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Mesopartner Profile

Mesopartner is a knowledge firm that specialises in territorial development, competitiveness and innovation. Our strategic intent is to be globally acknowledged as an innovator in economic development and partnering with strategic customers and associates through capacity building and coaching, as well as programme design, method and tool development and capture, knowledge management, and problem solving.

We operate as a service provider both to development organisations (development agencies, ODA (Official Development Assistance) donors, NGOs and others) and to consultants and consulting firms. Since 2003, the knowledge that we have shared, and the tools that we have developed, have helped development organisations and stakeholders in many developing and transformation countries to conduct territorial development in a more effective and efficient way.

Mesopartner offers the knowledge that local actors need to address the challenge of innovation and change. We develop innovative tools based on territorial development, local economic development, cluster and value chain promotion, strengthening of local innovation systems, and related topics. We coach and equip practitioners. We conduct leading-edge learning events for practitioners.





Foreword

Embracing Change - Economic Development from 2003 to 2013 and beyond

After a decade of operation as a multi-national micro-enterprise, Mesopartner is proud to announce the celebration of its 10th anniversary. Having started as the “PACA guys” 10 years ago, we have widely extended our topical focus, our geographical outreach, our methodological approaches and, of course, our network of associates, collaborators, clients and service providers. During this period the firm saw three new partners joining and one partner leaving in a very tragic way.

Not only the company, but also each individual partner, has gone through times of change. The wider development environment which all of us are working in now looks different from what it did 10 years ago. Certainly, most changes of the individuals, the company and the development system are mutually related and impact on each other. The decisions we make as individual partners or associates influence the company’s direction and strategic orientation, which is also shaped by the greater development environment. Ultimately, Mesopartner’s work in economic development involves trying to achieve relevant impact on the development system, whether in the form of changing mindsets or providing methodological equipment for development practitioners and local stakeholders.

Every change is rooted in individual or organizational efforts and is made possible by the readiness of the wider environment. In this publication on our firm’s 10th anniversary, we take the opportunity to reflect on this force field of individual and company development, and the development of the





global economic development arena. We are keen to understand where we stand, what we have achieved in professional and private terms and where our current limits lie.

In this publication we first present the changing company strategy of Mesopartner over the past decade and explore our legacy by examining Mesopartner's possible contribution to economic development. We then explain why we decided to place a stronger emphasis on specific themes and discuss our latest theme, systems thinking and complexity. We reflect on the question of why the Summer Academy which we organize annually regularly attracts development practitioners from around the world. In addition, we would like to share with our readers the variety of corporate social responsibility activities that Mesopartner undertakes.

Each partner and associate was asked to send one photo that he or she took during the last 10 years showing Mesopartner project work and to describe the situation and developmental implications. In this section on photos and their accompanying story you will find interesting, funny and insightful deliberations and impressions on economic development. The partners and associates also reflect on their time with Mesopartner, why they joined in the first place and what keeps them in or close to the company. Finally, we present our service providers, those individuals who often work invisibly in the background, but who make possible our smooth delivery of services.

We are aware that the future is uncertain and that there are many possible scenarios of how it might play out. We hope that this anniversary reflection on current and past achievements will help us to prepare for another decade in which Mesopartner, with all its related individuals inside and outside the company, will hopefully make some difference by improving conditions and creating opportunities for people in various parts of the world.

Christian Schoen (cs@mesopartner.com)



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A photograph showing a person sitting on the floor in a rustic, possibly outdoor or semi-outdoor, setting. The person is surrounded by a large pile of harvested corn cobs. The background shows a wooden wall and a doorway. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daylight.

The changing company strategy of Mesopartner over time

Mesopartner's understanding of strategy is guided by authors such as Henry Mintzberg. In his classic 1987 article *5 Ps for Strategy*, Mintzberg distinguishes five different concepts of strategy:

1. Strategy as *perspective*: strategy as an ingrained way of perceiving the world in terms of culture, vision, philosophy; the perspective must be shared and must carefully consider the common thinking or behaviour.
2. Strategy as *pattern*: strategy as consistency of behaviour, whether or not intended; gradually the successful approaches merge into a pattern of actions that becomes the strategy.
3. Strategy as *position*: strategy is a means of locating an organization in a competitive market or environment and looking out to find a niche within this environment.
4. Strategy as *plan*: consciously intended course of action made in advance, developed consciously and purposefully.
5. Strategy as *ploy*: manoeuvre intended to outwit an opponent or competitor.



One of the prevailing reasons for founding Mesopartner in 2003 was the strong demand for the PACA methodology. Its developer, the late Joerg Meyer-Stamer, wished to increase the supply basis for offering training and facilitation material and services and develop a community of practice around this rapid appraisal technique. In other words, we started Mesopartner as the 'PACA guys' with the intention of ensuring high-quality service delivery for PACA-related activities. Our first strapline *Local Economic Delivery* reflects this ambition and self-perception. Translated into the strategic framework of Mintzberg, our strategy was probably always based on 'pattern', 'perspective' and even earlier on 'position'. What do these three factors exactly mean in the context of Mesopartner's first ten years of existence?

- 'Strategy as perspective' addresses the alignment among the partners and with the growing network of associates. Before the start of the process of jointly working on LED projects, the various company members had partly different views on how to go about territorial and sectoral economic development. Through internal discussions and

joint activities and training, a gradual process of alignment took place, e.g. in terms of what we consider iron principles of economic development, such as market orientation, participation or facilitation. The key principles remained widely the same in all those years, although the perspective changed from product focus to process focus, flexibly combining methods and instruments. It recently changed to systemic thinking, acknowledging that we are dealing with complex adaptive systems in economic development.

- 'Strategy as pattern' addresses the activities pursued by the different partners and associates involved in consulting, training and facilitation activities, and it is causally related to 'perspective'. Initially, partners and associates carried out development activities in different ways – some did it in a more participatory way, others in a less participatory way, some approached LED rather from the social or planning angle, and others from the economic angle. Recently some have been more strongly emphasizing the systemic and complex nature of development work, while others are still pursuing the linear view, favouring best



practices over experimentation. After a while, a more coherent and consistent pattern of project-related and company-related activities typically emerges. Moreover, a consistent pattern of our work is strengthening institutions. When we conduct fieldwork, training or research, it is our aim to equip organizations to use the insights in a systemic way, to take over some of the tasks we carry out, and to support change processes.

