



Theoretically informed case study accompanying the film

ELTERN-AG –Germany



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QR-Code to the Homepage and video

Link to the video: <http://www.inno-serv.eu/eltern>

This report is part of the research project „Social Platform on innovative Social Services“ (INNOSEV). INNOSEV investigates innovative approaches in three fields of social services: health, education and welfare. The INNOSEV Consortium covers nine European countries and aims to establish a social platform that fosters a europeanwide discussion about innovation in social services between practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and service users. This project is funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme (grant agreement nr. 290542).



1. Short profile: ELTERN-AG parent education in Germany

ELTERN-AG is a private nonprofit provider that targets parents-to-be and parents of very young children who are 'hard-to-reach' or who do not access services (e.g. single parents, parents with immigrant background etc.). The organisation provides coaching to these parents to support them in the upbringing and education of their children. It does so with a 'low-threshold' approach, treating parents as experts, empowering them and initiating self-help networks to build sustainable support.

The project has been initiated in the context of a lack of effective connection between the regular public system of assistance and the target group. By creating individualised support, the project aims at breaking the circle of continued inequalities. Apart from that, the social role of families as places of community instead of solely private interests is strengthened.

Specific innovative elements of ELTERN-AG:

Access to 'hard-to-reach' target groups:

Project is realised within the target group's local communities; participants are recruited directly by users and network-actors (low-threshold approach).

User focus and empowerment:

Focus on the parents' perspective; they are seen as the main experts who just have to be activated to use their competencies; empowerment instead of paternalistic advice.

Initiation of self-help network structures:

Participants are encouraged to get more and more involved in the programme's form and content; aim: parents meet each other regularly as a self-organised and locally embedded group after the intervention has officially ended.

Scaling by cooperating with welfare organizations:

Employees of established welfare organisations are offered vocational training to become mentors; aim: spreading the approach widely by using the existing infrastructure of the welfare associations.

Research-based evaluation

Constant scientific evaluation of the programme's effectiveness.

Key characteristics of the service

Organisation:

ELTERN-AG's provider is a private non-profit organization called MAPP-Empowerment GmbH (located in Magdeburg, Germany). A special cooperation model enables welfare associations and other organisations from the field of social services to offer ELTERN-AGs directly on site. By September 2012 there were 188 trained mentors in ten German federal states, who have reached 1,228 parents and 2,908 children.

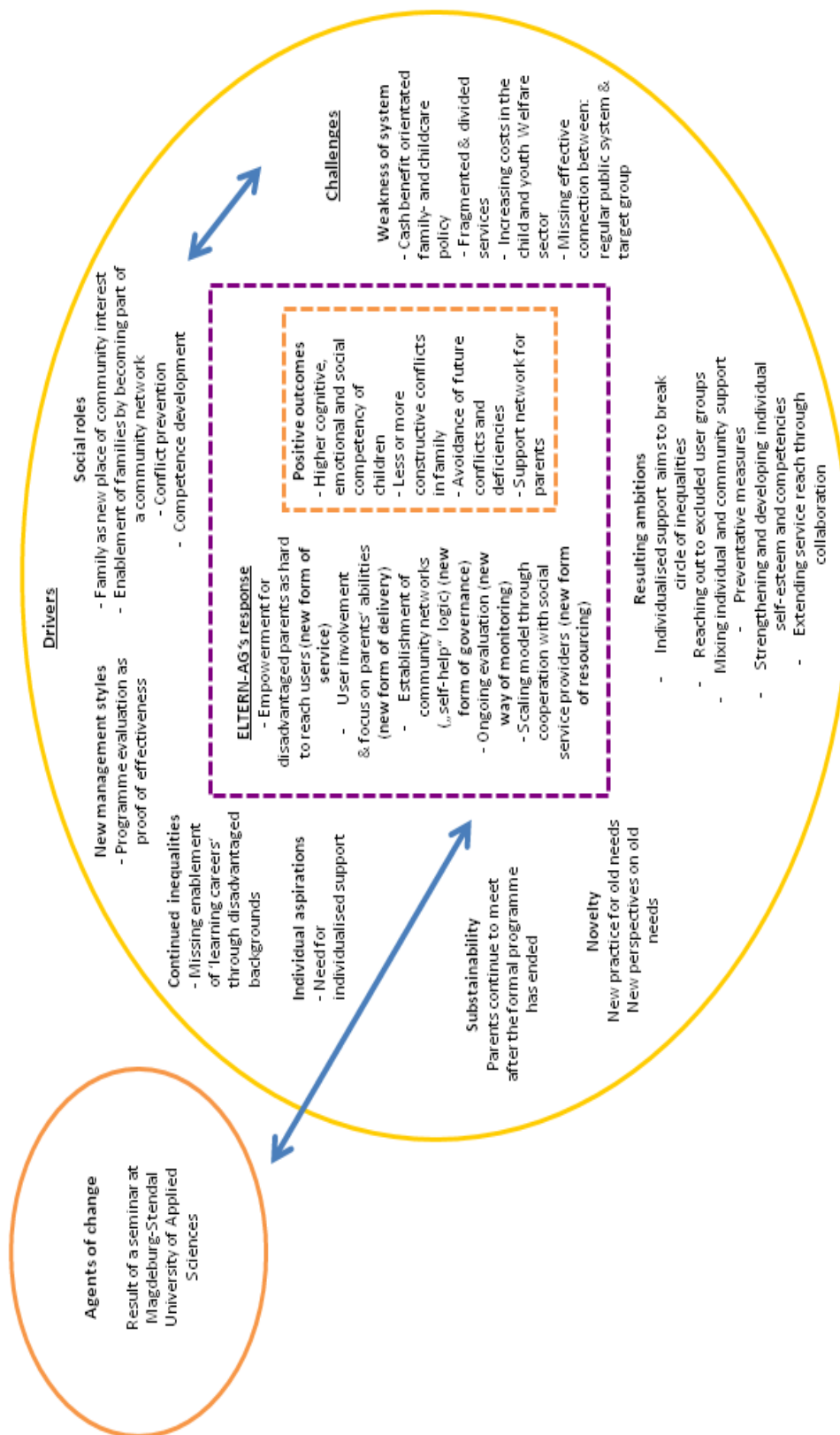
User groups:

