



Territorial Social Innovation in the Nordic Countries and Scotland



May I help you?

The idea of this social innovation (SI) is to bring young and old people together by having socially excluded young people help the elderly perform small everyday tasks. The SI aims to improve both the situation of the young people and that of the elderly, and addresses the demographic challenges of an aging population and of social exclusion.

Preconditions, Inspiration, Nurture

This social innovation is a new model for service and cooperation between citizens whereby local young people help the elderly with small everyday tasks such as collecting mail or grocery shopping. The approach addresses the challenges of the social exclusion of both young unemployed people and the elderly. It also addresses challenges relating to service provision.

The SI improves the social and labor market skills and the well-being of young people, and improves the well-being of the elderly; it provides them with social contacts, prevents loneliness, and also facilitates home living. The approach is not a service provision model as such, but more of a community development model bringing young people and the elderly together and thus improving the well-being of both. The development of the concept was led by public sector actors, but the implementation of the actual activities takes place between voluntary associations (e.g. a local youth association and a local association for retired people).

The idea was born as part of a project led by the Association of Finnish Regional and Local Authorities, where the Social and Healthcare Division of Kainuu Region participated as partner. The point of departure for the project as a whole was to explore new ways to provide services and to base service provision on the needs of the service users. The 'May I help you?' ('Arjen pelastajat') concept was one of the results of the project.

The first stage of the project consisted of a series of workshops with local inhabitants representing different groups with the aim of defining service needs from the users' perspective, and—together with the users—to develop new potential models for close-range service provision. The 'May I help you?' concept was one of 26 suggested concepts that were developed in the workshop, and the decision-makers in Kainuu region decided to work further with it and to implement it in the second stage of the project. During the second stage, planning workshops and meetings were organized, mainly involving the decision-makers, public authorities and potential implementing actors. Workshops were, however, also held with local inhabitants. The development of the concept was based on the idea of a client-based decision-making process. It comprised workshops over several phases, mapping and analysis of aspects such as the potential actors, the needs of elderly and young people, and how to respond to those needs in different ways while being able to measure the concept's success.

At the end of the second stage in 2015, the approach was piloted and one of the examples was for young people to teach the elderly to use information and communications technology. At the time of writing, the approach is being rolled out and scaled up in a

process led by the Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health (SOSTE), which coordinates the model and diffuses information about it to its member associations, which can then implement it.

Implementation

Resources

The approach was developed as part of a project by the Association of Finnish Regional and Local Authorities and the Social and Healthcare Division of Kainuu Region. The resources of the association in terms of knowledge, networks and funding can be expected to have played a key role for making it possible to plan and organize the long and complicated process of workshops and concept development.

Furthermore, the existence of active associations that have contacts with socially excluded young people or the elderly is an essential resource needed for the implementation of the model, because the associations are the actors that will implement it.

Implementing the approach relies on volunteer work when it comes to finding relevant partners and coordinating the activities and also when it comes to young people performing the actual tasks that help the elderly. This means that the role of third sector associations and their resources is central. In implementing the approach, there is no need for funding; as the associations involved organize its functioning with one another.

The Network / Cooperation

As noted, the approach was developed as part of a larger project by the Association of Finnish Regional and Local Authorities, mainly in cooperation with the Social and Healthcare Division of Kainuu Region. The development of the approach, however, also closely involved local actors. In particular, this took the form of various workshops involving local decision-makers and local third-sector actors and individuals.

Local networks have been central in developing the approach, and also remain central in implementing it. Implementing the approach requires the existence of active local associations who are willing to engage with the concept and to cooperate with one another, because the implementation is entirely based on associations. This may also constitute a challenge in the most remote and sparsely populated areas, where there are no active associations and where the number of young people available to take part in the approach is more limited.

Enablers and Barriers

The fact that the development project provided considerable resources in terms of competencies to develop it as a long-term, inclusive project was a central enabler that permitted it to take on concrete form. The project provided the possibility both of collecting extensive data on the needs of the inhabitants and of organizing a series of workshops and other activities leading to the development of the approach. This was probably important as a way to anchor the predominantly top-down project and to ensure that the desired user-based approach would be possible.

Active associations willing to engage in innovative activities have also been important enablers for the approach. Associations have already participated in developing the model, and have provided expertise on local conditions and on their members' needs and expectations.

As the actual implementation after the end of the development project is currently in its early stages, it is not possible to entirely analyze the remaining challenges that are likely to emerge later on. However, it was already clear during the development phase that there are a variety of legislative challenges involved. The barriers encountered during the project were not systematically recorded, which is mentioned as a 'lesson learned', emphasizing the importance of also ensuring that the challenges faced are properly documented.

As an example of challenges related to legislation, it still remains unclear what type of activities the young people are permitted to help with and what kind of assistance requires formal education. Initially, discussions were also ongoing about the young helpers receiving a small fee for their services, but it was deemed difficult as it remained unclear how such a system would have influenced the young people's social benefits and taxation.

Interaction with Municipalities and Other Levels of Governance

The approach was developed by a national-level association for local and regional authorities together with a regional authority responsible for social welfare and health care; municipalities in the region also participated in the development work.

Social Innovation Effects

Outcomes, Impact and 'Scaling'

Measuring the impacts of the model was discussed at one of the workshops during the development phase, and measuring was identified as important by local decision-makers. During the workshop, different measurement indicators were developed. Indicators included, for example, 'easier everyday life' measured by 'experience / knowledge', 'amount of new practices' measured by 'number of new conducted services', 'alcohol consumption' measured using statistics, 'outmigration' measured by the number of inhabitants leaving the municipality and 'improved social skills' measured by interviews and journals.

Scaling of the approach is taking place in 2016 and is primarily led by the SOSTE, which took over the coordination of the approach, provided the funding for it, and will start working on scaling it up in other parts of Finland.

Lessons Learned

This social innovation is very new, so only limited conclusions can be made at this point. It is an example of an approach where the public sector actively aimed to engage with local inhabitants and associations to develop service solutions that correspond more closely to user needs and resources. Although the approach is top-down, there was an explicit aim in the development process to work together with local people. This approach to developing services based on user needs is also part of a general discussion in Finland that for the last few years has emphasized user-based service design and public-sector innovation.

Specific to the approach of 'May I help you?' is that when implemented, no funding will be needed as there will be no transactions taking place between the participating associations.

In implementing the concept, the role of voluntary associations is particularly central, which may pose challenges in implementing the approach in more remote and sparsely populated areas. In areas severely suffering from outmigration of young people, it can be challenging to find young people to participate, but on the other hand, the model could provide a way to activate young people, especially in rural areas where other such forms of motivation may be lacking.

During the development of the concept, various legislative challenges appeared in relation to young people helping the elderly with different tasks. One lesson learned from the project coordinators was the need to record the challenges as they emerged, because at present they have not been documented or followed up.

The importance of measuring the success of the model was emphasized when developing the project, and a workshop was organized on the topic. When the project ended it was, however, still unclear which actor would be responsible for the measurements.