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## Policy papers

### **THE ROLE OF EXPERT KNOWLEDGE IN LABOUR MIGRATION POLICY-MAKING**

**The cases of Italy and Sweden**

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## **Executive summary**

What most European countries seem to have nowadays in common is that the body of scientifically based knowledge on immigrant integration has increased substantially, while at the same time public authorities seem to have become less interested in making use of the assembled knowledge. However, the way in which the research-policy nexus has developed varies strongly across countries. This policy paper is meant to analyse whether or not research-policy relations in the field of labour migration in Sweden and Italy confirm, so to say, national traditions of knowledge utilization, Sweden being a country with a well-grounded social engineering culture, dating back to the 1930s, whereas Italy is usually depicted by political scientists as a country characterized by a high degree of penetration of party politics over policy-making and civil society organizations, where experts are either marginal or controversial figures. Through this comparison difficulties and opportunities in the current relation between labour migration research and decision making will be highlighted.

## **1. Political and institutional context of research-policy nexus in the labour migration field in Sweden and Italy**

Consistently with the consensus-building approach that distinguishes Swedish policymaking, also migration research (in Sweden designated with the English acronym IMER: International Migration and Ethnic Relations Research) was, at earlier stages (1960s-1970s), consensus-driven (in fact it was essentially formulated by civil servants), although later on competing research positions challenging the consensus-based 'normality' have emerged. It must be pointed out that social and political sciences were reluctant, so to say, to recognize this new field of study; it was rather at newer universities and high schools that IMER courses were established in the 1990s (Jorgensen, 2011).

In Italy the first moment of institutionalized dialogue between expert knowledge and policy on immigration in Italian history dates back to 1978, when the newly founded Inter-ministerial Committee for Emigration commissioned to CENSIS (Social Investments Research Centre), an independent research institute, a study on the presence of foreign immigrants in the country, which yet did not arise much public interest (CENSIS, 1978).

It was only at the end of the 1980s, when public interest towards immigration increased in parallel with the growth of the phenomenon, that research about this field established; it is noteworthy that it was promoted by Third Sector organizations more than by Universities. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, academics as well started to pay more and more attention to the phenomenon (Caponio, 2013).

It was in those years that the partial consensus about the definition of the problem broke up and the question started being politicized (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004). It must be pointed out that left-wing experts tended to blame policies implemented since the 1980s as unrealistic: labour demand was systematically higher than what foreseen by planning tools; the latter were too rigid, not acknowledging the need of a direct match between households/companies and foreign workers.

In both countries the development of migration research has passed through the appointment of advisory bodies, which yet have played a diverse function, with definitely different outcomes.

A distinguishing feature of the Swedish research-policy nexus is the inclusion of researchers in the governmental commissions that are a further characteristic of Swedish decision-making tradition and that have proved to be of particular significance when it comes to labour migration policy in recent years. As one of the most prominent Swedish historians has written,

*[governmental commissions] serve as the institutional linchpin in a system of democratic governance whose hallmark is deliberative political practices that involve a mix of civil servants, politicians,*

*academics, experts, and representatives of relevant civil society organizations (Trägårdh, 2007, 254).*

After the 2002 election (won by the Social Democrats), a bipartisan alliance formed in the parliament between the Green party and the centre-right parties charged the government with the appointment of a committee to examine how to better manage labour migration (Borevi, 2010). For a long time since the early 1970s – when it was stopped – labour migration had not been an issue in Sweden; nevertheless towards the end of the century, at the same time with the recovery of Swedish economy after the crisis in the 1990s, it came out again. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (SN) initiated in the new millennium a campaign for a less restrictive labour migration policy (Fahimi, 2001; Ekenger and Wallen, 2002).

The Committee for labour migration (KAKI), was appointed in 2004 and published its proposals in October 2006, just a couple of weeks before the installation of the new (centre-right) government. In order to fulfil this commitment to a regulated immigration, the committee proposed that the Labour Market Board<sup>i</sup> verified the labour shortage in the concerned occupation prior to approving recruitment of TCN workers (KAKI 2006, 130-131).

