

Knowledge is Power: An Explorative Study of Knowledge Work Among European Members of Parliament

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Abstract: The value of knowledge resources is widely recognized in both science and business, and knowledge management measures are increasingly being adopted in public authorities. However, parliaments, as core institutions of democratic systems, have thus far received scant attention in scientific studies. Furthermore, previous approaches fail to take into account the characteristics of the political system, such as elected offices, the relationship between government and opposition, or the lack of minimum qualifications for mandates. As a result, several studies consistently find that knowledge within parliament tends to be disorganized and lacking in transparency. This is unfortunate, as effective knowledge organization is crucial particularly for familiarizing oneself with unfamiliar topics without the necessary training. As part of an exploratory study, an international comparative study of knowledge management of all members of the 28 European national parliaments (including the EU Parliament) was initially carried out. Between May and June 2023, an online survey and several interviews were conducted as part of a mixed methods approach. Due to the very low response rate of only three percent, there is no claim to generalization and conclusions must be formulated with caution. Nevertheless, the results indicate that organizational and cultural barriers hinder effective knowledge work in parliament. The existing technical and human resources are insufficient to enable transparent and universal knowledge provision, while ideologies, career aspirations and electoral success further complicate the situation. A systematic approach to knowledge management has not yet been identified, leading to a shortage of resources and specialized knowledge to adequately process and utilize the vast amounts of information generated daily. Inexperienced MPs and opposition members, who are particularly dependent on reliable sources of information, are especially affected by these deficiencies. Without ignoring its limited power, this paper aims to make a modest contribution to the debate by presenting a first approach to a political knowledge management model. It highlights the need to raise awareness of knowledge management, develop a clear knowledge strategy and involve external expertise more. This research is of the opinion that a systematic approach to knowledge management can be established by integrating external expertise and IT-based solutions. Further research is needed, but knowledge management has the long-term potential to become a useful tool in parliamentary work by facilitating the necessary mentality change and thus contributing to a broader knowledge base.

Keywords: Administration, Government, European Union, Member of Parliament, Policy making

1. Introduction

The relevance of knowledge in today's information society and in particular within the political system should be self-evident. Politicians, public administration and governments are in continuous need of current, valid, and serious information for situation analysis and decision making (Felfoldi and Donoso, 2012). Parliaments in particular play a central role here, as they must process a large amount of information in order to pass laws or carry out their supervisory duties towards the executive branch (Rizzoni, 2021). Thanks to a globally networked scientific community and modern telecommunications technology, political leaders now have more data and information at their disposal than ever before (Foxen, Saint and Webb, 2020).

It is therefore surprising that both economic and political science in the Western world have long ignored this subject. The current existing literature focuses mostly on marginal aspects, like specific policy fields (Fuhr and Gabriel, 2004), local municipalities (Martin, 2003) or public administration departments (Kasim, 2008), but leaves a research gaps with regard to parliaments. Although critical voices have increased in recent years (Nakash and Bouhnik, 2021), this paper represents the viewpoint that knowledge management has the potential to significantly improve work and decision-making processes in the political system. Indeed, parliaments would represent an insightful study field as the key institutions of a democratic system, since they are characterized by sophisticated, knowledge-intensive duties, cultural barriers (Cong and Pandya, 2003), as well as high fluctuation due to the variety of elections, which often results in the election of inexperienced politicians or deselection of long-term parliament members respectively (Coghill, Holland and Donohue, 2008). In Mittelstädt (2022) a case study on the German Bundestag was presented, contributing to the understanding of how parliaments and its members collect, use and archive their personal knowledge in terms of policy making. This was the first time,

that knowledge management of MPs was explicitly studied. The results showed that there is neither a uniform and stringent KM system nor understanding of its importance. Building on that, this paper aims to extend the research process within the framework of an international comparative study to provide a first model for a political knowledge management system. Methodologically, this study follows a mixed approach. First, a quantitative online survey of around 7,000 members of the EU's national parliaments collected in mid-2023 provides an overview of their use of KM methods. In a second qualitative part, these results are then supplemented and classified with the help of expert interviews. For that, seven politicians from six parliaments were interviewed about their working methods.

