Chapter 3.6

The Influence of RMA Associations on Identity and Policymaking Internationally

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Abstract

Professional associations mark an important step in the development of any profession. Research Management and Administration (RMA) as a profession is still emerging across Europe, thus the relevance of RMA associations is pertinent. These associations operate either specifically at the transnational or international levels or have certain activities linked to both levels. The theory of social constructivism from the field of international relations will be applied in this analysis with a goal to add additional insights on the topic. The results confirm that RMA associations have an outstanding role in enforcing the internationalised culture of their members, however, members in return can also exert influence on their association. Members are also aware that the association is providing a platform for collective actions in policymaking at national, transnational, and international levels. However, time plays a crucial role in social learning for identity and interest formation, as well as in recognizing the role of RMA associations in corporate agency.

Keywords: Identity; policymaking; influence; association; professional development; constructivism

Introduction

Associations for Research Managers and Administrators (RMAs) aim to promote self-awareness among these professionals and facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity building. Following the path taken in the United States, Europe and other parts of

the globe have seen the establishment of RMA associations at national levels since the 1990s. This has happened primarily in Western and Northern European countries (Saad & Zawdie, 2011), including, but not limited to ARMA[1] and PraxisAuril[2] in the UK, AGAUR[3] in Catalonia province of Spain, DARMA[4] in Denmark, Finn-ARMA[5] in Finland, NARMA[6] in Norway, ICEARMA[7] in Iceland, FORTRAMA[8] in Germany, ARMA-NL[9] in the Netherlands, and PIC[10] in Portugal. As EU-funded research and innovation (R&I) programmes set the same requirements at EU level, associations and networks of RMAs have been also launched at EU level, i.e. EARMA or the COST action BESTPRAC. However, only a handful associations are found in Central and Eastern European and in Western Balkan countries and, of which have been launched only recently. They include CZ-ARMA in Czechia[11] and SARMA in Serbia.

Services provided by these associations cover a wide range of activities, such as networking, knowledge exchange, involvement in the preparation of national positions on EU-funded R&I programmes, agenda setting, study visits, job profiling, mentorship, and support for the recognition of the profession. Since these activities are not limited at the national levels but are realised at international level, this chapter aims to examine the influence of existing associations if similar initiatives could contribute to reinforcing RMAs' identity, raise awareness on the importance of the RMA profession, and shape policies in favour of RMA in countries where it lags behind, such as Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

Literature Review

As it is presented below, professional associations, in general, are considered an important asset of professionalisation, even if explanatory models vary with regard to the steps of professionalisation.[12] Opposed to these previous studies, Moore (1970) argues against the perfect classification scheme and puts the mechanisms of becoming a 'professional' actor in the focus of these associations. Atkinson et al. (2007) integrate identity formation in the process of professionalisation which can be reinforced by professional associations gathering regularly and discussing challenges faced in the field. Putnam (2001) suggests that work-related associations develop trust between members and represent a mechanism for mutual assistance as well as expertise sharing. Such associations are regarded as one type of social networks, reinforcing the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. As such, these associations represent social capital.

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[1] See: https://arma.ac.uk/.
[2] See: https://www.praxisauril.org.uk/.
[3] See: https://agaur.gencat.cat/en/lagaur/qui-som/.
[4] See: https://darma.dk/.
[5] See: https://finn-arma.fi/.
[6] See: https://narma.no/om-narma/english-about-narma-and-contact/.
[7] See: https://icearma.is/.
[8] See: https://fortrama.net/.
[9] See: https://armanl.eu/.
[10] See: https://sites.google.com/view/PIC-pt?pli=1.
[11] See: https://www.czarma.cz/en.
[12] In Flexner's (1915) attribute model, for example, the existence of the association is required for the recognition of the profession. The process model of professionalisation goes further: first, it implies the identification of the full-time occupation, and second, the provision of training and this leads to the establishment of the associations. It is followed by the definition of code of ethics and the recognition of the profession by law (Curnow & McGonigle, 2006).

The aspects outlined above are all applicable to associations of RMAs. As discussed below, research conducted either by professionals or academics on this topic focus primarily on the main services offered by these associations and their added values. Only few studies investigate the influence that the associations might have on these professionals' identity or policy-making surrounding RMAs.

