

# The Public Role of Social Scientists in Constituting the Migration-Development Nexus<sup>1</sup>

by THOMAS FAIST (Bielefeld University)

## Abstract

Academic and public debates on the migration-development nexus often raise the question whether and in what ways social scientific research may form a basis for rational political decisions. The main thesis of this article is that such a question is ultimately misleading. Social scientific research may offer crucial information for describing, understanding and explaining the migration-development nexus. The most important role of social science is not to give policy advice but to offer concepts and patterns of interpretations – based on empirical research – which can guide political debates in the public sphere. This means that sociological analysis should go beyond focusing on research-policy links, and bring the social scientists' role in the public sphere in a much more forceful way.

**Keywords:** international migration, development, public sphere, knowledge, public role of social scientists

## Introduction

Considering remittances as instruments for economic development, and the idea that international migrants have the capacity to drive forward economic growth, have not been central tenets of the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015). Nonetheless, during the past decade and a half, attention to the potential of migrants' remittances for development has increased tremendously (Sørensen et al. 2002), and it is quite plausible that migration for development will play a prominent role in successor schemes and programmes to the Millennium Development Goals (cf. UNDP 2009). Experts and researchers have held a key function in the renaissance of

the idea that migration plays a central role for economic and human development. They have established a link between migration and development via remittances, and have convinced governments and international organizations to implement improved measurement techniques in order to record remittance flows (Bakker 2014). While this claim could be disputed, the question is which role social scientists, among other actors in the public sphere, have played in linking basic and applied research. The latter has often been conducted in the context of policy changes, which have touted migrants' remittances as a development tool.

More specifically, there is an often-mentioned gap between research in the social sciences, on the one hand, and social action and praxis on the other. This alleged disjuncture is particularly pertinent in the migration-development nexus. At

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first glance, this may seem astonishing because migration studies and development research—both fields being interdisciplinary in nature—are characterized by a high degree of commissioned research. This kind of research is often politically motivated. For example, one of the main motivations to sponsor economic development via remittances is to reduce international migration from the global South to the global North. To illustrate, over recent years politicians across Europe have often claimed that higher levels of economic development (measured by per capita income and/or increased human development symbolized by lower infant mortality and higher rates of literacy) would eventually lead to a decrease in international migration (European Commission 2002). Academic analysts of migration, however, insist that—while this expectation may be borne out in the long run, considering demographic transitions and economic transformations—increased economic development correlates highly with increased international migration, expressed in concepts such as the ‘migration hump’ (Martin and Taylor 1996). Moreover, while the policy world may be concerned with adhering to more efficient means of migration control, ranging from border controls to development cooperation, academic researchers often insist on those endogenous dynamics of international migration, which escape blunt efforts at control, such as irregular migration.

Thus, even in these fields of migration and development, which seem to be strongly immersed in public policy issues and public debates, both practitioners and academic researchers heatedly debate the difficulties of mutual exchange. At its core, this gap hypothesis raises the following question, which has been debated as long as social science research has existed: Would social science knowledge be more useful if it could be more easily applied instrumentally? In other words, would we desire a state of affairs in which political action could be systematically based on knowledge about calculable causal relations, as the term ‘evidence-based policy’ instead of ‘dogma’ would suggest

(Boswell 2009)? While this may be a fruitful question to begin with, it is ultimately misleading. John Maynard Keynes already pointed out in the 1930s that finding the link between the intellectual and the political world may be difficult to achieve, pointing to the crucial role of economic ideas: “Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slave of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling the frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval” (Keynes 1970: 361).

This proposition indicates that there is indeed a strong coupling of the two worlds of policy-politics and academia, albeit not through direct application of knowledge, but rather through ways of thinking and representation in the public sphere. It is in this way that social scientists are brokers bridging ‘structural holes’ (Burt 1992), which are not simply due to the absence of social ties but from different systemic dynamics as well. The function of academic knowledge in the public sphere goes beyond the ‘enlightenment’ role (Weiss 1979) because it designates a ‘place’ for public debates to occur. Thus, social science knowledge, on the one hand, and the system of public policy, on the other hand, are not only two very different worlds; they are linked in the realm where ideas are exchanged and arguments occur in publicly accessible forums that range from mass media to small circles of debate. The worlds of academic research and public policy are based on different assumptions. These assumptions, in turn, provide for different views about the function of knowledge. While academic research is more geared toward the function of knowledge to understand migration and development processes in a critical perspective, public policy tends to prioritize the instrumental use of knowledge. The social sciences do not so much produce social technologies, but offer worldviews and lenses which help to categorize observable social facts and make it possible to arrive at interpretations. The world of public policy-making, by contrast is

structured by its own dynamics in which political interests aim to shape social life. Policy-makers use social science knowledge when it serves the internal dynamics of policy-making, although in fact, quite often, it may not serve this function, as when electoral pressures trump expert knowledge. Politicians are often driven by political exigencies and in such circumstances end up ignoring evidence where it fails to support electorally appealing courses of action—especially in areas susceptible to populist styles of action such as migration. At any rate, the social sciences, not only including sociology but also political science, anthropology, and economics, have delivered such lenses galore, in the form of concepts dealing with human and economic development.

