Gender expertise in the EU: the case of the European Women’s Lobby

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Draft – all comments are welcome

Abstract
Contrary to some commentators’ suggestions, but in accordance with existing studies of the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), this paper argues that EWL activities are based on expertise in several respects. The more interesting question is what this means more precisely. If the EWL as the main European level women’s interest group provides European institutions with “expertise” and “gender expertise”, what more specifically is it that it provides? The paper aims at opening up the black box of one of interest groups’ proposed key success factors, exploring the different meanings and categories of expertise revealed by EWL activities. The analysis is based on a systematic reading of key EWL documents, and linked to existing EWL and interest group research, theoretical discussions of the expertise concept, as well as to ongoing debates on the “expertification” of gender equality policy making and feminist civil society, and implications for democratic legitimacy.

Introduction

The European Union’s (EU) multi-level governance structure provides multiple access points for diverse organized interests to shape its policy agenda. The EU has been described as a “massive transfer platform” of ideas and policies (Radaelli 2000: 26), where interest groups play a pivotal role as political agents of support, bellwethers of
legislative changes, suppliers of expert resources, and potential carriers of input legitimacy (Greenwood 2007).

If we break up the policy cycle into opportunities where interest groups can engage in the EU policy making process, roughly five stages can be identified: The agenda-setting phase where issues are identified and put on the table; the consultation period, where the European Commission invites responses on communications, green and white papers; the legislative phase in which the European Parliament and the Council deliberate in first and second readings, formulate common positions and draft the final documents; the post-legislative and pre-implementation phase where guidelines and implementation rules are decided; and a final stage where implementation and monitoring take place (Klüver 2013).

The focus of this paper is on the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), a European-wide umbrella organization of national women’s organisations established in 1990 with the support of the Commission. In 2015 the EWL is comprised of thirty-one national coordinations, representing each of the EU member states, plus three of the official candidate countries, representing more than 2 000 direct member organizations.¹ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the EWL are generally regarded to be most effective in the first, second and fifth stages of the EU policy cycle (Long 2009), but interact also successfully with the Parliament (Kluger Rasmussen 2014).

A factor often brought forward to explain interest groups’ effectiveness and success is their ability to provide policy- and decision makers with relevant expertise. Pertinent as this observation may be also with regard to the EWL, it tends to beg the question of what expertise means. This paper aims at opening up this black box of one of interest groups’ proposed key success factors, exploring and analysing different meanings of interest group expertise. If the EWL as the main European level women’s interest group provides the European institutions with “expertise” and “gender expertise”, what more specifically is it that it provides?

¹ EWL «Our membership» http://www.womenlobby.org/about-us/our-membership/?lang=en, accessed 15.05.2015
This question arguably addresses a blind spot in existing research literature. On the one hand, it is hard to make the EWL and the gender equality policy field fit with some of the general characterizations and theories of European level interest and lobby groups and how they work. Broscheid and Coen distinguish between regulative policies typically in overtly technical domains, for example sophisticated products regulations (pharmaceuticals, financial services etc.), and distributive and presumably more politicized policy fields, for example welfare or health policies, or policies on gender equality and anti-discrimination (Broscheid 2007). They go on arguing that the interest groups of the regulative fields typically constitute a concentrated set of heavily expertise based lobby organizations, offering high and complex levels of technical and scientific expertise, whereas the interest groups of the distributive policy fields are more varied, representing a broader set of often conflicting societal interests, offering not so much expertise as positions and national preferences that the Commission and other EU level institutions need to take into account to make feasible policies. However, the EWL does not seem to follow this pattern. It has currently a highly dominant position among interest groups in the EU gender equality field, and existing research on the EWL highlights how this unique position is intimately related to the EWL’s ability to deliver relevant expertise, both downwards, to the national and member organizations, and upwards, to EU policy and decision makers.

On the other hand, existing EWL studies are rather implicit and sweeping in their approach to what kind of expertise the EWL is providing. Is it expertise comparable to the highly technical, scientific expertise that is often key in the regulative policy fields, or is “expertise” referring to something else and more varied in this policy context?