Among the main sources chosen for this scope, Williamson et al. (2020, p. 49) present the importance of the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA)[13] by contributing to

> research management and innovation through encouraging practice and knowledge bases through advocacy, leadership, policy and knowledge platforms, working within respective national and regional systems of innovation, facilitating inception and development activities of other RMAs, capacity development programmes, study exchanges, mentorship, and so on.

Romano and Albanesi (2021) mapped associations worldwide in light of their activities, professional development framework, trainings/accreditations/recognition provided.

Other authors covering the issue of professional associations highlight the added value of RMA associations in the provision of trainings (Nembaware et al., 2022), opportunities for professional development (Kirkland, 2005c; Kirkland & Stackhouse, 2011; Nembaware et al., 2022), peer learning (Poli, 2018a; Kirkland & Ajai-Ajagbe, 2013) and networking (Kirkland & Ajai-Ajagbe, 2013). In addition, Langley and Ofosu (2007) underline the opportunity for sharing best practices and offering support to each other as the key values of such associations, referring to the examined associations as 'sustainable self-help organisations that disseminate good practice across the regions.' Liao and Ma (2019, p. 1828) present the importance of RMA associations in the 'transmission of information cues from the changing social context' to their members. Identity and policymaking related issues are absent in these works so it is important to expand the scope of investigation.

Ryttberg and Geschwind (2019) aim to understand the role of support staff's networks as sense givers. They found that associations providing trainings, courses, or even certificates can contribute in the long run to 'creating common understanding of specific roles, supporting the delineation of the specificities or scripts of the role of the professional staff' (Ryttberg & Geschwind, 2019, p. 14). Thus, they confirm the importance of networks or associations of research support staff in the professionalisation process.

Following Putnam's social capital theory centred on trust and reciprocity, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2009) corroborate the added value of belonging to social networks for RMAs. From their view, professional associations provide important advantages in equipping RMAs with the necessary know-how of their everyday task in an efficient manner. They underline the importance of informal knowledge gathered through these networks. In such relationships, general trust becomes important as members share not just practical topics but sometimes confidential issues. The inspiration of members to be collectively engaged, coupled with the opportunity of sharing and solving issues related to everyday work, and self-determination, even if not directly useful for career's purposes, are factors highlighted by Poli (2018a).

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[13] https://www.sarima.co.za/

The possibility of shaping funding programmes, setting their requirements, or potentially influencing policies are rarely mentioned in the existing scholarship. When examining research management at five African universities, Kirkland and Ajai-Ajagbe (2013, p. 9) underline that the 'wider research management community was an important factor … to gather support for the revision of funders' requirements or national government requirements'.

Identity related questions of research support staff have been touched upon in the last decades (Henkel, 2010; Szekeres, 2011; Whitchurch, 2006, 2007b, 2012) and discussed by Poli, Oliveira, et al. (2023, Chapter 3.1). Allen-Collinson (2009) concludes her study suggesting that RMA associations could reinforce the identity of their members. The role of professional associations triggering and reinforcing their members' identity of RMAs is underlined by Poli (2018a) who argues that the formation and strengthening of identity can be regarded as key factors in light of recognizing RMA as a profession. She builds on the arguments of Lewis (2014) on professional communities, professionalism, and identities. Whereas professionalism is an 'artificial construct, with ever contested criteria and definitions', identity is 'our understanding of similarities and differences' and 'a socially constructed entity which is constantly being reconfigured and reformed' (Lewis, 2014, p. 46). Professionals, however, have various identities (Lewis, 2014) who can be a member of an association, a profession, but also of their institute (Moore, 1970). Among others, professional identity is a 'conscious embodiment of the way a professional defines who they are and the way they choose to act and represent themselves' (Sonday, 2021).

Furthermore, identity related questions are frequently coupled with definitional discussions so as to broaden the focus of the research on RMA and it is worthwhile to note that the majority of the concepts developed in the literature are coming from practitioners themselves. Poli (2018a) maps the variety of these definitions, often referring to the broad literature on higher education to gain concepts that can be applied to RMAs. However, if RMAs were asked to describe their job, the explanations used would be even more varied. According to Kerridge (2016), RMAs are often thought of as the 'jack of all trades but master of none', whereas Spencer and Scott (2017) present them as the 'men in the middle'.

