

## The Effects of Institutional Change on Austrian Integration Policy and the Contexts that Matter

*Oliver Gruber and Sieglinde Rosenberger*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In the literature on public administration and policymaking, institutions are considered important as they shape collective regulation and public policies (March & Olsen, 1993; Peters, 2012). While a growing body of literature is available on the reasons and forms of institutional change (Koning, 2015; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Rocco & Thurston, 2014; Streek & Thelen, 2005; see also Bakir & Jarvis in this volume), less research has been done on the influence of institutional change on policy change. We have little knowledge of whether and how institutional reform can instigate changes in policymaking and the policy outputs produced. The literature on institutionalism generally focuses on established areas (economy, finance, foreign affairs, social affairs, etc.) and neglects emerging policy areas, especially emerging policy areas of low status within the architecture of government and public administration. This chapter contributes to filling this gap and focuses on the potential and impact of institutional reform on public policy in an area of steadily growing relevance,

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O. Gruber (✉) • S. Rosenberger  
University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

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that of immigrant integration. It utilizes the introduction of an executive actor in the Austrian government, the State Secretary for Integration (SSI), as a case study to respond to two research questions: What forms of public policy change are stimulated by a new executive actor in the novel policy area of migrant integration? How can these policy changes (or the lack thereof) be explained by the contexts and facilitating conditions in which the new executive actor is embedded?

The SSI provides a perfect case for analysing this institution-policy relationship, as it presented an institutional stimulus for policy change in the contested yet increasingly dynamic policy area of immigrant integration, which in previous decades had been given little priority by the Austrian national government. However, our study's empirical findings on policy determination and policy contents provide mixed evidence of the change stimulated by the SSI, demonstrating the potential and the limits of this new executive actor. In what we describe as a "depoliticized approach" to governance (Benton, McCarthy, & Collett, 2015; Fawcett & Marsh, 2014; Flinders & Buller, 2006; Flinders & Wood, 2015), we find that the SSI contributed to a new political style by redesigning governmental discourse and the modes of policymaking while maintaining the same legislative path as before.

To explain these divergent outcomes, we draw upon the literature on the embeddedness of executive actors (Baum & Oliver, 1992; Granovetter, 1985; Haxhi, van Ees, & Sorge, 2013; Scharpf, 2000), arguing that a new government actor depends on different types of context—institutional and non-institutional—as well as on situational facilitators that promote change in certain areas while hindering it in others. Institutional complementarities (Amable, 2003; Campbell, 2011; Crouch, 2010; Crouch et al., 2005; Höpner, 2005), partisan politics (Schmidt, 1996; Woldendorp, Keman, & Budge, 2000), as well as favourable situational macro-conditions (Keller & Yang, 2008; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sager & Rielle, 2013) and structural complementarities (Bakir, 2013, 2017) are the most important elements in this case. Our discussion shows how these different contexts and facilitators interact in shaping the impact of institutional reform of the priorities and directions of policy. In this way, our chapter contributes to the conceptualization of policy change and to theorizing the conditions of a new executive actor's stimulus for policy change while also providing rich empirical findings and documenting how different contexts matter.

## 2 CONCEPTUALIZING THE NEXUS OF INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY CHANGE

How can we grasp the relationship between institutional and policy change analytically? The following section outlines the framework by clarifying our conceptions of institutionalization and the dimensions of policy change considered in the empirical analysis.

### 2.1 *Institutionalization as a Stimulus for Policy Change*

Public administration research conceives institutions as stable patterns of governance and power structures or as formal organizations (Hult, 2003, pp. 149–150). They are perceived as providing "ex ante agreements about a structure of cooperation" that organize joint actions, avoid social or political disorder and, ideally, optimize the cost-benefit ratio of governance (Shepsle, 1986, p. 74). From an organizational perspective on public administration, institutional change generally refers to formal changes in organizational arrangements, such as the restructuring of the rules of cooperation, the rearrangement of competences or the addition/removal of new/old authorities to/from the institutional setting (Hinings, Greenwood, Reay, & Suddaby, 2004; Stromquist, 1998). As a form of institutional change in public administration, the institutionalization of new executive actors implies a reassignment of previous competences for a policy area with the objective of enhancing their status within the institutional architecture (Koning, 2015; Schout & Pereyra, 2011). To understand policy change resulting from institutionalization, the analysis must consider not only the organizational structure but also the driving forces and conditions that shape its development. Research on "institutional entrepreneurship" (Fligstein, 1997; Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007) or "institutional work" (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) indicates that actors and institutions "are mutually constitutive of one another" and analyses how "institutions themselves are produced and reproduced" by the actors driving them (Jackson, 2010).

Based on this understanding of institutional change, our chapter studies the way in which political parties "leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones" (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004, p. 657), such as government institutions. It argues that the introduction of a novel ministerial player—with executive competences—into the government architecture offers an opportunity for parties to operate as

institutional entrepreneurs and “to realize interests that they value highly” (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14). We agree with Egeberg (2003, p. 118), who emphasizes an intrinsic need for legitimacy and longevity in new institutional players. They seek to be perceived as “desirable, proper, appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Moreover, as novel actors, they are expected to provide innovation in a policy area in order to overcome previous institutional settings and outputs, whose shortcomings triggered institutional adaptations in the first place (van de Ven & Hargrave, 2004). Innovation and legitimacy are therefore two major intrinsic pressures on novel executive actors that suggest public policy change in various dimensions as a likely result.

