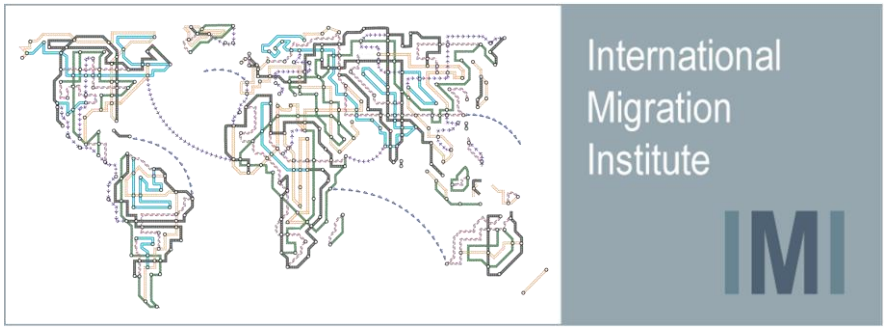

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Researching the Politics of Knowledge in Migration Policy

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PACES Project Working Paper No. 2

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between knowledge and power in migration policymaking. It challenges the notion that knowledge exists as an objective truth awaiting application by policymakers and argues that bridging the knowledge-policy gap in migration requires a deep understanding of the politics of knowledge. This entails grasping the power relations within migration research and policymaking and recognizing the diverse roles knowledge plays within the policy process. By bringing into dialogue literatures on knowledge use and knowledge production, the paper discusses how knowledge is always inherently intertwined with power dynamics, who is deemed legitimate to produce knowledge on migration, how policymakers employ knowledge either instrumentally or symbolically, and how this is shaped by the politicization of migration issues at stake. The paper ends with introducing four key methodological strategies for analyzing the politics of knowledge in migration policy: backtracking dominant assumptions, tracing issue-specific dynamics, identifying temporal shifts, and critically assessing the links between knowledge production and utilization. These strategies form the foundation for the empirical investigation of migration policymaking in the PACES project, which hopes to offer novel insights into the power-knowledge nexus in the field of migration.

Keywords: migration policy, knowledge, power

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Contents

1 Introduction

Knowledge on migration has exponentially increased and diversified over the past decades in terms of disciplines, methodologies and geographic coverage. Such **expert knowledge**[1] – be it scientific or technical – is produced by an ever-increasing range of actors: from academic research institutes, universities, think tanks and international organizations to consultancy firms, evaluation and research units within ministries and public advisory bodies. This has led some scholars to decry a 'migration knowledge hype' (Braun et al., 2018; Stierl, 2022) and to warn of an accompanying 'research fatigue' among 'over-researched' migrant groups (Omata, 2021; Pascucci, 2017). At the same time, scholars continue to raise serious doubts about whether such expert knowledge has any impact (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2018; Boswell, 2008; Carmel & Kan, 2018; Ruhs et al., 2019) – be it on public and political debates around migration, or on the design of **migration policy**, i.e. the "rules (i.e., laws, regulations, and measures) that national states define and [enact] with the objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of […] migration flows" (Czaika & de Haas, 2013, p. 489).

This diagnosis of a sustained **knowledge-policy gap** (Cornelius et al., 2004; Ruhs et al., 2019) is startling given that **'evidence-based policymaking'** has become a catchphrase in academia and policymaking since the 1990s (Cairney, 2016; Capano & Malandrino, 2022; Christensen, 2021; Hoppe, 2005) – also in the area of migration. The idea underlying evidence-based policymaking is that **policymakers** – be they politicians or civil servants – should use available scientific evidence or expert knowledge when developing policy measures in order to better address pressing societal issues. At its core, evidence-based policymaking thus presupposes that expert knowledge is used instrumentally in (migration) policy design, to ensure that policies achieve their declared goals. However, scholarship reviewed in this paper has shown that often, expert knowledge is rather used symbolically in policy processes, to substantiate a pre-defined policy position or to legitimize the actors involved in **(migration) policy decision-making** (Boswell, 2009; Knorr, 1977; Shulock, 1999).

At the same time, the value of expert knowledge as basis of decision-making has been increasingly challenged by the rise of post-truth politics and populism that dismiss facts, science and expertise (Berling & Bueger, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Newman & Clarke, 2018). Ironically, the status of expert knowledge in public and political spheres has also been partially compromised by funding bodies' increasing demand for policy-relevant research (Bakewell, 2008) and the resulting "intimacy" between certain migration scholars and policymakers (Stierl, 2022).

Both the widespread symbolic use of expert knowledge and the loss of authority of expertise implies that closing the knowledge-policy gap on migration is not primarily about providing more expert knowledge or communicating it better. Knowledge is not an objective truth waiting to be picked up and used by policymakers, but inherently entangled in power relations (Carmel & Kan, 2018). As Foucault (1977, 1980) highlighted through his concept of **power/knowledge**, knowledge serves to legitimize power and, vice-versa, power shapes the knowledge that is produced and considered legitimate. The production and use of expert knowledge are thus inherently political enterprises. In this sense, it is naïve to think that providing more expert knowledge will per se make a difference to policymaking. At the same time, the reverse claim – that knowledge does not matter at all in policy design – is equally shortsighted, given the continued investments in and references to expert knowledge by policymakers.

[1] This paper is accompanied by a Glossary defining the key terms and concepts used within PACES. Throughout the paper, terms defined in the PACES Glossary are marked in bold upon their first mention.

Researching the role of knowledge in migration policy therefore entails analysing the power dynamics that characterize both migration research and migration policymaking or, as Weingart (1999, p. 151) put it, the "simultaneous scientification of politics and the politicisation of science." It also requires approaching **knowledge production** and **knowledge use** as two sides of the same coin. However, scholarship on the knowledge-policy link has developed in two distinct fields (Christensen, 2021; Hoppe, 1999): On the one hand, public administration, organizational sociology, and institutionalist political science studies have advanced insights into the variegated dynamics characterizing knowledge utilization. On the other hand, critical theory and science and technology scholars have examined the role of power and legitimacy in knowledge production.

