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Citation for published version:
Boswell, C 2008, 'The Political Functions of Expert Knowledge: Knowledge and Legitimation in European Union Immigration Policy', *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 471-488. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760801996634

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1080/13501760801996634

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Published In:
Journal of European Public Policy

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Download date: 12. Oct. 2024

The political functions of expert knowledge: Knowledge and legitimation in European Union Immigration Policy

Christina Boswell

Abstract Most literature on knowledge utilization is premised on rationalist theories of organizations: bureaucracies draw on knowledge instrumentally, either to expand their power or to adjust policy output. This paper develops an alternative account of the functions of knowledge, arguing that organizations are just as likely to value knowledge as a source of legitimation, or as a way of substantiating their policy preferences. The prevalence of these different forms of knowledge utilization will depend on (a) features of the organization (its perceived stability and source of legitimation); and (b) features of the policy area (degree of contention and mode of settlement). The article applies this framework to explore the European Commission's use of knowledge in immigration policy, especially through the European Migration Network.

Key Words European Commission; expert knowledge; immigration policy; knowledge utilization; organizational sociology; technocracy.

Forthcoming in:
Journal of European Public Policy, 15:4 (May 2008), pp. 4721-488

1. INTRODUCTION

Bureaucratic organizations are dependent on expert knowledge in a variety of ways.[1] On the traditional Weberian account, bureaucracies are characterized by the rationality of their structures and action (Weber 1970: 220), implying a concern to ensure decisions are based on sound reasoning and empirical knowledge. Expert knowledge is thus valued in an instrumental sense, helping the organization to deliver its goals. But the Weberian account also implies a second, more symbolic function of expert knowledge: the use of knowledge as a means of legitimizing particular decisions, or legitimizing bureaucratic domination *per se*. On this account, knowledge signals the organization's conformity to rational rules, underpinning the authority of policy-makers and their decisions. So in the first case, knowledge is valued for its instrumental role; in the second, it is valued symbolically, as a means of demonstrating the credibility of the organization or its decisions.

Despite a huge expansion of literature on knowledge utilization from the mid-1970s onwards, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the symbolic functions of knowledge. To be sure, a number of scholars have observed that expert knowledge may be used strategically, as 'ammunition' for substantiating organizational preferences (Weiss 1986; Sabatier 1978; Majone 1989; Radaelli 1995). Moreover, contributions in organizational sociology have shown how organizations derive legitimacy through signalling their commitment to knowledge utilization (Feldman and March 1981; March 1994). However, there has been little attempt to develop a theory setting out the conditions under which symbolic knowledge utilization may be expected to occur, or testing these claims through empirical enquiry. This lacuna seems to be especially regrettable for studies of European Union policy-making. It has been argued that EU policy is predominantly regulatory and technocratic, and that its civil service appears to derive legitimacy from its expertise (Majone 1996; Radaelli 1999). But the absence of a more rigorous theory of the symbolic functions of knowledge has made it difficult to elaborate or test these claims systematically.

This paper takes a first step towards addressing this deficit, sketching the contours of a theory of the different functions of expert knowledge in (bureaucratic) policy-making. It argues that in addition to its instrumental function, expert knowledge can play

two alternative, symbolic, functions. The first of these is a *legitimizing* function. By being seen to draw on expert knowledge, an organization can enhance its legitimacy and bolster its claim to resources or jurisdiction over particular policy areas. In this sense knowledge can endow organizations with 'epistemic authority' (Herbst 2003: 484). The second is a *substantiating* function. Expert knowledge can lend authority to particular policy positions, helping to substantiate organizational preferences in cases of political contestation. The paper sets out the conditions under which organizations are likely to draw on knowledge to perform these instrumental, legitimizing and substantiating functions (section 2). Section 3 explores how this theory applies to the case of policy-making on immigration and asylum in the European Commission. I argue that the institutional structure of the Commission, and certain features of this policy area, imply a strong propensity to value knowledge as a source of legitimation and substantiation. In the final section I explore how far these expectations are met through a more detailed examination of the case of the European Migration Network (EMN).

