



RENN

Regional Hubs for
Sustainability Strategies

RENN NETWORK



REPORT 2019





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Foreword


RENN: Social participation for sustainability and the 2030 Agenda

Dear readers,,

These days, hardly a week goes by without seeing the topic of sustainability in the news or a Friday passes without young people protesting on the streets. This is nothing self-evident. When I was first appointed to the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) 15 years ago, the topic of sustainability was one only the specialists talked about. Though these developments seem at first glance to be positive ones, they also point out that we have not made significant progress on certain key issues: we need an appropriate carbon price in order to get a grip on climate problems and to drive the energy transition forward; we need to protect our soil and water resources from further contamination; we need to relieve our congested cities of their automotive burdens – and we must change our way of living. Nothing at all will become easier if we continue to wait; rather, it will simply be more expensive and more unjust. To achieve a substantial transformation towards greater sustainability, we thus need new and binding solutions.

Our answers must go beyond the familiar and must become more imaginative and creative. There are many such ideas to be found at the local level but, unfortunately, they have long been given too low a profile, too little chance to grow and been linked too little with one another. This is why in late 2015 the Council advocated to the Federal Government that the Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN) be established. The Government took up our advice, and today we can report: it has borne fruit. Several hundred events on urgent sustainability issues and implementation of the 2030 Agenda are organised by the RENN partner organisations every year, and numerous publications are made available containing practical tips on realising the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals at a local level. Long before the Fridays for Future movement, the hubs were proving that sustainability is not something that is limited to Berlin. The RENN reach and link people all the way from Lake Chiem to Flensburg who are invested in creating a worthy future for coming generations and who often are achieving great things with very limited means. This report is intended to give you a glimpse into these efforts. I, myself, as well as my colleagues on the Council, have always enjoyed playing a contributing role at various RENN events. I recommend, dear reader, that you too become an active participant. If the Federal Government again takes up the RNE's recommendation, you will be able to do so up to and including the year 2030 – we would like to see the hubs supported at least that long in their so very important work.

I hope you find it an inspiring read!



Marlehn Thieme

Chairwoman of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE)



A sustainability network
creates new alliances

I.R.G.E.N.D W.A.S.

INKLUSION

RADVERKEHR

GESCHLECHTERGERECHTIGKEIT

EUROPA

NATURSCHUTZ

DEMOKRATIE

WOHNUNGSBAU

AUFENTHALTS-
QUALITÄT

SOZIALE GERECHTIGKEIT

In 2015, the United Nations ratified the 2030 Agenda, a milestone in international politics as well as a breakthrough at the level of national politics in many countries – sustainable development is a universal and shared responsibility. Countries around the world made a commitment to playing their part in achieving the 17 jointly agreed global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030 to help create a world without hunger and poverty, with more fairness, an intact environment, clean drinking water and good working conditions. The agenda goals are linked with and dependent on one another. It is not simply a question of making progress in specific areas, but of the transformation of society as a whole – the government, the economy and society must all contribute to this change. New approaches necessitate new answers, and a holistic view forces us to recalibrate our thinking and think in new ways.

Germany has embraced this momentum and the Federal Government has aligned the German Sustainable Development Strategy with the 2030 Agenda. The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) provided the core idea here, namely implementation of the 2030 Agenda “in, with and by” Germany. Early on, in 2014, the Council implemented a stakeholder process concerning the consequences of the Sustainable Development Goals for Germany and advised the Federal Government. The 2018 peer review picks up on this approach and calls on policymakers to take fundamental action to prevent important goals from being missed (“off-track” goals).

All kinds of political and economic measures need to be effected for this. But from the Council’s perspective, even more needs to be done. In addition to “hard” implementation measures, there need to be “soft” changes where sustainable development stakeholders are concerned. The Council therefore proposed

to parliament that Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN) be established. These hubs are now contributing to creating a new culture of sustainability in Germany thanks to greater networking, more communication, more partnerships and agreements within politics and society. They bring commitment at the local level together with the needs of the 2030 Agenda, thereby highlighting the need for action at all political levels while also encouraging the stakeholders to assume responsibility and seize the initiative. The progress which is possible in one stakeholder’s specific area should not be held back by having to wait on steps first being taken elsewhere.

In the political arena, the primary instrument for realising the SDGs in Germany is the German Sustainable Development Strategy. This was fundamentally revised by the Federal Government in 2016 and restructured in line with the 17 SDGs. The new system of goals also had a major impact as a framework that determines the activities within sustainability strategies of the Länder (federal states). The 2030 Agenda gave the sustainability movement fresh impetus in areas outside of the political sphere as well, however. The 17 goals also created for the first time a shared point of reference for sustainability being put into practice by people in their day-to-day lives (within the family, in day-to-day purchases, on holiday, when eating out, etc.), at companies, in education and vocational training, in civil engagement and in terms of societal and political participation. Numerous stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations and from the fields of business and science, embarked on adapting the SDGs to their own activities.

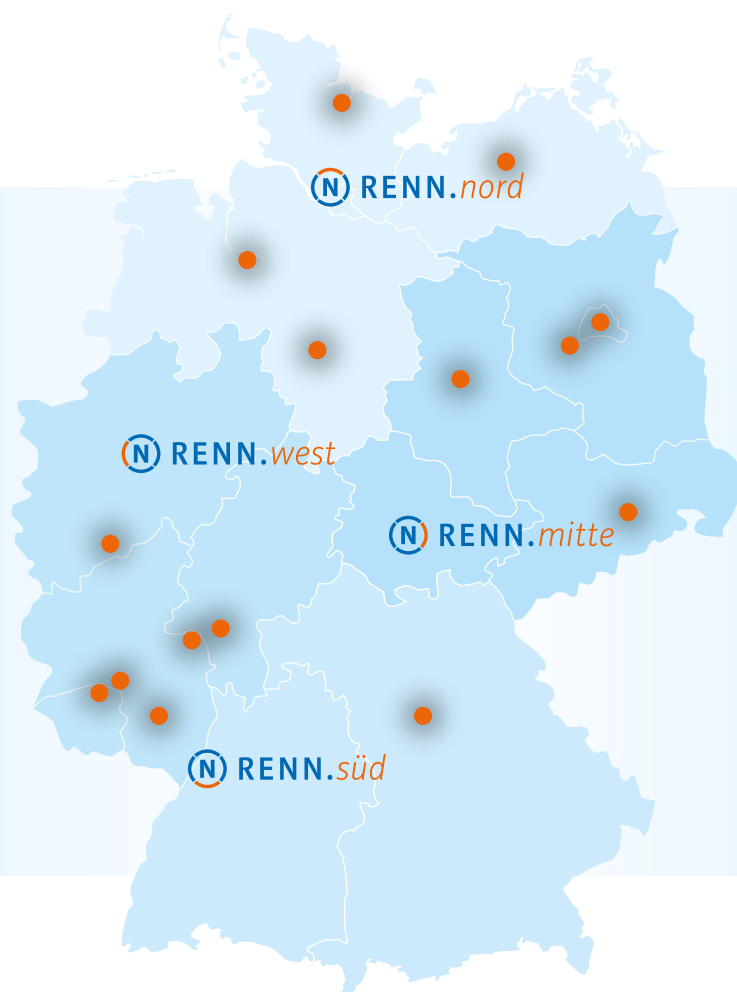
The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) sees this as a positive development. RNE projects such as the Sustainability Code, the Sustainable Shopping Basket, the

Sustainable City dialogue with mayors, and Project Sustainability are attracting more and more interest and are encouraging new stakeholders to get on board.

The RENN hubs nevertheless fill a gap. What was missing was a governance instrument that forged a link between initiatives that went beyond Berlin and other conurbations, got new stakeholders excited about sustainable development and gave structure to the inspirational exchange of experience and opinions. This gap meant that the holistic and bridging intention of the 2030 Agenda – both vertically and horizontally, politically and thematically – could not be realised as wished and needed in particular among the various

levels and sectors in spite of the endeavours of a wide variety of sustainability stakeholders in Germany. What was needed was for all too rigid demarcations and “silos” to be made more flexible, for the stakeholders to be given access to the SDGs and for expertise regarding new forms of dialogue, communication and cooperation to be built up. The idea of a new sustainability network was born. It needed to spread best practices at the federal, state and municipal levels and bring ideas together. The RNE’s proposal for such a networking project was called RENN, which stands for Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies. The name reflects the innovative and experimental character of the project.





The regional level as an experimentation space

What stands out in particular in the project name is the word “regional”. As a federal country, Germany is made up of the national government, the federal states (or ‘Länder’) and municipalities – regions do not exist in the political sense. The idea behind the RENN network is to tie in with this federalism by focusing on regional pooling while also establishing experimentation space for new dialogue and partnerships. This is in line with past recommendations from the RNE made to the Federal Government and the Länder that they strengthen not only sustainability initiatives and endeavours at the local level, but also

dialogue at the regional level. This is what the RENN hubs were designed to achieve, and four such regional hubs were planned, together encompassing all 16 Länder. This would make them each large enough to explore new avenues, while nevertheless giving them roots at the local level. The purpose of limiting them to four hubs was to promote cooperation, action-driven coordination and commonality across formal boundaries. The expectation is that, with this structure, the RENN hubs will take the SDGs to rural areas as well and support implementation of sustainability strategies at the federal, state and municipal levels.

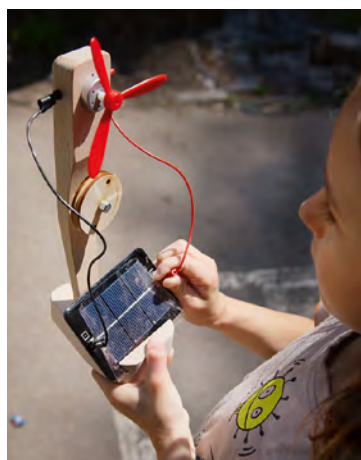


People take sustainable development forward

The term “hub” illustrates that what the Council wishes to do most of all is create a space for communication, dialogue, professionalisation and scaling. The fundamental idea was that establishing new communication channels and better interlinking would advance the concept of sustainability through the creation of an infrastructure for dialogue and offering greater freedom for concrete action. There are numerous examples here: a great many people and organisations in Germany are working towards fundamentally changing the country in order to leave an intact ecological, social and economic society for the generations to come. These include successful networks, for example in the areas of development assistance, environmental protection, local agendas, education for sustainable development and sustainable business, as well as in science and agriculture. There are fair-trade activities, “Eine Welt” (One World) networks and artists that make sustainability even more visible in the public arena. All of these together with the applicants for and participants in the RNE projects Project Sustainability and German Sustainability Action Days and the companies that apply the Sustainability Code are to be incorporated into the communication process

by the new network. In particular, smaller initiatives that often heavily influence and promote change at the local level are to be given a greater platform: community-run village shops, local food waste prevention initiatives, repair cafes, plastics initiatives and school companies are just a few examples of such committed groups.

However, the political conception of a regional network goes above and beyond this group of stakeholders who are already active. In many places, regional dialogue with groups that are more sceptical about the concept of sustainability is likewise on the agenda. There will always be restrictive echo chambers of participants talking to and agreeing with one another. But society needs a counterpoint to this where stakeholders and players with contrary positions can engage with one another and share their experiences. This allows everyone to contribute to and also benefit from the network. And only in this way can you establish lasting communication and collaboration connections – a network of sustainability that grows with its tasks and together with its stakeholders and partners.



