

## Structural Conditions of Knowledge Production

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The political reform debate and ensuing policy changes between the change of government in 1998 and the passing of the Residence Act in 2004 are often characterized as a “paradigm change” in migration policy-making in government documents and historical migration research. During this period of political change, the Research Group was founded, a process which will be analyzed in the following chapter. For the analysis, two findings in the last chapter are of particular importance. First, as is evident from the BAMF’s historiography, there is a strong reference to instrumental theories of knowledge production. This narrative draws a picture of rational, objective research as impartial information to policy-making especially in technical matters, while relegating the production of symbolic knowledge to the political arena. While it could be demonstrated that this discourse is in several respects imprecise – technical knowledge is political, and policy guidelines are influenced by technical knowledge – this narrative can be considered extremely influential for the creation of the Research Group. Second, the analysis of the history of governmental research revealed different styles of knowledge production and governance which continue to influence knowledge production until today. The mechanisms influencing knowledge production stemming from institutional, political, and scientific factors have been analyzed from the different phases of the history of migration research. In a similar manner, institutional, political, and knowledge-related factors will serve as a basis for the analysis of the Research Group’s scientific output. In both these respects, the tradition of governmental research as laid out by the BAMF can be understood as a structural condition of knowledge production: the methods, data sources, research topics, and political uses of knowledge production constitute a point of reference for how the BAMF Research Group understands its current role.

To complete the overview of structural conditions and practical constraints of governmental knowledge production, the development of the

institutional organization of knowledge production has to be accounted for as well. In the case of the BAMF, this development is interesting for two reasons. First, in its self-understanding, the Research Group at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, or as it was called until 2003 the “Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees,” represents like no other government authority the institutional changes of the new “policy paradigm” in migration policy making.<sup>1</sup> However, the new role of the Federal Office was by no means predetermined and without an alternative especially in regard to the establishment of a research body for governmental knowledge production on migration. Second, this history of foundation is discussed in terms of its impact on the formation of structural features of knowledge production at the BAMF. These features are not only influenced by the discursive framework of reference of governmental knowledge, but additionally by the specific institutional make-up of the Research Group and its position within the institutional hierarchy. Especially the latter point has been repeatedly raised during expert interviews when explain research designs or interpretations of findings. The configuration of the Research Group can be traced back to decisions taken in the phase of institutional and political reconfiguration of migration policy-making in the early 2000s. The analysis of the history of the foundation of the Research Group therefore focuses on the question of which role and function the Research Group fulfills at the BAMF and how this configuration frames the production of knowledge.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part recapitulates the institutional development of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees especially in regard to its enlarged competencies in knowledge production in the wake of the institutional reconfiguration of the early 2000s. This re-configured structure will be more closely examined in the second part of the chapter by describing the development of a specific self-understanding of the Research Group. This *Selbstverständnis* (“self-understanding”) nicely illustrates both structural-institutional conditions as well as conflicts of interest between various institutional actors, most importantly the BAMF leadership and the Ministry of the Interior, over the question of the strategic orientation of research.

Sources for this analysis are, besides expert interviews, BAMF publications and documents. Especially the Research Group’s yearly reports provide some insight into the development of the formal structure of the research

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1 Krienbrink and Worbs 2015, p. 330

unit; furthermore, the development of a mission statement can be retraced with the help of these reports.

## Paradigm Change

In 1998, the newly elected red-green government attempted to replace the “no country of immigration” paradigm. In this context, the “Lost Decade” was portrayed as a negative example in terms of inapt knowledge production: according to the BAMF’s historiography, the political stalemate was produced by the failure to realize the permanence of foreigner settlement migration in Germany. In abstract terms, the period is characterized by a growing antagonism between “objective” science and “irrational” politics: “The changed situation has been reflected by foreigner research and called for a redefinition of migration policy. Politics, however, does not acknowledge these new developments, and invents the formula ‘Germany is not a country of immigration’”, which is maintained until 1998.”<sup>2</sup>

This context is important for the ensuing reform period: around the turn of the millennium, the notion of paradigm change “was in the air.”<sup>3</sup> This paradigm change was most importantly connected to the hope that political stalemate could be overcome with expert knowledge and scientific policy counseling – with other words, a classic instrumentalist narrative was drawn.

The paradigm change is usually connected to the work of the Independent Commission “Integration” and the commission’s final report in 2001.<sup>4</sup> One reason for this lies in the political constellation and the principles of operation of the commission: the body consisted of experts on migration from academia, politics, and civil society. It was led by conservative politician Rita Süßmuth, a decision intended to soften the expected resistance of her own party. To fulfill the promise of independent expertise, the commission’s work was obliged to scientific rather than political standards of quality. In fact, only a small minority of the experts participating in the hearing process were politicians, while most of the experts were either scientists or mid-level administrative staff from government authorities.<sup>5</sup>

2 Heckmann 2013, 38f.

3 Interview, December 2017

4 Unabhängige Kommission “Zuwanderung” 2001

5 Numbers quoted after Schneider 2010, p. 258

Furthermore, 18 studies with an impressive total of more than 2,000 pages were commissioned.<sup>6</sup> All in all, the working mode of the commission promised scientifically-grounded policy proposals, published in a report, as a basis to decision-making. This mode of knowledge production by itself can be interpreted as a demonstrative turn from the “no country of immigration” dogma.<sup>7</sup>

Conceptually, the notion of expert knowledge retained a central position in the Independent Commission's proposals for policy reform. Indeed, independent expert knowledge emerges as the main remedy to the pathologies of migration policy-making of the past. Consequently, many of the proposals are based on the principle of scientific expertise on all levels of policy making. The proposals aimed at transforming not only the institutional structure, but above all the style of policy making: not ideological controversy and administrative *muddling through*,<sup>8</sup> but rather independent expert knowledge should become the chief governing principle of migration policy making.

In terms of policy reform, the commission proposed a policy of planned immigration. This included most importantly a coherent system of immigration steering and control similar to the Canadian model of a “point system.”<sup>9</sup>

This institutional structure was largely based on an expert opinion by Klaus Bade.<sup>10</sup> According to this proposal, administrative responsibility for all matters concerning migration and integration were to be concentrated in a single authority, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Expert knowledge was to become a systematic part of policy-making, including among other things the introduction of a comprehensive statistical information apparatus, the coordination of university research activities, the evaluation of legal acts and other policy items, and the prognosis of future migration movements. Institutionally, this research was to be organized in a two-tier structure consisting of the *Zuwanderungsrat*, an independent council of scientific experts, as well as the *Bundesforschungsinstitut für Migration und Integration*, a departmental research institute.<sup>11</sup> The Immigration Council's most important task was the preparation of a yearly report with immigration quota based

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6 Schneider 2010, 253ff.

7 Ibid., p. 364

8 Lindblom 1959

9 Unabhängige Kommission “Zuwanderung” 2001, p. 84

10 Schneider 2010, p. 260

11 Unabhängige Kommission “Zuwanderung” 2001, p. 286

mostly on labor demand. The proposal followed the structure of resort research institutions in socio-political administrative areas, most importantly the *Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung* (“Federal Institute for Population Research”) and the *Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung* (“Institute for Employment Research”). Both institutions are associated with federal authorities (the Federal Statistical Office and the Federal Agency for Labor, respectively) and provide scientific research for direct application in policy-making.

## Implementation

The Independent Commission proposed to turn the BAMF into one of the central administrative authorities in the field of migration policy, committed to the ideal of knowledge-informed policy-making. The central legislative measure implementing this reform was the Residence Act designed to contain most of the Commission’s reform proposals. However, despite the government’s political backing and the Independent Commission’s effort to propose impartial and scientifically grounded reform concepts, the process of legislative implementation turned out to be rather bumpy. Some parts of the legal act were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. During the implementation process, the government lost its majority in one of the legislative houses (*Bundesrat*) which caused a political deadlock. In the meantime, parts of the reform proposals were implemented by way of executive decree, among other things the Immigration Council in April, 2003. The council began by first using its expertise during the political controversy over the Residence Act. The Immigration Council’s report was strongly focused on the results of the Independent Commission’s work: it underlined the importance of scientifically grounded policy-making in general and criticized the lack of political vigor to implement knowledge-based policy-making principles.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the report proposed moderate immigration according to the needs of the labor market. However, especially the proposition of immigration sparked fierce media criticism. As a result, the council was finally dissolved due to heavy resistance of the conservative opposition parties.<sup>13</sup> After the removal of the Immigration Council, political compromise was established and the Residence Act was finally passed by both houses of the parliament.

12 Sachverständigenrat für Zuwanderung und Integration 2004, p. 395

13 Interview, December 2017. The council was finally dissolved in December 2005.

As a result of the legal reform, this is the actually implemented institutional configuration of governmental knowledge production: the pre-reform hierarchical order of institutions remains largely intact, the BAMF remains a subordinate authority to the Ministry of the Interior; the Ministry of the Interior keeps its central coordinating role in policy-making on most matters in the policy field. Nevertheless, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees constitutes something like the epicenter of the reforms: Not only does it retain the important competencies in integration policy, but also the newly established research unit. The Residence Act contains a legal mandate to produce scientific knowledge at the BAMF (Section 75 Residence Act):

“[...] The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees shall have the following duties: [...]

