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Cross-Sectoral Cooperation for Societal Change?

Perspectives from Georgian Youth

POLIS 180

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Preface

This policy paper is the result of a collaborative effort of the authors, Polis180 and the Georgian Institute of Politics. It was inspired by various discussions and projects in the framework of the project **#GEONext – Partnerships for Youth Engagement** , conducted from May to September 2022. We would like to thank the authors, editors, and reviewers for their work on this paper and the international speakers for their inspiring inputs. Special thanks go to Lela Khoperia, Andy Coxall, Armin Piálek, Brigitta Wortmann, and André Koch-Engelmann.

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Executive Summary & Recommendations

We live in a world of complex and multi-layered challenges. Mastering these will require long-term strategies and coordinated efforts across societies – on a global, national, and local scale. At the same time, finding answers to the pressing problems of our time is a **shared responsibility of multiple stakeholders** , from political actors and state institutions to science, education and academia, civil society, private businesses, charities, technology, media, the financial sector, artists, and cultural institutes. Given that none of these alone can provide comprehensive solutions, the aim of cross-sectoral cooperation is creating spaces for collaboration and exchange, and learning from each other to work *together* for change.

Accepting this complex reality and abandoning supposed certainties requires foresight and courage, flexibility and entrepreneurship. Informed by international experts, research and practical experience in Georgia and Germany in the framework of **#GEONext – Partnerships for Youth Engagement** , this publication aims at providing a comprehensive perspective of the advantages and challenges of cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as best practice examples and tangible recommendations for successful collaborations across sectors.

This paper is neither exhaustive nor claiming a prerogative of interpretation. Instead, it aims at inspiring a conversation across sectors and borders based on the recognition that many pressing problems of our time are so complex that none of us can solve them alone, and that joining forces for a common cause entails unexpected and comprehensive benefits for all partners. We therefore encourage everyone to engage in this exchange, to contribute their thoughts, experiences and ideas, and to challenge the assumptions presented here. We look forward to your feedback and welcome your suggestions anytime!

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Stay curious!** An important prerequisite for successful cross-sector cooperation is an open mind on all sides, and the ability to think and act outside established routines.
- **Do your research!** Before contacting or meeting with a potential partner, it is vital to familiarize yourself with their goals, visions, and activities.
- **Start small – but start!** If you are new to the field of cross-sectoral cooperation, small-scale, local partnerships can provide a fertile learning ground on which to build.
- **Reduce prejudices & appreciate differences!** When pooling resources, you will find that you have additional skills at your disposal, and an effective division of tasks can maximize results while minimizing expenses. Sharing responsibility on eye-level is key!
- **Write it down!** Make sure to put down all agreements in writing so you can always be sure that all partners are on the same page.
- **Talk!** To build trust throughout the process, be frank from the start about expectations and what you bring to the table, and be brave enough to admit and learn from failures.
- **Trust your gut!** Not every partnership is a good match. If you are tempted by an offer but do not feel comfortable with the conditions, you do not have to make a deal.

1. Cross-Sectoral Cooperation for Societal Change

We live in a world of multifaceted challenges affecting every part of society. Developing long-term, sustainable strategies to master the pressing problems of our time therefore is a **shared responsibility of multiple stakeholders** , from political actors and state institutions to science, education and academia, civil society, private businesses, charities, technology, media, the financial sector, artists and cultural institutes. Given that none of these alone can provide comprehensive solutions, the aim of cross-sectoral cooperation is creating spaces for collaboration and exchange, and learning from each other to work *together* for change.

While this approach has been advocated by various organizations in the past decades, we still lack a common framework and best practice models to establish cross-sectoral cooperation as a standard principle to counter these challenges. To begin with, we will therefore elaborate further on *why* cross-sectoral cooperation is needed, *who* can and needs to be involved, and *how* we can make it work in practice.

1.1 Cross-sectoral cooperation: WHY?

Cross-sectoral cooperation encompasses a wide array of ideas, concepts, and practices that bring together actors from two or more different societal sectors to join their expertise and resources to work together on a complex issue affecting the community they serve. While such forms of collaboration have been discussed since the 1960s and implemented unwittingly since long before that, public, private, and societal organizations more often than not continue to work in their own silos and in consequence fall short of tackling overarching societal challenges. Accepting this complex reality and abandoning supposed certainties requires foresight and courage, as well as flexibility and entrepreneurship.

The potential of cross-sectoral cooperation and detrimental effects of the lack thereof have been highlighted in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Agenda and depicted in the final of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), *Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals.*[1] It highlights the interconnectedness and complex interplay of the different sectors impacting drivers of systemic change towards sustainable development. All other SDGs – from ending poverty to gender equality and environmental protection – depend on an effective cross-sectoral pooling of efforts and resources. Given the massive changes our lives have been going through and will continue to face due to various and interconnected societal challenges such as climate change, growing inequality from the local to the global level, and the all-encompassing effects of digitization, it becomes clear that we *must* cooperate across sectors and overcome divisions to preserve livable conditions for all.[2] This is true not only for the long-term survival of the planet, but equally for smaller scale, local endeavors that affect far fewer people, but in a more immediate and tangible way. Such experiences can moreover serve as best practice models inspiring follow-up projects in other communities and sectors.

[1] https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal17 (*all links in this document last accessed on 30 September 2022*)
[2] Hazlewood, P. (2015). Global Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Scaling up public-private collective impact for the SDGs. *Background paper*, *4*

Research shows that successful cooperation across sectors yields better results than within the same or similar sectors.[3] It tends to be more effective and efficient, can spark innovation and unlock new opportunities, perspectives, skills, and networks. This innovative character can also help flagship initiatives to be replicated in different settings, exhilarating participatory formats that enable systemic change towards sustainable practices and solutions.[4]

1.2 Cross-sectoral cooperation: WHO?

Theoretically, cooperation is possible and desired across all sectors and for all challenges affecting modern societies. For example, efforts to tackle the effects of climate change are undertaken by political actors from multilateral fora to local governments, virtually all business sectors with some such as energy and mobility more in focus, innumerable universities and research centers, documentary filmmakers, art and education programs, and civil society organizations across the globe, to name just some. Given that the consequences of climate change affect every single person on the planet, albeit some of them disproportionately, every measure impacting this change has direct effects on all of us.[5]

Cross-sectoral collaboration usually tries to answer specific needs of a specific community, societal group, or target audience. These needs are often identified by civil society actors or academics who will provide specific recommendations to tackle them but usually do not possess enough capacities or resources to do so by themselves. One solution is to request fundings from state institutions or charities and create a program aiming at overcoming specific challenges. However, when engaging with multifaceted problems, more comprehensive and durable solutions might be found through a multi-stakeholder approach, bringing together the public, private, and broader civil society sectors.

"We're seeing the rise of crosssector collaboration–alliances of individuals and organizations from the nonprofit, government, philanthropic, and business sectors that use their diverse perspectives and resources to jointly solve a societal problem and achieve a shared goal." (Becker & Smith: 2018)

Public sector

The public sector, comprising public institutions, services, and enterprises, plays an important role in the implementation of community projects regardless of the scale. They can provide infrastructure, legal legitimacy and political communication. Public institutions are committed to the common good and often the direct bearers of political decisions whose implementation they coordinate. This can serve as a cornerstone for engagement, as they rely on partners within other sectors to help them fulfill their duty. They also provide funding, but bureaucratic requirements are usually high to avoid a misuse of taxpayer money. On the other hand, when planning long-term programs, it is crucial to have public officials and democratically elected

[3] Kotler, P., Hessekiel, D., & Lee, N. R. (2012). *Good works!: Marketing and corporate initiatives that build a better world... and the bottom Line*. John Wiley & Sons.
[4] Resonance Global (2022). *The Guide to Cross-Sector Collaboration. How Companies, Foundations, NGOs, and Governments Can Partner to Solve Business and Global Development Challenges*.
[5] Becker, J., & Smith, D. B. (2018). The need for cross-sector collaboration. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, *16*(1), C2-C3.

representatives on board to guarantee legitimacy and acceptance and avoid overlapping efforts or even clashes with local legislation, customs, or bureaucracy. Cross-sector engagement can also serve as a tool to increase the accountability of public institutions.

"As companies grow, they must navigate increasingly complex social, environmental, and supply chain challenges that they can't solve alone. Meanwhile, governments and donors increasingly rely on market forces, private sector innovation, and the economic opportunity created by companies to improve people's lives. The success of each sector is inextricably intertwined." (Resonance Global Guide to Cross-Sectoral Cooperation)

Business sector

Private enterprises are an important stakeholder in society as they provide employment, tax revenues and goods, while often consuming and/or polluting large amounts of resources. Most of them, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), are firmly rooted in their home communities and contribute to the identity of the towns and regions they are based in.[6] They often sponsor local events and sports teams, and are represented in local governments or other public councils. At the same time, the impact of global challenges and their regional effects will often affect them disproportionately and threaten their business models, which is why they are usually very aware of them and keen to support purposeful solutions. Business leaders as well as employees of all ranks can be key initiators and partners for projects supporting a common cause and benefit from their engagement long term without exuberant financial expenses. Apart from contributing to a positive public image which might boost profits, these benefits include stronger community ties, access to new demographics, e.g., future customers and staff, happier employees who can devote part of their working hours to a meaningful cause and gain new skills, and better resilience against shocks. The overarching question to be answered is *What role should business play in society?*[7]

Civil society sector

This section encompasses a broad range of actors independent from both the public and business sector. Classical civil society groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious communities, and voluntary organizations often enjoy widespread public trust and understanding of the communities they engage with. Civil society groups widely differ not only in their purpose but also in size, tasks, and structure. Small local organizations are often closest to the problem, but might lack established internal management structures and capacities due to volatile funding, and while larger organizations are more professional, they might be less flexible. Usually, NGOs work towards specific goals determined in their statute and as non-profit organizations are devoted to distinct societal ideals to which their members – often volunteers – will devote considerable amounts of time and efforts. At the same time, one must bear in mind that volunteers usually have other obligations as well, which makes their work less reliable than that of a paid employee. On the other hand, these less static structures allow for increased flexibility. What is more, while they will mostly not be able to provide funds of their own, money paid to them is often tax-deductible.

