



## **Public Lecture Series Spring 2016**

### **Transnational Perspectives and Future Prospects of Migration and Mobility**

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**Thursday, 7 April 2016**

**The Politics of Measurement: Issue Definition, Framing and the UK Net Migration Target**

**Prof. Christina Boswell**

**School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh**

**Discussant: Dr. Kijan Espahangizi, Center »History of Knowledge«, University of Zurich and ETH Zurich**

18:15–19:45 h, University of Neuchâtel, Rue Abraham Louis Breguet 1, Lecture Hall 301

#### **Abstract**

Governments and international organizations have become increasingly enamored of quantitative techniques for setting and monitoring policy goals. Performance indicators, targets, rankings, league tables and balanced scorecards are all typical tools of public policy, both across countries and in organizations such as the European Commission, OECD and UN agencies. Immigration and asylum has not been immune from such techniques. Indeed, in the UK, both Labour and Conservative governments have established high profile quantitative targets on asylum, and, more recently, net migration. Such targets have two main functions. They are designed to 'discipline' actors in the public administration by setting clear priorities and monitoring performance to these goals. And they

are valued as a tool of political communication, to signal to skeptical publics that the government is committed to immigration control, and to enable publics to hold their leaders to account.

The talk will draw on findings from a major ESRC project on 'The Politics of Monitoring' (2013–16), which explored the use of targets in UK immigration and asylum policy, as well as the effects of such targets on policy-making and implementation and public debates. Christina Boswell will look in particular at impacts of the 2010 'net migration target' on UK public political debates on immigration. This was a very controversial target, and one that swiftly proved to be unfeasible. However, the framing of policy goals as a target had a number of profound effects on political debate. It is argued, that we can understand this in terms of two effects of quantification on policy framing: a classification effect, whereby quantification creates discrete, equivalent (and simplified) units to be counted; and a measurement effect, whereby the codification of social issues in numbers becomes a normal and expected feature of political debate. The lecture will explore these two ideas by analyzing parliamentary debate and media coverage of the target between 2010–15. (See also this blog post)

### Curriculum Vitae

Christina Boswell is Professor of Politics at the University of Edinburgh. She is founder and Co-Director of the Centre for Science, Knowledge and Policy (SKAPE), and Director of Research for the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. Her research examines the relationship between knowledge and public policy, especially in relation to European and EU immigration and asylum policy. Her books include *The Political Uses of Expert Knowledge: Immigration Policy and Social Research* (Cambridge University Press, 2009/2012); *Migration and Mobility in the European Union* (with Andrew Geddes; Palgrave, 2012); *The Ethics of Refugee Policy* (Ashgate, 2005); and *European Migration Policies in Flux* (Blackwell's, 2003). She has served as consultant for the UN High Commission for Refugees, the UN Global Commission on International Migration, the British Foreign Office, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the OECD.

### Selected Publications

- 2015: (with E. Rodrigues), "Policies, Politics and Organizational Problems: Multiple Streams and the Implementation of Targets in UK Government". *Policy and Politics* (early online). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/030557315X14477577990650>
- 2014: "The Double Life of Targets in Public Administration: Disciplining and Signaling in UK Asylum Policy". *Public Administration* (early online), DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/padm.12134>.
- 2012: "How Information Scarcity Affects the Political Agenda: Evidence from UK Immigration Policy". *Governance*, 25:3, pp. 367–389.
- 2009/2012: *The Political Uses of Expert Knowledge: Immigration Policy and Social Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- 2011: (with Andrew Geddes and Peter Scholten) (eds.), "States, Knowledge and Narratives of Migration". Special issue of the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 13(1).
- 2008: "The Political Functions of Expert Knowledge: Knowledge and Legitimation in European Union Immigration Policy". *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15:4, pp. 471–488.
- 2008: "Evasion, Reinterpretation and Decoupling: European Commission responses to the 'External Dimension' of Immigration and Asylum". *West European Politics*, 31:3, 491–512.
- 2007: "Migration Control in Europe after 9/11: Explaining the Absence of Securitization". *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45:3, pp. 589–610.
- 2007: "Theorizing Migration Policy: Is There a Third Way?" *International Migration Review*, 41:2, pp. 75–97.
- 2003: "The 'External Dimension' of EU Cooperation in Immigration and Asylum", *International Affairs*, 73:3 (May 2003), pp. 619–38.