The results must be viewed with great caution due to the low response rate of 3 percent, but they support the thesis of insufficient knowledge management in parliament. Almost 70 per cent of those surveyed stated that they found the handling of knowledge as a resource to be critical. At the same time, a vast majority confirmed that both organizational and cultural barriers unnecessarily impede or completely prevent functioning knowledge management. This is regrettable, as there is good reason to believe that good knowledge work can contribute to better political output. In addition, the survey also showed that MPs mostly do not follow a structured system with regard to their personal knowledge management. Instead, this task is delegated to personal employees. Although many parliaments provide professional assistance, which the Members of Parliament regularly make use of, the question arises as to whether these instruments are sufficient to carry out the core task of an MP – the legislation process and steering the government. Studies show that the ability to understand complex political concepts is critical to the success of representative democracies (Jaeger, Lyons and Wolak, 2016). Since the small sample size calls for caution, the exploratory nature of this study should be emphasized. Without claiming to be generalizable, the initial insights gained into the challenges and potentials of knowledge management in parliament could help to reduce the identified deficits and create a new awareness of the value of knowledge for policymaking. This paper aims to make a modest contribution to this and calls for further research.

2. Theoretical Background

Although some promising case studies primarily focusing on Asian countries have been published in the last ten to twenty years, these often fail to discuss or even properly realize the unique structure of parliament administrations, parliamentary groups and Members of Parliament (Gaffoor and Cloete, 2010). First of all, a parliament or its members are not a homogenous group, but divided – sometimes even shattered – into various sub-groups including government and opposition, coalition fractions, and regional or sociological groups (Rudzio, 2015). There is no professional counterpart where a group of people with drastically different backgrounds and skill sets are expected to do challenging new jobs without any prior professional or educational training (Orton, Marcella and Baxter, 2000). There are institutions installed within most parliaments, such as libraries or research and documentation services, but these facilities normally use public information only. As Ahamed, Amarakoon and Senevirathne (2015, p. 4) point out, “knowledge in Parliaments tends to be tacit/informal and not recorded.” In addition, MPs vary considerably in terms of their professional background, so neither the awareness of the importance of nor the ability to manage knowledge can always be expected. Furthermore, it appears unlikely that MPs would be willing to share their knowledge with their colleagues or the public since politicians are constantly fighting for their re-election (Brancati, et al., 2022).

Given the ever-growing need for information and fast decision-making because of globalization, demographic change, and crises (Cong and Pandya, 2003), the need of parliaments and its members for proper knowledge management is obvious. As the work of Willis (2018, p. 486) shows for climate policy, how the politicians approach complex topics “is influenced by their understanding of scientific evidence, but also by their professional identity, their concept of their role as a representative, and their daily working practices.

However, the differences in structure and tasks between the economic and public sectors do not allow a simple transfer of KM measures (Hasler Roumois, 2013). Unfortunately, there is no general overview of knowledge management in the public sector so far. Given the enormous need for knowledge in public institutions driven by today's information society, globalization and crises of all kinds, it appears extremely advisable to conduct more research in this field. However, the OECD publishes annual reports and numerous case studies on KM practice in both the private and public sectors (Saussois, 2003). These show that within the OECD member states around two-thirds of all government agencies are making efforts in this field. Beginning with the strengthening of awareness, through further training of the staff to the purchase of special KM systems (OECD, 2003). The far-reaching changes caused by the introduction of e-government instruments should certainly be emphasized here. E-government means a government “that uses IT and e-commerce to provide access to government information

and delivery of public services to citizens, and all other business partners and stakeholders including private sectors" (Arora and Raosaheb, 2011, p. 240).

The ground-breaking book "*Developing and Implementing Knowledge Management in the Parliament of Finland*" highlighted the significance of knowledge management for democracy and economic growth while also outlining a knowledge management strategy for the legislative context (Felfoldi and Donoso, 2012). A few years later, the Federal Government Plan (PPA) 2004-2007 presented by the Brazilian Government included a programme for Knowledge Management, obliging all federal policies to implement e-gov procedures, "such as inter-institutional learning networks, strategic approaches to information and the use of information technology" (Mendes, Perna and Soares, 2004, p. 2). One of the first comprehensive studies was carried out by Mingmitr (2016) on the Thai Parliament in 2016. The Commission under Jean-Claude Juncker has also recognized the need and the advantages. A High-Level Reflection Group of Directors-General issued a report in June 2015 describing the guiding principles, immediate and long-term projects, and governance processes for a company data, information, and knowledge management policy (European Commission, 2016).