The maturity level of RMA associations vary according to the organization, and are constantly emerging. The recognition of the profession relies on the maturity of the professional associations, and thus, the influence of RMA associations on the identity of practitioners, as well as on policymaking, needs further investigation. Therefore, this chapter aims to showcase the influence of associations to see whether similar initiatives could contribute to increase awareness toward the RMA profession in countries such as Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans where this profession is still in a formidable stage. The lens of the social constructivism theory in International Relations (IR) will provide an analytical framework.

Social Constructivism in International Relations

Social constructivism can shed light on the influence of professional associations so as to advance the understanding of their role in the global environment. Social constructivism puts an important focus on the fact that the structures of human associations are determined by shared ideas rather than by material forces (Wendt, 1999). Social constructivism in IR was among the first theories which gave an important role to sub-state actors, such as civil society organisations (Chandler, 2005, pp. 25–27). Their role

in shaping state policies and forming identities either at a state or an individual level provides a useful basis for an analysis.

Social constructivism in IR was extensively explained by Alexander Wendt (1999) with a special regard to the relations among states aiming to understand how they fulfil their needs, how they form and represent their interests. His theory has been widely applied in the field of International Relations, explaining culture, socialisation, corporate agency, identity, and structural change. While the theory provides an important starting point, Wendt (1999) did not regard non-state actors as decisive players when applied in the context of IR (p. 353).

Chandler (2005) went beyond and used social constructivism to understand the role of transnational and international network activities in forming and internalising norms. On the same track, Risse (2009) and Risse-Kappen et al. (2013) analysed the power of Human Rights through the work of transnationally operating non-governmental organisations (NGOs), principle-issued NGOs, and transnational advocacy networks.[14]

As the investigation focusses on the influence on EU policies, one stream of Europeanisation theory should also be mentioned as it applies social constructivism and focusses on the role of legal systems and roles. Accordingly, EU law, rules, policies, procedures, unwritten administrative procedures, inter-institutional agreements, and common understandings can influence actors' identities (Checkel, 1999). As a result, non-state actors and policy networks promote norms and mobilise/coerce policymakers to change local policies; policy- and decision-making elites internalise norms and reproduce them through subsequent behaviour. However, in these cases, the main focus is on the formulation of identity specifically in the EU context.

Conceptual Framework

Social constructivism in IR suggests that RMA associations have a role in establishing, internalising, and even internationalising new norms, approaches, and guidance for RMAs regarding the R&I ecosystem and reinforcing a specific culture understood as socially shared knowledge. Funding policies and requirements shape RMAs' common identities and reinforce their transnational community: due to the common requirements of internationally funded projects as well as the blendedness of their profession, RMAs working in these projects create a common professional culture, which includes shared norms, rules, and organisations.[15]

Becoming a member of an RMA association initiates the socialisation[16] with these norms and rules at transnational levels due to the common requirements of EU and transnationally funded projects as well as the blended feature of the job. But such socialisation includes mutual and social learning processes as the requirements change continuously; their common understanding becomes the focus of the associations' activities. In this regard, RMA associations can be viewed as corporate agents, as they represent a structure of shared knowledge or discourse at national, transnational,

[14] The boomerang effect and then the spiral model explain how citizens joining transnational networks can give them a voice to alter state policies (Florini, 2001). However, they limit their explanation to cases when human rights were successfully taken over as a result of transnational network activism.

[15] This professional culture could be regarded similar to those of academic communities and academic ideas analysed in-depth by Becher and Trowler (2001).

[16] Socialisation is the process of taking to the formation of identity and to the definition of interests for members (Wendt, 1999).

or international levels. They also provide a platform for institutionalised collective actions to shape funding requirements, rules, and policies at these levels.

In the case of RMA associations, identity[17] is developed both by members (collective, role) and RMA associations (corporate, role, collective) which can be mutually formed. Interests[18] represent the motivational force of identities: not only the members, but RMA associations shall have and represent interest at the transnational level.

Associations as corporate agents are able to channel knowledge, ideas, interests, and needs to national and EU policy-making. Members of RMA associations active in national and transnational associations can have a voice through these associations to alter their state policies. However, RMA associations have a limited power in shaping policymaking, the question is to what extent is it limited and to what topics?

