

Communal Foreign Policy

**A Tool for Achieving Target Goals and for the
Progression of Social Equality in the Global South
and Global North**

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Abbreviations

CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
EU	European Union
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GIZ	Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit
KEZ	Kommunale Entwicklungszusammenarbeit
LEZ	Landesstelle für Entwicklungszusammenarbeit
MDG	Millenium Development Goal
MHSPV	Marzahn-Hellersdorfer Städtepartnerschaftsverein
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
UN	United Nations

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1 Introduction

In the following paper, I am going to present two locations which agreed to a district partnership in December 2013. The objective here is to give an account of the history and contemporary development of each district to both the public and the actors involved in this development process. In writing about this topic, I aim to further mutual cultural understanding.

In a text published by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung about communal partnerships and its networks, they postulate that a partnership between cities, communes or districts can be considered communal foreign policy. According to the text, communal networks of today have developed from historical goals like reconciliation, aid and *Völkerverständigung* into for example project partnerships, development policy and peacemaking.¹ Considering this broad spectrum of possibilities it will be an interesting endeavour to observe the various consequences of a district partnership between Marzahn-Hellersdorf and Hoàng Mai.

In the first part a description of how Berlin and in particular East-Berlin was coping with migrants until the late 1980s and early 1990s is given. In the subsequent second part some insight about the districts will be provided and some commonalities are pointed out. Thirdly, I will show how the partnership developed and specify its content. Following this, the question how and if a district partnership can alleviate some problematic consequences of their shared history is introduced. And last but not least, the question how a district partnership can contribute to global issues as stated in the United Nations (UN) Agenda 21 is asked and elaborated on.

There are two noteworthy points. One being that the Mayor of Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Stefan Komoß, is not in favour of one locality over another. The only restriction on possible district partnerships is that the city shall be outside the bounds of Eastern Europe as there are already three existing partnerships with Eastern European cities. The second point to take note of is that since there is a linguistic barrier in play, this text may reflect a more German point of view due to resulting limited research options.

2 A Historical Account of Migrant Workers in East Berlin

In the next two parts I will describe how Berlin, and in particular East Berlin, was coping with migrants until the late 1980s and early 1990s. As will be demonstrated, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had no intent to integrate migrant labourers. Regarding this, Berlin consequently had to reform its integration policies accordingly and is furthermore still in the process of reconciling mistakes of the past, which may both be treated as ongoing challenges. The concept of a district partnership can possibly be considered as one of the means to achieving this goal of systemic inclusion and reconciliation.

2.1 The GDR and its Relationship to Vietnam and its Diaspora Before The Fall of the Iron Curtain

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) officially became partners in 1978 when Vietnam joined the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the counter-strategy to the US Marshall Plan. However, there was some contact and exchange before that as early as the 1950s.

Since the late 1970s the GDR supported Vietnam as it was one of the stronger members of CMEA. At this time the forwarding of mass invitations to Vietnamese contract labourers for the purpose of working in Eastern Germany was set in motion. Though, this venture was of course of mutual benefit. Germany needed the labourers in order to produce goods for their own people, to sell them for profit or as a means of accumulating foreign currency.

¹ Introduction of „Kommunale Partnerschaften und Netzwerke“ by Fücks, R. and Wolfgang Pohl 2010, p.7

cy. Vietnam also needed occupational training for its people and the production income which is why this exchange was seen as mutually beneficial.²

In the early stages the GDR also invited people from other countries of CMEA like Angola, Ethiopia or Cuba. It was only later that Vietnamese people became the majority of the migrant labourers in East Germany. Expectedly, the Vietnamese did not settle all at once. There were separate waves of migration in accordance with different purposes. The first people to arrive were of a more privileged social standing and were holding a higher education. Nearing the end of this era, many people only came to do manual and relatively simple labour. Except for the purpose of working, contacts between Germans and foreigners, or even assimilation, was not massively supported by the governments. Beyond that, female contract labourers were not allowed to give birth to children in Eastern Germany regardless of the consequences for the women disadvantaged by this questionable practice. For female contract labour the only decision possible was either abortion or deportation. This is an example of the inequality experienced by contract workers and especially by women.³