Mapping the multiple meanings of EWL “expertise” and “gender expertise” seems to be a sound endeavour for at least three reasons. First, descriptive clarification would be interesting in itself. Contemporary political processes are often characterized as increasingly expertise-driven, “evidence-based policy making” is a buzz, and “knowledge”, “competence” and “expertise” are cherished and thought to be crucial for the enlightenment of politics and policies problem-solving merits, but what such terms refer to more concretely vary no doubt immensely. Secondly, such clarification can facilitate deeper causal understanding: If there are causally significant correlations
between “expertise” and interest groups’ success and effectiveness, getting a more precise grip on what expertise refers to in different cases is a necessary step to identify and explore how this could be. Thirdly, also valid normative assessments would seem to hinge on a more fine-grained understanding of the expertise notion. Whether contemporary “expertification” of policy-making is “good” or “bad”, is profoundly contested; where some see progress, higher decision quality and better policy outcomes as a result of expert involvement, others see technocracy, paternalism and decreased democratic legitimacy. Variants of this controversy also haunt feminist scholarship and analyses of gender equality policy-making. More detailed knowledge of what the expertise that infects – or alternatively enlighten – political processes amount to could contribute to less sweeping and more accurate discussions of normative implications. Accordingly, a proper evaluation of EWL expertification must take into account different notions of democratic legitimacy, but also – as we will argue – the different senses and meanings of expert knowledge.

We start out, in the next section, with an introduction of existing research on the EWL, focusing on what this research tells us about the role of expertise in EWL activities. In the section that follows we seek to clarify important characteristics of our concept of and approach to expertise, relying on some more theoretical exchanges and contributions. In the third part of the paper we present our data, EWL documents, and some methodological considerations. The fourth section presents and elaborates on the meanings and categories of expertise based on this document analysis. Finally, we sum up our findings and connect them to the discussion on the legitimate role of expertise in politics and implications for democratic legitimacy.

**Expertise in the EWL: review of existing studies**

The establishment of the EWL is closely linked to a firmer awareness throughout the 1980s and 1990s of the need to defend women’s interests at the European level. With growing EU competencies and increased legislation in areas that affected women’s daily lives, more synchronized and high impact participation in the EU level policy-making process became paramount. The EWL had thus resonance from below, among national women’s groups and organizations. However, the effective initiative came from above: European institutions, not least the Commission, were in need of organized interests to consult on gender equality issues, to increase legitimacy and improve on policies, and
engaged actively in the making of the EWL as a European wide umbrella organization (Strid 2009).

The EWL works for the advancement of equality between women and men, as well as the mainstreaming and monitoring of gender equality in all areas of EU policy (Eising 2013). From the very beginning the EWL perceived its role as being a link between women’s organizations and European institutions, facilitating dialogue and exchange between citizens and EU policy and decision makers. Its central focus were on lobbying at EU level to ensure gender perspectives to be taken into account in legislative processes, while at the same time providing information to and EU level participation of national women’s organisations (Mazey 2002).

In an early contribution Cathrine Hoskyn describes the rationale behind the organization’s formation, its structure and early activities (Hoskyns 1991). The twin challenge for the EWL was identified by Hoskyn as one of delivering both “expertise” and “participation” adequately and at the same time: Would the EWL, she asked, succeed in growing into an organization sufficiently competent and well-resourced to have a real impact, while also being broadly based, democratic and accountable to justify its claims to represent women across the EU?

Later studies of the EWL have similarly highlighted the organization as an expertise provider, as well as the expertise/participation dilemma at the existential core of the organization (Helfferich and Kolb 2001, Michalowitz 2004, Fuhrmann 2005, Strid 2009): Expertise is central for the EWL’s impact and success, but also the source of potential legitimacy deficits as far as expertification happens at the cost of democratic representation. What expertise means and refers to in this connection is however not always addressed very explicitly. The competence most frequently mentioned and elaborated on is the ability to “play the Brussels game”, a kind of Brussels lobbying expertise, referring to the EWL’s ability to manoeuvre competently in the relevant dialogues, be it in formal settings such as the network of EU advisory and consultative committees and expert groups, or in more informal exchanges with EU political institutions and other organizational stakeholders (Greenwood 2007). This specific Brussels knowledge, being updated on EU policy and organizational and legislative initiatives and changes, the ability to understand decision making processes and how to
access in Brussels, and to act adequately on this basis, has been built up over time, and is strengthened by personal relationships between EWL representatives and officials and the Commission and Parliament staff (Michalowitz 2004, Strid 2009). Brussels expertise is on the one hand crucial for EWL vis-à-vis the national and member organizations. Member support and EWL legitimacy depend decisively on the organization's ability to keep local and national groups informed about what goes on in Brussels and of its know-how of how to get access and results on its members' behalf in European level settings. On the other hand, the EWL's privileged position among EU policy and decision makers is centrally owed to the latters' satisfaction with dealing with a European-wide organization, representing Europe's women, that at the same time is updated on what is going on and knows how to move in the game. The EWL has a general reputation for being knowledgeable and "approachable" within the EU institutions (Strid 2009). In a changing policy-making context influenced by the ongoing Eurocrisis, austerity and an increased awareness of the fiscal costs of gender equality measures, commentator point in particular at the increased demand on the EWL to move smoothly and competently in relation to tighter budgets and in challenging budgetary processes (Cullen 2014).

