2. Methodological presuppositions and challenges

As a result of the democratisation of research (e.g. citizen science, evidence-based processes), and a humanist paradigm that aims to adopt an insider perspective, participatory research styles that try to involve all kinds of people, including vulnerable people, in research and development processes, have become established as both popular and well known perspectives. Moreover, they allow for close collaboration with the practitioners and people affected on-site.

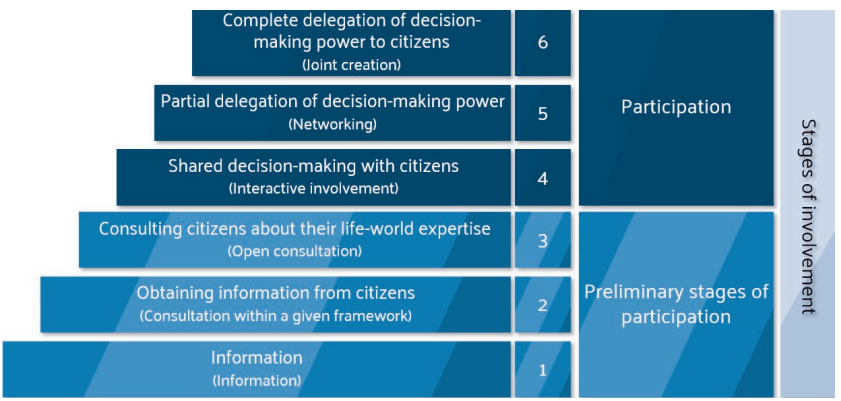
The formation of a participatory research tradition has been ascribed to critiques from within development studies of research as extractivist, sampling unequally and excluding people from decision-making processes (Chambers 1994a). It has been further influenced by activist participatory research (e.g. Freire 1968), applied anthropology and agrarian system analysis. In reaction, practitioners in development cooperation applied Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which aims 'to enable local (rural and urban) people to express, enhance, share and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act' (Chambers 1994b, 1253). With Participatory Action Research (PAR), a further developmental step took place, which combined two objectives: 'One aim is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people through research, adult education or socio-political action. The second aim is to empower people at a second and deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge' (Reason 1998, 271; for an overview see Beazley and Ennew 2006).

Participatory research also changes the understanding of the roles of researchers and participants (also called co-researchers, lay researchers, research partners). The focus is on learning from, with and through participants by enabling them to express their knowledge and preferences based on their own system of categories and values (Chambers 1994b). In order to include all kinds of people in research and evaluation processes, even those with disabilities or who are unable to read, write or understand/speak the national language, the tools and methods used should incorporate visual elements and reduce spoken and written ones (ibid.). Participants 'should have an active part in the whole process by examining, engaging, interpreting and reflecting on their social world and forming their sense of identity' (Hearne and Murphy 2019, cit. after Gruber et al. 2020, 21) and should be seen

as co-researchers, while researchers themselves are moderators and tutors in the learning process. Moreover, a linear research process is replaced by a cyclical one, since various iterations of planning, acting, observing and reflecting take place.

With regard to the degree of participation in the research or development process, the ladder of participation is a useful tool for critically reflecting on the level of participation. Arnstein's ladder of participation (2019, 26) contains eight levels, among which he identified two non-participatory levels and three further levels (information, consultation, placation) as 'tokenism'. Real participation is reached only from the levels of 'partnership' to 'citizen control'. The stage model of participation, we propose here, was used in the MATILDE project and is based on Straßburger and Rieger's participation pyramid (2014, 2019), in which the highest level of participation is achieved if decision-making power is completely delegated to citizens. In the MATILDE project, the highest level of participation is achieved when citizens (e.g. migrants) work together with policy-makers and other stakeholders to develop solutions to problems in their living environment.

Fig. 2: Participation pyramid based on Straßburger and Rieger (2014, 2019) and the MATILDE project (terms in brackets) (Gruber et al. 2020, 34)



While participatory processes are now initiated for many political measures, and citizens are at least informed and consulted, a complete transfer of decision-making power can often not be achieved in practice. However, the degree of participation can vary throughout the development process.

Since we want this book to be read by a range of target groups and individuals with different backgrounds, from experts (such as politicians or

company managers), to people involved in everyday encounters with migrants (including civil servants in public administrations, employees of NGOs, members associations or relief groups and finally immigrants themselves), some methodological presuppositions are presented below. These reflections address the positionality of researchers in the research process in general, and in the interview situation as a form of social interaction in particular, encompassing access and trust as important prerequisites not just for face-to-face interactions but also for collecting valid data. They also include language and cultural peculiarities, since these play an important role in interactions with migrants, and a discussion of interview settings. We also elaborate on the aforementioned process of becoming familiar with the locality and focus on ethical issues.

