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**Panel T07-P11 Session 2**

*Advancing the Understanding of Evidence Use in Public Policymaking  
Insights from Multiple Conceptual Approaches*

**How can discourse help us understand and critically reflect on  
evidence-informed policy-making?**

*Eleanor MacKillop*

*Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University*

[Eleanor.mackillop@wcpp.org.uk](mailto:Eleanor.mackillop@wcpp.org.uk)



## Abstract

The relationship between evidence or knowledge and policy has become a central question for the policy community in many countries. Inspired by the Evidence-Based Medicine movement from the 1950s, the emergence and growth of Evidence-Based Policy-Making (EBPM) over the last three decades, and lately renamed Evidence-Informed Policy-Making (EIPM), has meant that much research focuses on developing positivist ‘how to’ models aiming to distil ‘what works’ in transferring or brokering evidence into policy. Following the recent emergence of a critical strand in this literature, this paper develops a framework building notably on discourse theory and depoliticisation research to analyse a new instance of EIPM: Knowledge Brokering Organisations (KBOs). Building on case studies in the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and South Africa, we present some early findings contributing to unearthing the politics of KBOs, and knowledge use in policy more broadly, focusing on the discourses surrounding the emergence of KBOs, their activities and purposes for policy-makers.

***Please note that this paper is a work-in-progress and that data collection from the case studies is at an early stage. We are therefore unable to share many findings as only a limited number of interviews have been conducted and transcribed. The paper instead focuses on outlining research puzzles and questions, and a potential analytical framework for analysing EIPM and KBOs. In consequence, we look forward to your comments on this proposed framework and ways of developing it.***



## Introduction

Evidence-Based Policy-Making (EBPM), its successor Evidence-Informed Policy-Making (EIPM), and Knowledge Transfer (KT) are major concerns for academics and policy-makers. Although we have witnessed over the last few years a populist push back against the role of experts and evidence in policy-making – e.g. the United States under Trump, Bolsonaro in Brazil, , the oft-repeated statement from UK Michael Gove MP that people had ‘had enough of experts’ – policy-making across the world generally appears ‘thirsty’ for more evidence, knowledge and research to inform or be mobilised to support their policies. Considerable amounts of resources – financial and others – are being dedicated to improving the role and use of evidence and knowledge in policy-making and practice, from international, to national and sub-national levels. New knowledge broker organisations (KBOs) or evidence intermediaries (Gough et al., 2018) have emerged, purporting to fill different roles than traditional think tanks, brokering evidence into policy (Bell and Head, 2017; McGann and Shull, 2018; Rich, 2004; Stone, 1996). This push for the increased use of evidence in policy-making raises important questions for researchers about the politics of evidence and knowledge use, methodological problems and impact on policy-making and society.

Although their composition, funding, practices and organisation vary across policy systems, KBOs have been emerging at the knowledge-government nexus with the underlying rationale that they will bridge, translate, transfer or broker research and evidence into policy. Similar to the problems faced by the think tank literature (Kelstrup, 2016), it is difficult to clearly define these bodies as they fluctuate between research and policy (Bell and Head, 2017). Those that we are interested in mobilise concepts of evidence, independence, impartiality and impact to differentiate themselves from other bodies (e.g. interest groups, universities, think tanks); they also benefit from government funding to a smaller or greater extent. Examples of KBOs include UK What Works Centres (WWCs) and affiliates in Scotland and Wales, Canadian Institute for Knowledge Mobilisation and Ontarian Mowat Centre, US California Policy Lab and What Works Clearinghouse, Australian Sax Institute, Mexican CONEVAL (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social – roughly meaning National Evaluation Council for Welfare Policy), and Africa Centre for Evidence which span a greater array of policy areas



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than the traditional one of health (e.g. NICE) and claim to play different functions than traditional think tanks by articulating EIPM-inspired techniques and outputs (Abelson, 2018; McGann and Shull, 2018; Rich, 2004; Stone, 1996).

Other countries outside this Anglo-Saxon or Commonwealth tradition are also considering the introduction of KBOs as a possible solution to the perceived inefficiency of policy-making and the lack of sufficient evidence to address ‘wicked’ policy issues (this echoes the ongoing motto of EIPM) (Rittel and Webber, 1973). For instance, Japan and France are the latest countries exploring how the UK What Works Centre model could be applied in their context (Breckon and Mulgan, 2018) and the Finnish Prime Minister declared in 2018 that more EBPM is needed in Finland (Holli and Turkka, 2019). Notwithstanding the growth in number of these bodies, the sums involved, usually from governments, are great, with for the instance the UK government having invested over £200 billion in its WWCs since 2012 (Cabinet Office, 2018). Thus the knowledge-policy nexus or knowledge regime (Campbell and Pedersen, 2015) in these countries is becoming increasingly crowded and competitive, with a number of different attempting to inform or influence, and being mobilised by others in, policy-making with different strategies. A similar, albeit less pronounced, trend towards EIPM and a more competitive approach towards the knowledge-policy relationship is also emerging in traditionally consensus-based countries in Northern Europe (Lijphart, 2012). In Africa, Asia and South America, EIPM is now often identified by foreign governments and international organisations as a central solution to those countries’ policy and societal problems (Koon et al., 2013; Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 2006).

Why do these trends and international developments matter? These phenomena illustrate how the EIPM belief that more and better evidence will improve policy-making is becoming taken-for-granted. This increasingly causal linking between knowledge and policy provokes several questions as to who gets what, when and how with the growth of EIPM (Lasswell, 1992) which has not been sufficiently addressed by existing literature. We believe it is necessary to investigate the politics of EIPM, and KBOs in particular. This paper starts to address how and who takes part in the formulation of policy, what counts as knowledge and how to find it, the question of impact or influence of knowledge on policy, and of the politics



of policy-making and a potential depoliticisation of this process. We analyse why this agenda has been supported by governments, academia and others in different countries and at different times. Why have KBOs become so attractive in policy-making and what are the underlying reasons for this and consequences for policy and society. In particular, we are interested in three research questions:

1. Why and how did KBOs emerge?
2. How do they work and what is their role in policy-making?
3. What are the underlying power relations and interests at play with the existence of KBOs; and consequences for policy and democracy?

The EIPM literature is vast and has grown quickly since the 1990s. Yet, the typical EIPM image of the policy process, which posits research evidence as a necessary part of the policy-making process, is problematic as it is often naïve and idealistic. Overall, the dominant EIPM literature is perpetually seeking the next ‘how to’ model that will prescribe universal solutions to the ongoing puzzle of ‘evidence-immune’ policy-making. Overall, this literature tends to be dominated by positivist and prescriptive models which do not critically analyse the power, conflict and meaning surrounding evidence, knowledge and policy. More recently, some authors have begun developing new approaches that inject greater critique and politics into the analysis of EIPM (e.g. Cairney, 2016; Oliver et al., 2014; Parkhurst, 2017; Smith, 2013). This paper is situated in this new strand and aims to add to our understanding, explanation, and critical reflection on these important phenomena for policy and society. In doing so, we build on this emergent critical strand and public policy studies – e.g. network governance, depoliticisation research, discourse theory – to recast EIPM and KBOs as the product of politics.