Research Questions

There are two questions guiding the investigation. First, can RMA associations reinforce a common and collective identity of people working in the profession? Second, can these associations shape or influence policymaking at the EU level?

Methodology

This exploratory study relies on a questionnaire that ran for 4 weeks between 27 June and 21 July 2022. Four groups of questions were designed: the first investigating the associations or platforms or networks gathering RMAs to which respondents belong to (either national and/or transnational/international); the second focussing on the influence of associations on the professional life and development of respondents; the third assessing the policy related influence of associations; and the fourth collecting brief demographic data on respondents (see Zsár, 2022). The questionnaire was elaborated in a way to enable quick completion.[19]

The questionnaire was circulated primarily through social media posts. Some members of certain associations[20] were directly contacted who either reshared the social media post or circulated the questionnaire within the e-mail list of the associations. In total, 116 responses were collected, following the data cleaning 115 were analysed (see Zsár, 2022).

Figs. 3.6.1 and 3.6.2 provide a glimpse on the demography of respondents, which demonstrates a fairly balanced distribution of respondents across different positions (cf. Kerridge & Scott, 2018a, for Europe (n = 844): 35.7% operational, 45.0% manager, 15.2% leader; Kerridge, Dutta, et al. (2022) for Europe (n = 1,471): 33.9% operational, 40.4% manager, 19.9% leader, 4.1% assisting). In this case, administrators were less

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[17] Identities in social constructivism can be many-folded, including (1) personal or corporate identities, (2) type identities, (3) role identity, and (4) collective identity (Wendt, 1999).
[18] Identities and interests are formed through social interaction: becoming a member of an association can enforce professional identity, role, need, and interests to the members – but also active members can shape the associations' goals, interests, and needs (Wendt, 1999).
[19] The second and third group of questions used Likert-type scales, the first and fourth group of questions included short answers or selection from lists. Except for two long answers following the second and third sections, all responses were compulsory, therefore all the gathered responses are complete.
[20] Members of the following associations or networks were reached out directly: PIC, ARMA-NL, DARMA, NARMA, AGAUR, BESTPRAC, as Western and Northern European countries were primarily in the scope of the investigation.
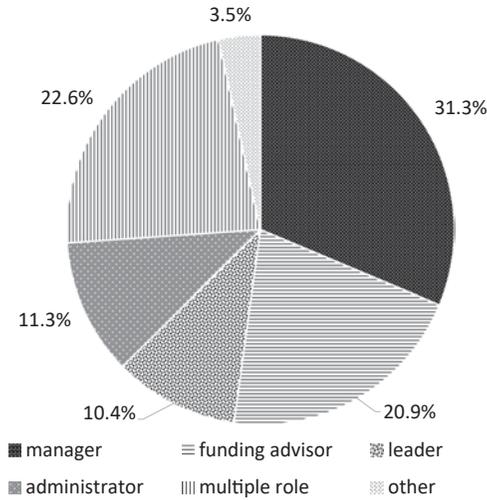
Fig. 3.6.1.   The Position of the Survey Respondents (*n* = 115).

represented (11.3%) based on which it can be assumed that they are more rarely members of associations or the associations have less influence on them. However, an important proportion of respondents indicated their position as funding advisors (20.9%) or having multiple roles (22.6%). Half of the respondents spent more than 10 years as RMAs (Fig. 3.6.2) which corresponds with RAAAP-3 findings [see Kerridge et al., 2022, for Europe (*n* = 1,482): <5 years: 25.8%, 5–9 years: 29.5%, >10 years: 44.7%].

