Relationships between Research and Policy on Migration in the European Union:
A Practice-Based Analysis

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Abstract

This paper analyses relationships between research and policy at European Union (EU) level about international migration by drawing from the perspectives of migration policy practitioners and their practices. By practitioners is meant those who seek to influence, shape or make migration policy at EU level including officials from EU institutions, national officials, academic researchers and representatives of international organisations, think tanks and NGOs. By practice is meant the socially recognised competence of practitioners. A particular focus is on the relationship between research and policy, or put another way, between the production of knowledge about international migration and the use of this knowledge in policy-shaping and policy-making. Questions include: how are relationships structured between researchers and policy-makers at EU level? How do policy-makers gather and process information? Is there risk of information overload and, if there is, how does this affect the relationship between researchers and policy-makers? Do policy-makers actually listen to researchers? If they do, what do they want to hear? And, do they actually hear it? Is there evidence that research has contributed to the development of shared understandings at EU level? If so, do these confirm or challenge existing policy orientations?

Introduction[*]

This paper analyses relationships between research and policy at European Union (EU) level about international migration by drawing from the perspectives of migration policy practitioners and their practices. The paper demonstrates the scope for policy learning and the sharing of ideas and practices at EU level, but also that this exchange remains focused on learning and information related to well-established approaches to migration governance. This means that European integration does change the context within which learning occurs, but this does not necessarily mean that the scope and content of policy changes or that critical approaches in academic research to existing policy have re-shaped understandings of policy challenges as a result of EU-level interactions.

The paper's focus is on routinised and regular interactions that now occur at EU level on issues related to migration. These are understood to relate to the regulation of migration (in its various forms) and to the integration of migrants. The focus is on migration by third country nationals (TCNs). By practitioners is meant those who seek to influence, shape or make migration policy at EU level including officials from EU institutions, national officials, academic researchers, private sector consultancies, representatives of international organisations, think tanks and NGOs. By practice is meant the socially recognised competence of practitioners. A particular focus is on the relationship between research and policy, or put another way, between the production of knowledge about international migration and the use of this knowledge in policy-shaping and policy-making.

An increased focus on migration issues and massively increased research interest in migration in Europe and at EU level raises a number of questions that this paper addresses, including:

- How are relationships structured between researchers and policy-makers at EU level?
- How do policy-makers gather and process information?
- Is there risk of information overload and, if there is, how does this affect the relationship between researchers and policy-makers?
- Do policy-makers actually listen to researchers? If they do, what do they want to hear? And, do they actually hear it?
- Is there evidence that research has contributed to the development of shared understandings at EU level? If so, do these confirm or challenge existing policy orientations?

This paper addresses these questions by drawing, in part, from 17 semi-structured interviews with EU officials, academics, people from think tanks, representatives of international organisations and national level officials. This paper is not an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of EU-level research on migration. For this, see, for example, the European Court of Auditors (2012) critical assessment of the effectiveness of projects funded by the European Integration Fund (EIF) and European Refugee Fund (ERF) to promote the integration of third country nationals (TCNs). Other work, such as the evaluation by the Centre for European Policy Studies of the EIF, looked in close detail at funded projects and also brought forward recommendations for future development. For example, the CEPS evaluation of the EIF calls for 'exchanging, discussing and disseminating throughout Europe the experiences, ideas and practices developed in projects that put into effect an understanding of integration as a two-way process' (Carrera and Atger, 2012).

This paper focuses on exchange, discussion and dissemination in the development of EU level practices. These take the form of, for example, the effects of routinised interaction, information sharing and the development of what could be called EU-level 'dialogue structures' that link the producers of knowledge with its users (Geddes and Scholten, 2013). The paper shows the importance of a 'shadow of hierarchy', by which is meant that well-established national level approaches have a considerable influence on the 'framing' of migration as an EU issue (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2012). There are well-established national ways of doing things and reluctance and/or resistance to taking on ideas from academic research. This can be because academic research is not packaged in the right way, but also because it is seen as too critical and too detached from the 'real world' of politics.

In addition, to a state-focused dynamic, a bargaining model at EU level is also identified that is linked to the activities of various actors such as think tanks that seek to shape and influence the EU agenda. This is understood as bargaining because think tanks and NGOs can lack the political and social legitimacy of national governments and EU institutions. Instead, they seek to intervene in the EU's 'marketplace' for ideas and to work with various partners to try to 'sell' their ideas.

The paper is structured as follows:

- It explores some ideas about the relationship between research and policy;

- It then outlines the idea of a 'Community of Practice' within which information is shared and common understandings develop, although, of course, the nature of these common understandings is crucial;

- It then assesses two EU-level networks that both have a strong focus on the production and use of knowledge about migration and its effects. These are European Migration Network (EMN) and the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). The paper explores practices, their content and assesses scope for 'boundary interactions' that could challenge the organisational and conceptual basis for policy-shaping and policy-making on migration.

A key point is that these interactions are not necessarily intended to lead to direct policy change. As an interviewee put it:

> We should not look at it [in this case, the EMN] only judging the quality of the reports that come out of there, because it's not the point. The point is to have government officials to sit together on a regular basis and discuss those issues that are political priority, to have a mechanism in which they can request information from their peers' (Interview with representative of international organisation, March 2013).