The paper is structured as follows: first, we identify and review how critical literatures relating to policy-making and the role of ideas and the construction of knowledge can help understand KBOs. Second, we outline our proposed analytical framework and methods. Third, we present



some early findings from the three case studies of KBOs. Fourth, we propose some initial conclusions and a plan for future research.

### [Literatures relating to KBOs and theories we build on](#)

In this section, we discuss our initial review of the knowledge brokering research and our analysis on the various critical scholarships and concepts which are helpful in developing further critical findings regarding EIPM, and KBOs in particular.

### [Review of the mainstream EIPM and policy literature](#)

We conducted a systematic review of the literature on knowledge brokering (KB) to understand what this concept and its affiliates meant, where KB was being formulated and implemented and whether it was effective. The search returned 3177 sources, with 75 sources retained for full review (paper under review). Despite the quantity of research produced on knowledge brokering (KB) and the presence of some interesting frameworks such as boundary organisations to analyse KBOs (Guston, 2001), we found that many of the sources we reviewed often didn't address satisfactorily issues of (1) definition; (2) theories and methods; (3) agency and structure; (4) policy and geographical areas; (5) KB evaluation and effectiveness; and (6) politics. There is An increasing consensus that the policy-making process is complex, involving a multiplicity of stakeholders, interests and relationships and research evidence, expertise or knowledge competes with multiple other factors in the development of policy such as political agendas, electoral tactics, the political cycle, interests of other stakeholders, technical, bureaucratic and political feasibility, costs (which has many meanings here), and gripping narratives (; Stoker and Evans, 2016). Christensen (2017) for instance emphasises these almost infinite variations of the policy-making process which contradict what most EIPM authors propose, "the fact [being] that policy researchers are rarely directly involved in the policy process" (2017, p. 163). And yet, these multiplicities of voices, interests and relationships, and more importantly the power plays, conflict and 'mess' of policy-making, are often muted by the dominant EIPM ideology. Although both EIPM and policy-politics studies document and



discuss how policy is made, these scholarships have evolved in almost hermetic silos, with little cross-fertilisation happening between the two. These silos lead to the EIPM literature lacking in realistic theoretically-informed discussions and methodologically-sound analyses of the policy process and of the role played by research evidence in this (French, 2018). Although EIPM has evolved mostly separately from policy and politics studies, its ideas and models are increasingly influential in policy-making and thus these disciplinary boundaries must be challenged to bring new insights into the changing roles and politics of knowledge in policy-making.

Another useful literature we draw on comes from research into think tanks and associated bodies present at the interface between research and policy. This field is vast with studies documenting and analysing the role of national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the making of policy (Hernando et al., 2017; McGann and Shull, 2018; Stone, 1996). These bodies may include university policy institutes, or evidence intermediaries set-up by governments alongside human rights organisations. This ‘all-included’ approach leads to issues of categorisation and analysis (Hernando et al., 2017; McGann et al., 2018). This scholarship also often struggles with the question of impact on policy – a common problem across EIPM – and how to demonstrate it (Abelson, 2018). Indeed, impact is often the *raison d’être* for the creation of most of these bodies. There is an empirical gap surrounding the emergence of new evidence intermediaries (such as UK What Works Centres (WWCs), Canadian Institute for Knowledge Mobilisation and Ontarian Mowat Centre, US California Policy Lab, and Africa Centre for Evidence) which span other policy areas than the traditional one of health and play different functions than traditional think tanks.

The policy literature more broadly has also looked at this in-between world of brokering or connecting and transferring knowledge and evidence into the policy process (see Smith, 2013 for a helpful summary). Policy broker studies are interesting because of their focus on this in-between world at the frontier of knowledge and policy but they don’t discuss knowledge and evidence extensively (Christopoulos and Ingold, 2015; Ingold and Varone, 2012). Studies channelling Advocacy Coalition concepts are useful in conceiving of scientists as political actors but say little about these new KBOs, focusing more on actors rather than organisations

(Weible and Sabatier, 2005). These new bodies require critical analysis and comparison to improve our understanding of what they do and whether and how they influence and inform policy. This can be achieved by looking at the range of brokering practices at play and how they mobilise and re-interpret knowledge and evidence according to different policy-making *scenarii*. At the moment, such analysis is lacking and remains the territory of these bodies examining themselves. These various gaps in the literature lead us to draw on other literatures which develop strong methodological frameworks and concepts to make sense of KBOs. We believe three literatures, when iteratively combined, can help make sense of these bodies.

#### Critical studies dealing with the role of knowledge in policy

First, networked governance and the wider governance literature can provide useful ideas for understanding KBOs. Stemming from pluralism, governance posits decision-making power as diffused outwards from the State and exercised by others such as interest groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business, research and the third sector. Some studies in this literature also develop the idea that government is being ‘hollowed out’ by the rise of governance (Rhodes, 1997). The rise of expertise and emergence of bodies such as KBOs dealing in evidence syntheses and Randomised-Controlled Trials (RCTs) can be conceived of as an illustration of the hollowing out of the State’s policy-making practices and duties, where increasing parts of policy development is being outsourced to these new bodies, from gathering information and knowledge, to modelling policies, piloting, and evaluating them (e.g. Canada’s Social Research and Demonstration Corporation). This move to the governance (rather than government) of evidence for policy-making poses questions relating to their independence, impartiality, the inclusion and exclusion of players in the field of policy-making, and consequences for policy and society, notably transparency and accountability. In the case of the UK for instance, why have some policy areas benefitted from the creation of a What Works Centre and sizeable government funding, with privileged access to policy-makers (e.g. children’s social care or ageing) when other areas such as poverty or gender inequality do not benefit from such a centre?





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Governance and networks allow for a broader and more complex understanding of policy-making and politics than advocacy coalition frameworks as they consider a wider array of actors and groups and draw attention, not to the moment of decision-making in policy, but to the decentralised and multi-polar process of governing and policy-making (Dryzek and Dunleavy, 2009). With this framework, it is also possible to start thinking about the rationale underlying the emergence of these KBOs. In an increasingly crowded and contested policy-making field, governments support the creation and functions of KBOs and EIPM more broadly to allow for different voices to be heard in the creation of knowledge and evidence around a given policy puzzle. By the same token, the creation of the KBOs blurs the boundaries between the State and other actors and groups, such bodies often bringing together experts and individuals from across the policy-making network, often with government monies as well as other sources of funding such as foundations. This blurring also allows governments to control at a distance the production and mobilisation of knowledge and evidence for policy, as well as practice such as from social workers, doctors or teachers (e.g. Foucault's governmentality; see for instance Rose and Miller, 1992). Networked governance also provides “a relatively flexible way for governments to operate that retains ultimate governmental control” (Dryzek and Dunleavy, 2009, p. 149), much more than internal research and evidence services could offer, with policy-makers’ attention fluctuating from one idea to the next seamlessly and at little cost.