In addition to EWL's Brussels lobbying skills, existing studies suggest two kinds of additional expertise. First, and in accordance with the anticipation by Brosheid and Coen (2007) as for distributive policy fields interest groups, the EWL delivers information to EU staff and politicians about positions and preferences among central national stakeholders: If EU parliamentarians or officials want to know what women's position somewhere in Europe on an issue is, they phone someone at the EWL secretariat (Strid 2009). Secondly, it is clear from the EWL studies that have been made, that the organization also offers what is seen as reliable knowledge about women's situation and gender equality policies in Europe, and so an expertise that is more equal to the technical and scientific expertise that commentators typically expect from the regulative policy fields interest groups.

However, the more exact content and shape of this expertise is not all clear. Is what the EWL provides comparable to the expertise typically provided by civil society actors addressing say pharmaceutical products or environmental standard setting, or do terms...
such as "technical expertise" and "scientific expertise" have somewhat or even substantially different meanings in the gender equality policy context?

And is this it? Does EWL gender expertise amount to scientific advice on gender issues and policies, whatever this includes more precisely, plus information on national stakeholder positions, plus Brussels know-how? As we will see, our data suggests a more varied set of expertise categories.

**The expertise concept**

But before we come to this, the expertise concept needs some exploration. In an influential exposition, philosopher Alvin Goldman (2011: 15) defines experts as those within a domain that “possess a substantial body of truths” and that “have more beliefs (or high degrees of belief) in true propositions and/or fewer beliefs in false propositions within that domain than most people do (or better: than the vast majority of people do)”. Experts thus know a lot about something and more than most others – expertise for Goldman is both a threshold concept and a comparative concept – and they have in addition internalised their knowledge in ways that makes it possible for them to apply it on new intellectual and practical problems in their field: The expert also has “a capacity to deploy or exploit this fund of information to form beliefs in true answers to new questions that may be posed in the domain” (Goldman 2011: 115).

Even if Goldman perhaps strikes the core normative meaning of “expertise”, the discussions of this paper will take at its point of departure a wider and looser definition of the term, or we will stand in danger of excluding important aspects of EWL expertise at the outset, due to definitional strictness. First, Goldman’s definition raises the question of whether those who present themselves as experts are “real” experts, or only try to give the impression, more or less consciously, that they possess a substantial body of “truths” and more “truths” than others. The analysis presented here will take a more descriptive and pragmatic approach, and look for expertise in the sense of reasonable claims to exclusive knowledge about something. The exclusiveness requirement implies that the knowledge in question goes beyond common knowledge. The reasonableness requirement implies that experts seek to substantiate and justify their knowledge claims. We have not simply looked for what the EWL “say” they know or have expertise on, but
claims to knowledge backed up by arguments and evidence. Whether the propositions made and the conclusion drawn are in the end “true” or not, is a different question.

The knowledge claims in question could furthermore be more or less explicit and more or less directly presented as expertise. We investigate thus not only what the EWL literally refer to as their “expertise” and “gender expertise”, but the types of reasonable, non-trivial knowledge claims that are made, irrespective of whether these claims are explicitly connected to a certain “expertise”, a “competence” etc. or not.

Moreover, “truth” is one of the regulating ideas of science, and so Goldman’s definition of experts as those that possess “truths”, may have the connotations that experts are typically scientists and expert knowledge typically scientific knowledge. To be sure, scientific knowledge is a major category of expert knowledge. However, for one thing, scientific approaches and methods vary between disciplines and fields, making “scientific experts” into a varied set. There may also sources of expertise than scientific training. One such source is practical experience: Experts can have come to know a lot about something by means of practical experience and engagement over time. Experienced regulators and public officials can possess this kind of practical expertise; the same go for civil society actors and interest groups representatives (Gorntizka & Sverdrup 2008, Harcourt & Radaelli 1999). Scientific expertise is moreover typically associated with theoretical knowledge (scientists have knowledge of scientific theories etc.), but not all expertise is conceptualized and codified; experts’ knowledge can take the shape of embodied skills and competence on how to go about in some domain, a not necessarily explicated and explicable know-how (Collins & Evans 2007), as we have already suggested with our elaboration of the EWL’s Brussels knowledge.