While accepting many of the committee's recommendations, on the specific point of the labour market test the centre-right government took a distance. In 2008, the government finally passed a reform (entered into force on 15 December) which has been presented as one of the most significant in the history of Swedish immigration policy. Until then a company wishing to employ a foreign person first had to check if that kind of competence was available within the EU; under the new rules, the company is no longer obliged to choose within the EU workforce but can employ whoever it prefers, yet respecting Swedish collective agreements (Quirico, 2012).

As far as Italy is concerned, while the two national conferences on immigration promoted by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and organised by CNEL (National Council for Economics and Labour) between 1990 and 1991, (Einaudi, 2007) can be regarded as attempts of establishing an 'enlightenment-like' model of science-policy dialogue (we follow here the conceptualization developed by Scholten 2009), the “Commission for the Study of a Comprehensive Law on Immigration” set up by then Minister of Social Affairs, Fernanda Contri, in 1993 can be seen as a kind of bridge from an 'enlightenment model' of science-policy dialogue to a more 'technocratic model': its members (scholars with different backgrounds) were directly engaged in drafting a complex bill, which was completed a few days before the 1994 political elections. The new majority, the centre-right coalition headed by Silvio Berlusconi with the Northern League as major ally, ignored the work made by the Commission (Caponio, 2013).

An overall reform of the immigration law topped the political agenda when a centre-left coalition ruled by Romano Prodi won the 1996 general elections. A new commission was appointed; the chair was the then Minister of Social Affairs Livia Turco and the members more and less the same of the Contri Commission. However, a closer collaboration with ministerial bureaucracies was pursued compared to the Contri Commission. After a two-year long law-making process, with the involvement of many and diverse civil society actors, the final text was definitively adopted on February 1998 and was named 'Turco-Napolitano' after its chief proponents, Livia Turco and Giorgio Napolitano, then Minister of Interiors (Einaudi, 2007).

The law provided for the establishment of a Commission for the Integration of Immigrants. It was headed by the political scientist Giovanna Zincone and charged with monitoring policy implementation, suggesting improvements if needed, and supporting the government on specific issues. In spite of the instrumental mandate, the Commission assumed since the beginning a high profile and tried to consolidate its role as an impartial institution in the controversial field of migration policy (Caponio, 2013).

Among its initiatives, the Commission published two reports, collecting contributions from experts (both from the field and academics) (Zincone, 2000). However, this demanding strategy failed to consolidate in a bipartisan form: the Commission was not reconfirmed by the new Berlusconi government elected in 2001 (Caponio, 2013).

## **2. Role of experts in the context of political instability in Italy and ideological shift in Sweden**

The first part of the decade 2001-2010 was marked by the return into office of the centre-right coalition led by M. Silvio Berlusconi, of which the anti-immigration Northern League party was a strong and crucial ally. Unlike the first Berlusconi government in 1994, the government appointed in 2001 had no hesitation in identifying immigration as a priority (Geddes, 2008).

One of the first acts adopted by the new government elected in the Spring 2001 was a new law (No. 189 of 2002, also known as 'Bossi-Fini' after the two main political proponents) introducing significant, although not structural, changes in the Consolidated Act on Immigration of 1998. Overall, the new rules aimed at making the mechanisms of control and repression of irregular and clandestine migration more effective, on the one side, while restricting possibilities of legal entry and permanent integration of immigrants in Italy, on the other (Einaudi, 2007).

Migration policies kept being security-centred with a strong emphasis on the danger represented by illegal immigrants (Bolaffi, 2001).

Notwithstanding the anti-immigration rhetoric openly expressed by important representatives of the ruling coalition, during the period 2001-2006 the crucial contribution of immigrants to the weak demographic growth became clearly observable, thanks also to research carried out or promoted by institutions which can be seen as a bridge between the sphere of decision-making and the world of research, like the ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), the CNEL (National Council for Economics and Labour) and the CENSIS, the latter being a private research institute but bipartisan and highly respected.

Gradually, after the strong attention devoted to labour migration in the first years of the 2000s, with the second half of the decade the issue ended by becoming almost invisible outside narrow expert circles. In mid-2006 the centre-left coalition returned into office, led again by Romano Prodi. A significant reform of immigration legislation was on the agenda (although not on the top), but the short duration of the second Prodi government (which fell in January 2008) blocked the endeavour (Salis 2012, 8-9).

