Sebenius, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

31. John Kurt Jacobsen, "Much Ado About Ideas: The Cognitive Factor in Economic Policy", *World Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (1995), p. 302.

32. Toke, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

an environmental issue that does not depend on normative, socially constructed, as opposed to positivistically inspired judgements" and also that "technical solutions' flow from problems that are subjected first to normative judgements".³³

Even analysts who employ the epistemic communities framework argue that the concept of epistemic communities should "be modified" in order to reach greater analytical capacity. For instance, Zito argues that the concept should either be linked to other supporting coalitions, or be broadened by changing its definition;³⁴ and Dunlop notes that an "increased level of explanatory power may only be secured if the four characteristics of the epistemic community themselves are problematised and their importance relative to each other elucidated".³⁵

Where does this article stand with relation to the above approaches and critiques? First, it should be underlined that the article employs the concept of epistemic communities, but the purpose is not to study international policy coordination, as most of the works dealing with epistemic communities do. The purpose is to study the construction and change of (world) social reality. Therefore, the article employs the concept of epistemic communities in order to propose a knowledge/power approach to the construction of world politics. In doing so it aspires both to address and resolve some of the aforementioned critiques.

The conceptualisation of epistemic communities in this article is more *purpose* rather than *method* oriented. Epistemic communities are conceptualised and defined as *thought communities (Denkgemeinschaft)*³⁶ made up of socially recognised knowledge-based networks, the members of which share a common understanding of a particular problem/issue or a common worldview and seek to translate their beliefs into dominant social discourse and social practice.³⁷ These thought communities might be local, national or transnational.

Such a conceptualisation of epistemic communities retains the basic characteristics of Haas's definition, but by giving primacy to the social recognition of knowledge authority it is better suited to the integration of epistemic communities to their social context. In this manner the concepts of knowledge, knowledge authority and science are contextualised and historicised, and different historical and cultural "knowledge structures" can be taken into account and studied.³⁸

33. See also the well-developed critique of Bernstein, and his counter proposal for a socio-evolutionary approach. Steven Bernstein, "Ideas, Social Structure and the Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2000), pp. 464–512.

34. Anthony Zito, "Epistemic Communities, Collective Entrepreneurship and European Integration", *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2001), pp. 600–601.

35. Dunlop, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

36. Ludwig Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 45, 158–159.

37. We use the German term "*Denkgemeinschaft*" in order to indicate that we are referring to a thought (*denk*) "*gemeinschaft*" (as the meaning of the latter has been established in Political Science). See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New York: Harper, 1963).

38. In this context Wittrock and Wagner note that it was during the first half of the 19th century that scientific "knowledge came, maybe for the first time, to be recognized by its institutional locus of production—and this in an institution which had, at best, marginal and more normally an adversary role in almost all major intellectual innovations in Europe since the Reformation". See Bjorn Wittrock and Peter Wagner, "Social Science and Building of the Early Welfare State: Towards a Comparison of Statist and Non-statist Western Societies", in D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol (eds.), *States, Social Knowledge and the Origins of Modern Social Policies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 100–101. In addition, for the concept of knowledge structure see Susan Strange, *States and Markets*, 2nd edn (London: Pinter, 1994), pp. 119–138.

Moreover, the concept of "thought community" brings to the forefront the normative and scientific beliefs that bind together "a knowledge-based network", and does not seem to imply either the existence of a unitary science, from which experts draw their knowledge, or the existence of a unique methodology on which knowledge is based and tested. Therefore, the concept of thought community is better than that of "a network of professionals"³⁹ in describing the Keynesian economists as an epistemic community.⁴⁰

Before completing this reference to the proposed (re-)definition of epistemic communities, an important point should be underlined. The prioritisation of the "purpose" over the "method" criterion in the definition of epistemic communities should be read as a re-ordering and not as a change of the constitutive characteristics of epistemic communities, as proposed by Peter Haas. In this regard "purpose" alone would by no means be a sufficient criterion for the definition of epistemic communities. What distinguishes these communities from other agents such as interest groups, advocacy coalitions and transnational networks is their authoritative claim on knowledge.⁴¹ However, this authority should not be treated as something endogenous to "knowledge" (which is dismissed in the face of raising "anomalies"). It is each and every spatio-temporal-specific knowledge structure that defines what is knowledge. Therefore, in order to examine the issue of "authoritative claims on knowledge" one should examine the knowledge structure in which these claims are embedded rather than the "content" of these claims, and their consistency.

