

Agencies and policy networks in the European Union: challenges for an evolving mosaic

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Introduction

- Policy networks represent a ubiquitous feature of European public policy and administration
- We here present the findings of an analysis of policy networks from the point of view of the EU agency as the focal organization:
 - How are EU agencies ‘embedded in’ policy networks?
 - What implications does it have for European public policies?
 - What does it entail for the development of the same EU agencies?
 - And are there more profound ongoing transformations of public administration at all levels (national, European), related to the growth of EU agencies and the reshaping of policy networks?

Extent of 'involvement' in European Public Policy Processes

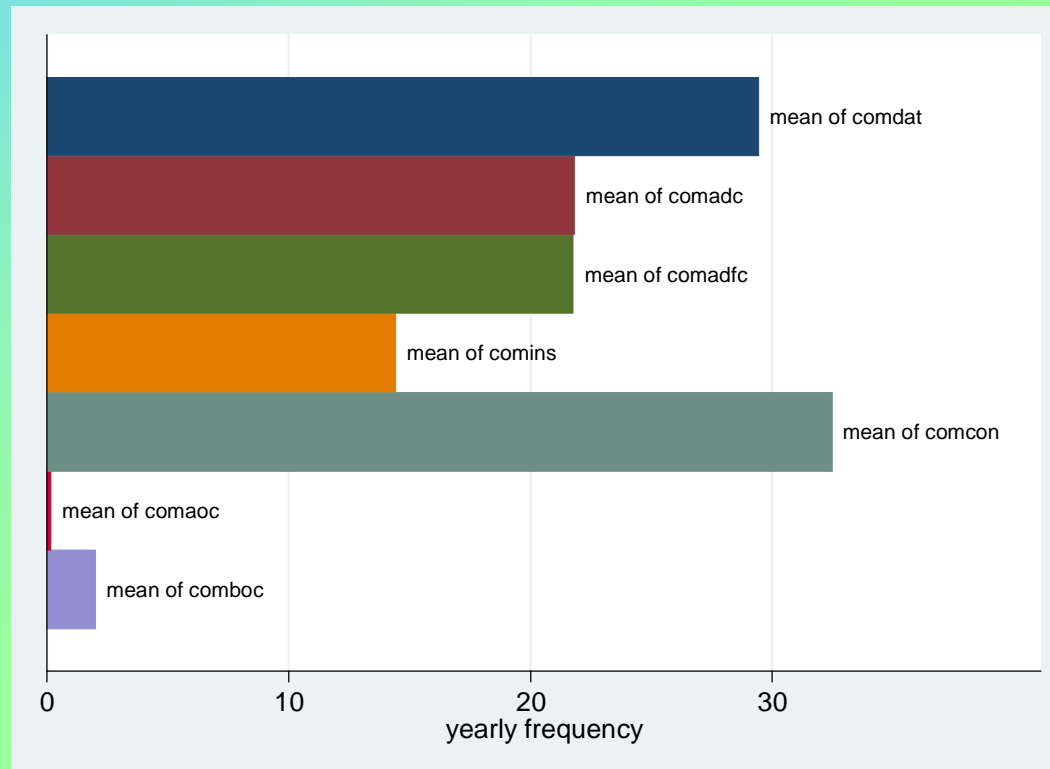
- An important part of EU agencies are involved to a significant extent in policy tasks such as: formulation of guidelines; issuing opinions and policy advice; implementation of specific policy measures; evaluation of policy/programmes
- Only certain agencies are involved in other activities (like negotiations at the international level; or the answering of Parliamentary questions)
- The specific tasks entrusted to agencies explains differences – The overall picture is however one in which EU agencies do have a role in various phases of European public policy processes

The question thus becomes: what role, constructed through what types of interactions, and with what actors of European policy networks?

