

## 1. Introduction

The field of migration and integration incorporates a wide range of actors and stakeholders, ranging from renowned researchers and young scholars in various disciplines to public administration practitioners, third sector and migrant-led organisations, civil society with its volunteers and economy, and politicians on various scales. The protagonists involved, however, often speak in different voices and at different volumes, and thus power asymmetries evolve. At the same time, migration and integration are frequently addressed as cross-sectional topics. The claim to include as many actors as possible and also to give voice to marginalised groups is reflected in a participatory perspective, in research as well as in practical social work that allows citizens to initiate bottom-up processes and co-create transformative measures. Participatory practices have become institutionalised in development studies and practices (Blackburn and Holland 1998) and are interlinked with particular methods and tools.

In this handbook, we want to address the absence of a comprehensive collection of methods and tools for migration studies that have a participatory orientation and an inclusive focus. We have derived such methods from our established research practice and are making them accessible here for practical everyday use by a variety of practitioners. In doing so, we aim to facilitate evidence-based migration policy and local governance practice. The demand for continuous reflection and evaluation of ongoing integration measures and the proper planning of needs and future processes is the result of the need of local administrations, policy-makers or third-party funders for justification. To assure evaluation also in municipalities where integration activities are not compulsory (e.g. Germany, Schammann and Gluns 2021) or in small municipalities where both funding and permanent personnel are limited, it is required to involve researchers or consultants who have to accompany administrators in monitoring and evaluating projects. We therefore argue for the close collaboration of research institutions, universities and practitioners.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this book, we use the term ‘researcher’ for both researchers at research institutions and universities and ‘practitioners’ in public administration, non-profit organisations

In this book, we also highlight the peculiarities of the evaluation and assessment of social work with immigrants in rural and mountain areas, which are very diverse in nature. While some places have established professional schemes of migration and integration governance, others – for various reasons – have not. What they all have in common, however, is the involvement of volunteers, who often represent the backbone of local schemes. Thus, besides policy-makers at different government levels and practitioners in public administrations, we explicitly address third sector and migrant-led organisations and volunteers as target groups for this book.

Another consequence that arises from the diversity of rural municipalities is the need for immersion into local constellations. The context is shaped by complex interdependencies between the aims and practices of institutions, the availability of (infra)structure, local discourses and key stakeholders (ISDA framework, Schammann et al. 2021). It is crucial to become familiar with such settings to facilitate the construction of suitable modes of evaluation and assessment. This includes the identification of (1) (key) actors and stakeholders; (2) their current local debates and needs; and (3) the municipal/regional historical, political and economic background as well as their future development (demographic, economic and social). Thus, the methods and tools presented in this participatory handbook are designed to be place-based and aim to take into account local constellations and frameworks.

Moreover, we take a subject-centred approach that warrants face-to-face interaction with research participants and thus facilitates a participatory, empowering research style. In the realm of migration and integration governance, it is important to explicitly address a range of capacities for expressing oneself. Following Amartya Sen's capability approach (2001, 18) which values the 'capabilities' of persons to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value', we acknowledge that different groups have diverse resources and capacities for self-expression (e.g. language or writing skills) and respond to this by means of a mixed methods approach. Sen (2001) argues for a '*two-way-relationship*' between capabilities and public policies according to which 'capabilities can be enhanced by public policy, but also, on the other side, the direction of public policy can be influenced by the effective use of participatory capabilities by the public'. At the centre

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(NPOs), migrant-led associations or for volunteers without institutional affiliation, since both carry out evaluation and assessment.

of Sen's concept of development stands the freedom of individuals. 'The success of a society is to be evaluated, in this view, primarily by the substantive freedoms that the members of that society enjoy' (Sen 2001, 18). In practice-oriented research in the field of migration, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches are promising (see Infobox 1).

