



The EU research platform INNOSERV made it possible to gain insights into the innovation action in social services, which above all reveal the complexity of this field. In each of the analysed cases innovation is a highly individual process influenced by numerous factors. In some cases, coincidences and surprising developments may play a role in the implementation of the innovation. However, the so-called change agents are always involved. People who support and advocate new ideas come together with other people to deliberately initiate and implement changes that may often be risky. The composition and objectives of such alliances seem to follow a certain logic: where users and social and care workers take the initiative, questions of autonomy and empowerment are focused on; this applies to concrete service provision but also to broader social movements. By contrast, when change is initiated and supported on the management and regulatory level, the focus is often more on efficiency gains. Where these seemingly opposing interests meet, there is room for a sustainable change and development of social services. This is especially visible in the multifaceted approach of user-centeredness.

Innovation-promoting contexts exist when change agents have a motive, leeway, and the opportunity for forming alliances and taking risks. This also includes a certain amount of safety. Framework conditions, e.g. the increasing projectification of the service field, which virtually force innovation, can paradoxically have a counterproductive effect, which means that innovation action can also become exhausted. By definition, innovation also includes the diffusion into durable patterns of action; if these do not develop and new routines cannot be established, innovations come to nothing and the energy that has been invested to develop the innovation is lost. This especially applies to social services, since they depend on reliability and trust as preconditions for their success.