

REVES focus

European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy

European conference in Marseille launches REVES initiative on Territorial Quality Standards in Social Services of General Interest

Challenges for social services of general interest (SSGI) and possibilities to set appropriate (territorial) quality standards were at the centre of a REVES conference on 4 and 5 May 2009 in Marseille (France). Approximately 90 persons representing local and regional authorities, social economy organisations at local and European level, national government and European organisations from different EU member states and Morocco came together to exchange their experiences and opinions.

The conference was opened by Michel Vauzelle, President of the region Province-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA), a REVES member region. In his welcome speech, Mr Vauzelle stressed the need to promote social economy as a different model of economy which proved its capacity to take on social, economic, environmental and territorial responsibility. Concluding, Mr Vauzelle urged political decision-makers to recognize the fact that "citizens want to become actors!" Philippe Chesneau, vice-

president of the PACA region (FR) and REVES co-president, deepened these considerations by referring to the challenges local territories face with regard to SSGI and the implementation of the European Monti-Kroes package. He said that also hitherto successful local partnerships between public authorities and social economy might be put at risk, partially by incertitude linked to EU legislation. In this context, Mr Chesneau recognised competition as an engine, but he also highlighted the necessity to set clear limits in order to avoid its negative impact.

The first panel discussion, animated by Jan Olsson, member of the European Economic and Social Committee and REVES co-president, focused on existing EU legislation on SSGI and related general observations by local governments and social economy. Alain Coheur, president of Social Economy Europe (BE), pointed out uncertainties regarding the application of EU legislation to SSGI that seem to be experienced also by the European Commission.

Stressing the fact that arising problems often have to be solved by the European Court of Justice, Coheur called upon national and European politicians to find appropriate solutions. In addition, he questioned the possibility to find a European definition of SSGI and quality in SSGI. Participants criticized that discussions on SSGI would depart above all from issues such as state aid and public procurement, but less from the necessity to define the role of SSGI for society or to fix quality criteria linked to a new kind of evaluation concerning wealth of a territory.

Gianni Salvadori, Minister for Social Affairs of the Region of Tuscan (IT) highlighted the need to build society on the concept of co-responsibility. This would imply, according to Salvadori, a focus on the individual and his/her active participation. In this context, the minister referred to the example of the Local Welfare Pacts in the Region of Tuscan, which are written jointly by local authorities, social economy and other

actors. These pacts form the basis of the Integrated Social Plan of the Region, which also determines the allocation of resources to local authorities. Regarding the question of quality, Mr Salvadori referred to the system of accreditation, which, if a regular control is ensured, provides important opportunities to fix and implement quality principles and standards based on the needs of local citizens and the territory.

In their reactions, participants stressed the need, in a number of territories, to first create appropriate conditions for participation of citizens. Elio Ferri, vice-mayor of Faenza (IT) and vice-president of REVES, provided an example for such participation in his city: Based on the so-called "Zone plan" (Piano di Zona), local authorities and social economy service providers jointly programme and manage social services. Only service providers that took part in the planning process have the possibility to later become accredited! With specific regard to quality in social services, Mr Ferri drew the attention of the participants to a difficult choice local authorities face: Investing in *maximum* quality of a service often means to reduce resources to guarantee *universal* access to a service. Here, Mr Ferri encouraged decision-makers and other actors to take into account

the needs of the local community as a whole.

Participants concluded that the discussion on SSGI and their quality needs to take into account different levels: 1. the political decision; 2. procedures and criteria for public procurement and 3. service planning by the service providers (in accordance with the needs of the beneficiaries, structural needs, expectations deriving from service contracts etc.).

The first afternoon session of the conference started with a video statement by Concetta Cultrera, European Commission, who outlined main elements of EU legislation concerning SSGI, initiatives taken by the Commission to clarify this legislation and opportunities for local actors to shape SSGI according to local needs. The following panel discussion deepened exchange on quality of social services from the point of view of European organisations and a national government.

