

***Opening up Canadian Federalism the European Way***  
**Coordination of Social Policy and the Involvement of Civil Society**  
**May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Montreal, Quebec**

**Workshop Report by Isaac Alexander Gray, Carleton University Student Rapporteur**

The purpose of this workshop was to engage with Canadian and European Union (EU) policy experts and create an opportunity for interactive learning and comparative analysis related to intergovernmental relations, policy learning and policy coordination in the EU and in Canada. In the opening address, Professor Amy Verdun from the University of Victoria drew attention to the comparison of the quasi-federal EU structure to the federal structure of Canada, pointing out that the two regions are logical comparators. She argued that the Canadian provinces tend to rely on path dependent solutions to guide policy making, and that there is potential for the provinces to learn from the information sharing practices of the EU Member States and specifically their Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC provides an opportunity for intergovernmental cooperation in EU, something that is noticeably underdeveloped in the Canadian context.

Bart Vanhercke, Director of the European Social Observatory, spoke about the character of the OMC and its potential applicability for Canada. He pointed out that the OMC is a malleable process that can be shaped to meet the needs of a policy area. As such, there is no concrete

and evaluation of policy, which should facilitate policy learning between the member states and States, EU institutions

and civil society, but notably the European Parliament plays a marginal role. Today there are

of the OMC tools (indicators, targets, peer review etc.). OMCs are created as they are needed and

instruments range from the ability to establish indicators, to stronger mandates such as the authority to monitor the progress of the Member States and to institutionalize coordination processes. The European Commission plays an important role in the OMC, which is to summarize the progress/regress of the Member States in relation to policy objectives, to point out problems, and to make policy recommendations to the individual Member States. The OMCs have influenced the character of domestic and European policy making by a) establishing a space for civil society to influence public policy b) increasing the statistical capacity, and c) allowing new policy issues to be put onto the policy agenda. It is also noteworthy that OMC tools have been replicated at the subnational level across the EU (e.g. regional peer reviews).

Rachel LaForest, Associate

reviewed the role that civil society

has played in policymaking in Canada and the EU. Europe has a long history of civil society involvement in policymaking and has developed institutional tools to include input from civil

society in policymaking at all levels of government. The OMC is a transparent example of how the civil society-state relationship is facilitated and maintained. In Canada, both the fedede Dintal (nge) (9C.i)-6c

Alain Noël, Political Science at the Université de Montréal presented research on how reporting in the OMC has influenced poverty reduction policy in the EU. Initially most were optimistic for the potential of the OMC, but over time that attitude has changed to pessimism. He noted that while the OMC has developed an opportunity for policy learning, it has not really influenced the concrete policies of the Member States