

Shaping Migration between Europe
and Latin America:
new perspectives and challenges

edited by Ana Margheritis



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2. Framing understandings of international migration: how governance actors make sense of migration in Europe and South America

Andrew Geddes and Marcia Vera Espinoza

In spite of extensive and valuable knowledge of the outcomes or outputs of migration governance systems being available in the form of policies, laws and the like, less is known about the views and attitudes elite actors hold within these systems. This chapter draws from extensive interview material to understand more about how these actors in Europe and South America seek to make sense of the issues they face and of the wider context in which they operate. Although patterns of human mobility mean that strong historical links exist between both regions, as explored elsewhere in this book, the focus here is in comparing migration governance at regional level in the two continents.

One reason for this is that a ‘liberal tide’ has been identified during the last decade as sweeping South America with greater openness, at least at the discursive level, in terms of migrants’ rights (Cantor et al., 2015). This contrasts with the case of the European Union (EU), where a migration/refugee crisis has been seen to exacerbate tendencies towards restriction and exclusion, or what could be called an ‘illiberal tide’. This chapter will concentrate particularly on the causes and effects of frames held by elite actors in migration governance systems in these two regions. It will also look at the various ways they can contribute to or shape governance outcomes in terms of the numbers of migrants admitted and their rights.

To address this question and the role of these actors, we focus here on ‘situated’ agents attempting to make sense of their duties and thereby assessing the relationship between concepts and practices, meaning and action. These are necessarily shaped by the context individuals operate within, including the immediate organisational setting, but also by the wider political, social, economic and historical context. We cannot simply read off or measure the influence of these frames, but would argue that not only is it interesting to explore elite actors’ reasoning, but also that scholarly work on migration has relatively little to say on the issue.

This analysis draws from the work of Karl Weick (1995) and his identification of ‘sense-making’ processes as the basis for the intersubjective

construction of meaning about migration within governance systems. This intersubjective component connects individual-level views and understandings as well as the wider social context of this reasoning. These can shape the setting in which approaches to international migration in its various forms are adopted. For example, if the actors understand migration to be something conducted in extremis by fleeing and desperate people, then it can acquire a negative connotation. If it is seen as driven by powerful pull factors linked to the economies or welfare systems of destination countries, then this could lead to measures that seek to deter migrants. But if migrants understand it as creating an opportunity to make a better life for themselves and their families, then a different frame is evident with the potential for disparate effects on policymaking contexts. It should be emphasised here that this study did not expect or find these views to fall neatly into these categories. There are, of course, contesting visions of migration within and between the two regions, but also important points of similarity, one being the idea of a ‘new normal’ shaping contemporary debates about the issue with important implications for the years to come. This new normal is seen as meaning relatively high migratory pressures in the foreseeable future with implications for managing migration. The relevant point for this analysis is that the idea of a new normality can be understood as a cognitive frame – as a way of understanding the causes of migration and its effects – shaping the context for action. These frames and their effects are then filtered by decision-making processes and the tricky business of implementation, but we argue that these frames matter and that they do have effects.

By ‘actors’ we mean those who seek to make, shape or influence migration policy. They include politicians, officials and representatives of regional and international organisations, key interests such as unions, business, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations. How do they understand migration’s causes and effects? Do these interpretations then inform policy responses? A key contrast is the policy gap in Europe between rhetorical commitment to controls and continued openness to migrant flows compared in South America to a reverse policy gap where a rhetorical commitment to migrants’ rights encounters implementation gaps on the ground (Hollifield et al., 2014; Freier and Acosta, 2015). The chapter draws from a total of 164 semi-structured interviews (75 in 6 South American countries, and 89 in 13 European countries). The interviewees fall into five broad categories: political leaders and elected representatives; national officials; officials from regional and international organisations; key societal interests such as business and trade unions; and NGOs (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Prospects for International Migration Governance (MIGPROSP): interviews per region

Region	Countries	No. of interviews	Categories of interviewees per region
South America	Argentina	21	27 national officials; 6 politicians; 14 international organisations; 9 regional organisations; 8 academics/advisers; 8 NGOs; 1 trade union; 1 business organisation; 1 thinktank
	Brazil	16	
	Chile	16	
	Colombia	5	
	Ecuador	7	
	Peru	10	
Europe	Austria	8	43 national officials; 7 politicians; 12 international organisations; 15 regional organisations; 6 NGOs; 1 trade union; 2 business organisations; 3 thinktanks
	EU (Brussels)	21	
	Czech Republic	5	
	Denmark	3	
	Switzerland	4	
	Germany	9	
	Ireland	1	
	Italy	3	
	Malta	3	
	Netherlands	6	
	Poland	6	
	Spain	9	
	Sweden	1	
	UK	10	

The drivers of migration governance

Most work on international migration addresses two overarching issues. The first – why do people move? – has led to a vast literature exploring the reasons why people migrate internationally. It links these to factors such as economic, social, political, demographic and environmental changes and their effects on decisions to move, as well as the distance and duration of these movements. The second big question is how do such movements affect governance systems

and the nature of the responses evident in them in the form of laws, policies, public attitudes and the like.