Second, two other helpful bodies of research in examining the role of knowledge or evidence in policy-making comes from the depoliticisation and discourse literatures (Buller and Flinders, 2005; Fawcett et al., 2017; Howarth, 2013; Standring, 2017). Depoliticisation implies “a ‘mode of statecraft’ instituted by politicians to deflect blame and accountability from governments as decision making is placed at ‘one remove’ from the centre” rather than being seen simply as “displacement of decisions from politicians” (Wood and Flinders, 2014, p. 152;154). Building on Hay’s (2007) typology, Wood and Flinders characterise the various practices which may come under this umbrella, emphasising how issues become part of “the realm of contingency and deliberation”, and thus politicised, for instance where religious taboos

become questioned in society, or are muted (Wood and Flinders, 2014, p. 154). The authors stress the need to ‘dig deeper’ than institutions and “trace those deeper social and discursive shifts” and thus examine the “broader ecosystem of depoliticising trends and tides” (ibid.: 152), evidence intermediaries and KBOs being a clear example of this. We are particularly interested in what the authors call a third face of “discursive depoliticisation” which focuses on “ideas and language” and “the tools through which debates concerning political choice and contingency are closed down” (2014, p. 161). Taking a discourse theory approach, we argue that all ‘faces’ of depoliticisation can be understood as constructed in discourse, whereby discourse is not limited to “speech act[s]” and “language” (ibid.) but constitutive of politics and the wider social order, where beliefs, identities, objects and rules are all subject to discourse, or the articulation of meaning into chains of equivalences (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 105). We believe that a discursive approach to depoliticisation can also help go further than framing depoliticisation as simply a displacement of responsibility and blurring of accountability – what Wood and Flinders term a “many hands problem” used “as a way of blurring the accountability space and distancing their own personal responsibility” (2014, p. 158). By characterising further the dimension of depoliticisation as “promotion of an issue” (ibid., p.161) and framing and analysing it as a means of gaining and retaining consent and continuing to exercise control over policy issues, discourse, with its focus on conflict, hegemony and emotional appeal, can help understand such strategies as KBOs and EIPM in a more complex and dynamic way. Some of the depoliticisation research has examined the question of EBPM. For instance, Standing examines how evidence-based policy) is “strategically chosen and promoted by political actors as a mode of governance maintaining ‘the shadow of hierarchy’ in complex networked policy areas” (2016, p. 1). He argues that evidence – far from being neutral and objective as articulated by the EIPM movement, and similarly to discourse theory’s understanding of ‘knowledge’ and ‘facts’ – is “instead understood as a process to generate socially constructed knowledge, which is partial [...] and value-laden, in order to constrain political choice and agency” (ibid.). Thus, there is a need to look at how EIPM strategies and concepts such as evidence and knowledge brokering are mobilised to reorganise and control the policy-making field and society more broadly. In doing



so, we must look at who is included and excluded in this EIPM ‘movement’, which types of ideas ‘win’ and which are excluded. We must also examine what is in this movement for governments worldwide. Indeed, why are disparate governments embedded in different political cultures supporting this move to EIPM and the outsourcing of evidence and expertise to KBOs? Finally, and overarchingly, what are the narratives or discourses at play that help explain these phenomena, and their underlying logics?

Although Foucault dedicated an important part of his research to analysing the role of science and knowledge in policy and society, there remains a lack of studies looking at EIPM via the prism of discourse and the articulation of ‘knowledge’ and ‘evidence’ in policy (Dryzek, 1990; Newman, 2011; Pautz, 2011 mobilising discourse to (re)conceptualise think tanks). Discourse presents three advantages as an approach to analysing evidence use in policy (Howarth, 2013). First, it allows to unpick the origins of a given phenomenon, especially one that is as taken-for-granted as EIPM is in Britain and elsewhere. Second, discourse is also helpful for examining the articulation of meaning – be they ideas, norms, beliefs – in analysing how evidence or knowledge are assessed and built into the policy-making process, or how alliances are built – for instance between researchers, academics, disciplines, centres and policy-makers. Finally, discourse allows the researcher to interpret a given phenomenon, mobilising rich qualitative data alongside theoretical concepts and tools such as rhetorical political analysis (Finlayson, 2007).

This paper combines this discursive framework with recent depoliticisation research (Wood and Flinders, 2014) as well as other critical scholarship to examine how political choice and contingency are renegotiated via the discourse of EIPM and the emergence of KBO’s at the interface of knowledge and policy. What matters to this discursive framework is to uncover the workings of power, often hidden by the mobilisation of notions of evidence and knowledge, in order to highlight alternatives and argue for more negotiated, plural, open and transparent decision-making (Fischer, 2009; Mouffe, 2007). It will also allow to critically reflect *in situ* on the roles, relations and negotiations at play in EIPM and KBOs. Although policy and evidence in themselves might not appear as emotional topics, they do appeal to individual

notions of what good policy ought to look like and how it should be formulated. For instance, EIPM discourses articulate futures of seamless and value-for-money policy-making which is fair and objective. Discourse addresses the question of emotions and how political projects appeal to people by positing that individuals are inherently lacking and thus seeking an (impossible) fullness by identifying with disparate subject positions offered by discourses. To appeal to individuals, discourses mobilise individual fears – e.g. of failing policies and costly policy blunders (King and Crewe, 2013) – and desires – e.g. of seamless policy-making where ‘facts’ and cost-effectiveness prevail – into what Griggs and Howarth (2013) term ‘fantasmatic narratives’ which manage to grip contradictory demands around a given empty signifier – a demand seeking to represent everything and thus appeal to all (Laclau, 1996).

These critical writings in public policy and politics cast a new and more complicated light over the evidence-policy-making relationship, opening up the way for new understandings of the role played by evidence in policy, the interests, conflicts, power plays and agendas underlying this relationship, and the excluded alternatives and possibilities resulting from a growing importance of EIPM.

### Research methods

Based on the critical ‘arsenal’ discussed in the previous section, we sought out similarly critical research methods to operationalise these concepts but also take account of the practice of EIPM, rather than focusing on causal mechanisms or universal rules to explain it. In this section therefore, we discuss interpretive policy analysis, case studies, data and analysis.