2.1. Positionality of researchers

Debates on power structures and the hierarchies that often become evident in othering processes – that is, identity construction through distinguishing oneself from the 'other' (Said 1978), and a way of speaking *about* instead of speaking *for* (Neuburger and Schmitt 2012) – currently influence both work and the social sciences. In the course of the othering debate, the normalisation of the self and the connotation of the other as deviant implies superiority (Gregory 1998; Husseini de Araújo 2011), which then results in the positioning of the researcher as a (superior and) distant outsider. Awareness of the dichotomising categories of outsider and insider might be a first step in challenging unequal power structures. The humanist turn in geography, for instance, focused on such dichotomies (Buttimer 1999), while more recently, current debates in feminist theory and postmodernism continue to make efforts to reduce them (Merriam et al. 2010).

Certain markers, such as name, profession, gender, age, physical appearance, clothing, use of language, family status, religion and many more, can influence the hierarchy in the relationship between a researcher and participants and can ultimately have an impact on power, respect and trust. When researchers are motivated to reflect on their own reactions, they can be sensitised to such hierarchies, which enables them to strike a balance between maintaining distance and identifying with participants (Kordel et al. 2018).

The prerequisite of a reflexive attitude throughout the research and assessment process is acknowledgement of one's own privileged position and understanding of one's own perception as just one way of seeing among

others. Reflexive researchers are aware that they do not just collect facts and establish a single truth, but rather construct their interpretations on the basis of their personal field experiences (Hertz 1997). As Finlay puts it, 'with reflexive analyses, the researcher is aware of experiencing a world and moves back and forth in a kind of dialectic between experience and awareness' (Finlay 2002, 533). Throughout the research process, people's subjectivity should be at the core. In order to engage with the perspectives of participants, Husserl (1970) suggests phenomenological reduction; that is, the exclusion of personal views and attitudes. Researchers should be actively reflexive during the preparation and implementation of an evaluation or assessment and the analysis of results.

2.1.1. Access and trust

Especially in the initial phase of the research process and when it comes to sampling and recruiting participants, access and trust is crucial and predetermines the successful accomplishment of interviews and workshops as well as the output of valid and reliable data. Trust between researchers and participants is important, to avoid the potential for interviewees to feel emotionally or physically threatened (RatSWD 2017) and simultaneously forms the basis of an authentic interpersonal relationship (Miller 2004). To establish trust, gathering information about participants and their life worlds, and especially the first contact – which might be facilitated by gatekeepers – is crucial (Donà 2007; Kabranian-Melkonian 2015). A gatekeeper might be a member of the ethnic community or a volunteer or social worker (Curry et al. 2017). Moreover, as McDowell (2010, 162) notes, the behaviour of researchers is of great importance for getting access to groups and places: '[Researchers should] construct an encounter in which the exchange is both sufficiently collaborative to make the 'respondents' feel comfortable and that their participation is highly valued, while at the same time not being intrusive or too focused on the interviewer's own life, values and beliefs'. Following this logic, it is recommended that researchers adapt to the surroundings to a certain degree, by means of their clothing, behaviour and their use and management of time (Kearns 2010). Accordingly, commonalities between the researcher and the participant can be highlighted to achieve trust (Donà 2007), the basis of which must also be made transparent during the course of the research process.

Finally, apart from trust, providing the target group with timely information about the research project, by means of social and local media or visits to places they frequent (e.g. language courses), has been seen as an important way to access participants and can therefore increase the rate of participation (Harris and Roberts 2011; Elliott and Yusuf 2014). Information for the target group should be concise and conveyed in appropriate (straightforward) language.

2.1.2. Language and cultural peculiarities

Sharing a common language represents an important means of building trust. In order to overcome language barriers, technical advice – for example, translation by means of smartphone apps – or interpreters can be incorporated into the research process. In the latter case, the distribution of roles is affected, since the intervention of translators can increase the distance between the researcher and the participant (Block et al. 2013). Thus, the role and its positionality must be critically evaluated, especially if the interpreter belongs to the same community as the participants or has a similar background, such as having had experience of being a refugee or if they have come from the same country. To reduce concerns, participants facing language challenges should be able to make their own decisions about what language they communicate in and whether to use an interpreter (Huisman 2011; Kissoon 2011; Elliott and Yusuf 2014; Fozdar and Hartley 2014; Wernesjö 2015). Mistranslations are mostly related to metaphorical language, connotations or local peculiarities and can be reduced by involving the interpreter in cross-checking primary/secondary data and the interpreted results. Financial issues and an interpreter's availability in terms of time should be discussed beforehand (Burja 2006).