This working paper seeks to bring those literatures into dialogue to provide the conceptual foundation for PACES' work on the politics of expert knowledge in migration policy. The goal of the PACES project is to critically examine the relationship between power and expert knowledge in migration policymaking through two aspects: First, PACES will identify the **assumptions** that policymakers have about how migrants behave and how they react to policy measures, and the role of expert knowledge in (re)shaping those assumptions. Assumptions are people's expectations about how the world works and allow people to navigate uncertain and complex environments. They are created gradually and can be updated over time as a result of new experiences and knowledge acquired. Second, PACES will analyze the role of expert knowledge in the justification **narratives** that accompany migration policy changes, i.e. the "knowledge claims about the causes, dynamics and impacts of migration […] setting out beliefs about policy problems and appropriate interventions" (Boswell et al., 2011, p. 1). Such narratives bring together "the assumptions needed for decision making in the face of what is genuinely uncertain and complex" (Roe, 1994, p. 51) into a coherent story. As a consequence, narratives act as filters for selectively using expert knowledge, whereby knowledge that confirms the narrative is more easily integrated and picked up by policymakers than knowledge that undermines the narrative.[2]

To what extent are assumptions on migration policy and migrant behavior based on expert knowledge, or are assumptions rather driven by political pressures, institutional imperatives, or dominant stereotypes? What role does expert knowledge play in justification narratives accompanying migration policy reforms? And how do these dynamics change over time, across countries and between migration policy issues? By investigating these questions, PACES seeks to advance insights into (1) what drives the production, use or non-use of expert knowledge in migration policy, (2) how this varies between different areas of migration policy, over time and across countries, and, ultimately, (3) what role knowledge plays in maintaining or defying existing power structures within academia and **migration governance** in times of social change.

The paper is motivated by these goals of the PACES research but is written as a general resource for migration policy research. It first outlines the overall ambition of the PACES project to link research on migrant decision-making and migration policy decision-making in times of social change, as well as how the policymaking process is conceptualized. It then reviews, synthesizes, and critically examines theoretical and empirical work on knowledge production on migration and the (non-)use of expert knowledge in policymakers' assumptions and justification narratives. On this basis, the working paper then draws out the four key conceptual and methodological strategies adopted in the PACES project to identify, dissect and critically analyse the assumptions and justification narratives of policymakers that lie at the heart of power/knowledge dynamics around migration policy.

[2] For a discussion of how the notion of narratives relates to the concepts of discourse and framing, see the PACES Glossary.

2 Migration and migration policy decision-making amidst social change

The PACES project aims to connect discussions on migrant decision-making, i.e. how people decide to migrate, when, how and where to, with discussions on migration policy decision-making, i.e. how policymakers decide which policy measures to enact and how to implement them. It does so by asking to what extent and how policymakers take migrant behavior into account when designing migration policies.

In researching migration and migration policy, PACES emphasizes that decisions are always made in a context of continuous social change, as transformations in political life, economic structures, cultural habits, demographic trends or technological innovations shape not only people's aspirations and opportunities in the world, but also how they respond to them. Concretely, PACES adopts the social transformation framework (de Haas et al., 2020) to examine how social changes at the macrolevel affect migration decisions at the microlevel and migration policy decisions at the mesolevel.

This understanding of decision-making within the social transformation framework has two conceptual consequences. First, both migration and migration policy decision-making are conceptualized within PACES as social processes. (Potential) migrants have to constantly make sense of social changes and navigate the changing conditions in their communities before or after starting their migration journey – including migration policies, economic opportunities or personal life objectives –, a process that influences their decisions to stay or migrate at any given point in time (Vezzoli et al., 2024). Similarly, when taking policy decisions, policymakers must interpret a constantly changing socio-political environment and make sense of social challenges, the actors at play, their **ideas and interests,** as well as evolving knowledge on the effectiveness of past migration policies and the factors shaping migrant behavior (Castles, 2004a).

Neither migration nor migration policy decisions are thus taken by individuals in a vacuum. They are social processes: People might take the ultimate decision to migrate on their own, but the formation of migration aspirations and development of concrete plans is strongly shaped by societal norms, family dynamics, as well as people's personal and professional networks (Castles et al., 2014; Czaika et al., 2021). Similarly, while policymakers' individual preferences and worldviews might play a role when formulating a legal text or enacting a particular regulation, the formation of such preferences and the development of specific policy priorities is strongly shaped by organizational cultures, inter-institutional relations and collective political beliefs (Bonjour, 2011; Heyman, 1995; Wakisaka, 2022). Importantly, the preferences of migrants and policymakers are not static but can change over time, as they integrate new realities, experiences or knowledge into their worldviews or adapt to social change.

Second, in addition to being a social process, migration policy decision-making is an inherently political process, in which legitimacy, power and knowledge are key factors. In any political system, policy decisions need to be legitimized through justification narratives both within the decision-making institution as well as towards competing political actors and, in a democracy, towards the electorate (Boswell et al., 2021; Natter, 2023). In this political process, legitimacy and power are thus inherently linked, as lacking legitimacy (in the form of weak or absent justification narratives) can eventually lead to a loss of power – to other ministerial units, interest groups or political parties. The concept of migration governance acknowledges this multi-level, increasingly transnational "assemblage of public, private, and societal stakeholders ranging from politicians, bureaucrats, NGOs and CSOs, humanitarian agencies, entrepreneurs and businesses, and international organizations" (Natter et al., 2023, p. 5) through which migration is regulated.

In this context, (migration) policies can serve two different types of **policy objectives**: On the one hand, policymakers might pursue an *interventional goal* through a policy when its aim is to improve a societal issue by changing the behavior of people. Indeed, "public policy almost always attempts to get people to do things they otherwise would not have done, or it enables them to do things they might not have done otherwise" (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, p. 510). In our case, the interventional goal is to shape migration patterns and migrant behavior, i.e., who moves, when, how and where to, in order to reach a higher-level objective, such as filling labor shortages, ensuring social cohesion, reacting to a geopolitical crisis or dealing with demographic decline.

