



Governance International
STUDY TRIP

on Community Empowerment
to the Stuttgart region, 5–6 June 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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WHAT THE STUDY TRIP WAS ABOUT

Every local authority and public agency is now taking citizen participation seriously. The hunt is on for approaches which really connect with local people (not just the 'usual suspects'), and involve them in service planning, management, delivery and evaluation in order to improve their quality of life. One of the areas of Europe which has become famous for innovative and successful approaches to community empowerment is the state (*Land*) of Baden-Württemberg in South-West Germany, where public agencies have already won many European awards.

The Governance International Study Trip on community empowerment to the Stuttgart region showed how decision-makers at local and central levels of government and representatives of NGO can take existing approaches of citizen engagement further and make them more results-oriented.

In order to make sure that our participants got maximum benefit from the Study Trip, the first session provided an introductory framework from *Governance International* staff on the context of local government and the public sector in Germany

The one-and-a-half day programme involved visits to and presentations from

■ **The press officer of the Stuttgart Community Foundation** which raises substantial funds to finance citizen-driven community projects in the City of Stuttgart

■ **The elected Mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*) and Directors of the Planning and Neighbourhood Management Departments of the City of Ludwigsburg**

■ **The Deputy Mayor and the Director of the Unit for Citizen Engagement of the City of Nürtingen** which has been developing a comprehensive approach to citizen empowerment over the last 15 years

■ Representatives of **self-help groups and citizen-managed projects in Nürtingen**, including projects focussing on people with disabilities and chronic diseases

■ **The Editor-in-chief of the local newspaper in Nürtingen** which coaches volunteers to report their activities professionally

■ Trainees and managers of **Heller, an international machine tool company in Nürtingen**, where all trainees have to participate in (and run) a community project in their spare time as part of the company training programme.

The participants also had the opportunity to take part in a guided walking tour of Ludwigsburg with its Versailles-style Castle and Baroque Garden Show.



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY TRIP

The study trip focussed on the following issues:

- How to develop a *larger community of more active* citizens
- How to involve '*harder to reach*' groups
- How to put *local councillors* at the centre of participatory processes
- How to get *local companies and the media* engaged with public agencies
- How to work with *the local media* to empower local people to do more for themselves
- How to get all engaged stakeholders to *commit more resources* to tackling public issues, not just leaving them to public agencies to deal with
- How to *sustain* citizen engagement over years, not just for short bursts on 'hot' issues

KEY LESSONS OF THE STUDY TRIP

This section will distil the kind of lessons that participants learnt from the presentations, discussions and site visits at the Study Trip.

1. The Stuttgart Community Foundation – How to raise funds for citizen-led projects

A community foundation is ...

- ... an autonomous and independent institution set up*
- ... to promote a variety of nonprofit and charity objectives*
- ... within a geographically limited (i.e. local or regional) area*
- ... which builds up a long-term capital stock*
- ... and is transparent in organisational structure and how it allocates its funds.*

'Community foundations' have their origins in the USA, normally focused on social and cultural issues within a region. They are founded by a number of citizens and not just one, as would be the case with a normal foundation. They therefore enable even citizens with low financial assets to co-finance community projects in their city. In sum, the US model is a form of community chest **for** citizens and managed **by** citizens.

This is also the basic idea of the Stuttgart community investment foundation which was initiated by the directly elected mayor of the City of Stuttgart, Dr. Wolfgang Schuster, with the support of number of influential men and women in 2001. In the start-up phase, about 140 local citizens donated around € 250,000. This amount was doubled by Stuttgart council in 2002. Now the capital endowments amount to € 4m, which makes it the fourth largest community foundation in Germany.

The objectives of the community foundation are defined broadly so that it can remain flexible. At present, the projects of the community foundation focus on three key issues:

- 1** inter-generational living in Stuttgart
- 2** improving the welfare of children based on the motto 'no child left behind'
- 3** enabling local citizens to die in dignity at home (palliative care).

Since 2007 most projects have been developed through round tables which bring together key stakeholders who are involved in a specific issue. For example, the current round table on palliative care includes medical experts, carers and representatives of voluntary and community groups. Typi-



cally, the roundtable participants are selected and approached by the staff of the community foundation who invest considerable time in mapping in order to make sure that the round table represents a wide range of views.