A brief word about the choice of case study. The Commission Directorate-General Justice, Liberty and Security (DG JLS) is in many ways an unusual example of a bureaucratic organization, relatively abstracted from the societal impacts of its policies, and engaged in a constant struggle for legitimacy. These features make it especially likely to set store by the symbolic functions of knowledge. Immigration and asylum, meanwhile, is a highly contested policy area characterized by epistemic uncertainty, offering considerable scope to deploy knowledge to substantiate policy preferences. So both the organization and the policy area stack the probabilities in favour of symbolic knowledge utilization. As such, it is not intended to offer a typical case, or to test the theory in a rigorous way. Rather, it provides a good illustration of the possibility of the symbolic functions of knowledge, and may be treated as a first 'plausibility probe' of this theory of the functions of knowledge.

2. KNOWLEDGE UTILIZATION: INSTRUMENTAL, LEGITIMIZING OR SUBSTANTIATING?

Hypotheses

Any account of how organizations use knowledge will inevitably be premised on a theory of organizations: a set of claims about the sources and nature of organizational interests, and how these translate into organizational action. Most theories of knowledge utilization adopt rational choice accounts, which assume that organizations are essentially interested in maximizing power (Sabatier 1978; Pfeffer 1981), or realizing mandated goals (Weiss 1978; Rich and Oh 1994). My account follows what can be termed an organizational institutionalist approach (DiMaggio and Powell 1991a). Its core premise is that administrative agencies are fundamentally concerned to secure legitimacy, in the sense of meeting societal expectations about appropriate structures, practices, rhetoric or output (Scott 1991: 169). Organizations are keen to secure both internal legitimacy from their members, whose loyalty is critical for organizational reproduction (Brunsson 1985: 18-21). And they need to secure external legitimacy from their environment, whether this consists of the political system, organized interests or consumers. Contrary to standard rational choice approaches, this quest for legitimacy should not be understood in terms of a rationalistic logic of maximizing performance, or expanding power. Members of organizations are concerned with reducing uncertainty and stabilizing social relations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991a: 19; Scott 1995: 21; Weick 1995: 86-7). They establish shared norms, beliefs and practices that help to provide stability through rendering patterns of behaviour more predictable, and offering a cognitive map for making sense of the organization and its environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1991a). As a result, there is often a substantial divergence between an organization's ascribed mandate and goals (its formal structure), and the norms, beliefs and practices that guide the actions of members (its informal structure) (Meyer and Rowan 1991: 57-8).

This account implies the need for caution about inferring any reliable link between objective features of the organization and its environment, and its interests and actions. However, one can posit a number of general conditions that influence organizational strategies for enhancing legitimacy. For a start, an organization is more

likely to seek legitimacy where it perceives itself to be operating in an unstable environment: uncertainty about its survival, or about the distribution of resources between itself and rival agencies (DiMaggio and Powell 1991a: 30-31).

Secondly, strategies for securing legitimacy will vary according to the type of organization involved. Here it is useful to distinguish between two ideal typical organizations: the action organization and the political organization (Brunsson 2002). Action organizations derive legitimacy from their output, or, in the case of administrative agencies, the impact of their societal interventions. By contrast, political organizations derive legitimacy from what Brunsson calls 'talk' and 'decisions'. Legitimation through 'talk' implies espousing certain norms and values in the organization's formal structure and its rhetoric. Legitimation through 'decisions' implies being seen to take action to respond to issues that have been framed as requiring political action. Put simply, we can assume that action organizations are more likely to use knowledge instrumentally, drawing on research to improve the quality of their output. This will occur where the organization recognizes there are knowledge gaps that hinder its performance. By contrast, political organizations are likely to use expert knowledge to signal their legitimacy. Where actors in the environment set store by expert knowledge, they will be keen to demonstrate a commitment to research.

If action organizations are likely to use knowledge instrumentally and political organizations use it as a source of legitimation, under what conditions will knowledge be valued as a means of substantiating policy positions? In fact, both action and political organizations may use knowledge to substantiate their preferences. The key variables influencing this type of knowledge utilization revolve around two features of the policy area. The first is the degree of contestation over policy. Organizations facing opposition to their policy preferences may find it expedient to draw on additional resources to lend credibility to their views. The second feature is what can be termed the mode of settlement considered appropriate for adjudicating between rival claims: technocratic or democratic (Boswell 2008). Technocratic modes of settlement prevail when scientific evidence and analysis are accepted as legitimate criteria for adjudicating preferences. By contrast, democratic modes prevail in policy areas in which popular support is considered decisive. Typically, these are areas in which conflict revolves around differences of

values or interests, rather than competing knowledge claims (Radaelli 1999). Knowledge is likely to be deployed by an organization to substantiate its preferences in instances where a technocratic mode prevails.