In the most recent years scholars dealing with labour migration have kept on stressing the inadequacy of current legislation compared to the needs of economy and at the same time have tried to draw the attention on the issues of socio-economic integration of migrants (see e.g. the works by ISMU, Institute for the Study of Multiethnicity), and on the complementarity vs. competition between native and foreign workers, in particular in time of crisis (see IRPPS, Research Institute on Population and Social Policies in Roma, a branch of the National Research Council-CNR, and the CRELI, Centre for Economic Research into Labour and Industry Issues, at the *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*, Milan).

After 2008 analyses of migrants access to the labour market have inevitably been combined with assessments of the impact of the international crisis on labour migration inflows and migrants' occupational conditions: IRPPS (Bonifazi, Marini 2013) and FIERI are two examples of research institutes which have worked on this issue (Pastore, Villosio 2011; Pastore, Salis, Villosio 2013).

The online forum Neodemos.it. regularly tries to stimulate public debate on demographic issues including migration. Together with FIERI and ISMU, Neodemos has recently worked out a paper with proposals for a new migration policy, focusing, in a non-ideological perspective, on both advantages and disadvantages of labour migration flows (Neodemos, FIERI, ISMU 2013).

Coming back to the Swedish reform passed in 2008, two of the main arguments in support of it, intertwined with each other, directly refer to experts' contributions and are respectively related with demographic trends and future Welfare State sustainability. Population decline – and its impact on labour market – was and still is pointed out by many as the main driving force of the reform: Swedes are getting older and many people will soon be leaving working life. This development may have negative consequences for labour

market and economic growth – and therefore for the sustainability of the Swedish model (Quirico, 2012).

As far as demographic trends are concerned, the main reference was the administrative agency Statistics Sweden. Whereas it is undeniable that in the early 2000s the agency warned against population decline, it is true as well that it did not recommend labour migration as the chief solution, reminding that the volume needed in order to balance the negative trend in population development would be too high compared to the absorption capacity of the country (Nilsson, 2002).

Coming to Welfare State sustainability, Jan Ekberg, one of the country's most influential labour market experts, has drawn conclusions quite opposite to the line followed by the centre-right government when passing the new law. He believes that, although immigrants have a more favourable age composition than the native population, the debate does not take into account that it is not only the individual worker who comes, but also his/her family. As a consequence, Ekberg predicts that there will be an increase in public expenditure (school system, healthcare and so on) and therefore the positive net effect of labour immigration will not be as large as many people expect to be (Ekberg, 2009).

It must be said nonetheless that under the reform implementation, the flows have proven to be not so large and this is why the issue so far is not very controversial (Lundborg). The debate is rather on the violation of rights of seasonal workers, but not on labour migration in itself (Wadensjö).

### **3. Assessments of the nexus: labour migration research-policy-making**

When the Swedish Social Democratic government appointed (2004) the Committee on labour migration (KAKI), all the political parties then sitting in parliament were represented in it. Besides them, some experts were also included: a jurist of the High Court, an officer of the Migration Board and officials of several branches of the public administration. (KAKI, 2005). The committee had also a reference group, made up of representatives of social partners (KAKI, 2006). They, too, are used to be considered 'experts', though with their own agenda, and of course are far more "active" in pursuing their interests (Hjelm-Wallén).

It is noteworthy however that no scholars were invited. Lena Hjelm-Wallén, appointed as committee chairman, makes clear that 'it is good to take advantage of academic knowledge, but it is not necessary': what matters is that the committee can take stock of research which has been carried out, not that scholars are represented within the committee.

Interestingly enough, among the references cited in the final report the presence of scholarly work was quite limited as well: the few exceptions were books by economists, economic historians or Welfare State experts. The remaining part was constituted of

reports by public bodies (e.g. Migration Board) and governmental statements (KAKI, 2005).

In the whole however Swedish policymakers are considered to be willing to learn from economists, political scientists and sociologists and to seek their support for their reforms; this is generally deemed true both for Social Democratic and Conservative governments (Lundborg; Jorgensen 2011, 106).