### Interpretive policy analysis

Making sense of policies and practices surrounding policy-making has been at the heart of why interpretive policy analysis (IPA) emerged. The interpretive turn seeks to make sense of policy *practices*, focusing on the experience of policies in the real world and their meaning-making and looking at all types of practices from written documents to other acts of

communication such as organisational routines and physical objects (similarly to discourse theory's understanding of objects and subjects as all subject to discursive articulation) (Yanow, 2007). Importantly in the case of EIPM and its strong normative aspect, IPA allows to go beyond the narrative of objective facts and often quantitatively-minded methods in EIPM. It is by studying practice and how EIPM is practiced in the real world that we will be able to understand the values, interests and politics at play in this phenomenon. This can be done via ethnographic studies, discourse analysis, genealogies and other methods, collecting in-depth qualitative data. In some ways, the EIPM movement is a new iteration of the trend towards the quantification and measurability of society, positing that reality can be clearly established into facts, and then measured, quantified, and controlled, with 'best ways' of 'what works' being applicable across contexts and times (Yanow, in Fischer et al., 2015). By putting forward the theoretical frames above, we wanted to emphasise the need for critical analysis of these positions and 'truths', and for unearthing the contested understandings and practices of EIPM, and KBOs in particular. Furthermore, we believe that studying EIPM from a positivist perspective, as often the case in EIPM-related research, is insufficient in explaining how and why it interacts with policy-making. As suggested in the previous section, it is also necessary to examine the politics or conflicts, rules, beliefs and emotions at play in the EIPM movement. However, these are often hidden and thus require alternative tools to analyse and critique them. This is where a focus on interpretive methods comes into play. In addition to IPA, we draw on a poststructuralist method, logics of critical explanation, to think retroductively between theory and data and problematise the emergence, normalisation and conflict around EIPM and KBOs in our case studies (Glynos and Howarth, 2007). These problematisations led to the three research questions outlined in the introduction.

### Case studies

In order to capture the different dimensions of the mobilization of KBOs, four types of data were collected. Three case studies were selected to compare how different KBOs work, make sense of what is evidence and policy, and how they achieve impact or influence policy-making.

Selecting different case studies allowed us to interrogate and observe how policy problems are constructed and addressed in different countries. More broadly, these comparative case studies help us examine what appears to be a global trend towards EIPM and KBOs, how it manifests itself in different settings, and how EIPM becomes mobilised alongside particular and local policy ‘problems’ such as lack of state capacity, complex and wicked problems, cost, or rivalries in the policy community. Rather than seeking to test causal relations and establish generalisations across different countries – as traditional comparative policy analysis does – our aim was more critical, qualitative and interpretive “using comparative research to emphasise the complexity and contingency of political phenomena” (Hopkin, in Marsh and Stoker, 2010, p. 303) (these case studies are ongoing).

These three cases were selected based on three main criteria:

1. Bodies which work on social policy issues (many KBOs are focused on a single policy area e.g. NICE on health care; Sax Institute on health and social care). This criterion was required to develop a comparative study including our own organisation, WCPP, which works across social policy areas such as education, social care, and justice.
2. Bodies that have existed for at least several years to allow comparison such as of annual reports, funding streams and activities
3. Bodies that work in English

## Data

Within these case studies, we collected different types of data. Between August 2018 and April 2019, we built a database of KBOs involved in policy-making in the UK initially and then wider to international examples, populating a spreadsheet to gather information from websites such as funding, budget, structure, ways of working, impact/influence, date of creation, number of staff, examples of impact. This step helped draw a picture of knowledge brokering worldwide and start understanding the different structures and practices mobilised by these bodies in influencing policy-making. Second, we conducted interviews with members of KBOs in the UK and abroad (this phase is still ongoing and interviews with other

stakeholders such as policy-makers will be added; 18 interviews have been conducted so far and are in the process of being transcribed). These interviews allowed us to build a narrative around the website data, gather additional data not available online, and begin selecting case studies. Questions focused on understanding the structures and practices mobilised by KBOs, discussing what worked and hadn't worked, how they went about influencing policy-making, how funding sources and length of funding influenced their work, and whether and how they evaluated their impact. More broadly, interviewees were also asked about the role that evidence has or ought to have in policy-making, as well as perceived best ways of influencing policy. These discussions helped compare the reality of what KBOs did with the literature on KBOs and its often highly theoretical models. They also highlighted some interesting similarities and differences across countries regarding the political culture, beliefs surrounding evidence, its meaning and its use and mobilisation by different players in the policy community, and the dynamics and power plays surrounding this question. Fourth, fieldnotes and a reflective diary on the everyday practices of these organisations were compiled regarding practices in KBOs, how individuals and demands were organised and conflicted, as well as what were the local myths about their history, impact and ways of working.

### Analysis

Regarding analysis, the data were first coded, following the themes developed for the interview to sift through a large amount of information. We looked for similarities and differences and progressively characterized key themes (ongoing). In helping us to make sense of these data, we called on discourse analysis and rhetorical political analysis which allowed to focus on the metaphors, ambiguities, story-telling and discourses underpinning perceptions and sense-making in EIPM and KBOs. We also feel that critically-inspired research tools, for instance Rhetorical Political Analysis (Finlayson, 2007), offer interesting tools from Aristotelian philosophy for analysing how 'evidence', 'knowledge', and other signifiers are mobilised in the policy-making narrative and to begin analysing the underlying discourse or rhetoric of KBOs and EIPM. In addition, paying greater attention to the contextuality of discourse, are those methodologies regrouped under the denomination of critical discourse analysis (CDA)

(Fairclough, 1995, 2005). This approach builds on poststructuralism, specifically Foucault, to establish a systematic analysis of the interplay of power and discourse. CDA highlights issues of domination and ideology and has identified rhetorical figures such as metaphors, synonyms and re-descriptions, similarly to discourse theory. However, unlike CDA's ontology, we subscribe to a 'fuller' definition of discourse that goes beyond talk and text and thus our operationalisation of this ontology will cover everything from talk and text to objects, actions and subjects.

This paper also follows a retroductive method, inspired from poststructuralist research, and going back and forth between theory and the 'real world' to make sense of puzzles or paradoxes (Glynos and Howarth, 2007). In our case, we began by noticing the growth in EIPM as a taken-for-granted movement, and particularly with the recent growth of KBOs. We questioned why such bodies were created, what was their purpose, what they did and whether they had any impact or effect on policy-making. Based on these guiding four problematics, we discussed in group and read across theoretical families and disciplines to try to make sense of what we were seeing. As illustrated here, there are a number of literatures and frameworks that can help us make sense or understand what EIPM is, what it represents and the broader and more hidden processes that might be at play. By articulating these ideas and concepts together, we believe it is possible to gain and construct new critical understanding as to what KBOs might symbolise, how they are being mobilised or understood by different players in the policy-making sphere – e.g. politicians, civil servants, government experts, academics, think tanks, third sector organisations, professions – and what might be the consequences of their existence for policy-making and democracy. Calling upon the cooperation and findings from different scholarships, we hope, will help generate new insights for research and practice.