“In our experience, the volunteers and professionals taking part in our roundtables get on well with each other. However, professionals are sometimes tempted to speak in the name of their organisation – so we make it clear that they are invited to the roundtable as individual experts.”

Irene Armbruster responding to the issue whether there is a conflict between professionals and volunteers

The roundtable usually meets for about 6 months to design new projects of 2–3 years duration. Once a project has been agreed by the roundtable, one of its participants is given the mandate to present it to the community foundation Board and to manage it if its funding is approved. The project manager has to inform the participants of the roundtable on a regular basis about the progress made on the project – and to give them the opportunity to make further inputs.

Typically, roundtables are initiated by the community foundation but may also be suggested by donors. For example, the consulting company Ernst and Young currently sponsors a round table

on education. Naturally, the donors may also participate at a roundtable, but only as members on the same footing as all the other members. If they are not really open to new ideas but actually want to sponsor one specific project, then a roundtable is not the right vehicle and they are encouraged to set up a separate trust, managed by the community foundation, which carries out the stipulations of the founder or donor. Of course, the ideas of the founder or donor have to match well with the overall objectives of the community foundation, otherwise their gifts will not be accepted. In particular, projects of a political nature cannot be accepted by the Community Foundation.

So far, the roundtable discussions have resulted in four projects with a budget of € 50,000. The first two roundtables were on the themes:

- 1 “Getting older in Stuttgart” with a strong emphasis on palliative care
- 2 “Old and young – learning from each other, doing things together” with a focus on inter-generational issues.

A new third roundtable on giving disadvantaged citizens access to culture and the arts is currently being set up.

Another key objective of the Stuttgart Community Foundation is to promote civic engagement in the City of Stuttgart. Every second year, innovative projects in the city are awarded a prize for civic engagement – (the community foundation contributes € 20,000.



Naturally, one key task of the four professional staff members of the community foundation is to raise more funds by attracting capital endowments from other foundations and individuals -the target is to raise € 1m per year.

“Community Foundations only work if they are independent and managed by professional staff” emphasized Irene Armbruster, press officer of the Stuttgart Community Foundation at her presentation in Stuttgart.

Therefore, professional public relations is very important. According to Ms Armbruster, one key success factor has been the good cooperation achieved with the local newspaper in Stuttgart, which is very supportive of PR campaigns to make the community foundation known to a large audience. Furthermore, a donation of € 100,000 from the Breuninger Foundation (set up by a large department store in South Germany, comparable to Marks and Spencer in the UK) helps the community foundation to finance PR work. As a principle, the community foundation expects the four professional staff to raise enough donations to cover their own staff costs – at the moment, these are financed externally by donations from the Breuninger Foundation and the Robert Bosch Foundation. The work

of the community foundation is also supported by 25 volunteers who help with events.

While the Stuttgart Community Foundation was a pioneer in Germany in 2001 there are now over 170 independent community foundations in Germany. Indeed, there is also one in Nürtingen, where there used to be a community foundation run by the local authority but this has been turned into an independently managed community foundation since November 2007.

2.Participatory community planning in the City of Ludwigsburg – How to put councilors into the centre of the participatory process

When the citizens of Ludwigsburg (about 85,000 inhabitants) elected a new mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*) in 2004, it was evident that time was ripe for a more open and transparent approach towards local policies and public management. The previous mayor had suffered a defeat by a popular referendum and was seen as rather unresponsive to citizens.

A particular opportunity was opened up by the fact that the military barracks formerly occupied by the American army was closing down, which opened up new investment possibilities for developers in



the city centre and allowed a new direction for the former 'garrison city'. The new mayor, Werner Spec, campaigned on a platform of increased citizen consultation and more transparent policy-making. Accordingly, he launched a participatory community planning process at the beginning of his term of office in 2004.

Of course, most council members were quite suspicious and feared a parallel system of decision-making which would undermine the local council. But in Ludwigsburg council members were not just passive observers. Rather, they were given the right to influence the participation process. It proved important that the local council was involved in the consultation process from the very beginning. In particular, all elected members were invited to join the team of project managers on two away days, which gave them the opportunity to discuss in an informal atmosphere the expected benefits and risks arising from the participatory approach.

