



Learning from Good Practices:

**Key findings from the Study Trip on  
Community Empowerment in Social  
Services to Nürtingen and Stuttgart,  
18–19 December 2008**



“Think outside the box  
to make the impossible  
possible”

## Why public agencies in the UK can benefit from the good practices of the German empowerment champions

In Germany there is no legal duty to inform, consult or involve citizens but many public agencies have recognized that community empowerment can be a low cost way of improving the quality of life of citizens and community cohesion. In particular, South-West Germany has a reputation for being particularly economic and efficient in its use of resources. It is not only the home of leading companies such as Daimler, Porsche and Bosch but also a leader in community empowerment. Why? As the participants of the Governance International study trip realized, one reason is that public agencies have been very successful in achieving close co-operation with local business and the media—the good practices developed by Nürtingen and Stuttgart councils are a case in point. As one UK delegate put it “Nürtingen and Stuttgart focus on the resources they have and not on gaps which are missing”.

This report highlights the lessons which the UK delegates of the Governance International study trip to Nürtingen and Stuttgart in December 2008 have reported after the trip, in order to enable other agencies at local and regional levels in the UK to get fresh ideas on how community empowerment in social services can be made more effective.

## The study trip in retrospective: what it was about

The one-and-a-half day programme provided delegates with the opportunity to have meetings and discussions with a variety of stakeholders involved in social services, including

- **Otmar Heirich, the directly elected Mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*), and Hannes Wezel, the Head of the Unit for Citizen Engagement of the City of Nürtingen**, which has been developing a comprehensive approach to citizen engagement and empowerment over the last 15 years
- Representatives of **self-help groups and citizen-managed projects in Nürtingen**, including projects focussing on disabled people and chronic diseases
- **Tim Holderer, a Lufthansa pilot who is also a citizen mentor** and actively engaged in a variety of initiatives in the city





- **Uwe Gottwald**, the **editor-in-chief of the local newspaper in Nürtingen**, which coaches volunteers to report their activities professionally
- **Andreas Walbert**, the **manager of the apprentice programme 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
- **Reinhold Halder**, the **Head of the Citizen Engagement Unit of the City of Stuttgart**, who has piloted an innovative approach to match skills and resources available in NGOs and the private sector and co-chairs a network of local councils in Baden-Württemberg.

The exchange with the German hosts was facilitated by the Governance International team Elke Löffler and Tony Bovaird, who also set the good practices in context.

## Aims and objectives of the study trip

An earlier Study Trip organised by Governance International in June 2008 had focused on community empowerment strategies in general. The December study trip was tailored to the needs of the delegation from Bedford Borough as they prepared for unitary status from April 2009. Therefore the Study Trip focussed more specifically on how community empowerment can form the building block for good outcomes in adult social care. In particular, the presentations and discussions during the study trip raised issues such as

- How to develop a *larger community* of *more active* citizens from disabled people
- How to work more effectively with self-help groups
- How to get *local companies* engaged with public agencies
- How to work with *the local media* to empower local people to do more for themselves
- How to *sustain* citizen engagement when resources are scarce

Before highlighting the key approaches and good practices developed by Nürtingen and Stuttgart councils, a brief introduction to the German political and administrative system may help to set the 'good practices' of community empowerment in context.





### The structure of German local and regional government in a nutshell

- Unitary: 116 unitary cities
- Two tier: 323 counties with about 13,000 district authorities
- 16 states (Länder), including three city-states: Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, each with its own constitution, Parliament and government

## Useful facts and figures about the German public sector

Clearly, German public agencies operate within a much more decentralised system, with much less central government control, than is the case in the UK. Local self-government is constitutionally protected and legislative interference is strictly limited. Audit and inspection units have no powers to tell local government what to do (except in the case of bankruptcy). Due to their power of general competence in local issues, local government has a wide range of responsibilities, both in terms of tasks belonging to their level and those delegated to them from above (80% of Federal and *Land* legislation is implemented by LAs).