Furthermore, it should be added that the division between "purpose" and "method" in the definition of epistemic communities is itself problematic. The methods used are not independent from the purposes pursued. The methodologies are chosen according to their "compatibility" and "fit" with certain ontological assumptions and worldviews; with certain purposes. Thus, methodologies are not independent from ontologies. The purposes are implicated in the methods, and thus the "purpose" and "method" criteria should not be treated as separate in the definition of epistemic communities. This fact makes even more problematic a positivistic conceptualisation of epistemic communities.

Examples of epistemic communities include a network supporting nuclear arms control⁴² or the ban on nuclear arms testing; a network concerned with the protection of stratospheric ozone,⁴³ a network concerned with the spread and application of (neo-) liberal or central-planning economic ideas; a network supporting the creation of a permanent international criminal court; and a network aiming at the "deconstruction" of the "enlightenment project".

This article distinguishes between two generic types of epistemic communities.

39. Haas, "Introduction", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

40. An example used by Haas himself, when he tries to distinguish epistemic communities from similar or relative concepts. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

41. To argue that epistemic communities are distinguished from other agents such as advocacy coalitions and transnational networks does not mean that epistemic communities are defined in opposition to these agents. Thus, members of an epistemic community can also be members of an interest group or of an advocacy coalition.

42. See Emanuel Adler, "The Emergence of Co-operation: National Epistemic Communities and International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control", *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), pp. 101-145.

43. Peter Haas, "Banning Chlorofluorocarbons: Epistemic Community Efforts to Protect Stratospheric Ozone", *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), pp. 187-224.

The first has the character of an *ad hoc coalition* aiming at the solution of a particular policy problem. This type of epistemic community is based on the logic that policy problems are what define the thought communities and “their life is limited to the time and space defined by the problem and its solutions”.⁴⁴ The second type of epistemic community has a more *constant and holistic character* aiming at the establishment and perpetuation of beliefs and visions as dominant social discourses. This type of epistemic community is based on the logic that social reality is what defines these thought communities and their life depends on the social interactions and the outcome of social struggles, which “produce” that reality. An example of the first type of epistemic community is a network aiming at the creation of an international “lender of last resort”, whereas an instance of the second type would be the community of (neo)Keynesian economists or the (neo)realist school of thought in IR. It has to be mentioned though that, in practice, the two types overlap.

Having briefly delineated the concept of epistemic communities, the next section focuses on their role and function in world politics.

Knowledge, Power, and Reality: From the Social Construction of Reality to the Construction of Social Reality

Two levels of action are distinguished in order to elucidate the role of epistemic communities in the construction of world politics. The first one is *cognitive*. The analysis at this level is focused on the role of epistemic communities in the (re)production of (world) social reality. How do these communities influence the “constitutive rules”,⁴⁵ the “foundational” and “constitutional” levels of world politics?⁴⁶ Could we diagnose a “three-dimensional view of power” in their action?⁴⁷ The second level is *practical* and is directly related to the policy process. How do epistemic communities intervene in the policy process? How do they influence—if they do so—the formation of states’ interests and decisions?⁴⁸ What is their power in terms of agenda setting? Obviously, the analysis of each of these two levels requires more space than is available in this article. Therefore, the analysis that follows is highly selective and in many regards incomplete. However, I chose to proceed in this way for the following reason. If the (re)construction of a world politics reality is to be studied, and the role of the epistemic communities within this process is to be understood, the cognitive and the practical levels, the structure and the agent, the frames of thought and

44. Adler and Haas, “Conclusion”, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

45. Ruggie defines *constitutive rules* as “the set of practices that make up any particular consciously organised activity—that is to say, they specify *what counts as activity*” (emphasis in the original). See Ruggie, *Constructing the World Politics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–25 (the quotation is from p. 22).

46. Jones, as far as political life is concerned, distinguishes: “a *foundational level*, identifying the ‘legitimate’ members of any political order and the ‘proper’ patterns of interactions; an *institutional or constitutional level*, giving form to the fundamental principles of any political order; and a *day-to-day level* of legislation, regulation and myriad actions intended to manage the affairs of the relevant political ‘community’”. See Barry Jones, “The English School and the Construction of International Society”, in B. Roberson (ed.), *International Society and the Development of International Relations Theory* (London: Pinter, 1998), pp. 236–237.

47. Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 21–25.

48. By referring to states’ decisions we do not mean to personify states. Rather, we imply a complex decision-making process, the final product of which is what we call here a “state’s decision”.

the acts cannot be separated. It is the *tension* between these two eternally bound-together “substances” that defines each of them, and allows us to talk about a socially constructed reality. Therefore, an examination of the role of epistemic communities as power communities in the construction of world politics has to take into account, even incompletely, both dimensions, and moreover—and more importantly—the interaction between them. It is the contention of this article that the two levels of action interact in structurationist terms. Thus the cognitive level acts as a social structure, which both shapes and is shaped by the practical one.

Epistemic Communities and Reality Construction: The Cognitive Level

As has been analysed above, social reality is a “game” of social interactions. In this “game”, though, not all the “players” have the same role, position and power. As long as “reality” is mainly knowledge about this “reality”, those players who possess and control knowledge (and it is generally recognised among the other players that they do so) have a dominant role in the game. Epistemic communities have been defined as thought communities made up of socially recognised knowledge-based networks. Thus, in the game of social interactions, epistemic communities control the key factor: (“recognised”) knowledge; and knowledge in this game is power. The logic of the argument is as follows: social reality consists of social facts, social structures and identities. The latter three constitute and consist of intersubjective knowledge. Epistemic communities exercise a “cognitive authority”⁴⁹ as far as knowledge is concerned. Thus, they have a decisive role in the interactions that produce and reproduce the intersubjective knowledge constructs on which social reality is based. In other words, these thought communities have the power to impose particular discourses and particular worldviews on societies. This power goes beyond the ability of A to get B to do something that B would not otherwise do. Additionally, it goes beyond the ability to set the rules of the game and the agenda.⁵⁰ The ability to impose a discourse includes the ability to influence people’s and collectivities’ self-understanding (identity formation) and therefore their understanding about their wants and interests;⁵¹ this includes the ability to influence the knowledge and ideas comprised within social structures. Along these lines, Stone proposes that epistemic communities can be conceived as a “technocratic kind of discourse coalition”.⁵²

It must be noted here that it is not implied that epistemic communities are exogenous to social interactions. Paraphrasing Carr, epistemic communities, prior to influencing social reality, are a product of this reality⁵³. Nevertheless, as long as reality is a dynamic process of interactions, and not something static, epistemic communities, by possessing the knowledge factor, have the power to

49. The term “cognitive authority” is used by Barnes and Edge (cited in Haas, “Introduction”, *op. cit.*, p. 11). See Barry Barnes and David Edge, “General Introduction”, in B. Barnes and D. Edge, *Science in Context* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), p. 2.

50. See Lukes, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–20; Albert Yee, “The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies”, *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1996), p. 99.

51. Lukes, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

52. Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

53. E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 40.

influence the direction of these interactions. They have the power, in other words, to create new understandings, and influence the evolution of the existing intersubjective understandings of which reality, and thus world politics, consist.

Thus, it could be argued that in their effort to understand this reality, epistemic communities, though a product of social reality, "(re)construct" it. This idea stems from Carr's lectures on "What is History?" There, Carr argues both that "[t]he historian, before he begins to write history, is the product of history",⁵⁴ and that "to write history is the only way of making it".⁵⁵ The dialectical relationship of these two phrases is an appropriate metaphor of the relationship between epistemic communities and social reality, which is introduced here. Thus, if we consider epistemic communities as historians of modern social reality, and social reality as a kind of history, it follows that epistemic communities are themselves products of social reality before they begin to analyse/write about it; but the analysis/writing of social reality is the only way through which this reality can acquire flesh and bones.

Therefore, it is at this cognitive level that knowledge is, above all, power. It is the indisputable nature of our assumptions—whether these refer to the sciences or to everyday human behaviour—where knowledge manifests its power in the most "crude" (i.e. unconscious) way. Foucault's work in this regard offers a unique insight into the analysis of social reality.

In closing this section it is important to underline the normative dimension of epistemic communities' action. These communities do want to influence social reality; and this will is constitutive of their existence. Epistemic communities are based on common normative beliefs, which provide a common vision for the social action of their members. This normative dimension, no matter what its sources, is important for understanding the function of epistemic communities in (world) politics.