As Mr. Kurt, one of the key project managers said: "we provided the local council with a folder which was empty when we started – but it was filled with so many summaries and reports by the end of the process that it could hardly hold the paper anymore. Indeed, one of our elected members complained that he was no longer able to make a decision anymore, since he had too much information!"

Although the consultation process has been mainly managed by the planning department, there was no 'masterplan' at any stage of the process – the consultation process was genuinely open, with no preconceived ideas. Clearly, this was nerve-racking for the project managers at times – but it made the process more credible to the councillors, who recognised that there was an opportunity to shape the process. Most importantly, the local council was comprehensively informed by the project team before and during the consultation process.

The objective of the consultation process was to identify priorities for the future development of the City of Ludwigsburg. The community planning consisted of three phases:

- 1** The planning department carried out a SWOT analysis and collected evidence on key policy issues.
- 2** The public consultation consisted of interviews with 70 stakeholders in order to get a wide range of views, theme-oriented consultations with specific stakeholder groups, a children and youth conference and two town meetings. The town meetings lasted 3 days each and were attended by 130 local citizens who had to apply in writing and specify what kind of knowledge and expertise they could bring to the process.
- 3** In 2006 the local council approved the 11 strategic priorities, including a rough action plan in a public council meeting.

The consultation process not only helped public officials and councillors to become better informed about the needs and perceptions of citizens but also triggered a number of citizen-designed and citizen-managed projects.

Clearly, the town meetings led to new innovative projects which were sometimes small in terms of financial resources but made a big impact on the quality of life of citizens. One example presented by Sandra Sperzel, neighbourhood manager, was the project 'nice toilets'. This project was close to the heart of many citizens, who complained about the poor facilities and lack of hygiene in public toilets. Therefore a number of restaurant managers and



other business people got together in Ludwigsburg and agreed to allow the public to use their toilets, in return for a small financial contribution made annually by the council.

The success of this public consultation process is considered to be due to three factors:

- 1** There was a close partnership with the local newspaper which ran lots of PR campaigns and reported extensively on the results of the consultation process.
- 2** Elected members were in the driving seat during the participation process and participated in the working groups during the town meetings. Each working group consisted of one councillor, one public official and six citizens and focussed on one strategic issue.
- 3** The consultation process took just one year and was completed by a public council meeting at which the community plan was agreed unanimously.

This meant that, at the time of the Study Trip, the local authority was already deeply involved in the implementation phase. Given that there is no standard performance audit for local authorities in Germany, and no national performance targets, the local authority now also faces the challenge of defining targets which will allow it to evaluate to what degree the agreed priorities have been implemented.

Another challenge in Ludwigsburg, like elsewhere in Europe, is to reach out to disadvantaged citizens. Given that not many migrants or other disadvantaged citizens took part in the town meetings, Ludwigsburg set up a specific consultation process in the neighbourhood of Eglosheim (about 10,000 inhabitants), which is an area of low quality housing, significant deprivation and poor infrastructure. This included two neighbourhood meetings and structured interviews with key stakeholders in the neighbourhood (basically 'the usual suspects'). In addition, Ludwigsburg decided to take part in a national government programme (called *Soziale Stadt* or *Social City*) which provided additional funds for investment and community projects in Eglosheim. Although the *Social City* programme finished in

2008, the City of Ludwigsburg continues to boost community empowerment in Eglosheim through a number of projects. First, the youth services manager, Sandra Sperzel, now devotes 25 percent of her time as a neighbourhood manager in Eglosheim, acting as a contact point between the neighbourhood and local council. Second, a neighbourhood budget is being piloted in Eglosheim which allows individual citizens and associations to apply for funds for community projects. At this point, only € 20,000 Euro are 'in the pot' but this neighbourhood budget may be increased in the future.

Because Ludwigsburg council sees itself as a 'learning organisation', it participates in various European projects and is eager to transfer experiences from other 'governance champions'.