Finally, theorists of expertise have introduced the term “moral expertise”, meaning expertise on what is “right”, “just”, “good”, “wise” etc., in addition to what may be of theoretical and practical expertise on state of affairs and what works. Peter Singer (1972: 117) for example concludes that “moral expertise would seem to be possible” – in a certain sense: “Someone familiar with moral concepts and with moral arguments, who has ample time to gather information and think about it, may reasonably be expected to reach a soundly based conclusion more often than someone who is unfamiliar with
moral concepts and moral arguments and has little time”. John Broome (2012: 9) argues along similar lines that there can be moral experts “of a sort”: those who “are practiced in accurate reasoning” on moral questions, who “know the range of alternative moral ideas that are available”, who “know how to subject those ideas to rational testing”, who can “refute bad arguments” in this domain, and that have “a trained sensitivity to moral, issues”.

Once more we will however ease the criteria for identifying something as expertise. Initially, were we to apply Goldman’s definition in the moral domain, moral experts would be those possessing more moral “truths”, more truths about what is just and good, etc. than most. With the introduction of Singer’s and Broome’s elaborations we have however already set aside any such strict truth requirement; they talk about moral experts as those with particular skills and competences in arguing and reasoning on moral questions, and with more insight than most in relevant moral positions and theories. Even if this is not spelled out by Singer and Broome, this would also seem to include skills in apt and relevant moral framing and conceptualization of the issue, including the capacity to make convincing moral narratives (Rorty 1998). Finally, our exclusiveness and reasonableness clauses will apply also in our search for moral expertise. We look for competences and skills in the handling of justice issues, questions of values etc. that go beyond common knowledge, and claims to such competences and skills that seems reasonable, i.e. that are backed up by viable arguments, reasonably adequate framings etc.

As we will try to show, parts of the expertise the EWL is possessing seems to be exactly of this kind, i.e. moral expertise in different shapes. Before we dig more into this and other categories and sub-categories of EWL expertise, we need however to present our data and method more closely.

Data and method

The EWL website gives access to an extensive data base of publicly available documents, position papers and reports, as well as detailed information as to who works in the secretariat and their professional background. The documents we have analysed originate from 1998 to the time of writing of this article (summer 2015). Furthermore,
we ran a search of the EWL website with relevant search terms to find press releases and articles of possible interest. A rough categorization of the documentary material looks as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of publication</th>
<th>Number of documents</th>
<th>Date range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1999-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position papers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1998-2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>2002-2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Documents for data analysis

We have systematically worked ourselves through the different types of documents in search for passages and paragraphs containing the kind of knowledge claims we in the foregoing section made the center of our expertise definition. A rough first coding was made on the basis of the expertise categories of existing EWL research and established distinctions in theoretical literature (see the previous sections). In a second round with the documents we double-checked our first round coding and focused on identifying the more specific characteristics of the different types of EWL expertise and some significant sub-categories.