(4) conducting scientific research on migration issues (accompanying research) with the aim of obtaining analytical conclusions for use in controlling immigration.”<sup>14</sup>

Quite remarkably, the Research Group – as a dependent unit in the BAMF hierarchy, not as a separate institution – is by and large the only element of scientific knowledge production which has actually been implemented in law. While this aspect will be discussed in some depth later on, it is important to highlight some institutional features of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

Judging from the history of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, its future central role in governmental knowledge production after the institutional reconfiguration of the “paradigm change” was relatively surprising. This central position is quite the contrary to the rather marginal role it had always played in policy-making and knowledge production on migration. The authority was established in 1953 as a successor of a government bureau for the material support of Displaced Persons.<sup>15</sup> After the passing of the Foreigner Act in 1965, the authority was renamed into *Bundesamt für die Anerkennung ausländischer Flüchtlinge* (“Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees”). The office’s tasks consisted chiefly in the processing of asylum claims. At the time of its foundation, asylum migration was small in volume compared to other migration streams such as expellee, “Guest Worker” recruitment, or ethnic German migrations from the GDR and Eastern Europe. Until the end of the

14 Bundesministerium des Innern, Section 75

15 See Kreienbrink 2013 for an overview of the history of the Federal Office

1970s, the number of asylum decisions rarely exceeded 10,000 per year, with occasional peaks in the wake of political upheavals. As a result, the Federal Office's area of responsibility was quite confined both in terms of workload and competencies. Although the number of asylum applications slowly increased during the 1980s, the surrounding conditions defining the area of competence for the Federal Office remained stable for a large part. Asylum policy was mainly structured by the political conditions of the Cold War: refugees from Eastern Europe and ethnic German resettlers were generally assumed to be politically persecuted, which resulted in preferential treatment of these refugee groups. This assumption was also useful in a political sense since it was seen as a proof of the superiority of Western liberal democracies.<sup>16</sup> This relatively preferential treatment is contrasted with the creation of the new status of "Asylum Seeker" as described in the last chapter: asylum seekers from Africa, Central Asia, and Turkey were increasingly subject to a racialized, pejorative political discourse and repressive treatment by the authorities. This included the erection of selective hurdles to the access to asylum to limit the influx of asylum seekers especially from Turkey, but also from Afghanistan and Pakistan in the early 1980s. The discourse of "asylum abuse" contributed to a process of curbing asylum inflow with repressive measures in an increasingly critical, political climate surrounding asylum and the work of the Federal Office throughout the 1980s. In sum, the BAfI represented perhaps like no other government the "no country of immigration" dogma of the "Lost Decade".

The precarious stability guaranteed by the political conditions of the Cold War shifted by the end of the 1980s in the wake of the beginning downfall of the Soviet Union and its allies. The consequences of this crisis were expressed in an historic surge in asylum applications and a dramatic increase of the workload and the backlog of asylum decisions at the Federal Office. In the years before and after 1990, up to 450,000 applications of asylum were registered annually. This surge resulted in a multifold increase of personnel at the Federal Office – from several hundred government officials to 5,100 employees in 1993.<sup>17</sup> The increase in personnel was rather difficult to implement at the time: the requirements of asylum deciders usually require fully qualified lawyers. However, the labor reserve for these employees was practically swept

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16 Klekowski von Kloppenfels 2003, p. 400

17 Including 1,000 government workers delegated temporarily from other authorities. Cp. Kerpel 2003, p. 12

empty as a result of the massive recruitment of state officials in wake of the German reunification. The resulting shortage of personnel could only be overcome by lowering the requirement standards<sup>18</sup> of recruitment and granting exceptionally generous conditions of employment.<sup>19</sup>

In 1993, the political conditions of the Federal Office's work fundamentally changed again: after the factual abolishment of the constitutionally guaranteed right to asylum, the number of asylum applications sank rapidly. From a peak of almost half a million applications in 1990, the number of newly filed asylum claims dropped in 1993 and hovered around 50,000 annually during the rest of the decade. As a consequence, the Federal Office with its oversized workforce and its network of almost 50 field offices underwent restructuring again. Until the end of the 1990s, personnel was cut by half to 2,500 staff in 22 field offices. The privileges granted to newly hired employees constituted a difficulty in this process and effectuated a somewhat negative selection of personnel; while younger, well qualified employees could be delegated to other state institutions, older, less qualified and less mobile staff stayed at the Federal Office. By the end of the 1990s the Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees had clearly experienced a rather untypical phase of institutional restructuring. The declining numbers of asylum procedures, reduced staff, and the relatively small area of responsibility pointed to a gradually declining degree of institutional importance in general. This trend is perhaps best illustrated by the anecdote of a state official who was delegated to the BAMF as a trainee in the mid-2000s by appointment of his superiors. This he experienced as a mild form of harassment due to his party affiliation.<sup>20</sup> In conclusion, until 2005, the office was characterized as a relatively unimportant "institutional backwater,"<sup>21</sup> both in geographical and hierarchical terms remote from the institutional centers of political decision-making.

## Establishment of the Research Group

During the course of the reform, the Research Group came into being at the end of 2004. Research started in two units: migration and integration re-

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18 Field Notes, background talk with a former BAMF officer, 2013

19 Kreienbrink 2013, p. 406

20 Field Notes, background talk with a former BAMF officer, 2013

21 Boswell 2009b, 163f.

search were initially conducted in a single unit, while a second unit was concerned with the economic aspects of migration.<sup>22</sup> This structure reflects to a degree the internal organization of the Independent Commission whose general office was located at the BAMF. The two working groups of the Independent Commission drawing most heavily on scientific knowledge, labor market and integration, reemerge as research units in the BAMF. Furthermore, the idea of merging migration and integration research refers to a frequently quoted key phrase of the Commission's report, according to which "integration and migration are two sides of the same medal."<sup>23</sup>

Some researchers were transferred from the Independent Commission's staff office or were recruited among the experts who participated in the commission's hearings.<sup>24</sup> Other researchers were recruited for the task of compiling the Migration Report, a research project regarded as one of the most prestigious at the time.<sup>25</sup> All in all, considering staff and research projects, the Research Group was able to take over a large share of the resources and functions of the now inactive Immigration Council.<sup>26</sup>

The actually implemented institutional set-up did not only fall short of the Commission's proposals in terms of institutional independence, but also created a situation of ambiguity regarding the actual mandate of the Research Group: although the conduction of research was codified in the Residence Act, the wording of the paragraph was rather imprecise. The legal text mentioned "accompanying research" which was to be conducted to "obtain analytical conclusions for use in controlling immigration."<sup>27</sup> At first glance, this expression seems to fit the concept of instrumental research in accordance with the proposals of the Independent Commission; indeed, most of the wording is taken over from the relevant parts of the Commission's report which likewise mentions "accompanying research" as one future task of migration policy making.<sup>28</sup> However, unlike the Independent Commission's paper, the term "accompanying research" is not linked to the established concept of departmental research (or to any other concept of knowledge production, for that matter)

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22 Research Notes, Email from the Research Group, February 2014

23 Bade 2001, 18f.

24 For example, Hans Dietrich von Loeffelholz. Cp. also Kreienbrink and Worbs 2015, p. 326

25 Boswell 2009b, p. 180

26 *Ibid.*, 167f.

27 Residence Act, Section 75

28 Unabhängige Kommission "Zuwanderung" 2001, p. 292

and is not further specified as such. In effect, the concrete meaning of the research task and therefore the functions of the Research Group were quite unclear.

In this situation, the Research Group drew up the initial research agenda mainly according to internal deliberations. Apart from two studies which were already commissioned by other government authorities concerning the Muslim community in Germany and the effects of a law restricting residence rights of Ethnic Germans, most first-hour study topics were selected by the Research Group. The development of this approach to interpreting the legal mandate to accompanying research – drawing up research projects according to the criterion “what could be of interest” – will be discussed in some detail later.