The proportion of female respondents is close (69%) to their proportion in other surveys [Kerridge & Scott, 2018a, for Europe (*n* = 844): 73.0% are female; Kerridge et al., 2022, for Europe (*n* = 1,479): 78.9% female]. The majority (73.9%) of respondents are between 31 and 50 years old, similarly to previous surveys [such as Kerridge & Scott, 2018a: RMAs between 35 and 54 amount to 63.2% of respondents, Kerridge et al., 2022,
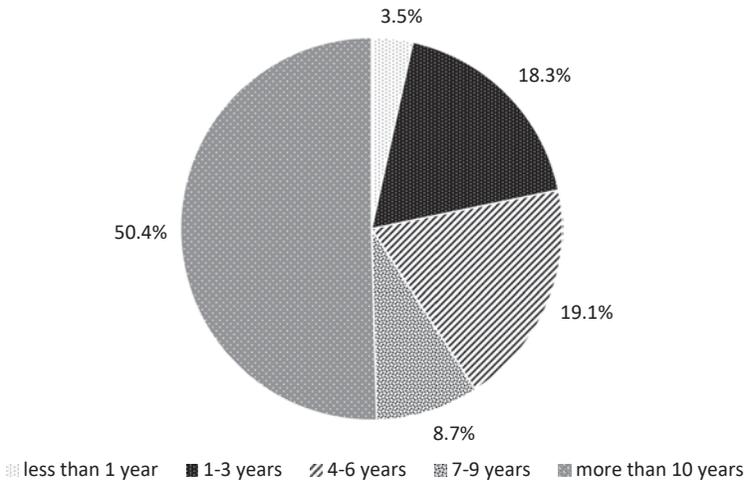

Fig. 3.6.2.   Number of Years Spent as RMA (*n* = 115).

for Europe (*n* = 1,465): 73.9%]. Around 17.4% of respondents are between 51 and 60, whereas 4.3% of them are either between 21 and 30 or above 60.

The top four countries of respondents are Portugal (21.0%), the Netherlands (18.0%), Norway (9.0%), and the UK (9.0%), followed by South Africa (6.1%), Ireland (5.2%), Denmark (3.5%), Italy (3.5%), Spain (3.5%), and Poland (2.6%).

Despite the diverse but reasonable coverage of responses, certain limitations have to be acknowledged regarding the running of the questionnaire. First, it was circulated during summertime of the Northern hemisphere; so many people were already out of office which limited the number of responses. Second, official channels were rarely used to reach out associations, so the distribution depended on the outreach of the persons contacted. Regarding the structure of the questions, to ease the completion, questions were not multiplied if a person indicated membership both in national and transnational/international associations but respondents had to answer each question only once, even if they were a member of more than one association. Answers might have been slightly different if the same set of questions were repeated to assess each membership.

Analysis

Collected data through the responses had to be cleaned first. Then the results were analysed in-depth for the overall response set and then through selected variables such as (1) geographical coverage of RMA associations (national vs transnational/international association), (2) length of membership in transnational/international RMA association, (3) length of the existence of national RMA association, (4) position of respondents, and (5) number of years spent as RMAs. The correlation analysis carried out did not show considerable outcomes for each variable, nevertheless, it proved to be important to see certain differences.

Influence on the Common and Collective Identity

Influence of RMA association on identity was investigated through multiple angles: that of the members, the associations, and their interrelations. Fig. 3.6.3 presents the results for all respondents.

Two questions aim to discover whether professional identity can be formed thanks to the membership ['*I became aware of what I am doing and that it is a profession on its own*', '*I can more easily define what I am doing and explain it to other colleagues (researchers, administration staff, leadership, and so on)*']. Based on the responses, the most important influence of RMA associations on their members is that they become aware of what they are doing and that research management and administration (RMA) is a profession on its own (34.8% strongly agree, 44.3% agree). Similarly, respondents confirm that thanks to the membership they can more easily define what they are doing and explain it to other colleagues (28.7% strongly agree, 40.9% agree). This rate is even higher in case of respondents having membership in international RMA associations: 38.9% strongly agree and 50.0% agree.