These two major questions are, of course, hugely important and have generated powerful insights. This chapter aims to do something different by opening the 'black box' of governance systems and add to understanding on how elite policy actors in Europe and South America make sense of international migration. By this we mean how they understand and interpret its causes and effects and how these frames can feed through into policy approaches. One good reason for opening the black box is a tendency for research on the issue to work back from the outputs of its governance systems (laws, policies and so on) to make assumptions about the nature of the process itself. So, for example, it has been observed that migration policies tend to fail to achieve their objectives and that key reasons for this failure include a lack of knowledge among decision-makers about migration dynamics as well as the existence of hidden agendas whereby policymakers will say one thing, but do another (Castles, 2004). It is, of course, plausible that policies do fail to achieve their objectives for these reasons and we do not intend to act as cheerleaders for elite policy actors or to argue that policies succeed. The point of this chapter is a different one: a problem with this analysis of policy failure is that it works back from the observed outcome of a process to infer the rationale and dynamics which characterised the process itself. The analysis suggests that perceptions from within migration governance systems in Europe and South America can provide valuable insight into the various ways actors in these systems understand migration dynamics, and also make sense of the wider organisational and institutional context they operate within. This can increase awareness of a neglected component of the debate about migration governance and offer additional understanding of similarities and differences between South America and Europe.

Two main conceptual pillars support this analysis: the development of an understanding of governance which informs its approach and a focus on sense-making within organisations. By bringing these together the foundations are laid for this chapter's later empirical analysis of attitudes among policy elites in Europe and South America in relation to international migration's causes and effects. This allows a perspective to be developed on what we call the 'drivers' of migration governance in Europe and South America linking concepts and practices, meanings and action.

Governance

Rather than seeing migration simply as an external challenge to governance systems, as something that happens to them, it can also be instructive to consider the role played by governance systems in South American and European countries in shaping how international migration acquires meaning as a social

and political issue. Key territorial and organisational boundaries in both regions are shaped by social, cultural and historical contexts which play an important role in defining the 'migration challenge'. For example, the category into which a migrant is placed – 'economic', 'family', 'refugee', 'student', 'irregular' – has important implications for their treatment in the country they are moving to. Labels, categories and classifications clearly matter and these are key outputs of governance systems as they try to make sense of international migration. Classification and categorisation are an inevitable aspect of modern society and are not necessarily bad in themselves (Bowker and Leigh Star, 2000). Here, it is important to be aware that they are extrinsic categories and labels rather than intrinsic characteristics of individuals, and that migration governance in Europe and South America is closely linked to attempts to coordinate a wide range of public and private actors across various governance levels, while taking into consideration the above types and categories. Migration types are thus dependent on – and not independent of – governance systems and are closely bound to their design, operation and functioning.

Increased attention has been paid to regional governance in both Europe and South America. The word 'governance' has also become better known perhaps for the adjectives attached to it, such as 'good', 'bad', 'multilevel' and 'networked', although they only describe a manifestation of governance and tell us little about the term's actual meaning. A 'governance turn' in European and EU studies has been identified with use of the term becoming a 'veritable growth industry' (Kohler Koch and Rittberger, 2006, p. 27).

This chapter draws from the 'dual meaning' of governance identified by Pierre (2000, p. 3). The first understands governance as the 'empirical manifestation of state adaptation to its external environment as it emerges in [the] late twentieth century', where public and private actors engage in the regulation of societal activities (ibid.). In such terms, governance in Europe and South America is both a state and a process with organisational, institutional, socioeconomic, cultural and ideological dimensions (Kohler Koch and Rittberger, 2006, p. 28).

The second meaning is the 'conceptual or theoretical representation of [the] coordination of social systems' (Pierre, 2000, p. 3). When applied to the governance of migration, this requires underlying social systems to be specified along with efforts to achieve coordination between the wide range of public and private actors involved in migration processes. The purpose of this chapter is not to map or describe these underlying systems and their effects on migration governance but, rather, to understand more about how elite policy actors make sense of them, that is, how they understand migration's causes and effects and how this then becomes a challenge of and for governance systems.

It is clearly the case that these processes take much different forms across Europe and South America and highly diverse responses across both regions are

to be anticipated. As one would expect, much of our interview data in South America comes from national level because a supranational political system with substantive law-making functions does not exist, whereas there clearly is such a system in Europe. Yet, at a general level, understanding migration governance as possessing this dual meaning provides basic conceptual ordering to an assessment of interpretations of migration and its drivers within governance systems in both regions.

This framework for analysis of governance privileges no particular site or location and is attuned to examining multilevel settings with a wide range of public and private actors. That said, this study does recognise the centrality of states within regional organisations and the key roles that they can play.

There are no 'natural' regions; they are political constructs that centre on and/or seek to promote social, political, economic or organisational cohesiveness (Cantori and Spiegel, 1970). Regions are highly diverse in form, sit between the national and the global, and reflect the multilevelling of international politics and the multidimensional complexities of international migration. A regional organisation can be understood as a grouping of geographically proximate states leading to perceived common interests derived from location and associated interdependencies. They tend to seek broad-based cooperation on a range of issues, but particularly trade and economic cooperation.

The aim here is not to empirically map or describe the form taken by regional migration governance in Europe and South America, but there are, of course, key differences. The EU has created a unique form of supranational governance which includes the creation of an open borders framework with a right to free movement for citizens of the (current) 28 member states. Since the 1990s, the EU has also developed aspects of a common migration and asylum policy: aspects of a common policy only because the EU has no say over the numbers of migrants to be admitted, which remains strictly a matter for member states as do immigrant 'integration' policies. Rather, the EU focus has been on asylum, border controls and irregular migration flows. Since the 2000s, the EU has also increasingly sought to develop an 'external' dimension to migration governance involving cooperation with non-EU member states. European Union competencies in this area are extensive and deeply institutionalised. The roles played by the European Commission (EC), Court of Justice and, more recently, the European Parliament, are all evidence of this deep institutionalisation in Europe (Acosta and Geddes, 2014).

