

# Equitable, sustainable, thriving

## Concept and pilot project for future-oriented partnerships of Berlin with cities and municipalities in the Global South (April 2023)



The Berlin state government stated in its coalition agreement:

"Likewise, the existing partnerships with Jakarta and with Windhoek are to be intensified" (page 107).

To this end, a civil society consortium coordinated by the Berlin Development Policy Council (BER) presents a concept with steps to intensify Berlin's city partnerships with the Global South, in particular with Jakarta, Windhoek and Mexico City - as a civil society recommendation to Berlin's state policy makers to achieve the 17th UN Sustainable Development Goal on Partnerships.

**Pilot project: Berlin's city partnerships with Windhoek (Namibia), Jakarta (Indonesia) and Mexico City 2024 to 2027 (budget: 400,000 euros annually)**

- Three North-South tandems at civil society organisations for implementing the partnership at the municipal level (Berlin-Windhoek, Berlin-Jakarta, Berlin-Mexico City).
- Overall coordination at a civil society organization in Berlin (including public relations)
- Appointed representatives for each city partnership within the municipal structure (externally funded and not part of the project costs).
- Networks in the cities involving administration, businesses, diaspora and civil society.
- Funding for South-South network meetings and North-South network meetings.
- Acquisition of third-party funds for joint projects in the areas of capacity building, democratic participation, domestic development work/ global citizenship education.
- Project fund for financing own contribution in the case of third-party funding.
- Supervision and anti-discrimination trainings.

# Part 1: Concept for Sustainable Partnerships of Berlin with Cities and Municipalities in the Global South - Equitable, sustainable, thriving and honest

The importance of municipal international partnerships has grown in times of crisis. When town twinning is shaped not only through diplomacy but also through personal encounters and projects, it makes a concrete contribution to addressing (shared) global challenges such as climate change, peace, democracy breakdown, coming to terms with colonial history, and global inequality.

Berlin's city partnerships with cities in the Global South contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which the state of Berlin is committed, and to the goal of "strengthening Berlin as a city of freedom and solidarity in European and international cooperation" (Coalition Agreement Berlin CDU-SPD, March 2023, p.7). This is especially relevant as the new state government has committed to intensifying partnerships with Jakarta and Windhoek (p. 107). Furthermore, the state of Berlin bears a special historical responsibility for Windhoek in Namibia and collaborates closely with Jakarta and Mexico City on various levels.

Cooperation among civil society, business and administration is particularly effective in international partnerships, as they work in a complementary way and bring in different expertise: Administrations are responsible for shaping urban processes for citizens, the non-profit sector develops local products to solve global challenges, and civil society actors know the needs of the urban population and create opportunities for participation. The resulting projects address people's needs, which enhances the legitimacy, acceptance, and sustainability of projects and decisions.

The potential of Berlin's city partnerships with the Global South has not been fully tapped into thus far. There is a lack of a common framework, of civil society participation, of municipalities' involvement in international processes, of transparency and of financial resources. Central challenges in international cooperations, such as human rights protection, development-related issues like the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and steps toward coming to terms with colonial history are rarely considered. In most cases, partnerships are unevenly structured, with little spaces for learning from each other to find solutions to global and local challenges. This is despite the growing dangers for democracies worldwide (in the Global North as well as in the Global South), such as *shrinking spaces* for civil societies, lack of participation opportunities for citizens, (right-wing) populist movements and armed conflicts. Partnerships often focus one-sidedly on deficiencies and development potentials in the Global South, while challenges in the Global North, such as responsibility for global crises, are less in focus. Repressive contexts further complicate international



cooperation but give these relationships all the more importance. By involving civil society actors on both sides, education for peace, democracy and human rights can be strengthened.

The concept describes the steps necessary from a civil society perspective to intensify Berlin's city partnerships with cities in the Global South, especially with Jakarta, Windhoek and Mexico City. It reflects the recommendation of Berlin development non-governmental organizations to Berlin's state politicians to expand its city and district partnerships with the Global South in order to achieve the 17th UN Sustainable Development Goal, "Partnerships" (BER Homepage).