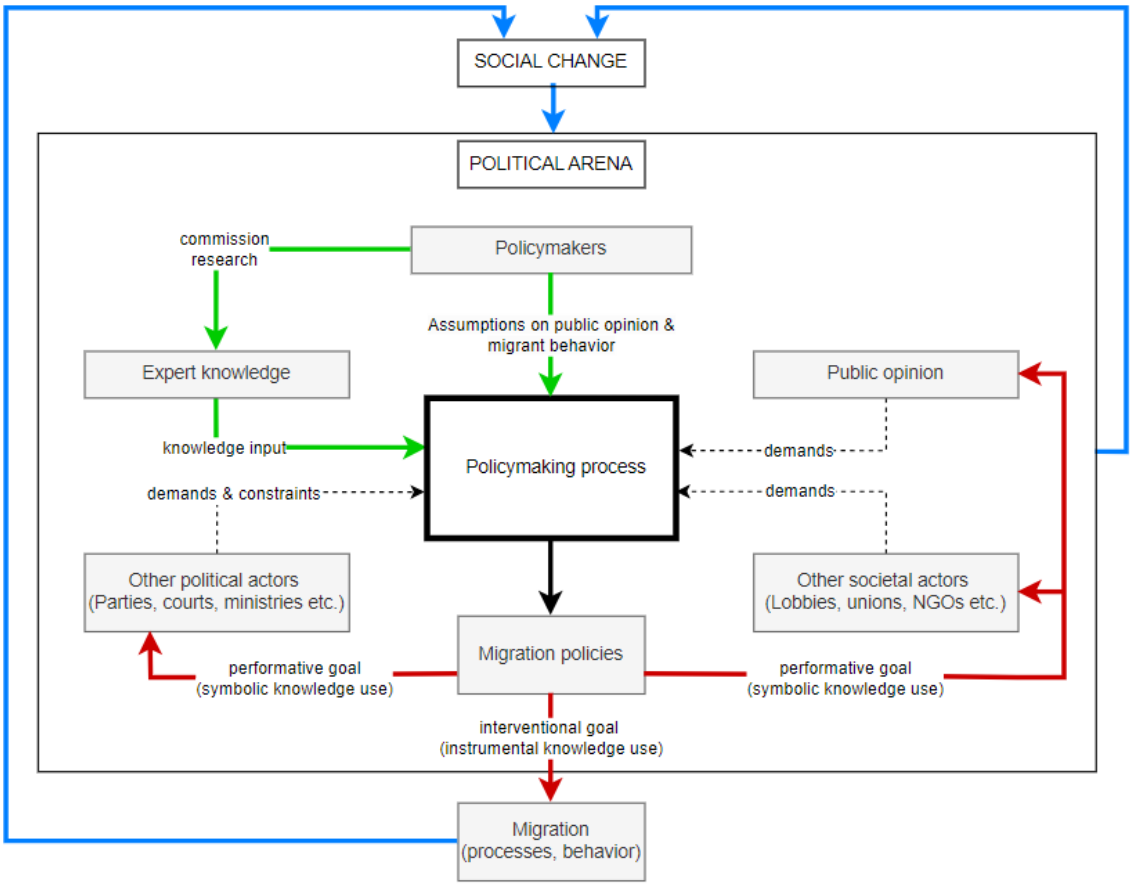
On the other hand, policymakers might pursue a *performative goal* through a policy to communicate to voters or other audiences that actions are undertaken, while the policy itself might have little or no practical influence on the situation or behavior of people at stake. In migration policy, this is often the case for policy instruments such as stepping up border control and restrictive law enforcement measures that create an "appearance of control" (Massey et al., 1998), while simultaneously immigration continues to be tolerated or even encouraged through less mediatized policy decisions.

Whether pursuing an interventional or performative goal, policymakers inevitably base their decisions on assumptions about what voters want, how migrants behave and thus how they will react to specific policy measures. What are these assumptions and to what extent and how do they rely on expert knowledge on migrant behavior and migration policies? What do we know about how and why expertise on migrant decision-making is integrated into policy design, becomes standard references to inform or legitimize policy choices, or is systematically disregarded? And whose expertise is considered legitimate and valuable input in the policy process? These questions stand at the center of PACES' research on the politics of knowledge in migration policy.

Before introducing and discussing the scholarship on knowledge production and knowledge use that is relevant for the PACES research, Fig.1 below sketches how we conceptualize the migration policymaking process as both a social and political process. While the format of a figure always requires simplification and linearization of processes, our understanding of policy-making embraces the fundamentally complex, non-linear and often messy process through which decisions on the substantive measures regulating migration are taken (Castles, 2004a; Meyers, 2000; Natter, 2018). The figure first of all highlights that the actors navigating the process of migration policymaking are constantly shaped by social change, but that vice-versa, the dynamics within the political arena as well as migration processes themselves also contribute to further social change and thus in turn affect the interests and ideas of citizens, societal and political actors (blue arrows). The figure furthermore showcases that combining the often separately-studied processes of knowledge production (in green) and knowledge utilization (in red) is crucial to fully comprehend the politics of knowledge on migration. Lastly, the figure also integrates the role of other societal and political actors, as well as **public opinion**[3] (dashed arrows) in migration policy-making, which are studied separately within PACES.

[3] In migration policymaking, public opinion (or policymakers' assumptions about public opinion) are a key driver for deciding what issues are set on the agenda, how they are framed and what policy options are considered. At the same time, public preferences also respond to policies. This dynamic relationship between policy and public opinion is studied more in-depth in a different part of the PACES project.

Figure1. *The policymaking process*



3 Conceptualizing the role of knowledge in migration policymaking

This section critically discusses existing research on the role of knowledge in migration policymaking, which has developed in two main bodies of literature that remain largely separate from each other: One the one hand, the literature around knowledge use examines the different functions knowledge can have in the policy process. On the other hand, the literature around knowledge production critically examines the power dynamics that underpin what and how knowledge is considered legitimate in the first place. By investigating the role of knowledge in policymaking, PACES is part of a broader scholarly attempt to take the role of ideas in policymaking seriously in their own right and to consider interests and ideas as "mutually constitutive" given that "knowledge and beliefs clearly shape perceptions of interests; but these interests in turn influence how knowledge is produced and deployed" (Boswell et al., 2011, p. 5).

3.1 Knowledge use: From 'speaking truth to power' to 'sense-making' at the policy-science interface

Scholars working in the tradition of policy science and public administration, as well as institutionalist political science and organizational sociology have focused on the output-side of the knowledge-policy nexus, namely on knowledge use, to examine the different functions knowledge has in policymaking.

Policy science in the tradition of Lasswell (1970) initially set out to examine 'what works' in terms of science-policy interactions. The idea was that by studying the policy process in detail, knowledge *on* policy would help improve the role of knowledge *in* policy. At the time, policy science was strongly influenced by the post-WWII belief in scientific rationality as a key to solving collective social problems. As a consequence, policy science scholars initially adopted a positivist understanding of knowledge as neutral, objective observations of social facts and saw the relationship between experts and policymakers as guided by pragmatic dialogue, in which experts were neither a substitute for nor purely at the service of politics (Hoppe, 1999).

This early optimism about the instrumental value of expert knowledge in policymaking did however not stand the test of time, as trust in experts and expertise made way to a more cynical assessment of the role of knowledge in the policy process (Weiss, 1991). The experience of knowledge mis-use or non-use led scholars to shift their attention away from the rationalist attempt to 'speak truth to power' towards better understanding how policymakers 'make sense' of knowledge and how specific power dynamics between experts and policymakers might lead to certain forms of knowledge (non-)use (Hoppe, 1999).