The South American context is different in that the competencies are not as extensive and the level of institutionalisation is much weaker. That said, migration policy in that continent has taken an increasingly important role in regional integration processes since the turn of the 21st century. Although

regional integration in other areas has been slow, policy here has been developed as a key feature of the region's sociopolitical agenda (Margheritis, 2015). In a longer-term historical perspective, many South American countries in the late 19th and much of the 20th century developed an open policy which welcomed and gave equal treatment to certain foreigners, mainly from Europe (Acosta, 2016). This was followed by restrictive migration policies as a result of economic crisis and political and social changes. The most notorious exclusionary policies emerged as a result of the dictatorial regimes and a highly securitised approach to migration, some elements of which are still in place (Domenech, 2007).

Since the return to democracy and a shift in migration patterns during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century, debates on the issue have generally become more liberal and focused on human rights. These developments came hand in hand with the changing context in South America, characterised by declining emigration and increased rates of intraregional and extraregional migration flows, with Argentina, Brazil and Chile attracting the most significant numbers (IOM, 2016). In the case of the regional approach to migration, the 2002 Residence Agreement on the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) is widely seen as a turning point.. Signed by all state members and associated states and ratified in 2009, it introduced regularisation norms in residency issues, provided a number of rights to migrants, and established a path to permanent residency (Acosta and Freier, 2015; Margheritis, 2015; Ceriani, 2013). Migration and mobility have also taken a prominent role in other regional organisations, such as in the formative treaty and declarations of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), in the measures facilitating mobility adopted by the Andean Community (CAN), and in the non-binding declarations of the South American Conference on Migration (SACM). Since 2009, all of them, including Mercosur, have discussed the possibility of establishing a South American citizenship (Margheritis, 2013). South America has also reinforced its commitment to refugee protection. Fischel de Andrade (2014) states that Latin America and South America have regional and subcontinental legal frameworks to complement international laws for the protection of forced migrants. Most of the countries in the region have signed the Cartagena Declaration (1984), the main instrument and base of refugee protection in Latin America and the Caribbean, and countries have modified their legislation on refugee protection according to international law (Jubilut and Madureira, 2014). The region has also implemented relevant humanitarian

programmes through the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action¹ and the adoption of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action in 2014² (Maldonado Castillo, 2015).

As Freier and Acosta (2015) have suggested, despite the influence of the region's liberal discourse in terms of agenda setting, the actual policy/legislative change and implementation of these policies varies within each country, reinforcing the idea mentioned earlier of a 'reverse migration paradox' (see also Margheritis, 2015). For instance, although countries Argentina (2004), Uruguay (2008), Bolivia (2013) and Peru (2015) have adopted liberal migration laws and Ecuador a progressive constitution (2008), Brazil only adopted new legislation in May 2017. However, Brazil's president (Michel Temer) vetoed 18 points of the legislation, which was considered a setback from the text originally approved by Congress. Chile, on the other hand, is still regulated by repressive migration norms enacted during the dictatorial regime. Discussion concerning a new law in Chile has been ongoing for years, awaiting a political consensus or the right sociopolitical moment.

Sense-making

The second key element of this chapter's approach is its focus on sense-making. Assessment or judgments about migration's causes and effects play an important role in shaping – or framing – responses to it in Europe and South America. In both regions, for example, our interview data demonstrate that migration is fundamentally understood as driven by relative international inequalities of income and wealth and by a range of political factors including conflict and the breakdown of governance systems. These understandings are, of course, hardly surprising. In Europe, however, we found governmental actors often understood migration to be something that occurs in extremis and as an act of desperation with little choice. We also found evidence in Europe of the view that the labour markets, welfare systems and open societies of its countries exert a powerful pull for new migrants. In South America, too, there was recognition that some migrants may feel they have no alternative but to migrate, but we also found more emphasis on the idea that migration is an opportunity for them as well as, potentially, for the countries they leave and move to.

Sense-making centres on the 'placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning' (Weick, 1995, p. 6). In an intuitive sense, it can be understood as individuals asking themselves 'what is going on here?' and 'what do I do next?' (Weick et al, 2005, p. 412). It

1 See www.acnur.org/cartagena30/en/mexico-declaration-and-plan-of-action-to-strengthen-international-protection-of-refugees-in-latin-america/ (accessed 13 Nov. 2017).