### [Some early findings from the case studies](#)

In this section [when it's written!], we will present some early findings regarding the three case studies we selected to explore the politics of EIPM and the particular device of KBOs. Key








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information about the three organisations is outlined in Table 1 below. The three cases will be discussed simultaneously via the three problematics developed, based on our research questions outlined in the introduction. By discussing these organisations simultaneously, we will also intend to tease out the similarities and differences between the cases, and reflect in situ on the politics of EIPM. The three problematisations we will analyse relate to: (1) the emergence of these KBOs; (2) how they work, their appeal and relationships with other players; and (3) their impact and underlying power plays and interests surrounding these bodies.



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Comparators <sup>i</sup> / Centres <sup>ii</sup>			
<b>Date of creation</b>	2016 (2014 <sup>iii</sup> )	2010	2017 (2013 <sup>iv</sup> )
<b>Organisational set-up</b>	University research institute	Independent public policy think tank	University research institute
<b>Number of staff</b>	15	14	20
<b>Policy area(s)</b>	International development, health, women's empowerment, labour, environment	Social policy with two research hubs focusing on not-for-profit and energy sectors respectively	Social policy areas devolved to the Welsh government
<b>Audience</b>	Decision-makers in Africa: politicians, civil servants, practitioners	Ontarian policy-makers Ontarian public	Welsh Government Ministers and sub-national levels of decision-making
<b>Outputs</b>	Evidence syntheses, evidenced capacities (capacity building), evidence communities (relationship building via Africa Evidence Network) Academic research	Ontario government commissioned reports presenting options and recommendations for policy-makers based on evidence review  Reports commissioned by other public, private or third sector bodies	Welsh government commissioned reports presenting evidence review on a specific policy question  Events e.g. roundtables, expert panels  Academic research
<b>Aim</b>	Reduce poverty and inequality in Africa	A better fiscal deal for Ontario; federal policy that serves Ontario; enhanced policy development capacity for Ontarian government	Providing ministers, civil servants and public services with high quality evidence and independent advice that helps them improve policy decisions and outcomes
<b>Example of impact</b>	Resolving a policy impasse in public housing in South Africa with evidence mapping	Reduction in Ontario's tax contribution to the Federation	Childcare tax credits
<b>Measurement of impact</b>	Case studies relying on quantitative and qualitative data e.g. DFID 'stories of change'	Impact methodology developed in 2015 blending qualitative and quantitative data  Performance indicators related to three roles of Mowat e.g. publications, citations, access	Research Excellence Framework (REF) impact case study  A new impact method in development



<b>Evidence standards</b>	Gold standard evidence reviews	Ad hoc	Ad hoc
<b>Engagement with users</b>	Section in annual reports dedicated to 'who is using our work'	Section in annual reports dedicated to 'who is using our work'	Ad hoc
<b>Funding source(s)</b>	Hewlett Foundation (39%) ESPA <sup>v</sup> (32%) DFID (13%) Universities (10%) 3ie (3.4%) RSA government (1%) Other (1.6%)	Ontario government grant (35%) Grants and sponsorships (26.8%) Research contracts (14.4%) Training courses (1.4%) Events (0.5%) Cash reserves (21.8%)	Welsh government (30%) ESRC <sup>vi</sup> (30%) Cardiff University (40%)
<b>Funding model</b>	Ad hoc, contracts and longer-term funding	Grants, contracts, ad hoc	Five-year grants
<b>Budget</b>	£534,740 (for 2017)	£1.63 million (annual)	£1.6 million annually

**Table 1: The three case study knowledge broker organisations**

**Problematisation 1: why did KBOs emerge and the depoliticisation of policy formulation**

- Anglo-Saxon origins of policy systems in the three case studies (although ACE focuses on the whole of the African continent)
- Important government investments in EIPM in Canada and UK, and in South Africa via foreign governments and international organisations' grants (e.g. DFID)

*“we won a DFID grant from 2014-2016, it was called the University of Johannesburg B-CURE project, Building Capacity for the Use of Research Evidence, and we were one of the handful of projects that worldwide DFID funded on a three year basis to deliberately try out different models and building capacity to use research evidence” (ACE, 1)*

- Similar narrative surrounding the emergence of KBOs in the three case studies: Need for more/better evidence, criticism of current evidence supply, frame policy problems as almost solely in need of more/better evidence (evidence as a panacea)

*“So I think there is a sort of sense that government used to both have more capacity internally, it simply had units that were in charge of thinking ahead, and it also had previously funded a number of councils and roundtables, and over the years the tap had been turned off. So now you know the narrative of the world is changing quickly, all of this happening, and there is no one around to sort of think about it, so that's one reason.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“there was real interest on the African continent for people to be able to link up, for people who were interested in evidence informed decision-making and researchers to link up with government. So the continuation of that community of practice was really important for us and we wanted to grow that further so that was really the kind of need that had established itself. But then also we are one of the very*



*few centres on the African continent who can do evidence syntheses and do systematic reviews [...]. Also the need for people who wanted to draw on that expertise on the African continent rather than someone else, someone from outside doing systematic reviews. So all of this converged into the establishment of the centre” (ACE, 1)*

*“it was a commitment in a Labour Party manifesto for the Assembly elections prior to our being established. And the reason it ended up in that manifesto was because the team of people working on the manifesto diagnosed a problem and cooked up a solution. [...] the problem that they diagnosed was that the Civil Service in Wales didn’t have the expertise to adequately advise ministers on policy decisions. There’s this long legacy of them just accepting policy developed in Whitehall, and so there just wasn’t the capacity in the system to do that job in Wales.” (WCPP, 1)*

- Incapability of the academic community to provide solutions for policy-making:

*“If you just want to know what is going on then the University people can do that. But what university people are really bad at doing, is having any clue as what you should do next.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“Very very rarely is there going to be an explicit research question that will be answered by one academic paper so comfortably and perfectly fit. That just makes it- That makes us redundant. [...] That doesn’t exist. [...] So if we operate within those assumptions then I think a Centre like ours, or an organisation like ours will blur the lines a little bit, but in the sense that it will allow possibly more interpretation of research results to align with the question that’s been asked so that it’s relevant to the question and it will draw from different sources to allow that to happen.” (WCPP, 3)*

- A complementary narrative was that of ‘fake news’ and the diminishing public trust towards governments, leading the latter to invest in outsourced evidence centres to provide objectivity and credibility:

*“[I]t was felt that often agencies outside the governments are able to do that better because they are seen as a little less interested.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“As public trust in government declined, the challenge of how government addresses big issues without being seen to be self-serving increases. Let’s say something needs to be changed about the retirement age or young people need a completely different skill set to be employable for the next 50 years, how does government say things like that in this atmosphere that is increasingly polarised and sceptical about the motivations of government? [...] because if the answers come from inside government they might not be valued.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“So it’s much more around those lines of credibility, it’s not blame they use it for, it’s the credibility they use it for.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“So I think that there will always be some politicisation of it [policy-making] because that is the nature of the political game but I think that there is also within that a role for evidence to play, whether the minister is pushing for a policy that isn’t necessarily the best option, for the research evidence to show that it isn’t the best option. Or the Minister has a more general direction that they want to go in and not a specific policy, for the evidence to weigh up how that fits within other options that are available. If you think of the bigger world of knowledge, I don’t know how much you have read on the post truth ideas, I think there is also a movement away from using evidence, from*



