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# The Committee Secretariat of the European Parliament: administrative mobility, expertise and keeping the legislative wheels turning

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## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a novel perspective on the benefits provided by the rotation of administrators within legislative systems, by exploring the Committee Secretariat (CS) of the European Parliament (EP) and their role as a source of information utilised by legislators. Using qualitative interviews, I provide an original outlook on the expertise of the Committee Secretariat after the entrenchment of career mobility practices. I find that the advent of mobility, where administrators are moved into a new position after a set number of years, is altering the culture of the Secretariat away from area specialists and towards greater concentrations of highly adaptable generalists. I provide an account on the functions of mobility and the benefits it provides from encouraging a more encompassing understanding of institutional practices. From gaining a wider knowledge, by working on different committees, administrators may be of greater usefulness to lawmakers.

**KEYWORDS** European Parliament; Committee Secretariat; mobility; administrative systems; expertise

## Introduction

Bureaucracies have been a subject of attention, ever since Weber's considerations, for those seeking to understand legislatures and how administrators impact the thinking of policymakers (Huber & McCarty, 2004). Depending on the parliament, its evolution and topography, administrators can be a utility which lawmakers utilise during legislative decision-making processes, applying the informational expertise gained from these officials when seeking to favourably affect outcomes (Högenauer & Neuhold, 2015), enabling legislators 'to be politically influential players' (Högenauer et al., 2016, p. 6). This notion is advanced by informational theorists (Krehbiel, 1991) and observed within cases such as the European Parliament (EP) at a tertiary level (Ringe,

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2010). While several studies have begun to illuminate the apparatus of the EP's administrative systems (Neunreither, 2002; Winzen, 2011; Marshall, 2012; Egeberg et al., 2013; Dobbels & Neuhold, 2013; Egeberg et al., 2014; Neuhold & Dobbels, 2015; Högenauer et al., 2016; Pegan, 2017), a considerable expanse concerning their presence in the organisation of the Parliament is still left unknown. Egeberg et al. (2013) have described consideration of the Secretariat, the Parliament's administrative actors, as an area of sparsity with an inadequate volume of scholarly work existing. This paper explores the still murky, yet significant, area of the Committee Secretariat (CS) as a key component of the Parliament's internal organisation, and the intervening impact which career mobility practices should have had – on their ability to support legislators.

Understanding of administrative turnover in comparative legislatures, when a bureaucrat leaves their system (Dahlström & Holmgren, 2019), has developed over time alongside accompanying knowledge upon the informational asymmetry which exists between officials and legislators resulting from electoral turnover (Lowande, 2018). The EP committee system, however, offers an intriguing exploration of administrative rotational turnover resulting from career mobility practices. Governments, typically, are the chief repositories of informational expertise, giving them their ability to write policies, opposed to legislatures which are disadvantaged with, generally, less expert capacity vis-a-vis executives. Administrators assist legislators to deliver upon their democratic mandates by the, potential, amelioration of this gap in expert capacity (Huber & McCarty, 2004). The Committee Secretariat complete crucial administrative functions which keep the legislative process efficiently turning-over (Neunreither, 2002). How, however, does the practice of career mobility affect the resource of informational expertise which policymakers seek from administrators to be influential? By addressing this question, this paper explores the informational utility of the CS and the surprising impact which internal mobility rules, propagated in 2004 (Hayes-Renshaw, 2017, p. 109), have had.

While not endeavouring to affect legislation politically (but may (Winzen, 2011; Marshall, 2012)), the actions of the Secretariat will impact upon the legislative system from facilitating the decision-making process and advising political actors of their options (Högenauer et al., 2016). However, the informational utility which the CS can fulfil is conceivably affected by the mitigating factor of career mobility rotating officials away from areas of speciality after specified time periods (Corbett et al., 2011). I observe mobility as having a positive impact, contrary to some accounts, on the abilities of administrators but simultaneously shifting their utility for lawmakers. The CS may be retaining relevance by using mobility to create an even greater pool of adaptable administrators possessing a wider comprehension of the institutional systems.