It is worth noting that all three types of knowledge utilization may involve quite calculated strategies for enhancing the organization's output, advancing its preferences, or bolstering its legitimacy. However, this does not imply embracing a rational choice conception of organizational action. The perception that knowledge utilization will yield a certain outcome, and that this outcome is desirable, are shaped by the organization's cognitive frame. Moreover, the symbolic use of knowledge need not involve a reflected calculation, but may emerge as a taken-for-granted procedure that conforms to deeply ingrained ideas about appropriate action (March 1988: 8).

These hypotheses are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Hypotheses on the Functions of Knowledge

Function of Knowledge	**Instrumental**	**Legitimizing**	**Substantiating**
Features of organization	Unstable organizational field	Unstable organizational field	Unstable organizational field
	Action organization	Political organization	---
Features of policy area	---	---	Contested policy area
	Organization recognizes epistemic uncertainty	Policy community recognizes epistemic uncertainty	Contestants accept technocratic mode of settlement

Indicators

Table 1 makes clear that there is some overlap between the conditions likely to prompt these different uses of knowledge. In particular, all three types of knowledge utilization are correlated with unstable organizational fields, and recognized gaps in knowledge.[2] This makes it difficult to test these claims, suggesting the need for indicators setting out the sorts of features we would expect to observe for each type of knowledge utilization.

First, where knowledge is being used instrumentally, we would expect the structure and procedures for utilizing research to be closely coupled to the organization's output needs. The organization will aim to ensure that research provides knowledge that helps meet performance targets. This will not necessarily be the case with legitimizing knowledge, where research structures and procedures will be influenced by the policy community's perceptions of appropriate arrangements rather than by the requirements of enhancing the quality of output. In the case of substantiating knowledge, one would expect a structure that enables knowledge users to select and draw on research according to their interest in justifying particular claims.

Second, in the case of instrumental knowledge, we would expect the research agenda to focus on areas in which the organization is keen to adjust its output, and for there to be mechanisms in place for knowledge transfer to relevant policy makers. This contrasts with the case of legitimizing knowledge, where policy makers will be less involved in selecting research topics or digesting findings. In the case of substantiating knowledge, one would expect senior officials to be interested in selecting topics and using findings that substantiated their policy preferences, but not in detailed aspects of the findings or methodology.

The third indicator concerns publicity of knowledge utilization. Where an organization is using knowledge as a source of legitimation, it will be keen to make its use of knowledge explicit to actors in its environment. This will not be the case for instrumental utilization, where the organization will in principle be indifferent as to whether its use of knowledge is being observed or not. Where knowledge plays a substantiating function, research will be publicized selectively according to its potential to justify policy preferences.

These indicators are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Indicators of Types of Knowledge Utilization

Instrumental Knowledge	Legitimising Knowledge	Substantiating Knowledge
1. Organizational structure and substance of research reflect performance targets	1. Looser fit between structure/substance of research and policy goals	1. Structure and substance of research reflect lines of contention
2. Intensive interest in and take-up of research by decision-makers	2. Looser ties between decision-makers and research unit	2. Some exchange between decision-makers and research unit
3. No obvious interest in publicising knowledge utilization	3. Clear interest in widely publicizing knowledge utilization	3. Selected interest in publicizing utilization (to relevant policy-makers)

3. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE FUNCTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

I would like to apply this framework to the case of the European Commission's role in immigration and asylum policy. This will enable us to generate more precise expectations, which can then be tested on a specific instance of knowledge utilization, that of the EMN.

Before beginning, it is worth clarifying the concept of 'organization' and its application to the Commission. Sociological approaches tend to delineate organizational boundaries in terms of an organization's shared culture or ideology (Shore 2000; Cini 1995; Beyer 1981; Brunsson 1985). Following this approach, the Commission may be best characterized as a multi-organization (Cram 1994; Hooghe 1997), whose Directorates display pronounced differences in terms of their ideologies, organizational cultures and policy styles (Cini 1995), as well as their ways of 'framing' issues (Mörth 2000; Surel 2000). Nonetheless, there are also a number of structural-institutional and ideational features that are shared across Directorates. The analysis that follows will therefore focus on the particular case of the Directorate JLS, but many of the points may be more generally applicable to the Commission as a whole.