[6] Bode, C., Rogan, M., & Singh, J. (2019). Sustainable cross-sector collaboration: Building a global platform for social impact. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, *5*(4), 396-414

[7] Mazzucato, M. (2022). What Role Should Business Play in Society? *Harvard Business Review*

Other stakeholders

Typically, public, private, and civil society actors are the core members of cross-sectoral partnerships and collaborations. However, other actors might play a central role, and hybrid organizations can serve as mediators between different fields.[8] These stakeholders include but are not limited to media, schools, universities and research centers, charities, the financial sector, artists, and cultural institutes.

Mediators

Given that cross-sectoral cooperation is currently not used to its full potential, there are several organizations that try to raise awareness and act as mediators between different sectors. They provide advice and resources, offer consulting, facilitate partnerships, or implement cross-sectoral projects. Internationally, NGOs such as *Common Purpose* or firms like *Resonance Global* offer a wide variety of free and paid support. For the SDGs, the UN and its agencies provide information, networks, and regular events bringing together different stakeholders. In Germany, *UPJ e.V.* serves as a network of committed companies and nonprofit intermediary organizations, while the *German Foundation for Civic Engagement (DSEE)* provides free advice and training for non-profits seeking to engage with other sectors. In Georgia, the *Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSRDG)* serves as an interlocutor and advises companies on possibilities for engagement. Multinational companies often have separate departments dedicated to corporate social responsibility (CSR), while many larger NGOs include these cross-sectoral partnerships in their fundraising strategies. In addition, universities do research on cross-sectoral cooperation and some even dedicate departments to this topic, such as the *Social Marketing Centre* at Griffith University in Brisbane or the *Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society* at Stanford University. All of these can serve as interlocutors for creating collective solutions to diverse challenges from the local to the global level.

Leadership

"We live in a world of complex problems. These problems cross boundaries. Yet most leaders do not."
(Andy Coxall, Common Purpose)

For cross-sector partnerships to work, a strong leadership based on a thorough understanding of mechanisms, guiding principles, and challenges to this specific type of cooperation is needed.[9] Raising awareness among current and future leaders for such issues and providing training and room to develop cross-sectoral communication skills are thus essential to create an environment where these principles are lived and streamlined across activities and on a daily basis. Ideally, these individuals will gain experience in various sectors, developing an understanding of their distinct cultures, broaden their horizon to make better informed decisions, and create more inclusive and thus more resilient working environments.[10] Beyond diverse experience and 'regular' leadership skills, this mindset can be deliberately stimulated and corresponding skills developed throughout their careers, making them multipliers and mentors in their professional and social networks and mainstreaming cooperation in the long term.

[8] Resonance Global (2022); *Chapter 4 provides pros and cons for partnerships across multiple sectors*
[9] Becker & Smith (2018)
[10] https://commonpurpose.org/about-us/our-approach/

1.3 Cross-sectoral cooperation: HOW?

Despite widespread agreement on the benefits of collaborating across sectors, this mode of operation is common practice for very few institutions only. One important reason are distinct organizational cultures that are not geared towards working outside a specific environment. A lack of awareness and experience outside their own sector will make leaders less prone to consider such partnerships or appreciate their benefits. They might also clash with the experiences, beliefs, and specializations of leaders and decision-makers within institutions. Even when leaders are aware of the possibilities, they will often dash against full schedules, a lack of resources, or simply the question of how to begin.

Another factor is the sheer multitude of forms cross-sectoral cooperation can take. Just like the challenges they aim to tackle, these partnerships are complex, diverse, and in flux. While being a distinct strength of this approach, it can also complicate the development of common grounds and strategies. It can therefore be helpful to consult existing models and established principles before reaching out to potential partners, as well as throughout the process.

Guiding principles

In cross-sectoral partnerships, different goals, values, cultures and hierarchies meet. While this can be a fertile ground for common learning, it also bears the potential for conflict and misunderstandings. It is therefore crucial to adopt a set of measures and principles to ensure that the partnership is built on mutual understanding, shared expectations and common goals. Moreover, these agreements should be revisited on a regular basis throughout the entire process to avoid frustrations and maximize the joint achievements.

Before you start: Ahead of reaching out to one or more prospective partner(s), make sure to identify the root problem you want to address and clearly formulate your needs. Only then should you start searching for partners by compiling an overview of all the stakeholders your project idea addresses.[11] Draw on pre-existing contacts or involve mediators. Usually, a lot of information can be found online, but if in doubt do not hesitate to call their offices or consult someone in your network who might be familiar with them (social media platforms and professional networks such as *LinkedIn* can be helpful here). From your list, consult with your team who might be the most promising partner for your endeavor and reach out to them, giving a brief description of your idea and the kind of partnership you envision, and suggest a meeting. If they are not interested or unable to collaborate, make sure to ask for other actors from their sector who could be suitable, as they are likely to have a better overview.

The first meeting: Once your search was successful and a first meeting scheduled, make sure to prepare for it thoroughly. Formulate your goals and ideas clearly, but leave some flexibility for your partner's suggestions. It can help to formulate a draft agenda and share it with the other side(s) ahead of the meeting to make sure you are on the same page. Allow some time in the beginning for an informal exchange and introductions so that everyone can get acquainted and comfortable. When presenting your institution, try to reflect on your partner's

[11] Resonance Global (2022)

requirements. Be open about your motifs and why you reached out to them specifically. Listen closely, and try to ask open questions. Allow for enough time to ask and answer all questions, and be appreciative in your communication. Make sure to take minutes and share them.

You will find that each sector and organization have their own languages and you might not always refer to the same things when using similar expressions. Try to avoid sector-specific jargon and abbreviations, reformulate when in doubt and actively ask whether you understood correctly. When contemplating the allocation of roles, be frank about your resources, strengths and expectations. Acknowledge the difference in approaches and take advantage of the different perspectives as these are your greatest strength as a cross-sectoral team! After the meeting, sleep on it and have an honest reflection with your team on whether or not this partnership is beneficial for your project idea and make sure to provide feedback. In case you decide to proceed, this is also the moment where you can ask additional questions that have come up during the reflection round, and give them the same opportunity.

"If you do not feel that the chemistry is right, remember that you do not need to open the door for partnership!" (Brigitta Wortmann, BP)

Closing the deal: Once you have an agreement and a common vision, make sure to fix it in writing. Only then can you be sure that everyone has the same understanding and expectations. Agree on the time frame, distribution of roles and resources, and a strategy for funding, management, and oversight. *Working together and on eye level throughout the process is key!* This does not mean that you cannot divide tasks meaningfully, but all actors involved should be comfortable with their role and assignments. If you feel that your partner does not take enough account of your needs or purposes, make sure to address this before signing the deal, and if your doubts are not removed, it is fairer and more sensible to opt out and find a new partner than dragging out a flawed match.[12]

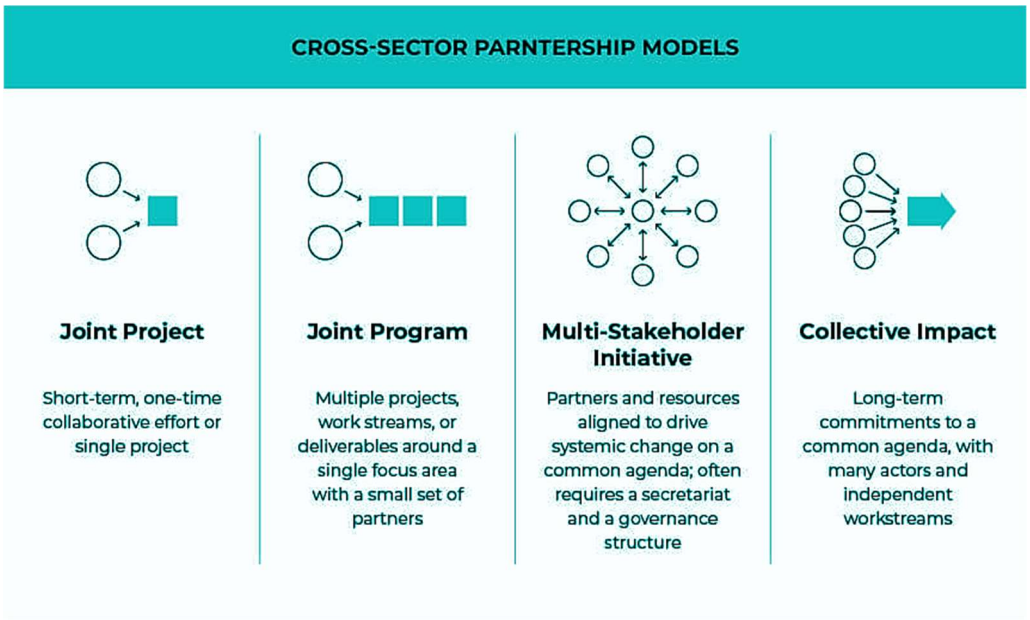
Be open and clear about the incentives and benefits the parties involved will get from the agreement, and ensure that everyone knows their tasks and is committed to them. Agree on your communication and procedures, as well as a budget plan. Make a list of your target groups/beneficiaries and other stakeholders, and discuss how to involve them (*community management*). Crucially, discuss possible risks and challenges and how you plan to address them. Ensure sound documentation and knowledge management in case employees or responsibilities change, and allow for flexibility as plans as well as outside conditions can and will change. Create an inclusive environment where people can get involved, take charge, and engage critically. This is especially vital for your target audiences, since those affected by the challenges and countermeasures are important experts and stakeholders in the process. Therefore, plan points of engagement and moments of reflection and evaluation including of your partnership, and do not allow a full agenda to erase this important part from the project cycle! In the end, results must be felt locally in order to really be deemed successful.[13]