In this paper, I utilise Krehbiel's (1991) informational perspective of legislative organisation, adopting the conceptual approach that information equals influence – the ability to alter outcomes towards preferences. Legislators cannot determine with certainty the summative outcome of policy choice. The fear of negative consequences drives legislators to acquire information on the options available. Information may be manifested as an understanding of the specialised technical aspects of a policy, or knowledge of sources, such as administrators, to acquire this efficiently. Information may also be constituted as understanding what solutions have been proposed previously, what was acceptable to different decision-makers, or how to best manage the legislative process (Krehbiel, 1991). The acquisition of information places a legislative participant into a stronger negotiating position, knowing more than the opposite party, and exploiting the asymmetrical informational advantage to their strategic benefit during bargaining (Costello & Thomson, 2010). Obtaining expertise costs time and resources, decision-makers seek the sources of expertise which provide the highest information available for the relatively lowest costs incurred (Gilligan & Krehbiel, 1990). In parliamentary systems it is not exclusively the right to make a decision which defines influence but equally the ability to fulfil the potential, that decision-making involvement gives you, by the consumption of information and what variables, such as mobility, affect this resource (Gornitzka & Sverdrup, 2011).

After reviewing the functions of the CS and the potential consequences of mobility, discussion turns to the approach adopted and how the data collected is utilised. Once the merits of the research design have been specified, the data is considered before a discussion on the contributions to the field of legislative decision-making and administrative organisation is advanced.

## Committee Secretariat

The Secretariat are the Parliament's civil service, performing administrative functions which could be expected in most parallel Western European systems. However, like comparing one national civil service to another, each has its own working culture. The term 'administrative styles' describes the 'standard operating procedures and routines that characterise the behaviour and decision-making of bureaucracies' (Knill et al., 2016, p. 1059) – effectively what does an administrative body do, resulting from engrained practices and rules. Engagement with this level of the CS is not extensive in publication. What has been discovered suggests they are performing limited, but essential functions, being a usable utility supplying expertise to political actors in what may be set, but not fully verified, circumstances.

The Parliament's General-Secretariat are organised into 12 sectorial departments named the Directorate-Generals (DG). The DGs supply and organise

administrators within the different areas under their remits, for instance DG 'Internal Policies of the Union' (DG IPOL) supplies the administrators for those EP committees regarded as responsible for internal EU policy. There were 5,273 General-Secretariat operating under the different DGs 7th term (2009–2014) (Corbett et al., 2011, p. 219), increasing to 5,602 officials 8th term (2014–2019) (Dobbels et al., 2016). Parliamentary officials are recruited through open competition, and, typically, practice is to hire individuals fresh out of higher education or early career phases (Högenauer et al., 2016). From an initial stage the goal was to recruit 'talented and committed officials who thereafter devoted their talents to sustaining and extending the parliament's role and powers' (Westlake, 1994, p. 197).

Within the Parliament decision-making is organised around a system of 20 standing (+2 sub) committees. When a legislative proposal is made by the Commission, it is sent to the Council of the European Union and the relevant EP committee. After the Treaty of Lisbon (enforced from 2009) the Council and EP are co-legislators in all but select areas, each can propose amendments or ultimately veto a proposal. Once a proposal is received, a committee member will be nominated the 'Rapporteur' assigned responsibility for writing their committee's position, which will, excluding extreme instances, become the Parliament's position. Assisting the Rapporteur will be at least one committee administrator who follows the proposal until completion (Neunreither, 2002).

Each committee possesses a dedicated Secretariat unit staffed from relevant DG resources. Staff lists are unfortunately not published by all committees, only being found in internal directories. Inside accounts and observed directories, however, establish the average as 10 administrators, with 5 clerical assistants (performing secretarial duties), per committee. Depending on size and influence accredited, some committees are staffed at elevated levels and, concurrently, smaller committees operate below the average. The CS is collectively over 200 members, spread across the 20 (+2 sub) committees and any temporary special committees. Each department is led by a head of unit, whose responsibility is to oversee their division and coordinate broad functions with the elected committee chair. Below the unit head are administrators at various levels of seniority. Seniority can be observed by which administrator 'function group', referred to as 'AD', an official is assigned. AD scales for the CS range from AD5 to AD14. Grades AD 5–6 are considered junior administrators, with AD9 and above senior officials (a unit head must be grade AD9 or above). Promotions are dependent on positive annual reviews but are only approved after a minimum of two years on a current grade (OJEU, 2020). Accumulated service and competency are both considerations regarding progression.

The Parliament does not publish statistics on how many administrators are registered at each AD grade per Committee Secretariat, hindering the

ability to gauge a distribution of senior members. Being designed based on the French bureaucratic model, however, administrators commonly stay within the EU system with high tenures (Dobbels & Neuhold, 2013). Neunreither (2002) suggests that committees with more perceived influence do attract a greater concentration of senior officials regardless of overall committee size. The average committee, nevertheless, possesses an assortment of senior and junior administrators at various career stages.

