



EVALUATING TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION POLICY INSTRUMENTS

THE EXAMPLE OF THE AUSTRIAN PROGRAMME FOR THE PROMOTION OF FEMALE RESEARCHERS “INNOVATORINNEN”

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the evaluation of transformative innovation policy (TIP) instruments through the case of the Austrian programme INNOVATORINNEN which promotes women in applied research and innovation. To contextualise the empirical analysis, the paper reviews the evolution of innovation policy, focusing on instruments designed to support female researchers and advance gender equality in Austria, as well as their evaluations. The analysis positions INNOVATORINNEN as a transformative innovation policy instrument.

Using deductive content analysis, the evaluation concept and practice of the INNOVATORINNEN programme are assessed against the requirements for TIP evaluations outlined in recent literature. Key aspects examined include evaluation strategy, the role of evaluation, theory of change, and methodology. The findings reveal a strong alignment between the programme's evaluation and TIP evaluation criteria, particularly in fostering programme learning, reflection, and evidence-based development. Notably, the evaluation incorporates content-oriented, co-creative processes that actively engage programme participants and programme owners, resulting in a “knowledge-triangle” driving the continuous improvement of the programme. The paper concludes by reflecting on key lessons from the evaluation process,

emphasizing the importance of openness, flexibility, a willingness to learn, trust and mutual respect among all involved parties.

Keywords: transformative innovation policy (TIP), TIP evaluation, promotion of female researchers, application-oriented research programme, deductive content analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Innovation policy has seen a shift when it comes to the main targets of investment in research and innovation – an evolution that has been discussed in recent academic literature, amongst others by Weber and Rohrer (2012), Schot and Steinmüller (2018) or Joly and Matt (2022). Transformative innovation policy (TIP) is an emerging generation of innovation policies, reorienting public science funders' and innovation policy professionals' efforts for initiating or contributing to societal change on a broad scale (Ghosh et al., 2021). TIP becomes most evident when it comes to governmental responses to recent global policy agendas, such as the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), the *Paris Climate Agreement*, the *European Union Green Deal*, and the 2020 World Economic Forum agenda on "Fixing inequality" (Ghosh et al., 2021). In the context of TIP, new requirements for the evaluation of policy instruments arise, as outlined e.g. in Molas-Gallart et al. (2020 and 2021) and Boni et al. (2019).

This paper focuses on the Austrian programme for the advancement of women in application-oriented research and innovation (R&I) "INNOVATORINNEN" by the Austrian *Ministry of Labour and Economy* (BMAW) and the *Austrian Research Promotion Agency* (FFG). This paper argues that INNOVATORINNEN is a case of a transformative innovation policy instrument. Particular attention is given to the accompanying evaluation of the programme: The purpose of this contribution is to provide insights into the evaluation, which – next to a set of "traditional" policy evaluation methods – uses novel evaluation elements based on strong interaction with programme management and participants. In this light, this contribution also aims to elaborate on how far the evaluation concept and practice qualify as TIP evaluation. To achieve this, the evaluation concept is analysed in the face of the requirements of TIP evaluations as proposed by Molas-Gallart et al. (2020 & 2021), Wise et al. (2022), TIPC (2019), Boni et al. (2019), and Ghosh et al. (2021).

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 explains the theoretical and empirical background, focusing on the development of innovation policy, its underlying understanding of innovation and its evaluation, as well as on the development of innovation programmes for advancing women in R&I in Austria. Section 3 presents the INNOVATORINNEN programme as the empirical context of the paper and provides arguments for its characterisation as potential TIP instrument. Moreover, it sheds light on the accompanying evaluation of the programme. Section 4 details the research question and methodological approach; section 5 deals with the findings of the analysis of the evaluation concept, and section 6 provides a conclusion.

2. EXPLANATION OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUNDS

This section delves into the theoretical and empirical foundations of the chapter. The first sub-section examines recent developments in innovation policy, situating the emergence of instruments designed to promote female researchers in R&I within this broader context. The second sub-section explores the evolution of evaluation approaches that have accompanied the progression of innovation policy over time. Finally, the third sub-section highlights key innovation policy instruments aimed at supporting female researchers and innovators in applied R&I in Austria.

2.1 THE WAY TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION POLICY

In line with a changing understanding of innovation and its effects, innovation policy has changed throughout the past decades: This development has been traced in recent academic literature (e.g. Weber & Rohracher, 2012; Schot & Steinmüller, 2018, Joly & Matt, 2022) and can be summarised in three frames, which are outlined in the following based on Wise et al. (2022), Carayannis & Campbell (2009, 2012), Schot et al. (2019) and Wroblewski & Schaller-Steidl (2023). Figure 1 provides an overview of the three frames of innovation policy, also pointing to the underlying notion of innovation and innovation policy for the advancement of women in R&I.