3. Methodology and Data

As the previous literature analysis suggests, knowledge work in parliament is unsystematic in the sense of KM. This is also consistent with the assumption of Boltmann and Bankole (2017) who state that knowledge is recognized as a strategic asset in parliament, but it is mostly disseminated in an unstructured, informal way that is unrelated to a parliament's strategic aims. However, dedicated data sets are missing for more in-depth analyses. Therefore, the research question is: To what extent is systematic knowledge management used by MPs in Europe? The aim is to get an overview of the knowledge management situation of MPs in order to identify both structures and deficits in order to present initial proposals for a political KM system as a next step. For operationalization, nine sub-hypotheses were formulated based on the literature and previous studies. Due to capacity reasons, only two can be presented here:

Hypothesis 1 is based on the assumption that knowledge management in parliamentary institutions is often characterized by the informal transmission and storage of knowledge. This is supported by Amarakoon and Ahamed (2015, p. 4) who point out, that "knowledge in Parliaments tends to be tacit/informal and not recorded." Parliamentary work is often characterized by high turnover (e.g., through elections) and dependence on personal networks, which means that knowledge often remains with individuals rather than being transferred to institutional structures. Studies show that organizations with a high dependence on tacit knowledge have difficulty making this knowledge available to others, which can lead to inefficient knowledge use and redundant work (Long and Fahey, 2000). In parliamentary contexts, this is reinforced by the high fragmentation of issue areas and the personal expertise of MPs, which is rarely fully documented. A lack of systematic knowledge management means that knowledge often remains anchored in personal notes, informal conversations or individual experiences rather than being institutionalized in easily accessible knowledge systems (Alavi and Leidner, 2001).

H1. Knowledge in parliament is implicit and unorganized.

The second hypothesis is predicated on the idea that successful information exchange in parliaments is constrained by organizational and cultural frameworks. Individual knowledge sovereignty, power dynamics, and cultural norms all have a big impact on how knowledge is shared in organizations, claim Long and Fahey (2000). Knowledge silos can arise in political institutions as a result of party-political divisions, hierarchical systems, and competition for expertise. Furthermore, research indicates that a lack of technical infrastructure and a collaborative culture can impede the exchange of knowledge (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). This is especially important in parliaments, because information is frequently dispersed and restricted to particular subjects or committees (Mittelstädt, 2022).

H2. The use of knowledge management in parliament is hampered by organizational and cultural barriers.

3.1 Research Design

This research will largely deal with a virtually unexplored area. It is unlikely that one research method alone can provide the desired findings and insights. In addition, there was a fear from the outset that it would be difficult to persuade the target group of MPs to participate. Therefore, this work is based on a mixed methods approach. This consists of an online survey accompanied by several qualitative expert interviews. Please note that only the core results are presented.

3.1.1 Quantitative online survey

Online surveys are one of the most widely used instruments of quantitative research. The extensive research on KM application in companies and public administration therefore offers a good starting point. In developing the questionnaire on which this is based, the author drew in particular on Alvarenga, et al. (2020) and Mittelstädt (2022). The latter presented the first case study of a Western European parliament with the German Bundestag.

The questionnaire consists of 27 closed-answer questions constructed allowing the assessment of the perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of MPs concerning the process of digital transformation and concerning knowledge management in the organization. The questions were divided into five categories: general assessments, cultural dimension, employees, application of knowledge work and personal information. In addition to yes/no questions, the Likert scale from 1 (rejection) to 5 (agreement) is used. The online tool *Sosicisurvey* was used as the platform. The questionnaire was offered in English, German, Spanish, French and Czech. A pre-test was carried out with the help of two employees of the German Bundestag. Minor changes were subsequently made.

In May 2023, all 7.083 Members of the national parliaments in the European Union were contacted via e-mail. The addresses were publicly visible on the internet. Only the parliaments of Croatia and Portugal did not offer this so the contact forms of the MPs were used via the central parliament website. In June 2023 a reminder was sent. It should be noted that for all parliaments, several messages could not be delivered. The reasons may have been of a technical nature or based on personnel changes. Since they were between 2-4 percent each, they can be neglected. The MP offices occasionally replied that they generally do not take part in scientific surveys. Without exception, this was justified by the high number of such inquiries. The author received a few e-mails with specific questions about individual sections of the questionnaire, about technical terms or the translation. The answers were received over a period of three months in total. A conscious decision was made not to involve the staff. On the one hand, this would have shifted the focus and, on the other hand, it would not have been feasible. It was decided not to offer any incentives, as there was no budget for this and we did not want to give the impression of being untrustworthy. An overview of the persons addressed is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of MPs addressed