Having completed the discussion on the cognitive level of epistemic communities' action, the next section turns to the practical one. It has been argued that the two levels of action cannot be studied in isolation as long as the cognitive level functions as a social structure that both shapes and is shaped by the practical level. Moreover, the fact that both levels are multiply fragmented in terms of worldviews and paradigms creates a social reality that is based on and transformed according to struggles taking place in multiple and different sites within and across the cognitive and the practical levels.⁵⁶

Epistemic Communities, the Policy Process and Decision Making

Epistemic communities intervene and influence the policy process in a variety of ways, whether at the local, national, international or transnational level. First, as has already been mentioned at a cognitive level, by influencing social reality these thought communities influence the conceptual framework in which every policy process is embedded.⁵⁷ Such an influence includes: the very way that a

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*, p. 22 (Carr borrows this phrase from Oakeshott).

56. This point is explored further in the section dealing with the struggle among epistemic communities.

57. Yee, *op. cit.*, pp. 95–96; Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *The Knowledge Elite and the Failure of Prophecy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 26–27.

policy process is conceived and the way in which the content of the *roles* of the actors is conceptualised; the way in which a situation is defined (i.e. “what is the ‘real’ situation”); the way in which the possible/impossible and acceptable/unacceptable axes are conceptualised, and thus the way in which actors conceptualise structural constraints.

The role of language should also be emphasised. “Language not only enables knowledge” of world politics, “but *is* knowledge of world politics” (emphasis in original).⁵⁸ By having a strategic role in the construction of social reality, epistemic communities have an important role in the construction of the language that is used to describe and depict this reality. Therefore, they have the ability to exercise “language power”, thus further constraining and constructing the conceptual framework in which the policy process is taking place. Writing about the importance of language, one could confine oneself to a reference to Wittgenstein’s analysis on language and its epitome in the phrase “[t]he limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”⁵⁹

Second, epistemic communities play a significant role in the way in which states decipher their environment and define their interests.⁶⁰ To begin with, members of these communities may engage in the policy process either directly (i.e. as members or representatives of governments or international organisations, or otherwise as decision makers themselves) or indirectly (i.e. as consultants, members of think-tanks, journalists or any other position that allows them to influence the policy process).⁶¹

With respect to the direct participation of members of epistemic communities in the policy process, matters are less obscure. The thought community whose members participate as decision makers in the policy process has a strong capacity to infuse its ideas and to establish its “vision” in the policy process. The extent of this capacity depends both on the position that its members possess and the power and influence of opposite thought communities activated in the policy process. For instance, after a Greco-Turkish crisis in the Aegean sea (January 1997) concerning two islets, two basic positions, supported by two different ad hoc epistemic communities, were developed in the Greek political scene. The first supported the notion that Greece could not itself propose a judicial solution to the problem (i.e. the “nationality” of the islets), because by doing so it would implicitly accept the contested status of the islets, which “were Greek”. The second supported the fact that in so far as Greece had strong legal evidence that the islets were Greek, it was to its advantage to propose a judicial solution through the International Court of Justice; thus “proving” to the “international community” the “aggressiveness” of the Turks.⁶² The second policy was adopted, as the prime minister (C. Simitis) and the deputy minister of

58. Roger Tooze, “Ideology, Knowledge and Power in International Relations and International Political Economy”, in T. Lawton, J. Rosenau and A. Verdun (eds.), *Strange Power: Shaping the Parameters of International Relations and International Political Economy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 189.

59. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Cornwall: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 56.

60. This issue is multifaceted and would require more room than is available here. Therefore this section aims only at a concise analysis of the involvement of the epistemic community in policy processes.

61. Haas, “Introduction”, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Yee, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

62. Inverted commas indicate the epistemic communities’ argumentation.

Foreign Affairs (C. Rozakis) were members of the thought community that had proposed it.⁶³ It can be argued that this example illustrates two points: (a) when we change the focus of our analysis from the cognitive level (in terms of the general conceptual framework) to the policy level (in terms of the day-to-day policy process), epistemic communities become part of a concrete—multiple and multilevel—policy game. (b) The gaining of governmental and bureaucratic positions (as well as access to the press), is one of the most effective methods for diffusing the epistemic communities' ideas in (international) society.⁶⁴ It could be added here that the consolidation of an epistemic community within a bureaucracy, whether national (e.g. ministries and other public services), inter/supranational (e.g. NATO, the IMF, World Bank, UNO, European Commission) or transnational (e.g. Pugwash, Greenpeace, European Federalists), can lead to the institutionalisation of that community's influence in the policy process.⁶⁵

Finally it should also be mentioned that it is this case—of the direct involvement of epistemic communities' members in the policy process—which overtly blurs the limits between decision makers and policy advisors/experts. Hence, when "experts" become political leaders, the value of conceptualising epistemic communities as thought communities becomes more explicit.

