



POLICY BRIEF

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Research-Policy Dialogues on Migration and Integration in Europe

By Rinus Penninx,
IMES, and Peter
Scholten, University of
Twente

Research-policy dialogues are contested in the domain of migration

This brief presents how research-policy dialogues have been organized and informs researchers and policymakers

Scientific facts alone are not enough

Scientific credibility must be (re) produced

We need reflective research

Summary Academic research and expertise has been an important driver of migration and integration policies throughout Europe. Yet, the research-policy dialogues in this domain are increasingly contested. Policymakers often complain about the lack of clear scientific evidence upon which to base their policy decisions, given the growing multiplicity of knowledge claims raised from the field of migration research. Meanwhile, researchers seem increasingly disenchanted with the impact of their studies and the difficulties of delivering ‘unwelcome messages’.

This policy brief addresses the question: How can we organise dialogues between research and policy in such a way that contributes to the resolution of complicated migration-related social problems? Based on the IMISCOE conference ‘Research-policy dialogues on migration and integration in Europe’, held at the University of Twente on 22 and 23 May 2008, it will present different ways research-policy dialogues have previously been organised and help inform policymakers and researchers in their work to strengthen the research-policy nexus.

Main findings and recommendations

- Research-policy dialogues involve much more than the invocation of scientific facts. Since topics in migration and integration have become part of political debate and controversy, ‘supporting evidence’ is no longer taken as being objective or, for that matter, even true. Deeper probing is required to achieve constructive research-policy dialogues in these domains.
- The credibility of social research cannot be taken for granted: scientific credibility must be constantly produced and reproduced. It should also be distinguished from other types of expertise such as that of migrants, politicians and the lay.
- An effective way of developing more sustainable policies over the long term is through reflective research. Reflective research transcends instrumental forms of knowledge production and utilisation in favour of a research model that critically examines basic policy concepts and theories and explores policy alternatives.

- For example, this would mean that research should not only look into how to achieve integration, but also analyse the very concept of integration, why integration should be achieved and theoretical and conceptual alternatives to integration. As such, reflective research can help identify those policy alternatives, sometimes called ‘lost frames’, that somehow get excluded from the prevailing policy setting. By punctuating impasses in the debate and sparking further reflection on more conceptual and theoretical levels, reflective research can help resolve policy controversies.
- Reflective social research should always be vigilant for lost frames and their implicit policy alternatives. The role of social research can reach beyond that of speaking truth to power by reflecting on policy alternatives. It can promote a ‘making sense together’ by helping policymakers reflect on policy alternatives and their possible consequences.
 - One, single model for organising the research-policy nexus does not exist. Different settings require different types of research-policy dialogues. In seeing past the idea of one dominant model for the research-policy nexus, an important priority for the future should be identifying the circumstances under which the research-policy nexus can be organised in productive ways.

Reflective social research should be vigilant for ‘lost frames’

We should see past the idea of one dominant model

Research has been instrumental to the development of migration and integration policies

Migration-related research has been shaped by policy developments

Why focus on research-policy dialogues? Migration and integration research, along with their related policies, have been shaped by mutual dialogue. In many European countries over the past decades, research has played an important role in the development of such policies. Up until about a decade ago, there was the belief generally held by both researchers and policymakers that policies well founded on scientific evidence would eventually steer society in a rational way when it came to migration-related problems. This made research instrumental to the initial development of migration and integration policies in most European countries. The role of research in policy has extended to various stages of the policy process, including agenda-setting, policy formulation, implementation and policy evaluation.

At the same time, migration-related research has, in and of itself, also been shaped by policy developments. Not only has the demand for knowledge and expertise contributed to the field’s growth, it has also influenced the development of specific knowledge paradigms in the field of migration research. A case in point: over the last few decades, Western Europe’s growing concern about the integration of immigrant minorities has unmistakably contributed to the development of a thriving research field focusing on issues of integration, in which the so-called ‘integration paradigm’ has obtained a more and more central position.

Today researchers and policymakers seem uncertain of their relationship to one another

Yet, today there seems to be uneasiness about the relation between research and policy. Both researchers and policymakers seem more and more uncertain of their relationship to one another. With the political controversies emerging in European countries over the past decade, (e.g. a strong politicisation of immigrant integration in the Netherlands, where populists declare the Dutch approach a failure) and increasing conflicts between schools of research (e.g. the French battle over ethnic statistics), it has become less obvious how research-policy dialogues can be configured to promote constructive cooperation. Given the nature of immigrant integration as a contested political issue and the growing manifestation of knowledge conflicts in the field of migration research itself, how can we still organise research-policy dialogues that help tame this policy controversy and develop effective and sustainable policies?