Practices and communities of practice

The idea of 'practice' can link the production of knowledge about international migration and the use of this knowledge. Practice can be understood to mean 'competent performance'. Adler and Pouliot (2011: 3) write that: 'most political dynamics come to rest on the fixation of meanings – a hard work in which practices play a prominent role'. Practice amounts to more than simply 'behaviour' or 'action' because it involves 'the patterned nature of deeds in socially organized contexts' (Adler and Pouliot, ibid). To explore how practices play an important role in the development of EU migration policy, this paper draws from ideas about 'communities of practice', which can be understood as groups of people that interact frequently to 'creates the social fabric of learning'. This involves commitment to forms of practice that embody 'the knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains' (Wenger et al., 2002: 28–29). Communities of practice provide the 'social containers' that bring people together plus a sense of joint enterprise, mutual engagement and a shared repertoire of resources (Wenger, 2010: 229). The definition of the term practitioner used in this paper is broad. It refers to a wide range of actors and organisation that seek to shape, influence or make EU migration policy including national and EU level governmental institutions, NGOs, international organisations, think tanks and academic researchers.

The purpose of European and EU networking, information-gathering, research and of the various seminars and workshops that happen all over the EU is presumably so that learning occurs. There is a huge literature in political science on learning in public policy, which can be defined as: 'the updating of beliefs based on lived or witnessed experiences, analysis or social interaction' (Radaelli and Dunlop, 2012: 1). Learning can be intentional or conscious, more organic or unintended; it can also be 'single loop' or 'simple' when actors alter their strategies or it can be more 'complex' and 'double loop' when preferences and identities are revised (Levy, 1994).

There is an important social dimension to policy learning in the EU because of the need to promote dialogue that seeks to cross or challenge the organisational and conceptual boundaries that are associated with 'ways of doing things' in the member states. The role of expert knowledge has been seen as playing a key role in challenging these boundaries and of developing new understanding of key issues in international politics. For example, the idea of the 'epistemic community' describes how international policy learning can occur based on a: 'a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain or issue area' (Haas, 1992: 3). Under conditions of uncertainty, such networks of policy experts sharing 'common principled beliefs over ends, causal beliefs over means and common standards of accruing and testing new knowledge can play an important role in driving policy convergence' (Drezner, 2006: 63).

The social definition of learning in a community of practice has two components: *competence* and *personal experience*. These combine with three modes of belonging: *engagement*, *imagination* and *alignment*. The issue that then follows is the extent to which these components and modes of belonging can lead to 'boundary interactions' that can generate shared understandings at EU level. This then also means considering the scope for *co-ordination*, *transparency* and *negotiability*.

First, we consider the two key components of a community of practice. Competence is historically and socially defined and is related not only to repetition, but also to the ways in which groups adopt similar standards to interpret competence (Goffmann, 1959; Adler and Pouliot, 2011). Wenger (2010: 229) writes that: 'To be competent is to be able to engage with the community and be trusted as a partner in these interactions' (Wenger, 2010: 229). As will be shown, EU officials value their relationships with key academic researchers that they see as competent guides to the issues. Competence and personal experience are not necessarily congruent but when they are in close tension and either starts pulling the other then learning can occur. One practical example of this relationship between competence and experience is the steep learning curve for new member states/countries of immigration with experiential asymmetries that affect the social definition of competence.

We now assess the three modes of belonging (engagement, imagination and alignment), which are typically seen as co-existing. Engagement involves people working together in ways that can shape experience. An imaginative leap can be required to think of oneself as a member of a community of practice and to see some basis for shared membership. This leap may be large if the community is big (a national community) and members don't all meet, but is not such a large leap if members do meet on a regular basis (as they do in the EMN, although membership changes quite frequently). Alignment is a mutual process of co-ordinating perspectives. This may, at first glance, seem quite pluralistic, but will be embedded within social structures that do not evenly distribute resources; some actors will be more powerful than others as too will some ideas.

The social definition of learning and the modes of belonging are the basis for communities of practice with three key characteristics.

- A shared domain of interest as membership implies a commitment to the domain.
- The existence of a community is evidenced by joint activities, discussions and information sharing.

- A community of practice is also a community of practitioners with a 'shared repertoire of resources – experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems – in short a shared practice'.

The issue that now arises is the scope for boundary interactions (for example, between research and policy) to influence policy. Boundary interactions can be understood as exposure to a 'foreign competence' and involves efforts at *co-ordination*, *transparency* and *negotiability*; or, put another way, attempts to make sense of 'foreign competencies'. To take the case of the EMN and MIPEX there are various kinds of boundary interaction such as the sharing of information about national policy approaches, the development of glossaries of key terminology, the gathering of data, the funding of research and requests for information about how things are done in other countries.

Table 1 plots the key aspects of social learning in a community of practice (CoP) on the left hand side of the table against the key features of boundary interaction across the top.

Table 1: Communities of Practice and Boundary Interactions

	Coordination	Transparency	Negotiability
Engagement	Opportunities for joint activities and problem solving	Explanation of practices to each other to facilitate learning	Can multiple perspectives meet?
Imagination	Understanding of respective perspectives to present effectively and prevent misunderstandings	Artefacts etc that held build picture of another practice	Do both sides see themselves as members of an overarching community with common interests?
Alignment	Can methods etc be interpreted into action across boundaries?	Are the basis of CoPs clear enough to reveal common ground?	Who decides when negotiating between CoPs and searching for compromise?

