
Evaluation Report

Methods and Results

Internal Report

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1. Evaluations – an Introduction

This evaluation report aims to be a tool for internal use, illustrating, enhancing and assessing project activities. Moreover, it aims to be an input to several further project outputs and a basis for the dissemination of results. The latter includes, among others, scientific publications and third-party conferences focusing on themes and topics relevant for the SEMPRE project, within education, and for presentations held at the final project conference.

Today, there is an overwhelming amount of literature dealing with, describing and advising on different methods and strategies of evaluation to be implemented under different circumstances.

Regardless of the theoretical or practical field where an evaluation is planned or executed, most approaches have a few features in common: they stress **strategies that enable a thorough, in-depth assessment or determination of the nature, merits, worth or value of whatever the evaluation is about**. Therein, the evaluation may focus on either something or someone, as well as the actions, interventions or quality of whatever objective the evaluation concentrates on.

EVALUATIONS ARE A “CAREFUL RETROSPECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE MERIT, WORTH, AND VALUE OF ADMINISTRATION, OUTPUT AND OUTCOME /.../ WHICH IS INTENDED TO PLAY A ROLE IN FUTURE PRACTICAL ACTION SITUATIONS”.

Source: Vedung, 1997

The project application of SEMPRE initially specified that the evaluation of empowerment tools was primarily to focus on goal fulfilment with respect to **needs assessment, service innovation and entrepreneurial support**. The evaluation was to focus on the **effectiveness** of the tools as well as their **applicability** in different contexts, and their **usability** for social-service provider staff and end users. The evaluation methodology was also intended to be process-orientated, incorporating methods and focus groups.

Moreover, the SEMPRE project was also particularly aimed at the evaluation of micro projects. This evaluation activity was designated to focus on the **performance of micro projects** in terms of developing new or enhancing existing social services for disadvantaged groups.



2. Evaluation Strategies

The questions to be posed before any evaluative task are the following:

What is to be evaluated?

What aspect(s) of the input are included in the evaluation? How can it/ they be measured?

What are the evaluation criteria, i.e. what are the criteria of achieved goals? How can they be measured?

What other plausible conditions affect the result/ outcome?

How will the evaluation be conducted? What means of data collection will be used?

How will the collected data be distributed between partners: who is to do what?

For what purpose is the evaluation conducted? What is the intended use of its results?

Literature focussing on evaluations usually differentiates between different strategies of evaluation. Without attempting to include all strategies here, we highlight a few of those most frequently used within the realm of social and public evaluation, concentrating mainly on those strategies included in the SEMPRE project plan and application.

2.1. Goal Attainment Evaluation

The main issues to address in goal attainment evaluation are:

Were the results of project activities due to the project, i.e. was the outcome caused by the project – or were the results perhaps the result of any other (simultaneously) occurring factor(s)?

Moreover, we may be interested in a broader set of outcomes and outputs, including those that were not the main purpose of the project.

Were the results within the target area of the project – or did the project result in outcomes that were either positively or negatively associated with the project, yet not within the focus/target area of the project?

Finally, goal-oriented evaluations are often as interested in the effectiveness of the input with respect to outcome as in the outcome itself. Therefore, the last main question to be included is:

Were the results relative to the input? Was the result sufficient when compared to the time, money, effort etc. put into the activity in order to achieve the result? Or was it a very costly or time-consuming process resulting in only minor outcomes?

The evaluations of the SEMPRE project are largely based on the so-called basic goal attainment model illustrated as follows:

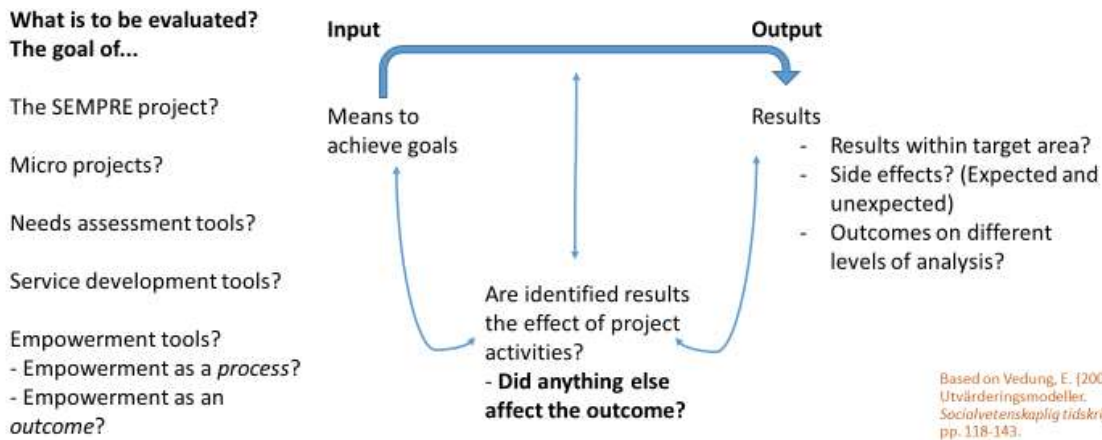


Figure 1. Evaluation of SEMPRE project activities.

2.1.1. Results and Outcomes

In terms of effects and outcomes, it may be of crucial interest to differentiate between results (including all effects, outputs and outcomes) that are intended, i.e. those results that a project / intervention / programme is designed to deliver, and those unintended results that may occur, both positive and negative. In addition, we are often anticipating side effects, both positive and negative, although they were not considered as main outputs or outcomes. In addition, (side-) effects may not have been foreseen at all times.

By intended effects and outcomes, we here focus on those outcomes that we intended to achieve by implementing a certain strategy, or by developing and presenting an empowerment tool. By not intended effects and outcomes, we focus on outcomes that we did not think of nor imagine would surge out of the activity or the project.