Claire Roumet, secretary general of CECODHAS and vice-president of the European Social Platform, presented experiences from the social housing sector where a number of fixed standards exist above all for the construction phase. In her view, opportunities for discussion on quality aspects are given when it comes to the allocation of social housing. However, according to Ms Roumet,

possibilities to improve quality in that respect are very much linked to financial resources of the local authority and the service provider. Social housing does, in her opinion, not in every country cost much. However, there is a need to invest with a long term perspective which might make it, on the other hand, impossible to *immediately* respond to the needs of the citizens. In that respect Ms Roumet also stressed that the perception of quality might change over time.

Bérengère Steppé, Attaché at the Federal Ministry for Social Integration in Belgium, illustrated the Belgian context for the definition of quality in SSGI. The national government, based on an agreement with the regions and through a specific fund for the development of social services, is in a position to create the general framework and provide resources for social services. A problem, in the view of Ms Bérengère, is the dependence of certain service providers on public financing.

Rainer Schlüter, director of Cooperatives Europe, highlighted the role of cooperatives such as housing cooperatives, social pharmacies or social cooperatives in the provision of social services and their capacity to build quality in a different way by associating users. On the other hand, Mr Schlüter

«There is a need to create appropriate conditions for the participation of citizens in programming and managing social services. »

“We face a dilemma: Investing in maximum quality of a service might also mean to reduce resources to guarantee universal access to that service.”

pointed to the impossibility to create *universal* standards for SSGI. In his view, concrete standards have to be co-constructed by different actors and citizens at local level. In this respect, Mr Schlüter also questioned diverse political or legal measures which rather hinder a stronger implication of users and a co-definition of standards (e.g. criteria in public procurement): "These rules prevent us from taking concrete actions."

In conclusion of this first afternoon panel, first results of a REVES-TQS screening of the international/European normative framework which (potentially) influences social services were presented. They show that principles and standards for quality also in social services already exist and do not necessarily need to be reinvented. However, participants agreed upon the necessity to 'translate' them into a local context. Even though it seems vital to have common European *principles* for service quality, concrete *standards* have to be conceived at *local* level.

The third panel discussion of the day focused on local realities and challenges for a definition of quality standards such as they are perceived by local authorities, local social economy and trade unions.

Jaroslaw Jozefczyk,

presented experiences from the Polish city of Gdynia. A number of principles for quality in social services are, in his opinion, already included in diverse pieces of legislation, even though they can be found rather "in-between the lines". According to Mr Jozefczyk, the Act on Social Welfare already foresees an involvement of a number of local actors, including civil society, in discussions relating to planning and management of social services.

Bernard Delanglade, director of the federation of service providers URIOPPS PACA, which is a member of the social economy platform CRESS PACA, called upon different social economy actors on a same territory to jointly define and implement a strategy for the promotion of quality in social services. Moreover, he stated the necessity for social economy and other actors to more strongly consider and improve participation of employees in the co-definition of quality criteria and strategies.

Andreas Paul Stöhr, who presented the point of view of a major German trade union (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund), joined the statement of the previous speaker regarding necessary criteria for quality of working conditions. In his view, this subject is still fairly sidelined when it comes to discussions on

service quality. With regard to participation of other stakeholders in the definition of quality of the service as such, Mr Stöhr mentioned the "Dialogue to ensure quality" (Dialog zur Qualitätssicherung) in specific service fields such as services to youngsters or long term care, which was established in Germany.

Luigi Martignetti, REVES secretary general and responsible of the REVES TSR agency, concluded the panel by presenting the TSR® procedure and the possibility to use it as a method to define local quality standards for social services. He reminded the major characteristics of the TSR® process. This process allows for a participatory definition of values on the basis of which activities of enterprises or policies of local authorities are evaluated and (re-)defined. According to Mr Martignetti, a similar methodology could be applied to define criteria for the quality of social services. These criteria would then be included in the revision and planning of these services.

In the following discussion, participants highlighted the importance of the definition of a "common vision of the territory" and its needs. In addition, they endorsed the integration of strategies promoting quality of social services in the larger framework of a coherent social policy.

"Social economy and other actors need to more strongly consider and improve participation of employees in the co-definition of quality criteria and strategies."

"A common vision of the territory and its needs has to be the basis of the definition of quality standards for SSGI."