One consequence of this has been that, since the 1990s, policy science has moved towards a more interpretivist, critical approach that takes inspiration from organizational sociology and institutionalist political science (Capano & Malandrino, 2022; Shulock, 1999). In this context, some scholars have started to investigate the so-called **science-policy interface** (Maas et al., 2022), which recognizes that science-policy relations are not linear but instead "multiple, two-way and dynamic interactions between processes of knowledge production and decision-making" (Wesselink et al., 2013, p. 2). Others have explored how the process of organizational socialization provides members of a specific **epistemic community**, i.e. "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain," (Haas, 1992, p. 3) with a shared worldview and knowledge base and thus legitimacy to defend a particular position (Cross, 2013). Together, these works suggest that expert knowledge "is more a tool of the democratic process than the problem-solving process" (Shulock, 1999, p. 227) and thus that the value of expert knowledge rather lies in legitimizing the actors involved and decisions taken.

Within migration studies, this literature on knowledge use has flourished since the 2010s and adopted a dual focus – on actors and on narratives – to examine the role of knowledge in migration policy. On the one hand, migration scholars have sought to better understand the interactions of those involved in the science-policy relationship, mobilizing concepts such as boundary organizations, epistemic communities and research-policy networks. For instance, the DIAMINT project set out to study research-policy dialogues on migrant integration across seven European countries. It showed that the level of **politicization** of the specific integration issue at stake, i.e. its salience in the political arena and the polarization of political actors around it (van der Brug et al., 2015), as well as the institutional structure these dialogues take (e.g.: individual relations between policymakers and researchers, ad-hoc scientific advisory commissions, or in-house research facilities within public institutions) shapes whether, how and what kind of knowledge is taken on board (Caponio et al., 2015; Scholten et al.,

2015a). In a similar vein, but looking more closely at the triangular relationship between experts, policymakers and the media, the collection of Ruhs et al. (2019) examines different research-policy relations – from advisory committees and expert commissions to scientific councils and government-commissioned research projects – to identify when and why knowledge does or does not matter and thus how to bridge the gap between scientific evidence, media narratives and political decision-making on migration.

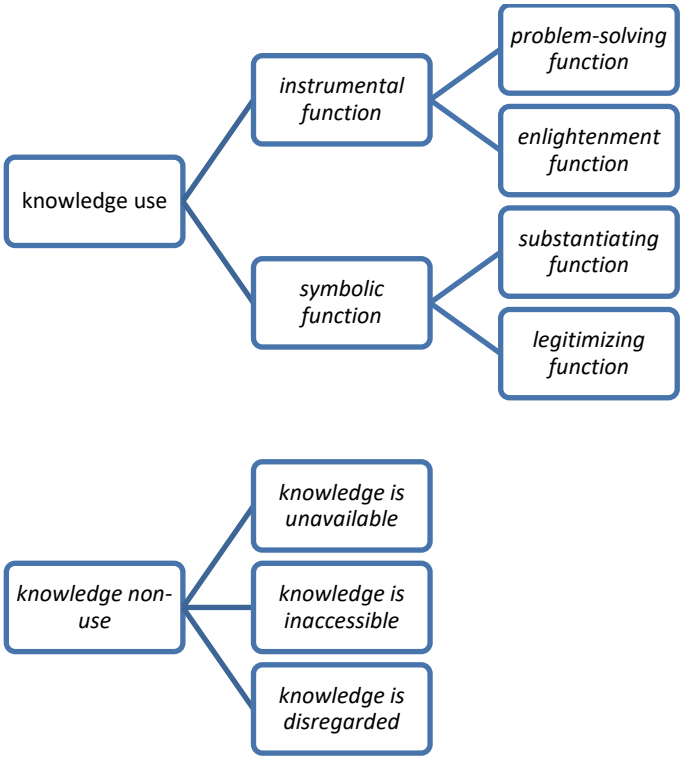
Others studying knowledge use in migration policy have traced how expert knowledge travels across institutions and to what extent it impacts (or not) ultimate policy decisions. For instance, Alagna (2023) shows how local practitioner knowledge on the counter-productive effects of anti-smuggling policies was actively disregarded in policy reform at EU level, despite effective knowledge sharing across institutions and governance levels. He traces how knowledge traveled from local Italian actors up to European institutions (via the Italian National Anti-Mafia and Anti-terrorism prosecutors' office, the European Parliament's LIBE committee and its Research Service) but was then nonetheless disregarded by both European Commission and European Parliament given the political and institutional dynamics around the highly contentious issue of migrant smuggling.

Next to such actor-focused studies, the knowledge use literature in migration studies has also examined narratives to understand the role knowledge plays in legitimizing policy preferences and organizational power. The work of Christina Boswell (2008, 2009) has been particularly influential here, as she demonstrates how expert knowledge is instrumentalized in policymakers' narratives in view of maximizing their institutional power, justifying pre-existing preferences or underpinning wider organizational legitimacy. Examining such policy narratives is not only crucial to understand the assumptions circulating within the policy arena. In fact, policy narratives also travel into the social domain and are even taken over sometimes by migrants themselves, who reproduce specific policy narratives (such as around the 'deserving refugee' or the 'migration crisis') to rationalize and make legible their own migration decision-making to others (Leurs et al., 2020).

Collectively, this scholarship has advanced a typology around the (non-)use of expert knowledge in migration policy, introducing a broad distinction between (1) instrumental use, (2) symbolic use and (3) non-use of expert knowledge (Boswell, 2009; Knorr, 1977; Shulock, 1999) (see Fig.2). As will become clear, all these types of knowledge (non-)use are at play in migration policy, given that migration is a societally complex phenomenon with high levels of uncertainty, a politically contentious issue subject to polarized public debates, as well as a bureaucratically contested policy issue that lies at the intersection of different ministries and levels of governance, making it prone to turf wars and power plays among state institutions.

First of all – and this was the ideal function of knowledge in the early days of policy science, knowledge can be used instrumentally, to improve the effectiveness of policies in achieving their declared goals. Such instrumental knowledge use can happen punctually, when it is mobilized for technical or substantive guidance of policy choices. In this case, knowledge has a clear problem-solving function (Sabatier, 1978). For instance, in the early 2000s the British Home Office drew heavily on in-house and academic research demonstrating the positive economic impact of immigration as evidence-base for the liberalization of labor migration (Boswell, 2015). Similarly, Kremer (2019) showed that publications by the independent Scientific Council for Government Policy in the Netherlands (WRR) were central in guiding Dutch integration and migration policy from the mid-1970s to the mid-2000s, a dynamic that collapsed after the publication of a 2007 report on Dutch identity which moved the WRR's work into the political spotlight.

