



Empowerment – Making it happen

A handbook on user involvement in
social service design and delivery



Imprint

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AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE

Dear Reader,

Welcome to *Empowerment – Making it Happen*, a handbook that takes you on a journey through the different phases of working practically with *empowerment*.

This handbook was prepared by the partners of the EU-funded project “Social Empowerment in Rural Areas” (SEMPRE), for whom *empowerment* is a philosophy – an inspiring framework for working with service users, social service providers, stakeholders and decision-makers. The *empowerment* concept is closely linked to participation, ownership, recognition, sharing and democratisation, values that are at the heart of the SEMPRE partners’ work via micro-projects, networking and advocating.

Initiating, designing and delivering services *with* and not *for* service users, as practiced by SEMPRE, is an innovative approach to improving services and meeting service demands that are not being met. The experiential knowledge of service users is a highly valuable asset that is urgently needed if we want services to be available, accessible, affordable, sustainable and of good quality – the kind of services we would want if we were in need of help ourselves, whether we live in a rural or urban area.

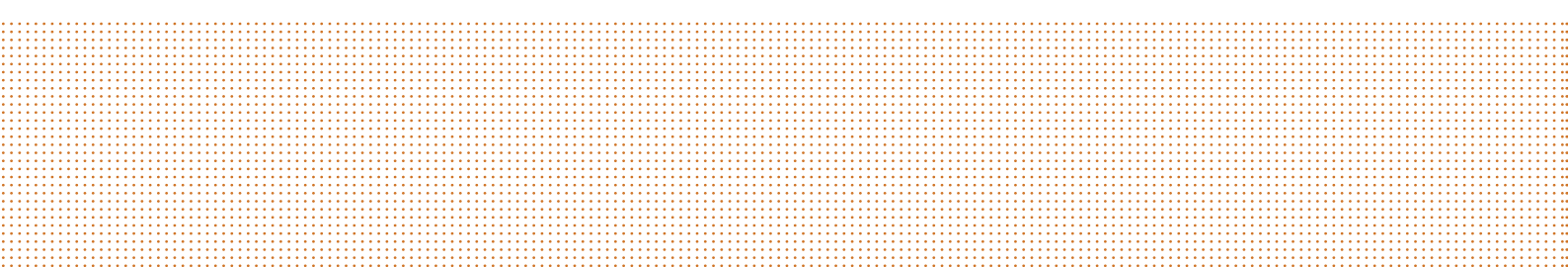
What’s more, working *with* and not *for* service users addresses everyone who works in social service provision, not only because it helps us in our endeavours to provide better, more targeted social services, but also because it brings us closer to a more inclusive society.

As the lead partner of the SEMPRE project I am honoured and privileged to invite you to explore all the project outcomes – the Organisational Roadmap, the SEMPRE Guidebook for Empowerment Training, the brochure presenting our micro projects and the policy recommendations. These publications highlight the complexity and challenges we face when we work with *empowerment* but, more importantly, they illustrate the high level of commitment, creativity and inspiration that becomes available when we are open to *empowerment* as a working principle.

I hope that by working with this handbook and exploring SEMPRE’s products you will be invigorated and motivated in your work in the same way that our own work has been invigorated and motivated by engaging with *empowerment*.

Heiko Naß
Landespastor
Head of the Diaconie
of Schleswig-Holstein

Sincerely yours,
Heiko Naß







01

What is this handbook about?

This handbook presents tools and methods to make service delivery innovative and involve the service users in the process. This is based on the idea of **empowerment** – giving people, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups, more of a say in their future and enhancing their ability to get involved in the process of social renewal.

This handbook describes when and how particular empowerment tools can be used, supported by practical examples from the SEMPRES project partners in the Baltic Sea Region. This project was based on the hypothesis that actively involving users in service innovation will lead to more tailored and more sustainable social services, particularly in rural areas.

The first section of the handbook explains the concept of empowerment and service-user involvement in the design and delivery of social services and is meant as background.

This is followed by a chapter describing the project logic that SEMPRES has worked with and that could serve as a model for forming successful services. The main body of the handbook describes the different tools for needs assessment and service design that social service providers and social workers can use to involve service users in the design, development and delivery of a new or improved social service. Finally, the overall recommendations on how social service provider can support user initiatives and social enterprises are presented.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

This handbook is aimed at social service providers and social workers who:

- would like to develop new or improve existing social services with the active involvement of service users
- already have a project/service up and running and are looking for tips on how to further develop or consolidate the solution through the active involvement of service users
- would like to find out more about the benefits and challenges of service-user involvement and empowerment.

This handbook provides useful instruments for involving service users in different stages of developing a social service, from the identification of their needs to designing, developing, implementing and scaling-up the social service. The handbook is therefore relevant for service providers who are at different stages of the service-development process. SEMPRES does not suggest a one-size-fits-all approach but rather highlights the choices made by the SEMPRES project partners. Unlike a book or report, the handbook does

not need to be read from cover to cover. Rather, it serves as a reference document you can turn to for answers to specific questions.

As budget cuts and the lack of a skilled workforce become more urgent challenges for public, private and civic social service providers, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain a high-quality social service infrastructure. Involving service users in service innovation, and even helping some of them to become social entrepreneurs, might alleviate some of this pressure and provide social workers with new perspectives and opportunities in their daily work.

HOW DID THE HANDBOOK COME ABOUT?

This handbook is one of the outcomes of the SEMPRES project¹, which was funded by the Interreg BSR Programme 2014–2020. SEMPRES promotes service-user involvement (namely the involvement of members of disadvantaged groups such as single parents and migrants in the development and delivery of social services) as an essential element of service innovation. By empowering service users to participate in service design and delivery, the project strives to improve the social service infrastructure in rural areas while at the same time enhancing the ability of the groups concerned to influence both society and their own lives. Although the key focus of the project has been on rural areas – where demographic challenges and structural shortcomings make it particularly difficult to provide high quality services – the findings from the project are applicable to a wider spatial context.

The lessons learned and recommendations presented in this handbook are based on the knowledge and experiences developed from the SEMPRES project partners, including diaconal centres, civil society organisations, associations and universities.

The empowerment methods chosen were adapted according to the possibilities and needs of each specific service user group in the SEMPRES project. Service-user involvement has varied significantly depending on the characteristics of the group, such as their qualifications, available time, health conditions and language skills. This has two important consequences for this handbook. On the one hand, it was neither possible nor desirable to identify and deliver one-size-fits-all solutions that work with all user groups in all regions. On the other hand, this handbook includes a wealth of perspectives and experiences

that have been achieved by working with various user groups in the very heterogeneous socio-economic settings of different EU member states of the Baltic Sea Region. This handbook should therefore not be interpreted as a collection of blueprints, but rather as an inspiration to social workers and service providers to consider tools and methods they might not have used before.

DO YOU NEED ANY PRIOR KNOWLEDGE?

No, but you need to be open to learning, experimenting and working with an empowering approach to user involvement.



Social services are services provided by society to people who are particularly vulnerable or experience difficulties. The services cover areas such as individual and family care, support for people with disabilities, care of the elderly, and support for migrants, ex-offenders and the unemployed, to name but a few. Social services can be provided as public, private and civil society initiatives. The services can be established as short-term and long-term activities.

Social service innovation is the development of new or improved public services to better address social needs (e.g. increased user-friendliness and efficiency). It often implies new or improved ways of designing and delivering services through, for example: greater involvement of service users; empowerment of service users through more information, knowledge, recognition and greater voice or power; transformed social and power relations among service providers and users, and so on (*Lindberg, 2018*).

The service user is somebody who uses a social service. In the SEMPRES project, they are single parents, families with low incomes or children with special needs, older adults, people with disabilities, disadvantaged youth, people with addictions, ex-prisoners and the long-term unemployed, as well as (young) refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

02

What are empowerment and service-user involvement all about?

REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

ROOTS AND IMPACT

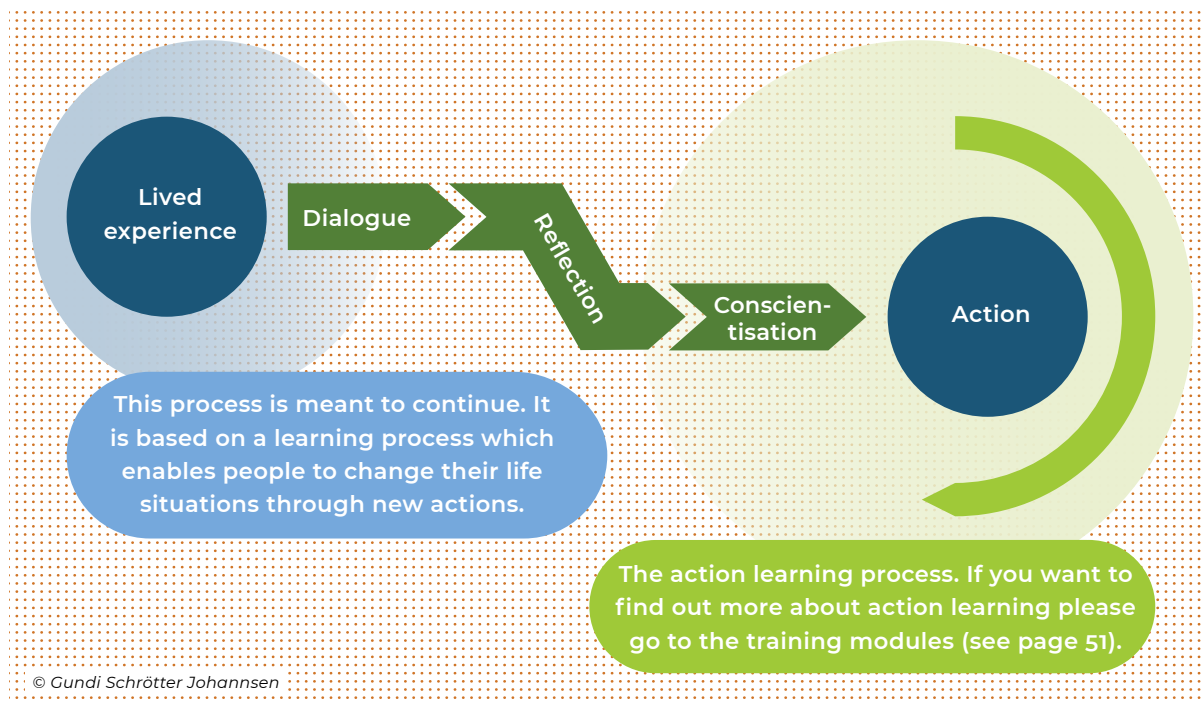
The concept of empowerment is rooted mainly in social movements such as the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s, the campaigning of people with disabilities, and community-based developments (Beresford, 2016; Herriger, 2014).

These movements borrow from Paulo Freire, a

Brazilian educational theorist, his reflections on the “pedagogy of the oppressed” and his lived experiences, which are based on his work with landless peasant workers and small farmers in Latin America (Freire, 2000).

The crucial elements of his concept are dialogue, reflection, conscientisation and action. These elements interact with each other in such a way that they build a continuous loop of transformation (figure 1).

Fig. 1 Transformation cycle of empowerment.



For Freire, it is essential that people perceive their own life reality and engage with it critically. During the process through which this happens, people (re-)discover and experience their own creativity and power, by using their own words to name the

world and reclaiming the right to do so. This conscientisation is the driver for action and transformation. “To exist humanly, is to name the world, to change it. [...] Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection”

(Freire, 2000: 88; author's italics). This naming of the world is an "act of creation" for Freire (p.89,) and "authentic reflection" focuses "on people in their relations to the world" (p.81). Freire's reflections draw our attention to SEMPRES points of departure, one of which is creating opportunities for dialogue with and amongst service-users on their concrete life-situations and for transforming social services as a result of these reflective processes.

For adult educationist Stephen D. Brookfield, the aim of critical thinking is to identify and challenge our basic assumptions, which are "...those taken-for-granted ideas, common-sense beliefs and self-evident rules of thumb that inform our thought and action" (Mezirow, 1990: 177). The critical reflection of these assumptions has in the SEMPRES project been supported by training courses based on action learning. For further information about critical reflection and action learning, please look at the SEMPRES Guidebook for Empowerment Training.

Paulo Freire's book was first published in 1968 and has lost none of its relevance today. Empowerment is a multi-disciplinary, cross-border, international concept and can be traced in discourses of various kinds. For instance, Norbert Herriger, a German sociologist who has a strong focus on empowerment, defines "empowerment" as encouraging processes of self-enabling when people who are in situations of deprivation, disadvantage or social exclusion begin to manage and decide their own affairs (Herriger, 2014).



Conscientisation –

or developing consciousness – is a dialogic process through which people become aware of their life situations and the sources of their disempowerment. For Freire, dialogue itself is a cooperative activity, which means that people are working with each other respectfully in order to change or transform their reality. In SEMPRES, for instance, we have fostered the process of conscientisation with needs assessment tools, and we observe the wish to impact on life realities in micro projects, which address specific needs of service users.

Peter Beresford, a British researcher and expert on citizen participation and social policy, argues that empowerment processes must aim at the "redistribution of power and control" (Beresford, 2012: 26). For Mark A. Zimmerman, a US psychologist, conceptual reflections on empowerment "suggest that participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources, and some critical understanding of the socio-political environment are basic components of the construct" (Zimmerman, 2000: 44).

This includes people's right to articulate their own opinions, wishes and expectations and to make them heard and give them weight in public political processes (Otto et al., 2010: 159–160).

WHOSE KNOWLEDGE IS VALUED?

This particular challenge, raised by Otto et al. (2010), touches on the question of the nature of legitimised and valued knowledge and expertise. Until the 1970s/1980s, the positivist research paradigm went almost unchallenged. Only in the last decades have qualitative research methods entered the acknowledged circle of research approaches, and lately participatory and user-led research designs have gained more acceptance (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2013: 1–42; Norvoll, 2013: 13–36). This shift in research methods does not

mean that the positivist paradigm has been overthrown, but it indicates that different ways of knowing begin to influence research agendas. Different kinds of knowledge are being reassessed, and "growing bodies of Feminist, Black, Queer, Disability and Mad Studies literature explore the significance of subjective and standpoint knowledge" (Beresford & Carr, 2018: 8). Experiential knowledge has not only entered academic discourse but also plays a more important role nowadays in service design and delivery. This

development is accompanied by service users' perspectives, as they are directly involved and on the receiving end of services. "The knowledge and experience of service users and their organisations are likely to have a helpful role to play in supporting better integrated and coordinated practice in human services" (*Beresford, 2017: 68*). The new discourse concerning what can be defined as valued knowledge is also a key point

in research regarding rehabilitation work and is well known from the psychiatric field, especially in relation to recovery processes. In relation to recovery and empowerment, different forms of knowledge – evidence-based, practice-based and experience-based knowledge – should cooperate in order to produce the best service which meet concrete user needs.

SERVICE-USER INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL SERVICE INNOVATION

Societal and demographic challenges, exacerbated by welfare cuts, have driven social service providers (whether public authorities, welfare organisations, NGOs or social enterprises) to reassess their situations and their strategies for the future; if they did not do this, the delivery of social services, especially in rural and remote areas, could not be sustained in the long run (*Copus et al., 2017*). Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches for sustained and improved welfare services, in terms of both solutions to address the challenges and the process of addressing them (e.g. the new ways of involving concerned actors) (*Lindberg, 2018*).