The rather unusual degree of institutional liberty connected to the blurry legal mandate for accompanying research was not, however, experienced as an unequivocal advantage by the first-hour staff. The combination of hierarchical subordination of the research with an unspecified task created a situation where the Research Group was isolated from the rest of the Federal Office not only in functional, but also in cultural terms. In practice, these tensions materialized in several ways, most of them concerning the different work cultures of researchers and government officials:

“Very important thing, office hours and time stamp cards. The idea of punching the clock was unfamiliar to the researchers at the time. But it was impossible to obtain permission for exemption, because there were worries that researchers would be even less accepted if they had a privileged role. There was an element of incomprehension on the side of the Office: someone only because he went to university comes into the Federal Office and gets fairly well paid [in comparison to government officials, VK]. They write studies which take a long time until they are done and no one knows what they are good for.”<sup>29</sup>

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29 “Ganz wichtige Geschichte, Kernzeit und Stechuhr. Die Vorstellung, dass wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter einstechen, war, sämtlichen Wissenschaftlern völlig fremd damals. Sie konnten es aber nicht durchsetzen, dass die Forscher eine Sonderrolle kriegen, weil man befürchtet hat, dass es noch weniger Akzeptanz gibt. [...] Und, eine Komponente spielte da auch mit, ein Unverständnis auf Behördenseite, warum jemand, nur weil er studiert hat [...], jetzt plötzlich in diese Behörde kommt und echt gut bezahlt wird und an Papieren schreibt, die noch dazu sehr lange dauern bis sie fertig sind und wo man nicht weiß, was das alles so bringt.” (Interview with a BAMF researcher, 2016)

In the quote, the apparent difference between scientific and administrative work cultures is mentioned as a core problem in the initial phase of establishment. This entails both incomprehension of administrative procedures and norms (such as the time stamp) on the side of the researchers as well as incomprehension of the actual task of the Research Group on the side of government officials.

One important aspect of this miscomprehension was the plan to publish research results. This concept followed from the strategy of imitating practices of departmental research: these institutes publish research results routinely, and similar practices prevail in ministries and other government authorities with commissioned scientific studies.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the idea was based on deliberations to make the job postings at the Federal Office more attractive to scientists by offering the possibility to publish to a scientific audience. To achieve this, a series of Working Papers was established.<sup>31</sup> However, considering the usual practice at the BAMF, publication of research results was a stark deviation from the Office's common treatment of public relations. This traditional approach is characterized by a rather unusual degree of restraint in terms of public visibility:

“Most officials working on asylum or integration within the Federal Office and the Interior Ministry attach little weight to external output. As a senior researcher explained, when the Research Group was first established it was not clear to many Federal Office staff that there should be external publications at all. ‘Some people thought it was sufficient to send reports to the Interior Ministry.’”<sup>32</sup>

This practice of avoiding public attention is understandable given the history of the policy field in combination with the subordinate position of the BAMF: asylum and migration policy was, at least since the 1980s, a field of increased public attention which often resulted in criticism of the Office's work in the media. This critique was not, however, connected to the BAMF's decisions on policy, since the Federal Office as a subordinate authority had little actual influence on policy-making. Rather, the criticism can be attributed to the bureaucratic proverbial wisdom that “garbage rolls downhill,” meaning

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30 Kraler and Perchinig 2017, p. 63

31 Boswell 2009b, p. 185

32 Ibid., p. 186

policy failures are often blamed on executive authorities instead of the decision-makers. Given the long-standing history of negative media attention confronting the Office, the general strategy of keeping a low public profile seems reasonable. Although the Federal Office managed its public relations even before 2005, these relations were traditionally treated with some reservation. As a government official put it rather drastically, “media attention is considered an operational accident.”<sup>33</sup> The Research Group’s strategy of public visibility was therefore one decisive structural difference between the researchers and the rest of the Office which contributed to the initial situation of alienation.

This image of alienation is consistent with empirical research at the Federal Office conducted in 2008 by Christina Boswell. One core piece of evidence in this context is the study on Ethnic Germans. It was one of the first research commissions assigned to the Research Group by the Ministry of the Interior. During the course of one and a half years, a thorough empirical study with representative questionnaires was conducted. However, the study was conducted out of a misunderstanding of the research task, as became apparent later:

“The two-hundred-page final report was courtly received, but the authors were informed by the Ministry of the Interior that a shorter study would have sufficed and the existing one did not contain the answers to the questions posed by the ministry.”<sup>34</sup>

As a consequence, Boswell describes alienation as a structural cultural element of institutions of governmental knowledge production. The case of the Ethnic German study, but also the other observations of diverging traditions of work culture as described above, are interpreted as an outcome of this alienation process. Drawing on Boswell’s work, Kraler and Perchinig conclude that the Research Group has failed in their task to bridge the gap between politics and social research.<sup>35</sup> In the literature, in general terms, this failure is often characterized as an expression of a systematic gap between research and politics. Alienation is explained from a system-theory point of view as an incompatibility of inherently different system logics between science and

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33 Field notes, October 2013

34 Kraler and Perchinig 2017, p. 75

35 *Ibid.*, p. 85

politics. This reasoning is even part of the official self-understanding of departmental research: according to a strategy paper published by the Federal Government, this type of knowledge production is characterized by “several areas of tension which is caused by different rationalities in science and politics.”<sup>36</sup> This reasoning refers to a well-established discourse on structural difficulties of research in bureaucratic contexts; Luhmann’s theory of incompatible systems (as in the quote above) is a standard reference in this context. Bourdieu’s study on the French national agricultural research institute (INRA) likewise concluded that severe contradictions can arise in an institution which is committed to both knowledge production according to scientific standards and the exercise of political power.<sup>37</sup> From this perspective, alienation between the Research Group and the rest of the Federal Office is an expression of structural incompatibilities which potentially cannot be resolved.

However, the development of the Research Group points to a different, somewhat less pessimistic interpretation: while most interviewees agree that there was initially quite severe alienation, it seems equally common-sensical among interviewees that this gap was to a large degree limited to the first years after the Research Group’s establishment:

“By now, the Research Center has become a normal part of the Federal Office, as a result of a certain process over the years. Everyone has their task and duty, everyone respects each other.”<sup>38</sup>

This development is not easy to explain with the gap thesis of governmental research. In interviews, researchers describe a process over some years during which both the Research Group and the rest of the Federal Office gradually adjusted their functions and work cultures. On the side of the Research Group, crucial to this development is the acquisition of processural knowledge about the Federal Office, especially by experienced staff who were transferred from the Immigration Council’s office.<sup>39</sup> With the help of this knowledge, the Research Group was in a better position to navigate through the bureaucratic

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36 Bundesregierung 2007, p. 3

37 Quoted after Barlösius 2008, 11 f.

38 “Mittlerweile ist das Forschungszentrum zu einem ganz normalen Teil des Amtes geworden, ist ein gewisser Prozess über die Jahre gewesen. [...] Alle haben ihre verschiedenen Aufgaben und man respektiert sich.” (Interview with a BAMF researcher, September 2015)

39 Field notes, July 2016

workings of the Federal Office and therefore able to carve out established working modes of knowledge production. In this context, the practice of acquiring study commissions, which will be discussed later in some detail, contributed to a functional integration of the Research Group into the BAMF since many of these commissions originated from other BAMF departments, above all the integration unit.<sup>40</sup>

This process of establishment was, however, not only conditioned by the integration efforts of the Research Group's members, but perhaps even more importantly by the structural changes in the Federal Office:

“The Office has changed extremely in the last ten years. Researchers used to be on the one side, jurists on the other, but this is not true anymore. Especially in the operative area of integration, but also in the asylum department and in other units, there are much less jurists, and more social scientists have been hired. Also specialists on Islam, demographers, geographers, politologists. There has been a radical change in the whole Office.”<sup>41</sup>

This “radical change” was also brought forward by the fact that not only the Research Group, but also other administrative departments were founded from scratch in 2005.<sup>42</sup> This introduced new responsibilities, policy tools, and a greater diversity of personnel in terms of professional and academic background and working tasks. The restructuring of the BAMF can therefore be considered a rather exceptional time which serves as an explanation for initial friction between the Research Group and the rest of the Office:

“If a group of young social scientists is introduced into an institution which is in a process of thorough rebuilding – I am talking about the years 2004, 2005 – there is of course a certain feeling of alienation from the established parts of the Office.”<sup>43</sup>

40 Gütthuber and Schimany 2013, 25f.

41 “Das Amt in den letzten zehn Jahren hat sich extrem gewandelt. Am Anfang gab [es die] Juristen und es gab halt die Forscher, aber das stimmt so inzwischen überhaupt nicht mehr. [...] Gerade in dem [...] operativen Bereich der Integration, aber auch im Asylverfahren [...] und [...] in anderen Bereichen, sind sehr viel weniger Juristen und es sind Sozialwissenschaftler dazugekommen. Und Islamwissenschaftler, Demographen, Geographen, Politologen. Also, es hat auch im ganzen Amt ein Riesen-Umbruch stattgefunden.” (Interview with a BAMF researcher, 2015)

42 This includes most importantly the integration department.

43 “Wenn Sie eine Gruppe von jungen Sozialwissenschaftlern haben, die Sie in ein Amt [einführen], das gerade im vollen Umbau ist – ich rede jetzt von den Jahren 2004,5, [...]”