36 months of RENN

The Bundestag put the financial parameters in place for the RENN network with its 2015 budget. The RNE presented its ideas for the RENN initially to the Federal Government and then within the Federal Government–Länder dialogue on sustainability, and the network was then established one year later (see chapter 2 for details of how this was done). The network ideas are practised differently within the respective RENN hubs (see chapter 3). It is the partners' own responsibility to determine which issues and target groups they wish to focus on and which activities they want to carry out, the only condition being that the funds they need be available. The network is thus very diverse. This set-up means the RENN stakeholders do not simply remain advocacy groups, i.e. describing and evaluating other people's actions. Rather, they have to make their own decisions and take effective action themselves. The success of this is clearly illustrated by the increasing quantity and

quality of the entries submitted to Project Sustainability and the fact that the number of citizens' initiatives during the German Sustainability Action Days has increased to more than 3,200.

In 2018, a group of international sustainability experts under the aegis of Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and one-time Head of the United Nations Development Programme, acknowledged the importance of the RENN network for implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional level. The experts completed a peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy on behalf of the Federal Chancellery in 2018. In their recommendations, they argue for the RENN project to be extended until 2030 and for the network to be integrated into the key public dialogue processes relating to sustainability strategies.

A network is given structure – the RENN set-up and approach



With the decision having been made to create a new sustainability network, a governance concept was needed at the end of 2015 that would give RENN a sensible structure and incorporate it into Germany's sustainability policy. Based on this, responsibility for the network's set-up and overall coordination lies with the Office of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), within which a RENN Coordination Centre was established. In addition to coordinating and handling the network's activities across topics and regions, this Coordination Centre gives widespread exposure to important input and project ideas.

The RNE Office adhered to the principle that a regionally organised network could only be a success with (at least) the conceptual support

of policymakers at all the various levels. The Federal Chancellery paved the way for the RNE to arrive at a suitable solution by inviting the RNE Office to participate in dialogue about sustainable development at the Federal Government-Länder coordination level.

One part of governance is the institutional allocation of funds. The budget for RENN is provided by the Federal Chancellery. Here, it draws on the services of the project management agency DLR, which in turn concludes contracts with the RENN consortium leaders and partners. The Coordination Centre is financed using the same funds. It is responsible for making professional assessments regarding fund allocation and provision.



The selection process

Following its initial presentation and explanation of RENN to the Länder, the RNE asked the various state chancelleries to put suitable (primarily non-governmental) organisations within their states forward for involvement in the network. These needed to have extensive experience in the field of sustainability and already be actively involved in sustainability work. In this way, the RNE avoided the creation of duplicate structures and guaranteed a speedy project start. The Länder were also asked to agree among themselves who would belong to each of the four RENN hubs.

Many – but not all – of the Länder provided the Council with such proposals, some of them proposing one and others putting forward multiple organisations. As anticipated, the picture painted was not only geographically heterogeneous – it also reflected some of the different focal issues of the Länder in the area of sustainability. Among others, organisations were put forward that had, in the past, first and foremost tackled the issues of local Agenda 21s, development assistance, environmental protection and education for sustainable development.

In the next step, the RNE wrote to all 14 of the organisations put forward and asked them to submit execution concepts in which they were to outline how they wished to practically implement the RENN idea in their region. The specifications were that this include the notion of networking and therefore the top-

ic's content breadth, and that as many “new” people as possible be reached regarding sustainability and the SDGs. It was up to the applicants to decide for themselves which issues and target groups they wished to focus on and which activities to carry out.

The organisations were advised to reach agreement within their region and appoint one body to be in charge per region (consolidation). This body would then coordinate the region's RENN activities and serve as the RNE's point of contact. As no organisations had been named in some of the Länder, the organisations were asked to propose potential partners. This was the case in particular in RENN.central, where the lead body essentially put organisations forward with which contact had already been made. This RENN hub's composition is therefore homogeneous. In one of the federal states within RENN.central, no suitable civil society organisation existed at the time the RENN hub was established. An organisation was therefore founded in the course of the project to assume this role.

Five consolidated concepts were put forward. Two competing concepts were proposed for the northern RENN hub. The other regions each reached agreement on suitable consolidated involvement at the concrete submission stage. In the case of the competing entries, the RNE made a selection decision. This resulted in the Federal Government being presented with four concepts to back.

Structure and composition



RENN.north comprises five Länder – Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. Each of the states has a project partner. This hub is managed in Hamburg.



RENN.central likewise comprises five Länder – Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. Each of the states has a project partner. This hub is managed in Thuringia.



RENN.south consists of the two Länder Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, each of which has a project partner. It is managed in Baden-Württemberg.



RENN.west is made up of four Länder – Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland. Hesse and Saarland both have one project partner, while North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate each have two. This hub is managed by one of the partners in North Rhine-Westphalia.

The Council reached agreement with the Federal Chancellery that the available funds would for the most part be allocated equally together with a smaller sum based on a region's population. This means that a RENN hub with fewer partner organisations has more funds per organisation at its disposal. The individual RENN hubs have very different assessments of the question of allocating the funds equally or based on population numbers.

The Federal Chancellery makes the funds available to the hubs through a project management agency. The same goes for the funds for the Coordination Centre within the RNE. There is no contractual relationship between the four RENN hubs and the RENN Coordination Centre. The Coordination Centre reviews on behalf of the Federal Chancellery whether the activities serve the general objective for which funding is provided. This is made possible by the mandatory attachment of funding allocation decisions.

Cooperation

Several times a year, the consortium leaders meet with the Coordination Centre team to share experiences and achievements and to plan joint RENN-wide activities and projects. Regular RENN-wide formats include, for instance, participating in the RNE annual conference and the National German Sustainability Award and promoting the German Sustainability Action Days, as part of which a large number of independent events are also organised. Since 2017, the RENN hubs have also been holding a central networking event in Berlin – the RENN.days – which is overseen by the Coordination Centre.

Agreements between the RENN hubs and the Coordination Centre are organised by the consortium leaders within their respective hubs. The hubs' institutional set-ups vary, as do the partners' rights and obligations with regard to one another (see also chapter III). The way in which and degree to which representatives of the Länder are notified about the work and

decision-making processes likewise vary from hub to hub. Three of the four RENN hubs have established a fixed structure for this.

In its day-to-day work, the Coordination Centre serves as the functional and organisational liaison body between the Council and the RENN hubs. For example, it assists the hubs when they would like Council members to make contributions to events or publications. At least once a year, the consortium leaders also meet the Council members directly in the Council's regular meetings. The RENN hubs then report on the project progress made and potential hurdles, and also have the opportunity to raise matters related to their local work regarding which they would like a recommendation or an opinion from the Council. The Council then discusses such a matter. This process is designed to allow the network to feed its experience at the local level into the national level.

RENN.süd FORUM

Prof. GÜNTHER BACHMANN

MUT
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WANDEL

WAS BEDEUTET
GEMEINSAM?



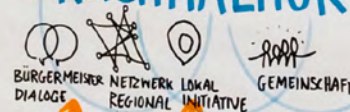
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NACHHALTIGKEIT



JETZT

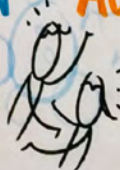
Probleme
sind schneller als
Lösungen...

Gesellschaftliche

KRÄNKUNG

LERNEN DURCH
AUSTAUSCH

IRRITATIONEN

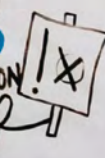


UMFELD

VERÄNDERUNG

TÄGLICHES TUN
WANDELN

KEINE
VETO
SITUATION
HAFFEN



KOMPETENZ
VERMUTUNG

LEGAL
MACHEN

= Demo
Grund

WAS IST
DAS?

?

23. März
ULM

KAT FÜR NACHHALTIGE
ENTWICKLUNG
18 JAHRE

FAST FOLLOWER

GEMEINWOHL
ÖKONOMIE

GREEN
WASHING
PIONIERS
EINBINDEN



WIE DIE
WIRTSCHAFT
BEI RENN.
MEHR EINBINDEN?

MEHR-
WERT
DURCH
AUSTAUSCH

POSITIVES
FEIERN

STREITEN
ZU VIEL!

LEHRSTUHL
FÜR NACHHALTIGKEIT



RENN
KOOPERATIONS
PARTNER

In Ulm total
Aktive
LOKALE
AGENDA
INITIATIVEN

WIR MÜSSEN
LERNEN UNS
ZU POSITIONIEREN

KOMMUNEN
ALS AKTIONS
RAUM

WIR
IDENTITÄT
SCHAFFEN!



(New) Partnerships
for sustainability



Sustainability festival "spring awakening" in Wilhelmshurger Insel park

The Northern Regional Hub for Sustainability Strategies (RENN.north) is a consortium consisting of six partner organisations in the five northern Länder of Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Lower Saxony and the two city states Bremen and Hamburg. As one of the four RENN hubs, RENN.north serves as a regionally organised information, exchange and activity platform that helps to boost societal dialogue about sustainable development by actively networking stakeholders. RENN.north thus seeks to make the complex concept of sustainability something which can be experienced across regions and state borders. RENN.north is underpinned by the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which also form the basis of the German Sustainable Development

Strategy. Its partner organisations operate primarily in their respective Länder, but also engage in joint projects with other partner states. The network is therefore diverse in terms of structure and topic focus.

The consortium is overseen and managed by the Association for the Protection of the German Forest (SDW) in Hamburg, which is an established nature conservation organisation and a certified sustainability education centre. The partner organisations are each represented within the RENN.north Coordination Group by one member. The Coordination Group determines the hub's strategic focus, discusses key issues and makes the appropriate decisions.

Who is responsible for what?

The RENN.north staff (currently eleven) are based at the six partner organisations and are active at the local level. In addition to the SDW, the network consists of:

- The Academy for Sustainable Development Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (ANE)
- The Centre for Education on Nature, the Environment and Rural Areas in the State of Schleswig-Holstein (BNUR)
- Environmental Companies Office (GUU) c/o RKW Bremen GmbH
- Climate Protection and Energy Agency Lower Saxony (KEAN)
- Association of Educational Initiatives Lower Saxony (VNB)

The network is diverse in terms of its structure and topic focus. This is a good prerequisite for RENN.north accommodating the diversity of the SDGs in its work. The following focal issues can be ascribed to the individual partner organisations:

- ANE: the sustainable development of rural areas
- BNUR and VNB: education for sustainable development (ESD)
- KEAN: climate protection within municipalities
- GUU: sustainability within companies

The expertise related to these areas is reflected in the fields of activity of the RENN.north staff.

The individual staff members' academic backgrounds are as diverse as the hub's topic focuses and include education science, engineering, forestry, cultural studies, political science and business psychology.



The RENN.north team introduces itself

Making use of existing networks, forging new connections

RENN.north's networking activities would not be possible without the availability of the existing networks and contact with the cooperative partners. These advantages serve as the basis of its activities with external stakeholders.

As such, many of RENN.north's networking connections and partnerships develop on the basis of the RENN.north partner organisations' existing cooperations. New networking connections include:

- Additional input in existing networks
- RENN.north strengthening various sustainability communities
- Last, but not least, new and unique initiatives and network activities

For example, the staff in Lower Saxony successfully brought civil society stakeholders in the fields of ecology, environmental and climate protection, global learning, social affairs, culture and economics together. The collaborating stakeholders include Lower Saxony's Youth Environmental Network (JANUN),

the Alfred Toepfer Academy for Nature Conservation (NNA), other voluntary service providers, the Lower Saxony Development Policy Association (VEN) and the Economic Solidarity Academy. Collaboration with government, municipal, education and church institutions has also been intensified.

Culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability

For RENN.north, the three established pillars of sustainability – social affairs, environment and economy – are joined by a fourth pillar, culture. Artists and culture creators are actively incorporated into the RENN.north network with the aim of broadening the target groups and making use of new formats and methods for establishing a culture of sustainability. In Schleswig-Holstein, partnerships were entered into with the art and culture festival Norden, the international wildlife film festival Green Screen and the Schleswig-Holstein

state museum Molfsee Open-Air Museum. In Hamburg, too, an exhibition concept on the topic of sustainable consumption was developed and successfully implemented together with a Berlin-based gallery and the Nelson Mandela School in Wilhelmsburg, a deprived district and social flashpoint of Hamburg. The exhibition prompted the artists and schoolchildren involved to continue to address the issue of sustainability in greater detail going forward.

Topic for the year: sustainable tourism

To boost public awareness of RENN.north's many different activities, it was decided at the beginning of the project that an annual conference (symposium) would be jointly held. Since then, the topics addressed at the annual conferences have also been RENN.north's focal issues for the year, which are reflected in all sorts of events and activities held throughout northern Germany.

With the project lasting five years and there being five Länder involved, it was decided that each annual conference would be held in a different state with the aim of forging new links between the SDGs and the theme for the year by means of focal topics. As the United Nations (UN) designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, this was the topic around which the first annual

conference, held in Schleswig-Holstein, revolved. This annual conference was held in Lübeck and was organised by the RENN.north partner organisation BNUR in conjunction with Tourismus Cluster Schleswig-Holstein as the industry network for the state's tourism businesses. This allowed professional expertise and contact with the industry network to be incorporated into the event's planning and organisation. Experts provided information in six interactive theme blocks and encouraged dialogue on the topics of sustainability in business, certifications, regional products and experiences, sustainability in the events industry, mobility and refugee integration. With 300 attendees and 40 exhibitors from the fields of politics, education and business, the event is one of RENN.north's first high-profile successes.



Sustainable district development

A year later in 2018, RENN.north addressed sustainable district development as its focal issue. New partnerships were formed in northern Germany and good examples were presented and discussed in four workshops that ran simultaneously. The annual conference “Future-oriented district development – real-life examples in northern Germany”

was held in Hanover under the auspices of the RENN.north partner organisation KEAN. Cross-Länder networking took place at the preparation stage and during the conference itself. Stakeholders in the fields of science, politics and civil society developed new ideas and partnerships, and thus contributed to the particular success of the conference.

Bringing stakeholders together to achieve more

One of RENN.north’s primary objectives is to bring stakeholders together that would otherwise not cross paths. Planning, organising and executing the RENN.north annual conferences are key shared work focal areas for reaching this objective. The successes achieved so far confirm to us that this networking aspect is one of RENN.north’s strengths.

Counsel (Hamburger Ratschlag) since autumn 2018. This alliance of Hamburg-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has been developing concrete demands addressed

to Hamburg’s policymakers since 2016 regarding how the UN’s 2030 Agenda should be implemented. At the same time, many young, committed people are establishing dialogue platforms and connecting via these to promote sustainable development in Hamburg. These two groups are pursuing similar goals, but are unaware of each other. This is where RENN.north comes in, bringing the groups together in a dialogue in order for them to pool their strengths and raise public awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals.

An SDG guide for SMEs – professionalising and expanding partnerships

Another example of successful activities founded on new partnerships among stakeholders which are strengthened and advanced by RENN.north can be found in the city state of Bremen. In 2018, an SDG guide for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was jointly developed by the Environmental Companies Office (GUU) based within the RENN partner organisation RKW Bremen GmbH, the CSR-Hanse alliance of companies and the University of Bremen’s sustainability management professorship. This guide was met with a great

deal of interest from all sorts of company representatives in northern Germany and also further afield. The SDG SME guide is designed with smaller companies in mind that do not have the capacities required to produce sustainability reports or report on their sustainability activities in line with generally accepted international standards. The brochure’s public presentation at Bremen’s Chamber of Crafts was very well received as it allows companies to practically align their activities with the SDGs.

New formats, new target groups

There is a need among companies to deal with the SDGs, as demonstrated by past events on this topic and the high demand throughout northern Germany for the SDG SME brochure. Consequently, the #Tisch17 dialogue format based on the guide is to be rolled out across northern Germany following a trial period in Bremen. This involves select stakeholders being invited to attend a panel discussion moderated by RENN.north in which the participants are encouraged to reflect on implementation of the SDGs. The #Tisch17 format is to be professionalised, partially structured and given a flexible design that allows the demand among companies and other target groups to be met across all the regions. Stakeholders with different levels of experience can benefit from one another and can share their examples of good practice in the area of business transformation.

Other formats with which RENN.north wishes to reach new target groups include an innovative escape room in Lower Saxony on the topic of sustainability and an intergenerational climate project designed to generate regular dialogue regarding climate change between schoolchildren and senior citizens on the basis of an installed weather station.

In addition, tried-and-tested formats have been applied to new target groups – the Lower Saxony dialogue forum “Education Creates a Future” (Bildung schafft Zukunft) now comprises not only experts from the field of ESD, but also stakeholders in nature conservation and environmental protection and also various economic sectors (e.g. tourism). The focus here is on the following question: which education services relating to business, science, culture and participation contribute to the SDGs being achieved and what complementary formats make sense?

Peer learning through networking in the north

The RENN.north members learn from and with one another. Each partner organisation has a different set of competences and experience and focuses on different issues (ESD, energy efficiency, business, etc.). The intensive collaboration has sometimes resulted in new

issues being considered and added, such as sustainability within SMEs and culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability. There is therefore ongoing sensitisation to other topics and each partner organisation benefits from the synergies.



The Regional Hub for Sustainability Strategies in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria (RENN.south) is based within the Sustainability Office of the Central Environmental Authority of the State of Baden-Württemberg (LUBW) and the Bavarian State Network for Civil Engagement (LBE) together with the Centre for Sustainable Municipal Development in Bavaria. RENN.south first and foremost addresses matters relating to sustainable living. It focuses on, for example, consumption, mobility and the conservation of resources, in other words sustainability issues with strong day-to-day relevance for people. Its methodological activities focus on networking, supporting and boosting the profiles of civil society initiatives

for sustainable lifestyles, looking in particular at smaller, local initiatives as actors from “non-organised civil society”.

With its events and its home page, RENN.south is a forum for supporting initiatives dedicated to tackling sustainable lifestyle issues. The initiatives can use events, publications and the RENN.south home page to spread the word about their issues and experiences and also for networking. In addition to RENN.south’s own cross-Länder discussion and exchange forums, it supports state-wide, regional and local events such as conferences, workshops and info evenings as cooperation events.

Municipalities as platforms for sustainability activities

Civic involvement doesn't occur in a vacuum, so one of the focuses is on municipalities and districts as platforms for non-governmental sustainability initiatives – many local Agenda 21 processes boasted a large number of civic projects that were the result of collaboration between civil society stakeholders and the municipalities. RENN.south wishes to further develop this approach, tie it in with new initiatives such as transition towns, repair cafes, urban gardening, etc. and jointly create new

forms of collaboration. In the case of municipalities, it is in particular the many climate protection concepts that serve as touchpoints for collaboration in the areas of sustainable consumption and mobility. Municipalities can also assume a role model function in relation to sustainable consumption by focusing on sustainable procurement and raising awareness of this by working together with other players such as fair-trade shops and with the help of suitable PR.

New events and partnerships

RENN.south has initiated new links and partnerships at various levels. The majority of its events are initiated and organised together with cooperative partners, with RENN.south assuming a variety of roles such as initiating

the events, helping to determine the programme, financial involvement, providing input, and advertising, all depending on the local situation and the partners' needs.

RENN.south Forum: knowledge exchange for everyone

An annual RENN.south Forum involving both of the hub's Länder gives all the civil society stakeholders the opportunity to engage in an exchange of knowledge. The RENN.south Forum for initiatives in the area of sustainable living is an annual cross-Länder platform for knowledge exchange and mutual learning on this issue. In addition to a keynote speech, the focus is on the participants willingly introducing topics themselves. A Market of Possi-

bilities with a walking assembly highlights good examples and provides information about initiatives, projects and project ideas for various topics relating to sustainable living. Topics are developed and discussed in depth in working groups. The RENN.south Forum is held on a Saturday each year to allow those involved on a voluntary basis to attend too. These volunteers' travel expenses are reimbursed.

Jointly reducing the flood of plastic

Another cross-regional event was the first networking meeting of civil society initiatives that are combating the flood of plastic, which was held on the eve of a congress addressing this topic. Some 180 delegates who attended the “Plastic-Free City” (Plastikfreie Stadt) congress discussed the dangers of plastic and plastic waste, future-proof developments

and the reduction of consumption. Keynote speeches provided plenty of food for thought ahead of a panel discussion. On the eve of the congress, approximately 45 representatives of initiatives which promote the reduction of plastics consumption came together to talk about their work and their approaches.

Global trade and personal consumption behaviour

Many municipalities run consumption-critical guided city walks to teach citizens about sustainable and responsible consumption. Instead of landmarks, these city walks stop at the offices of global trading companies. The topics addressed include the labour conditions for these companies’ workers and the impact that production and transport have

on the environment. The idea is to show those who take part in the walks how their own consumer behaviour can play a part in making global consumption more sustainable. RENN. south now hosts a regular meeting of the organisers of such consumption-critical guided city walks for them to network and share their thoughts.

Municipalities in dialogue

The format of the learning circle has been applied to the topic of sustainability at a cross-regional level. The idea behind the forum entitled “Thinking about My Municipality in a New Way” (Meine Kommune weiterdenken) is to allow municipal decision makers to exchange knowledge, the aim being to change how policymakers, public administration and civil society cooperate in the area of transforming sustainability. The focus here is on bolstering those in positions of responsibility who wish to move away from a “carry on as you were” approach to work organisation. To boost its effectiveness and to get to a stage of in-depth and trusting exchange as quickly as possible, this format is designed first and foremost with municipal decision makers in mind, offering them three half-day working meetings in which to exchange their thoughts.

In Bavaria, this was kicked off with sustainability-conscious districts and municipalities being networked with civil society stakeholders at, so far, two state-wide conferences. These will henceforth take place annually. The aim is to establish a regular exchange of knowledge about sustainable development throughout Bavaria that identifies the focal issues while also offering a point for the many stakeholders and their respective issues related to transformation in the direction of greater sustainability to join the discussion. The focus here is on the municipality as a platform for action: new negotiation processes and meeting places are becoming increasingly important for tackling complex societal issues and taking on the goal conflicts which are inescapably connected with sustainability. Various perspectives are therefore taken into account in interactive

formats. In particular, the aim is to make it possible for topics to be addressed in greater detail and advanced further in events held between the annual congresses. In 2018, around 200 delegates from the fields of municipal

administration and politics, civil society and science took the opportunity to share their thoughts on implementation and ongoing development options for sustainable development at the municipal level.