Our exclusiveness and reasonableness clauses are less than clear-cut and leave a space for interpretation. This complicated coding, and may have contributed to reducing the likelihood of replication. Such clauses are however hard to do without. Were we to define expertise simply as claims to knowledge, disregarding in effect both the comparative and the threshold dimension of the expertise concept, we believe we would misidentify the actual character of the expertification controversy: It is a controversy about how to normatively assess the extra political power of actors that are arguably particularly knowledgeable (what are implications for democracy, on legitimacy etc.), and not a general discussion of whether it is somehow “good” or “bad” that those who claim to have knowledge are empowered by making such claims, irrespective of the reasonability of their claims. No one would think of defending expertification of political processes based on unfounded claims to expertise.
Finally, to map EWL expertise on the basis of EWL document reading seems worthwhile, but it obviously does not give the full picture; the documents, and so the data of our investigations, must be understood as the condensed expression and textual outcomes of particular organizational processes and interactions. Initially, the positions expressed in the documents are meant to reflect the will of EWL’s General Assembly, around hundred delegates from national and European member organisations meeting annually. However, the Policy Committee, elected at the assembly every second year, meets three times a year to take the more detailed decisions concerning actions to be conducted and political priorities the EWL plans to pursue. The committee is also consulted for the adoption of position papers and regarding the day-to-day activities of the EWL. In addition there is the Steering Group, meeting regularly to decide on urgent matters and representing and lobbying actively on behalf of the EWL, and the seven members Executive Committee, meeting even more frequently, consisting of the EWL president, two vice-presidents, a treasurer and three members. Last but not least, the organization’s activities are coordinated by the Secretariat based in Brussels (the Secretary General, the Director of the Observatory on Violence against Women (VAW), four Policy Officers, three administrative staff and two policy assistants2), linking with decision makers on a day to day basis, preparing documents and position statements, providing information and briefing to members, organizing statutory meetings, conducting projects and producing publications. In the end it is thus very often someone in the Secretariat who would have done the actual writing of EWL documents (Strid 2009). It goes without saying that EWL representatives and members mobilize expertise on a myriad of occasions and in ways that may not be fully captured in a corpus of mainly Secretariat produced texts.

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The meanings and categories of gender expertise: analysing EWL documents

As we have seen, existing research on the EWL highlights how the organization primarily delivers three types of expertise: information on national stakeholder positions, scientific advice on gender issues, and Brussels know-how. A natural first step would be to investigate how these expertise categories are relied on in EWL documents and what they include more specifically.

With regard to the first type, it would make sense to include it in a broader category of what we could call *representative expertise* where the EWL claims to possess expert knowledge on European citizens’, in particular female European citizens’, interests, priorities and preferences. This category includes also information about national stakeholder’s and member organizations’ positions and preferences, as suggested by existing EWL studies. A characteristic of these knowledge claims is that they are quiet general. Typically, variation in views and approaches nationally and among members are more suggested and hinted at than listed and spelled out. *From Beijing to Brussels. An Unfinished Journey. European Women’s Lobby Beijing +15 Report on the Activities of the European Union* (2010: 5) can illustrate with the following introductory statement: “The situation of women in the European Union is extremely diverse; across the continent, women’s experiences and needs, as well as the rights they enjoy, are far from homogenous”. However, throughout the report the variation in European women’s “situation”, “experiences” and “needs”, are more a backdrop, than an explicit topic of elaboration and discussion.

On other occasions the fact of multiple positions and diversity among women is even less highlighted. The contention is rather that the EWL possesses representative expertise – know what “European women” want and need – due to its organizational procedures, structure and activities. Typically, the reader is reminded of the EWL’s status as an umbrella organization of European women’s organizations and other relevant NGOs, and more immediate actions that have been taken to ensure representativeness and democratic grounding (for example the organization of a workshop, conferences or forum bringing interested stakeholders together), before one goes on to introduce claims and strategies and evaluate and propose legislation and policies.
With regard to what we broadly speaking could refer to as “technical” and/or “scientific” expertise, it seems to be significantly present in our documentary material. The question is what more precisely it includes. First, there may in the end be something left of the proposed distinction between distributive and regulative policy fields NGOs; Brocheid and Coen (2007) claimed, as we saw, that only the latter specialize in reviewing and mobilizing highly technical and scientific knowledge of causal effects (of pharmaceutical products, environmental damage etc.). Causally oriented social science research, for example on policy effects, is referred to in the EWL documents – as in this passage on maternity leave: “A Canadian study shows that high maternity leave payments in the 20 weeks after birth are a strong incentive for women to return to their previous jobs after maternity leave” (7 Common myths about the cost of maternity leave, 2010: 2). More systematic strategies of basing policy assessments and advice on “evidence” of causal effects are however hard to trace; typically the myth-breaking above includes no effect studies of different maternity leave arrangements; the idea is not, seemingly, to “evidence-base” policy-making in a stricter sense (Nutley 2007). What is provided rather, are single cases (“a Canadian study”), included in broader narratives and arguments on current problems and what to be done about them.

Generally, passages of the following kind seem to be far more common than reference to cause-effect knowledge:

“A 2008 Eurobarometer shows that discrimination based on a combination of a number of factors has been experienced by a relatively high proportion of EU citizens (16%)” (European Youth Forum Report: Racism and its impact on young people 2008: 28).