Figure 2: *Types of knowledge (non-)use*



However, instrumental knowledge use can also happen incrementally, with knowledge taking on an 'enlightenment function' as it progressively (re)shapes the assumptions of policymakers (Weiss, 1977). For instance, Germany's self-understanding has long been that it is not an immigration country – despite an overwhelming evidence pointing at the contrary. Eventually, in 1998, the new Socialist-Green government coalition officially recognized Germany as an immigration country, which led to a range of policy changes to adapt Germany's legal framework to reality (Reißlandt, 2002).

Although institutions like to uphold "the myth of instrumental use" (Boswell, 2009, p. 249), the literature has shown that more often, knowledge is used symbolically, as ammunition in political or organizational power games (Boswell, 2009; Radaelli, 1995). This symbolic knowledge use has two variants: On the one hand, knowledge might be used (selectively) to substantiate pre-existing preferences of policymakers or organizations. In this case, drawing on expert knowledge can lend authority to a particular argument or policy position, which is especially relevant to rally support behind a decision in highly contested policy areas. For example, Caponio (2015, p. 10) showed how in Italy, the work of the Scientific Committee put in charge in 2006 to draft a Charter of the Values of Citizenship and Integration was primarily to "giv[e] scientific substance to an already established normative goal". And in the Netherlands, Nispen and Scholten (2017, p. 93) showed that the very production of data on the socio-economic differences between residents with and without migration background in itself "substantiated the belief that a policy [on integration] is required to intervene in the position of migrants."

On the other hand, knowledge might be used (selectively) to legitimize an organizations' authority in front of rival political or institutional actors as well as towards the public. Indeed, referring to expert knowledge can boost the perception that policymakers or organizations have reliable, relevant and detailed knowledge at hand, which in turn strengthens their role as legitimate decisionmaker on the

question. Typical examples for such a legitimizing function of knowledge include the creation of in-house research units that increase the credibility and reputation of the organization, such as the Research Group of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees or the EU Commission's European Migration Network, which allowed the BAMF and EU Commission, respectively, to underpin their authority on migration vis-à-vis other ministries and EU member states (Boswell, 2008, 2015). As Boersma et al. (2022, p. 89) show in the case of the EU Trust Fund for Africa, such legitimizing use of knowledge entails that institutions tend to be "more willing to learn when there are high reputational costs attached to an unintended [policy] effect", while potential for policy learning is limited on issues that are less salient publicly.

Lastly, expert knowledge can of course not be used in policymaking. This can have three sources: Expert knowledge might be unavailable, because the issue at hand is too new or too difficult to study. Expert knowledge might be inaccessible to policymakers, because of scientific jargon, lacking links between experts and policymakers or lacking organizational capacity of institutions to engage with available knowledge. But most importantly, expert knowledge might be actively disregarded, because of institutional imperatives, political-electoral pressures that clash with the course of action suggested by expert knowledge or because of a generalized suspicion towards expertise and facts in times of post-truth politics (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2018). The work of Alagna (2023) mentioned earlier for instance showed how the EU Parliament ultimately rejected a motion to reform search and rescue at sea, going against the evidence collected by its own, internal research service to avoid exerting too much pressure and jeopardize their position in inter-institutional dynamics with the EU Commission and Council.

Overall, however, and despite the shift from positivist to more interpretative approaches and the increasing attention to the role of power and legitimation dynamics in knowledge use, most of this literature takes the existence of knowledge as a given and does not question its nature, origins and production in the first place. This is where scholarship on knowledge production comes in.

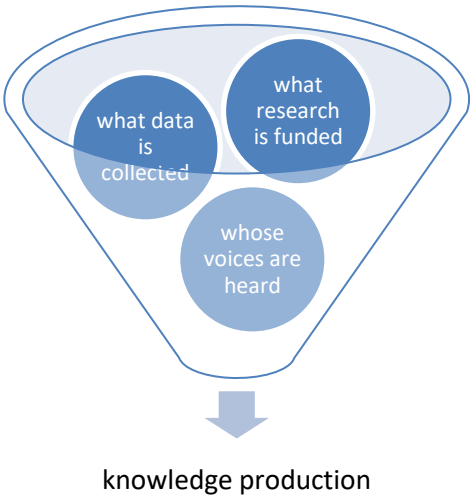
3.2 Knowledge production: Power, legitimation and in/exclusion dynamics

Complementary to but having emerged largely separately from the policy science literature, scholars working in the tradition of science and technology studies and critical theory have focused on the input-side of the knowledge-policy nexus, namely on knowledge production, to examine the power dynamics that underpin what and how knowledge is considered legitimate in the first place.

This literature starts from the observation that knowledge is a fundamentally political enterprise. As Foucault (1977, p. 27) famously argued, all knowledge is intrinsically political and all politics relies on a knowledge system and thus, power and knowledge co-produce each other: "We should admit […] that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and at the same time constitute power relations."

Within the more general rise of post-modern and post-colonial theory, scholarship on knowledge production has burgeoned over the last two decades (Bhambra, 2014; Hessels & van Lente, 2008; Jasanoff, 2004), highlighting how crucial it is to examine the power dynamics that underpin how, by whom and for what purpose knowledge is produced. More specifically, scholarship on knowledge production has tackled three core questions: What research is funded? What data is collected? Whose voices are heard? (see Fig.3).

Figure 3. *Key ingredients for analysing knowledge production*



In this vein, within migration studies, scholarship on knowledge production has demonstrated that knowledge on migration is all but objective, as it both emerges from distinct power relations and contributes to their reproduction (Carmel & Kan, 2018). In particular, this literature has brought to the fore three key insights on the role of knowledge in migration policymaking, namely: (1) the centrality of state perspectives and agendas in funding and research on migration, (2) the power of migration data itself in shaping reality and our understanding of migration, and (3) the in/exclusion dynamics shaping whose voices are considered as producing expertise on migration in the first place.

First, the knowledge production literature has asked migration scholarship to be more critical of the 'politicization of science' (Weingart, 1999) and more self-reflective about the power dynamics that shape academic research on migration. Bakewell (2008, p. 432) has for instance forcefully argued that "the search for policy relevance has encouraged researchers to take the categories, concepts and priorities of policy makers and practitioners as their initial frame of reference for identifying their areas of study and formulating research questions. This privileges the worldview of the policy makers in constructing the research, constraining the questions asked, the objects of study and the methodologies and analysis adopted."

