

Activity 1: SWOT analysis

<p>Topic assessed: The Austrian Expert Group Learning in Later Life – creating a successful dialogue between practitioners and researchers (University of Graz)</p> <p>The case study illustrates the formation, activities/working methods and output to date of the Austrian Expert Group on Learning in Later Life and the Center for Continuing Education’s leading role in it. The expert group was established in 2008 (based on previous project work)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to offer a forum for an institutionalised dialogue between educational practice and educational research in consultation with public administration/policy development, and • to produce concrete results for the further development of existing concepts in the area and give concrete recommendations for priorities in the fields of practice, research and policy development. 				
<p>Helpful in achieving the objective</p>		<p>Harmful in achieving the objective</p>		
<p>Strengths</p>		<p>Weaknesses</p>		
<p>Internal Factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation and composition of the group (mix of practitioners, policy development – federal and regional government officials, researchers) • Collaborative discussion and working out themes and recommendations • Visibility of results through a joint publication (formation of teams of authors composed of researchers and practitioners) • Content: recommendations referred to LLL-practice as well as to research • Impact on Austrian national strategy for LLL (“Action Line 9 – Improvement in quality of life in retirement”) • Impact on programme development in the Center for Continuing Education (Programme Vita activa) • Common “enemy”: negative age stereotype and indifferent public • Good project management to balance divergent interests and actors as well as leadership in a group of equal experts (the group as temporary “expert organisation”) • Face to face communication of equal group members 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time • Spatial/geographical and institutional dislocation of group members • Lifelong learning research is mostly applied research which is, by the university, not seen as important/prestigious as basic empirical research (published in peer-reviewed journals) • Final loop missing to discuss the joint publication and its recommendations in more details 	
	<p>Opportunities</p>		<p>Threats</p>	
<p>External Factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To find a common ground: what is LLL?; definition of terms; common language • To clarify different concepts and approaches of research-practice relations: what do researchers/practitioners mean by research/practice and what interests do they have in each other? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability: Mainly dependent on individuals on a voluntary basis; and self-organised; missing institutionalisation of network – can disappear quickly • To maintain the network: No public funding of network up to now (only project funding) • Unclear mutual expectations: What do researchers expect from practice? What do practitioners expect 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop new roles: “researching practitioners” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from research/researchers? It is difficult to achieve a certain level of quality of the joint product (publication) – who defines the quality criteria in a mixed group of researchers, practitioners and policy developers?
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2. Can the hindering factors (weaknesses and threats) be generalised and applied at national level? Which other hindering factors can be identified?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career development of researchers today: To a great extent, the positive developments of careers of young researchers depend on the quality/number of publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals. To initiate and maintain enduring, systematic contacts with practitioners could even become a hindering factor for their individual careers. Of course exceptions are research interests/projects where (punctual and short-term) contacts to practice/practitioners are absolutely needed. The more universities are requested to focus on basic research, the weaker enduring, systematic contacts with practice are; universities focusing on applied research are supposed to initiate and maintain more links with practice. The relevance of “practice” in study programmes: Generally speaking, regular university study programmes focus on further development of the scientific disciplines, not on implementing new scientific knowledge into practice (“practice” is not seen as relevant in the curricula and in teaching). For universities, university lifelong learning programmes / university continuing education is, in general, seen as <u>one</u> of the “platforms” for intensified contacts/communication between research and practice. Institutionalisation of a structured dialogue between research and practice: In Austria, up to now an institutionalised forum for a structured exchange and dialogue between research and practice does not exist. We do have forums for researchers (e.g. The Austrian Society for Geriatrics and Gerontology - Österreichische Gesellschaft für Geriatrie und Gerontologie (ÖGGG)). A joint platform with a concrete work programme would be a goal. Relationship between research and practice: Research tries to be independent and tries to „analyse“ independently and therefore principally has to have an “openness” regarding the options of societal development; practice is always “ideology”, practice „does“ and also wants to „form“ (shape) society. These are different goals and highlight the important „difference“ between the logic of research and the logic of practice. Practice expects results and output from research to be able to further develop practice. Independence of research has as prerequisite that the relationship between research (researchers) and practice (practitioners) is not too close. One of the challenges is how researchers prepare and present their results in order to allow practitioners to make use of them and draw conclusions from them. To do so, researchers need to have understanding of the practical uses of their research in society including policy development.

3. Once you have identified the general hindering factors, please try to analyse their reasons to find out how these factors are embedded in your respective learning and research culture.

<p>Four factors have been identified: Career development of researchers today; the relevance of “practice” in study programmes; institutionalisation of a structured dialogue between research and practice; relationship between research and practice. For more details see box 2 above.</p>
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4. Actions that could be carried out to overcome these identified reasons for barriers and hindering factors to cooperation between ULLL researchers and practitioners or solutions

Please identify and explain possible solutions for the identified reasons of barriers.

As set out above, (basic) research and practise are two separate areas of a specific nature, i.e. both systems follow, so to speak, a different logic (“to analyse” versus “to shape”). Of course, this gap can’t be bridged completely. Nevertheless, four actions/measures could contribute to overcoming barriers to improve cooperation between researchers and practitioners:

- a.) **Researchers** need basic communication competences and skills in order to be able to communicate with a lay audience. Each dialogue starts with finding a common ground and a common language. Science communication trainings should therefore be an integral and mandatory part of staff development / career development for young researchers.
- b.) **Practitioners**, on the other hand, need a basic understanding of research. What are the main questions and concepts in the concerning field? Introductory lectures and workshops about ULLL research should be a mandatory part of career/staff development for practitioners. What is more, practitioners should also be willing to get involved in a dialogue with research and reflect everyday practise in an academic/scientific way.
- c.) **Government** officials should help by supporting and maintaining networks/platforms of a structured dialogue between research and practice. They play an important role via policy development, lobbying and public funding in the process of institutionalisation.
- d.) **Universities of applied sciences:** We need a further development and perspective of applied research within the university structure. Are the universities of applied sciences the missing link between research and practice? Up to now their research output is very limited due to limited resources and an unclear political mandate.

5. Actors which (could) play a role in carrying out these actions (based on the network analysis of activity 2 and 3) and reason:

Please reflect on how the identified actors of the network analysis could help to overcome identified barriers and constraints.

Actors	Reason
Groups of Practitioners (in a leadership role in: adult education, ULLL, NGOs, cultural institutions, etc.)	Through <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a.) lobbying for a dialogue between ULLL/ Learning in Later Life research in their institutions, umbrella organisations, etc. in general; b.) research-based programming; c.) (informal and/or formal) engagement with the most important theories, concepts, questions, findings in the respective field of research.
Federal and regional government officials	Policy development through <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a.) lobbying for the theme Learning in Later Life (national and regional level); b.) incorporating the theme in a national strategy for LLL (in Austria LLL: 2020: “Action Line 9 – Improvement in quality of life in retirement”) (national level); c.) developing and providing funding programmes for relevant research-based practice projects (national and/or regional level);

	<p>d.) long-term funding of a platform for a structured dialogue between research and practice (national and/or regional level).</p>
<p>Researchers</p>	<p>Through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a.) lobbying for a dialogue between ULLL/ Learning in Later Life research and practice at university level and in the scientific community; b.) (informal and/or formal) acquisition of basic knowledge, competences and skills in science communication; c.) actively trying to get familiar with the main questions und challenges (organisation, programming, finances, etc.) practitioners are faced with.