The quest for legitimacy

One important feature of the European Commission is its relatively fragile basis of legitimation (Horeth 1999: 254). It is not headed by elected representatives, nor is it tasked with implementing a democratically mandated programme. Although many areas of EU cooperation are by now well-entrenched, in a number of policy areas – including JLS – the Commission's role is continually being questioned, and its activities subject to demands for justification. This implies that DG JLS is operating in an unstable organizational field, and constantly striving to enhance its legitimacy.

Much of this insecurity derives from inter-departmental wrangles, including battles over jurisdiction with DG Employment and Social Affairs (Interviews, June 2006). There have also been tensions with DGs External Relations and Development, exacerbated by the complexity of cross-pillar arrangements on the 'external dimension' of JLS (Boswell, 2002). The Directorate also has good reason to feel insecure about its external environment. In addition to the typical rivalries with the Council and concern to enlist the support of the Parliament, JLS is engaged in a continuous struggle for competence with member states. Immigration and asylum is a highly sensitive area of cooperation, with many governments resisting the development of common policies. While there has been considerable Europeanization in this area over the past decade, the Commission has also faced numerous set-backs, seeing various proposals rejected or substantially watered down. These uncertainties make the Directorate likely to draw on resources that will enhance the legitimacy of its remit.

The Commission as a political organization

Much of the literature on the Commission has stressed the importance of its image as a technocratic agency, whose actions are based on rationalistic decision-making procedures and the use of expertise. Some scholars link this to the Commission's role as mediator or 'honest broker' between member states and EU institutions (Hooghe and Nugent 2006: 153; Cini 1996: 30). The Commission is keen to present itself as having privileged access to data, enabling it to get the sort of cross-national comparative perspective that is unavailable to national governments. Access to this type of knowledge also allows the Commission to identify areas that arguably require Union-level regulation (Stevens 2001:

139; Cram 1994: 211). Other scholars have traced the Commission's technocratic character to the structure of policy-making, which implies a key role for interest groups, labour and industry, and national officials (Richardson 1995). In addition, the preponderance of regulatory, rather than distributive, policy at EU level implies a dependence on expert knowledge rather than material resources (Majone 1996; Radaelli 1999).

This reliance on technocratic competence becomes more explicable if we consider the Commission's distance from the societal impacts of its policy interventions, especially in a policy area like immigration and asylum. Through their involvement in implementation and delivery, national interior ministries have multiple channels of feedback and intelligence about the impacts of their interventions. Crucially, such impacts also become the object of party political debate and mass media scrutiny. This contrasts with DG JLS, which has a proscribed role in implementation, and is not generally held accountable by national media. This contributes to the Directorate's distance from the societal impacts of its actions, and its lack of direct accountability.

All of this has two implications. First, the Directorate perceives itself to be judged on its talk and decisions, rather than its performance. It is an almost paradigmatic case of a political organization. It invests far more energy in securing support for its proposals than on following up or trying to adjust their societal impact.[3] Second, this abstraction from societal impacts has practical implications for the Directorate's sources of knowledge. Rather than receiving direct feedback on the impacts of its policies through affected groups, JLS tends to rely on the collection of data on socio-economic indicators, or comparative analysis of national legislation. Its sources of social knowledge are thus far more abstract and actively structured than those of national bureaucracies.

DG JLS is therefore reliant on specialized knowledge to legitimize its role in this policy area. It has more work to do justifying its role through its expertise, since it cannot secure credibility through its impact. And it is obliged to rely on abstract knowledge, since it has limited opportunities to observe societal processes through praxis.

Knowledge as a source of legitimation in the migration policy community

The Commission is especially likely to use knowledge to boost its legitimacy where the policy community recognizes the importance of expert knowledge in underpinning decisions. Where this is the case, it may trigger mimetic isomorphism: the imitation of styles in knowledge utilization observed in the organization's environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b: 69). The Brussels-based immigration and asylum policy community includes an array of international organizations, lobby groups and think tanks. Many of the larger organizations have dedicated research departments or 'research officers'. DG JLS officials are increasingly active in a variety of fora bringing together these actors. They regularly participate in conferences and workshops, have frequent meetings with researchers, sit on advisory boards for research programmes, and publish academic articles. Thus officials are continually exposed to situations in which they are expected to demonstrate expertise on migration issues. A senior official eloquently conveys this, in describing their experience on first joining the DG.

