Qualitative Research on the Role of Asylum-Related Organisations in the Context of the Common European Asylum System

Anna Mratschkowski

Introduction

This book reflects one of the main products of the teaching–research project "MApping REfugees' arrivals at Mediterranean borders (MAREM)" carried out by the Ruhr-University Bochum. Initiated in 2013, the MAREM project was undertaken to take a closer look at the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and its implementation in several Mediterranean countries.

Since 1999, the European Union (EU) has been working to create such a system and to improve the current legislative framework in order to establish fair and effective procedures that could be used throughout the member states, thus guaranteeing high standards of protection for people "fleeing persecution or serious harm" (EU Commission 2014: 3). The main aim of CEAS is to provide better access to asylum procedures for those who seek protection, which would lead to

> *fairer, quicker and better quality asylum decisions, [ensuring that] people in fear of persecution will not be returned to danger [and] providing dignified and decent conditions both for those who apply for asylum and [for] those who are granted international protection within the EU* (EU Commission 2014: 1).

To achieve its aims, CEAS provides rules with regard to responsibility for asylum applications (the Dublin System), asylum procedures, qualifications of applicants for international protection and related rights and also sets common standards for the conditions of reception (EU Commission 2014: 5). Since 2005, considerable progress has been made towards greater harmonisation of these rules across Europe through joint decisions about the direction CEAS should take. In 2008 and 2009, the EU Commission submitted several legislative amendments to the Council of the European Parliament concerning improvements to CEAS.

In June 2013, the second stage of this system (CEAS II) was adopted in order to strengthen such harmonisation (EU Commission 2014). The aim of CEAS II was to implement fair and more efficient procedures for asylum seekers in Europe by raising the processing standards and strengthening solidarity among the member states receiving them (Bendel 2014: 2). The legal framework of CEAS II consists of two regulations and five directives. Two EU agencies play a particularly important role in the implementation of CEAS – the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the border agency Frontex (EU Commission 2014).

Although major changes in legislation at the national level were driven by the implementation of CEAS and its directives and regulations, EU member states have adopted unilateral measures to deal with the inflow of asylum seekers into their territory (EU Parliament 2015) instead of consistently applying the CEAS provisions. The CEAS directives and regulations are intended to ensure that all those who apply for asylum in Europe undergo a fair and consistent asylum procedure regardless of the member state to which they apply:

> *The revised Asylum Procedures Directive aims at fairer, quicker and better-quality asylum decisions. Asylum seekers with special needs will receive the necessary support to explain their claim, and in particular there will be greater protection of unaccompanied minors and victims of torture.*
> *The revised Reception Conditions Directive ensures that there are humane material reception conditions (such as housing) for asylum seekers across the EU and that their fundamental rights are fully respected. It also ensures that detention is applied only as a measure of last resort.*
> *The revised Qualification Directive clarifies the grounds for granting international protection and therefore will make asylum decisions more robust. It will also improve access to rights and integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection.*
> *The revised Dublin Regulation enhances the protection of asylum seekers during the process of establishing the state responsible for examining the application and clarifies the rules governing the relations between states. It creates a system to identify problems in national asylum or reception systems early on and to address their root causes before they develop into fully fledged crises.*
> *The revised EURODAC Regulation will allow law enforcement access to the EU database of the fingerprints of asylum seekers under strictly limited circumstances in order to prevent, detect or investigate the most serious crimes, such as murder and terrorism* (EU Commission 2015).

Even though CEAS defines common standards and procedures, there are major differences in the living conditions and recognition rates of people seeking protection among the European countries (EASO 2015: 27). There

is an obvious gap between official declarations ('talk') and actual behaviour ('action') within the EU, between national governments and NGOs. Applying the theory of neo-institutionalism, the MAREM project examines the role of asylum-related organisations and their cooperation networks with respect to CEAS and the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe. The MAREM project seeks a solid scientific understanding of current European migration policy, of the situation of asylum seekers and refugees and of the scientific, governmental and non-governmental organisations and their networks that are involved in this area. Moreover, available and examined information concerning this timely and up-to-date issue will be made accessible to the broader public. The project aims to draw public and scientific attention to the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe and to share knowledge as a means of supporting the improvement of this situation and asylum politics.

