

Case study

“Verantwortungspartner” (“Partners in Responsibility”)

Overview

Driver	Bertelsmann Foundation
Country	Gütersloh, Germany
Societal issue addressed	Education, integration, demographic change, work-life balance, social cohesion
Partners	enterprises, nonprofit organisations, schools, crèches, Chambers of Commerce, universities, communal administrations, business development agencies, volunteer agencies, state administration
Status	Started in 2008 (2 years and still ongoing)
Impact	About 500 organisations (mainly small and medium sized businesses) in 7 regions, encompassing over 50 concrete local projects
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (Social) networking by small and medium-sized enterprises ▪ Regional Capacity Building geared towards the creation and sustaining of business networks on community investment
Endorsements	Evaluated and transferred results into a “how-to” guide and an interactive website



Executive Summary

Bertelsmann Foundation, on various sites within Germany, pilots projects to incorporate stand-alone instalments of business community investment into networks and aims to build up bundled efforts. It gears the collected efforts towards a future-oriented local community development. Businesses act as “Verantwortungspartner” (Partners in Responsibility) in conjunction with nonprofit organisations, schools, crèches, chambers of commerce, universities, local administrations, business developers, volunteer agencies and federal ministries.

These local networks select and work on a subject of regional prevalence. To assist them, specific techniques of process moderation are employed. This guidance establishes continuous mutual support and sustainable progress. During the initial pilot phase, moderation was offered by the Bertelsmann Foundation. Local intermediary organisations take over this role in later partnerships. All partners are invited to moderated milestone meetings on a regular basis. These meetings offer an opportunity to co-ordinate executive strategies and co-develop new ideas. Workshops are offered to provide guidance and best-practice examples of business community investment projects. The Partners in Responsibility-method proved to be a successful instrument to start up regional networks with social, economical and infrastructural added value – and sustainability.

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1. Situation and societal issue

Fundamental changes as e.g. structural turnover in the economy and demographic change represent challenges for all: government, administration and for companies too. Discussions are centred around topics such as education, integration, social cohesion, work-life balance or the scarcity of qualified workers. These challenges cannot be solved by either government and administration or by companies alone. It requires merged efforts by all actors involved in society to come up with innovative ideas and sustainable solutions. This is the very point of the partnership approach. It builds up on previous experiences of co-operation between companies, public authorities and nonprofit organisations to attract relevant added value for the community. The projects created within the partnerships might focus on child care or the transition between schools and work life. Obstacles lying within the commercial surroundings and impeding social and commercial success can be solved with competent partners. This approach raises the co-operation potential and helps to build up social capital in the local community.

2. Partners

- Bertelsmann Foundation
- Over 500 small and medium-sized enterprises
- State administration (e.g. The State Ministry of Economics of the Saarland)
- Chambers of Commerce (=IHK) (e.g. IHK Heilbronn-Franconia, IHK Detmold, IHK Schleswig-Holstein, IHK Halle-Dessau etc.)
- Business development agencies (e.g. GILDE Detmold)
- Chamber of Commerce Salzburg
- Universities (e.g. University of Halle (Saale))
- Volunteer Agencies (e.g. Volunteer Agency Halle (Saale))
- Local schools, crèches, educational bodies
- Community organisations and local administration
- ...

Bertelsmann Foundation pilots the partnership approach at select areas. Bertelsmann provides enterprises with know-how and expertise to support the development of co-operation with local partners in the fields of education, integration, demographic change, work-life balance and social cohesion in the region. Local business developers, Chambers of Commerce and industrial business networks, as well as local administration support the process initiated by the enterprises by offering know-how and expertise. Through the co-operation of such diverse actors resources and local know-how are bundled and used in a goal-oriented way for the benefit of local projects. The results are innovative projects and pro bono networks with mutual benefits for all actors. Both the local community and the involved enterprises receive added value, the latter investing into their long-term commercial success by investing in their environment.

a. Driver

Small and medium-sized enterprises are central actors of the partnership approach. They are the backbone of the economy as well as a driver and pivotal actor of a changing society. They are facing the aforementioned challenges. As entrepreneurs they take the responsibility for and show courage and competency to take ownership of processes of change. Research

shows their self-conception encompasses social and environmental involvement. Therefore they have to be perceived as dual actors. Firstly they are actors in the economic system, secondly they act within civil society, as a “good citizen” (corporate citizen). The benefit for companies acting as partners in responsibility: the approached change in the social environment is reflected onto them.