In the figure below, we differentiate between goal-oriented outcomes (intended, unintended and secret goals, the latter being extremely hard to identify, of course); and side effects which may not have been the main focus or target of the activity, but nevertheless may add to the value of a project.

In projects like SEMPRE, it not uncommon that targeted interventions of the project produce both expected and unexpected side effects, for instance in terms of interventions relating to end users and their family members (new opportunities outside the realm of the project activities); participating service providers (for instance in terms of new ideas for development of new activities or as new ways of operating); or in the surrounding community.

Outcomes

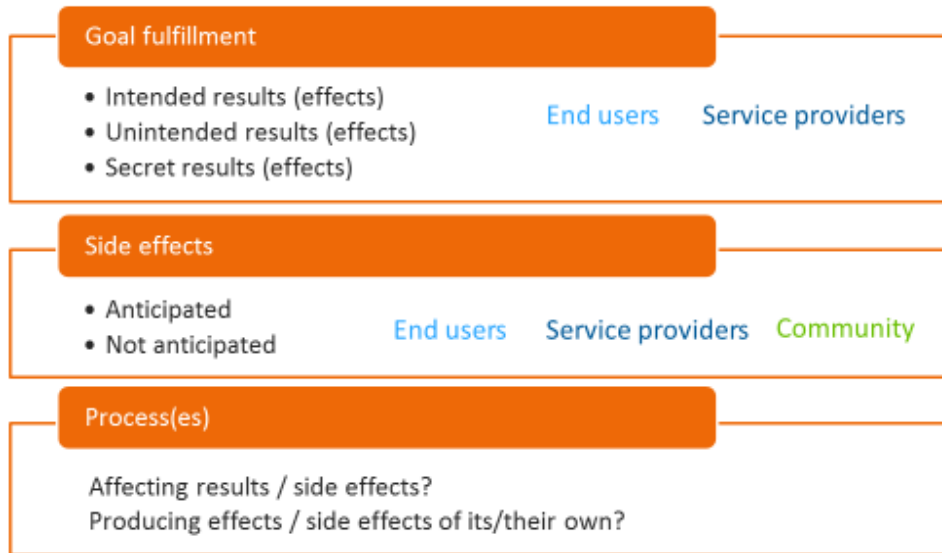


Figure 2. Differentiation of outcomes of SEMPRE-project activities.

2.2. Process Evaluations

Process evaluations are usually used as a collective term for evaluations focussing on the processes of a project, intervention or similar. The starting point is that the processes themselves shape effects and outputs, as much as the interventions or activities that are the main focus of the evaluative efforts.

Evaluations focussing on processes are usually intended to answer questions about project **operations, implementation** and **service delivery**.

2.3. User-Oriented Evaluations

User-oriented evaluations focus on the end-user perspective. In the SEMPRE project we have focussed on quite different end users as groups: service providers; individual people in the focus of a policy/intervention; etc.

The main questions for the evaluator to address before conducting a user-oriented evaluation are:

Who is the user of services in the focus of the evaluation?

What is the users' experience of the project, its activities or tools?



2.4. Data Collection Methods

Generally speaking, research guides and literature distinguish between four different data collection methods: interviews; questionnaires; documents; and observations. Sometimes, experiments are also included as a fifth data collection method, however experiments are rather rare in humanities and social sciences, in part because of a multitude of ethical questions raised when studying people, interaction and activities in society.

Here, focussing on the main data collection methods:

- (1) **Interviews** can be both individual, group or focus group interviews. Moreover, an interview can be either highly structured (including only predefined optional answers to specific questions) or open ended (containing only a few questions or themes to discuss in depth) – or something in between.

Sometimes, an informal discussion without a specified theme can also be considered an interview. However, informal, open-ended discussions often encounter ethical problems if the aim of the discussion has not been clarified to the interviewee in advance. In addition, the interviewer and evaluator may run into practical problems in terms of gaining results that do not answer to evaluative purposes. Therefore, we have not included results based on informal discussions here.

- (2) **Questionnaires** / surveys are typically used when there are too many respondents for interviews, when interviewees are geographically too distant to enable comparable interviews, or when the aim is to gather easily comparable data to be analysed with quantitative methods. Moreover, surveys may also be quite appropriate if the questions to be asked are easy to reply to, or when they include features that a person is likely to feel uncomfortable speaking about. Like interviews, questionnaires may contain questions that are both highly structured and questions that are open ended.
- (3) **Documents** include all written documents that may be used as a basis for evaluations, for example books, protocols, diaries, etc. Moreover, “documents” as a data collection also include any recorded sources; like music, illustrations, pictures, movies, artefacts that are “documented”, etc. In other words, documents are typically sources that can be re-examined or reused.
- (4) **Observations** can also be used as a data collection method, and in some instances, observations can be an invaluable method of gaining insight, for instance into issues that not even the observed person is aware of. However, similar to informal discussions, observations are paired with a number of ethical considerations, and they are not very easy to conduct as an answer to the evaluative needs of this project. Therefore, evaluative efforts based on observations are not included in this report.



2.5. Levels of Evaluation

Similar to many other studies within the realm of behavioural and social sciences, evaluations can focus on different levels of assessment. Basically, any intervention / programme / project including humans and societies can be studied on three levels:

- (1) **the individual level**
- (2) **the organisational level**, inasmuch as the activities in focus include any kind of organisation
- (3) **the societal level**, i.e. societies that shape the context of any given person and organisation

Focussing on contextual boundaries, the effects of any output may be studied both on a local level, a regional level and a national level. Naturally, some interventions/ programmes/ projects tend to be considered effective on only one of the levels – even when the outcome may have some (intended or unintended) effects on other levels than the main level of intended outcome.