## Pillars of the town twinning initiatives

The concept for sustainable partnerships in town twinning initiatives rests on three key pillars: Equality, Sustainability and Vibrancy. The pillars in turn contain elements as recommendations for action within Berlin's city partnerships.

### Pillar A: Equality

Equality and cooperation "on an equal footing" is a principle that many actors would likely agree with today, and it is indeed a fundamental tenet enshrined in nearly all partnership contracts and cooperation agreements. However, in practice, achieving true equality doesn't always manifest in the same way. So, what concrete steps are necessary to effectively put this basic principle of equal partnership into action?

To foster partnerships based on equality, actors from administration, business, and civil society collaboratively shape common objectives, focusing on several key questions: What are the connecting elements between the two municipalities or cities? What can this partnership realistically achieve and transform? Which structures need fortification in the municipalities or cities? What concerns are shared by the citizens of both locales? At the core of this process lies the understanding of how both sides can and should benefit from the partnership.

An important step towards equal partnership work consists in designing projects that include both local and international measures, viewing them as interconnected rather than separate entities. Up to now, projects have mainly been designed to be implemented either in one partner municipality or in the other. However, this approach contradicts the idea that projects should be conceived and developed collaboratively, addressing shared global challenges. While it's true that the respective

local contexts may require different approaches to tackle these challenges, exchanging ideas and jointly conceiving projects can yield fresh and innovative solutions, leading to mutual learning.

This approach also challenges the traditional donor-recipient mindset that often results in imbalances, especially in North-South partnerships. Typically, partners in the Global North assume the donor role due to historical role allocations and greater financial resources. In an equitable partnership, this dynamic must be regularly reassessed.

It's crucial to recognize that cooperation should not solely revolve around financial resources but should also value knowledge, experience, and expertise as valuable partnership assets. Equal partners are expected to engage in mutual learning, with knowledge flowing in both directions. Simultaneously, it's important to acknowledge the significance of economic interests and financial resources in municipal twinning. This often involves discussions related to location marketing, foreign trade promotion, and the enhancement of international trade relations. Being mindful of these interests and making them transparent is essential.

Development education serves as a means to raise awareness among all participants, both in the North and the South, about the fundamental principles of collaboration. Over the course of more than 500 years since the commencement of European colonization, colonial attitudes, perceptions, and thought patterns have become deeply ingrained in our (sub)consciousness. Some partners in the Global South have internalized similar attitudes and should be involved in the process.

When these fundamental principles are embraced, internalized, and put into practice, a circular approach to partnership work replaces a linear, hierarchical structure. In this context, both partners collaboratively determine and develop the framework, objectives, and activities that underpin their cooperation. They learn from each other and derive mutual benefits from the partnership.

**1<sup>st</sup> element: Joint formulation of objectives in a kick-off phase, kick-off workshops in each partner municipality, drafting of a memorandum of understanding.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> element: Development education on power-critical action in international partnerships.**