The introduction of an executive actor can instigate changes in the way policies are recognized, defined and processed, especially in emerging policy areas with little tradition of regulation or governmental priority (Balch & Geddes, 2012; Dorado, 2005). In contrast to mature policy areas (e.g., economy, security, education), the stakes in emerging policy areas are less deadlocked, innovative positions and new forms of governance have a greater chance of being considered and the lack of experience grants greater voice to external experts (Buonanno & Nugent, 2013; Collett, 2015). However, the evaluation of this potential depends on the way in which policy change is conceptualized and on the dimensions of public policy that are taken into consideration.

## 2.2 Mapping Dimensions of Public Policy Change in the Area of Integration

While public policy can be defined broadly as the “sum of government activities” (Peters, 1999, p. 4) that are “revealed through texts, practices, symbols, and discourses” (1997, p. 2), empirical study needs to specify which of the several dimensions of public policy change are the object of analysis. As we are interested in both the content and the determination of public policy (Fox, Bayat, & Ferreira, 2006; Gordon, Lewis, & Young, 1977; Parsons, 2001), we use this distinction as a departure for our analytical framework (see Table 8.1): “Policy determination” refers to the patterns in which public policies are constructed and concern (1) policy instruments and (2) forms of policymaking.

Regarding policy instruments, scholars traditionally separate legal, economic and communicative instruments (van der Doelen, 1989), which

**Table 8.1** Analytical framework for policy change in immigrant integration

Level	Policy determination: instruments & modes of policymaking		Policy content: discourse & legislation		
Indicators of change	Adapted use of legal, economic, communicative instruments	Shifting extent of pluralism and technocracy	Position shifts between liberal and restrictive	Position shifts between cultural and economic	Emphasis of other integration dimensions

Note: Authors' framework based on Gordon et al. (1977)

relate to the stick (regulation), the carrot (subsidies) and the sermon (information) in Vedung's (2010) famous metaphor. Legal decisions represent the regulatory aspect of policymaking and are at the core of public policy analysis (Knoepfel, Larrue, Varone, & Hill, 2011, p. 18). Economic instruments (such as subsidies for projects, groups, etc.) represent the distributive aspect of public policymaking and express government rationales in a different but equally important way. Finally, communicative measures (events, campaigns, brochures, media appearances, etc.) ensure the informational aspect of explicating the government's ideas and principles in a policy area (Bemelmans-Videc, Rist, & Vedung, 2010; Peters & Van Nispen, 1998). This chapter analyses policy change by investigating which of the three aspects (legal, economic and communicative) are emphasized more strongly than previously.

The study of policy determination also focuses on changes in the modes through which policy output is created (i.e., how different actors and organizational norms inform the policymaking process)—for example, analysing the role of elites, pluralism, corporatism or expert inclusion (Parsons, 2001). Within integration policymaking, three modes have been considered of particular interest due to their emerging, transversal and contentious nature: the transversal policy area of integration is conceived as a prototype for pluralistic governance that includes stakeholders, care organizations, NGOs, and so on (Czada, 2010; Desiderio & Weinart, 2014); furthermore the role of experts is regularly emphasized as a vital element in a policy area that is still in the making (Scholten, Entzinger, & Penninx, 2015); lastly, in light of the controversial nature of the issue, symbolic communication is considered a key element for an integration approach with lasting success (Martiniello, 2006). Our analysis investigates whether these modes of policymaking have intensified as a result of institutional change.



The analysis of policy content focuses on the positions, preferences and values that are expressed through public policies. The ideational dimension of policy is an important indicator of policy change (Béland, 2009; Campbell, 1998; Schmidt & Radaelli, 2004). Expressed through broad discursive structures, such as narratives or frames, ideas can shape common perceptions and legitimize further action, signalling shifts in underlying policy paradigms (Hall, 1993; Roe, 1994). In order to identify shifts of this kind, this chapter investigates whether the Austrian government's policy narratives of integration change as a result of institutional reform. Policy narratives express ideas using storytelling elements, such as settings, plots and characters, that are "disseminated toward a preferred policy outcome" (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2011, p. 539). As Balch and Geddes (2012) have shown with reference to the UK immigration system, the establishment of new executive actors can encourage considerable modifications in policy narratives.

The regulatory dimension of policy represented by legislation standardizes governmental policy preferences. Government specifies its key priorities and positions through legal decisions (Birkland, 2011, p. 9). Thus policy analysis of migrant integration has largely focused on the analysis of the legal framework for integration (Zincone, Penninx, & Borkert, 2011). Drawing on this literature, this case study investigates policy content on the basis of two criteria. First, we ask whether changes in the scope of integration dimensions occurred (i.e., whether the new executive actor emphasizes different dimensions of necessary integration than before). Second, we analyse whether the direction of policy positions changes between restrictive and liberal tendencies on the one hand, or cultural and economic tendencies on the other (for operationalization, see Sect. 4).

This analytical framework is applied to the case of Austrian integration policy after the establishment of the SSI, to which the next section provides a cursory introduction.

### 3 IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION: AN EMERGING POLICY AREA

Immigrant integration has only slowly emerged as a dynamic policy area in Europe. Because of its transversal configuration, for decades it was not perceived as a distinct topic of political activity (Guiraudon, 2003). During the post-war period of economic growth, most Western European policymakers cherished the illusion that immigration was temporary, and so no

long-term integration efforts were considered necessary (Wiesbrock, 2013). Only when immigration was recognized as a permanent phenomenon, when public controversy and party politicization had reached critical levels, were these assumptions set aside (Borkert & Penninx, 2011; Heckmann & Schnapper, 2003). At the level of the European Union, steps were taken to put the topic on the common agenda and at the same time national governments started to increase their integration efforts, following a trend towards civic integration measures (Joppke, 2007) and the establishment of new institutional structures and actors (Gruber, 2017).

