



Towards Innovative Social Service Provision in the Baltic Sea Region

Policy Recommendations



Imprint

LEAD PARTNER

Diakonisches Werk Schleswig-Holstein
Landesverband der Inneren Mission e.V
Kanalufer 48
24768 Rendsburg
Telefon: 04331-593-0
Telefax: 04331-593-244
info@diakonie-sh.de

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Doris Scheer, scheer@diakonie-sh.de

PROJECT COMMUNICATION

REM Consult Lang + Partner, Hamburg
Hauke Siemen, sempre@rem-consult.eu

AUTHORS

Anna Berlina, Gustaf Norlén, Doris Scheer and Hauke Siemen

ART DIRECTION

Lynn Grevenitz, kulturkonsulat.com

ICONS © fontawesome.com & © freepik.com

PICTURES

Cover page: © Yadid Levi / norden.org

Page 4: © Magnus Fröderberg / norden.org

Page 7: © Michael Rosner Hyman / Unsplash.com

Back cover: © Priscilla du Preez / Unsplash.com

Project duration: March 2016 – February 2019

The SEMPRES project was part-financed by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund) under the Interreg Baltic Sea Regio Programme 2014–2020.

The project was also supported by the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure of Germany under the Federal Programme Transnational Cooperation



These recommendations reflect the authors' / project partners' views. The EU Commission and the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat are not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein. All images are copyrighted and property of their respective owners.

THE SEMPRES PARTNERSHIP

- 1 Diaconie of Schleswig-Holstein (DE)
- 2 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany (DE)
- 3 Academy of Economics Schleswig-Holstein (DE)
- 4 Novia University of Applied Sciences (FI)
- 5 Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius (FI)
- 7 Diaconal Centre Liepaja (LV)
- 8 University of Latvia (LV)
- 9 Lutheran Diaconia (LT)
- 10 Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EE)
- 11 Foundation for Social Action (EE)
- 12 The Foundation for Lifelong Learning PERITIA (PL)
- 13 Companion Norrbotten (SE)
- 14 Sunderby Folk High School (SE)
- 15 University College South Denmark (DK)
- 16 Nordregio (SE)
- 17 Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (LV)

Towards innovative social service provision in the Baltic Sea Region

These policy recommendations are based on learnings from the SEMPRES project funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme from 2016 to 2019 and several workshops with external stakeholders conducted in this project. The recommendations address policy- and decision-makers in the fields of social affairs, regional development and innovation, aiming at a reliable, affordable, and accessible service infrastructure in rural areas.

Societal and demographic challenges, the centralisation of services and lower welfare budgets have put pressure on the quality of service provision in rural areas. Members of disadvantaged groups are particularly affected by declining social services in rural areas since they are at risk of poverty and social exclusion and since their potential is often neglected. Addressing the challenges mentioned above will require innovative approaches if we are to sustain and improve welfare services, in terms of both solutions to address the challenges and the process of addressing them (Lindberg, 2018).

User involvement in service design and delivery has been promoted as a promising approach in the social service innovation paradigm, because of its potential to play a key role in adapting quickly and flexibly to changing demands and to make social services more effective, inclusive, efficient and sustainable (Copus et al., 2017).

Service-user involvement refers to the process by which people who are using a service become involved in the planning, development and delivery of that service. This process contributes to a more socially inclusive and innovative service provision. The benefits of service-user involvement are many and diverse. There is a growing recognition that because of service users' direct experiences of using services, they have a better insight into what works and what does not, which can help to improve services. Active involvement of service users in social service design and delivery can also contribute to the users' personal empowerment by giving them an opportunity to develop their innate potential and gain the skills

and sense of self-worth.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of service-user involvement, it is not yet a common practice. Responses and actions from different actors and stakeholders are required in order to promote and enable user involvement in service design and delivery. This needs to go hand in hand with simultaneous changes in the organisational and social structures that impact the quality of life and wellbeing. Therefore, the target group for these policy recommendations consists of social service provider organisations and policy-makers at different levels of governance and other relevant stakeholders.



SEMPRE - Social Empowerment in Rural Areas

The Interreg project SEMPRES aimed to promote the involvement of disadvantaged groups, such as single parents or migrants, in service provision and service innovation. Local Empowerment Networks were created in 11 partner regions throughout the Baltic Sea Region to organise co-creation processes which resulted in 30 locally based, user-led micro projects. In the process, the project partners tested various tools for empowering service users and compiled them into an Empowerment Handbook.



