Effectiveness in a Political Context – Implications for Migration

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Abstract

This paper builds on the presumption that the idea of effectiveness refers primarily to an organizational and managerial context. It asks the question how this idea is transformed when used as a rationale for action in contexts where economy and efficiency are of minor significance and where no organizational survival is at stake. The EU and Swedish migration policies show, however, that persistent egoistic implications help construct a specific territory as an organization to be managed much like a business firm. It is concluded that the meaning of effectiveness does not necessarily change when this concept is used in an alien context. Instead, references to effectiveness help transform the context to which the concept is applied.

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A Bussiness Firm Concept Translated to Politics

When, in September 2020, the EU commissioner for Home Affairs presented a new migration policy for the EU, effectiveness featured as a prominent attribute. The policy was presented as a "comprehensive framework." It was described as a "fresh start" and was to build on notions of sustainability, predictability – and effectiveness (European Commission, 2020a).

The Swedish Parliament referred to similar – almost identical – objectives when it decided on a new migration policy in June 2021. The legal framework should be sustainable in the long run, humane, lawful, and effective, the Swedish Government had declared (prop. 2020/21:191). This emphasis on effectiveness corroborates the general demand that effectiveness should permeate the government administration and be the management objective of all its agencies (SFS 2007:515). Only in this case it was not a question of asking (or encouraging) individual organizations to be effective – the same epithet was used to denote a desirable characteristic of an entire national policy.

My discussion in this paper starts from the presumption that effectiveness is first and foremost an economic concept, pertinent to business firms, for which effectiveness is a vital condition for survival. This means that effectiveness is also an organizational concept, as, arguably, a business firm is the very epitome of "an organization."

I further start from the observation that in organizational contexts popular ideas are frequently transferred from one context to another (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996). A *translation* of an idea from a local to a global and again to a local context tends to imply a change of the original meaning of the idea. The translation process will then include objectification – some type of verbalization of the idea – before the idea is put into action once more (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). Following this line of reasoning, I hypothesize that when they presented their migration policies the EU and Swedish policy makers had some other meaning of effectiveness in mind than that conventionally employed by managers of business firms.

A migration policy is neither an activity primarily driven by economic considerations, nor an organization. Instead, as the EU Commission and the

Swedish Government underscored, the policy should consider the idea of universal human rights, as explicated by the United Nations in its1948 declaration and in other international conventions (prop. 2020/21: 191; United Nations, 2022a; European Court of Human Rights, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). The European Commission stated that the new policy should be grounded in European values and that decent conditions were to be provided for men, women and children arriving in the EU. The Swedish Government declared that the national migration policy should not only be effective but also lawful and humane. This very combination of value-laden concepts suggests that the meaning of effectiveness must indeed change when this concept is translated into a new context.

My discussion on the following pages is inspired by this curious emphasis on effectiveness in a context where one would expect economic considerations to be of minor importance relative to the topic at hand. My specific question is: What happens to the idea of effectiveness when this concept is in a context where – at first sight – it seems far-fetched?

To illustrate important aspects of this question I use the presentations of the EU and Swedish migration policies. Because in February 2023, the EU policy was still being negotiated, I give a more detailed account of the Swedish policy and its implementation within the Swedish government sector. Migration policies, I argue, are an archetypical example of how concepts that appear inconsistent are combined nevertheless. The fact that these policies were closely linked to international conventions, the world economy, climate change and armed conflicts within and among nation states makes them even more intriguing. What does a *regional* or a *national* migration policy stand for? I believe, however, that there are wider implications to be drawn from an examination of effectiveness with relation to migration policies. Ideas of effectiveness permeate many areas of human existence, even the everyday life of individuals (Gergen, 1991; Brunsson, 2011).

As a basis for my discussion, I start by briefly recapitulating the meaning of effectiveness as this concept is commonly used.

Effectiveness as an Economic and Organizational Concept

I first clarify the idea of the "three E's" and the relationship of effectiveness to economy and efficiency.

