

Welt:Stadt:Quartier

Institute for education, research and innovation

Urban X-Change Network pilot phase

Summary report of the evaluation

The 'Urban X-Change Network' and the Scope of the Evaluation

The project 'Urban X-Change Network' (2021-2023) aims at furthering urban diplomacy through novel opportunities for local partnerships involving adult education centres, local authorities, civil society, and the local population at large. In the pilot phase, two German-Ukrainian and two German-British partnerships were established, the adult education centres acting as main coordinators and communication hubs, both locally and internationally. The partners jointly develop local strategies and projects, linked to the local needs and addressing core issues of the UN's 2030 Agenda, as specified in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The main support instruments of the project consist of financial grants to cover the project costs, personal support through facilitators (project coordinators), networking meetings and an expert conference. The project was initiated and is executed by the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. /German Adult Education Association (DVV); it is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office as a part of its efforts to strengthen external educational and cultural policy.

The main purpose of the evaluation of the pilot phase was to better understand the impact of the project, to gather information for the design and implementation of the project's main phase starting early 2023, and to draw generalisable conclusions regarding projects supporting urban diplomacy. Therefore, the evaluation addressed the following three levels and corresponding main questions:

- **Conceptional level:** What implications can be drawn from project experiences regarding approaches supporting citizen / urban diplomacy?
- **Institutional level:** In what ways and roles did the different stakeholders of the project participate in the project? Did participating in the project lead to changes in the institutions, especially regarding motivation, competences, and opportunities for future international projects?
- **Operational level:** How did the local partnerships develop, and what was the impact of the projects? What were success factors, which obstacles had to be faced?

The evaluation methods included desktop research, interviews with the project team, and 15 qualitative interviews with 18 project participants of the four partnerships.

The report at hand summarises the findings of the evaluation. Due to the exceptional circumstances of the German-Ukrainian partnerships because of Russia's war of aggression, the German-British and the German-Ukrainian partnerships are first analysed separately before drawing overarching conclusions.

German-British partnerships (Kiel / Coventry and Aachen / Rochdale)

In the German-British partnerships, the following **stakeholders** were involved:

- **Senior staff of the adult education organisations** were the central planning and communication hub: they came together first and defined the topics and the structural and temporal framework of the cooperation projects in a preparatory phase during the first half of 2022. According to unanimous responses, this phase was both critical for the further success of the project and much more time-consuming than anticipated. Adult education organisations sought to link the projects with their general operations, such as language training courses or already existing projects. Thus, **adult education teachers and trainers** became a central stakeholder group, who contributed to and benefitted strongly from the partnership. Their bilateral exchange focussed on very practical issues, such as teaching methodologies, successful ways to approach diverse target groups, and furthering participation of vulnerable target groups. In the Aachen / Rochdale partnership, expert exchange was further supported through an expert meeting.
- **Local authorities** – including the highest levels of local government - were very committed to supporting the partnerships and allotted extra time for the direct exchange during the partnership visits. They were and are also playing a critical role in developing frame conditions for extended long-term partnerships.
- **Civil society organisations** of different types were involved as well, for example the Coventry Association for International Friendship, and NGOs implementing adult education and local integration programmes.
- The **broader public** was approached through the direct involvement of language course participants, a hybrid photo exhibition, a symposium with 250 participants, and public campaigns. Some of these activities started only after the time of writing this report, so that their effects could not be evaluated.

As regards **contents**, both partnerships addressed questions of social inclusion and integration, resulting from the advent of new immigrants to the local urban societies, through adult education and beyond, as well as the prevention of institutional racism and discrimination. Thus, they discussed the local challenges and options for action regarding the global phenomenon of migration.