2 See www.acnur.org/cartagena30/en/brazil-declaration-and-plan-of-action/ (accessed 13 Nov. 2017).

emphasises an internal, self-conscious process of developing a coherent account of what is going on (Fiss and Hirsch, 2005, p. 31). While ostensibly the focus is on individuals, sense-making has a social dimension as events acquire meaning through interaction with others as well as a result in the sharing of information and ideas. In South America and, even more so, in Europe there are intensive interactions between actors in the migration governance field. This includes government officials who interact in both formal and informal settings to share ideas and coordinate their actions. For example, a representative from an EU member state described ‘like-mindedness’ in the EU setting thus:

So we will have a likeminded dinner tonight, with Austria as one of them, Sweden, Germany, the UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands. That’s it. We discuss what we should say and how we should react at the following meeting, trying to get a common approach to the issue. Because on this issue we think more the same than a lot of other countries. (member of Brussels delegation, December 2014)

In Europe, our research was, of course, framed by the Mediterranean migration/refugee crisis. Crises can provide helpful insight into sense-making processes because they are initiated when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from what one would normally expect (Weick et al, 2005, p. 409). Particularly in Europe, but also among interviewees in South America, we found perceptions of a new normal. The importance of this idea or framing of migration can be seen in this extract from an interview with a senior EU official from a migration-related agency in Brussels describing a meeting between EU and US officials:

Yesterday at this meeting of the US and the Commission and others ... [they] were repeatedly mentioning that this will be the new normal. These 250,000–280,000 irregular migrants a year, that’s basically what we have to count on in the foreseeable future. Nothing will change in this regard. I tend to agree, because as long as things are going the way they are going on in North Africa, sub-Saharan African countries, Afghanistan, Iraq, what have you, I don’t see an end unfortunately to that. (December 2014)

Other interviewees also referred to the impact of future migration/refugee flows, but it is significant that the precise phrase ‘new normal’ also appears at an official level in a June 2016 EC Communication outlining a new approach to working on these issues with non-EU member states:

External migratory pressure is the ‘new normal’ both for the EU and for partner countries. This requires a more coordinated, systematic and structured approach to maximise the synergies and leverages of the Union’s internal and external policies. To succeed, it needs to reflect both the EU’s interests and the interests of our partners, with clear objectives and a clear way forward on how the objectives will be achieved, in terms of positive cooperation where possible but also the use of leverage where necessary (p. 5).

The Commission's statement about a new normal appears to be referring to underlying change in the factors causing or driving international migration – worsening economic inequality or intensifying conflicts. The claim that a liberal tide is sweeping South America could also be seen as linked to underlying change, particularly a highly political process of coalition building driven by the need to differentiate new political leaders from their predecessors and thus rewrite national narratives in ways that go far beyond migration issues.

Reference to a new normal can be understood as an example of confounded expectations and the need for a rethink. This isn't necessarily an accurate or full assessment of the situation, but it provides a plausible interpretation of events and basis for action. In such circumstances, the idea can emerge that the flow of actions individuals have previously been immersed in has become unintelligible in some way. To make sense of the disruption, people will first try to find reasons enabling them to resume the interrupted activity and remain in action (Weick, 1995). These reasons are taken from frameworks such as institutional constraints, organisational premises, plans, expectations, acceptable justifications, and traditions inherited from predecessors (*ibid.*). Sense-making processes are not independent actions, but are always embedded in certain frameworks. In the case of immigration, these include ideas and logics within the institutions that drive migration governance, particularly within interior ministries. At the same time these frameworks do not determine action, people make sense by 'acting thoughtfully' (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412), or, put another way, people simultaneously interpret their knowledge within trusted frameworks, yet can also mistrust those same frameworks by testing new ones and fresh interpretations. Thus, sense-making relies upon the past as well as potentially rejecting it.

Sense-making is not about 'the truth' and 'getting it right', it is the process of continued redrafting of an emerging story, so that it becomes more comprehensive, and is more resilient when confronted with criticism (Weick, 1995, p. 415). What is plausible for one group, however, such as government leaders, may prove implausible for another group, such as pro-migrant NGOs (*cf. ibid.*, p. 415). This is an inevitable consequence of making sense of a complex and contested issue such as migration where no simple appeal to the facts alone can be made without becoming entangled with complex normative issues.

Making sense of migration in Europe

This chapter focuses on elite actors' understandings of migration's causes and effects in European and EU governance systems using them to explore issue framing and how concepts and practices, meaning and action become associated in migration governance. These understandings have been powerfully framed

by the migration/refugee crisis. Among European interviewees, migration flows from or to South America arose in interviews only in Spain – in reference to historical migration dynamics, the settlement of certain population groups and as forming part of the largest movements of people – but not as a specific concern driving current governance. Even when interviewees mentioned cross-regional dialogue and cooperation, they emphasised that each region had their own position.

Perceptions of the openness or attractiveness of European countries were seen as key drivers of unwanted forms of international migration. By ‘unwanted’, we mean those defined by the labour markets and welfare states of European countries as less valuable in terms of economic contribution. This can then lead to deterrence measures. For example, Austrian foreign minister Sebastian Kurz was strongly critical of Germany’s more open approach to the refugee crisis, claiming that:

These people don’t come to Europe because they want to live on Lesbos. They come here because they want to enjoy the living standards and benefits they are guaranteed in countries like Austria, Germany or Sweden ... Don’t get me wrong, I don’t blame these people; I can understand them, because many politicians have triggered false hopes. (*Observer*, 5 March 2016)

Another EU state representative from the Brussels delegation identified the UK as ‘hypersensitive’ to the deterrence rationale. In an October 2015 television interview, the then UK home secretary, Theresa May, demonstrated the selective use of cues when she effectively discounted large-scale and systematic research evidence concerning the potentially positive effects of economic migration by saying this was not what people in her constituency had told her.³ The ‘hypersensitivity’ to a deterrence rationale was evident when the UK refused to support extension of the Italian-led Mare Nostrum search-and-rescue mission because being rescued was seen as a pull factor for migrants.