“When including all forms of violence against women, 45% of all women in Europe have been subjected to and suffer from men’s violence.” (Women’s NGOs call on the Swedish Presidency to initiate a European strategy on all form of violence against women 2009: 1).

“In 2007 the percentage of women working part-time in the EU was 31.2%, four times higher than for men.” (Women, the Financial and Economic crisis - the urgency of a gender perspective 2009: 2).
“More than 100 million women and men in Europe live below the poverty line, and inequalities based on sex, race, age, sexual orientation and disability are still widespread in Europe and world-wide.” (European Womens Lobby, WIDE and CONCORD statement towards a gender responsive, accountable and participatory post-2013 EU multi-annual financial framework and EU financing instruments 2011: 2).

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Basically, this is descriptive quantitative information, often of a quite striking and illustrative kind, framed to contribute to effective mobilization and attention with the relevant audiences. The numbers are however presented as they are, as statistical raw data more or less; it is not included in more advanced statistical analysis emphasizing statistical significance levels, causal implications etc., as a scientific data treatment would require.

We see a similar pattern in the policy and legislation overviews, for example in the report "Women’s economic independence and care responsibilities" (Women’s Watch 2012-2013:9): "With regards to maternity leave, our Report reveals that provisions vary in duration, remuneration and from full benefit, full salary regimes to less generous and more restrictive regimes. The length of maternity leave varies from 6 weeks in the United Kingdom to 36 weeks in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and from 100% remuneration (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Croatia) to a very low 55% in Slovakia.” Or in Statement concerning EU legislation for the equal representation of women and men on corporate boards (2011: 1) where you find a passage like the following: “Some countries have taken action for more equal representation in boards of state-owned companies in the last ten years. More recently, a number of European countries have started to adopt binding measures/quotas (with a more or less binding system) for other types of companies, in order to ensure swift progress, notably in Norway, Iceland, Spain, France, Belgium, Austria, Italy and the Netherlands.” 7 Common myths about the cost of maternity leave (2010: 1) highlights how: “Only one in three European countries – the UK, Germany and Malta – is maternity leave financed directly through employers rather than tax or social welfare systems, and two of these countries
Germany and the UK have a recuperation scheme, which applies to both SMEs and large corporations.” European Women's Voice (2013:2) informs that: “There is no binding provision for the equal representation of women and men in the EU and no uniform system to ensure parity for the European parliament, where national electoral laws apply. At the national level, five EU member states have legal quotas and in about 16 countries some political parties have voluntary quotas.”

What is revealed in such passages are intimate descriptive knowledge and overview of national and EU policies, practices and legislation, often forming the basis of “best practice” assessments and recommendations. Once more however, the idea is not, seemingly, to make recommendations “scientific”; to apply more advanced statistical techniques on the policy mappings, to measure causal effects of policies etc.: The focus is on translating situations and descriptions into numbers, not to live up to some stricter academic standard of making policy advice and best practice analyses “knowledge-based” or “evidence-based”. Accordingly, in the EU 2020 Strategy, when the EWL recommends the “development of data and method of analysis, which allows to monitor the impacts of changes and taxes and benefits” (European Women’s Voice 2015:30), it is doubtful that this is a call for more academic research on causal “impacts”. What one seems to have in mind, rather, or at least primarily, are monitoring systems that trace descriptively developments in gendered distributions of income, education levels and other resources under varied and shifting tax and benefit regimes.

Furthermore, and related to this, when providing evidence and arguments on state of affairs and what works the EWL documents do sometimes refer to academic studies and literature, but more significant are reports, websites etc. made by other knowledge producing organizations, UNDP or UNICEF reports, EU documents, NGO reports, and magazine articles, or information from national governments (for example is the Unveiling the hidden data on domestic violence in the EU (1999: 3) report giving an overview of information and data on domestic violence in 15 member states, with ministries providing the data).

Moreover, when academic literature is referred to, it is quantified knowledge, numbers and “hard facts”, but embedded in broader qualitative and ideological framings. Or to be
more precise, what you find, very often, are passages combining references to
descriptive statistics on social situations and policies combined with insights from
feminist conceptual and qualitative analysis, as in the Manifesto of the EWL Presented at
the EWL annual conference (2012: 4): “Redefine outdated concepts in relation to
household composition and family models and provide gender disaggregated data and
measures to address the feminisation of poverty throughout the life cycle.” Or in 18
Myths on Prostitution 2014:2: “Extensive research indicates that poverty, family loss,
homelessness, drug addiction and a history of physical and sexual abuse combine to
make young women vulnerable to entering prostitution. [...] Let us change the
perspective: pimping could indeed be considered the oldest profession in the world. In
any case, just because something has existed for a long time does not mean that it should
or cannot be changed.”