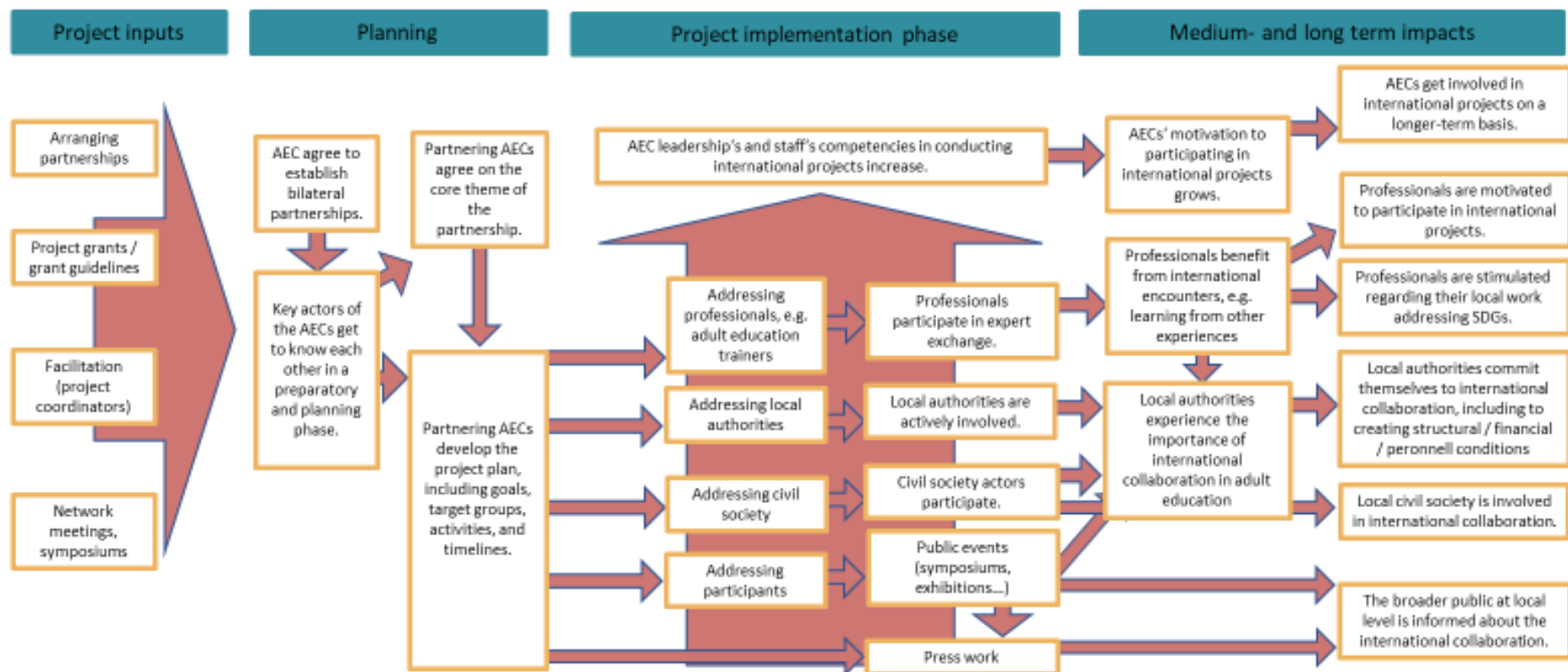
A core project in Kiel / Coventry was a photo exhibition that was created by migrant participants in language trainings (German / English as a second language), who expressed their views of their new hometowns in a creative way. As a result, a range of actors was involved, including the trainers, participants, and the public.

In Aachen / Rochdale, a stronger focus was set on expert exchange regarding welcome culture and ways to diminish institutional discrimination and racism. To this end, an expert meeting was carried out to discuss different strategies.

The partnership projects referred to the following SDGs: SDG 16: promote peaceful and inclusive societies; SDG 11: make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable; SDG 10: reduce inequality, promote equal opportunities; SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Impacts on institutional and operational levels are depicted in the impact map below.

UXC: observed impacts in the German-British partnerships



German-Ukrainian partnerships (Celle / Sumy and Leipzig / Kyiv)

The German-Ukrainian partnerships had to respond to a radically changed context due to the Russian aggression against Ukraine since February 2022, and quickly adapted the project plans to address the local needs of people in Ukraine, those of refugees to the two German cities, and institutions and people working for their integration.

In both cases, the participating cities are twin towns for a long time already; Leipzig and Kyiv are the first German-Ukrainian twin towns: their town twinning was established in 1961. In both cases, the adult education organisations were involved in the town twinning for the first time.

Adult education centres were the central agents of both collaborations. These include established NGOs from Sumy and Kyiv who were already experienced in developing and implementing educational programmes for diverse target groups in their respective cities and beyond, and the public Volkshochschulen (VHS) in Celle and Leipzig.

In Celle / Sumy, authorities from both cities were actively involved, and the project sparked and channelled civil engagement by Celle's citizens for humanitarian support for Sumy's citizens.

In the Leipzig / Kyiv partnership, offline activities were reduced to Leipzig. However, Kyiv's Association of Innovative and Digital Education – the adult education centre involved in the project – created an educational hub in Leipzig, targeting the information needs of Ukrainian refugees, inspired by its educational hub in Kyiv which was established with the city of Kyiv. In addition, a website on the same matter was created.

As a part of the city administration, Leipzig VHS built connections to other local agencies, including the mayor's office. In Celle, NGOs were involved in the conceptual design of specific educational activities.