The process of the partnership approach is started from within a small group, the so-called regional initiative group (“regionale Initiativkreise”). Comprising committed businesses and other partners dedicated to the idea of the partnership approach, this group lays out initial plans and involves the public by means of an official roll-out event. The further structure of the partnership approach builds upon this step and continues through a moderated process enabling a continuous dialogue and progress of the bundled efforts. All partners are invited to moderated milestone meetings on a regular basis. These meetings offer the opportunity to co-ordinate executive strategies and co-develop new ideas. Workshops are offered to provide guidance and best-practice examples of community projects. The partnership approach was systematically piloted in select regions to deliver new and effective bespoke solutions for the region – together with local administration, political bodies and nonprofit organisations.

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b. Businesses

The partnership approach was developed as a fundamentally entrepreneurial, target oriented method. This might necessitate a shift of perspective and rethinking of the (social) roles currently carried out by the involved parties. In German-speaking countries traditionally the state filled a central leading, governing and care-taking function. Companies and citizens are therefore not aware per se of their individual responsibilities. They have to learn and practice, namely by co-developing and conjunct execution of community projects.

c. Community organisations

Community partners are involved as experts in the hands-on aspect of the partnership approach. Organisations based within the community have the know-how on the fields of social issues, education, integration etc necessary for the successful implementation of the projects. On top of that, many issues in the community can only be addressed by a close co-operation of enterprises and not-for-profit organisations.

d. Broker/ intermediary organisations

Brokers such as volunteer agencies, community business developers, local administrations and chambers of commerce can provide a crucial part to bring relevant local actors together. Their remit regularly encompasses local problems within social development, education and integration in the region. Such intermediary institutions can seize the opportunity to strengthen their profile within the partnership approach, present themselves as capable moderators, to reach out to their members and partners and provide them with an additional benefit.

Brokers are enabled to start the process of responsibility by approaching interested businesses. At the same time one has to

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bear in mind that the partnership approach is one of entrepreneurial and collaborative ideals and gains its momentum from the self-induced involvement of businesses and places authority on the responsible shoulders of all involved parties. The process needs to be carried by their involvement and motivation. Institutions and associations can point the direction and start the project, which itself has to be self-sustained (by the businesses).

The conception of the partnership approach is specifically geared towards the wants and needs of businesses. It encompasses a goal oriented workflow laid out to an average duration of one year. This limited time frame was chosen to suit the enterprises' demand of prompt decisions and results. Its appeal lies in the waiving of obligatory institutionalisation. It builds on a voluntary network, the actual concern of the businesses and the ability to support the programme.

The process can be supported by intermediary organisations. They can take care of continuous tasks within the organisational structure of the project, such as documentation, organisation and moderation of workshops and meetings. It was a successful approach to involve a sole entity or even a single person in given regional settings. The Saarland cluster works with the State Ministry of Economics; Heilbronn-Franconia, Lippe District and Schleswig-Holstein attracted the respective Chambers of Commerce. The Berlin cluster is supported by an industrial association bureau and a competence network. In principle however any organisational body familiar with event management or professional communication can provide such service. They take over the organisational tasks of sending out invites, booking venues and providing materials for the meetings. They co-operate closely with the moderators of the event, unless they take over the task themselves. Additionally it proved fruitful to have professional moderators guiding throughout the project. Accompanying moderation ensures coordinated, target-driven and effective proceedings and therefore a prompt execution of the partnership modules. As the moderators support all partners in finding a sensible strategy, defining goals and finding consensuses, it bears advantages to choose an intermediary organisation for this task.

e. Public administration and government

The partnership process is defined by civic engagement and corporate citizenship. In some of the projects public service agencies were involved in process development and execution.