Source: Wenger 2010: 235.

Boundary interactions can be stimulated by individuals acting as brokers across boundaries while 'boundary objects' such as the development of data and information can also facilitate boundary interactions as comparable data can also help to generate a sense of shared meaning (Star and Griesemer 1989).

The quest for more information

We now move on to assess the first set of questions raised by this paper, which relate to the question of knowledge production and the dialogue structures that link those who produce research (often, but not only, academics) with those who use it (policy-makers).

There can be little doubt that there is both a thirst for information and also intensified interaction at EU level. Generally speaking, information and its pursuit are recognised as important features of modern organisational life. Feldman and March (1981: 178) wrote that information symbolises reason: 'asking for information, and justifying decisions in terms of information have all come to be significant ways in which we symbolise that the process is legitimate, that we are good decision-makers and that our organisations are well-managed'. A key role at EU level is played by the

European Commission, which has long been both highly receptive to and dependent on outside expertise (Radaelli, 1999).

It should also be acknowledged that the rational idea about information gathering and the use of information (i.e., asking for and justifying ideas with reference to information) is not necessarily always evident. As more and more information is demanded and accumulated, people within organisations can feel that they don't have enough time to process the data and to make sense of it. The result can be information overload leading to the paradoxical situation of an 'over-interest in and underuse of information' (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012: 1201). An interviewee working in an EU institution provided insight into information overload:

> Reading entirely all the reports is wishful thinking. We have our priorities set in terms of our agenda …we receive all the information, we file it, we know where it is and we access it when this is needed.

To provide shortcuts, it may be that key researchers or organisations are seen as trusted sources to provide guidance that cuts through the need to engage with all the research. A representative of an EU institution identified interaction between policy-makers and researchers in the nascent phase of EU policy development on migration at the beginning of the 2000s.

> In the early days … we worked very closely with academics because it was a new area for us at European level and because there was not a great deal of information available, and certainly not comparative information, because where research had been done it had been done [on] a national basis on the whole, and it wasn't very accessible because it was all in national languages and difficult to be able to compare ….when we wrote those early communications on how we might develop a European policy, we did that with the help of the research community in the sense that I went to various academic meetings to meet people, to talk to people. We organised seminars where we discussed drafts of the papers with them, and talked to them about how things would work. (Interview with representative of EU institution, June 2013).

The basis for this attempt to develop a European understanding in the early phase of policy development was supported by networking, which provided a social basis for policy development and learning, but also led to the establishment of close connections between officials, consultants and selected key academics and experts. This also depends on a certain 'sympathy', as one interviewee put it:

> if you're going to have an interaction on a regular basis, then policymakers and academics have go to know each other fairly well, they've got to know what the issues are and be sympathetic to doing the research that policymakers need or being able to tell policymakers we need to do research in this area if you want … policy in that area…you have to have a dialogue between them…and that means actually knowing people and so on….which is not always easy to manage…particularly when policymakers change so often. … Policymakers need to be able to ask questions and academics need to be able to suggest ways of dealing with issues and you need to be talking to them. You need the dialogue and that isn't always easy to set up and maintain. (Interview with representative of EU institution, June 2013).

We return to the idea of networks, practice and the role of practitioners below, but this demand for more and 'better' information and the emergence of more individuals and organisations at EU level to satisfy (and also create) this demand and can then lead, in the words of Bourdieu (1975: 19) to a 'locus of competitive struggle, in which the specific issue at stake is the monopoly of scientific authority, defined inseparably as technical capacity and social power, or to put it another way, the monopoly of scientific competence…to speak and act legitimately'. This does raise the definition of expertise given that this is a valuable currency at EU level (and not only in the EU, of course). As a representative of a think tank put it:

> who is an expert? Even, who is an academic? The problem we are seeing not only in DG Home, but also in the European Parliament is the same. So that you have an academic …issuing a paper … basically serving a certain political interest … and this is something that is developing more and more (Interview with representative of a think tank, March 2013)

The Commission is a relatively small organisation and has long been involved in close relationships with the producers of knowledge such as academic researchers, but also other organisations such as think tanks. One reason for this is that there are relatively small numbers of people in the Commission in front-line policy roles. Take the case of migrant integration, which is one of the hottest issues in European politics. As an interviewee from a think tank observed in summer 2013:

> For the time being there are two persons dealing with integration issues in DG HOME. And outside of DG HOME I would be really, really impressed if we were able to find out other people dealing with integration issues. Which means that for perhaps the most important difficult and challenging topic that will have to be addressed in the next couple of years by the EU and Member States, there is little manpower and brains available. (Interview with think tank representative, June 2013).

The result is that policy relevant research is targeted at relatively small numbers of officials who couldn't possibly read it all and, if they did, would have no time left to actually do their jobs. Shortcuts suggested by trusted experts can help policy-makers to navigate a path through the research. Officials often develop relationships of trust with certain sources seen as authoritative and reliable. We could call these the social pre-conditions for the development of EU level communities of practice.

Evidence and policy

The paper now moves on to explore the 'structure' of the dialogue between research and policy on migration. This means addressing questions such as the 'impact' of research and the ways in which research could contribute to the development of shared understandings that may or may not challenge existing policy orientations. There may also be social limits to policy learning, as is shown.