Setting limits to plastic pollution – RENN.south congress on the topic of a “plastic-free city” in Ludwigsburg



Networking in rural areas and in the city

The “Future Forum” (Forum Zukunft, or Forum Z for short) in the district of Aichach-Friedberg is one example of a regional networking meeting in a predominantly rural region. It champions a more sustainable and more environmental lifestyle and approach to business in the Aichach-Friedberg district, and the third Forum Z is to be held in 2019. In 2018, some 90 representatives of associations, municipalities, organisations and education institutions in the region came together with committed citizens to jointly think about creating a better future. The topics discussed included environmental and climate protection, democracy and mobility. In a number of working groups, the participants formulated goals such as a 30 km/h speed limit in all residential areas in the Wittelsbacher Land region and the region’s own currency. On top of presen-

tations and workshops, there was an auxiliary programme of events and a kids’ programme to showcase initiatives and projects. In 2018, RENN.south provided input on examples of regional networking meetings of all kinds of different sustainability stakeholders in other regions.

A networking meeting involving “speed dating” was piloted in Karlsruhe as a city with a local Agenda 21 and many other active sustainability initiatives. Approximately 60 committed activists in the areas of the environment, ‘One World’, consumption, social affairs, health and the climate came together on 30 November 2018 and started by getting to know one another with the help of “speed dating”. In a second round, the participants had the opportunity to exchange information

on “haves” and “wants”. Under the “wants”, for example, many groups are seeking new volunteers or premises and virtual networking. Among other things, “haves” included very practical things such as exhibitions, materials

and events. All the results are evaluated and made available to the participants to enable them to continue to network and collaborate informally.

New partnerships for sustainable mobility, nutrition and qualification

Partnerships were established with environmental organisations via events relating to repair cafes or sustainable mobility. Together with the international organisation Slow Food, events are held at the national slow food fair on the topic of sustainable nutrition. A qualification programme for all voluntary activists in the field of sustainability was set up in conjunction with the Baden-Württemberg Development Policy Umbrella Organisation, the Association of Fair-Trade Shops and

development policy action groups. Existing activities were also addressed and expanded together. In this way, joint activities were created rather than diverse and competing offers, and these have since been steadily augmented and professionalised. The above-mentioned formats were further developed and in part applied to new target groups. A range of different discussion and event formats are therefore used to respond to the various sustainability situations and structures.







RENN.central comprises five civil society Agenda 21 organisations: Berlin 21 e.V., Brandenburg 21 e.V., Netzwerk Zukunft Sachsen-Anhalt e.V., Landesverband Nachhaltiges Sachsen e.V. and, as the consortium leader, Zukunftsfähiges Thüringen e.V. The partners can build on many years of experience in the networking of sustainability stakeholders and in dialogue with policymakers. Their aim is to help realise the goals of the 2030 Agenda together with civil society and municipal stakeholders.

The five partners operate on the premise of a shared understanding of strong sustainability: “We see strong sustainability as a compre-

hensive fairness concept – preserving natural resources as the foundation for life and, within the bounds this sets, enabling everyone to live well”.

Those who work for the five RENN.central partners have a diverse array of professional and scientific qualifications and extensive knowledge of sustainability discourse. They also have a wealth of practical and career experience. This level of qualification makes interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration possible with a variety of stakeholders, networks, specialised politicians and scientists.

In the first two years, the work of the Central Regional Hub for Sustainability Strategies (RENN.central) has allowed the networking structures between the five Länder Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia to be established and expanded. It is a similar story with regard to the work within each of these Länder, with civil society stakeholders and municipalities being strengthened and support structures for sustainable development being further developed at this

level. The five partners see themselves as network hubs, competence centres, catalysts and platforms for dialogue among the initiatives, organisations, associations and municipalities working to realise the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda within the RENN.central region. Partnerships are increasingly being entered into, in particular in relation to the three focal issues that RENN.central has been actively setting since 2018:

- Sustainable municipal and regional development
- Sustainable business/rethinking prosperity
- Education for sustainable development (ESD)/political education/participation



New network links and partnerships

- The RENN.central partners bolster collaboration between municipalities and civil society, they work with policymakers, administration and various committees, and they play a part in each federal state's sustainability strategy and also, in some cases, other ministerial strategies and concepts such as action plans for education for sustainable development.
- The RENN.central partners bolster collaboration between municipalities by initiating and overseeing mayoral dialogues and information on municipal sustainability strategies.
- The RENN.central partners assist with bringing stakeholders in education for sustainable development together within partner networks and specialist forums on Germany's ESD action plan, the purpose of which is to realise the global ESD action plan. Individual members of the RENN.central partners are likewise active in these forums, allowing for new networking links between education networks for ESD and global learning and the civil society 2030 Agenda initiatives.
- In their events on ESD and other issues, the RENN.central partners focus in particular on the topic of democracy education and shaping competence, among other things in light of the increasing disenchantment with democracy and extreme right-wing developments.
- The "netzwerk N" student project was selected as one of four transformation projects from among 40 sustainability projects within the Project Sustainability competition run in 2018. This prompted RENN.central to actively support netzwerk N in its transformation through a nationwide partnership.
- A partnership was initiated in 2018 with the initiative "Day of Good Life" (Tag des Guten Lebens), which was launched in Cologne some years ago and which is working on going national. This embraces the concept of "buen vivir" that was enshrined in the Ecuadorian constitution by the economist and former Ecuadorian Minister of Economics Alberto Acosta.
- New network links and partnerships are also being established at the local level through the addressing of locally relevant issues such as the post-growth city in Weimar and the founding of food policy councils that help develop food policy strategies in cities such as Berlin and Leipzig.

Bringing stakeholders in sustainable development together

A focal area in the networking of stakeholders is the RENN.central partners being involved in or organising sustainability forums within the Länder. This format continues to integrate new stakeholder groups.

Panel talk and discussion with participants of the 2nd yearly conference of RENN.central in 2018 in Potsdam



There are other networking platforms such as:

- Mayoral dialogues on sustainable municipal development
- Parliamentary sustainability events
- Workshops and assistance with processes relating to RENN.central's three focal issues
- Specialist workshops on other issues

Sustainability advice for municipalities

One complex is presented here as an example: existing partnerships between sustainable development stakeholders and stakeholders in municipal administration are professionalised and expanded by giving municipalities expert preparatory and initial advice regarding municipal sustainability strategies and processes. The services within the RENN.central region are developed and arranged in cascade form. Initial consultations, training, municipal dialogues and workshop series help to prepare the development of comprehensive municipal sustainability strategies and civic participation processes, and highlight where there are support opportunities at the state and national level. Specifically, RENN.central can provide overarching preliminary advice here and offer dialogue formats.

It can draw among other things on the experience garnered in the project “Global Sustain-

able Municipality in Thuringia” and on the RENN.central partners' many years of experience in overseeing participation processes in their respective Länder.

The format of mayoral dialogues on sustainable development takes things in a similar but more general direction. The basic tenor here is to facilitate peer-to-peer dialogue on sustainability, offer mutual encouragement and prompt collaboration on specific individual topics. Collaboration within the RENN.central network has made it possible for the mayoral dialogues on sustainable municipal development which have existed in Thuringia since 2013 to be transposed to other Länder.

Participation in the state-specific mayoral dialogues on sustainable municipal development will depend on municipal 2030 Agenda resolutions being adopted.

Competition or looking ahead together?

Collaboration with the municipalities, the 'One World' networks and environmental and nature conservation organisations in the five Länder has resulted in synergies. When RENN.central first got down to work, some of the stakeholders had clear concerns from a development policy perspective that the RENN hubs may be in competition with their own services and projects.

These concerns were, for the most part, allayed through mutual participation in events and the targeted incorporation of individual stakeholders in networking meetings.

One of the long-standing formats is the annual national Netzwerk21 Congress, which is sponsored by Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMU) and the Federal Environment Agency (UBA). To some extent, this reaches out to the same target groups as the RENN.days. The two events have been

constructively dovetailed over recent years thanks to RENN.central and the Netzwerk21 organisers jointly participating in and contributing to workshops and working groups.

Sustainable development at the local, national and global level can only be achieved on the basis of concerted effort and holistic, cross-cutting thinking and action. The RENN.central partners communicate this approach with their cross-topic events, partnerships and collaboration services.

A challenge that remains for all the RENN partners is to communicate the RENN hub's profile and goals to other, sometimes heterogeneous, target groups, in particular in view of the fact that the partner structures, the chosen focal issues and the work processes of Germany's four Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN) are in part very different from one another.

New formats with new target groups

RENN.central successfully established an annual conference for all of its constituent Länder based on tried-and-tested format elements and expertise.

Focusing on

- "RENN.central – globally and regionally connected" in 2017,
- "Societal transformation and fairness" in 2018 and
- "Municipalities and civil society – shaping sustainability together" in March 2019

this event brings long-term committed individuals and target groups together with new stakeholders and target groups in productive dialogue. With these annual conferences that build on one another in terms of their content, RENN.central is seeking to gradually work through all 17 of the global Sustainable De-

velopment Goals (SDGs) and involve the appropriate stakeholder groups. The conferences are on the one hand about sharing experience and information as well as strengthening continued collaboration, and on the other hand they are about mutual coaching, in particular for young stakeholders wishing to launch new

initiatives and projects. The annual conferences are held in a different RENN.central federal state each year. Another primary objective is to engage in dialogue at the state level and to discuss the implementation and ongoing development of the individual state's sustainability strategies.

The German Sustainability Action Days (DAN) initiated by the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) have been running for a number of years now. They have been given a real push nationally by the RENN hubs and thanks to regionally concerted appeals for people to participate. For instance, the DAN action days were heavily promoted and made more widely known in the RENN.central region too, resulting in very high involvement in 2018 (256 activities) and 2019 (340 activities).

The profile of Project Sustainability, which was founded by the RNE, was likewise boosted in the regions by means of extensive advertising when it was taken on, continued and further developed by the RENN hubs. This resulted

in significantly more entries being submitted to the competition than in previous years, with the entries also being predominantly of a higher quality than in the past. And this trend continues with the current competition in 2019 with 124 entries (517 entries at national level). In an innovative format, the 2018 award ceremony for the winners in the RENN.central region was combined with content-based networking in specialist workshops. Competition winners and entrants alike were invited to attend.

The RENN.days were developed by the four RENN hubs in conjunction with the RENN Coordination Centre as a nationwide two-day event and were a success in 2017 and 2018 with approximately 200 participants each year.

After RENN.central first offered coaching and training in, among other things, funding and participation formats for sustainability initiatives during the RENN.days, RENN.central will now offer this approach as a standalone format for the first time.

Peer learning within the RENN.central network

Peer learning is promoted within RENN by means of the annual RENN partner workshops and with topic-oriented working groups involving all the RENN hubs.

Within RENN.central, the team draws throughout directly on the diverse expertise

outlined above in its day-to-day business as well as on specific expertise related to joint addressing of topics. There has also been internal training within RENN.central on some initial issues such as ESD. Further training sessions are to follow in order to address and amplify the other focal issues.



