

# Family Policies and Civil Society: How to Implement the Subsidiarity Principle

## Partnerships and Alliances for Family: a Project for Europe?

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*An important part of German national family policies relies on new forms of network-based governance, most of them established within the national initiative “Lokale Bündnisse für Familie”. Within the initiative a multi-level and multi-stakeholder system of partnerships has evolved. Today almost 650 cross-sectoral partnerships and alliances engage on the national, regional and local level. They effectively tackle the complex and multifaceted issue of local family-friendliness.*

*The overall structure developing over the past six years follows two organisational principles being effective in a large variety of policy fields: the “bottom-up approach” to choose the best level to take responsibility combined with enabling cross-sectoral networks on all levels and even across levels. This combination forms a modernized subsidiarity principle leading to partnerships and alliances which allow successful policymaking in policy fields with limited influence of the public sector. The effectiveness of these networks is based on the stakeholders’ interests and potentials.*

*Asked whether such partnerships and alliances for family may be a project for Europe a first tentative “yes” will be given and a possible European project is sketched. The answer given relies on a close analysis of the German initiative “Lokale Bündnisse für Familie” concerning relevance for the stakeholders involved as well as institutional frameworks and settings in favour of implementation. From this analysis criteria for evaluating the chance of a successful implementation of the European project are derived and applied to the situation found in selected European countries, aiming at denominating possible participants for such a project.*

### **1 The national framework in Germany**

On the national level in 2003 the “Alliance for the family” was founded. The national chambers of commerce and handcrafts, trade unions, the Federal Government, scientists and big companies engage in this nationwide alliance established with the goal of enhancing family-friendliness in work-life. This was embedded in a national strategy in family policies of the Federal Government aiming at improving time- and infra-structure to advance the balance of family-life and work-life – therefore shifting the focus away from relying only on financial transfers as done in the decades before.

One major project of this Alliance for the family put forward by the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) is the initiative “Lokale Bündnisse für Familie”. It aims at

changing local time- and infra-structure relying on the knowledge and the power of a large variety of local stakeholders – all of them influencing family- and work-life in a certain manner.

The main goal of the initiative is to initiate and stabilise the development of so called “Lokale Bündnisse für Familie” – referred to as “local partnerships for family” in this paper<sup>1</sup>. In these local partnerships institutions and players from all parts of the local society engage in networks to enlarge family-friendliness in the local area. Up to date 636 partnerships (24.09.2010) exist with more than 13.000 institutions engaged, among these more than 5.000 business companies.

## **2 Analysing the initiative “Lokale Bündnisse für Familie” (local partnerships for family)**

In this chapter an overview concerning the structures within the initiative is given followed by an analysis concerning the specific occurrence of a modernized form of subsidiarity. Finally the factors of success for implementation of the initiative are worked out in order to derive conclusions for a possible European project in the following chapter.

### **2.1 An overview of structures, partners, topics, tasks and outcomes**

Within this initiative several different governance-structures on different levels and even across different levels have evolved:

- First of all naturally the focus lies on the local level: local partnerships for family enlarge their influence year by year through a growing number and by using different potentials inherent to networks.
- Secondly local alliances start covering the regional level. They do this by acting together in the regional level or regional actors implementing local partnerships for family-friendliness or – the third possibility – local partnerships from different municipalities interacting with the German states.
- On the national level a corporate identity is built up linking all local partnerships.
- Together with large numbers of local partnerships the Federal Ministry has built up nationwide structures which will be referred to as vertical networks since they comprise protagonists from the national and the local level – so called development partnerships.

All these structures have developed because of the necessities combined with certain sub-topics of family-friendliness and will be described in more detail in the following passages. In

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<sup>1</sup> Within the European Alliance for the family they are referred to as “local alliances for family”. It should be mentioned that this translation does not grasp the whole meaning of the German word “Bündnis”. “Bündnis” is somewhat more emotional and stresses the bondages between stakeholders as well as the aspect of acting together whereas “Allianz” or “alliance” focuses on functional aspects of networks. This emotional aspect was quite important in establishing the German initiative.

the beginning there was no master plan and there still is not, even though a lot of work is going into the formation of the overall structure.

A service agency supports the networks on all levels by consultancy concerning the organization of networks and public relations. Additionally it provides a knowledge-basis concerning topics covered and projects realised by the local partnerships as well as know-how concerning aspects of how to run a network effectively.

### **2.1.1 The local level**

The first step to develop a local partnership is made by protagonists from all parts of society e.g. companies, trade unions, churches, administrations, politicians, associations, charity organizations, sometimes families themselves who come together to answer the question “What can we do locally to enlarge the family-friendliness?” by developing ideas and realising projects. These local partnerships for family therefore engage in different areas to enhance family friendliness locally, especially in child-care and family-friendliness in work-life. Traffic and local surroundings, healthy childhood and education are other fields of action – always following the local needs and existing possibilities of action provided by the local stakeholders.

