

**KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER
AND MIGRATION
POLICY MAKING**

Christina Boswell

Geneva, October 2004

**Knowledge Transfer and Migration
Policy Making**

Special Lecture on Migration
by

Christina Boswell

International Institute for Labour Studies
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Knowledge transfer and migration policy making

Christina Boswell¹

In this contribution I would like to offer some observations on the constraints to knowledge transfer in migration policy. Knowledge transfer in this context refers to the absorption and application of social science research in migration policy making. My starting premise is hardly controversial: that there appears to be a significant gap between, on the one hand, the empirical and theoretical assumptions underlying migration policies in European states; and on the other, “state-of-the-art” research on the causes of mobility and settlement, or the economic impact of migration, or the determinants of different trajectories of incorporation. The more cynical of us may claim this is nothing surprising. It can be attributed to the stubborn adherence of officials and politicians to established values and beliefs; or the incapacity of researchers to translate their findings into wieldy (“policy relevant”) tools; or, another favourite, the pressures of electoral politics and the tendency to dumb down complex issues and “play to the stalls”.

I believe that these responses do not do justice to what is, in reality, a far more complex configuration of constraints. I am now embarking on a four year project, sponsored by the EU, which will analyse this configuration in more depth.² What I would like to do today is to present some initial ideas on the policy making context, and the problems this generates for knowledge transfer.³ The first part of the paper will be devoted to a (very preliminary) attempt at delineating some trends in migration policy making and politics that may affect knowledge transfer. The second part will consider how this can influence the legitimacy and effectiveness of migration policies. The third part will suggest the implications for research and consultancy on migration issues: what is the scope for expanding the impact of research at different levels of the policy process?

1. Two trends in policy making

The “Unbinding” of policy making

Much of the literature on policy making since the late 1970s has moved away from the traditional political science focus on parliament and political administration as the focus of decision-making. Instead, the emphasis has been on understanding the relationships and flows

¹ Head, Migration Research Group, Hamburg Institute of International Economics.

² Marie Curie Excellence Grant, “Expanding the Knowledge Base of European Labour Migration Policies” (KnowMig). See www.migration-networks.org.

³ Subsequent parts of the project will deal with the relationship between research and policy from the two other perspectives already hinted at: the forms of knowledge being produced by the research community; and the sociology of knowledge transfer between research communities and bureaucracies.

of resources between a wide range of actors influencing policy processes.⁴ This new emphasis on “policy” or “issue networks” and “advocacy coalitions” offered a new way of conceptualising the links between the state and societal interests, one which was felt to better capture a number of changes in the nature of governance.⁵ One of these was the increasing complexity and technocratic nature of policy, especially in the sphere of the economy and welfare system. Policy was increasingly differentiated into separate specialised sectors, and the officials dealing with these highly complex technical areas became functionally dependent on technocrats and interest groups for expertise and information. A form of horizontal inter-dependency was developing, whereby policy makers needed to mobilise resources from actors outside of the classic hierarchical political structure.⁶ Thus “instead of emanating from a central authority, be this government or the legislature, policy today is in fact made in a process involving a plurality of both public and private organisations”.⁷

Parallel to this process, other authors have described how expanding democratisation and rights have created opportunities for a far greater range of social organisations and interests to become engaged in policy. This applies not only to interest groups, but also to the expanded role of judicial systems at national and supranational level, as well as increased opportunities for mass media, through more liberal rules on press freedom and technological advances.⁸ This “unbinding” of politics increases the range of actors serving as a monitor or constraint on political power, again rendering the notion of hierarchical political control through government essentially out-dated. Both developments imply that the hierarchical model of political, in the words of Beck:–

... is being displaced by theories that emphasize consultation, interaction, negotiation, network: in short, the *interdependency and process character* in the context of the responsible, affected and interested agencies and actors from the formulation of programs through the choice of measures to the forms of their enforcement. While the traditional understanding of politics proceeded with a certain naiveté from the assumption that the goals set can be reached by politics, provided the proper means are taken, politics in newer approaches is now viewed as the collaboration of different agents even *contrary* to formal hierarchies and *across* fixed responsibilities.⁹

⁴ Jeremy Richardson, Actor Based Models of National and EU Policy-Making, Essex Papers in Politics and Government No. 103 (1996).