Users are parents-to-be and parents with very young children, who meet at least one of the following criteria: single-parent, young parent, immigrant background, socially deprived, low educational level.

Principle:

The main idea is that the simple educational advice given to parents is sufficient for unleashing and fostering their educational potential. This potential can be developed, strengthened and shared in groups. The method is based on scientific expertise from the fields of neuroscience, developmental psychology and social work.

Factors influencing Social Services Innovation



2. Policy framework related to parent education in Germany

Principle/ Guidelines	Key organisations and actors	Services provided by government	Expenditure, resources
<p>1. Education as a basic right: the care and upbringing of children is the natural right and a duty of parents. The state watches over them in the execution of this duty (cf. Basic Law of the federal Republic of Germany, art. 6, par. 2)</p> <p>2. Families as spheres of 'informal education': Trend to strengthen education beyond the formal educational system (cf. BMBF, 2010, p. VIII-IX)</p> <p>3. Educational partnership: Redefining state's sentinel function from paternalism to partnership based forms of support in the upbringing and education of children. (cf. BMFSFJ 2009)</p> <p>4. Shifting the perspective... ... from deficit to resource oriented perspective on families (cf. Wiesner 2012)</p>	<p>- The state (in this case: municipality) is legally obligated to build up an infrastructure of youth welfare services by running public or subsidising private non-profit organisations (cf. Schröer, Struck & Wolff 2005)</p> <p>- Legal foundation of the right of every child to support their individual development and to build a self-dependent and socially natured personality (cf. Social Security Code VIII, §1)</p> <p>- Every Family has got the same legal claim to child and youth welfare services, but esp. families in need either cannot be reached by the services, or do not participate at all, or tend to drop out of interventions prematurely</p> <p>- Especially in the very early years (2-3 years) there is a support gap. Parents cease to receive parental pay and at the same time children don't yet have a legal claim to go to pre-school. A similar gap prevails in after school care for school-aged children. (cf. Bellermann 2011)</p> <p>- Policy competencies are polarised and fragmented between different specialisms (school and youth welfare; pre-school and early childhood education; etc.) (cf. Bellermann 2011)</p>	<p>Legal milestones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of Security Code VIII - Individual entitlement to a pre-school place for parents with children under the age of three years (coming in 2013) - Unclear legal and conceptual status of the so called 'early intervention', especially its financing (cf. DJI 2009) <p>Service characteristics</p> <p>Early interventions are either based on voluntary decisions of parents to participate or mandatory when the child's wellbeing is endangered. Thus, it is hard to find data on ELTERN-AG's target groups. The following gives an impression on the issue of single parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are 8.2 million families with children in Germany, 20% of them are single parents (cf. StBA 2011) - From 1996 until 2010 the number of single parents increased from 1.3 million to 1.6 million - More than 210.000 single men and women care for a child under the age of three years (cf. BMFSFJ 2012; own calculation) - about 10% of single parent families rely on state support in education (cf. StBA 2010) 	<p>1. Public expenditure for the whole area of child and youth welfare in 2010 (cf. StBA 2012):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - about 28.9bn € - about 1.5% of it is spent on 'early interventions'¹ <p>2. Financing of municipal child and youth welfare is generally granted by the local government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Out-of-pocket payments by the parents only in case of residential measures (according to their income); most of youth care services are tax-paid and free for the users