2.2 How The Fall of the Wall Caused Fundamental Communal Change and its Effect on the Diaspora

After The Fall of the Wall and particularly after the reunification on the 3rd of October 1990, the GDR was automatically no longer part of CMEA. As a result, former contract labourers in East Berlin had to overcome many obstacles. Consequently, a substantial amount of roughly 59.000 Vietnamese people had to leave Germany, while only 5.000 people living in Berlin and 15.000 people living outside of Berlin were permitted to stay in the country.

The counter-strategy applied by many Vietnamese people was to become self-employed, but there were deep-seated structural problems since a plethora of legal uncertainties existed in the early 1990s. As a result of these uncertainties an informal sector formed, especially for the import of cigarettes, and local gangs drifted into violence to the point of murder. The effects of those structural problems became a field of profiling for right-wing parties. Luckily many left-leaning groups on different societal levels and other initiatives voiced their opposition to fascist ideologies.⁴ Nonetheless, this phase contributed to a German perception of Vietnamese people as a rather homogenous group persisting until today, not acknowledging the regional differences and the different waves of migration. To reiterate, an integration policy for migrants in both parts of the city was non-existent before the reunification. Nowadays, there are around 60.000 Vietnamese people living in the eastern parts of Berlin.⁵

And it is a common perception today, not only in East Berlin, that migrants live in ethnic communities. According to Heckmann, relationships between Vietnamese people and chain migration are at the base for this perception. Migrants consider it as positive to find a place of residence or labour more easily.⁶ But there are other relations like associations offering help. Unfortunately, existing social relations and problems can be reproduced within ethnic communities e.g. it's often fact that older generations hardly speak the language of the new country, as they can live entirely within their own community without having any actual need to learn a new language. But indeed it cannot be denied that the Vietnamese in Berlin have very different cultural backgrounds. There is a significant difference of people from northern, central and southern Vietnam. They are as heterogeneous as people from Berlin and Saxonia would be. Especially those who came as labourers to East Germany do not necessarily share the same identities with those who migrated later in the 1990s. The new borns of mixed ethnicity parents who have not yet set foot on Vietnamese soil diverge from those in their early or mid-twenties. Beyond that, there is a huge social difference between the refugees who settled in Western Germany and those migrant labourers in the East. Their difference is based on the experience of the American war from 1955 to 1975. Contrary to those

² www.projekte.hu-berlin.de/migrationddr/projekte/vietnam/einreise

³ www.projekte.hu-berlin.de/migrationddr/projekte/vietnam/abtreibung

⁴ Kil, W. and Hilary Silver 2006, pp. 104-110

⁵ Hüwelmeier, G. 2013, pp. 62-63

⁶ Heckmann, F. 1998, p. 32

contract labourers, Vietnamese refugees in West Berlin were entitled to work, give birth and marriage, except participating in elections. Moreover, they were supported largely by German institutions and associations.

Equating the collective of Vietnamese people into one ethnic community is thus highly problematic. Both the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany overwhelmingly failed to integrate contract labourers, as there were no real efforts to implement any kind of policies specifically calling for inclusive integration strategies.

3 The Localities

3.1 Marzahn-Hellersdorf in Berlin

The village of Marzahn was founded around the year 1230 and became part of Great Berlin in 1920 together with five other localities of contemporary Marzahn-Hellersdorf. However, it was only in 1979 that Marzahn and later Hellersdorf on the 1st of June 1986 became districts. They were merged into one district in Berlin's municipal restructuring process of 2001. Compared to other Berlin districts, which are often older, MH developed rather late and very differently. Both of these districts were restructured largely before The Fall of the Iron Curtain. As a consequence, the defining structure and architecture both convey the district's unique history as part of the German Democratic Republic very clearly. Back then, the giant settlement of Marzahn-Hellersdorf was supposed to relieve the city from a lack of space in other districts. It also provided relatively modern housing at that time with features such as central-heating and sanitary facilities inside the residence. By today, Marzahn-Hellersdorf holds about 254.000 inhabitants with a size of 61.8 square km, where the total population of Berlin is around 3.5m and the city itself measures in at 891.8 square km.