The institutionalisation of regional governance in the EU also means that ideas and experiences are shared with ideas and practices associated with deterrence. These formal and informal interactions are much more evident in Europe than in South America. They mean that cognitive assessments about risks and uncertainty are combined with normative evaluations of what should or could be done as a result of interactions and the sharing of ideas and information. Of particular importance are the networks linking governmental actors who are dominant in this field.

Ostensibly, it seems plausible that a country’s relative attractiveness (land of opportunity, welcoming, rich) and openness (ease of entry, rights and benefits

3 BBC Daily Politics, 6 Oct. 2015, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06h1srq (no longer available).

extended to newcomers) could drive migration. The potential limits of such a view are twofold. First, it over-emphasises pull factors, downplays push factors and neglects the role played by migration networks. Second, this pull-factor perspective can swiftly translate into deterrence-based approaches reasoned as follows: migrants come because of country *x*'s attractiveness (the ease of getting across the border, the rights and benefits provided) and thus things need to be made much more difficult to hinder this pull factor from operating. This is evident in the enthusiasm European leaders demonstrate in disrupting the 'business model' of people smugglers, although smuggling is an effect, not a cause, of the pressures which can cause people to migrate.

Informing all these actors' understandings is the common element of central economic factors, but the link between cognitive and normative reasoning about what should be done can vary in ways linked to position within the migration governance system. While obviously not writing push factors or the effects of migration networks out of the equation, pull-factor-based perceptions with their links to a deterrence strategy are strongly evident among government and anti-immigration actors.

The word 'crisis' has frequently been attached to the European politics of migration with good reason, the most obvious being the scale of movement and loss of life in the Mediterranean region since 2011. Using the word does not necessarily indicate a route towards resolving the crisis. The elite-level policy actors whom we interviewed do recognise the complexities of migration and the interlinkages between issues, but also hold a strong and constraining perception of domestic politics in the member states. This contributes to a powerful disjunction in Europe among policy elites between understandings of the drivers of both the migration and the associated politics. This tends to induce reactive rather than proactive approaches resulting in, as one interviewee put it, a 'whack a mole' policy approach dealing with the latest crisis or challenge: 'where the mole pops up and you hit it, and then it pops up here and you hit it there' (member-state official, justice ministry, March 2015).

Central to the pursuit of deterrence has been the development of an external dimension to EU migration governance involving attempts to work with non-EU member states (Lavenex, 2004). Rebellions in the Middle East were initially interpreted in some quarters as marking a desire for liberal democracy, even as a 'welcome confirmation' of EU values and modes of governing (Noutcheva, 2015, p. 21). Many of those striving for change in the Arab world had a different conception of their struggle (Pace, 2014). At the same time the rebellions, the challenge they posed to existing authorities, and the resultant civil conflicts unleashed fears of unprecedented migration movements to Europe. The Italian government, for instance, foresaw 'epochal' movements

of 'biblical' proportions, with hundreds of thousands of refugees predicted to arrive on Europe's shores (Campesi, 2011).

In light of these developments, leading EU officials and member state leaders have repeatedly emphasised the need for a new perspective, in the aftermath of the upheavals in the Arab world regarding international migrants and asylum seekers. A sense of this thinking can be gained from the 'non-paper' circulated in spring 2015 by the Italian government on the 'possible involvement of third countries in maritime surveillance and search and rescue' (Statewatch, 2015). They appealed to all member states to help prevent 'the departure of migrants from the southern shores of the Mediterranean' in order to tackle the deadly situation there and decrease migration inflows, emphasising that 'the current situation is so serious that a radical change in the EU perspective is required'. This required solidarity within the European migration governance system, which has been in short supply.

Shortly after this paper was circulated, a proposal, jointly announced by the EU High Representative of Foreign Affairs (Federica Mogherini) and the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship (Dimitris Avramopoulos), suggested the use of a military mission targeting smugglers and their vessels carrying refugees from Libya to Europe. According to Mogherini, the goal of the naval mission plan, which was a response to the increased death toll of migrants in the Mediterranean, was to 'disrupt the business model of smugglers and traffickers' networks' in that area.

The operation was legitimised by interpreting the increasing deaths of migrants at sea as a wider security problem or, as Mogherini framed it, 'not only a humanitarian emergency but also a security crisis since smuggling networks are linked to and finance terrorist activities' (*Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 2015). Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, also signalled readiness to support the mission, arguing that 'there might be foreign fighters, and terrorists trying to hide and blend in among the migrants ... this underlines the importance that we have to respond' (*EUobserver*, 18 May 2015).

Officials from the EU have presented this approach as genuinely new or, to refer to Mogherini again, as the 'final awakening of Europe' in response to the rising numbers of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean: 'Working daily, drop by drop, produces results in the long run. Shocks, as dramatic as they are, accelerate the process. I hope this [process] is irreversible' (Seafarers' Rights International, 20 April 2015).