⁵ Paul A. Sabatier and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith, eds., Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1993).

⁶ Tanja A. Börzel, “What’s so Special about Policy Networks? An Exploration of the Concept and its Usefulness in Studying European Governance”, EioP Vol. 1, No. 16 (1997).

⁷ Renate Mayntz, “Modernization and the Logic of Interorganizational Networks”, MIPF Working Paper No. 4, Max Planck Institute for Social Research (Cologne: 1994), p. 5.

⁸ Ulrich Beck, Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (London: Sage, 1996).

⁹ Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 199.

We can see indications of this in almost every area of migration policy. Regarding the technocratic and detailed nature of policy: consider, for example, the increased complexity of categories and criteria for the grant of humanitarian status for protection seekers; the so-called “proliferation” of labour permit programmes; or rules governing family reunion. This complexity is both a product of, and further contributes to, the involvement of a range of different actors and institutions in policy making: from courts and migration and refugee lawyers, to NGOs and pressure groups. One can also discern the role of rights expansion in multiplying forms of monitoring and constraint, as, for example, in the case of the increased role of the judiciary as a check on political power, as well as the use of media as a lever of pressure on governments.

What consequences does this have for the direction of migration policy? As a number of authors have shown, this engagement of other actors tends to push migration policy in a more liberal direction. With the notable exception of the media, most actors participating in these horizontal networks or monitoring activities are seeking to expand opportunities for the entry, settlement and incorporation of migrants or refugees. One explanation for this expansionist bias is offered by Freeman’s political economy account. He attributes this to the concentrated benefits of liberal policies for certain organised interests (employers, immigrant groups).¹⁰ Those standing to lose from immigration simply have insufficient incentives to mobilise resources to lobby for restriction. Other accounts locate liberal forces in the equalising and rights-expanding logic of various bureaucratic and judicial institutions of the liberal welfare state. These institutions stand to expand their influence through the differentiation and specialisation of policy, and – in most cases – will use this influence to push for the expansion of rights and welfare to immigrants.¹¹ Diverse as these accounts are in terms of theoretical assumptions and focus of analysis, they all point to an expansionist, liberal tendency amongst organised interests and institutions. Thus once one accepts (a) that the locus of policy making has become more diffuse, and (b) that the actors involved have a generally more liberal orientation than those engaged in party political debates, then the result is likely to be a discrepancy between policy outcomes and proclaimed policy goals.

¹⁰ Gary P. Freeman, “Modes of Immigration Politics in Liberal Democratic States”, *International Migration Review*, 24:4 (1995), pp. 881-902.

¹¹ Virginie Guiraudon, ‘The Marshallian Triptych Reordered: The Role of Courts and Bureaucracies in Furthering Migrants’ Social Rights’ in Bommes, M. and Geddes, A. *Immigration and Welfare: Challenging the Borders of the Welfare State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 72-89; Guiraudon, “The Constitution of a European Immigration Policy Domain: A Political Sociology Approach”, *Journal of European Public Policy* (2003); James F. Hollifield, “Ideas, Institutions, and Civil Society: On the Limits of Immigration Control in France” in Brochmann, G. and Hammar, T. (eds) *Mechanisms of Immigration Control: A Comparative Analysis of European Regulation Policies* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), pp. 59-95; Christian Joppke, *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

At the same time, however, growing complexity has the effect of encouraging a tendency to “dumb down” complicated policy issues in public discussions. Politicians are confronted with a gap between complex and technical issues, and the need for policy to be couched in more catchy terms in order to enlist popular support.¹² At best, this can generate pressure to simplify policy issues. At worst, it engenders (in the rather polemical words of Edelman) “a process that manifestly lends itself to the elevation of misconceptions to the status of dogma and also to the omission of crucial factors of the social and economic scene”.¹³ Once this tone of political debate is established, it is difficult to introduce more complex or subtle forms of argumentation. This is of course a point about the *form* of political discussion, but does not in itself explain the *content* of what is simplified. Seen in tandem with the trends I shall outline below, though, it is likely that this will indeed veer towards pro-restrictionist policy agendas.