¹ The official statistics do not include 'early interventions' as an independent category; it is usually included with other related forms of assistance into a category called "general promotion of education in families" (cf. Social Security Code VIII §16; StBA 2012). Restructuring in this regard is to be expected, which underlines the peculiarity of the field as an emerging, increasingly important special category of intervention.

3. The social, political and institutional context

3.1 Population/ Government

	Germany (2010)	EU27 (2010) ²
Total Population (2010)	81,751,602	501,104,164
Population projections 2010-2050	69,412,000	524,052,690
Proportion of population aged 0-3 years (2010)	2.5%	n/a
Single parent families (2010)	1,600000	n/a
Expenditure on social protection (total) (2010)	765,717.82 in millions of Euros	n/a
Expenditure on social protection (% of GDP) (2009)	31.1%	29.51%
Expenditure on child and youth welfare services (% of GDP) (2010)	1.16%	n/a

Source: StBA 2012

3.2 Information about the specific welfare state³: Germany

The German welfare state has a long tradition which goes back to the end of the 19th century and to Bismarck's social policy (which itself can be seen as a genuine social innovation). It can be illustrated as a 'two-pillar model'. The first pillar of welfare is focused on shelter and protection. Social insurance and transfers serve as risk buffers in special circumstances (livelihoods, services of general interest) and shall guarantee a minimum of societal participation (*the material problems of life*). The second pillar, the social services, are the institutional version of service arrangements in which the state and society provide interventions that address social problems with more or less specialised consulting, mentoring or care (*the immaterial problems of life*). Which areas social services should focus on is influenced by several supply- and demand-side factors and is the subject of political debate and compromise:

- On the demand side and with regard to the particular service field, it is mainly socio-cultural change that has an effect on raising demand for such services: pluralisation and individualisation trends, changes in gender roles and relations, increasing mobility requirements of changing labour markets and structural change in families, for example, demand a greater density of care services for children and adolescents (child care).
- On the supply side, a broadening of services offered comes through the diversification and specialisation of social services provided by an increasing variety of actors. The growing number of welfare professions creates an expansion of the definition of requirements, particularly in the field of education, social work or psychotherapy.

Recent structural changes in welfare-state arrangements are to be understood primarily in the context of issues relating to the affordability of the welfare state ('neo-liberal critique') in relation to social change in modern service economies. Based on the tension between the requirements of increasing social welfare services on the

² The variety of national statistical categories makes it hard to clearly identify budgets dedicated to the field on the EU level. This is why most of the data are indicated as n/a.

³ For references and a more fine-grained illustration of the Welfare sector in Germany compare to literature review of INNOSERV WP1 and separate "Reader on the field of Welfare in Germany".

one hand and growing demands for cost saving on the other hand, a restructuring of the architecture and the logic of welfare distribution is in progress in almost all fields of state intervention. This process (also called commodification or economisation in the current discourse) refers not only to institutional and legal frameworks, but is also reflected in an increasing business orientation of organisations. This leads, in the context of limited available resources, to the introduction of economic indicators to assess social services. Economisation is accompanied by the paradigm of activation, which comes together with a redefinition of the welfare state's self-image. The enabling state has to offer a broad range of highly complex, preventative and activating social services in order to increase the capacity for self-help and individual responsibility. Thereby, it supports and encourages a stronger interaction between public and private providers, as well as a free and active civil society. These still ongoing reconstruction processes relate strongly to the welfare state landscape:

- Local government social services have been reorganised since the 1990s with regard to structures and processes. The underlying aim has been a radical modernisation of the administration (keyword: new public management, lean management, double-entry accounting and privatisation of municipal services support).
- In the area of child and youth services, market competition has found its way into the provider landscape. Youth services have experienced an extended role in preparing adolescents for participation in working life (public investment in early childhood education). Other functional areas of the sector (such as educational aids) have suffered from legitimacy pressures in recent years due to their declining power of integration.