User involvement in the service design process has been widely promoted as a central approach in the social service innovation paradigm, for its potential to play a key role in adapting in a quicker and more flexible way to changing demands and in making social services more effective, inclusive, efficient and sustainable (*Copus et al., 2017*).

There are two perspectives on user involvement. The first is supported by New Public Manage-

ment, which emphasises efficiency and cost-effectiveness. According to this line of thought, service users are customers of the public sector, following the market logic of choice, but without sufficient mechanisms of monitoring, control and decision-making concerning resources, design and delivery. The second has a strong democratic/citizenship orientation and aims at erasing/diminishing exclusion and oppression, and at redistributing power (*Beresford, 2016*).

On the one hand, by designing services and solutions with the service users and not for them, better results can be expected, including improved outcomes for service users, improved design and accountability, ownership and sustainability of solutions, increased efficiency of services and use of resources, potentially lower cost of service provision and/or improved capacity to meet service users' needs. On the other hand, active involvement of users in service design is perceived as important in the process of identifying and addressing unfulfilled needs that contributes to increasing their ability to influence both society and their own lives (*Lindberg, 2018*).



DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EMPOWERMENT

INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment on the individual level is seen as an identity empowerment. The aim is to change a negative self-perception based on experiences with oppression, powerlessness and learned helplessness into a more positive and resourceful self-perception. With reference to Michel Foucault (1986), individual empowerment can be seen as a conflict between “the picture I have of myself” and “the picture others have of me”. This level contains individual’s right to name their own reality and to decide and do what they want with their lives. The purpose is for individuals to (re-) gain power over their own lives. Zimmerman sees individual empowerment as a psychological empowerment that “includes beliefs about one’s competence, efforts to exert control and an understanding of the socio-political environment” (Zimmerman, 2000: 46).

GROUPS AND EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment on the group level is seen as a strength empowerment. By joining a group, individuals have the opportunity to share their experiences with others who are in the same or a similar situation. The empowerment here can be identified on several levels: when sharing your problems and needs with others, the personal, individual aspect in some sense becomes public; members of the group can help each other with mutual support; and the group can be helpful in preventing problem-solving and solutions being decided by service providers rather than the people involved.

When working with empowerment, the group’s goal is for participants, who share the same conditions, to experience the fact that joint action can create change (Lundemark Andersen et al., 2000: 110).

There are some necessary competences that need to be developed when working with group empowerment. The members of the group must develop skills to enter a group relationship, to develop the dialectic in the group and to create and strengthen social supporting networks.

ORGANISATIONS AND EMPOWERMENT

Organisations are an important factor in our everyday lives. They frame our life world (education, health, work etc.) and in modern societies they are often regarded as instruments to solve problems (Pohlmann, 2016: 13). Social service provision is tied closely to organisations, which are usually the means by which such provision is delivered. Financial pressures and new management ideas around centralising, scaling up and growth have impacted on social service providers, often leading to them becoming uniform with strict hierarchies and disempowering regimes for staff and service users. Each organisation is “unique with its own culture, environment and web of living individuals” (McMillan in Beresford, 2016: 340). Organisational cultures and their values form systems of belief that attach meaning to the work delivered by staff and the services received by users. These belief systems support socially accepted, taken-for-granted concepts of “users” that often are deficit-ori-



entated and manifest disempowerment regimes. Such organisational belief systems have developed over many years and shape the identity and behaviour of staff and users, and therefore are very resistant to change.

But environmental pressures (demographic, financial, political etc.), increasingly self-assertive service users and a growing number of user-led organisations underline the necessity for change. One element of change can be seen in professional and user collaboration. The weaving of user involvement, experience and knowledge into service design and delivery demands that staff and management engage in critical reflection in order to establish participatory and empowering organisational structures. Service users not only articulate critiques of existing organisational practices but also offer their solutions to overcoming barriers faced by collaborative approaches. Collaborative practice changes the role and perspective of staff and management, enriching rather than diminishing their professional identity. Supported by “experts of experience”, social service provider staff extend their task portfolio (becoming facilitators, mentors, supporters and so on) and acquire new or deepen existing competences (communication, networking, cooperation, critical reflection). In order to accommodate empowered staff, organisational set-ups need to be reviewed: empowerment needs to be embedded in structures, processes and practice (*Laloux, 2015: 139; Theunissen, 2009: 96*). For instance, organisations, including service providers, have to rearrange their workflows, reallocate their resources, create spaces for critical reflection and dialogue, initiate communities of inquiry and rethink decision-making processes (*Reason & McArdel in Cummings, 2008: 123–135*).

Thus, power, which is usually connected to hierarchies and management, becomes less relevant or redundant. For Theunissen, empowerment is professional practice which is ready to give up its traditional hierarchical, paternalistic dimension of work for processes of bargaining and negotiating, joint explorations and discoveries (*Theunissen, 2009: 29*). Professional expertise understood as the only way of knowing and the right way of designing and delivering services becomes obsolete. In their reflections, Beresford (*2016: 341*) and Laloux (*2015*) doubt that empowered social practice can actually thrive in traditionally organised organisational formats. They argue for more diversity in or-

ganisational forms, which may lead to a growth of empowered and empowering organisations.

SOCIETY AND EMPOWERMENT

To bring about change is one of the objectives of empowerment; and if change is meant to be sustainable, it needs to be owned by people. This assumption is related not only to the personal but also to the other three levels (group, organisational and societal) we look at in this handbook. The personal, group, organisational and societal levels interact, and on the societal level empowerment addresses wider structural and political dimensions. “The personal is political” was a slogan of the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and its relevance still shows in political social policy planning, which is often blind or unreceptive to people’s needs. Voicing users’ needs and personal matters, and advocating, is a process that user-led organisations take into the public and political arenas. This “going public” (for example, people with physical disabilities blocking access to public buildings, such as local council offices, because they have no ramps for wheel chairs) illustrates the interdependence of the personal and the political spheres.

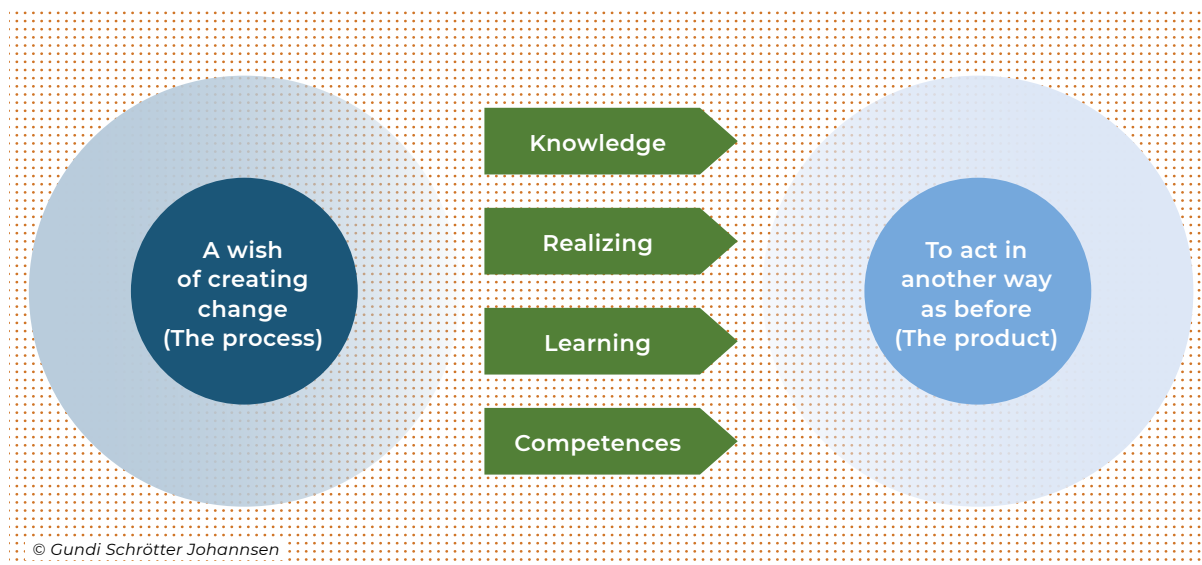
For the UK, Beresford states that “mainstream social policy is still frequently administrative in its nature, charting policy developments and legislation, framing them in its own ‘expert’ theorising, offering its own recipes for solution” (*Beresford, 2016: 359*). This observation applies to many countries, and it indicates that experiential knowledge and user perspectives are not yet part of social policy design. Empowered or participatory social policy has its roots in different types of knowledge and ways of understanding; furthermore, it needs innovative design and implementation processes that involve service users at an analytic, structural and socio-political level. Thus, the struggle of many user-led organisations for the assertion of individual social (welfare) rights is not only a struggle for social policies that are user-oriented but also fosters a new approach to innovative kinds of analysis, evaluation and theory (*cf. the emergence of “mad studies” in Canada and other countries in Beresford, 2016: 350*). Zimmerman (*2000: 58*) concludes that empowerment “connects individual well-being with the larger social and political environment, and suggests that people need opportunities to become active in community decision-making in order to improve their lives, organisations and communities.”

EMPOWERMENT: AN OPEN PROCESS OF CHANGE

Working with empowerment in a professional context will always be an unpredictable process where the service provider needs to adopt a humble and respectful attitude. Empowerment starts with people's wishes, needs and dreams to make a change in their lives. A crucial point in empowerment is that you cannot empower others; people can only empower themselves. In the same way, people must re-conquer power in their lives;

power cannot be given to them. In order to support people to act in a different, more liberating way, the service provider must build an environment based on opportunities for increased knowledge, self-realisation, learning and competences, and must have the professional courage to work in an open and unpredictable way. The elements of the open process is shown in figure 2:

Fig. 2 Empowerment – an open process of change.



EMPOWERMENT IN SEMPRES

In remote regions that are not well connected to urban centres and strongly affected by demographic change, the social service infrastructure is often poor and deteriorating further. The basic hypothesis of SEMPRES was that empowering users of services will help to improve social services in these areas.

For the purposes of SEMPRES, we define **empowerment as a process that enables service users to develop their confidence and innate potential, and to build the capacity to take control of their lives and circumstances by playing an active part in the design and delivery of social service solutions.** Empowerment in this sense is seen as a process and desirable outcome that enables social services to be designed and delivered in a way that better meets service users' needs.

The concept of empowerment deployed by SEMPRES is based on processes whereby people who are in a weak position can acquire the strength and power to take control over their own lives by handling the material, structural, social and cultural factors that keep them in a powerless and oppressed position (Elstad & Johannsen, 2017). Defined in this way, empowerment is at the same time a process and a product; that is, working with empowerment makes the service users realise their situation, and they learn and gain competences in order to change their life situation (see figure 2). This understanding of empowerment indicates there are different dimensions that interact, communicate and need to be considered if empowerment is to realise its full potential: empowerment impacts on the individual, group, organisational and societal dimensions.



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03

The SEMPRES project logic

The idea and set-up of the SEMPRES project mirrored the different levels of empowerment introduced previously in this handbook. The starting point for developing new or improving existing social services is clearly the users' needs. Each of the partner organisations therefore decided on between one and three user groups that they wanted to work with. They engaged these groups in an empowerment-based service development process, thereby addressing the individual and group levels of empowerment (read more about the different levels of empowerment in chapter 02). Local

social service providers were also involved in this process, and they also participated in pilot empowerment training conducted by the SEMPRES partners. These trainings addressed the organisational level and are supported by the organisational roadmap, another SEMPRES project output. And finally, the service development process was accompanied by local and regional networking and communication with public and private actors as well as civil society, covering the societal level of empowerment.

THE SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THE SEMPRES PROJECT

At the outset of the project, it was envisaged that an empowerment-based service development process would follow a rather linear approach comprising three distinct stages (see figure 3):

1. Needs assessment: Gathering service users in a group setting and working out and prioritising their service needs and wishes in a participatory manner.

2. Service design: Developing ideas for new social services that address the needs compiled in stage 1, initiating user-driven "micro projects" that have the aim of delivering these new services.

3. Entrepreneurial support for micro projects: Assisting and consulting the initiators of the micro projects in finding the right organisational

format (e.g. social enterprise, cooperative, NGO) and setting up a business plan, enabling the micro projects to operate independently and without external financing in the long run.

This service development process was to be carried out by the SEMPRES partners in distinct local settings, involving members of vulnerable groups as well as local social service providers. The SEMPRES partners' task was to facilitate this process and moderate between service providers and users. For this purpose, they tested a variety of "empowerment tools" that are presented in this handbook.

Micro projects (see definition below) were regarded as the key outcome of this process. The



Micro projects are defined in SEMPRES as small-scale initiatives at the local level that aim to improve the living situations of members of disadvantaged target groups. To be considered as a micro project in SEMPRES, initiatives must fulfil the following criteria:

- They must be initiated at least partly by service users (members of a disadvantaged group).
- They must react to specific needs of this disadvantaged group.
- They must deliver a service that was not previously available or follow a newly developed approach.

The service users thus become co-producers of social services, while the traditional social service providers act as facilitators rather than drivers of this process.

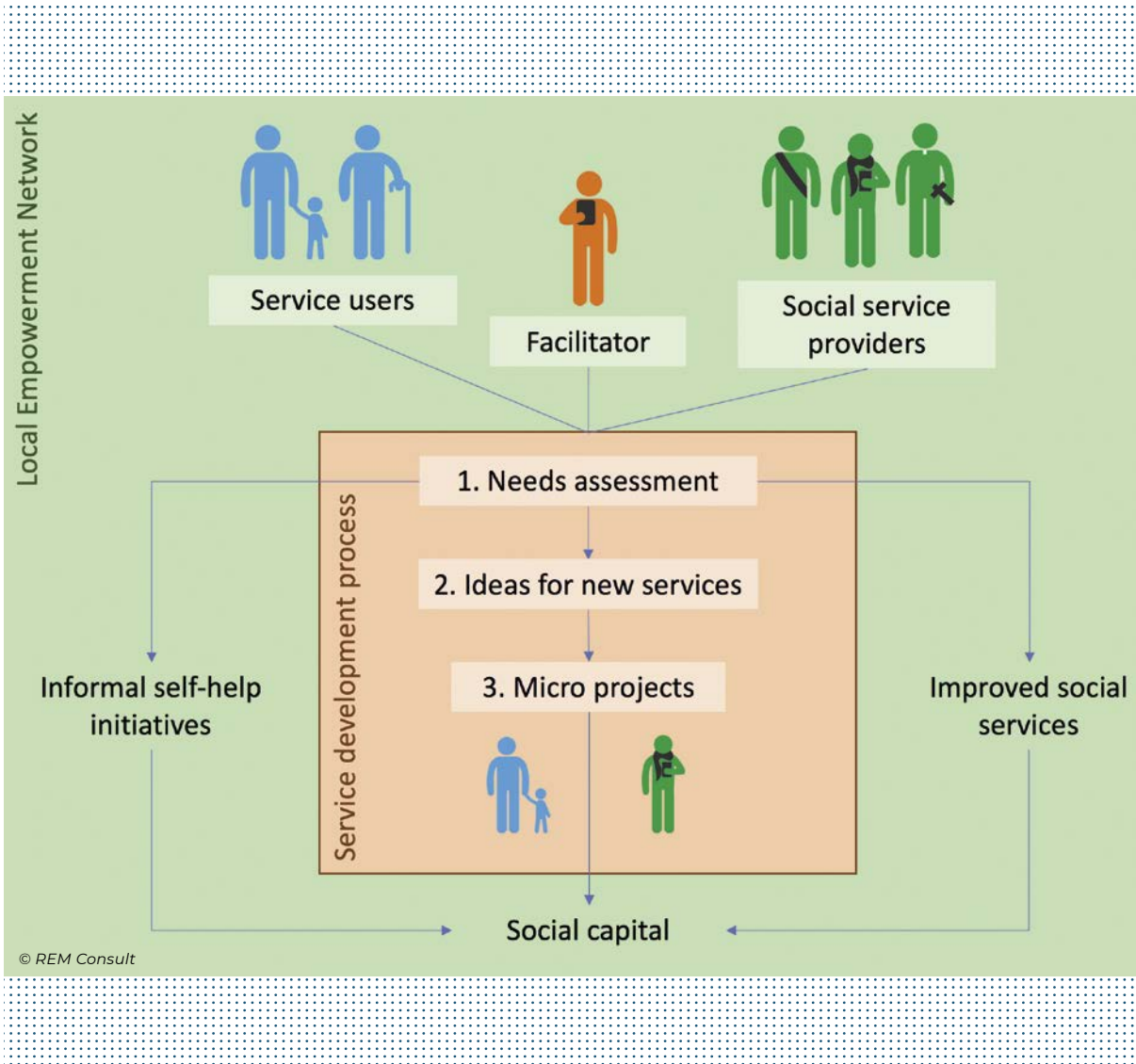


Fig. 3 SEMPRES project logic.

expectation was that in the best-case scenario, a micro project might end up becoming a service user cooperative or a social enterprise run jointly by service users and service providers. In some cases, this expectation became reality (see the example of the tailors' cooperative on page 18). But many other micro projects did not reach this level of maturity within the project's lifetime of three years. As might be expected, turning service users into social entrepreneurs is an endeavour that requires time and resources.