Austria is no exception to these developments. Despite its long history of immigration, politicians had widely refused to conceive the country as one of immigration until recently. Originally, the guest worker regime negated the need for any concerted form of integration policies. Consequently, integration was almost a non-issue for decades and an appendix to immigration policy largely left to local authorities and non-governmental actors (Kraler, 2011; Perchinig, 2009). In the early 1990s, immigrant integration became a political issue due to rising numbers of labour immigrants, a wave of refugees from the Yugoslavian civil wars and the growing politicization of fringe parties on both right and left (Gruber, 2014; Strasser & Tošić, 2013). Immigrant integration climbed the political agenda, largely in a negative tone stressing the failures of newcomers' efforts to integrate. In response to far-right campaigns, the centrist coalition government formed by Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the conservative People's Party (ÖVP) began to introduce integration policies under a largely restrictive approach (Mourão Permoser & Rosenberger, 2012).

In institutional terms, the main responsibility for integration remained at a sub-departmental level of the Ministry of the Interior. Even after the election of a right-wing coalition government in the year 2000, formed by the ÖVP and the far-right Freedom Party, the low-key assignment was maintained, but the role of the long-established Austrian Integration Fund rose from being an agency for refugee support to actively executing integration measures for all strands of immigrants. It became instrumental in the implementation of the so-called "Integration Agreement" which was introduced in 2003 and marked a contested move towards formulating criteria which the state considered necessary for successful immigrant integration (Mourão Permoser, 2010).

But with the return of the centrist grand coalition government and years of consultation with academic experts, non-governmental stakeholders and officials from various levels, a cohesive national integration programme was



formulated in 2010, accompanied by the establishment of two advisory Councils on Integration.<sup>1</sup> Finally, in 2011, the integration agenda was promoted in the ministerial hierarchy. As part of a cabinet reshuffle, the centre-right ÖVP introduced a State Secretary for Integration (SSI), the first high-level executive actor specifically charged with immigrant integration. Assigned to the Ministry of the Interior, its executive power and responsibilities were limited because, constitutionally, state secretaries<sup>2</sup> are subject to their superior line ministers. However, depending on the leeway granted by their superior, state secretaries can take on a significant role in setting new agendas, establishing networks and channels of communication, promoting public attention, ensuring inter-ministerial coordination and stimulating legislative proposals. Against this background, the SSI provided an institutional stimulus intended to bring about change in policy determination and content. Over a period of 30 months the SSI gave immigrant integration politics a face and a voice before being upgraded to the status of a federal ministry after the general election in 2013.

#### 4 DATA AND METHOD

The findings presented in this chapter result from an instrumental holistic single-case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Levy, 2008). Its instrumental, theory-guided approach aims to contribute to existing theoretical explanations for the relationship between institutional and policy change. The focus on a single holistic case is based on the aspiration to provide an in-depth understanding of the broadest possible set of factors influencing this relationship. The choice of the Austrian SSI's establishment as the study's focus is due to the interplay of a number of case characteristics that make it an ideal object of analysis. It does not provide only a case of high-level ministerial institutionalization of migrant integration: as the innovation occurred halfway through the legislation period, its impact can be explored in an otherwise consistent institutional setting (same government constellation, migration conditions and patterns of party competition). Moreover, the conditions for migrant integration in Austria thus provide an insightful context. The country has one of the highest shares of non-national population in Europe, yet it also has one of the most restrictive integration policies according to MIPEX 2004/2007/2010 (Geddes, Niessen, Balch, Bullen, & Peiro, 2005; Huddleston, Niessen, Chaoimh, & White, 2011; Niessen, Huddleston, & Citron, 2007). These conditions have been

linked to the powerful presence of far-right populist parties, who have successfully put these issues at the top of the public and political agenda (Gruber, 2014). In this highly politicized climate, and with public opinion critical of immigration (Rosenberger & Seeber, 2011), the Austrian SSI represents a model case to study the effects of ministerial institutionalization of migrant integration.

To identify whether policy change actually occurred, this study compared two phases of the Austrian parliament's 25th legislation period (2008–2013), the so-called pre-institutionalization phase (2008–2011) and the SSI's period of action (2011–2013).<sup>3</sup> The data came from different arenas: in the media arena, we analysed media articles ( $n = 431$ ) and press releases ( $n = 225$ ) alongside statements by the major ministerial actors in the policy area of integration; in the parliamentary arena, we coded plenary agenda items ( $n = 110$ ) that included references to the subject of integration made by members of government parties (see Fig. 8.1). We conducted a narrative analysis of these discursive materials which coded the elements of policy narratives—characters, plot, solutions, causal mechanisms—as outlined by Shanahan et al. (2011). Moreover, to evaluate the legislative dimension of policy, we conducted a document analysis of bills explicitly relevant to integration passed by the Austrian National Council ( $n = 82$ ), coding the initiator, the legal content and the addressee (for the list of bills, see Appendix 3).