3. Empowerment

The focus of the SEMPRES evaluations is empowerment. In the Empowerment Handbook, produced by the SEMPRES project, we take our starting point in the fact that empowerment is perceived both as a desirable **process**, and as a desirable **outcome**. It aims at encouraging people to discover their own strengths and increase their own authority and control over resources and decisions that they feel are important to themselves, and that affect their lives.

EMPOWERMENT IS “A PROCESS OF AWARENESS RAISING AND CAPACITY BUILDING AND ENABLES GREATER PARTICIPATION, GREATER DECISION-MAKING POWER AND GREATER CONTROL AND TRANSFORMATIVE POWER”.

Source: Abbott, Wallace and Sapsford, 2016

The underlying idea of the SEMPRES project is that **empowerment is enhanced by end-user participation** in different activities, stages and work packages of the SEMPRES project. Hence, our understanding of participation includes **participatory methods of social services** for those individuals concerned.

In the SEMPRES project, an end user is defined as “a resident and user of a social service” (see Empowerment Handbook). In our project, the end users are the following: single parents; older adults; people with disabilities; disadvantaged youth; families with children with special needs; former prisoners; the long-term unemployed; refugees; asylum seekers; and migrants.



Service providers, on the other hand, are those public, private or third sector organisations that provide social services for different end users in society.

Moreover, the focus of the SEMPRE project is the **development of new or improved public services to better address social needs**.

Finally, the question of “why” we are interested in “empowerment” and why we should focus on the participatory aspects of end users in the process of empowerment are of interest. Professor Aila-Leena Matthies summarised the advantages of participation (public SEMPRE-lecture, Vaasa 14.3.2018) by stressing that **participation and inclusion are crucial to enable access to a full and decent life. Participation empowers individuals as full members of society**. In contrast, a lack of participation can deepen the experience of marginalisation and hinder inclusion.

In the following, we aim at addressing different evaluative angles of the empowerment tools applied in the SEMPRE-project. These tools include process-oriented evaluations, goal attainment and user-oriented evaluations of needs assessment, as well as evaluations of service development and support tools.

4. Needs Assessment Tools

Needs assessments are usually conducted to answer questions about the (social) conditions a project, programme or intervention is designed to address. Initially, the SEMPRE project agreed during initial project meetings to focus primarily on four needs assessment tools: The Backpack Method; Participatory Rapid Appraisal; The Future Workshop Method; and Logical Framework Analysis. In addition to these, other tools, such as the Problem and Solution Tree, Action Research Frameworks, statistical data, focus group interviews and combined methods were also used by partners in combination with one or several of the tools used above. For a more detailed description of these, including advantages and disadvantages of the different tools, see **Empowerment Handbook**.

In brief, during the **evaluation interviews** focussing on micro projects together with the project partners’ LEN-coordinators, **the use of the future workshop method, interviews and conferences were mentioned as productive ways of working with end users**. The information gathering was perceived to be effective and the tools provided a chance to empower both end users and local partners. Therein, the feeling and experience of participation was vital to the process.

An active use of different empowerment tools was also considered to **engage co-partners and end users** to the project. Moreover, tools used in various stages of projects were taken into practical use by external partners and associations.



The use of needs assessment tools made it possible to exchange experiences, and further refine the new learnings, into new practices. The opportunity of gaining new, unexpected ways of working was possible when people gathered to generate new ideas and had a prospect to discuss and share their problems.

4.1. Partner Questionnaires

In partner questionnaires distributed to all project partners, it was clear that not all needs assessment tools had been used as frequently as others. The future workshop method had been used the most frequently, whereas participatory rapid appraisal and logical framework analysis had been used only rarely.

In many instances, partners had also opted for different data collection methods and strategies than the tools identified in the earlier stages of the SEMPRES-project, primarily as supplementary forms of gaining a better insight into the needs expressed by end-user groups. Such supplementary methods were questionnaires, individual and focus-group interviews, action research and participatory research.

4.1.1. The Future Workshop Method

Due to its many strengths, the future workshop method was used as a needs assessment tool by many partners working with different end-user groups. It was a safe method that worked well with end users who were not known to the co-ordinators and stakeholders. The method enabled end users to work intensively and talk openly about their problems and challenges in life. The future workshops method enabled a process to begin where ideas for practical implementation could be constructed.

“The future workshop tool is very suitable for carrying out a needs assessment. At the end of the process you get concrete results upon which further work can be built.”

- LEN Coordinator

The future workshop method is a democratic tool that encourages participation. In the SEMPRES context it provided an opportunity for end users to describe their own needs according to their own framework settings. The method enabled service providers to distinguish the problems that needed to be solved.

The future workshop method was also used in relation to the stakeholders as “target-oriented brainstorming” events. Therein, the future workshop method was particularly useful when applied during the first come-together with the project stakeholders as well as when using the knowledge of all stakeholders to develop accurate results; giving the end-user group the opportunity to choose the framework of the discussion; and in giving end users a chance to define their needs related to the



problems they identified themselves. However, participants often wanted more time for some of the questions.

During the process, valuable information about the real-life situation of the participants was received and many of the service providers were positive about the process itself and the outcome of the method. They had not expected to have the concrete results that they actually received through use of the future workshop method.

In a few cases, individual interviews were also conducted to complement the future workshop method. These individual interviews helped to build trust between the partners and participants. The future workshop method seemed quite understandable and applicable when working with single parents and people who had had substance addictions in the past, for example.