The case of indirect involvement of epistemic communities in the policy process is more complicated. Most analysts agree that the importance and influence of epistemic communities increase in conditions of complexity, uncertainty and crisis—in other words, in conditions where the decision makers are unable to assess the expected outcomes of their alternative policy choices, or even when they cannot understand what the problem is exactly.⁶⁶ Therefore, when traditional policy patterns fail to function, the demand from decision makers for "specialised" information, advice and guidance becomes vital and urgent. In the following paragraphs, I consider some dimensions of epistemic communities' indirect involvement in the policy process.⁶⁷

First and foremost, by acting as "advisors" or "sources of information" epistemic communities may decisively influence agents' policy and interests. Examples include states' decisions on whether to participate in regional organisations; on how to face an economic crisis or in general how to manage their economy; and how to transform their educational systems. Verdun, for instance, examined the role of the Delors Committee in the creation of European Monetary Union.⁶⁸

63. It is true that Greek Prime Minister Constantine Simitis, although a Professor of Law, is not a specialist in International Law, and therefore his belonging to this epistemic community is disputable. Christos Rozakis, on the other hand, is Professor of International Law in the University of Athens.

64. As the failure of privatisation policies in many countries has demonstrated, policy discourses that do not resonate with public discourses and face a hostile press coverage are mostly doomed to fail, even if they are promoted by majoritarian governments.

65. Adler and Haas, "Conclusion", *op. cit.*, pp. 374–375; Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 89–90; Yee, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

66. See Haas, "Introduction", *op. cit.*, pp. 13–14; Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 89; Adler, *op. cit.*, p. 105. For a sophisticated approach to the contemporary conditions of uncertainty see Ulrich Beck, "The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernisation", in U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash, *Reflexive Modernisation: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 8–13; Anthony Giddens, "Risk, Trust, Reflexivity", in U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash, *op. cit.*, pp. 184–185.

67. See also Adler and Haas, *op. cit.*, pp. 375–387.

68. Amy Verdun, "The Role of the Delors Committee in the Creation of EMU: An Epistemic Community?", *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1999), pp. 308–328.

Second, epistemic communities can decisively influence the formation of the agenda in both domestic and world politics (an agenda-setting function).⁶⁹ This can be done either by adding new issues to the agenda or by changing the way in which existing issues are approached and conceptualised.⁷⁰ In both cases an alliance strategy is developed, where the members of a community try to inform and mobilise as many people, groups and organisations as possible, thus increasing support for their ideas and the pressure on the political system to accept their approach. At the same time (depending on the nature of the issue), an attempt is made for the epistemic community to attain a transnational character. A number of methods and practices are employed to achieve these targets: the organisation of conferences, seminars, press conferences, public discussions, lectures, publications, and so on. Two factors are important in this process: access to the media and the existence of an institutional structure (mostly in the form of a think-tank, a regulatory agency or a governmental policy research body).⁷¹ The case studies of Haas, concerning the protection of stratospheric ozone,⁷² and Adler, concerning nuclear arms control⁷³, are illustrative of this process.

There is also a third dimension in the indirect involvement of epistemic communities in the policy process. Often, members of epistemic communities are asked to work out only the details of a policy. For example, prior to a European Council meeting the Portuguese government takes the decision to support strong political integration of the European Union, as well as retention of the national veto for issues of strong national interest. To this end it sets up a group of experts to elaborate on and formulate its position in terms of negotiation strategy, article proposals, public presentation and the like. This function of epistemic communities could be described as a "supplementary/problem-solving" one. However, to continue this example, during the meetings between the experts and government members the latter are persuaded that the initial political decision cannot stand, or is not functional (e.g. political integration and the national veto are opposite goals); or it does not really serve Portuguese national interest (e.g. further political union would unacceptably reduce Portuguese sovereignty). Hence it could be argued that, through what are usually only *problem-solving* processes, *critical* processes relating to the redefinition of interests can be seen.⁷⁴

These three dimensions illustrate how the indirect involvement of epistemic communities in the policy process may both (re-)define (or decisively influence the formation of) agents' interests, and raise issues in national and international agendas.

69. Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–94.

70. Here one can include the new framing, by epistemic communities, of existing complex issues. See, for instance, William Drake and Kalypto Nicolaidis, "Ideas, Interests, and Institutionalization: "Trade in Services" and the Uruguay Round", *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), pp. 37–100.

71. Haas, "Introduction", *op. cit.*, pp. 31–32; Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–99.

72. Peter Haas, "Banning Chlorofluorocarbons: Epistemic Community Efforts to Protect Stratospheric Ozone", *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), pp. 187–224.

73. Adler, "The Emergence of Co-operation", *op. cit.*

74. For the terms, "problem solving" and "critical" see Robert Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory", in R. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 207–210.

One factor should be added here which acts as a multiplier of power for the epistemic communities in all the above cases: the increasing complexity of (world) politics. A number of points should be mentioned here. First, there is a strong international tendency towards a technocratisation of politics. Thus, an increasing number of socio-economic issues that traditionally belonged to the "political sphere" (which means that they were open to political and normative contestation) are now treated as technocratic issues, in which "politics cannot have a say". Second, there has been an increase in the numbers of actors involved (e.g. local authorities, governments, international governmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations, individual actors), and the borderless character of most of the current issues (e.g. economic stability and prosperity, terrorism, environmental and population issues, immigration, drugs traffic, AIDS). Thus, world politics, from a "power and interdependence" approach, seems to move to a "post-interdependence" "turbulent" paradigm.⁷⁵ Third, the definition of politics per se, and thus its agenda, is changing.⁷⁶ Thus, traditionally excluded issues from domestic and international agendas are now acquiring a place in national and international bureaucracies and agendas.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned developments, and their bifurcated character, it could be argued that the current "systemic environment" of world politics enhances the necessity and thus the role and the influence of epistemic communities.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that even when involvement of epistemic communities in the policy process takes place at a "unit/national level", it finally has a systemic impact. By influencing the definition of units' interests, epistemic communities influence their self-understanding and their behaviour. This change(/continuity) in actors' self-understanding leads, through structuration processes, to structural changes(/continuities). In this context, it can be argued that epistemic communities function as a catalyst for structural change or continuity in (world) politics.

Recapitulation

Two levels of action have been distinguished in the elucidation of the role of epistemic communities in the construction of world politics: a cognitive one, related to the production and reproduction of social reality; and a practical one, related directly to the policy process. The contention of this article is that epistemic communities decisively influence the conceptual framework in which every policy process takes place, and play a significant role in the day-to-day policy process, through which agents of world politics deal with uncertainty and define problems and interests. Lastly, it has been argued that these two levels interact in structurationist terms.

75. J. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 3–20, 243–296.

76. See, among others, Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 31–43; and Jennifer Chapman, "The Feminist Perspective", in D. March and G. Stoker (eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 98–106, 109–110. Chapman, in particular, referring to a new feminist definition of politics, notes: "politics is in *all* the decisions that shape our lives, not only those made in the restricted arena conventionally described as 'politics'" (p. 100) (emphasis in original).

In the next section the analysis turns to a decisive issue for a complete understanding of the concept and function of epistemic communities: the struggle among them. To this point, the analysis has been discussed mostly as if only one epistemic community exists and participates in the game of interactions that produce and reproduce social reality. I did so in order to clarify the “ultimate” role and effect of epistemic communities in the construction of world politics. However, reality is more complex. What the term “ultimate” signifies is the “final product” of a process of struggle among epistemic communities; and this final product should be conceptualised as a fragile and ever-changing balance, which reflects the fragile and disputed nature of human knowledge.

Epistemic Communities Against Epistemic Communities: Reality as a Field of Struggle