In this context, it can be assumed that the feeling of alienation as expressed by research staff was not primarily caused by systematic incompatibilities between research and administration, as suggested by the academic literature discussed above. Instead, empirical evidence points to the fact that alienation was caused by the specific context of institutional change which created the development of both the Research Group's tasks and the Federal Office. Researchers were among the first newly hired employees at the office after years of a hiring freeze; they arrived at the Federal Office in a situation where the management was eager to accommodate large numbers of surplus staff with new responsibilities.<sup>44</sup> The restructuring process of the 1990s and 2000s created a staff with relatively old and under qualified members with little perspective on future tasks, a precarious situation where the researchers represented a challenge. The Research Group's undefined task somewhere between departmental research institution and the public relations unit contributed to this feeling of alienation as well, since it did not clarify the question of legal tasks, area of responsibility, and competence which are all highly important for the functioning of any bureaucracy.<sup>45</sup> The resulting dynamics of this process was mainly experienced as a gap in terms of work culture and alienation on the side of the Research Group. However, most interviewed experts confirm that alienation has in the meantime been overcome and that research plays an integral part in the proceedings of the Federal Office.

In sum, the specific constellation of institutional change can be considered the main cause of initial alienation. Members of the Research Group were considered representatives of the institutional change in the Federal Office which challenged established responsibilities and hierarchies. In this context, the Research Group was not in a fundamentally different position than other newly founded departments such as the integration department. This view is further supported by the impression of most interviewees that now most structural differences seem to have somewhat smoothed over. Through the thorough restructuring of the Federal Office, the Research Group repre-

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da ist das natürlich gewisser Weise gegenüber Alteingesessenen ein gewisses Fremdheitsgefühl." (Interview with a BAMF researcher, 2015)

44 Boswell 2009b, p. 176

45 Barlösius 2008, 12 f.

sents less of a “foreign body” in terms of the background of its members, its work organization, and its institutional task.<sup>46</sup>

### The Research Group as a Departmental Research Institution

The integration of the Research Group into the Federal Office was described in terms of the structural approximation between BAMF officials and research staff. The process of approximation challenges somewhat the predominant hypothesis of a structural gap between research and policy-making. In a related process, the gradual integration is visible in the development of a self-understanding which can be read as something like a mission statement of the BAMF Research Group. The self-understanding of the Research Group in terms of task, research areas of interest, methods, and aims of research developed over the years. This development is particularly interesting since it demonstrates what kind of knowledge and topics as well as which political uses seem relevant from the researchers’ point of view. At the end of the chapter, a specific understanding of political relevance, arising directly from this process, will be outlined.

Again, the blurry legal basis can serve as a point of departure for analysis. Since the legal task of the Research Group was all but clear, initial attempts of self-describing the role and function of government research are drawn up directly from the research work of the group.

“At the beginning of the year 2005, the Federal Office defined the task of the Research Group. According to this, the aims of the research of the Federal Office are defined as following:

- a) Gaining analytic insights for the control of migration
- b) Study the effects of migration processes for the Federal Republic of Germany
- c) Migration Research in the context of demographic change
- d) Analysis of the integration process of Ethnic Germans
- e) Evaluation of integration policy measures
- f) Study of the economic effects of integration and non-integration.”<sup>47</sup>

46 Meanwhile, the once infamous punching clocks are abolished in the BAMF. Field notes, December 2016

47 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2009b, p. 10

In sum, this early mission statement refers almost exclusively to the research agenda and the way it is drawn up. Not incidentally, this list of tasks reads like it had been compiled from the research topics of the first research projects. Apart from the first item on the list which refers to the legal mandate of the Residence Act, all other points simply name research projects in one way or another: “effects of migration,” “integration of Ethnic Germans,” and “evaluation of integration courses” were each individual study projects.<sup>48</sup> The other two items on the list – demographic change and economic effects – refer to the research areas of the initial two units of the Research Group.<sup>49</sup> Taken together, the list of research goals illustrates the early approach to interpreting the task of “accompanying research” pragmatically from the research tasks; these, in turn, were largely the outcome of a bottom-up process.

However, between 2009 and 2012, a clear trend can be discerned from initially largely self-assigned study topics to an increasing share of mandated research studies commissioned by other state authorities:

“Initially, we have selected study topics ourselves, under the aspect which topic could be relevant for policy counseling. In the course of the last years, our capacity is increasingly taken up by study assignments. Most assignments originate from the Ministry of the Interior, or directly from the BAMF.”<sup>50</sup>

This increasing trend in study assignments is primarily caused by related demands by other ministries, above all the Ministry of the Interior, which developed a rising interest in commissioning research to the BAMF.<sup>51</sup> Over time, it seems that the initial autonomous selection of study topics is completely replaced by commissioned studies; at least in publications, the Research Group seems eager to create this impression. In a 2013 overview of the research activities, the planning of the research agenda is described as a “result of a

48 Cp. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2005a, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2007c, Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2008a

49 Cp. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2009b, 67f.

50 In der Anfangszeit haben wir Themen sicherlich stärker selbst ausgewählt, unter dem Aspekt was wir meinten was relevant ist für die Politikberatung. Es ist in den letzten Jahren aber stärker dazu gekommen dass wir [...] ganz überwiegend mit Aufträgen ausgelastet sind. Die meisten Aufträge kommen aus dem Bereich des Bundesministeriums des Inneren, [...], oder hier direkt aus dem Haus. (Interview with a BAMF researcher, 2015)

51 Boswell 2009b, p. 175

thorough coordination process” in which study proposals can be submitted both internally [...] and externally.”<sup>52</sup> “Internally” refers here to other BAMF departments, and not the Research Group itself, which is presented somewhat exclusively as a receiver of study proposals. In the following overview of selected research projects, this impression is further enforced: in the table, every single study is linked to a specific commissioning institution – most often the BAMF and the Federal Ministry of the Interior.<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that this impression was created partly by selectively representing related research projects, partly by relabeling originally self-administered studies as “commissioned by the BAME,” such as the migration potential project.<sup>54</sup> Be that as it may, this evidence indicates that study commissions seem highly valorized by the Research Group. Indeed, in the Research Group, study commissions are regarded as a measure of the degree to which the institution is well-regarded and acknowledged.

Currently, the process of acquiring study commissions is formally organized. Proposals for research projects are collected from other state institutions about once a year through an inter-departmental working group:

“The inter-departmental working group makes project proposals every year what the BAMF should conduct research on in their view. If an idea is pushed hard, and if it makes sense, or there are two ministries which want something similar, it is taken very seriously. One tries to augment it and turn it into a project proposal.”<sup>55</sup>

In practice, research mandates are usually not carried out without further negotiations. All in all, while research proposals are in principal regarded as “good news,”<sup>56</sup> these are scrutinized and become subject to a process of negotiation between the Research Group and other authorities in question.

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52 Gütthuber and Schimany 2013, p. 23

53 *Ibid.*, p. 24

54 Field notes, July 2016

55 “Diese interministerielle Arbeitsgruppe darf jedes Jahr Vorschläge machen was das BAMF denn mal in ihren Augen untersuchen sollte [...] Wenn aber für den Vorschlag lobbyiert wird, und der [...] Hand und Fuß hat oder es gibt zwei Häuser, die sich was ähnliches vorstellen, dann nimmt man das schon sehr ernst und versucht dann das anzureichern und einen Projektvorschlag draus zu machen.“ (Interview with a BAMF researcher, 2016)

56 Field notes, December 2016

“We discuss what has been proposed to us. We check if something exists already on these topics. Sometimes we reject proposals directed to us: if it is not worth the effort, or if it is redundant. Some questions we reject because they are not within our mandate, they are too distant from the BAMF's competencies.”<sup>57</sup>

The practice of acquiring study commissions can be embedded into a larger strategy of interpreting the role of the Research Group *like* a departmental research institute despite the lack of legal recognition as such. One expression of this strategy can be seen in the imitation of certain structural features of departmental research institutions. For example, a scientific advisory board was founded in 2005. The advisory board's task was to support the Research Group with expertise and provide its research activities with the legitimacy of renowned academic experts from different migration-related disciplines. The Council's tasks and composition is equivalent to similar organs in departmental research institutions.<sup>58</sup> Another aspect of this strategy concerns the publication of research results: by default, these results are published in a series of research reports, which resembles similar practices of departmental research and can be considered a major novelty in the BAMF, as already mentioned.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the Research Group is frequently referring to a catalog of quality standards of departmental research.<sup>60</sup> Also, the Research Group was eager to build up a network of institutional contacts and a working group of departmental research institutions concerned with migration research since 2008.<sup>61</sup> From the perspective of the researchers, this strategy provides a model of reference for its research activities especially towards other state actors, therefore counterbalancing the blurriness of the legal mandate.<sup>62</sup>

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57 “Wir [...] diskutieren dann was uns vorgeschlagen wurde. Wir schauen dann auch nach, ob es zu diesen Bereichen schon was gibt [...]. Und weisen eben auch Vorschläge, die an uns gerichtet wurden, eben auch zurück: Das lohnt jetzt nicht, das ist Doppelforschung; bei einigen Fragen sagen wir auch das ist nicht unser Auftrag, das ist zu weit weg von dem was das BAMF sinnvollerweise machen könnte.” (Interview with a BAMF researcher, September 2015)

58 Gütlhuber and Schimany 2013, 27f.

59 Kraler and Perching 2017, p. 85

60 Kreienbrink and Worbs 2015, p. 329, Gütlhuber and Schimany 2013, p. 27

61 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2009b, p. 62

62 This is connected to the fact that, due to constitutional regulations, scientific research cannot be conducted by the Federal Government unless it is directly connected to the executive tasks of government.