The very fact that the social sciences usually do not have direct impact on decision-making but are able to influence at best the lenses through which ‘social problems’ are viewed, make it all the more important to look not only at the interaction of social scientists and policy-makers in governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, social movement organizations, and the like, but also at their role in the public sphere. If it is true that social scientists can usefully provide lenses through which to view and identify issues, topics, and problems and not so much be prescriptive, the direct linkage to policy and thus decision-making should not be overrated. Yet the discursive impact then assumes an ever more crucial role. And it is in the public sphere that such lenses are debated. And it is, above all, in the public sphere that political decisions in democracies, no matter how particularist the interests behind them are, can usually be seen to make and to have been legitimated by reference to both universal norms and plausible conceptual beliefs. The ubiquitous references in policy debates to meta-norms such as human rights, or the almost undisputed gospel of economic growth, are examples that come to mind.

This proposition can be explicated in three issue areas. The first concerns public policy and research agendas, social order, and the organization of research in the specific field of migration

and development. In this area we are basically concerned with the (mutual) conditioning and conjunctures of academic research and policy paradigms. The second issue area deals with knowledge production in the social sciences and the public role of social scientists. Finally, the third issue area addresses social science knowledge and its uses in public policy and in the public sphere. But before plunging into these issue areas, however, it is necessary to question the standard account of why the worlds of academic research and public policy supposedly talk past each other.

### **The standard account: the gap hypothesis and its deficiencies**

A deficit or gap argument is at the core of standard debate, which states that given the large stock of academic knowledge in various fields of societal life, the de facto usage of this kind of knowledge in politics, state, and non-state policy-makers is widely insufficient. In the field of migration and development, we claim to have knowledge about how financial remittances ameliorate or increase social inequalities in regions of origin and destination of migrants. This knowledge, as the argument goes on, is only insufficiently applied to policies by the respective national governments or international organizations. In this perspective, much more could be done to facilitate the transfer of money by reducing transaction costs in offering channels alternative to Western Union and MoneyGram, or even to ‘illegal’ viz. informal routes, such as the Hawala system. Hence, no publication on the subject of remittances fails to mention the Mexican government’s ‘3 for 1’ program in which each ‘migradollar’ is complemented by an extra dollar from the federal and regional government. The fact that only a fraction of remittances is channelled into this program is rarely mentioned (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008).

Usually, three reasons are advanced to account for the allegedly deplorable gap between the plentiful store of research knowledge and its application in decision-making. The first pos-

its that social scientists simply do not yet know enough about certain causal relationships or mechanisms of behaviour. In the case of financial remittances, this refers, for example, to the question how—if at all—remittances sent to family members in regions of origin aggregate from the family level to local communities or even to the national economy. So far, social scientists know very little about these processes of aggregation. The second reason offered relates to the transfer of results from the social sciences to *praxis*. Each of the two worlds uses its own language and particular jargon. One could argue that social scientists write in barely intelligible ways and should strive for greater clarity. This insight suggests that a simple one-to-one transfer is not possible. Instead, the processes and tasks involved could be better described as the mutual translation of different codes characteristic of the social sciences and public policy, respectively. Thus, it is not surprising that policy-makers establish expert commissions—such as the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) convened in 2005 by the then Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), Kofi Annan—not only to legitimate decisions or delay them, but also to translate actual research results. We can observe a similar pattern of knowledge translation in the run-up to the latest International Migration Report (UN 2013). A third explanation of the gap suggests that those who apply social science knowledge are thought to lack the capacity to interpret research results correctly, or that their readiness to learn is, moreover, also limited. If so, a change in the style of thinking among this group would be warranted. This third argument is highly questionable because we find that many policy-makers in fact have a social science background. While one may quibble with the fact that among social scientists in the field of development, those with an economics background predominate; one may also plausibly argue that economics as a field has been buoyant and imperial, and perhaps less reflexive about the transfer problem. It is still true that the staffs of national and international organizations are filled by aca-

demically trained persons, and policy-makers are certainly capable of being influenced.

