The Open Method of Co-ordination in the UK:
An Open but Invisible Method[1]

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Abstract

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the strand of social inclusion (social inclusion OMC) has been followed by provisions for participation of all relevant stakeholders in the policy-making process. This includes people who experience poverty. However, scholars have been sceptical about whether these provisions have been applied in practice. They argue that due to the limited participation of stakeholders the method lacks in visibility. Yet, there is a deficit in the literature regarding the participation of primary stakeholders (i.e. people in poverty) who are the people targeted and affected by policies drawn up in the context of the OMC. This article presents the findings of an analysis of a series of workshops. These workshops have been organised throughout the UK as a response to the OMC's provisions for participation of primary stakeholders in the social inclusion policy-making process. In doing so, the article focuses on the participation of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion in the *Get Heard* and *Bridging the Policy Gap* projects. It shows that for the first time in the UK there has been an important mobilisation of primary stakeholders with the purpose to feed their views into the EU and UK social inclusion policy-making process. However, those who participated were unaware of the fact that they did so within the context of the social inclusion OMC.

Key Words: Open Method of Coordination, Lisbon Strategy, policy instruments, social inclusion, participation, visibility

Introduction

Through the official declarations of the Lisbon Strategy, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) has been followed by provisions for the participation of different

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groups of EU, state, and non-state stakeholders in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of certain national policies (employment, social inclusion, pensions etc.). However, such participatory provisions have been proven largely inapplicable in the majority of the member states (Heidenreich and Bischoff, 2008; Büchs, 2008). As a result, the OMC has been characterised as a closed and technocratic process visible only to a limited number of participants (civil servants, politicians and members of NGOs) (PPMI, 2011; Kröger, 2009; Frazer and Marlier, 2008). In turn, the limited visibility of the method has been seen as an obstacle to widened participation (de la Porte, 2010). In other words, actors who would otherwise intend to participate in the OMC do not do so because they are unaware of the method.

The assessment of the (in)visibility of the method through the scope of participation appears to take the limited participation of groups of stakeholders in the OMC for granted. Thus, a research hypothesis has been brought forward by independent experts concerning the visibility of the method (PPMI, 2011). According to this hypothesis, the more stakeholders participate the more visible the method is expected to become (*ibid*: 14). This article intends to test this hypothesis by focusing on the application of the social inclusion OMC in the UK.

The UK offers a very promising area of research, because as a study of the social inclusion OMC has shown, the method has triggered a wide participation of non-state stakeholders, mainly primary stakeholders (i.e., people experiencing poverty) (Johnson, 2009). The issue of the participation of primary stakeholders has been neglected by the assessments of the visibility of the social inclusion OMC. Thus, this article intends to fill this gap in literature. It will do so by focusing on two projects: the *Get Heard* and the *Bridging the Policy Gap* (BTPG). These projects were undertaken between 2004 and 2007 in the context of the application of the social inclusion OMC in the UK, with the participation of primary stakeholders. Across the UK, a wide number of individuals were mobilised in order to inform policy-makers about their own experiences of living in social exclusion and about their own views on which social inclusion policies were working or not working (see UKCAP, 2004b). Both projects' main goals were the participation of a high number of primary stakeholders and to raise the awareness of the local, regional, national, and European policies for social inclusion (UKCAP, 2006; Poverty Alliance web-portal). The present article puts forward the following research question: Were the people who participated in the *Get Heard* and the BTPG aware of the social inclusion OMC in general and of the social inclusion OMC's role behind their participation in particular?

The article follows de la Porte's (2010) proposals for research on the visibility of the OMC. De la Porte (*ibid*: 10) proposes that due to the different groups of actors concerned with the social inclusion OMC, researchers should 'distinguish between institutional visibility (governmental actors), stakeholder visibility (social partners, NGOs and other actors), and academic visibility (among academics, especially when

they prepare policy analyses for governments)'. Thus, in line with these proposals this article seeks to contribute to the issue of stakeholder visibility by focusing on primary stakeholders. Additionally, as de la Porte has noted, studies on the visibility of the OMC should involve a triangulation of data. For this reason, this article has been primarily based on the documents produced in relation to the *Get Heard* and BTPG projects (reports, toolkits and communication documents), and on five interviews with key actors in the projects. Additionally, data has been taken from EU documents and academic studies.

