

5. Dissemination and stimulating transformation with research

It is obvious that empirical research in a certain region or municipality *per se* always represents an (un)intended intervention. ‘Simply making contact introduces differences, and thus represents an intervention in the system and changes the perspective’ (Hübner 2012, 162, author’s own translation). Such interventions can also take place during data collection, not only during the asking of interview questions or the process of observation, but also in the context of data analysis and building hypotheses and background theories, as well as possible solutions in the context of feedback loops between the researchers and the practice system (e.g. stakeholders of the municipality investigated) (ibid., 162).

Interview questions can lead to reflections among the interviewees and, as a result, to changes in their behaviour. For example, the MATILDE Action Research in Carinthia (Austria) showed that migrant women and female refugees who participated in an all-female focus group were prompted to reflect on their own success stories by means of a participatory photo talk. Reflecting on their successes in turn showed them their own agency and power. Hence, research can lead to the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, especially when the target groups are directly involved (face-to-face), and consequently create changes in a (local) system.

According to the OECD (2002, 78), applied research is defined as an ‘original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge. It is, however, directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective’. Hence, applied, practice-oriented research aims not only to provide new insights, but should also lead to ‘benefits’ for the practice partners or the practice system involved (Hagendorfer-Jauk and Gruber 2022), by means of policy recommendations, new solutions, or a change of perspectives on how something should be done in the future, for example. Thus, on the one hand, the joint evaluation of integration measures and migration impacts can represent an intervention in the fields of practice to be investigated and, on the other hand, offer the opportunity to gain a joint awareness of the current situation and work together on improved measures. Where practitioners and further stakeholders jointly evaluate integration measures and migration impacts, this can also increase the dissemination potential. Consequently, research results are not simply handed to the practitioners

by the researchers, as is usually done in the traditional division of roles between science and practice. Rather, in participatory migration impact measurement, practitioners from different fields are involved from the very beginning. The range of dissemination of results is thus already higher, from the very beginning of the research; the risk that research results remain in the drawer is lower. Instead, due to the involvement of different practitioners, the chance that research results will be taken up is much higher. If a feedback workshop is also run, additional stakeholders and interested parties can be invited to discuss the (preliminary) results. The findings, which in the traditional organisation of research would be handed over to the client representative (in a municipality, for example, this would be the mayor or responsible administrative officer), can be communicated to various stakeholders (including politicians, administrators, educational facilities, business operators, (migrant) associations and citizens) while the project is still running or is in its final phase.

Infobox 11: Policy roundtables

Policy roundtables can be a stimulating method for discussing, validating and complementing findings and preliminary policy recommendations². A possible procedure for conducting feedback workshops in the form of policy roundtables, might be:

1. Selection of participants. Invitations sent to partners participating in the research (interview partners, focus group participants, etc.) as well as other relevant stakeholders (policy-makers, civil servants, entrepreneurs, chamber representatives, members of associations, citizens with and without a migration history etc.);
2. Presentation of the (preliminary) results;
3. Discussion of the findings in moderated mixed small groups (reaction to the results, additions, clarifications and contradictions); collection of results written on moderation cards;
4. Discussion of group results in plenary; possibility for further reactions, additions, contradictions; if the groups have also worked on concrete

2 For detailed information on the organisation of different policy roundtables and their results in the context of the H2020 MATILDE research project, see <https://matilde-migration.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/d7-12-roundtables-on-policy-recommendations.pdf> and <https://matilde-migration.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/D65-Report-on-the-thematic-round-tables-with-relevant-policy-maker.pdf> (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7371866).

policy recommendations or solutions, these can also be presented for further discussion;

5. After that, the participants get the chance to rate which results, policy recommendations etc. are most important to them;
6. Finally, participants are told what will be done with the results and what further steps are planned.