Some have suggested that the underlying problems at the heart of the relationship between research and policy are more profound than information overload and short-staffing. An influential strand of work on migration policy is rather pessimistic about the relationship between research and policy. Stephen Castles (2004) has written about how flaws within the policy-making system and a failure to use research properly have led to policy failure. This reflects a more general interest in the ways in which research can shape policy and *vice versa*. Adrian Little (2012: 3) argues that there are significant limits to 'evidence based policy-making' because evidence can be highly contested while 'policy design, implementation and evaluation are bound up with a number of other contingent factors …such as the structure of power, the politics of influence and judgements about the contextual constraints in any policy environment [all of which] have a direct bearing on whether the policies that are actually pursued are grounded in evidence or whether the evidence is manufactured to suit the policy agenda'.

An important strand of work in organizational and institutional analysis identifies limits to learning that are linked to the structure of modern organisations and that can lead to cognitive limitations in the form of 'bounded' or 'semi-rationality' (March 1978; Brunsson, 1985). Along similar lines, Lindblom (1959) refers to decision-makers 'muddling through' while the so-called 'garbage can' model of decision-making focuses on instability in organizational environments (due, for example, to high turnover of staff) with the resultant ambiguities preventing people from fully mobilising their cognitive capacities and acting rationally (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). Stability in terms of, for example, participants in various EU level networks can be important. Meetings and other forms of networking can be useful, but an interviewee identified the effects of instability and ambiguity as follows:

> Meetings [are] useful in developing bilateral relationships … you develop some good relationships. Where it's less effective is having some in-depth discussions about matters of mutual interest. Once or twice I've tried to put items on the agenda which I think are really quite relevant, but they haven't materialized…I don't know whether that is…it may be that the opportunities aren't offered by the Commission, but it's probably more about the level of expertise

> by the representatives…because they are constantly changing, it'd be good to have a bit of stability …The interesting thing for me is the fact that a lot of the representatives change because of political changes. It's not necessarily that they are political appointees, but often, if there is a new government in a particular country it'll move integration or migration to a different ministry, and it'll maybe take a different attitude or approach.

Information overload and/or instability in participation can hinder the development of networks, but this does leave open the question of the extent to which cognitive limitations and underlying power relations can lead to a disinclination to use intellectual resources. For example, could there be circumstances in which organisational settings stifle rather than stimulate reflexive capacity? If so, the result could be that 'cognitive capacities may be limited by relations of power and domination rather than a lack of time and resources, or cognitive fixations' (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012: 1196). These amount to more than 'blocks' and have been labelled as 'functional stupidity', or, less pejoratively, as an inability to learn (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). An inability to learn may actually be functional to organizations because it can reduce uncertainty. People may be unwilling to challenge the assumptions upon which their role and activity are based. This can take the form of a lack of reflexivity by not questioning knowledge claims and norms or it could take the form of a lack of justification in not demanding or providing explanations for action. These run counter to a logic of communicative rationality that would involve giving reasons for actions or behaviour and seeking to justify them. A lack of substantive reasoning also means that questions can be framed in narrow ways that might even be misleading (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012: 1196). In such circumstances, an inability to learn can take the form of an organisationally-supported lack of reflexivity, substantive reasoning and justification. It would entail a refusal to use intellectual resources outside a narrow and 'safe' terrain.

It is clearly the case that there has been, is and will continue to be a reliance at EU level on expertise to support policy development and legitimate institutional roles (Boswell, 2009). However, it seems unlikely that research can simply be understood as the raw data, the evidence, facts upon which policy is then developed. If this were the role of knowledge production then it would accord with the idea of 'evidence-based policy-making'. Evidence does, of course, support policy-making, but, the previous discussion has suggested potential constraints (time, resources, the fact-value problem and even an inability or unwillingness to learn). This suggests that we need to take seriously the ways in which the relationship between knowledge production and its use is closely related to the institutional setting which, in this case, is the EU. It also means considering two other potential aspects of the relationship between research and policy that interact with evidence-based policy-making. These are:

- *Evidence-based institution-building* Research can legitimate institutional roles, which means that institutions can justify their role by building authority based on expertise about particular questions. This could lead to allegations of technocracy, but, in the case of the EU, it is more relevant to consider a politics of expertise within the EU and to ask questions about the meaning of expertise (who is an expert? How is expertise defined?) (Radaelli, 1999).

- *Policy-based evidence-making* Research could substantiate existing policy choices. This means that research agendas are shaped by policy agendas rather than the other way around. As an interviewee from an EU institution put it: 'impact goes both ways, the impact goes also in the research community … if you looked at research through Europe in a couple of years, you probably see certain trends emerging… and you could probably trace those trends back to discussions taking place at the European level' (Interview with representative of EU institution, June 2013). To take an example: was/is the trend towards 'civic integration' in migrant integration policy a research or political question? It's probably actually quite difficult to answer this question, which might also suggest that the lines between research and policy are blurred and that it's a mistake to think of the issue being simply one of how the research system communicates with the political system; they are enmeshed and interlinked.