Symbolic politics

The second trend concerns not so much the range of actors and the nature of their influence on policy, but rather strategies of political mobilisation that shape public discourse on migration policy. Two developments are important here. The first is the consequences of the state’s inability to redeem its historical guarantee to provide socio-economic protection for its citizens. Since the 1970s, economic depression, large-scale unemployment, welfare reform and labour market restructuring have shifted expectations about the state’s capacity to protect the welfare of its citizens. Habermas famously argued in the 1970s that this could be described as a legitimisation crisis, in which the state is unable to fulfil its ascribed function of protecting citizens from economic shock through a social safety net.¹⁴ This deficiency exposes latent social conflicts, and forces the state to compensate by falling back on alternative strategies of mobilisation. Such strategies can involve making use of elements of socio-cultural traditions to stimulate feelings of loyalty or prejudice – such as national symbols, cultural references, and so on.

Whether or not one accepts Habermas’ thesis on the origins of legitimisation crisis,¹⁵ many analyses of the politics of immigration discern a similar pattern in strategies of mobilisation. States and competing parties deploy idealised conceptions of shared culture (e.g. “Leitkultur”), with promises to protect these from erosion through immigration. This is likely to be a typical

¹² Holger Kolb, *Rationale Politik hinter dem Rücken des Volkes? Eine Diskussion am Beispiel der deutschen ‘Green Card’*, PhD Dissertation, Faculty of Philosophy, Westphalian Wilhelms University of Münster (2004).

¹³ Murray Edelman, *The Politics of Misinformation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 4.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (translated by Thomas McCarthy). Boston, Beacon Press, 1997.

¹⁵ He has since revised it, moving away from the original Marxian explanation of legitimisation crisis as ultimately caused by the exposure of class inequalities triggered by (inevitable) economic shocks in the capitalist system. In fact, the class conflict assumption would not be consistent with Beck’s thesis on the reconfiguration of collective identification.

pattern of mobilisation in societies with an established tradition of ethno-nationalist mobilisation.¹⁶ Another strategy is to reassert the role of the state in protecting the welfare of citizens, through attributing responsibility for scarce resources to outsiders who are abusing the system or those making (unjustifiable) claims of entitlement to social and economic resources (asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, unwanted labour migrants, etc.). The proposed remedy is to reassert the state's control and function as welfare guarantor, through foreclosing access to outsiders. Other authors have seen parallel strategies in the securitisation of migration and refugee issues.¹⁷

At the same time, the opportunities for this type of mobilisation have expanded in liberal welfare states. This can be to a large extent attributed to the widely recognised decline in traditional and more stable categories of collective self-identification. Traditional categories of identification and bonds of solidarity such as class, church, ideology or nation-state have declined since the 1950s. According to Beck, this is a function of the declining relevance of classic distributive conflicts over material resources. These have been replaced by conflict over the distribution of risks produced by techno-economic development. This creates new categories of collective identity or bonds of solidarity characterised by forms of "solidarity from anxiety". Whereas previous forms of solidarity or collective identity tended to be based on class alliances to advance well-defined material objectives, new alliances are generated by concerns to cope with more diffuse and ill-defined forms of insecurity: environmental degradation and pollution, or fear of loss of social status.

Since such forms of solidarity are guided by less tangible goals, they are more prone to fall back on identity-based criteria of identification. Often vague concerns about risk may then be articulated as issues of distribution between in- and out-groups. Classic candidates for this articulation are forms of xenophobia and nationalism, such as anti-Europeanism, chauvinist nationalism, anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant sentiment. The susceptibility of sections of the electorate to this form of mobilisation creates high incentives for political parties to generate support through restrictionist immigration and asylum policies.