In regard to the mission mandate, this strategy achieves two aims: first, it integrates the Research Group into the proceedings of the state bureaucracy; research is not conducted as a result of internal deliberations, but rather as a result of according demand by the BAMF or other state actors. Secondly, this process supports the shaping of an original area of competence vis-a-vis other institutes of knowledge production: this is, for example, visible in the practice of declining research mandates with the argument that they would fit the scientific profile of another institution better. Reference to other institutions, on the other hand, implies a claim to a specific area of migration and integration research which is considered the original competence of the Research Group. The exact confines of this area are not clear from the outset and are subject to negotiation, which will be analyzed in more detail in the next section. The important point in this context is the fact that this area of competence is defined and defended primarily against other departmental research institutions. Quite clearly, the Research Group views itself as the only institution with a clear mandate and competency in migration and integration research:

“Out of the 47 federal research institutions listed in the federal report on research and innovation in 2012, nine institutions are concerned with migration and integration topics at least implicitly. The explicit primary research focus of none of these institutions, however, lies on these topics. This means that the Research Group at the Federal Office is the only federal institution which is explicitly engaged in migration and integration research.”<sup>63</sup>

All in all, the orientation to departmental research is more than just a rhetorical reference, but rather can be considered the core strategy for institutional development for the Research Group. This is well visible in the following passage:

“In its character, the research of the Federal Office is departmental research, even though it is not formally constituted as a departmental research institute. This means that the research is not primarily theory-driven, but rather application-oriented and provides transfer knowledge. Research does not only provide short-term information for enquiries and statements, but also study projects in the medium term.”<sup>64</sup>

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63 Gütthuber and Schimany 2013, p. 32

64 Memo from the Research Group sent to the author, February 2014.

According to this reasoning, departmental research is mainly defined in terms of its orientation towards policy-making, and not institutionally, in terms of its position within the administrative hierarchy. Furthermore, departmental research is above all defined by its difference to academic research and is mainly characterized by the fact that it is application-oriented, and not theory-driven.<sup>65</sup> In this view, as a consequence, by fulfilling similar tasks, the Research Group's work is "in its character" departmental research as well.<sup>66</sup> Even though there is a short reference to the lack of legal recognition of the Research Group, this appears rather like a formality and not as an important structural feature.

The most elaborate attempt to define the Research Group's task and to clarify its relationship to the concept of departmental research is contained in the 2015 ten-year anniversary essay:

"accompanying research in the sense of the legal mandate has to be understood as application-oriented research, which includes the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of policy measures or programs in the area of migration management. This cannot be reduced to the collection of data and information in relation to current or future political measures. For well-grounded 'analytic evidence', this would not be enough. Rather, prognoses are additionally necessary to identify future needs of policy-making. Only the combination of advance and accompanying research in the narrow sense of the word enables us to do justice to the mandate of policy counseling. Departmental research, on the other hand, has an even larger mandate; it elaborates scientific groundwork as a basis for decision-making in administration and policy. [...] Even though the Research Center fulfills these characteristics in part, the institutional set-up is different to departmental research institutions. This creates some differences in matters of finance and personnel [...] as well as the lack of the evaluation through the scientific council."<sup>67</sup>

Again, in this definition of accompanying research, practical relevance and the functional equivalence to departmental research are the two crucial features. In addition, this essay specifies the tasks of research in some detail: practical applicability means that research is an integral part of policy-making and indeed fulfills all functions of scientific policy counseling such as evaluation,

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65 Cp. also Bundesregierung 2007, p. 3

66 Cp. also Gütlhuber and Schimany 2013, p. 20

67 Kreienbrink and Worbs 2015, p. 329

monitoring, and prognosis. Again, the influence of the concept of departmental research is obvious since these research goals are almost literally taken over from the Federal Government's research guidelines.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, the notion of practical applicability seems to serve as a core concept of the Research Group's practice of governmental research. In this context, it is interesting to analyze this notion in some depth: can the provision of practically relevant knowledge serve as a meaningful distinction between the Research Group and other organizations, most importantly academic research institutions?

It is important to note that, as already mentioned, the frequently discussed systematic difference between science and politics is not the most important demarcation line in the institutional arrangement of governmental knowledge production. As discussed above, the Research Group has been quite successful in integrating its knowledge production into the workings of the Federal Office. In contrast to that, it seems that a much more pronounced line is drawn between governmental research and academic or university research. In this logic, not the inherent difference between knowledge production and administration, but the difference between governmental knowledge production and academic research is the most important line of distinction for BAMF researchers. This distinction became apparent, for example, in the following interview passage when discussing theoretic concepts of the BAMF research work:

"We work flexibly with what serves best. [If] we have a concrete question, we look at which methods we can use to answer the question posed to us. In this we are not overly committed to a specific theoretical concept. If we refer to definitions [e.g. in the National Migration Report], these relate to statistical data, and the statistical data depends on legal regulations."<sup>69</sup>

This does not imply that the Research Group fully disassociates itself with traditions and methods of academic knowledge production, which clearly struc-

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68 Bundesregierung 2007, p. 3

69 "Wir arbeiten flexibel mit dem was da ist. [...] Wir haben eine konkrete Frage, wir schauen uns an mit welchen Methoden wir die konkrete Frage die uns gestellt wird beantworten können. Und sind nicht übertrieben eng hinter [...] einem Theoriekonzept her. Wenn wir Definitionen benutzen [zB. im Migrationsbericht] richtet sich bei uns nach den statistischen Erhebungen, die statistischen Erhebungen wiederum richten sich nach dem was in unseren Gesetzen drin steht." Interview with a BAMF researcher, September 2015

ture the BAMF's research output: empirical data is gathered and analyzed with scientific methods, the texts use academic literature reference systems, and project results are disseminated in typical academic forms such as working papers, anthologies, or scientific conferences.

Be that as it may, the concept of practical relevance and the partial disassociation from academic knowledge production constitutes nevertheless a basic feature of the Research Group's self-understanding. The reason for this can be found in the strategy of becoming a departmental research institute: according to empirical studies on these institutions, the habitus of dissociation from academic research is discussed as a deeply entrenched feature of departmental research. The general argument goes that the pathologies of academic knowledge production, such as dependency on third-party funds, short-cycle ups and downs in the economy of attention in scientific research, the "publish-or-perish" dilemma and others are referred to as a negative image in contrast to departmental research which is portrayed as "practice oriented."<sup>70</sup> In this context, theory development is not a purpose in itself but rather an instrumental feature of knowledge production: theory is applied to maintain a claim of scientific objectivity, but altered in a way that it fits into "practical relevance" considerations. In governmental research, the preferred mode of operation is the orientation towards a mainstream within a given field to avoid political controversy. Barlösius comments on the structural link between practical applicability and theoretical conservatism:

"Departmental research delivers good performance if research results stand the test of practical politics. [...] To achieve this, it is rather not necessary, in the contrary even a risk, if departmental research is positioned at the 'peak of science', because these methods and interpretations are often controversially discussed within academy. The use of such research results risks a scientific dispute [...] which could disable political action rather than support it. To minimize this risk it is more favorable to the ministry to use secured, undisputable scientific knowledge and appropriate methods, which are part of the established scientific tool box."<sup>71</sup>

In sum, the orientation towards the model of departmental research as a somewhat neutral provider of practically relevant information to policy-makers lies at the root of this rather over-pronounced disassociation from uni-

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70 Barlösius 2008, p. 23

71 *Ibid.*, 15f.

versity research.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the Research Group puts forward exactly the same concept of governmental knowledge production – on the one hand, commitment to academic method, on the other hand, reference to “practical applicability”:

“We conduct academic studies which apply the usual methods. Only the research question is usually not theory-driven, and that is a difference to universities. Here, we focus on applied research. [There is a wide array of] policy-counseling institutes which likewise follow an academic approach, which are almost always managed by academically trained scientists, but which have a more diversified audience.”<sup>73</sup>

The self-understanding as a departmental research institute in form and function can be regarded as the most important factor in the self-understanding of the Research Group.

The requirement of practical applicability systematically influences the knowledge production at the BAMF in various respects: most importantly, this influence is visible in the formulation of the research agenda which is a result of either internal deliberation of “what could be of interest” or the result of a study commission. In regard to methodology and definitions, practical relevance means to use legal definitions and official statistics whenever possible. In regard to theoretical concepts, it stands to reason that despite contrary claims, scientific theory is systematically applied to the texts but usually not explicated. Knowledge production follows the above-mentioned principle of structural conservatism, according to which uncontroversial, mainstream theories and methods are strongly preferred over alternative accounts.