2.1.3. Interview settings

Besides the above-mentioned issues, the interview setting itself – place, time and interpersonal relations – represents an important factor in success. Interview locations should be known to participants and be perceived to be safe and secure. Thus, the interviewer should be flexible about the selection of places and include participants in the decision (Harris and Roberts 2011; Penman and Goel 2017; Ziersch et al. 2017). Interview locations may be private

or professional places, such as workplaces in the case of experts, the flats and apartments of migrants; or (semi-)public places, such as cafés, restaurants or libraries (Poppe 2013; Dandy and Pe-Pua 2015). Noise and interruptions caused by someone leaving the room, or by children, family members or neighbours, should be avoided during the interview (Huisman 2011). To enable parents with small children to participate, consideration shold be given to the use of assistants to provide childcare (Farber et al. 2018). In some cases, it might be enough to provide food and drink to help create a comfortable interview setting, particularly if one suspects the interview might go on a long time (Dandy and Pe-Pua 2015; Farber et al. 2018). For volunteers, and migrants especially, whether they are included as individuals or in groups, it is important to be aware that they are spending their free time and consider some (financial) compensation (e.g. for travel costs) or other incentives (Kissoon 2011, Farber et al. 2018).

2.2. Becoming familiar with the locality

Becoming familiar with the peculiarities of both the locality and the people in it is crucial for the interviews and discussion to be rich in both content and substance. Thus, intensive preparation for the fieldwork itself is necessary. Jagger et al. (2011) remind us to consider, firstly, the political context – including (in)formal hierarchies, resources and access, and the political and economic history – and secondly the cultural context. This could be achieved by reviewing the region's particular and local characteristics and, in some cases, by additional research on the concrete locality and stakeholder landscape. Researchers should also immerse themselves in the field, although the degree of immersion strongly depends on the aims and method to be applied. If external participants are going to be involved, where they choose to live and what they choose to eat can reduce the distance between the researchers and participants (Jagger et al. 2011). A structured site visit, including participant observation or simply hanging around in a specific locality could enhance the understanding of local peculiarities (Althaus et al. 2009) and prevent the drawing of early conclusions. In the context of research with migrants, hanging around with migrants (Rodgers 2004) and informal conversations (Miller 2004), were both clearly highlighted for their value in getting to get to know the life worlds of individuals and for approaching participants (see also Tool Municipality Profile chapter 3.1).

2.3. Ethical issues

Collecting empirical material from individuals, especially those who may be particularly vulnerable, means that it is important to consider ethical aspects (Kabranian-Melkonian 2015; Roth and von Unger 2018; von Unger 2021). Any interaction with these subjects should take place within the appropriate guidelines on data collection, security and protection. In line with the European Commission's Guidance Note on research on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, the principles of sensitivity, objectivity, transparency, avoidance of ethnocentricity and rigorous safeguarding of participants' dignity, wellbeing, autonomy, safety and security need to be applied, while participants' values and their right to make their own decisions must also be guaranteed. Unexpected, incidental, or unintended findings that are not harmless need to be reported in line with national legislation. Informed consent or alternative forms of consent must be sought from participants, while sensitive personal data need to be protected and anonymisation techniques applied (Kabranian-Melkonian 2015, Clark-Kazak 2017; see Infobox 3). A peculiarity of rural and mountain areas is that the degree of anonymisation must be considered: the fact that very few actors and stakeholders live in such places often allows for the easy identification of stakeholders (Stachowski 2020). Thus, special attention must be given to anonymisation.

Infobox 3: Checklist for Researchers (Clark-Kazak 2017, 14)

1. Do I need ethics approval for this project? If so, how can this be obtained?
2. Where applicable, have I shared my ethics protocol with relevant partners?
3. Who will benefit from this research?
4. Who else is doing research on this topic and with this population? Have we coordinated efforts to avoid over-researching?
5. What are the potential limits of confidentiality? What strategies do I have in place to deal with situations where criminality, exploitation or self-harm are disclosed?
6. Who is not included in my proposed research? How can I facilitate the participation of these individuals?

7. How will I include relevant partners in all phases of my project: from design to dissemination? What mechanisms and protocols are in place to ensure full participation?
8. Have I factored into my project budget compensation for the time and other resources non-academic partners invest in research, including as respondents, serving on advisory committees, recruiting other respondents and facilitating the participation of other respondents?

The International Association for Public Participation (2017) provides a Code of Ethics for Public Participation Professionals as a basic framework for ethical standards in public participation processes and respectful and effective interactions with stakeholders:

1. *Purpose:* Supporting public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.
2. *Role of practitioner:* Enhancing the public's participation in the decision-making process and assisting decision-makers in responding to the public's concerns and suggestions.
3. *Trust:* Undertaking and encouraging actions that build trust and credibility for the process among all the participants.
4. *Defining the public's role:* Carefully considering and accurately portraying the public's role in the decision-making process.
5. *Openness:* Encouraging the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.
6. *Access to the process:* Ensuring that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public for the public participation process and not advocating for interest, party or participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions.
7. *Respect for communities:* Avoiding strategies that risk polarising community interests or that appear to 'divide and conquer'.
8. *Advocacy:* Advocating project outcomes.
9. *Comments:* Ensuring that all commitments made to the public, including those by the decision-maker, are made in good faith.
10. *Supporting practice:* Monitoring new practitioners in the field and educating decision-makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.

Further Reading: Iosfides 2011, Stachowski 2020