## Function

The day-to-day functions of the Secretariat are one area which has been advanced with a qualified level of analytical work. The expected functions are to assist Members of the Parliament (MEPs) within the legislative process, and its efficient operation, by offering members an understanding of processes and knowledge of the technicalities of policymaking with the supplying of information (Neunreither, 2002; Egeberg et al., 2013; Egeberg et al., 2014; Neuhold & Dobbels, 2015; Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood, 2017). This may take the form of assisting committee members draft own-initiative reports, provide legal advice or, even, political guidance (Winzen, 2011) for proposed legislative amendments, support Rapporteurs writing of reports and facilitate committee operations performing everyday organisational tasks (Högenauer et al., 2016). Secretariat additionally provide information to facilitate the EP's oversight functions upon other EU institutions, such as the Commission, resulting from the everyday interactions and cultivated relationships which develop between administrators in these bodies (Egeberg et al., 2014).

Dobbels and Neuhold (2013; Neuhold & Dobbels, 2015) have proposed a conceptual framework of functions which Secretariats may perform. Three distinct roles are proposed: (1) Production: drafting reports and voting lists (order proposed amendments are voted upon in committee), and preparation of triologue meetings (informal EP, Commission and Council negotiations) – low to medium involvement in the legislative process. (2) Service: provide briefings on compromise agreements, supply expert advice on policy and procedural guidance – medium to high impact. (3) Steering: proposing compromise agreements to Parliament's political groupings and active involvement within inter-institutional negotiations – high impact. Each of these degrees of participation, however, can only be performed by officials with incrementally higher levels of retained informational resources, or in another word expertise (Dobbels & Neuhold, 2013). A bureaucrat without the resource of expertise, developed from acquired information, will not have much success in assisting legislators or an impact on the policy process (Huber & McCarty, 2004). According to Krehbiel (1991), two definable types of informational resources can be retained by administrators

(and legislators), that of political expertise (referred to subsequently as ‘policy-making expertise’ to avoid misunderstanding its nature, which reaches beyond partisan machinations) and technical expertise.

Technical expertise is the appreciation of the solutions which are feasible at a specialised level, existing separately, but non-exclusively from policy-making expertise (an individual may possess both). A legislative participant may possess an understanding of the technical intricacies of an area and apply this to drafting more sophisticated amendments resulting from a specialist professional or educational background (Daniel & Thierse, 2018). An example would be a Secretariat possessing an advanced educational degree (a PhD) in chemical engineering while working for the Environment committee. Technical expertise is often observed by the prepossession of these types of backgrounds, and the concentration of individuals possessing these (Hermansen, 2018). Those without pre-existing technical vocations, however, may still develop technical knowledge if working for an extended period on policy where technical expertise is required to participate. Technical information, drawn upon by legislators, can be utilised to influence negotiating partners by widening or constraining policy-choice or, assist in the formulation of proposals which are difficult to oppose on technical competency grounds.

Policy-making expertise is the experience which officials acquire working within a legislative system. With accumulated time spent in a committee administrators can learn the system within which they operate, drawing a specialist understanding of how policy is best drafted within the legislature, an expert understanding of how legislative procedures are utilised for optimal returns, and the political complexities of their area. In the example of the Secretariat, Dobbels and Neuhold (2013) offer the potential output of policy-making expertise in the form of their ‘production, service, & steering’ framework. Administrators must be experienced, understanding how best to navigate their system, to participate successfully and propose compromise agreements or to build the relationships needed to be regarded as competent support agents by MEPs (Dobbels & Neuhold, 2013; Egeberg et al., 2014). The CS assist legislators by providing policy advice on the preferences of other legislative actors or even signalling to a member their own groupings preference from retained policy-making experience. Administrators with policy-making expertise may, furthermore, remember the successes or failures of a previous proposal and advise legislators accordingly (Winzen, 2011).

The Secretariat are purported ‘carriers of the EP’s institutional memory’ (Pegan, 2017, p. 300), due to the lack of retained memory collectively within MEPs (Dobbels & Neuhold, 2013). The rate of MEP turnover has been consistently high historically (Treib & Schlipphak, 2019), therefore, MEPs on a committee do not seemingly retain collectively significant levels of institutional memory (Mamadouh & Raunio, 2003). While party

assistants, or lobbyists, may act as an alternative informational repository, legislators desire a proportion of information which lacks an interest-based agenda to facilitate legislative decision-making, which the CS provide (Egeberg et al., 2013). Dobbels & Neuhold (2013) observe this in the case of the Fisheries committee, when MEP's lacked expertise administrators had an increased role supplying information, to an extent that their participation went beyond guidance to shaping outcomes. Both technical and policy-making expertise are collective entities, falling within the communal basket of a CS unit's institutional memory, the concentration of each within a unit the greater the potential utility of that department as a source of information for legislators. However, a mediating factor is seemingly in effect in the form of career mobility.