3. Programme Description

a. Initiation

The rise of a co-operative regional development is due to increasing demographic challenges, regional challenges in the field of education, integration and social issues as well as raised competition between companies and also between business locations. Business development and “soft site-related factors” are found to be on the rise as decisive factors. Therefore regional development has to be an integrated process comprising different actors and regional potentials. By means of the partnership approach, Bertelsmann Foundation supports bundling efforts and local networking. The distinguishably new part of the method puts the focus on ways to turn entrepreneurial initiatives from a solitary act into co-operative and bundled efforts and building up regional development geared towards the future. About 500 companies, centred around 7 local hot spots, collaborate with local administrations, state governments, Chambers of Commerce and NGOs to develop a core problem of exceptional local prevalence.

b. Process

Early in 2008, three partnership regions started their projects in a pilot phase. Later on, four further regions joined the programme, resulting in seven regions encompassing about 500 organisations being successfully involved in a partnership process.

The process of the partnership approach is started from within small groups, the regional initiative groups. This group lays out initial plans and involves the public by means of an official roll-out event (initial/preparation phase). Following that, three meetings (so called milestone meetings) are held (executive phase). They are held to the end of mutual interchange, discussion of the general goals and the coordination of further proceedings. Simultaneously, small themed groups, the so called project teams, hold work meetings to plan and execute the single projects. Their interest lies predominantly in strategy, contacting required participants and carrying out financial planning. Finally, a further public meeting is held to present the current stage of the projects and the plans to sustain them (sustainability phase). Depending on the participants and the local starting situation, proceedings may be varied. The process plan offers multiple opportunities.

c. Resources

Bertelsmann Foundation provided the projects with resources for the initial development and moderation of the pilot phase. During the processes themselves local resources were used predominantly. The involved companies especially and their partners invested time, concepts and financial means. During the live process, diverse cost centres emerged. Initially work materials (moderation tools, correspondence etc.) and events (paid speakers at conferences, food and beverages...) represented cost centres. Additional money was spent for the execution of the projects, e.g. rented venues, amenities etc. The partners in responsibility used the joint resources of the great number of involved companies to their advantage. The project team put together a detailed and transparent financial plan for their undertakings. This plan was the basis for a goal driven search for executional possibilities for specific measures and activities. The existing partnership regions show the potential to realise a great number of plans and goals, especially if the partners' time, personnel, means and know-how is put to use. Given necessity and availability, some projects were publicly funded by local and state bodies to facilitate development and implementation of regional projects.

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d. Activities

The partnership approach was piloted on five sites, two additional sites joined the programme in summer 2009 and decided to organise it independently. In each site, one company takes responsibility over the coordination of the partners. All in all, fifty single projects were rolled out during the past 18 months. A briefing of the core concerns of the respective sites follows:

Partnership Berlin and Brandenburg (region)

Core concern „Initiative gegen Fachkräftemangel“ / „Fachkräfte für einen starken IT-Standort“
 (“Initiative against the lack of qualified workers” / “Qualified workers for a strong IT region”)

Berlin is a relevant region in the IT industry. According to work force, it is the second largest "IT region" in Germany. Numerous IT companies added to this success. Although universities in Berlin and Brandenburg have a good reputation and educate a large number of computer scientists every year, qualified work force is scarce in the region. Comparing within Germany, the lack of qualified workers is the most prevalent in this region. This presents a particular problem as the industry in and around Germany's capital city is growing. This concern motivated Berlin's IT companies to act: as partners in responsibility for Berlin and Brandenburg and in joint efforts with schools and universities they develop projects to educate, attract and bind a qualified work force.

Partnership for Halle (Saale)

Core concern "training, education and profession"

"Diminishing cities" and "changing cities in the East of Germany" are concerns calling for new solutions. Local partnerships bundle business efforts to attain increased value for the sites. Education and trade training prepare the region for future challenges. Furthermore, the public profile of craftsmanship is raised by industry-spanning efforts. Partnerships involving schools and businesses are the first steps on this journey.