**3<sup>rd</sup> element: Ongoing guidance and regular feedback rounds to foster partnership growth.**

**4<sup>th</sup> element: formal complaint mechanism.**

**7<sup>th</sup> element: Joint public relations efforts.**

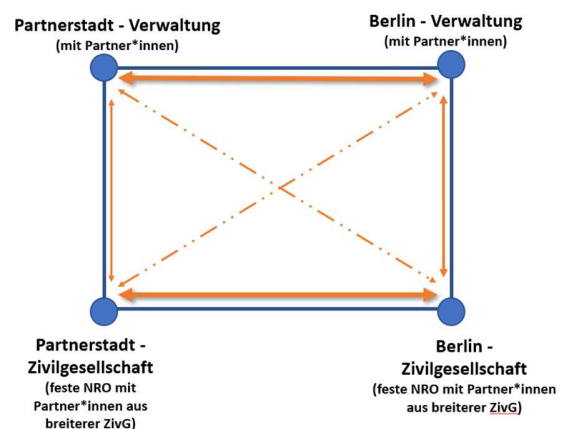
## Pillar B: Sustainability

To establish enduring, equitable, and sustainable partnerships, a tandem of civil society and administrative representatives for each city partnership on both sides is indispensable. Municipal cooperation partners play a pivotal role in formalizing the partnership and ensuring its longevity. Without their (infra)structural and financial resources, the implementation of twinning initiatives becomes challenging. In addition to representatives from the two municipalities or cities, the involvement of civil society and citizens is an essential prerequisite for the success and longevity of partnerships.

In both partner municipalities, there are representatives from the local administration and registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or twinning associations. These entities serve to promote and integrate the partnership within the community. They also bring valuable practical experience and expertise in development policy matters. The goal is to establish a network that engages civil society actors in shaping the partnership. This network includes individuals and organizations from local government, businesses, schools, trade unions, universities, migrant groups, and various communities that may not have formal NGO structures.

Ideally, government and civil society actors in the partner communities collaborate effectively. While it may not always be feasible due to the political context, it should be actively pursued. In the best-case scenario, all four actors collaborate, thus establishing a stable partnership relationship. To enable civil society to conduct continuous and successful twinning work, it is crucial to provide secure and flexible financial support. In addition to project funding, associations must receive annual non-project funding to cover their operational costs and personnel. Project funds should also be accessible to non-institutionalized actors, such as grassroots groups. These groups often require infrastructure and spaces, and the administration should assist them in identifying and financing these resources.

- 1. Element: Identification of partner institutions from the areas of administration, business, diaspora (in the Global North) and civil society.**
- 2. Element: Establishment of a joint network in the respective cities.**
- 3. Element: Establishment of a Funded Steering Structure, featuring a North-South Tandem at**



- a **Civil Society Organization** responsible for implementing the partnership within the local community.
4. **Element: Appointment of a Representative for the Respective Twinning Initiative within the Municipal Structure (Externally Funded and Not Included in Project Costs).**
  5. **Element: Project fund, e.g. to finance own contribution when receiving third-party funding**
  6. **Element: funding for South-South and North-South network meetings.**

## **Pillar C: Vibrancy**

The third fundamental principle of town twinning is centered around projects and activities. These encompass both one-time events and enduring initiatives that form part of a transformation process. One-time activities may consist of individual events or regular gatherings (such as summer or Christmas or Ramadhan celebrations, anniversaries, general meetings), as well as delegation trips and other exchange programs between the partner municipalities. These activities aim to foster relationships and trust among individuals and participants.

Simultaneously, long-term projects are focused on addressing socially significant (development policy) issues, thereby drawing closer to the substantive objectives of the partnership and initiating social and ecological transformations. This stage involves a reflection on the common (global) challenges, interests, and objectives identified when the partnership was established. Such endeavors may encompass public relations, educational or informational initiatives, and exchange programs. The latter, in particular, holds significant importance in involving a broader cross-section of the local population in town twinning and, where necessary, recruiting volunteers or members for twinning activities. It is essential to underscore that delegation trips and exchange projects are executed in both directions equitably, considering both the number of trips and the significance attributed to the guests and visitors in each instance.

**Element 1: Projects of domestic development work/global citizenship education in various thematic fields**

**Element 2: encounter projects in various thematic fields: Culture**

**Element 3: Projects Focused on Capacity Building and Enhancing Democratic Participation.**

## PART 2

# Pilot project: Enhancing Berlin's "South City Partnerships" with Windhoek (Namibia), Jakarta (Indonesia) and Mexico City (Mexico)

The foundation for the model project lies in BER's "Concept for Sustainable Partnerships of Berlin with Cities and Communities in the Global South" (as of April 2023) and its core principles of equality, sustainability, and vitality.