[12] Danish Red Cross & Deloitte (2016). Cross Sector Partnership Guideline. Link: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/no/Documents/strategy-operations/deloitte-cross-partnership-guideline.pdf

[13] Further tips are provided in the *Resonance Global Partnership Development Guide*: https://www.resonanceglobal.com/partnership-development-guide

Types of partnerships

Cross-sectoral cooperation can be singular events, temporary engagements, permanent partnerships, or anything in between. They can involve any number of institutions and actors from an international to an individual basis, and any activities from planning a local sports event to developing a global framework for carbon emissions. The same goes for potential partners and forms of cooperation, the most common of which are shown in the graphic.



From the Resonance Global Guide to Cross-Sector Collaboration (2022)

Having multiple partners on board might multiply the output and reach, but managing a multi-stakeholder cooperation requires substantial administration efforts. Especially for longer term projects, it might be advisable to have a core team and engage partners from other sectors sporadically where suitable. However, it is crucial to be aware of all stakeholders relevant to the cause the cooperation is aimed at and to keep them informed about your progress.

A classic form of cooperation are **public private partnerships** (PPPs), where public agencies work closely with private firms to implement a political goal or new legislation. These often engage with civil society groups as well, as they directly affect the community. For example, when a political directive to increase digitization in schools is to be put in practice, the ministry will probably look for companies in the IT sector and at the same time consult representatives of teachers, students, and parents. While this particular example might work out as a 'silo' project where each entity works independently, it can also be an opportunity for a cross-sectoral partnership, with students supporting the process as interns, companies adjusting their products to the specific needs of the education sector, and possibly the start to a comprehensive dialogue on the future of education in this specific community that can later serve as a flagship model for others.

The gateway for many companies to get involved in cross-sectoral cooperation with the non-profit sector is the debate around the responsibility of private firms towards the societies they

are embedded in, which has been ongoing since the 1920s and resulted in a diversification of the stakeholders represented in corporate boards, public councils, and non-profit organizations respectively.[14] However, the concept of **social corporate responsibility** , or **CSR**, of private firms has been reinterpreted in the neoliberal era and today emphasizes the voluntary character of their engagement.[15] Such activities can be singular and short-term, such as donating part of the profit of a certain product to a charitable cause or other forms of *corporate donations*, but they can also entail longer term commitments. Another method is *corporate volunteering*, i.e., private sector employees supporting public or non-profit causes with their time and skills. *Corporate philanthropy* on the other hand usually extends far beyond temporary measures and stems from acknowledging the societal and environmental impact a firm has in order to introduce measures aimed at reducing this effect. Critics of CSR usually point out that these efforts are aimed at creating a more positive public image to increase revenue while in reality, they do very little to reduce their impact. And even if their efforts are accepted as genuine, the argument continues, it is rarely enough to make a real difference.[16]

However, in practice the picture is much more complex. It is certainly easy to find examples of 'greenwashing' and campaigns that backfired on the firms behind them. And yet, in the same sector can be found pioneers of corporate philanthropy who have been engaging with civil society and the public sector for decades, established international networks, and advise actors from all sectors based on their experiences. Many of these are large international companies, which only make up a very small number of businesses in any given society. Most firms are much smaller, much more regionally embedded, and thus much closer to the communities they engage with. And while marketing and the public image are unlikely to tell the whole story, global pledges towards more sustainable societies and ensuing legislation are hitting the business sector hard, underlining the need for innovation across sectors.

Similarly, the role of work in societies and for individuals has changed considerably during the past decades, which led the US-entrepreneur Aaron Hurst to coin the term **purpose economy**, "an economy that is driven and organized around the creation of purpose for people, not just information, goods and services."[17] Creating material revenue alone, says Hurst, no longer satisfies many employees, as they want to contribute to positive solutions in their communities through their work. In order to remain competitive, corporations have to engage with this demand, and new businesses are increasingly founded on this model. Platforms such as *Work for Good* facilitate purpose-driven careers or volunteering opportunities from early-career to senior staff, and especially sectors struggling to find qualified staff can use purpose approaches and different forms of cross-sectoral partnerships to attract new demographics.

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[14] Pillay, R. (2015). *The changing nature of corporate social responsibility: CSR and development–the case of Mauritius*. Routledge

[15] GREEN PAPER Promoting a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (2001). *European Commission*: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52001DC0366&from=DE

[16] Marcus, J. (2022). Will Patagonia founder's plan to give away brand to fight climate crisis be enough? *Independent Online*, Link: https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/ patagonia-billionaire-founder-yvon-chouinard-b2169184.html

[17] Hurst, A. (2016). *The purpose economy, expanded and updated: How your desire for impact, personal growth and community is changing the world*. Elevate Publishing

A very successful model often used in the legal and IT sectors are **pro bono activities**. For example, legal firms offer free advice to non-profit organizations, establishing a positive image among their members – among whom are potential future clients or employees – and using these tasks to train their interns or early-career lawyers who will compile the advice and thus giving their supervisors an impression of their work.[18] National and international pro bono networks, including in Georgia and Germany, as well as organizations such as the *Taproot Foundation*, are dedicated to facilitating pro bono services and encouraging partnerships. These activities can serve as entry points and provide mediated experiences with representatives of other sectors, a prerequisite to foster cross-sectoral mindsets in the long term.

Challenges

Based on the understanding that cross-sector partnerships are essential to tackling complex problems, various obstacles to successful collaboration and towards *business model innovation for sustainability* (BMIfS) have surfaced.[19] One of the most frequent arguments is that private businesses are profit-oriented and thus often non-sustainable by default, and "economic value creation is about satisfying market demand, while environmental value creation targets the need of complex biophysical systems, and social value creation serves exactly those human needs that markets do not address"[20]. As a result, different actors perceive and generate distinct values based on sector-specific interests and catering to different needs and stakeholders, and at first glance these often seem incompatible for partnership.

However, as many examples have shown, it is worth looking twice as unexpected roads for engagement might open up if you keep an open mind and dare to think outside the box. As a civil society organization, you might find a partner in the very institution that is subject to your criticism if you reach out to them with constructive ideas. This is the business model of the German animal advocacy group *Albert Schweitzer Foundation*, which approaches fast food chains and supermarkets to convince them to switch to more animal friendly and plant-based products. What is more, if you look into businesses and organizations more closely, you will often find that they are involved in multiple fields offering various points of engagement. For example, an oil producer is unlikely to stop exploiting oil fields, but they might consider using recyclable coffee cups at their gas stations, with a massive impact on waste management. While you should be realistic when engaging in cross-sectoral partnerships, be sure to stay open-minded and curious as there is a lot to learn and discover!

[18] https://www.pro-bono-deutschland.org/en/

[19] Stål, H. I., Bengtsson, M., & Manzhynski, S. (2022). Cross-sectoral collaboration in business model innovation for sustainable development: Tensions and compromises. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *31*(1), 445-463

[20] Stål, H. I., Bengtsson, M., & Manzhynski, S. (2022). Cross-sectoral collaboration in business model innovation for sustainable development: Tensions and compromises. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *31*(1), 445-463

2. Beyond corporate sponsorship: learning from practice

Despite the various challenges it entails, a number of pioneering actors have been engaged in cross-sector cooperation throughout the past decades, explored the possibilities, and worked closely together towards a common cause. Some of these pioneers have already been mentioned; the following section will provide tangible examples of cross-sector partnerships from their invention to the long-term impact and results. Given the broadness of the field, the three cases cover a variety of approaches and goals, trying to provide a glimpse of the vast potential this form of collaboration entails.

2.1 Civil Academy: A forum to support young engagement in Germany

In 2005, the first edition of the Civil Academy program took place in Germany. In the course of three weekends within six months, 24 young volunteers learned how to turn an idea into a successful project. The program was developed by the *Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement* (National Network for Civil Society; BBE) in cooperation and with financial backing by *BP Europa SE*, a globally operating mineral oil and energy company. BEE has been founded with the aim to create a nationwide network bringing together non-profit actors with the private sector and federal as well as community institutions. “The cooperation within the network is based on mutual trust and partnership, relying primarily on dialogue, cooperation and practical stimuli for the promotion of commitment and civic involvement. Everyone involved benefits from the cooperation and moves closer to the common goal”.[21]

Group work during Civil Academy Round 29

The Civil Academy program included project management, financial planning, fundraising, team leadership, and public relations. Apart from trainers and experts recruited from the BEE network, the young activists were supported by professionals from BP Europa SE, who passed on their knowledge for a good cause. In addition to hard facts, a lot of room was given to time for networking among each other, creating new ideas together, and discussions about issues that affect what is happening on the ground and the wider world in equal measure. A creative atmosphere coupled with the know-how of the participants and the experts made the Civil Academy a great think tank for young committed people who joined the alumni network after participating and thus had access to a pool of volunteers, trainers, and experts working on diverse topics and could join networking events.