Economy, efficiency, and effectiveness

The conventional rationale for economizing is scarce resources: "Were the resources not scarce, there would be no need at all to make plans for how to use them," the authors of a textbook on public administration laconically declared (Molin et al., 1979, p. 194, translated from Swedish).

Within organizations many types of resources are treated as scarce, including (costly) employees. Similarly, a regional or national policy may be designed to economize on scarce natural resources, located within territorial borders. Political ambitions with relation to world-wide migration in contrast, are not bound by borders, which is why the very idea of economizing seems irrelevant.

The idea of efficiency is closely related to presumptions of scarce resources and economizing. It is a relative concept: *the ratio of outputs to inputs, or the amount of output per unit of input* (Anthony and Govindarajan, 2007, p. 130, italics in the original). Efficiency coincides with effectiveness when the output is perceived as so valuable that the more output, the better. The same holds true when output is perceived as harmful, only in that case efficiency will denote the reduction of output (or zero output). But in situations where competition, legal restrictions, or lack of critical resources threaten organizational survival, it becomes important to make a difference between *doing things right* – efficiency (also referred to as productivity) – and *doing the right things* – effectiveness.

The three E's – economy, efficiency, and effectiveness – are all contingent: they depend on somebody's judgment in a specific situation and at a specific point in time. The idea of

effectiveness further presumes somebody's intention: it indicates the degree to which individuals or organizations meet their objectives (Horngren et al., 2011).

An appreciation of effectiveness may or may not include estimates of efficiency. When waste of resources – inefficiency – is believed to prove effective in the long run, a time dimension is added, and the idea of effectiveness is de-coupled from that of efficiency. This is the case, for example, when management ideals impinge on legal ideals, and an efficient judicial process conflicts with justice or a fair treatment of migrants (Soennecken, 2013).

The definitions of economy and efficiency presume an organizational setting or the equivalent of an organizational setting, as is the case with natural resources. New public management (NPM) – the "mega-trend," of the 1980's (Hood, 1991, p. 3) – gave priority to efficiency. Government agencies were asked to reduce their spending by two percent each year while maintaining their production (Brunsson, 1988). Consequently, public sector entities were reconstructed as formal organizations, like business firms (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). The role of public agencies and civil servants changed in parallel. Whereas before, these agencies and their employees were respected as public servants, working at an interface between politics and administration, they were now seen as service producers and expected to pay as much attention to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness as private business firms (Czarniawska, 1985).

Migration, however, is not the outcome of a somebody's production process but an instance of global failure. Migration belongs to a category of phenomena where behavioral rather than financial measures are required. It has little to do with scarce resources, but all the more with resources that exist in abundance.

Typically, abundance characterizes emotions and other intangibles. It makes little sense to economize on phenomena such as love, joy, generosity, or compassion; nor on knowledge, language skills and good ideas. These and similar phenomena with positive connotations grow with use and are most effectively employed when shared (Hardt, 2010). The same line of reasoning does not apply to their negative equivalents, however. When – for example – hatred, misery, or ignorance are at stake, it makes sense (one may argue) to economize and beware of the tendency of these and similar phenomena to grow with use. In these instances, efficiency is achieved when output is reduced to a minimum. Contrary to what textbook authors claim, economizing is then a prerequisite for effectiveness, despite an abundance of resources.

In sum, migration highlights the apposition of the two types of non-scarce resources: it is an outcome of war, harassment of minority groups, natural catastrophes, or poverty, and refers to inadequate economizing of negative emotions or behavior. The remedy is to employ other non-scarce resources in abundance. Ideally, migration leads to compassionate encounters where empathy and righteous initiatives for establishing a situation of equality dominate.

Yet this attempt to relate the three E's to non-scarce resources may seem far-fetched, even inappropriate. I expound my discussion of the meaning of effectiveness in the next section, where I point to the close relationship between the idea of effectiveness and that or the organization and underscore the egoistic imperative inherent in the idea of the organization.