Aside from the so called *Spätaussiedler*, Germans who migrated from the former Soviet Union, there are few people with migration backgrounds living in the district. Actually, the district has one of the fewest numbers of migrants with 3.5% compared to Berlin with 14%. Due to its location it provides large spaces used for industry. Remarkably, it also features about 18% of the district's size in green spaces, which is above the Berlin average. That is why Marzahn-Hellersdorf also claims to be the district of "health", "green", and "future" by providing adequate living conditions.⁷

It is rather important to think of Marzahn-Hellersdorf as a district of Berlin and consequently about its federal state structure, the involvement in the European Union and Berlin's relations with the United Nations. The next paragraph outlines just one interrelation of Marzahn-Hellersdorf and shows the potential influence on this particular district partnership.

For starters, the German state and Berlin agreed to the UN Agenda 21. It states that global problems should be solved locally and vice versa that local problems should be solved in respect to a sustainable global development. Therefore, Berlin and the institution "Landesstelle für Entwicklungszusammenarbeit" (LEZ) support the strategy of so called "global learning" and the concept of a "fair and sustainable economy". In terms of migrant integration Berlin also enacted the application of policies in line with Agenda 21 targets. In contrast, the partnership on a district level as between Marzahn-Hellersdorf and Hoàng Mai is considered as "Kommunale Entwicklungszusammenarbeit" (KEZ) and follows its own particular communal principles. These principles can diverge from strategies of the City of Berlin and the Agenda 21. These communal ideas might rather reflect the interests and positions of the local actors together with their partners.⁸

Naturally, some influence of the Agenda 21 has to be acknowledged as well. This does not hold true for the guidelines, though. For example, the LEZ regularly invites communal politicians to conferences about how to improve KEZ financially and how to support a cross-sectional approach among representative councils. In 2008, federal ministers both acknowledged the importance of KEZ and for the first time ever since 2013 there is a budget dedicated to support various projects on a communal level.

⁷ <http://www.berlin.de/ba-marzahn-hellersdorf/derbezirk/zahlenfakten/kurzinfo.html>

⁸ Integrationsplan Marzahn NordWest 2011

All in all, the district partnership is influenced and supported by higher institutions like the UN or the state. However, this kind of relation provides a certain freedom from political agendas. But it also puts the local activity within the confines of a distinct discourse.

3.2 Hoàng Mai in Hanoi

In this following chapter, a description of the locality, namely Hoàng Mai, a district in Hanoi, Vietnam will be given for the sake of comparability. As outlined in the introduction, due to a linguistic gap I was unfortunately unable to contact the delegation directly. However, a private student offered help in understanding the district and its people.

3.2.1 Short Description

Hoàng Mai has become a district of Hanoi on the 6th of November 2003. By 2009, there were about 329.000 people living in 9 communes. Its size is about 41 square km and it is located in the eastern part of the city. In its current structure, Hoàng Mai has developed out of Hai Ba Trung and Thanh Tri villages.⁹ But actually, it is assumed that 3000 - 4000 years ago people settled for the first time in this area. The old villages like Hoàng Mai and Thanh Tri were originally located in south-eastern direction of Thang Long's city wall, which is the former name of Hanoi. This wall does not exist anymore, only one gate is still visible in the Old Quarter of Hanoi. Despite its central location on the map, Hoàng Mai is considered an outskirt district. This is because the Municipality of Hanoi contains 10 urban districts in addition to 1 town and 17 rural districts around the main city.