The following section starts with the launch of the OMC, its application in the field of social inclusion and the method's participatory provisions. By discussing the issue of the (in)visibility of the OMC in social inclusion the following part shows that these provisions have been proven inapplicable in the majority of the member states. The second part of the present article shows that in the case of the UK, the OMC's participatory provisions were applied successfully, especially in the case of the participation of people in poverty. The presentation of the *Get Heard* project and the project provides evidence regarding the openness of the OMC to the participation of primary stakeholders. The third part presents eight reports from the *Get Heard* and the BTPG and empirical findings from five interviews conducted for this research with organisers and participants. According to these reports and interviews, the participants in the workshops appeared unaware of the OMC process. The third part ends with the reasons behind the invisibility of the social inclusion OMC in the UK. Lastly, the fourth part draws the conclusions from the present research.

1. The OMC, social inclusion, participation and visibility

The 2000 Lisbon European Council which launched the Lisbon strategy, focused on the coordination of the member states' actions towards the objective to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council, 2000a). In order to meet this objective, the intergovernmental Council introduced a new tool: the Open Method of Coordination. Contrary to the community method which imposes sanctions to the member in cases of non compliance with EU law, the OMC is a mode of governance based on non binding objectives and guidelines (Trubek and Trubek, 2005: 343). In fact, it is designed to promote coordination around commonly agreed objectives which are drafted at the EU level (Council of the EU) and translated into guidelines and targets according to the needs of the national, regional and local levels. The coordination is facilitated with the sharing of good practices, and the monitoring and evaluation of progress with peer reviews (Bruno *et al.*, 2006; Zeitlin, 2005; Jacobsson, 2004: 357).

However, one of the core reasons why the OMC has been named as a 'new' tool of governance is the wide range of actors it promises to involve (Borrás and Jacobsson,

2004: 189; de la Porte and Pochet, 2005: 353). Together with the traditional actors (i.e. the member states, EU Commission, Council of the EU, relevant committees and to a lesser extent, the European Parliament), the OMC offers opportunities for participation to 'the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society…' (European Council, 2000a: point 38). In the context of the Lisbon strategy, the Nice European Council in December 2000 assigned to the OMC the fight against poverty and social inclusion. Through the social inclusion OMC, the Nice European Council called for the mobilisation of all relevant stakeholders[2] with explicit reference to the mobilisation of the people who experience poverty and social exclusion. According to these provisions, one of the priorities must be the promotion 'according to national practice, [of] the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them' (European Council 2000b). In other words, as primary stakeholders in the domestic social inclusion policies, socially excluded people have been called to participate in a dialogue with the national and local governments in the stages of preparation, implementation and monitoring of these policies (CEC, 2005; European Council, 2000b).

However, despite the provisions for participation of stakeholders in general and people in poverty in particular, the application of the method has not managed to meet its normative objectives. Thus, according to Zeitlin (2005: 460), the OMC is a

> Narrow, opaque and technocratic process involving high domestic civil servants and EU officials in a closed policy network, rather than a broad, transparent process of public deliberation and decision-making, open to the participation of all those with a stake in the outcomes (see also Kröger, 2009).

Undoubtedly, the OMC in social inclusion has managed to mobilise wider numbers of stakeholders than any other field of public policy that the method has been applied in (Noel and Larocque, 2009; de la Porte and Pochet, 2005). However, even in this policy field the OMC is not beyond criticism concerning its openness and visibility. In the words of a particularly active network in the social inclusion OMC process, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), 'the main experience [of the application of the social inclusion OMC] continued to be lack of participation or consultation…' (EAPN, 2007: 6, emphasis in the original).

Therefore, the OMC processes are invisible to the citizens in the member states (Büchs, 2008). As a result, an independent assessment has shown that particularly the social inclusion OMC is almost hardly referred to in domestic media, whilst journalists who are specialised in social policy issues are left unaware of it (PPMI, 2011). Different academics have also highlighted the lack of 'media and public awareness' for the social inclusion OMC and they have added that no political debate

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[2] NGOs, social partners, service providers, people who experience poverty etc.

about the process has emerged in most member states (Frazer and Marlier, 2008: 2; Armstrong *et al*., 2008: 439). As a result, this OMC is known only by a limited number of participants; mainly civil servants, politicians and members of NGOs (e.g. EAPN) who participate in the process (PPMI, 2011; Frazer and Marlier, 2008). However, what is more striking is that the method also lacks 'institutional visibility' (e.g. Vanhercke, 2010: 117). According to this term, the method is invisible even by the actors who could potentially participate and people who are targeted by the OMC (de la Porte, 2010). More analytically, according to de la Porte (2010: 10), the issue of the visibility should be further distinguished between 'stakeholder visibility' (i.e. NGOs, social partners etc), 'institutional visibility' (government actors) and 'academic visibility' (academics who specialise in social policy issues) owing to the wide range of actors in the social inclusion OMC.