A rationale for egoism

Quoting the seventeenth century Presbyterian Richard Baxter, Max Weber (1904-05/1989) referred the idea of effectiveness to Calvinism and its Puritan ethics, when an effectively spent existence on earth was a road to salvation. To Baxter (according to Weber), it was important that any profits that the diligent human might make were not used for trivial purposes but to abide by God's will:

> I God show you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way (without wrong to your soul or to any other), if you refuse this, and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and you refuse to be God's steward, and to accept His gifts and use them for Him when He requireth it: you may labour to be rich for God, though not for the flesh and sin. (p. 162)

In the eighteenth century, this eschatological view on wealth applied not only to individuals but to the entire economic discipline, which was regarded as a divine science (Frängsmyr, 1971). With time, and the emergence of a "society of organizations" (Stinchcombe, 1965; Simon, 1991), the idea of effectiveness was transferred to a secular setting, where life on earth takes precedence over any eschatological hope.

In a secular and organizational setting, the idea of effectiveness is tainted with egoism. Organizations should be effective for the benefit of somebody else only if this commitment coincides with their own objectives. They should consider their chances of long-time survival but simultaneously seek to reach, even exceed, their own goals as fast and expediently as possible (Brunsson, 2017).

Therefore, the idea of an effective migration seems misplaced. Migration may or may not follow on organizational activities, but the migration phenomenon consists of individuals or groups of individuals who were forced to leave their homes.

This makes the use of "effectiveness" as a rationale for the national migration policy all the more bewildering. The formulation of the EU and the Swedish migration policies was not a prerogative for policy makers of the 21st century; they were bound by decisions on human rights and agreements to honor these rights made by their predecessors almost a century ago. The Swedish policy, specifically, must comply with Sweden's commitment to the European Union, as the Swedish Government made clear in its proposal to Parliament (prop. 2020/21: 191).

But the policy makers of the European Commission and Sweden seem to have regarded the idea of a migration policy for a specific territory, whether a region or a nation state, as unproblematic. When presenting the new migration policy, they largely ignored the global nature of migration. Nor did they consider the difficulty of predicting the number of individuals in need of protection. In the next section, I provide some numbers to illustrate the scope and ubiquity of migration.

Migration – A World-Wide Phenomenon

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 proved – once more – how fragile a global arrangement with strong nation states and little supreme governance may be. By September 2022, more than 7 million Ukrainians were refugees in other European countries and another 7 million were estimated to be internally displaced within Ukraine (UNHCR, 2022a), By November 2022, some 48 000 citizens from Ukraine were registered with the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket, 2022a).

Before the Russian-Ukraine war, millions of people had already been forced to leave their homes. Migration was a phenomenon to which most countries must accommodate. (Numbers change, but updates are available on the sites referred to below and on many other internet sites.)

- In 2020, about half of the Syrian population, 6,6 million people, had left Syria and were living in refugee camps in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt (Unicef, 2020).
- In 2019, there were 3.6 million refugees in Turkey and 2.6 million refugees in the European Union. In Turkey 4.3 percent of the total population were refugees, in the European Union 0.6 percent (European Commission, 2021).
- The number of refugees almost doubled between 2010 and 2020 (UNHCR, 2020).
- 15,548 persons drowned in the Mediterranean Sea between 2015 and 2019 (Save the Children 2021). In 2020, some 1,300 and in 2021 more than 1,900 were estimated to have lost their lives, or gone missing, while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa (UNHCR 2021, 2022b).

The transnational character of migration parallels that of international trade. However, the debate on migration was kept separate from that on the transfer of goods and services., where an ideology of specialization and free trade dominated (European Union, 2022). A high

standard of living – in Europe and Sweden – was made possible through low salaries in countries where salaries were lower (World Bank Group, 2022), Business firms were encouraged to profit from existing differences across the world, while the very opposite was true for individuals. The EU migration policy shows how the definition of effective migration did not concern the situation for migrants, but the well-being of the EU nation states.