The latest development can be linked to "Doi Moi", when strong development in terms of economic growth began to take place. "Increasing stability and economic reforms led to a massive rural-to-urban migration. Hanoi's population began to grow by 3% a year, reaching three million by 1990."¹⁰ This kind of growth continued and is called spontaneous urban development. The same source summarizes that "[...] 90% of the buildings in Hanoi have been built without official permission – the land untitled and never surveyed."¹¹ But in "an unusual mix of basic regulation and control"¹², Hanoi gave incentives for people to construct or improve their houses up to a standard minimum, including electricity and sanitation. By applying those rules, houses could get a legal status later. This resulted in a strong contrast. On the one hand there are old villages like Hoàng Mai or Thanh Tri with places such as the Ngã My pagoda or Đền Lư Giang pagoda. These are often in a good shape and frequently used. And on the other hand there are places which now provide living-space for many people. Either in big-size complexes like Times City or cheaper versions which are more typical for the outskirt areas of Hanoi.

In terms of infrastructure there are, of course, many public places like police stations, a hospital, (high) schools, a local convention center, swimming pools, shopping facilities - either traditional markets like the one in "Hoàng Mai street" or modern supermarkets and malls. Adding to this, there is a train and a bus station providing connection within Vietnam and beyond.

3.2.2 History and Culture

The former name of the village of Hoàng Mai (literal meaning: Yellow Blossom of Apricot) was Ke Do, which also referred to the production of apricot. In fact, many cultural activities all over Vietnam have links to traditional ways of living. That might be the production of food or clothes or the practice of martial arts.

Here are three examples of cultural activities: In Thanh Tri village, on the 1st of March, people worship their ancestors who started to cultivate the land and produced steamed rice pancakes (Bánh cuốn). Since 2008 there is a contest taking place.¹³ For Hoàng Mai, the practice of martial arts or, in other words, the defense of attackers is also of relevance. There is an annual wrestling event taking place between the 4th and 6th of the first month of

⁹ <http://vovworld.vn/de-de/Reise/Das-Dorf-Hoang-Mai-ein-historisches-Gebiet-südlich-von-Hanoi/111339.vov>

¹⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/aug/11/hanoi-slums-vietnam-urban-planning-construction>

¹¹ Op. Cit.

¹² Op. Cit.

¹³ <http://vovworld.vn/en-US/In-Pictures/Thanh-Tri-village-holds-steamed-rice-pancake-making-contest/227747.vov>

the lunar calendar in the village Mai Dong. It is said that the General Nguyen Tam Trinh introduced wrestling between the years 40-43.¹⁴

Speaking of the lunar calendar, most of the relevant festivities are related to it like for example the celebration of the New Year “Tết Nguyên Đán”. Another example is the Ullambana on 15th day of the 7th month, where it is said that the gates of the underworld open and the spirits of the dead will visit the homes. Therefore, in many pagodas rituals are taking place. Private citizens also worship their ancestors at home and burn devotional things like fake money or clothes made of paper. Eventually, this kind of devotion was being questioned nowadays as more and more people complain about pollution. Some villages in Hanoi even banned the burning, which is a good example for reinvented traditions.¹⁵

Among other festivities, the Mid-Autumn festival is related to both, the season of the year and the cycle of the moon. During this festival, people get together to give thanks for the harvest and to pray. This festival is considered as the second-most important festival in Vietnam. It is also celebrated in other countries in East and South-east Asia.

Speaking in terms of religion and culture, there is a division between Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and animistic beliefs. This cultural diversity can also be experienced in everyday (northern) Vietnamese life today. It might not seem obvious immediately from an outside perspective, but the structure of pagodas can show that the local belief systems are combined. Pagodas may have shrines for Buddha and local saints. Depending on the purpose people act differently or choose to go to different places of worship. But of course the imperialist history of the last two centuries, the Vietnam-American War and the rule of the Socialist Party all have had major impact on the importance of villages including the traditions and religion. But for the purposes of this working paper, this is a topic onto itself and can therefore not fully be explored here.

3.3 Differences and Features of the Locations

When thinking about two different places like Vietnam and Germany, it is not easy to find commonalities. Most apparently, the mayor of Marzahn-Hellersdorf appreciated that in this district partnership both cities are located in the outskirts of the capitals of their countries. Both municipalities were also integrated into their respective cities relatively late. Both cities also record relatively equal population figures, namely some 254.000 inhabitants in Marzahn-Hellersdorf and 329.000 inhabitants in Hoàng Mai.