- 'Strategy as position' addresses the competitive advantages and uniqueness initially of the PACA approach as a product and later Mesopartner as a company within the international economic development community. This is more than the development and application of individual tools and instruments for economic development. It also relates to the way Mesopartner approaches economic development, our reputation globally and the attention we receive. The stronger our reputation grew, the more we could let loose on individual methodologies. We started to realise that our bottom-up perspective is valid not only in the countries and regions where we work, but that it could have supranational and international value. The strategic intent that has guided the company's orientation since then was formulated by the partners in a 2008 company meeting in Dortmund and it is still valid today: *Being globally acknowledged as an innovator in (territorial) development and partnering with strategic customers and associates through capacity building and coaching, as well as programme design, method and tool development and capture, knowledge management and problem solving.*

The concept of strategic intent, introduced by the management thinkers Gary Hamel and C K Prahalad, suggests that the key issue in strategy is not to plan incremental steps to move from some state in the present to a somewhat better state at some time in the future. Strategy is rather about allowing and exploiting the gap between ambition and resources. It is not only about looking at the existing resources and asking what to do with them – it is rather about formulating an ambition and then mobilising the resources that are necessary to fulfil it. The strategic intent presented above is exactly about this kind of stretch goal: in order to achieve it we need to stretch ourselves and our resources permanently and take on challenges and sometimes accept drawbacks in order to learn and improve next time.

A strategy is long lasting and cannot be revised on an annual or biannual basis as would be done with a plan. So when our founding partner and mentor Joerg Meyer-Stamer passed away in 2009, we decided to stick to our strategic intent, although we had lost one of our essential resources. At that time we tried to make the strategic intent more operational by moving into new themes, while still upholding our philosophy and principles. The new tagline 'connect the dots' is the visible expression of this reorientation and highlights our attempt to address development in a systemic way. At the same time, all the partners try to identify consulting opportunities and theme-related work that are in line with our strategic intent, which in turn helps to position Mesopartner where we think it should be.

Christian Schoen (cs@mesopartner.com)

A close-up photograph of several golden wheat stalks hanging from a dark, weathered wooden beam. The wheat is ripe and has a warm, golden-brown hue. The wooden beam is dark and shows signs of age and wear. The background is dark, making the wheat stand out.

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Mesopartner's contribution to development

Our 10th anniversary is a good time to ask what Mesopartner's contribution has been to development and change. As the firm has usually an advisory or training role in larger programmes or project structures, it is not an easy task to attribute specific outcomes or impacts to the work of the partners and associates. Nevertheless, as Mesopartner is part of the development community, we would like to highlight some areas where we locate our specific contributions to the broader goals of development.

Strengthening the business logic in meso institutions

One of our important goals during the past decade was to better understand economic development from a business perspective. As Mesopartner is mainly working at the meso level, we encourage support organisations to put themselves in the shoes of businesses. Taking this perspective opens up a wide range of learning opportunities and the chance to overcome prejudices. Businesses have to act and survive in markets, are often faced with bureaucratic obstacles and often work very much in an isolated way. Getting a better picture of the reality in which they act requires the openness to really look into the economic systems they work in and are faced with. During the past 10 years our experience has been that if supporting organisations really want to support economic



development, by talking with businesses and analysing the systems they work in, deep insights are obtained about main challenges and opportunities. This is highly relevant for developing demand-oriented services and effective promotional activities. Mesopartner has always emphasized the necessity to change perspectives to be able to really develop the competitive advantages of territories in which the private and public sector deliver their knowledge and responsibilities. In this respect we opened new perspectives for the stakeholders we worked with.

Broaden the perspective to the whole system

Economic development is not only about the right policies, the right laws, or carrots-and-stick incentives. With the systemic competitiveness approach as our backing framework of work, we always emphasized the need for competition between businesses and between support organisations as a driving force to stimulate creativity and economic development efforts. But we also always emphasized the need to look at the economic system as a whole and to understand the interrelations as well as the cause and effect relations between organisations, policies and businesses at the local and national level. As distinct from isolated promotion approaches, we always wanted to promote the whole systems we worked in. These systems could be related to a territory, a value chain, a cluster etc. We believe that this emphasis on systemic interventions has contributed to more holistic interventions in economic development promotion.



Empowerment of local stakeholders

We have never perceived ourselves as a typical consultancy. Most of our clients perceive us rather as coaches. For us this is an important difference. Finally, we see ourselves not as a provider of services based only on the demand of the respective contract partner, but more importantly in our approach to work we follow a philosophy of promoting change in territories and in private sector development. Following our own principles in our work sometimes also needs more in-depth discussions with the partners and stakeholders. But because we believe in our approach we obviously stand by it.

This behaviour has enabled us during the past years to create strong relationships of trust with our contractors and colleagues. For us it is finally a strong contribution to the development field in which it is necessary to follow certain professional principles. In this respect we were able to reduce donor or government dependency on local partners and stakeholders with whom we worked and increased local own and intrinsic potentials for economic development.

Make the measurement of impact more systemic and mindset oriented

During the past decade much emphasis was placed on the measurement of the impact of donor and government interventions. New evaluation frameworks and monitoring procedures were introduced to measure and ensure the impact of activities. Mesopartner supported the development and application of more systemic-oriented and participatory-driven monitoring tools. We learned that most of the change happens within mindsets over time. We often find ourselves in situations where former partners contact us again years after our cooperation. They tell us about how our work

has changed their mindsets and how they still see the impact of the work. This demonstrates to us that we have left deep learning in the regions we worked in and with the stakeholders we worked with.

Make world-class academic research easy to use in developmental practice

One of our strengths and contributions is that we make use of our academic and scientific insights for the adaptation of our work on the ground. Our didactic methods and intervention approaches are backed by new knowledge of change and economic development. Our efforts have not been aimed at contributing to the publication of further research papers, but to making the knowledge of economic development available to practitioners and to developing the tools and methodologies that will allow them to increase their insights and knowledge for real practice. This is one of the strongest contributions we have been able to provide during the past years.

Promotion of a solution- vs. problem-driven way of working

Our work has always focused on the promotion of concrete actions. Concrete activities have the advantage of providing learning loops within stakeholders and the networks in which they live and act. The action itself need not always be the perfect solution, but should be oriented towards the right attitude and objective. It is important that it should create a proactive attitude as well as an intensive learning process within the group of partners and contribute continuously to improvements and adjustments. This process of 'walking the talk' also entails learning from failures. Our philosophy in this respect very much follows Samuel Beckett's principle: Ever try ever fail, no matter. Try again. Fail again. But fail better.