Within any professional realm there will be natural turnover of staff, within the Secretariat this is exacerbated with mobility. The scheme was expanded across the EU from 2004, previously being a limited practice to becoming a general organisational approach. Once recruited, administrators spend 3 years in an area linked to their professional or educational backgrounds. After 3 years, extended to 7 years for two subsequent rotations, the individual is obligated, the term 'forced-mobility' is often employed, to enter a new position. The expectation is that after 10 years an administrator will be in at least their third different position. Once 17 years is completed rotational requirements may be relaxed considering an administrator's age and seniority. Beyond their first assignment there is no guarantee an official would be moved into a position where they possess pre-existing experience or expertise. Mobility, additionally, does not mandate rotation be limited to the Parliament. While anecdotal accounts indicate the insular nature of the CS leading to rotations frequently occurring internally, an official may rotate to the CS from outside or leave to join other bureaucracies.

Beyond partial accounts, and despite potential impact, the practice of mobility has not been substantially considered within the EP. Corbett et al. (2011, p. 229) have alluded to the significant effect which mobility has seemingly had. While being a jarring process when first introduced, mobility has become 'accepted as introducing a degree of dynamism into staffing policy' (Corbett et al., 2011, p. 229), which appears to have been the objective pursued by the head of the Secretariat, the Secretary-General. Corbett et al. (2011) do not, unfortunately, elaborate on what 'dynamism' entails. Our general understanding of legislative turnover does, however, not cast it in a positive light. Accounts of expertise within legislative bodies, stipulate that it is most useful as a resource when an individual, usually a legislator, is retained on the same committee for an extended period, when they leave they take their experience with them (Weingast & Marshall, 1988; Krehbiel, 1991; Mamadouh & Raunio, 2003; Woods &



Baranowski, 2006; Lowande, 2018). Mobility could weaken the Committee Secretariats' retention of experienced administrators as a result of rotation. This has been ventured by Marshall (2012, p. 1382), that mobility 'has had the unintended consequence of causing a severe loss to the secretariat's institutional memory'. Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood (2017, p. 743) offer a similar interpretation of mobility, a loss of institutional memory, while, indicating briefly, it has allowed for 'an influx of new experiences'. The organisation of mobility would indicate that technical expertise is undermined by specialists being placed in areas where their expertise does not apply. Technical expertise is hard to retain if an administrator possessing it leaves a committee and is not replaced by an individual with similar expertise. The Secretariat are, however, frequently portrayed as generalists (Marshall, 2012), so it is possible that the impact of mobility is less pronounced regarding technical expertise.

Administrative turnover is associated with the fear of 'a reduction in experienced-based expertise, a consequent decline in effectiveness, and the unhappy prospect of neophytes left in charge of complex and vital matters' (Salisbury & Shepsle, 1981, p. 381). If this is held to be reality, the consequence of mobility should be a stark reduction of informational resources retained within the CS. Before its application, however, adopting a generally applied mobility policy was proposed as a solution to the challenging environment which EP administrators find themselves in to 'internalise the unwritten rules' of policymaking (Neunreither, 2002, p. 47). Considering Corbett et al. (2011) allusions to dynamism and the brief reference to an 'influx of new experiences' by Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood (2017, p. 743), as positive by-products, the adoption of mobility may be understood by adapting the idea of 'Inter-Positional Knowledge' ('IPK') developed in studies of corporate organisation (Volpe et al., 1996; Cannon-Bowers et al., 1998). Drawing understanding from the organisation of private companies and applying it to parliamentary organisation is not a significant act of cross-disciplinary heresy. Weingast & Marshall (1988) gained ample insight into the organisation of the US Congress by comparing congressional committees to the operational practices of corporations.

When a corporate actor operates within different institutional positions, learning new responsibilities, they develop 'cross-training' skills. IPK is the expertise which an individual has gained from the process of cross-training (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1998). The employee has learned the function and utility of the various players within the network of their organisation from different experiences within the corporate body. They gain a broader understanding of both the resources and capacity of these different areas they have worked within, or interacted with, applying this knowledge to future operations. Optimal working practices are more quickly disseminated across different sectional areas from the exchange of positional knowledge.