As a result, most reforms cannot be imposed ‘top down’—indeed, local authorities typically have always been much more management-oriented than Federal and *Land* governments, so that local innovations actually tend to “creep upwards”.

This also applies to community engagement and empowerment approaches, which typically are first piloted by some local innovators. In particular, the longstanding financial crisis in the German public sector—which was widely believed to be just coming to an end, when the credit crunch hit the reviving German economy in late 2008—encouraged local authorities to tap the ideas and resources of its citizenry. In the meantime, a number of states (*Länder*) also promoted local citizen empowerment, even giving some financial incentives for it. For example, involving disabled people in the commissioning of their own social care started in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate in 1998 and has become a legal obligation in all German *Länder* since 2008.

As far as community engagement and empowerment is concerned, the Land Baden-Württemberg has been in a very favourable position for a long time because of its high social capital. Indeed, as the first German-wide survey on volunteering confirmed in 1999, Baden-Württemberg is the leader of citizen engagement in Germany. According to the second survey of 2004, the number of engaged citizens had further increased: in 2004, more than 42 percent of citizens in Baden-Württemberg were engaged as volunteers—interestingly enough, women had caught up (from 37% in 1999) with the level of male volunteers. In Nürtingen, a local survey found out that the level of community engagement was 45 % in 2004<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The results of another local citizen survey on engagement and empowerment carried out in 2008 were not available at the time this report was produced.





But Baden-Württemberg also stands out in Germany because of its historically distinctive local government constitution, in which all municipalities have directly elected mayors—a system which then spread to other Länder in Germany at the beginning of the 1990s. In contrast to the UK, the elected mayor is also the CEO. Clearly, as the case of Nürtingen and Stuttgart shows, the *Oberbürgermeister* can play an important role in promoting and enabling citizen engagement and empowerment, partly because they see it as a way of enhancing their popularity. Yet, there is no empirical evidence that a popular directly elected mayor necessarily entails a commitment to significant community engagement—even in Baden-Württemberg, many directly elected mayors still think that they are the ‘first citizen’ and are hesitant to involve citizens in local decisions.

The following section distils the main lessons that participants learnt from the presentations, discussions and site visits at the Study Trip.





## Nürtingen stands for

- a **comprehensive** approach to community empowerment which not only includes citizens but also business and the media
- a **bottom-up** approach – none of the initiatives has been imposed on the local authority, even though Nürtingen benefits from the Baden-Württemberg network of citizen participation and other national networks such as *Civitas*
- an **enabling** approach – Nürtingen does not employ an army of neighbourhood managers but works through citizen mentors who are trained citizens
- **sustainability** – community empowerment is also on the agenda of the directly elected mayor, Otmar Heirich (SPD), who builds on the engagement approach developed by his conservative predecessor



## What UK public agencies can learn from Nürtingen council

### Mobilising the resources of people, not focussing on their limitations—community empowerment in social services in Nürtingen

The City of Nürtingen (population 40,000) in Baden-Württemberg has already been practicing community engagement and empowerment for 18 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, councilors 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. As the UK delegates immediately observed when entering the historical town hall of Nürtingen, there is no security control—a common feature in most German town halls. It is therefore easy for citizens to approach and get in touch with public officials and with the mayor and cabinet members. In Nürtingen, this ease of access is reinforced by the fact that citizens are deliberately lured into the town hall by the positioning of a café in a modern annex to the town hall, immediately beside the access to the underground car park (which serves the market place, not just the town hall).

In contrast to the UK, where public agencies are concerned to develop specific approaches for reaching out to disadvantaged groups, the Nürtingen approach focuses on what people from different backgrounds can contribute. As Hannes Wezel, the community engagement officer puts it *“we try to see what people with different skills, talents and abilities can do to improve their quality of life and the quality of life of others, rather than focussing on their limitations”*.

One manifestation of this policy is that the management and operation of the Nürtingen Citizens’ Forum has been contracted out to an association of disabled people, a decision which had its roots in a Citizen Workshop of 2003 (European Year of Disabled People).