This standard account needs to be questioned in a fundamental way because of its rationalist prejudice. This mode of thinking is based on a purely instrumental model according to which the social sciences are to be used in applying generalized findings to particular, concrete situations. In abstract terms, this perspective says: if A then B, or B as a function of A. The policy-maker then seeks to change B or produce B, and so forth. This formula seems to be rather shortsighted, not least because all knowledge needs to be translated, for example, to consider *ceteris paribus* conditions. When talking about the effects of a policy, one cannot simply say, when A then B, etc. but one needs to know about consequences of specific and complex sets of factors. Yet such knowledge is not simply stored in the warehouse of the social sciences. There is also no recipe-like knowledge in the form of easy rules to follow (Luhmann 1992). For example, it is plausible to argue that financial remittances may result in the economic improvement of regions of origin. Yet the number of *ceteris paribus* conditions affecting this formula are legion, and it would take a great deal of specific knowledge other than academic knowledge—such as tacit, ‘everyday,’ and local knowledge—to appreciate the conditions under which financial remittances make a particular impact (on various ideal typical ways of modelling the boundaries between science and policy, see Hoppe 2005).

Even more important is that all social science knowledge is value-bound, even derived under the ideal of value-free objectivity. Concepts have direct and strong relations to values, such as development, evolution, exploitation, social progress, social integration, and social inequality. With these notions in mind, social scientists produce something of a worldview of selected parts of reality, which also implies an urge to act in a certain way. For example, the notions of economic development and human development suggest somewhat different policy action regarding the use and desirability of financial

remittances. Notions of economic development would emphasize the investment character of remittances, e.g., into education, health, or manufacturing. By contrast, notions of social development, such as Amartya Sen's (1984) capability approach, draw upon the idea that persons have a choice in how to employ remittances in aid of certain objectives, for example, geographical mobility, which constitutes one of many possible elements in the individual's well-being and quality of life.

### **Issue area 1: public policy, social order, and research**

This issue area concerns a host of questions revolving around how research and policy agendas are set and potentially interact, and especially how public policy agendas impact actual research that is undertaken: how have public policies, foundations, and other actors influenced research on the migration-development nexus, and in what ways—e.g. what are the mechanisms of influence, such as funding and hiring? How have institutions such as the World Bank and state governments set the migration-development agenda? Since the concept of development achieved prominence in the late 1940s, how have issues of economic growth and political order been bundled over time? What premises have been underlying policy research agendas, such as neo-liberal or grass-roots perspectives and orientations? How did these agendas reflect the changing or even transformed relationships between principles of social order—that is, state, market, civil society/community? In which institutions has research been undertaken—e.g., in universities, independent research institutes, or in international research institutes and organizations?

While it is impossible even to begin addressing these questions here, it is helpful to place them into a discursive-institutional context. In other words, one needs to identify how the research and policy interests in the migration-development nexus have coincided in three consecutive cycles or phases (Faist 2008), and what

exactly the (counter-)paradigmatic strands were. The first and the third phases were undoubtedly stimulated by public policy interests—the first in the 1950s and especially the 1960s by the OECD. The third and on-going phase has taken off after the World Bank placed migrants' financial remittances at the core of its annual report (World Bank 2002). Other agents, national governments and international organizations included have followed suit. In the second phase, one also finds a correspondence between public policy interests in the South and the North, and academic concepts—a 'strange bedfellow' arrangement of both restrictive migration control on the one hand and a critical analysis of underdevelopment through reference to such deleterious mechanisms as the 'brain drain' on the other hand. In all three phases, research knowledge was and still is scrutinized for its applicability to development, based on different theoretical assumptions and slightly different policy priorities.

In phase 1, during the 1950s and 1960s, with spin-offs into the 1970s, economic policy-makers and most representatives in the economics discipline in the global North held that migration contributes to the development of sending regions.<sup>2</sup> In fact, most research was actually undertaken after restrictive migration policies had been implemented in the early 1970s (e.g. Penninx 1982 on Turkey). Following the 'recruitment stop' in Western Europe, public policies aimed to encourage migrants to 'return' to their regions of origin. Financial incentives were allotted to those returning. By and large, the theoretical underpinning of the recruitment drive in the global North of the 1960s was based on social modernization theory. International migration, quite apart from the much more massive internal migration in the South, was meant to siphon off excess labour and transfer it to the North, where it could—accord-

<sup>2</sup> Ironically, theories with a perspective from the global South on economic development in the 1950s and 1960s focused on import substitution industrialization and thus did not consider international migration, albeit migration in the latter part of this period began to take off (again).



ing to the OECD (Kindleberger 1967)—fill labour gaps in labour-intensive industries. In this way, international South-North migration (East-West was curtailed by the Iron Curtain) could both contribute to development in the South and the growth of GDP in the post-war reconstruction economies of the West. Although modernization theories covered a great deal more terrain than economic development *per se*, an economic lens heavily dominated the focus and terminology of the migration-development nexus. From a wide array of complex theoretical components in modernization theory, only the economic perspective was chosen to justify public policy choices. Up until the late 1970s, when the first studies were published on the effects of remittances, social scientists and governments alike saw migration as a solution to development obstacles in emigration regions. Empirical results, however, painted a different picture, often concluding that there was little evidence that remittances boosted local, not to mention national, economic development (Lipton 1980).