Following this initial coding, the findings in two aspects were evaluated. On the one hand, we evaluated the scope of the integration dimensions addressed. Since immigrant integration represents a transversal policy issue, integration dimensions refer to the different policy fields in which integration is claimed to occur and where policy measures must be taken (e.g. education, employment, housing, health system, welfare system, citizenship) (Ager & Strang, 2008; Council of Europe, 1997; Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). On the other hand, we evaluated the direction of policy positions on two orthogonal categories, a liberal-restrictive and an economic-cultural dichotomy. Liberal positions refer to the strengthening of immigrants' rights, affirmative action or a focus on positive aspects of migration in a two-way process of mutual accommodation (Carrera & Atger, 2011), while restrictive positions favour a tightening of existing regulations, securitization and/or a focus on the unfavourable aspects of migration, and are marked by the perception of integration as a process mainly requiring efforts from immigrants (Scholz, 2012). Cultural/ethnic arguments may focus on cultural differences and

address immigrants in categories such as linguistic, religious or ethnic groups, while economic/civic arguments may focus on labour market performance and immigrants' personal merit (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003; Joppke, 2007; Koopmans, Statham, Giugni, & Passy, 2005).

In addition to the content analysis, expert interviews were conducted with leading public officials of the Ministry of the Interior, the State Secretariat for Integration and the Austrian Integration Fund. Ministerial reports on integration measures were consulted to validate the findings (see the list of interviews and reports in Appendix 1).

## 5 RELATING INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION TO POLICY CHANGE: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In evaluating the impact of the SSI as an institutional novelty on public policy, one empirical result stands out: while major changes concerned the applied instruments, the modes of policy determination and shifts in the policy narrative, the content of the government's integration legislation resembled that of the pre-institutionalization period.

### 5.1 *Changes in Policy Determination and Content: Sponsorship, Technocracy and Meritocratic Discourse*

The SSI entered the political stage proclaiming a "new approach to integration policy" (State Secretariat for Integration, Press release, 6 July 2011) that comprised a number of modifications in both policy determination and policy content.

#### 5.1.1 *Technocracy*

One major innovation encouraged by the SSI was the unprecedented use of external expertise, a familiar practice in institutionalization processes (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The crucial body for this approach became a council of renowned academic figures whose chairman quickly suggested that the State Secretary should essentially rely on the council's proposals and just implement them:

Heinz Fassmann, chairman of the Expert Council for Integration introduced by the government in January to implement the "National Action Plan for Integration", says the council will complete work on its suggestions and present them in June. Thus it's an easy task for State Secretary

Kurz: he does not need to develop a programme himself, but can simply present an already prepared programme to the outside world. This is exactly what Fassmann would recommend the State Secretary to do. (*Die Presse*, 21 April 2011)

Subsequently, the Expert Council became the centrepiece of a technocratic mode of policymaking which grants experts the role of policymaker entitled to define policy issues and to develop solutions, while politicians focus on safeguarding the overall direction and selling the results (Bell, 1976; Scholten et al., 2015). The Expert Council was granted major control over the design of integration measures to be pursued by the government and translated the National Action Plan for Integration's general priorities into concrete steps. The SSI repeatedly endorsed the council's key role (BMEIA, 2011, p. 1) and this technocratic approach not only supported the SSI's claim of objectivity, it also assisted in de-politicizing the contentious issue of immigrant integration.

#### 5.1.2 *Government Voice and Sponsorship*

The technocratic shift in policymaking paved the way for another element of the new approach (i.e., the proactive use of public communication). As Fig 8.1 shows, the number of media articles featuring government claims on integration and press releases issued by the Ministry of the Interior and the State Secretariat increased drastically after the SSI's establishment. These activities ensured an unprecedented degree of public and media attention for the subject of integration, now endowed with the mark of governmental authority. Other relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs or the Ministry of Education (both led by the coalition partner SPÖ), maintained a low number of press releases throughout the whole legislation period. The institutional innovation did not raise the number of debates on integration in the parliamentary arena either. Eventually the SSI became the main government representative to the public and to political stakeholders outside the government and parliament.

Another element of change concerned increased distributive intervention via subsidies for and symbolic endorsement of individual projects—an instrument that grants more flexibility to political actors than the long and obstructive legislative process. The SSI publicized and subsidized numerous initiatives, but also stipulated new initiatives, such as integration prizes, subsidy programmes for young entrepreneurs or jobseekers, and



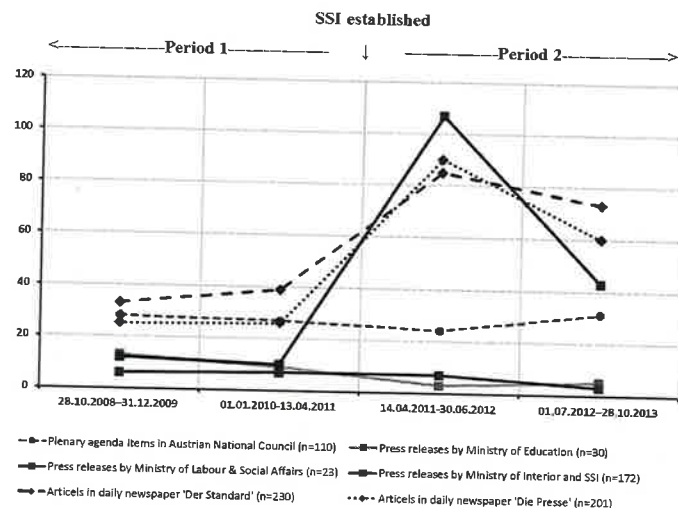


Fig. 8.1 Number of relevant plenary agenda items, press releases and media articles

campaigns with successful immigrants acting as role models for integration, with the effect of drawing attention to the issue:

The State Secretary put the spotlight on these activities. For years, we [the ÖIF] dealt with these things in the dark. Not being politicians, we rather focused on the content. And all of a sudden there was someone who turned on the light. [...] He was a real integrative figure, took the rough edges off the topic and brought people on the stage who would not have gone there in previous years. He signalled to them that he appreciated what they were doing. (Interview 1, Vienna, 14 April 2015)

In terms of material endorsement, the total sum of funding (including both national and European resources) distributed by the government in the field of integration grew by more than 50% from 2010 to 2013, from about €7,850,000 to €12,060,000 (BMEIA, 2014; Mühlhans, 2011).