Moreover, it turned out that the service development process did not always follow the linear structure described above. Sometimes, established social service providers adopted ideas that

were elaborated in stages 1 and 2, to improve their service portfolio and offer more targeted services to user groups. In other cases, it turned out that it was enough to bring individuals in contact with each other, as they developed informal self-help initiatives that provided ad hoc, low-threshold solutions to service user needs.

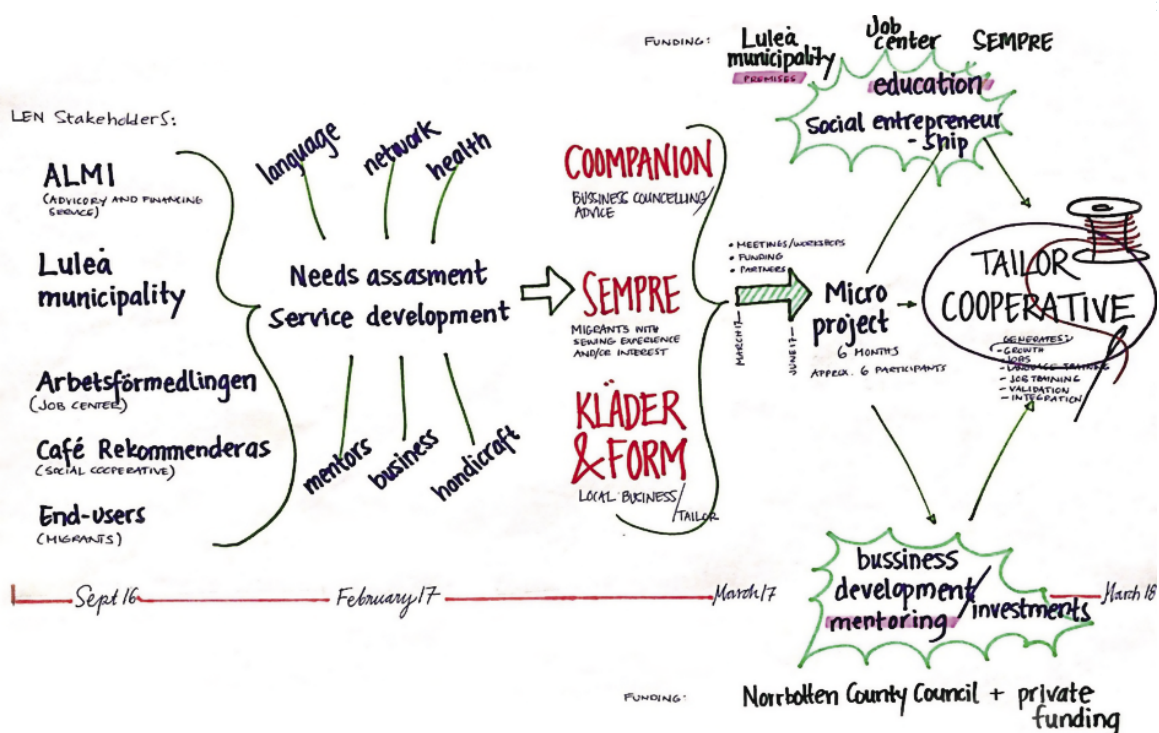
Even though these types of outcome of the service development process did not fulfil our own criteria for micro projects, we considered them very valuable results of the SEMPRES project. Together with the "proper" micro projects, they build up social capital (i.e. networks, relationships and trust among actors) in rural areas and improve the life circumstances of vulnerable groups.

Tailors' cooperative: a micro project from Luleå, Sweden

The timeline below illustrates the process by which a tailors' cooperative was developed in Luleå, northern Sweden, from day one. The process started by establishing a Local Empowerment Network consisting of different stakeholders with a mutual interest in supporting migrants on their way towards self-sufficiency and employment (September 2016). This was followed by the needs assessment of a group of migrant women (February 2017) and developing ideas for a joint service or project development. One of the women's ideas for a potential future activity was to start up their own business in handicrafts or sewing. By a lucky coincidence, Coompanion Norrbotten (a SEMPRE project partner providing business advisory services) was approached by a local tailor, who

suggested they start up a tailor cooperative together (March 2017). Over the next four months, Coompanion Norrbotten facilitated a series of meetings where a business plan was developed together with the migrant women and the local tailor, and assisted in looking for partners and financing. The tailors' cooperative started up as a micro project with financial and other support (e.g. marketing) provided by the stakeholders from the Local Empowerment Network, Luleå municipality and the Swedish Public Employment Service. The cooperative now employs six people and is run and developed by the end users with continuous support provided by the mentors, including education on social entrepreneurship.

Fig. 4 The process of creating a Tailors' cooperative.





INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH LOCAL EMPOWERMENT NETWORKS

To facilitate the service development project, each SEMPRE project partner created one or several **Local Empowerment Networks** (LENs) consisting of representatives from social service providers, public authorities, and private and third-sector actors. The task of the LEN was to bring together service-user representatives and the public and private service providers, and to test the empowerment tools in practice. The fact that direct communication between these different actors was possible on a regular basis was an important success factor, and for

this reason the LENs were based locally, either in a local or county council.

Employees of one or several partner organisations who operate in a particular location coordinate the LEN and assume the role of facilitator in the service development process and the testing of the empowerment tools. Each of the LENs concentrates on one or several disadvantaged groups. Together with the service users, LEN staff identified service users' service needs and ideas and developed micro projects with the support of the empowerment tools.

Example of an LEN in Liepaja, Latvia

by Martin Urdze

Who are the actors in your LEN and what are their motives for being involved?

“Our LEN in Liepaja, Latvia, brings together representatives from different NGOs and local government institutions that work with people with disabilities or are interested in supporting them. In our LEN we have representatives from four local authority social services, the University of Liepaja and the support groups we have initiated. Journalists and politicians have also taken part. We meet in a big group every three or four months. We have also smaller meetings in the region with the leaders of the support groups for people with disabilities. It is an open network where the participants take part depending on their time and interest.”

“The LEN is a forum where it’s possible to meet people who are working in different organisations and contexts. The LEN offers our support groups the opportunity to present their achievements or difficulties to a wider public. It is important for them that somebody shows interest in the work they do and that they can learn from each other.”

What have been the main benefits and challenges of cooperation within the framework of LEN, in your opinion?

“The LEN has helped the participants to get to know each other and share activities. Also, the LEN offers a different view of social work, where the service users have a much bigger role than in their everyday working context. One challenge is that many social service providers do not see any opportunity to change the consumer mindset of service users in their own work and are simply tired of the negative attitudes from service users that they experience in their own institutional settings. We’ve tried to engage in some bigger issues as well, for example we invited representatives from the local transport company to speak about problems people with disabilities experience when using public transport. Unfortunately, we didn’t get very far because of legal issues that can only be solved on the national level.”

How will the cooperation continue after the end of the project?

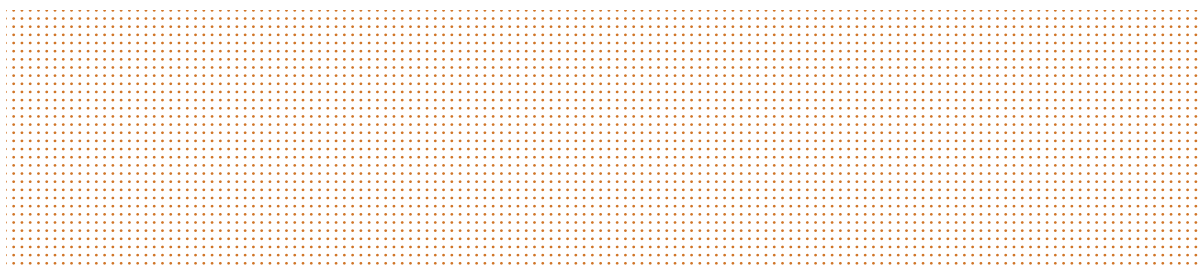
“The LEN will continue to meet regularly. One idea is for other organisations to host meetings, not just the Diaconal Centre Liepaja.”



Overall, 16 LENS were established in different Baltic Sea Region countries. Each of these LENS focused on a particular service user group, and between 5 and 20 local social service providers and other stakeholders were involved in each LENS.

Table 1 An overview of established LENS, their service user groups and the project partners involved

LEN location	Service user group	Project partner involved
County of Dithmarschen, town of Meldorf (DE)	Single parents	Diaconie of Schleswig-Holstein
County of Plön (DE)	Long-term unemployed and their families	KDA/Nordkirche
County of Nordfriesland (DE)	Migrants and refugees	Academy of Economics Schleswig-Holstein
City of Vaasa, region of Ostrobothnia and Turku area (FI)	Older adults (65+)	Novia University of Applied Sciences
Kokkola and Pietersaari local authority areas (FI)	Unemployed migrants	Kokkola University Consortium
Liepaja and surrounding counties (LV)	People with disabilities	Diaconal Centre Liepaja
Cities of Pagegiai and Jurbarkas (LT)	1. People suffering from addiction diseases (Pagegiai) 2. Single parents (Jurbarkas)	Lutheran Diaconia
Counties of Võru, Põlva, Viljandi and Harku county (EE)	Harkujärve community church (strengthening community coherence); godparents	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
Counties of East Viru, West Viru, Järva and Harku (EE)	Families with children with special needs and very old or ill patients in hospitals. Ex-prisoners	Foundation for Social Action
Ryczywół (PL)	Rural youth (11–25+)	The Foundation for Lifelong Learning PERITIA
Cities of Övertorneå and Luleå (SE)	Migrants with a permanent residence permit	Companion Norrbotten
City of Luleå and Boden local authority area (SE)	Young refugees, asylum seekers and young people with mental and physical disabilities	Sunderby Folk High School
Varde & Tønder local authority areas (DK)	Refugees/migrants	University College South Denmark
Vidzeme county (LV)	Disadvantaged youth, lonely parents, people with intellectual disabilities	Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences





04 The empowerment tools

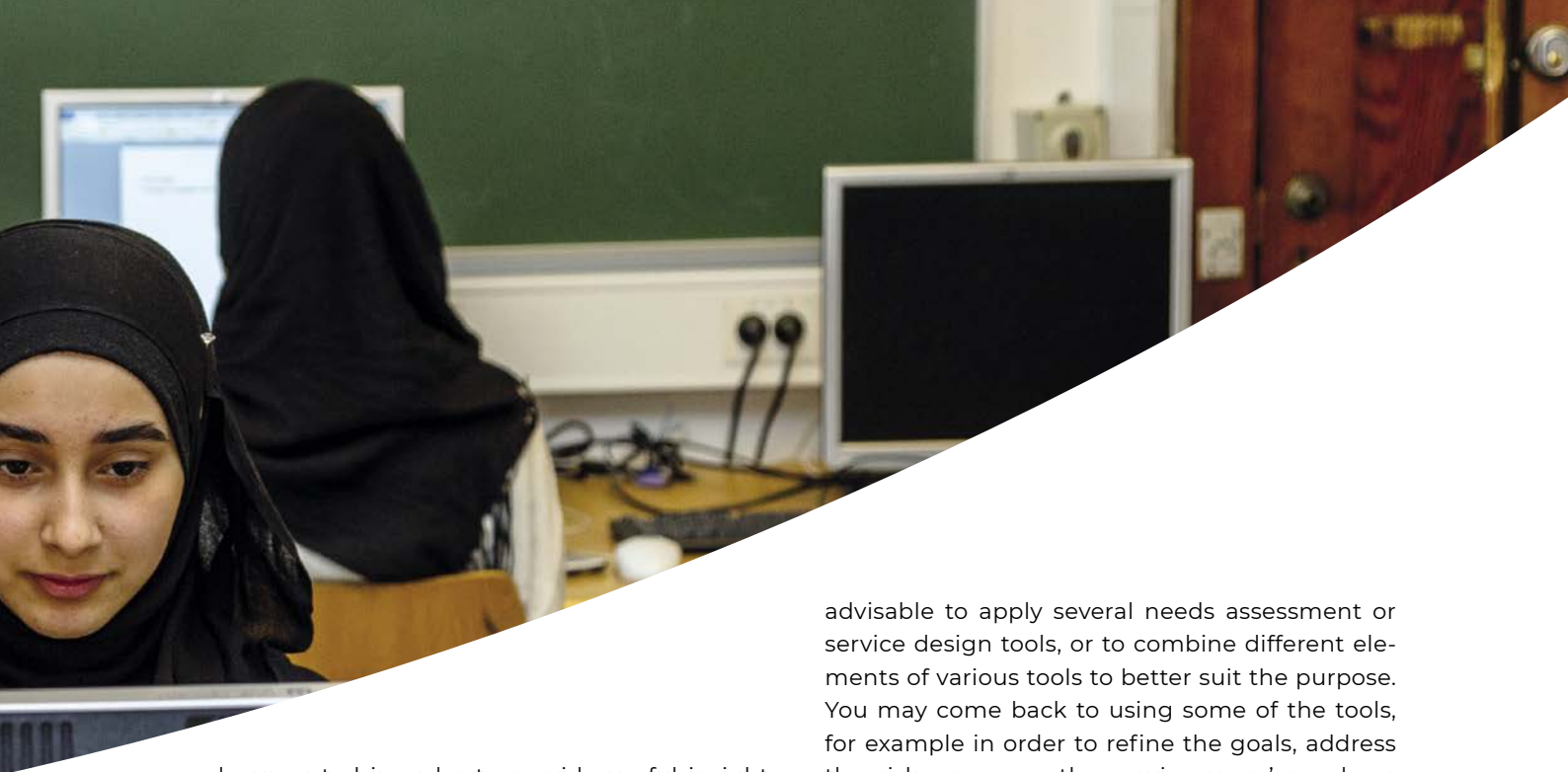
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EMPOWERMENT TOOLS?