Both tendencies contribute to migration assuming a highly symbolic role in political discourse.¹⁸ Migration issues take on a symbolic importance insofar as their perceived importance to the

¹⁶ See, for example, Michael Mann, "The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing", *New Left Review* 235 (May/June 1999), pp. 18-45.

¹⁷ Oliver Weaver, B. Buzan, M. Kelstip and P. Lemaire, *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1993); Jeff Huysmans, "Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier", *European Journal of International Relations*, 4:2 (1998), pp. 226-55.

¹⁸ Thomas Faist, "How to Define a Foreigner? The Symbolic Politics of Immigration in German Partisan Discourse, 1978-1992" in Baldwin-Edwards, M. and Schain, M. A. (eds) *The Politics of Immigration in Western Europe*

electorate surpasses the (rational perception of) impact of migration on society or individual interests. This can be seen as a “bottom-up” process of reconfigured categories of collective identification, which increasingly revolve around identity or single issues; and/or a “top-down” strategy of mobilisation by the state and rival groups. The result is that migration, in the phrase of Beck, becomes a “lightning rod”, a device for channelling a range of diffuse concerns about social change.

What is the result of these two sets of trends? Summarising the points above:

1. Like many other areas of economic and social policy, policies regulating the control, entry, stay and integration of immigrants and refugees are increasingly complex and technocratic; and (partly as a result) they engage a wide range of political and judicial institutions and societal groups in the processes of policy formulation, implementation and enforcement.
2. This technocratisation, and features specific to the actors and institutions involved in policy, tend to militate in favour of more expansive migration policies.
3. Complexity also creates a necessity to simplify policy issues in public debates.
4. Two further factors meanwhile increase the likelihood that this simplified description will have a highly symbolic and restrictionist character: changing patterns of collective identification, and the state’s need to find new patterns of mobilisation to shore up legitimacy.
5. The result is a gap – perhaps even a gulf – between migration policy praxis (aims of policy as advanced by actors participating in the policy process, the substance of measures, and their implementation and enforcement); and migration policy as depicted in party political debates and the mass media.¹⁹

Finally, and partly because of simplification (point 3) and attempts to restore legitimacy (point 4), the myth of the politically authoritative state persists.

2. Implications

What are the implications of this discrepancy? Most obviously, it raises questions of accountability in politics. These are not purely of an ethical nature, but can have direct

(London: Frank Cass, 1994), pp. 50-71; Dietrich Thränhardt, “The Political Uses of Xenophobia in England, France and Germany” in Ucarer, E. M. and Puchara, D. J. (eds) *Immigration into Western Societies: Problems and Policies* (London: Pinter, 1997), pp. 175-94.

¹⁹ The precise borders of this distinction vary depending on how much of the “praxis” is conveyed in public policy debates. One can imagine a case where the public becomes versed in a greater level of detail, in which case the “behind the scenes” area will be proportionately reduced. This distinction between two levels is therefore not based on any fixed distinction between, for example, types of legislation or level of complexity.

implications for public confidence in political institutions and elites. In a number of European countries, anti-immigration political parties have struck a popular chord in arguing that political elites are out of touch with public opinion, and that their restrictive rhetoric belies the reality of increasing and/or uncontrolled immigration, or overly liberal approaches to diverse cultural practices. Populist political parties and the mass media are likely to be continuously on the lookout for signs of the gap between tough declarations and more liberal policy practice, and to exploit these to embarrass government and political elites. Unfortunately, given the continued “myth” of centralised political authority, the typical response of governments will be to reinforce their hard-line rhetoric, and perpetuate the cycle of political promise, failure to deliver, populist pressure for restriction, political promise, and so on.