Country	Number of MPs	Number of answers
Austria	183	20
Belgium	150	3
Bulgaria	240	2
Croatia	151	1
Cyprus	56	0
Czech Republic	200	10
Denmark	179	1
Estonia	101	0
Finland	200	2
France	577	0
Germany	736	24
Greece	300	1
Hungary	199	2
Italy	630	6
Latvia	100	4
Lithuania	141	3
Luxembourg	60	7
Malta	67	5
The Netherlands	150	4
Poland	460	0
Portugal	230	1

Country	Number of MPs	Number of answers
Romania	329	1
Slovakia	150	0
Slovenia	90	0
Spain	350	2
Sweden	349	8
European Parliament	705	0

To test the hypothesis 1, the MPs are asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that knowledge in parliament was disorganized and tacit. Response options ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Supplemental to the first question, the question "Do you have direct access to a knowledge management system or sub-components of such a system?" is asked. Finally, the question, "Do you have written policies or procedures for knowledge management practices?" complements the section. Both questions can be answered with yes, no and don't know. For a summary see Table 2.

Table 2: Operationalization of Hypothesis 1

Item	Evaluation
Evaluation of the thesis	1 item, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) 2 items yes/no mean score

Hypothesis 2 formulates a negative correlation between the use of KM and the presence of cultural or organizational barriers. The former is queried by an extensive query of the usage behavior of various KM methods and the formation of an average. The latter are formed through various questions about organizational procedures and perception of working practices within parliament.

MPs are asked whether, in their opinion, knowledge work was more of an individual or a team task. The scale ranges from 1 for "individual" to 5 for "team". Furthermore, question no. 8 asks in order to assess to what extent the parliament promotes a culture of sharing knowledge. A Likert scale from 1 (=not shared) to 5 (=always shared) is also used here.

Based on the knowledge building blocks of Probst, Raub and Romhardt (2006) eight task fields (goals, identification, acquisition, development, distribution, utilization, preservation, and evaluation) were queried on a Likert scale from 1=no application to 5=high application. A media score is then calculated from the respective individual values. In doing so, a new variable "KM use" can be formed (Table 3).

Table 3: Operationalization of Hypothesis 2

Item	Evaluation
Use of Knowledge	8 items, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) mean score
Cultural/Organizational barriers	2 items, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) 3 items, yes/no mean score

3.1.2 Qualitative interviews

For the second part of the presented research project, it was decided to use a qualitative approach to supplement the previous quantitative findings. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, qualitative research is better suited to capturing and evaluating subjective opinions, assessments and individual situations. On the other hand, a sample size that is too small can be compensated in this way (Sandelowski, 1995). Building on the quantitative results, a deductive approach was used. The goal is to either confirm or adapt an existing theory based on the findings from the data (Pohontsch, 2019).

Within the qualitative method pool, interviews are among the standard instruments (Damaskinidis, 2017). In order to prepare for an interview, it is necessary to provide a written interview guide (Kallio, et al., 2016). The

guide serves to control the course of the conversation in such a way that the interviewer always knows that the aspects relevant to him are definitely taken into account. A semi-structured interview also offers the possibility for the researcher to ask questions at a suitable point and if necessary. Following a deductive approach, the results of the quantitative part were explicitly included in the preparation of the interview guide in order to later achieve a validation of the primary data if possible. A pre-test was carried out with an employee of a representative's office, and slight changes were made afterwards. The questionnaire contains questions about employees, office organization, learning methods or the willingness to share knowledge.

The following criteria for participation were set in advance: at least one year's membership in parliament and membership in the same committee, here: Finance. Secondly, the aim was to cover all regions of the EU with Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern Europe. Finally, men and women, different age cohorts and opposition and government politicians should be interviewed. All political groups should also be represented, as well as government and opposition groups. Partys are only indicated with left or right. Finally, good knowledge of English or German.

For this paper, the content analysis according to Mayring and Fenzl (2014) was applied. It includes a total of six steps:

1. Define the unit of analysis, here the seven interview texts.
2. Mark relevant text passages, paraphrase them by summarizing key content while retaining original wording.
3. Generalize the content in your own words, briefly and concisely.
4. Perform a first reduction by further shortening and removing duplicate paraphrases or generalizations.
5. Conduct a second reduction by merging similar generalizations into one or two words, acknowledging some information loss.
6. Develop categories based on the second reduction. Assign categories to all relevant text passages.