However, the fact of the matter remains that these cities are located in the Global North and the Global South. Therefore, the particular focus of this ensuing chapter is focusing on three points which reflect on these circumstances. Major features and attributes related to the topics located in the field of politics, social inclusion and environment shall be outlined in the following paragraphs.

3.3.1 On the Politics of Hoàng Mai

The German Federal Republic and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam obviously employ different politics. The former is described as a federal and social democratic state. Whereas in the latter, a Marxist-Leninist party claims to lead the societal development. However, both of their economies are capitalist. Vietnam is described as a deconcentrated rather than decentralized country. This is because the “peripheral units and staff remain bound by a common bureaucracy and ultimately are subservient to the centralised decision-makers.”¹⁶ For example, there is a People’s Council as the representative body and the People’s Committee as the administrative body for each level, which may be a municipality, a district or a ward. The latter body, particularly in urban areas like Hoàng Mai, governs “all aspects of the commune, including socio-economic development, health care, education and police.”¹⁷ etc., but then there is also the Commune People’s Community, a group of 50 households who

¹⁴ <http://vovworld.vn/de-de/Gesellschaftliches-Leben/Vor-Ort-beim-Ringkampf-im-Dorf-Mai-Dong-bei-Hanoi/218398.vov>

¹⁵ Viet Nam News (Sunday) Vol XXIV, Number 8232, 31st of August 2014, p. 4

¹⁶ Parkinson, J.; Nguyen Viet Anh; Wilfrido Barreiro 2005, p.11

¹⁷ Op. Cit.

are for example “[...] responsible for implementing and co-ordinating the water supply and sanitation projects in collaboration with the district's administration.”¹⁸

There are also other features which differ quite a lot from Marzahn-Hellersdorf like the Labour Fund for Public Interest. In which people contribute money and labour for 10 days, or alternatively compensate with money. Two thirds are used within the own ward, the rest is going to the district and city authority. There are mass organisations like the Women, Farmers or Youth Union as well. In fact, these play a central role in achieving targets on every level of society.¹⁹

Seeing that an in-depth discussion of these aforementioned institutions is not possible, the explanation given is a brief one.

3.3.2 Social Inclusion and Equality in Marzahn-Hellersdorf

Marzahn-Hellersdorf is the neighbouring district of Lichtenberg and Hohenschönhausen, where the biggest Vietnamese trade centers of Berlin are located. One is the Dong-Xuan Center and the second one is the ITC International Trade Center. Additionally, there is an abundance Vietnamese people running businesses like restaurants, flower shops or nail salons. Nonetheless, Vietnamese people are working in all kinds of sectors, especially those who received special training during the GDR. As mentioned above, migrants in East Berlin tend to live in ethnic communities. As shown, this might weaken their level of social inclusion. The Deputy Council for Integration not only sees problems for Vietnamese people, though. It also states that the general German majority shall acknowledge the internal differences of the Vietnamese. Moreover, Germans themselves can also not be considered as a homogenous people.

There is a need for open structures in every direction to stop segregation of disadvantaged social milieus. Generally, the status of migrants has improved in some ways compared to the GDR e.g. all women are allowed to give birth nowadays, regardless of citizenship status. Though, depending on visa-status, not everybody is allowed to work and earn an income. There are also ongoing difficulties with the acceptance of vocational or academic degrees of foreigners.

In conclusion, until now Vietnamese people in Marzahn-Hellersdorf lack representation to some degree, compared to other districts of the city.

3.3.3 On the Environment of Hoàng Mai

As explained, Marzahn-Hellersdorf claims to be the district of both good health and a good environment. For Hoàng Mai, it seems that the economic development after Doi Moi caused severe environmental damage. This can be observed easily when approaching most lakes, rivers and canals in the district. I was told in two interviews with locals that only 15 - 20 years ago people were actually swimming in the rivers of Hanoi. But nowadays it is common consensus not to do that. Admittedly, very few people would swim in the Spree or the canals in Berlin either. But the quality of drinking water and lakes etc. in Berlin is generally considered as high. Tap water is clean and subject to frequent and high-standard monitorings and tests and therefore safe for consumption.