In the complex environments in which we work it is difficult

to clearly identify our specific contributions. The colleagues in our professional networks and our local partners in the field are better able to judge this. We would like to thank all our colleagues, partners and friends for a decade of intensive learning about how to increase economic and social development and how to act in our environment with a proactive but also consistent and business development-oriented way. Through our way of working we have created strong relationships of trust with our partners and started on a path we also want to walk in the coming years. To make this walk exciting we will continuously update our themes and contribute through our work to 'fail smarter'.

Frank Waeltring
(fw@mesopartner.com)
and
Ulrich Harmes-Liedtke
(ul@mesopartner.com)



A woman in a white lab coat, hairnet, and face mask is working in a food processing plant. She is wearing red gloves and holding a stack of yellow cheese sticks. In the background, there are rows of metal machinery and other workers in similar attire. An orange square with the number '3' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

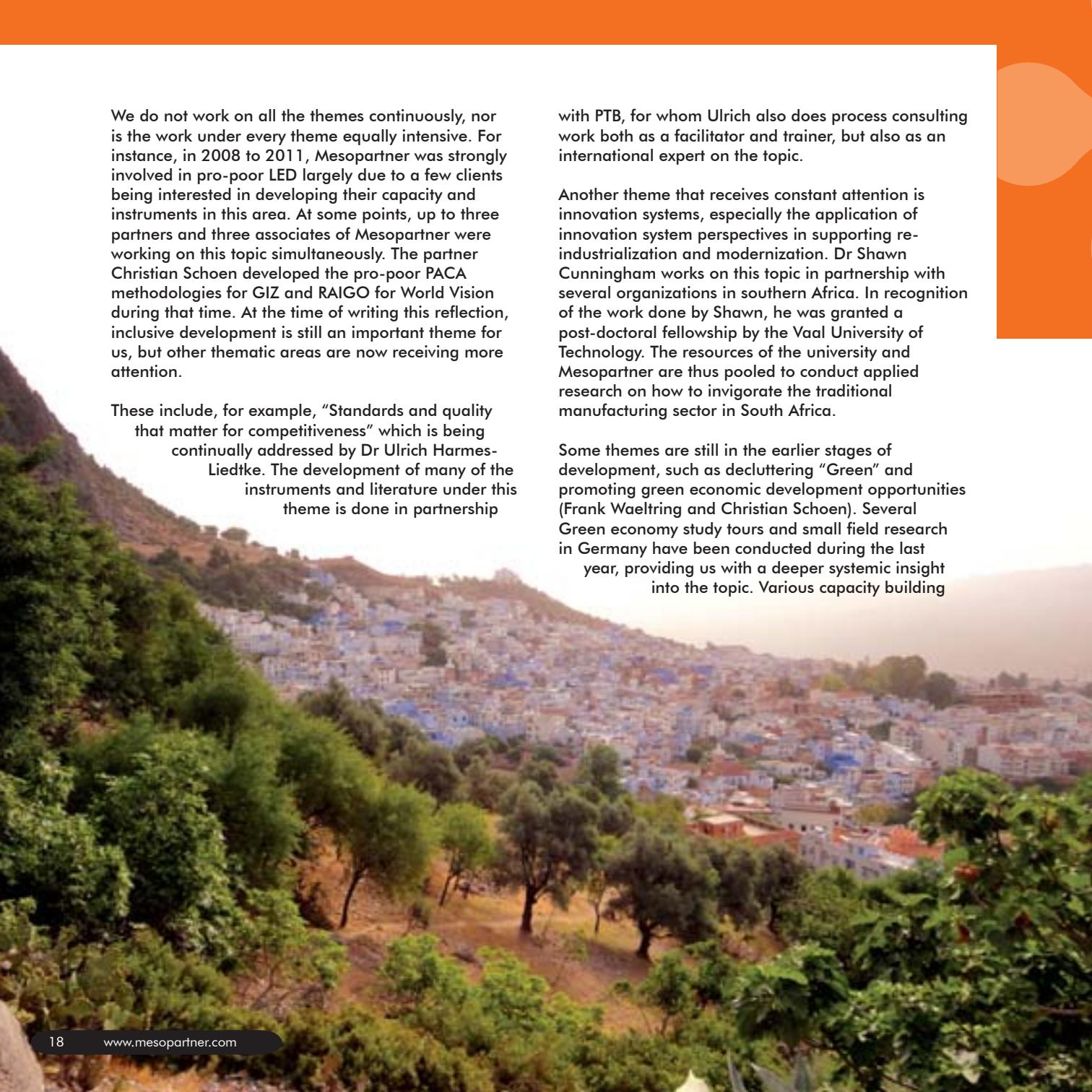
3



Mesopartner's rationale of focusing on themes

In 2011 we decided to structure our learning and collaboration with our customers under various thematic headings, since we realized that presenting our content under products and services was clumsy. In most cases we worked in a collaborative manner with our clients, combining our products, services and process consulting expertise with their institutional capacity, target groups and organizational tools. Very often we develop or refine our own instruments within the context of a client relationship, while our clients at the same time strengthen their own systems, methods and tools.

The structure of the new thematic areas was determined by common bodies of knowledge, expert networks or our unique expertise. We also had the intention of giving our clients much more credit as being co-developers of knowledge and methods. This idea did not work very well, as most of our clients did not really want to have to worry about developing a tool or a whole suite of methods, documents and manuals; they were often more interested in the results and applying instruments in a robust way. Despite this, we have decided to retain this characteristic because many clients like the idea of collaboration.



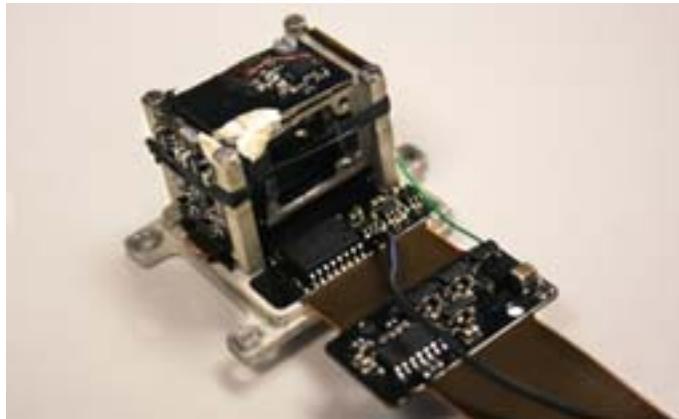
We do not work on all the themes continuously, nor is the work under every theme equally intensive. For instance, in 2008 to 2011, Mesopartner was strongly involved in pro-poor LED largely due to a few clients being interested in developing their capacity and instruments in this area. At some points, up to three partners and three associates of Mesopartner were working on this topic simultaneously. The partner Christian Schoen developed the pro-poor PACA methodologies for GIZ and RAIGO for World Vision during that time. At the time of writing this reflection, inclusive development is still an important theme for us, but other thematic areas are now receiving more attention.