### **Infobox 1: Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research**

While interdisciplinary research means the 'interaction between two or more disciplines' (McGregor 2004, n.p.) and 'new synergy emerges from the transfer of knowledge between disciplines' (McGregor 2004, n.p., based on Lattanzi 1998), transdisciplinary research does not just involve different disciplinary knowledges, but also integrates other stakeholders, practitioners and non-academics, which should help to target complex life world challenges (OECD 2020, 4). Transdisciplinary research tries to stimulate 'a new form of learning and problem-solving involving co-operation among *different parts of society*, including academia, in order to meet the complex challenges of society' (McGregor 2004, n.p.; based on Regeer 2002). Hence, transdisciplinary research takes up 'real-world' problems, involves different relevant disciplines and crosses disciplinary boundaries. The involvement of practical knowledge plays an important role in the appropriate analysis of real-world problems and the development of adequate solutions, strategies or measures, as well as their implementation. Transdisciplinary research integrates interdisciplinary scientific knowledge and links practical and scientific know-how, which should result in new scientific findings and/or strategies and solutions that are relevant for practitioners. Finally, the new scientific insights and practice-relevant solutions should become part of enhanced scientific and practical discourses (Bergmann et al. 2005, 15).

Participatory research goes even further and aims to conduct 'the research process *with* those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study' (Bergold and Thomas 2012, 192). Research questions should therefore be developed with the involvement of scientific and practical knowledge and perspectives, with the aim of benefiting both sides. Participatory research empowers the practice partners who are often the subject of research to represent and advocate for their own perspectives and interests. A major advantage of participatory research for co-researchers is that the research setting enables them to critically reflect and question everyday routines, established approaches and familiar problem-solving strategies.

To be able to harvest the advantages of participatory research, both sides, science and practice, need to develop a mutual understanding of each other's perspectives, needs, interests and working methods (Bergold and Thomas 2012). The transformation of roles – for example, of researchers, informants and respondents into participants – is reflected in our discussions on terminology (see Infobox 2).

### **Infobox 2: Informant – respondent – participant**

Traditionally, individuals who provided information in ethnographic studies were called 'informants,' and the term is still used today by some social scientists and ethnographers. In the past two decades, however, the term 'participant' has increasingly been used to describe individuals who take part in, especially, qualitative research. This evolution is due to both the negative connotations associated with the use of the word informant in criminal investigations and the trend toward the increased democratisation of research. The word participant connotes a more two-way process. The use of participant has not yet taken hold in other, more structured, forms of inquiry. 'Respondent' is still widely used, for example, to describe individuals who answer structured questions in survey research (Guest 2015, 224).

The selected research methods and tools in this book are conceptualised in a way that should enable the comprehensive face-to-face involvement of practical stakeholders; their aim is to foster a *participatory* (self-)assessment in the realm of migration and integration. Assessment means the 'systematic collection, review, and use of information about (...) programs and services undertaken for the purpose of quality improvement, planning, and decision-making' (State University of New York at Fredonia 2023, n.p).

Evaluation research uses scientific methods to analyse a specific *evaluation object (an intervention)*. This can be a product, programme, project, policy (field), law, public or private institution, method, system or person. The evaluation should consider the different relevant *stakeholders* (e.g. migrants, civil servants, NGO representatives) and quality criteria standards (e.g. ethical issues) (Döring and Bortz 2016, 979). To support high-quality evaluation, OECD (2021, 18) proposes the six following criteria:

- ‘Relevance: Is the intervention doing the right things?’
- Coherence: How well does the intervention fit?
- Effectiveness: Is the intervention achieving its objectives?
- Efficiency: How well are resources being used?
- Impact: What difference does the intervention make?
- Sustainability: Will the benefits last?’

However, an evaluation can be designed to fulfill different purposes, such as gaining information about and assessing the results, performance and effectiveness of projects or programmes, which should also foster the accountability of results; contributing to evidence-based judgements and policy-making; helping to improve the design or performance of already-running projects or programmes, or promoting institutional learning based on its results (Batra, Uitto and Feinstein 2022, 40).

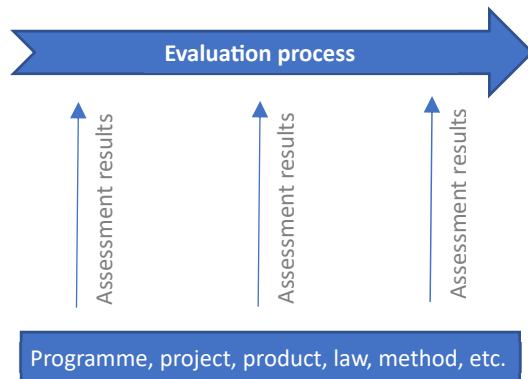
As can be seen from this description, ‘assessment’ and ‘evaluation’ are not the same. While an assessment could be part of an evaluation (e.g., assessing customer satisfaction with training), the latter is a broader process that systematically collects information and focuses more on the effectiveness and impacts of programmes or policies. Likewise, although ‘evaluation’ and ‘research’ are similar things, they are also not the same. Research also gathers data, but puts an emphasis on the means by which knowledge is generated. On the other hand, in evaluation processes the knowledge gathered is central for informed decision-making (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, 18).