“Service quality should be evaluated from an integrated perspective which would take into account the different needs of a person and diverse services delivered to or her.”



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The second conference day on 5 May 2009 was devoted to the presentation of three examples of partnerships between local or regional authorities and social economy. Jean-Claude Alberigo from the PACA region (FR) gave participants an insight into the process that led to the creation of a specific regional action programme for social economy (PROGRESS) and to a re-animation of a network between different social economy actors. Based on this action programme, divers initiatives related, inter alia, to the creation and improvement of social services, have been conceived. Replying to questions from the audience, Mr Alberigo highlighted the importance of the voluntary approach which all interested actors had taken at the very beginning. Ideas for joint actions were developed without considering, already in the very beginning, questions related to costs. Gradually, other actors and with them additional resources joined the alliance. Lisa Fröbel, representing the Association of Local Authorities in the County of Jämtland (SE), illustrated a Swedish example for the construction of a stable partnership between local authorities and social economy. This initiative comes at a time where, in Sweden, a significant shift from public to external private providers of social services can be observed. In the opinion of Ms Fröbel it is thus more important than ever to bring different local actors together in order to work on territorial quality standards for social services and social responsibility in general. Adriana Predonzan presented local partnership procedures for social services of general interest in the city of Pordenone (IT). According to her experiences, social economy has a multi-fold role to play not only as service provider, but also as an actor *proposing* specific initiatives and services, or with its capacity to create links between different actors on the territory. These features have become very important pre-conditions for support *by* and collaboration *with* the local authority in Pordenone. The conclusions of the conference were drawn by speakers from European organisations, social economy and a regional authority. Jan Olsson, member of the EESC and REVES co-president, encouraged REVES and the partners of the TQS project to rapidly respond to a possible European Commission paper or other initiative on quality of social services of general interest. In his view, every kind of principle and standard has to be conceived starting from perspective of the local community. Finally, Olsson invited social economy actors to take the opportunity and progress on issues linked to social responsibility of their own structures and its evaluation through means such as TSR®. Referring to processes for the definition of quality, Jeff Weitzel, president of the European Council of Associations of General Interest (CEDAG), stressed the necessity to adopt a more integrated vision of diverse services that might be delivered to a person, departing from an integrated perspective of the different needs of an individual. He proposed to establish, at all levels, trans-sectoral quality *principles*. Moreover, Mr Weitzel encouraged participants not to fear ‘the market’: “We have to frame capitalism by ethical structures!” Concluding the conference, REVES co-president Philippe Chesneau (FR) urged political decision-makers and administration to “consider social economy as economy and not only as a sort of charity” and to calculate, through cooperation with citizens, the “maximum social profit” of social services. (ek)

Defining Quality Standards in Social Services of General Interest: Do we have to 'start from scratch'?

Screening of relevant international and European guidelines

To set the framework for project activities at local level, the TQS project started with a screening of international and European guidelines which (may) have an influence on quality in SSGI. A distinction was made between more general **principles** as "moral rules that guide behaviour" and **standards** as a "specific level of quality".

During this screening exercise it became evident that it is not necessary to start from the very beginning when (re-)defining quality **principles** for SSGI. Many of such principles already exist. They are enshrined in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights or in quality systems such as EQUASS, E-Qualin or the "Nine golden principles for SSGI" of the European Social Platform. Other quality principles which *are* or *may* be applied to SSGI, can be found in models such as Total Quality Management and related schemes.

Moreover, certain *international conventions* such as the Alma-Ata Declaration (WHO) provide much more than quality *principles*. A number of them contain very clear criteria and

guidelines for the application of these principles in practice. These are sometimes far more concrete than the provisions of EU legislation. Often, however, such conventions are ignored, little known or simply not enforced.

TQS research also found several sets of concrete **standards** such as ISO that are used also in social services. Yet, many of these standards were initially developed for *industrial production* and have been adapted, at a later stage, also to services. International and European **standards** applying *specifically* to social services of general interest do not exist so far.