> I remember I went to a big meeting just after I'd joined in the year 2000, and everybody in integration – all the people in integration, all the key academics – were there. And of course I didn't know this – I didn't know any of them. But nevertheless you immediately and quickly begin to identify the leaders in this whole field, and since then I've got to know most of them, and you can get into the network very quickly ... so gradually you build up your knowledge and you network yourself so that you get to know what's going on (Interview, June 2006).

Such interactions place officials under pressure to keep abreast of research, in order to secure the respect of the policy community.

A contested policy area

The features outlined above make the Commission likely to use knowledge as a source of legitimation. But we can also point to a number of factors that indicate the usefulness of knowledge as a means of substantiating policy preferences. Chief among these is the fact that immigration and asylum policy is a highly contested policy area, with considerable divergence of views between member states and EU institutions. Within these debates, DG JLS has a distinctive set of beliefs and norms, which can be broadly characterised as liberal, human rights and free market oriented. These preferences are consistently

articulated in the Directorate's communications, legislative proposals, and in the rhetoric of officials.

Policy positions premised on a commitment to international human rights law or liberal economic reasoning are well suited to technocratic modes of justification. They imply the need to ground policies in more rational and universalistic principles, which transcend populist or nationalistic perspectives. Such technocratic modes of justification, moreover, are highly appropriate given the particular institutional status of the Commission. The organization can portray itself as uniquely abstracted from immediate political exigencies, adopting a longer-term, impartial perspective.

There is a second way in which knowledge utilization may help promote the Commission's policy preferences. It has been argued that where the Commission fails to secure political agreement on a proposal, it frequently employs a strategy of 'softening up' (Majone 1992: 6). It puts the proposal on hold, biding its time, but continuing to devote attention to technical and procedural aspects of the policy (Cini 1996: 31). For example, it may continue to gather evidence supporting its claims, or establish a procedure for monitoring national developments. Over time these procedures become institutionalized, and national governments become accustomed to the idea of cooperation in the given area (Cram 1997: 38). It may well be that this form of softening up characterizes the Commission's use of bodies such as the EMN. The very process of debating the Network's research agenda may normalize the idea of cooperation. This is a rather different notion of the substantiating function of knowledge. It implies that the very *process* of producing expert knowledge – rather than the research findings themselves – bolsters the Commission's policy preferences.

In sum, DG JLS displays characteristics making it likely to use knowledge symbolically. The Directorate is operating in an unstable environment, prompting it to find ways of enhancing its legitimacy. It is likely to do this through its talk and decisions, rather than actions, implying a propensity to draw on knowledge as a source of legitimation. The need to be seen to draw on expert knowledge is particularly pronounced in the area of immigration and asylum, where there is intensive interaction with the research community. Moreover, this is a highly contested area in which the Directorate has a

distinctive ideological agenda, making it likely that the Directorate will draw on knowledge as a means of substantiating its preferred policy choices. Finally, JLS' ideological preferences lend themselves to technocratic rather than democratic forms of justification, again implying that knowledge may play a substantiating function.

4. EVIDENCE

It is difficult to 'test' these propositions in any rigorous way. However, we can try to gauge the functions of knowledge through observing patterns of research utilization along the indicators set out in Table 2. I have chosen to focus on the example of the EMN, established by DG JLS in 2002. The Directorates's stated rationale for this Network was instrumental: it would supply research and data on immigration and asylum, to improve the quality of EU policies. In this section, I will consider how far the Network's mandate and structure, its research output, and its dissemination strategies, confirm this instrumental function. The findings are based on nine semi-structured interviews with Commission and national officials involved in the EMN; a questionnaire filled out by 10 JLS officials; observation of three EMN meetings; and analysis of Commission and EMN documents.

