

SEMPRE

Project Evaluation

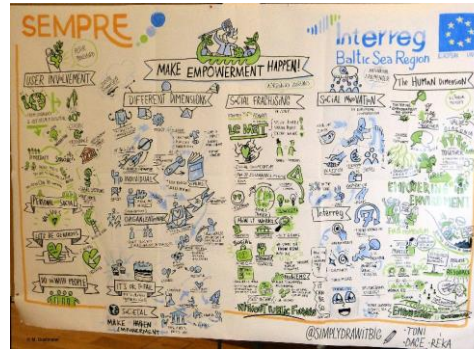


Through the Transnational Project Lens



SEMPRE Project Evaluation

1. Why a transnational focus?
2. Who participated?
3. What is the questionnaire about?
4. Which results become visible?
5. Which conclusions can be drawn?



1. The transnational focus

In the social field in particular transnational project work very often faces the ambiguity of being seen as rewarding and beneficial on the one hand, and of being devalued and discredited on the other. It is apparent that transnational professional exchange enriches the innovative potential of participants / staff and institutions and organisations (you share one idea and return with two or more), but at the same time this exchange is downgraded and belittled. Surely, this attitude is linked to the fact that social work and social services are offered locally and directed to people most often in situations of concrete need. Care for the elderly or handicapped people needs to be situated, is delivered directly, and aims at alleviating stress and offering support. This immediate, individual social assistance though is embedded in local, national and European structures, policies and strategies, which affect the way we design and deliver social support. Therefore, it is only reasonable to get involved in networks and professional exchange, addressing these different levels (SEMPRE Policy Recommendations).

Transnational professional exchange - in networks, at conferences and workshops, in project work – offers the opportunity to create and use learning opportunities for and with colleagues and partners, old and new ones, in order to deepen and widen our individual and organisational knowledge basis. Explorations into what works, what does not work, what can be appropriated, what needs to be reviewed and redesigned are essential for service innovation. Service innovation addresses complex, cross-border societal challenges, and therefore, it requires the pooling of resources and multiple perspectives. In order to be effective, service innovation needs interaction across organisational, sectorial and geographical borders, networking and coordinating actors of different economic, cultural and political backgrounds. This diversity is essential for service innovation because it recognises and brings together different ways of knowing which are at the heart of transnational project work and innovation. This outlined approach has guided the SEMPRE project work and communication right from the beginning and shows in the SEMPRE project outcomes.

2. Who participated?

All SEMPRE project partners participated in this reflection on the transnational dimension of the SEMPRE project work. The SEMPRE partnership consists of sixteen project partners from Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Our Polish partner had to leave the SEMPRE project prematurely because the demands set by the application could not be met.

The SEMPRE partners are institutions of higher education (university and universities of applied sciences), training institutions and social service providers. They are all united in their efforts to explore

empowerment and user involvement, in order to create innovative approaches of service design and delivery in particular in rural areas where the social infrastructure is diminishing and with and for vulnerable social groups who usually do not have a say in such matters.

3. What is the questionnaire about?

The questionnaire focusses on three dimensions of our project work:

- the internal organisational dimension of each project partner
- the external (outreach) dimension of each project partner
- the cooperation within the transnational project partnership

These three dimensions seemed important to the SEMPRES partnership because they highlight specific aspects. The internal organisational dimension shows, for instance, if and how the project partners had prepared for transnational work, if and how organisational structures and hierarchies accommodated a transnational project, if organisational structures changed because of SEMPRES.

Questions targeting the external dimension intend to explore if SEMPRES has opened new outreach opportunities for the project partners such as participation in conferences, workshops, seminars, increased media attention and EU project ideas with new partners.

The transnational project dimension intends to highlight the quality of the cooperation within the partnership, taking a closer look at the project management structures and the internal relation between partners.

4. Which results become visible?

The internal organisational dimension of each project partner

When questioned about how the different organisations became involved in SEMPRES, all partners answered that they had been approached by partners they had known, by contacts they had established, or they had met the lead partner beforehand. So altogether we can say that personal contacts were the primary entrance to the SEMPRES project.

Half of the project partners had prepared for the transnational work; two partners, for instance, had offered language training. Thirteen partners had employed extra staff, most of which had hired between one to three new staff members.

SEMPRES was embedded in the organisational structures and routines of the partner organisations (twelve positive responses), project news appeared regularly on the organisations' websites (ten partners), all partners reported regularly about SEMPRES in their staff meetings and superiors, directors, heads of units participated regularly in SEMPRES events (ten positive answers), and all project partners were approached by colleagues about SEMPRES and their project work and results.