Doing this they create profit for all those engaged: family-friendly companies are attractive for employees, family-friendly villages and townships gain socially by stronger bonds between people and economically in the competition between business sites, churches and family associations profit because of the gain in social welfare. No matter what the goals of an institution are, all of them take profit in the jointly created win-win situation.

The starting point for most local partnerships is to develop ideas and to realize projects to enlarge local family-friendliness. In this early phase they work as networks for innovation. Networks well established take over other tasks. Some work as communication networks to make family-friendliness “the top topic” in town. Others establish production networks to adjust the working processes of the participating institutions. Doing this, e.g. employment offices and youth administration link their processes to enable single parents to better arrange work and family life.

It can also be observed that a large number of local partnerships go beyond “just” realising projects: they act strategically influencing the whole local policy field and take over tasks like planning, decision-making and evaluation of family-friendliness in the local area covered by the partnership.

### **2.1.2 The regional level**

Regional Partnerships for family are a strong trend in the initiative. Two major reasons lead to this development:

- Local partnerships realise there are certain topics they can't deal with in an effective way – especially questions concerning mobility, regional development of family-friendliness or child-care for bigger companies with employees commuting daily to work coming from many different towns in the region.
- Regional actors such as counties, employment agencies, chambers of commerce or metropolitan regions identify family-friendliness as an important factor in the competition for business locations or identify topics like the above mentioned and establish a local partnership for family with a regional focus. Often enough they realise that local partnerships in small villages are necessary too, since there are a

lot of topics such a partnership on the regional level can not deal with in an effective way.

All this leads to a rising number of more than 100 regional partnerships mostly closely connected to existing local partnerships or even initiating the development of local partnerships, ideally covering the whole region.

In addition on the level of the German states, networks for the exchange of experiences have been established, slowly developing into networks of action too. Most of them are organised by the states, e.g. in Saarland or Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. In the latter local partnerships are even strongly integrated into a family-convent giving advice to the Government of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania concerning family policies. In Baden-Württemberg the local partnerships have organised such a state-wide network all by themselves. They are now establishing this network as an important player in family policies of Baden-Württemberg.

### **2.1.3 The national level**

First steps to establish governance structures on the national level were national conferences of the local partnerships for family. These conferences were and are a place for exchange. Here processes of learning between the local partnerships are initiated. They also are a place where the Federal Government gives the local partnerships a positive feed-back and enforces further engagement by appreciating their work.

Network-building on the national level slowly but surely has lead to an own identity of the local partnerships within the initiative. This feeling of “belonging together” is constantly nourished via communication – sort of a “corporate” identity is evolving. The introduction of a new organisational form of thematic activity in 2008 accelerated the identity-building: a vertical thematic network in the form of a “development partnership” was formed establishing a direct cooperation of the Federal government with a selected group of local partnerships for family. The task to be dealt with in this development partnership was: to collect experiences in enhancing the compatibility of work- and family life for single parent-families thus creating knowledge for the Federal Ministry and the local partnerships as well.

## **2.2 Subsidiarity – mapping influence and responsibilities**

Looking at the overall picture one can identify two main organizational principles underlying the structures developed within the initiative:

- tasks should be dealt with and decisions should be taken by those being closest to people and best capable of dealing with the topic (vertical subsidiarity)
- tasks should be dealt with and decisions should be taken by outcome-oriented cross-sectoral networks with steady win-win situations (cross-sectoral network-building)

with the latter enhancing speed and amount of outcome realization.

The combination of these two principles may be understood as a modernized form of subsidiarity giving answers to the complexity of challenges modern societies deal with on the one hand and the huge amount of specialisation present in many policy fields on the other hand. It is obvious that simply asking for the right level of action – for example the smallest entity or the local level – is not sufficient when we look at complex cross-sectoral issues. Networks are essential for the development of effective and efficient solutions in policy-fields

with complex settings. Only such networks bring together the necessary knowledge, resources, power, and interests of stakeholders.

Within the initiative “Lokale Bündnisse für Familie” first of all the combination of both principles leads to the observed vertical structure of networks:

Local partnerships for family take responsibility and decide independently how to change infrastructure and time-structure on the local level in a family-friendly way. There is no direct influence of the Federal Government or the German states concerning these decisions on the local level. This corresponds to the core belief within the initiative that on the local level it is not only best known *what* to do, but also best known *how* to do things and last but not least it is on the local level that the institutions have the influence to change things in the first place. On the other hand the local level is the lowest level of action to perform these tasks since groups of citizens or families (the individual level) they can't change infra- and time-structure in a large scale.