To summarise, although there are frequent appeals for evidence-based policy-making, it is unlikely that research exists prior to policy and is simply the factual basis for policy. Research can and does

inform policy, but policy can also inform research. It is well-established that policy-making is not a linear process (debate leading to decision-making leading to implementation), so, similarly, it would be unwise to see the link between research and policy as linear. One reason for this is the fact-value problem. Another is that policy issues are continuously structured and restructured by ideas and discussions, including reflection on the effectiveness of previous and existing approaches. These ideas and discussions can be understood as 'stories' that construct causality in a way that is more-or-less convincing (Stone, 1988; see also Boswell, et al, 2011). Two examples illustrate this point. The first relates to economic migration and the activation of a debate about the need for migrant workers that occurred at the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century that was linked to the influential UN report on 'replacement migration'. As an interview from an EU institution put it:

> in beginning of 2000 the UN published its population figures… graphs… for the first time they publicised the fact that we had an ageing population in Europe…that had an immediate impact on the work that I was doing … we have this ageing problem, migration is going to be one of the answers, one of the solutions to this problem …and then the media closed in and public opinion became very negative and it stayed that way ever since. 2000 till I suppose 2001…there was a window of opportunity which we never had since… it was also the beginning of the discussion about migration at the EU level. The whole atmosphere was so much more positive in those first two years. (Interview with representative of EU institution, June 2013).

The second example is migrant integration. The definition of migrant integration as an EU-level issue in the early 2000s was closely linked to the activities of key researchers mobilised within a network called the Athens Migration Policy Initiative (so-called because Greece held the Council Presidency at the time) by an influential US-based think tank, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI). From this network the EU's Common Basic Principles on migrant integration (CBP) were formulated and then agreed by the member states. A national level official working with the EMN and an EU official both referred to the centrality of research, but also to the key role played by 'boundary organisations such as think tanks and foundations:

> that [the CBP] was a particular case where there was an active involvement of the research community spearheaded by the Americans but working with the Bertelsmann Foundation and other academics …the academic community which knew each other…to influence and to prepare for decisions that were taken at ministerial meetings, so you had before Thessaloniki conclusions that were really prepared by a seminar which was organised by [MPI]. And then the Common Basic Principles they were basically written by [a Dutch academic] …but going backwards and forwards between America and the Netherlands. So there were some direct and indirect ways in which there was a very strong interaction in those early days. Now I don't know how strong that is now…but it certainly was at the time. (Interview with representative of EU institution, June 2013).

> Even if you go back to the Common Basic Principles, a huge amount of research done in the Netherlands that helped to formulate these Common Basic Principles. Even now we're looking at things like integration tests… the stuff that migrants have to go through…(Interview with EMN National Contact Point, Brussels, June 2013).

A key point is that in subsequent years, the understanding of both labour migration and migrant integration as policy issues have changed and both are primarily member state competencies (affirmed by articles 79(4) and 79(5) of the Lisbon Treaty). For example, perceived policy failings have led to movement away from 'multicultural' approaches at member state level to a greater emphasis on socio-economic adaptation in the form of civic integration by migrant newcomers, including linguistic adaptation. In economic migration, there has been a continued interest in recruitment of the highly qualified, plus a growing interest in temporary and circular forms of migration.

The structuring effects of EU dialogues

This section takes forward the analysis of links between research and policy by exploring the relationship between knowledge production, its utilisation and the scope for policy learning and looks at the EMN and MIPEX as EU-level practices in the sense that both involve routinized interactions.

The EU level debate about migration is a rather specific and specialised debate with little evidence of spillover into wider public debate. This does not mean that the issues are not deeply controversial and contested; clearly they are. The point is that this contestation occurs primarily at member state level. There are also research-policy dialogues on migration at EU level that involve a specialised community of actors and are both frequent and intense with networks such as the EMN and MIPEX facilitating this interaction. There is regular interchange of ideas, information and knowledge in seminars, conferences and the like that occur regularly across Europe. There are also many research projects focused on aspects of EU migration policy comprising Europe-wide networks of researchers, often with a strong emphasis on active participation by potential beneficiaries of this research. This includes funding made available for migration-related research within the EU's 'framework' programmes and, after 2014, the Horizon 2020 programme. There are also funding programmes linked more specifically to migration, such as the EIF and ERF between 2007 and 2013. There is also a growing amount of data, although, as Singleton (2006:66) notes, a frequently voiced criticism as policy developed in the 2000s was that: 'policy developments have had little impact on the structure and systems of statistical data production within member states. Exceptions to this pattern lie in the response of applicant countries of Central Europe to EU demands for the use of harmonised concepts and definitions in the fields of Justice and Home Affairs'.

Data and information about migration within, to and from Europe emanates from a wide range of sources, including scientific researchers in universities but also from other organisations such as political parties, think tanks, international organisations and NGOs. Sometimes the lines become blurred as, for example, academic researchers work with think tanks or international organisations work with NGOs. By doing so, all claim a stake in policy - and no policy is complete without its 'stakeholders' - and seek to make interventions that are viewed as legitimate and authoritative. This helps to highlight that the relationship between research and policy is not simply between academic researchers and policy-makers. For example, a key role in mediating the relationship between research and policy is played by what can be called 'boundary organisations', including international organisations and think tanks that bridge the worlds of research and policy and can also have research capacity. As a think tank representative put it:

> I see think thanks as the facilitators between those two worlds that probably should be utilised a lot more, both in the way that think tank reports can use language that's more accessible than academic research, so that they can be the bridge to policy. And I also think that funding for research should emphasize that time for dissemination of the results also needs to be funded. So not just have an end report and then it disappears, but have a plan or strategy for bringing that research and knocking on x amount of doors. We're only starting to realize that in our own projects. We don't do research projects, but a lot of it starts with research. And we're trying to fund that dissemination part and the advocacy part, much more than the research itself. (Interview with think tank representative, Brussels June 2013).