How can land consumption in Germany be reduced? Discussions at the RENN.west ARENA 2017 in Dortmund



The Western Regional Hub for Sustainability Strategies (RENN.west) is an alliance of seven organisations in the Länder Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland – a region comprising approximately 30 million inhabitants. Its constituent partners are the Hesse Working Committee for Nature and Environmental Education (ANU), the Rhineland-Palatinate State Network for Development Policy (ELAN), the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, Energy Agency Rhine-

land-Palatinate, the European Academy of Otzenhausen (EAO), Germanwatch and, acting as the consortium leader, the State Working Committee Agenda 21 North Rhine-Westphalia with an office in Bonn. They put their various sets of expertise on the topics of sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda and the related strategic processes to productive use at the municipal, state and national levels. The RENN.west partners focus on four strategic areas in their joint activities:

- Exchanging knowledge on the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the 2030 Agenda and the sustainability strategies of its Länder
- Networking and professionalising heterogeneous target groups within civil society, the business sector, the scientific community, municipalities and politics
- Assisting the various target groups in implementing (the Sustainable Development Goals of) the United Nations' 2030 Agenda
- Jointly shaping policy (in the area of sustainable development) by means of targeted discourse formats and statements submitted to the federal government, the Länder and municipalities

New network links and partnerships with stakeholders for RENN

The networking and inter-stakeholder collaboration of the RENN.west partners are major successes in themselves – thanks to the new structures, partnerships between partners from different Länder were established for the first time in a form that hadn't existed before. RENN.west's particular strength is the diversity of its partners – the hub brings together the experience and expertise of stakeholders in environmental, energy and development policy, sustainable urban and regional development, education for sustainable development and global learning, integrated sustainability strategies and science. All of the network partners further augment the joint network with their own existing partnerships, thereby serving as multipliers of their shared objectives. Its dialogue with the other RENN hubs in Germany is also beneficial. This is the first nationwide structure to have been created that facilitates dialogue among, the coordination of and the professionalisation of sustainability stakeholders.

RENN.west honours the concept of networking with its own discourse and dialogue formats. Its events generate concrete results for the ongoing development of sustainability strategies and focus stakeholders' awareness on these strategies as concrete solutions for an environmental and social transformation. The individual formats of the RENN.west network prioritise sustainability issues for which realisation has so far been classified as "off track" in

the German Sustainable Development Strategy. These include in particular the issues of mobility, biodiversity, climate protection and adaptation to climate change, sustainable agriculture, consumption and production, land use, global responsibility, digitalisation and social justice. Education for sustainable development is discussed as a cross-cutting topic to boost implementation of the 2030 Agenda in an overarching way. It is worth highlighting here that the proven expertise of the network partners, such as the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld at Trier University of Applied Sciences (ranked sixth in GreenMetric's list of green higher education institutions around the world), has generated new access points to universities and higher education institutions. As another example, its work within RENN.west has allowed ANU Hesse to bring together the regional networks for education for sustainable development and promote the creation of new networks that have won new stakeholder groups over to ESD (for example companies and agriculture representatives) and that are ensuring vertical integration by networking active ESD stakeholders across the regions. Further, the partnerships between education stakeholders and development policy networks and organisations have been expanded and more intensively maintained in order to strengthen a holistic view of the global challenges and questions concerning global justice within discourse on sustainable development.

New network links among stakeholders

The aim of RENN.west's networking activities is to involve previously non-participating stakeholders in sustainability discourse in order for them to jointly discuss new solutions, enhance existing ones and incorporate these solutions into the policymaking processes at the various federal levels. RENN.west specifically focuses on issues in relation to which there have been major goal and interest conflicts. Conflicting target groups are purposefully approached and networked in order for them to negotiate new lines of compromise and develop workable solutions. In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), for example, state ministry representatives, members of the state parliament, representatives of conventional, ecological and community-supported farming, environmental organisations, the scientific community and food retail companies were brought together at a round table to engage in internal discourse regarding their positions and potential lines of compromise

for the realisation of a comprehensive agricultural turnaround.

More open formats in all of the RENN.west Länder have resulted in new networking structures for a different focal issue every year such as mobility, sustainability at higher education institutions, education for sustainable development, sustainable tourism, social justice, the 2030 Agenda and biodiversity and have generated important input for statements from RENN.west. In particular, the Project Sustainability award and the German Sustainability Action Days (DAN) have made it possible to reach out to and involve new stakeholders who previously played only a minimal role in discourse on sustainability strategies. Among these are many small social innovation initiatives which have potentially developed or could potentially develop momentum for social change within their specific fields.

The Project Sustainability awardees 2017 from the RENN.west region



Professionalising and expanding partnerships through RENN

RENN.west is specifically working on professionalising the aforementioned target groups with regard to their structures, impact and implementation of sustainability strategies. In particular, the inclusive, human rights-based and universal character of the 2030 Agenda allows partners that previously



tended to address a specific sectoral issue to be incorporated and their work to be bolstered. In Hesse, for example, focal issues for the year allowed network partners to be incorporated into the transfer of knowledge regarding the German Sustainable Development Strategy, transformation development, youth involvement and sustainable higher education institutions. In Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland, many stakeholders were made aware of the SDGs by means of a campaign called “17 Goals in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland” (17 Ziele in Rheinland-Pfalz und im Saarland) run by the State Network for Development Policy (ELAN), the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, Energy Agency Rhineland-Palatinate and the European Academy of Otzenhausen (EAO). In North Rhine-Westphalia, existing ties with

environmental protection, nature conservation and climate protection organisations, consumer organisations, ministries and grass-roots movements were expanded with the help of biodiversity and agricultural turnaround events. It was also possible to multiply the participatory development of municipal sustainability strategies by civil society and municipal RENN.west partners within the context of the SDGs through the project “Municipalities for Global Sustainability” (Global Nachhaltige Kommune) belonging to LAG 21 NRW and Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW).

Other content-related and structural professionalisation processes have likewise come about on the basis of joint internal meetings and closed conferences. The partners continue to analyse the federal government’s and states’ sectoral strategy papers as well as their sustainability strategies. RENN.west also attaches significant importance to knowledge-based dialogue with ministries and policymakers both at the national and state levels. This dialogue also serves to bring the results of the network’s discussions to the attention of decision makers on the basis of a back-directional principle while also feeding the results of policymaking processes into the network. Through the involvement of network partners in national, state and municipal committees, RENN.west serves as an interface here which can strengthen intersectoral knowledge transfer and influence decisions regarding and the coordination of model projects and funding programmes. RENN.west additionally plays a part in bringing the projects and campaigns which are identified as successful models within the network and lend themselves to being rolled out at the various levels to the attention of the target groups.

Synergies and/or competition with existing networks and how to deal with this

As a competence centre for sustainability strategies, RENN.west uses its expertise regarding the content and structures of the German Sustainable Development Strategy to generate clearly identifiable added value for the various stakeholders. RENN.west brings together the expertise of other stakeholders and networks regarding the specific focal issues of sustainable development with the intention of transparently introducing this expertise to decision-making processes and the decision makers as the results of discourse. Its networking activities also help to generate synergies among and with the partners within projects, campaigns, congresses, conferences

and lobbying activities, thereby also generally strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships in the area of realising sustainable development. The network also provides consolidated and target group-specific information on the ongoing activities at the various levels.

RENN.west therefore thinks and acts in terms of partnerships rather than competition and makes its own expertise available to the partners in their work. It has been able to break down perceived competition (for example with a number of development policy stakeholders) by means of joint goal identification and concrete collaboration offers.

New and well-established formats with new target groups

Drawing on tried-and-tested methods, RENN.west has developed its own highly distinctive event formats which can be applied to various target groups. With RENN.west ARENA, N_Denk_mal, the N_Lab and the N_Lounge, it has come up with productive formats that bring together all kinds of different stakeholders in specific sustainability goals via methods that offer innovative, creative and constructive content. The specific formats are well received by initiatives in the areas of social innovation, municipalities, science, businesses, politics and culture creators, and promote networking among change agents.

The N_Lab, for example, has a concrete focal topic which is discussed in depth with the participants in order for clear recommendations for action to be developed or for the partici-

pants to share their thoughts on existing solutions. This can occur within an open or closed, confidential framework. Innovative formats such as future workshops and think tanks (open format) are also put to the test.

In Rhineland-Palatinate, an online dialogue platform for the federal state's sustainability strategy has also been launched. This gives citizens the opportunity to comment on Rhineland-Palatinate's sustainability goals and to inform the state government about their wishes and suggestions regarding how the state's sustainability strategy is continued. The platform is designed with a variety of stakeholders in mind, including from the fields of business, science, social affairs, environment and youth.

Peer learning through networking

The peer learning processes have both a content and a structural aspect. Knowledge is built up across all the Länder within the network on the basis of the systematic and comparative analysis of the sustainability strategies of the individual states and of the federal government, and also of their sustainability architectures. Analysis and mapping of the sustainability scene and stakeholders at the national, state and municipal levels contribute to the systematic addressing of new as well as important existing target groups, thereby also serving to build up the network in a targeted manner.

The structural experiences of the individual RENN.west partners are shared and are made use of to augment experience and organisation. Thanks to the work of the RENN network, formats already established within a federal state, such as mayoral dialogues, civil society sustainability forums, regional networks for ESD, (municipal) sustainability conferences and projects on municipal sustainability strategies such as “NRW Municipalities for Global Sustainability” (Global Nachhaltige Kommune NRW) or on municipal sustainability budgets, can be communicated quickly and ideally transferred.



Joint effort for sustainability: how does the collaboration of all societal powers succeed?
Panel discussion with German Council for Sustainable Development member Dr. Imme Scholz at the RENN.west ARENA 2017 in Dortmund



Success factors and challenges



RENN.north: dialogue and mutual inspiration

RENN.north engages in regular dialogue with the RENN Coordination Centre and the other RENN hubs. The platforms for nationwide collaboration include an annual work meeting of all the RENN staff and partner representatives during a two-day workshop, joint active participation in the annual conference of the Ger-

man Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) in Berlin and the annual participation of everyone in the RENN.days. Nationwide internal RENN dialogue is especially important as it allows the staff members to gain valuable inspiration from and also learn from one another.

Metropolitan regions and large federal states: different strategies are required

RENN.north operates in two city states (Hamburg and Bremen) and three large federal states (Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein) comprising an area totalling approximately 88,000 km². The population density ranges from > 5,000 inhabitants/km² in some of the Hamburg districts to < 50 inhabitants/km² in a number of districts in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Lower Saxony. This results in very different networking activity requirements simply on the basis of the time it takes to travel to

the stakeholders and initiatives, because both the physical accessibility of regions with a low population density and Internet access in such regions tend to be worse than in the city states. It can be inferred from this that the strategies in the large federal states have to be different to those for the metropolitan regions. However, this anomaly was not taken into account in the recruitment of the RENN.north staff – each state has approximately one full-time position at its disposal, which in most cases is split across two part-time positions.

"Courage to be inefficient"

The development process of the brochure "17 Goals in Practice – Examples from Mecklenburg-West Pomerania" (17 Ziele in der Praxis – Beispiele aus Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) produced in conjunction with the ANE and other partners is a good example of the challenges involved here. The brochure presents 17 sustainable development initiatives from throughout Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, including some located in remote regions. These 17 examples were selected from among many very good projects. In most cases, multiple visits to the projects were needed as the

basis for acting responsibly. Precise research was also needed, as was the building up of trust with the projects so that they had faith that the brochure's publication wouldn't have any undesirable consequences for them. This requires time and indeed the "courage to be inefficient", which is essentially impossible to account for using quantitative criteria, but is nevertheless a crucial prerequisite for success. The results validate our approach – all copies of the first edition of the brochure have already been snapped up and there are already many initiatives and stakeholders in Meck-

lenburg-West Pomerania that either wholly or partly see themselves reflected in the practical examples presented and that say “We can do that too!”. RENN.north has since given them a platform by creating a blog which they can use for self-promotion and for knowledge exchange. Here, networking is therefore primarily about support.