Mandate and structure of the EMN

At the outset, the Commission had no clear preference concerning the mandate and structure of the EMN. The Network was tasked with the broad goal of 'setting up a systematic basis for monitoring the multidimensional phenomena of migration and asylum in the EU, by covering the legal, demographic, economic, social and political aspects, and in identifying associated underlying causes.' (EMN web-site). As one official describes the mandate:

> In a way it was deliberately very broad, because particularly at the early stage one wasn't exactly sure how it would evolve, and you couldn't say, right, you're going to concentrate on this. Also because you didn't really know the expertise of the national contact points. So I think the whole thing was deliberately broad. (Interview, September 2006)

This lack of design casts doubt on the prevalence of an instrumental function of knowledge, instead implying that the Network was valued as a source of legitimation. Although they continually stressed the need for more knowledge, JLS officials were clearly under pressure to meet the expectations set up by the Laeken European Council, which had called for the establishment of the EMN. In this sense it represents a case of coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b), whereby the Commission felt compelled to adopt the trappings of a research competence because of expectations set up by its environment.

The Directorate displayed stronger preferences when it came to the structure of the Network. Initially, it had favoured a network of independent and well-reputed researchers led by a 'scientific coordinator', with the Commission merely funding the meetings. This reflected an interest in signalling the scientific credentials of the Network, again implying a concern with organizational legitimacy.

For a number of reasons, this model proved unworkable. Interior ministries wanted to select their own national contact point, and in most cases preferred this to be a government official. They were keen to retain control over the collection and exchange of information on such a sensitive topic. Moreover, the Commission realized there were certain drawbacks to relying on independent experts. This is how one senior official describes the reasoning:

> Initially we started in this rather naïve way, believing that by involving mainly research and scientific institutes you could create something like an objective view of migration, which is – forgive me my clear works – utter nonsense. Because whatever you say, whatever you do, it will be politically instrumentalized by one side or the other, for whatever purposes. So in the end we realized, whatever this network does, in whatever way it is composed, the Commission will be responsible for it. (Interview, September 2006)

In other words, the Commission became aware of the impossibility of deliberating these issues in a purely technocratic mode, to be settled through evidence and rational argumentation. The structure that emerged instead was an inter-governmental network, composed predominantly of officials, and coordinated by the Commission.

Not only did the structure of the Network change after 2002, but its goals were also increasingly crystallized in terms of an instrumental function. This can be attributed

partly to a process of trial and error, which enabled the Commission to become clearer about what the Network could and could not deliver. As one official put it:

> I think what is coming out more, and if you like, in terms of the EMN finding its niche, is this idea of it being much more to support policy and decision-making. (Interview, September 2006).

This new focus gained the approval of member states in the context of a consultation on the future of the EMN, carried out in the first half of 2006. Reflecting the new consensus, the Commission became increasingly committed to the idea that the Network's work should feed into Union policy-making.

One can therefore discern a quite marked evolution in the Commission's reasoning. The initial preoccupation with the Network's legitimacy gradually shifted to an emphasis on the instrumental function of knowledge. It remains to be established if this instrumental function was realized in practice, or whether it was instead a form of rhetoric adopted to enhance the credibility of the new structure. This should become clearer by considering patterns of research production and utilization.

Research agenda and research utilization

As with the Network's mandate and structure, it was only from around 2004-5 onwards that the Commission started to develop a clear idea about what sorts of studies to select. The topic for the first major study was widely considered to have been, as one official put it, 'an unfortunate choice'. The study dealt with the highly complex question of 'The Impact of Immigration on Europe's Societies'. It soon became clear that the project was far too ambitious. The quality of national reports diverged substantially, and many failed to meet the deadline. The summary prepared by the 'scientific coordinator' proved highly controversial, prompting the Commission to cancel a planned launch of the study in Summer 2005. The report came out in March 2006, after substantial editing. As one Commission official observed:

> This was such an unfortunate choice for the first study. I mean, this could have been the crowning work after several years of developing this network. Instead, we started with the most controversial and difficult and complex issue … this could not but end in disaster, as it did. (Interview, September 2006)

Subsequent studies were more tightly defined, and generally geared towards providing information relevant to up-coming decisions. Interestingly, though, a number of these were produced too late to feed in to policy debates. Thus a study on voluntary return was expected to be concluded in November 2006, several months too late to inform Council discussions on the issue. Likewise a study on asylum reception systems was published in May 2006, once the relevant Directive was already in force. This implies a general aspiration to produce policy-relevant research, but insufficient coordination with policy-makers.