Positioning in the network: frequency of interaction with key actors

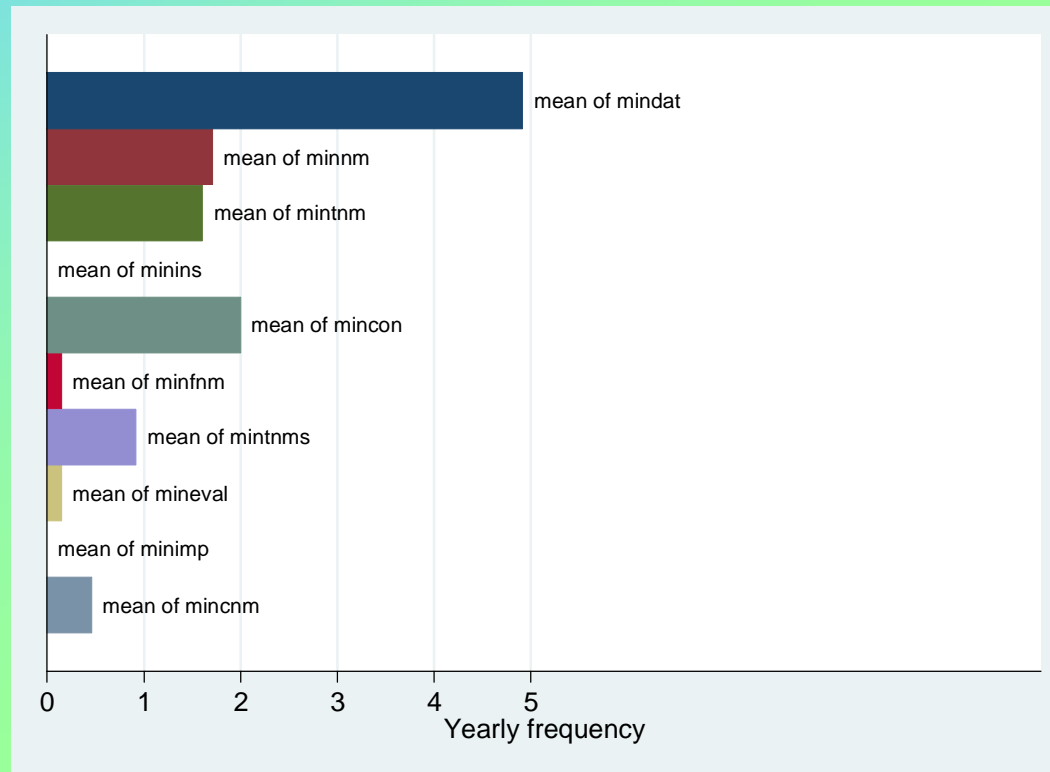
- Frequency and contents of interactions of EU agencies with a range of relevant policy actors have been detected
- Type (contents) of interactions range from data exchange to advice (to or from the agency), from transmission of mandatory instructions (to the agency) to consultation, from transfers of financial resources to audit evaluation and control
- Frequency of interactions spans from weekly or more often to yearly or less often