4.1.2. The Backpack Method

Besides the future workshop method mentioned above, the backpack method was also used by many partners. This method seemed to be particularly useful when working with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The backpack method proved to be very beneficial when working together with refugees, because it enabled partners to discuss the time before arriving in the country in a natural way. On the one hand, the method allowed the facilitator to have a look at the resources (human, social, economic etc.) that a person carried with them from their past and, on the other hand, the facilitator could gain an insight into the kind of stressors or burdens a person had before coming to the new country.

In addition, this method allowed the facilitator to assess a person's current situation and the good things they could appreciate from the past, at the same time as they could face the issues which were not so beneficial for the person. The issues that were not beneficial were to be left behind, figuratively speaking, in line with "what to collect in the backpack" and "what to take out of the backpack" and leave behind. Third, the backpack method also addressed issues related to what (else) was needed in order to achieve wellbeing and empowerment (e.g. contacts, education, knowhow).

4.2. Data Collection Methods and Research Strategies

Several other data collection methods and so-called research strategies were also used as needs' assessment tools, including focus group interviews, questionnaires and action research and participatory research, as described in the [Empowerment Handbook](#).

Action research and participatory research helped not only to organise the needs assessments, but also to develop the relationship and sustainable contact with the end-user groups and stakeholders throughout the project. These approaches were established within the community, for example due to a poor attendance of end users in needs-assessment groups, or a lack of time on behalf of the service providers.



In some cases, it was impossible to commit social-service providers to conducting continuous extensive evaluations due to their already heavy workloads. In these cases, it was also obvious that the development of services needs to be an on-going process. Therefore, **action research** could also be argued as a relevant approach, even though it was not included among the needs-assessment tools used in the SEMPRE-project.

Focus group interviews were considered to enable the integration of several different methods, such as the future workshop and backpack methods, deconstructing past experiences, formulating the strengths of participants and opening up the phases of future dreams and ambitions, as well as to debate a possible roadmap to realise those ambitions. The strength of focus group interviews was seen in the fact that it was possible to focus on, for instance, gender-specific issues and other issues relevant to different age groups or other groups participating in the SEMPRE project.

The challenge of focus-group interviews with participants from different countries is that not too many language groups can take part in one focus group. This is due to the number of interpreters required and possible language barriers arising. Interpreters should also be informed in advance about possible concepts or topics.

In addition, one partner also had access to **large-scale survey** data collected among end users and service users in focus. This data gave a comprehensive picture about the needs of a specific end-user group. In addition, aggregated data findings also pointed to the needs of some of the target-group members who had not participated in a needs assessment and development of services themselves.

4.3. Needs Assessment with LEN Partners

In the early phases of the project, focus group interviews were conducted with LEN partners in 11 SEMPRE partner organisations. Therein, LEN partners in the different SEMPRE countries identified a number of risk factors they felt were typical of the end users they were engaged with. Such characteristics were: **unemployment; loneliness; lack of support or supporting networks; a low self-esteem; poor education; low income or poverty; living in distant/remote areas addiction-related problems; physical and mental disabilities.**

Naturally, many of the characteristics were also related to those challenges that service providers encounter when engaging in cooperation with or providing social services to those individuals they felt were potentially vulnerable to marginalisation. Therein, LEN partners were more specific, however, in pointing to problems on different levels, such as illnesses or the lack of a meaningful daily activity or structure, as well as the lack of any demand on the labour market on a structural, societal level.

The **main needs** among the end-user groups that the LEN partner organisations identified were primarily summarised as the following: **working /activity opportunities; possibilities to acquire new professional and/or language skills; income and financial stability; individual counselling; and respect.**



Moreover, in the focus group interviews, LEN partners identified several issues they felt were needed in order for the end-user group they were working with to feel empowered. In addition, LEN partners also identified service areas where the service could better meet the needs of the end-user group. The latter can be summarised in the following:

- **Creating better possibilities for voluntary work (i.e. meaningful tasks) for end users**
- **Providing education / training courses for end-user groups**
- **Strengthening cooperation between organisations** (service providers)
- **Opening up for new solutions** (service providers)
- **Supportive or facilitating activities** (organized by service providers), **including:**
 - social networking**
 - meeting places for end users**
 - activities and spare-time offers**
- **Individual solutions** taking personal preferences and contexts into account

After the needs assessments with the end users had been completed, a follow-up focus group interview, aimed towards evaluating the needs assessment tools in the eyes of the LEN partners, was conducted. Therein, the focus was set on identifying what the LEN partners had learnt from the needs assessment.

In total, 11 partners completed the first focus-group interview, whereas four LEN groups concluded the second focus-group interview. In the following, we will focus on three themes addressed in the second focus-group interview with examples from partners.

4.4. LEN Partners' Learnings of Needs Assessments with Service Users

Four project partners, active in Latvia, Lithuania, Germany and Finland, concluded a second needs assessment focus-group interview with a few additional questions regarding the learnings, usefulness and future perspectives of the needs assessments that had been conducted in the early phases of the project:

What did the LEN partners feel that they had learnt from the needs assessments conducted with end users in the SEMPRE project retrospectively?

Were the needs assessments useful for the initiation of new micro projects and/or services and/or new activities within their organisations?

How did LEN partners think that the learnings of the needs assessment could be used in the future?

In general, LEN partners would make positive statements about learnings and awareness raising, including learning about service users' needs, developing communication and the exchange of



information. Different partners stressed the importance of **participation and inclusion of service users; respect and recognition of service users; reduction of prejudices; and extensions of networks** by means of including service users in the assessment processes.

In addition, the LEN group facilitated by of Lutheran Diaconia in Lithuania also stressed that the standardised needs assessment instruments that are often used in the daily work of service providers do not target the needs that service providers would discover by using open-ended questions and dialogue.