An Effective European Migration Policy

With its New Pact on Migration and Asylum the European Commission asked for an effective migration policy built on notions of sustainability and predictability (European Commission, 2020a). Among numerous activities and initiatives included in the pact, three "pillars" were all used with the epithet effectiveness – effective procedures, effective solidarity, and effective returns (European Commission, 2020b).

With respect to procedures, the Commission proposed a pre-entry screening procedure at the EU borders. The screening should apply to all third-country nationals about to cross the external border without authorization. It should include identification, health and security checks, fingerprinting, and registration in the Eurodac database and take no longer than five days. The objective was to strengthen the EU borders by redirecting potential asylum seekers, thereby facilitating a channeling of individuals to the right type of procedure. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, whose mission it is to ensure safe and well-functioning external EU borders, should supervise the borders, prevent illegal border crossing, and fight human smuggling.

A second pillar stipulated that all member states should take part in a system of solidarity, sharing the responsibility for refugee migration. Countries unwilling to accept refugees might compensate for their stance by contributing financially to the costs of the new migration and asylum system, for example by helping finance the special task force on the Greek island Lesvos, or the new border or return procedures. The Commission described this option of sponsoring relocation and return as a "solidarity mechanism" designed to guarantee lasting solidarity and help create predictability within the migration and asylum policy domain.

Further, a common EU system for returns should be based on partnerships with third countries, be adapted to the circumstances in each case, and appreciated by both parties. Migrant smuggling, which the Commission identified as "shared challenges," should be prevented with the help of Frontex, among others. Voluntary returns were to be stimulated and effected within twelve weeks.

When presenting the pact, the Commission highlighted its intention to strike a balance between responsibility and solidarity. Concurrently, it revealed a pronounced predilection for the idea of effectiveness:

> In its pamphlet on migration ("New Pact on Migration and Asylum") the Commission (2020c) used the word effective eighteen times in twenty-one pages. It asked for effective procedures (four times), effective support (twice), and effective crisis response. It mentioned effective solidarity (four times), effective access to asylum (twice) and effective returns. The words migrant or migrants, in comparison, were used only seven times; five times in connection with migrant smuggling, migrant relocation and return, and twice related to the certainty, protection, and views of migrants.

The Swedish Government aligned its proposal for a new migration policy with that of the European Commission when it described effectiveness as a core concept of its new migration policy. In the next section I describe the Swedish migration policy in greater detail. As I understand it, this policy is not exceptional. Similar policies were implemented in several countries of the "Global North" (Mountz, 2020).

An Effective Swedish Migration Policy

When in 2015, Sweden had received close to 163,000 asylum seekers, out of which more than 35,000 were unaccompanied minors, the Swedish prime minister declared that Sweden had experienced a "migration crisis" and needed "time out" (Regeringen, 2015). Temporarily reinforced border controls were established, and a temporary law stipulated that residence permits were to be issued for three years only (SFS 2016:752). With time, both initiatives became permanent. In November 2020, the Government prolonged the border control law for the thirteenth time (Europaportalen, 2020). Due to the temporary law and other measures, the number of asylum applicants decreased drastically from 2016 onwards. In 2019 (before the Covid pandemic) only some 22,000 asylum applicants arrived. The number was considerably lower than in the years preceding the "migration crisis" (Migrationsverket, 2020).

In April 2021, the Swedish Government proposed that temporary residence permits be the rule for all asylum applicants. As before, refugees resettled from a third country according to international agreements and after a government decision should constitute an exception and receive permanent permits of residency. Arguably, the restrictive Swedish policy would conform to the policies of other European countries. Neither EU law, nor other regulations to which EU members must adapt its legislation required permanent residence permits (prop. 2020/21:191).

Sustainable, humane, lawful, and effective

In its proposal to the Parliament, the Government built on a report from the Migration Committee, whose task it was to find a long-term and sustainable order for the Swedish migration policy (SOU 2020:54). Like the Committee, the Government started from the declaration that the Swedish migration policy should be *sustainable, humane*, *lawful*, and *effective* (prop. 2020/21:191, translated from Swedish). It did not specify how these concepts might be reconciled. Therefore, my discussion in this section builds on inferences from the committee report and the Government's proposal to the Swedish Parliament.