Policy-makers often prefer research which, from their point of view, is appropriately packaged; although this may not correspond with the ways in which academic research is presented, or, more broadly, with how academic careers are structured.

> One of the problems with getting the impact to policymakers is packaging the results in a way which policymakers can use, and academics were never very good at that, because they weren't trained to do that. It's still an issue today….One of the big issues…presenting the results. How do you present the results, what format do you use? And the problem that, for the researchers on the whole, he's not going to get any credit for doing that. He gets credit when he gets his results

published in a scientific journal; but not if he influences policy decisions (Interview with representative of EU institution, Brussels, June 2013).

An interviewee from a think tank was blunter:

if I were a politician I need to know what Mister A coming from Oxford thinks about this subject. Or what is the result of this research. And I need to have this on one or two pages because I am going to talk to a conference, and I just have ten minutes in my car to have access to this data. And I need to have this data available to me in order to say within the conference 'but you know that Professor A has demonstrated that…. in the political cycles, you just have 5 minutes and that's it. And as long as academics are not able to transform their research result into policy oriented results, they won't be able to reach the target.

This EU-level networking can be understood as a form of soft, non-binding governance with interactions creating the potential to change the relationship between national policy systems and perhaps also reshape policy. While soft governance is relatively weak it can create space for relations between knowledge producers and the users of this knowledge. An interviewee referred to the limitations of a relatively weak legal and Treaty base, but saw how, in the area of migrant integration, both academics and think tanks are present in debates:

this is the 'weakest' level of policy making at EU level. But despite this, there are so much coordinations that have been established at the EU level … and in this process we can say that the National Contact Points, the Integration Handbook, the website, the forum … these are different places where integration issues are discussed and where I think that academics have to a certain extent for some of them found their way to go through it. And I think that …. Migration Policy Group has been quite effective in being able to include into this process some academic research. But I think that there was space… there was a space available for academics to push for their voice (interview with think tank representative, Brussels, June 2013).

This focus on softer governance corresponds with analyses that explores inter-state co-operation on aspects of migration policy, including issues of rights and integration, and that has identified 'functional logics' arising as a result of information exchange, development of best practice, and creation of non-binding codes of conduct. 'Softer' modes of international governance have been seen by Martin (2005) to provide international legal instruments and resources for advocacy at national level that potentially induce states to participate in international agreements and to take further practical steps. With a more specific EU focus, Newland (2005) argues that 'bottom-up' alternatives can promote intensive interaction among government officials with similar responsibilities. Significantly, Newland sees the EU as offering 'an example of government networks calling forth, over time, supranational institutions with legislative, judicial and executive responsibilities' (p. 5). This insight finds a more general reflection in work that looks at the EU as a 'learning organisation'. Zito and Schout (2009: 1103) note behind the highest political levels 'are a myriad of 'micro' processes of civil servants and politicians interacting concerning problems, hopes, norms, symbols, instruments, etc…. Over time, these exchanges generate changes in information, goals, values, behaviours, structures, policies and outcomes'. Such exchanges are central to the development of EU-level practices which we now move on to assess.

The EMN and MIPEX as communities of practice?

This section analyses two EU-level networks: the EMN and MIPEX. Both seek to promote boundary interactions. The EMN is a largely state-led network. MPIEX is led by a Brussels-based think tank working with key stakeholders across the EU. EMN and MIPEX are analysed in relation to the earlier discussion about practice and the embedding of practice within communities of practitioners. The core element of practice is that it is routinised. Table 1 also explores how the key elements of practice (engagement, imagination and alignment) can promote interactions that cross boundaries and that lead to exposure to 'foreign competencies'. As Table 1 also showed this raises issues about co-ordination, transparency and negotiability.

First, we look at the role of the EMN. In 1996, the Commission undertook a feasibility study for the creation of a European Migration Observatory, although in the end this was not established. The Laeken European Council meeting in October 2001 called for a system of information exchange on migration. In 2003, the EMN was launched as a pilot project and then as what is known as a 'Preparatory Action' between 2004 and 2006 during which participation was voluntary and the EMN was run from a research centre in Germany. The first topic for an EMN report was the ambitious question of the *Impact of Immigration on European Societies*. The report was controversial, much delayed and led to a re-evaluation of the EMN's role with a greater emphasis placed on work of a more technical nature (Boswell 2009).

The Hague Programme for Justice and Home Affairs covering the period 2005-10 included a plan for a Green Paper on the future of the EMN. On the basis of the Green Paper the Commission in August 2007 proposed to the Council the creation of a legal basis for the EMN, which was agreed by Council Decision 2008/381/EC. The decision to more formally constitute the EMN also gave it a stronger intergovernmental base as most of the national correspondents or National Contact Points (NCPs) as they are known are based in interior ministries.