In Latvia, one LEN partner also said that the needs assessment had been crucial in identifying the problems in a precise and concrete sense. When tangible problems were identified, the process continued more smoothly. Here, the engagement of the youth (with Intellectual disabilities) and their parents (carers) also helped share responsibilities in developing trust; the project partner began to organise more events aimed at enhancing socialisation. Therein, the LEN group also expressed learnings about how to think and plan different events to reduce discrimination and social isolation. The communication aspect was very important.

Example

We feel more self-confident when the end users are satisfied with what we are doing. For instance, the young man (age 30) was completely isolated and physically very weak because of improper health care and social care solutions at home, after the car accident. Now he is a student and we are willing to help him to become independent as much as it is possible. We hope to solve the need for a social flat and to see if he could, after the education, start his own business (shoe maker).

- Smiltene municipality

Several LEN groups of several project partners also stressed that the needs assessment tools and activities conducted within the framework of the SEMPRE project developed new approaches that were now included in their organisations. Some LEN partners stressed that the mere concept of empowerment had been novel but was now used in their organisation. One LEN partner also explicitly mentioned that end-user participation was completely new to their daily work; they said that they still worked on their internal capacity and organisational settings – as well as on defining the borderlines in their relationship to the service users and clients – but that they were really happy to see an involvement towards greater empowerment.

Secondly, several new ideas had been developed based on the assessment results. Although not all ideas developed into micro projects, in Latvia, for instance, a change in service provision was initiated in at least six municipalities (*Priekuli, Cesis, Koceni, Valmiera, Alsviki, Valka*). There were several important activities, like the exchange of experience and knowledge, that helped to foster those changes.

With respect to future perspectives, one LEN partner stressed the importance of needs assessments to be conducted more than once, in order to be useful for further work and development. It is also useful to differentiate between needs, to scrutinise the needs and try to create solutions one step at a time. Therein, **time is the main resource** in conducting the work.



Motivation, training and other support tools, including the exchange of experiences, are also very crucial when the aim is to build the self-esteem of service users. It is very important to explain why any action, including a needs assessment, is useful; it may not be clear to all persons involved that needs assessments are made for initiating the change. Therefore, it is also important that both service users and providers agree on the future use and value of conducting needs assessments.

With respect to service users, LEN partners also felt that participants had gained a better understanding of institutional structures through the processes related to needs assessments, along with all **partners involved having gained a better understanding of each other, extended networks and the push for change.**

5. Service Development and Support Tools

By service development tools we refer to tools jointly used by service providers and end users in creating or further developing the project idea or elaborating a framework for a project or a new service in cooperation with the end users. The tools are intended to be useful in structuring, visualising and further developing project ideas. **By support tools**, on the other hand, the SEMPRE project means **tools that aim at building self-efficacy and entrepreneurial competences** of members of target groups and project participants. Primarily, support tools are developed to enable end users to become co-producers of social services and to help ensure the long-term operation of the established solutions. Depending on the solution, the target group and other preconditions, the support tools could include e.g. education, training, self-reflection, networking, mentoring, reaching out to media and inspiring examples.

In the **Empowerment Handbook**, a more detailed description of different tools and partners' experiences of using the different tools is outlined, including advantages and disadvantages of all the above-mentioned tools. Therefore, we do not develop the evaluation of service development and support tools to any greater extent here. However, in the interviews with LEN coordinators regarding micro projects (chapter 7), several partners also pointed out the need for repetition with respect to certain empowerment tools, and that this was also a way to clarify the changing needs of the target groups throughout the process.

Moreover, since the starting point changed with time, some tools needed to be reapplied during the project, and services needed to be adjusted according to changing needs.

With respect to the usefulness of the tools at identifying barriers in implementing services, partners also discovered that the tools were helpful in showing which steps were not helpful for reaching the goals of the (micro) project(s). Nevertheless, the tools offered a possibility to structure the processes into different steps and phases, therein helping to identify barriers (financing, for instance) in the development process.



6. Micro projects

Micro projects are defined as small-scale initiatives implemented at the local level aiming to improve the living circumstances of a target group participating in the SEMPRE project. To be considered as a micro project, initiatives must:

- (1) be initiated at least partly by service users (members of a disadvantaged group).
- (2) react to the specific needs of this disadvantaged group.
- (3) 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.

Initially, two different strategies were developed in order to answer to the evaluation strategies of micro projects: first, an intrapersonal empowerment questionnaire directed at all end users taking part in the micro projects was developed and, second, an interview with LEN coordinators focussing on how well the micro projects initialised within the SEMPRE project answered to the goals set was conducted. In the interviews, questions were also included regarding how processes worked out with respect to the intended results as well as results that were not expected.

6.1. Intrapersonal Empowerment

Our basic mindset of the evaluation of the intrapersonal experience of empowerment was based on the understanding of **empowerment as a process** resulting in a greater sense of wellbeing, including features, and combinations of features, enhancing wellbeing in life: **a sense of influence; meaningful activities; a sense of belonging or being part of a social context outside of family; not feeling lonely; having sufficient economical means; a good (enough) health and; being happy.**

Here, we were not searching for any single feature that, in and by itself, was suggested to have a causal relationship with a person's subjective assessment of empowerment and wellbeing. Instead, we included all features we had found to be associated with the process of empowerment, which was aimed at achieving an increased sense of subjective wellbeing. Therein, we adapted a holistic view of the process of intrapersonal empowerment, focusing on the possibility that **multiple different combinations of causal variables may enhance an intrapersonal empowerment process** and wellbeing.



6.1.1. Participants' Questionnaire

The interpersonal evaluation of micro projects was launched in the beginning of the project. Survey questions and forms were agreed upon and forms were distributed to all partners. Partners were asked to translate the questionnaire into the languages of the end users before handing out the questionnaire or conducting a structured interview based on the forms. In the first round of intrapersonal assessments, the evaluators could identify three main end-user groups: **families with special needs** (n=77), **older adults** (n=30), and **refugees** (n=15).