Besides identity formation, the question '*It has changed my life and gave me motivation to move forward my professional career*' aims to reveal whether interests of RMAs can be formed thanks to the membership. 51.7% of RMAs working for more than 10 years in the profession (*n* = 58) confirm this influence on their professional life. These results suggest that the associations may affect its members' interests and motivations only after a certain amount of time and attainment to higher positions.
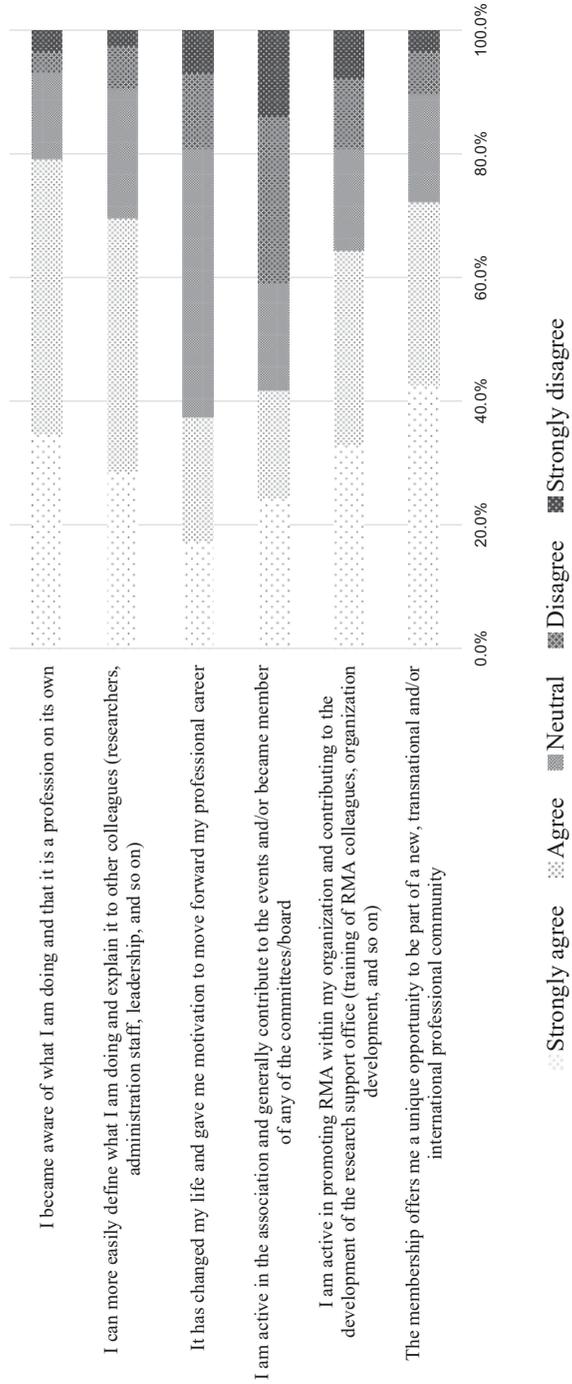
Fig. 3.6.3.   Influence of RMA Associations on the Identity and Interests of Members ($n = 115$).

The question '*I am active in the association and generally contribute to the events and/or became member of any of the committees/board*' aims to understand whether members are aware of and use the opportunity of influencing and forming their association, its identity and interests. Similarly to the previous question, being active in the association is registered only in the case of a smaller group of respondents: 17.4% agrees and 24.3% strongly agrees. The number of years spent in the profession and the possibility of belonging to an international community seem to matter: 36.2% of respondents working for more than 10 years in the profession (n = 58) strongly agree and 29.3% agree that they are active in the association. Respondents being members of international associations for more than 6 years also indicates a similarly high rate of agreement: in case of 6–8 years' long membership (n = 16) 50.0% strongly agree and 25.0%; while in case of 9 or more years' long membership (n = 19) 36.8% strongly agree and 47.4% agree. Accordingly, the overall trend is that experience in RMA increases the likelihood for members to become active and contribute to the identity and interest formation of associations.

The following question '*I am active in promoting RMA within my organisation and contributing to the development of the research support office (training of RMA colleagues, organisation development, and so on)*' aims to understand whether the norms, values, and guidance set by the association can shape the institutions in which RMAs are working. With that regard, the number of years spent in international association seems to be decisive: whereas 7.4% of respondents having membership for 1 or 2 years (n = 27) strongly agree and 29.6% agree, the longer is the membership of respondents, the higher is the proportion which strongly agrees or agrees (see Fig. 3.6.4). The position also matters: all respondents in leadership positions agree with the statement confirming that they have the opportunity and the power to promote the profession within the organisation.