How to configure research policy dialogues in times of political controversies?

Research policy dialogues have taken place in many ways in various countries and periods

The diversity of the research-policy nexus Research-policy dialogues have taken place in many ways through an array of venues in various countries and in different periods. In Belgium, France, Germany and Italy, research-policy dialogues primarily occur through personal contacts, informal networks and open public debate. In such settings, individual knowledge brokers and good research dissemination strategies are pivotal to getting dialogues going.

In other countries, a more institutionalised research-policy nexus has emerged through the establishment of institutes such as advisory bodies and research councils. In the Netherlands, research was one of the main pillars on which the country's first minorities policies were based, and it involved various research councils and advisory bodies. In Denmark, research has, to a great extent, been clustered in the Academy of Immigration Sciences (AMID). Research has played an important role in Sweden by allowing various expert committees to participate in the country's consensual style of policymaking. Germany's research-policy nexus has recently become more institutionalised through establishment of the Unit for Research on Migration and Integration within the Federal Office on Migration and Asylum.

Institutionalisation does not guarantee success

Construction of more institutionalised venues for research-policy dialogues, however, does not guarantee success. Recent decades have seen gradual dissolution of the Netherlands' research-policy nexus due to the establishment of stronger political primacy (and politicisation) and the manifestation of controversies within the Dutch migration research community. Within the politicised setting of Danish policies, many of AMID's policy reports were ignored; in other words, AMID hardly guaranteed policy impact for Denmark.

The impact of research can be less direct

Still, the impact research has on policy is sometimes less direct. It may effect change within the underlying framing of the problem at hand rather than provide tailor-made data or analysis for direct policy use.

The Süßmuth Commission, for example, lay at the basis of a fundamental shift in German politics; its work catalysed German society to accept itself as a country of immigration and develop the country's first policies aimed at immigrant integration.

Knowledge and expertise in times of political controversy The role of research in the development of migration policy cannot be understood without acknowledging the complex nature of this policy domain. Initially, people believed that migration and immigrant integration did not constitute significant policy problems – or they were at least solvable if approached rationally. However, this domain has clearly evolved into what has been described as an ‘intractable policy controversy’. In most countries, controversies rage not only about appropriate policy measures, but also about whether they should be regarded as social-economic, political-legal or social-cultural issues.

The potential role of research is related to the complex nature of the migration-related policy domain

The role of research in these types of complicated policy matters might seem limited. Research findings themselves often fall prey to ongoing policy controversies; ‘facts’ rarely provide convincing evidence when there's controversy. What is taken for fact tends to be contested. Criteria for choosing what passes as a relevant fact differs (e.g. Is the prevalence of headscarves at school relevant when dealing with issues of integration?). And interpretation of the facts can vary greatly (e.g. Do headscarves worn at school indicate the educational emancipation of Muslim women or a failing cultural integration?). Various studies have shown how political factors and personal networks tend to be far more influential than research findings when it comes to resolving – or endeavouring to resolve – policy controversies.

Facts rarely provide convincing evidence when there is controversy

Research's contribution to the resolution of migration-related problems can and should be much more significant. Social research should always be vigilant for ways of looking at a problem that are not yet considered in the policy process. There are many reasons certain ways of framing a problem may be excluded: politics, historical legacies (e.g. the republicanist model that has been dominant in French politics, policy and research) and the interests of researchers themselves. Alternative frames can shed a new light on societal problems and related policies. Research can provoke critical reflection among policy actors and produce knowledge about the policy process. It can do so in a way that fully recognises the multiplicity of knowledge claims in this policy field and the difficulties for policymaking in such contested settings. The role of social research can reach beyond that of speaking truth to power. It can promote a ‘making sense together’ by helping policymakers reflect critically on policy alternatives and their possible consequences.

Research's contribution should be much more significant

Social research can offer ways of looking at a problem not considered yet in the policy process

Research-policy relations also shape migration research

Policy dialogues and the development of migration research

Most studies of research-policy relations tend to focus on the process of knowledge dissemination and utilisation: that is, from research to policy. Much less attention has been given to how research-policy relations can also shape the development of migration research as a field in its own right.