The needs intrapersonal empowerment evaluation showed that SEMPRE was collaborating with groups of people whose health was mostly good (66%), but who were often outside of working life or fulltime employment (74%). Some SEMPRE participants also experienced daily physical or mental difficulties (30%), whereas others (a total of 46% partially including participants with disabilities) could not participate in activities they wished they could have participated in the beginning of the project. Most of the respondents felt part of a community outside the home (80%), but more than half of the end users did not feel that their service needs were met (55%).

Families with special needs, such as families with children with a disability, felt the least in control of their lives (13%) and the least influential in society (32%). One third of the refugees did not have the economic means to sustain themselves (33%), whereas both older adults (10%) and families with special needs (10%) felt lonely more often than other groups. Roughly one out of four refugees said that they did not have a close friend to discuss important matters with.

Families with special needs often experienced that they had been discriminated against (40%), as had many refugees (27%). Overall, families with special needs most often said that they were happy with their lives (89%), followed by refugees (86%) and older adults (83%).

While different groups might answer and understand questions differently, overall it can be said that the SEMPRE end users had both strengths and challenges when starting the work with the SEMPRE micro projects.

After the micro projects had ended, the initial plan had been to renew the intrapersonal empowerment assessments in order to receive an indication on whether the micro projects had enhanced processes of empowerment or not. However, the second round of intrapersonal questionnaires was much harder to fulfil than the first round. This was due, firstly, to the participants of the micro projects changing throughout the project lifetime. Secondly, there were also linguistic challenges and limitations that the project partners may have underestimated in the early phases of the project. Thirdly, since many project activities were launched a few months after schedule, the time limitations of producing evaluative results limited some partners' opportunities to deliver a second round of intra personal empowerment questionnaires (or interviews). Last, but not least, some of the end-user groups did not feel comfortable answering personal questions regarding health, loneliness, etc. Therefore, we cannot determine for certain whether any of the circumstances of the end-user groups changed during the participation process of a micro project, nor whether the



micro projects themselves where experienced as empowering for the participants in a more objectively defined way.

6.2. Project Partners' View of Goal Fulfilment

The interviews with LEN-coordinators were held in March 2018 in Vaasa, based on the following questions and themes:

1. What was the goal of the micro project?
2. How did you involve the end users in defining the need for the micro project? What did you do?
3. Describe the outcomes of the micro project. Expected outcomes? Short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes? Unexpected outcomes, for end users and/or for service providers? Side effects and unintended outcomes, positive and/or negative?
6. Was the input proportionating to the outcome? (Time, money, human resources, knowledge, etc.)
7. What worked well in the micro-project process? What did not work well?
8. Have you noticed any added value of the micro project when compared to existing services?
9. If you were to conduct a similar micro project, would you do anything differently?
10. Do you believe that this micro project will have an impact on the overarching goal of micro projects to improve the living situation of end users?

In March 2018, interviews were held with LEN coordinators during the Vaasa project meeting. Each partner was asked to focus primarily on one main micro project. This section is therefore based on results deriving from the experience of partners within the framework of 13 micro projects, regardless of the fact that most partners had been engaged in more than one micro project.

6.2.1. Good Practices

In several of the interviews held with LEN coordinators, learning from experience was emphasised as a positive aspect of the project. Partners also found the effects of the micro projects on different levels, on a personal, community/ local and national level.



Learning from Experience

When the SEMPRE project staff participated in micro projects, engaging in close cooperation with service users, they felt that they learnt a lot, both from the users and from the process itself. In the interviews with LEN coordinators, it was also clear that it had been vital to the process that local service providers were included right from the start. **Early involvement** was thus considered essential, and it was stressed that early engagement strengthened the later stages of participation, both for the end user and service provider.

With respect to service providers, **adjusting old ways of working**, based on the needs assessment conducted before the initialisation of micro projects, was also considered as an essential part of developing methods and practices that were suitable regarding the needs of the target groups.

Local Level Outcomes

In the interviews with LEN coordinators, several interviewees considered the influence of the micro projects conducted to be more wide-ranging than expected; **the original end-user group was often able to offer human resources, empowering action, time and funds to others, therein turning into facilitators themselves**. This was considered empowering both for the end users and for the local community.

Several groups of people also learnt from each other. Therein, **cumulative knowledge led to new solutions** with respect to some of the issues that were discussed. In addition, people who needed more personal service were better reached through groups than they were individually.

The close cooperation with local service providers created possibilities and experiences of empowerment. In many cases, **communication and building personal relationships were seen as vital parts of networking and the subsequent stages of service development**.

Organisational and National Level Outcomes

Micro projects, and activities related to them, contributed to **new ways of thinking** on an organisational level. In addition, new concepts and ideas expanded to both local and national organisations.

The dialogue between participants of the SEMPRE project and governmental actors was also considered a vital trait of successful micro projects. Therein, the dialogue ensured that the important issues of the end-users' interests were extended to the national level. At the same time, the importance of the project and issues in focus received national attention. **The micro projects served as a means to change practices on the national level, and they gave a surplus value to the project**.



6.2.2. Networks

One of the aims of the SEMPRE project was to create new networks. Consequently, networks were built both on the local, regional, national and transnational level. These networks commonly served as meeting grounds for individuals, local service providers, end-user groups and governmental actors. Primarily, the networks were built either on the bases of one focus issue or theme, or on the bases of one end-user group's specified needs. Sometimes networks were also formed rather unexpectedly.

