

MEDem Dissemination and Communication

1. Dissemination

MEDem brings together scattered European infrastructures, research initiatives, centres, and projects under one umbrella to work together on the issue of democracy research, ultimately bringing into being a new research infrastructure. This is the area of expertise that combines the understanding of how citizens, elites, parties, parliaments, governments and media interact and relate to each other in the democratic process. This area is therefore central for the understanding of modern societies. In this area of expertise, MEDem mobilizes the widest possible network of researchers engaging in data collection for monitoring each one of these mentioned political actors. The inclusion of so many data collection projects and infrastructures under the wider MEDem umbrella is of paramount importance to the success and impact of the project.

This network mobilization will facilitate data harmonization, enable linking and integration between various projects and data sources, and above all it will stimulate cooperation and collaboration. The wider the inclusion of existing data collection infrastructures, projects and mechanisms, the more successful will be the creation of standards and their implementation.

The data produced in the framework of MEDem will be used by joint research activities. In addition, the data and all resources will be freely available to other researchers. In large social science projects, this is an important aspect to stimulate additional innovation through wider use of newly-created data.

Despite the focus on democracy research, the results of MEDem will have a wider impact. The stakeholders of MEDem vary in terms of their data affinity and connection to the existing democracy research community; however they are all important and will all be addressed. Specifically, the stakeholder communities are

i) *existing data collecting infrastructures and projects delivering data to MEDem*. These are either well-defined national election studies with regular funding from their governments or national science foundations; or research enterprises in project format organised, brought forward, and funded as needed by the national research communities on democracy research. Also in this category we see the various comparative projects either collecting data for a specific type of actor or harmonising data across existing national data collections.

ii) the *wider social science community* is an important stakeholder because they are the ones who will use the data to produce knowledge. Within this category we need to also give a special mention to young

researchers who will be the future of MEDem and, in general, to all the activities surrounding research on electoral democracy.

iii) Another special category are *data and science journalists* who may lack the tools and expertise to unlock the potential of the data but, due to their special place in society, who offer opportunities for wider dissemination and more profound impact in the society. A similar group, due to their skills and functions, are also citizen scientists.

iv) a step further down the dissemination chain are *political actors and policy makers* that can benefit from the results of MEDem research through targeted publications of bite-size results; and finally

v) *citizens interested in politics* in the wider sense, who crave research-based but easily readable information.

The dissemination (provision of data and documentation, as well as of training) and communication (about the project as well as about its research results) for the various stakeholders will be using four main channels:

- i. The *MEDem website* will be used to create the single point of access with information relevant to existing projects, individual researchers, and the wider research community: Information on the individual projects and their data collections, how to access the data, tools and guides to using the data in combination, etc.
- ii. *Standardised and linked data, syntax files and documentation* produced by MEDem will be curated and preserved at GESIS, a certified social sciences data archive.
- iii. A *public web platform* leaning on the Swiss www.DeFacto.expert model will be used to make findings from research on democracies available in an easy way. The wider communities of journalists, policy makers and the wider public will be covered through the communication activities. Impact maximisation within those groups mainly relies on the simplicity of the message, high quality visualisations, and the use of appropriate channels.
- iv. Various *trainings, events and meetings* will bring together different parts of the scientific community related to MEDem. This will allow communicating on the advancement and key development with key stakeholders in an interactive way. Activities such as the dissemination events will have high visibility among policy makers, journalists and public and will increase the impact of our research output.

MEDem is a community-based project. When data from the various data collection projects will be prepared and harmonised, the work is structured in a very collaborative way. Even though specific

organisations (such as Competence Centers) are charged with MEDem tasks, their main role is to also engage the data collecting infrastructures and projects, and remain in open dialogue with them throughout the project. The idea is that all MEDem standards development will be done in deliberation and collaboration with those projects, so adoption of standards will be as natural as possible. MEDem has reserved a part of the project budget to subcontract harmonisation and data handling tasks by the data producers themselves. Through this mechanism the impact of MEDem work will live on and ensure harmonisation across data collections in the years to come.

The wider democracy research community is already very well-organised through various academic professional organisations, standing groups and research activities. MEDem will not re-invent the wheel, but will make use of the existing structures to maximise the impact of this community. The joint research activities will present their results in academic conferences and organise sessions in already-established conferences to showcase the new potential found in the MEDem-harmonised data. MEDem will provide training to young researchers but also ensure that there is one point where all researchers can get informed about who provides training and on what topic. MEDem will also liaise with the training providers to refine their training on methodological issues that fit better the needs of the more complex MEDem data structures. The impact of the MEDem data will only be able to expand if the community is ready to work with these data. Therefore, training and networking activities connect existing training operators (e.g. ECPR summer and winter schools). Additionally, data-producing projects will be also trained on data management and documentation, to ensure a lasting impact under guidance from MEDem itself.

