



‘A GENERALIST APPROACH TO (SOCIAL) WORK’

A project within the common framework of the European Social Fund

The operational programme for the implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Flanders in the 2014-2020 period supports initiatives that increase employment and improve social cohesion in Flanders. Innovative projects are set up in order to meet our societies’ challenges on the labour market. This project proposal wants to develop an innovative method within a transnational partnership. In this project summary you will find more info about the aim of the project, the Flemish partnership and the reason why we want to set up a transnational cooperation (TCA). In this project we focus on the extent to which user participation can contribute to generalist social work aiming to enhance the activation of people in poverty.

The aim and objectives of the project

Social work practise is increasingly confronted by *the dilemma between specialisation and generalism*. Historically, social work is rooted in a generalist approach. Since the early work of Perlman and Richmond, and under influence of social systems theory and ecological approaches, social work practise gained its generalist perspective (Turner, 2003).

Generalist social workers are affiliated with service organisations that emphasise a comprehensive and holistic view of clients’ problems (Blom, 2004; Perlinski, Blom, & Moren, 2013). Here, we follow Blom (2004, p. 24), stating that generalist practise means that social workers are affiliated with service organisations that work with all types of problems and client cases. However, more recently, a trend within social work to divide services into specialised units and organisations focusing on only one aspect of the client’s problems or target group can be observed (Blom, 2004).

This *increasing need for specialisation* is often explained by a variety of both intra- and extra-organisational factors (Perlinski et al., 2013), such as an upcoming managerialism, a need for efficiency (McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009) and an increasing focus on workfare (McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009; Raeymaeckers & Dierckx, 2013). In the scientific literature however there is, however, no consensus about ‘the best way of practice’, since *both generalist and specialist social work services have a necessary role to play* when supporting vulnerable target groups.



In this project we explore how generalist social work can be implemented in specialist organizations aimed at activating vulnerable target groups towards the labour market.

We more specifically focus on how methods of client participation can be used to improve a generalist social work practice of activation towards the labour market.

The Flemish partnership

Weerwerk, *KOPA* and *Emino* are Flemish organizations that aim to establish an inclusive labour market by creating opportunities for people in poverty to work in a responsive working environment at the regular labour market. These partners use the method of Supported Employment¹, internationally considered as a best practice to guarantee chances to succeed in the regular labour market. Together with *Recht-Op*² (an anti-poverty organisation) and *OASeS* these organizations formed a Flemish partnership in 2015 for the development of innovation funded by the ESF. The research group *OASeS* stands for Centre on Inequalities, Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City and is part of the faculty of political and social sciences of the *University of Antwerp*.³ In this project the partners developed a method for job coaches and consultants who offer guidance for jobseekers to use a generalist approach within their specific organisations. One of the outcomes was a new training course for professionals to learn how to use a generalist approach to social work and to gain the necessary insights regarding poverty and exclusion. ...

A new challenge: focus on client participation

Client participation is thus considered as a critical success factor throughout the entire process of the project. The partnership strongly believes that (models of) client participation can make an contribution difference in closing the gaps between the target group and the service providers who support them on the labour market. The partnership wants to set up a transnational partnership and a new European project for research and development to develop exchange on and establish best practices of client participation for the activation of people in poverty.⁴



¹ It is a way of helping people with disabilities and obstacles to working, and other vulnerable groups, to find and hold down paid employment on the normal labour market. They get support before, during and after finding a job. The employer too is supported; here the focus is on the person's abilities rather than their limitations. More info www.SUEM.be

² The organization is also a member of the European Anti-Poverty Network or EAPN www.eapn.eu

³ Research carried out by OASeS is structured along three main research clusters:

- Poverty, Social Exclusion and Social Inequality
- Urban Development, Governance and Community Work
- Space, Policy and Innovation

⁴ The tangible outcomes are an inventory of best practices in Europe, study visits and exchange of information, a scientific research and evaluation of best practices, a website, a publication and a scientific report with conclusions and recommendations.