What is needed for successful user involvement in social services?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICE-PROVIDER ORGANISATIONS

Service-provider organisations work directly with service users and are key actors in ensuring that user involvement happens on the ground. What service-provider organisations can do to facilitate users' involvement in the design and delivery of social services is discussed below. Recognising that the resources, size and capacity of service-provider organisations vary significantly across the countries and that this may influence their capacity to act, the recommendations aim to present a broad spectrum of measures that may be adopted in a variety of contexts.

1. Skills and competences development

- **Strengthen the capacity and skills of social service provider staff to implement service-user involvement**

Too often, the service provider's staff do not have the knowledge, skills and competencies that they need to change their working methods, step out of their usual thought and work patterns and embrace stronger service-user involvement. It is therefore important for service-provider organisations to support their staff in developing the skills needed, encourage them to participate in courses and training, and make resources available in terms of time and finance.

- **Encourage (trans)national exchange and peer learning**

Mutual visits and study tours are good opportunities to learn and to encourage the transfer of good solutions and practices to other organisations. Service providers have the means to facilitate contacts and twinning between organisations.

2. Service-user involvement as part of the organisational practice

- **Promote service-user involvement as an integral part of organisational practice**

To foster user involvement, service providers should reflect on their organisational practice. This requires a supportive leadership that embraces service-user participation. Organisational change also entails the rearrangement of workflows, the reallocation of resources, the creation of spaces for critical reflection and dialogue and a rethinking of decision-making processes. This is a long-term process that requires a shift in attitudes and the building of knowledge and skills.

One possible way to strengthen leadership and create commitment in the long run is to become involved in and support strategic networking between organisations engaged in a change process in order to encourage the exchange of experiences and organisational peer learning.¹

It is crucial that service-user involvement is taken seriously by service providers. If mere lip-service is paid to user involvement, it may result in frustration and disempowerment. For tools and methods for service-user involvement see the *Empowerment Handbook*.²

“Implementing user involvement as an organisational principle is a complex task and requires a lot of communication and commitment and the willingness to walk off the beaten path.”

*Doris Scheer, project leader,
Diaconie of Schleswig Holstein*

- **Employ service users as members of staff**

Employing or providing a role for former or current service users is a way to contribute to their empowerment and recognise their value. Service users can be engaged as staff members, facilitators, mentors or supporters. Make sure to take them seriously and treat them as equal colleagues. Former service users can bring specific knowledge to the organisation. They are experts by experience and can speak to members of disadvantaged groups in the right way, acting as door-openers and trusted individuals, as well as being positive examples to others.

- **Small-scale piloting**

Service providers can use their resources to finance innovative pilot solutions for social service provision that ensure strong user involvement. Service providers themselves can encourage small-scale pilots that involve small budgets, minimal bureaucracy and few people. Piloting on a small scale is a good way to establish whether a solution has the potential to grow or ‘fail fast’, while using the minimum of resources.

- **Support service users in the process of establishing user-led organisations**

Another way to increase service-user involvement and empowerment is to support user-led initiatives. Service providers can facilitate this process by offering coaching and capacity-building, providing space for meetings and lobbying efforts. For examples of user-led initiatives see the *Compilation of SEMPRE Micro Projects*.³

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, POLICY MAKERS AND OTHER RELEVANT ORGANISATIONS

Service-provider organisations have a limited capacity to act on a strategic level. Engaging public sector actors and agencies in facilitating service-user participation is therefore important. The organisation of and responsibilities for social service provision, management of EU funds and other related tasks vary considerably in the Baltic Sea Region countries. For this reason, this set of recommendations addresses a wider range of agencies and stakeholders.

1. Availability and appropriateness of funding mechanisms

- **Make room for different funding mechanisms and instruments**

The availability of different types of funding and mechanisms accommodating the needs and potential of different user-led initiatives is highly important. These funding instruments should allow different types of stakeholders and organisations to apply for funding, including loose-knot and informal groupings. Small-scale financial instruments, such as micro loans and fast cash (see info box), are examples of good practice.



‘Fast cash’ (*snabba cash*) is available to young people aged 13–25 for small projects with a budget of up to €1,000 in Norrbotten County in Sweden. This financing mechanism does not require applicants to be established organisations.
Read more at: <https://boden.enamnd.se/oversikt/overview/375> (in Swedish).