During an initial one-year startup phase, civil society stakeholders in Berlin and the three partner cities – Windhoek (Namibia), Jakarta (Indonesia), and Mexico City (Mexico) – establish a cohesive working structure and engage other civil society actors. They are guided by the fundamental principles outlined in Part 1 of the partnership concept. The primary goal is to collaboratively develop solutions, foster mutual learning, and address shared global challenges. The focus is on exchange and education among all four participating cities, rather than the creation of infrastructure or investment projects. Consequently, equitable civil society structures will be established in the partner cities and Berlin alike. Measures in the build-up phase:

- **Kick-off meeting with a two-day retreat:** This meeting serves as a platform for networking and acquainting all involved stakeholders in Berlin. During the retreat, participants from both the North and South collaborate to devise a common approach, accounting for the unique partnership contexts. To achieve this, the parties begin by individually addressing these questions: What are the primary challenges and (development policy) concerns that should be prioritized in the partnership, and how should they be addressed? What common values drive this partnership? Which other actors should be engaged? Subsequently, the parties collectively establish shared interests.
- **Expanding the network:** Expanding outreach to potential civil society actors, including schools, universities, local communities, diasporic groups, non-profit organizations, youth clubs, trade unions, neighborhood associations, and local initiatives, to create a broader town twinning network. Public engagement events will be organized to raise the profile and visibility of town twinning in all four cities.
- **Awareness training:** Strengthening diversity skills, offering anti-racism training, and empowerment programs.
- **Development of concepts and applications** for the implementation phase beginning in 2025.

- **Evaluation:** At the end of the one-year set-up phase, it is jointly evaluated and assessed: Were all partners equally involved? Were there imbalances and how can these be counteracted? Should the focus identified in the kick-off be maintained or should the challenges and topics be adapted?

The setup phase is followed by an implementation phase lasting a minimum of three years (with the intention to extend it after successful work). During this phase, collaborative projects are undertaken, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aiming to initiate a socio-ecological transformation. It is crucial that these projects, whenever sensible and feasible, encompass measures in both partner cities. This approach ensures, in accordance with the fundamental principle of equality, that the project is grounded in the idea that both partners exhibit "development potential" concerning the defined global challenge, and changes are necessary on both sides. In parallel with the long-term project work, there is a need for additional selective and accompanying measures, which should be funded from ongoing resources allocated for town twinning.

Measures during the implementation phase:

- Long-term project work (a minimum of 3 years and funded through third-party funds)
- **Continuation of the coordination offices plus administrative costs/structural support in all four partner cities**
- **Delegation/meeting trips:** Following the principle of liveliness, at least one delegation/meeting trip per year should take place, alternating between Berlin and the partner cities.
- **Meetings (informal) & public engagement events:** 1-2 times a year, events are organized to make the work of town twinning partnerships accessible to a broader audience within the context of (development) policy and societal issues. These events may include exhibitions, panel discussions, film or literature evenings, and more.
- **Mid-term evaluation and assessment meetings:** Digital mid-term evaluations should take place once a year to ensure that the common goals are pursued and the principles of partnership are adhered to, with adjustments made if necessary. These meetings should be facilitated by an external process supervisor.

The state of Berlin is called upon to support the project for sustainable city partnerships starting in 2024 with an annual budget of €400,000, with additional third-party funding being secured. These funds will be allocated to Berlin's three partner projects with Jakarta, Mexico, and Windhoek. This will result in the formation of three NGO tandems, each comprising an NGO from the respective partner city and an NGO from Berlin. A coordination office in Berlin will oversee the development and



representation of the overall project at the Berlin level. The selection of Berlin-based organizations and their southern partners will be made through a participatory process.

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The civil society consortium coordinated by the Berlin Development Policy Council (BER) is composed of the following organizations: Afrikarat Berlin Brandenburg, Decolonize Berlin, Mexiko via Berlin, Solidaritätsdienst International (SODI), and Watch Indonesia!

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