However, limited participation which is cause and simultaneously effect of the invisibility of the OMC does not seem to be the case in the UK. An independent study of the participation in the social inclusion OMC has shown that the UK government has been successful in promoting participation of people in poverty (Johnson, 2009). In fact, according to Johnson's study, the participation of primary stakeholders in the UK forms a good practice which in the context of the OMC should be shared with other EU member states. Therefore, the following part will focus on the openness of the social inclusion OMC in the UK.

2. The Openness of the method in the UK: the *Get Heard* and the *Bridging the Policy Gap* projects.

Armstrong (2005) has shown that due to the social inclusion OMC a kind of partnership has emerged between the central government and antipoverty associations (e.g. UK Coalition Against Poverty, EAPN-UK[3]) for consultation in the making of social inclusion policies. Accordingly, during interviews conducted for this research, representatives from key British associations in the field of social inclusion appeared generally satisfied not only with their own participation in the consultation of the domestic inclusion strategy but also with the participation of people in poverty and social exclusion. Thus, in the words of a member of the ATD-Fourth World's[4] national coordination team:

> The thing about the OMC and the UK is that you have to understand before there was this Open Method of Coordination, there was no speaking to the government about poverty in the UK. There was no dialogue. There was no participation. […] There was nothing here. And it's only because of this slight

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[3] The EAPN-UK is the representative of the EU level umbrella organisation EAPN in the UK.

[4] ATD Fourth World is a very active organisation in the social OMC process in the UK and a member of the Social Policy Task Force (SPTF).

opening, coming down from the EU, as part of this Open Method of Coordination where you have to include all stakeholders; that involves people in poverty (Interview in London, 16.02.2010a).

This cooperation in the field of social inclusion between the UK government and a group of social NGOs, as a response to the EU calls for partnership between various actors, started in 2001 with the creation of a Social Policy Task Force (SPTF). The SPTF has been an informal body made up of third sector and primary stakeholders for the consultation of the government in the drafting of the National Action Plans (NAPs) (Armstrong, 2010). The NAPs, central to the OMC process, were drafted in the context of the social inclusion OMC. They were the official government documents which described the member states' planned strategies to contribute to the 2000 EU Lisbon Council's commitment 'to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010' (European Council, 2000a). According to Armstrong (2010), the UK Coalition Against Poverty (UKCAP) and the EAPN-UK were the antipoverty networks which created the SPTF in cooperation with the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP). However, an even more explicit presentation has been given by the former vice president of the EAPN-UK during an interview for this article (Interview in London, 05.02.2010):

> We brought all stakeholders, every organisation which is interested in this work, working on antipoverty issues and want to have direct dialogue with the government. It [i.e. SPTF] has been a platform for dialogue with the government (…) we express our views and we tell them how their policies are affecting the people (Interview in London, 05.02.2010).

In the context of this cooperation, the DWP and the SPTF have been behind the two biggest participation projects to date within the field of social inclusion in the UK in terms of participation of socially excluded people: the *Get Heard* and the *Bridging the Policy Gap* projects. In the context of these projects workshops all over the UK were organised by local organisations (e.g. Merseyside Network for Europe, Migrants Resource Centre). Evidence of *Get Heard*'s importance and size is given by the following words:

> *Get Heard* is one of the largest projects undertaken in the UK to involve people with first-hand experience of poverty to give their views on government policies designed to combat poverty. […] The project ran a total of 146 workshops around the UK between December 2004 and December 2005: 81 in England; 45 in Scotland; 14 in Northern Ireland; and 6 in Wales (UKCAP, 2006: 4).

The overall objective of the project was the participation of people in poverty in a series of workshops organised across the UK in order for those people's views to have

a positive impact on the national and the EU social inclusion policies.[5] For this objective to be met, it was presupposed that the participants were aware of the OMC process; at least with what concerned the drafting of the NAPs (UKCAP, 2004a).

Get Heard was facilitated by the *Get Heard* Toolkit which was steering the workshops around three main questions about domestic social inclusion policies: 'What's working?' 'What's not working?' 'How should things be done differently?' (UKCAP, 2004b: section 2.1) The Toolkit, apart from highlighting these issues, was also referring explicitly to the NAPs as a process which would help to 'understand complexities and differences in poverty across the EU' according to the 'agreed objectives for tackling poverty across the EU' (section 1.2). Importantly, it was stating that the NAPs were a part of the OMC process while a link to the EU Commission's web-portal was provided for further information (section 3.1).