These include, for example, “Standards and quality that matter for competitiveness” which is being continually addressed by Dr Ulrich Harmes-Liedtke. The development of many of the instruments and literature under this theme is done in partnership

with PTB, for whom Ulrich also does process consulting work both as a facilitator and trainer, but also as an international expert on the topic.

Another theme that receives constant attention is innovation systems, especially the application of innovation system perspectives in supporting re-industrialization and modernization. Dr Shawn Cunningham works on this topic in partnership with several organizations in southern Africa. In recognition of the work done by Shawn, he was granted a post-doctoral fellowship by the Vaal University of Technology. The resources of the university and Mesopartner are thus pooled to conduct applied research on how to invigorate the traditional manufacturing sector in South Africa.

Some themes are still in the earlier stages of development, such as decluttering “Green” and promoting green economic development opportunities (Frank Waeltring and Christian Schoen). Several Green economy study tours and small field research in Germany have been conducted during the last year, providing us with a deeper systemic insight into the topic. Various capacity building



sessions were developed and piloted for our clients in Germany and abroad. We plan to delve deeper into this topic and to equip our customers with practical tools to understand and respond to climate change and environmental pollution in the context of their work.

During 2012 Mesopartner decided to use its global bottom-up perspective to engage with the international development community on local issues and the complexity of development. This resulted in a completely new theme of work around the whole issue of systemic thinking and the complexity of development. This theme is not presented on our Mesopartner website, but on a dedicated, separate systemic-insight.com website. The theme complexity is developed in conjunction with the SEEP Network, especially with the Market Facilitation Initiative (MaFI) and with several collaborators who are interested in this new development topic.

For Mesopartner, a thematic approach means that we have to clearly identify and master the underlying theories, develop the relevant instruments to apply our insight in the field, build relevant expert networks,

publish relevant publications and develop training methods and supporting structures for the experts we equip. It means that we do not have tools that stand in isolation. We want to be sure that we and our collaborators have mastered both the theory as well as the practical application in each of the thematic areas that we are active in.

Shawn Cunningham (sc@mesopartner.com)



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What does ‘systemic’ actually mean?

“We need more systemic approaches!” This claim has gained some traction in the development world. Everybody is talking about how to make development approaches more ‘systemic’. USAID recently published a paper titled *Facilitating Systemic Change in Value Chains: Lessons Learned for Strengthening Country Systems*.¹ GIZ organized a conference on *Systemic Approaches in Evaluation*.² DFID, SDC and others are adopting and promoting the *Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P)* approach, which, according to the M4P Hub website³, focuses on “systemic action.” At Mesopartner we also call one of its most central frameworks ‘Systemic Competitiveness’.

But one might ask, what does ‘systemic’ actually mean? Is it just a buzzword or what is hidden behind it? First, we have to differentiate between ‘systematic’ and ‘systemic’, as these two terms are still often confused. If you do something in a systematic way, you follow a clear methodology in a regular and comprehensive way. Doing something in a systemic way, on the other hand, means that you take the wider

¹ <http://kdid.org/library/facilitating-systemic-change-value-chains-lessons-learned-strengthening-country-systems>

² <http://www.evaluation-conference.de/en/index.html>

³ <http://www.m4phub.org>

system and its behaviour into account. While a systematic intervention follows a clear plan in a meticulous and ordered way, a systemic intervention tries to have an impact on the 'whole system'.

The point of looking at the whole when taking a systemic perspective is well illustrated when we look at systemic competitiveness. This opens up the perspective from micro- and macro-economic considerations of competitiveness to the whole picture of an economic system, which also includes institutions (meso-level) and socio-economic considerations (meta-level).

There are various schools of thought and applications in systems theory, but there are three ideas that all of them have in common:

- A need to understand interrelationships
- A commitment to include multiple perspectives
- An awareness of boundaries

Interrelationships are essentially about how things are connected and with what consequences. Interrelationships affect the behaviour of a situation over a period of time, but interrelationships can also change over time. Interrelationships cause non-linear reactions of systems, where the scale of 'effect' is apparently unrelated to the scale of the 'cause', by allowing feedback of information to flow through the system. Interrelations define a context, making interventions highly context specific. The same intervention in different areas has varying results, making it unreliable to translate a 'best' practice from one area to another.

Interrelationships are important in the systemic competitiveness framework when considering how the different aspects within one level interact with each other or how the different levels interact with and influence each other. Changes in the meta-level can lead to changes in other levels. For example, when the attitude towards free market economy changes in a society, this automatically has a consequence for the macro-levels where the necessary legislation is changed.

Thinking systemically is, however, more than making sense of what interrelates with what and how. Thinking systemically includes how we look at the picture; it includes different perspectives. People will 'see', interpret, and make sense of





those interrelationships in different ways. The concept of perspectives in thinking systemically pushes us further than just considering stakeholder interests. We need to understand that different stakeholder groups may not share the same perspective, and most importantly, any one stakeholder will hold several different perspectives, not all of which will be compatible with each other. Thinking systemically about perspectives will help us make sense of individual, diverse and unintended behaviours.

When applying the systemic competitiveness framework, we need to be aware of the different perspectives. There is no one correct way of assessing the system. This goes beyond a participatory approach of applying the framework. Considering different perspectives draws the focus away from the perceived 'reality' of how the system works and allows us to consider alternatives. Essentially we can not only look at how the world is, but also compare our conclusions with alternative perceptions of what people think the world looks like. This will have important consequences for how we define interventions, as it is the system stakeholders for whom the intervention needs to make sense. Hence, their perspective is relevant. Thinking systemically about perspectives thus gives us a window on motivations through which we can explain and predict behaviours.

The third feature of the concept of thinking systemically is based on the realization that we cannot think about everything. Thus *setting boundaries* around our thinking is not optional. We make situations manageable by setting boundaries. Thinking systemically has to include a process of making this boundary setting conscious. A boundary determines what is deemed relevant and irrelevant, what is important and what is unimportant, what is worthwhile and what is not, who gets what kind of resources for what purpose and whose interests are marginalized, who benefits and who is disadvantaged. Boundaries are sites where values are played out and disagreements are highlighted. Power issues are often wrapped up in boundaries. Boundaries also determine how we approach a situation, what we expect from it, and what methods we might use to manage it. Systemic competitiveness sets some boundaries for us by defining the four levels of competitiveness. The discussion of what element goes into what level is a boundary question. It can have consequences for how we define our interventions.