Much of the literature analysing the EU's modus operandi in regard to migration after the so-called Arab Spring's series of anti-government protests and demonstrations which began in 2010, suggests there has been no major overhaul of the EU's existing priorities and actions in the field of migration. A common criticism is that, despite the EU's strengthened discursive

commitment to a comprehensive approach. A common element of these basic understandings of the causes of migration – which promised a major rethinking of repressive migration policies in cooperation with the neighbouring countries – these ‘on paper’ commitments did not materialise in practice. Instead, it has been argued that member states have remained trapped within a one-sided security-migration frame, making it difficult to implement the relocation scheme actually agreed upon by the member states. By September 2016, just over 4,500 had been relocated out of the 160,000 applicants targeted to do so. Great effort was put into securing a deal with the Turkish government which essentially created a ‘one in, one out’ scheme for up to 72,000 refugees, with rejected asylum applicants sent back to Turkey in return for refugees moving to an EU member state. The EU-Turkey scheme was central to the EU response but rested on concessions to Turkey, particularly visa liberalisation for Turkish people travelling to EU member states (Nas, 2016).

Since the Operation Sophia naval mission was introduced in 2015, targeted at people smugglers in the Mediterranean, a security-driven perspective was observable reproducing an ‘old’ approach of seeking to deter migrants and keep them away from Europe’s shores, as well as trying to place greater responsibility on origin and transit states to curb migration flows to Europe.

The frames or judgements about migration’s causes and effects in the wake of the refugee/migration crisis in Europe tend to understand relocation to Europe as something that occurs in extremis due to a lack of alternatives. As such, it is not seen as a kind of adaptation to changed circumstances, but as a failure to adapt, leading to migration taking the form of people fleeing as an emergency response. The following quote from a senior EC official provides an example of this thinking:

But if I just look at this, then economic drivers are the majority, and even in this, with due respect to human rights and human values, also here the economic drivers are the majority. If I would be in Syria, of course I would have a reason to fear, but why do I flee? I flee to a place where I think I have an economic future. I have a safe future, which is economic. (June 2015)

In Europe we found that by asking about migration’s causes and effects a focus on the factors that can pull migrants to Europe, and an awareness of the issue’s domestic political sensitivities, could be discerned among governmental actors. The purpose here is not to judge the accuracy of this assessment, but to note that sense-making does not necessarily rely on its correctness but on its plausibility. Among elite actors in European governance systems there is a plausible story about migration helping them to make sense of the phenomena and their own roles. Deterrence-based approaches are one result of this. There are reasons to be sceptical about their efficacy, but the focus here is on exploring

how these understandings take form, the shape that they take and to make comparisons with South America.

Making sense of migration in South America

Basic similarities in both regions in understandings of migration's causes are evident, but also an assessment of the effects shows a divergence linked to temporal and political factors. Temporally, we see in South America an increased attention to the dynamics of migration management, which we link to the changing approaches related to broader political change and uncertainties about migration dynamics. Different constructions of migration to those prevailing in Europe can be observed. It would be simplistic to say that these are wholly unrelated but, at least at the discursive level, they provide some evidence supporting further the idea of a more liberal turn or tide in South America. We also suggest some differences between sending and receiving countries in the region.

An assessment of people's reasons for moving reveals that basic similarities between Europe and South America are apparent. Two themes dominate responses: economic opportunities and the search for a better future; plus political changes that have generated a need for protection. A key divergence between South America and Europe is that, in the former, economic factors were understood in relation to both push and pull factors. Understandings of the role of push factors were informed by the tradition of South America as a migrant-sending region due to inequalities in development. An Ecuadorian MP from Quito suggested the central role of poverty as a push factor:

There are structural inequalities in many countries. There is great poverty in less-developed countries. Those are the countries of origin. People migrate in search of a job and looking for a better life. If the person had that in their country of origin, maybe they wouldn't migrate. (December 2015)

While interpretations about the economy as a push factor are similar to the perceptions in Europe, the understanding of migration as a right is one of the main differences, as asserted by another Ecuadorian MP from Quito:

What we need to explain is that the normal thing is that people move. And why do they move? People move because we are humans, because we also search for better opportunities, because we have great curiosity and we want to explore. And also because there are huge inequalities in the world economy and it is logic[al] that when there are such differences in salary between different economies, people will move trying to find some balance. (December 2015)

This interpretation recognises migration as a form of adaptation in contrast with Europe where we found a tendency to refer to it as something that occurs in extremis. This kind of framing is important because it reveals understandings

of migration as a crisis event and as a form of adaptation. This does not mean that two starkly contrasting frames with crisis effects evident only in Europe could be discerned. Recurrent economic and political crises in South American countries have also powerfully shaped the context of migration policymaking, but the effects of crisis may lead to wholly diverse approaches to the issue. In Ecuador, for example, the wider economic and political setting prompted explicit recognition of the universality of migrants' rights and the non-criminalisation of irregular migration. A government official explains this perspective:

In regards to human mobility, we like to think that we are at the forefront in how we conceptualise rights and how we want to be true to our constitution. Ecuador does not recognise 'illegality' of any kind in relation to migration. No citizen is illegal. Our constitution recognises equity and equality as rights for nationals and foreigners. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mobility, Ecuador, December 2015)

Similar recognition of migrants' rights is evident in the migration laws of Argentina and Peru, as well as in the rhetoric of politicians across the region. Despite the fact that the understanding of migration in some South American countries emphasises it as a form of adaptation, policy change seems to occur as a response to crisis. As in Europe, the policy in South America is mostly reactive. While laws and policies may recognise migration as a right and as an adaptive process, it is often crisis events and effects of the wider economic and political environment that trigger policy change.