RENN.north’s capacity is soon stretched to its limit here, and this can only be overcome with the help of partnerships. The key to success is making use of the partner organisations’ expertise and seeing them as part of RENN.north.

It is by no means only in the rural regions that the building up of trust is important. The strategy outlined here is founded on the staff members’ time factor being not only an obstacle, but also the key to establishing trust in rural areas. It is just as important that trust be built up with the established cross-Länder networks, some of which have been around for decades. If RENN.north’s cooperative partners have the sense that a competitive situation is arising, this can be a serious obstacle. As it is not in the interests of good networking for parallel structures to be established, the trust required for a lasting collaboration needs to be won and maintained.



Exhibition opening of “17 goals in practice – examples from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania”

Internal communication: saving time with videoconferences and fewer emails

The fact that the RENN.north staff members are spread across six locations throughout northern Germany frequently stands in the way of internal communication within the team. A lot of importance is therefore attached to regular dialogue via videoconferences. The structure of RENN.north's internal communication and collaboration includes a quarterly meeting of the Coordination Group and an annual two-day closed conference of all the RENN.north staff. There is also per-

son-to-person dialogue at other meetings and in workshops. The videoconference systems in place within the six partner organisations since 2018 not only save time and eliminate travel expenses – they also encourage lively and productive dialogue among the partners. To reduce the volume of emails, the latest decisions, event details and documents are sent to all the staff members in a weekly internal newsletter.

External perception: from network organisers to sustainability experts

The RENN hubs' strength lies in their staff members serving as cross-cutting stakeholders: RENN.north operates independently and across an array of topics. This means stakeholders from very different areas can be brought together, for example from the nature or cultural sector or from different economic sectors. The "day-to-day" networking consists primarily of the staff members building up a network of contacts and of their being seen as the people to talk to. RENN.north is perceived

by external stakeholders and stakeholder groups in a variety of ways. Some see RENN.north as their point of contact for sustainability issues. The staff members are therefore sometimes asked to serve as experts, for example in the execution of events thematically related to the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs. The staff members endeavour to meet this need in spite of their limited time and to turn their expertise into direct added value for interested parties.

Communication with the target groups: taking the specific circumstances of the Länder into account

RENN.north's target groups are civil society (NGOs, organisations, etc.), businesses and consumers. Various formats are used to strengthen networking both within and among these groups.

These include workshops, conferences, seminars, public festivals (e.g. district festivals), public relations work, presentations and information stands, newsletters and social media. In essence, it is a question of identifying the key stakeholders within the individual Länder, assisting them with realising projects and bringing them together with partners that they have not previously collaborated with. This calls for comprehensive knowledge of a federal state, that is to say an overview of the stakeholders within a state, their activities, new movements and state-specific structures (infrastructure, politics and administration, business locations). The staff members are ex-

perts in sustainability, and circumstances specific to a federal state are taken into account by their supporting the established partner organisations. This calls for ongoing research, further training and qualification on the part of the staff members and also close contact with the interest groups within a federal state and within the sustainability scene.

In spite of all the regional differences, it makes sense in many cases for PR activities to be coordinated across state borders. The RENNN.north website and the social media channels (in particular Twitter) serve as an information platform which is used jointly in order to optimise external communication and transparency and thereby make a fundamental contribution to the success of the project. The various public relations materials are another example of cross-Länder communication media.





RENN.south: Listening and allaying fears concerning duplicate structures

Building up networks takes time. What's needed are in-depth personal contacts and talks to get to know one another. This is a prerequisite for successful networking. RENN.south therefore had a lot of local appointments throughout the two Länder over the past two years in order to introduce itself and to listen to what stakeholders have to say. It is important to also identify in this way why networking is needed. Networking is not an end in itself – it has to offer those involved added value compared with how they previously worked.

Sustainability networks must bear in mind that subject-specific and regional networks already exist and that there are also stakeholders who boast significant expertise in

certain fields. Major civil society stakeholders have different reasons for being interested in a possible collaboration and less need for networking than the small initiatives within “non-organised civil society”. “We have been addressing this topic all this time and now you come along and want to network with us?” – this is a question that a number of stakeholders understandably confronted us with in the early stages. We first had to allay the fears of major associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerning competition and duplicate structures. This can be achieved well with clearly outlined partnerships that allow these associations to take up topics that they have not previously tackled to any great degree and which are therefore new to them.

Providing support where the existing funding programmes don't work

The smaller initiatives within “non-organised civil society” have a greater need for exchange and networking opportunities with initiatives that champion the same issues as them. This is something they cannot manage themselves. RENN.south bridges this gap by acting as a service provider. Smaller initiatives in particular also need financial assistance with events

and publications. The generally small sums in question are not covered by the existing funding programmes, which sometimes involve lengthy application procedures. RENN.south provides support here by financing publications and events produced jointly with these initiatives.

Providing visibility for good examples

Good examples and initiatives deserve to be highlighted and recognised. The “Projekt N” competition, which was established by the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) and subsequently taken on by

RENN, conveys just such public recognition and has proved its worth in this regard. It is also resulting in new partnerships and network partners as well as further boosting the profiles of these good examples.

Making use of and further developing existing networks

In the Länder that make up the RENN.south region, it has proved prudent to embed the new Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies at the state level in an existing advisory centre (Baden-Württemberg) and in an association that has years of experience in networking civil society stakeholders with policymakers and administration (Bavaria) and to further expand these accordingly. Firstly, this allows for good coordination with sustainability activities which are already up and running. And secondly, it means use can be made of existing contacts and networks.

In addition to knowledge exchange, here networking is about strengthening local network partners in particular in their work with the help of appropriate services and with dialogue regarding content and methods, to give them the opportunity to spread the word about their initiatives even more. This leads to new partnerships and has a snowball effect, potentially initiating similar sustainability initiatives in other places where previously there were none.

This calls for various formats that are adapted to the needs in question. The various event formats, which are explained in detail in Part III using examples, were designed for this purpose:

- The cross-Länder RENN.south Forum allows initiatives to be showcased and their profiles to be boosted through future markets with a walking assembly and allows initiatives to learn about other initiatives.
- Topic tables and/or working groups at events of this size allow issues to be examined in greater depth, knowledge to be exchanged and discussions to be held with initiatives working on similar subjects. There are also a number of smaller events and regular conference calls.
- Regional and local events are the best forum for developing joint activities and partnerships based in initiatives familiarising themselves with one another. These are especially important for smaller initiatives.
- In-depth teaching formats such as learning circles with only a handful of participants can further qualify stakeholders who are already quite advanced (e.g. municipalities). They are a forum for in-depth exchange and for learning from one another.

With these formats, the networking has to be targeted and appropriate moderation and a managed focus have to facilitate concrete results.

The challenge when it comes to spreading the word about good examples lies in preparing the examples such that transfer is possible

in spite of there being entirely different local and regional initial situations. The support of the policymakers and administration, organic structures, consensus among the civil society stakeholders – all of these factors vary from place to place, but the majority of processes can nonetheless still learn from one another.

Greater coordination of the various sustainability strategies needed

Three approaches in particular have so far emerged in the work of RENN.south:

- Subject-specific networking meetings, e.g. for the providers of consumption-critical guided city walks, for initiatives combating the flood of plastic or for initiatives seeking to reduce waste caused by to-go coffee cups
- Regional/local networking meetings at which stakeholders get to know one another across different topics and discuss how a municipality or region can jointly be made more sustainable
- “Strategic” talks to help build bridges between civil society initiatives and policymakers/administration

RENN.south has resulted in in-depth exchange across Länder, thus facilitating the transfer of successful activities and mutual learning. This is desirable for other RENN hubs and Länder as well.

If civil society and municipal sustainability stakeholders are to be given assistance through networks by improving the parameters of their (voluntary) work, their concerns and problems need to be fed into overarching political structures. This has worked very well so far with the RENN Coordination Centre serving as the bridge to the federal government’s German Council for Sustainable De-

velopment (RNE) and the German Sustainable Development Strategy. At the state level, this has so far usually only been possible with the relevant ministries on a case-by-case basis and at the work level.

Better coordination of the various sustainability strategies at the various levels is urgently needed in order to avoid competitive situations or the duplication of activities by the federal government and the individual Länder. Here, too, networking and an ambitious role model function for society is needed.

Accepting network differences

Regional networking activities need to be adapted to the regional circumstances and stakeholders. There is no national one-size-fits-all solution. This is also borne out by the nationwide RENN network – the RENN hubs each have very different set-ups and even within each of the four hubs, there are major differences from one federal state to the next. This is something that the individual RENN stakeholders can learn from, for example in relation to accessing target groups that weren’t previously the focus of their own work. Good

networking activities are characterised by regional distinctiveness and diversity. The various traditions and structures of the sustainability policies of the 16 Länder become apparent in the course of the RENN project, together with all of their opportunities for and obstacles to networking. Even with all of these differences, what’s important is that there is a belief in a shared self-perception involving both the term “sustainability” and an understanding of networking.

You can't twist people's arms

The coordination and planning processes connected to the functioning of a network require time above all else. For external partners outside of work structures this kind of investment is only sensible if it leads to concrete results and dynamics of cooperation within a specific amount of time. Otherwise, it is better to set an end to the efforts and to concentrate on partners that are willing to cooperate. In the case of a lack of time being the main rea-

son for rejecting the cooperation, it should be tried again at a later point.

Coordination processes within one's own organisation have to be optimised to such a degree that they do not limit your own operational networking activities. Conference calls have proved to be a valuable instrument in the case of cross-Länder and nationwide networking.

Facilitating the involvement of municipal and societal stakeholders

For reasons of time and cost, it is difficult for civil society and municipal stakeholders to observe nationwide networking dates. Such dates then tend to only comprise the larger stakeholders within these target groups. It makes sense to offer a small set of concentrat-

ed events for which the participants' costs are covered. The nationwide RENN.days created to this end and held in Berlin have proved their worth and should be further optimised in terms of qualification, sustainability agenda setting and knowledge exchange.



Setting limits to plastic pollution – RENN.south congress on the topic of a "plastic-free city" in Ludwigsburg

Organising greater knowledge exchange among the four RENN hubs

So far, the regional hubs have only been able to exchange knowledge with each other “horizontally” to a limited extent. Until now, the focus of nationwide events has been nationwide activities and individual topics. There was good knowledge exchange among all 16 Länder in Germany between 2000 and 2008 thanks to the state agenda offices that existed back then. At six-monthly day-long meetings held at a central location, all the Länder reported on their current activities and, in particular, on their plans. This allowed for true peer learning as it was possible to very effectively incorporate the knowledge of other multipliers into own work right from the start.

In a nationwide project with its own coordination centre, regional hubs also serve as bridges for the multiplication and implementation of nationwide sustainability activities and for spreading the word about the national sustainability strategy and the 17 SDGs. However, this role as a mediator should not be allowed to limit a hub’s own networking activities in the regions and locally. It comes second to these networking activities and may not take up too much of the hub’s time. The local and regional stakeholders must be placed at the heart of the networking activities – only with them can the word about sustainable development be spread broadly and comprehensively.