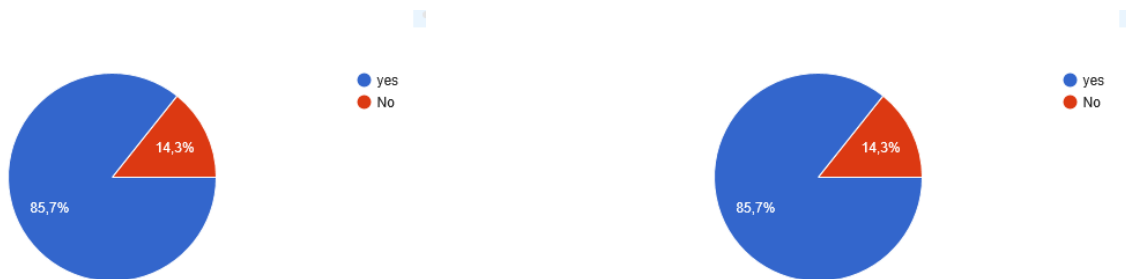
Half of the project partners indicated that SEMPRES had highlighted the need for training and capacity building in their own organisations. They named training needs in fields such as

- end-user involvement and new training techniques

- work with migrant staff
- action learning, conflict solution, group dynamics
- mentoring
- management, finances, leadership.

Twelve answers indicated that there has been a visible interest in EU funding on the one hand, and the same amount of positive responses showed that SEMPRES had helped to initiate new project ideas.

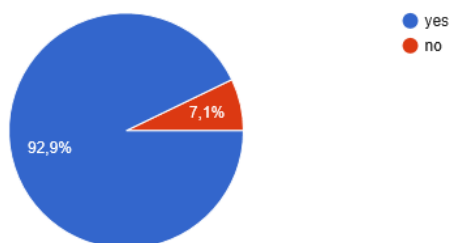
Did SEMPRES create positive awareness for EU funding? Did SEMPRES initiate ideas for new projects?



The external (outreach) dimension of each project partner

All partners agreed that SEMPRES had increased their outreach opportunities, and twelve partners noticed an increased amount of invitations to events (local, regional, national, and EU wide). In addition, twelve responses underlined the fact that media attention had increased because of the SEMPRES project.

Did SEMPRES create dialogue opportunities with organisations you would otherwise not have contacted/you would not have been contacted by?

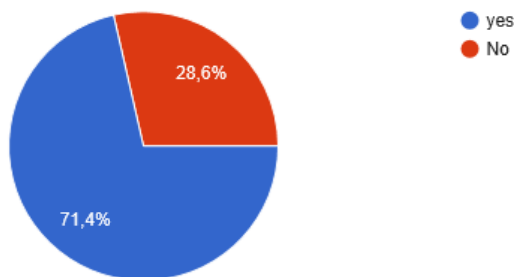


The positive reactions of fourteen partners indicate the network potential that SEMPRES generated. Initiating networking with new partners, co-ordinating different competences, pooling available resources – all these activities are elements of social innovation processes.

The cooperation within the transnational project partnership

The majority of partners agreed that the SEMPRES project objectives were set out (fourteen responses) and communicated in a clear way (eleven answers). Roles and responsibilities were openly discussed and agreed upon (fourteen positive reactions) and also the communication and information flow was positively acknowledged (fourteen answers). Partners felt that the communication flow was continuous (eleven responses) and sufficient (thirteen answers).

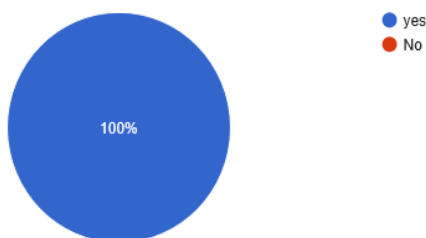
Was there sufficient time and space for debate and exchange at project partner meetings?



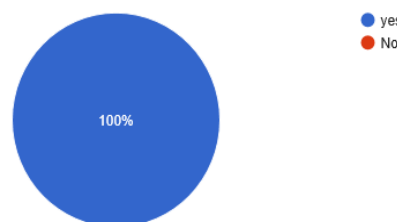
We can see here that the SEMPRES project partners would have liked more time for in depth exchanges at project partner meetings, in particular about their micro-project work.

Fourteen partners were convinced that all SEMPRES partners were respected and accepted and that within the partnership work was carried out in a respectful and appreciative way. All partners characterised the work relationship in the partnership as trustful and productive.

Did you experience the work relations in the SEMPRES partnership as trustful?