In this vein, scholars have for example examined how the sudden growth in research funding across Europe after the 2015 'migration crisis' has reshaped the field of migration studies in two ways (Braun et al., 2018; Rozakou, 2019; Stierl, 2022): First, the growth in funding opportunities has led to a proliferation of research projects, papers and also study programs on migration, and with it, an increasing competition over resources at the expense of intellectual reflexivity. The PACES project is in itself an outcome of this dynamic, being a EU-funded research project that responded to a call that requested more research on a topic that has already been amply studied. We try to counter this dynamic by focusing on integrating existing knowledge and cooperating with other research projects rather than creating new research and data for the sake of it. Second, the demand for policy-relevant research has multiplied interactions between migration scholars and policymakers and led to dynamics of "intimacy" (Stierl, 2022) that can be seen as problematic given the political context in which migration policies have become increasingly rights-denying. The scholarship on knowledge production – which has in itself also benefited from increased funding opportunities – thus urges the field to constantly reflect on its research practices, keep a critical distance to policymakers and purposefully pursue research that might seem "policy irrelevant" (Bakewell, 2008).

Second, next to such reflexivity around the dynamics characterizing migration studies as a politicized scientific field, scholars working on knowledge production have been concerned with understanding what data on migration is collected in the first place and how the dominance of particular types of knowledge shape the construction of reality and thus how social problems are framed and what solutions are proposed (Bartels, 2018; Broeders & Dijstelbloem, 2015; Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). Scheel and Ustek-Spilda (2019) have for instance examined the production of international migration statistics by IOM and how the curation of this data suggests a particular understanding of migration "as a reality that can be managed because it can be precisely known and quantified" (Scheel & Ustek-Spilda, 2019, p. 665). And Promsopha and Tucci (2023) have shown that the type of evidence collected by humanitarian actors on Syrian refugees in Jordan led to the invisibilization of refugees living outside of camps and to the side-lining of their needs in aid projects, thus shaping the policy responses to the issue at stake.

Taking this argument one step further, scholars have also evidenced how knowledge production can form an intrinsic part of an actors' legitimation strategy. For instance, van Houtum and Bueno Lacy (2020) argue that visualizing data on irregular border crossings through oversized arrows allows FRONTEX to underpin their narrative of threat and invasion and to justify not only their existence as an organization, but also successive budget increases by the EU. Working on Central Asia, Korneev (2018) examines how the knowledge production partnerships between IOM and other international organizations and relevant local stakeholders allowed IOM to bolster its legitimation in a region where its reputation was challenged. Similarly, Welfens and Bonjour (2023) have shown that the knowledge produced through the monitoring and evaluation framework developed for the EU Trust Fund for Africa serves primarily the goal to legitimize specific actors and policy choices, rather than to assess the policy impact of the EUTF's activities. In doing so, they showcase how power relations are actively produced and maintained in the process of knowledge production, not only knowledge use. Within PACES, we are acutely aware of these legitimation dynamics and realize that the insights and knowledge generated by PACES may be used symbolically (if at all) by policymakers and that the entire process might reinforce existing power structures.

Third, and building upon these insights, scholars of knowledge production have been particularly attentive to the power dynamics that shape what is considered legitimate knowledge and who is considered an expert in the first place. Drawing on the sociological concept of '**boundary work'** (Evans, 2008; Gieryn, 1983; Jasanoff, 1987), scholars have shown that actors deliberately work to maintain their authority and reputation as legitimate knowledge producers through enforcing certain research standards, practices and formalities and that this process inevitably involves dynamics of in/exclusion. Boundary work describes how scientists demarcate their work from the knowledge produced by other actors through a set of everyday practices "for purposes of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activities as 'non-science'" (Gieryn, 1983, p. 782). For instance, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020, p. 10) points at the "politics of citation" as a practice that reinforces the boundaries between recognized and non-recognized scientific expertise.

Taking these in/exclusion dynamics as a starting point, an emerging body of research drawing on decolonial theory, the reflexive turn in migration studies and collaborative knowledge production has started to ask questions about whose voices are not heard in policymaking, i.e. what kind of knowledge is not considered expertise, and what is lost in the understanding of the subject-matter by excluding it (Amelina, 2022; Mayblin & Turner, 2020; Nieswand & Drotbohm, 2014). In this vein, scholars have sought to understand the processes that maintain **hegemonic knowledge** and silence **non-hegemonic knowledge**, such as experiential knowledge of migrants that "reflects lived experiences that are difficult for outsiders to capture" (Baillergeau & Duyvendak, 2016, p. 407), or knowledge of marginalized actors in the Global South, especially perspectives of migration scholars, civil society actors or host

populations (Amelina, 2022; Dahinden et al., 2021; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020; Kabbanji, 2014; Nimführ, 2022).

The notion of hegemonic knowledge "points not just to the existing dominance of a particular way of thinking" that maintains the narratives, policies, and practices in place, "but explicitly signals the active process of marginalising other forms of knowledge" (Machen & Nost, 2021, p. 556). Analyses have for instance pointed at the historically-grown international division of scientific labor between the Global South and North (Alatas, 2003; Kabbanji, 2014), with Global North scholars being typically in charge of theoretical or cross-comparative knowledge production while Global South scholars find themselves often limited to producing empirical knowledge on their own countries. What all of these studies argue is that a reflection on the power dynamics shaping knowledge production, as well as the purposeful integration of experiential and marginalized knowledge is key to ultimately achieve a comprehensive understanding of migration as a global phenomenon.

While this is beyond the scope and power of the PACES project, what should have become clear until now is that looking only at knowledge use or at knowledge production is limiting scholarly understanding of the politics of knowledge in migration policy. Instead, a serious and integrated consideration of both knowledge production and knowledge use practices is imperative, which is what the PACES' empirical research on the role of knowledge in migration policymaking aims to do.

4 Empirical strategies to study policymakers' assumptions and the politics of knowledge in migration

The goal of the PACES project is to critically examine the relationship between power and expert knowledge in migration policy-making and by identifying the assumptions that policymakers have about how migrants behave and react to policy measures, as well as by analyzing the justification narratives that accompany migration policy changes. What are these assumptions and justification narratives? To what extent are they based on expert knowledge on migrant behavior and previous policy effects? And what kind of knowledge is considered expertise and used in the policymaking process? Reflecting on the state-of-the-art above allows to draw out four main empirical strategies for advancing insights into the politics of knowledge around migration policy. These concern: (1) backtracking assumptions in policy decisions, (2) tracing and comparing issue-specific dynamics, (3) identifying shifts over time and (4) reflecting on knowledge production-knowledge use linkages.