Partnership for Heilbronn-Franconia

Core concern "Demographic challenge and integration"

Heilbronn is the high-order centre in the economic region of Heilbronn-Franconia. It is an attractive site for businesses. World market leaders are based here and top quality products "made in Heilbronn" are found in the following industries: mechanics, automotive, packaging, food and beverages and electrical engineering. The companies and their products have a high reputation around the globe. The fields of demographic change and integration are not developed on a comparable level. Companies from the region want to change this. Building on a partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce (IHK), dubbed "future pact", the Wirtschaftsjuvenen (young entrepreneurs' association), municipality Heilbronn and nonprofit organisations, they introduce high-impact integration projects. This way, they build up answers for businesses and the region.

Partnership for Lippe

Core concern „Education – work – life quality“

Lippe lies between river Weser and the Teutoburg Forest and is part of the industrial and service region "Eastern Westphalia-Lippe". In industries such as electrical engineering, polymer and furniture processing and mechanics Lippe companies are known worldwide. The site, at the same time, is on the cutting edge of simplified bureaucratic processes: in one pilot project red tape was cut to ensure added value for businesses. Lippe competes with other German sites for a qualified work force. The partners try to face this challenge by providing schools, crèches and universities with better professional training and by adding to the life quality in the region. These measures allow the attraction of further qualified workers and motivate them to stay there – because the region offers quality for families and employees.

Acting as partners, the local businesses will initiate projects in conjunction with the Lippe Chamber of Commerce in Detmold, GILDE business developers and other partners, to build up a sustainable region.

Partnership for Saarland

Core concern “Youth, technology and work”

The Saarland region successfully restructures the economical framework: once dominated by montane and heavy industry the federal state now fosters modern high-end technologies. The automotive, mechanical engineering and IT industries have blossomed even more in recent years. These promising industries, however, lack a local supply of qualified employees. The core concern of this partnership is to confront this issue at an early stage. They address this situation in conjunction with crèches, schools and other bodies to enthuse young people for technologies.

Partnership for Salzburg (Austria)

Core concern “Life quality, education, Salzburg”

To foster new ideas for community engagement and support the quality of Salzburg as business site, companies in Salzburg build a partnership with the Salzburg Economic Chamber. Dubbed “WE venture the future” (pun intended), this partnership focuses on education and local economy to advance commerce and community.

Partnership for Schleswig-Holstein

Core concern “State of knowledge: Schleswig-Holstein”

The core concern for Schleswig-Holstein is to reinforce the region's renown as a site of wisdom and knowledge. The future of the region lies in its innovative abilities. The local partnership in responsibility aims to strengthen a “state of knowledge” in Schleswig-Holstein. The pre-existing commercial initiatives and the historically strong bonds between the state administration and the chambers of commerce will be utilised to generate knowledge and foster innovations. The long term goal of this approach is to attract more qualified employees to Schleswig-Holstein.

4. Programme Evaluation

The experiences achieved during the pilot projects were reflected through two expert focus groups. Between these experts and the involved parties, the most successful tools and methods in the respective regions were agreed on. Building from there, the experts developed a “how-to” guideline, incorporating the experiences from the partnership approach. It defines criteria for success and pins them down on actual instances from the pilot phase. The guideline is to be understood as a collection of ideas and experiences, to provide other regions and organisations with a resource to learn from. Simultaneously, a dedicated web site was introduced, providing useful templates for letters, work sheets, presentations and more. This self-reflection and project guide is aimed to help the partnership approach proliferate.

5. Impact

a. Benefits to the local/ regional community

Companies invited community organisations and municipal bodies on an individual basis to participate in local partnerships.