In summary, in the Research Group’s definition, the core characteristic of the research work is a specific understanding of practical relevance, understood as a counter-draft to academic knowledge production. In this, differences between accompanying research and departmental research appears rather marginal both in terms of the institutional structure and in terms of the

72 AG Ressortforschungseinrichtungen 2016

73 “Es sind akademische Arbeiten, die genau mit dem ganzen Handwerkszeug arbeiten. Nur ihre Fragestellung ist in der Regel nicht theoriegeleitet, und das unterscheidet sich von dem, was an Universitäten passiert. [...] Bei uns steht die angewandte Forschung im Vordergrund. [Es gibt eine große Bandbreite an] politikberatenden Instituten, [...] die [...] auch akademischen Anspruch haben, die natürlich [...] fast immer von akademisch ausgebildeten Leuten geleitet werden, aber die ein breiteres Publikum haben. Interview with a BAMF researcher, September 2015

legal mandate. In consequence, the Research Group puts forward a mission statement which claims that it can be considered a departmental research institute in all but the name. In this self-understanding it seems that the institutional make-up is not discussed as a somewhat limiting factor to the research. Quite the contrary, the dependent structure of the Research Group is praised as a specific advantage of the institution:

“The incorporation of research into the Federal Office and the proximity to the operational tasks of the authority [...] has proven to be a significant factor of success for the work of the Research Group. As a result, synergy effects could be realized and research results with a high degree of practical relevance were produced.”<sup>74</sup>

In effect, the mandate of the Research Group in its mission-statement differs little from the original concept of departmental research envisaged by the Independent Commission.

### **Institutional Conflict and Cooperation**

Up to this point, the structural factors of knowledge production have been analyzed from the point of view of the Research Group: the institutional make-up, the history of foundation, and especially the development of a specific self-understanding around the notion of practically relevant knowledge production have been discussed. In the remainder of this chapter, the relationship between the Research Group and various institutional actors will be analyzed. The relevant institutions include on the one hand what the Research Group regards as peer institutions, namely two socio-demographic departmental research institutions (The institute for Labor Market Research and the Federal Institute for Population Research). On the other hand, they include the vertical institutional hierarchy: the BAMF presidency and the Ministry of the Interior.

Concerning the former, departmental research served as something like an ideal model for the Research Group in the course of its establishment as the most important institutional concept of governmental knowledge production. In practical terms, this model included, besides the acquisition of study commissions, a strategy of coordination with other departmental research institutes, the most important in this regard being the Institute for La-

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74 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2010b, p. 10

bor Market Research (IAB) and the Federal Institute for Population Research (BIB), as mentioned above. The two institutions constitute not only a model of reference, but represent at the same time the most important competitors for resources, study commissions, and epistemic authority. These conflicts illustrate the actual differences between departmental research institutions and the BAMF Research Group quite well. One example in this context is a conflict over personnel between the BAMF and the Institute for Population Research during the foundation phase of the Research Group: the Ministry of the Interior intended to redirect funds to the Research Group at the expense of the BIB, the main argument being the lack of practical applicability of the Institute for Demographic Research's output especially regarding integration policy.<sup>75</sup> A similar situation of conflict arose between the BAMF and the Institute for Labor Market Research in the context of the "refugee crisis" in 2015, when the Institute for Labor Market Research intensified its activities in what was perceived as the original area of competency of the BAMF.<sup>76</sup> In the context of analyzing knowledge production, these incidents are important for two reasons. First, institutional conflicts and struggles within the bureaucracy constitute rather the norm than the exception. However, both conflict situations point to a peculiar asymmetry between the Research Group and its competitors: in both cases, the subordinate role of the BAMF played out as a disadvantage. In the first case, the Institute of Demographic Research was at least in part successful both in warding off the BAMF's attempt to redirect personnel as well as the Ministry's intention to influence its research agenda. In the second case, the Research Group seemed to have too little political leeway to ward off the IAB's "invasion" of the BAMF's territory. Second, it seems that the communication channels between departmental research institutions and the BAMF Research Group seem not developed well enough to absorb such a situation by way of inter-institutional compromise.<sup>77</sup> In any case, this leads to the assumption that the Research Group's institutional network is not very strongly integrated. In fact, regarding the actual research output, there are almost no cooperative publications between the Research Group and other departmental research institutions until 2016.<sup>78</sup> In the Research Group's ex-

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75 Bade 2017, p. 68

76 Field notes, July 2016. Cp. also Kleist 2018 who mentions that the IAB has a larger total research output on refugees than the BAMF.

77 Cp. Bade 2017, p. 68

78 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2016a

ternal relations, the inherent ambiguity of the concept departmental research becomes visible: on the one hand, it serves as the most important conceptual guiding post for institutional development, while on the other, departmental research institutions constitute the most important institutional rivals in regard to research mandates, competencies, and resources. As illustrated above, this rivalry sometimes sparks conflicts of interest which usually play out to the disadvantage of the Research Group. This evidence puts the BAMF's claim to conduct departmental research in all but the name into question. Rather, it seems that the institutional constitution of the Research Group is insufficient to actually play in the same league as its main competitors.

### Strategic Orientation of the Research

If the vertical institutional environment is considered, it becomes clear that the Research Group's efforts to interpret its legal mandate were embedded in a political struggle over the strategic orientation of the research: partly due to the potential use (or threat) of research in the policy process, partly due to the comparatively large area of interpretation left by the blurry legal definition, several forces influenced the role and functions of knowledge production at the BAMF. Key actors in this struggle are, besides the researchers themselves, the Research Group's scientific advisory board, the BAMF leadership, and the Ministry of the Interior.

In 2005, at the time of the establishment of the Research Group, the BAMF was led by a profiled politician, Albert Schmid, a significant difference to many of his predecessors who were usually regarded as administrative specialists with little political ambitions. With his political background, Schmid recognized research as a strategic tool to enhance the BAMF's area of responsibility vis-a-vis other institutions as well as its political profile.<sup>79</sup> In the years after the institutional restructuring, the BAMF promoted a strategic idea about its new role as a "Competence Center for Migration and Integration"<sup>80</sup>; in bolstering this strategy, knowledge production assumed a key position.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, judging from the visual impression of Research Group publications, the BAMF leadership seemed to attribute increasingly more importance to the Research Group's output: from 2008 onwards, the Research

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79 Boswell 2009b, p. 167

80 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2008d, p. 2

81 Boswell 2009b, 177f.

Group released an annual report about its activities to enhance the visibility and dissemination of its work.<sup>82</sup> From 2010 onwards, the BAMF's president is featured in it with a foreword, stressing the scientific competence of BAMF researchers and the quality of its publications.<sup>83</sup> Resources in terms of personnel and research funds are gradually enlarged as well: from 2007 onwards, research is conducted in three units (formerly two); from 2010 onwards, the Research Group receives a flat-rate research budget (in addition to project-based funds and staff).<sup>84</sup> The name of the research unit changed from the initial designation "Research Group" to "Research Center for 'Migration, Integration and Asylum'" in 2014, reflecting the ambition to provide it with a more publicly visible profile.<sup>85</sup>

However, the growing importance of research from the BAMF leadership's perspective had some bearings on the research agenda, too. By and large, the BAMF favored an application-oriented, demand-based orientation of research, a concept which had to be implemented at the expense of more general, long-term foundational research. In the leadership's concept, research was less a source of knowledge relevant for decision-making but rather a means of symbolic authority, to demonstrate expertise in the field of migration and integration to the public and other authorities. While this strategy effectuated a higher visibility of the Research Group and its work, it came at the cost of rather menial non-research tasks such as speech-writing, briefing of higher BAMF officials or memo compilation.<sup>86</sup> In the BAMF leadership's concept, the development of an academically oriented scientific profile of the Research Group was clearly of secondary importance.

In contrast to this, the scientific advisory board of the Research Group favored a more independent role of research with a focus on long-term research projects. The advisory board's idea about research tasks can thus be seen in line with the Independent Commission's concept of the role of research. These diverging ideas about the long-term strategic orientation of research were the

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82 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2009b

83 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2011c, p. 9

84 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2012f, Gütlhuber and Schimany 2013

85 Kreienbrink and Worbs 2015, p. 326. To avoid confusion, this text uses the term "Research Group" in a consistent manner; this follows the nomenclature of most BAMF researchers who refer to this expression in interviews.