- **Simplify the application and administration procedures to make funding more accessible for smaller organisations including NGOs, cooperatives and social enterprises**

Language that is too complex and demanding, and bureaucratic application and project management processes are key barriers faced by social service providers and service users wishing to apply for funding.

- **Build capacity for working with different funding instruments**

Information and capacity-building on how to develop an application, report costs and manage a project should be available to everyone who is interested in applying. Capacity-development services should be built on active user involvement and the principles of user involvement should be incorporated into the training.

2. An ecosystem for user involvement

- **Use public procurement as a tool to support service-user involvement**

Public procurement can be used to create an ecosystem that facilitates and encourages user involvement when signing contracts for public services or buying products or services. It is important that socially responsible public procurement does not give priority to well-established organisations but also considers newcomers.

- **Create a supportive environment for social service providers to adapt new work methods and manage organisational change**

Creating a framework for social service providers to facilitate service-user involvement and encourage user-driven initiatives could entail various measures, such as providing training and capacity-building for social service providers (public, private and third sector) and incorporating service-user involvement in social work education. These measures are necessary in order for social service providers to adopt new working methods and instruments and successfully manage organisational change.

- **Make sure that civil society organisations are not used as a substitute for social welfare services**

Fostering user-led initiatives should primarily be seen as a way to trigger social innovation, strengthen social capital and contribute to higher quality social service provision. Shifting full responsibility for service provision to civil

actors should be avoided, as governments and public institutions have the primary responsibility for social services provision.

3. Partnerships and network-building

- **Mobilise multi-stakeholder partnerships**

User involvement practices and initiatives driven by service users to tackle complex societal problems have a greater potential to succeed if they are anchored in a good network of local and regional partners and if the knowledge and resources of different actors are combined. Multi-stakeholder perception of and devotion to the issues addressed may open new avenues for funding and facilitate the sharing of power and responsibility. This approach was successfully tested and implemented in the SEMPRES project, as part of which Local Empowerment Networks (LENs) were formed as structured platforms for cooperation. LEN members included local community actors such as representatives from rural resident associations, non-profit organisations, “folk high schools”, worker cooperatives, labour unions and local authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU POLICY-MAKERS AND INSTITUTIONS

1. A stronger focus on the social dimension in EU policies and programmes

- **Add socially-responsible criteria to the EU procurement rules**

The EU procurement rules already allow for social considerations so long as the principles of value for money and equal access for all EU suppliers are observed. Adding and enforcing more socially responsible criteria would make public procurement a strategic tool to influence society in a more inclusive and socially sustainable way.

- **Encourage closer focus on the social dimension in EU policies and new funding programmes**

Social innovation has not been acknowledged significantly in European strategic thinking, particularly in the ERDF. Future Interreg programmes should better acknowledge the value of the social dimension for European regional de-

velopment and territorial cooperation by putting technological and social innovation on an equal footing. To this end, social innovation should get a proper place and recognition in relevant policies and strategies, including the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its action plan.

- **Include the principles for service-user involvement that have emerged from SEMPRES in EU policies and programmes**

The SEMPRES principles of working with user involvement and empowerment take place on four levels: individual, group, organisational and societal. All these levels affect the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals. In order to achieve sustainable and long-term change, empowerment should be addressed at all levels simultaneously.

2. Interreg programmes post 2020

- **Allow pre-financing of Interreg projects**

The lack of start-up funding for Interreg projects is a major barrier to participation for smaller organisations, as they are required to carry out project activities for up to 14 months before they receive their first payment. A proportion of the project budget should be made available to partners before the project starts. This will open up opportunities for more diverse actors to become involved in Interreg projects.

3. Descriptive indicators to measure societal outcomes

- **Improve the way societal outcomes are measured by including descriptive indicators**

In addition to other measurements, it is important to calculate the added value of projects in terms of societal outcomes. This requires the development of an appropriate descriptive indicator framework, as quantitative indicators fail to measure the quality of a product or a service. Future Interreg programmes should allow for greater flexibility in terms of indicators in order to accommodate social perspectives when measuring project progress. One solution could be to allow each project to come up with a set of relevant descriptive indicators to measure its progress.

References

Bibliography

Copus A., Perjo L., Berlina A., et al. (2017) Social innovation in local development: Lessons from the Nordic countries and Scotland.