However, the relationship between the two communities depends also on individual politicians: some of them, particularly those with an academic background, tend to be more inclined to talk with researchers<sup>ii</sup>, whereas those without an academic education can be more reluctant because they “don’t speak the same language”. (Lundborg, id.).

And indeed in the last decade it has been pointed out that Swedish policymakers, while trying to stimulate, and control, collaboration between research and policy, have revealed a quite stereotypical understanding of concepts such as ‘science’, ‘academics’, and ‘society’. Of particular relevance from this point of view has been the “the recurrent ‘thematization’ of science and academics as being ‘difficult to manage’ ” (Hellström 2005, 444).

Despite that, relations between decision-makers and migration scholars have been satisfactory in the whole.

As far as Italy is concerned, assessment both from policy-makers and experts of the impact of research upon decision making in Italy vary considerably.

According to former minister Turco on the issue of labour migration experts’ contribution to the discussion preceding the enactment of the 1998 law was crucial. She refers both to academics as well as to trade unions and both leftist and Catholic organizations. And indeed according to an interviewed high-level civil servant, more than to individual experts, centre-left parties and governments have been receptive rather to a sort of

*experts' network, made up of trade unions representatives, religious organizations, academics who used to work and to publish together as well as to high-level civil servants. In this social environment, reform proposals were developed and have remained more or less the same from the 1990s onwards: a more open citizenship and a more consistent and effective labour migration policy (Einaudi).*

On the other hand, former minister Fini (chief proponent, together with Bossi, of the comprehensive act passed in 2001), admits that ‘in the face of what has been perceived as a dramatic increase in labour migration inflows little time has been left for reflection and analysis’.

Among experts, some notice an improvement in the relation with the policy community over the last years, especially in the centre-left coalition and among the younger ministers.

The prevailing impression nevertheless is that experts' contribution is more apparent than real.

#### **4. Strengths and weaknesses in the relationship between labour migration research and policy making**

After looking into the Swedish and the Italian case, it is possible to point out to national features, economic circumstances and institutional assets which seem to be relevant in view of an effective dialogue between researchers and policymakers.

- Role of the State in supporting immigration research. In Sweden this is crucial (FAS 2003, 15) and is consistent with the fact that Sweden is among the countries with highest levels of investment in innovation and research in the world (Vinnova 2011). On the contrary, in Italy inveterate financial difficulties make it difficult to take advantage from research on a regular basis.
- Functioning of public administration. Italian policymakers, unlike their Swedish colleagues, cannot rely on public administration for research results, as the administrative machine is not in the condition to carry out research activities on its own; this prevents a constant and fertile dialogue (Dalla Zuanna). Moreover, with the partial exception of the Andreotti government in 1991-92, which established a Minister for Italians Abroad and for Immigration, in Italy the political elite has never thought seriously of creating an administrative structure with full powers on immigration (Bolaffi 2001, 38), like the Swedish Migration Board.
- Stability of the political system. While Sweden in the last twenty years has had only two political majorities (Socialdemocratic governments 1994-2006; centre-right governments 2006-), the unpredictability of the Italian political system during and after the Berlusconi age has not provided a favourable ground for the consolidation of a stable research-policy nexus.
- Politicians' attitude to research. Even when hardly criticizing migration and integration policies, researchers' assessments seem to have been taken into account in Sweden (Jorgensen 2011, 103), whereas Italian politics is more sensitive to ideological concerns than to the need of assessing policy effectiveness. Furthermore, "What policymakers care about is not so much expert knowledge, in the perspective of a long-term policy planning, but rather to parade, thanks to some media articles, that they trust research and invest in it" (Bonifazi). Finally, In Italy policy assessment (so common in other countries) is not popular at all.