So we can clearly see the two principles at work: local partnerships are exactly the right place to deal with family-friendly infra- and time-structure, since it is not only the right level of action but every partner itself takes profit from the outcomes of the local partnerships leading to cross-sectoral networks with stable win-win situations.

The same counts for the regional level. Topics we find there are best dealt with on this level, because they may not be influenced in an effective way on the local level. And the complexity of the tasks makes it necessary once more to build networks following the win-win principle: counties and regions gain in the competition of sites, enterprises make a big step forward in the “war for talents”, together all actors are able to realise synergies in communication and thus these tasks are best dealt with on the regional level in a steady and cross-sectoral way.

Finally on the national level we find the Federal Government and the Alliance for the family dealing mainly with agenda setting, communication, appreciation of the outcomes the local partnerships produce, pushing forward the structural development of the initiative and engaging in law making concerning the third pillar of family-friendliness: “finances for families”. These are all tasks the Federal level is the best level to do so and it definitely needs a stable alliance to push forward the overall development.

It should be pointed out that with growing experience local and regional partnerships realise a great deal of communication and agenda setting themselves. They do this by making specific network-based forms of communication come to work – the so called guerrilla marketing - and thus: again we see the modernized subsidiarity principle at work. The level of action is changing following the first principle of vertical subsidiarity and a cross-sectoral communication network starts to work.

This “simple” picture of a hierarchy of horizontal networks on different levels is enriched by the newly developing vertical networks mentioned above. These networks are established to deal with new challenges making a combination of practical research, analysis, convincing communication and maybe even a change of legislation necessary. The federal level brings in its organizational, legislative and communication power and coordinates research projects whereas the local partnerships bring in their interests in topics suggested by the National Government, detailed knowledge of local situations, patterns of action and experiences in realizing new forms of work within networks. Thus the first principle is at work with the local level bringing in a lot of power to shape processes and the National level adding specific support which only this level can provide.

These development partnerships enable the local level to cope with complex problems which they probably wouldn't have been working on without a vertical partnership. On the other side these partnerships open possibilities for the Federal Government to act effectively where the normal forms of governmental operations – funding and legislation – would not be very effective. Additionally all partners combine their specific possibilities of communication and thus realise a somewhat coordinated form of agenda-setting. Thus we find steady cross-sectoral network-building crossing levels of action.

It should be mentioned that any kind of horizontal subsidiarity – understood as administration and politics coming in only if society isn't capable of dealing with specific topics by itself – is something we don't find in the initiative because of the second principle of modernized subsidiarity being at work. In contrary within all the governance forms described in Local alliances for family administrations are important partners. They would leave a huge gap if they were missing in the partnerships being established. This makes the initiative being essentially different from mainstream forms of civil engagement where society often organises itself without or even against the official authorities.

Let's have a final look at the distribution of influence within this initiative. This is done to give an impression concerning the challenges involved for other National Governments when implementing such an initiative.

Though all these networks work and decide independently, the National Government still has a lot of influence concerning the overall structure established. This influence essentially relies on communication, marketing, appreciation as well as initializing and supporting the structural development as means of steering. One can see that by applying these means – partly via the service agency – three main results have been achieved:

- most of the local partnerships focus on topics the National Government pushes forward: child-care and the balance of work- and family-life
- enterprises are partners in most of the networks – a goal set up by the BMFSFJ too
- and all networks have been kept together to some extent: there is a widespread feeling of belonging together.

It should be pointed out, that instruments of direct administrative control aiming at the single local partnership have not been set to work. Even in an initiative without direct funding and the corresponding administrative tools of control could have been implemented set up rules to be obeyed or obligatory topics of work e.g. criteria to join the initiative and participate in the services of the intermediate agency. This would have been extremely counterproductive in an initiative relying on personal engagement and subsidiarity.

Even without such explicit forms of central steering there is always a potential conflict between the independency of the local partnerships and the existing urge of a central government to control and steer following its own goals. An intermediate agency helps buffer these potential conflicts and thus helps stabilize the overall win-win situation for all protagonists.

### **2.3 Factors of Success**

In order to derive criteria to decide whether implementing such partnerships and alliances within a European project is promising, a careful look concerning the factors of success in Germany is necessary. This is done distinguishing three categories:

- the relevance of the initiative for important stakeholders
- the institutional framework in terms of allowing societal and cross-sectoral networks to evolve and to annex responsibility and influence and
- the terms of implementing the initiative.