Actors possessing IPK bring a collective benefit of greater working efficiency for the corporate organisation (Volpe et al., 1996). This could be considered in a political science context, that a more holistic form of institutional memory of the wider system is gained which can be applied to the benefit of administrators and those utilising their experience. This resonates with Neunreither's (2002) suggestion that if mobility was widely applied, before it was, EP administrators would benefit from possessing a broader understanding of the institutional systems, providing better tools to more quickly learn the ropes of their position.

Has mobility had the impact of creating greater adaptability, despite the negative characteristics attributed to turnover? If so, has this affected the role of the Secretariat to involve the greater exchange of in-depth technical expertise for an even broader understanding of the institutional systems? Mobility may be the Secretariat's response to reassert its utility for legislators, focusing on providing adaptable civil servants.

## Method

To explore the impact of mobility within the European Parliament, this paper investigates the Committee Secretariats' operations from 2004, when mobility was first applied as a general policy, to the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> term in 2019. This timeframe represents the period where mobility practices were having their progressive impact felt, with those first affected finishing their third fullest-length rotation in 2021, in the observable context of the EP's influential committee system. While the Lisbon Treaty placed the EP and Council on a more equal legislative footing a deficit of informational resources between the EP and the Council, who are privileged to the vast expert resources of national executives, still remains, albeit notably reduced by the expansion in MEP staff allowances and the creation of DG Parliamentary Research Services, during this period.

This paper adopts a qualitative approach with the use of semi-structured interviews to develop an account of mobility. A saturation of information was reached with 34 interviews, 22 Secretariat, at senior and junior levels, representing roughly one tenth of the Committee Secretariat, alongside 11 interviews with MEP offices (9 MEPs and 2 assistants) and 1 Commission official. Interviews were conducted with Committee Secretariat, and former staff working in capacities within the Parliament but now outside the committee units, to gain direct knowledge of their capacity and how they describe this in relation to mobility. The choice was made to conduct supplementary interviews with MEP offices, to corroborate select claims made by administrators and give qualified judgements on mobility. Interviews were conducted with CS representatives from a range of 16 committees.

A thematic approach was used for the analysis of the data. Open coding, manually gathering phrases, was adopted to identify recurring patterns within transcripts. Categories were developed from interviews consistently returning to primary themes during analysis of transcripts. The refined relevant categories that emerged were (1) policy-making expertise/experience and acquisition, (2) technical expertise/experience and acquisition, (3) the effects surrounding turnover (leaving the committee system completely due to retirement or career change) and (4) mobility (rotating to a new committee) impact.

## Findings

As one political official stated ‘we have the Secretariat for all the formal things’ and, importantly, ‘they already have the institutional memory’ that MEPs require as a resource to utilise (Interview 1). The overarching narrative (91% of interviews) from administrators, and supported by MEPs’ offices, reaffirmed that the utility of the Secretariat involve support for MEPs, alongside ‘helping to ensure a functional legislative process and coherence of [MEP’s] proposals’ (Interview 2). Mobility has, however, affected the informational resources that the CS possesses in interesting ways.

Mobility is ‘a double-edged sword’ (Interview 3) providing drawbacks for the ‘concentration of technical expertise’, alongside positives in the development of well-rounded institutional knowledge (Interview 4). Mobility is ‘not fostering the build-up of technical expertise’ (Interview 5), as ‘your next assignment does not necessarily relate to the specialist knowledge you learned in your first [Secretariat] position’ (Interview 4). The impact of mobility is perceived as ‘not being a positive’ (Interview 5) and ‘counter-productive’ (Interview 6) when considering only technical expertise, due to the ‘difficult nature of finding yourself in an area you do not yet know at a truly knowledgeable level’ (Interview 7). Concurrently, ‘mobility is advantageous’ (Interview 8), granting ‘collective unit benefits’ (Interview 9), giving administrators the ability to develop a more encompassing understanding of the institutional system and how to navigate the undercurrents faced.