*drawing on experts, that I think is also a threat to the evidence and the use of evidence informed decision-making from a different angle. I don't see ministers... I don't see a complete depoliticisation.” (ACE, 1)*

- This continued narrative often contrasts with the fact that previous EIPM devices have failed to deliver this sought-after ideal of evidence-informed policy: KBOs become framed in the respective national discourses as the new panacea or solution to bridging the ‘evidence-policy gap’

*“they [Ontarian government] thought that if they were going to have a think tank or a Public policy research organisation that is going to do evidence-based research and advise us on things, they might as well advise us on everything else at the same time [...]. And as the research agenda takes shape, it really ended up focusing on the way in which the work of government itself needed to change, so in terms of using new technology or using evidence better.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“in environments that had severe resource constraints, which is most of the governments in Africa, you can't afford to waste money so you really want to get out a policy that is going to have the most impact and that is going to be the most effective and that actually fits your budget, that you can afford. In an ideal world there should be very little room for guessing, for wasting money, for ministers thinking ‘oh yes I woke up this morning and felt that this policy could work’.” (ACE, 1)*

- Also important in the case study organisations’ creation was the presence of charismatic individuals heading the organisation:

*“we came down to the right individual being in the right place at the right time. I think everyone recognised that it was high time and a good idea but I think if it hadn't been him [the inaugural director] it probably wouldn't have come to pass.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*



*« If you look back at our B-CURE program, our earlier relationships with the South African government, a lot that was as a consequence of our director Ruth Stewart. So I would acknowledge the influence of the individual broker but there is also risks related to that. » (ACE, 1)*

*“I think what Steve [Martin, WCPP Director] did really, really well, and it’s easy to forget how many bear traps he avoided in doing this, was to build the trust and to build good working relationships.” (WCPP, 1)*

#### **Problematisation 2: how do KBOs work, their appeal and relationships with other policy players**

- Identify the organisational models and practices of the three centres: demand-led, types of activities, budgets, outputs and outcomes (see Table 1 for a beginning of this search): based on preliminary research (document analysis and interviews), it appears that the three KBOs have adopted a very similar *modus operandi*, based on the same EIPM discourse around ideas of responsiveness, objective and systematic methods, and staying away from the politics of policy-making:

*“That’s why the non-partisan mandate because we are funded from the public so we have to be seen as not sort of siding with one party against the other. And also this is where we may end up having more influence. In that immediate day-to-day cut and thrust of politics decision-makers have already made up their mind anyway so they are not going to read a research proposal and say ‘oh my god, I read the research report from the Mowat Centre which has completely changed my mind’ [laughs]. So the attempt to try and shape things at one level higher.” (Mowat Centre 3)*

*“So we have three broad streams of work, evidence synthesis [...], also evidence capacities where we try and build the capacities of those who are interested in evidence synthesis, systematic reviews, evidence*





*assessments, evidence maps to build their capacity to do this work. [...] And our third stream [...] are our evidence communities which refers to our focus on relationships which underpins all of what we do.” (ACE, 1)*

*“the way that we present our work is that it always needs to be responsive to what people want. That is kind of our key. Because you can have a beautifully done systematic review that’s done according to gold standard, if it misses the policy window by a day it’s useless. So timing is key and being responsive is key. I know that there is in the evidence synthesis community sometimes questions are around not compromising the quality of your work and the rigour. An engagement process is often time-consuming and a little bit messy. » (ACE, 1)*

*“So we do quite a lot of upfront work scoping it, to make sure that we’re doing something that is useful.[...] Then we play around with different models, but broadly what we’re doing is some kind of evidence synthesis work that brings together and packages what is known about the relevant issue or issues.[...] Then we do some kind of knowledge mobilisation activity.” (WCPP, 1)*

- Funding was also an important part of the organisations’ activities and took a lot of time in some cases:

*“So as soon as you start following because there is a certain amount of interest coming in, then it becomes a hamster wheel very quickly because you have grown and you have more desks and more computers. So certainly you can contract if you have to and we have done that but it’s a bit of a double [edged sword] [...] it increases your footprint and your reach and so on but then it becomes certainly part*



*of my job to keep that flow of money coming in and it's not always useful time." (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*"We are entirely externally funded which always raises the difficulty of ... to what extent are you chasing the funding in order to survive versus trying to stick to your core mandate and seeking out funding that fits with that. So I think we have had a little bit of a mixture of short and slightly longer term funding, by longer term at this point I would mean a year or year and a half, which isn't really long in the wider scheme of things" (ACE, 1)*

*"We are now funded by an ESRC grant that the Welsh Government contributes to, and that's a very different kind of relationship with Welsh Government to the one that we had before. [...] I think the change is subtle but important. It's more of an attitudinal stance now, where we, I think, feel able to pick up questions that we're not being asked to look at and do work on them." (WCPP, 1)*

- There were similar discussion across the three countries on arm's length EIPM and the tension between independence and influence (similarly to the think tank literature): This is where interviewees talk about the 'dance', 'tight rope exercise', 'pleasing the customer' involved by trying to follow the commission stipulated by the policy-makers but at the same time create and maintain the independence, impartiality and credibility of the body.

*"[Y]ou do not have to present your research agenda to anyone for formal sign off or approval. In practice of course, the survival of the organisation depends on its relevance and that relevance needs to be kind of carefully assessed. [...] And it's that relationship that is quite interesting. So what does that mean? It means that I don't have to*



*present, I don't have to say 'look I would like to do a study of this is that okay?' I didn't approve it yes or no. And they certainly don't approve the outcome of anything that we do. Our funding agreement is a four-year agreement, if I spent that four-year addressing issues that they weren't interested in, the chances of them renewing the funding after four years are null." (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*"the real risk is the dance of being far enough at arm's-length from the government in the execution of the mandate that the credibility can be maintained. So we had to address questions that we think they think are relevant but without doing it in a way that makes it look like we are trying to ingratiate ourselves because if we did that then the whole credibility is shot. So how do you get close enough but not so close?" (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*"But again I think we wouldn't see ourselves as advocates. There is some kind of line between recommendations that are the kind of logical next step that this would lead to, and here are the practical changes that are better. But we wouldn't necessarily say That that means that we are advocates because advocacy would bring us into that train of day-to-day politics and we try and stay out of that." (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*"The other part of is the behind the scenes trusted relationship with the public servants. And again to be brutally honest this is something that is also in the process of evolving to a new stage and we have to see how it will work out" (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*"we definitely see ourselves as independent. We would never see that our work is being compromised through collaboration because of the principles of transparency and being systematic in our evidence*



*synthesis. There is no kind of influence of policymakers to try and compromise those principles. If that would happen, we would stop the product.” (ACE, 1)*

*“[Talking about the high levels of children being taken into care in Wales] Going all the way back to your question, is that me advocating for a particular point of view or is that me agitating for a particular point of view? I made some active choices in those conversations, to guide those conversations to a particular place. I think that that’s the right outcome, but arguably I’m advocating for playing an honest broker role. So some of these things break down and blur.” (WCPP, 1)*

- As mentioned in problematisation 1, all these bodies are demand-led, meaning that the evidence questions have already been narrowed down to the government(s) preferred topics, problems and, potentially, to their preferred solutions. This could point to Christina Boswell’s thesis on the political uses of expertise regarding substantiation and legitimation (beyond the normal filling of an evidence/knowledge gap) (Boswell, 2009).

