

MATILDE – EVALUATING MIGRATION IMPACTS ON RURAL AND MOUNTAINOUS AREAS OF EUROPE

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Abstract. MATILDE – Migration Impact Assessment to Enhance Integration and Local Development In European Rural And Mountain Areas – is an European research project funded under the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon2020. The aim of the project, which involves 12 research and 13 practice partners from ten European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom), is to explore the social and economic impacts of migration on rural and mountainous areas of Europe and how territorial cohesion and integration of migrants can be improved. This will be investigated in 13 case study regions in the participating countries by using qualitative and quantitative methods as well as a participatory action research approaches. Moreover, the project aims to initiate and implement sustainable changes on the ground, such as the installation of ongoing awareness-raising and public relations work on the topic of migration in rural areas or the visible construction of places that promote encounters and exchange. This is achieved through close research and practice partner cooperation, on the one hand, and the inclusion of local stakeholders from politics, administration, business and NGOs, as well as migrants themselves, on the other hand. The transnational cooperation and the continuous exchange of knowledge between the partners involved play an important role for the development of research and evaluation methods, such as methodological toolboxes for researchers and practitioners, or the collection of good practice examples at European level. This added value of cross-border cooperation is also reflected in transnational publication projects and (comparative) case study analyses, which increases the visibility also at the academic level. The transnational consortium has also managed to organize an international photo contest and to develop an online course on migration and its effects in rural areas.

Keywords: Migration, rural and mountainous areas, territorial development

1 PROJEKT BACKGROUND

The MATILDE (Migration Impact Assessment to Enhance Integration and Local Development In European Rural And Mountain Areas) project was initiated by researchers from different countries who are involved in the voluntary and self-managed transnational network “ForAlps – Foreign Immigration in the Alps”. This network has already been existing since 2016 and is comprised of a group of scholars and practitioners, who are engaged in international migration in the Alps. The researchers of this network have observed for different countries that, on the one hand, international immigration is increasingly taking place also in rural areas for various reasons (such as refugee migration), which, on the other hand, offers the opportunity to have a positive impact on rural areas that are often characterized by out-migration and population shrinkage.

MATILDE is based on the assumption that foreign immigration can be an opportunity for rural and mountainous regions, which are often considered as “left behind” and places that “don’t matter”, places that experienced or still experience periods of out-migration, brain drain, and economic or demographic decline. [1] Following this vision and based on the first observations, a project consortium with 25 research and local partners spread all over Europe was built to investigate, how migration and in particular migration of third-country nationals (TCNs) can foster the revitalization of abandoned spaces and regions “left behind”. Finally, the MATILDE project has been submitted to and funded by the EU Horizon2020 research and innovation programme, “EU.3.6.–Societal challenges – Europe In A Changing World – Inclusive, Innovative And Reflective Societies”, topic “Migration 03-2019 – Social and economic effects of migration in Europe and integration policies” (call: H2020-SC6-MIGRATION-2019). The MATILDE project runs from 2/2020 to 01/2023.

2 CONSORTIUM, AIMS AND RESEARCH INTEREST

The MATILDE consortium comprises 12 research partners located in ten European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom) and 13 local partners representing key actors in the local and regional governance of migration and integration affairs, such as representatives of municipal and regional authorities, municipal associations, governmental agencies and NGOs. The two-level consortium fosters the engagement of local stakeholders and helps to realize a multi-actor perspective. In addition, an international scientific advisory board and a transnational network of 19 supporting institutions is engaged in the project. MATILDE aims to reverse the perspective of the shrinking, ageing and from out-migration affected rural region by examining the social and economic impacts of migration and TCNs on local development and territorial cohesion. Moreover, the project aims to support the socio-economic integration of TCNs, to promote the governance of migration in rural areas, and to stimulate better urban-

rural relationships and socially inclusive and territorially balanced growth. In particular, MATILDE strives to achieve the following results [2]: (1) Developing a conceptual and methodological framework for multi-scale assessment of migration impacts, resulting in a matrix and toolbox for researchers and practitioners. (2) Multi-scale assessment of the social and economic impacts of migration in European rural and mountainous regions. (3) Migration Impact Assessment in 13 local case studies through participatory action research, focusing on local/regional needs, challenges and opportunities. (4) Improved governance of migration to support territorial cohesion, considering the different governmental levels (EU, national, regional, local), and grounded on evidence-based policy recommendations. (5) Contributing to an informed debate and new perception of migration impacts in rural areas. With its goals and aspired results, MATILDE contributes the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular to Target 11.a (“Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning”) [3], as MATILDE focuses on improved rural-urban relationships and social and economic interactions between TCNs and local communities.