There is a steady increase of in-kind benefits as percentage of total social protection benefits (including social services), which underlines the significance of such services against simple cash benefits. The table below illustrates social protection expenditures of Germany in comparison with the EU 27.

Social protection expenditures: Aggregated benefits and grouped schemes in millions of Euros

Time	Total expenditures for social protection in millions of Euros		Increase in in-kind benefits	Proportion of in-kind benefits (of total social protection benefits)	
	1996	2010		1996	2010
EU 27	/	3,605,678.95	/	/	34.07%
Germany	565,683.07	765,717.82	52.53%	30.79%	34.69%
Hungary	/	22287.98	/	/	32.19%
France	379,396.42	654,238.65	84.47%	31.94%	34.17%

Source: Own calculations based on EUROSTAT 2012

4. Challenges and drivers of innovation

Structural weaknesses of the system:

- Still mainly cash benefit oriented family- and childcare policy
- Highly 'polarised' and 'fragmented' services

Gaps in support for pre-school and school aged children - Cost increases in the area of child and youth welfare

Drivers and challenges

Within the given context, the main societal and sociopolitical **challenges** which ELTERN-AG has to deal with and its **responses** to it can be summarised under the following topics.

- Reflecting the close connection between social background and educational opportunities, the challenge is to break the circle of **continued inequalities** which families in lessfavorable social circumstances often experience. The response is to enable 'learning careers' through **individualised support** and to promote **self-help** among participants .
- The latter aspect plays a role in the issue of **spreading an intervention** (scaling). Given the diversity of service providers, which comes with a multiplicity of ideas but also with the risk of losing quality, innovative impulses can best be standardised through **collaborative efforts** (between new and established constituents). In terms of quality, **continuous** (scientifically guided) **evaluation** and impact measurement can be expected to play a pivotal role.
- The understanding of **social roles** has to be changed. Families are no longer seen as places of solely **private concerns** which are hermetically sealed from **community interests**. So the response is the enablement of families as part of a community network.

Innovation: Ideas, criteria, levels and added values

The need for individualised support for parents in difficult life situations in bringing up their children is likely to continue in the future. Reasons for this are the ongoing pluralisation of forms of family life, the high divorce rate and the inequality of wealth distribution (specific poverty risk for single parents).

One of the basic principles of child and youth welfare in Germany is the voluntary use of the offered services (when the child's wellbeing is not endangered acutely) and the obligation of cooperation between parents and public bodies (cf. Social Security Code VIII §27 and §36).

These high-level professional requirements make it hard for public youth welfare services to act preventatively and to reach out to the identified target group. Parents are not obliged to take part in educational programs and have to be constantly encouraged to keep up their participation. This is beyond the capacity of the public youth welfare system. This gap in provision is filled by the selected example based on the following innovation criteria (as introduced initially):

Access to hard-to-reach target groups:

Participants are recruited directly by network actors and users working in the programme and/or other cooperating institutions. There are eligibility criteria directed at including groups that are most in need of the service.

User focus and empowerment:

The participant's perspective is stressed and parents are encouraged in their abilities and competencies. The parents are treated as experts, who simply need a (subtly) guiding hand and the chance to share experiences. This strategy of empowerment creates a motivating service situation, instead of paternalistic advice which might provoke resistance.

Initiation of self-help network structures:

From the beginning, participants are encouraged to become the essential part of the programme. At the end of the formal programme the parents meet up with each other regularly as a self-organised and locally embedded group, supported by a mentor if required. This helps to ensure the sustainability of effects and builds an ecosystem of support that helps to minimise individual exclusion.

Scaling by cooperating with welfare organizations:

Instead of offering all services themselves, the organisation provides vocational training for the staff of well established welfare organisations. By using the existing infrastructure, the service can be spread widely. As a result, the idea becomes more embedded in the public welfare system, which can be seen as another indicator of sustainability.

Research-based evaluation:

The programme is evaluated constantly by an independent research institute, to improve quality and measure the effectiveness of the intervention on the cognitive, emotional and social development of the children whose parents have participated. This is important for illustrating the programme's value to funders, partners and third parties broadly.

Agents of change

ELTERN-AG was founded at the Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences in 2002/2003 as a reaction to controversies about continued inequalities in educational opportunities for children in Germany. In order to scale up the programme, a private non-profit organisation (MAPP-Empowerment GmbH; gemeinnützig) was established in 2007 as the new provider of ELTERN-AG. The connection to academia and science has contributed to the establishment of a continuous evaluation programme accompanying the offered services. First, This first took the form of of self-evaluation, later an external evaluator was commissioned.