So, in essence, if we want to call something 'systemic', we have to think about whether it covers the three aspects of interrelationships, perspectives and boundaries to a satisfactory degree, and in an explicit way.

Marcus Jenal (mj@mesopartner.com)

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The Summer Academy and other innovative training events



The concept of the Mesopartner Summer Academy was born in late 2004, with the first being launched in 2005 in Duisburg, Germany. After the huge success of the first Academy and the positive feedback from the participants, the idea of an annual Summer Academy was established. Seven successful academies were held at the same venue in Duisburg, and in 2012 the 8th Summer Academy was moved to the German capital Berlin, a city whose transformation process is familiar to many. The Mesopartners therefore had the insight that Berlin would not only be an exciting city in which to hold the Summer Academy, but could also present a laboratory of complex economic and social polarities and provide a wide range of experience on how to manage and facilitate change in a complex urban-rural environment.

Due to the strong demand, and in order to customize the Summer Academy concept to local realities, Mesopartner conducted a few 'regional' Academies on Economic Development, such as those in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2006, and in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2008, and a few in Pretoria, South Africa, over the years.



In every Academy there is always great excitement in convening a group of about 30 people who are mostly LED practitioners or who are working in related fields. The group of participants is typically from 12 to 15 different countries, each having experience of territorial development processes, value chain development or other such related topics that everyone can relate to.

The format of the Summer Academy is suitably arranged not only to maximize individual learning, but also to enable the connecting of group experiences and sharing of lessons learned. The informal yet structured training format, as well as the creative facilitation methods and tools, assist in drawing out the participants' extensive experience to match the new information and insights presented to the group. Over and above the in-session training, the carefully planned excursions provide further experiential learning and insights reflecting on the impact of structural changes on a territory and future prospects for local economies.

The topics, which change slightly from year to year, are not only relevant to the participants' experience, but the arrangement also allows them to present

case studies, which enable the tools and techniques presented to be tested in a real situation – this gives the rest of the group practical guidelines and tips on approaches and responses to challenges, with perceptive feedback from the trainers.

As the end of the week of a Summer Academy, the participants have not only gained new insights and knowledge, but have also gained new contemporaries and friends – including the Mesopartners – whom they can contact and from whose insights they can draw. Needless to say, once the Summer Academy bug bites, many of the participants return for yet another. This is because no one Summer Academy is exactly like any other, with the participants and experiences differing each year. Working in a dynamic world of regional and local economies, new insights are gained, the





tools are refined and adapted and new techniques are developed and themes elaborated and presented.

The Summer Academy is one of the few opportunities for all the partners and some of the associates to work together and develop training materials and sessions. This has positive spill-over effects on other training events that are later presented by only one or two partners, such as those on creative facilitation, green

economic development, market failures and many other topics. In this way the academy can be regarded as a learning and training design laboratory from which the participants and the partners and their clients benefit for a much longer time beyond just the one week duration of the Academy.

Zini Godden (zg@mesopartner.com)



6

Einladung



MACH MIT.



Connect the dots: Promoting sustainable development beyond project work

In 2010, “Connect the dots” became the new strapline of Mesopartner. During the last 10 years we have tried through our support to create linkages between human beings, support organizations and government bodies responsible for and interested in economic development. We are convinced that we can contribute with this work to more sustainable local development. In our opinion, it is not possible to totally separate our work from our private lives. Frequently we see systems that are disconnected, notice unintended consequences and observe inconsistent development efforts. What we are also trying to do is to “walk the talk”, which means trying to apply our principle of zooming out and looking at the bigger picture and stimulating societal change in areas that are not immediately work related. For instance, it is important for us to support small bottom-up change initiatives in our living environment, which we are doing in different ways.

Ulrich collaborates in his city Chascomús, Argentina, with the local culture movement, La Usina, or the grassroots project, Basura Cero, for waste selection and recycling. He tries to use his contacts with leading academic institutions to stimulate mutual learning between the local community he lives in and academia. His collaboration with the research centre INTECH, a subsidiary of the Universidad



San Martín (UNSAM) and the National Research Council (CONICET), is an attempt to make academic knowledge useful for its host town. He also uses his blog to document stories and insights from his town to promote the place and illustrate his learnings regarding LED.

Shawn and Annelien live in Pretoria, South Africa. They started a recycling initiative in their neighborhood. Shawn regularly participates in public and policy events, contributing his economic development experience to important discussions without charging for his time. He frequently lectures at universities and participates in various think tanks on economic development. He is also active on several boards and advisory committees where he provides advice without compensation.

In Germany many rural villages are losing their attractiveness. Although it is nice to live in the countryside, young people often move out of the

villages, fewer people are born in them and the number of old people is increasing. Several years ago Frank moved back from the city to his home village. With a core group of active people who were born or live in the village, he started with a village conference and several future workshops to find ways of making the location more attractive for the young and old inhabitants, as well as attracting possible new families and tourists. Several cultural, infrastructure and social initiatives have begun to be implemented. Learning from each other and from others is an important principle in this respect. This is an experience from our work: in small towns you also find many innovative and creative young and old people. Building on this knowledge is important, as is looking for new ideas from outside. Facilitating such a progress as a 'local inhabitant' is exciting. Our contacts with other dynamic, innovative and creative small German towns in the surrounding area often help to create bridges and new ideas among the local people.



Due to our project activities, we need to fly frequently and thus contribute to the increase of CO₂ emissions. To take environmental responsibility and support the mitigation efforts, partners like Christian are used to buy CO₂ certificates to at least partly offset the damage done to the environment.

Overall, “walking the talk” in private life is not always easy when travelling regularly and when also having other private duties and interests. Nonetheless, it is always exciting to find opportunities to use our work experience to contribute to the communities and the environment that we live in. And what makes it really exciting is that we use the learning again in our professional lives.

Frank Wältring (fw@mesopartner.com)

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Walking through a decade of cooperation and learning

Ten years ago we started to cooperate with Varazdat Karapetyan in a first training in Armenia. Today Varazdat is the Director of the National SME Agency in Armenia and a strong promoter of the Mesopartner philosophy and our methodologies. In 2012 he also became a Mesopartner associate. We took the opportunity of our 10th anniversary to look back at the past and forward to the future with him.

Frank: Dear Varazdat, we have become 10 years older. Let us take a brief look back from 2003 to today: Where was your first contact with Mesopartner and where did you cooperate with us during the past years? Let us take a walk back through the past decade.