86 Kraler and Perchinig 2017, p. 75

subject of frequent discussions between the BAMF leadership and the scientific council, as one member of the council describes:

“In [the BAMF president’s] view this institution should above all conduct commissioned research. According to his definition this meant ‘giving answers to posed questions’. The researchers were constantly overburdened with tasks like briefings and speech drafts. So we negotiated successfully to grant more freedom for independent scientific work.”<sup>87</sup>

The Ministry of the Interior as a superior authority played a rather unclear role during the Research Group’s early years: in the course of the drafting of the Foreigner’s Act, the ministry was one of the driving forces to limit the impact of the Independent Commission’s proposal of knowledge-based policy-making, which ultimately effectuated the low degree of the Research Group’s institutional independence. Hierarchically, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the *Fachaufsicht*, the administrative, technical, and legal supervision of the Research Group which entails (at least formally) influence on the research work. The ministry’s control reservation is frequently cited (usually off tape) as an important impediment to a more independent general research strategy.

“It would be possible to change the residence law and delete the research paragraph, or it could be interpreted differently: ‘research means that one employee compiles some information for the federal government.’ It is a very flexible term. That means there is a certain dependency on the good-will of the Ministry of the Interior.”<sup>88</sup>

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87 “Der BAMF-Präsident vertrat die Auffassung, dass diese Institution vor allem Auftragsforschung übernehmen solle. Nach seiner Definition hieß das: ‚Antwort geben auf gestellte Fragen‘. Die Forscher wurden dadurch und durch viele andere Aufgaben, z. B. durch Briefings und Entwürfe von Reden, zeitlich überfordert und zuweilen auch qualitativ unterfordert. Deshalb haben wir – erfolgreich – darüber verhandelt, ihnen mehr Freiraum für die selbständige Forschung einzuräumen.“ (Interview with a former member of the BAMF advisory board, 2017)

88 “es wäre ja möglich zu sagen, das Aufenthaltsgesetz wird geändert und der Forschungsauftrag wird gestrichen. Oder der Forschungsauftrag wird ganz anders ausgelegt. Der Forschungsauftrag besteht darin, dass ein Mitarbeiter für die Bundesregierung ein paar Informationen zusammenstellt. Das ist ja ein sehr dehnbarer Begriff. Das heißt es gibt natürlich eine Abhängigkeit von der Gunst der Leute, die im BMI sitzen.“ ((Interview with a BAMF researcher, 2016)

However, after establishment, the Ministry did not directly interfere with the research work of the BAMF, except for the exercise of the usual routine of editing report manuscripts.<sup>89</sup> Some interview partners as well as research literature mention that in the initial phase, the Ministry of the Interior had in fact little use for research, which would at a first glance contradict the assumption of the exercise of control.<sup>90</sup>

However, when commenting on the role of the ministry in interviews, a common theme consists of the rather discrete and indirect mode of control, as is, for example, visible in the quote above; the ministry's influence is not easy to pin down directly in certain restrictions, actions, or hierarchical orders, as in the case of the BAMF leadership. Rather, its control reservation is experienced as a "feeling of dependency on the good will." Evidence from academic research indicates that these indirect control tactics can be found in the Ministry's conduct vis-a-vis affiliated political actors, such as the Independent Commission or the Islam Conference. Research on these political bodies reveals relatively subtle forms of control via "paper technologies"<sup>91</sup> which remain shy of the level of what is considered undue political influence. These forms of influence include, in the case of the Islam Conference, the BMI's production of conference session protocols. These protocols were presented as a service to the conference but were produced slightly biased towards the positions of the state in terms of length, accuracy of representation, and plausibility.<sup>92</sup> In the case of the Independent Commission, the ministry exercised tacit influence on the production of internal papers by way of affiliated staff in the Independent Commission's office as well.<sup>93</sup> In the case of the Research Group, indirect methods seem to prevail as well. This can be illustrated with the following interview passage describing the process of creating an inter-departmental working group responsible for drawing up proposals for future BAMF research projects. This was preceded by an unusual accumulation of complaints about the BAMF's research topics and publications:

"The problem was that the supervision control at the BMI let the Research Group's notices heap up on his desk and did not forward them to other ministries which worked on similar research questions. This resulted in unnecc-

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89 Kreienbrink and Worbs 2015, p. 330

90 Boswell 2009b, p. 175

91 Engler 2018 forthcoming, p. 64

92 *Ibid.*, 26off.

93 Schneider 2010, p. 265

essary redundant work, which led to a request for additional administrative control. This in turn complicated the Research Group's work even further."<sup>94</sup>

In the quote, it seems that the ministry's alleged lack of attention effected tightened control via a newly established supervision body over the Research Group. In the case of the inter-departmental working group, this subtle control is not the consequence of an all-encompassing, "Foucauldian-style"<sup>95</sup> surveillance strategy with indirect means; rather, it can be regarded as a more or less random result of neglect of bureaucratic duties.

The point is, however, that this neglect played out in favor of the Ministry by enlarging its grip on the Research Group's inner workings.

The most important entry point for indirect influence can be discerned in the practice of commissioning research as seen in the case of a study on naturalization. As a result of the reform of citizenship law in 2000, children of foreign nationals acquired German citizenship by birth but were in some cases required to discard the foreign nationality before reaching the age of 23, otherwise the German citizenship would be revoked. In theory, the so called *Optionspflicht* ("mandatory option") regulation was meant to reconcile the *ius soli* concept of citizenship with the foundational principle of restricting access to dual citizenship wherever possible. However, in practice, dual citizenship was more a rule than an exception since in about half the naturalization processes the other citizenship was not revoked.<sup>96</sup> As a result of exemptions of EU nationals, the mandatory option regulation targeted mostly Turkish nationals, which sparked considerable political criticism with charges of discrimination and an undue bureaucratic harassment of prospective future citizens. In reaction, by commission of the Ministry of the Interior, the BAMF conducted two studies on the effects of this unique and controversial legal regulation.<sup>97</sup> The results of the studies were rather positive: not only did

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94 "Das Problem lag darin, dass hochrangige Beamte des BMI, denen die Fachaufsicht oblag, Meldungen der Forschergruppe nicht weitergaben an andere Ministerien, in denen zum Teil ähnliche Forschungsfragen delegiert oder diskutiert wurden. Das führte zur Vorstellung von unnötiger Doppelarbeit und zu der Forderung nach administrativer Kontrolle der Forschergruppe des BAMF, was deren Arbeit unnötig erschwerte." (Interview with a former member of the BAMF advisory board, 2017)

95 Boswell 2011

96 This applied to all EU citizens, as well as citizens of countries which were unusually uncooperative in releasing their subjects from citizenship.

97 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2012d and Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2012b

almost every young foreigner opt for German citizenship, but a large majority reported that the decision was rather easy for them. Consequently, the study results were regarded as proof of the success of the policy by the Ministry for the Interior.<sup>98</sup> However, these studies were conducted on a group of people born between 1990 and 2000 whose parents applied for the mandatory option as part of a transitional arrangement. This decision was justified with logistic necessities, since this special group were the only people who could be included in such a study since the law was otherwise only applied to newborns which were at that time too young to be included in a social survey. However, from a methodological point of view, this selection created a source for bias. The administrative hurdles to accessing the mandatory option were somewhat higher for this group, since parents had to file an application and pay a fee of 500 Marks. Indeed, another study presented data which points to a positive selection in terms of socio-economic data, German skills, and support for German citizenship by the social environment of this sub-group; given the legal requirements of fee and formal application, these findings are not overly surprising,<sup>99</sup> as a member of the Research Group's scientific advisory board confirmed:

“The parents take an interest in the German citizenship. They will tell this to their children, and will comfort them if they have identity conflicts. The result of this, as we argued, will be the information to the public that everything was allegedly completely unproblematic. And this is exactly what happened: the Federal Secretary of the Interior proudly presented the successful and unproblematic implementation of the legal regulation.”<sup>100</sup>

This study illustrates nicely how different political actors exercise political influence on the generation of knowledge: study results can be framed and influenced in a particular direction, as in the case of the dual citizenship

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98 Bax 2012

99 Diehl and Fick 2012, p. 349

100 “Die Eltern haben ein Interesse an der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit ihrer Kinder. Sie werden ihnen das nachdrücklich deutlich machen. Und wenn die Kinder beim Wechsel der Staatsangehörigkeit irgendwelche Identitätsprobleme haben sollten, werden sie sie ermutigen. Das Ergebnis wird die öffentliche Information sein, so haben wir damals argumentiert, dass das alles angeblich völlig unproblematisch sei. Und genau das ist dann passiert: Bundesinnenminister Friedrich berichtete stolz von einer erfolgreichen und ganz unproblematischen Umsetzung der Regelung.” (Interview with a former member of the BAMF advisory board, 2017)

study through selection of a non-representative sub-group. The researchers are aware of this problem and react with detailed, methodologically sound discussions of the potential bias sources of the sample data and frame the study in a sober, unassuming way. This methodological discussion, however, is not part of the political communication strategy. The detailed documentation of bias sources is relegated to the background of a “success story” based on the finding that most migrant youth opt for the German passport without much inner conflict. With this, the BAMF’s study is interpreted as a support of the politically contested regulation without mentioning the fact that the rather positive study results can be attributed to a large part to the bias created by the study’s target group. The policy in turn is supported by the allegedly objective, sober scientific findings.