Two years later, the other major project in terms of participation, *Bridging the Policy Gap* (BTPG), adopted the 'European concept of a "Peer Review" as a basic structure that allowed for thoughtful and reflective discussion amongst participants' (Armstrong, 2010: 184; see also EAPN, 2009: 65). Such peer reviews were organised in three local authorities in Swansea, Newham, and Glasgow with 300 participants. For example, in Glasgow a two day event was held in October 2007 which brought together fifty participants. They were local, regional or central government officials, NGOs, academics and people who experience poverty (BTPG, 2008d). Similar groups of representatives participated in the events of Newham and Swansea. Among its core objectives, the project was aiming 'to raise awareness of European Union social inclusion processes (and their relevance to the UK) among a range of key stakeholders' (Poverty Alliance web-portal.)[6]

The EU was not only the recipient of people's views through their participation in the projects and its impact on the British NAP. The EU Commission also supported the *Get Heard* and BTPG projects by being their main funding source. At least in one case, an antipoverty network which organised workshops for the *Get Heard* project in Northern Ireland was calling the OMC as the 'NAPs process' (Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN), 2004: point 3). In such a way, the NIAPN was clarifying that the British government's efforts to tackle social exclusion were part of a European coordination process. The NIAPN appeared to acknowledge the role of the OMC and its link to the EU. For this reason its members were calling for participation

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[5] The following British NAP (2006-2008) was expected to reflect this impact (UKCAP, 2004a).

[6] According to the other three objectives the BTPG was also aiming to 'shift the culture and attitude within statutory agencies towards stakeholder dialogue on issues of policy formation and implementation; to address the "implementation gap" of social exclusion policies by improving communication between different levels of government, and within a wider range of stakeholders, including people with experience of poverty; and to contribute to the development and evaluation of participatory mechanisms for mainstreaming, monitoring and evaluation of practical anti-poverty strategies within the framework of the National Action Plan on social inclusion (NAP)' (Poverty Alliance web-portal).

of grassroots as a response to the EU's democratic deficit and as an effort to influence the increasingly involved in daily life European level decisions (NIAPN, 2004). It follows that without the OMC's calls for participation of grassroots individuals and without the EU's crucial role in bringing the fight against social exclusion onto the British political agenda (Armstrong, 2006), the *Get Heard* and BTPG projects would not have taken place. As the then vice-president of the EAPN in the UK admitted in an interview:

> I think that Europe definitely played a role. If it was not for the EU I don't think that we would have done it. So, this was, if you want, a hundred percent European initiative, European activity. Because it started in Europe, it took shape and it was promoted there (…) This is something that came from Europe and we took it up. So yes, Europe was important essentially (Interview in London, 05.02.2010).

In the same vein, during an interview with a representative from the Poverty Alliance (the antipoverty network which organised the BTPG), he praised the OMC for its 'added value' to the mobilisation of grassroots individuals (Interview in Glasgow, 02.12.2010):

> I think, over these 10 years [from the launching of the OMC], the OMC has definitely contributed for greater participation and for some NGOs an ongoing dialogue. It has stimulated higher levels of participation in different times, and I think that the main periods were around the preparation of the 2005-2006 NAP; when NGOs in the UK were involved in the *Get Heard* project. The OMC was responded by the NGOs to support the involvement of grassroots organisations through projects like *Get Heard*.

However, despite the openness of the social inclusion OMC in the UK, and the OMC's indispensable role in the launching of the projects; and in spite of the intentions of the projects to raise awareness of the EU social inclusion policy, the participants in the projects did not seem to acknowledge the existence of the OMC. Thus, the following part will show that during workshops of both projects, there was no reference to the method by the participants. In fact, participants appeared to be unaware of the European coordination process.

3. The invisibility of the OMC in the *Get Heard* and the *Bridging the Policy Gap*

One of the most detailed reports in the *Get Heard* project was published by the Merseyside Social Inclusion Observatory (MSIO). A 103 page long report showed the experiences, findings and recommendations of 'more than 320 participants with direct experience of social exclusion and poverty in a number of workshops across Merseyside' (MSIO, 2005: 7). However, throughout the report, the European

dimension was only mentioned four times and only by the author of the report, mainly because of Merseyside's classification as an Objective 1 region and the Structural Funds. According to the report and its detailed presentation of the workshops, no reference to the EU level was made to show that participants discussed or were aware of the OMC social inclusion process.