In addition, information on law, regulation and legal procedure are emphasized,
revealed in passages of the following kind:

“From a legal point of view, a number of arguments stated in our contribution explain
why the exception to the principal of equality provided for in Article 5(2) should be
abandoned in the future.” (Joint answer to the questionnaire prepared by Age- the
European Older Peoples Platform- Test A-Chats and the European Women’s Lobby 2009:
2).

“EWL highlights the fact that Article 2, 3 and 13 of the Treaty read in combination, define
equality of women and men as an objective of the community and the member states.”
(Shadow Directive on achieving equality between women and men outside the field of
occupation and employment 2002: 1).

“While the EWL warmly welcomes the current Directive as a step along the path to
gender party, there are plenty of weaknesses within the Directive which give cause to
concern-such as the lack of uniform, tough sanctions across the EU, the exemption of
small and medium companies, the lack of binding measures for executive directorships
and the lack of measures to tackle the persisting overrepresentation of men in CEO
positions.” (EWL Report Cracks in the glass ceiling or just a trick of the light? 2015:2)
These references to and mobilization of legal knowledge are moreover intimately connected to the EWL’s Brussels know-how, highlighted strongly also by existing EWL studies. The “playing the game in Brussels” expertise is prevalent throughout the documents, both as something the EWL explicitly notify as their “expertise”, but also implicit in passages such as the following:

“Promoting equality between women and men must be made one of the horizontal priorities of the post 2013 Cohesion Policy common strategic framework, to ensure that in addition to the European Social Fund (ESF), also the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Fisheries Fund, and the European Agriculture Fund, will finance activities that promote women’s economic independence and improve reconciliation of work and family life.” (European Womens Lobby, WIDE and CONCORD statement towards a gender responsive, accountable and participatory post-2013 EU multi-annual financial framework and EU financing instruments 2011: 4).

The recent economic and institutional crisis in the EU seems also to have changed the policy-making context, with implications also for the EWL. Hence, in addition to legal knowledge, managing Brussels competently, seem to imply more and more having technical knowledge of budgets and economic models. This can be seen, for example, in the report ‘European Women’s Voices 2015’, which employs the expertise of member organisations and academics with expertise in economic/technical fields such as budgeting and in developing a feminist economic model for the EU.

Finally, with all these categories and sub-categories of EWL are included, a significant category is missing, namely what could be thought of as a moral expertise, a certain developed skill in raising women’s issues in the “right” way, with the “right” salience, clarifying and framing the moral and political issues involved adequately, and providing effective and viable moral arguments. Mobilizing this kind of authority and expertise stands out as key for the narratives and the argumentative moves made in the EWL documents, whether the expertise occurs as declarations and general statements in introductory or concluding chapters, or is included as part of more complex arguments relying on different categories of expertise.
The significance of this expertise category is highlighted by its internal variation, and the prevalence of different kinds of moral argument and evidence. A key framing is an Enlightenment narrative stressing the moral value of universal individual rights, equal treatment and equal opportunities, more or less connected to the legalistic discourse described above and EU legal terminology. The following passages, both from the *Joint answer to the questionnaire prepared by Age- the European Older Peoples Platform- Test A-Chats and the European Women’s Lobby* (2009: 2), my exemplify: “Individuals belonging to a group do not have the power to change “group” or to demonstrate that the characteristics observed in connection to their “group” are not relevant to them. Therefore differences in treatment between individuals on the basis of general characteristics which are in fact merely averages for groups of people cannot be justified.” And: “The fundamental right to equal treatment irrespective of sex is an individual right enjoyed by men and women as individuals and not as members of a given group.”

Secondly, there is a set of sociological and radical-feminist framings, emphasizing patriarchal and other structural relationships, and women’s common interests, for example: “Prostitution and trafficking are directly linked to the lack of economic independence of women and the structural power relationships between men and women.” (*Statement for the 47th session of the Commission on the Status of Women from the European Women’s Lobby on the theme of violence against women* 2003: 1). And: “For the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), the way that the media consistently links international sporting events with prostitution leaves no choice but to believe that sports are considered to be all about men and catering to their needs, including supplying women for sex. Do we really believe nowadays that men cannot survive a few weeks from home without sex?” (*Sport and Prostitution; Enough is Enough!* 2010: 1).