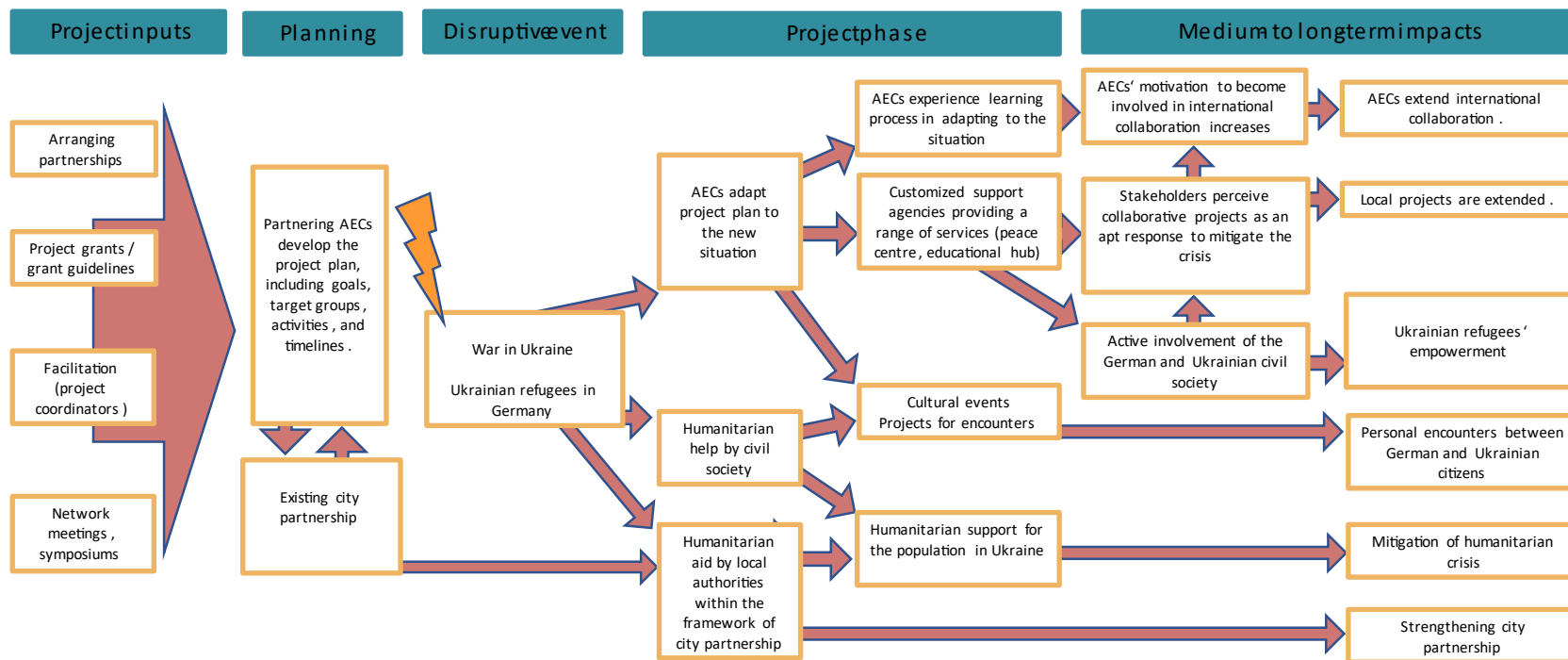
In Leipzig, the educational hub was created as a vibrant environment for communication, learning, and meeting in digital and analogue spaces, advertised by a telegram channel with 2.000 participants. It was supported by strong voluntary commitment by many Ukrainian refugees, who swiftly identified their own and peers' needs in terms access to diverse services, as well for mental health support. Leipzig VHS set a focus on a German-Ukrainian theatre project aiming at mutual understanding and exchange.

In Celle / Sumy, Peace Centres were established to pool and provide diverse services for people in Sumy who had to adapt to the hazards of war, and for Ukrainian refugees in Celle. In both cities, digital and analogue peace festivals took place to further promote these services, including educational programmes to enhance orientation in Germany, cultural activities, and mental health support. In Sumy, programmes included instructions to build air-raid shelters, among others.

The most relevant SDGs include SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, and SDG 4: inclusive education, life-long learning opportunities.

Observed impacts can be seen in the following graph.

UXC: observed impacts in the German-Ukrainian partnerships



Key findings

Operational level

- All four partnerships chose 'glocal' themes: the local manifestation of global challenges. Central to the partnerships was an exchange on local strategies in meeting and mitigating these challenges. Respondents appreciated the opportunities for peer exchange on these strategies and praised the individual and institutional learning opportunities arising from Urban X-Change. Choosing a locally urgent topic as the central theme of the partnership proved to be instrumental for activating a broad range of stakeholders, from city government and agencies working in the respective fields to the local population. Further, the creation of customized structures and formats – both digital and analogue – was key to involving the local population.
- The local stakeholders mostly chose a multiple-level-approach which proved to be a key success factor: they deliberately and systematically designed the project in such a way that stakeholders from the highest ranks of the municipal leadership to a range of public and independent agencies, programme participants and the public at large were targeted through specific measures.
- Respondents claimed that the allotted time frame was rather too short to achieve the stated goals. This is also visible in the fact that many activities exceeded the project's term. As it turned out, the different phases of the project planning, implementation and communication take time, and can neither be skipped nor accelerated.
- Similarly, the respondents state that they underestimated the necessary efforts for the project implementation in terms of human resources. The allotted funding was mainly used for the implementation of the project activities, whereas project management, administration and many of the communicative tasks had to be carried out by the general staff of the Adult Education Centres, including those in senior leadership roles. This way, the project goals were achieved, but at significant costs in terms of extra hours.