To further stress the environmental issue, I would like to mention a study about the decentralized wastewater management of Hoàng Mai from 2005. It describes the situation for Hanoi and Hoàng Mai in particular as follows: First, it is said that drainage and sanitation companies were to cover their costs and will receive financial support in case of new expansions. But it is admitted that these companies heavily rely on the central government. So by 2005, about 30% of the solid waste entered the sewers, channels and rivers.²⁰ Further articles support this by claiming that 71% of the remaining lakes are polluted and 14% are severely contaminated.²¹

¹⁸ Op. Cit.

¹⁹ Op. Cit.

²⁰ Parkinson, J.; Nguyen Viet Anh; Wilfriedo Barreiro 2005, p. 10-13

²¹ <http://vietnamnews.vn/print/225035/are-ha-nois-lakes-doomed-to-decay.htm>

The study summarises that the above mentioned Labour Fund and Unions are a good basis. Though, in terms of capacity building at a local level it is required “to incorporate the needs and aspirations of local people in deciding public resource allocation and ensuring accountability.”²²

What can be seen in these three examples are the consequences that exist through historic problems like non-existing policies of migrant integration or rather ineffective dealing with environmental issues. This is why it will be interesting to see how a district partnership among partners from the Global North and Global South can contribute to social equality and developmental goals.

4 On Mutual Agreements and the Birth of a District Partnership

The discussed partnership is the result of a process of at least two years and a long-standing history between these countries. The districts agreed to a partnership after local actors from a Marzahn-Hellersdorf hospital, namely the Unfallkrankenhaus Berlin (UKB) established a connection to a hospital in Hoàng Mai. With that, involvement and participation on a local political level expressed in mutual visits was set in motion. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed for the first time in May 2012 during a visit by a German delegation. Later, a Vietnamese delegation visited Berlin in October 2012. An Agreement of Cooperation (Kooperationsvereinbarung) was signed by the chair of the People’s Council (Volksrat) on behalf of Hoàng Mai and the Secretary of the Party Tran Thi Thanh Nhan and the Mayor of Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Stefan Komoß. Among the issues discussed in this document are:

- 1) Education, Youth and Social Matters
- 2) Medicine and Health
- 3) Vocational training
- 4) Economy, Tourism and Culture

The partners agreed upon exchanging experiences and information between the representatives responsible for these matters. In Marzahn-Hellersdorf, the Association for City Partnerships Marzahn-Hellersdorf (Marzahn-Hellersdorfer Städtepartnerschaftsverein - MHSPV) was given the power of control over dealing with the civil society, i.e. individuals and other associations in the context of establishing and maintaining foreign relations and local policy. It is an understanding that each year further planning will be conducted and so the establishment of an official district partnership was mutually agreed upon in 2013. The date by which this partnership became operative was carefully chosen holding significance, as it was the 10th anniversary of Hoàng Mai.

Finally, on 2nd of December 2013 a district partnership agreement was signed and became operative. In detail, the agreement was intended to support a long-lasting and sustainable partnership and to increase understanding between the citizens, as well as to support each other in achieving consensus and advantages in terms of development and communication on both sides. A final clause demanding the laws of each country to be honoured was added. Interestingly, the document now speaks about the local actors involved in only a very general sense. This means that no one in particular is mentioned by name except for the signees of the agreement.

It stands to reason that the ambitions of each participant and also the global context should be examined further. It was interesting to find that the concept of urban planning is not mentioned in the district partnership. This might raise a red flag as Christian Gräff, a signee of the contract, is the current Deputy Mayor for Economy and Urban Development.