5. Key innovative elements of this example

Field of service	Welfare and education
Establishment of organization	2002/2003
Type of organization	Private non-profit organization; limited liability company with "public benefit" status (gGmbH)
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training and cooperation fees of the collaborating welfare organisations, which in turn can receive a full refund from the state - Charitable donations and grants from foundations
Size of organisation	188 trained mentors in ten German federal states
Members and participation	<p>1,228 parents and 2,908 children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - special cooperation model enables welfare associations and other organisations from the field of social services to apply and spread the programme
Name of the innovative example Contact Homepage	<p>Programm ELTERN-AG Klausenerstr. 15 39112 Magdeburg</p> <p>http://www.eltern-ag.de/</p>

In 2000, the PISA study (Program for International Student Assessment) and later on the IGLU study (German for PIRLS – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) showed that the social backgrounds of children are strongly related to their educational achievements on the one hand and their individual mental and physiological health on the other hand. These connections are especially pronounced in Germany. Therefore these results stimulated debates about reforming the German formal educational system and renewing the educational mandate of nursery schools. In addition,, the role of non-formal education, especially in families, became an intensively discussed subject. ELTERN-AG is an approach that focuses on the latter in order to deliver equal educational opportunities for all children irrespective of their social backgrounds. The eligibility criteria for the ELTERN-AG-empowerment are strict and aim at including the most vulnerable groups. The organisation pro-actively approaches their participants and is thereby most effective in reaching the 'hard-to-reach' target groups that alternative providers have failed to enlist. This is also due to the fact that there are no costs for the participating parents.

What are the characteristics of ELTERN-AG as a social service and how is this service organised?

ELTERN-AG is **organised** in a special cooperation model which enables welfare associations and other organisations from the social field to offer ELTERN-AGs directly on site. Employees of the cooperating welfare organisations are offered vocational training to become mentors.

ELTERN-AG's **financing** comes from training and cooperation fees paid by the collaborating welfare organisations, which in turn can receive a full refund from the state. Furthermore, there are charitable donations and grants from foundations.

ELTERN-AG as a **social service** can be characterised along the following **basic themes** (cf. Armbruster 2005):

- early childhood: focus on pre-school aged children
- intuitional educational competency of parents: “parents are the born educators”
- competencies of children: self-regulation under conductive framework conditions
- de-institutionalised assistance – working without professional experts: exchange at eye level
- gender specific: raising awareness of the role of mother and father by both male and female mentors
- scientific approach: neuroscience, developmental psychology, pedagogic, evidence-based

The intervention is targeted at parents-to-be or those with very young children. Thus, the intervention is **highly preventative**. It helps avoid family problems before they occur or worsen. Thereby, it ensures a conflict-free upbringing and education for the children. This is important, since early childhood and youth experiences have a high impact on future development.

The coaching programme fundamentally builds on the interests, the involvement and the capabilities of the parents, which decide individually and freely on their participation (empowerment). Parents are given the following **basic educational guidance** to tap into and enable their existing educational competencies (cf. Armbruster 2005):

- respect for the child
- advancement and responsiveness
- setting clear limits and being consistent with decisions
- reinforcement of desirable behaviour and ignoring undesirable behaviour
- constructive way of dealing with conflicts
- upbringing free from violence

By applying a **bottom-up, low-threshold approach** the organisation succeeds in building trust with participants that enables intense and effective collaboration. Furthermore, the programme is conceptualized for small groups in local neighbourhoods. The parents are seen as experts, which is reflected in the following basic group rules that contribute to group cohesion (Armbruster 2005):

- focus on joint issue: our children
- voluntariness
- mutual respect
- mutual assistance
- absolute confidentiality
- equal rights for all
- no pathologization/medicalization

Thereby, it automatically enables the establishment of mutual aid and community networks that mostly continue to exist after the end of the official programme.

The effectiveness of the intervention is underpinned by two facts: The results of the scientific evaluation; and the increasing number of well established, large welfare organisations that make use of the experiences and the special concept of ELTERN-AG and let their staff participate in the vocational training provided by the organisation. ELTERN-AG thereby serves as an innovative lever for the existing welfare landscape.

Similar positive effects could be expected in other European countries, as the ELTERN-AG seems to be an appropriate measure to break the cycle of continued inequalities in education, which is a Europe-wide problem. Targeting the close connection of social background and educational success by a highly preventative early intervention along the criteria and principles of the ELTERN-AG concept seems a very promising way to avoid problems before they emerge.

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