Institutional level

- As a key result, Adult Education Organisations have raised their international profile and expressed intent to get involved in further international collaborations. Adult Education Organisations could assume the role of central communication and organisational hubs, both in facilitating the involvement of local authorities, civil society organisations and the population at large in their hometowns and in acting as central partner organisation in the bilateral cooperation. In so doing, they applied and deepened their project organisation and communication capacities. In particular, Urban X Change was a learning opportunity for those Adult Education Organisations that had little or only past experience in international exchange projects. In some cases, the project was connected to organisational change processes fostering a more agile, project-oriented conduct of the organisation; these change processes and Urban X-Change mutually reinforced each other.
- Actively involved in a range of exchange activities (online meetings and physical visits) and the implementation of a range of projects, adult education trainers / teachers were among the most active participants of the projects, and at the same benefitted on a range of levels in their professional roles. In a broader sense, expert exchange related to the

locally chosen areas of action played a central role for the stakeholders' perceived benefits of Urban X-Change.

- Local authorities played an important role in raising the profile of the project, in embedding the project in existing town twinning and / or the overall international strategy of the city. They are also instrumental in turning the projects into long-term partnerships; to this end, some of them have already committed to structural support, while others were preparing for it at the time of the evaluation. Through the project, new connections were created across different municipal agencies, e.g. offices for international affairs and the adult educations services.
- Civil society actors played a broad range of roles and acted as subject matter experts, trainers, and hosts during study visits, among others, thus mirroring the diversity of the local civil society, both content-wise and structure-wise. However, while the involvement of the local authorities and the adult education centres matched the expectations expressed in the project concept, the role of civil society differed somewhat. For example, the choice of the central themes of the partnership project and the communication with a wide range of target groups was done by the Adult Education Centres rather than by civil society actors. A more active involvement in the project management would have required an even more extended preparatory phase and additional funding, according to respondents.

Conceptual level

- Participants are overwhelmingly satisfied with their participation in Urban X-Change and with the opportunities they gained from participating. The conceptual framework allowed local adaptations so that even the German-Ukrainian partnership projects could be realised despite the extreme conditions.
- The project coordinators played a crucial role in supporting the cities and the Adult Education Centres, facilitating exchange and enhancing communication between the participating cities and the central project management at DVV.
- The international conference of December 2022 was perceived as an important element of the project; participants obtained inspiration and appreciated the opportunity for international peer exchange. Key lectures on urban diplomacy and glocalization were lauded in particular.

Perspectives for dissemination strategies

Overall, Urban X-Change has proven that local educational actors, Adult Education Organisations in particular, are apt agents for implementing urban / citizen diplomacy projects. Through adult education, a broad range of target groups can be directly reached, including migrants learning the language of their new home and other vulnerable groups. Also, adult education centres have shown to be well connected with municipal authorities, and to be qualified to carry out international exchange projects. Projects such as Urban X-Change correspond with a larger development towards more project-oriented work on a range of locally relevant issues, building on and at the same time exceeding the traditional role of course provider. As of now, the motivation of adult education centres to be involved in international exchange exceeds the opportunities.

The Urban X-Change project was flexible enough to let stakeholders choose locally relevant themes; their multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach was instrumental to the project successes. The active participation of migrants / refugees as core actors in an urban diplomacy context is a particularly inspiring facet of the project.

Hence, Urban X-Change represents a high qualitative ambition in implementing urban / citizen diplomacy projects. To bring this model to scale, one must consider that the project grants and allotted time frame were perceived rather scarce in relation to the ambitious goals. Therefore, a dissemination would either require a more generous funding structure, co-funding elements from other agencies, or a 'lighter' version that focuses on more limited goals, such as expert exchange. For dissemination strategies, the creation of one or several competence centres to support urban diplomacy in the field of adult education would be advisable.

Evaluation team

Institut Welt:Stadt:Quartier

... was established in Berlin, Germany, in May 2021. It is expert network that brings together social scientists from a broad range of disciplines as well as representatives of academia, local authorities, civil society, and culture. Their shared interest lies in the interconnectedness of local and global developments and dynamics. They act as consultants for public agencies, civil society, and cultural institutions.

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