### 5.1.3 Shifting the Policy Narrative

With regard to policy content, the SSI positioned itself as a neutral, apolitical force between “dreamers on the left and agitators on the right” (State Secretary Sebastian Kurz in *Die Presse*, 24 April 2011). It fostered a rhetoric that allowed feasible answers to challenges without risking the muddy waters

of a hostile approach *vis-à-vis* immigrants—the introduction of a meritocratic narrative. The formula “What counts is a person’s merit, not his origin” became the SSI’s mantra guiding its integration approach:

In the policy area of integration, it’s about tackling the challenges and solving the problems. For this reason, we choose a complete new approach, that is “Integration on the basis of merit”. The origin of a person and his religious affiliation shall not be important, but his character and his willingness to make an effort in professional and social life and to achieve acknowledgement as a result of this effort. (State Secretary Sebastian Kurz, Press release, 6 July 2011)

This narrative shift represented a push towards broadening and liberalizing the debate. It signalled a departure from the previous emphasis on cultural and value-oriented civic integration measures and supported a pragmatic approach which targeted economic participation that is most accessible for state interventions. At its centre were demands for the incorporation of newcomers into the educational system, for their access to the labour market, but also for voluntary contributions to their neighbourhoods. Acculturation claims did not vanish per se, but they were portrayed as a functional outcome of successful economic integration. More importantly, unlike the restrictive statements on cultural values made in previous years, the remaining cultural discourse took on a more liberal tone, emphasizing respectful exchange, welcoming immigrants’ competences as an asset for Austria’s position as a business location and, eventually, acknowledging that Austria was a country of immigration. Thus the SSI helped to transform a culturally impregnated discourse including both restrictive and liberal elements into a liberal and economic discourse under a meritocratic narrative. This further supported a depoliticization of the issue. The former head of the Austrian Integration fund said: “I believe they wanted to neutralize the topic and eventually they managed to separate it somewhat from partisan wrangling for a while” (Interview 1, Vienna, 14.04.2015).

### 5.1.4 Conclusion: Depoliticized Governance

Summarizing the findings on public policy changes, the prevalent approach can be characterized as one of delegated/depoliticized governance (Benton et al., 2015; Fawcett & Marsh, 2014; Flinders & Buller, 2006; Flinders & Wood, 2015). It operates through a technocratic form of policymaking that delegates competences for policy formulation to external experts, thereby allegedly liberating it from partisan motives. The increased distribution of state subsidies to non-governmental organizations and stakeholders providing integration measures fosters this delegating

approach further, while executives focus on the informational competency of promoting policy measures. Its discursive content—meritocratic integration—further substantiates the move towards depoliticization as it replaces the previous controversial contention over cultural integration by focusing more strongly on educational and labour market participation.

### 5.2 *The Limits of Institutional Innovation: Legislative Continuity*

In contrast to the innovations in policy determination and discourse, the regulatory dimension of legislation was mostly shaped by continuity. The analysis of government bills passed by the Austrian National Council indicated neither a change in the scope of integration dimensions nor a change of direction in legislation.

Although there were a number of legislative initiatives, most were either an extension of existing legislative proposals or additions which pursued similar priorities to those that predated the SSI, the most important being the labour market, the educational system and the immigration and residence laws (see Appendix 3). Moreover, most of the legislative measures actually took the same direction that had characterized the pre-institutionalization phase: promoting language training, enforcing mandatory school attendance, combatting immigrants' unemployment and low skills, facilitating the nostrification of academic titles or strengthening existing pre-conditions for the acquisition of citizenship and residence permits (such as language skills, self-sufficiency and integrity, while voluntary work was one of the few elements to gain new importance). Finally, none of the major civic integration regulations introduced in previous years, such as the criteria for long-term residence, family reunification and citizenship acquisition, were actually reversed. Instead, they were expanded by additional criteria or altered by changes to the language or income levels required.

As a result, if one considers those integration dimensions that have traditionally been listed as having restrictive regulations according to the MIPEX-framework (Huddleston et al., 2011; Niessen et al., 2007), the record of changes through institutional innovation was poor. While some improvements were made in educational integration, legislative reforms regarding anti-discrimination and family reunion point in both directions (some more restrictive, some more liberal). On citizenship acquisition and

the political rights of non-citizens, regulations remained as restrictive as they had been before. Recent data provided by the MIPEX project confirm this continuity and Austria's setting of integration policies continues to rank only in the mid-field (14th) of EU countries.

How can these findings on the focus and the direction of policy change be explained in light of the new government actor's embeddedness in various contexts? On the basis of the institutionalist literature on embeddedness, the following section develops and applies an explanatory framework.