Despite the prevalence of economic factors, interviewees in South America identified persecution and violence as powerful causes of migration. At the same time, interviewees – particularly from sending countries – emphasised the roles of family reunification and social networks, both as push and pull factors. Overall, actors in South America recognised that causes of migration are complex, with more than one triggering the decision to migrate, as explained by this representative from an international organisation in Chile: 'There are so many reasons. In the case of Chile, we see here labour reasons, the need to improve economic situations. But there are also many people that come here to be reunited with their families, influenced by diverse social networks' (July 2016).

This understanding of migration as a process of adaptation triggered by varying and complex factors contributes to interpretations of the liberal discourse identified by the literature in South America, and the prominence of migration as part of the social agenda in regional integration processes (Margheritis, 2015). The discourse is further complemented by the fact that most actors in South America agreed on the need to protect migrant's rights not only due to the causes of international migration, but also in relation

to its effects. Several interviewees perceived that the increase in xenophobia and racism within the region's countries was one of the main consequences of the process and discourses associated with international migration. As a government official from Argentina put it:

A consequence of migration is in relation to migrants' integration. Argentina is a country which formation has been as result of immigration. However, we still have xenophobia. So when the country is not going through a prosperous economic moment, people tend to blame migrants because the lack of opportunities, the lack of employment and insecurity. (National Migration Directorate, May 2015)

This idea is reinforced by a politician in Ecuador who highlighted the gap between perceptions and policies which see the risk associated with migration and those which perceive the benefits to be had in terms of diversity and demography:

There is a contradiction between a policy that sees migrants as a threat and the other that faces the host society with its demographic problem, with the lack of children. [This] ambivalence is rooted, I believe, in cultural ghosts. For instance, when talking about my country, in the past we tried to attract Germans or Spaniards, people wanted them to come. We welcomed them based on affirmative migration policies that aimed to bring Europeans. But there is a very racist conception of the whole thing, because if we start receiving Muslims or Africans then things get complicated and we faced collective fear. It seems disturbing. Personally, I don't see why a Pakistani could be more complicated than an English person, but there you have collective fear and we faced an issue that has no economic basis. (MP, Quito, December 2015)

While many of the interviewees in South America identified that racism and xenophobia were the negative effects of international migration, many of them recognised positive consequences such as when it became a driver of development and had a key role in population growth. Finally, one of the key consequences distinguished by actors in different countries, particularly in Argentina, Ecuador and Colombia, was the emergence of inefficient and expensive restrictive responses and securitisation policies. The thoughts of a representative from an Argentinian international organisation, summarise this position:

I think that the immediate consequence is the huge tension that leads to the strength of migratory control measures. Knowing that in some situations, migration does not only respond to economic factors. If people have to leave to save their lives, they will keep leaving. So in that sense, I think the most immediate consequence will be that tension to impose control at migratory level. (May 2015)

These understandings are also relevant when discussed in relation to the context framing this rhetoric. Many actors within governance systems in South America in dissimilar positions share experiences of exile during dictatorial regimes or they have been migrants themselves in other countries, many of them in Europe. Identity and identification are central properties in sense-making processes, and interviewees explicitly referred more often than in Europe to some of these experiences as key events that have shaped or modified their views of international migration.

However, this interpretation of international migration, that is emphasis on push and pull factors, migrants' vulnerability and the protection of their rights, has not necessarily been translated into expansive migration discourses or policies, a phenomenon identified as a reverse immigration policy paradox (Freier and Acosta, 2015). Instead, the South American data suggest some differences between destination countries and predominantly sending ones. In the former a more pull-factor-focused approach is evident, similar to what was seen in Europe. An increase in intraregional flows developed after Chile, Argentina and Brazil became key destinations in the 1990s. We found that understandings of a country's attractiveness varied depending on the interviewee's identification of his or her country as a destination, transit or sending state. The quotes below, one from a Chilean politician and the other from a Colombian civil servant, exemplify these diverse perspectives:

The main reason why people move is because they are looking for a better quality of life. People don't leave their homes to live worse ... Most of them arrive as tourists, supposedly, but so many of them don't know their rights and responsibilities. We don't even ask a background check, so we don't know who is arriving! Having said that, why do they come to Chile? Well, because we have a country that is growing and at some point had a good economy, the country was generating jobs. (MP, Santiago, July 2016)

Colombia is not a destination country, for now. However, there are a number of Colombians that have started to return. Colombians that at some point in history had to go and now have realised that their future is in Colombia ... Also, Colombia was for a long time a country that expelled migrants, and now is changing to receive them. (December 2015)

In destination countries, understandings about migration's causes tend to highlight pull factors such as economic prosperity, political stability and perceived openness. In Chile, for instance, several participants mentioned the facilities for changing visas within the country as a pull factor. Similar perceptions about pull factors were shared among some transit and return countries such as Peru and Colombia. However, the emphasis on pull factors in certain countries does not exclude the recognition of push factors as drivers of migration. The nuances in these views may contribute to understanding

why the region has not necessarily adopted deterrence measures as in Europe. Instead, the main focus in South America is on migration management, not necessarily restrictive policies, but responses that ensure both control and migrants' rights. This quote given by a senior Peruvian government official illustrates this position:

Today, Peru is a state of transit migration. That means that we don't only have transit flows, but also a larger number of arrivals. With that scenario, and understanding that Peru has human rights obligations to each of these migrants, and also understanding that mobility processes are expressions of a right and human freedom, what we are looking to do then is to strengthen the management system, [one] ... that ... [takes a long-term view], able to achieve the States articulation and a timely reaction. The main focus is people security under any condition. I mean we need to have a system that is flexible but that ensures migration management. (Peru's foreign affairs ministry, June 2016)

One of the main differences we have found between South America and Europe in relation to understandings of international migration is the focus on 'regularised migration'. In South America push and pull factors are considered to be intertwined which leads to this duality of protection/control that is better resolved in the form of management. As in Europe, policymakers' responses in South America are reactive, trying to balance causes and consequences of international migration. Migration management also serves disparate strategies. On the one hand, it is in line with the human rights-based approach, promoted by the regional processes, while on the other it provides a sense of being in control that ensures political gains at the local level. There are potential economic gains, too, because managed migration can promote migrant regularisation and thus inclusion in formal markets and taxation systems.