### *Policy-making expertise*

Initially from mobility ‘as a new person, inside the organisation, you can see inside other departments’ and gain an understanding of the ‘different policy-making dynamics’ which occur (Interview 3). Mobility officials gain an ‘advantage’ from ‘understanding better these different areas’ and retaining policy-making experience ‘operating across different departments’. A comprehension of ‘how the Parliament is working’ in a wider context is developed and a knowledge of ‘what is the role or capacity of

the different units [and] other legislative points of contact, and how to operate in different positions' is developed. This expertise is 'applied to our benefit' serving to fulfil the expectations of MEPs 'when finding ourselves in new roles'. Officials gain from mobility a familiarity 'of the capacity, what we can get, get out of, or how best to manage', different contact points across the EU institutions to 'assist in our role of coordinating the process' (Interview 10). The 'knowledge from mobility is transferable' and 'can be used, or useful, in any unit once acquired' (Interview 4). A holistic 'institutional memory cultivated by mobility' is beneficial in providing a utility 'to our Rapporteurs, with our acquired understanding of the wider system and procedures' and is more frequently required than 'technical understanding is requested' (Interview 11).

Different departments have diverse working approaches with some, claimed as, 'examples of best-practice which others are adopting' (Interview 12). Avoiding judgement on which units are locations of optimal practice, 'knowledge exchange' does take place between 'colleagues to improve approaches' (Interview 13). 'Regular working groups' operate between the committee units, 'reviewing the practices which take place'. Mobility, 'creating a mix of institutional backgrounds in units', alongside the working groups, assists to facilitate the dissemination of perceived best-practice (Interview 14). From 'working with each other' Secretariat develop expertise upon the 'formal and, importantly, the informal conventions' surrounding policy-making, and use this 'to determine what is practical' and 'acceptable to the political actors', such as the Council or Commission (Interview 15, 16). Advantages are provided from mobility at both individual and collective unit level.

'The formal legislative procedures across the committees are similar now', learning the formal and informal topography of one area can frequently be then applied to future areas which must be navigated with similar undercurrents apparent (Interview 17). 'Solutions from the process of a report in one area can often be applied again' from learning different positional roles with mobility (Interview 11). Even when previous policy-making experience cannot be directly applied, mobility officials are developing further skills of 'adaptability' (Interview 8), as opposed to only, inflexible, technical specialisation (Interview 18). 'The expectation is prepossession of [technical] expertise is not demanded' from a Secretariat in many cases. Technical expertise can be accessed 'from different sources, like the Commission, as required', so need not be pre-existing in all circumstances (Interview 11).

Mobility in these accounts only partly fits with our comprehension of the negative aspects associated with administrative turnover. Those who experience mobility can develop more inter-positional understanding, helping to facilitate the dissemination of optimal practices more rapidly or create better conditions for this to occur.

### *Technical expertise*

The CS are more predominantly used as mechanisms for the transferring of information from other informational nodes, rather than acting as containers of prepossessed technical information, in potential resignation that mobility does undermine collective technical expertise. Although MEPs recognise administrators as a potential ‘source of [technical] expertise’, contact is not consistent, ‘some elect not to use Secretariat resources’ (Interview 14). These members ‘have their assistants, and advisors’ (Interview 19) from political groupings, ‘so only rely on Secretariats to ensure formalities’ (Interview 4). While some explain this as certain MEPs not ‘engaging for political reasons’ (Interview 20), legislators can develop their own informational networks to an extent that the CS are ‘surplus to requirement’ regarding the ‘supplying of [technical] information’ (Interview 19). Committee administrators are not a guaranteed source of technical expertise, because of mobility, raising the spectre of less efficient informational returns if relied upon exclusively by legislators. MEP offices ‘receive and access the technical information from other sources’ outside of the CS, such as ‘parties or home contacts’ (Interview 21). If political offices are developed, or a ‘professional background’ is prepossessed, to the extent that MEPs are confident to rely on their personal epistemic networks, Secretariat relevancy reduces (Interview 22). While a trend of MEP offices not relying consistently on administrators for technical support was evident, there were deviant cases.

Taking the example of the Budgetary Control (CONT) and Budgets (BUDG) committees, a divergent pattern emerged. ‘MEPs, especially when they arrive’ within the BUDG and CONT committees for the first time, ‘do not have the expertise we [budgetary Secretariat] have’ concerning the EU’s technical budgetary mechanisms (Interview 23). Entering the 8th term, the turnover of legislators on the budgetary committees was describe by members as ‘extraordinary for its level’ (Interview 24) and notable for ‘the intake of fresh-faces’ (Interview 25). Expertise is retained by administrators and deployed ‘to support members lacking technical understanding’ of budgetary mechanisms (Interview 26). ‘We are the technical advisors: we prepare everything a member could need regarding technical information on budgetary policy’ (Interview 23).