In Northern Ireland, the fourteen workshops' discussions were summarised in a full report which was published by the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN, 2006). According to the report, participants in the workshops expressed their views which included those of asylum seekers, groups of women, people with disabilities, and older people etc. Once again, the report, which was composed to reflect the issues raised in the workshops by the participants and would be used to feed the participants views into the 2006-2008 NAP, was not making any reference to the OMC.

Another example from the *Get Heard* project was the five workshops which took place at the Migrants Resource Centre (MRC) in London in 2005. These workshops discussed migrants, refugees and asylum seekers' experiences of poverty and social inclusion. Apart from the steering questions of the Toolkit (i.e. what is working, what is not working, what should be done differently), seventy-nine participants discussed four extra questions:

1. 'What do you see as the necessities to lead a dignified life?'
2. 'What is it like to be poor?'
3. 'How does it feel to be poor?'
4. 'What are the main reasons for migrants' and refugees' poverty?'
(MRC, 2006: 7)

Again, the report of the workshop did not include any evidence about references from the participants to the perspectives that the OMC offers in combating poverty, exclusion and discrimination. In fact, it did not include any evidence that the participants had referred to the EU, at all.

Eventually, the *Get Heard*'s overall report which was submitted to the DWP and was annexed in the 2006-2008 NAP followed the main structure of the individual cases (UKCAP, 2006). The analysis of this final report of the whole *Get Heard* project, which summarised the issues raised in all workshops around the UK, confirms the fact that the local/regional workshops did not include any discussions or awareness of the social inclusion OMC in general and the method's role behind the participants' mobilisation in particular.

During an interview with the former vice-president of the EAPN in the UK and director of the MRC, which undertook the five workshops mentioned earlier for the *Get Heard* project in 2005, she was asked why the final report that she drew did not refer to the OMC (Interview in London, 05.02.2010). As the director of the MRC has

put it:

> For me, it has to do with resources and time. I did the report, and this is a summary. I could have written more about the EU; actually I have written about the EAPN in the introduction. But this was a very short report and I wanted everyone to be able to read it from the person who's been in the streets to the policy-makers. Not like the government reports that are very complicated and only policy-makers can understand them. This is feedback for the UK and it is far from the EU. But maybe we should have said more (Interview in London, 05.02.2010).

It seems that the interviewee attributed the lack of references to the EU (and the OMC) to *her* drafting of the report confirming that these references were not made by the participants. Likewise, she argued that the project was solely focused on the UK and not on the EU.

Despite the intentions of the *Get Heard* project to raise awareness about the OMCs social inclusion strategy (see part 2), the workshops focused exclusively on their local and the national policies. In this way the link between the domestic policies and the EU policies did not become evident. As proof, an interviewee from the antipoverty NGO ATD-Fourth World (member of the EAPN-UK) stated: 'the fact is that it [the *Get Heard*] is part of the EU process but the dialogue is not about the EU, it's not about an EU process…' (Interview in London, 16.02.2010a)

As it has been said above, BTPG organised three peer review workshops in Newham, Glasgow and Swansea in 2007. In the beginning of the reports of these three peer reviews the coordinator of the project repeated that the objective of the BTPG was to raise awareness of the EU activities to tackle poverty and social exclusion (BTPG, 2008b: 2; 2008c: 2; 2008d: 3). Right after that, an explicit description of the NAP was given. Identically with the cases of the *Get Heard* reports, this description also mentioned that the whole NAP process was applied in the context of the OMC though which the EU was intending 'to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010' (BTPG, 2008d: 4). No other information about or reference to the OMC was given. On the contrary, many local and national level policies, agencies and projects were discussed. At the end of the events the reports presented the recommendations to the policy-makers. Apparently, these recommendations were targeting central and devolved government officials (e.g. BTPG, 2008d: 25). Throughout the documents it became clear that despite the objective of the BTPG to stress the role of the OMC, the participants discussed complex issues such as minimum income schemes and labour market participation without considering the EU level.

As in the case of the *Get Heard* overall report, the BTPG's overall report which summarised the issues discussed in the local peer reviews in Newham, Glasgow and Swansea did not provide any evidence to show that the participants were aware of the

social inclusion OMC (BTPG, 2008a). Additionally, the representative from the Poverty Alliance which, as said above, was the antipoverty association which undertook the organisation of the project, was asked whether participants were actually aware of the method (Interview in Glasgow, 02.12.2010). In his own words,

> Probably not! The *Get Heard* and the *Bridging the Policy Gap* were launched for NGOs and grassroots organisations as an opportunity to seek to have influence over the UK policy. I think the biggest motivation was 'here is an opportunity to influence domestic policy', rather than 'here is a good thing that Europe is doing for us'.