A second type of implication concerns how this gap affects migration policy outcomes. It is important to recognise that even where statements of political intent diverge from outcomes, the declaratory content of these statements may still have an impact on praxis. Such declarations play an important role in resetting the boundaries of what sorts of approaches are considered legitimate or feasible. This is especially the case for areas where public attitudes have a strong impact on outcomes – for example questions of discrimination, or integration. To take an example, while the Kohl government’s “Return Law” promoting the repatriation of (especially Turkish) guest workers in the early 1980s has been proven to have had almost no impact on return rates,²⁰ it nonetheless contributed to notions that Turkish immigrants were not essentially (wanted) members of German society. Such declarations can therefore quite significantly impact both host society views on immigrants, and the latter’s motivation to define themselves as members.

Moreover, the gap between political declaration and praxis can severely hamper planning. This is most obviously the case for integration policies, where different agencies have had an important role in expanding the rights of immigrants or refugees – helping to prolong or make permanent their stay in host countries, and to extend their social and political rights – often in spite of policy statements and legislation seeking to limit such possibilities. The judiciary, welfare bureaucracies, immigrant and asylum lobby groups may therefore be successful in subverting restrictive policies on a case-by-case basis (or, in exceptional cases, may set a legal

²⁰ Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland: Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2001), p. 255.

precedent or successfully lobby for special treatment for a particular group). But this is a qualified victory if they are denied the opportunity of developing a systematic and predictable framework for determining rights, or assisting integration.

In some ways, then, the divergence of praxis from declaratory politics is to be welcomed by those favouring a more expansive approach to migration. But it can have a number of damaging repercussions: not just for the credibility of political elites and their migration policies, but also for policy outcomes. Restrictive declarations can undermine efforts to promote more constructive attitudes towards immigration, or motivate immigrants to integrate. And a refusal to publicly acknowledge that entry, stay and/or expanded rights for certain groups is unavoidable can hamper policy planning.

It is worth briefly considering how these factors may kick in, in the case of programmes to recruit labour migrants.

Most west European states have highly complex arrangements regulating work permits. There are often a plethora of different categories, based on a combination of human capital or other characteristics of immigrants (points systems), occupations or sectors, labour market tests, or bi- and multilateral agreements with particular sending countries or regional blocks – not to mention the complex provisions covering access to the labour market for protection seekers, family members, those graduating in the host country, the self-employed, and so on. Specific decisions on permits follow these complex regulations, but may also be more or less generously implemented and enforced, depending on the configuration of agencies and lobby groups involved. As Freeman's political economy model predicts, the actors involved in policy making and implementation in this area are skewed in favour of an expansive interpretation of the rules, especially firms and employers' groups and local employment offices.²¹

This messy praxis is rarely conveyed in public debates: whether because the media or politicians cannot translate it into a sufficiently simple or punchy message; or because they prefer not to draw attention to the breadth of possibilities for entry and employment. The second is certainly true of the German case. The main political parties have allied in perpetuating the myth of the 1973 "Recruitment Stop", although a decree of 1990 – the so-called "Anwerbestoppausnahme-Verordnung" – had already listed multiple exceptions to the ban. These exceptions were not subject to public debate, nor were the various bilateral agreements on temporary workers, or arrangements for intra-company transfers, or multilateral agreements on

²¹ If one adds the various provisions for individual or collective regularisation, not to mention labour mobility through other sorts of agreements such as intra-company transfer or service provision, the picture becomes more complicated.

free movement of service providers. They were often expansively interpreted and implemented through branches of the Federal Labour Office.

The SPD-Green government attempted to close the gap between a declaratory policy of restriction and de facto openness in 2000, through its Green Card Programme, and the proposal of a points system in its draft Immigration Law. Yet even in debates on the proposed points system, neither the government nor the opposition parties made any attempt to explain the fact that multiple possibilities for entry already existed. Both preferred to stage a highly symbolic debate on whether or not it was appropriate to lift the Recruitment Stop.²² The implicit claim was that the government was in a position to decide how many workers to admit, and according to which criteria; and that the policy change under discussion would involve a switch from a ban on recruitment, to a policy of recruiting additional labour. After lengthy negotiations, the proposed points system included in the bill was abandoned on the insistence of the conservative opposition parties.