[21] https://www.b-b-e.de/english

Supported by the strategic partnership of the two actors and implemented by a program office, more than 700 young volunteers have been supported in implementing their project ideas in 31 Academy rounds during the 15 years' program. From the program development to its implementation and constant evaluation, the common goal of the two partners of the Academy was to motivate young people to become actively involved in society and to give them a sense of achievement through training.[22] Participants should experience their commitment as an important experience and component of society, and societal recognition of civic engagement was to be strengthened.

This was achieved by combining knowledge and methods from business and civil society. While BBE synchronized the development of their expertise in the field of young engagement with the program experiences, BP aimed at contributing to (civil) society with its specific competences as a business enterprise, including creating an opportunity for its employees to get involved. With this joint project, both partners wanted to illustrate in practice why the strategic partnership between companies and civil society actors is an important development horizon in a whole-of-society approach to comprehensive challenges.

The feedback from the participants makes it clear that in addition to technical information and practical tools, it is above all the opportunity to exchange ideas with other equally committed people, to motivate and inspire each other, that made this program so valuable. In a circle of like-minded people, it is easier to talk about difficulties, to accept constructive and critical suggestions, and sometimes to jump over one's own shadow. In this sense, the Civil Academy was a safe space where the multitude of different perspectives provided by the mix of participants and experiences opened doors for new ideas, often beyond an original project.

Polis180 #IdeaBase 2020

Two of this paper's authors, Anna Kiknadze and Frauke Seebass, are Civil Academy alumni themselves and have experienced the enormous potential first-hand. Frauke Seebass, who took part in the 29th round in the second half of 2019, had been responsible for community management in the board of Polis180, and apart from developing a German-Georgian youth project to increase political participation was able to use the inputs and discussions during Academy weekend to create a new format to bring together existing and potential members for common learning, networking, and project development.

[22] Wortmann, B. & A. Klein (2020). *15 Jahre Civil Academy Partnerschaft von BBE und BP zur Förderung von jungem Engagement*. Link: https://www.b-b-e.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/05_Newsletter/ 01_BBE_Newsletter/2020/11/enl-10-2020-wortmann-klein-beitrag.pdf

The Polis *#IdeaBase*[23] was a huge success and has since been established as an annual event. What is more, the original project idea was realized in *#GEOYOUTH2020 - Manifesto engaging youth in politics in Georgia*[24] funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, followed by *#GEOYOUTH2021*[25] and *#GEONext*[26] in 2022, building on each other and substantially aided by the Civil Academy experience and network, including for experts and trainers.

2.2 Open Source Leadership: Reinventing leadership across sectors

Common Purpose was founded in the UK in 1989 as a non-aligned, not-for-profit organization dedicated to designing and improving cross-sector leadership programs for current and future leaders of all ages and nationalities. Their vision is to create common, open spaces to bring together actors from all groups constituting society to discuss overarching challenges and develop solutions together. As this involvement requires certain skills and experiences, they aim at preparing as many and diverse people as possible to engage in this space. Today, they operate in roughly 100 cities around the globe.[27]

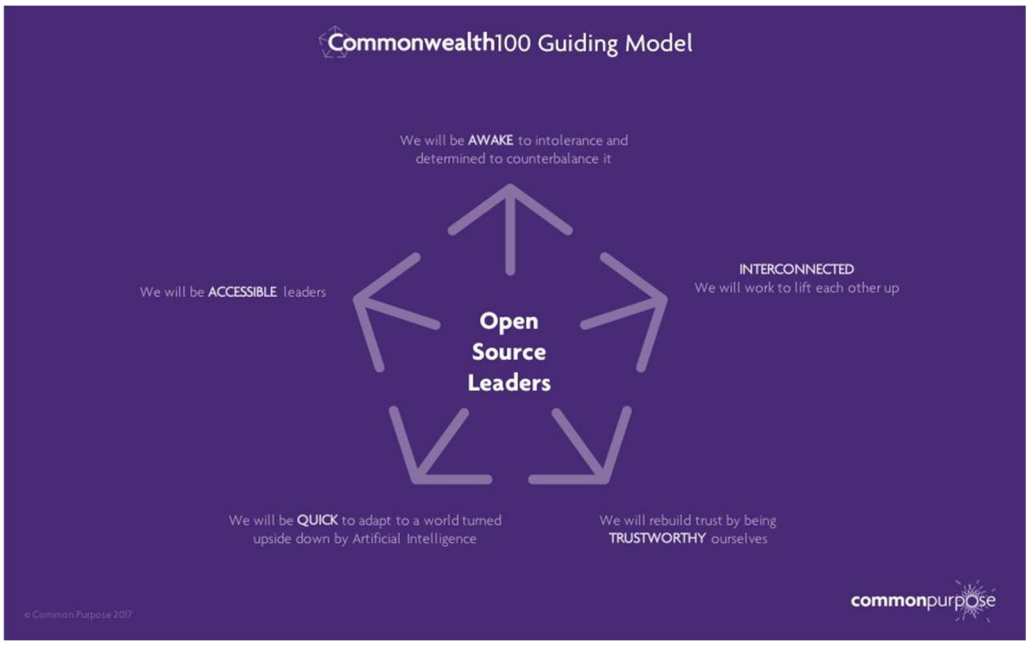
In 2017, the organization joined forces with allies from various sectors and nations across the Commonwealth to develop a modern leadership model preparing future leaders for their roles in an increasingly volatile and complex global environment characterized by multiple interconnected crises. They brought together 1000 young people from across the world and asked them what kind of leadership their generation wanted to stand for and needed for the future. Several different methods – surveys, focus groups, interviews – were used to collect their voices, and a steering committee was formed comprising young people from 16 different countries across the Commonwealth nations and all continents. They were supported by an advisory group, i.e., international senior leaders from all sectors of society.

The steering committee reviewed the research results and looked for common themes that would inform future leadership models. Rather than answering to the advisory group, the youths were coached and advised by them, and all actors profited from this intergenerational exchange of experiences, practices, and expectations. The goal was to turn the multitude of insights compiled during the research phase into something practical that would serve future leaders for guidance throughout their careers. **Open Source Leadership** was the result.

Based on the five principles that crystallized from the research – ***awake*** (creating a tolerant, inclusive environment), ***interconnected*** (collaborating rather than following purely selfish motives), ***trustworthy*** (rebuilding community trust in leaders), ***quick*** (adapting to the rapid changes in technology), and ***accessible*** (being open to ideas and criticism from everyone) – an online, asynchronous leadership course was created. The **Commonwealth100** program

[23] https://polis180.org/events/25-jan-ideabase-in-berlin/
[24] https://polis180.org/geoyouth2020-manifesto-engaging-youth-in-politics-in-georgia/
[25] https://polis180.org/geoyouth2021-fostering-youth-participation-in-local-politics/
[26] https://polis180.org/geonext-partnerships-for-youth-engagement/
[27] https://commonpurpose.org/about-us/common-purpose/

has since seen more than 43,000 registrations from across the world.[28] It is sponsored by a cross-sectoral consortium including governments, financial institutions, businesses, and universities. Staying true to its open source character and guiding principles, the program is constantly adapting and evolving, including new perspectives and constant learning.



The Open Source Leadership Model by Common Purpose[29]

The skills participants gain through the course can help them become better and more inclusive leaders, moving with increasing ease between sectors and collaborating among them. This is further reinforced as the course includes group sessions bringing together diverse young leaders from across the Commonwealth, thus furthermore learning cross-sectoral collaboration and open source leadership in practice. While this was a large-scale project bringing together numerous stakeholders from many countries and requiring comprehensive, long-term funding, it can also serve as an inspiration for smaller, more targeted partnerships, such as developing a summer school or training program.[30]

2.3 Pro Bono Network Georgia: For the public benefit

Georgia has in recent years developed several types of partnerships models across sectors. One of them is *Pro Bono Network of Georgia*[31], an informal association of Georgian and international companies operating in Georgia and willing to use their professional resources and expertise for societal benefit. The network was initiated by the *Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia* (CSRDG) and established in 2015 with the support of German and US partners – *MitOst e.V.*, *BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt*, and *Taproot Foundation*. Based

[28] https://commonpurpose.org/leadership-programmes/legacy-a-global-campaign/commonwealth100/
[29] https://commonpurpose.org/blog/archive/open-source-leadership-reinventing-leadership/
[30] Find the TED Talk by Common Purpose Chief Executive Andy Coxall here: youtu.be/4kPS-TkkEI8
[31] https://probonogeorgia.ge/en/home

on the Goodwill Memorandum[32] signed by the members of the network, they are committed to providing free professional support to non-profit organizations working on socially relevant issues, encourage their employees to get involved, and also collaborate with each other to raise awareness of pro bono concepts.