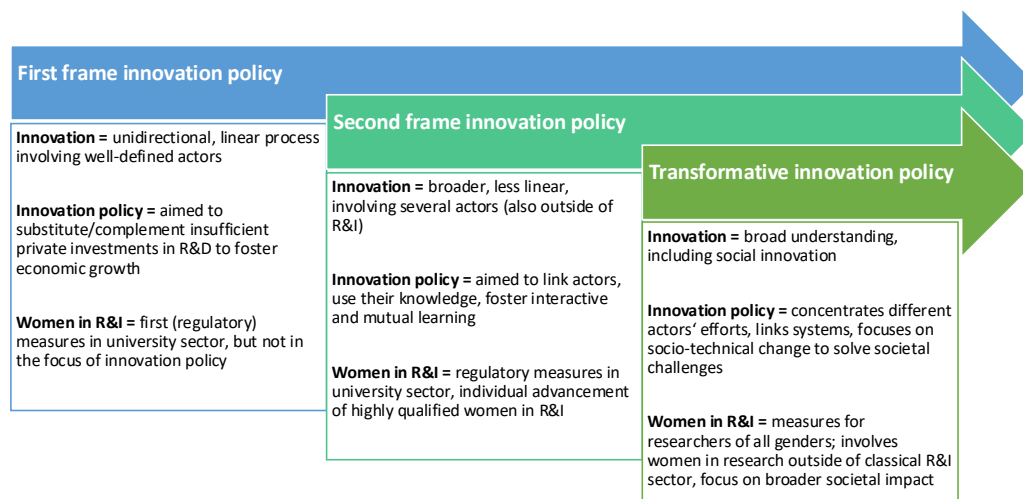


Figure 1 Overview of innovation policy frames. (Source: Own illustration, based on Wise et al. (2022, p. 273), Carayannis & Campbell (2009, 2012), Schot et al. (2019) and Wroblewski & Schaller-Steidl (2023))

In the *first frame*, prevalent between the 1970s and 1980s, innovation was considered a unidirectional, linear process from development to commercialisation, involving well-defined actors from the R&I sector (Carayannis & Campbell, 2012, p.3), and as means to foster economic growth. Accordingly, innovation policy primarily aimed at solving the market failure of insufficient private investments in R&I. Policy instruments in use were aimed at stimulating knowledge generation, developing regulatory and educational policy as well as raising awareness of the importance of innovation and technological advancement (Wise et al., 2022, p. 272). The first measures for advancing female researchers in Austria appeared in the 1970s, however, they were mainly limited to the university sector, while the area of applied research close to industry in large parts remained unregulated. Promoting women was not the primary focus of the *first frame*-innovation policy; this is not solely due to the then-prevailing notion of innovation but is primarily attributable to the societal conditions and practices that were dominant at that time.

In the *second frame*, from the 1980s up until today, the understanding of innovation has become broader and less linear – for example, Etzkowitz' & Leydesdorff's (1995) triple helix, the concept of open innovation (e.g. Chesbrough, 2003) and Carayannis & Campbell's (2009) quadruple helix suggested to also involve actors outside the R&I sector, such as government, civil society and industry, into the innovation process. Accordingly, innovation policy has been based on the notion of better linking and using the knowledge of different actors alongside fostering mutual learning. Policy instruments under this frame aim at stimulating and facilitating linkages and coordination between actors to foster interactive learning, knowledge utilisation, innovation

and entrepreneurship, which, in turn, stimulate economic growth (Wise et al., 2022). In the run of this *second frame*, promotion programmes for the advancement of women in science, research and innovation started to be established more systematically in Austria and Europe. Early programmes in the 1990s primarily focused on regulations on equal opportunities in the university sector; in the early 2000s, policy measures in Austria were extended to women in applied and industrial research, mainly comprising the individual advancement of highly qualified women from the R&I sector (Wroblewski & Schaller-Steidl, 2023; details see in section 3.3 of this paper).

The *third frame* of innovation policy is currently emerging and summarised under the term TIP, which is based on an extended understanding of innovation, including social innovation. The notion of the term transformation implies a change of socio-technical systems to solve complex societal challenges, such as the climate crisis, growing inequality, or a socioeconomic health crisis in the aftermath of the COVID-19-pandemic (Schot & Steinmüller, 2018; Ghosh et al., 2021). Focusing on this transformation, TIP aims to concentrate different actors' efforts, coordinating with other policy sectors and fostering new connections between systems. Consequently, TIP instruments focus on missions, challenge competition, or challenge-driven innovation programmes stimulating experimentation and co-production (Schot et al., 2019, p. 22-23). Within this *third frame*, inequalities in different areas of life are addressed as societal challenges, thus equal opportunities in R&I can be considered a major concern in TIP. In recent years, the measures for the advancement of women were partly redesigned to address equal opportunities for researchers of all genders in their early stages, while concrete objectives within these programmes are supposed to assure wide female participation (Wroblewski & Schaller-Steidl, 2023, chapter 3). At the same time, programmes such as INNOVATORINNEN – the empirical context of this paper – were introduced, aiming at promoting women in applied R&I based on an extended understanding of innovation, and at yielding broader societal impact (see section 4 of this paper).

2.2 EVALUATING TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION POLICY

With the broadening understanding of innovation and the development of innovation policy, the evaluation of policy instruments has been confronted with new requirements. While evaluation of innovation policies under the *first frame* was primarily focused on statistical measures of R&I inputs (e.g. funding sources, performers, personnel) and outputs (e.g. published articles, patents), the extended framing of innovation policy to system level (*second frame*) was

accompanied by new evaluation strategies. In particular, survey methods and qualitative research methods were used to complement existing statistical approaches. The focus was shifted to new aspects of innovation, such as innovation capabilities or linkages between actors in the innovation process (Wise et al., 2022, p. 273).