### 2.3.1 Relevance of enhancing family-friendliness

Three stakeholders and their attitude towards the initiative are of specific importance: politics and administration, the economical sector and naturally families and people themselves. It can be shown that from the beginning all of them had a growing interest in the **outcomes** of the initiative as well as in the **governance forms** to be established. Concerning the outcomes the stakeholders' interests may be described as follows:

- **Families:** Family is important to Germans – national polls show this constantly. Initiatives to enhance family friendliness therefore are popular. Thus every measure aiming at enhancing family-friendliness is due to be supported in a broad manner as long as it doesn't force people to lead their family-life in a specific way. Polls done at the beginning of the initiative show a strong support for the idea of local partnerships for family (Forsa 2005) and in addition to this they show that people believe local partnerships are able to influence a better balance of work-life and family-life and moreover establish a climate of family-friendliness (Emnid 2004).

With families taking profit churches, welfare organizations and family associations also see relevance in such an initiative although in the beginning there were some discussions if it were the right path to follow relying on societal engagement instead of the government investing money.

- **Politics and administration:** Until the year 2003 German family policy on the federal level was focussing on financial support for families. In 2003 this changed fundamentally, solutions were sought to influence time and infrastructure in favour of families following the seventh national family report.

To do this the initiative to establish local partnerships for family was set up. This was inspired by pioneering towns which successfully improved local time- and infrastructures within cross-sectoral networks. These pioneers showed promising possibilities for the Federal Government to influence local family-friendliness without direct funding or legal or financial threats. Thus the Federal Government saw the opportunity to implement a completely new form of policy-making: firstly the idea opened possibilities to change the local framework of family life without the constitution giving the government responsibilities in this field and secondly it showed up to be an idea to influence things in a rather effective and efficient way at the same time – important for a ministry which is one of the smaller ones in Germany's federal administration.

On the local level at this time there was an urgent need in many municipalities to enhance family-friendliness. The initiative was started at just the right moment, when family-friendliness was already a topic and a lot of people were looking for measures boosting family-friendliness, while there were only an audit concerning family-friendliness of organizations and some instruments to monitor family-friendliness available. In this situation the initiative was started just in time and opened possibilities for engagement and quick wins.

The quick success of the initiative leading to more than one-hundred local partnerships within the first year and the outcome of these partnerships convinced even more local politicians and administrations to follow this path of success as well, adding up to a big movement across all political parties addressing big cities as well as little villages, regions and counties. It can be observed that family-friendliness is still gaining in importance and is becoming a strategic issue more and more – in the social sector as well as in the economical sector.

- **Economy:** The German chamber of industry and commerce realised very early that with the demographic change a workforce shortage was just around the corner in a lot of business sectors. Thus it was very important for them to enlarge employment rates of qualified mothers (and fathers) and thus enlarge the labour market. Enhancing local family-friendliness was understood as a key to success in this situation. Trade-unions were partners from the beginning too, joining in because of the balance of family- and work-life being an essential part of good work. As shown in the “Zukunftspanel 2008” of the Cologne Institute for Economic Research narrow two thirds of the polled companies think local partnerships are able to increase consciousness for the relevance of a family-friendly quality time.

Over the years family-friendliness has been steadily gaining in importance for single enterprises, since it becomes more important every year to be attractive for employees and to support programmes for quick return to the workplace after parental leave.

Additionally other aspects make an engagement in the initiative worthwhile for business companies nowadays. Local partnerships offer possibilities to engage for the local community, binding consumers and investing in a positive image. They improve the local situation in the competition for business-locations and thus stabilize the development of companies or even the follow-up in smaller firms. In some cases family-friendliness even inspired the development of new products.

Concerning the relevance of the new governance form for all stakeholders it soon became quite obvious, that a complex issue like a family-friendly society may only be coped with by broad and cross-sectoral networks, since in specialized societies nobody alone can exercise a really far-reaching influence concerning this topic. The successful projects and outcomes of the first local partnerships helped a lot to build up this firm belief.

### 2.3.2 Institutional framework

Two things have helped the development of the initiative a lot: existing positive experiences, open-mindedness towards establishing new network-based governance structures and a highly decentralized public administration in Germany.

- **Network-based governance structures:** Cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder networks were first developed in Germany in environmental policies, urban planning und development, youth care and scientific research. They demonstrated that networks can achieve success and bring profit to those involved.
- **Decentralization of administration:** In Germany, local government has a powerful position – both financially and politically: they are responsible for relevant policy fields – ranging from welfare, employment, urban planning and development, integration to childcare provision, tourism and cultural activities. An administrative reform in the late 1990ties has shifted attention to stronger cooperation with societal actors. Thus they are strong partners for local networks.