This story points to another mechanism in the way knowledge is produced on politically sensitive topics in general. In the case of the study on naturalization, the Research Group seemed to be keenly aware of the political controversy and the possibility of exploitation of study results for different political purposes. In line with the Office’s general defensive policy in terms of public relations, the researchers adopted a role of impartial providers of information by refraining from overt recommendations in this study:

“some of our studies draw conclusions on what could be done. But in such a contested area like for example citizenship [...] we didn’t do that. We made a proper study, we analyzed [different] effects and presented [the material]. If you look at the [...] press releases [of two contesting political actors, V.K.], one could think they referred to two different studies. But [...] we were OK with that, because everyone can work with this material.”<sup>101</sup>

By adhering to the “neutral presentation of scientific facts” on especially sensitive political topics, the Research Group interprets its role as a source of information for all political parties.<sup>102</sup> From the point of view of the Research Group, this communication strategy is sensible since it avoids criticism of partisan knowledge production which could undermine the credibility of scientific results and, eventually, the carefully constructed reputation of the Research Group as a quasi-departmental research institution. At the same time, this kind of knowledge answers to the given demand, as Amir-Moazami argues:

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101 Interview with a BAMF researcher, September 2015

102 Kreienbrink and Worbs 2015, p. 330

“A correlation materializes which seems both obvious and paradox at first glance: the demand of rationality rises in the same rate as does the politicization of the field which renders objectivity and neutrality basically impossible.”<sup>103</sup>

In the case of the Research Group, this communication tactic points to a certain ambiguity of the strategy of acquiring research mandates: on the one hand, study commissions ensure institutional recognition and are seen as proof of practical applicability. On the other hand, it provides an entry point for political actors to influence the research agenda without compromising the scientific credibility of research results. At the same time, the strategy of producing objectivity by focusing on methodologically sound research combined with a decidedly defensive communication geared to avoiding criticism could arguably further enhance the political actor's possibilities to exploit study results in a partisan way. By defining “scientific neutrality” in a way that study results can be used by all political actors to bolster their respective and usually contradicting political claims, the study results become in a way random and prone to arbitrary interpretation.

In conclusion, empirical evidence of different strategies of control and influence over the research agenda were described as a framework of institutional preconditions for the formulation of knowledge. This framework is on the one hand somewhat typical for institutions of governmental knowledge production, as the frequent reference to departmental research institutions shows. On the other hand, most importantly the blurriness of the Research Group's legal mandate represents a somewhat unique situation which has been explored in some detail. The process of institutionalization can be characterized as the result of a struggle over the research strategy between the Ministry of the Interior, the BAMF leadership and the Research Group itself. The actors represented different ideas of how governmental research ought to be oriented. The Research Group and its Scientific Advisory Board were eager to shape its institutional make-up like that of departmental research institutions, an approach which entailed most importantly a strategy to acquire commissions for the systematic inclusion of research results in the process of policy-making. The BAMF leadership, on the other hand, favored a different role of the Research Group as having a much lower scientific profile – compiling memos, speeches, or short studies for ministerial requests

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103 Amir-Moazami 2018b, p. 111

instead of conducting foundational research. In the case of the ministry, the main characteristic of its control practice is the absence of direct influence on the research process itself – the selection of methods and analysis modes seems to be a truly independent area of decision for the researchers.<sup>104</sup> By focusing on tacit, indirect methods of influence, both of the ministry's roles as described in interviews – disinterestedness and control reservation – are less of a contradiction than expected at first glance.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, the reforms of the “paradigm change” has been recapitulated from the point of view of the Research Group as an involved actor. In this context, the notion of a “paradigm change” was crucially connected to a new role of knowledge in the process of policy-making in migration politics as suggested by the Independent Commission Immigration: scientific knowledge promised more reasonable, effective and coherent politics. In this respect, it seems plausible to assume that the Research Group represents this paradigm change like no other institution in the current set-up of German migration policy-making. However, many of the Independent Commission's proposals especially in regard to knowledge production were sacrificed in the legislative negotiations. In this context, the blurriness of the legal mandate was not a somewhat accidental result of the parliamentary process surrounding the implementation of the Independent Commission's recommendations. Rather, it can be regarded as a result of a strategy to systematically diminish the institutional influence of research in policy-making as a whole: this strategy is materialized in the removal of the Immigration Council, the inclusion of knowledge production into the BAMF hierarchy, and the resulting political primacy over the research agenda. In reference to the original proposals put forward by the Commission, the selective implementation of proposals display a bias towards administrative control, thereby strengthening especially the central role of the Ministry of the Interior. This strategy did not only refer to the reform elements discussed here, but can be considered the general pattern of implementing the Independent Commission's reform proposals.<sup>105</sup>

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104 Barlösius 2008, 17 f.

105 Schneider 2010, p. 635

Taken together, the Research Group's establishment can be regarded as a complex interaction between political actors and their different visions about the role of knowledge production in politics on the one hand and strategies on the other to give meaning to the rather blurry legal mandate of accompanying research at the BAMF. In this situation, the Research Group developed a strategy of imitating a departmental research institution, therefore providing a model of orientation for its research activities. As a result, the Research Group developed a self-understanding that it conducts departmental research in all but the name; in a way, this claim can be read as the fulfillment of the Independent Commission's vision of a knowledge-based migration and integration policy. A measurement of success of this strategy can be found in the fact that initial tensions and alienation between the research staff and the administrative units of the BAMF seem to have largely given way to a smooth integration of the different units of the authority. However, this success is somewhat put into perspective by the fact that both the BAMF leadership and the Ministry of Interior took advantage of the low degree of institutional independence of the Research Group and exerted considerable influence on the strategic orientation of research. In interviews, the political aspect of control is usually mentioned in explaining this specific formal set-up; there seems to be a consensus that the interest of political control outweighs the merits of a truly independent research institution from the perspective of the ministry. As a result, the Research Group is subject to two different supervision hierarchies and rationales: the ministry was limiting the potential political problems arising from independent research by confining the institutional independence of the Research Group with indirect means, while the BAMF was eager to turn the Research Group into a productive factor for its political strategy. Not incidentally, both institutions are the most important study commissioners to the Research Group. Through this practice, both the BAMF leadership and the ministry have the means to crucially influence the knowledge produced by the Research Group without directly intervening with the research process and therefore undermining the scientific credibility of the study results.

In the institutional make-up, some evidence can be found which illustrates how this political influence materializes in terms of the organization of research. This is expressed by the fact that, staff and budget wise, the Research Group still stagnates and has since about 2013. Initially, personnel as well as financial funds were constantly expanded, but these reached a peak

around 2013 of about 25 scientific staff and ca. 400,000 EUR, respectively.<sup>106</sup> Another aspect of the situation of the Research Group is the fact that most of the job positions are limited to two-year periods which limits the attractiveness of the work conditions as well as the ability of individual scientists to develop expertise in their given field of responsibility.<sup>107</sup>

All of these factors combined point to the structural limits of research in its present form:

“The researchers successfully put a lot of effort into producing sensible results within the confines of the possibilities presented to them. However, research would be much better if the group was larger, if it was managed according to scientific principles, and if its research would be better integrated strategically.”<sup>108</sup>

As a result, while the Research Group maintains that it conducts departmental research for all practical concerns, it stands to reason that the structural confines are more limiting than conceded in the official mission statement. One effect of this institutional dependence is the Research Group's defensive approach to political controversies and the resulting restraint in political recommendations. Instead of providing knowledge to inform and monitor political measures, research results are distinctly formulated in a way to avoid evaluation of political measures, motivated mostly by the fear of avoiding public criticism of partiality. This effect is not, however, random or a standard feature of all Research Group publications. Rather, the restraint in terms of policy recommendations is greatest in politicized issues. Ironically, these politically heated questions were a prime target of scientific knowledge production in the concept of the Independent Commission to begin with: ideologically framed policy fields subject to a decade-long stalemate and reform backlog were to be reformed by superior technical knowledge. In precisely these policy areas, however, research results are formulated in a way that they can be applied to support almost any political claim. Knowledge production is no longer

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106 Email from the Research Group, February 2014

107 Field notes, december 2016

108 “Die Forscher bemühen sich im Rahmen ihrer Möglichkeiten erfolgreich darum, vernünftige und tragfähige Ergebnisse zu produzieren. Diese Möglichkeiten wären aber deutlich besser, wenn die Anlage größer wäre, wenn sie wissenschaftlich klarer geführt und forschungsstrategisch besser eingebettet würde.“ (Interview with a former member of the BAMF advisory board, 2017)

a basis for policy-making in the sense of an external, to a degree independent, voice which is in the position to monitor, evaluate, or give recommendations to policy. In a way, the relationship between policy-making and knowledge production is almost the reverse of the Independent Commission's concept.