"The goal of Georgia's Pro Bono Network is to make the expertise of the private sector available to the organizations working to improve society." (Pro Bono Georgia)

As Lela Khoperia, Head of the Corporate Social Responsibility Program at CSRDG points out, the value of Pro Bono for Georgia is enormous. It provides a space to connect civil society actors with many affiliated organizations within the network such as Georgia's leading banks, insurance companies, and law firms. In this process, trust and confidence are built. The private sector recognizes the importance of civil society engagement and the topics it covers. Simultaneously, civil society actors learn to speak the language of the business community and to communicate confidently.

One of the most fruitful activities of Pro Bono Georgia implemented by CSRDG is mediation between sectors. As we have seen, cross-sector collaboration requires smooth and professional mediation to be successful. Mediators understand the needs and demands of private companies that lack connections to civil society as well as time and human resources to get involved. In turn, civil society organizations often lack access to professional services such as legal advice crucial to their work and impact. This is where the mediation initiative comes in, bridging the gap between supply and demand from different sectors, and guiding them through the entire process.

Last but not least, Pro Bono Georgia covers a wide range of topics that are in demand on site. Starting from strategic planning and organizational management to financial issues, human resource management, legal issues, as well as marketing and PR. The method also depends on the project duration and level of engagement, which can include one-day seminars, pro bono marathons, or strategic mentoring and consultations. For example, many non-profit organizations face legal challenges and need professional assistance. On the other hand, small companies that want to invest in social projects need personnel, time capacities, and ideas. As part of the EU-funded *Civil Society STAR Initiative: CSOs as Sustainable, Transparent, Accountable and Resilient Development Actors in Georgia*[33], CSRDG facilitated a legal workshop in May 2022 in the Kakheti region with the local partner law firm *Zedelashvili & Laywers Group*[34], with a special focus on women's rights. In doing so, they provided an innovative forum to learn about and experience cross-sector partnerships first-hand, helping to overcome obstacles and establish trust among participants as well as in CSRDG as a mediator.

[32] https://probonogeorgia.ge/en/georgian-pro-bono-network/about-the-network
[33] https://csogeorgia.org/en/pages/evrokavshiri-sakartvelostvis
[34] https://alfg.ge/en/zedelashvili-lawyers-group/

3. Cross-sectoral cooperation in Georgia

As we have seen, cross-sector partnerships play an essential role in addressing the rising global socioeconomic, environmental, and political changes and challenges. Because these are global in nature, they affect both developed and developing countries. Despite the different levels of commitment and willingness to cooperate with different sectors, it is clear that the need for this type of cooperation is increasing and becoming an absolute necessity in tackling complex problems. In Georgia, this need is met by specific challenges and opportunities.

3.1 Specific challenges in a post-socialist environment

Georgia is a country in transition towards economic stability and development. As such, it has similar characteristics to other economically developing countries. More specifically, due to its historical past we can find many similarities with other former members of the Soviet Union. Under the socialist system, the state and large state-owned enterprises provided social services to the population with funds from the state budget. The economy was part of the political system, which left no room for private enterprise, which consequently did not exist[35].

The transition from a socialist to a market economy was accompanied by 'wild capitalism', meaning that profit maximization was the only goal. Due to political and economic instability, the focus was on immediate benefits, and there was a lack of strategic vision and knowledge of how to build a profitable, successful, and at the same time socially responsible enterprise. At the same time, civil society in general was not strong enough to hold them accountable. On the one hand, there were no established non-governmental organizations, and on the other a lack of knowledge about why and how to cooperate or even approach the private sector, which put additional strain on an already fragile environment. In addition, development was hampered by the fact that society had no expectations of responsible business conduct.

The socioeconomic situation in Georgia changed from the mid-1990s onward, evolving toward a more organized and rules-based environment in which long-term visions slowly took precedence over short-term benefits. The number of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations increased, as did the establishment of larger business associations. At the political level, Georgia's strong foreign policy orientation towards European integration was clearly defined, resulting in the awareness of a need for different types of interaction between government, business, and civil society.

Consequently, Georgian citizens became more aware of the need for corporate social responsibility and their expectations increased accordingly. A social survey conducted in 2007 showed that the majority of Georgian citizens saw the responsibilities of companies not only in business activity and profit-orientation, but also in their function of caring for the common good and actively contributing to the solution of ecological environmental problems and other social challenges. When characterizing an 'ideal business model', in second place after the

[35] Khoperia, L. (2012). Corporate Social Responsibility Handbook. *The Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, Friedric-Ebert-Stiftung.* P. 104

production of quality products, citizens named the implementation of activities that serve the common good as the top priority. [36]

3.2 Where are we now? Mostly uncharted, yet promising territory

Looking at the current trends in Georgia, we can clearly see progress compared to the initial situation. When it comes to addressing social and socio-economic issues, the level and willingness to engage tends to be higher since the end of socialism. Climate and environmental issues, including practices of social and environmental reporting, on the other hand, are usually less in focus – however, there are some positive international and local trends that encourage greater attention to these issues. In Georgia from *Pro Bono Network* presented above, there are several other types of partnerships commonly practiced.

Social Entrepreneurship

Globally, the trend toward social entrepreneurship began in the 1970s, when civil society organizations took up entrepreneurial activities and used the profits generated to solve social and environmental problems. As civil society organizations often have in-depth knowledge of social challenges, adding an entrepreneurial element provides an effective way to implement social goals. Particularly during the pandemic, interest in the concept of social enterprises increased when, united by a common problem, expertise from different sectors and the need for innovative solutions emerged[37]. Young people in particular are attracted to start their own businesses with a social mission.

This is true for Georgia as well, where social entrepreneurs are finding their place between the private sector and civil society. The *Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia* (CSRDG) was one of the flagship organizations that started to popularize social entrepreneurship in 2009 with the support of the *British Council* and the *European Fund*. In 2016, CSRDG and other successful social enterprises from Georgia founded the *Social Enterprise Alliance Georgia* (SEA) as an umbrella organization that promotes the relevance of the topic, actively participates in the regulation of the legal framework for social entrepreneurship, and protects or perceives the interests of social enterprises. At present, there is no legal framework in Georgia for social entrepreneurship, but in 2017 Levan Alaphishvili, an expert at CSRDG offered to a package of bills on social entrepreneurship and supporting mechanisms to the Georgian Parliament[38], which was approved by 12 Parliament Members, and is currently in review.

Nowadays, SEA is responsible for creating an enabling environment for existing social enterprises and promoting the creation of new ones. For this purpose, it offers a range of services, including the planning and implementation of cross-sectoral cooperation and networking activities, as well as awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy and public relations activities. In

[36] The Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSRDF), UN Global Impact Program on Geor*gia. (2007) Study of the attitudes of the population of Tbilisi towards corporate social responsibility. https://csrgeorgia.com/uploads/publications/CSR_Study_GEO.pdf*

[37] Gigauri, I. & Djakeli, K. (2021). Remote working challenges for Georgian social enterprises in the context of the current pandemic. *Holistica Journal of Business and Public Administration* 12: 39–53.

[38] https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/132460

recent years, they have held several important events and campaigns, such as the *B2B Fair 2017*[39], *Social Entrepreneurship Youth Fest*[40], and the *New Year Fair* in cooperation with the Georgian Heritage Crafts Association and Tbilisi City Hall[41].

CSR in Georgia

As far as corporate social responsibility (CSR) is concerned, some peculiarities can be identified in the Georgian case. Apart from the historical context explained above, CSR in Georgia today is still at an early stage of development. Some companies use the concept mostly for marketing purposes and without much engagement, while others aim at having a positive impact on the environment, people, or the economy.

What is the advantage and benefit for business to cooperate with civil society? This is a key question asked by various stakeholders, including the companies themselves. As Georgian CSR expert Lela Khoperia points out, CSR programs are individually tailored to the priorities of a company. Crucially, businesses are most likely to engage with social groups that have a good reputation in the communities they serve. If the company sees an experienced civil society organization working on a certain topic successfully, then the company is more likely to reach out. Therefore, reputation and reliability are important!

Another important reason to form partnerships is that working on the same challenge from different angles and with different experiences saves time and resources. When a company recognizes this advantage, it has little hesitation to transform and evolve its CSR programs. When it comes to providing resources in collaboration with civil society, the corporate sector achieves better results, social impact is more tangible, and visibility is greater.

One of the biggest challenges Georgian companies face in furthering their CSR programs and activities is the lack of knowledge and experience. When CSR is not built into the individual corporate structure, it is often considered a charity exercise rather than a central social responsibility of companies. In order to develop and integrate social responsibility within corporate structures, financial stability is needed, which is another obstacle for many medium-sized companies in Georgia that still consider profit maximization as their top priority. Financially, only well-established, large corporations are in a position to invest in the process of transforming business organizations into socially responsible enterprises.

"Since many small and medium companies are already operating responsibly, integration of CSR into their activities does mean transforming their operations, but rather maximizing the effectiveness of their existing practices. Thus, social responsibility is not an extra burden for the companies. In fact, it means to do something you have already been doing in a better way and turn the existing reality into your competitive advantage".
(CSRDF Corporate Social Responsibility Toolkit for Small and Medium Companies)

[39] http://gtarchive.georgiatoday.ge/news/8086/First-B2B-Exhibition-of-Social-Enterprises-Held-in-Tbilisi
[40] http://seageorgia.ge/en/news/56
[41] http://www.seageorgia.ge/en/about-us/background

Last but not least, a stimulating environment provided by the governmental side is of great importance as well. Currently, the Georgian government does not have a unified strategy to promote CSR, and there is no state policy in this regard. However, there are several state initiatives that directly and/or indirectly support the process of corporate social responsibility development in Georgia. These initiatives address business and human rights through the Georgian Government's *Action Plan on the Protection of Human Rights*, *Charity Tax Incentives*[42], as well as the *Strategy of Georgia on Social-Economic Development Georgia 2020*[43], which aims at promoting principles of sustainable development.