4.1 Mutual Expectations, Benefits and Problems

The person in charge of a district partnership on the official district level in Marzahn-Hellersdorf is one Deputy Council mayor, which in the case of Marzahn-Hellersdorf and Hoàng Mai, is Christian Gräff. He agreed to be inter-

²² Parkinson, J.; Nguyen Viet Anh; Wilfrido Barreiro 2005, p. 32

viewed together with his secretary Lehmann. As Gräff is a member of the association MHSPV, the association will be the starting point of this paragraph.

The association was established in 1994 in Marzahn only. According to the statute from the 16th of December 2002, the MHSPV claims to represent the City of Berlin at a small scale level by representing the district itself. Its purpose is to achieve *Völkerverständigung* with partner cities or districts. At the moment, the chair of the association is Komoß. Though it does not necessarily have to be the mayor, it could be any other individual of the 35 members. When I asked Gräff about the concept of *Völkerverständigung* he replied that this term might be outdated. For him, a district partnership is mostly about young people having contact and supporting their education.

Consequently, Marzahn-Hellersdorf first wants to finance a vocational school as a particular school in Hoàng Mai was not in a good condition. Furthermore, it was explained to me that Marzahn-Hellersdorf has so far never applied for financial support at an institution like the German “Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit” (GIZ). Future planning will take place during the visit of a delegation from Hoàng Mai in September 2014. This is when the 35th anniversary of Marzahn-Hellersdorf will be taking place and all city-partners are invited to join the festivities. MHSPV will support organizing the festivities. As the district will exhibit the International Garden Exhibition in 2017, it was explained that there is the possibility of some joint activity with Hoàng Mai as well. But yet there are many things which remain unclear in 2014.

Unfortunately, I was not able to conduct any interview with the Vietnamese involved in the district partnership. During the interview with Lehmann, he explained which expectations were expressed towards him.

Hoàng Mai's expectations were related to the places they have visited, for example a primary school, a sport center and the aforementioned school for vocational training. According to him, the Hoàng Mai primary school seemed to be in good condition with only few shortcomings. In contrast, the sport center seemed to have major structural problems. To overcome these would lie beyond the limits of what a district partnership could achieve. Last but not least, the expectations of the vocational school provided the best chances for a bilateral cooperation on a communal level. They required not only material and financial support, but also methodological support in order to provide good education for the pupils.

However, I was not alone in having problems with approaching the Vietnamese side. The delegations had to face the same problem. English for instance is not a common language among Vietnamese officials. So far, the delegations received help by a private person doing it voluntarily. Both interviewees considered it a major problem that the partners cannot easily communicate via phone. Admitting that even a telephone is not the most trustworthy form of communicating either. In the end, the language barrier contributed largely to the fact that until now only few activities are planned. That is why Gräff and Lehmann also expressed their hope to have Vietnamese people of Berlin participating in almost any direction.

4.2 The Necessity of Achieving Target Goals of Global Sustainable Development as Stated in the UN Agenda 21 In The Context Of Municipal Partnerships

As elaborated on in 3.1, Berlin itself is largely involved in the Agenda 21 and is seeking to achieve the target goals already outlined. Target goals which, for example, are related to environmental issues, the economy and social justice. For Berlin, aside from the UN Agenda there are several other agendas on social justice and integration in particular as by the EU, the German state, the City of Berlin in addition to the endeavours of parties and the civil society. Therefore, the official political level seems to already have considered the integration of migrants (up to the 3rd generation). Nonetheless, the few official objectives are solely focussing on younger generations. Among those objectives are the goals, that migrant children shall have the same German skills as non-migrants upon starting school, to generate comparable quotas of graduation, and to provide equal access to

vocational training.²³ It appears that the problems of older generations within the ethnic communities are not fully taken into account.