Therefore, like *Get Heard*, BTPG focused exclusively on the domestic social inclusion policies. The director of the EAPN-EU seemed to share the view that participants were not aware of the OMC because the projects were eventually concerning the local policies and not the policies of the EU (Telephone interview, 09.01.2012). In such way the links between the domestic policies and the EU policies were prevented from being visible by the participants. Additionally, once the projects were divided into local workshops and peer reviews the initial objectives were changed: awareness raising in relation to the EU social inclusion initiatives was turned into awareness of domestic policies. It seems that the information and knowledge about the OMC that the antipoverty networks (UKCAP and EAPN-UK) which undertook the projects had, was not distributed to the local organisations which undertook the workshops. As another interviewee from the ATD-Fourth World has stated (Interview in London, 16.02.2010b),

> Often the originators will diffuse it down to the organisations who will then ask the people working in these organisations at various locations, to run workshops on specific issues without necessarily giving them the background of where this is all coming from or where it goes back to. I think part of this is lack of information-sharing. Lack of clarity.

4. Conclusions

In this article the presentation of the mobilisation of people who live in poverty and social exclusion for the consultation of the British social inclusion strategy has confirmed the openness of the OMC in the UK at least for the period between 2004 and 2007 when the *Get Heard* and the *Bridging the Policy Gap* projects were launched. As detailed above, arguments in the existing literature hold that the invisibility of the method is explained by the limited participation of stakeholders. According to the same arguments limited participation results in limited visibility of the OMC. Thus, the hypothesis which was brought forward was that openness of the social inclusion OMC to participation of primary stakeholders (i.e., people who experience poverty) is expected to make the method visible to them. However, empirical evidence taken from reports of *Get Heard* and BTPG, and from interviews

with key participants in the projects showed that the primary stakeholders who participated in the projects' workshops were unaware of the social inclusion OMC. Therefore, the OMC remained invisible despite the openness of the method in its application in the UK. *Get Heard* and BTPG have failed to meet one of their core objectives, namely the raising of awareness of EU processes in the social inclusion field.

The main reason behind the invisibility of the method during *Get Heard* and the BTPG appears to be the structure of the projects. As interviews and reports' analysis showed, in spite of both projects' statements on the need to raise awareness of the EU level, the projects were actually structured around questions about the local, regional and national level. This was a multi-level approach of poverty and social exclusion on the one hand, but on the other it excluded an analysis of the EU level on behalf of the participants. As representatives from involved organisations argued during interviews, participants regarded the projects as exclusively internal. This, again, prevented the role of the EU to be seen and discussed by them. However, an extra reason behind the participants' unawareness of the OMC was that the information and knowledge of the organisations which undertook the projects was not shared to the local organisations which organised the workshops. As a result, the local organisations did not provide the participants with information about the OMC as an EU initiative towards social inclusion.

With the launch of *Get Heard* and BTPG, a participatory process started in the UK similar to processes in other EU member states (e.g. Belgium and France) with long traditions of involvement of primary stakeholders in the making of policies for social inclusion. The case of the UK can serve as an indication of the OMC's potential to involve wide numbers of primary stakeholders especially in the social inclusion policy-making process. However, this case illustrates that wide participation of primary stakeholders is not a sufficient condition for overcoming the problem of the invisibility of the OMC. National antipoverty associations involved in the organisation of projects which mobilise primary stakeholders must approach the OMC through its European context and to disseminate knowledge and information to participating primary stakeholders. In other words, antipoverty associations must consider the reason why the method was designed in the first place: as a process intending to stimulate common action to solve common *European* problems rather than simply as a tool coming from the EU to help solve national problems. The OMC's toolkit seems to be able to encourage this approach. Hence, future EU level peer reviews should promote the European context of the OMC and focus on the dissemination of knowledge and information to all participants.

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Interviewees

Member of the ATD-Fourth World's national coordination team; interview in London, 16.02.2010a.

Director of the Poverty Alliance; interview in Glasgow, 12.02.2010.

Director of the Migrant Resource Centre; interview in London, 05.02.2010.

Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network, Brussels; telephone interview, 09.01.2012.

Policy and Participation Officer at ATD-Fourth World; interview in London, 16.02.2010b.