3. Nürtingen mobilises everybody – How to develop a sustainable stakeholder participation process

The City of Nürtingen (population 40,000) in Baden-Württemberg has already been practicing citizen engagement and citizen orientation for more than seventeen years. The trigger was almost accidental – when the old town hall, dating back to the Middle Ages, had to be extended in the early 1990s, councillors decided that it should be taken as an opportunity to transform what had been an administrative headquarters into a transparent citizen-oriented agency. At the same time, the Forum for Senior Citizens, a rather low profile local initiative, was transformed into a meeting point for people of all ages – the Citizens Forum.



Given its comprehensive approach to citizen engagement, it was no surprise that Nürtingen was awarded first prize in 1999 in a nation-wide competition for citizen-oriented councils. Since then, Nürtingen has become a Mecca for citizen empowerment in Europe.

One reason why citizen participation has been so successful in Nürtingen is that it is **not only driven by the local authority but by the local media and local companies as well**. In particular, the local newspaper and other businesses provide support to community initiatives in a number of ways:

■ **Local businesses finance a “Bonus Card” for volunteers** which gives them price reductions for services and products offered by the sponsoring companies. The local authority also offers price reductions for local facilities such as the swimming pool and cultural events run by the local authority. The “Bonus Card” is an important part of the ‘recognition culture’ promoted by the local authority and shows volunteers that the community esteems their engagement.

■ Another local initiative with business support aims at rewarding volunteering work of young people. The city council has fashioned an **agreement with the school authority and local businesses that pupils who are engaged in volunteering work get a special school grade in their school certificate**. This distinction is recognised by local businesses, which

give socially engaged pupils preference when it comes to awarding placements for training or jobs. Even without such an agreement, the council believes that young people who do voluntary work find it easier to get a job later, as they are more experienced and self-confident.

■ The **international machine tool company Heller has become a pioneer in corporate social responsibility in Nürtingen**. Its trainees (currently 110) are typically aged 16–17. They have to work as volunteers for at least 4 hours per year during their 3-year training programme. The volunteering activities have to take place during their own spare time. They can choose between several projects which are coordinated by the Citizen Engagement Unit of the local council. At the time of the Study Trip, several young people were involved in organizing a disco for disabled people in the Café Rainbow, to which our study trip participants were also invited! Other typical projects are about organizing football tournaments for people with disabilities or selling self-made crafts at the local Christmas market, with the funds raised going to charity. This ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) initiative provides young staff with important project management and social skills, which are valuable to the company, while it costs the company very little to support the trainees in these activities –senior managers Mr. Mack and Mr. Walbert estimate that the whole CSR initiative only costs 3 person days per annum, while direct costs are minimal.



■ In response to proposals made to it by some active citizens, **the local newspaper *Nürtinger Zeitung* initiated a volunteer newspaper *BINGO***, which gives extensive information three times a year to volunteering activities. **Moreover, it seconds a journalist for 3–4 days to support the ‘volunteer journalists’ in producing every issue of this journal in a professional way.** A marketing company produces the layout for free and the costs of production are financed by an advertising page. *BINGO* has a print run of 12,000 copies and this edition of the newspaper is always particularly popular in Nürtingen. Furthermore, the newspaper gives away 10 free copies every day to a local charity shop, so that people who can’t afford to buy it nevertheless have access to it. As the editor-in-chief, Uwe Gottwald, pointed out in his presentation, these initiatives not only help to improve the image of his newspaper but also put him in touch with the “movers and shakers” and opinion-formers in Nürtingen.

Clearly, this initiative works particularly well in the South German context, where there is still a tradition of daily newspapers – in countries where this tradition is no longer maintained, it is much harder for stakeholders to be well informed about local issues. However, the idea of activating journalists and media companies to coach associations and NGOs in how to improve the marketing of their activities and how to package all their news stories into one professional outlet, instead of each printing its own newsletters, brochures and leaflets would certainly be transferable to other contexts as well.

Another interesting approach which attracted the interest of the study trip participants Nürtingen is the citizen mentoring programme.