The Agenda goals related to global responsibility and gender equality are considered as cross-sectional tasks in Berlin. The district partnership appears to fit ambitions like this perfectly. As mentioned above, Marzahn-Hellersdorf also claims to be the district of health and environment. It will be particularly interesting to see which joint activities the partners are going to plan to face prevalent maternal disadvantages and other central problems head on. To give an example, the UN describes the situation in Vietnam nowadays as follows: “Viet Nam has made significant achievements in relation to achieving the MDS [sic], and is on track to achieve most of the targets set by the MDGs [Millennium Development Goal] by 2015. However, an ‘unfinished agenda’ remains in relation to several of the MDGs including maternal mortality and malnutrition, and water and sanitation.”²⁴

An additional interview with Dagmar Pohle, Deputy Council Mayor for Health in Marzahn-Hellersdorf, about future plans proved futile in early 2014. She was basically looking forward to the district partnership. An interesting starting point for further research would be the question how and if water and wastemangement are bullet points in the discourses of other district partnerships. An example for this would be Lauingen, Bavaria and their city partnership with Lagos Island, Nigeria. In the field of wastemangement they created two internships for Nigerians and participated in conferences in Lagos, too.²⁵

All in all, joint activities on a communal level can potentially contribute to solutions on many levels. Whether it is about the integration of migrants in Germany, or about achieving the Vietnamese Development Goals which already adopted the MDGs.

5 Communal Foreign Policy as a Tool for Ensuring Agenda 21 Compliant Sustainable Development and for the Progression of Social Equality in the Global South - A Conclusion

In summary, the implementation of a district partnership between Marzahn-Hellersdorf and Hoàng Mai proved an appropriate measure. The shared history of contract labour provided the basic background of the existing Vietnamese ethnic community. It should be positively noted that both districts are strongly committed to dealing with their past. By acknowledging it with all of its benefits and disadvantages, an important first step was taken to tackle social inequality among migrants and in society at large. Both actors have proven a decided openness to the idea of increased participation and representation of the Vietnamese people.

Overcoming the language barrier can most definitely be considered as the most urgent issue to tackle. It is a concrete obstacle for everybody involved as this language barrier is undermining mutual trust by ways of narrowing mutual understanding and discourse, leading to less contact and more estrangement. Hopefully, the district partnership itself will find resonance among bilingual speakers. Especially during this current first momentum, as it can be argued that these initial momentums are the most significant. If the partners can overcome this linguistic obstacle, the future planning of projects will be made easier and has the potential to broaden the linguistic and cultural horizons of generations of people in both countries, generating even more opportunities in life.

As for Marzahn-Hellersdorf, the district partnership provides a real opportunity to weaken existing prejudices in society towards the Vietnamese. As explained before, integration has to be considered one of the most urgent needs for society, not only concerning migrants, but much rather all people on Earth. The social cost of leaving people behind is the existence of rather segregated ethnic communities. Building a sense of community, belonging and acceptance appears, especially in the case of older generations, to be a difficult enterprise not everybody

²³ Integrationsplan Marzahn NordWest 2011, Resolution of Berlins' Parliament on the 8th of June 2006, 15/15221

²⁴ <http://www.un.org.vn/en/about-viet-nam/overview.html>

²⁵ http://www.lauingen.de/1450_DEU_HTML.php

manages to accomplish. A district partnership might, if appropriate measures are ensured, help in achieving this shared foundation of existence and acceptance.

But not only does Marzahn-Hellersdorf profit from a district partnership like this, Hoàng Mai definitely does too. Though Vietnam is experiencing economic growth, the issues mentioned in the chapters before cannot be ignored and warrant serious attention. The state is considering social equality, education and a safe and healthy environment as targets already. But the period since Doi Moi brought increased economic development that led to spontaneous urban development and resulted in its own subset of consequences of which not all are yet resolved. One of these unresolved consequences is bad water quality. Aside from that, gender inequality is still alive. The potential outcomes of a district partnership are, when taking into account Berlin's expressed commitment for global responsibility, vast and intriguing. Strong partners like vocational schools (Oberstufenzentren) and hospitals (UKB), are among the most powerful allies in this venture and are playing a substantial part in pushing society forward.

Observing the effects of these first steps produces the hope of seeing people assemble to strengthen existing bonds and to form new ones. The next official action to be taken will be in September 2014, which unfortunately will be after this paper has been completed. The following year will therefore pose a great opportunity to assess the achievements and shortcomings of the steps outlined in the chapters above.



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