What were the effects of this continued gap between more liberal practice and declaratory restriction? In the case of Germany, the gap did not seem to undermine confidence in the system, simply due to the fact that the mass media and political parties lacked the knowledge or interest to call attention to it in the public debate. In terms of the impact on policy outcomes, however, there were certainly a number of disadvantages to keeping the more generous practice on recruitment hidden from public debate. One of the disadvantages was that Germany would continue to perpetuate an image of itself – both for Germans and non-Germans – as “kein Einwanderungsland”. This could have implications for the attractiveness of Germany as a destination for high-skilled labour. It also implied the retention of a basically sceptical attitude towards the possible benefits of immigration on the part of the host society. On the question of policy planning, the retention of a gap between declared intent and practice meant the continued treatment of labour migration as (at least symbolically) an exception to the norm. This supposed “exceptionalness” of labour migration implied treating immigrant labour as an economically necessary, but in other ways far from desirable, instrument of labour market policy. It certainly did not create space for promoting more positive attitudes on the part of the receiving society, or for better planning and assistance of integration in the case of longer-term stay.

The recent German case offers an example of just one possible trajectory under the conditions of non-hierarchical policy making and restrictive declaratory politics. In the UK case, the centre-left government had similar reasons for switching its declaratory stance to a more pro-labour migration approach. In fact, it has had far more success in this, at least with reference to

²² Kolb, 2004, *op. cit.*

recruitment of skilled migrants, or those filling occupations with acute shortages. Italy offers an example of the other extreme, where the gap is in many ways exacerbated by a populist (apparently anti-immigration) government, which nonetheless tolerates and even encourages *de facto* migration.²³

3. What Role for Research?

In drawing out the implications for research, I would like to consider two questions. First, what opportunities does the (new) policy and political context create for expanding the influence of research? And second, how, if at all, can researchers help to bridge the divide between expansive praxis and declaratory restriction, and its negative side-effects for politics and policy?

It is useful here to distinguish between two functions of knowledge: instrumental and legitimising. The instrumental function essentially refers to the ability of knowledge to clarify the causes and impacts of immigration and different patterns of incorporation, and (in the case of applied research) how policy interventions can mediate these impacts. The legitimising function refers to the more symbolic role of knowledge in lending “expert” authority to particular views or decisions. The capacity to do so will of course depend on the credibility of the research produced. To simplify somewhat, one would expect the instrumental role to be more valued by the policy community at the “behind the scenes” level of policy praxis, while the legitimising function will assume greater importance at the level of declaratory politics.

Policy making and instrumental knowledge

To return to the first of our two questions, it is evident that the increased technocratisation of policy generates a greater dependence on knowledge. Officials need to be able to grasp technical detail of complex policy, and the linkages to other policy areas; and what sorts of trends (including the policy interventions themselves) may impact these, and in which ways. Haas has argued that this creates dependency on extra-bureaucratic channels of advice, which he characterises as “epistemic communities”: networks “of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area.”²⁴ Although these experts may come from different disciplines, they share a set of normative beliefs, causal beliefs, notions of validity, and what Haas calls a “common policy enterprise”.²⁵

²³ See, for example, Christina Boswell, *European Migration Policies in Flux: Changing Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion* (Oxford: Blackwell’s and Chatham House, 2003).

²⁴ Haas, Peter M., “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination”, in Haas, ed., *Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina), pp. 1-35. (p. 3)

²⁵ Haas (1992).

Such epistemic communities clearly exist in migration policy. They include:

- research institutes and universities working on policy-relevant migration issues, who are either contracted by government agencies to carry out research, or disseminate their own research to the policy community;
- researchers or policy/legal experts within NGOs and lobby groups. For example, ECRE, the British Refugee Council and the German Pro-Asyl all have legal and/or policy experts who may provide a supportive or critical role; and philanthropic foundations such as Rowntree, the German Marshall Fund, the German Körber Stiftung, committed to goals of social justice, inter-cultural harmony, etc. who are also increasingly sponsoring or carrying out their own research on migration;
- migration and refugee lawyers, who offer technical expertise, and increasingly disseminate legal analyses through internet, publications, and at conferences;
- officials in national, regional and international organisations whose research and consultancy output is not solely to inform or legitimise their own organisation's policies, but can contribute to the knowledge basis for national policies (RSD in the British Home Office, new research department in BAFI, Germany; officials in European Commission DGs JHA, Employment and Social Affairs, etc.; OECD, ILO, IOM, more recently UNGCIM ...).