Other studies have been more carefully timed to coincide with policy deliberations. Thus a study on illegal migration is scheduled to be completed prior to the Commission's Communication on this topic, planned for July 2007. The third small-scale study on highly-skilled workers should be ready in time for a proposed Directive on the rights and responsibilities of migrant workers in the EU. Discussions on the work programme for 2007 place a premium on relevance for planned Commission proposals and communications.

Priority is also given to studies that will help substantiate the Commission's policy preferences. Clear examples of this are the studies on migrants in the health sector, and on highly-skilled workers. Indeed, the selection of these studies suggests a 'softening-up' strategy. Both issues are highly sensitive, and/or discussion on the area has been blocked at the level of the Council of Ministers. As a senior Commission official observed of the study on the health sector:

> It's one of these very, very delicate issues that for the moment we'd rather steer clear of, I'd have to say, and this is just a little bit of information gathering. It's an issue that's totally explosive, and you have to be so clear about the facts, what you're doing, and how you present it. (Interview, June 2006)

The Commission hopes that discussion of this issue in the Network could help indicate where the problems lie.

> Each member state knows what's going on in its country, and what is particularly sensitive in its own country … So it's a very good antennae because we see as much as we can from here and we try and keep in touch as much as we can. (Interview, June 2006)

Probably the most telling indicator of the functions of the Network is the use of its studies by policy-makers. There appears to be a disjuncture between the professed goals

of the Network, and take-up of its research by Directorate staff. Apart from the handful of officials directly involved in the coordination of the EMN, few staff are aware of its studies. Instead, they continue to draw on a range of other sources to provide input into policy proposals and draft legislation. As an official commented, 'I haven't discussed it [the Network] with colleagues since I've been here, no-one's really mentioned it'. Instead, the official concerned preferred to derive information from existing studies produced by research institutes, or through attending conferences. The disjuncture suggests that the Network's research agenda may not be targeted primarily at meeting the information needs of Commission officials.

Not surprisingly, this contrasts with the opinions of officials involved in running the Network, who emphasize the supposed instrumental function of the EMN. They are concerned to portray the Network as contributing to policy development, presumably to lend it legitimacy. Senior officials involved in strategic planning, on the other hand, show more interested in the Network's potential to substantiate Commission preferences, whether by softening up governments, or through producing research that supports the case for policy harmonization. So there is a clear discrepancy between the functions of knowledge for different parts of the organization.

Dissemination and publicity

The Commission has consistently emphasized the importance of publicizing the work of the Network, though the rationale for dissemination has not always been evident. One clear priority has been to publicize information on the Network to officials in other European institutions. This was particularly pronounced in the run-up to negotiations in 2007 on the legal basis of the Network, with the Commission keen to publicize the EMN's activities to senior policy-makers in the Council and the Parliament. A planned conference in 2007 was seen as an opportunity to 'sell' the Network to policy-makers (EMN Meeting, September 2006). One official summarised the concern this way:

> The more studies the EMN produces the more it becomes visible, and the more it's growing, and the more visible you become the more people are interested in what you're doing. They show up, they enquire what you are doing. And this is why we are advocating, also by means of conferences and by means of nice shiny looking brochures which we produce at our own cost, at the Commission's cost, in high numbers, that the first reports get the necessary

> circulation and spread. So we send them with letters from the Director General to MEPs, chairmen of committees who are concerned, the Commission, Member States, NGOs, and so this is the kind of advocating and promoting of this network – in order to increase its visibility. (Interview, September 2006)

The Commission has also encouraged national contact points to organize meetings to publicize work to researchers and 'stakeholders' within each participating country. The idea is to 'ensure a representative range of institutions, organizations and initiatives at Member State level, which would allow the voices of all relevant stakeholders to be heard' (EMN Work Programme 2007, MIGRAPOL Doc 105). But it is unclear how this concern to involve stakeholders furthers the professed instrumental goals of the Network. The most plausible explanation is that the Commission is embracing modish ideas about the need to involve stakeholders as a means of enhancing its legitimacy.

It is difficult to derive cut and dried conclusions from this pattern of dissemination. One can detect a relative emphasis on disseminating information *about* the Network, especially to researchers and senior policy-makers in EU institutions. This was in part a strategy to consolidate the position of the Network. There was also some concern to demonstrate that the structure and activities of the EMN conformed to expectations about appropriate patterns of knowledge utilization, especially in terms of the political relevance of its output, and its inclusive, consultative approach to research. Both sets of concern indicate an interest in the legitimizing function of the Network.