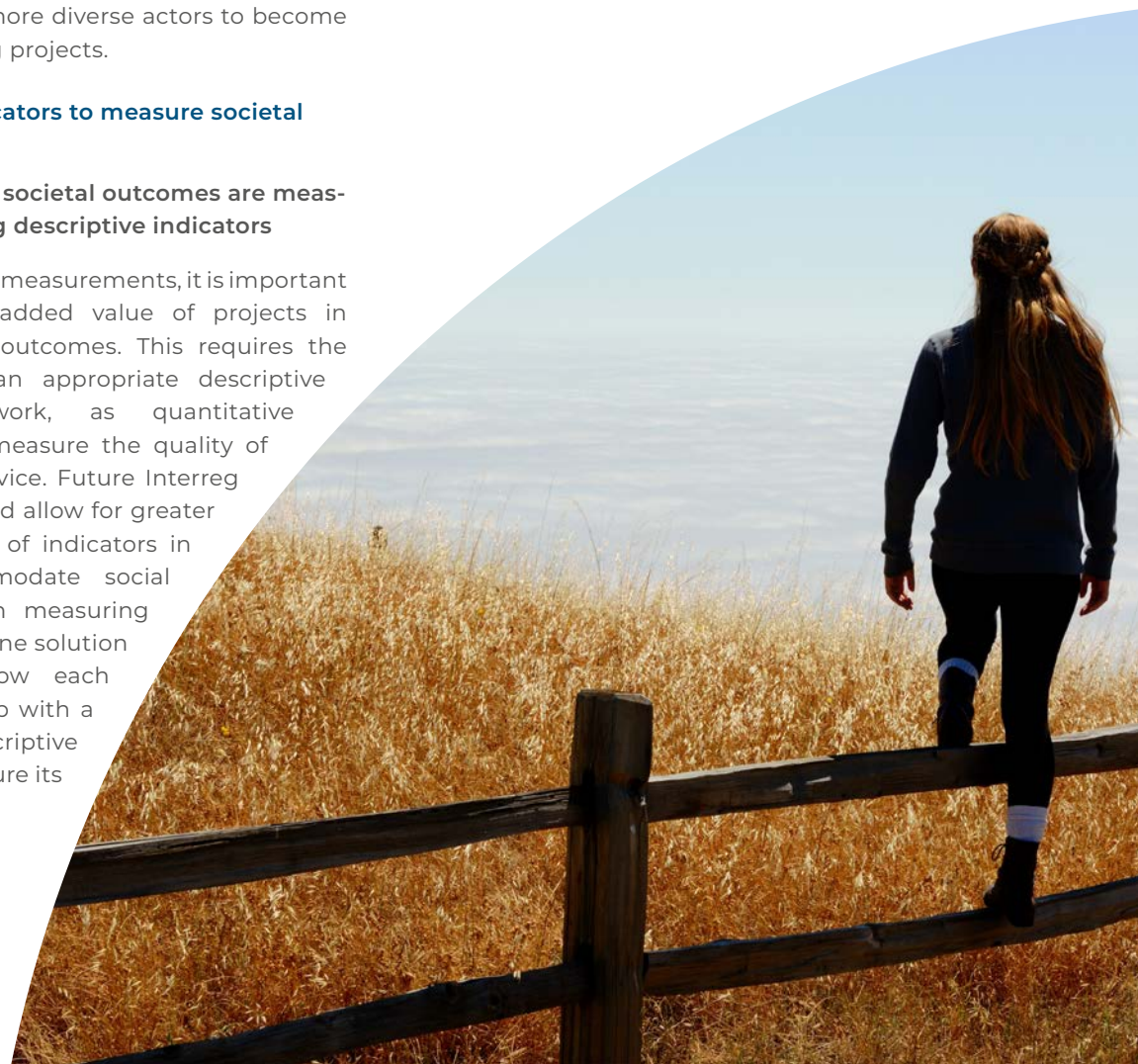
Lindberg M (2018) Promoting and sustaining rural social innovation. *European Public & Social Innovation Review* 2(2): 30–41.

Endnotes

1 For information on how to support the organisational change process, see the *SEMPRES Organisational Roadmap for Social Service Providers* (<http://www.sempre-project.eu/roadmap>)

2 <http://www.sempre-project.eu/handbook>

3 <http://www.sempre-project.eu/micro-projects>



How can we build empowering environments that value the knowledge of service users and foster the co-production of social services together with the users? Find answers to this question in the policy recommendations based on learnings from the SEMPRE project. These policy recommendations address service-provider organisations and policy- and decision-makers working with social affairs at the local, regional, national and EU level.