### 2.3.3 Implementation

Success factors concerning implementation cover the whole set-up of the initiative as well as the factors making work within networks possible at the local level. These aspects have been covered in details elsewhere and thus only a short summary will be given, concentrating on aspects important for the construction of a European project:

- A strategic though incremental and responsive form of developing the structures within the initiative was practised. There was no master-plan covering the structure to be developed but every one or two years structural improvement was established thus enhancing the influence of the whole initiative. Main steps until now comprise the start of identity-building within the network of all partnerships(2005), the development of vertical networks (2008), intensifying the development of regional structures (2010) and concentrating on the even better inclusion of networks into local society and preventing the upcoming cocooning of networks (2010).
- The local partnerships receive no funds by the Federal Government but are supported in developing structures and by knowledge transfer. Direct funding would be kind of a “sweet poison”: First of all it could weaken and impede subsidiarity and engagement, since funding always goes along with influencing topics and sometimes even work directly. Additionally public money would probably attract very different actors –probably rather those who ask the question “What are we supposed to do with the possibilities given to us?” and not those, who ask the question “What do we want to do and **what can we** do with the possibilities we have?” Entrepreneurship in the local partnerships– an important driving power of the initiative – wouldn’t have been developed under those conditions.
- The existence of an intermediate agency which doesn’t act as stakeholder in any single of the networks and with some independency though being funded by the Federal Government and the ESF brings forward the application of the two organizational principles of modernized subsidiarity – sometimes buffering the steering impetus of the Federal Government, sometimes taking part in developing ideas for new partnerships to be established and supported, e.g. the vertical networks described.
- The initiative is driven by emotions and rationality as well. Economical arguments are very important – on the other side giving it something like a corporate identity and a brand is an ongoing and very important process in strengthening the initiative from the inside.

### 3 A project for Europe?

Altogether in Europe there is a strong trend to introduce new forms of local / regional governance and network-based governance which is strongly fostered and supported by the OECD, the European Union and other international organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank. Thus – generally speaking – we find a good starting point for a European project consisting of three elements:

- The European Alliance for the Family and National Governments or even better National Alliances of the participating countries raise public awareness for the potential of local partnerships for family, encourage and support private, public and

civil society stakeholders to build those partnerships and enhance family-friendliness

- European and national networks of local partnerships connect with each other, create and transfer knowledge, strengthen the identity and foster the feeling to belong to a great European wide development towards more family-friendliness. The “look-and-feel” of Europe would become extremely positive for those engaged. This would be a win-win situation for both the local partnerships and the European Alliance for the Family.
- Methods of project-management ensuring the organizational principles of modernized subsidiarity are applied continuously. Additionally the project is set up in a responsive way enabling creativity concerning the structural development on all levels of action.

It should be pointed out that the suggested focus of these partnerships is lasting positive effects on local family-friendliness. That means local partnerships don't focus on certain target groups like “single-parent families”, or on selected facets of family-friendliness like “work-life balance” or “gender mainstreaming” and it is certainly not about preserving or introducing a certain form of family-life.

Only such an open-minded project – not setting a specific definition of what good family-life is, not concentrating on specific sub-topics – will be able to attract a wide variety of different institutions crucial for the overall success. Only such a project attracts all those interested in more family-friendliness in society whatever their reason is for doing so: economical, ethical or personal beliefs. To clarify things in the beginning – such a project may well be integrated in government programs stressing certain goals like “Better work-life balance” or “Equal opportunities in work-life”, but it shouldn't force people to engage only in favour of these goals. Many will do this anyway as soon as it is a mainstream topic in society.

Starting from this point let us get back to the question “Could this be a project for Europe?” Derived from the German experiences it could be a promising project if two conditions are fulfilled or at least are on a good way to be fulfilled in the participating European countries:

- **Relevance of enhancing family-friendliness:** Protagonists from all parts of society must be strongly interested in enhancing family-friendliness. And it should be stressed we need all parts of society: the economical sector, the administrative sector and the so called civil sector. It doesn't work if there is any single sector missing.
- **Degree of decentralization and relevance of network-based forms of governance:** Decentralized structures in the administrative sector should already be established or at least there should be a strong interest on the National level to do so. This together with a framework encouraging society to take responsibility for family-friendliness would enable the upcoming of strong local partnerships for family with society taking itself into charge of enhancing family-friendliness following the organisation principles of modernized subsidiarity.

For several European countries checks of relevance as well as the valuation of the institutional setting are performed based on easily available documents and scientific studies. Doing this several categories of countries are identified with different probabilities of success and different implementation strategies to be followed.

### **3.1 Checking relevance**

Checking relevance we especially focus on stakeholders from the public and the economic sector since it may well be assumed that relevance for families should be given in most places.

#### **3.1.1 Relevance for National governments**

Concerning relevance of enhancing family-friendliness three types of countries may be distinguished:

- countries with a strong family policy and a lot of measures already been realised
- countries with first measures already being realised and people recognizing that there could be done a whole lot more
- countries where throughout the whole society family mostly is understood as a private affair and there are no or only a few measures being performed by government or other stakeholders.