The program *MAXQDA* was used for the practical implementation of the data analysis. The interview texts were uploaded as a *Word* document and then processed there according to the analysis steps described above. Subtasks were performed in *Excel*.

3.2 Data

Of the 7,083 members of the European National Parliaments, 535 people clicked on the questionnaire. In fact, a total of 218 people, or around 3.08 per cent, responded to the inquiry and answered the questions. Around two-thirds filled out the questionnaire completely. This response rate is certainly far too low, but it was to be expected. Inadequate feedback rates, especially in email-based surveys, are a widespread problem and have long been discussed with regard to their consequences for the validity of research results (Hikmet and Chen, 2003). This aspect will be examined in greater detail later; however, it is important to note that all results presented here should be considered with caution.

The evaluation and graphical representation of the data were carried out with the statistics program *JASP* (Version 0.17.2.1), which in turn is based on *R* as open-source software. It should start with a brief overview of the group of participants. The hoped-for broad coverage of political parties has been achieved. Figure 1 shows the political division from very left (1) to very right (7). Most nations could also be reached, with clear focal points in German-speaking countries. Additional socio-demographic data such as education, gender, etc. were not asked in order to keep the questionnaire as short as possible and because these data were not considered absolutely necessary.

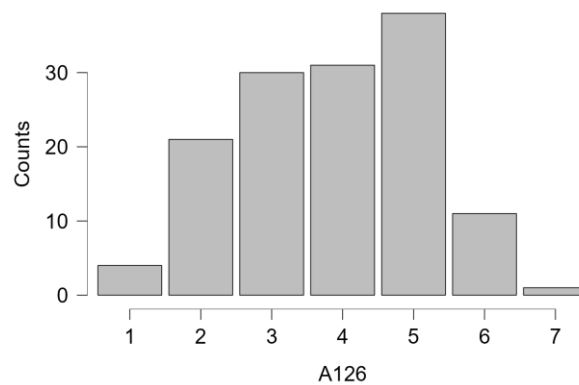


Figure 1: Party affiliation

The search for interview partners began in May 2023. For this purpose, the members of the finance committees of selected parliaments were contacted personally by me by email. As expected, the process proved challenging. The response rate was extremely low and MPs' offices often declined the request due to lack of time, insufficient language skills or lack of competence in the subject. In the end, however, seven suitable interview partners could be found. The originally envisaged equal gender distribution of the subjects, however, could not be maintained, so that $n = 6$ subjects were male, while only $n = 1$ subject was female. An overview of the socio-demographic data can be found in the following Table 4.

Table 4: Interview partner

Subject	Nation	Party	Duration
1	Germany	Right	41.12 min
2	Austria	Right	59.12 min
3	Sweden	Right	46.24 min
4	Sweden	Left	47.02 min
5	Estonia	Left	29.07 min
6	Malta	Left	29.35 min
7	EU (Germ.)	Right	33.14 min
Average	/	/	40.72 min

The interviews took place in July 2023 after the quantitative survey was finished. They were carried out completely online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The languages were either English or German. The course of the interviews was as follows. First, the author and the research project were briefly introduced. The reference to the complete anonymity of the participation was assured again. Finally, the questions were read out according to the guidelines. Questions were reduced to an absolute minimum due to time constraints. No changes to the questionnaire itself were necessary. At the end of the conversation, open questions were clarified and the offer was made to provide information about the further course of the research project. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Embarrassed sounds, digressions and disturbances were not taken into account. The transcription takes place in written language. The German-language transcripts were later translated into English. The transcripts have been numbered chronologically from A - E. Quotations are countersigned with the position (Pos.). Both the original audio files of the interviews and the transcripts are archived by the author.

4. Results

Both questionnaires and the quantitative dataset are freely available via <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25295413.v1>. The interview transcripts remain with the author. Since the focus of this paper is on the quantitative results, only a very abbreviated summary of the qualitative results is presented below to support the theses. Furthermore, reference is made to Mittelstädt (2024), where the interviews are discussed in detail in relation to financial crisis management.

4.1 Quantitative

4.1.1 Test of hypothesis 1

A third of respondents agreed with the statement that knowledge in Parliament is unorganized. Adding the answer "partially" increases the value to over 68 percent (Table 5). The question about access to knowledge management systems was answered in the negative by 32 percent. Another 14 percent did not know whether they had access to such a system (Table 6). Almost half also stated that they had no guidelines for the handling of knowledge. Another 9.5 percent gave "I don't know" as an answer. These results suggest that the hypothesis can be supported.