The empowerment tools in this handbook are the means and methods to involve service users actively in the design, development and delivery of a new or improved social service. The empowerment tools strengthen the interaction between the providers and service users, with the aim of developing innovative or improved social services. The process of mobilising and engaging service users to take an active part in service development contributes to boosting their self-confidence and building their knowledge and competences. It also enables them to take part in developing project ideas and, even more importantly, bringing these ideas to fruition. The empowerment tools primarily address the individual and group level of empowerment (you can read more about this in Chapter 2).

Based on the SEMPRES project's approach, the empowerment tools introduced in this handbook are divided into two broad categories or stages:

- (i) Needs assessment – determining service needs in a way that promotes the active involvement of service users and allows them to articulate their needs themselves instead of prescribing what is considered best for them
- (ii) Service design – encouraging service providers and service users to step outside their usual thought patterns and work together in order to create new ideas that meet concrete social needs, and to initiate resourceful relations, networks and cooperation.

This chapter presents an overview of the selected empowerment tools that have been tested by the SEMPRES project partners and found most useful in the context of the Local Empowerment Networks and micro projects. Please note that the list of tools presented in this chapter is not exhaustive. The descriptions are intended to introduce tools and techniques rather than provide “the definitive explanation” on how to use them. The partners' feedback, tips and lessons learned in the process of applying these tools have been



documented in order to provide useful insights and learning for a wider audience of social service providers. You may need to customise the tools for your organisational context. In some cases, it may be

advisable to apply several needs assessment or service design tools, or to combine different elements of various tools to better suit the purpose. You may come back to using some of the tools, for example in order to refine the goals, address the risks, reassess the service users' needs or improve the project plan. You may also skip the needs assessment phase and start with service design tools if it is considered more appropriate in a specific context.

Table 2 Overview and a short description of the empowerment tools

Purpose of the empowerment tool	Stage of the social service innovation process *	Description	Level of empowerment	Methods (examples of the tools)
Needs assessment of service users	Early stage, continuously repeated	Individuals are asked to identify their needs for a social service and to assess the existing challenges they experience	Individual and group level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Workshop • Backpack method • Focus group interviews • Problem and Solution Tree • Kitchen Talks (Participatory Rapid Appraisal)
Service design (e.g. idea development and design of a new service/project)	After the needs assessment and at later stages of the service development process	Stimulating the development of new ideas for social services, innovative means of social service delivery or adaptation of existing services	Individual and group level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory of Change • Business Model Canvas • Double Diamond

** Note: There is no clear-cut division between different stages of the service design process. The distinction between the stages of service innovation is made for the purpose of a better understanding of the process. In real-life situations, the application of empowerment tools may cut across different purposes and stages of a service development process. For instance, the Theory of Change method may already be used in the needs assessment stage. Similarly, the Problem Tree might turn into a Solution Tree in the service design stage. In general, working with the empowerment tools should be seen as an integrated process where different tools can be used to achieve different purposes at different times depending on the context.*

(i) TOOLS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In order to develop and provide services that are meaningful (i.e. they meet the actual needs of the service-user groups), effective (i.e. they improve the life situation of the service user) and cost-efficient, it is important that service providers have a clear picture of the real needs of disadvantaged groups, and update and revise this picture constantly. Too often, services are based on traditional and outdated assumptions about the situation of disadvantaged groups rather than a dialogue with the users of the services. Participatory forms of needs assessment not only provide for better communication between service providers and service users, but also give the members of the disadvantaged groups the feeling that they are being acknowledged and taken seriously. Changing their needs assessment routines also allows service providers to tap into new sources of ideas for innovative social services and forms of delivery.

Performing a needs assessment is helpful for testing the assumptions of the service providers about the needs of the service users, or for prioritising needs in order of relevance. This process helps to build trust and develop relationships with the service-user groups.

“Needs assessment helps to recognise the heterogeneity of service users, and the significance of the background and experiences that they bring with them.”

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

One user of the social service, who participated in the needs assessment process in 2017, said: *“It is important for me that the initiative and topics come from the group. It was a very important point for me to be able to contribute.”*

One of the lessons the SEMPRES project partners learned was that needs assessment is a continuous process and should be implemented several

times throughout the service development process. It may take some time for the group to realise and formulate their needs. Also, it is likely that some of the participants and thus the needs of the group may change.

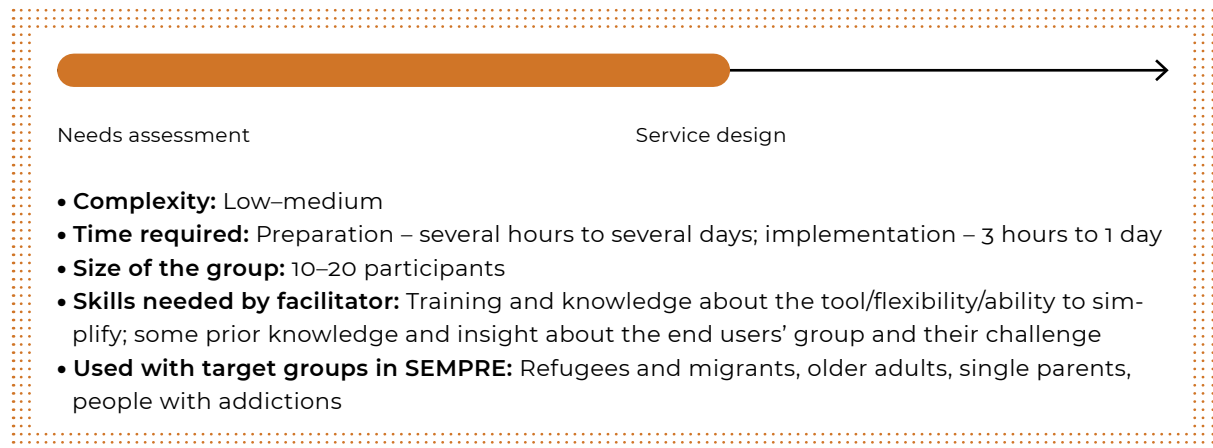
“Before we started the needs assessment process we expected that we would know the needs of the service users. Our expectations have been met – the service providers knew about the needs of the single parents. But single parents asked for more flexible services than service providers can offer today.”

**Cläre McDaniel, a project
partner from the Diaconie of
Schleswig-Holstein, Germany**

Another lesson was that it may be helpful to combine different tools and methods of working (e.g. in groups and on an individual basis) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the service users' needs (see the example from Denmark on page 35).

The project partners have tested a number of needs assessment tools, on their own and in combination. The most popular ones – the Future Workshop, the Backpack method, Focus group interview, Kitchen Talks (part of the Participatory Rapid Appraisal) and Problem and Solution Tree – will be described below.

Tool 1.1 The Future Workshop



The Future Workshop is a method that was developed by Robert Jungk in the 1970s with the idea of increasing people's participation in solving collective or shared problems. It allows a group of people to discover what an ideal future might look like and enables them to develop new ideas or solutions to jointly defined needs, problems or challenges.

Future Workshops are held in groups with a trained moderator or facilitator. The Future Workshop is composed of three phases: (i) the problem phase; (ii) the fantasy phase; and (iii) the realisation/visionary phase. The problem phase is intended to identify the problems and needs, while the fantasy and realisation phases are used for generating ideas and possible solutions to meeting the needs. The Future Workshop method can therefore be used both for needs assessment (problem phase) and as a service development tool (the fantasy and realisation phases). These are often complemented by a preliminary preparation phase and a subsequent trial phase. The workshop starts with a short presentation by the facilitator, outlining ground rules and the schedule for the workshop. Participants are then put into smaller groups, preferably with a good and mix of people. Each group is given paper or post-its on which to write their ideas. The participants first consider the issue on their own, taking notes, and the ideas are then organised into groups based on their similarity.

In the fantasy phase the focus shifts from the problem to the solution, with each small group brainstorming about desires and dreams for the future in regard to the common problem/issue.

The central question is: "What would you do if there were no restrictions in terms of resources and opportunities?" The ideas are then evaluated and prioritised. In the realisation phase the most promising ideas are selected and an action plan for realising the vision is made (Vidal, 2006).

"The Future Workshop tool is very suitable for carrying out needs assessment. At the end of the process, you get concrete results on which further work can be built. We presented the results to some social service providers in our network and received a lot of positive feedback. The participants of the Future Workshop were involved in the presentation."

**Maike Hagemann-Schilling,
LEN coordinator in the County
of Plön, Germany**

Read more at: Finland Futures Research Centre (2014)²

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRE PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE FUTURE WORKSHOP METHOD

ADVANTAGES

- ✦ Suitable for a group of people who are meeting for the first time and who share a common problem or issue to be solved or addressed
- ✦ Saves time in comparison to individual interviews
- ✦ Good for generating ideas, seeking possible new directions and collecting images of the future
- ✦ It is a flexible tool (e.g. you can choose to use just one or two of the phases)
- ✦ The tool is easy to understand and explain

DISADVANTAGES

- Time-consuming
- Requires good language skills; may be difficult to use with migrants and refugees
- Requires a trained moderator

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE FUTURE WORKSHOP TOOL WAS APPLIED IN ÖVERTORNEÅ, SWEDEN

The Future Workshop was chosen as a method for identifying the needs of migrants in Övertorneå, Sweden. There were 13 service users participating in the workshop, as well as five local service providers, one language teacher, one interpreter and two SEMPRE team members who acted as facilitators. For needs assessment purposes, only the problem phase of the Future Workshop was used, which took approximately four hours.

The participants were put into groups depending on their native language. There was one local service provider in each group taking notes. The interpreter knew several of the languages being spoken and supported the discussions in the groups and in the plenary. The fact that the service users had met before facilitated the implementation of the workshop, as they felt more comfortable sharing their stories and needs. The needs that the participants rated the highest were those concerning language, health, internship and education, and the ability to get/feel motivated.

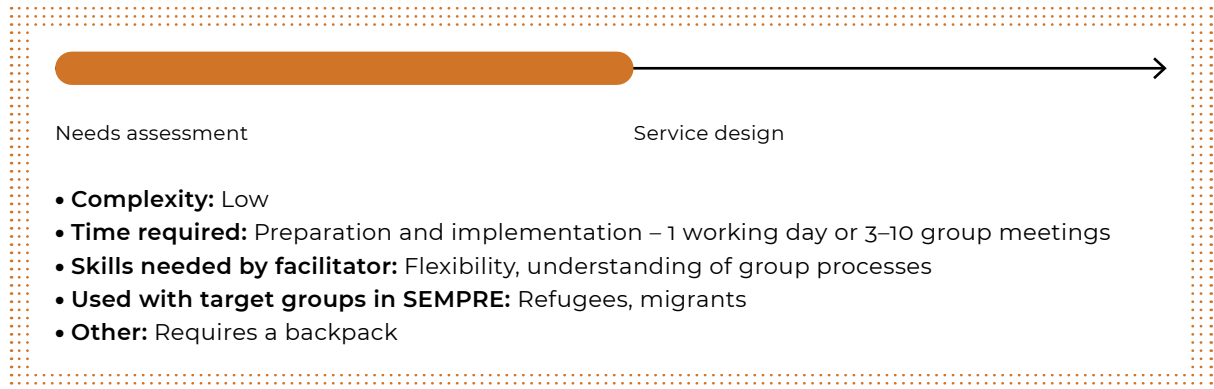


“One thing that could have been done differently was to give more space for reflection and analysis and to make sure that we (the facilitators) have interpreted and summarised the end users’ thoughts correctly before we ask them to select and prioritise among the identified needs.”

Helen Nilsson, a project partner from Coompanion Nord, Sweden



Tool 1.2 The Backpack method



The Backpack method is a tool that helps a group of people to reflect on the resources available to an individual (human, social, economic) and his/her challenges (internal and external), now and in the past.

The group is given backpacks and asked to name a few things they would like to put into a backpack, including things that are appreciated from the past and can be taken into the future. They

also name some things they would like to take out of it – things that are not so useful and can be left behind. This method helps to reveal: what the desired future looks like; how the things in the backpack can be used; what things should be left out; and what needs to be added (e.g. relationships, education, material resources, social support).

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRES PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE BACKPACK METHOD

ADVANTAGES

- ✦ Gives a deep understanding of the individual's needs and their context
- ✦ Enables different time frames (from a single meeting to weekly or monthly group meetings over six months)
- ✦ Helps to bring to light group members' competences and skills that may be valuable if they are also involved in service design
- ✦ It gives everyone the space they need
- ✦ Good for building trust in a group and getting to know each other
- ✦ Enables building a positive narrative for the future

DISADVANTAGES

- May be difficult in a larger group
- Moderator needs to express sensitivity to past traumas (when working with migrants and refugees in particular)

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE BACKPACK TOOL WAS APPLIED IN KOKKOLA, FINLAND

The Backpack method was chosen as a tool for identifying the needs of a group of young refugees in Kokkola, Finland. The group met once a week for five weeks, each meeting lasting for about two hours. A five-day workshop can be carried out in one day if the group knows each other prior to the meeting.

First meeting: The Backpack method was introduced and explained to the group, and backpacks were handed out to the participants. The main focus of the first meeting was on getting to know each other and building trust. The more homogenous the group is, the easier it is to build trust and delve deeper during the process. Homogeneity may mean education, language and ethnicity. The moderator asked each participant

to bring something positive/negative from their past to the next meeting (for example, an object, an image, something written or a drawing).

Second meeting: All participants were given space to tell the group something about their past and what they needed to take into the future with them. It was possible for them to keep some things private; not everything needed to be said out loud. Some things could be kept in the backpack. Creating a safe atmosphere was crucial.

Third meeting: Each participant was asked to reflect on their current situation (social relations, support, health condition, leisure activities, school/education, etc.) in terms of pros and cons, and what was in the backpack: how light/heavy was the backpack? At this point, participants were starting to think about their future plans.

Fourth meeting: Each participant began to develop concrete future plans. This process started with them reflecting on their own wishes and dreams. It was important to emphasise that attention should be paid to their own wishes and not those of their parents or community. After that, the concrete tools were gathered in the backpack (relationships, education, support, skills, etc.).

Fifth meeting: In this session, the group reflected on the process by looking at what the backpack included. It was still possible to add/take out something. The entire group was asked to support this.

The key questions that the refugees were asked during the meetings were:

- What things in your backpack have you taken from your home country? Show some of these that are important for you. (These could also be symbolic, ideas etc.)
- What would you pack in your backpack today? What are you collecting now/what is important for you now?
- What do you need for your future?
- What will you be in five or ten years?
- What is stopping you from realising your plan?