However, the level of technical detail required to make a useful contribution may delimit the role of much academic research, at least in terms of the *instrumental* function of knowledge. The knowledge demanded is often highly applied and specific. The broader parameters for policy have usually already been laid down, whether through legislation or constitutional provisions; the pre-formed values and beliefs of officials; or established practice. These parameters also define the types of research (research question, theoretical approach, methodology) considered helpful for the purpose of achieving these policy goals. Most (policy-relevant) academic research tends to be located at a higher level of abstraction: it examines how more generalised categories of social/economic change affect resources or patterns of behaviour, and – in the case of policy research – how policy interventions mediate these relationships.²⁶ With the possible exception of a few technically specialized areas such as asylum law or econometrics, it rarely addresses the particular (applied) configurations that are of interest to those at the more detailed end of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

²⁶ Topf describes this as a distinction between bureaucratic knowledge, oriented towards the classification of the world into categories based on a need to change society; and scientific knowledge, whose aim is to “devise descriptive categories of the world ‘as it is’.” Topf, Richard, “Advice to Governments – Some Theoretical and Practical Issues”, in B. Guy Peters and Anthony Barkers, *Advising West European Governments: Inquiries, Expertise and Public Policy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 182-98.

This omission can be in part attributed to the limited incentives for researchers to invest the time and effort in applying their theoretical/methodological expertise to highly specific policy problems, with little reward in terms of academic or public recognition. Even where researchers carry out more applied consultancy projects, they can rarely match officials' knowledge of the precise constellation of conditions that produce a given policy problematic. The most valued input may instead come from other practitioners – NGOs, social partners, private service providers or who have more direct experience or understanding of these applied issues.

There are, of course, exceptions to this. First, there may be individuals or groups within organizations who are willing and able to see the “bigger picture”: for example, to make the intellectual bridge between more abstract causal linkages (e.g. ethnic networks can facilitate integration) and a specific problem (how far should we promote ethnic dispersal in our council housing policy in a particular district). The openness to other perspectives is likely to be greater in periods of uncertainty, where previous policies are being questioned because of changed conditions, or because they have been proved ineffective. Moreover, as I suggested, certain technical knowledge or know-how will be valued: detailed knowledge of the impact of a new EU Directive on existing anti-discrimination practices, or the ability to estimate labour shortages in a particular sector. Another exception may be empirical knowledge of how other regions/countries have managed particular problems – as exemplified in the current fad for analyses of “best practice”. Or, of course, evaluations of the effectiveness and impact of previous policies and programmes will be valued. This type of information is of course already highly applied, although requires breaking down into generalisable propositions in order to be applicable in different empirical conditions. But it is precisely its facticity that may appeal to the policy community (as opposed to more generalisable, abstracted causal links).

This implies that while there are opportunities for knowledge transfer from research to policy networks (or, in Haas' more fluid concept, “epistemic communities”), these may not be so extensive. Exceptions are highly applied technical knowledge, best practice and evaluation, or, under some circumstances, more general propositions about causal relations.

Having said this, where there *are* opportunities for transfer, this analysis implies that it is important to target the wider community engaged in policy, rather than limiting recipients to those in the political administration. Strategies for disseminating policy research should aim to reach NGOs, social partners, the legal community and other practitioners, not just officials.