- Politicization of the issue. The presence in the Parliament of an immigration-hostile party, the Democrats of Sweden, has changed also the media attitude, keeping migration out of the scene when possible and anyway keeping the discussion at a low-key level (Lundborg). The centre-right parties have kept their distance from anti-immigration attitudes, and the Social Democrats are aware of the risk of being lumped together with the Democrats of Sweden when they claim for a more restrictive labour migration policy. As a consequence of these political calculations, and of the polls showing that the xenophobic party is gaining ground<sup>1</sup>, the political elite (both centre- right and leftist) has kept a low profile on labour migration, in a public discourse which is anyway still dominated by the asylum issue. Coming to Italy, the decade 2001-2011 was marked (with the exception of the centre-left government in power from Spring 2006 to Spring 2008) by the centre-right coalition led by M. Silvio Berlusconi, of which the anti-immigration Northern League party was a strong and crucial ally (Geddes, 2008). The outcome was a high politicization of the immigration issue.

## 5. Toward a bureaucratic model?

The field of labour migration confirms, in the Italian case, a national tradition of informal and non-institutionalized dialogue between experts and policy-makers, in which the latter are used to turn to the former only on exceptional circumstances. A more unexpected finding is about Sweden, where the well-grounded tradition of social engineering is disproved by the development of the debate on labour migration throughout the 2000s. This has to do with the actors (the centre-right parties and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise) who have been able to impose their understanding of economy and demography - and of migration as an at least partial solution to the difficulties arising in both spheres – taking advantage of favourable political circumstances.

According to Peter Scholten's definition, under the *technocratic model* science, although keeping its primacy, gives up the isolation which on the contrary is a distinguishing feature of the *Enlightenment model* and is much more directly involved in policy processes. With the *bureaucratic model* the primacy moves from science to politics and the former is required to deliver evidence-based knowledge according to policy makers' needs. The demarcation between the two spheres is sharper than in the technocratic model, but science has a much more instrumental role (Scholten 2009, 562-3).

In Sweden the centre-right government has picked up knowledge (basically demographic and economic statistics) here and there, but the policy choice has not been the outcome of some sort of structured research-policy dialogue, rather knowledge has been used as a

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<sup>1</sup> 9,7% in the last European elections compared to the 5,7% of the 2010 general elections (www.val.se).

symbolic resource in order to legitimize a political line which had already been drawn. The aim of passing new rules taking into account exclusively employers' assessment about economic needs has been achieved, one could say, thanks to scholarship but without scholars, with a shift from an engineering to a bureaucratic model. The continuous reference in public debate to demographic and economic arguments has not been accompanied by a dialogue between policymakers and independent experts, having the former (the centre-right government) preferred to turn almost exclusively to governmental experts, who are supposed to be independent and as such suit better both to a strategy aiming at equating employers' decisions with what economy as a whole needs, and to the effort to avoid any politicization of the issue.

On the other hand, in Italy the center-left has proved at least sometimes to be inclined to rely on experts' assessments, yet in a fragmentary and not univocal way, in a meeting of interests between knowledge and policy based on market needs (a foreign labour demand not matched by the current regulations) and migrants' rights. However, the never ending political instability, and the cultural hegemony of the centre-right during the last twenty years, has prevented a reinforcement of the science-society nexus, which keeps on swinging between a bureaucratic and a technocratic model.

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## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Barbagli, Marzio 06/02/13	University of Bologna
Bonifazi, Corrado 05/06/13	IRPPS (Rome)
Dalla Zuanna, Gianpiero 04/06/13	Member of Senate
Einaudi, Luca 04/06/13	Presidency of the Council of Ministers
Khilblom, Ulla 12/12/12	FAS (Forsknings om arbetslivet), Stockholm
Fini, Gianfranco 26/11/12	Then President of the Chambers of Deputies
Hjälms-Wallén, Lena 13/12/12	Social Democratic representative, Sweden
Lundborg, Per 11/12/13	University of Stockholm
Pelling, Lisa 28/02/13	Global Utmaning, Stockholm
Turco, Livia 26/11/12	Democratic Party – Forum on Migration
Wadensjö, Eskil 11/12/13	University of Stockholm
Zelano, Karin 12/06/13	FORES, Stockholm

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<sup>i</sup> The Board was replaced in 2008 by the Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*).

<sup>ii</sup> For instance, the Minister of finance in charge since 2006, Anders Borg, has a PhD in Economics (Lundborg).