3 METHODS

3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

Both, the social and economic impacts of migration, were investigated by qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The qualitative research of each country/case study team was build on problem-centred interviews and expert interviews, as well as focus groups to examine both, the social impacts of migration/TCNs on rural and mountainous areas, considering social dimensions such as social polarization and cohesion, participation/active citizenship, service provision, and social inclusion, as well as to analyze the economic impacts by considering dimensions such as economic growth, innovation inside organizations and companies or the development of (social) entrepreneurship.

3.2 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

As for the quantitative analysis, to gain more insight concerning the social and economic impact of international migration, statistical data on each participating country was analyzed with the result of ten statistical briefings. The statistical briefings on social effects focus on the topics social polarization, social cohesion, active participation, access to and quality of services [4]. Those on economic effects analyse the impact on economic growth, regional and national labour markets, productivity and innovation and entrepreneurship [5]. Depending on data availability, the relevance of migration (of TCNs) in all mentioned areas as well as their social and economic situation, differences between TCN/migrants and nationals, as well as disparities between urban and rural areas were in focus. To guarantee comparability between the countries, only data from international databases (e.g. Eurostat, OECD, ILOSTAT) was

used. A comparative report was compiled assessing the overall effects of migration on social innovation practices and the economy based on the qualitative and quantitative reports.

3.3 PARTICIPATIVE ACTION RESEARCH

To conduct the local case studies, researchers and local partners were working together applying a mix of methods. The transdisciplinary-participatory action research had build the basis for the involvement of different stakeholders, where social actors and migrants become co-researchers, which increases, in consequence, the individual and collective self-empowerment of migrants and their participation in society. Based on the Stakeholder Involvement Plan [6] and different participations models, in Carinthia (with focus on the city of Villach and its rural surrounding), being one of the case studies, a productive cooperation between the MATILDE researchers, the local government of Villach, NGOs and migrants as experts of their integration processes, has been established. With the help of participatory research methods, different intercultural actions have been implemented (e.g., social & mobility mappings, sociograms, photo talks, focus groups, roundtables, and an intercultural city walk). Finally, policy roundtables will be organized for the joint development of policy recommendations which will allow to reach the highest form of citizen partizipation.

4 FIRST RESULTS AND ADDED VALUE OF CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIPS

Two-thirds of the project duration are over by January 2022. During this time, 25 deliverables have been elaborated by the international consortium, i.e. country-specific reports on the social and economic impacts of migration, as well as a report focusing on the existing political goals, programs, and strategies on integration in the European Union, the MATILDE countries and its rural regions. While the policy report shows that migration and integration policies have been tightened in many MATILDE countries since 2015 [7], the results on the qualitative economic analysis reveals positive aspects of international migration (i.a. mitigating labour shortages, increasing companies' internationality, diversity, and potential for innovation and promoting their internationalisation) [8]. However, the quantitative economic analysis presents that TCNs in the MATILDE regions show on average a lower level of educational attainment compared to nationals and lower employment rates by educational level, which indicates the need for action [4]. Currently, policy recommendations based on the findings of the qualitative, quantitative, and participatory research are drawn and the toolbox for researchers and practitioners is being developed and tested by the target groups. It is noteworthy, that all partners contribute to the elaboration of the different results, which does not only deepen the findings but allows for comparisons between the 13 case study regions.

The development of the conceptual framework, the project is based on, the innovative research and evaluation methods used, or the identification of good practice examples at different government levels in different countries, is driven by the transnational project

cooperation between the two-level research-practitioner consortium and the continuous exchange of knowledge and research experiences made in the 13 European regions. The cooperation is also reflected in transnational publication projects. The first results of the social and economic impacts, as well as the current impacts of COVID-19 on TCNs and rural areas, have already been presented at several international conferences on migration and spatial research and have already been published or are in the process of publication. A manifesto with 10 theses, dealing i.a. with migration in rural areas, and possibilities for an interdisciplinary migration impact assessment is currently being developed as an open-access publication. In addition, several edited volumes focusing on the qualitative, quantitative, and action research results, as well as the political implications for the governance of migration and integration in rural and mountainous areas are in the making with high reputation publishing houses. In addition, the transnational consortium has also managed to organize an international photo contest and developed a Massive Open Online Course.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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