While this could be regarded as the budgetary Secretariat’s own self-importance, committee members and their offices supported this perspective. Budgetary committee members ‘are in contact’ with their Secretariat to supplement technical expertise lacking from not possessing personal backgrounds or experience relevant to EU budgetary policy (Interview 25). The ‘Committee’s Secretariat is very important for all MEPs here, they are involved with it all, knowing how it works with the whole picture, having

the technical knowledge,' which some members lack (Interview 27). Higher MEP turnover may mean that the Secretariat has greater potential relevancy, supporting the elevated need for technical information in a difficult to penetrate area. Without experience of the 'complex financial mechanisms' (Interview 25) utilised, budgetary policy can be a 'difficult area to engage with for the uninitiated' (Interview 28), requiring extra support. Similar themes emerged anecdotally from the International Trade committee, that Secretariat, alongside senior MEPs, 'helped to supply technical expertise to new members' (Interview 7) lacking 'an understanding of the feasibility of technical solutions' (Interview 29, 30, 31, 32).

A deficiency of retained expertise in the insular budgetary committees, accredited to MEP turnover, may increase the likelihood of members engaging with administrators, placing more pressure on the CS to retain technical expertise. Mobility would have a greater impact on these committees, than those where legislators expect less technical specialisation.

## Discussion

A nuanced interplay arises when exploring the resources utilised by the CS to fulfil their expected informational functions once factoring for career mobility. The mitigating impact of mobility is more subtle than first expected. When an administrator leaves a committee, due to career change, retirement or by rotating to a new committee, they take their policy-making and technical experience relevant to the previous area with them. It was my informed supposition, therefore, that mobility could weaken the retention of information, hampering the Committee Secretariat's ability to assist in the supplying of specific expertise (Marshall, 2012; Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood, 2017). Mobility does negatively impact the concentration of in-depth technical specialisation, with possible caveats. Simultaneously mobility should propagate CS units with staff possessing, or developing, a more holistic institutional memory by acquiring a positional cross-unit understanding of policy-making processes. Administrators are acquiring more expedient expertise, from mobility, upon the informal dynamics of policymaking, which pre-mobility Neunreither (2002) assessed as being too often lacking or was slow to be acquired.

The concept of Inter-Positional Knowledge predicts that from operating across different positions and training in diverse responsibilities, an employee becomes more capable, developing a wider knowledge of the capacity of different departments, and facilitates the spread of best practice by their movements. EP committee officials are observed as learning from their experiences, working across different committees, and applying the knowledge gained to future operations. By requiring administrators to

rotate between positions, a generalist concept of policy-making expertise is promoted, rather than one which is rigidly area exclusive. From acquiring policy-making expertise beyond the area specific, administrators should gain a more expedient general overview of how to engage with the legislative process for optimal returns and obtain understanding on the preferences of different actors, to appear as adept support agents and facilitate higher potential levels of service or steering involvement. The accompanying dilution of specific institutional memory, by mobility's moderating effect upon collective technical expertise in committee units, should not, however, undermine the overarching support officials supply to legislators. Technical expertise is not a ubiquitous demand from legislators in all committees, or one that officials could not often fulfil by utilising their acquired knowledge of institutional sources of expertise, which have grown as the Parliament has matured.

The narrative this paper has constructed does explain what the 'dynamism' that Corbett et al. (2011) have alluded to, as the impact of mobility, pertains. The EP is utilising and developing, via mobility, adaptable administrators who are more capable at engaging with a diverse range of interactions during the legislative process and are a more flexible resource for legislators to utilise. I question, therefore, parts of Marshall's (2012) assertion that mobility undermines institutional memory and collective understanding of the legislative process, weakening CS informational utility for legislators. This assertion by Marshall was made at a relatively early stage after the harmonisation of procedures under Lisbon in 2009 and the entrenchment of mobility from its propagation in 2004, and so may be less apt as time has progressed. I would qualify Marshall's claim that institutional memory is undermined. Technical elements of retained collective memories are mitigated indeed, but at the expense of increased collective adaptability.

Within the CS, a balance is maintained with those at a senior management level who are generally not as impacted by mobility, with less requirement of rotation or having completed their rounds, and those in the process of gaining IPK. Senior actors retain area specific institutional memory vital to ensuring consistency of legislative actions, possessing knowledge of past decision-making. Junior members who have experienced mobility, learn from senior colleagues but alternatively provide a varied perspective of actions and flexibility from their developing memory of the wider system. Senior actors compensate for the area specialisation which junior mobility Secretariat lack. Unit heads have been observed as vast depositories of institutional memory (Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood, 2017), informing junior members of practice and approach, alongside other senior graded colleagues. This mix of institutional memories creates a more dynamic whole which should be able to engage more



flexibly with diversifying policy issues and disseminates the best practices of different units more swiftly.