...the development of certain infrastructures

There are various ways in which all policies can affect the development of research. For instance, the development of specific programming and infrastructures can optimise opportunities for particular strands of research. To give another example from the Dutch case: in the 1970s and 1980s, the government created an infrastructure that provided opportunities explicitly for sociological and anthropological research.

...the emphasis on evaluating migration policies

Another development seemingly triggered by the institutionalisation of migration policies throughout Europe is the greater emphasis being placed on evaluating migration policies. Key issues here are the production of reliable data on particular facets of migration and integration and the connection between this evidence and the policy efforts of various governments. How can we measure the success or failure of these policy measures? Some countries have made efforts to institutionalise such data provision, such as the Institute for Social Research (SCP) in the Netherlands. A growing trend in evaluation research is the combination of quantitative methods of data collection with more qualitative methods of analysis.

...more attention to new immigration countries and development of research in these countries

A third development in migration research sees more attention being given to new immigration countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Over the past decade, these countries, which were once solely sending countries, have come into position as emigration, transit and immigration countries all at once. Whereas East-West migration was originally studied just from the perspective of the West, it is now also gaining ground as a research field in the East itself. In these countries, too, we can see how the research-policy nexus is shaping this new research field. Nevertheless, the 'old' immigration countries still provide us with lessons to be drawn from past experiences of organising research-policy relations

New challenges and opportunities for research-policy dialogues

Research-policy dialogues at the local and European levels

Research-policy dialogues are more frequently beginning to take place at local and European levels. At the former, we see more integration policies taking shape while, at the latter, we see indications of a nascent European policy domain. These developments provide new challenges and opportunities for research-policy dialogues.

Focus on the European and local levels

At the European level, there have been various efforts to institutionalise the research-policy dialogue. At the local level, there seems to be a growing demand for policy-relevant knowledge and expertise as expressed by city initiatives through projects such as Cities for Local Integration Policies (CLIP; see www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/populationandsociety/clip.htm) and EUROCITIES (see www.eurocities.eu). Both projects improve local policies through systemic comparisons and an exchange of experiences.

A clear demand for knowledge and expertise on European and local levels

These local and European research-policy dialogues are driven by a clear demand for knowledge and expertise at their respective levels. Using methods such as networking, the trading of good practices and knowledge dissemination, the many initiatives here fill an obvious lacuna in policy. At the same time, these dialogues provide new opportunities for developing migration research: cross-European comparative research and the study of local- and/or neighbourhood-level processes will help us overcome the nation-bound history of migration research.

We must go beyond stereotypes

Shaping research-policy dialogues for the future We must get beyond stereotypes of researchers determining policymaking or, conversely, research on tap with politics on top. There are, after all, more creative ways to organise research-policy dialogues to justify the logics of both fields.

We must learn to appreciate the diversity of ways in which research and policy can be brought together

We must learn to appreciate the diversity of ways in which research and policy can be brought together. There is no single dominant instrumentalist model for research-policy relations. The standard model of science speaking truth to power does not capture the diversity of research-policy relations found in empirical cases. Given specific circumstances, there is a great variety of ways to make the nexus a fruitful one. In some cases, networks and personal contacts can play a crucial role in the process of defining a problem. In other cases, more institutionalised forms of nexus between research and policy may fulfil the demand for knowledge in stages of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Apart from being instrumental, research can also have a less direct though no less enlightening function by providing alternative definitions and new concepts for problems. Research can also have a more symbolic function, legitimising policy choices by providing convincing evidence. Research thus enables policy to have different functions, while policymakers' demands for these functions will also vary over time.

We should understand why and how specific research-policy relations emerge and what function they should serve

An important priority for the future then is to grasp just how and why the research-policy nexus has been configured in various European countries. We should analyse the consequences that different types of nexuses have on both policymaking and research developments. Also crucial to put on the agenda is better understanding of why, and under

which circumstances, specific models of research-policy relations emerge and what function they should serve. This is a first step in exploring the feasibility of organising the policy-research-nexus in a fruitful way.

***Rinus Penninx** is scientific director of IMISCOE and professor at the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies at the University of Amsterdam. **Peter Scholten** is lecturer (assistant professor) in sociology of governance at the University of Twente. On July 1st 2009, he will begin as assistant professor of public policy & politics at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam.*

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