Table 4: Frequencies for unorganized and implicit

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
1	13	6.878	6.878	6.878
2	46	24.339	24.339	31.217
3	67	35.450	35.450	66.667
4	54	28.571	28.571	95.238
5	9	4.762	4.762	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	189	100.000		

Table 5: Frequencies for KM Systems

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Yes	99	52.381	52.660	52.660
No	61	32.275	32.447	85.106
d.k.	28	14.815	14.894	100.000
Missing	1	0.529		
Total	189	100.000		

4.1.2 Test of hypothesis 2

More than 50 per cent see knowledge work as a (rather) individual task. Another 27 per cent were undecided (Figure 2). Besides around half of those surveyed consider the sharing of knowledge to be bad or in need of improvement (Figure 3). Considering the figures mentioned above, according to which 40 per cent do not have access to KM tools, the results presented here seem to support the hypothesis. Both cultural and organizational barriers exist and hinder the successful application of knowledge management.

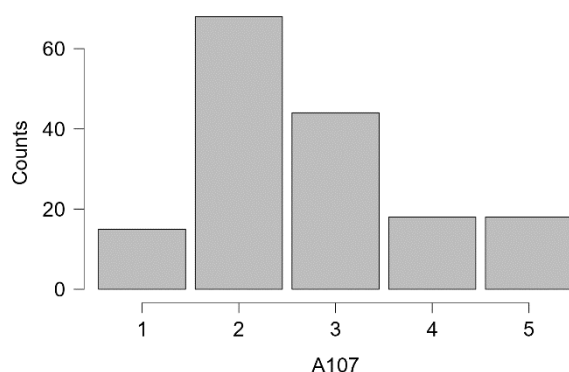


Figure 2: Frequencies team task

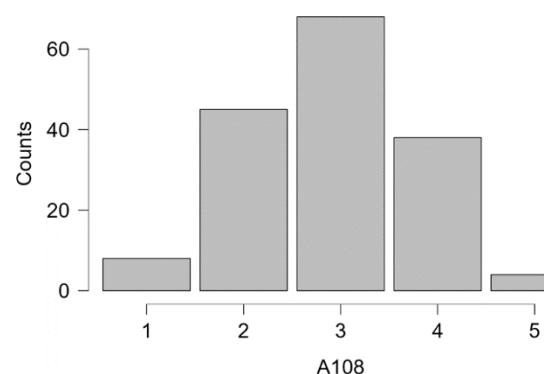


Figure 3: Frequencies sharing

4.2 Qualitative

Knowledge in parliament is poorly organized and is not equally available to all members. Virtually all interviewees – graded according to their affiliation with the government camp – confirmed the hypothesis (B,

Pos. 6) and described inefficient decision-making processes. Although gaps in knowledge are normal due to the enormous complexity of the issues and the rapid pace of change (G, Pos. 8), the work processes are insufficient to compensate for these. Many work processes are based on analogue archives (A, Pos. 10) and public sources (B, Pos. 10). Databases or digital tools are often only used to a limited extent and often lack higher-level interfaces (E, Pos. 28). The situation is made more difficult by often very limited human resources and the loss of knowledge when employees leave (B, Pos. 4). This lack of organized knowledge infrastructure hinders the ability to respond effectively, particularly under the time pressures inherent in legislative work, so that the key statements from the interviews can be used to support hypothesis 1.

The interviews also provided various arguments for maintaining the second hypothesis. Cultural barriers prevent knowledge from being shared across parliament, which is detrimental to effective policymaking. One MP was very honest about the fact that he withholds knowledge from his colleagues in order to shine in debates (D., Pos. 14). The work of the opposition in particular is made extremely difficult by the government's knowledge blockade (A, Pos. 12). There is also the factor of ideology, which is detrimental to a neutral and unbiased assessment of data (G, Pos. 32). Although there are national differences in the weighting of transparency and trust, all interviews pointed in the suspected direction. While some parliaments have comparatively good infrastructure, such as libraries, scientific services and databases, MPs in other countries must be viewed as lone fighters (E, Pos. 6). An efficient organization of a central knowledge pool is therefore not possible, which once again confirms the thesis.