The Government referred the fact that, in 2015, many more asylum applicants arrived in Sweden than in other European countries of similar size to the existence of permanent residence permits which were then the rule and had proved attractive. The Migration Committee discussed such permits in terms of a so-called pull factor. Temporary permits, on the other hand, would rather discourage migrants from approaching Sweden, the Committee speculated. With the temporary residence permits, it would take longer and be more complicated to become a Swedish citizen (SOU 2020:54). In line with the Committee's view, the Government emphasized that those who were not accepted as residents should return to their "home countries." The Government further planned to introduce specific tests for citizenship regarding income, language skills, familiarity with the Swedish society, and behavior. In the spring of 2021, these requirements were not yet specified, however (prop. 2020/21:191).

In sum, the two main arguments for the new migration policy were comparisons and deterrence. Sweden should not take unproportioned responsibility for asylum seekers compared to other European countries. A restrictive migration policy should make Sweden less attractive for migrants who asked for residency in Europe. Not only did the new migration policy allow Swedish authorities to restrict the number of immigrants; it also allowed them to put those who were accepted on trial and to expel them when they did not prove to be up to certain standards.

Effective implementation

The arguments for a new migration policy point to an underlying, though implicit rather than articulated, view on migrants as an unsettling intrusion, to be eliminated whenever possible. The centralized organization for the implementation of the policy reflects this apprehension: it implies that immigrants draw on Swedish (limited) resources, bring uncertainty into the

country and are potentially dangerous. Whereas, in Sweden, health care, schools, or care for the elderly has been delegated to regional or local authorities, the migration policy is to be implemented by one government agency, the Swedish Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*). A centralized organization facilitates the transformation of asylum seekers into categories, to be further transformed into organizational achievements (Brunsson, 2021). (The same is true for criminals or drug addicts.)

The annual reports from the Migration Agency illustrate the policy shift that took place shortly after the so-called migration crisis in 2015. An agency-centered discussion on accomplishments then substituted for the earlier compassionate worldview of the agency. Instead of referring to the precarious situation for migrants or Sweden's potential to help, the director-general concentrated on the work of the agency and its accomplishments. Excerpts from the prefaces of the annual reports illustrate this change of attitude (translated from Swedish):

> I am proud of the work of the Migration Agency. Our work serves as a model for other countries. (Annual report for 2013)

> Many countries are eager to protect the right to asylum. But verbally only – Sweden belongs to the group of countries that make a difference. (Annual report for 2014)

> We plan to develop our work under more stable conditions - - - I am convinced that progress in terms of effectiveness, quality, and service is feasible. (Annual report for 2017)

> We are planning for a new recruitment policy and digitalization - - - a holistic view on the asylum process shall make decision-making faster. (Annual report for 2018)

> We note that many arrows point in the right direction - - - 2019 marks the end of a unique decade in the history of the Agency. (Annual report for 2019)

In its annual report for 2020, the Migration Agency measured efficiency with reference to its number of decisions. Decision-making had become faster and cheaper: In 2018, each employee made on average 50 decisions; in 2020 the number was 80. Each decision cost around 30,000 Swedish crowns in 2018; in 2020 the cost was around 21,000 (Migrationsverket, 2021). A high rejection rate helps explain the numbers: The time spent on a decision of acceptance was considerably longer than a reject decision. In 2018, some 39 percent of first-time asylum applications were accepted; in 2020, only 29 percent (Migrationsverket, 2021).

A quality measure was added to the efficiency numbers: Agency decision-making should be predictable, uniform and in accordance with the law. The Migration Agency used the number of changes made by the courts of appeal to measure the judicial quality of its decisions. In 2018, the courts overruled 12 percent of the agency decisions submitted to them and returned 7 percent to the Migration Agency. In 2020, 7 percent of submitted agency decisions were overruled and 5 percent returned (Migrationsverket, 2021). (Critics referred these numbers to compliant courts that did not assess the complaints independently but relied on the Migration Agency, see Eckerman and Fridell Anter, 2021.)