The informational advantages which administrators have when turnover of legislators is high, and the potentially increased role this gives bureaucrats, has been examined in comparative studies regarding the influence of legislators (Woods & Baranowski, 2006). Similar to Dobbels & Neuhold (2013), I find the impact of relatively higher MEP turnover and the requirement of technical expertise more emphasised in insular areas. Administrative systems should respond to legislative composition. Future work, however, should examine the potential direct relationship between MEP turnover rates and the changeable utility demanded from administrators. This would assist towards development of the conceptual frameworks of cause and effect between legislator composition and administrative systems, regarding expertise and capacity.

## Conclusions

I find the objective of the adopted organisational practice of mobility is to gain greater efficiency by compelling administrators to perform different occupational functions as they progress the career ladder. From completing these different functions, positional institutional knowledge is gained which can be readily applied by administrators and utilised by lawmakers. By applying the notion of Inter-Positional Knowledge to administrators we may be able to better explain the impact of administrators on decision-making when rotation occurs.

Mobility has been promulgated to develop a generation of Secretariat with an even more generalist approach, building on the services already highly generalist attributes, in an increasingly political parliament where specialised information originates more frequently from political sources. This shift toward even greater breadth than depth of expertise is not uniform. Some committee units are still expected to have a depth of specialised technical expertise, to be utilised by MEPs, retained in the collective institutional memory. A mark of developing maturity in many Western European parliamentary systems is a demarcation between technical committees requiring specialisation and political committees requiring knowledge of political preferences. The nature of the Committee Secretariat may signal a delineation within the EP as part of the further institutionalisation of its structures.

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## Appendix

### Interviews

- Interview 1: Assistant to MEP. 7/11/14.Brussels
- Interview 2: MEP INTA Committee. 15/1/16.Brussels
- Interview 3: Secretariat REGI Committee. 13/5/14.Brussels
- Interview 4: Secretariat ENVI Committee. 19/3/14.Brussels
- Interview 5: Secretariat ENVI Committee. 20/3/14.Brussels
- Interview 6: Secretariat ITRE Committee. 4/11/14.Brussels
- Interview 7: Committee Secretariat. 4/12/14.Brussels
- Interview 8: Committee Secretariat. 13/1/20.Phone-Interview
- Interview 9: Committee Secretariat. 6/11/19.Phone-Interview
- Interview 10: Committee Secretariat. 4/11/19.Phone-Interview
- Interview 11: Committee Secretariat. 6/11/19.Phone-Interview
- Interview 12: Secretariat TRAN Committee. 2/4/14.Phone-Interview
- Interview 13: Secretariat FEMM Committee. 13/5/14.Brussels
- Interview 14: Committee Secretariat. 18/11/19.Phone-Interview
- Interview 15: Secretariat EMPL Committee. 25/6/14.Phone-Interview
- Interview 16: Secretariat JURI Committee. 14/5/14.Brussels
- Interview 17: Committee Secretariat. 31/10/19.Phone-Interview
- Interview 18: Committee Secretariat. 7/11/19.Phone-Interview

- Interview 19: Secretariat IMCO Committee. 15/5/14.Brussels
- Interview 20: Secretariat IMCO Committee. 15/5/14.Brussels
- Interview 21: MEP ENVI Committee. 7/1/15.SKYPE-Interview
- Interview 22: MEP ENVI Committee. 6/11/14.Brussels
- Interview 23: Committee Secretariat. 14/5/14.Brussels
- Interview 24: MEP BUDG Committee. 4/11/14.Brussels
- Interview 25: MEP CONT Committee. 4/12/14.Brussels
- Interview 26: Committee Secretariat. 30/10/19.Phone-Interview
- Interview 27: Assistant to MEP. 6/11/14.Brussels
- Interview 28: Commission Official. 5/11/14.Brussels
- Interview 29: MEP INTA Committee. 17/11/15.Phone-Interview
- Interview 30: MEP INTA Committee. 2/12/15.Phone-Interview
- Interview 31: MEP INTA Committee. 15/12/15.Phone-Interview
- Interview 32: MEP INTA Committee. 12/1/16.Phone-Interview
- Interview 33: Secretariat Impact-Assessment Unit. 3/7/14.Phone-Interview
- Interview 34: Secretariat AGRI Committee. 16/5/14.Brussels