In the context of TIP, the need for new evaluation strategies is highlighted by several authors (e.g. Molas-Gallart et al., 2020 and 2021, Boni et al., 2019). Next to the traditional purposes of (formative and summative) evaluation – assessing efficiency, effectiveness, and the relevance of policy programmes (Peersman, 2015) – Boni et al. (2019), Schot et al. (2019), Ghosh et al. (2021) and Molas-Gallart et al. (2021) call for a new evaluation strategy that comprises monitoring transformative outcomes and “signs of change” (in the shape of changes in behaviour, emerging constellation or relationships or activities among people, groups and organisations, evolution of strategic aims), and informing the direction of the pursued systemic change process. In line with Molas-Gallart et al. (2021, p. 435), these authors stress the integration of evaluation as strategic dimension of the given programme with the aim of enhancing reflexivity and learning.

According to Wise et al. (2022), TIP evaluation is strongly rooted in sustainability transitions literature and multi-level perspectives on socio-technical transitions. The Transformative Innovation Policy Consortium (TIPC, 2019) developed a “formative approach to TIP evaluation” that differs from traditional (formative, summative) and developmental (see e.g. Patton, 2016, p. 28) evaluation in several respects. In particular, it stresses mixed methods, participatory approaches, and the integration of evaluation as a formative and strategic dimension of a programme to support learning and to inform strategic choices over time. Both data gathering and analysis involve participating actors and try to include a variety of perspectives. The results are used as “food for thought” and guide the adjustment of the envisaged transformation path (Wise et al., 2022). Table 1 summarises the integrated characteristics of TIP evaluations.

Table 1 Characteristics of TIP evaluations (Source: Own illustration based on Patton (2006), Molas-Gallart et al. (2020 & 2021), Wise et al. (2022), TIPC (2019), Boni et al. (2019), Ghosh et al. (2021))

Evaluation strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring transformative outcomes and signs of systemic change in real time (behavioural changes, emerging relationships / activities / constellation / interactions between actors, evolution of strategic aims) Informing the direction of the change process
Role of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation integrated as strategic dimension of the programme to enhance reflexivity and learning Informing strategic choices concerning the programme over time Evaluation results used as “food for thought”, guide the adjustment of the envisaged transformation path, help to refine the transformation process
Theory of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible, revisited, and refined throughout the evaluation process Nested approach to assess multiple levels
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed methods Participatory approaches in data gathering and analysis Include a variety of perspectives

2.3 DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES TO PROMOTE WOMEN IN APPLICATION-ORIENTED RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN AUSTRIA

Austria looks back to a relatively long tradition of measures to promote the equality of women in research, science, and innovation. The first measures date back to the 1970s; however, it was not until the 1990s and thus far into the *second frame* of innovation policy, that an entire set of instruments can be identified. These instruments, next to the promotion of women, aimed at antidiscrimination and the establishment of women and gender studies as dedicated disciplines. The bulk of these early policies was concentrated on the publicly-financed university sector and facilitated the institutionalisation and professionalisation of equality approaches. Comparable efforts in the broader higher education sector (comprising universities of applied sciences (UAS), private universities, and universities for teacher education) only followed in the past decade (Wroblewski & Schaller-Steidl, 2023, p. 11ff).

The sector of applied research close to industry does not know any comparable regulations but benefitted from programmes that addressed female researchers' individual career cycles and the consideration of the gender dimension in research, which were launched at the turn of the millennium (*second frame* of innovation policies). One prominent example is the programme fFORTE, which was recommended by the *Austrian Council*

for Research and Technology Policy (*Rat für Forschungs- und Technologiepolitik*, RFTE) in 2001. With this intersectoral programme, the former *Ministry of Education, Science and Research* (BMBWF¹) and the *Ministry of Traffic, Innovation and Technology* (BMVIT) addressed female researchers' entire educational and career cycles; a set of structurally effective measures was realised in subsequent years under the umbrella of fFORTE, such as doctoral colleges at two Technical Universities or the scholarship programme DOC-fFORTE of the *Austrian Academy of Sciences* (ÖAW). In 2005, the *Ministry of Labour and Economy* (BMAW) joined the initiative and financed measures under the programme w-fFORTE (short for "economic impulses from women in research and technology" [translation from German²]). The programme focused, amongst others, on the promotion of mixed teams for improving the quality of research and innovation (Dorr et al., 2020, Wroblewski & Schaller-Steidl, 2023) and explicitly addressed the aspect of economic growth, which still used to be dominant in the prevailing notion of innovation of that time (see section 3.1).

Around the same time as w-fFORTE, the programme FEMtech was established by the BMVIT under the umbrella of fFORTE. The aim of the programme was to foster the embedment of the gender dimension in research content as well as women's careers in technical and scientific areas. It was divided into three main elements: (1) FEMtech research projects (projects with a gender dimension in their research contents, mainly aimed at awareness raising), (2) FEMtech internships (for young female scientists to gain ground in applied research) and (3) FEMtech career (the programme supports organisations in employing more women in the fields of science and technology, e.g. via the FEMtech Career Check for SMEs; Grasenick et al., 2011). In 2024, FEMtech was continued as "Diversitec"³, focusing more broadly on aspects of diversity, equality, and inclusion in R&I.

In 2009, the impulse programme "Laura Bassi Centres of Expertise" was established as a lighthouse project in the frame of the BMAW's w-fFORTE programme. Its aim was to address the problem of female underrepresentation, particularly in those areas of research in which research and development (R&D)-expenditures used to be highest, as well as in top positions. The impulse programme was embedded in the w-fFORTE

1 Nowadays Federal Ministry of Women, Science and Research (BMFWF)

2 "Wirtschaftsimpulse für Frauen in Forschung und Technologie"

3 For more information see <https://www.diversitec.at/>

programme and served as a one-time funding pilot initiative. Its main objective was to “highlight excellent female research performance at the intersection between science and industry” (Heckl & Dörflinger, 2014, p. 36). Participation was limited to women in classical areas of R&I.