Included in the ambition to fortify the Swedish borders was an insistence on an effective "return process." The Migration Agency (2021) reported that, in 2020, some 6,800 out of 15,000 asylum seekers left Sweden voluntarily. About 1,500 left the country with police escort. Almost 4,500 whose applications had been rejected had disappeared, and some 2,500 were no longer on the case list. The numbers were lower, and it took longer than in previous years, because the Covid pandemic had made it difficult to arrange for return travels. Some 2,500 asylum applicants had been kept in detention for an average of 55 days. The number was lower, the detention time longer, and the costs higher than before, again due to the Covid pandemic. (Critics regard the report on voluntary returns as an instance of euphemism. There is no such thing as a voluntary return, they claim, see Delmi, 2021; Röda Korset, 2021.)

The Migration Agency did not explicitly evaluate its performance in terms of effectiveness but left it to the Government and others to evaluate the numbers. A frequent mention of "improvements" referred to both accomplishments and future initiatives by the agency.

A Policy for the Citizens

Obviously, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum was not inspired by compassion for those who seek refuge from war, poverty, or harassments. While emphasizing that the Geneva convention of the right to apply for asylum was still valid, the Commission implied that the target group for the new migration and asylum pact was not migrants or asylum seekers but EU citizens. These citizens should trust that the EU administration could protect their interests (as perceived by the administration). The mention of European values, like the fact that the EU policy domain called *Promoting our European way of life* was responsible for the pact, indicates that the Commission did not find that an influx of war-stricken, poor, or harassed people would promote the interests of the EU citizens. Implicitly (and at the press conference at times explicitly) it regarded asylum seekers as a burden, for whom the responsibility (and public expenditure) must be shared. In line with an egoistic, organizational ideal, the European Commission designed the New Pact on Migration and Asylum for the benefit of European citizens. It defined solidarity as a relationship among its member states.

By emphasizing the common interest of the EU member states to maintain and strengthen the EU borders, the Commission made clear that it regarded the EU as one entity. By promoting a *migration management system,* it referred to the European Union much like top managers might refer to their corporations (European Commission, 2020c). This implicit analogy between the EU and any other organization makes egoism appear normal (Brunsson, 2017). What is perceived to be the organization's best interests then define perceptions of effectiveness.

When the Swedish policy makers decided on one of the strictest migration policies in Europe (Delmi, 2022), they had the Swedish citizens in mind. Many organizations had observed the adverse effects of the new policy. Temporary permits of residency would jeopardize the health of the migrants, they argued, and make integration efforts difficult (prop. 2020/21:191). These objections remained unheeded, however. Instead, the Government redefined the meaning of the "migration crisis" of 2015. The crisis no longer referred to the war in Syria or other war-stricken regions but to the high demands suddenly afflicting the Migration Agency and other Swedish authorities (*Värmlands folkblad*, 2016). An emphasis on costs followed from the presumption that migrants were an affliction for which the responsibility must be shared among the European countries. No reference was made to the gains that might come with new inhabitants and citizens (Hansen, 2021).

As shown, the Migration Agency measured its effectiveness also by the relative number of appeals that the migration courts overruled. To the agency, high acceptance rate implied a mark of both quality and effectiveness. Possibly, these and other numbers, incited the director-general to declare that "many arrows point in the right direction" (Migrationsverket, 2020). Lawfulness and effectiveness were intertwined but concerned the Swedish law and the work of the Swedish Migration Agency. None of the arrows concerned the situation for refugees located in camps around the world.

Whereas the New Pact on Migration and Asylum was to protect EU citizens and the territory of EU states, the Swedish migration policy concerned Swedish citizens and the Swedish territory. In neither case were the policies defined as *doing the right things* with reference to migrants' basic needs – they referred to an apprehension of the well-being of certain citizens. But even in this respect, the policy was lopsided, as it focused on (costly) "responsibility" but ignored the benefits that migrants might contribute to society.