RENN – four different networks

The stakeholder groups within the RENN central region rate the RENN set-up as being very positive and necessary. It allows the transfer of knowledge regarding the ways in which the SDGs and the German Sustainable Development Strategy can be implemented, both among the various governance levels and within the civil society and municipal levels, to be shaped and strengthened. A major advantage in the eyes of the RENN.central partners is the fact that they have direct access to ministerial stakeholders at the federal level through the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE). This means reliable contact networks can be bolstered and expanded at the state and municipal levels too.

The various annual nationwide campaigns and event formats, in particular the German

Sustainability Action Days (DAN), the Project Sustainability competition awards and the RENN.days, mean the work of RENN.central can, in combination with regional services and events, become a reliable cycle that systematically engages and brings together more and new stakeholders not only within the RENN.central region but also nationwide, generates multiplication effects and highlights sustainable development issues.

The RENN hubs have been able to rapidly boost their public profile through the incorporation of RENN in traditional national events such as the RNE's annual conference and, for the first time in 2018, the National German Sustainability Award ceremony as well as in national committees.

Political statement or management by project?

Seasoned stakeholders who have been pushing for greater coordination between the national, state and municipal levels for some time and who champion concerted sustainable development measures consider it to be of great value that the RENN stakeholders can contribute positions, discourse results and scientific findings with their own statements regarding the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the state strategies and, for example, the federal government's international peer review. The civil society stakeholders see this opportunity as a unique feature. Some of them would like to see even clearer political statements here, while others reject this. In

short, RENN.central sees RENN as being somewhere between political statement, demand and position versus management by project, in other words realising transformational change on the basis of successful projects.

RENN.central is active in both directions, both nationally and regionally.

The current RENN structure represents an ongoing development task and challenge for RENN.central – the composition of the four RENN hubs is characterised by diversity. Due to their individual structures and origins, each Regional Hub for Sustainability Strate-

gies has different stakeholders and different ties with the civil society/government institutions that influence the decision-making processes within the hubs. This means a high degree of coordination is required both within the RENN.central team and among the RENN hubs in general in order for the results of the discourse processes in the individual Länder, in the RENN regions and in particular at the national level to be pooled and processed in such a way that the synergy effects within RENN.central are visible for all the RENN hubs

and can be successfully incorporated into their respective decision-making levels and processes.

In addition, it must be clear to the stakeholders involved in RENN.central what contributions they are supposed to make, how these are used transparently and how the results of their work contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals being achieved or are used by the decision-making levels.

Strengthening policy coherence

RENN.central is sponsored by five civil society organisations and initiatives with many years of experience in the areas of Agenda 21, civil society collaboration, participation processes, working within political committees and scientific expertise. Some of the RENN.central partners have worked together in the past in various constellations and together they are a comparatively homogeneous group. Collaboration within the hub is therefore highly constructive, trusting and fruitful. The RENN structure allows the long-standing endeavours of the individual RENN.central partners to be brought together within jointly defined interfaces and for their impact to be substantially boosted.

RENN.central also engages in trusting and constructive dialogue with representatives of the state ministries responsible for the individual states' sustainability strategies and, with these representatives, has developed "Cornerstones for Collaboration with the Central Regional Hub for Sustainability Strategies" (Eckpunkte zur Zusammenarbeit mit der Regionalen Netzstelle Nachhaltigkeitsstrategien Mitte) that shape the work process. Information about the planned activities of the RENN.central partners and

the state policymakers is shared at annual work meetings. They have also started to discuss joint projects and explore possible future partnerships. Here, the RENN.central partners are also pursuing the goal of strengthening the coherence of the political ministries and the administration at the municipal and state levels by means of joint events, advisory talks and networking services for the implementation of sustainable development measures.

Thuringia, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg each have state sustainability strategies of different ages and in some cases with very different content focuses, structures, hierarchical ties, goal and indicator systems, and also implementation instruments. In a number of Länder, the strategies have been based on the SDGs in recent revisions. Berlin branched out in 2015 with the Berlin Sustainability Profile.

Correlation of the state strategies with the SDGs and the German Sustainable Development Strategy needs to be monitored from a municipal and civil society perspective as these strategies are revised over the next few years. This is something that RENN.central wishes to be actively involved in.

Thuringia: first Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainability at the state level

In accordance with a state parliament resolution, the first Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainability within a state parliament was established in Thuringia in May 2018 alongside the state government's Sustainability Advisory Council. Its purpose is to more firmly embed the concept of sustainable development in all areas of parliamentary work. What makes it special is that it is made

up of the chairs of all the state parliamentary committees. This sends out the clear signal that sustainability is something that affects all areas of political work. The Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainability intends to forge close ties with civil society stakeholders. This is something that RENN.central will pick up.

Cities and rural areas – dealing with regional contrasts

From a regional perspective, the contrasts between densely populated cities – in particular Berlin and Leipzig, but also Dresden, Magdeburg, Halle and Erfurt – and sparsely populated rural areas within the four large Länder are formative for RENN.central. They represent a particular challenge with regard to developing the work concept and touching base with the heterogeneous stakeholders and their needs. Here, the RENN.central partners focus on dialogue about successful examples and urban-rural partnerships. These are found through, for example, the DAN action days or Project Sustainability.

At the municipal level, the widely known discrepancy between federal and state funding and in subsidies for the promotion of endeavours which are evidently not sustainable plays a significant part in the discourse, in particular for civil society organisations, and also for mayors and city councillors. Municipal representatives are increasingly also referencing the contradictory nature of individual 2030 Agenda goals as well as the lack of coordination (coherence) across national and state policies. Even if the federal government and the Länder have adopted sustainability strategies, there is certainly no guarantee of a will to

implement these coherently in day-to-day political and administrative activities or of this occurring with due urgency and assertiveness.

The joint task will be to identify, communicate and underpin the context in which these contradictions become virulent and how the controversies can be turned into appropriate political decisions. This is an ongoing task for RENN.central in its dialogue with municipalities and civil society.

In view of all this, another challenge that remains is communicating RENN's profile and goals to the heterogeneous target groups. The RENN.central partners have agreed to communicate the Sustainable Development Goals along the lines of "strong sustainability", which is to be understood as a comprehensive fairness concept – preserving natural resources as the foundation for life and, within the bounds this sets, enabling everyone to live well. It is still not generally accepted that in order for development to be future-proof, it must be achieved within planetary boundaries.

RENN.central is encountering a great deal of interest in its networking, dialogue and

Award ceremony of „Projekt Nachhaltigkeit“ 2018 with Berlin senator Dirk Behrendt and deputy chairman of the German Council for Sustainable Development Olaf Tschimpke



partnership services, as demonstrated among other things by the pleasing reception of its annual conferences. There is evidently also a great deal of interest among the stakeholders in getting involved in shaping the evolution of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and championing its implementation. However, many dialogue partners are calling for binding rules and procedures in this respect.

In this context, the question has been raised again and again as to whether and how local initiatives and stakeholders can be substantively promoted and financially supported.

This is another reason why the realisation of Project Sustainability being transferred from the RNE to RENN has proved to be very helpful.

The successes to date were achieved because all the RENN.central partners were able to draw on their many years of experience, large networks, other projects and topics within their organisations, and also the RENN network as a whole, the RENN Coordination Centre and the RNE. Extensive voluntary services are also provided. This needs to be taken into account in its applicability to other regions and Länder.

Ongoing project funding from state governments desirable

RENN.central is structured such that Zukunftsfähiges Thüringen e.V. acts as the consortium leader, but all decisions are made jointly by all five RENN.central partners. The coordination processes involve regular conference calls, approximately six work meetings a year and a two-day closed conference.

The Saxon stakeholders' involvement in RENN.central prompted them to put a state-wide civil society structure in place in Saxony too. The organisation Landesverband nach-

haltiges Sachsen e.V. was founded in August 2018; it will henceforth act as a partner within the RENN.central network. Its founding members are organisations that wish to pool their sustainable development endeavours at the state level and therefore strengthen them. They include Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk Sachsen e.V., BUND Landesverband Sachsen e.V., VEE Sachsen e.V. and other organisations and individuals who themselves represent sustainability networks and initiatives.

The work of the RENN.central partners is currently funded with approximately one full-time position per partner. Some, but not all, of the RENN.central partners also receive proj-

ect-based funding for their work from their state government. Ongoing project funding of the concrete work at the local level provided by the federal states would be highly desirable.

Target groups reached and future topics

The partner organisations provide networking opportunities for the stakeholders and networks in their respective Länder, for example ‘One World’ stakeholders, environmental organisations and mobility networks, higher education institutions/students, food policy councils, fair-trade towns, transition towns and community-supported farms. Churches and trade unions have also been reached out to on specific occasions. Initiatives that have predominantly been active in their own fields come together, resulting in synergy effects that turn the voicing of individual interests

into discourse on comprehensive contextualisation. Their common goal is to establish a correlation with sustainable development.

Over the next few years, RENN.central will first and foremost address the three focal issues mentioned above. It is also interested in simultaneously taking a closer look at the following issues, which are classified in the German Sustainable Development Strategy as being “off track” in relation to the key SDGs and subgoals:

- Digitalisation and sustainability
- Biodiversity, soil, reducing land use
- Food and agriculture
- Climate, energy, mobility

RENN.central is also specifically engaging in larger and more long-term partnerships across its Länder, in particular in relation to its three focal issues. And smaller partnerships are entered into individually and for specific

occasions in the individual Länder. The instrument of support through cooperation and involvement will continue to be expanded wherever possible.



Nationwide structures

The establishment of the Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies created a new structure that not only civil society stakeholders but also municipal stakeholders had been calling for for some time in order to strengthen and accelerate knowledge transfer and the realisation of sustainable development at the various federal levels. A key factor for the success of the RENN hubs' work is its proximity to the decision-making processes at the state and national levels. High visibility of the RENN hubs is guaranteed by their incorporation into nationwide events (RNE annual conference, National German Sustainability Award) and committees (German Council for Sustainable Development [RNE], "Forum Nachhaltigkeit" [Sustainability Forum], Open SDGclub, parliamentary evenings), and this is perceived as very positive by the stakeholders. Additionally, the RENN hubs' own nationwide events involving civil society stakeholders allow them to engage in appreciative dialogue, which is being increasingly recognised.

The stakeholders' appreciation of the RENN hubs is also fundamentally founded on the hubs' ability to contribute positions, discourse results and innovative developments through their statements regarding the German Sustainable Development Strategy, state strategies and the peer review. This lifted positioning of the RENN is seen by the stakeholders as being a key unique feature.

The greatest content-related obstacle at the level of national policy is perceived to be decisions that delay achievement of the goals of the German Sustainable Development Strategie

gy and the 2030 Agenda or which are pursued with little ambition. Precisely because of their discourse on realisation of the strategies, the RENN hubs are seen by the stakeholders as having great legitimacy. However, this legitimacy goes hand in hand with high implementation expectations within the target groups. If no serious pursuit of the goals or indeed softening of the goals becomes evident in spite of intensive dialogue based on partnership, the risk is that stakeholders will distance themselves again.