Interactions (cont'd): European Commission



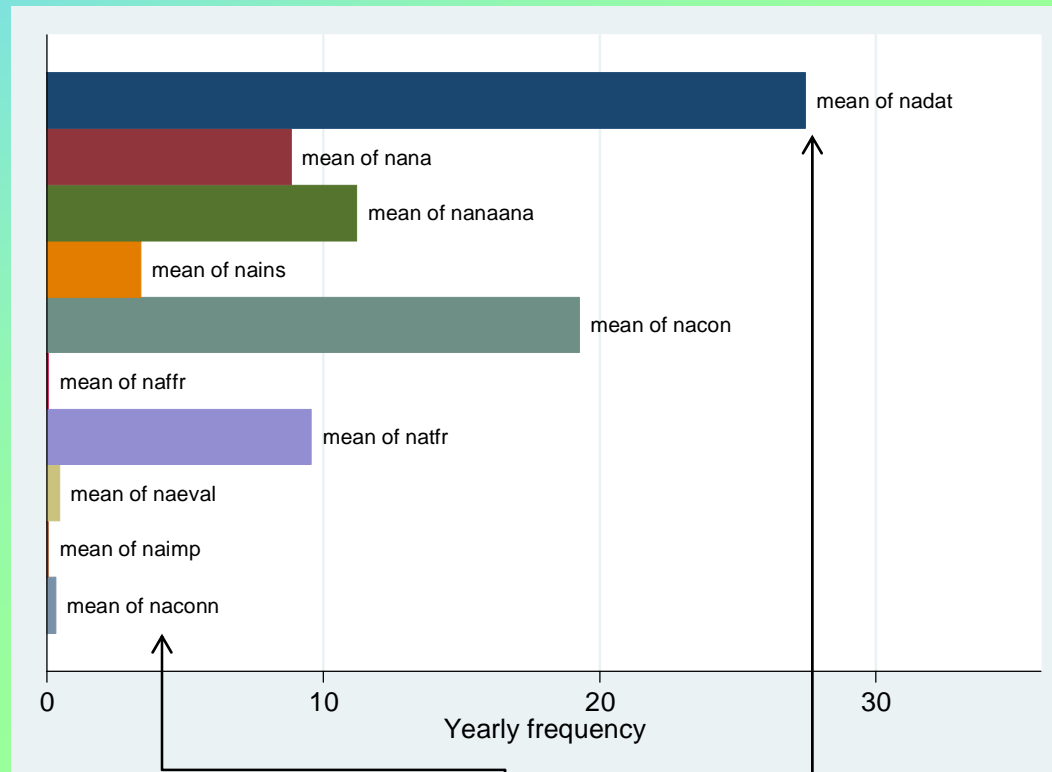
- Consultation, followed by data exchange, and by exchange of advice are the most frequent types of interactions – 20/30 times per year
- Also transmission of mandatory instructions is significantly present

Interactions (cont'd): EU agencies and national ministries



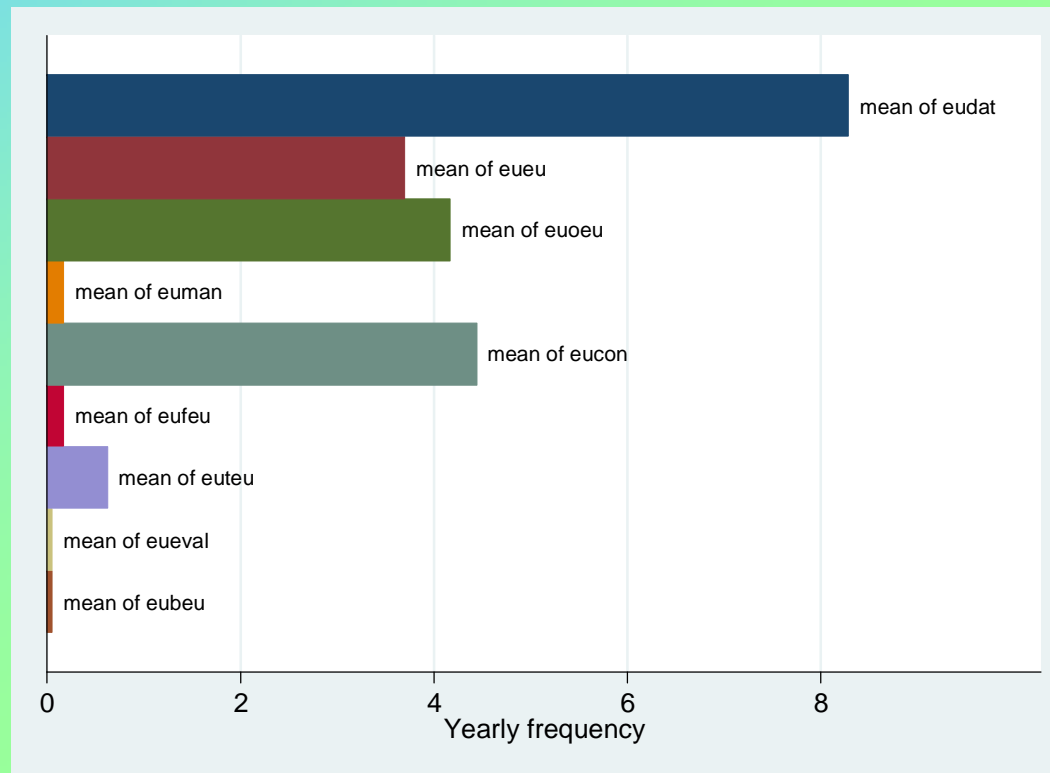
- Frequency of interactions is very limited, and mainly confined to data exchange
- instead interactions with national *agencies*....