Whereas in phase 1 causal reasoning went from international migration to development, social science thinking during phase 2 largely reversed causality: the line now ran from underdevelopment to migration. Still rooted in modernization theoretical assumptions, dependency and world systems theories questioned the impact of economic modernization on developing regions, now cast to the peripheries. Coinciding with such theoretical underpinnings, policy debates also highlighted the deleterious consequences of migration, especially the ‘brain drain’ of professionals. The debate reached a climax in the context of discussions of the ‘New International Economic Order’ in which many southern states in the United Nations system raised their voices. It was then that international migration as a policy solution became problematic; it turned into the problem in this reformulation of modernization theory, leading to the conclusion that migration as such contributes to structural economic heterogeneity and ever increasing social inequalities between South

and North and between centres and peripheries within these regions. Needless to say, there was little policy impetus in the North to challenge such assumptions. After all, restrictive immigration policies, implemented in virtually all states in the North/West since the early 1970s, were not accompanied by alternative means to promote development, such as international trade. Thus, restrictive migration controls and the brain drain rhetoric nicely complemented each other in portraying international migration as a social problem. In the research carried out in phase 2 the emphasis lay even more forcefully than in phase 1 on an economic perspective, this time with a counter-hegemonic political economic drive.

Phase 3 in policy clearly took off with the wake-up call by the World Bank in its report on development finance (2002). Now, concepts such as increasing competitiveness, hunting for the ‘best brains,’ and other key notions dominated the policy debate. In tune with globalization talk, concepts such as ‘circularity’ assumed greater importance (GCIM 2005), in addition to efforts at tapping into the benefits brought about by return migrants. Now terms such as ‘brain gain,’ later modified to ‘brain circulation,’ came to replace ‘brain drain.’ The European Union (EU) itself now declared its aim to compete on par with the United States in attracting the so-called highly skilled. In addition, the second demographic transition in most immigration states renewed discussions about attracting migrants to make up for a shrinking labor supply and an increase in the number of pensioners over the coming decades. As a legitimizing strategy to engage in attracting the ‘best and brightest’ (Kapur and McHale 2005), this development policy for the North was placed in the context of helping countries in the South to develop their economies—and, again a direct demand by the EU—to build up their migration control infrastructure. This latter issue has been of particular relevance with respect to states such as Morocco and Turkey, bordering on the EU and being transit countries for migrants from further afar. At this point, this

linkage between securitized migration control and development cooperation has reached into countries far away from the Mediterranean, such as most West African states.

In all three phases mentioned there was a confluence of policy and research cycles on the migration-development nexus. This is not to say that there were one-way streets between science and policy or public debates. Nonetheless, it indicates that there were elective affinities or even mutual conditionings. What can be said with some certainty is that public policy drew upon research concepts when suitable, and that academic research provided suitable models which were later (indirectly) used to justify a renewed emphasis on remittances. For example, in the transition from the second to the third phase, in the 1990s, approaches such as the New Economics of Labour Migration in economics and the livelihood approach, originating in sociology and anthropology, focused on small collective units such as families and kinship groups as main decision-making sites and realms of action regarding (international) migration. The former approach looks at migration as a form of informal insurance against risks such as crop failure, whereas the latter views migration through the lens of ensuring a living in often adverse circumstances. These mid-range concepts constituted a decisive move away from analytical models that prioritized individuals as the main unit of analysis, as in neo-classical migration economics. The change of perspective from individuals to small groups, and from rational choice to social choice, led researchers to take a more nuanced look at the origins, the flows, and the consequences of financial remittances (Levitt 2001). For example, in the past, the use of remittances to pay bills for health and tuition fees or consumer products had been seen as unproductive. Yet a closer look at how some families or larger collectives pooled resources to cope with risks led researchers to realize that investments into the areas mentioned could be helpful in coping with diverse economic hazards and combating poverty. Now there was a proliferation of arguments that the

effect of remittances in the earlier literature and policies was underestimated. Though it would be difficult to trace the exact route these changing concepts from the social sciences took to find their way into the decision-making and planning of (inter-)governmental organizations, it stands to reason that the changes of analytical patterns used across the three phases of the migration-development nexus is no coincidence. In the third phase, in particular, academia-policy brokers of knowledge, such as authors of the reports by the intergovernmental International Organization of Migration (IOM), played an important role and thus tried to gain a prominent place among the spate of international organizations dealing with cross-border migration.