In 2020, the programme “w-fORTE Innovatorinnen” was launched, aiming at supporting women in site-relevant R&I in a targeted way, and rendering them more visible. Highly qualified female researchers were encouraged and empowered to develop their ideas, expand their professional networks, and gain greater creative freedom and opportunities for professional growth (Alber et al., 2021). The programme was the Leadership-pilot of INNOVATORINNEN, the empirical focus in this chapter (see section 4).

From the perspective of Schot & Steinmüller (2018) and Wise et al. (2022), all of the above-mentioned innovation policy instruments show signs of frame two-innovation policies: They are or were based on the aim to seize different actors’ knowledge, to link these actors and foster their mutual learning – also cross-sectionally. The overarching aim of these policies was to stimulate, support and highlight excellence, and to foster economic growth through the promotion of female researchers. All these programmes underwent evaluations in the past decade (Grasenick et al., 2011, Heckl & Dörflinger, 2014, Alber et al., 2021). It was constated throughout the evaluation studies that all the mentioned programmes enjoyed an excellent reputation, both in Austria as well as internationally (ibid.). Methodologically, the evaluations comprised mixed-methods designs and participatory approaches. Most of them counted on different types of document analyses, (statistical) data analysis, case studies (e.g. of funded projects), quantitative (online) surveys with beneficiaries, qualitative interviews and/or focus groups/workshops, e.g. with experts and/or the owners of the programme.

3. THE INNOVATORINNEN PROGRAMME

The Austrian research promotion programme specifically for application-oriented female researchers, INNOVATORINNEN, initiated by the BMAW in cooperation with the *Austrian Research Promotion Agency* FFG in 2022, emerged from its predecessor programme w-fORTE (2005-2021), in particular from the pilot “w-fORTE Innovatorinnen” (2020-2021) – see section 3.3 – and findings of its evaluation. It comprises (1) a so-called “Leadership programme” (more

details see below), (2) an alumnae network⁴, and (3) the “INNOVATORINNEN Club”⁵. Moreover, resulting from the evaluation subject to this chapter, a fourth line, the “INNOVATORINNEN Lab” was established which took place as pilot in 2024⁶.

The programme specifically addresses female researchers, innovators, R&I entrepreneurs, and practitioners regardless of their disciplines, affiliations, or career levels. Its principal aim is to support women in their designing and shaping roles in R&I and to increase their visibility. To enter the Leadership programme, candidates are asked to apply with individual “R&I-missions”, for instance establishing themselves in a new research field, realising a new project, exploiting their research results, founding an enterprise, reaching out to relevant stakeholders, or similar. Candidates are supposed to argue the expected economic, societal, or ecological impact of their missions, which is a decisive criterion for being selected into the programme by an independent jury. In the Leadership programme, successful applicants are supported throughout a period of 10 months in working on their missions based on intense exchange with mentors, trainers, and their peer group. An essential element of this work is to identify and interact with relevant (non-academic) stakeholders and communicate own ideas to others. Moreover, a focus is set on activities for personal empowerment and acquiring new innovation and cooperation competences.

For the first round of the Leadership programme starting in February 2022, 18 participants were selected and formed a heterogenous peer group: Successful candidates came from seven (out of nine) Austrian states (*Bundesländer*); 39% were affiliated with private companies, start-ups or were in the process of founding their own enterprises. Around one-third of the participants came from non-university research institutions, and another third from universities. Moreover, the group was characterised by different professional phases and different age groups (in a range between 25 and 55 years), whereby a majority of 56 % ranged between ages 25 and 34. With regards to disciplines, classical topics of applied research were represented, such as wood technology,

4 The alumnae network comprises all former Leadership and Lab-participants; there are dedicated events and trainings for alumnae, and alumnae are regularly involved in activities of ongoing Leadership programme courses.

5 INNOVATORINNEN Club is an open format for female researchers and innovators, offering different types of events and trainings.

6 INNOVATORINNEN Lab aimed at support female researchers in their dissemination and exploitation visions. For more information see e.g. https://www.ffg.at/sites/default/files/2024-02/Leitfaden__INNOVATORINNEN_LAB_final_4.pdf

biomedical analytics, micro-mechanics, material sciences, and digitalisation, but also missions⁷ in the area of development cooperation, humanitarian aid, or theatre & digitalisation.

While the framework of the Leadership programme and the alumnae network had been well defined at the onset of the programme in 2022, the INNOVATORINNEN Club was still in development and fed by findings from the evaluation underway. In its current state, it is open to all female researchers and innovators and offers networking events and training.

The results of the evaluation of the first round of INNOVATORINNEN underlined the positive effects of the programme on its participants and their missions (Régent & Ecker, 2024). In the past, the pilot programme w-fORTE Innovatorinnen had already reached international recognition: It was cited as one out of 15 best practice examples in a study by the German *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft* as a format that fosters “competences for openness and a culture of enabling” (Leimüller et al., 2021).