During the second half of the last century and until the mid-1980s a literature was developed internationally that described the emergence of a “knowledge elite” that would help in the creation of a peaceful and prosperous world.⁷⁷ The main argument of this literature was that provided politicians and governments were increasingly reliant on experts to plan and implement their policies, and find solutions to social problems, politics (and thus policy) would finally turn out to be a knowledge-based activity. Sooner or later this emerging knowledge elite would dominate the policy process, and by applying “scientific methods and solutions” would create “better” societies and finally “a better world”. Several terms were used to describe these developments. Bell referred to a new “knowledge class” as the most important agent of post-industrial society.⁷⁸ In an influential book, Peter Drucker, the “father” of modern management, wrote about the rise of the “knowledge society” in which “scientists and scholars ... largely determine what policies can be considered seriously”.⁷⁹ Brzezinski wrote about the arrival of the “technetronic era” as a revolution that carries the promise of greater human equality and freedom.⁸⁰ Galbraith argued that in the “new industrial state”, organisation and enterprises are based on “technostructures”, and power “has in fact passed ... [to] men of diverse technical knowledge ... which modern industrial technology and planning require”.⁸¹ Finally, Gouldner referred to the rise of a “New Class”, which is composed of intellectuals and technical intelligentsia, and characterises both “late capitalism” and “authoritarian state socialism”.⁸² He starts his book with an extract from Nietzsche:

77. For a short review of this thesis see Etzioni-Halevy, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–34, in which the author develops a counter thesis.

78. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of the Post Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

79. See Peter Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to Our Changing Society* (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 247–355 (the quotation is from p. 348).

80. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages* (New York: Viking, 1970).

81. See John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), mainly Chapter Six (the quotation is from p. 61).

82. Gouldner argues that there “are at least two elites within the New Class: (1) *intelligentsia* whose intellectual interests are fundamentally “technical” and (2) *intellectuals* whose interests are primarily critical, emancipatory, hermeneutic and hence often political”. See Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 48. For the phenomenon of the “New Class” see also the volume edited by B. Bruce-Briggs, *The New Class* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1979).

Be robbers and conquerors, as long as you cannot be rulers and owners, you lovers of knowledge! Soon the age will be past when you could be satisfied to live like shy deer, hidden in the woods! At long last the pursuit of knowledge will reach out for its due: it will want to rule and own; and you with it!

This article contends that no single “knowledge elite” exists. Put differently, the knowledge elite is not a single, coherent knowledge-based community, sharing normative and principled beliefs and a common vision for the future. On the contrary, this “knowledge elite” consists of a variety of epistemic communities, which have different and often antithetical normative beliefs, and visions about society and world politics. Thus, these communities struggle with one another in their effort to establish their discourses and visions of societies. This is not to say that this struggle, this everyday overt and covert fight, is something negative. As Hill argues, there may be only one world, but we may need more than one kind of approach to improving it.⁸³ At this point it is useful to employ *discourse theory* to understand the interactions and processes that form “reality” as conflicts and struggles between antagonistic/competitive forces over “the structuring of social meaning”.⁸⁴ These struggles can be seen as taking place at two levels: at a macro level, which is constituted mostly by the struggles among the holistic types of epistemic communities, and at a micro level, constituted by the struggles among the ad hoc ones.

At the first level, epistemic communities and *epistemes* struggle with one another to define the ideas of which social structures consist. This struggle is not unrelated to the other two elements of social structures: material capabilities and institutions. But the latter two have more of an instrumental function in the struggle among epistemic communities.⁸⁵ The result of these struggles is the establishment of specific social discourses, of specific cognitive orders. These cognitive frameworks are taken for granted in everyday social transactions. All facts and practices take meaning from, and are interpreted through, these frameworks. The second level of struggles takes place in the reality of the first. Epistemic communities emerge at this level, and struggle and cease to exist in relation to specific policy issues and problems.⁸⁶

It is proposed that these two fields/levels of struggle should be conceptualised in “concentric terms”, in the sense that the core values and visions that struggle at the macro level inform the various struggles taking place at the micro level. This overlapping nature of the two levels becomes apparent if one takes into consideration the overlapping memberships between the holistic and the ad hoc communities.

83. Christopher Hill “Academic International Relations: The Siren Song of Policy Relevance”, in C. Hill and P. Beshoff (eds.), *The Two Worlds of International Relations: Academics, Practitioners and the Trade in Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1994).

84. This article adopts a limited definition of discourse theory, based on David Howarth, “Discourse Theory”, in D. March and G. Stoker (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 115–133 (the quotation is from p. 132).

85. Andler and Haas, *op. cit.*, pp. 379–380.

86. Martin and Richards, suggest a fourfold approach to the study of scientific controversies in the policy process: the “positivist”, the “group politics”, the “constructivist” and the “social structural”. See Brian Martin and Evellen Richards, “Scientific Knowledge, Controversy, and Public Decision Making”, in S. Jasanoff *et al.* (eds.), *Handbook of Science and Technology Studies* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1995), pp. 506–526.