CSRDG as a flagship organization plays an integral role for the furthering of cross-sectoral cooperation in Georgia and aims to support this process both on an institutional and individual level. To raise awareness, they publish an CSR Blog[44] with news and expert opinions on specific aspects and benefits of CSR. In addition, the CSR-Hub Georgia[45] was launched with the support of the EU and the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation* (KAS), compiling literature on the concept and international standards, as well as guides and toolkits on best practices for small and medium-sized enterprises. Last but not least, CSRDG established another tangible initiative, the Meliora Award for Responsible Business in Georgia[46], offering companies the opportunity to promote their CSR efforts and receive recognition for best practices.

3.3. The way ahead: Pathways & strategies for cross-sector cooperation in Georgia

Transparency & Accountability

In Georgia, where strong cross-sector partnerships are still a novelty, some tangible strategies for businesses, governments, and civil society actors are needed. This can improve sustainability and the ethical basis for successful long-term cooperation. One of the greatest challenges to building trust is 'greenwashing', i.e., one-time campaigns that are a facade for companies aiming to improve their reputation to maximize profit. While this is a complex issue, there are remedies for this: transparency and accountability!

Clear communication and transparent reporting are two of the most important components to avoid labeling and reputational issues. If companies feel accountable to share their socially responsible activities and beyond, this can benefit the company in the long run by increasing trust, interest, and motivation of other stakeholders to collaborate with them[47]. This includes an openness towards internal challenges and problems, which is key to creating a fair and transparent society. Additionally, in order to prevent and detect 'greenwashing', local NGOs have developed screening programs, that reveal hidden trade-offs or baseless claims.

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[42] *Ordinance of the Government of Georgia on On Establishing an Interagency Human Rights Council and Approving its Statute. Document N 551. 13.12.2016*

[43] *Ordinance of the Government of Georgia on Social-economic Development Strategy of Georgia "GEORGIA 2020". Document N 400. 17.06.2014*

[44] http://csrblog.ge

[45] https://csrgeorgia.com/en/home

[46] https://meliora.ge/en/home

[47] Khoperia, L. and Chkheidze E. (2018). Corporate social responsibility Tolkit for small and medium enterprises. *The Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, Pub. Petiti.* Tbilisi. P. 51

Trust-building needs time

Trust is central to building stable and sustainable partnerships. It cannot be taken for granted, but requires consistent, long-term work and in-depth experiences. Usually, Georgian companies initiate their first contacts with government or civil society actors they know and trust, who have a good reputation, and who can be relied on both thematically and in terms of their resources. They will seek these actors in their own networks or rely on intermediaries who are aware of the needs and requirements from all sides involved.

Building trust takes time and relentless effort, but once it has been established, a partnership can be hugely successful in the long run. Such a success story is the partnership between *Natakhtari Fund* and *Our Home Georgia Association*, who have been working together for ten years to help young people in need. Founded in 1991, *Natakhtari* is a leader in the Georgian beer and soft drink market and established the Natakhtari Fund in 2011 as its CSR program. Their partner, Our Home Georgia, is an association engaged in immediate and long-term commitment to improve the quality of life of children and their families. The aim of this partnership was to empower youth without parental care and prepare them for an independent life. To this end, about 1 million GEL (approximately 370,000 EUR) was spent from the Natakhtari Fund to support over 500 beneficiaries. As a testimony to this successful partnership, the Fund has been awarded several CSR awards,

> *"We knew at the beginning that we would see results within several years, and this award is proof that our expectations were right: we have achieved results! The mechanism (caring for adolescents), worked out by the Natakhtari Company and Our Home Georgia, has proved a success, proven by the fact that more than 270 youngsters have been able to receive a professional education, while over 300 have found jobs, since the outset."*
> Nino Surmava, Brand Manager of Natakhtari

The role of mediation: Individual work with sectors needed

Since the different sectors speak different languages, translation is required for them to understand each other properly. This is where intermediaries come in, who can help in linking the different sectors and play a crucial role in creating and sustaining collaborations. Especially at the current stage, it is very difficult to make the process sustainable in Georgia given the lack of official guidelines or tools, making mediators all the more important.

Talking to each other, building bridges, and showing positive examples are core tasks for mediators who can move between actors from different sectors. This requires individual work with each sector and the actors who belong to them. Companies should recognize that working with civil society is an important tool to increase the social impact of their business, so they can recognize the benefits of this relationship. On the other hand, facilitators should work closely with civil society actors to demonstrate that working with businesses and governments and holding them accountable is important for a stronger society and the development of the country. In addition, they should recognize their own interest and a solid stake in the process. Last but not least, creating small best practices and sharing them can yield many unexpected benefits. The Pro Bono Georgia mediation initiative and the CSRDG are taking on this difficult task, with great courage to be the pioneers and impulse-givers of this process.

4. #GEONext: Partnerships for Youth Engagement

Through our joint project *#GEOYOUTH2020*, Polis180 and GIP together with 150 youths across Georgia identified challenges for young people to get involved in politics and solution approaches to civic engagement, resulting in a jointly drafted Youth Manifesto. Building on this successful interaction, *#GEOYOUTH2021* focused on providing training and funds for the youths to implement their own ideas and projects in their local communities. As we learned in the process, it is here that these actions have the most direct impact, which is why continued support is crucial to ensure democratic resilience and sustainability – especially given the ongoing political turmoil on the national level. Increased citizen participation requires raising civic awareness, building capability and confidence of various strata of Georgian society to be engaged in democratic life, and encouraging social activism beyond the formal civil society sector. This is precisely where **#GEONext** set off.[48]

If young people are not actively involved in politics, important negotiation processes towards a pluralistic society are inhibited. Therefore, it is vital that this generation - the first one to grow up in a democratic system – is prepared for the discourses constituting it. The EU initiated the Eastern Partnership program[49] in order to support these national processes, notably civil society and youth, who hold a key position to ensure resilience of democratization processes but lack representation and participation. Building on our experiences, we therefore want to take participation to the next level. Together with a broad international network of stakeholders, we want to highlight the importance of social corporate responsibility and cross-sector partnerships for sustainable and impactful civic engagement.

While our activities have established active networks among young people willing to engage in local politics, it is also essential to link them to a broader civil society sector, including NGOs, private companies and the public sector. The aim of #GEONext therefore is to use civic education and international, cross-sectoral cooperation to prepare the next generation of Georgians to be civically engaged, know and exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities, harness technology, and build partnerships, including with the private sector, in order to demand and facilitate increased government accountability.

Eight youth groups from different parts of Georgia were selected in a competitive process based on transparent criteria. Their project proposals tackle the challenges of *digitalization*, *inclusion*, *climate/sustainability* and *regional economic development* in their respective communities. In addition to receiving funding and administrative support, they were coupled with mentors[50] from international businesses and non-governmental organizations. These helped them in developing their ideas, implementing their projects, and engaging a wider audience in their activities and the dissemination of results. What is more, four co-mentors[51] from German civil society acted as experts on the four topics, providing advice and training.

[48] https://polis180.org/geonext-partnerships-for-youth-engagement/
[49] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership_en
[50] https://polis180.org/blog/2022/09/22/geonext-meet-the-mentors/
[51] https://polis180.org/blog/2022/06/27/put-your-hands-together-for-our-geonext-co-mentors/

#GEONext was accompanied by a series of inputs by international experts, including during the kickoff session[52] and through a German-Georgian webinar on cross-sector cooperation.[53] A conference in Tbilisi in October 2022 brings together the youth groups, their mentors and co-mentors, as well as diverse actors from all relevant sectors to discuss the results of the local projects and the role of cross-sector cooperation to tackle these challenges. The following project examples from diverse regions in Georgia demonstrate how even on a small scale, cross-sector engagement can have meaningful and lasting impacts.

4.1 Challenge 1: Climate Change / Sustainability

The EU is positioning itself at the forefront of climate change mitigation and adaptation. With its Green Deal,[54] it launched an ambitious roadmap on the way toward climate neutrality no later than 2050. To become a resource-efficient and climate-smart economic hub, the Green Deal has the goal of eradicating greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and reducing them by 50 per cent by 2030, while at the same time decoupling economic growth from resources and engaging in transparent and inclusive transformation processes. But what does this mean in practice, and how will these policy pillars be implemented?

To reach its goal by 2050, the Green Deal relies on cross-sectoral cooperation as all sectors actively contribute to achieving the 2050 targets. First comes the promotion of innovative climate-friendly technologies and providing financial resources for climate-smart innovation. The second pillar addresses infrastructure, reimagining transportation and energy grids to become more sustainable through decarbonisation of the energy sector. The final goal is creating fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly global food systems.[55] To reach the green economy goal, financial initiatives for the EU partners under the European Payments Initiative (EPI) countries, including Georgia, are required.[56] Financial initiatives include private-public investments, sustainable investment taxonomies, and growth in labor strategies.