3.1 INNOVATORINNEN AS TIP INSTRUMENT

Considering current definitions of transformative innovation policy, INNOVATORINNEN aligns with the characteristics of a TIP instrument for several reasons. First and foremost, the programme aims at tackling the important and ongoing societal problem that female researchers and innovators still rarely assume a shaping role in R&I. Therefore, INNOVATORINNEN aims at the explicit promotion of innovation emerging from non-male life realities. The continuing underrepresentation of women in leading roles in science and innovation is a challenge that disadvantages a major proportion of the population (e.g. Wroblewski, 2022, Greussing et al., 2016, OECD, 2016, Klapfer & Moser, 2022, Wisenöcker et al., 2021) and holds far-reaching consequences for society at large: Recent studies suggest that when female scientists have freedom of shaping research, both the contents of and the approaches to research topics change, as was illustrated in the frame of the programme Laura Bassi Centres of Expertise and the w-fORTE Innovatorinnen programme (see both in section 3.3; Wroblewski & Schaller-Steidl, 2023). As found in the frame of the evaluation study subject to this chapter, survey results from close to 280 respondents suggested that, if female researchers had more decisive power, they would more strongly pursue research projects to solve social and ecological problems and work towards

7 For selected examples of R&I-missions pursued during the Leadership programme, see <https://www.ffg.at/content/how-she-did-it>

changing work conditions and collaborative practices (Régent & Ecker, 2024, p. 37-59). Enabling women to shape innovative processes and to realise innovation from R&I-outcomes of their interest is thus an important societal effect that is fostered by INNOVATORINNEN.

With a view to pertinent definitions of TIP, Schot et al. (2019, p. 21) describe TIP as instruments that aim at fostering new connections between systems, providing spaces for experimentation, and co-creating solutions for broader socio-technical system change. Unlike traditional programmes that are aimed at promoting women in research and science, INNOVATORINNEN adopts an explicitly interdisciplinary and intersectional approach, bringing together participants from diverse sectors, disciplines, and affiliations to form peer groups. In doing so, it acknowledges that scientific careers are increasingly non-linear and often do not follow the “typical” academic path. The creation of new knowledge, developments, and products increasingly happens at the intersections of research and innovation in other sectors. Many important impulses for tackling the grand challenges and working towards the SDGs come from areas that are not traditionally rooted within the academic sector, such as education, creative industry, or the social sector.

This said, INNOVATORINNEN adopts an approach centred on pursuing research careers guided by individual missions. In contrast to former or comparable programmes, the focus is not primarily on female researchers’ individual careers (even though there are effects for participants on the personal level), but on missions with arguably strong and broad impacts. Societal effects of R&I-missions and a sound illustration of the expected impacts are an essential selection criterion for candidates of the Leadership programme; moreover, throughout the programme, a strong focus is given to working out impact pathways (Régent et al., 2023). As participants stated in the evaluation, the mission- and impact-oriented nature of INNOVATORINNEN is a convincing factor of the programme, even for women who are usually not attracted by programmes explicitly addressed to an exclusively female target group (Régent & Ecker, 2024). For the (thematically open) programme in total, this means that much rather than focusing on aspects such as the gender dimension or the excellence of the research, as was the case in the previous programmes (see section 3.3), the broader societal impact is in the front. As it was found in a survey among programme participants in the frame of the evaluation subject to this chapter, most participants were aiming at impacts in the area of health and wellbeing (SDG 3), measures for climate protection (SDG 13), and sustainable consumption and communities (SDG 12) (ibid.).

Moreover, one of the key elements of INNOVATORINNEN is its focus on fostering impactful exchanges between participants and stakeholders from diverse fields relevant to their research. For instance, researchers in health or medical sciences engage with representatives of the health system, facilitating the transfer of their research into practice. The Leadership programme provides participants with structured opportunities to share and refine their ideas through interactions with actors from various sectors, including science, civil society, government, and industry. These exchanges take place in carefully designed co-creation and experimentation workshops. Moreover, Leadership participants are tasked with reaching out individually to relevant stakeholders to discuss and advance their ideas. In this regard, the programme's training extends beyond conventional science communication, equipping participants with the knowledge and tools necessary to translate R&I results into real-world applications. This includes collaborating with practitioners in relevant systems and positioning themselves as experts within relevant fields of application. Co-creation is a cornerstone of the programme's approach, reflected in its emphasis on engaging stakeholders and the integration of dedicated co-creation and experimentation workshops. These workshops not only encourage participants to connect with stakeholders but also provide a structured environment for collaborative exploration and innovation.

Finally, also the FFG is breaking new ground with INNOVATORINNEN: The programme is situated in the strategy department (much rather than in the classical funding administration) which experiments with new formats and target group-specific offerings. The aim of the FFG strategy department is to systematically collect learning experiences for taking up new roles as a funding agency with a view to the implementation of transformative innovation policy instruments. In the area of non-monetary support, the programme INNOVATORINNEN tries to strengthen the impact of R&I for the grand societal challenges and SDGs in a target group-oriented way and with novel networking formats and systemic innovation processes.

While INNOVATORINNEN aligns with many aspects of transformative innovation policy as illustrated in this section, there are also considerations regarding its scope and level of impact that merit reflection. INNOVATORINNEN indeed fosters important societal effects by empowering female researchers, however it does not aim to directly address organisational structures. Strengthening individual agency is a key step towards transformation, but at some point, lasting systemic change may also require complementary measures at the institutional level. This, however, is not within the focus and scope of the

programme and can potentially be fulfilled by complementary programmes that aim to influence broader organisational and structural shifts to widen the transformative potential.