Declaratory politics and legitimising knowledge

Researchers will need to pursue a very different approach to exert influence at the level of symbolic politics. Drawing on the analysis in part one of this paper, they will have to take

account of three characteristics of politics: the need for simplified descriptions; the susceptibility of sections of the public to issue or identity-based mobilisation; and (where research seeks to directly influence government policy), the state's imperative to portray itself as guarantor of its citizens' privileged access to socio-economic goods. Given that knowledge is assuming an essentially legitimising function at this level, it is also important to ensure the credibility of the source (qualifications, reputation and perceived objectivity of the individual or organisation, validity of methodology).

The first point to make is that the types of argument that may be derived from most research on the causes or impact of migration or migration policies are likely to be complex and subtle, almost certainly lacking the punchiness of statements favoured in political discourse and the mass media. The difference is not just one of scale of complexity, but also concerns level of emotiveness of the argument. The mass media prefers stories that are more capable of evoking strong emotional responses. As Baringhorst puts it, "the features emphasized [in the mass media] are those such as the prominence of the actors, the novelty and sensationalism of the events, the emotionality of the content, conflict orientation, and the personalization and simplification of complex structures".²⁷ Stories which are anti-immigrant are more likely to provoke such reactions than those pointing to beneficial or positive aspects of immigration (e.g. resentment, anger, fear or disgust). Moreover, given the pressures and opportunities for restrictive populist mobilisation, there will simply be more political actors willing to draw on negative, often distorted information, than those seeking to campaign with a more positive message on migration. Pro-immigration policies are rarely vote winners. The one window of opportunity in this respect is where governments or political parties want to send out a positive message about migration. As we saw in the last section, there are circumstances under which it is expedient for them to try to close the gap between praxis and declaratory politics. In this context, research can help to back-up this message, playing a legitimizing function.

If policy researchers want to provide support in these cases, they may have to work on putting their research findings into clear, cogent messages. Most researchers would probably consider this sort of packaging to fall outside the scope of their activities. And adopting a more simplistic and emotive style for presenting findings could well undermine the credibility of their research. Yet those interested in supporting attempts to promote a more balanced and well-informed

²⁷ Baringhorst, Sigrid, "Symbolic Politics of Multiculturalism: How German Cities Campaign against Racism", in Sophie Body-Gendrot and Marco Martiniello, eds., *Minorities in European Cities: The Dynamics of Social Integration and Social Exclusion at the Neighbourhood Level* (Macmillan, 2000), pp. 75-87.

debate on migration could at the very least think more carefully about what sorts of studies could provide material that could be packaged in this way.

Conclusion

This paper examined some features of migration policy making and political discourse, and considered their implications for knowledge transfer. It argued that although the discrepancy between policy praxis and declaratory politics could result in more liberal policy outcomes, it also had a number of damaging repercussions for politics and praxis. Where populist parties and media draw attention to the gap, it can also undermine the legitimacy of the political system. Moreover, restrictive declaratory politics can have a detrimental impact on policy outcomes, impeding possibilities for policy planning or for sending out a more positive message about the benefits of immigration or diversity.

These features also have several implications for policy research.

- First, the function and content of knowledge will vary quite significantly between the two levels. In the case of “behind the scenes” policy praxis, research can in principle play an instrumental role, helping policy makers define causal linkages of relevance to policy decisions and evaluation. However, the knowledge that policy makers define as useful will often be highly specific. In this case, researchers based at independent institutes or universities may have limited comparative advantage, or, for that matter, professional incentives to pursue such applied lines of enquiry.
- In the case of declaratory politics, knowledge is likely to play a more legitimising function, implying the need for the source of research to be seen as objective and maintaining high scientific standards. However, research will need to be packaged in a way that delivers simple, persuasive and if possible gripping messages – a requirement which may conflict with the conditions for retaining scientific credibility.

These are still rather tentative conclusions, and require much more analysis, as well as empirical research of instances of knowledge transfer in migration policy. Subsequent parts of the project will also explore ways in which the types of knowledge being produced by the research community may be failing to meet the needs of policy makers, as well as how institutional arrangements are hindering knowledge transfer. This will be the task of the project in the coming four years. But I hope this initial analysis has at least provided some ideas as to how the political context may be hindering successful knowledge transfer.