Interactions (cont'd): EU agencies and national agencies



... is much more frequent!

Interactions (cont'd): EU agencies amongst themselves



- Interactions not insignificant (though highly differentiated from agency to agency), contrarily to initial expectation of research team
- A ‘system’ of pan-European agencies seems to some extent to be taking shape, across levels of governance and policy sectors⁸

Interactions (cont'd):

Interest groups and stakeholders

- Interactions with interest groups and stakeholders (the former intended as the more organized groups, the latter as a larger category of social groups affected by the action of the agency) have been examined, in order to analyse the broader policy network
- Interactions with these types of actors are much more limited (as well as of course confined to data exchange, advice and/or consultation), but surely not irrelevant
- In general, EU agencies tend to have more interactions with stakeholders at large than with organized interests

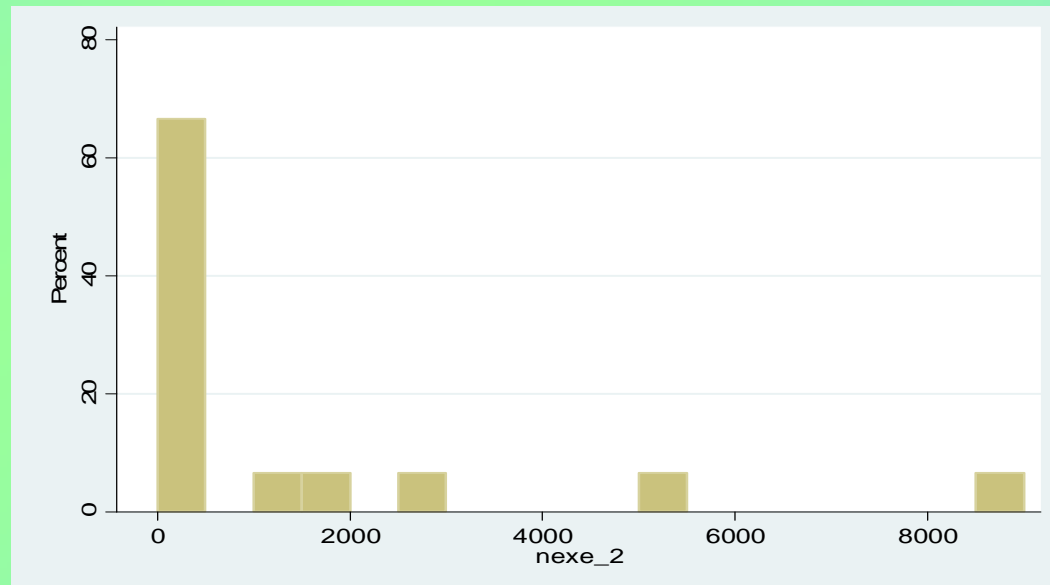
Who is on the recipient side?

Target groups of EU agencies

- National governments are the main target group (both ministries and agencies)
 - followed by the European Commission in its various units (DGs, Services)
 - private businesses and individuals are the subsequent more important recipients of the outputs delivered by EU agencies,
 - followed by a wide set of target groups, ranging from national-level agencies, to regional/local governments, employers' associations, etc..
- EU agencies work more frequently directly for their constituents (in the executive domain): the national governments and the Commission

The use of expert knowledge

- Operating through networks is also a necessity for EU agencies in order to acquire external resources essential to carry out their tasks (expansion of capacities through network resources)
- An important number of agencies rely on the expertise of professionals and scientists – but in the total population less than 50% do so



EU agencies in the global(ised) world

- It emerges that the majority of agencies do interact with international organisations outside the European Union (from police cooperation to border controls, to aviation safety-related issues, etc.)
- Data exchange is the type of interaction which occurs most frequently, whilst advice and consultation types of interaction are less frequent but not irrelevant
- Contents and frequency are driven – but not entirely determined - by the task(s) executed
- ... a good reminder of the global dimension of most European public policies!