The very fact that a reappraisal of the migration-development nexus has been going on for some years now means that perceptions of negative effects of migration upon development, so prevalent in phase 2, have changed. Indeed, the change would not have been possible without a much broader transformation of the social order and the relationships among the underlying principles. Such a sea change can be identified on the discursive level and in institutional and policy domains. If, for heuristic purposes, we define three principles of social order as state(ness), market, and civil society or community, we can trace the shifting emphasis of public policy-making and research agendas over the past several decades, since development entered the lexicon of public debate in the late 1940s. Apparent are two discursive and policy shifts, both of them combinatorial forms including civil society or community. The overarching characteristic is a move away from the national state (apparatus) as an engine and coordinator of development. The demise of the national developmental state was accompanied not simply by a rise of the market, as critics of the so-called Washington Consensus would have it. Indeed, the first shift is a combination of stateness and civil society. The national state has not been replaced, but complemented by local state and international organizations. Terms such as 'government' have been

complemented by 'governance', and 'state' has been extended to 'stateness'. Obvious examples of combinations of local state and civil society are programs labelled *co-développement*, which often include local states—cities, municipalities—in immigration states and transnationally active migrant associations. The second move is the combination of market(s) and transnational civil society. In our case, this shift is best exemplified by the term diaspora. Both those who advocate the entrepreneurial market citizen, an individual migrant who is economically active across borders, and those who favour participatory approaches rooted in collectives, have used the term diaspora to indicate a new stage of either individual or civil societal involvement. Those who see diaspora as a form of entrepreneurial activity focus on the role of the 'highly-skilled' living outside their country of origin. These persons are thought to contribute to development via the transfer of knowledge. By contrast, those taken with the notion of cross-border civil society emphasize the role of hometown associations and other small-scale groups in providing collective goods for the regions of origin. Both approaches make far-reaching assumptions about diasporists as brokers. What can be stated with some certainty is that there has been an increasing co-optation of diaspora groups in policy-making and policy-consultancy and that it has been national state activities providing the policy infrastructure.

### **Issue area 2: knowledge production and the public role of social scientists**

The second issue area broadly concerns the kind of knowledge produced by academic social scientists and the role these scientists play in the public sphere. The public sphere is much broader than the world of public policy-making, and relates to the realm of public debate. The questions thus are: What role have social scientists played in the linkage of knowledge production and public policies through participation in the public sphere as experts, advocates, partisans, or public intellectuals? What have been the dif-

ferences among the various social science disciplines, such as economics, political science, and sociology? And what have been the differences, if any, between the interdisciplinary fields of migration research and development research? What kind of knowledge production has been propagated by social scientists, e.g., instrumental vs. reflexive knowledge? What has been the self-understanding of social scientists involved—professional, critical, or policy-based?

Again, this sketch may offer only a partial frame in which to consider these questions. To start with, knowledge gained from research in the social sciences can rarely be condensed into social technologies. The specific objects of the social sciences are not amenable to social engineering. Yet this technological deficit is not an outcome of the inability of most social sciences to devise ever more sophisticated techniques of observation and measurement, but is due to the specificity of the objects and the associated normative implications. In societies with high degrees of personal freedom and a high value on individual autonomy a premium is placed on social change. Progress is legitimized by the concept of 'modernity' or even 'post-modernity,' itself a cultural consciousness of the changeability of things. A direct consequence of this spirit of modernity is that scientific claims usually allow for various and diverging interpretations. There is a constant debate over results, based in the competing paradigms and the multiple normatively grounded belief systems underlying social scientists' claims. One does not need to adhere to a criticism of the 'strong programme of science' (Barnes 1974) and thus engage in a social reductionist interpretation of the social sciences to realize that the questions posed by social scientists and the interpretations of research results are guided by normatively bounded ideas. The migration-development nexus in general and the term 'development' as a short-hand for multifarious and even contradictory goals such as 'the good life', economic growth, and ecological sustainability lends at least suggestive support to the hunch that such normative ideas



need not be very specific and may even have passed their conceptual zenith—as the concept of development in fact has—but still serve as rallying foci.

The crucial point of departure is the linkage between knowledge and the public. Often, two types of knowledge are contrasted; namely, instrumental knowledge which is oriented toward the means to achieve goals, and reflexive knowledge, which is geared toward (normatively desirable) ends. This stark distinction is reminiscent of Kant's moral imperative, which argues against using persons as means rather than ends. Both forms of knowledge, instrumental and reflexive, can be found in the various self-understandings of sociology and sociologists. While sociology is selected here as exemplary of the social sciences, it stands to reason that similar distinctions could also be fruitfully applied to other social science disciplines such as political science. Michael Burawoy (2005) has devised a four-fold typology of sociology and its public role. He distinguishes between professional, policy, critical, and public sociology. First, in his view, professional sociology is heavily engaged in knowledge production along a positivist methodological perspective, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. We could classify many contributions to so-called mainstream journals and publications as professional. This kind of sociology has established clear-cut criteria for ranking the quality of knowledge, such as peer review. Second, policy sociology, quite simply, produces knowledge for a client. It is mainly engaged in carrying out commissioned research for government agencies or private end-users. Third, critical sociology incorporates both those researchers who are 'reflexive'—those who openly question the assumptions and underlying politics of the discipline—and people who are politically aligned activists, and who see sociology as a way of confronting injustice or power or elites. We may refer to C. Wright Mills as representative of this branch. Fourth, Burawoy's favourite type, public sociology speaks directly to 'publics,' that is, various kinds of groups, either randomly gathered (e.g. television viewers) or grouped by common