Concerning the first type it is probably difficult to realize such a project: “Why should anyone – government or companies, family associations or trade unions – engage when there already has been done a lot and the improvements still to be achieved probably are not worth the effort of establishing local partnerships?” France and Sweden are countries of this type, since they have been very active in all fields of family policy – covering financial support and support concerning time and infrastructure as well. It thus seems not very promising to establish the project in a broad scheme in these countries although still there may be single municipalities with specific needs local partnerships can meet.

Starting the project in the second type of countries seems very promising. Things are already developing in such countries and in this situation local partnerships may be boosters for further development. Poland and Spain are countries belonging to this category. Poland is intensifying its engagement in the last four years a lot, e.g. it is putting a stress on rebuilding childcare services leaving a lot of room for local partnerships to engage in supporting parents to improve the balance of work and family life. Compared to this Spain is relatively short on family policies, but there has been a cultural change to the effect that the dual-earner model is becoming predominant, which means that people have a strong need for a better support in combining work-life and family-life.

#### **A glance at family policies in Spain**

Spanish family policies focus on financial transfers, especially for families with a low income and families with disabled children whereas it can be seen that these transfers do not improve families' income levels substantially, because or the sums involved were and are very small. As a result public spending on family benefits represents only 1.1% of GDP, being below the EU average of 2.1%. To be noticed is that over the past few decades there has been a great cultural and societal change with the dual-earner model becoming predominant. Therefore there is a strong need to further a better balance between work and family life. Because of the plunge in fertility (1.4 children per woman in 2007) first measures have been started to support a better work / life balance in combination with the enhancement of female employability. In 2007 a comprehensive act on equality between men and women was approved, including the expansion of parental-leave to up to three years and achieving more security for returning back to work. Besides this women are entitled to 16 weeks of maternity leave, receiving payment at a 100% rate of the mother's latest salary, whereas fathers are

entitled to 13 working days of paternity leave and 15 in the event of multiple births. Since the Spanish education reform in 1990, children can be enrolled in school from the age of three. However the real lack of measures supporting young families lies in the insufficient supply of childcare services for children under the age of three, which is currently taking place in rather informal contexts like families or babysitters.

### **A glance at family policies in Poland**

Poland is confronted with three challenges: high levels of child poverty, an insufficient supply of appropriate childcare facilities and low fertility rates (1.31 children per woman in 2007). Since 2006 the Polish government has answered this with several measures. Some of these are proclaimed in the 'family policy package', which came into force in January 2009. The measures aim to improve the conditions for families and to enable parents, especially women, to balance their work and family life better by promoting gender equality, improving the financial situation of families and also boost a more family-friendly society in general. Besides others it includes the following measures: the extension of the maternity leave to 20 weeks and since 2010 the leave is also extendable for an optional period of up to 6 weeks. In this connection mothers on optional maternity leave are entitled to work part-time with a proportionally reduced maternity benefit. Despite this, parents who are entitled to parental leave have the possibility to reduce working hours. Since 2010 fathers are eligible to take one week of paternity leave and this will be extended to two weeks in 2014. Also the government has lifted employment restrictions for mother/father on parental leave, which means the government will top up their contribution to social security. The Education System Act in 2007 played a role in improving the situation of childcare facilities. It establishes a framework for the development of small private and non-subsidised crèches and pre-school facilities. In addition to this the government rebuilds nursery schools with significant support from EU structural funds.

The third type is somewhat more challenging concerning the establishment of local partnerships and civil society taking responsibility but the German example shows that local partnerships are a very good instrument to build up awareness as well as to realize short-time success stories. Such an initiative may very well be one of the starting points to enhance family-friendliness in a society as planned in Italy.

### **A glance at family policies in Hungary**

With its family policies the Hungarian government aims at reconciling work and family life. Therefore it focuses on providing generous options for parents to take time off work to care for their children. The current Hungarian family support can be grouped into three complementary approaches: There is long-term financial support like family allowances, which increase with the number of children (up to three children). There is additional financial support for the first years of parenthood like the maternity grant, a universal one-off payment provided at the birth of each child, and also different forms of maternity and parental leave benefits (GYES, GYET, TGYAS and GYED) which differ in eligibility, in the amount and the length to be paid. And third there is non-financial support like the maternity leave options, which are quite generous, so under certain circumstances they can be taken for up to three years. So far this system has failed to influence fertility (1.32 children per woman in 2007); it rather encourages long separation from the labour market and is also quite expensive (around 2.8% of GDP in 2006). The government's response is to develop childcare services

which help parents return to work. There are free pre-school facilities, which also include regular healthcare supervisions. Parents only have to pay for meals and children living in poor families are given meals for free. In 2005 the central government introduced a regulation requiring localities with a population more than 10.000 to provide nurseries. Despite this, the supply on childcare services is still too low to further reconciliation of work and family for women. Besides this, the government encourages employers to create family-friendly jobs and work environments for example with the Family-Friendly Workplace Award, an annual award that goes to companies and institutions implementing outstanding family-friendly measures.