Current State of Research

The current asylum situation in Europe has been the subject of considerable debate within the scientific community. Although much research has been done in the field of asylum-related issues (e.g. Mainwaring 2008; Lambert et al. 2013; Cabot 2014; Pastore and Roman 2014; Tirandafyllidou 2014; Vellutti 2014; Kalpouzos and Mann 2015; Karakayali and Kleist 2015; Katsiaficas 2015; CEAR 2016; Mogiani 2016), refugee-related organisations and their cooperation networks have been overlooked. The MAREM project is an attempt to fill this gap in the research, and reports of some of the earlier studies (carried out prior to 2016) are already available (Gansbergen 2014; Gansbergen and Breuckmann 2016; Gansbergen and Pries 2015; Gansbergen[1] et al. 2016). These studies involved one or two (at most five) Mediterranean countries and had a less theoretical background than do those described in this book. For example, Pries (2016) described the refugee movement that occurred in 2015 in Europe with a focus on Germany.

In this book, the authors describe the main outcomes of their research in six European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy, Spain and Germany)

1 Gansbergen (now Mratschkowski) is my former name.

as part of the MAREM project in which the theory of neo-institutionalism provides the scientific basis of the investigations. Their analyses contribute to our understanding of the asylum-related organisations currently at work in Europe.

Neo-institutionalism

Because the MAREM project focuses specifically on the cooperation networks of asylum-related organisations, the theory of neo-institutionalism was chosen as the scientific basis of this research. Sociological neo-institutionalism (see Meyer and Rowan 1977) approaches institutions from a sociological perspective, defining them as a collection of more or less formalised rules and traditions (Schimank 2007: 162). As a theory, neo-institutionalism is concerned with the emergence of new institutions, interactions among institutions and their effect on their environment. Attention is also given to the organisations operating within these institutions and the expectations and influences of their environment with regard to the organisations' appearance and behaviour. This theory can also be used to explain the requirements for the successful implementation of a homogeneous asylum system across Europe.

> *This new orientation proposed that formal organizational structure reflected not only technical demands and resource dependencies, but was also shaped by institutional forces, including rational myths, knowledge legitimated through the educational system and by the professions, public opinion, and the law. The core idea that organizations are deeply embedded in social and political environments suggested that organizational practices and structures are often either reflections of or responses to rules, beliefs, and conventions built into the wider environment* (Powell 2007: 975).

Neo-institutionalism is concerned with the adaptation of organisations to their organisational field. Organisations within the same field can influence one another in certain ways, and taking a closer look at an organisation's network will reveal its environment. Therefore, analysing the cooperation networks of asylum-related organisations can help us learn more about the role of these organisations within specific environments, and vice versa, including the role of these environments in forming the structure and operating principles of the organisations.

We focused on the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) to explain certain actions organisations take, interactions between organisations and

changes and structuring within institutional fields. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 147–160), the main goal of an organisation is its survival and legitimation, both of which are achievable with the help of appropriate structures and action. Organisations tend to observe their organisational environment in order to endure on local, national and even international levels and to legitimise their work. Often the organisational field becomes institutionalised, allowing what has become known as the 'myth of rationalisation' to emerge. This concept refers to certain rationalised structural elements binding organisations that want to become or remain a part of the institutionalised field (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 343). In trying to achieve rational, effective and efficient action, organisations might even adapt certain structures and copy practices. In the long run, this can lead to a homogenisation of the organisational field, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 148), who define the organisational field as

> *those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 148).

Institutions can influence organisations in three ways that are central to the theory of neo-institutionalism: regulative requirements and compulsion, normative exceptions, and cultural–cognitive structures of meaning that are not questioned within the societal system (Sandhu 2012: 76). This can lead to a homogenisation of the institutional field – a process known as isomorphism. This process occurs in organisations within an institutional field that know and observe one another. Such observation leads to mutual learning and to an institutional alignment through the previously mentioned pressure of legitimisation (Sandhu 2012: 77). DiMaggio and Powell differentiate three types of isomorphism:

- *Normative isomorphism* occurs in response to the pressure of meeting normative expectations owing to professionalisation in the organisational field. It is possible to analyse the extent to which the organisations' internal structures and working procedures converge as a reaction to an increasing degree of professionalisation.
- *Coercive isomorphism* is a result of the influence of political institutional frameworks and the problem of an organisation's legitimation. Coercive isomorphism indicates the adaptation of an organisation to the paradigms of action of another organisation on which it depends

for funding. It results from the formal pressures exerted by one organisation on another organisation.
- *Mimetic isomorphism* is the phenomenon that occurs when organisations orientate themselves towards well-established organisations because of uncertainties.

These three types of isomorphism display an ideal typical distinction. Because of general social and organisational complexity, their characteristics influence one another and are often indistinguishable (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150).