A Managerial Approach

When presenting their new migration policies, the EU and Swedish policy makers concentrated on individuals crossing the borders of their respective territories. As noted, they did not relate migration to the transportation of goods and services across these borders. Instead, they accepted as a matter of course a situation where inexpensive goods and services were produced by impoverished industrial workers belonging to opaque supply chains in poor

countries. By emphasizing that migrants should return to their "home countries" and by providing financial aid to some of those who returned voluntarily (European Commission, 2020a; Migrationsverket, 2022b), these policy makers helped sustain a situation where the poor were accepted as key producers of European and Swedish wealth but preferably in countries far away. They endorsed a situation of economic inequality, contrary to goal number one of the agenda for sustainable development adopted by the United Nations – *no poverty* (United Nations, 2022b). Because the – effective – EU and Swedish migration policies served to protect the lifestyle of the citizens within their specific territories, the most vulnerable were kept at a distance, deprived of their political rights (Ingram, 2008; Krause, 2008). Again, effectiveness referred to the situation for a limited group of people, defined by borders.

By concentrating on the perceived well-being of their citizens, the policy makers presented their regional and national policies as strategies, little different from strategies developed within business firms.

A world of one's own

It has been observed that many, including scholars, tend to mistake "society" for the idea of the nation state (Ahrne, 2022). Individuals and their social bonds and relations constitute society, which is boundless, like a landscape. States, in contrast, are like formal organizations in many respects. States have borders, budgets, and a certain number of members (citizens). Specific individuals, whether elected by the citizens or self-appointed, are to deliberate on norms, set rules, and allocate money to a variety of undertakings. Much like business firms, states are liable to depend on management and some unique management system, or systems. (And the European Commission [2020c] explicitly proposed a migration management system.)

But different from business firms, states are bound to a certain territory. They cannot move, should they find another location more attractive. It takes war or some other illegitimate action to expand the territory. Nor can states choose the number and quality of their member-citizens. Normally, those who were born within the state territory must be accepted as citizens and cared for. This is true even when too many babies were born, or babies were born accidentally, perhaps as a result of outrageous rape.

The migration policy, however, implied an outlook much like that of a specific business firm. People may turn to business firms and ask for employment even at times when these firms are not looking for new recruits. But the firms should hire employees – and make them redundant – with their own effectiveness in mind (Fayol, 1916/1949). In Sweden, as a rule, new employees are tested during a trial period before being hired on a permanent basis.

The migration policies were modeled on this view on migrants as potentially useful or potentially superfluous people. They were designed to – effectively – deter migrants from approaching the EU and Swedish borders; further, they made a difference between various types of migrants, allowed some to stay, but mostly on a temporary basis, and forced others to leave, or else be declared "illegal" (Brunsson, 2022). By identifying different categories of inhabitants, entitled to various degrees of welfare services, the policy makers created borders also within their territories. The EU and Swedish nation states were treated much like formal organizations, where there are departments, hierarchies, and distinct categories of employees with different rights to agency.

By arguing as if a migration policy were a matter of management, the policy makers transmitted (or sought to transmit) an impression of order and predictability like the order, predictability, and control that (ideally) pertain to a management system within a business firm (Fayol, 1916/1949, Brunsson, 2017; Jönsson, 2021). Yet their policies concerned a phenomenon, which was largely outside of their control, but which they were obliged to recognize. Contrary to business firm managers, who may leave circumstances that do not involve their own organization unattended, these policy makers had agreed to follow international conventions on human rights, including the right to asylum (United Nations, 2022a; FRA, 2022; Regeringen, 2022). By isolating as much as possible the EU and Swedish states from their environments, the policy makers disregarded their international obligations.

Although world-wide migration is the very reason for a migration policy, they treated this phenomenon extemporaneously, as a potentially harmful inconvenience that had best be warded off or ignored. Declarations of humane migration policies had become subordinate to the idea of effectiveness, as this concept is commonly used by business firms.