interest (e.g. experts working on the migration-development nexus). Public sociology engages diverse publics, reaching beyond the university to enter into an ongoing dialogue with these publics about fundamental values. However, such an approach needs to consider that the migration-development nexus is intimately related to the migration-security nexus through the "migration industry" which channels people across borders (Sørensen 2012). The possibilities for debate on the migration-development nexus are therefore severely circumscribed by the (sometimes implicit) linkage to security concerns. Restrictive, or more precisely, selective immigration policies of OECD countries are legitimized by pointing out the dangers of migration to national and/or welfare state security, thus severely limiting the development potential of migration.

There are also 'in between' positions, such as that of 'involved detachment,' as claimed by Norbert Elias, which is rooted in professional sociology but reaches out to public sociology. Elias remarked that the role of social scientists' engagement is an issue of 'how to keep their two roles as participants and inquirers clearly and consistently apart, and, as a professional group, how to establish in their work the undisputed dominance of the latter' (Elias 2007:84). Public sociology also shows some overlap with critical sociology but is not as openly dedicated to advocacy and partisanship as the latter. There are basically two types of public intellectual knowledge, in Antonio Gramsci's terms, 'traditional' and 'organic.' Traditional public sociology speaks to publics from on high as in such works in American sociology as Robert Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart* (1985) and William Julius Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978). In Europe, some of Pierre Bourdieu's later works, such as *La Misère du monde* (1998), may fit this pattern. These books generated public debate and raised public consciousness about socio-political and economic issues. They work through various media—radio, print, film, electronic—that easily distort the original message. Organic public sociology, on the other hand, involves an unmediated dialogue between sociologists and

their publics, taking place in the trenches of civil society. Here we find publics that are more local and more active—at any rate, in direct engagement with labour movements, minorities, prisoners, or even transnational NGOs.

The division of the four kinds of sociologies already gives an idea of the role of social scientists in public. Yet we need to go beyond the ‘intellectual’ typology and distinguish more finely the role of social scientists in the public sphere. Essentially, we may distinguish three main types or functions, since an individual social scientist may fulfil various roles successively: social scientists may act or function as experts, advocates, and intellectuals. A prominent function of the first type, the expert, is that of a consultant to political organizations. Expert hearings, commissions for all types of political issues (ethics, migration and integration, etc.) abound in democracies. Jürgen Habermas (1968) famously criticized this position of experts in that such politics leads to the division of labour amongst experts who are no longer able to understand the wider context of society. Migration policy, as other policy fields, abounds with experts. The ‘Independent Commission on In-Migration’ (*Unabhängige Kommission Zuwanderung*) in Germany (2000-2002), for example, consulted about a hundred academic experts in its comprehensive look at Germany’s immigration processes. The second type is the advocate. Advocates take sides. Their self-understanding may correspond to those of Burawoy’s critical sociologists who are politically aligned activists and envision their research as contributing to or strengthening the cause in which they are engaged. Not only is the area of migration and development fertile ground for debates on social justice, equality, human rights, and other fundamentals; it is also a field in which advocacy is coupled with research. Finally, the third type is that of the public intellectual. S/he corresponds to the image portrayed above of traditional public intellectual who seeks to change the perspective of the reader or listener by strength of the better argument. We may think of Jürgen Habermas’ interventions with respect to migration and

multiculturalism arguing against scapegoating of certain migrant groups. His morally demanding statements have been widely diffused in the western world (e.g. Habermas 2010). One may surmise that while direct input into public policy-making concerns social scientists, above all, as experts, the public sphere is primarily the realm of the advocate and the public intellectual. Needless to say, an overlapping of the three types is possible; for example, a mixed type, called partisan, which is a combination of advocate and public intellectual. S/he comes close to the organic public intellectual described above.

### **Issue area 3: knowledge and its uses in public policy and the public sphere**

The third issue brings together the concomitant production of knowledge and policy cycles from issue area 1 and the public role of social scientists from issue area 2: How have research findings made their way into public debates and political decision-making? Under what conditions has this transfer taken place? Which researchers and research institutes have been influential, directly or indirectly? What kind of knowledge was used and on which level of abstraction? Has theoretical abstraction left room for human agency? What has made a difference—direct knowledge, such as concrete research results and suggestions for policies, or indirect impacts, such as the spread of concepts, ways of thinking, approaches to problems from the social sciences outward? Which bodies of research, concepts/theoretical guidelines, empirical results, etc., have been picked up, which have been neglected or discarded, and on which occasions?