One reason for isomorphic change is professionalisation based on the "*resting of formal education and of legitimation in a cognitive base produced by university specialists"* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). Organisations professionalise by choosing staff members with a certain educational background, thereby becoming more similar to one another because organisational norms and behaviour are developed among professionals in universities and professional training institutions (Ibid.). According to *normative isomorphism*,

> *the greater the reliance on academic credentials in choosing managerial and staff personnel, the greater the extent to which an organization will become like other organizations in its field* (Ibid.: 155).

Hence, having the same criteria and standards when it comes to choosing staff would be regarded as an increase in homogeneity in this field and would eventually lead to decreased diversity in their ways of working. However, research shows that often just the formal structure of an organisation is influenced by cooperation and pressure of legitimisation, whereas the informal and actual strategies of action differ from these institutional paradigms. This leads to the emergence of what can be called a 'talk-and-action gap' in the everyday institutional structures, whereas actors formally follow the institutional paradigms but rely on the former structures of their own organisations (Sandhu 2012: 74). Institutions influence the formal structure ('talk') but leave actual strategies ('action') untouched, because organisations prefer to rely on their informal structures. This phenomenon can be seen in relation to the normative power of institutions. Organisations often depend on these institutions to survive, so to receive maximum support, it is necessary for them to be legitimised. Consequently, they must follow certain discourses of institutions in a formal way yet this reveals little about their informal organisational structure (Sandhu 2012: 76).

Another reason for isomorphic change is to improve the organisations' economic situation. According to *coercive isomorphism* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150), the more an organisation depends on a single source of funding, the greater the extent of isomorphic change and the more this organisation would adapt to an organisation on which it depends for resources:

> *The greater the centralization of organization A's resource supply, the greater the extent to which organization A will change isomorphically to resemble the organizations on which it depends for resources* (Ibid.).

Compliance with coercive pressure means the conscious willingness to incorporate values, norms or institutional requirements in order to receive benefits, which can include increased resources or legitimacy (Oliver 1990: 246–247). The mechanisms of coercive isomorphism are also likely to be caused by political influences and dependencies: "*In some circumstances, organizational change is a direct response to government mandate"* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150). Many non-profit organisations depend on government support and therefore operate within a politically controlled environment. The pressures exerted by government agencies increase the likelihood that organisations will surrender to these coercive pressures in order to receive needed resources (Johnston 2013: 34).

Some organisations try to increase their legitimacy and efficiency by mimicking other organisations within their environment. When *mimetic isomorphism* processes are at work, *"organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful"* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151). By analysing the extent to which an organisation copies the best practices of other organisations in its environment, one can determine whether its internal structures and behaviour converge. It also is interesting to see whether organisations copy practices from similar organisations, because this would lead to homogenisation among the organisations in that field. DiMaggio and Powell indicate that greater homogeneity does not necessarily lead to more efficiency:

> *It is important to note that each of the institutional isomorphic processes can be expected to proceed in the absence of evidence that they increase internal organizational efficiency* (Ibid.: 153).

An expectation of homogeneity could become stronger when the number of alternative organisational models is low: *"The fewer the number of visi-*

ble alternative organizational models in a field, the faster the rate of isomorphism in that field" (Ibid.: 155).

The MAREM project focuses on these processes of isomorphism, the identification of network dynamics and the gaps between talk and action. In the studies described in this book, asylum-related organisations in Europe are the specific focus of our research.

Methodological Process of Teaching Through Research

In the MAREM project, qualitative semi-structured expert interviews were conducted in the six countries of interest. Data were collected over a period of three years by means of more than 100 interviews with asylum-related governmental organisations (GOs), international governmental organisations (IGOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field of asylum. In March 2016, the project members conducted expert interviews with representatives from relevant NGOs, research institutions, IGOs and GOs in the Mediterranean region and in the city of Bochum in Germany.

In order to obtain specific information within a limited period of time, an efficient methodology was chosen (see Bogner et al. 2014: 18). The main method used in the MAREM research project was to conduct expert interviews with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire. The structure of the questionnaire was adapted to the thematic focus of the research, but it also allowed both the interviewers and the interviewees to set priorities and choose their own focus (see Pfaffenbach 2007: 159). On the basis of the research questions, a set of questions was developed that serves as a framework for the interview. Although the course of the questionnaire was structured by the issues under study, it could be adjusted depending on how the interview situation evolved (see Mayer 2013: 43).