Varazdat: Looking back on these ten years, we can confidently say that our cooperation with Mesopartner really had a huge impact on the economic development in our country. The first acquaintance with Mesopartner came via the German PROSME project (Prosme - Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises) led by PEM Consult and GIZ. At that time I founded the Gerakunik chamber and PROSME became our strategic partner for LED and SME promotion in our region. They involved Mesopartner in their process and it was in 2004 when I was sitting in a first LED



training given by Jörg. Based on this cooperation with PROSME and Mesopartner, we started to implement PACA (Participatory Appraisal of Competitive Advantage) exercises, adjusted the methodology and later also enriched other Mesopartner tools like Compass, LED Café, and Genesis. Last year we also developed together with Mesopartner the 'National SME Promotion Strategy of Armenia'. This strategy became not only my guideline as Director of the National SME Agency, but also the golden thread for the government and also for the support community and donors.

Frank: If you had to define the key element of the Mesopartner philosophy, what would you say?

Varazdat: It is a little difficult to formulate in a single sentence. I would say understanding the economic and human systems and intervening in a participatory way, focusing on economic objectives that can only be reached through cooperation, learning with and from each other, the creation of trust and through action.

Frank: If you look back at our cooperation, what were for you the main learnings with Mesopartner and the methodologies?

Varazdat: There are many learnings, but maybe one important learning for me and us is that local economic development is very much a vivid and iterative process, not a static one based on projects. It is also not mainly about physical or infrastructure development or blueprint activities. Much more it entails a comprehensive set of changing mindsets through intensive community participatory dialogue and cooperation. It was very important for us to understand that local economic development always starts with the significant players in the community, therefore



their involvement and participation is vital for any economic development programme. Unfortunately, most of the local organizations in our country implement their programmes in a mainly social and paternalistically driven approach in the poorest areas. The expectations created in communities by such approaches then often affects our work negatively because we want to focus on the use of the local economic and human resources.

Frank: What would you say are your two main open questions in your current work situation? Do you see any chance that our cooperation can support you in this further process?

Varazdat: In parallel with our economic activities in the smaller towns and villages in Armenia, we now need to pay more attention to moving to a higher level, creating linkages between the local bottom-up approaches and identifying regional economic development potentials as well as participatory intervention methods. For this we need effective tools and methods which merge top-down and bottom-up approaches. We are currently working on this together with you and with other partners.

Frank: Varazdat, you became an associate of Mesopartner in 2012. What do you think will be important topics that Mesopartner needs to find answers to in the next decade?

Varazdat: The proposed philosophy and the methodologies and tools used have great opportunities to be applied in our region, and I see an increasing demand. For Mesopartner it will be necessary to have a clear strategy of how to monitor the quality and effectiveness of their approach. Additionally, I think that value chain and cluster development are now topics of high interest for many countries. Although Mesopartner is already working on these topics, there is a need to develop them further. For the SME Centre and our staff as practitioners it would also be great to get additional tools and knowledge to facilitate the running of economic change initiatives rather than for the analysis itself.

Frank: What do you think are the key future success criteria for Mesopartner to be able to stay as a company at the cutting edge of development consultancy?

Varazdat: Times are changing, and consequently there are changes in the structures of the local economies, the forms of relationships and values. Any effective methodology is only a means to an end. Mesopartner will have to keep up with the changes in the countries they are working in. This means continuous reflection with their partners on adopted and innovative approaches to develop the different economies they work in.

A photo and its story

Group photo with gas cylinder

The photo was taken recently at the end of a CALIDENA Workshop in Costa Rica, which was organised to improve the entire security and quality system of this Central American country. The participants are all experts with different expertise in liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The chief of the fire brigade engineers' department brought along a damaged gas cylinder which had exploded recently in a private house. Mesopartner is collaborating with the Development Cooperation of the German Metrology Institute (PTB) in a regional project to improve the quality infrastructure in Central America. This also involves the elaboration of adequate technical regulations and standards, including an effective system of conformity assessment to protect the legitimate interests of the security and health of the population and countries.

Ulrich Harmes-Liedtke (uhl@mesopartner.com)





A photo and its story

Fixing the maize market in northern Laos

In 2005 local farmers in Hongsa district, Sayaboury province, Laos, were encouraged by the district government to grow maize. The seed provider and collector of maize was the Rural Development Company (RDC), which also held a contract with the CP group in Thailand that provided the seeds (hybrid) and was supposed to buy the maize harvest and further process it to animal feed. The contract had been initiated by the provincial government and the Deputy Prime Minister of Laos. However, during a PACA exercise in January 2006, we discovered that the RDC had not collected the maize harvested due to the fact that the trade window between north-western Laos and Thailand was only open every year from January to June according to a multilateral trade agreement and due to a lack of storage facilities. Although the maize harvest in Hongsa took place in November 2005, the RDC did not have the funds available at that time to collect the maize harvest. Hence the RDC did nothing, which was clearly in violation of the contract with the farmers.

The farmers, however, did not have the skills and experience to properly store maize, and accordingly were eager to sell the product as soon as possible. In January 2006, the maize was on the verge of spoiling. Moreover, the farmers urgently needed cash to invest in the upcoming rice season.

At the same time, other traders were not allowed to invest in maize contract farming either, or to buy the harvest lying in the villages. The PACA team decided that a specific proposal aimed at improving this situation had to be urgently addressed in the first way-forward workshop at the end of the PACA exercise. The district vice-governor, as well as the Director of the RDC, attended the way-forward workshop. Surprisingly, the way-forward discussions pointed out that (1) the RDC had started to collect all the maize three days before, and that (2) the farmers had been properly compensated. Thus the subsequent way-forward planning exercise could focus on opening the market to private traders in the future and so as to avoid such situations.

Later it was confirmed that the provincial and district governments had learned about the discussions within the PACA team and its intention to address the maize issue in public. Obviously, PACA had already started to solve the problem and improve the dire financial situation of the poor farmers by simply detecting the details, surfacing the causes behind the issues and intensively discussing them in public. This confirms the ability of PACA to motivate and encourage people to act, either to receive the benefits and gratitude or to avoid being blamed.

Christian Schoen (cs@mesopartner.com)

A photo and its story

Open learning by example and starting joint learning

Knowledge and experience should not be concealed, and often neither should it be lectured on but rather shared and exchanged with others. It then becomes real learning. We follow this principle within Mesopartner. This philosophy of learning has contributed strongly to our success during the past 10 years. Our success depends in the same way on great partners, experts, colleagues and even competitors whom we meet in the course of our activities. In 2009, I had such an experience in Finland, where the facilitator and organizer of the International Cluster Conference (TCI) in Jyväskylä was a practical example of this way of thinking.