CONCLUSION

DG JLS is a political organization *par excellence*, deriving its legitimacy from talk and decisions rather than action. As such, the expectation was that it would draw on knowledge primarily to enhance its legitimacy, rather than to improve its performance. Given the contested nature of EU immigration and asylum policy, it was also to be expected that research would be valued as a means of substantiating its policies.

The case of the EMN generally supports these expectations, but it also suggests the need to nuance the account in a number of ways. In the early stages of the EMN's

development the Commission lacked a clear strategy, implying it had little interest in the Network playing either an instrumental or a substantiating function. This is borne out by the relative lack of interest in the Network on the part of JLS officials working on policy. Instead, the concern was to build up a Network that would be viewed as scientifically reputable and politically independent. The predominant function of the Network appears to have been that of bestowing legitimacy.

However, Commission thinking on the Network underwent quite a pronounced shift between 2004-2005. First, the experience of the initial phase made it clear that the structure and work programme of the Network would have to be reconsidered. The Network's activities were deemed too politically sensitive for it to be composed of independent researchers, and teething pains with the first studies encouraged the Commission to think more strategically about how to select topics. This led to the prioritization of a more instrumental function for the Network, at least in the Commission's rhetoric. But second, and just as important, it became clear that this new structure had potential to play a substantiating function. The involvement of national governments in producing studies could help normalize debate on controversial policy issues, and make them more likely to endorse the findings. So the Commission demonstrated considerable flexibility, able to exploit new possibilities for producing substantiating knowledge.

The analysis also pointed to a divergence between the views of officials depending on their organizational role. Senior management were interested in the substantiating function of the Network; while those actively involved in the Network continued to set store by its supposedly instrumental function. They were keen to propagate the view that it was feeding into policy-making, though this was not borne out by the experience of their colleagues working on policy. Their concern was to legitimize the EMN through claiming an instrumental role for the Network, although this goal remained largely aspirational.

The findings have wider implications for the theory of knowledge utilization, as well as for EU studies. In theoretical terms, they suggest that it is possible for different parts of an organization to nurture quite divergent beliefs about the functions of knowledge, contingent on their organizational role. They also suggest that organizations do not

necessarily have a fixed or even reflected strategy of knowledge utilization. Instead, ideas about the functions of knowledge can become crystallized or change over time, through a rather erratic process of trial and error.

From the perspective of EU studies, the case offers a good illustration of how a Commission DG has drawn on expert knowledge to bolster its credibility and help pursue its policy goals. Clearly, DG JLS is working in a particularly sensitive area, and is still struggling to assert its authority. It may be that DGs with a less contested remit and/or whose societal impacts are more tangible set greater store in the instrumental functions of research. It would also be instructive to compare the Commission's style of knowledge utilization with that of bureaucracies at national level. One would expect national governments to show a greater interest in the instrumental functions of knowledge, especially in areas where policy impacts are subject to intensive public scrutiny. That said, my surmise is that these symbolic functions are likely to pervade knowledge utilization in most administrative departments, a sobering thought for those engaged in policy research.

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[1] Expert knowledge refers to the product of research, i.e. of 'a codified, scholarly and professional mode of knowledge production that has its prime institutional loci in universities, policy analysis units of government department or international organizations and private research institutes and produced by academics, think tank experts and [policy] professionals.' (Stone 2002: 2).

[2] Strictly speaking the table should contain a fourth column representing the case of non-utilization of knowledge, which could be associated with a stable organizational field and no recognized knowledge gaps.

[3] This should be contrasted with the view of Horeth (1999), who emphasizes the important of output as a source of legitimation for the Commission. However, it is worth noting that much of what Horeth defines as 'output' would fall within Brunsson's categories of 'talk' or 'decisions' (Brunsson 2002).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper benefited from feedback from participants of an EU-CONSENT workshop at Sciences-Po, Paris, and a panel at the 2007 EUSA Conference in Montréal. I am also grateful for excellent comments from Michael Bommes, Simon Bulmer, Claudio Radaelli, Jo Shaw, and the JEPP referees and editor. The research was funded by a Marie Curie Excellence Grant, 'Expanding the Knowledge Base of European Labour Migration Policies' (KNOWMIG).

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