It is of utmost importance to start any analysis of linkages between research and public policy and the public sphere by considering the inherent systemic rationalities of the different worlds. Political decision-making has its own rationality. The instrumental application of social scientific knowledge does not by any means lie at the centre of political decision-making for public policy. Politically, knowledge derived from research is a tool but not necessarily an aid to or require-

ment for problem-adequate solutions. Academic knowledge may serve three functions for decision- and policy-making: a legitimizing, a substantiating, and a symbolic function.

First, social science knowledge may serve to legitimate decisions already taken or to delay decisions deemed undesirable. In this way, policy-making authorities in government can gain 'epistemic authority' in defining what the public knows, in our case, about migration and development. The fields of immigration and asylum are highly contested policy areas and are characterized by a high degree of methodological uncertainty, as can be seen most dramatically in the field of irregular migration. By definition, it is impossible to arrive at a reliable estimate of the number of irregular migrants. Expert estimates can sometimes show an enormous range: for instance, experts estimate that the number of irregular migrants in the U.S. lie somewhere between 5 to 20 million; with the most reliable figure of close to 12 million established by the Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project (<http://www.pewhispanic.org>). Clearly, and most importantly, there is a huge asymmetry in the usage of knowledge; political decision-makers may tap into social science knowledge at their will, largely unencumbered by the intentions of social scientists. Policy-makers can select a particular voice from the social sciences to listen to and endorse it. For example, in phase 2 of the migration-development nexus discussed above, a report by the International Organization of Labour (ILO), written by authors from the Hamburg Archive for World Economy (HWWA), drew on standard trade theory which argued that trade should substitute for migration (Hiemenz and Schatz 1979). That is, instead of migrating to work in garment shops in New York, Bangla Deshi workers should produce shirts in Dhakka to be exported to the Americas. In practice, this does not work since the rich countries usually keep protecting their own inefficient industries while forcing the developing countries to drop their import tariffs. Yet, precisely because the paper mirrored a standard economic argument

in migration policy, it could be used in such a way as to legitimate very restrictive immigration policies.

Second, academic knowledge may have a substantiating function in that it can strengthen the position of an organization, a political party, or politicians vis-à-vis rivals, contending parties, and positions. The World Bank, for example, emphasized the magnitude of financial remittances sent by migrants compared to Official Development Aid (ODA) in the early 2000s in order to position itself as a regulator of international financial flows. After all, in those days fewer and fewer developing countries were taking out loans from the World Bank. The World Bank thus drew upon the migration-development link to reposition itself among international players in the field of finance. In taking the lead among international organizations addressing the above-mentioned migration-development nexus, the IOM falls into the same category.

Third, knowledge sometimes fulfils a symbolic function by contributing to the credibility of politicians and public authorities. To illustrate, one has only to call to mind the spate of academic working papers commissioned or invited by organizations such as the United Nations, government agencies, ministries and other public agents active in the field both on the national and international levels.

Whatever the specific function knowledge from research plays in policy-making and public debates, political decisions have to be legitimated by referring to universal values and norms, although particular interests may guide them. For example, restrictive immigration clauses in the EU regarding asylum seekers are not simply legitimated by referring to potentially tight labour markets or the burden upon social welfare systems. Rather, such policies are discussed jointly with 'positive' normative goals, such as addressing the so-called 'root causes' of migration in the regions of origin—most prominently migration from African countries. Further, the EU has taken vigorous measures to link cooperation with African countries beyond clear exchange packages—

migration control in exchange for development aid, as in the case of Albania, Morocco, Senegal, and Nigeria.

Beyond looking at various instrumental linkages between social science knowledge and the world of policy, it is important to consider that as an academic discipline, the main self-declared task of the social sciences is diagnosis; guiding social action and generating remedies is not its goal. Social science knowledge may thus be most effective in publicly disseminating concepts, notions, and associated arguments. In this way, social science knowledge can make a difference in defining the relevant policy targets and the indicators to measure social problems. The use of knowledge involves attribution of meaning, interpretation of events, and (re)definition of situations. Where public policy in the public sphere is concerned, it is indirect influence that counts; that is, those crucial notions and concepts which guide societal perception and interpretation of societal processes and not the actual stock of empirical findings. The definitions of social—economic, political, and cultural—situations are highly relevant for defining and framing issues and questions, not decision-making as such. A prominent example is Amartya Sen's work with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in which he advanced his capability concept as an alternative to notions of development built solely around economic growth. Sen argued that the main criterion for development is the availability of choice for persons to pursue certain goals they regard as essential (Sen 1984). Moreover, Sen developed indicators which were then concatenated into the Human Development Indicator (HDI) currently used by the UNDP. In sum, the social sciences give ever-new concepts and meanings to the changes of objects in societies. Ultimately, this influence increases the reflexivity of societal conditions.