Local Networks

Generally speaking, local networks were found to be empowering to the participants, both to the individual end users and organisations. They were seen to provide new opportunities to local people by: **providing information and peer support;**

creating opportunities to learn from each other;

establishing contacts and developing relationships;

developing (new) meaningful activities;

creating new possibilities of (self-)learning;

providing practical help in everyday life; and

creating new job opportunities.

Many local networks started as informal gatherings, even though the aim was to build established, active and effective activity formats. Local networks also gave people an opportunity to conduct voluntary work, and to share their time, knowledge and skills with people who would benefit from the activities. Therein, the **feeling of empowerment and making an impact was mutual** between individuals and organisational actors.

Local groups and their network could answer to the various needs that people expressed and the variety of knowledge within the group of participants could be used efficiently.

The communication and PR work of the local networks were vital. It was essential to plan how to advertise and market micro projects, as well as how to motivate and engage people. Sometimes personal contacts were needed, and sometimes word-of-mouth was an effective strategy to engage participants and communicate information. But sometimes there was also a need for a more structured marketing plan.

The local institutional network was frequently used as **a mediator for information.**

The building of strong local networks **ensured continuity** of the project even after the official project time had ended. Also, more formal and influential networks were established. Their goal was to make an impact and to influence the political level.



In the interviews, it was emphasised that it was important to realise that various kinds of networks are needed to answer to different needs. Some people do not want to participate if there is “too much” formal and official activity, whereas others are interested primarily in regular and formalised activities.

Project co-partners on the local level had proven themselves to be important actors, both in organised activities and as negotiators with the municipality, for instance. Herein, established organisations would often contribute with their knowledge of how things work on the official level, at the same time as they had the skills to work in a more informal setting, like the SEMPRE network.

Regional Networks and National Aspects

Networks were primarily built on the organisational level. Their purpose was to enable more co-operation between local service providers from different sectors aiming at, among other things, finding new networks and new solutions on the regional level.

Being part of a SEMPRE network **contributed to assertiveness when contacting national actors.** Herein, it seemed helpful especially in communicating with “higher” organisational level agents; the fact that SEMPRE consists of a larger international network of organisations also contributed to the authority of a partner organisation in the dialogue with other agents.

6.2.3. Financing

In many cases, financing enabled participation that had not been possible without financial support.

The funds provided by the SEMPRE project were considered vital for both end users and partners in engaging the activities they set out to do. However, some interviewees mentioned that more money would have been helpful in enabling more partners to participate and engage in micro projects and project activities.

On the other hand, many of the social service provision costs of the SEMPRE project were so low, that the funds would have been sufficient to answer the needs of micro projects, training modules and local action, for instance, if resources had only been distributed somewhat more efficiently in the earlier phases of the project.

Therein, financial management could also be considered a skill that is needed on different levels, not only for the purposes of end-user empowerment, but also with respect to other project participants: partner organisations and service providers.



6.2.4. Challenges

The challenges of the SEMPRE project micro-project activities that were pointed out in the interviews mainly fell into two categories; firstly, challenges related to end users and service provision organisations; and secondly, insufficient funds as well as limited human and time resources.

End Users and Organisations

It was considered a challenge to provide services to heterogeneous groups. **The end users had various needs and it was difficult to form a functional group to meet all needs.** Cultural differences also caused challenges: different concepts of time and different interpretations, between end users and project staff, of the importance of commitment to the project were challenging. Effective ways to inform about the project was also a matter to be improved, as well as marketing skills among the project staff. It was considered difficult to find and reach out to end users and more specific target groups. Therein, the ways of motivating end users and scheduling were important issues.

The lack of end-user involvement sometimes also caused limitations in data collection about the impact of the project and its developmental needs; a wider participation would have produced more information.

It was also challenging to find the right balance between the demand of getting organised and keeping a slim organisational structure. The end users didn't consider it necessary to organise in a formal manner, in fact it was considered to be an obstacle for participation; they participated only when the action was considered to be informal. Therein, a dilemma occurred in different interests between the SEMPRE project, requiring organised and structured forms of activities, and the end users, who would only participate in voluntary and informal activities.

Moreover, **motivational factors often played a role in fulfilling the micro-project aims.** For instance, the involvement of the church and other social service providers was difficult if there were conservative attitudes and prejudices about the project and its target groups. Therein, a lack of knowledge about the project and its aims was seen as a challenge in the attempts to involve partners.

Projects were sometimes seen as competitors, not as partners or extra resources for the local social work services.

Continuity of cooperation in the organisations was considered essential in building a functional action. **The circulation of employees was challenging** in this respect; the dependence on only a few people within many different organisations brought vulnerability to micro projects as well as to the SEMPRE-project partners activities, in general.



Financing, time and human resources

A lack of sufficient funding was seen as a hindrance to getting co-partners involved in projects. In addition, the limited time of the Sempre project was seen as a challenge in the project developing into a sustainable organisational form. Also, the challenge between combining low-paid or voluntary work with other tasks was difficult; therein, the availability of human resources was a challenge.

6.3. What's in It for Me?

In some of the micro projects, evaluative interviews were also conducted after the micro project had ended. Below are illustrated the micro-project evaluations of two micro projects, Guest at School and WIRkstatt.

6.3.1. Guest at School – Different Stakeholder Perspectives

Many older adults have an intrinsic knowledge of many arenas of working life, third sector services and voluntary work, as well as household competences that younger persons have not yet learnt or participated in. In the micro project "Guest at School" older adults participated in educational activities in Korsholms högskolestadion, a secondary school in the municipality of Korsholm (Mustasaari), and shared their expert knowledge with pupils. In focus group interviews with stakeholders of the micro project, the concept was considered a win-win situation both for the older adults, the school and the pupils. (See also [Micro Project Brochure](#) for a more detailed description of the micro project.)