According to the Council Decision the purpose of the EMN 'is to meet the information needs of Union institutions and of Member States' authorities and institutions on migration and asylum by providing up to date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum with a view to supporting European policy-making in these areas. The EMN will also serve to provide the wider public with such information', by, for example: collecting, exchanging and updating data; analyzing data and providing it in readily accessible forms; contributing to the development of indicators; publishing periodic reports; creating and maintaining an internet-based information exchange system to provide access to relevant documents. The EMN is coordinated by the Commission (DG Home Affairs) which is supported by two private sector contractors that assist with the exchange of information and with the development of the technology to support interchange. The work is supported by EMN NCPs in all member states (except Denmark, but including Norway) with at least three experts, one of whom is the national coordinator. These are mainly from ministries of the interior and justice but also involve research institutes, NGOs and international organizations (the International Organization for Migration is the NCP for three member states).

The intention to promote social learning as well as the EMN's intergovernmental orientation was emphasized by an interviewee from an international organization:

> There is still a learning and exchange process that comes with that network. There is some kind of network effect to it, it's hard to put the finger on it, it's not a network that produces some groundbreaking new evidence that changes the course of policies, but that rather informs the policymakers and these people largely come from the institutions that also set policy course (…) (Representative of international organization, Brussels, March 2013).

There can, however, be variable quality that poses a challenge for the private sector contractor that manages the EMN. As an interviewee from an NGO put it:

> when it comes to doing the synthesis reports, that it's really difficult because they [the contractor] have really uneven reports to work from. But you can see that yourself when you go on their website and you try and find the country report…it looks very different from country to country, even if the methodology is the same.

Networking within the EMN is intensive and takes various forms:

- Regular meeting of NCPs;
- EMN Studies drawing from information from all participants of which there are usually three each year;
- An annual EMN conference;
- Training sessions on technical or administrative issues;

- Twinning and collaboration meetings;
- Studies addressing specific themes;
- Annual reports from all participants that feed into the Commission's Annual Report on Migration and Asylum;
- The development of a glossary and thesaurus as the basis for improved comparability to develop common understanding of terms with the aim of harmonising policy concepts;
- An information exchange as a repository with a search function;
- Ad Hoc queries.

Ad Hoc queries are particularly interesting examples of routinised interaction. Of the 400 or so requests that were made between 2008 and 2012, more than 260 have been published. Essentially they amount to a request from an EMN member state or the Commission to other member states asking for practical information about particular policy issues. The queries are grouped under various headings: illegal immigration, return, protection, economic migration, integration, borders, EU acquis, family reunification, residence, students, trafficking, visas and a general 'unclassified' category. An interviewee from an international organisation highlighted the role of Ad Hoc queries as follows:

> my impression (…) is that the EMN in particular has become important through its more kind of research gathering, the ad hoc queries. There is an enormous amount of queries that are circulated and that are requested on a state basis (…) that really has become an important mechanism of policy learning (…) Member States who have an interest to make or change a policy on a particular issue, sometimes on very specific issues (…) even if it's just six or seven Member States replying to that, it's still something that you don't have, or something that individual Member States don't have the capacity to deliver in the same way. It's much more difficult for individual Member States to use their own contacts (…) to get that kind of information in that timeframe (Representative of international organization, Brussels, March 2013).

Two representatives of think tanks both highlighted a strong intergovernmental dynamic, but also the way in which the strategic context for national policy-making has changed:

> It serves intergovernmental needs because it allows Member States to ask their ad hoc queries (…) they are very politically motivated (…) you can match almost every query to a national policy debate or national policy process (…) it allows them to then make the comparative claim themselves (…) In the UK there was a green paper restricting family reunification, with many proposals (…) and they were then using comparisons, you know, saying (…) other countries do this (…) and then they would give certain examples. Whereas they only chose very few countries in Europe that do this, not noting that all other countries do not do this (Interviewee from Brussels think tank, Brussels, March 2013).

> Ad hoc queries are surprisingly useful because they tend to be linked to one particular Member States' deliberations at a given moment (…) last year when the Dutch were thinking about the integration of EU citizens, they had an ad hoc query (…) and they got a wealth of information back and it really helped them to think through what the key issues were (…) (Interviewee from Brussels think tank, Brussels, March 2013).

Regular interactions within the EMN can break down barriers between national policy systems and serve as a mechanism for norm diffusion. The country reports can also play a role in this too and also for the informal networks that lie 'behind' these reports. As an NCP put it when referring to the EMN country reports:

> I am an avid reader of the country reports because (…) I am interested in what works, so those country reports are extremely useful. There is a kind of hidden output of those. Are you aware of the informal networks? The integration contact points and the responsible authorities for the various funds that we manage have a number of informal networks (…) so for example I was in Bratislava back in the spring talking very specifically about the funding issues (…) that's a kind of offshoot of some of the work that's being done. You choose the networks you want to join on the basis of country reports (…) so this particular network is Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic,

> Poland, Netherlands, Austria and the UK (…) looking at common factors around the funding of projects. You have the background information from the country reports (…) so you can find out what are the similarities or what are the contrasts. We also have other informal bilateral relationships which are again informed by the country reports. I talk a lot to my opposite numbers in the Netherlands, in Germany, Italy, France on quite specific issues that come out of those reports (…) things that we want to follow up on (…) (Interview with EMN NCP, Brussels, June 2013).