A decisive and close analysis of how social science concepts spread in the public sphere and in public policy-making necessitates a look at the secondary effects of social science knowledge and, more specifically, a study of feedback loops.

How sociological knowledge in the broadest sense is received depends very much upon structures of plausibility in public discourse. While social science concepts may be received favourably under certain conditions, these situations themselves may be propelled to keep changing, also as a result of the diffusion of sociological knowledge. The latest and third phase of the migration-development nexus re-emerged at a time when the development industry was casting around for new target groups, when international financial institutions, most prominently the World Bank, was searching for new areas of activity. The re-combination of statehood-civil society and market-civil society principles allowed for the emergence of a new development actor: migrants and migrant associations. Once the associated ideas of migrants as development agents started spreading across Europe, (local) administrations turned to the social sciences for help in framing issues. Thus, the transnationalist paradigm, for example, is now strongly embedded in various institutions in countries such as France and Spain (see Lacomba and Cloquell, this issue). Such imports from the social sciences prefigure the engagement of public authorities through the funding NGOs and migrant associations engaged in development cooperation with regions of migrant origin.

The proposition that the most important effect of social science knowledge is its potential for creating (a new) public perspective on social issues is borne out by the conclusions of researchers who look at the policy implications of the migration-development nexus (de Wind and Holdaway 2008). Virtually all studies conclude that it is the analytic (research to determine the impacts of policies) and the explanatory (research to explain why governments adopt the policies) functions that loom largest and are most effective, whereas the prescriptive function (recommendations, based on research, regarding policies governments should adopt to attain particular goals) is usually not very successful in finding direct entry into public policy.

### Outlook: production of orientation and meaning

We are now able to return to the original question: Would social science knowledge be more useful if it could be more easily applied instrumentally? In other words, would we desire a state of affairs in which political action could be systematically based on knowledge about calculable causal relations? The answer given here is: no. What applies to societies in general would also be true for the social sciences. There is a difference between formal and material rationality, between instrumental rationality and reason (Weber 1968). In other words, while knowledge about causal relations may make political action more rational in a formal sense, it may also be put to service to do normatively undesirable things. Eventually, social scientific knowledge is *'welt-anschaulich'* and thus has a function for producing orientation and meaning. These results suggest going further and examining the role of social sciences and social scientists beyond the realm of consultancy and policy-making. While much ink has been spilled over academics as consultants and advisors, less has been said about the role of researchers in the public sphere. Yet it is here that their functions in providing patterns of orientation and meaning have potentially the strongest impact—and, in the long run, on political decisions and public policies.

These considerations imply at least three points to be heeded in the post-2015 migration-development dialogue after the Millennium Development Goals. First, social scientists active in the field should see their role not primarily as advising politicians but as entering into a dialogue with the public. This would mean that social scientists should seek to speak to varied audiences in the global North and South, not just the representatives of government or organizations. Second, social scientists need to engage in setting the agenda of the debate, preferably by widening the scope and horizon of discussion. For example, the migration-development nexus is intimately connected to the migration-security nexus by border control and control of financial

flows across borders through state agents. Quite often, the rhetoric of the migration-development nexus occludes that certain migrant categories are subject to restrictive coercion, such as asylum seekers, whereas others are not only wanted but also welcome, such as those categories termed highly-skilled or talents. It is the very selectivity of migration policies which needs to be considered when calling into question overly optimistic 'win-win-win' situations; that is, gains for the emigration countries, immigration countries and the migrants themselves. Third, social scientists need to look behind the smoke and mirrors of ideological statements and speak in no uncertain terms about the construction of the policy field. For example, frequently, remittances to development schemes are presented as ideal types and model examples of 'market' solutions to economic and human development, pointing out that migrants are their own best development agents. Such statements overlook the fact that states enable mobility across borders in the first place, and that market solutions critically depend upon a public infrastructure of enabling and controlling mobility of persons, remittances and other resources across borders. This also implies to call upon the states in the global North and South to live up to the responsibility for residents within their borders and citizens outside. After all, the 'other' is already one of 'us'.

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**Note on the Author**

THOMAS FAIST is Professor for Sociology at the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Dean of the Faculty and Deputy Director of the Collaborative Research Centre 882 “From Heterogeneities to Inequalities”. His fields of interest are transnational relations, citizenship, social policy, development and migration. Books he recently co-published include *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Social Science Research Methodologies in Transition* (2012), *Transnational Migration* (2013), and *Disentangling Migration and Climate Change* (2013). His current research focuses on the transnational social question.