The last question '*The membership offers me a unique opportunity to be part of a new, transnational and/or international professional community*' aims to touch upon whether RMAs acknowledge that their interaction within and with the association deepens their collective identity through which we can identify an increased degree of cultural internationalisation of RMAs. Equally important proportion of respondents strongly agrees (42.6%) or agrees (29.6%) that through the membership they become members of a new, international community. Although respondents mainly confirm
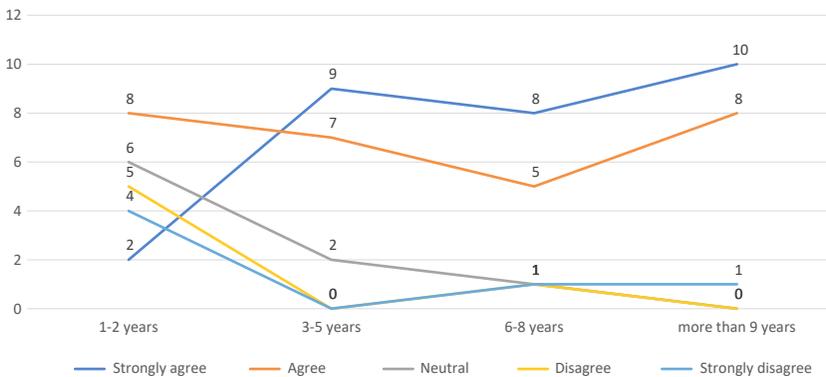

Fig. 3.6.4. Increasing Rate of Active Promotion of RMA in Line with the Length of the Membership in International RMA Associations (n = 78).

the statement, there seems to be a trend again that respondents with a longer career in RMA, being in higher positions and having membership for several years tend to recognise this influence.

Influence on Policymaking at the National, Transnational, EU, and International Levels

The next bunch of questions focusses on the corporate agency role of RMA associations: to what extent they can influence transnational and international policies in their domain and beyond, how the interests of members and the associations themselves are pursued, and whether it is acknowledged by members at all. Overall the rate of neutral responses are much higher than in the previous section suggesting that the influence on policymaking is less visible for the members (Fig. 3.6.5).

The first question '*The association is active in promoting and contributing to the development of the RMA profession at the national, transnational, EU and/or international levels*' aims to give a general context of the associations' activities as corporate agents. The vast majority of respondents acknowledge that the association is active in promoting the profession and contributing to its development (strongly agree: 39.1%, agree: 47.8%).

Then the two questions, '*The association is striving to shape relevant policies in favour of the RMA profession at the national, transnational, EU and/or international levels*' and '*The association is striving to shape relevant policies beyond the RMA profession at the national, transnational, EU and/or international levels*' are focussing directly on the awareness of members on the associations' influence on policymaking: the first in the RMA field, the second in other fields. 28.7% of the respondents strongly agree and 44.3% agree that the association is striving to shape policies in favour of the profession. However, the number of neutral responses is relatively high in the case of respondents who are newcomers to the profession [less than 1 year (n = 5): 75.0%, 1–3 years (n = 21): 57.1%]. Almost the same proportion (46.9%) agrees or is neutral (44.3%) regarding that their association is striving to shape policies beyond the RMA profession. The proportion of neutral answers is higher for newcomers to the profession [less than 1 year (n = 5): 75.0% and 1–3 years (n = 21): 57.1%] as well as to the associations [having membership for 1–2 years (n = 27): 51.9%].