The association manages and staffs the Cafe Rainbow, which is a busy café in the foyer of the Citizens’ Forum, within the new Annex of the town hall. 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. (Participants in the 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 well used by the local associations and self-help groups to run meetings and events—about 1700 events are held in the Café per year. In contrast to many community centres in the UK, which are sometimes even unknown to local taxi drivers, newcomers to Nürtingen know where to find the Café, as it is actually in the town hall.

Clearly, the activities of self-help groups and associations in Nürtingen are not much different from their peers in the UK. However, the fact that **the council networks with representatives of such groups on a regular basis in so-called fora** makes their work a lot more effective. The fora are typically theme-oriented, including themes such as public safety, culture, tourism, getting older in Nürtingen or living with disabilities. They ensure that the service heads in the council consult on a regular basis with citizen mentors who in turn are in charge of connecting to communities and NGOs. Therefore, **citizen engagement and empowerment is not just practiced by the Citizen Engagement Unit but runs like a red thread through the town hall**. For example, at the time of the study visit, Christmas trees had been set out in all the streets in Nürtingen—nothing special by German standards but in Nürtingen the trees in the main shopping street were not decorated by the council but rather by each association, NGO, school or kindergarten, each of which was given the responsibility to decorate ‘its own tree’. Even homeless people were invited to make a wish and hang it from one of the Christmas trees—these were picked up and actioned (where practicable) by trainees in the town hall.





## Mobilising the resources of local business and the media in community empowerment

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 and has won many other awards since then. 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 guarantee socially engaged pupils an interview when they are selecting young people for training or jobs.
- The **international machine tool company Heller has become a pioneer in corporate social responsibility in Nürtingen**. The business case is obvious: nowadays, no one buys machines just because of the product quality—quality of service is now a key factor. Therefore, it pays dividends when technical staff have the well-developed social skills which are important in providing an excellent service. Heller’s cadre of 110 trainees, aged 16-17, 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 disabled people or selling craft products designed and made





by the trainees, 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, but cost very little—Mr. Walbert, a senior Heller manager, estimates 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 on 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 voluntary organisations and NGOs in how to improve the marketing of their activities and how to package all their news stories for professional media, would certainly be transferable to other contexts as well.





### Training-the-trainers: Enabling citizens to do the grassroots work

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

#### 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 airplane 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.



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. The citizen mentoring programme is not only offered to citizens but also to staff in the town hall. Clearly, this helps professionals to see issues from a different perspective.

Some citizen mentors also made presentations to the Study Trip to illustrate some projects in which they are involved, e.g. for disabled people and chronic diseases. In Nürtingen, disabled persons are encouraged to participate in 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 widely showcased, so that citizens know that this is a priority in the city.





### Stuttgart in a nutshell – the capital of Baden- Württemberg is ...

- the home of 600,000 citizens from 170 nations speaking 120 languages
- the centre of a metropolitan area with 3 m inhabitants and one third of the surface of Baden-Württemberg
- at the heart of high-tech industry such as Daimler Benz, Porsche and Bosch
- an historically poor protestant city which has become one of the wealthiest in Europe

## What UK public agencies can learn from Stuttgart city council

### Coordinating community projects effectively: the council as the network of networks

As in Nürtingen, community engagement and empowerment is important to the City of Stuttgart. Therefore, Reinhold Halder, Head of the Citizen Engagement Unit of Stuttgart Council reports directly to the Oberbürgermeister Dr. Schuster. However, given the size and the status of Stuttgart as the capital of Baden-Württemberg, Mr. Halder rarely coaches community projects directly but rather sees his task as a network manager.

The coordination of the Stuttgart Unit for Citizen Engagement focuses on three issues:

- financial resources: the Stuttgart umbrella organisation of foundations and community chests creates a common platform for 200 local charities and ensures that organizations with similar objectives work together to avoid duplication.
- human resources: the City of Stuttgart informs interested citizens about more than 800 volunteering opportunities through its Agency for Volunteers. In order to attract volunteers, Mr. Halder and his team organize a Citizens Festival in the city every two years—impressively, the last event had 30,000 visitors.
- qualification of volunteers: The FrEE Academy offers training courses and seminars to citizens who want to become engaged and to voluntary organisations to help them to work more effectively. The management of the Academy has been outsourced to the main community school in the area.