Finally, ways to link gender equality, women’s rights and feminism to the general good and dominant societal goals are explored. The EWL seems to want to offer moral vocabularies and justifications for liberals, feminists etc., but also for wider and more conservative audiences. Of particular significance are the ongoing attempts throughout the documents to connect women’s empowerment to arguments of economic productivity and viability, for example:
“We wish to raise awareness of the need to ensure that whatever reforms are introduced, they will take on board the particular needs of the more vulnerable and will consider social policies as a long term investment rather than a cost to the public purse” (Intergenerational Solidarity the Way Forward 2008: 5).

“Women have contributed more to global economic growth than the emerging economies of China and India.” (7 Common myths about the cost of maternity leave 2010: 1).

“Targeted EU budgets that make a difference for women’s’ rights and that help women live up to their full potential as agents of economic growth are currently on a very small scale.” (European Women’s Lobby, WIDE and CONCORD statement towards a gender responsive, accountable and participatory post-2013 EU multi-annual financial framework and EU financing instruments” (2011: 2).

Gender expertise in the EWL: summing up and re-visiting the debate on “expertification” and feminist technocracy

Contrary to some commentators’ suggestions, but in accordance with existing studies of the EWL, we find that the EWL activities are expertise based in several respects. The major aim of this paper has been to explore the meanings, categories and sub-categories of EWL “expertise” and “gender expertise”. An important finding is the different facets of “technical” and “scientific” expertise, and the multi-faceted relationship between EWL expertise and academic knowledge. Another key finding is the way EWL mobilizes what we have termed representative expertise, a particular competence in representing European women, their “voices” and demands. Finally, the EWL relies crucially and within multiple framings on what we have elaborated here as moral expertise, denoting skills in arguing on and effective framing of what is “right”, “just” etc.

Our contention is, moreover, is that these insights on the more particular composition of EWL expertise can and should inform normatively oriented debates. Feminist commentators are still rightly preoccupied with Hoskyn’s concern in her early EWL
analysis: What happens to democratic legitimacy when both gender equality policy makers and civil society actors rely increasingly on expertise and expert advice (Squires 2009, Walby 2005, 2011, Pateman 2012, Fraser 2013, Galligan 2014)? Are expertification processes worrisome, or should they rather be embraced, and if so, why?

A proper assessment of this question must take into account different notions of democratic legitimacy. It is common to distinguish between moral and instrumental justifications of democracy (Marti 2006, Peter 2011). The first set sees the basic legitimacy criterion and defining feature of a proper democracy as certain intrinsically valuable democratic procedures and political equality. The second set connects legitimacy to good outcomes, and stress how democracy must be “truth-tracking” or “truth-sensitive” and institutionalized in ways that increase decision quality, in people’s best interest (Lafont 2006, Estlund 2008, Christiano 2012).

Normative legitimacy assessments of expertification processes must however also take into account the different meanings of expertise and expertification – and relate expertise in the different senses expertise occurs to moral or procedural democracy accounts on the one hand, and outcome-oriented democracy accounts on the other. The offshoot would be, we believe, a less sweeping and more accurate analysis of the legitimacy concerns involved in debates on expertification of gender equality and “feminist technocracy”.

From a procedural perspective emphasizing the intrinsic value of political value, any inequality in political power between non-experts and experts would is suspect at the outset, i.e. procedurally speaking, the concentration and expertification of the European women’s movement would seem to be problematic in principle. A particular worry would be that expertise based organizations such as the EWL mobilize not only technical expertise, but also contribute to concentrating and “technocratizing” moral discourse, developing expertise and skills in the moral domain, arguably at the expense of citizens’ engagement. Proceduralists would also worry about the way the EWL claim representative expertise as far as there is limited grounding in actual representative practices and citizens’ active involvement.

An output oriented discussion of the EWL expertification would go on in a different terrain, focusing rather on how the EWL’s use, development and mobilization of
different kinds of expertise and experts recruitment actually contribute to improvements in women’s situation and gender equality in Europe. From this perspective, the worry could rather be that the EWL is not “scientific” enough in its societal descriptions, best practice analyses and policy recommendations, or effective enough in its moral argument and story-telling.

References (incomplete)