### 3.1.2 Relevance in the economical sector

Concerning the relevance in the economical sector we have identified: enterprises and their organizations are motivated to get engaged mostly by three reasons:

- Being attractive for employees: these enterprises mostly come from sectors with a need for a well qualified staff difficult to meet, e.g. companies delivering services for other enterprises (banks, consulting services...), production companies with a high technical standard and a need for engineers, hospitals and universities. Engagement to enhance a companies` attractiveness to employees is somewhat lower in enterprises engaged in commerce, tourism or agriculture and in regions less affected by demographic changes.
- Engagement for the township: these enterprises are mostly located in smaller townships and villages with a strong culture of solidarity, no matter what the task of the enterprises is. In Germany we find small shops engaged on the local area as well as bigger owner-managed companies with the owners being a part of the local society.
- Engagement for the business site: these enterprises we find either in the countryside trying to prevent families from migrating off to bigger towns or in metropolitan regions engaging to prevent families from wandering off into other regions, e.g. after finishing university.

Generally speaking countries with a higher birth rate such as France are currently less influenced by demographic change, thus the pressure on employers to engage in family-friendliness aiming at attractiveness for employees is lower. This is more or less the only easily available information on the National level giving a hint concerning the relevance of the project for the economical sector within a whole country.

Statistics concerning the size of the dominant economical sectors in a country give some additional hints on how easily the project could be started in a country. But in the end the local situation concerning the sectors present, the competition with other regions and the migration balance concerning employees are the major facts influencing the relevance of enhancing family-friendliness for enterprises.

Altogether the reasons for engagement of the economical sector are very diverse. Combining this with the fact that all European countries have a broad mix of sectors and competition among regions within Europe grows steadily, most probably the relevance in the economic sector is generally sufficient to expect engagement if there is still something to be done concerning local family-friendliness which points back to the relevance for National Governments.

### **3.2 Checking relevance in terms of the degree of decentralization and importance of new forms of governance**

The last question is whether the political and institutional setting in a country allows and supports this new approach of network-based governance. For example this puts the focus on the extent of decentralization in a given nation, the position and power of local governments, the presence of new forms of governance, such as stakeholder participation, the development of networks or the political culture. Before looking into the different types in more detail, situations shall be named which would make the realization of such a project not very promising.

Participating in the project most probably wouldn't work in strongly centralized states reluctant to share power with local actors. Nations with a relationship between administration and society dominated by distrust are likely to have difficulties starting partnerships too. And a start would probably be unsuccessful in states with a huge redistribution of income without people feeling they get something back, since in this case the project would probably be understood as a "tricky" way of making people work for something they had already been paying for via taxes.

Altogether probably not a single one of the democracies within the European Union is at one of these points though it should be mentioned some people in Germany do argue too "Why should we engage? Isn't this the job of our government?" Fortunately this is a minority and with implementing local partnerships these voices diminish since it is much more fun changing things your way instead of watching others doing it their way.

Looking at European Nations three different possible situations may be identified with a specific advantage going along with the establishment of the project proposed for each of them:

- young democracies
- countries starting to realize decentralization and devolution of power
- countries with a clear path of establishing governance forms and networks

**Young democracies:** A look at the situation in Eastern Germany helps identify the advantages the new democracies in Eastern Europe could possibly gain from realizing the project. Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg explicitly support the initiative as a project to strengthen local democracy and society taking over responsibility, following the implementation of decentralized government structures after the reunification of Germany. Similar effects could probably be expected introducing the project in Poland and Hungary. Influenced by European Union Cohesion Policy, economic pressures and democratization efforts both have made major efforts to decentralize in the late 1990ties. As a result it can be found that the power and acceptance of as well as the trust in local governments have grown.

**Countries on a path to decentralization:** France is an interesting example to show how networked decentralization in a highly fragmented centralist state may work well. Decentralization efforts in the 1990ties have delivered ambivalent results – formal new local structures have partly been established but mainly with limited powers in planning, decision-making and implementation.

The decentralization of the "Revenu minimum d'insertion" – minimum income for the unemployed – in 2003 -2004 to the "departements" in contrary came along with a full decentralization – meaning power was fully decentralized including planning, decision-making

and implementation – without sharing power with the central level. This newly gained scope of action was used to integrate local partners – ranging from unemployment agencies, social centres to interest groups and form local implementation networks to achieve best results for the target group of unemployed people with low income.

Speaking more generally, networked decentralization worked well and fully developed its potential in a policy field different stakeholders have a strong interest in and joint up thinking and acting is not only needed but promises quick success. And this is in the centre of the project proposed – putting the focus on a policy field promising quick wins for a large number of stakeholders and relying on engagement instead of formal redistribution of power. Thus the suggested project could rely on existing positive experiences with network-based governance forms and introduce even more of these forms.