2. Research Data management

Data management is central in MEDem activities. MEDem does not collect or generate any data. However, it bases itself on other projects or infrastructures that are already doing so. For that reason it is essential that those data sources adhere to strict data management rules that can ensure data integrity and promote FAIRness of the data. Collected data come from existing data collections projects or infrastructures. Most of these data are collected in regular time-spans that follow the election cycle. Most of the data are individual-level surveys without direct identifiers. For these there is a standard practice that adheres the GDPR regulations. MEDem will ensure, before using any data, that they have been collected according to GDPR rules. Other data are surveys of candidates, where full anonymization is less straight-forward. For this reason access to these types of data is more restrictive. Finally there are data that are collected on the basis of coding of texts, or harvesting of social media data. MEDem's work is based on harmonising, linking, and integrating these data. In this processes information is lost for the benefit of aggregation potential. For this reason, anonymization problems are minimized.

FORS and GESIS, two CESSDA service providers, will be central members of the future MEDem consortium. They are active members of the DDI community setting standards for metadata and documentation. For MEDem two things are important: (a) the data collected by the associated projects are documented to high quality standards and (b) all harmonisation and linking processes done by MEDem are documented in such a way that ensures transparency, and reusability. Additionally, the issue of provenance is important. MEDem will ensure that all data used for harmonisation and linking will, with the permission of their initial owners, be added to a bigger integrated dataset. The new data and syntax files produced by MEDem will be curated and preserved at GESIS, a certified social sciences data archive. This ensures the highest standards approved by CESSDA, and also easy and stable access. The business model of GESIS allows MEDem to preserve its data there without additional costs. Access to these data is controlled by GESIS. There, they follow the rule "as open as possible, as restricted as necessary". As a general standard for the type of data like the ones MEDem will be producing, access will need a login but in general data are directly downloadable once a user is logged in.

3. Communication activities

i. Results from the MEDem project

There are various communication measures planned for MEDem also targeted toward specific stakeholders, that were mentioned above. These will be directed through two main web portals:

A *MEDem website* will be built in order to provide different project-related information that is mainly relevant for *existing data collecting infrastructures and projects delivering data to MEDem as well as to the wider social science community*. On this web portal there will be

- General Information on the MEDem project. Information on the advancement of MEDem that will also be sent out through an electronic newsletter (by e-mail) with project updates to various stakeholders
- Information on the projects attached to MEDem
- Information on data collection standards, measurement standards, conceptual maps etc.
- The single point of entry for data which includes the MEDem: Data Hub
- Training material, information on upcoming and past events
- Research outputs

A public web portal for a wider audience. MEDem will establish a communication platform for a non-academic audience (such as students, data and science journalists, political actors and policy-makers, citizens interested in politics) following the model of DeFacto. DeFacto is an already existing community amplifier in Switzerland (<https://www.defacto.expert/>) that allow multi-language materials from various predefined sources to appear in a centralized place. This is a very well-functioning platform where all Swiss political science university departments and research institutes in Switzerland participate. Content for DeFacto is always based on research findings (to a large extent from published journal articles or book chapter, in some cases also specifically produced for DeFacto), however, presented in a way that is accessible for a broader audience. DeFacto has a partnership also with an academic journal and key findings of most scientific articles appearing in this journal are then also presented in DeFacto to a wider audience in a national language.

MEDem will adapt the platform to the European level and this will help the community to better convey the importance of disseminating scientific content to general audiences, and help access results in a meaningful and convenient way. The public web portal will also disseminate new content through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and DeFacto will be open for other projects and collaborations with scientific journals.

ii. Strategy for knowledge management, protection, exploitation and dissemination

Because a central component of MEDem is a national archive, GESIS (which is linked to CESSDA), the knowledge management regarding MEDem data will be handled through standard CESSDA protocols and procedures. A data archive has as its primary objectives the protection of data and of the subjects referenced by those data, and the secondary objective of facilitating user access to the data. GESIS has standard procedures for publicizing the availability of new data and for making it readily available. These procedures will be augmented, when it comes to MEDem data, by software designed to facilitate the linking of MEDem data from different projects, possibly held at different repositories. These procedures will be innovative and of considerable interest beyond the research community directly involved with MEDem. Thus the MEDem data will gain additional visibility as exemplary beneficiaries of procedures likely to become ubiquitous. Because users of GESIS data undertake to provide references to the source from which the data was obtained, any publicity gained through conference participation and/or academic and media publications will automatically bring awareness of the source of the data concerned. We anticipate that MEDem data will garner considerable publicity because of its implications for policy-making summarized in the project proposal.