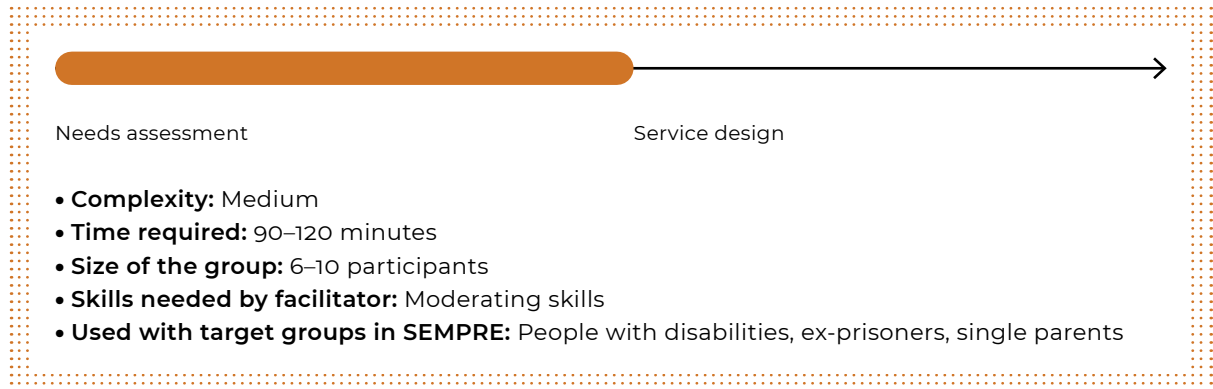


“The overall feedback from the participants was very positive because the method is concrete. Support from the other participants is seen as important and encouraging. The method also enabled us to identify needs and possibilities that had not come to mind earlier.”

Kati Turtiainen, a project partner from Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius, Finland



Tool 1.3 Focus group interview



Focus groups are group interviews, typically including six to ten participants who share a similar background. It is a method that has been much used in marketing (to understand customers) and in research and social work. Focus groups are led by a trained moderator who leads the discussion without interfering too much. The moderator follows a guide rather than conducting an interview as such (Greenbaum, 1998). Those participating in focus group interviews are selected because they are knowledgeable and have something to say about the topic. It is therefore not only about getting a representative selection. The advantages of focus groups include that you can interview many people at the same time, you get to hear different views and you can make participant

observations (Rabiee, 2004). Challenges include steering the group so that everyone gets the chance to talk and to keep the group “on track”. The role of the moderator in focus groups differs between research and social work contexts. In social work, the moderator can be seen more as a helper or mediator rather than a data gatherer. The moderator has an important role and it is therefore advisable to have an assistant moderator as well, if possible (Gaižauskaitė, 2012). In order to prepare the participants, it is helpful for them to be given some written questions in advance that can guide the discussions. It can also be a good idea to tell them beforehand how long the process will take and not to exceed a maximum of two hours, as participants will be less attentive after that.

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRES PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

ADVANTAGES

- + Multiple people can be interviewed at once
- + Can help in prioritising identified needs
- + People feel encouraged to speak when there are others who have similar problems/issues
- + Requires little time

DISADVANTAGES

- Getting information from the group can be challenging if the discussion diverts from the original theme
- Participants may not feel comfortable sharing sensitive information or views in a group, especially if they do not know each other
- Requires a skilled facilitator who is able to maintain structure and control throughout the process

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE FOCUS GROUP TOOL WAS APPLIED IN SOUTH-WEST LATVIA

Focus groups were used as a needs assessment tool by the Diaconal Centre in Liepaja, which works with people with disabilities in south-west

Latvia. People with disabilities are often very isolated because of accessibility problems and the distance from their home to the nearest town or village. The first challenge was therefore how to gather together the service users. By contacting



local service providers and working with NGOs and parishes, the Diaconal Centre managed to reach service users and arrange for their participation in a conference and focus group. In total, four focus group interviews were held in different localities.

The focus group interview started with discussions about living conditions, obstacles faced by participants, and what could be done to improve their lives. One common need that was highlighted was the desire to meet other people and have a place where they felt welcomed. As a result of the focus group, five support groups were formed (this was one of SEMPRE's micro projects). Most of the support groups now meet once a month and have started doing different activities together.



Tool 1.4 Problem and Solution Tree (part of the Logical Framework Approach)

Needs assessment → Service design

- **Complexity:** Low-medium
- **Time required:** Preparation – 1 hour; implementation and evaluation – 2.5 – 3 hours
- **Number of participants:** 10–20
- **Skills needed by facilitator:** Moderation skills
- **Used with target groups in SEMPRES:** Single parents

The Problem and Solution Tree method forms a part of the Logical Framework Approach method. The “problem tree” is the first phase, during which understanding of the problems and their causes is developed. The facilitator puts the audience into smaller groups in order to discuss the causes and consequences of the problems from the perspective of the service users. The results are written down on post-it notes. One note stands for each cause and consequence. All notes are stuck on a wall to create a “problem tree”. The roots, written as negatives, are the causes of the problem; the leaves are the consequences of the problem; and the problem itself forms the trunk of the tree. For example, “a decreasing popu-

lation in rural areas” can be identified as a problem; “lack of job opportunities” and “unsatisfactory infrastructure” as the causes; and “lower tax income” and “brain drain” as some of the consequences. The tree is used to visualise how causes and problems are connected. It helps to develop a better understanding of complex life situations and the context in which a project is to occur. It also helps to illustrate the fact that in order to be able to solve a problem, its roots need to be addressed – the causes of the problem. Once the problem and its causes are identified, the focus shifts toward the next phase – the solutions. The “solution tree” aims to develop alternative approaches to achieving a desired change.

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRES PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTION TREE METHOD

ADVANTAGES

- ✦ Good visual expression of problems and solutions – has a symbolic meaning
- ✦ Good for initiating reflection, debate and sharing
- ✦ Helps in networking and forming alliances
- ✦ Easily adaptable to different participants
- ✦ Each branch can be developed into its own tree in follow-up workshops

DISADVANTAGES

- Needs two good moderators who are able to shift the two groups of participants from thinking about “problems” to thinking about “solutions”.

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTION TREE TOOL WAS APPLIED IN DITHMARSCHEN, GERMANY

A LEN working with single parents, in Dithmarschen district, Germany, deployed the Problem and Solution Tree at the outset of the SEMPRES

process in the region. This tool had been chosen carefully in order to generate the best possible results, to visualise problems and solutions in an appealing and immediate way, to share responsibilities and to carry on working with the results. The Problem and Solution Tree reflects the



Watering cans that can help to follow-up and recall specific solutions/ideas. Photo: © Wiebke Hinz

in other words, an idea they would water like a tiny plant and watch it grow.

As shown in the photographs here, the tree and watering cans are used as tools to foster sustainability and act as reminders. They can be displayed at follow-up meetings and help to recall specific solutions/ideas.

The tool is easily adaptable for use with different participants: stakeholders, service users, and so on. It is essential to have a set of focused questions at the beginning in order to make the group-work efficient, and a good team of moderators (preferably at least two people). This tool also helps to network and to form alliances: in order to work towards an effective solution, you will need stakeholders and supporters with different resources and competences.

“A particular challenge was to connect solutions to responsibilities. Our trick was the watering cans: a visible item with a key word (solution) to ensure one of the participants takes it on board and follows it up. We wanted to make sure that good solutions did not evaporate.”

Doris Scheer

“The problem/solution tree is a good tool to initiate reflection, debate and sharing. The dimensions ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ are related: the problem needs to be identified but it is essential to tackle it. The tool motivates us to look to the future and to realise that change is possible.”

Doris Scheer, project leader, Diaconie of Schleswig-Holstein, Germany



Tool 1.5 Kitchen Talks (part of the Participatory Rapid Appraisal)



The Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) combines several methods and approaches for developing a preliminary, qualitative understanding of a situation. In short, PRA enables vulnerable and marginalised groups to share, examine and analyse their own knowledge of life, problems and conditions, thereby allowing them to plan, set their own goals and act. There are numerous participatory techniques and tools that can be used; what is common for all PRA methods is that they enable information to be gathered from a large group of people and enable quick results – hence the name, “rapid appraisal”.

One of the PRA techniques is semi-structured interviews, dubbed “Kitchen Talks”, conducted by trained students. The process starts with the training of 12–20 students as interviewers and the development of a semi-structured questionnaire. The objective of the questionnaire is to find out how the respondents perceived their life circumstances, and identify their problems, needs, dreams and goals.

The students usually conduct about 45 interviews in total. The respondents are selected randomly and officially informed about the process in advance. In most cases, the interviews are conducted at the interviewees’ homes, hence the name “Kitchen Talks”.

Every evening during the process, the students meet up to share their results. After three days of interviews, they have two days to evaluate and interpret their results; then, on the final evening, they present the results to the respondents (service users), university teachers, social service providers and other stakeholders (e.g. regional partners). Some of the results could be presented in a creative way. The evening ends with a discussion and planning the next steps.

The preparation phase for a PRA is rather time-consuming, as it takes time to find a contact person at the university, find and mobilise students as interviewees and find the interviewees.

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRES PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE KITCHEN TALKS METHOD

ADVANTAGES

- ✦ Allows a comprehensive and relatively quick analysis of the main problems and needs of the service users
- ✦ Obtains information from a large group of people
- ✦ Respondents get the results quickly and are involved in the discussion of the results
- ✦ The presentation of results creates a favourable environment for communication between service users and social service providers
- ✦ Engagement of students raises interest and is seen positively by the service users

DISADVANTAGES

- Time-consuming and resource-demanding. Preparations take a long time, especially establishing cooperation with university, and finding students and respondents
- The realisation phase depends on the university’s timetable (curriculum/terms)
- Translating the results of analysis into concrete steps depends on the interest and motivation of the social service providers

EXAMPLE OF DIFFERENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLS BEING COMBINED IN TØNDER, DENMARK

To create an environment conducive to refugees being able to formulate their needs and wishes, and thus empower them to become active participants in the creation of their future lives, a mixture of three types of needs assessment tool was chosen by the project partners in Tønder, Denmark. Engaging refugees across different ethnic backgrounds can be more productively done by focusing on the resources they have brought with them from their country of origin rather than on the barriers they have encountered in their new country or the scars they have from conflicts or other past events.

The unpacking of positive past experiences and resources was inspired by the **Backpack method**. The SEMPRE team hoped that refugees' past experiences could serve as a starting point for them to develop ambitions for the future, which was the primary focus of the **Future Workshop**. The third approach used was the **appreciative inquiry**³. To integrate the three approaches, the SEMPRE team used focus group interviews to construct three phases: the first focused on past positive experiences and resources; the second explored dreams and ambitions; and the third debated a possible roadmap to realise those ambitions. The first two phases were divided into five subthemes: learning Danish; education/work; free time; family and friends; and home. The participants were asked to reflect on a theme and then write about its key aspects.

Participants in the Parents Night, a micro project with migrants in Tønder, Denmark.

Photo: © Margrethe Cæsar Bjerg



(ii) TOOLS FOR SERVICE DESIGN

Service design tools help service providers and service users develop new ideas for social services, innovative means of social service delivery or adaptation of existing services.

These tools may help to clarify problems, make them tangible and develop possible solutions with clear goals and targets, milestones and activities. Further, these tools are helpful in identifying the resources needed for the project or service to succeed, as well as the stakeholders who should be included.

The SEMPRES partners note that service development tools help to create an environment in which dialogue is enabled, and new relationships

and trust are built among service users and social service providers. In this sense, service development tools also help to initiate resourceful relations, networks and cooperation. The partners also observed the “developing effects” on service users through their self-confidence being boosted and the development of new skills such as project work and strategic thinking.

The project partners have tested a number of service development tools, on their own and in combination. The three most popular – Theory of Change, Business Model Canvas and Double Diamond – will be described on the following pages.



Tool 2.1 Theory of Change



Theory of Change (ToC) is a tool that helps to structure project development into logical steps. The tool is used to create milestones and targets while showing the logical process of how activities lead to the desired impact. This tool offers structure (Nesta, 2013) and helps to:

- frame the goals and see wider benefits of the new or adapted service
- describe and illustrate the logical steps needed for developing new services
- understand what the focus needs to be
- define and think ahead about the impact and economic viability of the initiative
- identify and understand bottlenecks and barriers that can emerge during the development stage of the initiative, and create effective pathways
- reflect on particular steps, together with the service users

- visualise how daily activities relate to the overall mission and long-term goals
- clarify the objectives and outputs (for whom, and in what context, is value created?)
- achieve better planning and better evaluation (possibly to measure progress towards achieving the goal)
- apply for funding.

ToC is composed of a template that includes a set of boxes representing the principle elements of the solution (including problem definition, key audience, entry point to reach the audience, steps towards change, measurable effects, long-term change, key assumptions) and their interwoven relationships.

You can read more and download ToC template at: [Development Impact and You by Nesta⁴](#)

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRES PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE THEORY OF CHANGE TOOL

ADVANTAGES

- ✦ Helps to narrow down the aim and stay focused on it
- ✦ Provides a good structure
- ✦ Step-by-step approach is motivating and helpful, as progress and a logical way forward can be seen
- ✦ Helpful for reflecting on and (re)assessing the chosen steps for reaching the goals
- ✦ Quite easy to use; does not take much prior knowledge to work with it

DISADVANTAGES

- The template and questions need to be simplified for certain target groups
- Requires a skilled facilitator

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE THEORY OF CHANGE TOOL WAS APPLIED IN VIDZEME, LATVIA

The ToC was chosen as a tool for mobilising and engaging single parents in the process of a new service development in Vidzeme, Latvia. The problems had already been defined during the needs assessment phase with the service users but required prioritisation. Overall, the process of developing the ToC framework required about 15 meetings. As the group had a low level of education and included people with intellectual disabilities, the facilitators tried to simplify the task by using drawings. Together, they tried to understand whether the problems faced by the service users – unemployment, social isolation, loneliness, lack of or very limited support from social service providers – could somehow be structured and prioritised. It was quite easy to get the service users to acknowledge problems at community level but it required patience to encourage them to recognise such problems as low self-esteem, low level of education and lack of work experience, and this took several meetings. Identifying common problems that were common to the majority of the group was a real challenge.

With the help of the ToC tool, the group came to the conclusion that the key common problems were social isolation and lack of work/practice/training opportunities (key assumptions). The group came up with an idea to establish a coffee shop where the service users would have the opportunity to socialise, engage in different activities, create their own working and training space and be the first in this rural area to put this into practice.

Describing the steps needed to bring about the change was found useful for clarifying how ex-



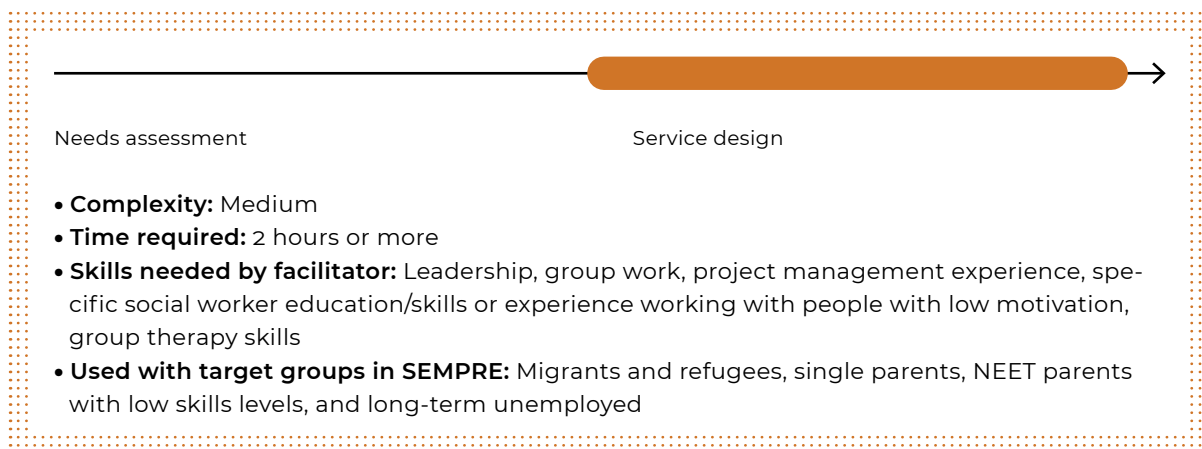
actly the goal would be reached. To begin with, it was crucial to motivate the service users to become fully engaged in the process and raise their self-esteem. Facilitators played a crucial role in this process. Together with the service users, the facilitators identified the steps forward. It was especially important to identify the missing knowledge and skills to be developed and how to do it.