## 6 INTERACTING CONTEXTS MATTER: THE EMBEDDEDNESS OF EXECUTIVE ACTORS

A new executive actor's capacity to initiate policy change is contingent upon the settings and conditions in which it is embedded (see Baum & Oliver, 1992; Granovetter, 1985; Haxhi et al., 2013). Most generally, scholars distinguish two types of context under which specific factors can be subsumed: "institutional" and "non-institutional" contexts (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995; Scharpf, 2000). Our analysis suggests a third type of factor, which we call "situational facilitators", comprising structural macro-conditions at a specific point in time (Table 8.2). What is crucial is that these contexts and facilitators, and their

**Table 8.2** Contextual factors explaining a new executive actor's potential for policy change: The case of the Austrian State Secretariat for Integration (SSI)

<i>Permanent political contexts</i> (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995; Scharpf, 2000)	
<i>Non-institutional context</i> (policy area and partisan power-interest configurations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transversal and controversial <i>policy area</i> intermingled with related topics (immigration, asylum)</li> <li>• ÖVP's <i>strategic motive</i>: Regaining issue ownership from radical right opponents</li> <li>• ÖVP's <i>ideological motive</i>: Establishing liberal-conservative ideology in integration</li> </ul>
<i>Institutional context</i> (government structures and type of new executive actor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong <i>horizontal division</i> of competences</li> <li>• <i>Type of executive actor</i>: State Secretariat dependent on other ministries</li> <li>• Potency of <i>legislative path dependencies</i></li> </ul>
<i>Situational facilitators</i> (Bauer & Knill, 2014; Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom & Norman, 2009)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low immigration/refugee numbers, lack of terrorist threat</li> <li>• Budget leeway for political intervention, moderate unemployment</li> </ul>	



effects on executive actors, should not be viewed in isolation but in interaction, as this helps to understand why specific policy changes are realized while others are blocked (Bakir, 2013). The following section discusses these contexts and their interaction based on the case study's findings.

### 6.1 *Non-institutional Context*

Novel executive actors are essentially defined by the “non-institutional context” that encourages their establishment and sets their agenda—most importantly, the characteristics of the policy area and the normative orientations of those actors outside of the government realm that are driving institutional change (Fleurke & Hulst, 2006; Marks & Hooghe, 2004). The most striking feature of integration in Austria was its controversial nature as part of the broader debate on immigration, asylum and diversity. In the words of a long-standing top official in the Ministry of the Interior:

In Austria, the issue has always been emotional and it was impossible to discuss it on a rational, objective basis in political fora. In contrast to Germany, if you look at the parliamentary debates there, which are on a very high and rational level, in Austria these debates quickly drift off into extreme positions and those positions always make it into the media. (Interview 2, Vienna, 27 April 2015)

On such controversial issues, new executive actors, endowed with increased resources and legitimacy, are capable of mooted debate in a different way—and it was also a priority for the SSI to “detoxify the situation”, as one high-ranking official confirmed (Interview 3, Vienna, 28 April 2015). The SSI's technocratic mode helped to pacify controversy but also compensated for the lack of executive experience—a step that would not have been necessary in an uncontroversial policy area with a long tradition of governmental policymaking.

However, policymaking is also a consequence of the ideological and strategic motives of non-institutional actors who promoted institutional change in the first place. In parliamentary democracies with a pronounced role of political parties (‘party government’), parties in office use executive government as a means to implement their political programmes (Schmidt, 1996; Woldendorp et al., 2000). In the case of Austrian integration policy, the SSI was presided over by the centre-right ÖVP, the key player behind

institutional change. Its creation helped the party to “get free and to create something of our own, something new, irrespective of coalitional limits” (Interview 3, Vienna, 28 April 2015). The SSI thus played a vital role in the party's competitive and strategic plans to regain issue ownership in an area dominated by fringe parties and was tied to the ÖVP's ideology of Christian-democratic liberal conservatism. Depoliticized governance also served the ÖVP's strategic motive of regaining issue ownership, as it supported the party's claim to be a centrist alternative to vocal fringe parties on the left and right, but also effectively reduced the potential for partisan critique by opposition parties. Moreover, the pronounced liberal economic shift of a meritocratic policy narrative provided centrist policy content in line with the party's ideological core. Thus, while meritocratic arguments have traditionally appeared in the party's political platform, in the area of integration they were presented as an unideological approach, beyond party contestation.

### 6.2 *Institutional Context*

Being part of a broader institutional setting, a new executive actor also relies on a second type of context: the “institutional context”, which defines the scope of its power and its competences. To begin with, the assignment of a new ministerial actor offers an opportunity to redefine the boundaries of a policy area—a potential also exploited by the SSI. The organizational dissociation of the integration agenda from previously connected aspects, such as immigration control and asylum management, supported the issue's detachment from these rather conflictive aspects and the SSI's shift towards a depoliticized approach. It also substantiated the establishment of the integration topic as a distinct policy area, not only in organizational logics, but also in the perception of policymakers and the wider public, as the former head of ÖIF confirmed:

I think the pioneering achievement has been to upgrade the topic. It has arrived at the top levels of government hierarchy. And even if one day a new coalition government decides to alter its allocation, the topic itself has become much more relevant to society in general. You can't discount it as an exotic topic any more. In the eyes of policymakers there is a consensus that this is such an important policy area—because so many other aspects [demographics, social security, etc.] depend on it—that you simply cannot discount it any more. (Interview 1, Vienna, 14 April 2015)