The following aspects were of central value to the municipalities:

- By taking part and cooperating the administration generates valuable know-how and competencies of practical use
- By supporting the projects the municipal administration shows concern for the local community and develops public profile
- The municipality achieves access to new conceptual areas and freedom for development through the cooperation and involvement
- The municipality can identify and access important resources and “civic capital” from the involved companies and civil representatives
- The economical region gains renown and profile in the national competition

b. Benefits of the community organisations

- NGOs and community organisations get access to new and innovative capacities and resources
- The newly found partnerships enable a timely realisation of projects through the access to financial and human resources
- Various actors within civil society (communities, associations, communal bodies and organisations) broaden their public profile through new contacts and are able to communicate their goal to a wider audience
- New partnerships might attract new members for communities as associations
- The civic actors receive inspirations for their respective work through discipline-spanning interchange. New ways to act are opened.

c. Benefits to the companies

- Public profile and renown of the company are raised
- Business community investment generates social capital (contacts, co-operation, social skills)
- Business community investment acts as advertisement for the company. Existing business relationships can be intensified and new ones can be created.
- Employees are motivated by corporate community involvement. Employee satisfaction is raised.
- Business community investment inspires and opens new perspectives for the respective corporation (business ideas, potential to innovate)
- Personnel recruitment becomes easier

6. Challenges

The experiences from within the regional partnerships demonstrate that various precautions have to be met to build a strategic, goal oriented and networked partnership with other companies, municipalities, nonprofit organisations and associations. Many regions still have to learn their role. The tradition of beneficial donations on a local basis [=individual corporate sponsorships] plays an important role, but a higher impact will be achieved when many companies co-operate to take ownership of an issue in a coordinated and goal-oriented manner.

Strategic involvement for the benefit of a region will be sustained particularly if it provides tangible benefits for both the companies and the community. This new perception of

cooperation between businesses, nonprofit organisations and public authorities requires all parties to redefine “community involvement”. On top of that, the strong networking approach of the partnership method requires diligent preparation to incorporate existing institutions into the implementation of the process. A particular focus is needed to include existing networks and current community projects into the bundled efforts of partnership activities. All in all, the results point towards additional potential within companies to participate in the local community and regional development. This potential needs to be activated and mobilised. The experiences from the pilot partnerships offer a viable solution to do that.

7. Contact & Further Information

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www.verantwortungspartner-region-halle.de

www.verantwortungspartner-lippe.de

www.verantwortungspartner-saarland.de

www.verantwortungspartner-salzburg.at

INCLUDE – Pathways to Community Investment

The European project INCLUDE provides local intermediaries like civil society organisations, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and public authorities with support that will help them to engage businesses in innovative cross-sectoral partnerships. INCLUDE identifies on a worldwide scale good examples of collaborative business initiatives as well as business engagement in cross-sectoral partnerships, which contribute towards skills development and employability of disadvantaged groups, towards social inclusion and innovation in addressing societal challenges and communicates them.

INCLUDE builds upon the results of the CSR-Laboratory “Skills for Employability enhanced through Employee Engagement” which was carried out as part of the European Alliance for CSR and is run jointly by UPJ and the ENGAGE initiative coordinated by Business in the Community (BITC). Partners of the project are the German Federal Department of Labour and Social Affairs, Citi-Group, Asociata pentru Relatii Comunitare (Romania), Önkéntes Központ Alapítvány (Hungary), SMartKolektiv (Serbia), Pontis Foundation (Slovakia) and Özel Sektör Gönüllüler Derneği (Turkey).

The project is supported by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities).

Further information about the project is available at www.bitc.org.uk/global/include.html (in English) www.upj.de/include (in German)

UPJ

UPJ is the German national network of engaged businesses and local non-profit intermediary organizations. Its projects and programmes create new connections between businesses, civil society organizations and public authorities thus contributing to solve societal challenges and to shape sustainable communities. UPJ, a registered charity under German law, provides organizations from the business, community and public sectors with information and consultancy to improve their Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Social Responsibility activities. www.upj.de



ENGAGE

ENGAGE is an international programme that brings together businesses and community organisations around the globe to increase the quality and amount of employee community engagement in their local communities. Its mission is twofold: To inspire, mobilise and support companies to develop sustainable community investment programmes, and to provide community organisations with a network, tools and support that will help them work more effectively with business partners. www.engageyouremployees.org



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