4.1 Backtracking dominant assumptions

First of all, the literature review showed that most existing studies on knowledge use analyze the actors involved in the science-policy interface – within academia, expert commissions, ministerial units or other public actors – as well as their narratives to examine how knowledge is (not) used in political debates or how it (does not) impact eventual policy decisions (see for instance: Alagna, 2023; Boswell, 2009; Caponio et al., 2015; Ruhs et al., 2019; Scholten et al., 2015b).

PACES adopts the reverse approach, starting with the ultimate policy decision to then identify the justification narratives that got us there and actors' – explicit or implicit – assumptions about migrant behavior and past policy effects that underpin it. We do this through a combination of critical policy analysis and semi-structured interviews (see PACES Methodology and Fig.4 below). While the literature on migration policy highlights the fact that explicitly mentioned policy objectives might differ from underlying, hidden political intentions (Castles, 2004b; de Haas et al., 2015), "even when communication is used mainly as propaganda, it always entails the development of a rationale – that is

to say of a corpus of arguments and worldviews that are designed to convince the audience" (Pécoud, 2023, p. 10). It is in this vein that within PACES we analyse policy documents and conduct interviews to identify the justification narratives and assumptions underpinning migration policy decisions and the role of expert knowledge within them.

By contrasting the empirical insights gained on dominant assumptions with the state-of-the-art literature on migrant behavior and policy effects, we can assess the (non-)use of knowledge in justification narratives, as well as the function that such (non-)use of knowledge performs in inter-institutional relations and democratic politics. To a certain extent, it is a fallacy to think that policymakers do not attempt to take into account migrant behavior when designing migration policies. However, we know little about the mechanisms that policymakers envision as connecting policy design and desired policy objectives and what knowledge or narratives are mobilized in this process. At its core, then, PACES focuses on identifying dominant assumptions in migration policymaking across three countries that differ in terms of the policy-science relations they exhibit (Netherlands, Austria, Italy) to critically examine variations in power/knowledge systems on migration in European democracies.[4]

4.2 Tracing issue-specific dynamics

The literature on knowledge-policy dynamics furthermore suggests that two factors are particularly crucial in explaining knowledge production and use, namely the level of politicization of the issue at stake and the nature and functioning of the organization in charge. In this context, it is surprising that many studies either take 'migration' as a single issue area or focus on one particular area of migration policy such as labor migration or irregular migration. This disregards the fact that a country's **migration regime** – the entire set of policies and practices regulating migration – is typically a "'mixed bags of measures, containing multiple laws or decrees" that "because they are subject to different arenas of political bargaining, […] are bound to display internal incoherencies 'by design'" (de Haas et al., 2018, pp. 325-326).

As a consequence, interest structures, organizational responsibilities and also knowledge claims vastly differ depending on the migrant group or migration policy area at stake (de Haas et al., 2014; Natter et al., 2020). For example, migration and development programs are generally under the responsibility of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, while work permits for highly-skilled migrants are generally a joint competence of Ministries of Interior and Labor and Social Affairs, engaging very different actors, assumptions, inter-institutional relations and thus also power/knowledge systems. This calls for more disaggregated and comparative analysis of knowledge-policy dynamics across migrant groups and policy issues. Right now, however, we know little about whether policymakers assume all migrants to behave in the same way or whether for instance highly-skilled migrants are assumed to act as rational agents, while forced migrants are assumed to act irrationally, driven by emotions in an environment with imperfect information.

Within PACES, we will trace such issue-specific assumptions and knowledge-policy dynamics by comparing the ways in which knowledge is (not) used across three policy issues, which vary in terms of their level of politicization, ministries involved and relevant bodies of knowledge, namely: (1) policies seeking to attract or retain highly-skilled migrants and essential workers for shortage jobs, (2) policies seeking to deter irregular migrants and smuggling via information campaigns and penalties, and (3) policies seeking to provide solutions for displacement via refugee resettlement and development programs geared towards protection in the region.[5] By contrasting and comparing knowledge-policy

[4] For our country selection rationale, see the PACES Methodology.
[5] See the PACES Methodology for a justification of the policy issue selection.

dynamics across these three different policy issues, we hope to gain a more nuanced understanding into how knowledge is or is not mobilized in the justification narratives underpinning different aspects of migration policy.

4.3 Identifying shifts over time

A crucial conceptual element for understanding migration and migration policy decision-making within the social transformation framework adopted in PACES is the passage of time. Within PACES, we argue that individual and institutional preferences – be it about migration decisions or migration policy decisions – are broadly speaking formed through an assessment of what has been, what is and what may be in the future given constantly ongoing social change (Vezzoli et al., 2024). In our analysis of the politics of knowledge in migration policy, we take into consideration time by adopting a longitudinal approach: In particular, we are studying justification narratives and assumptions underpinning policy decisions in the three policy areas starting from the late 1990s/early 2000s in order to identify both continuities in dominant assumptions and narratives, as well as moments of shift, when institutions might have abandoned certain assumptions or replaced them by other justification narratives.

Zooming into such moments to understand the drivers behind shifts in assumptions will provide privileged insights into the workings and potential transformations of power/knowledge systems around migration. Ultimately, rather than assuming that power/knowledge systems are stable configurations, we consider them as sites of contention that require us to pay attention to "the ways in which formations of expertise become stabilized and de-stabilized, vulnerable to challenge and contestation" (Newman & Clarke, 2018, p. 40).