Policy implications

A Multi-Actor policy process?

Why not!

- Competencies of agencies are confined to specified tasks – nonetheless, through continued interactions (data exchange, consultation, advice, issuing of guidelines, delivery of services, ...), they do have a role in European policy processes , mainly - but not exclusively! - in the implementation phase
- From decision science we learn that decisions processes are more than the formal acts – a plurality of actors may dip in and out decision-processes bringing solutions to problems, problems to solutions, decision-making capacities,
- Highly dense policy networks facilitate such dynamics
- Virtues and limitations as regards decision-making: such processes may be more fragmented, slow – but possibly decisions may be much more informed, more options can be considered before reaching a decision, and adjustments can more easily be made

The development of EU agencies?

Reflections from state of the art

- It seems apparent a process of institutionalisation of EU agencies – independently of the nature of the tasks executed, the formal powers and ‘status’, the sector
- They are actors in their own right of the policy process – the sway being mainly in the alternative generation phase, and policy implementation
- Intense networking may provide both opportunities and constraints to organisational development
- Agency’s action occurs in a multi-level setting, and produces multi-level implications

A transforming Public Administration?

- Is the 'European accumulated executive order' being reshaped? And if so, how?
- It has been argued (Egeberg) that 'the executive function' in the EU may be transforming: European Commission, EU agencies and national agencies are becoming more and more 'integrated', a deeply interconnected, cohesive system
- Partly to the detriment of cohesion in (previously highly integrated) national public sectors
- Empirical evidence presented here may be interpreted (with caution) as adding confidence to this interpretation
- Thus, could it be that too much attention is given to processes of apparent fragmentation (because of their high visibility), whilst overlooking other, deeper though latent, transformations?

Thank you!