Furthermore, the Unit for Citizen Engagement is also a one-stop shop for all major umbrella organizations providing social services and also for the umbrella organizations in culture and sports. Even the volunteer fire brigade associations are included—a common feature in every German village and city.





### Bringing NGOs and business together: the council as a match-maker

The participants of the Study Trip also had the opportunity to learn about an innovative approach which they all believed is exportable to the UK: the Stuttgart market place. The idea originated in the Netherlands but was first piloted in Stuttgart in 2007. The idea is simple: by simulating barter trade demand and supply of NGOs and business are exchanged. There are no limitations to the trade, with the only exception that no financial support can be provided. This means that the support offered by business may include:

- volunteering of staff
- professional coaching and advice of business
- logistical support

NGOs typically offer their cooperation in business projects.

One example of an agreement included a business agreement between a women refuge and a heating company, where the refuge needed a distinctive collection box and the heating company commissioned a box in the shape of a heating tank from a local artist—this was so well done that they then had to seek insurance for it, which was donated by a local insurance company—the overall project was so distinctive that it achieved significant media coverage, which was good marketing for the two companies involved.

The meetings between business and NGOs reps at the ‘market place’ are facilitated by a broker. The challenge for anyone who makes an offer is to attract interest, e.g. through imaginative presentations. Successful negotiations are stamped by a solicitor, so that they have official weight. (Afterwards the deal is also sealed with a glass of champagne at a photo shoot and social gathering!).

Of course, both business people and NGO representatives are at first shy to approach the ‘other side’, as Mr. Halder explained. Therefore, both sides have to be briefed separately for about an hour before meeting. In 2007 the marketplace included 20 businesses and 20 NGOs and resulted in 45 deals. The target for 2009 is to increase participants to 40 on both sides.





### **The advantages of the market-place**

For business ...

- Access to new markets
- Development of social skills which are appreciated by customers
- Good value marketing opportunities
- Feelgood factor to have done something good

For NGOs...

- Cooperation with business helps NGOs to improve performance management and marketing
- Access to new resources and skills not available in the NGO
- Helps the bidding NGO to become more competitive

For public agencies...

- Replace public funding by funds available elsewhere
- Make new contacts in business and the voluntary sector
- Learn about innovative ideas and projects



## What the UK can learn from the Stuttgart and Nürtingen community chests

'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.

*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.*

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).





## Overall learning points and planned actions by the study trip participants

The participants on 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 that the German good practices had shown that community empowerment does not require a great deal of public funding ...

- when additional resources from business are brought in. The case of the Heller company and the market-place project of Stuttgart council convinced the delegates that the business case for CRS must be made much clearer, in particular, during in the recession when traditional company sponsorship dries up. The examples given by the German firms prove that local business can support community groups and projects in many ways and benefit from more engagement with the voluntary sector.
- when public agencies cooperate effectively with local media. As demonstrated in Nürtingen, but also by the Stuttgart Community Chest, it is important to give citizens the perception that they can make a difference.
- when community trusts are coordinated better.
- when the voluntary sector is coordinated effectively and works closely with the service departments. In particular, it was thought that there may be benefits in making the voluntary sector directly responsible to the directly elected mayor.

The participants of the study trip had all developed ideas on specific actions they could take, implementing the insights gained on the Study Trip. In one case, a detailed action plan had been developed to change the way in which adult care services are provided in the newly merged Bedford Borough unitary council.

Planned actions following the study trip included:

- Establishing a time bank for volunteers, in particular the probation service
- Including a contract clause in service level agreements that would provide incentives to business to engage more in the local community
- Setting up a voucher system for volunteers to reward their engagement

Finally, one key benefit of the study trip was better collaboration between the study trip participants, who were only partly familiar with each other's work before the trip but who now have to work together in the new unitary council.





**FURTHER INFORMATION**

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



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