“With the help of the ToC tool the group [single parents] came to a conclusion that the key problems are social isolation and lack of work and training opportunities [...] Describing the steps needed to bring about the change was found useful for clarifying how exactly the goal will be reached.”

Anna Broka, LEN coordinator in Vidzeme, Latvia



Tool 2.2 Business Model Canvas



The Business Model Canvas is a strategic management and entrepreneurial tool that is applicable to both commercial and not-for-profit initiatives. There are a number of different variations of the Business Model Canvas, including the Social Business Model Canvas. Regardless of the variation, the canvas helps to describe a new or existing business model in a more tangible, holistic and visual way.

While not quite as comprehensive as the business plan, the Business Model Canvas allows a briefer, easier to read version of a business plan to be developed, which can be revisited and reworked later. The Business Model Canvas is also a communication tool; it helps to communicate goals to stakeholders and clients and can be used to attract funding.

The Business Model Canvas consists of nine basic building blocks, thereby breaking a business model down into easily-understood segments:

key partners; key activities; key resources; value propositions; customer relationships; channels; customer segments; cost structure; and revenue streams.

The guiding principles of working with the Business Model Canvas (*Strategyzer, n.d.*) include:

- using post-it/sticky notes (one idea per note) to make it possible to move things around or remove elements from the canvas
- creating sticky notes for each of the nine building blocks
- using different coloured sticky notes to highlight certain aspects of your business model
- avoiding describing too many different ideas in the same Business Model Canvas, as it can lead to confusion
- creating multiple canvases to map out business model options; this allows different opportunities to be mapped, then the most promising

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRES PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS TOOL

ADVANTAGES

- ✦ Advantages are similar to those of the Theory of Change (read more on page 37)
- ✦ Easy to change
- ✦ Visual
- ✦ Useful for tracking validation of hypotheses
- ✦ Easy and quite quick to create
- ✦ Helpful in presenting and explaining ideas to other stakeholders

DISADVANTAGES

- Not detailed enough, does not provide priorities and does not take competition into consideration.
- It can help to conceptualise, but further analysis is needed
- The template and questions need to be simplified for certain target groups
- Requires a skilled facilitator

ones to be picked out and validated step by step, instead of simply going with the first idea (Orgler, 2018)

- revisiting the canvas regularly – it needs constant updating!
- making the canvas visible for the team (e.g. by hanging it on the wall).

You can read more and download the Business Model Canvas at Strategyzer⁵. Social Business Model Canvas is available here⁶.

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS TOOL WAS APPLIED IN BODEN, SWEDEN

Sunderby Folk High School set up a two-hour workshop with local stakeholders and service users (asylum seekers). The facilitator had prepared a large drawing of a Business Model Canvas on a whiteboard and all participants were given printed blank canvases. The facilitator explained the model (this is most easily done by giving a concrete example). The preliminary idea for a micro project had been agreed beforehand. The idea was to start a cooperative that would organise the picking and selling of berries by asylum seekers. As a second step, the cooperative would develop a processing business to produce jam, marmalade and lemonade.

During the workshop, the participants went through the different boxes one by one, starting with the value proposition. First, they thought about it by themselves for a couple of minutes and then everyone shared their thoughts and the facilitator filled in the canvas on the whiteboard.

The facilitator's role is to make sure that every aspect is thought about and that everything correlates. Throughout the process, things were added and changed, and this had consequences for other boxes on the canvas. Because of this, it is best to work with a whiteboard, post-its or both. If it seems realistic, the canvas can serve as a basis for a business plan (see figure 5).

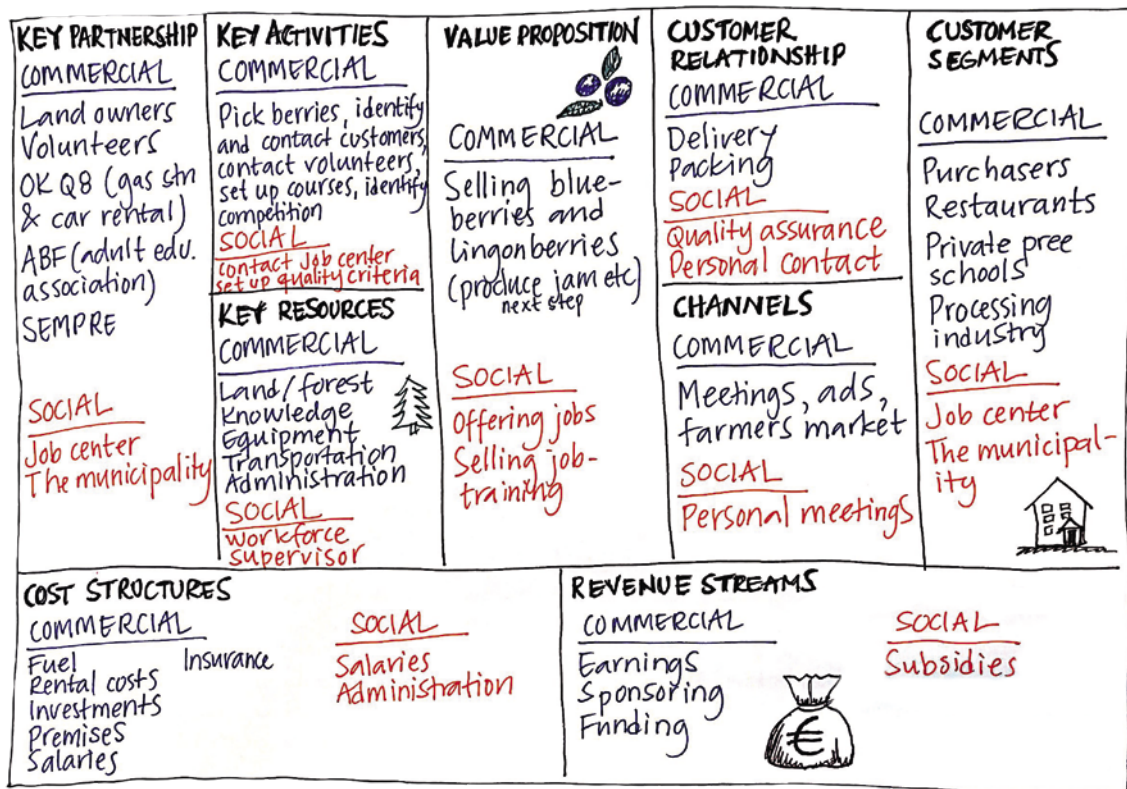


“We found the Business Model Canvas very helpful. It gives you an idea of what aspects you need to think about and if the idea is realistic or not – all on one page. It is also helpful when explaining your idea to others. One piece of advice when you have filled in your canvas is to take another look at it after a day or two to see if there is something wrong or missing.”

Helen Nilsson, project partner, Coompanion Nord, Sweden

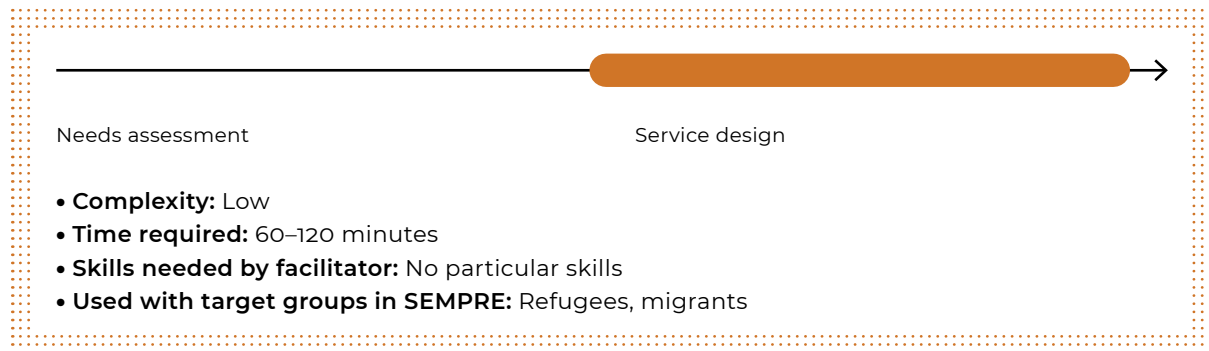


Fig. 5 The Business Model Canvas for a micro project on berry picking involving asylum seekers.
 Source: Sunderby Folk High School 2017.



BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS INCL. SOCIAL IMPACT

Tool 2.3 Double Diamond



The Double Diamond is a simple visual map of the design process that could be applied to social work and other fields. It is divided into four phases: discover, define, develop and deliver. The first two phases focus on problem definition, while the third and fourth phases focus on developing ideas and refining and narrowing them down until the best idea is arrived at. This tool helps to structure the work and keep focused during the process. The ideas are developed, tested and refined a number of times, in order to select the strongest idea with the highest potential for implementation (*DesignCouncil, 2018*).

Discover: This phase of the Double Diamond model involves looking at the context and getting insights into the problems. It is an exploratory phase and includes identifying service-user needs and problems that could be addressed.

Define: In this phase, the group tries to define specific areas to address and focus on – which of the problems and needs identified in the discover phase matter most? The group is encouraged to use “convergent thinking” to narrow the options

down to the most relevant or feasible challenge or need to address. The questions to be answered in this phase include: What is feasible and which challenge or need should we act on first?

Develop: This is the phase in which solutions or concepts are created and tested. It is a process of trial and error that essentially helps to improve and refine the ideas and solutions. It starts with gathering broad ideas for a new service. During this phase, “divergent thinking” is used, in which all creative solutions are welcome. The aim is to generate lots of possible ideas and think outside the box.

Delivery: In this phase, the solutions that work best are selected (e.g. by voting). In this last step, “convergent thinking” is used again, focusing on what can actually be delivered and the best solutions to address the service users’ needs. The questions to be answered in this phase include: What is feasible and what ideas should we act on? Finally, the solutions are put into practice. You can read more and download the Double Diamond template at Design Council website⁷.

FEEDBACK FROM THE SEMPRES PROJECT PARTNERS ON THE DOUBLE DIAMOND TOOL

ADVANTAGES

- + Easy to understand and use
- + Can be easily combined with other more advanced service development tools and methods (e.g. Theory of Change)
- + Fits well in working with, for example, refugees and migrants, who often have poor foreign language skills, so it can be an advantage when there are only small amounts of text

DISADVANTAGES

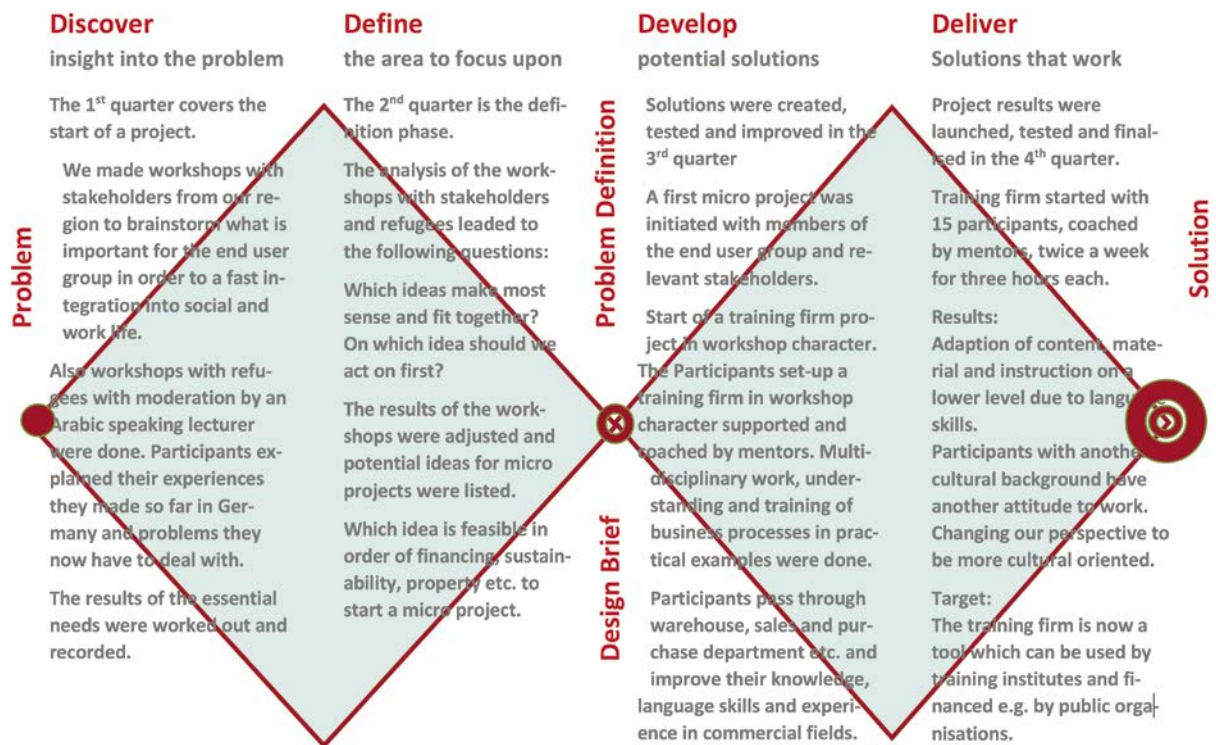
- Low flexibility and quite basic outcomes
- Does not provide a good framework for identifying and handling the obstacles and risks

EXAMPLE OF HOW THE DOUBLE DIAMOND TOOL WAS APPLIED IN NORDFRIESLAND, GERMANY

The Double Diamond was chosen as a service development tool in working with refugees and migrants in Nordfriesland, Germany (see figure below). The starting (discover) stage took about two months and included workshops with service users where needs and problems were identified. In the next stage (define) the group moved from definition of problem to development of ideas. Potential ideas for the joint projects were discussed and listed. In the development stage, the most feasible and promising ideas were selected with the service users. This included developing work-integrated training in the field of business development supported by mentors and coaches. Two coaches were employed to work with the group. The project idea was promoted during the integration courses and among various stakeholders in the region. It took about a month to find participants for the project. The SEMPRE team realised that there was a need to simplify the paperwork and training material for the service users due to the often poor language skills of the participants. In the delivery phase, the solution was implemented and received support from the Job Centre and the Employment Agency.



Fig. 6 Completed Double Diamond in Nordfriesland, Germany.