Structurally speaking, the RENN partners' heterogeneity is both a strength and a weakness. The networks comprises 20 very different organisations and institutions spread across 16 federal states with almost 60 members of staff, some of which have more than 20 years of experience in the area of sustainability processes and networking, while others focus more on sector-specific issues and networks. Ideally, heterogeneity allows the learning processes regarding content, networking activities and structures to be accelerated and applied more quickly without the strengths inherent in the regional partners' specific characters being lost. However, the very intensive coordination processes within the individual RENN hubs and across the network as a whole are seen as an obstacle to collaboration. A process which has already been initiated to hammer out a content-based brand essence that positions the RENN hubs as a competence centre for sustainability strategies both nationwide and within the regions and also a clear organisation chart that transparently presents the network partners' expertise will hopefully

iron out imperfections in the future. Developing discrete profiles for the RENN hubs will become increasingly important in order to clearly communicate to the numerous target groups what it is that the hubs offer. The funding agencies commissioned the RNE to set up and manage the RENN project, and the RNE established the RENN Coordination Centre to this end. This entity oversees the project on behalf of those funding agencies and ensures that the content of the measures which are implemented and planned is appropriate.

Regional RENN structures

RENN.west combines the knowledge and expertise of very diverse partners from four Länder with very pronounced sociodemographic differences. For example, with more than 18 million inhabitants and multiple conurbations, North Rhine-Westphalia is the most densely populated federal state, and Saarland, which borders France and Belgium and has a population of less than 1 million, is the smallest federal state. The RENN.west partners have a very high level of expertise with regard to the key sustainable development issues. The partners – the internationally renowned climate, environment and development policy lobbying organisation Germanwatch, ANU Hesse as a key initiator of education for sustainable development at the regional, national and international level, the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld as one of the world's most sustainable higher education institutions, the Rhineland-Palatinate State Network for Development Policy (ELAN) as a major stakeholder in development policy within this state, Energy Agency Rhineland-Palatinate with expertise relevant to the implementation of municipal climate protection, the European Academy of Otzenhausen (EAO) as a sustainable education institution in the Franco-German border region and the

The Coordination Centre also feeds important content ideas from the Council and the RNE Office into the RENN network and has overall responsibility for all the network-wide activities. It confers with the consortium leaders, which themselves contribute to the networking of the individual RENN hubs and coordinate the internal RENN processes at and between the various structural levels. The Coordination Centre and the RENN hubs are continuously developing their collaboration.

State Working Committee Agenda 21 NRW – work together, drawing on their many years of experience in networking sustainability processes within civil society, in municipalities and at the state level.

Dialogue within the network significantly enhances expanding perspectives, the exchange of ideas and partners' strategy skills. Working together within RENN.west also very much strengthens the partners' access to and discourse with the state ministries responsible for sustainability. The RENN hubs are recognised by the Länder as important initiators.

The RENN.west staff members consider the hub's workload to be very ambitious and this sometimes leads to the decisions and discussions conducted within the RENN network at the consortium leader level not being adequately communicated, thus making it feel like a top-down process.

Many of the obstacles that existed at the beginning of the network's activities have since been resolved by joint and trusting collaboration, in particular thanks to the results of an externally moderated closed conference on the network's organisation and content.

The RENN.west network partners currently work together efficiently and effectively with clear structures and clarified goals.

Structure of RENN.west

RENN.west has a clear organisational structure which is characterised by the following elements:

Consortium leadership is the responsibility of LAG 21 NRW. Representatives of each partner organisation are appointed to a steering committee that makes strategic and operational decisions for the network. The operational level comprising members of the partner organisations' staff prepares the decision-making

processes and is responsible for realisation of the regional and state-specific activities. A RENN.west partners' committee was additionally established in consultation with the Länder, comprising representatives of the four states' chancelleries and ministries and the steering committee. This discusses network matters and shares important information on the national and state policies on sustainable development.

Practical work of the RENN hubs

The diverse expertise of the RENN.west partners results in a broad array of specialist knowledge on sectoral and integrated sustainability issues and structures. This expertise facilitates collaboration within the network on joint and state-specific campaigns, congresses and conferences, and makes it possible to offer the target groups professional assistance and support at all times. In this respect, it has been and continues to be advantageous that the RENN partners can draw on their existing networks, thus positioning RENN.west

as the new competence centre for sustainability strategies. At the same time, knowledge is built up within RENN.west which is used individually by the partners within their Länder and also jointly for the further development of their strategies, and which is valued by ministries and policymakers in RENN.west's capacity as a point of contact. This role concept calls for a high degree of coordination, planning and approval regarding operational and strategic realisation.

RENN's target group communication

RENN.west communicates with the target groups appreciatively and with the intention of using the various target groups' work and positions on issues in such a way that they can be productively incorporated into the dialogue processes at the municipal, state and national levels and have an impact there. The purpose of the event formats developed by the network is to bring together and discuss conflicting ideas for how to achieve sustainable development. A point is therefore made of getting both established and new stakeholders with transformation potential involved. The target groups are communicated with via the RENN network's website, jointly devel-

oped information materials and nationwide campaigns such as the Project Sustainability competition and the German Sustainability Action Days (DAN). The RENN.west partners also attend numerous events run by other stakeholders as experts and are involved in various committees at the state and national levels.

Broad communication with the population to build up people's knowledge of the German Sustainable Development Strategy could be achieved with appealing joint information materials featuring a positive message that inspires people to embrace change.

German Sustainability Price 2018:
Dr. Klaus Reuter (RENN.west) and
Dorothee Lang (RENN.süd) in conver-
sation with Stefan Schulze-Hausmann
and Professor Günter Bachmann



Akteure vernetzen
Erfahrungen austauschen
Nachhaltigkeit erleben



RENN: new, ambitious, creative



The RENN network was launched in late 2016 and there are now numerous examples from all RENN hubs which show that the concept of a regional network is bearing fruit. The same applies to activities run jointly by all RENN hubs.

The regionalisation of Project Sustainability has proven highly successful. As part of the project, the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) had already been awarding prizes for particularly successful sustainability activities for a number of years. The Council believed that making this part of the RENN network's responsibility would further raise awareness of the competition. This did indeed happen. In 2018, 450 associations, initiatives, companies and/or individuals submitted an entry for one of the 40 awards, each of which is worth €1,000 in prize money. This is twice as many entries as in previous years.

The annual German Sustainability Action Days, the German contribution to the European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW), also benefited from the regionalisation drive. They are held from 30 May to 5 June each year as Germany's contribution to the European Sustainable Development Week. Thanks to the RENN hubs, it was possible to increase the number of initiatives submitted from approximately 2,500 in 2018 to over 3,200 in 2019. This made Germany the number one contributor in Europe in 2019. It is not just the numbers which are growing, however. The quality of and professionalism with which the various initiatives are implemented is also constantly

on the rise, as is the degree to which they are linked with other ongoing projects and processes.

The RENN.days network-wide conference series, established in 2017 and held in Berlin, is also very well received. Offering a two-day networking platform for around 200 people who are involved in sustainability activities throughout Germany, the event is organised and facilitated by the Coordination Centre. Demand for tickets was considerably higher than anticipated in 2018, with the event selling out in the space of three weeks.

There is (as yet) no overarching evaluation process or monitoring mechanism in place for the many activities, several hundred events around the country, and dozens of publications. As far as it is possible to tell, functioning network structures are not hallmarked by technical monitoring: instead, they work by expanding and deepening precisely those networks, which is perceived as a success by the participants. Furthermore, the many partnerships with other players and networks raise the question of which concrete successes are attributable to whom. The question of what exactly makes something a success may also be defined differently at the various RENN hubs.

The points raised here reflect the Coordination Centre's experience from its overall coordination of the network. Additional – or other – factors may determine success or failure at local level (see chapter 4).

1. First of all, the establishment of a new sustainability network calls for a credible initiator. The most suitable candidate is a body which is both independent and has an understanding of administrative structures and the ability to accommodate them. It needs to enjoy the confidence and support of policymakers and society; the body itself and its ideas must carry weight. Furthermore, it needs to have the capacities and experience for overarching coordination. Without the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) fulfilling this role to the best of its ability, there would be no RENN network.

It is crucial to provide more than just initial impetus: it must be maintained continuously by means of further interventions, incentives or action aimed at generating a response. Importantly, sound judgement must be used when attempting to reconcile the organisation's capabilities with its mission. This calls for ongoing dialogue.

2. The establishment of a new sustainability network takes time and credible, competent partners. They need to come together in the new constellation, define common ground and organise coordination processes. It proved a considerable advantage for the RENN network that all twenty organisations already had extensive expertise and were able to get straight to work. Their involvement in other existing networks additionally helped to build trust. The RENN hubs also completed a great deal of administrative groundwork beforehand. Without experience of submitting applications, existing structures and staffing resources, it would have taken substantially longer to reach the point where the actual project could begin. We believe that a minimum term of five years is essential for the success of a sustainability network.
3. The establishment of a new sustainability network which sets out to make a key contribution towards implementing the 2030 Agenda at local level must be founded on the understanding that sustainable development is a cross-cutting topic. The issues tackled and action taken by the RENN hubs touch on all ministries' capabilities and responsibilities. In Germany, sustainability falls within the remit of the Chancellery, and the RENN hubs also receive funding from there. We believe that this link makes it easier for the network to devote equal attention to all aspects of sustainability.

At the same time, additional funding from line ministries for specific areas is to be welcomed. Funding of this kind was received for the first time in 2019. The RENN hubs were given funding for development policy education work by the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

4. The establishment of a new sustainability network is facilitated by a framework that fosters political commitment. In Germany, the German Sustainable Development Strategy is the central means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. The majority of the Länder also have a strategy of this kind. Many municipalities have started to adopt them as well. We believe that this facilitates the RENN hubs' work.

The RENN Coordination Centre and representatives of the North, West and Central regional hubs discussed these points and other experiences from the first few years of the RENN project with international experts at the RNE's Open SDGclub.Berlin in May 2019. Models

from other countries and regions were also presented and debated at a workshop. At the end of the second day, a list of success factors was drawn up which can also be applied to the RENN network:

- The regional and local levels play a key role in practical solutions. Sustainability networks and similar projects should guide the way by setting an example that inspires others to implement the SDGs.
- The SDGs represent a cross-party agenda and it is essential to emphasise this in information and political communication so as to ensure that their implementation is not threatened by a change in government, for example.
- Communication must be understandable for the general public; language plays a critical role.
- The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs should be communicated holistically; attention should be drawn to the big picture when specific aspects are discussed in isolation.
- The players need sufficient time and money.
- Many existing best practices and processes which have not yet been considered in connection with the SDGs must be linked with them. The question is: How do we infect working processes with the blueprint of the SDGs?

The delegates at the Open SDGclub.Berlin came from national councils for sustainable development or similar bodies, civil society networks, the business world, academia, municipalities, or national parliaments. They have one thing in common: they are all actively promoting sustainable development in their respective areas of responsibility. Based on their practical experience and in their respective capacities, they emphasised the significance of the 2030 Agenda and made an urgent appeal for greater implementation efforts. In this clarion call, they also stressed the

importance of the regional and local levels for achieving the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals.¹

The RENN network makes an important contribution towards this in Germany. We would therefore like to finish by calling to mind the recommendations made by both the international peer review and the German Council for Sustainable Development in June 2019, which urge the Federal Government to continue to fund the RENN project until 2030.


¹ https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Open_SDGclub_Berlin_2019_Call.pdf



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Imprint

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RENN-Coordination Center
c/o Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
www.renn-netzwerk.de

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Translation: Scholz&Friends NeuMarkt GmbH
Graphic design: www.odenthal-design.de

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