*“[If] they [the government] called us and said ‘our government has made an announcement on this issue. We want you to write a report on that issue’ that is game over because it’s game over in the sense that we can only say no to that but if we say no to that, where does our relationship and relevance go? So how do you make this mandate work ? It takes two to make that work. It takes us being smart on our side but it takes the government being smart on its side because if it overreaches [...] it burns the bridge.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“I think the government expects us to hold its hand more than I am usually inclined to. That’s a point of difference between us. We had a meeting with the First Minister last week and we discussed what it*



*means for us to be engaged in work which shows what works. I was saying, "I think that we present the civil service the evidence and then it's the civil service's job to work out what policies they advise ministers to develop in light of that evidence". The First Minister was saying, "No, we want you to go further than that and tell us what you think is going to work." (WCPP, 2)*

*"Because their job [policy-makers'] is to make policy. Us providing evidence, in some situations, doesn't necessarily get them any further forward. In fact, it could make it more difficult especially if the evidence is equivocal." (WCPP, 2)*

*"So demand is everything. We can produce the best kind of work in the world, but if it's not meeting the criteria of Government and public services then it will fall flat. A lot of the impact that we can have, a lot of the impact that evidence might have on policy making really does depend on the client." (WCPP, 3)*

- How are these bodies mobilised by policy players (e.g. government or others) to exclude other policy players? In the case of the Mowat Centre and WCPP, set-up in a devolved/sub-national policy context, sometimes mobilised by the devolved governments to substantiate claims for new powers or resources.

*"So Mowat wrote that paper [on taxation] because the point about it is the [Federal] government was not trying to penalise Ontario, it was trying to ingratiate itself with the taxpayers. [...] So they [the provincial government] asked whether there was a way of explaining to people why this was such a big deal. Mowat did write a paper and its recommendation was that and so it has been celebrated here as something that has saved the Ontarian government billions of dollars.*



*So why were we successful? Because we depoliticised this issue and explained it meanwhile.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

*“Ontario could take it for granted that the national [i.e. Federal level] decision [on taxation] would just kind of break in its favour. And increasingly it was felt that this was no longer the case and therefore not only did the Ontario government need some regular stream of analysis, sometimes unpacking the pluses and minuses of Federal financial decisions, but that the public also needed to be engaged in that discussion because if the Ontario government was to make the case of saying it, it would simply sound like sour grapes or just sort of political wrangling that lacked the kind of credibility that the government felt it needed to have.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

- In the case of ACE, it is sometimes used by policy-makers to address stalemate situations where different departments have different preferred policy problematisation and solution:

*“So the evidence and the evidence map was really a way to bring together the different parties that were at loggerheads as to the best way forward because these were different government departments and each with different evidence on the same issue an different thinking on the way forward. So kind of us going in as evidence brokers, as a more neutral party with the idea of an evidence map where everyone can see their evidence reflected on the evidence map also use that as a point of discussion to eventually come to a consensus on the way forward in terms of housing policy.” (ACE, 1)*

- Case where WCPP report on Brexit which was used to support the Welsh government’s claim that decision-making on this should be collaborative rather than solely pursued by the UK government.



*“it’s [WCPP report on Brexit and international trade] helped them [the Welsh government] in negotiations with either the UK or Scotland or Northern Ireland or with the European Union. The tangible policy and fact of that is small but simply improving the knowledge of Government has been really worthwhile as well. You can sort of sense the gratitude from that and you then get further questions in that space. We’ve received questions from Ministers or officials on Brexit because of previous work we’ve done on Brexit. I think we’ve built a good relationship of trust based on that good work we’ve done.”*  
(WCPP, 3)

**Problematisation 3: what impact do KBOs have over policy-making and underlying power plays**

- Discourse or narrative of impact and how is this articulated? Focus in the three case studies on impact of KBOs but impact will be defined and measured in different ways according to the context and history in the separate countries (e.g. Mowat Centre is the most advanced in this aspect), quantitative versus qualitative, and what the funders request in terms of evidence of impact (e.g. WCPP: no stated demand for impact evidence versus ACE where funders, notably DFID, require stories of impact). The three cases use similar signifiers to demonstrate their impact, relying on quantitative data such as metrics of page views, number of meetings, hours of engagement. The three bodies also use letters and quotes from policy-makers to demonstrate causality between their evidence reports or other outputs and policy success.

*“We could do more around the qualitative stuff [to evaluate impact]. During our B-CURE project, DFID asked us to produce what they call stories of change, even if it is two A4 sides, right up from the beginning what happens and what was the final change that you saw and I know that it is something that we have been wanting to reintroduce at ACE,*



*to more qualitatively look at examples but I don't think we are quite... we don't have the capacity at the moment to do that internally regularly." (ACE, 1)*

- Impact as understood as grip or appeal of these bodies in framing and thinking about policy-making and evidence:

*"There are papers in terms of the funding that we have from the government, it is very undefined and it comes up to the directors of the organisation [i.e. Mowat] to sort of find out where the most impact can be made and a combination of need and opportunity" (Mowat Centre, 3)*

- ACE's remit has grown geographically to work with a number of African governments in addition to managing the Africa Evidence Network, a network of over 2000 members which brings together policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in developing more and better evidence for policy-making in Africa; ACE's activities have grown too, from only systematic evidence reviews to a growing number of training courses and other knowledge brokering activities; overall, policy-makers engage ACE at a much earlier stage in their policy formulation, highlighting the growing role of such a body in providing legitimisation and substantiation for policies:

*"I would definitely say that our experience of that has changed substantially, it's not shoehorning at all. I wouldn't say that it is coming from the position of not having thought of evidence at all. It's usually 'I am an expert in my field, I know this field I have been working in this department, I know that different sources exist but what else is there? I don't have access to searching an academic database? What else is out there? How do I make sense of it in terms of policy in terms of what the gaps are and what the evidence tells me?'. All of our recent*





*examples and some of our examples from the past it's starting at a much earlier stage, not at this stage of can I put it at the top of my policy and I just need a couple of references. We don't see examples in our work of that happening at all. It's happening at a much earlier stage." (ACE, 1)*

- Substantiating policy-makers' options:

*"There is also something around the reputation of those who present, so senior civil servants who present policies to ministers, who put input into policy. There is something about your own reputation that they... that people want to protect. So if someone who is higher up questions what it is that you did or why could you have possibly suggested this, or is there a policy alternative, do they have something to fall back on? You know to say that we have consulted the evidence rather than saying I didn't really think this through. So there are a lots of benefits to using evidence" (ACE, 1)*

- WCPP's remit has increased since the initial organisation, the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW), was inaugurated in 2013 (initially, it worked on issues such as fishing quotas and bus routes; now it works on what are perceived as more 'wicked' issues such as sustainable economic growth, homelessness and domestic violence).