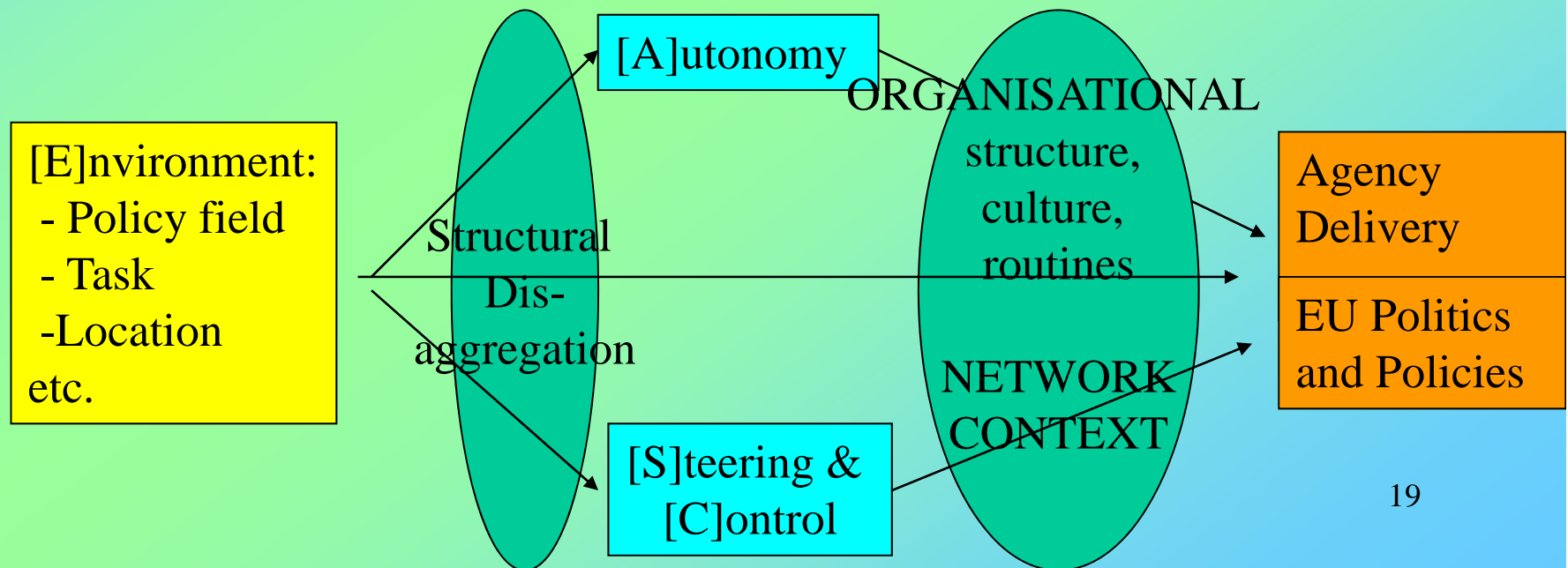
Overall design of the research

Background information on the
underlying research project
completed at SDA Bocconi in 2010

First approximation reference model

(“CRIPO model revisited”)

- How [E] affects [A, S&C]?
- How [E, A, S&C] affect [Agency delivery], [Agency influence on EU policies and (executive) politics] also through [ORG] and [NET Context]



Assumptions

- The model assumes an ‘Institutional’ view (*that for example does not consider ‘executive leadership’, etc.*)
- However, the model is quite ‘open’ and receptive to a variety of theoretical interpretations (broadly close to ‘sociological new institutionalism’ – but open to insights from both normative and rational choice new institutionalism perspectives)

Main limitations

- The focus of the analysis is on already existing agencies
- This means that questions like the following are not addressed:
 - under what circumstances will an agency (i.e.: an institution that may challenge the existing power structure of the EU) be established?
 - what is the influence of the formative phase (but the ‘age’ of the agency) over subsequent developments?

‘Added value’

- Scientific, ‘independent experts’ contribution to debate on the agency phenomenon
- Utilisable for self-diagnosis collectively by the agencies (system-wide) as well as individually by each agency comparing with the overall system of agencies
- Actual impact of agencies on delivery (efficacy), policy (intelligent, quick, neutral advice; reliable data for policy decision), politics (the evolution of the EU polity)

EU Agencies

- Three waves of establishment of EU agencies (before 1990, the 1990s, the 2000s)
- They nowadays represent a significant ‘portion’ of the EU polity
- Various classifications have been proposed – and perspectives of investigation (effects on regulatory regimes, issues of accountability,)
- Main task: information gathering; Handling of individual cases (‘adjudicational’); Policy advice; Issuing of implementation guidelines;

→ EU agencies do affect EU policy and politics

- Executive bodies embedded in multi-level frameworks (national and sub-national administrations, national agencies)

Specification of the Model: structural disaggregation

- Structural disaggregation and/or the creation of ‘task specific’ organisations is at the core of the idea of agency
 - Division of labour between agency and ‘parent’/supervising administration(s)
 - Legal basis (of agency, and statute of its personnel), statute, the board and the broader ‘corporate governance’
- EU agencies often (though not always) perform ‘new’ tasks (part of the building of the ‘executive function’ at the EU level?)
- Generally speaking, EU agencies are less diverse in terms of tasks, size, etc. than national level agencies

Specification of the Model: Autonomy

Autonomy is always 'relative to'

- Autonomy from what institution(s): usually from the Parent/Supervising Administration (→ *Commission DG(s), Council*)
- Autonomy in what respect: financial autonomy, managerial autonomy, 'strategic/policy' autonomy, ... (dimensions of autonomy)

Specification of the Model: Steering & Control

The system through which the parent administration(s) steers the agency

- Agency's goals assignment,
- Evaluation, systems of reward and punishment, etc.
- Procedures of appointment of board, director/chief executive, etc.

Specification of the Model: organisational and network context

Agency action and agency performance is affected also by

- The organizational structure, culture and routines
- The configuration of the policy network(s) where the agency operates, the functioning (games that are played) of the network, the position of the agency in the network

Specification of the Model: Influence on EU politics and policies, and agency delivery

Overarching Research Questions include:

- Under what conditions will EU agencies be able to actually transform EU politics and policies?
- Under what conditions will EU agencies be more or less performing, and in what respects?