The EMN can promote an enhanced understanding of international migration as a European issue and, to return to a point made earlier, not only inform policy, but also legitimate institutional roles and substantiate existing policy choices. Learning is linked to co-ordination, transparency and negotiability. That said, policy learning at EU level occurs in the 'shadow of hierarchy' as a result of the strongly embedded nature of national policy responses and their powerful effects on the 'framing' of EU policy and on norm diffusion (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2011).

While the EMN is a largely state-led network, a contrasting dynamic is provided by MIPEX that emerged from a civil society and think tank initiative and involves cooperation with in academic researchers in the development of its huge evidence base. On the basis of a normative framework drawn largely from EU directives on migrants rights and other international standards such as those associated with the Council of Europe, MIPEX constructs rankings that measure performance of national legal framework against these standards and also compares EU member states with non-EU countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia. Similarly to the EMN, it is interesting to think about MIPEX in terms of practices and the development of a community of practice. This would require a shared commitment, information sharing and exchange and a focus on practice. MIPEX also functions as a boundary object that can facilitate co-ordination, transparency and negotiability. An example of MIPEX as a 'boundary object' was identified by an interviewee from an international organisation:

> MIPEX is a clear tool that helps to initiate a discussion…my country ranks really badly, let's talk about it…. Is it an invitation to speak about it or maybe an invitation for complacency? There are different ways to look at it and I think not everyone who looks at those tools has a clear understanding of what this actually means, the data that comes out on the screen and what else you need to do to put it in the right context.

The network of civil society organisations that underpin the work of the MIPEX network then provides the context for national debates in the context of a wider European debate. The impact of MIPEX is carefully monitored with credible evidence that changes in law and policy have arisen as a result of poor performance in the MIPEX rankings. MIPEX thus seeks to make migrant integration more tractable as a common European issue, but, compared to the EMN, it does so in a more contested environment. The EMN is a state-led dynamics based on a Council decision. MIPEX is a civil society initiative. MIPEX is led by a highly credible actor at EU level, but, in contrast to the shadow of hierarchy that looms over the EMN, MIPEX is subject to more of a bargaining dynamic as it puts its ideas forward in the EU marketplace.

Conclusions

This paper has developed an analysis of research-policy relations that has stressed the importance of practice, by which is meant routinised interactions between a range of actors seeking to influence, shape or make migration policy. The relationship between research was then analysed in relation to the practices that play an important role in constituting the field of migration governance at EU level and the competitive dynamics associated with it as policy choices are made and institutional roles develop. It as shown that these practices have changed the context within which policy learning occurs, but that this has not changed the substantive orientation of policy. There are also impediments to the use of academic research that relate not only to information overload and the packaging of research, but also to the relationship between policy and critical research.

The paper addressed a series of questions. The first of these is the structuring of the relationship between research and policy. The importance of dialogues between the producers of knowledge (including but not only academic researchers) and the users of this knowledge (particularly EU institutions and the member states) was highlighted. This has led to routinised forms of interaction that can be understood as communities of practice within which competence and personal experience underpin social learning. The basis for the development of a community of practice is processes of engagement, imagination and alignment. For 'boundary interactions' to occur, it is necessary for there also to be co-ordination, transparency and negotiability. It was found that there is some instability within these EU-level interactions because of constant changes in participation which can then lead to ambiguities that 'bound' rationality and impose some social limits on policy learning.

The paper then sought to understand more about how policy-makers seek to process information. It asked whether there was a risk of information overload. It was found that a strong emphasis is often placed on relationships with key experts (academic, but not only) who can become trusted guides for officials when seeking to make sense of the mountain of research evidence. These can be understood as the social pre-conditions for the formation of a community of practice because they play an important role in defining competence.

Once these relationships have been established then it is also important to think about the nature and content of the practices themselves. It was asked whether policy-makers listen to researchers. If they do, what do they want to hear? And, do they hear it? It was found that the production of academic knowledge and the structure of academic careers are seen as impediments to the relationship between research and policy, but an important role has developed for boundary organisations such as international organisation and think tanks that mediate the relationship between academic researchers and policy -makers (while also sometimes having research capacity themselves). The paper also emphasised the importance of moving beyond a simple approach to the relationship between research and policy and, instead, suggested a more complex relationship between evidence, policies and institutions that recognised the possibility for research to inform policy, but also to legitimate institutional roles and to substantiate existing policy choices (cf Boswell, 2009).

The paper then assessed the impact of research to the development of the shared understandings that can inform policy development and asked whether these understandings tend to confirm or challenge existing orientations. To do this, the EMN and MIPEX were assessed. It was argued that a shadow of hierarchy cast by ideas embedded in policy frameworks at national level has been cast over the work of the EMN and that this plays a key role in terms of the network's 'content' and also the diffusion of norms and practices. In contrast, MIPEX was seen as displaying a bargaining dynamic and as an intervention in an increasingly crowded marketplace for ideas at EU level. MIPEX is also more challenging to current approaches, although the main challenge it poses is for national approaches to become more consistent with the normative standards associated with the approach of the EU and other international bodies such as the Council of Europe. The paper has thus explored research policy relationships by emphasising the importance of EU-level practices that are likely to become increasingly important in the struggles about institutional roles, budgets and policy development that will play out in the coming years.

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