A glance at Spain shows quite a similar starting point on the local level. Though there is no central initiative for network-based decentralization since the 1990ties regional and local authorities have – along with other relevant local actors – increasingly taken the lead in policy innovation and built partnerships of public, civic and private actors. That was – among others – a reaction to immense administrative decentralization and the decentralization of relevant policy fields such as health, education, social policy and urban development. Today, there are many of those local / regional networks active in Spain – embodying the modernized subsidiarity principle

### **A glance at governance in Spain**

#### **Network-based governance in Spain: Local actors initiate policy innovation**

The centralist Spanish system underwent immense changes in the 1990ties: Political and financial decentralization was pushed forward and resulted in territorial pluralism, division of power and highly autonomous local municipalities, for example all relevant policy fields such as health, education, social policy and urban development are local. This change opened up new positive opportunities and increased responsibility on the local level. As a reaction regional and local authorities have increasingly taken – along with other relevant local actors – the lead in policy innovation to tackle the new challenges. Therefore, the trend to intensive cooperation with public, civic and private actors has started in the late 1990ties as well – and is still dominating local governance reform in Spain. While there is no consolidated central government-led initiative for participatory governance, citizen participation and manifold forms of network-based governance have therefore devolved – with high territorial variation: the local / regional networks engage in urban planning, regeneration and development, health, education, immigration, social policy, tourism and new forms of citizen participation. Pioneers like Barcelona, Malaga or Catalonia experimented with the creation of local / regional networks, integrating key local public, civic and private stakeholders. Barcelona and Malaga are known for example for their creation of efficient and effective local participative democratic structures - planning, decision-making and policy implementation in urban development and social policy. Catalonia approaches innovation policy – its main target of local development – with network-based governance.

***Countries with a clear path of establishing governance forms and networks*** A good example for following a systematic path of establishing network-based governance forms is to be found in the United Kingdom. The country has a long history of centrally initiated networked decentralization in various policy fields, e.g. local strategic partnerships, “Communities for Health”, and local enterprise partnerships to foster regional economic

development. Cabinet Office has been very clear that the so called cross cutting problems like the treatment of drug abusers, community health and others must draw on the local knowledge of stakeholders and requires co-ordination of across sectors and formal jurisdictions. A next step could be the nationwide connection of these networks and building up large-scale networks on the regional or national level as shown in the German imitative. So establishing the proposed European project would follow the lines already drawn and would push the development even a step further by realizing new vertical and horizontal networks.

## **A glance at governance in the United Kingdom**

### **Joint-up thinking and acting – the long tradition of local network building in the UK**

An explicit cabinet-level commitment and attitude of “Learning side by side” on the national level; a benchmarking to promote cross-sectoral learning on the regional level; networks which allow a holistic approach to local issues on the local level: in sum central government involvement and multilevel governance structures characterise the tradition of network building in different policy areas in the UK. The central government initiated programme of “**Local Strategic Partnerships**” (LSP, 2000-today) is one – well evaluated and researched – example for this participatory local governance approach. The LSP programme initiated nearly 400 of those new forms of partnerships between citizens, the government, the voluntary sector, business, service providers and housing-, employment- and community-safety services. The partnerships engage in neighbourhood development and renewal – only a third with central government funding. The experiences were transferred into other fields i.e. the 380 “**Local partnerships for Health**”; and currently the central-government supports local economic development with “**Local enterprise partnerships**” – partnerships between local authorities and businesses to promote local economic development.

## **4 Conclusion**

Though the checks done don't deliver an in-depth analysis, the information found encourage us to give a positive votum concerning the start of a European project as described above without being able to name the participants completely and finally.

The preliminary analysis done concerning relevance and fitting of the new governance structures points at Spain, the United Kingdom and Poland as very promising participants for such a project whereas France and Sweden most probably aren't first choice candidates. Here a lot of measures in favour of families have already been performed leading to a rather low relevance of such a project. Nevertheless a European project should include an invitation to interested local partnerships in these countries to join the trans-national networks even if National structures weren't part of the project.

Taking brief looks at even more European countries such as Austria and Hungary and taking into account the path the European Union follows for democratic development is encouraging enough to even state: the starting point seems to be good in terms of timing as well. In some countries such a project would boost developments in family policy, in others the project would get things started and in some it could probably fill in existing gaps. In all countries it would foster the democratic development adding a strong pillar – society taking responsibility - to existing forms of representative democracy and forms of direct citizen participation in decision-making.

It is definitely worthwhile realizing this project and the German way of implementation gives a lot of ideas how to do so, making modernized subsidiarity come to work in favour of families and all those being engaged.

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