It appears worth to mention that by far not all identified principles and standards take the individual (beneficiary, families, caregivers, local community) as the *point of departure* of all quality considerations. In a number of cases, participation of beneficiaries and staff or partnership with other stakeholders seem to be not more than (marketing) instruments for the improvement of the final product (or service) and means to finally better sell the product. Empowerment and social well being of all are not

necessarily the *final* and *overarching* objectives of the whole process.

It seems thus that there is a need for specific *standards* concerning quality of social services, which would ensure that the needs of the individual are taken into account *at the very beginning of and throughout* the whole process of service planning, delivery and review. However, should these standards be conceived and common at *European level*?

The European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities, in its Memorandum on a European Quality Principles Framework, declares: "EASPD believes the best way for the EU to ensure high quality services provision in Europe is to establish consensus on European quality principles instead of quality standards. Quality standards could be implemented on the national or regional level, but quality principles are the most effective on the EU level."

This statement received support also by REVES members and other organisations which participated in the kick-off conference of the TQS project. Participants agreed that needs of individuals and communities might differ depending on the socio-economic situation in a

country, region, city and according to other factors or personal circumstances. Services and quality standards for social services therefore have to be developed at the very bottom and in proximity to the citizens, i.e. at local level.

TQS partners, in the stages following this research, will find out which quality principles and standards for social services already exist at local and regional level, how they are applied, following which mechanisms they are developed and which kind of obstacles might hinder their proper application. Research and experimentation will then focus on the possibility to develop a common methodology for the definition of *local* quality standards for social services of general interest that are in line with aforementioned international and European conventions and legislation. In this process, however, partners will also identify existing rules at European or national level which might hinder local authorities or service providers to apply certain quality principles and standards that may be of importance at local level.

Detailed results of the screening exercise will soon be published on the REVES website. (ek)

The project “Territorial Quality Standards of Social Services in General Interest”

Objective of the project:

The objective of this project is to develop local mechanisms for a participatory (re-)definition and measurement of local quality standards for social services of general interest which would respond to local needs and provide an orientation for service users, providers, local authorities and other relevant parts of the local community.

More specifically, the project aims to develop and test:

- Mechanisms to identify criteria for the definition of local quality standards: Who should participate in the definition of these standards, when and how, by which means etc.?
- Mechanisms to ensure that local quality standards are coherent with national and European minimum requirements as well as with international benchmarks
- Mechanisms to identify useful *indicators* for quality in SSGI
- Mechanisms to improve local policies concerning the provision of SSGI, based on the aforementioned analysis of local quality standards

Actions foreseen (15 December 2008 - 31 October 2010):

1. Analysis on existing European guidelines/obligations regarding quality assessment and standards in SSGI
2. Analysis on quality standards applied in the performance of social economy service providers
3. European level analysis on methods for the definition of quality in SSGI
4. Analysis on the definition and application of quality standards in SSGI at local level
5. Developing and testing methods for the definition of local quality standards in SSGI
6. Elaboration of a Vademecum for local authorities and other local actors
7. Conception and publication of recommendations to local, national and European decision-makers as well as to social economy

Outputs:

- Vademecum for local and regional authorities (political decision-makers and administration in general), social economy and other service providers
- Political recommendations to local, national and European decision-makers as well as to social economy
- Short communication package (including summary of the project findings, a bibliography, relevant websites and contacts)
- Specific section on REVES website

Partners:

- Cooperatives Europe (BE)
- CECOP (BE)
- Region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (FR)
- Pfefferwerk Foundation Berlin (DE)
- Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DE)
- Prefecture of Piraeus (GR)
- PARSEC Consortium Soc. Coop.(IT)
- Province of Piacenza - Consortium SOL.CO Piacenza (IT)
- City of Livorno - Arci Solidarietà ONLUS (IT)
- City of Faenza - Zerocento Società Cooperativa Sociale ONLUS - Cooperativa Educativa Famiglie Faentine C.E.F.F. - Ricercazione Società Cooperativa Sociale (IT)
- City of Pordenone (IT)
- City of Gdynia (PL)
- SERUS (SE)
- Association of local authorities of the County of Jämtland (SE)
- Coompanion (SE)

Next project meeting:

Faenza (IT) 5-6 November 2009

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