*Interviewer: "[...] could it be a way of outsourcing increasingly difficult policy decisions?"*

*WCPP 1: "I think that's an indicator of the success that we've had in working with them certainly. [...] This is now just jumping around a bit, but I'm wondering, or I've started to wonder more recently, about how we don't unhelpfully displace activity that should be happening within Welsh Government."*



- But impact is often conditioned by a number of factors, in a sort of ‘alignment of the stars’:

*“Sometimes you get an announcement by possibly the First Minister or a key Minister about the key policy portfolio that’s within or policy area or question that’s within the devolved competence of Welsh Government. There’s a public sort of pressing need and priority that’s deemed to be there, and almost all the stars align in that context. Combined with a really good working relationship with officials, who are keen to work with you, so that when your work is published, and let’s assume that it’s of good standards and so on that we’ve talked about, that it lands and it’s listened to and it’s acted upon. I think that’s rare because of the way, just the messy nature of policy. It’s rare because just quite often Governments don’t act so kind of concretely.”*  
(WCPP, 3)

- In interviews conducted in the three case studies, interviewees talked of the growing trust between themselves and policy-makers which allowed the former to gain a greater role in the formulation of the policy question or problem, which would then influence the type of evidence that would be sought, for instance by being involved in discussions following the report produced by KBOs:

*“I think what this recent set of revelations for me is bringing out more is that yes we coproduced the work programme, and yes we provide independent evidence synthesis, but there is something that we do alongside that in some projects – not all projects but in some projects – which is about... I don’t know if it’s about coproduction. I would say it’s about knowledge mobilisation. It’s about the active evidence-informed conversations with key decision makers.”* (WCPP, 1)

*“The other thing that’s worth mentioning is that as our relationship with Welsh Government has matured our approach to... Well, two*

*things. The kinds of questions we get asked has changed, and our approach to picking up or not particular questions, or reframing questions that we do decide to pick up, has changed.” (WCPP, 1)*

- Reduction in the competition over knowledge? These bodies, at least in the Mowat and WCPP cases, have become privileged first points of contact for policy-makers in accessing evidence on various policy issues. In the case of ACE, because it works across national boundaries and it is not principally funded by those African governments (these latter fund ACE on a project basis), this role in providing evidence for policy formulation is less pronounced. However, in this latter case, the organisation is much younger than Mowat or WCPP and these relationships might change.

*“the Civil Service were quite allergic to the idea of there being a separate source of advice. [...] To have another organisation come in and be able to insert themselves between the Civil Service and ministers is deeply, deeply uncomfortable. Similarly, knowledge and analytical services [internal government research services] [...] feel like they get shut out of policy discussions. [...] They could easily do evidence synthesis work. Yet the reason that they're not asked to is because money has been funnelled to this organisation that sits outside the Welsh Government and does it instead of them.” (WCPP, 1)*

- Need to analyse the impact of these privileged relationships for other providers of knowledge in those countries.
- How do these examples of impact stack up against the narrative of EIPM and KBOs? Is it evidence-based policy-making or policy-based evidence? (Cairney, 2019). How can we go about demonstrating this better? In the case of the Mowat Centre, it was abolished within the first year of the 2019 Conservative Ontario government, the latter stating that all think tanks and evidence centres funded by the government would be

abolished. Could this be understood as a sign of the politicisation of expertise? (three interviews to be conducted in the next few months will discuss that).

*“Once you get past that first five years which we have been passed for a while, the relationship is always going to be continually work-in-progress, it’s never going to be really settled. It has to be won each and every day.” (Mowat Centre, 3)*

- Examples from document analysis and interviews point to how these bodies and their outputs are mobilised by policy-makers to include and exclude certain ideas and players and continue organising this evidence-policy space at a distance. E.g. the types of questions asked (cf. WCPP) and examples of how the evidence reports and other outputs are used. More research needed here but early findings from interviews suggest that this is an important and difficult question, interviewees referring to their work being misused.

## Conclusions

- A discursive framework goes some way to continuing the critical work being done by others in the EIPM field. By focusing on the why and how questions of EIPM and policy-making, a discursive apparatus helps to explore the logics or governing rules and discourses surrounding the creation of KBOs and how and why these are being mobilised and used by policy-makers and others. This is still early days in the development of this approach (as you can see from this paper!) but we believe that it can contribute to a nascent movement in the research community that doesn’t take EIPM for granted.
- Taking the case of KBOs allows to explore a recent iteration of EIPM and examine how they have emerged, their activities and how they are being constructed by KBOs themselves and other players in the policy community.
- Early findings from our data (interviews and KBOs documents) point to the importance of that construction of meaning around KBOs, them making sense of their own



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existence and activities, as well as how they are mobilised by other players in the policy field, notably policy-makers. In doing so, KBOs mobilised different strategies in constructing their credibility which built on those used by think tanks, academic organisations and policy-makers. Notably here, impact was an important topic of conversation in interviews and documents as a means of demonstrating their *raison d'être*. Some interviewees were more open in recognising how their work and existence was mobilised by policy-makers and others in forwarding pre-set political projects, notably regarding a move towards the depoliticisation and outsourcing of policy formulation, and the substantiation and legitimation brought by KBOs to chosen policy options.

- We need to dig deeper into these emerging themes, with more interviews being conducted, not only with KBOs but with other players in the policy field too. We also plan to talk to other KBOs worldwide (e.g. in Mexico, New Zealand, Australia) to gain greater understanding of the narratives surrounding the emergence and work of KBOs.

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<sup>i</sup> Data are for 2017 expect if specified otherwise.

<sup>ii</sup> Sources: (Gough et al., 2018; Lalande et al., 2019; website data and interviews)

<sup>iii</sup> UK Department for International Development (DFID) grant from 2014-2016.

<sup>iv</sup> The Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) was set up in 2013 with Welsh government funding only. The new WCPP saw ESRC and Cardiff University become funders alongside the Welsh government.

<sup>v</sup> Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation Program, partly funded by DFID and ESRC.

<sup>vi</sup> Economic and Social Research Council, an academic funding body in the UK.