The last two questions '*The existence and the activities of the association is acknowledged by stakeholders (research performing organisations, policymakers, decision-makers, research funding organisations, etc.)*' and '*The association can shape stakeholders' (research performing organisations, policymakers, decision-makers, research funding organisations, etc.) activities*' aim to get a picture to what extent RMA associations are recognised by other actors. Although 17.4% of respondents strongly agree and 33.9% agree that the association is acknowledged by stakeholders, 33.0% of them are neutral about the statement. The proportion of neutral respondents is especially high in case of newcomers to associations [1–2 years (n = 27): 51.9%]. The number of years spent in RMA and the current position in RMA seem to matter again: the more respondents work in the profession and get into a higher position, the higher is their proportion confirming the statement. Influence of RMA associations on stakeholder activities are the least acknowledged by administrators giving the highest rate of neutral answers (69.2%). Compared to them 61.5% of RMAs with multiple roles (n = 26) agreed and 7.7% strongly agreed with the statement suggesting that the latter groups have better overview of these activities possibly due to their involvement in various or multiple roles.
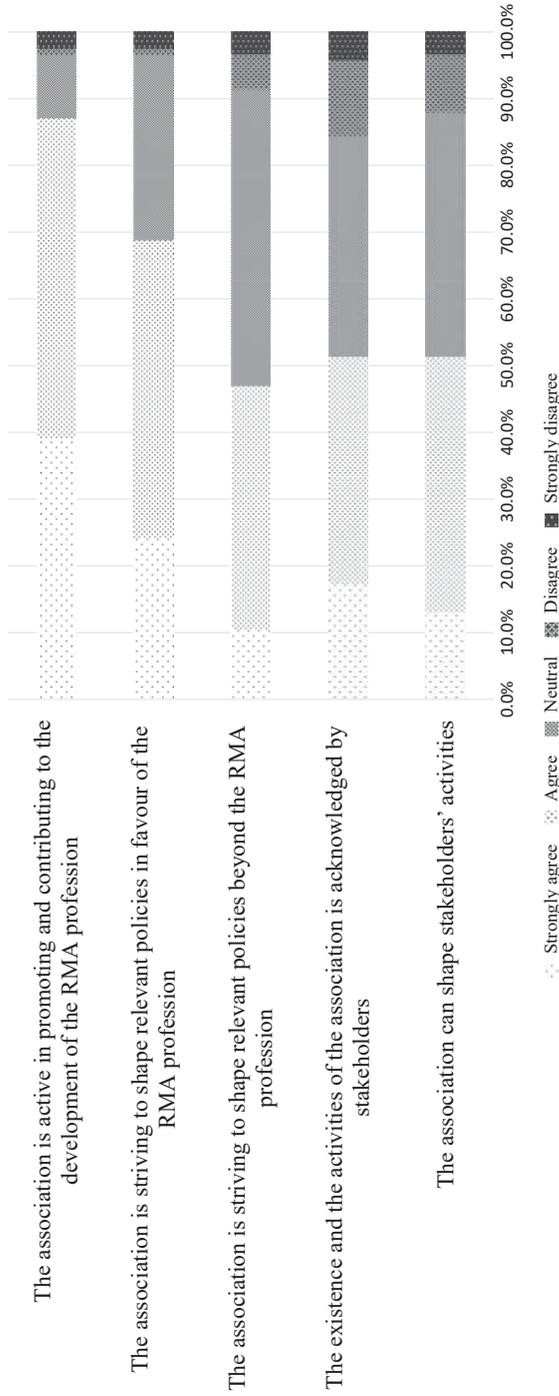
Fig. 3.6.5.   Influence of RMA Associations on Policy-Making (*n* = 115).

Conclusions

Based on the investigation, RMA associations have a significant impact on their members. The most crucial influence is that members gain a clearer understanding of their profession and recognize RMA as a distinct field. Membership also enables them to define their roles more effectively and explain them to colleagues, thereby shaping their professional identities. Additionally, belonging to these associations reveals a sense of community with a global perspective, including shared knowledge, work culture, norms, and values. However, the findings suggest that the process of socialisation and identity and interest development through membership is gradual and is particularly beneficial as members advance in the careers.

Regarding the influence of RMA associations on policymaking at various levels – national, transnational, EU, and international – respondents confirm that the most important activity is promoting the RMA profession. However, shaping policies in favour of RMA is also noteworthy. This suggests that members recognize the association as a platform for collective action in policymaking. On the other hand, nearly half of the respondents are neutral about the association's potential to shape policies beyond RMA. Notably, the respondents' years of experience in RMA and their positions play a role: those with more experience and higher positions are more likely to acknowledge the corporate agency roles and activities of RMA associations.

The results also suggest that members are more aware of measures aimed at developing the RMA profession rather than those extending beyond it, such as shaping policies outside the RMA domain or other stakeholders' activities.

These results underscore the influential role of RMA associations in both fields of the investigation. Therefore, it is recommended to establish and operate such associations in countries, where the profession is less mature or nonexistent as in the case in several Central and Eastern European and Western Balkan countries. However, it is crucial to emphasize that even in countries with existing associations, more efforts are needed to promote the corporate agency role, particularly activities related to influencing policymaking, among all members. This is important as it can deepen the RMA identity of members and enhance the identity of the associations. Additionally, it would be worth while to explore ways for members to become more active in the early stage of their membership to, fostering a deeper mutual identity-building process between members and the association.

Since this investigation solely focused on the perspectives and experiences of RMA association members, future research could explore the views and approaches of the leadership regarding topics like identity and policymaking.

Acknowledgements

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