

Heidelberg, 18/12/2018

Meeting report of the German-Canadian Workshop on Knowledge Mobilization in Heidelberg, Dec. 12-14, 2018

Within the framework of the German-Canadian Working Group on the integration of refugees, 25 researchers and practitioners convened in Heidelberg last week to discuss and exchange ideas about current knowledge mobilization approaches in the field of refugee research. The research cooperation between Germany and Canada was initiated in 2016 after large numbers of refugees had arrived in both countries. The society and newcomers alike are now facing the task of successful integration. Researchers therefore felt the need to explore the situation in more depth and gain a clearer understanding of how to facilitate integration processes. Since the beginning of 2018, the German project Integration CAN-D funded by the BMBF and the Canadian Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) have supported this research cooperation by organizing various joint activities and meetings. In Heidelberg, participants in the workshop on knowledge mobilization were researchers from the German Leibniz institutions, German and Canadian universities and Canadian service provider organizations.

The workshop agenda offered an overview of the most relevant fields of knowledge mobilization: communication and information, consulting, education and training, and transdisciplinary and permanent cooperation projects involving both researchers and practitioners. In this frame, approaches from various projects to knowledge mobilization were discussed, for instance the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia in Halifax (Canada); the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration in London, Ontario (Canada); the Real-World laboratory, asylum seekers in the Rhine Neckar region (Real-Labor Asyl) in Heidelberg (Germany). Furthermore, various research projects in the field of education and teacher education introduced their concepts.

It soon became apparent that research mobilization is an evolving concept and, so far, a clear and coherent systematization has not yet been developed. Depending on the perspectives involved, different approaches and schemes are considered as research transfer and mobilization. Theoretical reflections can be taken from disciplines like health care studies, sustainability and social innovation research, and implementation sciences. Still, a concept of knowledge mobilization or transfer is lacking that would integrate knowledge from these various approaches into one theoretical body.

In the workshop discussions, some general ideas could be identified. Since teacher training and education is naturally situated at the interface between research and practice, there was an understanding that this field bears great resources for knowledge mobilization. Different approaches have introduced concepts on how knowledge can be transferred to active and future teachers. Such knowledge could, for example, address strategies for dealing with diversity in the classroom, using such diversity in a productive way, or adapting the learning paths of refugee children and youth to their personal history and living conditions.

Another very important topic was that a close cooperation between practitioners and researchers can support, enrich and facilitate work at both ends. The experiences and insights of the people who work practically with refugees can inform research questions and approaches, and practitioners can benefit from the results of scientific research. At the workshop, new approaches to a close exchange were introduced and discussed. Here, interesting examples were given by Canadian projects like “wisdom 2 action” (<http://www.wisdom2action.org/>), or the close cooperation between CYRRC researchers and the Immigrant Services of Nova Scotia (isans) (<http://www.isans.ca/>).

It hence became obvious that the comparison between German and Canadian approaches can offer new perspectives on potentials and difficulties of knowledge mobilization. Researchers from both countries agreed that an exchange about ongoing practices, discussions about common understandings and theories, and the development of new networks and approaches can support successful knowledge mobilization.