Since its pilot, the INNOVATORINNEN programme has been undergoing an accompanying evaluation. As Molas-Gallart et al. (2021, p. 4) state, evaluation of TIP instruments should be integrated as strategic dimension to enhance reflexivity and learning. This aspect can be found in INNOVATORINNEN – it has emerged from its predecessor programme w-fORTE Innovatorinnen and its evaluation; Furthermore, INNOVATORINNEN fundamentally builds on its accompanying evaluation, comprising collaborative approaches between the evaluators and the programme management. More details to the evaluation can be found in section 3.2.

3.2 EVALUATION OF THE INNOVATORINNEN PROGRAMME

The authors of this article were commissioned with the accompanying evaluation of the programme INNOVATORINNEN. The evaluation was started in May 2022 und continued through December 2023. This way, two entire cycles of the Leadership programme could be accompanied. The evaluation study was built on two modules focusing (1) on the Leadership programme and the alumnae network, and (2) on the INNOVATORINNEN Club. Details on the respective research questions and methodological steps can be seen in Table 2.

Module	1: Accompanying evaluation of the Leadership programme cycles 2022 and 2023	2: Research for the INNOVATORINNEN Club
Research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the participants' characteristics (in terms of age, discipline, affiliation, missions, intended impacts, role in projects, care responsibilities, etc.)? How suitable and effective do participants consider the programme? (e.g. with a view to changes in their own self-perception, confidence and working style, personal progress towards empowerment and their individual mission, experience with peer group, etc.) Which effects are reported by programme alumnae and how does the network among them evolve? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the characteristics of the INNOVATORINNEN Club-target group? What do female researchers' life and work realities look like? How strongly are women involved in the development of new projects and cooperation? Which support can the INNOVATORINNEN Club provide women? What would women change in R&I (structures and processes, research topics, target groups, etc.) if they had full decisive power?
Methodological steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative surveys among all participants of the first and second cycle of the Leadership programme (2022 and 2023) Qualitative interviews with selected participants of the first and second cycle of the Leadership programme with the aim to gain profound knowledge on participants' personal stories linked to their participation in the programme (5 interviews per yearly course) Open participative observation of selected programme elements Participation of evaluators in co-creation workshops, co-productive sessions together with programme participants, the owners of the programme, and other external stakeholders with a focus on participants' missions Focus groups with programme owners, selected participants and alumnae with a focus on programme characteristics and learning points for the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative survey among former female beneficiaries of FFG-funding (n = 277) Profound reflection on the underrepresentation of women in R&I and the role of the INNOVATORINNEN programme between the programme owners and the evaluators, resulting in a published book chapter⁸ Reflexion workshop with programme owners and external stakeholders Qualitative interviews and focus groups with selected users of INNOVATORINNEN Club-offerings

Table 2 Evaluation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme (Source: Own illustration)

In total, the evaluation concept comprises a set of traditional (e.g. surveys, interviews) and non-traditional (e.g. co-creation) evaluation methods, including close collaboration between evaluators and programme owners. In the following sections, the analysis of the evaluation concept and practices shall be presented.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Next to providing insights into the accompanying evaluation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme, the aim of this contribution is to assess its evaluation concept and practice against the requirements of TIP evaluations as articulated in relevant literature. The analysis focuses on the accompanying evaluation of INNOVATORINNEN during 2022 and 2023⁹, with the results published in early 2024 (Régent & Ecker, 2024). Of particular interest is whether and how the various elements of this evaluation align with TIP evaluation requirements, as outlined in the literature.

The evaluation elements under investigation include the research design, evaluation methods, and evaluation practices. These were analysed using a deductive content analysis framework. The requirements for TIP evaluations proposed by Wise et al. (2022) and other key authors (summarised in Table 1) served as the coding scheme. This scheme emphasises core aspects such as evaluation strategy, the role of evaluation, theory of change, and methodological rigor.

To ensure a systematic and comprehensive analysis, a two-cycle coding approach was applied, following the procedures suggested in Creswell & Creswell (2018). In the first cycle, the data was coded according to the predefined categories derived from the TIP evaluation literature. The second cycle of coding focused on refining these patterns and synthesising them into broader insights, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how the evaluation aligns with or deviates from TIP evaluation standards.

9 The authors of this paper were evaluators of INNOVATORINNEN in 2022 and 2023. Moreover, they evaluated the pilot programme in 2021 and are currently evaluating the second round of the programme (2024-2026). The analysis presented in this contribution is limited to the years of 2022 and 2023.

5. FINDINGS: DOES THE INNOVATORINNEN EVALUATION QUALIFY AS TIP EVALUATION?

This section presents the findings of the deductive content analysis, offering insights into how the evaluation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme aligns with the requirements of TIP evaluations. Table 3 provides an overview of the key results, serving as a concise summary of the analysis. These findings are further elaborated in the subsequent discussion, where each aspect of the evaluation is explored in more detail.

