

 Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche

IRCR ES

ISTITUTO di RICERCA sulla CRESCITA ECONOMICA SOSTENIBILE
RESEARCH INSTITUTE on SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Participatory practices to produce impact in social science research.

What lessons for evaluation?

Serena Fabrizio, Lucio Morettini, Emanuela Reale
CNR- IRCRES emanuela.reale@ircres.cnr.it



AIM OF THE WORK

To analyze the ways in which stakeholders are involved in social science research in order to:

- Identify elements that can increase the likelihood of producing an impact on policy and society
- Discuss their influence on research evaluation both at the ex-ante level (elements characterizing the design of the project) and ex-post level (achievements and practices indicating that an impact is produced or signaling the possibility an impact might occur).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Participation of stakeholders improve the likelihood to produce an impact beyond the academic context from research activities (Lang et al. 2012 ; Weik et al. 2014; Reale et al., 2017)
- The effect of interaction are related to the ways in which researchers and stakeholders use to communicate about research, its goals and societal demand (Molas-Gallart, 2012)
- Social impact is a consequence of a comparison process between different knowledge and expertise to achieve specific objectives that are relevant for the progress of society (Spapeen and Van Drooge, 2011).
- A participatory research process could affect deeply the sustainability of research so it must be implemented since the beginning of projects (Talwar 2011).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Stakeholders' involvement presented in literature can be typified around three main categories of contribution:

- i) Co-creation of knowledge between academics and non-academics (Weik et al, 2014; Edelnbons et al., 2011; Spaapen and van Drooge, 2011; de Jong et al, 2013);
- ii) Unpacking the research objectives into sub-task that are more manageable for producing usable results (Bell et al. 2012);
- iii) Discussion and dissemination of research results after their production in order to facilitate generating an impact (Spapeen and Van Drooge, 2011; Weik et al, 2014).

HYPOTHESES

There is a direct link between the degree and the way of stakeholders' involvement in the project and the emergence of social impact of research.

Way of involvement

Two-way process: continuous involvement of stakeholders in the different phases of the project and stakeholders show a concrete willingness to contribute in a substantial way to the research achievements.

Degree of involvement

Ability to create a common language between the different actors, scholars and non-scholars, so that exchanges are able to create new knowledge and mutual understanding.

A more extensive and effective co-participation in research creates the conditions for dissemination of results in broad and articulated terms, over the original boundaries.

METHODOLOGY

Comparison of two case studies that present a broad involvement of stakeholders
DISCIT and INCLUD-ED.

Four aspects of interaction are considered:

- Modalities and communications
- Timing
- Language
- Outcomes

Triangulation of different sources: documentary analysis, data and indicator on research outputs, interviews with researchers, coordinators, and stakeholders involved in the activities collected for the IMPACT-EV Project.

CASE STUDY: INCLUD-ED

INCLUD-ED– Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education

Five-year-long project funded under FP6.

Interdisciplinary team. The Consortium is composed by 15 organizations from 14 different European countries.

The main objective is *to analyse educational strategies that contribute to social cohesion and educational strategies that lead to social exclusion providing key elements and lines of action to improve educational and social policy (Successful actions)*

Focus on how education can be improved such that all children succeed in school and have greater opportunities for social inclusion.

CASE STUDY: INCLUD-ED

Main results:

- The *dialogue* has been constructed by the creation of mechanisms of consultation at key points of the research process.
- The *involvement* of diverse voices enforced the validity and rigorousness of the scientific process thus contributing to high impact of research results.
- Many events scheduled during each year with different stakeholders involved in order to discuss steadily *medium-term achievements*, to share different points of view on methodological approach, to implement the model through specific training seminars.
- The *communicative methodology* integrated and included knowledge from different disciplines and orientations, using different methods and techniques to collect and analyse data (mixed-methods approach).

CASE STUDY: DISCIT

DISCIT – Making persons with Disabilities Full Citizens is a three-year-long project funded under FP7.

DISCIT includes six universities, two research institutions and a civil society organizations from nine countries plus an European organizations, each member of the consortium cooperates with a national stakeholder committee plus an European committee.

Main goal is to redefine the European Social Model, examining the crossed effect of different type of policies on the enhancing of Active Citizenship, an idea of social participation of disabled persons based on three pillars: security, autonomy and influence.

The main point of analysis of the project is based on the collection and processing of data through interviews with over 217 people with disabilities in 9 European countries.

CASE STUDY: DISCIT

Main results:

- Circular exchange of information between researchers and stakeholders helped to define the problems related to disability as a common area of intervention with several articulations.
- Interaction has led to an effort to harmonize language between researchers and civil organizations first and secondly to researchers and policy makers.
- The constant involvement of the stakeholders has legitimized the project researchers as interlocutor of the policy makers in the discussion of some normative acts at European and national level.
- The presence of DPO representatives at plenary meetings allowed the creation of contacts and the exchange of ideas and good practices.

COMPARISON DISCIT – INCLUD-ED

	Modalities and communications	Timing	Language	Outcomes
DISCIT	<p>Circular exchange of information</p> <p>Diffusion and discussion of the methods of analysis with external stakeholders</p>	<p>Intense involvement in the review and investigation phases, partial discussion of policy proposals</p>	<p>Harmonization between countries and areas of interest</p>	<p>Formal involvement in policy making process</p> <p>Exchange of best practices</p> <p>Cultural impact: new idea of disability</p>
INCLUD-ED	<p>Dedicated events for targeted stakeholders (training for teachers, dissemination for scholars, political meetings for institutional representatives)</p>	<p>Continuous involvement of all stakeholders along the five years of the project</p>	<p>Communicative methodology</p>	<p>Formal stakeholders involvement in knowledge creation</p> <p>Replicability of the outputs in different national and institutional contexts</p>

SUMMING UP

In both cases:

- Stakeholders involvement produced a different approach to the social problem addressed
- Cultural impact (new language, wording) is extremely important but difficult to measure or to single out through empirical observations
- Political impact takes a long time to emerge (beyond a project time limit) but it is directly linked to the cultural impact
- Institutional barriers are present and strongly affected the sustainability of the impacts produced
- Good practices exchanges and guidelines are important mean for productive interactions generating impact beyond the project participants
- Quality of research and social impact: need of further investigation

DISCUSSION

- Transformative effects on society need the co-production of new knowledge that can be used by societal actors, and co-production of knowledge needs the development of an appropriate language to deconstruct the content, organizational features and knowledge carriers.
- The sustainability of the transformation goes beyond the effort of any research team the duration of the project and the resources must be sufficient to have the chance that effects -when appear, can remain over time.
- The formal and informal confrontation between researchers and stakeholders should become an automatic mechanism rather than endogenous events for themselves.
- The dissemination of research results may also arise from direct comparisons between end-users.

WHAT LESSONS FOR EVALUATION?

How the mentioned results are relevant for the evaluation of research projects? What do they tell us about evaluation design and methods?

Ex-ante evaluation evaluators

- useful insights to delineate criteria for assessing the robustness of the project proposals design for impact achievement.

Ex-post assessment

- stakeholders' participation can help to overcome at certain extent problems of attribution of impacts produced by the project
- stakeholders might help to follow effects derived from the project for a longer period and in different national and institutional contexts, figuring out limitations in the results achieved and problems of impact sustainability that could inform further research on the selected topics

Room for further investigation