The training programme is offered on a regular basis and has already trained up a number of foreign-born citizen mentors, who work closely with the

local authority while reaching out and keeping in touch with their own community. Some citizen mentors also made presentations to the Study Trip to illustrate some projects they had been involved in which had involved people with disabilities and chronic diseases. In Nürtingen, apart from these specific projects aimed at helping and supporting them, disabled persons also undertake high visibility activities at the annual *Stadtfest* (city festival) – part of the programme typically includes performances by disabled people and a city marathon for the disabled, so that the council policy of integration is not only implemented in its activities but also showcased, so that citizens know that this is a priority in the city.

Furthermore, the management and operation of the Nürtingen Citizens’ Forum has been contracted out to an association of disabled people. This decision had its roots in a Citizen Workshop in 2003 (the European Year of Disabled People). The association manages and staffs the Café Rainbow, which is a very busy café in the foyer of the Citizens’ Forum. It pays a small rent for the premises and runs the Café with four disabled employees – even delivering snacks and drinks (particularly iced coffees, which are much needed in the very hot South German summers!) to employees of offices and shops in the town centre. Indeed, the participants of the GI Study Trip had the chance to enjoy an excellent lunch in the Café Rainbow and could see how professionally it was managed and run. The Café is highly frequented by people in Nürtingen, as well as by all the citizens attending events at the Citizens’ Forum. Its walls are used to host art exhibitions by local people – at the time of our Study Trip, it was exhibiting paintings by two local citizens (one a citizen mentor), who both suffer from chronic diseases and have used their paintings to give insights into their feelings and experiences – talks about and tours round these paintings have themselves been the subject of a number of events in the Citizens Forum.

The citizen-mentoring programme in the state of Baden-Württemberg

The citizen mentoring programme is financed and coordinated at state level by the Department for Work and Social Affairs of *Land* Baden-Württemberg. The training programme is intended to help citizens and citizen-led initiatives to see beyond their own patch and to encourage less active and more hesitant citizens to become engaged.

The courses for civic mentors are run at local level and include 40 hours over a period of 3 months. At the end of the course, the participants receive a certificate. The courses are co-produced by neighbourhood managers of the local council, trainers from a regional voluntary organisation with a contract from the Department for Work and Social Affairs of *Land* Baden-Württemberg, and citizen mentors who have already completed the training programme in their local area. For example, in Nürtingen Tim Holderer, a Lufthansa pilot who is also a citizen mentor and actively engaged in a variety of initiatives in the city, now runs training courses on teamwork for local voluntary and community organisations, illustrating from the example of teamwork in an airplan cockpit the lessons which the participants need to transfer to their own context.

In general, the training courses for citizen mentors provide ...

- information about community activities and projects going on within the local area
- information about local resources and networks for civic engagement in the *Land*
- ideas and approaches on how to implement civic engagement within the local area
- tips and tricks on how to get people and organisations more engaged with citizens and other organisations in their area
- a platform for civic activists to exchange their ideas
- an introduction on how to improve the quality of life of young people and the elderly.

Each mentor develops an personal activity profile during the mentoring programme and in the coaching phase afterwards, which helps them to line up their activities with local priorities. This activity profile is based on an assessment of all volunteering opportunities in the local area. As the Study Trip participants found out during their visit to Nürtingen, almost every department in the town hall is supported by one or two citizen mentors who act as a bridge between the local authority and other citizens.



OVERALL LEARNING POINTS

The participants of the Study Trip agreed that they had learnt many new ideas and approaches which could be taken back home to their own agencies. In particular, the group agreed on the following learning points:

- 1** Community empowerment must address ALL citizens, then nobody feels excluded.
- 2** Community empowerment should not be over-planned but rather practiced as an open process.
- 3** Community empowerment works best when local councillors are given an active role in it.
- 4** Community empowerment requires professional PR, therefore local media are important partners.
- 5** Community empowerment requires resources, staff time and expertise from the business sector, as well as the public and non-profit sector – and business benefits from these CSR programmes.
- 6** Community empowerment requires skilled and motivated citizens – and therefore it is right to offer qualifications and clear public recognition to citizens.
- 7** Community empowerment may sometimes be greatly enhanced by significant financial investment – and raising these funds can be successfully done through an independent community foundation.

Further information

If you want to know more about this or other study trips organised by Governance International please contact



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