Experts who work within asylum-related organisations have well-honed, privileged insights into specific knowledge about the dynamics and networks of the organisations. They are willing to cooperate and share their expertise and practical knowledge for purposes of research. Following their practical experience, the information obtained can provide orientation and opportunities for action for other related actors (Bogner et al. 2014: 14). With regard to their specialised function within the organisation, these interviewees could also contribute technical knowledge about operations and the refugees' situation in the field, the laws of the specific

countries, the legal environment and changes in cooperation behaviour. The experts also were familiar with the decision-making processes in their organisations. Although they were supposed to give the researchers an objective point of view, they often did not take a neutral stance because of subjective interpretations, their own opinions and beliefs and the fact that they were expected to promote the ideas and interests of the organisations they worked for. For this reason, the interviewers had to be aware of the interviewees' living reality. In addition, there was no claim of statistical reliability owing to the qualitative nature of the research. Rather, the goal was to identify different perspectives on the same topic and produce the greatest possible range of information and ways of interpretation through diverse sampling (see Sandelowski 1995: 180).

The main purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain information about nature of the organisational networks and the applicability of neo-institutionalism and isomorphism to these networks. It included questions regarding changes in the cooperation networks and the isomorphic processes that have occurred in the past few years. To confirm the findings and identify elements of development, some organisations were interviewed more than once during the three rounds of interviews (2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16).

Because the aim of the MAREM project is to analyse organisational networks, organisations were regarded as actors. The questionnaire for the expert interviews elicited the organisations' most important cooperation partners in order to carry out network analyses. There are two different perspectives of the network analysis: egocentric networks and entire networks. In an egocentric network, there is a focal actor and a set of contacts of this actor from his or her perspective (Jansen 2006: 65). The whole network reflects all the actors within a defined set and the ties among them (Erlhofer 2010: 252). We decided to analyse the egocentric networks of the interviewed organisations, which would reflect the environment of the organisations from their own perspective.

Three visualisations of the networks for each city or country were created using the network tool Visone[2] to analyse the networks more closely. In each illustration, the cooperation ties for the investigated organisations

2 Visone is an open-source software designed for visualising networks. For more information, see http://www.visone.info.

were visualised with regard to three criteria: actor type, spatial reach, and driving norms and values.

These three characteristics were used to explore isomorphic processes and the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the networks composed of asylum- and refugee-related organisations in the countries studied. The egocentric networks of the organisations in one country were connected to each other in the case of common ties in order to be able to reveal a bigger picture of the work, the cooperation partners and the role of asylum-related organisations in Europe.

This book presents the results of the MAREM research project. Coverage begins with an analysis of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and its role in the asylum system in Europe. The subsequent chapters describe the research on asylum-related organisations in six selected EU countries – that is, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy, Spain and Germany. The final chapter offers further analysis and comparisons of the authors' results.

References

Bendel, P. (2014) The Common European Asylum System: Achievements, Failures, Outlooks and Policy Learning for the EU and Canada. http://labs.carleton.ca/canadaeurope/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/Bendel-policy-brief-20141.pdf.

Bogner, A., Littig, B. and Menz, W. (2014) Interviews mit Experten: Eine praxisorientierte Einführung. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Cabot, H. (2014) On the Doorstep of Europe: Asylum and Citizenship in Greece. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

CEAR (2016) 2015 Report: Situation of Refugees in Spain: Executive Summary. Madrid: CEAR. http://www.cear.es/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Executive-Summary-2015-Report_ok_b.pdf.

DiMaggio, P. J. and Powell, W. W. (1983) The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147–160.

EASO (2015) Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union. http://www.bfa.gv.at/files/berichte/EASO_Annual_Report_2014.pdf.

Erlhofer, S. (2010) Missing Data in der Netzwerkanalyse. In Stegbauer, C. (Ed.) *Netzwerkanalyse und Netzwerktheorie: Ein neues Paradigma in den Sozialwissenschaften* (2nd ed.) (pp. 251–260). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

EU Commission (2014) A Common European Asylum System. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

EU Commission (2015) Common European Asylum System. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/index_en.htm.

EU Parliament (2015) Enhancing the Common European Asylum System and Alternatives to Dublin. Brussels: European Parliament. www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/519234/IPOL_STU(2015)519234_EN.pdf.

Gansbergen, A. (2014) Flüchtlinge im Mittelmeerraum: Das Lehrforschungsprojekt 'MAREM – Mapping Refugees' Arrivals at Mediterranean Borders'. In *Mediterrane Grenzen – Grenzen des Mediterranen: 4. Bochumer Nachwuchsworkshop für MediterranistInnen* (pp. 53-62). Bochum: Zentrum für Mittelmeerstudien.