Aspect	Elements of TIP evaluations	INNOVATORINNEN evaluation
Evaluation strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring transformative outcomes and signs of systemic change in real time (behavioural changes, emerging relationships/ activities/constellation/ interactions between actors, evolution of strategic aims) Informing the direction of the change process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation as strategic dimension of the programme. Monitoring “signs of change” via surveys and interviews with participants, alumnae and further representatives of the target groups; participative observation at several instances. Informing change process through co-creation workshops with focus on participants’ missions; workshops and co-authored publications with programme owners.
Role of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation integrated as strategic dimension of the programme to enhance reflexivity and learning Informing strategic choices concerning the programme over the time Evaluation results used as “food for thought”, guide the adjustment of the envisaged transformation path, help to refine the transformation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Interim) results are regularly reported and considered 1) throughout the Leadership programme, 2) from one cycle of the Leadership programme to another, 3) for developing the INNOVATORINNEN Club. Evaluation is considered a strategic dimension of the programme with a view to 1) programme development, and 2) contribution to the participants’ missions (co-creation).
Theory of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible, revisited and refined throughout the evaluation process Nested approach to assess multiple levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation concept is adjusted to programme needs in real-time: 1) Data gathering instruments are created in close collaboration with programme owners, 2) in module 2, methodological steps are used flexibly, depending on the developing state of the INNOVATORINNEN Club.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed methods Participatory approaches in data gathering and analysis Include a variety of perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed methods and participatory approaches in data gathering and dissemination. No participatory approaches in data analysis. External stakeholders’ view only rudimentarily considered.

Table 3 TIP evaluation elements in the evaluation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme

5.1 EVALUATION STRATEGY

The programme owners explicitly consider INNOVATORINNEN a “learning programme” based on controlled trial and testing (Alber et al., 2021). Already, the creation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme as such was inspired and co-determined by evaluation results of its predecessor programme (ibid.). In total, INNOVATORINNEN is conceptualised in a way to assure regular feedback of (interim) results to the programme owners with the aim to inform the programme’s further development. To achieve this, workshops between the evaluators and programme owners were held on a regular basis to share the latest developments and results and to discuss their implementation into the further run of the programme underway. This way, the programme was developing in real time based on evaluation results. These referred, on the one hand, to participants’ views on the Leadership programme – their behavioural and interactional changes were monitored in the evaluation (Module 1) through regular surveys, interviews, and open participative observation; on the other hand, the wider perspective of women in R&I, their work and life realities as well as potential obstacles to leadership in R&I were considered (Module 2). The results of both modules were used to further develop the Leadership programme and to develop the INNOVATORINNEN Club.

The INNOVATORINNEN evaluation also appears in line with TIP evaluations intending to inform the direction of the change process. Two elements are particularly noteworthy in this context. First, the evaluators actively participated in co-creation workshops within the Leadership programme. In terms of the evaluation, these workshops served a dual purpose: they provided an opportunity for data collection through open, participatory observation, while also positioning the evaluators as external stakeholders and experts alongside other external contributors. In this role, the evaluators engaged with participants to discuss and further develop their individual missions. This approach allowed the evaluators to contribute their expertise as social and economic scientists and, more significantly in this context, to apply the knowledge gained during the ongoing evaluation. By integrating these insights into a co-creative setting, the workshops facilitated the refinement and advancement of participants’ missions.

Second, the evaluators engaged in reflexive processes with the programme owners to examine the broader issue of women’s underrepresentation in research and innovation (R&I), particularly in industry-related contexts and in top positions. A notable outcome of these discussions was a co-authored book chapter, published in June 2023, which integrated insights gained during the

evaluation. This contribution not only advanced the evaluation process, but also enriched the public and academic discourse on the topic.

Both of these aspects are uncommon in policy evaluations and highlight the collaborative, egalitarian approach between programme owners, participants, and evaluators. Hence, this partnership underscores a mutual commitment to learning and co-creation throughout the evaluation process.

5.2 ROLE OF THE EVALUATION

As outlined in sub-section 5.1, the accompanying evaluation played a significant and strategic role for INNOVATORINNEN. In the frame of Module 1, data was gathered from the participants of the Leadership programme via surveys, interviews, and observations regularly. Findings were reported to the programme owners who primarily used them as information source for developing the subsequent cycle of the Leadership programme. Partly, adjustments within the same cycle of the Leadership programme were made.

An even more decisive role of the evaluation could be seen in the development of the INNOVATORINNEN Club (Module 2) – apart from an initial anchor concept, programme owners flexibly designed and adapted the major components of the Club in line with evaluation results. Particular importance was given to the survey with close to 280 female researchers all over Austria (the sample was drawn from women who had received FFG funding in a shaping or leading role in the ten years prior to the survey) which aimed at eliciting their needs with a view to a supportive network under the umbrella of the INNOVATORINNEN Club. In autumn 2022, the Club started with its first events and offerings.

5.3 THEORY OF CHANGE

As discussed in the previous sub-sections, the evaluation concept was implemented in a flexible and adaptive manner. At the onset of the evaluation, the evaluators developed an anchor concept that served as a guiding framework. This concept identified the data required for the evaluation, as well as the methods for its analysis (see Table 2). It is important to note that the development of data-gathering instruments was carried out in close collaboration with the programme owners to ensure alignment with the programme's objectives and context.

Reflecting principles of the „theory of change“ in TIP evaluations, the evaluation concept incorporated iterative and adaptive elements to respond to emerging

insights and evolving needs. For instance, certain methodological steps, such as the evaluators' participation in co-creation workshops, were introduced mid-process. This adaptation was informed by the realisation that integrating the evaluators into these workshops could provide dual benefits: generating richer data through participatory observation and offering programme beneficiaries valuable feedback based on insights gathered through the ongoing evaluation.

This iterative approach aligns with the theory of change by ensuring that the evaluation not only assesses outcomes, but also actively contributes to achieving the programme's transformative goals. By enabling real-time adjustments and fostering learning among stakeholders, the evaluation process itself became an integral part of driving the programme's mission forward. Such an approach underscores the importance of flexibility and collaboration in TIP evaluations to ensure they remain responsive and impactful.