4.4 Reflecting on knowledge production-knowledge use linkages

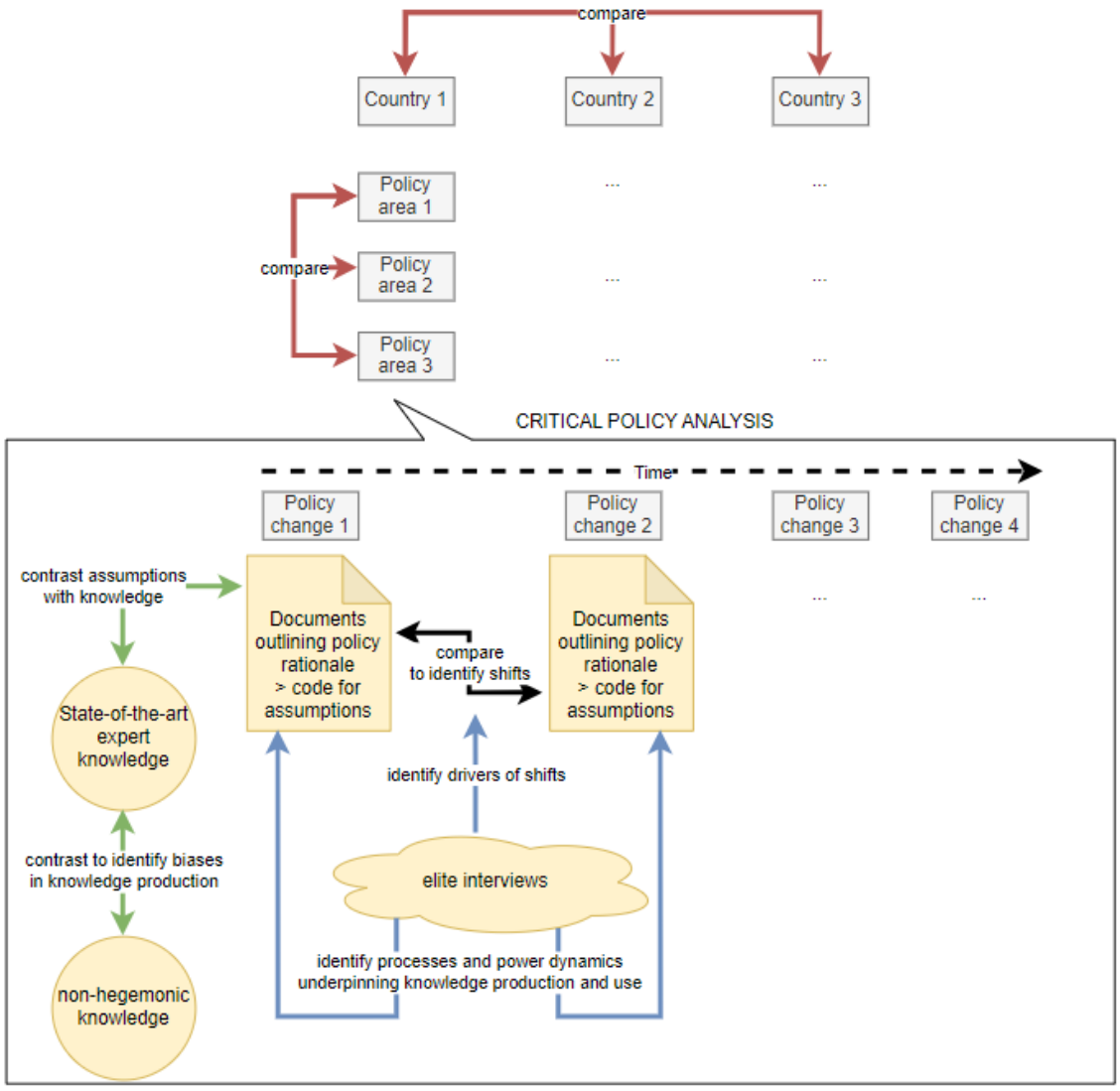
In this context, a fourth critical element when investigating the politics of knowledge in migration is to seriously consider the nature of the knowledge that is brought into the policy process. As mentioned earlier, and despite the reflexive turn in migration studies and efforts to decolonize and decenter knowledge production in the field (Amelina, 2022; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020; Nieswand & Drotbohm, 2014), the literature on knowledge utilization and the science-policy interface has so far almost exclusively focused on Western contexts and the role of academic or professional expert knowledge. The vibrant discussions in broader migration studies around the political economy of knowledge production and the role of experiential, non-hegemonic and marginalized knowledge (Baillergeau & Duyvendak, 2016; Bakewell, 2008; Berling & Bueger, 2017; Kabbanji, 2014) are surprisingly absent from the specific literature on knowledge (non-)use in migration policy.

This is problematic for two reasons: First, it means that many of the studies on knowledge use do not critically question what is actually considered as knowledge in the first place – by policymakers but also by funders and other researchers in the field. This, however, shapes what knowledge claims, sources and worldviews are ultimately considered legitimate enough to be included in policy design. Second, it also entails that scholarly work on knowledge use often indiscriminately takes over the vocabularies, categories and analytical frameworks dominant in policymaking, hereby indirectly confirming or legitimizing them. This limits the ability of academic research to identify and critically reflect on the taken-for-granted assumptions of policy-makers. While it is beyond the scope of PACES to initiate a step-change in terms of integrating non-hegemonic knowledge – of migrants, local communities or other marginalized actors – in policy design, a first necessary step in this direction that PACES hopes to spearhead is to critically diagnose the lacking reflexivity (including within the PACES

project itself) over the nature of knowledge used and to start bringing the debates on knowledge use and knowledge production into dialogue.

Fig. 4 below visualizes the empirical strategies and analytical approach pursued within the PACES project to investigate the role of knowledge in migration policy. It highlights the three core sources used in PACES' critical policy analysis (yellow boxes) and the research processes associated to them: (1) the collection of policy documents outlining the justification narratives of key policy changes enacted, in order to code dominant assumptions and identify shifts in assumptions (black arrow), (2) the state-of-the art of expert knowledge and non-hegemonic knowledge on the policy area, to contrast expert knowledge with policymakers' assumptions as well as to identify biases in knowledge production (green arrows), and lastly (3) the conduction of elite interviews in the three countries, to identify processes and power dynamics underpinning knowledge production and to identify the drivers of shifts in assumptions (blue arrows). The figure also highlights the longitudinal dimension of PACES' research process (dashed arrow) and the potential for novel comparative insights across policy areas and countries (red arrows).

Figure 4. *PACES' analytical research process*



5 Conclusion

This paper set out to introduce the conceptual foundations for the work on migration policymaking within the PACES project. It reviewed the rich, yet surprisingly disconnected literatures on knowledge use and knowledge production in order to clarify the projects' own position within the politics of knowledge debate. In a nutshell: PACES distances itself from the understanding that closing the knowledge-policy gap is simply about providing more knowledge or communicating it better. Rather, it argues that it is about better understanding the variegated roles that knowledge plays in the inherently political process of policymaking. Disentangling and comparing, for different migration policy issues, what the underpinning assumptions and justification narratives are, how they shifted (or consolidated) over time and how they relate to both expert knowledge and non-hegemonic knowledge will allow for more systematic insights into where, when, what and how knowledge is produced and (not) used in migration policy decision-making. Ultimately, we hope that such insights can serve as an entry point for policymakers, academics and migrants to better navigate dominant power/knowledge systems around migration in times of social change.

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