ENGAGEMENT OF SERVICE USERS IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND SERVICE DESIGN: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

By working with various user groups in the different socio-economic settings across the Baltic Sea Region, the SEMPRES project partners obtained different perspectives and experiences. Presented below are the general observations and lessons learned with regard to the implementation of needs assessment and the service design process. Please note that the recommendations only reflect the experiences of the SEMPRES partners and may require adaptation for different contexts. What follows are some tips for the successful engagement of service users in needs assessment and service design from SEMPRES partners:

- **Plan some extra time for the process of building social networks, building trust and creating engagement, preferably before starting the needs assessment.** This helps to create fertile ground for developing further activities and commitment. Also, because service users comprise diverse and heterogeneous groups, getting to know each other and building relationships takes time – often more time than expected. We advise not to underestimate the importance of ice-breaking and trust-building exercises.
- Some of the service users may be hard to reach, especially during the starting phase of the activities. The importance of **using the right outreach channels and “door-openers”** is emphasised. A door-opener can be an anchor person in the local community (a trusted individual or a community leader) or a respected organisation, who may help to publicise the workshop, establish first contact and bring people together, especially if service providers have not had any direct prior contact with the service users' group.
- Involve a trained and experienced **facilitator** who knows about the empowerment methods and tools chosen and has knowledge of both the process and the target group (read more about this in text box). Make sure that the facilitator or social service provider does not take over the discussion.
- When working with certain target groups, **visual help tools**, such as posters and drawings, were found to be a useful way of expressing opinions during the workshops. For instance, visual tools helped to minimise language barriers when working with newly arrived refugees or migrants. However, such an exercise is only

of use up to a certain point and participants should be given the opportunity to voice their opinions and needs through debate and dialogue. Other tools for communication, such as music and role-playing, have not been used within SEMPRES but might be effective ways of expressing needs.

- **Choose the right location for the meeting.** You should try to be adaptable in making sure the location meets the needs of the specific service-user group. For example, you might go to the service users' own meeting or organise a meeting in a convenient location for them instead of organising it in your office.
- In terms of the **frequency of the meetings** with service users, it is best not to leave too much time between them, otherwise it may be difficult to keep the service users interested and committed to the process. Responsibilities for certain tasks can be handed over to the users in order to increase their motivation and commitment.



Finding the right facilitator is extremely important

“In Varde, Denmark, the facilitator has been the key to the success of the youth group. One of the reasons the youth group has strong ties and relationships is because the facilitator really believes in them and this is an important quality for empowering the group.” (Anette Nielsen, a project partner from the University College South Denmark)

Competencies: Empathy; openness; acceptance; patience; the ability to build trustful relationships but also motivate and inspire others; “simple speaking”; strong leadership qualities but not taking over the discussion.
Skills: Experience in social work and an understanding of the working method.

How to develop these competencies and skills? See: The SEMPRES guidebook for Empowerment Training at www.sempre-project.eu/training



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05

How can social service providers support user initiatives and social enterprises?

Support tools are activities and measures that help to build service users' capacity, self-confidence and entrepreneurial competences. Such skills and competences are important for implementing and sustaining social services or projects in the long-term.

For SEMPRE, the primary objective of applying the support tools is to ensure that the service users assume ownership of the micro projects and that the micro projects continue even after the end of the SEMPRE project. This may require additional help from the social service providers and external actors, and therefore the support activities also address a wider group of stakeholders.

The great variety of support activities reflects the differing needs of the service-user groups and the objectives of new social services. The support activities may be applied throughout the whole service development process but are especially important at the later stages, in particular when a new service has been developed and the challenge is to make it sustainable and self-supporting. Some of the support tools are directed primarily at service users while others, such as

funding and external networks, address the social service providers as well.

The aim of this chapter is to inspire social service providers in their work to support user-driven initiatives. Hence, unlike the previous chapter, the description of the support activities is rather general and less formalised, and leaves space for different interpretations and adaptations to different contexts. It is important to note that this chapter does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of support activities, but rather to highlight the most relevant ones in the context of the SEMPRE project and describe the experiences of the project partners.

FACILITATE LEARNING AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Learning and training activities are pivotal for raising service users' self-esteem and building

their individual strengths and competences in order to bring about change, not only in their own life situations but also in those of other people. Learning activities are relevant for increasing service users' capabilities, motivating them and engaging them, in order for them to become involved in a service or project in the long run.

Publicly funded learning and training activities (e.g. courses offered by the public employment agencies and relevant ministries) and a broad variety of existing online and onsite training offered by NGOs and other agencies were found useful by the SEMPRES project partners. Depending on the needs of the service users and the theme of the micro project, the learning activities ranged from language courses, handicrafts, writing a CV and improving IT skills to fundraising, (social) entrepreneurship, business development and sales strategies, project management and leadership. For some micro projects, more specific courses were relevant, such as cooking and hygiene in the case of Liepa Coffee Shop.

Several project partners designed their own learning courses and training, responding to the needs of the service users and relevant to their micro projects. For instance, a course for social entrepreneurs has been developed by Coompanion, Sweden. It consists of 15 comprehensive workshops, each focusing on a different theme, from leadership and cooperative values to customers, marketing and selling norms. Another example is the Diaconal Centre Liepaja, Latvia, which has developed a course for support and assistance personnel. The course provides basic knowledge on how to support people with disabilities, including medical and psychological aspects. It is primarily targeted at people with disabilities who would like to become "support people", as well as relatives of people with disabilities. The course is run by local professionals.

Of course, if new working methods and approaches are to be applied successfully, social service providers themselves must engage in continuous learning and training. Lectures on empowerment and social entrepreneurship have been delivered to social workers by several project partners. Social service providers have also participated in training on mentoring, supervision and group conflict therapy.

Action learning (see text box) was considered a valuable approach in several of the support activities carried out by the SEMPRES partners, in relation to both service users and service providers.



Tips for success:

- It is important to make sure that learning and training activities are adapted to the needs and possibilities of the service users. For example, consider timing, distance to travel and so on.
- Learning and training activities should be based on the different forms of communication that can work for different people.
- Involve service users in co-creating and running the training and learning activities. The best results can be achieved if training is run by and for service users.
- Encourage learning about empowerment and service users' involvement in order to build up interest, experience and expertise.
- Think about knowledge transfer and power sharing. As Anna Broka, a project partner from Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, says: *"In order truly to work with the empowerment process, the wise group leader will transfer knowledge and encourage the group to take the initiative. Power sharing is important. It is not an easy task for the facilitator, as they should still provide guidance but in a less visible way."*



ENCOURAGE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networks can be defined as the ties between individuals or groups and can take the shape of "formal" networks (e.g. voluntary organisations and associations) or "informal" structures (e.g. family, friends and leisure groups) (Afridi, 2017). In evaluative interviews with the SEMPRES project partners, it was emphasised that local networks gave people a way to practice voluntary work and share their time, knowledge and skills with people who could benefit from this. The feeling of empowerment and making an impact was mutual.

By sharing information, peer-like interactions and mutual support, social networks help strengthen ties and build trust within a group, which are important preconditions for the success of any user-driven initiative. Further, social networks can strengthen the community feeling of belonging, which in turn increases people's commitment, engagement and motivation to get involved in

Participants of the SEMRE Mid-Term Conference in Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: © Urmas Roos



Action learning as an overarching support framework for service users engagement

Action learning (AL) is a type of participatory research that is grounded in the core values of human rights, social justice, the dignity and worth of persons. AL deliberately sets out to create social change and is conducted in collaboration with and for those taking the action. AL endorses interaction and social dynamics and is characterized by the incorporation of stakeholders as co-researchers and co-subjects in the entire process. Its process consists of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and moving into a new planning phase (*Reason and Bradbury, 2008*). A key principle of AL is that it is grounded in lived experiences and addresses concrete problems and challenges.

Action learning was used as an overarching support framework for carrying out the activities in the SEMPRES project by several project partners and could be a relevant approach to use in other projects and contexts as well. AL can be applied in all stages of the service development process (read more about how to apply AL in practice in the the SEMPRES Guidebook for Empowerment Training).



Meeting of the micro project “Locally Produced Joy in Life” in Korsholm, Finland. Photo: © Ann-Britt Pada

a project or initiative. The youth group in Varde, Denmark, is a good illustrative example of this. Anette Nielsen, project partner from University College South Denmark, explains: *“The young people are using the strength of their network to arrange activities for others in need so it becomes possible for them to change their self-image and be part of the group or form a new network. For example, the young people have arranged a farm holiday for both Danish and ethnic minority single parents. This has created new networks among the participants and some of those who took part joined the group afterwards.”* Here, the Varde community has benefitted from the social capital that has grown because of the engagement of the youth group in community matters. User-led social networks have an important function for vulnerable groups in society through providing psychological, emotional, social and practical support. These networks are also important for building users’ self-confidence, creating engagement and building trust in the group, which can spur the development of other activities and initiatives. These networks contribute to empowerment on a group level (read more in chapter 2). One example of such user-led networks is the so called “self-help groups” that are formed by

service users with shared experiences and take into account the impairments that people have and the barriers they may face. Several self-help groups were established as part of the micro projects in the SEMPRE project. Here, social networks bring participants together to provide and exchange services such as childcare and other forms of support (e.g. teaching, learning and sharing) and welfare.

Four rural local authorities in Latvia set up support groups to provide organised help for people in need. The groups are composed of people with disabilities and their relatives, who help each other solve everyday problems such as arranging a lift to the doctor’s surgery or borrowing a wheelchair. In the County of Plön, Germany, a self-help group for the long-term unemployed called “Wirkstatt” was formed. The group’s members set their own agenda and objectives (e.g. setting up a mediation body with the local job centre), which they pursued with support from social service providers.

A number of volunteers were trained as to provide assistance to ex-offenders in Ida-Viru and Lääne-Viru Counties in Estonia. This service plays an important role in helping ex-offenders reintegrate in society, find accommodation and a job, and so on. The idea for the service stems from

ex-offenders' need for social contact and someone to guide them and help them become accustomed to a life of freedom.

Local networks were also seen as crucial in working with single parents. Mindaugas Kairys, a project partner from Lutheran Diaconia, Lithuania, says: *“Creating space for single parents to talk and share experiences was needed in Jurbarkas. The project enabled connections between people who wanted a change. They can now start making that change. Now they know where to get the support. In the long-term, we hope to create a ‘club’ where single parents can come together and get support and professional training on management and entrepreneurship.”*



Tips for success:

- Provide a safe space for respectful dialogue. Joint activities that participants experience as relevant or meaningful, preferably on a regular basis, are an incentive to participate and get engaged. Offering a mix of formal and less formal meetings with varied agendas could increase motivation for service users to participate. The real issue however, is that end users are involved in networks, on equal terms, in organising, decision-making and financial matters.
- Social service providers should be careful not to take over too much control of the process of network building and only provide as much help as is needed. It is advisable that service providers start with a more active involvement and then reduce their involvement incrementally.
- Let the service users decide themselves if they would like to continue their network in an informal manner or develop into NGOs or other formalised organisational forms. If the network is less formal, it does not mean that it has a less empowering effect on the service users. Doris Scheer, a project partner from Diaconie of Schleswig-Holstein, says: *“It is important to realise that various kinds of networks are needed. Some people do not want to participate if too much formal and official involvement is expected of them; others want regular and established activity.”*



REACH OUT TO EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The power of people-to-people contact goes beyond the inner circle network composed of the service users and service providers. Projects and initiatives have a bigger chance of long-term success if they are anchored in a good network of local or even national partners. Creating connections and reaching out to external stakeholders – such as public authorities, business networks, non-commercial organisations and the local community – plays a crucial role in developing a self-sustaining initiative. This collaboration can open up new avenues for funding and cooperation and facilitate the sharing of power and responsibility.

Local authorities and their networks can play an important role. They may offer access to available premises free of charge, as in case of the Tailor Cooperative in Sweden. In Harkujärve in Estonia, an empty church was taken over and given new life and meaning as a community centre. In Rakvere, also in Estonia, a local church provided meeting facilities and support in organising handicraft lessons and training courses for parents and their children with autism spectrum disorder. The local authorities in southern Estonia also helped find transport solutions.

In addition, engaging volunteers can bring meaningful results. For instance, the Harkujärve Community Centre benefitted from the involvement of a number of volunteers when it was renovating and setting up community church activities. Today, the community centre provides babysitting and day care services to children with severe and profound disabilities, and support person services to their families, as well as other activities that increase the well-being of the local community (e.g. language courses, dancing lessons, gardening and concerts).

The involvement of a broad network of actors via Local Empowerment Networks (LENs) is an integral part of the SEMPRES project logic (read more in Chapter 3). Forming an LEN is seen as a way to mobilise a number of important stakeholders. Cooperation within the framework of LEN has been appreciated by the stakeholders themselves, who might not necessarily get an opportunity to meet otherwise – even though they are operating in the same geographical area and with the same user groups.

LEN cooperation yielded positive results in establishing a migrant-driven tailor cooperative in Luleå, Northern Sweden. Mobilising a broad net-



What do SEMPRES partners say about Local Empowerment Networks?

“The stakeholders are relevant because they are a wider audience and a multiplier. LENs are useful for anchoring the projects.”

“Involving LEN in the project makes the stakeholders more supportive of the end-product.”

work of committed actors involved in the process was among the key factors for its success. The LEN was set up with stakeholders who had a mutual interest in supporting migrants on their way towards self-sufficiency and employment. The network brought together the local government in Luleå, the Swedish Public Employment Service, civil society actors and the service users – a group of unemployed women from various countries outside Europe. Today, the actors in the LEN continue to support the tailor cooperative, both financially and by other means.

Tips for success :

- The establishment of Local Empowerment Networks is one of the approaches tested in the SEMPRES project that has proved to bring positive results in the long-term and that can be copied by other local and regional service providers (read more in Chapter 3).
- In the experience of the SEMPRES project partners, the early involvement of various relevant stakeholders makes them more supportive of the end product. As a result, it may be useful to identify those key stakeholders who could be important to engage or reach out to, before or during the service development process (e.g. by conducting a stakeholder analysis and filling in key stakeholders into the Theory of Change or Business Canvas templates). The SEMPRES project partners found this process useful, as it helped them discover what kind of resources were available and could be mobilised in their project's initiatives. Moreover, activities like

completing a Business Canvas template were found to be useful in communicating with external stakeholders, as it meant the project was taken more seriously.

- Increasing collaboration and coordination among the stakeholders could help in identifying linkages and complementarities, as well as service gaps. Even small local authorities can find it difficult to maintain a good overview of all the available social services provided by public, private and third sector organisations. Bringing together different stakeholders with different expertise and knowledge may result in new partnerships and unexpected positive outcomes, a first step towards innovation (see the example in the text box).

BE CREATIVE AND STRATEGIC ABOUT HOW YOU SOURCE FUNDING

Finding funding to carry out activities can be an exhausting task but is essential if the solution is to continue after the pilot phase. While some activities only require a limited amount of funding – for instance, covering the expenses of a meeting – many non-profit initiatives depend largely on outside funding from grants to continue operating. The successful management of non-profit organisations requires the ability to fundraise effectively to finance their activities.

There are different types of funding available for social and non-profit initiatives during different stages of development, both public and private. The service providers are generally well informed about funding opportunities, such as EU structural funds, micro credit loans and support mechanisms for social enterprises in EU member states and business incubator support, as well as national and regional programmes.

Some SEMPRES micro projects have received support from private companies through sponsorship, as well as from philanthropic organisations, foundations and investment funds. Alternative funding is also not to be disregarded – why not try crowd funding (e.g. Kickstarter)? Several foundations, organisations and authorities also provide co-funding support for those participating in EU-funded projects.