These understandings are also framed in relation to the uncertainties which shape these perceptions in the region, and which may prevent more expansionist policies and practices. Three main uncertainties are pivotal here: the role of the new normal; the lack of characterisation of the migrant population; and uncertainty about political change. As in Europe, South America experienced the tensions which emerged from the idea of a new normal discussed above, in other words the belief that migratory pressures will remain high. A common theme among interviewees was the rapid change of migration dynamics and the perception that intraregional and extraregional mobility will remain elevated. In the words of a senior official from an international organisation:

A few years ago, all South American countries were worried about our communities abroad and about how many people were migrating. Ten years later there are people coming, others are returning and others are moving within the region. And these happened within few years, so those changes in the migration dynamics translate in uncertainty that has an impact on us. (Argentina, May 2015)

The uncertainty about migration dynamics also responds to the political and social changes within the region. Participants touched on the questions of how the peace treaty may unfold in Colombia and the fears that are emerging around the crisis in Venezuela. A second uncertainty, related to migration dynamics, is the lack of accurate information about the number of migrants and their characteristics. Actors in different countries recognised the existence of weak information systems and lack of collaboration both within and between countries, as acknowledged by this representative from an international organisation based in Peru:

The uncertainty we have in the region is that we lack measurements systems, statistical instruments that allow us to measure the magnitude and volume of migration, but also all the correlations that are possible in regards to migration. That is one of the main uncertainties that we work with, the lack of information. (June 2016)

Finally, the uncertainty that triggers political changes at the government level was mentioned, a concern particularly expressed among civil servants and regional and international organisations, as summed up by this Colombian official: ‘One of our aims is to generate a long-term policy, because one of the failures we have had is that we create something and suddenly there is a change in the government and we lose what we have built’ (Foreign affairs ministry, December 2015).

These uncertainties play a key role in sense-making process and cognitive reasoning, shaping both understandings and responses to international migration. Actors within the region consider that migrants’ rights should be the keystone of the ideal policy. However, by facing these uncertainties the responses tend to be reactive as a way of protecting both migrants’ and the state’s interest. Nevertheless, as many interviewees stated, the policies are very slow in the making and in some countries the need for managed migration ultimately translates into a status quo bias.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to contribute to mobility debates in Europe and South America by exploring how elite actors in each region perceive international migration so that they may understand more about the cognitive frames employed to make sense of the issue and consider their potential influence on policy. By doing so, it has made three contributions. First, its focus on sense-making has allowed the ways in which international migration is epiphenomenal and linked to changes in underlying systems to be drawn out, particularly the economic and political ones. We have developed an understanding of governance, attuned to the impact of change in underlying social systems, that illuminates the various ways elite actors understand the causes and effects

of migration. In both Europe and South America, it is clearly the case that international migration forms part of wider transformations of national and regional governance and cannot be separated from them. It would be a mistake to paint with a broad brush and claim that attitudes are wholly different in Europe and South America, but it is possible to tease out some variations, such as there being more emphasis in South America on migration as a part of social and economic development, and as an adaptation strategy. In Europe it is more usual to find it being represented as an act of desperation or manifestation of crisis. That said, while there is some evidence, at least at the discursive level, of a liberal tide in South America, it is also clear that the framing of migration can vary in different South American countries and that the effects – and durability – of this tide are heavily dependent on wider economic and political factors.

Second, this chapter has shown that it is possible and potentially rewarding to open the black box of migration governance. We would argue that it is a mistake to work back from the observed outcomes of a process to make assumptions about the nature of the process itself. Instead, it is possible to understand how actors make sense of their roles, how they frame the international migration and the effects these frames can then have.

Finally, the analysis detects evidence that elite actors are aware of important changes, both current and forthcoming, in the context within which migration governance systems are operating. In particular, awareness is evident of the idea that things have changed and continue to do so, and that elevated migratory pressures may become part of the global picture for the foreseeable future. This chapter has not aimed to test the veracity of this view but, rather, has sought to understand more about the reasons for it and to trace some effects of its emergence. As noted earlier, a key point regarding sense-making processes is not their accuracy but their provision of plausible interpretations of the world, which can then form a basis for action. It argues that this idea of a new normal does resonate within governance systems, does have implications for contemporary migration governance in Europe and South America, and will have important implications for the future. The results discussed here go beyond cross-regional mobility between the two continents, but can also have implications for these particular dynamics. How understandings and practices of deterrence in Europe affect Latin-American migrants has yet to be seen, but the idea of a new normal is likely to shape governance systems in both regions which will affect the management of cross-regional mobility as well as other migration patterns.

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