The reference model is a frame for mapping ‘clusters of factors’ and ‘main lines of influence’ around these and similar RQs (CRIPO ‘added value’)

Research design and questions

- Research questions
 - What are the features of EU agencies?
 - What are the linkages (cause-effect) and what explains such linkages (Reference model)?
- Research design
 - Case study (exploratory: designing the reference model) + survey (questionnaire-based) + Multiple case study (analysis of causal linkages)

Structure of the questionnaire

Three parts

- Respondent information (2 questions)
- Section 1 (pre-filled, to be validated) (30 questions)
- Section 2 (to be filled in) (20 questions)

Structure of the questionnaire (cont'd)

Section 1 (pre-filled questions):

- ✓ features of the agency (age, budget, task...)
- ✓ goals definition
- ✓ decision-making competences
- ✓ evaluation systems
- ✓ governance structure
- ✓ budgeting process

Structure of the questionnaire (cont'd)

Section 2:

- ✓ autonomy
- ✓ outputs of the agency
- ✓ performance indicators
- ✓ audit
- ✓ competition and network
- ✓ relation with national agencies and national experts
- ✓ human resources management

Previous research work

Comparative analysis of EU with national level agencies
on
Autonomy, Steering and Control, Structural Disaggregation

(see Barbieri, D. and Ongaro, E. (2008) 'EU agencies: what is common and what is distinctive compared with national-level public agencies', *International review of Administrative sciences*, Vol. 74:3, pp. 395-420.

Research questions and design

- RQs: Does a ‘European type’ of public agency exist? What are its features? And how does it differ from the world of the national- and sub-national-level agencies?
- Research design: mainly based on public sources (statutes, reports, evaluations, etc.); focus on First Pillar agencies
- Limitations in the variables that could be observed: focus (selectively) on structural disaggregation, autonomy, contractualisation

Research design (cont'd)

- The national cases: stylised cases of agencies in Italy, Sweden, United Kingdom (examined through literature plus survey & case analysis)
- The 'Tripod model': theoretical term of reference (first theorised by Pollitt, 2004) – it is a 'Practitioners' model', whose main features are
 - Mono-task, focused on operations
 - Managerial, no strategic autonomy
 - Steered through a performance contract

Findings

	EU	Tripod Model	UK	Sweden	Italy
<i>Structural Disaggregation</i>					
Indicator					
A. INSTITUTIONAL DISTANCE	High (though agencies do not resolve upon their statutes - uniform values for all agencies)	High	Mixed	High	Mixed
B. TASK COMPLEXITY	Low (agencies operate only in one policy area)	Low	Mixed-Low	Mixed	Mixed
C. INSTITUTIONAL SPECIALIZATION on operation	High (uniform values for all agencies)	High	Mixed-High	Mixed-Low	Mixed-High
<i>Autonomy</i>					
Indicator					
D. FINANCIAL AUTONOMY	Low (though a few agencies can acquire further resources outside Commission funding)	Low	Mixed	High	Mixed
E. MANAGERIAL AUTONOMY	Low (uniform values for all agencies)	High	Mixed-High	High	Mixed-High
F. STRATEGIC AUTONOMY	Low (concerning the formulation of policy targets) High (concerning the determination of policy instruments)	Low	Mixed	High	Low
<i>Contractualisation</i>					
Indicator					
G. DEGREE OF CONTRACTUALISATION (PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING)	Low (uniform values for all agencies)	High	High	Mixed-Low	Low

Findings (addressing RQs)

- There is an ‘EU type’ of agency – but different from the tripod model
 - very limited degree of contractualisation
 - limited managerial autonomy (personnel and organisational design)
 - but it does have autonomy in the definition of policy instruments (a kind of strategic autonomy)
- The EU type of agency has the features described in the above Table
- The EU type of agency is less differentiated than national-level agencies (i.e.: it is a type) (which elicits further RQs: what explains such relative uniformity? What are the effects on policy and management of such uniformity?)