In general, the funding possibilities for informal networks are often limited. In most cases, having an established organisational form (e.g. a NGO, a

social enterprise or a cooperative) is a precondition for funding; or, as was the case for the NGO for Afghan refugees in Kokkola, Finland, grants are made available to set one up. Although this requirement has been heavily criticised by the SEMPRES project partners, it is important to acknowledge this general rule. Some exceptions to this general rule are found in Sweden, where “fast cash” (*snabba pengar*) financing is available for individuals and youth groups to organise small-scale activities.



Tips for success:

- Pool financial resources with other service providers to offer some financial support
- Act as door-openers to potential financial supporters: foundations, private sponsors and others

- Act as mentors and offer your office infrastructure to micro projects for a limited time
- Consider different funding possibilities. A piece of general advice is to use a diverse mix of income sources as this helps to lower the risk of dependency on one particular source
- Include potential financiers in the LEN from the start, and activate stakeholders who might be interested or know about ways of obtaining financial support
- Have a clear business plan – the Business Canvas tool may be of great help here. The business plan is a first step to success, as it encourages the identification of potential funding sources during the service-development process. It is also a good way to visualise the project plan, increasing the chances of sourcing funds
- Engage in fundraising training. Writing funding applications is hard work but it is often a necessity and it requires special skills. Grant-writing may also be an empowering experience



World Café on social innovation at the SEMPRES Mid-term Conference in Tallinn, Estonia, Photo: © Urmas Roos

for the service users, especially if the outcome turns out to be positive. Several partners in the SEMPRES project participated in training in fundraising and grant-writing. For instance, the LEN in Dithmarschen in Germany organised a workshop on fundraising for one of its micro projects. A professional fundraiser explained the concept of fundraising, fundraising strategies and first steps into practical implementation. This workshop also included issues around legal and informal organisational forms that are relevant for fundraising activities.



FACILITATE MENTORING

Mentoring can be described as a process of individual training, guiding and supporting a mentee by an experienced mentor (Ross-Sheriff & Orme, 2017). Mentoring schemes focus on personal growth and skills development as a means of addressing disadvantage and exclusion.

In the SEMPRES project, mentorship was used for giving guidance and advice, providing practical support, engaging in problem-solving and enhancing empowerment.

Mentoring was assigned a particular importance in work with young migrants in Varde, Denmark, where an experienced social worker served as a mentor for a group of young people from ethnic backgrounds. She has been a mentor, a role model and a support person for the youth group for more than two years. She gives the young people more and more responsibility and they now run some of the activities.

In Liepa, Latvia, the mother of a child with intellectual disability (a social worker herself) was involved as a mentor for other mothers in the area. This mum/mentor was a good source of information and knowledge about different social, support and child care services available for children with disabilities and their parents. Being both an end user and a mentor was found to be more effective and personal than inviting a social worker to take on the role. It also made it easier to create a supportive environment and the mum/mentor's experience was empowering for the group.

In Plön, Germany, service users (the long-term unemployed) took part in a mentoring programme to become leaders and mentors themselves. This meant they were trained to perform specific tasks within the framework of the micro project.

For example, three service users were trained as spokespeople for the group and representatives for the project at press conferences, workshops or other events. Others were trained as leaders for the group and other organisational tasks. A group member who had special knowledge of these tasks and the manager of a local social service provider acted as mentors in this case.

A training firm providing professional mentoring and coaching was involved in working with refugees in Nordfriesland, Germany. The aim was to facilitate access for this group to the regional labour market. The participants worked out structures for a company. Supported by two lecturers/mentors they then learned and implemented the operational procedures. The participants tried their hand in the different departments (e.g. stores, sales, purchasing) and benefitted by gaining knowledge, skills and experience in commercial areas and in the tourism industry.



A practical example of the importance of collaboration

One of the many examples of the value of collaboration across stakeholders comes from Korsholm, Finland. In working with older adults and social service providers in the area, the SEMPRES project partners realised that although there are various social events and get-togethers organised for the older adults in the municipality, the information about them does not always reach the service users. Also, there is a limited knowledge about available offers among the social service providers themselves. This finding pointed to the need for a closer collaboration among the service providers and coordination of their efforts, which resulted in developing a calendar of events (digital and printed) as a micro project. The calendar combines activities that are offered in the municipality that enhances cooperation and allows for a better coordination and planning among the service providers (e.g. in adjusting the timing of services), among other things.



Tips for success:

- Engage service users (or former ones) as mentors or role models
- Make sure that both sides (mentor and mentee) are committed to the process and the relationship is based on trust and engagement
- Finding the right mentor might not be easy! Look for qualities like patience, perceptiveness, optimism, emotional intelligence and self-awareness, along with skills in building relationships, communicating, coaching and teaching (*Boddy, 2012*).



MAKE USE OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

The impact of media and communication in contemporary society cannot be underestimated. The media offers a powerful tool that can be used to communicate with large audiences, raise awareness and engage them in change and making a difference.

Media involvement can be useful during different stages of developing initiatives, starting with advertising to attract service users to local workshops. In the rural settings of SEMPRE's Local Empowerment Networks, local newspapers and radio were generally found to be more useful media channels than the mass media and social media.

Furthermore, the media can be a useful tool for raising awareness and drawing attention to the sensitive issues in the society, and even changing perceptions of specific groups in public opinion. Ex-offenders and migrants, for instance, are often labelled as problematic groups. Their difficulties may be compounded by prejudice and social stigma. Clearly, there is no quick fix, but part of the solution is to educate the authorities and the general public. Articles and media interviews are among the tools that can help to tackle prejudice, distrust and discrimination, and these have been used by SEMPRE partners working with ex-offenders, migrants and the long-term unemployed.

Media attention may have an empowering effect on the service users. For instance, the participants in a micro project, "Wirkstatt", in the county of Plön, Germany, and the members of a youth group in Varde, Denmark, were asked to give interviews to the local newspaper and talk about their life situations and the activities of the micro projects. Being acknowledged and noticed by the media contributed to raising the service users' self-esteem and self-awareness, and was important in increasing motivation and engagement in the activities. It also created awareness of the actual activities by advertising the micro projects.

Several micro projects used the media both as a support tool and as an end result. In Nordfriesland, Germany, a bilingual website and newspaper were developed as an outcome of a micro project with refugees. The articles are written in both Arabic

Stress relief balls produced by a micro project in Estonia. Photo: © Urmas Roos



and German and the newspaper is available in print and online. Having an online platform and newspaper has an empowering effect on the service users, as it gives them an opportunity to make their voices heard, while at the same time providing them with an opportunity to connect with other members of the community and contributing to intercultural understanding.

In Kokkola and Pietarsaari, Finland, the migrants were involved in producing short films in which they told stories of their experiences of living in a rural area in Finland. These short films are now used by providers of social services as a support tool to educate new migrants about Finnish society.



Tips for success:

- When trying to reach service users, find out what media they typically use
- Think about combining digital and traditional communication channels (e.g. work with social media and articles in a local newspaper)
- Use media and communication channels that are suitable for specific groups of service users.



STUDY VISITS

Learning from good practices can be motivating. Learning from good practice can be motivating, inspiring and educational. Study visits can be useful support tools in further developing projects or initiatives. During a study visit, you can ask practical questions, learn about how certain challenges were overcome and learn new skills. Both social service providers and service users who have participated in study visits to other project partners found the experience inspiring and enlightening. One SEMPRES project partner noted that study visits provided good input on organisational issues, inspiration for product and service development, and valuable contacts.

MONITOR AND EVALUATE

Monitoring and evaluation (or follow-up on and assessments of) activities and their results, is necessary. Evaluation helps to assess whether the original aims and objectives defined during the planning stages of the service development process were achieved. It helps to identify what

can be improved and how to avoid pitfalls in the future and can be used to celebrate success (recognising the achievements and contributions of the service users and other staff members). Funding bodies often demand evaluations and they help motivate stakeholders to continue supporting an activity. Feedback and evaluation can give service users and service providers the possibility of exerting real influence on the product /service. Better utilisation of existing monitoring and evaluation methods can be a good way to describe/ highlight the impact of an initiative, which may in turn make it easier to attract clients and/or funding. It is a way to identify skills gaps, detect communication challenges or give feedback to each other.

An example of an evaluation conducted within micro projects in the SEMPRES project was the evaluation strategy adopted by the micro project Guest at School in the secondary school in Korsholm, Finland. The evaluation was conducted as three separate focus group interviews with three groups of stakeholders, including service users, service providers and management. The outcome of the evaluation included suggestions for development from the perspectives of different stakeholders. The outcome was very positive, and the evaluative findings motivated a third party to become engaged in the facilitation of the activities developed within the SEMPRES project on a nationwide scale.

Some of the empowerment tools that were presented in chapter 4 can also be used for evaluation purposes. For example, the business model canvas or theory of change template can be used by the group to monitor its own progress, identify loose ends and celebrate milestones that have been reached.



Tips for success:

- Involve service users in the design of the evaluation and the choice of tools
- When working with questionnaires, use language that is easy to understand
- Be mindful about time resources (service users may be volunteers – single mothers in the AllDi Group/ Dithmarschen are full time employees)
- Be clear about the purpose of the evaluation.
- Be transparent about the evaluation results. (Who owns them? How do they impact?)



The SEMPRES partnership at a project meeting in Esbjerg, Denmark

06 Concluding remarks

The SEMPRES project provided tools and methods to work with empowerment and service users' involvement in service design in rural areas of the Baltic Sea Region. What we have learned during this three-year journey is that empowerment and user involvement are long-term change processes and not *ad hoc* or one-off approaches. This transformation not only relates to individual behaviour, work practice, management and organisational change but also impacts on societal structures (the social capital of communities, for instance). It is a long journey and can be a bumpy road at times – therefore it is important to pause and remind yourself why you are doing it (have clear aims and objectives) and why it is so important.

Regardless of the tools chosen, continuity and commitment to the process are key. There is no right or wrong in this process and you can explore different practices, methods and tools, as long as you keep to the key principles for service-user involvement, which are: support and access.

Fostering service-user involvement can mean many things. Support could range from adapting a meeting structure to make it better suited to service users (without jargon and easily understood) to building confidence and skills, as well as offering practical help (for example, for people who need physical assistance).

Another essential element for service-user in-

volvement is access. Access means that service users' opinions should be valued, and their voices allowed and listened to. They should be ensured access to organisations and decision-making structures and have a real say in them (Beresford, 2013). This means that it is crucial that empowerment and user involvement are taken seriously. If user involvement is mere lip-service, it may result in frustration and disempowerment (Beresford, 2013; Blow, 2008) – the opposite of its genuine intention: to be liberating, participatory and appreciative.

A final remark: if you want to learn more about the many examples of micro projects that are mentioned in this handbook, you will find a compilation of all micro projects on the project website. And if you or your organisation would like to dig deeper into the concepts of empowerment and end-user involvement and start putting it into practice, we recommend that you have a look at the Roadmap for Organisations and the SEMPRES Guidebook for Empowerment Training. Both of these publications can be found at:

www.sempre-project.eu

Together we can reach our goal – let's make empowerment happen!

The SEMPRES partnership wishes you a rewarding empowerment journey!

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Endnotes

1 <http://www.sempre-project.eu>

2 <https://www.utu.fi/fi/yksikot/ffrc/kehittamispalvelut/futuresfocus/Documents/futures-workshops.pdf>

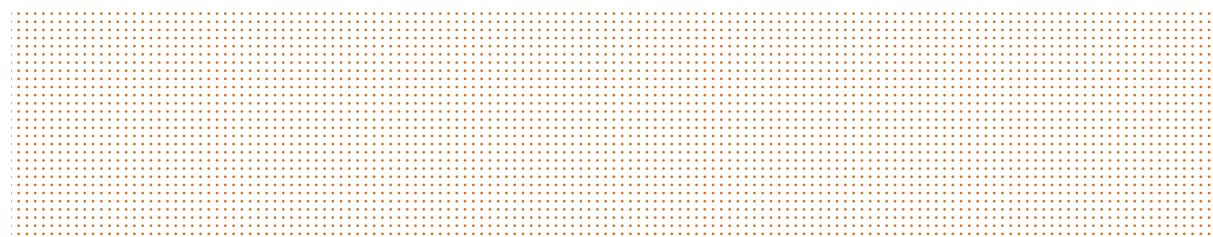
3 Appreciative inquiry (AI) is part of an action research approach. It is rooted in the idea of positivity as opposed to more traditional research methods that focus on deficits or problem-solving. AI begins by identifying something positive about the situation, something that energises people and that they most care about, in order to produce and sharpen a vision and inspire action for change.

4 <https://diytoolkit.org/tools/theory-of-change/?cn-reloaded=1>

5 <https://strategyzer.com/>

6 <http://www.socialbusinessmodelcanvas.com/wp-content/uploads/SBMC-v2.png>

7 <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/Design%20methods%20for%20developing%20services.pdf>



MORE SEMPRES PUBLICATIONS:

The **Roadmap for Organisations** is meant to be used by leaders of organisations in the social sector. It provides inspiration and guidance to implement user involvement as an organisational practice.

www.sempre-project.eu/roadmap

The **SEMPRE Guidebook for Empowerment Training** describes training modules that were jointly developed and piloted in several SEMPRES partner regions. It can be used for inhouse trainings and education of future social workers in empowerment and user involvement.

www.sempre-project.eu/training

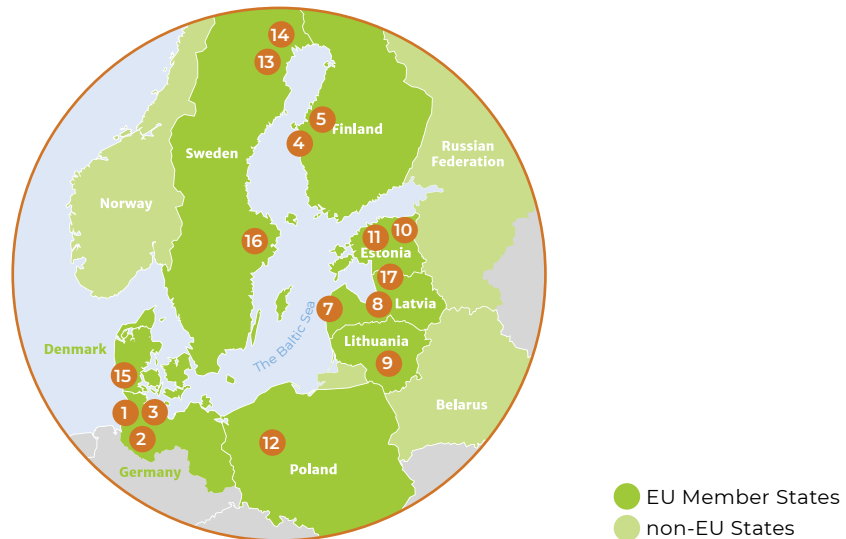
The **compilation of micro projects** that were initiated in the Local Empowerment Networks of the SEMPRES project shows the variety of user-driven initiatives and the value of co-creation in service design.

www.sempre-project.eu/micro-projects

The **SEMPRES policy recommendations** address policy makers in the fields of social affairs, regional development and innovation. They highlight the importance of promoting social innovation and listening to marginalised groups, particularly in rural areas.

www.sempre-project.eu/recommendations

THE SEMPRES PARTNERSHIP



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



How can we build empowering environments that value the experiential knowledge of service users and foster the co-production of innovative and sustainable services? This handbook builds upon three years of cooperative work in the transnational project SEMPRE and provides practical advice and inspiration for everyone who works with and within social services.