The Georgian Perspective

Georgia like other countries in the region mostly face air pollution challenges, lack sustainable waste management systems, and struggle to ensure safe water and food supplies. The EU and Georgia work together in four key policy areas tackling environmental degradation while engaging in policies respecting people and the planet, ensuring climate standards and improving the overall life quality of the Georgian population. In order to reach these policy goals and ensure sustainability, strong civil society, grassroots engagement, and active youth are vital. Only by linking young people to the civil society sector and through the establishment of cross-sectoral partnerships, a re-imagination of Georgia's economy can be successful. This was underlined by UN Secretary General António Guterres during the 2021 United Nations

[52] https://gip.ge/kicking-off-geonext2022/
[53] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lurk6JSUaiU
[54] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en
[55] https://www.unsdsn.org/sdsn-and-eesc-host-eu-policy-workshop-farm-to-fork-how-to-make-it-work
[56] https://www.epicompany.eu/

Climate Change Conference (COP26): "Young people have been in the forefront of putting forward positive solutions, advocating for climate justice and holding leaders to account. We need young people everywhere to keep raising your voices."[57]

Grassroots Action: Youth4climate

This is exactly the stance #GEONext pursues: Enabling international cross-sectoral cooperation by supporting Georgia's youth in building partnerships with others sectors to implement regional projects, while simultaneously facilitating accountability and transparency on the part of the Georgian government. *#GEOnext is taking youth engagement seriously by putting young activists at the frontline for fighting climate change.* Our initiative in Kazbegi is actively working on strengthening eco-knowledge through capacity-building workshops for youth to raise awareness through the mobilization of local volunteers, as explained by their founder Salome Kushashvili: "We have managed to form a group of local volunteers, who have a strong wish and possibility to do their best (…) and have productive results".

Linking climate change to overarching societal challenges is the prime goal of the *Youth Center Illuminator*,[58] active in Pankisi Valley. The organization not only delivers capacity building and local clean-up actions to promote environmental competence among Georgia's youth, but also actively promotes the integration of ethnic minorities as the organization's founder Giorgi Mokverashvili emphasizes: "We want the youth of our valley to be maximally involved in civic activities (while at the same time) increasing the level of integration between the Kist ethnic minority and Georgians. This is the most important issue for us".

The Pankisi group visiting a Polyvim recycling facility

Clearly, the EU Green Deal and the EPI have established the foundation for Georgia´s transformation towards a green economy. However, it is the engagement of cross-sectoral youth grassroots activism that fills these policies with actual meaning. Cross-sectoral participatory youth activism is truly shaping global climate protection. Clearly, local, global, and regional partnerships are imperative for successful climate action from the regional to the global level.

[57] https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1101712
[58] https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064196376102

4.2 Challenge 2: Inclusion

Social inclusion is defined as "the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society–improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity"[59]. While a recent study[60] commissioned by the Council of Europe detects a decline of negative perceptions towards minorities in Georgia, the level of exclusion of certain social groups is still high. Even though attitudes towards ethnic and religious minorities improved during the last years, the majority of Georgians is not aware of the challenges people with disabilities face in their daily lives. But if the majority of society does not even know or acknowledge that certain societal groups are excluded, how can their living conditions and social participation be improved?

Tackling discrimination against people with disabilities in Georgia

According to the World Report on Disability[61], discrimination against people with disabilities leads to a lesser degree of economic activity and higher rates of poverty, as well as serious barriers to participating in all levels of daily live (using public services, participating in social and cultural events, etc.). These global trends are in line with the findings of a 2021 situation analysis of the rights of people with disabilities in Georgia[62]. In the framework of #GEONext, two groups of young people developed local grassroots initiatives to tackle some of these issues in their respective regions. In their project *Public spaces' accessibility for people with disabilities*, participants focused on the issue of accessibility in public spaces. The second group, *Youth for regional changes* highlighted the importance of professional development and improvement of soft skills in order to increase the chances for people with disabilities in the job market.

To achieve their goals, both groups were supported by experienced actors from the field who offered their perspectives and professional insights. *Caritas Georgia*[63] has been working with marginalized and vulnerable groups since 1994, mainly focusing on their self-responsibility and dignity. *Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) Georgia*[64] contributes to the participation and inclusion of women and marginalized groups by amplifying their voices, especially in local politics.

[59] https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion#3
[60] https://rm.coe.int/book-eng/1680a583d0ndmkaj/https:/rm.coe.int/book-eng/1680a583d0
[61] World Health Organization & World Bank. (2011). World report on disability 2011. World Health Organization. *https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44575*
[62] https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/situation-analysis-rights-people-disabilities-georgia-2021
[63] https://caritas.ge/
[64] https://www.wecf.ge/

Both groups greatly benefited from the advice they received from their mentors during the at times challenging implementation of their initiatives: "As a small initiative group, we faced many challenges during the project planning and implementation stage, such as limited experience, team building, community mobilization, time management. However, the mentors shared their knowledge and experience from their large organizations. Thus, this cooperation and experience sharing was a very interesting and pleasant process for us" said Dima Karchava from Senaki's youth initiative group *Aba Ula*. According to Rima Beridze from *Youth for regional changes,* the cooperation with well-established NGOs did not only provide his group with knowledge and advice, but also with access to these NGOs' networks of activists.

By combining a local grassroots local perspective of young people with and without disabilities with the guidance and professional backgrounds of established international organizations from the field, both groups were able to develop and implement their projects in a much more effective and comprehensive manner, while their international partners benefited from their innovative ideas and approaches, as well as knowledge of the local needs.

4.3 Challenge 3: Regional Economic Development

According to the World Bank[65] and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development[66], Georgia is boosting its competitiveness, connectivity and regional integration, innovation and digital transformation. But why is the government in Tbilisi putting so much effort into local economic development? And what does it mean in the Georgian context?

The political and the economic shock in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in intra-ethnic conflicts and a rapidly deteriorating business climate, led to drastic economic decline in Georgia. The Rose Revolution, the devastating Russian-Georgian five-day war over the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, and the global economic crisis set the Georgian economy back again. Although international donors provided the country with financial reconstruction packages,[67] there were significant insecurities preventing sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The lack of economic reforms, increasing social problems, and state and government intervention, as well as confrontations with Russia, were the reasons for a renewed change of power in the fall of 2012[68]. This political instability led to decreasing private investments with severe impacts on ordinary people. This was reinforced in 2020 when the global pandemic hit the world's economies.

Another major problem of Georgia's economy is its dependence on the agricultural sector which in 2017 accounted for about 50 percent of all employed persons in the country. This

[65] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview
[66] https://www.ebrd.com/georgia.html
[67] https://reliefweb.int/report/georgia/international-donors-conference-georgia-call-wide-international-support-stabilisation
[68] https://www.npr.org/2012/10/02/162169654/opposition-victory-signals-new-direction-for-georgia

indicates some of the key problems: critical structural challenges remain particularly weak productivity and the necessity to create high-quality jobs in rural areas.[69] The World Bank summarizes: "Many Georgians in rural areas remain engaged in low productivity agriculture. Measures of human capital continue to be weak, with poor learning outcomes and a lack of linkages between education and private sector needs. In addition, Georgia's trade openness and reliance on income from tourism make it vulnerable to external and global shocks"[70]. Clearly, Georgia needs creative solutions and engaged youth in a decentralized effort to overcome the socioeconomic differences between urban and rural areas by local diversification strategies. How can the Georgian people achieve higher productivity and generate inclusive economic growth? The answer is: Together across sectors and with a grassroots approach!

Local grassroots movements and innovative ideas for economic growth

In the process of territorial development in Georgia and transforming urban and rural areas, the aim of bottom-up cross-sectoral cooperation is to reduce socio-economic disparities between regions and municipalities. Local democracy must be strengthened in a process of inclusive participation as it leads to a better life for everyone in the affected communities. This is what the two projects realized in the framework of #GEONext were all about. Apart from bringing together young people invested in societal change and the pro-European stance of youth in Georgia and Germany who can support and learn from each other, the exchange with mentors from the business world leads to an increase in acceptance and credibility of young voices in decision-making processes. In this exchange, they learned how their ideas can become sustainable solutions to change systemic inequalities and imbalances to value the aspect of living in an equitable and just society.

The first group focused on the utilization potential of Baghdadi Municipality. The main purpose of the project was to support honey and wine producers. The project was carried out in two ways: by introducing ways of utilizing opportunities for better sales by delivering lectures about touristic social platforms such as *Airbnb* for winery owners and honey producers. In a second step, the group invited professionals from the field and arranged practical workshops for honey producers regarding building Api-touristic facilities (tourism connected to beekeeping as a traditional profession) in their everyday workplace. A notable achievement by the group was the increased interconnection between local business owners. Winery owners and honey producers clearly felt the importance of establishing cooperatives or associations as an essential tool for fostering cooperation, attracting investments, and increasing the quality of their products. The group organized an exchange with bigger companies to show the participants how they are working together with municipalities and to use the international experience of how people in more recognized brands work together with them.

[69] OECD (2017). Migration and agriculture in Georgia. *Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Georgia*

[70] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview

Graduation Ceremony of the *Summer Camp of Youth Ideas*

The second group organized a *Camp of the Youth Ideas*. They met with young people in the region of Adjara, bringing them together with experts in the field of regional economic development and including perspectives from European youth stakeholders. The main goal of this project was to give school children living in the Kobuleti municipality theoretical and practical know-ledge in the preparation and implementation of start-up projects (micro and small projects related to entrepreneurship as well as innovative technologies). Their ideas included creating a social space with books, a reading room, a work space and a small cafe, creating an app that will include educational materials, and video lessons which will help highschoolers prepare for university exams or tackling the issue of student housing.