Mikko Markkanen from the consultancy company Business Arena had designed the five-day conference as a learning journey into regional economic development, using interactive moderation tools and creative design and storytelling in the documentation. This is similar to the way that Mesopartner works. After a fortuitous chat at the conference dinner about creative conference design, my production of blog articles (<http://tci2009.wordpress.com>) and the discovery of similar work philosophies, Mikko invited me straight away to facilitate a World Café with him at the conference two days later without really knowing me. This was the start of a joint learning journey in the following years.

In 2011, again in October (and again in Jyväskylä), Mikko invited me to a Finnish Innovation Bootcamp. We both recognized during the innovation workshop event that in a group of open-minded experts even brief comments can create a butterfly effect – resulting in new emerging perspectives and ways of looking at your own world. Besides, working together in a relaxed and beautiful setting in the countryside is a lot of fun. On this occasion, we developed the idea of organizing an International Innovation Bootcamp in Germany. We held the event in August 2012, which was again based on the philosophy of learning through the open exchange of international expertise, which enriched us not only as experts, but also as human beings.

Frank Wältring (fw@mesopartner.com)



Purified PC board washer

There are two aspects of my work with Mesopartner which I love. Firstly, I love conducting training. We receive positive feedback on our events that spurs us on to take on more technical and difficult topics in creative ways.

Secondly, there is the fieldwork where we typically investigate a particular regional economy or an industry. We usually do this to build capacity within meso institutions. Most of my fieldwork is involved with improving innovation systems. Innovation systems are social constructs that explain how whole industries or regions innovate, thus they go beyond creative entrepreneurs.

The attached photo is one of my favorites as it summarizes many of the things I am passionate about. It shows a dishwasher that a team of technicians in an electronics manufacturing company converted

A photo and its story

into a PC board washer over a weekend. In doing so they saved thousands of dollars while having fun solving an expensive problem. They combined different existing elements into a new unit, just in the way that Schumpeter defined innovation. Their employer allowed the staff to experiment (and to fail) after hours, using company equipment and resources. This defines knowledge creation within a hierarchy. They solved a problem by analyzing alternatives and then choosing an experimental approach to determine whether they could build their own equipment. This is the heart of the scientific method.

Our diagnostic approach typically involves combining quantitative with qualitative research. In this example, the company replied during an interview that they did not have resources or knowledge of how to innovate. In purely quantitative research it would have been recorded that they did not innovate because they did not know how, did not have the funds and that government does not support them with research. However, in a qualitative approach we visit factories and interview staff, not just management. While touring their plant we found this innovative PC board washer. Later when reflecting with the stakeholders on our diagnosis, we realized that the South African electronics sector is innovative because management allows for failure and learning by doing.

Shawn Cunningham (sc@mesopartner.com)



A photo and its story

Passionate problem solver and skills developer

One aspect of my work that I enjoy is being able to expose LED practitioners, policy makers and managers to examples of LED practice on the ground. These LED study tours often result in interesting discoveries and surprising encounters. One such encounter during an LED exposure tour with a delegation from Algeria was with a passionate engineer contributing to the development of practical engineering skills amongst youth in the small town of Saldanha on the West Coast in South Africa.

Mr Hans Herrmann had moved from Germany to South Africa in the early 90's and started Hansing Engineering in Saldanha. The company offers much

need local support in designing, manufacturing and heat-treatment. They see themselves predominantly as problem solvers, using modern machine tools, measuring- and testing equipment to deliver higher standard workmanship than originally requested. The main knowledge is in earthmoving equipment components and they have years of experience and expertise in the engineering sector which allows them to identify trouble areas and be able to react and provide assistance on time, providing much needed support to Arcelor Mittal Steel SA in Saldanha, Transnet Port Terminals, etc.

My Herrmann has taken a group of young people under his wing, training and mentoring them to be able to provide quality services in this engineering field. When asked how many engineers the company employs his response was, "none" – we train and employ artisans.

Zini Godden (zg@mesopartner.com)





A photo and its story

Approximately right or precisely wrong?

There are times when a single event or discussion can have huge consequences. It can change the way people see themselves and each other. Just as importantly, it can change us, it can expose our illusions of how things are, or should be, in a humbling and uncomfortable way.

Some ten years ago in Hazyview, a small town on the border of the Kruger National Park, a volatile situation was escalating: the local community was decimating the natural forest for wood to make carvings of animals to sell to tourists. At the same time, they were leaving invasive and noxious trees behind. If the trees were destroyed, the animals would migrate and the tourism market would collapse for everyone.

The easy assumption was that people were making carvings because they did not have anything more

productive and profitable to do. The solution would be to create more “normal” jobs and the trees, the animals and tourists would be safe, which seemed simple and logical. It was not really that simple, and this was when the depth of insight that runs through the Mesopartner philosophy came to the fore. The question to ask was: “What is really behind this?” The answer was far less obvious but still simple: the carvers really did want to carve and they were cutting down the indigenous trees because they were not as pretty as the invasive trees, which that they thought the tourists preferred.

It turned out that the invasive trees were actually better for carving, and the park authorities now make harvesting easy and have given the crafters space to sell in the main tourism hot-spots.

Colin Mitchell (cm@mesopartner.com)

A photo and its story

Gender-sensitive fig value chain in northern Morocco

A focus group of women involved in the fig value chain in northern Morocco: the application of a gender-sensitive value chain approach over more than a year by the regional GIZ EconoWin programme enabled women to strengthen their economic position. It was a very valuable and rewarding experience for me to see how, through this project, rural and often disadvantaged women could stand up for themselves and become empowered in their economic activities as well as in their personal lives.

Valerie Hindson (valhindson@gmail.com)





A photo and its story

PACA to identify benefits from Chinese investment in Africa

These are young Chinese workers with their Tanzanian counterparts on a drilling site in southern Tanzania. The Chinese investors were exploring coal and iron deposits to assess the viability of establishing a smelting project and railway line to the coast for export to China. It was reported to me that about half of the Chinese workforce had contracted malaria over the previous month. They were there on contracts that kept them from home for long periods, with only intermittent Internet connection to family and friends at home.

Within the local communities, the presence of the exploration company provoked both fear and hope. Those living on or near the mining sites feared being displaced and having large tracts of their ancestral lands destroyed without compensation. Many feared that crime, disease and the undermining of local traditions would result from inward migration and urban growth. At the same time, the Chinese mine exploration created much hope that Chinese investment would provide opportunities for local investors, stimulate employment growth, bring improved social services and open the district to the outside world.