Some older adults find it regretful that their knowledge is not valued so much after retirement. At the same time, retirement sometimes comes with alienation from younger generations, which many older adults also find to be unfortunate. In contrast, many younger persons today have only little contact with older adults.

With respect to educational activities, teachers at secondary school usually do not have an extensive experience of working outside of school or in other areas of working life. Therefore, they, too, expressed an interest in the experience that older adults could bring into the educational environment. Pupils expressed an interest in the themes that the older adults were engaged in teaching about, including entrepreneurship, hunting, textile work, voluntary work in distant countries, etc.

However, engaging older adults interested in participating in the early phases of the project appeared to be more time consuming than anticipated. Therefore, it is quite understandable that the school itself was not likely to initiate the project without support from a facilitating third party. Therefore, in order to keep continuity in engaging older adults at school, it is important that the facilitating role was passed on from the SEMPRE project to another actor, whose role is to engage older adults in the future, facilitating the inclusion of older adults also in other schools than the piloting school.



Simultaneously, focus group interviews also resulted in a few practical reflections regarding improving processes of engagement in the educational environment in the future.

6.3.2. WIRkstatt – Benefits of the Micro Project and Continuance

The micro project “WIRkstatt” was interested in finding out more about the long-term unemployed and obtaining an impression of their own view of their life circumstances and problems. In a ‘future workshop’ it was revealed that one of the biggest problems that unemployed people in the rural parts of the county faced, was a lack of social contacts. They felt very lonely, and because of their lack of financial resources they could hardly take part in social and cultural life to make new connections. Thus, as a result of the future workshop, the wish for community development and networking, or a meeting point, was born. Out of this, the WIRkstatt was founded.

The participants created the concept and developed the idea to work with various relevant topics. Important topics for participants were how to deal with service providers, such as the local job centre, and how to work against the negative image that the long-term unemployed had in society. WIRkstatt brought long-term unemployed persons and social service providers and companies together in a new way.

Towards the end of the SEMPRE project, during a workshop on developing the micro project WIRkstatt, the participants discussed in small groups how participants and social service providers in the district seat of Plön could benefit from WIRkstatt. Benefits resulting from the sustainability of WIRkstatt were seen on the personal, organisational and public level:

On a personal level, the participants of WIRkstatt highlighted that WIRkstatt was important both for personal development and as a meeting point. It could help to increase the self-esteem and self-efficacy of its participants. On an organisational level, the participants described WIRkstatt as a support group with additional offers in the social sector: these offers boost social engagement by giving the participants a daily structure as well as professional and mutual supervision. WIRkstatt offers a space for participation and expressing concerns and ideas.

Public benefits, or benefits relevant on a societal level, were also seen in the empowerment approach, which changed the way of working with respect to all those involved. Moreover, participants highlighted the aspect of participation. Participation of marginalised groups retains social and political stability. Exchange between social-service providers and deprived groups facilitates goal-oriented work and the active development of new offers. Because of its open concept, new participants can easily integrate into the WIRkstatt-group. This is also a necessity for continuance of the project.



7. Evaluative Learnings from the SEMPRE Project

The aim of monitoring and evaluation is usually to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, effectiveness, impact or result agreed upon. Therein, evaluations often concern projects, programmes, activities, processes or interventions. Ideally, an evaluation should provide information that is considered useful, either in terms of determining the value, worth or merit of the evaluated objective, or in terms of incorporating lessons learnt in the future – or both. Monitoring and evaluation are also in high demand among many stakeholders within public policy, projects and funding organisations.

In addition to the findings in this report, we are also to conclude on the project learnings regarding the monitoring and evaluation activities of the SEMPRE project. In retrospect, the evaluation team of the SEMPRE project finds that some of the evaluations conducted within the framework of the project have been limited by different factors.

The most notable factors from an evaluative learning point of view are:

- **Results were not easily comparable** at all times.

Due to very dissimilar groups of service users, differences in timetables – some of which are nation specific, for instance with respect to vacation calendars that differ between countries as well as between partners – it is often difficult to collect data that is comparable regarding its evaluative aspects. Project partners have also been at different stages throughout the process, at the same time as data was missing, in some cases, due to unexpected illnesses or some partners' needs to prioritise other aspects of the project. This was in part expected, however, since it is a well-known fact that not all partners can be equally involved in all activities in a large project like the SEMPRE-project.

- **Diverging interpretations of methodology and data collection strategies** have resulted in somewhat diverging outputs of evaluations on different abstraction levels.

All outputs produced by different partners in different settings are fruitful in their own context and to the issue ownership of one particular setting, but not all outputs are easily comparable or compliant in a joint evaluation report. This was, of course, also to be expected considering the multi-professional background of project partners, as well as the different organisational aims of participating partners.

- In multinational projects, such as the SEMPRE-project, it is also to be expected that there are **linguistic obstacles and barriers** in conducting comparable evaluation activities.

The linguistic diversity within the project required translations and summaries of data in order to communicate with local service providers and service users, as well as with partners of the SEMPRE project. Yet, the effort that translations etc. demanded had perhaps not been fully foreseen by the evaluation partners in the planning phase of the project.

- **Project timelines and deadlines** limit the dissemination of results.



It is in the nature of a project to have a fixed beginning and a fixed end. However, a delay in actual beginnings of projects with several external partners is only to be expected, since organisations seldom work on a day-to-day basis. The delay in start-up processes is often reflected in problems fulfilling the final stages of a project plan, in part because most project staff are eager to fulfil the aim and intention of project activities. Therein, quite naturally, evaluation and administrative tasks, including dissemination of results are not always fulfilled at the end. This is also the reason that fixed dates for endings of projects, in general, may result in seemingly meagre outcomes, even when the results of activities may be quite plentiful in their local context.

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