5.4 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Even though containing non-traditional methodological steps, the evaluation methodology applied in the accompanying evaluation of INNOVATORINNEN differs in two aspects from that requested for TIP evaluations. Indeed, the INNOVATORINNEN-evaluation is based on a mixed methods research design (see Table 2) as well as on participatory approaches in data gathering and, as outlined in section 5.1, in the dissemination of results; however, in contrast to the methodological elements of TIP evaluations, the element of data analysis was done in an utterly non-participatory manner by the evaluators.

Moreover, deviations from TIP evaluations can be observed regarding the inclusion of diverse (including external) perspectives. While programme owners', participants' and female researchers' views on a broader scale were included, further external stakeholders, such as representatives of the innovation system, were not considered in this evaluation, apart from representatives of the Austrian BMAW in a reflection and validation workshop (that said, BMAW is the funder of the programme and thus not external in the strict sense).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNINGS

This paper deals with the Austrian programme for the advancement of female researchers INNOVATORINNEN. The paper argues that INNOVATORINNEN is an example of a potentially transformative innovation policy. It differs from previous related programmes in several respects which are elaborated on throughout the paper. In particular, it aims to enable innovation coming from non-male life realities and thereby fostering societal, economic, or ecological impact. This comprises supporting female researchers in taking a shaping role in R&I and increasing their visibility. Thus, impacts on a personal level are achieved through the programme; however, they are considered a side-effect that results from orientation to individual F&Is missions. That said, INNOVATORINNEN does not aim to directly influence the institutional level. Envisaging definitions of TIP as articulated in recent literature, this paper argues for INNOVATORINNEN, overall, to be an example of a TIP instrument.

The primary aim of this paper was to explore whether the accompanying evaluation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme meets the criteria for a TIP evaluation. A deductive content analysis has shown that most of the requirements of TIP evaluations (see Table 2) can be found in the accompanying evaluation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme: Evaluators and commissioners act as equal partners in a collaboration that is clearly focused on the content-related development of the programme, which is strongly responsive to evaluation results underway. Notably, INNOVATORINNEN can be considered an example of a “learning programme” based on controlled trial and testing (Alber et al., 2021). The evaluation process is characterised by mutual learning and knowledge transfer in both directions, which not only provide a basis for informing and refining the development of the programme, but also for shaping the discourse of empowerment and visibility of female researchers and innovators from an intersectional perspective. An example of the responsive nature of the INNOVATORINNEN programme is the development of the INNOVATORINNEN Lab based on evaluation findings that suggested participants’ major interest in the implementation, dissemination, and exploitation of their R&I results. The pilot of INNOVATORINNEN Lab took place in 2024.

Comparing the INNOVATORINNEN evaluation with TIP evaluations, two essential elements stand out in a particular way: (1) The evaluators’ participation in co-creation workshops with programme participants, aiming at benefitting participants’ missions from knowledge generated in the run

of the accompanying evaluation; and (2) reflection processes between evaluators and programme owners with the aim, amongst others, to shape the public discourse on the topic of advancing female researchers. Both elements underline the egalitarian collaboration and mutual learning between evaluators, programme owners, and participants, building up a knowledge-triangle that ultimately enriches the further development of the programme and contributes to its objectives.

In contrast, concerning evaluation methodology, two key elements of TIP requirements were not fully met in the accompanying INNOVATORINNEN evaluation. These elements include the use of a participatory approach to data analysis and the incorporation of a broader range of external stakeholders' perspectives, such as representatives from the Austrian innovation system apart from the funding ministry.

This contribution also provided insights into the evaluation of the INNOVATORINNEN programme as well as its challenges and learning points. In contrast to traditional evaluations, the accompanying INNOVATORINNEN evaluation demanded high flexibility among all involved parties: evaluation experts in the role of independent external knowledge gatherers, the evaluators had to be ready for constant shifts from the original methodological concept and flexibly assessed and implemented evaluation requirements raised by the programme owners. They, in turn, had to demonstrate the same level of flexibility in their programme design and show openness to an evolving and open-ended evaluation process. In addition, they needed to engage with the methodological steps – an area that is not necessarily subject to their work –, while respecting the independent nature of the evaluation. Finally, the quality of the evaluation was in large parts dependent on programme participants' openness and flexibility with regards to their engagement with the evaluation and the evaluators. In total, both evaluators and programme owners were required to create and maintain an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect throughout the entire duration of the evaluation that went far beyond what is required in more traditional evaluations.

This paper aimed to illustrate a case of an accompanying evaluation incorporating several non-traditional elements that align closely with the principles of TIP evaluations. However, the study comes with a set of limitations. First, the historical analysis of programmes aimed at advancing female researchers is confined to the Austrian context, limiting the broader applicability of its findings. Second, due to the qualitative nature of the analysis, it is important to note that the authors of this paper have been

directly responsible for the accompanying evaluation of INNOVATORINNEN during its pilot phase, as well as its first and second rounds. Consequently, the analysis presented here should be viewed as a reflective examination of the authors' own work. While this enables the integration of tacit knowledge gained throughout the evaluation process, it also precludes an external or more objective perspective. Finally, this research, based on a single case study, is not embedded in a broader empirical analysis of TIP evaluations. Further empirical research is required to gather diverse examples and practices systematically, which would help to further extend and substantiate the theoretical and empirical foundation of TIP evaluations.

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