Yet once the boundaries of a policy area are reset, government actors depend on the “institutional complementarities” in which they are embedded (i.e., the ways in which their functional performance is conditioned by the presence of other institutions). The concept of institutional complementarity helps to understand that the performance of any individual institution can only be assessed within its broader institutional configuration. While a high level of complementarity does not necessarily lead to “coherent” forms of governance across all the connected institutions, it does indeed force each individual institution to take its institutional counterparts into stronger consideration when planning its own actions (Amable, 2003; Campbell, 2011; Crouch, 2010; Crouch et al., 2005; Höpner, 2005). In government, one important form of institutional complementarity is the horizontal division of (ministerial) competences (i.e., whether government bodies are equipped with an autonomous mandate, with a shared mandate or simply with a coordinating role between institutions). Our case study demonstrates this influence most vividly: in an institutional setting for integration characterized by a marked horizontal division of competences and by strong stakes by different ministries, the nature of a State Secretariat predefined the SSI’s scope of action. It was compelled to rely on the resources already available and on actions developed by other ministries but also to establish its own activities in those areas in which it enjoyed independence. This explains why the SSI was able to initiate policy changes in the technocratic mode of governance, in its public communication efforts, in the distributive use of subsidies from its own budget and in changing the integration narrative—in this way it provided a different approach to integration without interfering with other ministries, thus establishing an institutional equilibrium between old and new executive bodies. It also explains why the SSI had little success in reshaping the direction and focus of the government’s integration legislation. Here the institutional complementarities in the form of a marked horizontal division of competences and line ministerial dominance represented a barrier to legislative change, amplified by the persistence of legislative paths. On the other hand, the presence of a new executive actor raises awareness among other government ministries that they ought to establish contact channels and shape and report their activities in the policy area more precisely and more actively than they had in previous years. The launch of an annual integration report documenting all government activities was one obvious manifestation of this new institutional arrangement.

### 6.3 *Situational Facilitators*

While institutional and non-institutional contexts largely explain the decision for institutional change and the type of policy change stimulated by the SSI, another—more short-term—aspect proved to be equally important: the role of situational facilitators. Here we refer to those variable macro-social and macro-economic conditions—or “structures” (Bakir, 2013)—that are not under the immediate control of politicians, but whose current shape is relevant to the design, adoption and implementation of public policies in a specific policy area (Keller & Yang, 2008; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sager & Rielle, 2013). Their interdependence in a network of “structural complementarities” (Bakir, 2017; Bakir & Acur, 2016) provide another precondition that can open “policy windows” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 174) for policy entrepreneurs to stimulate change but can also become a barrier to change under opposite auspices (Bauer & Knill, 2014; Mintrom & Norman, 2009). In the present case study, the situational factors favoured policy change, thus creating an ideal window of opportunity for the new executive actor. There was no immediate pressure from large-scale immigration, there were no viable threats or attacks by Islamist terrorism and the macro-economic conditions in Austria (budget leeway for political intervention, moderate unemployment rate) were also quite favourable. As another leading official from the Ministry of the Interior underlined:

If you think of Germany, the UK, France, many European countries have faced enormous levels of immigration and things have changed so massively that they had to do something. They had to act from necessity: What shall we do, for example, in light of the riots in our suburbs? This was not the case in Austria. Here no cars were burning, there were no problematic *banlieues* etc. Here it was simply an insight that our society was changing and that immigration accelerated this change in the composition of our society. And that it was going to be one of the main challenges for the future: How can we provide a framework for social cohesion in a changing society? This insight was the strongest factor for us while in other countries it might have been more out of immediate necessity. (Interview 2, Vienna, 27 April 2015)

As a result, the lack of restrictive pressures and the favourable situational facilitators allowed shifts towards a more liberal economic approach and soft policy measures, some of which are being questioned or abandoned by the same government coalition and similar contexts under the current



conditions of economic and refugee crisis. Thus, generally speaking, besides the more stable institutional and non-institutional contexts, which facilitate the impact of institutional innovation on policy change in some aspects while restraining them in others, the situational conditions relevant to a policy area are a superordinate setting influencing whether institutional change can be a feasible stimulus for change and its political direction.

#### 6.4 Interaction Between Contexts

What these findings also demonstrate is that different contexts—non-institutional and institutional—and situational facilitators are not mutually independent but interact with one another (Bakir, 2013, 2017). Above all, only the presence of favourable situational conditions opened a window for the ÖVP's party political interests (non-institutional) to materialize in an institutional change towards the SSI, which reorganized government configuration (institutional) in the policy area of integration and eventually contributed to the policy change documented in this chapter. Second, the horizontal division of institutional competences was directly related to the non-institutional nature of cross-sectionalism characteristic for the policy area of integration, and this interaction determined the kinds of institutional change and policy change possible. Last but not least, the controversial nature of the previously intermingled topics of immigration, integration and asylum policy (non-institutional) largely contributed to policymakers' decision to separate them organizationally with the institutionalization of an executive actor specifically assigned to integration (institutional), which eventually shaped the depoliticized direction of policy change via technocracy and a new policy frame.

From these examples of interaction between different contexts for executive agency, we can conclude that both institutional change and related policy changes are "an outcome of the interplay of multiple independent" context factors reinforcing one another (Bakir 2013, 59).

### 7 CONCLUSION

What is the significance of the institutionalization of an executive actor for public policy change in an emerging and controversial policy area and what role do the various contexts play for this potential? From our case study of the Austrian State Secretariat for Integration, we draw two main conclusions.

First, ministerial institutionalization has an immense potential to establish and delineate an emerging policy area whose boundaries and segmentations are still in the making. The mere presence of an executive actor with relevant competences allows enhancement of the policy area, not only as an autonomous policy matter within public administration, but also *vis-à-vis* non-governmental political actors and the wider public. It plays a huge part in delineating this policy area, defining what is perceived to be part of it and what is not. As the case of the Austrian SSI suggests, this function is facilitated considerably if negative or conflictive aspects that might be tied to the policy area (e.g., the controversial aspects of asylum management in the context of integration) can be separated conceptually and organizationally ascribed to another executive actor. These are important conclusions for public policymakers and scholars alike, as it demonstrates that institutional reforms do indeed matter for public policymaking, especially in emerging policy areas. In fact, one might even conclude that, once a certain level of expansion has been reached, upgrades in institutional representation are actually a prerequisite for a policy area to expand any further.