Did you experience the work relations in the SEMPRES partnership as productive?



At the end, the questionnaire offered an open question so that partners were able to communicate their specific remarks / comments, which were not covered by the questions. Exemplary statements are:

- It has been a most engaged, trustful and hardworking partnership, where we have enjoyed each other's company and inspiration.
- The time for exchange in the LEN meetings during the project meetings was tight.
- Partners had different access to communication tools, such as SKYPE, video conferencing etc.
- Objectives may have been clearly understood, but considering that all partners have different backgrounds and different professional identities, it took a while before all partners had the same understanding of goals and roles.

Statements from the project partner meeting in Hamburg where a time slot was used for joint reflections on the SEMPRES work and partnership:



- SEMPRES makes the EU real.
- SEMPRES helped to feel proud to be European.
- SEMPRES is a peace project: do not mess with your friends!
- SEMPRES creates an empowering environment.
- We finish a project, but not empowerment.
- SEMPRES is about sharing; it felt comfortable working in this partnership.
- SEMPRES offered new relations; there was always a solution to any problem we encountered.
- SEMPRES rooves diversity – not as challenge but as enrichment.
- SEMPRES was the opportunity for a small organisation to participate in a big project.
- SEMPRES is a complex project – it was well explained and implemented.
- SEMPRES partners are committed, open minded, warm hearted and empowered.

5. Which conclusions can be drawn?

The SEMPRES partnership has demonstrated a truly transnational spirit, as the statements above show. In order to establish a trustful, appreciative and productive partnership it is essential to create an

atmosphere where all partners feel welcome and respected. This shows at project partner meetings, for instance. Project meetings were organised together with the hosting partner who knows best about the venue, stakeholders and local and regional characteristics. SEMPRES project meetings were always an invitation to discover the region of the hosting partner, the work culture and the environment, which frames our work. This essential understanding fostered a deeper insight into the development of the micro-projects. Project meetings were always prepared, moderated and documented by the project management team. The project management team ensured an open and transparent dialogue amongst the project partners; opinions were heard and in case of differences, compromises were worked out. Decision-making was transparent and participatory. The project management team took care that the SEMPRES project was well monitored and communicated. The agendas of the SEMPRES project meetings were usually tightly knit work plans, and some partners wished for more time to intensify professional exchanges.

- SEMPRES project money spent on travel and accommodation was well invested because a well-functioning, productive partnership is an essential element for high quality project results. Opportunities to meet personally are essential in order to build trustful relationships, which allow the partners to experience “highs” and which will carry the partnership through “lows” in particular. Furthermore, these relationships will outlast the SEMPRES project lifetime. They will be the basis for a growing interest in innovation, EU projects and funding (see p.4).

The implementation of a transnational project such as SEMPRES has highlighted the impact it may have on internal organisational structures. Training and qualification needs are identified which aim at improving the transnational competence of staff but also at improving the organisation’s performance in general. The SEMPRES project has been embedded in organisational routines (staff meetings, websites etc.) and has created awareness for new project ideas and EU funding opportunities inside the partner organisations. In other words, SEMPRES has loosened barriers, which may have prevented the partner organisations to play out its innovative potential.

- SEMPRES has taken on the function of a best practice example in partner organisations to highlight the benefit of transnational project work. It has initiated awareness, capacity building and has generated the internal innovative potential of partner organisations for further transnational project work.

The transnational character of the SEMPRES project has enlarged the range of activities beyond the usual organisational boundaries. SEMPRES enabled networking which exceeded the everyday contacts and which created new invigorating contacts. Media awareness and presence was growing not only for and around the SEMPRES project, but also for the organisations owning such a transnational front-line project. This showed in a growing number of invitations to conferences, workshops, seminars etc. on local, national and European level.

- SEMPRE creates public awareness, offers new stakeholder and network activities, adds new aspects to the reputation of the partner organisations and encourages other organisations to get involved in transnational work, partnerships and networks.

The advantages of transnational project work can be found in a concise overview in the table below:

For SEMPRE	For the European Union
Finances	Project results as knowledge base for EU programme design and territorial development strategies
Exploration beyond everyday limits	Transferable quality and innovation knowledge and competences
Interdisciplinary professional work	Innovative elements for coherent regional development strategies
Extension of the organisation's knowledge basis	Expert knowledge and skills on project level
Discovery of hidden innovation potential	Growth of acceptance and legitimacy because of cooperation with regional actors
Sensitisation for the OTHER	
Growing publicity	
Capacity building (competences for transnational work)	

SEMPRE is an invigorating example of lived European reality.

www.sempre-project.eu

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