These projects impressively demonstrate the importance of grassroots initiatives and how it is significantly contributing to an inclusive Georgian economy. If we want to see a more just and inclusive society where everyone benefits, not just in Georgia, successful business owners need to team up with civil society and especially youth initiatives to develop an inclusive and sustainable local economic system for individuals, municipalities and cities.

4.4 Challenge 4: Digitalization / Entrepreneurship

Digital transformation has become a central buzzword of the 21st century. Mostly, the focus is on the transformation of businesses to incorporate digital technologies in the way they work, produce, and deliver to their customers. Additionally, there are now new business sectors that would not exist without the respective technologies such as the social media industry, online retail and e-commerce, as well as web design. But digital transformation is also about the changes these digitization processes follow, and how we as a society communicate, consume, work, and interact with each other. News consumption over the last decade changed drastically from newspapers to online news, from radio to podcast, from live TV to social media platforms.[71] The same is true for political communication.

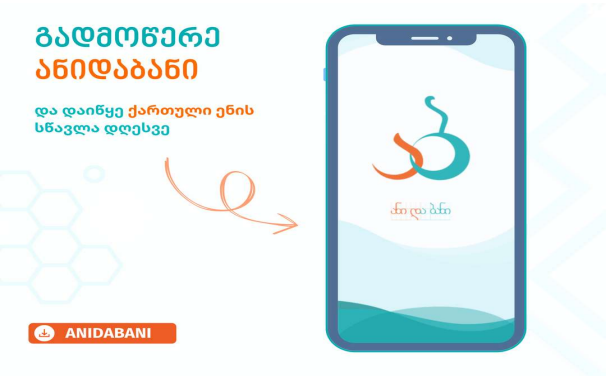
Digital transformation and youth engagement

This changed pattern of news consumption is most visible within a younger generation and it impacts how young people practice civil engagement. Already in 2012, a study noticed that

[71] YouGov (2022): *Global media outlook report 2022*

"the image of a citizenry whose interaction with traditional public information involves passive consumption of top-down mass communication content" is no longer true for most persons under 30. Rather, there is a shift towards multiple sources of information and active engagement with the content, as well as their own content production. This might lead to a citizenship model which "emphasizes new repertoires of political action based on personal expression through social networks often using digital media."[72] However, this new form of civil engagement requires a different skill set than classical activism. A survey conducted in 2020 found that young people across the world were most willing to learn digital skills when international organizations would engage with them. Other aspects young people appreciated was assistance in entrepreneurial activities, engaging youth through meetings and conferences as well as support in the form of mentorship, financial aid, or skill cultivation.[73]

Cross-sectoral cooperation towards youth engagement for digital transformation



The digital application *Anidabani* is a Georgian language learning mobile application especially designed for ethnic minorities in Georgia.[74] Knowledge of the state language is key for the social and cultural integration of ethnic minorities. The aim of this project is thus to facilitate Armenian and Azerbaijani speaking citizens' integration into Georgian society, and simultaneously to digitize Georgian language teaching. With the support of #GEONext, the group was able to create *3000 new exercises* to enhance the application's content!

During the project, the project team cooperated with *Sweeft*, an international software development and digital marketing company. They received extensive advice in two fields: digital marketing and web development. In terms of digital marketing, the Head of Marketing of Sweeft, Tako Nibladze, assisted them to define the target audience more precisely and recommended content variations through social media platforms. She provided guidance to enhance app store optimization (ASO) of Anidabani to increase the visibility of the app in the search results of app stores, and suggested developing spell-checker features in Anidabani.

In their assessment, the project team found that the cross-sectoral cooperation helped them immensely in developing a user-friendly and highly functional application. This case shows how digital and marketing skills of businesses can directly benefit youth engagement. Crucially, as digital transformation does not only affect the business sector but every aspect of our lives, cross-sectoral cooperation and common learning processes should be incorporated comprehensively in efforts of youth and civil society engagement. In the long run, this will benefit both sides, and can help encourage necessary societal changes.

[72] Bennett, W. L.; Freelon, D. G.; Hussain, M.; Wells, C. (2022). *Digital Media and Youth Engagement*
[73] International Telecommunication Union Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Society (2020). *ITU 2020 Youth Engagement Survey – Data and Interpretation*
[74] https://m.apkpure.com/anidabani/com.anidabaniapp

Conclusions & Recommendations

This paper is neither exhaustive nor claiming a prerogative of interpretation. Instead, informed by expert discussions, academic research and practical experience in Georgia and Germany, it aims at inspiring a conversation across sectors and borders based on the recognition that many pressing problems of our time are so complex that none of us can solve them alone, and that joining forces for a common cause entails benefits for all partners.

The following recommendations draw on these various inputs and aim at providing practical tips to start and maintain partnerships across sectoral boundaries. Further and more context specific resources are provided by numerous agencies, research institutes, and practitioners around the world, many of which are mentioned and referenced above. As cross-sectoral collaboration is still far from being common practice for most actors, the conversation is still under-developed. Therefore, the authors encourage everyone to engage in this exchange, to contribute their thoughts, experiences and ideas, and to challenge the assumptions presented here. We look forward to feedback and welcome suggestions anytime and hope that these recommendations will help you in developing new ideas and approaches, build new partnerships, and add your contribution to improving the conditions for sustainable development from the local to the global level.

Stay curious!
An important prerequisite for successful cross-sectoral cooperation is an open mind on all sides, and the ability to think and act outside established routines. Developing a mutual understanding of each other's operational logic takes time and conscious efforts, but it is well-invested as it opens up a space for common learning, leading to new opportunities and approaches. As this is likely to pose a challenge throughout the process, preserving a sense of curiosity helps keeping up both morale and success.

Do your research!
Before contacting potential partners, it is vital to familiarize yourself with their goals, visions, and activities. Try to understand how they operate, where they come from and what drives them. You can also ask in your network for first-hand encounters with them. This should not replace introductory presentations during the first meeting, but having a clear picture helps you to ask more pointed questions, develop and present clearer ideas, and act professionally.

Start small – but start!
If you are new to the field of cross-sectoral organization, it is advisable not to plunge into a long term, multi-stakeholder venture right away. Instead, small-scale partnerships on the local level can provide a fertile learning ground on which to build on. At the same time, a lack of experience should not prevent you from getting started if you have a sound idea and did your research on potential partners. You can never plan for everything or answer every question beforehand – this is part of the process, and with your partners contributing their experience, problems might even develop into opportunities!

Reduce prejudices & appreciate differences!

Working in a specific sector usually gives you a specific perspective, as well as a set of strengths needed to succeed in your field. When pooling resources, you will find that you have additional skills at your disposal, and an effective division of tasks can maximize the results while minimizing expenses. At the same time, keeping an open mind for a different organizational culture can contribute to improvements within the project as well as within your own team, e.g., in the nexus between time efficiency and quality of decision-making. And finally, when engaging with actors from other sectors you may find that certain practices you criticize might not be due to ill intentions but rather the result of a lack of knowledge. Here, **raising awareness** and providing tangible alternatives can make a great difference and possibly be the gateway for a fruitful partnership all actors involved can learn from. While distributing tasks makes sense, **sharing responsibility** and collaboration on **eye-level** are key!

Write it down!

Even if your partnership is absolutely harmonious from the start, make sure to put down all agreements in writing. Take minutes of meetings and share them with each other, and clearly define central terms to make sure you have the same expectations and understandings. Formalization is essential to avoid frustrations and ensure commitment, and a valuable resource for the onboarding of new team members or partners joining in the course of the process.

Talk!

Arguably the most important basis for successful cooperation is trust which needs to evolve and be fostered throughout the process. Be frank from the start about your expectations and what you bring to the table. If something happens that prevents you from meeting a deadline or keeping your end of the deal as promised, make sure to explain the problem as soon as it occurs. Of course, you do not have to involve your partner in the details of your personal or professional challenges, but they need to know that they can rely on you. Sometimes, admitting a weakness can even deepen a relationship – after all, nobody is perfect, and every success involves overcoming failure, and learning from it.

Trust your gut!

There are a multitude of reasons why cross-sectoral cooperation is beneficial and what can be learned and gained from it. However, not every partnership is a good match. If you are tempted by an offer, but do not feel comfortable with the conditions, address this within your team and your contact at the partner institution. If your doubts cannot be erased, it might be better to abandon the project. The same applies when you have already started working together and feel that the project is going in the wrong direction. Open and clear communication to all relevant stakeholders is key and can help to avoid wrong perceptions within and beyond your network.

Trustbuilding needs time!

Trust is the key to building stable and sustainable partnerships. It cannot be taken for granted, but requires consistent, long-term work and deep experience. Listening to each other, understanding each other and finding common ground, even if it's just a seemingly fine point, paves the way for a strategic partnership. Don't give up if things don't work out right away, but ask yourself, whether you are a business enterprise or a civil society actor, how and by what means you can generate value and contribute positively to a collaborative effort.

Clear communication matters!

Share how your tasks are progressing, how you are working together and what you have achieved. Transparency and accountability are an important part of social responsibility and cross-sector collaboration. In addition, proper communication of results is one of the foundations for success. Constant and professional communication with the selected audience and interested parties will increase the motivation to work together and strengthen your position and reputation in society.

About the authors

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