Second, ministerial institutionalization makes room for innovation in both the content and the determination of public policy, which would be harder, if not impossible, to achieve if previous institutional settings were maintained. New executive actors are in fact largely expected to stimulate change in order to gain legitimacy. However, as our study clearly demonstrates, it is not institutional innovation per se that ensures change, but institutional innovation within a specific interaction of contexts. A novel executive actor is confronted with distinct contexts that shape not only that actor's establishment in the first place but also the opportunities and constraints in which it is able to redesign public policy. Of these, our study points to three types of context in which executive actors are embedded—all of them interacting with one another to reinforce certain outcomes of institutional and policy change:

The characteristics of the policy area and normative orientations of the actors driving institutional change are important *non-institutional factors* explaining the SSI's shift towards a centrist approach to integration that comprises technocratic policymaking and a discursive shift towards a meritocratic policy narrative. *Institutional factors and complementarities*, such as the strong horizontal division of competences, the subordinated role of a State Secretariat in relation to other ministries and the power of legislative paths explain why the SSI succeeded in presenting a new, "depoliticized



approach" to integration policy by strengthening technocratic policymaking, intensifying public communication, increasing distributive interventions and reshaping government discourse on integration, although it failed to alter the focus and direction of legislation on immigration. Here the competences of other ministerial actors, as well as legislative paths set long before the introduction of the SSI, limited its impact in practice. But, ultimately, *situational facilitators* appear to be the most important precondition for institutional change to have any chance of stimulating public policy change. Only as long as relevant macro-political conditions are generally favourable for the proposition and implementation of policy change will the stimuli set by new actors stand a chance of bearing fruit. As demonstrated by the Austrian government's recent measures in response to the pressures created by the massive refugee movement towards Europe and threats by Islamism, changes may quickly fall flat without a favourable environment.

#### APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CITED INTERVIEWS

- Interview 1: Dr. Alexander Janda, former head of the Austrian Integration Fund. Conducted on 14 April 2015.
- Interview 2: Dr. Mathias Vogl, head of Government Department III (Rights) and Mag. Peter Webinger, head of Departmental Group III/B (Asylum, Migration, Citizenship)—Federal Ministry of the Interior. Conducted on 27 April 2015.
- Interview 3: Dr. Stefan Steiner, head of Government Department VIII (Integration)—Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. Conducted on 28 April 2015.

#### APPENDIX 2: LIST OF CITED GOVERNMENT REPORTS/PLANS

- Government programme 2008  
(<http://www.bundeskanzleramt.at/DocView.axd?CobId=32965>)
- National Action Plan for Integration 2010  
(<https://www.bmeia.gv.at/integration/nationaler-aktionsplan/>)
- Annual Integration reports 2011–2015  
(<https://www.bmeia.gv.at/integration/integrationsbericht/>)

#### APPENDIX 3: BILLS RELEVANT TO INTEGRATION PASSED BY THE AUSTRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL (ACCORDING TO INTEGRATION DIMENSION & EXAMINATION PERIOD)

	2001	2006	2011	2015	2016	2017
Education	<p>Early childhood development</p> <p>Language (immigrants and assistance measures in primary, secondary and high schools)</p> <p>General housing reforms</p> <p>Vocational schooling</p> <p>Adult education</p>	<p>DNC-085: Mandatory kindergarten (intro)</p> <p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>
Labour and Social Affairs	<p>Labour market access regulations for specific occupational groups</p> <p>General access to labour market access for immigrants</p> <p>Social policy reforms with immigrant integration assistance</p>	<p>DNC-085: Mandatory kindergarten (intro)</p> <p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>
Immigration, Asylum, Residence, Citizenship	<p>General reforms of immigration regulations, procedure and integration agreement</p>	<p>DNC-085: Mandatory kindergarten (intro)</p> <p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>	<p>DNC-332: Mandatory kindergarten (extended)</p> <p>DNC-445: Expansion of institutionalized childcare facilities</p> <p>DNC-336: Language training in childcare facilities (extended)</p>

Notes: Authors' classification based on (Ager & Strang, 2008; Council of Europe, 1997; Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2016) and inductively specified. Important bills (decisions of the National Council) are bold.

## NOTES

1. First, an *Integration Council*, representing the interests of stakeholders, social partners and authorities from regional and local levels of government. Second, an *Expert Council for Integration* of researchers and practitioners from the various fields linked to integration.
2. Austrian State Secretaries formally belong to the federal state's highest organs (Art. 19, B-VG), but are de facto "political adjutants to federal ministers" (Wieser, 1997). They are assigned to line ministries and their main function is to act as ministers' "support in the management and parliamentary representation" (Art. 71, B-VG) as well as standing in for them in their absence (Art. 73, B-VG). Yet they can also be charged with specified portfolios by their superior minister (or the chancellor, if assigned to the Chancellery) and equipped with the ministry's administrative resources in the form of a State Secretariat (Kahl & Weber, 2008, pp. 174–175).
3. The chapter presents findings gathered in the research project "The State Secretariat for Integration: Evaluating Policy Change in Immigrant Integration", supported by the Austrian National Bank—Anniversary Fund (project number: 15758). For more information see: <http://www.government-integration.at>.

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