To push this point further, it could also be argued that the macro level of struggles exists and manifests itself only through the multiple struggles at the micro level, and the struggles at the micro level acquire existence and meaning only through the struggles at the macro level. In following this line of argument it also becomes apparent that struggles at both the macro and micro levels stem from both cognitive and practical forms of epistemic communities' actions. Indeed, struggles over issues such as the Kyoto Agreement, the International Criminal Court and the "Tobin Tax", are issue-specific struggles that manifest and exemplify the struggle of competitive worldviews. Therefore, it is through policy issues and policy process (the practical level of action) that competitive worldviews struggle; and thus through struggles at the micro level that new "openings" and change dynamics can be born in world politics.

Critics of epistemic communities would underline here the absence of political power (narrowly defined) from the above puzzles of struggles and changes. In this regard they argue that "[e]pistemic communities approaches downplay—almost to the point of neglect—the ways in which scientific information simply rationalises or reinforces existing political conflicts".⁸⁷ Therefore, critics make the case that in real terms it is political power and not epistemic communities that decide about and "produce" knowledge. It does so, the argument goes, by taking the final decision about the issues that will be included in the formal agenda; by supporting and institutionalising the epistemic communities that are closer to its beliefs and interests; and by trying to exclude from the public agenda issues and communities which are considered "dangerous" or difficult to satisfy.⁸⁸

This article contends that the above critique is based on a conceptualisation of epistemic communities as distinct and separate from a *political power*. Nevertheless, such a conceptualisation: (a) does not accurately describe the nature of the policy process, as long as many decisions makers are themselves "experts", and (b) is highly problematic if seen through a power/knowledge framework. Through this framework there can be no successful attempt to draw meaningful boundaries between the *political* and the *epistemic*; between "power" and "knowledge". The epistemic can manifest itself only through power; and power is (and draws its substance from) the epistemic itself. The construction of social reality is based on the construction and production of social knowledge. Consequently, the production of socially legitimate knowledge *is* politics, and politics *is* the legitimisation of (some) knowledge.⁸⁹ As Foucault notes, there "can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth ... We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth."⁹⁰ Therefore, even when a government excludes an issue or a community from the public debate, this act is not an act of power coming from nowhere; rather, it is an act of power embedded (and meaningful) only in a specific knowledge/power framework.

87. K.T. Litfin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 12, quoted in Dunlop, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

88. See, among others, Lukes, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–20; and Adler and Haas, *op. cit.*, pp. 381–384.

89. See Tooze's insightful analysis, "Ideology, Knowledge and Power in International Relations and International Political Economy", *op. cit.*

90. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (London: Harvester, 1980), p. 93; see also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 27–30.

Conclusion

Do epistemic communities matter in world politics, and, if so, how? This has been the main question addressed by this article. To summarise the logic of our argument: epistemic communities are socially recognised knowledge-based networks. Their knowledge authority, as well as their will to exercise it, offers them a decisive role in the social interactions that produce and reproduce the knowledge constructs on which reality is based. Consequently, the article contends that epistemic communities play a significant role in the construction of world politics.

Beyond their dominant role at the cognitive level, epistemic communities are actively involved in the policy process. In doing so they influence, through day-to-day interactions, agents' self-understanding (i.e. identity and interest), and through a structuration process this influence leads to structural changes in world politics.

The aim of this article has been to open a space for the study of knowledge and change in world politics. Of course, some aspects of the issues presented here need further investigation. The relationship between the epistemic and the political, although discussed briefly, requires further analysis. Moreover, it is usually argued that the weakness of epistemic community approaches is the inability to prove/establish a causal link between the cognitive level (the conceptual framework) and the changes that are taking place at the practical level (the day-to-day decision making). However, the concept of influence adopted in epistemic approaches "cannot be reduced to a simple cause-and-effect relationship".⁹¹ Furthermore, the more significant pattern of epistemic community influence is that in which such communities succeed in bringing the public "to inhabit, in some sense, the same mental world that they do"; and, indeed, it is in these cases where it is less meaningful to refer to and develop causal models.

91. Mary Furner, "Social Scientists and the State: Constructing the Knowledge Base for Public Policy, 1880–1920", in L. Fink *et al.* (eds.), *Intellectuals and Public Life: Between Radicalism and Reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 145.