Participatory evaluation is a special form of evaluation which involves those people in the evaluation who are affected by the investigated programme, policy or measure. Hence, the members of the target group become research partners who are not only used as informants, but get the chance to formulate, for example, evaluation questions relevant to them and/or to participate in designing the evaluation and the analysis and interpretation of data (Döring and Bortz 2016, 1014). ‘Self-evaluation’ is a form of participatory evaluation, in which practitioners themselves become evaluators. As they are the main users of the evaluation results, they themselves decide if, when and how their programme, project or measure should be evaluated. They decide what the evaluation will involve, and what it should focus on, and collect and analyse the evaluation data. However, practitioners need some training to be able to carry out self-evaluation on their own (Döring and Bortz 2016, 989). Self-evaluation, in turn, is a type of ‘empowerment evaluation’ as practitioners not only participate

in the evaluation as research partners but also conduct the evaluation on their own. This also enables (empowers) socially less privileged groups to take an active role in improving their own living conditions. Professional evaluators only advise the practitioners on their self-evaluation (Döring and Bortz 2016, 1015, based on Fetterman 1994 and 2001).

As the explanations above show, an ‘assessment’ can be the beginning of an evaluation of integration work and the impacts of migration. It is recommended that this ‘assessment’ is verified and that work is done towards a systematic evaluation in order to also capture the effectiveness and broader impact of, for example, political programs (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, 17-18).

*Fig. 1: How assessment results inform the evaluation process, own graphic M. Gruber*



In order to get results that can be shared by the people they will later affect, it is important to involve them early in the process of evaluation, following the principle ‘Nothing About Us Without Us’, which was originally used by a global movement of organisations representing people with disabilities to foster their participation and equal opportunities in everyday life (United Nations n.d.). Moreover, as shown, this can promote the self-confidence and empowerment of disadvantaged people.

*How to use this book*

This book has been developed as a toolbox for applied and practice-oriented migration impact assessment and evaluation. The tools are designed to be used by researchers in research institutions, but also by practitioners in public administrations, NGOs or associations. The book introduces the most important concepts of transdisciplinary and participatory research. Furthermore, the concepts of assessment, evaluation and participatory evaluation are explained and discussed.

The next chapter (chapter two) deals with key methodological presuppositions and challenges. Special attention is given to the role of the researcher in the research process. Factors such as the personality and attitude of the researcher play an essential role. To gain access to research participants, aspects such as trust, language and cultural particularities, the design of interview settings and familiarity with the locality, as well as ethical issues, all play important roles. Readers are referred to important terms and concepts in information boxes (Infoboxes).

The third chapter presents the individual tools that can be used for evaluating integration work and migration impacts. The explanation of the tools follows the same systematic approach: the possible applications of each of the individual data collection tools are presented, along with their advantages and disadvantages. The level of moderator involvement is also explained, as well as considerations that should be taken during preparation and the stages by which the research proceeds. Finally, information is given on how to document the results of data collection. For each tool, helpful hints or examples for practical application are presented in information boxes.

However, the process of evaluating migration impacts and integration processes does not end with the collection of data. In order to be able to draw important conclusions from the information collected, it must first be analysed and evaluated. In principle, several methods are available for this purpose. Following the logic of the book, which looks at data collection on its own, methods of participatory data analysis are presented in chapter four.

An essential part of participatory research is to reflect the results back to the people who participated in the data collection. This can also contribute to the dissemination of results. In chapter five, suggestions are given for the reflection and dissemination of findings and how research can provide an impetus for change (intervention research).

## *1. Introduction*

In the concluding chapter (six), the individual tools are presented in brief overview in the form of a factsheet. Detailed descriptions, including the corresponding references, can be found in chapter three.

The selected tools have been chosen for the evaluation of migration impacts and integration activities in rural and mountain areas. However, they can also be transferred to regions affected by transformative processes such as demographic, climate, societal or technological change.