5. Discussion

5.1 Limitations

The very low response rate of MPs is certainly one of the most serious points of criticism in this study. It is true that numerous studies suffer from low participant numbers (Nulty, 2008). However, it must be self-critically criticized that it was not possible to find sufficient access to the target group of MPs. There is also the fact that the scatter is by no means evenly distributed. A disproportionate number of German-speaking MPs answered, while Southern and Eastern Europe are hardly represented. Another factor that was not sufficiently considered in the preparation is the self-selection of the MPs. There is a risk that those who have explicit knowledge of or interest in knowledge management in particular decided to participate. This would of course distort the results. Morgan, et al. (2023) already pointed out that special recruitment methods are needed for elite groups. Although an attempt was made to counter this problem by choosing a mixed-methods approach, the exploratory nature of this study should nevertheless be emphasized once again. The results presented can and should only be seen as an impetus for debate.

Indeed: despite its low response rate, the study provides a solid first basis for identifying trends and patterns. There are several reasons for that. First, participants represent a variety of nations and parties, offering a range of viewpoints. Second, many studies show that even low response rates can lead to useful results (Anseel, et al., 2010). Nevertheless, thirdly, there is no urgent reason to doubt the robustness of the data, as it shows comparable patterns across country and party boundaries. Finally, the data is consistent with both the initial theses and the accompanying qualitative interviews.

Future research must take this aspect better into account, which is why some suggestions should be mentioned. Contacting people by e-mail alone is clearly insufficient; instead, more use must be made of direct telephone contact with the offices and/or the cooperation of the respective party leaders must be obtained (Morgan, et al., 2023). It also became clear during the survey that the questionnaire must always be offered in the respective national language to minimize inhibitions. The question of incentives for participation is not easy to answer, as there is a risk of appearing dubious. Stoffel, Chaki and Vlaev (2024) suggest donations to charitable organizations, which was far beyond the scope of this study.

Although the questionnaire was planned with great care and adjusted repeatedly, it was only through practical application that various weaknesses were revealed. A few points are mentioned as examples. On the one hand, the beginning of the questionnaire should have been simpler in order to reduce the high dropout rate. The opening question was obviously too abstract since it got straight into the theory – without sufficient explanation. In general, terms or abbreviations such as KM were not sufficiently introduced. One should also take into account that, the MPs' employees were not part of the survey, although they played an important role in the answers. This was intended in the design of the study, so it is debatable whether this represents a weakness.

5.2 Political Knowledge Management

This paper shows, on the one hand, the current cultural and organizational obstacles to good knowledge work in parliament and, on the other hand, offers a first draft for a political KM system. Parliaments are places of knowledge. However, despite numerous experts, well-trained staff and the technical infrastructure, the conclusion of this study when it comes to knowledge work was ambivalent. A key reason for this may be that “[i]n the public sector, information management systems are well developed while knowledge management systems are still in its infancy” (Romanelli, 2016, p. 655). Given the widespread agreement in the analysis that knowledge is still viewed as implicit and disorganized, there is an undeniable need for reforms. The study is based on the belief that systematic knowledge management can improve parliamentary processes through better use of information, transparency and efficiency. Opposition members and newly elected MPs could particularly benefit. KM could enable more informed decisions, reduce knowledge loss and improve the quality of political processes. The author therefore advocates the establishment of a knowledge management system (KMS) specifically developed for parliaments and designed for their specific needs. A good KM system would guarantee a transparent, high-quality and sustainable flow of information, especially in the context of the aforementioned high staff turnover. The possible counterargument of high costs can be invalidated by the fact that the European parliaments already have very good infrastructure. Although the desire for more staff was repeatedly expressed, which is certainly justified in individual cases, the potential of digitalization and increased international cooperation should make excessive personnel costs unnecessary. Especially members of the opposition, whose access to knowledge will, by nature of their position, always be limited, could highly benefit. An IT-based system could assist and improve organizational processes for knowledge production, storage/retrieval, transfer, and application (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). The first step would certainly be to formulate a holistic KM strategy that encompasses all areas of parliament and encompasses the peculiarities of the political space. It must define clear goals and structures, clarify responsibilities, and formulate the rights and obligations of both the government and MPs (Greiner, Böhmman and Krcmar, 2007). The ostensibly most important task will be to establish a greater awareness of knowledge as a resource. For that, the role of the MP must be defined as that of a knowledge worker and, above all, supported as such much more than it is at present (Davenport, Lond and Beers, 1998). Especially newly elected MPs will need more support in their dealings at the beginning of their term of office, for example through appropriate training.