The policy makers neglected the two caveats that come with the idea of effectiveness: They did not state whom or what or which laws they had in mind when they asked for effectiveness. Nor did they recognize and distinguish between contexts where resources are scarce, and contexts where, in contrast, abundance (waste) is a token of effectiveness (see the paragraph on economy, efficiency and effectiveness above). These omissions make the frequent references to effectiveness seem out of context. The question is what the policy makers sought to achieve by insisting time and again on effectiveness. In the next section, I suggest two alternative interpretations.

Politics as management

Perhaps effectiveness was used merely as a vague reference to (or flirtation with) something that the policy makers presumed resonates with many, due to implications of rationality, economics, or other abstractions with positive connotations (Edelman, 1967). The concept then takes on vague moral overtones, as if an effective policy were superior a priori to a policy that lacks this epithet. When that is the case, and reference to effectiveness serves as a (weak) moral reinforcement, the idea of effectiveness combines easily with nouns that come with a similar type of implications, such as solidarity or sustainability.

An idea of effective solidarity may seem like an oxymoron, as if the European Commission had mistakenly mixed concepts from different social domains, but reference to effectiveness may in fact enhance the morality implicit in the notion of solidarity. If policy makers appear more trustworthy when they relate solidarity to a concept with which many are familiar and understand as positive, the idea of effectiveness is a functional supplement to the (positive) connotations of solidarity (Luhmann, 1968). This means that, when translated into a new context, the idea of effectiveness lost its connection to economy, efficiency, and egoism and served instead as a reinforcing attribute, perhaps addressing a different audience than that of the adjunct noun. With relation to migration policies, this interpretation seems inadequate, however, because the solidarity and humane aspects of the policy were downplayed in favor of a managerial approach to migration.

A second, more fruitful type of analysis, is to argue that, to the contrary, the implications of the idea of effectiveness did not change when this idea was used in a policy context. Instead, as before, effectiveness was tied to the three E's and the idea of the formal organization. As the description of the migration policies show, any appreciation of a boundless global society was superseded by an instrumental managerial perspective. The organization-like properties of the nation state (or states) were bolstered, and an unruly and largely uncontrollable situation was transformed into something orderly.

Further, the egoistic implications that the idea of effectiveness entails in an organizational context were accepted as a matter of course, and the effective migration policies were designed to enhance the welfare of those within a specific territory. Effective solidarity referred to solidarity among the EU states. A humane Swedish migration policy addressed the work of the public sector, public expenditure, and the (perceived) interests of Swedish citizens. The emphasis on effectiveness, therefore, helped modify the meaning of other concepts with which it was combined. It parallels the NPM emphasis on efficiency, which also impinged on the context to which the concept was applied. As shown, significant implications followed for the organization of the public sector and the role of civil servants. The consequences of applying the idea of effectiveness were even more radical: in this case, the worldwide and unpredictable phenomenon of migration was transformed into a question of management.

One may argue that the very idea of regional or national migration policies is a contradiction in terms. The freedom of a conglomerate of nation states, or a single nation state,

to enforce specific policies is limited to a predefined territory. The transnational character of migration challenges this prerogative. That is why an agreement to protect the right of all individuals to migrate should be a social undertaking rather than state duty. An attitude to migration based on solidarity and compassion with migrants in a chaotic, war- and poverty-stricken world should prevail globally, irrespective of any perceived inconveniences for individual states. A social view on migrations would endorse equality and come close to the type of economy the seventeenth and eigteenth century thinkers believed to be fair – even without references to eschatological hope. The declaration of human rights would then be not only a principle perfunctorily alluded to, but a practice. All types of "migration policies" would be superfluous. The effectiveness concept would lose its dependence on the idea of organizations and their inherent egoism – if this concept was at all relevant.

As yet, such a (utopian) society has little capacity to act, however. Effectiveness remains a favorite concept among policy makers. My discussion concludes, therefore, with the observation that that references to effectiveness is not any harmless addition of a largely vacuous concept. The transformational capacity of this concept may be substantial, enhancing the organizational properties of nation states and making all types of problems into managerial problems.

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