Gansbergen, A. and Breuckmann, T. (2016) Refugee Related Organisations in Greece and their Cooperation Networks in the Context of the European Asylum Regime. .Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: MDT 2016-2100. http://www.atiner.gr/papers/MDT2016-2100.pdf

Gansbergen, A. and Pries, L. (2015) Zwischen 'Festung Europa' und 'Raum der Freiheit, der Sicherheit und des Rechts': NGO-Netzwerke in der Institutionalisierung eines europäischen Flüchtlingsregimes. In Lessenich, S. (Ed.) *Routinen der Krise – Krise der Routinen: Verhandlungen des 37. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Trier 2014, 1-15*.

Gansbergen, A., Pries, L. and Witkowski, J. (Eds.) (2016) Versunken im Mittelmeer? Flüchtlingsorganisationen im Mittelmeerraum und das Europäische Asylsystem. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Jansen, D. (2006) Einführung in die Netzwerkanalyse: Grundlagen, Methoden, Forschungsbeispiele (3rd ed.). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Johnston, M. (2013) Mimetic, Coercive and Normative Influences and the Decision of National Sport Organisations to Bid for World Championship Events. Thesis. Auckland: Auckland University of Technology.

Kalpouzos, I. and Mann, I. (2015) Banal Crimes Against Humanity: The Case of Asylum Seekers in Greece. *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 16(1): 1-28.

Karakayali, S. and Kleist, J. O. (2015) EFA-Studie: Strukturen und Motive der ehrenamtlichen Flüchtlingsarbeit in Deutschland: 1. Forschungsbericht: Ergebnisse einer explorativen Umfrage vom November/Dezember 2014. Berlin: Berliner Institut für empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung.

Katsiaficas, C. (2015) A New Day for Greek Migration Policy? The New Government and Prospects for Reform. BREF Commentary No. 33.

Lambert, H., McAdam, J. and Fullerton, M. (Eds.) (2013) The Global Reach of European Refugee Law. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mainwaring, C. (2008) On the Edge of Exclusion: The Changing Nature of Migration in Cyprus and Malta. *The Cyprus Review* 20(2): 19-49.

Mayer, H. O. (2013) Interview und schriftliche Befragung. Munich: Oldenbourg.

Meyer, J. W. and Rowan, B. (1977) Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2): 340–363.

Mogiani, M. (2016) Passing Through Greece. *Forced Migration Review* 51(1).

Oliver, C. (1990) Determinants of Interorganizational Relationships: Integration and Future Directions. *The Academy of Management Review* 15(2): 241–265.

Pastore, F. and Roman, E. (2014) Implementing Selective Protection: A Comparative Review of the Implementation of Asylum Policies at National Level Focusing on the Treatment of Mixed Migration Flows at EU's Southern Maritime Borders. FIERI Working Paper. http://briguglio.asgi.it/immigrazione-e-asilo/2014/dicembre/art-roman-pastore-asilo.pdf.

Pfaffenbach, C. (2007) Methoden qualitativer Feldforschung in der Geographie. In Gebhardt, H., Glaser, R., Radtke, U. and Reuber, P. (Eds.) *Geographie: Physische Geographie und Humangeographie* (pp. 157–164). Munich: Spektrum.

Powell, W. W. (2007) New Institutionalism. In Clegg, S. R. and Bailey, J. R. (Ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Organizations Studies* (pp. 975–979). London: Sage.

Pries, L. (2016) Migration und Ankommen: Die Chancen der Flüchtlingsbewegung. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.

Sandelowski, M. (1995) Sample Size in Qualitative Research. Research. *Nursing & Health* 18(2): 179–183.

Sandhu, S. (2012) Public Relations und Legitimität: Der Beitrag des organisationalen Neo-Institutionalismus für die PR-Forschung. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Schimank, U. (2007) Neoinstitutionalismus. In Benz, A., Lütz, S., Schimank, U. and Simonis, G. (Eds.) *Handbuch Governance: Theoretische Grundlagen und empirische Anwendungsfelder* (pp. 161–175). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Tirandafyllidou, A. (2014) Greek Migration Policy in the 2010s: Europeanization Tensions at a Time of Crisis. *Journal of European Integration* 36(4): 409–425.

Vellutti, S. (2014) Reforming the Common European Asylum System: Legislative Developments and Judicial Activism of the European Courts. Heidelberg: Springer.