Indeed, the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Parliament is a partnership between the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and several parliaments with the goal to develop new technologies in order to modernize parliamentary procedures and “strengthen the role of parliaments in the promotion of the information society by encouraging ICT-related legislation. [...] It contains recommendations on information sharing and networking, analysis and research, technical assistance and advisory services” (Romanelli, 2016, p. 656). These systems must be located directly at the level of parliamentary administration as a neutral institution and administered from there. Only then will MPs be able to build enough trust in this source of knowledge. Its main focus must be the use of internet directories and database searches to locate an expert or a documented source of knowledge, sharing expertise and cooperating in virtual teams, accessing data on the previous legislature, and learning about the newest scientific findings (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). Nevertheless, it is essential to create interfaces to the parliamentary groups or individual parliamentary offices so that a higher-level network is created. In addition, statements from affected stakeholders can be added and commented on by independent experts in order to create an overall picture that is as neutral as possible. Of course, the ability to work independently with these documents must remain. Solo national efforts must be avoided at all costs. Rather, there must be a European solution that ensures the greatest possible level of networking. AI tools can provide valuable services in translation and categorization (Tsui, Garner and Staab, 2000).

Departments responsible for knowledge work should be set up as standard. The installation of chief information/knowledge officers, some of which already exist in authorities (Estevez and Janowski, 2013), would also be a step in the right direction. In addition, as all the results show, the vast majority of parliaments already have good human resources. Each committee should be obliged to have a certain number of advisory, obligatory experts who accompany the legislative process from the beginning. Critics may object that this additional bureaucracy slows down the processes – an objection which certainly cannot be dismissed outright. However, the benefits of legislation based on scientific facts are far greater.

5.3 Future Research

This work is based on the idea that knowledge management can contribute to improving the parliamentary work of MPs, despite current criticism of its practical suitability (Nakash and Bouhnik, 2021). However, future research is needed. This should first take measures to increase the limited significance. Conducting national case studies could help in this regard in order to be able to focus resources on one parliament. Ideally, the basis for long-term studies could be created in cooperation with the respective parliamentary administration. In addition, consideration should be given to including not only the MPs but also their staff, as the interviews showed that they play a significant role in knowledge work.

Future studies could then focus on developing a KM system tailored to parliamentary needs. Overcoming the organizational and cultural obstacles described in this paper would be of central importance for the success of such a project. Possible aspects would be looking at the onboarding of new MPs, improving the availability of knowledge, for example between government and opposition, or best practices. The possibilities of artificial intelligence would also be worth taking a closer look at. AI could generate enormous efficiency gains in the research, translation, analysis and provision of knowledge and contribute to a significant increase in transparency.

6. Conclusion

This paper aimed to provide an overview of the extent to which Members of Parliament in Europe apply a systematic knowledge management approach to policy making and, building on that, to develop a first draft for a KM system especially designed for the needs of parliaments. The data, while limited, suggests that knowledge management in parliaments is carried out inadequately or unsystematically, and that both organizational and cultural barriers hinder its successful implementation. Not only are there no dedicated KM strategies, but the existing technical infrastructure is often inadequate for neutral and comprehensive knowledge provision. In addition, there are strong obstacles to interpersonal relations, especially but not only between government and opposition, as well as decision-making processes dominated by ideology. The results must therefore be viewed with great caution due to the explorative nature of this study, but provide first insights and reason to believe that both hypotheses are valid, which should be seen as an encouraging sign for further research.

The numerous crises of the last two decades in particular have exposed knowledge deficits among political decisionmakers. Siriopoulos (2021) laments about the financial illiteracy that exacerbated the financial crisis of 2008. Bratianu and Bejinaru (2021), in turn, point to the knowledge gap in dealing with the Covid pandemic. It is therefore in the public interest that knowledge is not only universally available to parliamentarians but is also used in the best possible way. This study aimed to make a modest contribution to draw the attention of the scientific debate to these gaps. By emphasizing the potentials of KM in the policy context and formulating a first attempt at a political science management system, this paper lays a solid foundation for further research.

Ethical Statement: This research was conducted in accordance with all relevant ethical guidelines. All participants provided informed consent prior to their participation, and they were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all data were collected and stored in an anonymized format.

AI Statement: The author declares that no generative artificial intelligence has been used in the writing of this manuscript, nor in the creation of images, graphics, tables, or their corresponding captions.

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