One of the factors that made this exercise interesting was its focus on using large-scale investment in mining

and smelting as a basis for anticipating and stimulating local economic development. Community receptivity to the PACA exercise was at a level I have not witnessed before. The news of the PACA exercise travelled far and wide, aided by announcements by political leaders in the district and church leaders during Sunday services. Wherever we went, people had already heard of us and were keen to be involved.

Our work was aided by the presence of two very dynamic national facilitators and a highly committed local team. The PACA exercise built on a local investment dynamic already geared to taking advantage of the mining investment. Our task was mainly to draw together the initiatives already under way in the district within an overall planning framework.

My hope is that in 10 years' time, when looking back, the local people will say that the PACA exercise was a positive contribution; that it genuinely helped them to benefit from the Chinese investment; and that it helped to empower them to improve their lives and secure what was precious in their culture, traditions and environment.

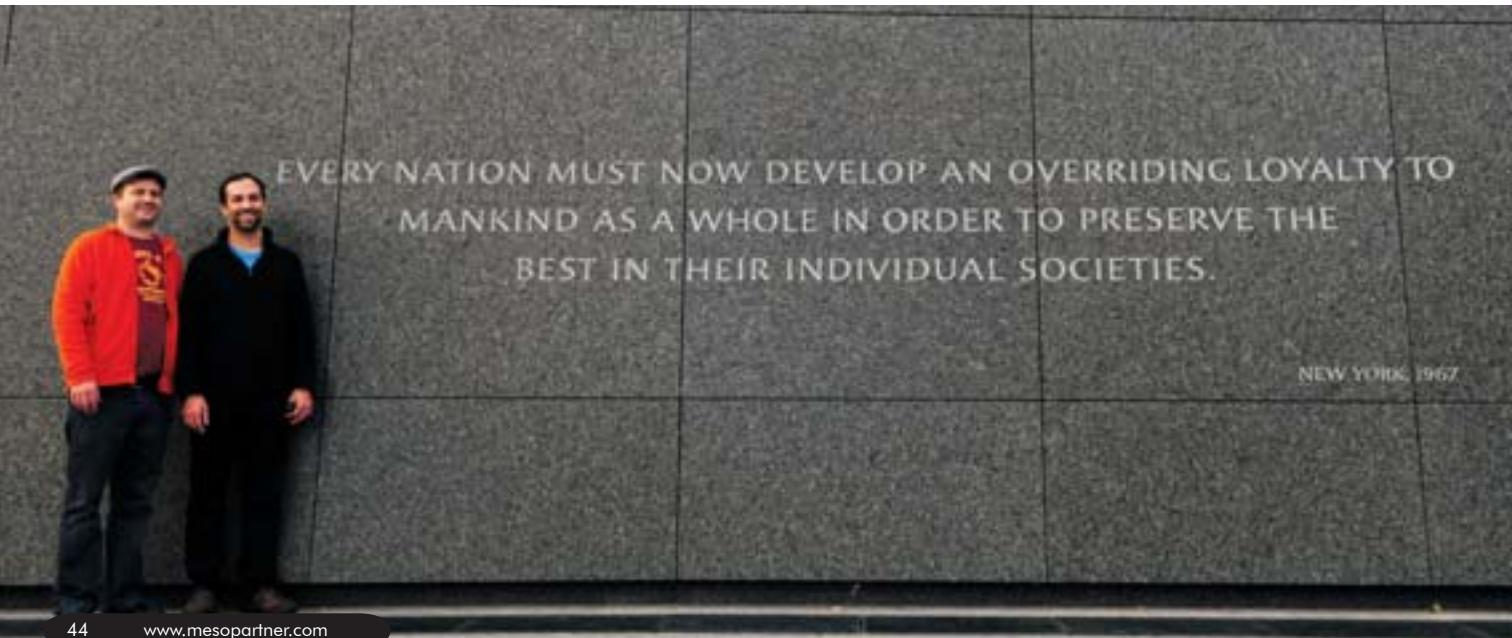
Doug Hindson (doug.hindson@gmail.com)

A photo and its story

Every nation must now develop ...

The picture shows myself and Shawn Cunningham in front of a quote by Martin Luther King Jr., at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington DC. Shawn and I spent time in DC to participate in the SEEP Network Annual Conference 2012, where we co-organized the opening plenary. The topic of the plenary was on innovative new ways for measuring impact in market and financial systems development (see <http://seepnetwork.org/systemicme>). As systemic approaches were a big topic, this was of course always on our minds. We also saw the sights in DC during the leisure part of our trip. When we looked at his quotes, it struck us what a systemic thinker Dr King must have been.

Marcus Jenal (mj@mesopartner.com)



PACA Interview with local oil producer 2012, village of Vaghashen, Armenia

A photo
and
its story

- Mr. Arman, what are you doing to maintain quality standards in your oil production?
- I bought this machine in Soviet time from a factory that was producing electric lamps. Do I need any other quality standards?

Varazdat Karapetyan (karapetyanvarazdat@yahoo.com)





My time with Mesopartner



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The founding of Mesopartner is for me closely related to our move to Argentina and working in development. Since finishing university in 1991, I have worked continuously in areas related to local and regional development in my home country Germany and other European countries. My special relationship with Spain, where I studied and worked, created an affinity with, and interest in, Latin America. Mesopartner gave me the opportunity to extend my work experience far from home.

We have already been living for ten years in Argentina and I travel frequently around the region. In the beginning, especially living in the city of Buenos Aires, I saw a lot of similarities with southern Europe. This is easy to explain, because large parts of the local population are decedents from Europe. Until the middle of the 20th century Argentina was one of the most developed countries in the world and the hope for numerous migrants from Europe. Having lived now for a while in Latin America, I became more aware about the developmental challenges, such as the large disparities between rich and poor, the uncontrolled growth of megacities, poverty and informality. At the same time, I appreciate a more relaxed lifestyle, which emphasises collective values and values more indigenous roots reflected in the concept of 'good living'.

Usually my work consists of projects, where I work with different clients and assignments in parallel. This also requires a lot of travelling, alternating with periods in my home office. This type of work has the advantage of providing many experiences and realities in a short time, but it often becomes stressful coordinating various tasks and people. At the same time, I also experience continuity, since nearly for a decade I have been working with specific clients such as the Technical Cooperation of the German National Metrology Institute (PTB) or the Universidad San Martín (UNSAM) in Argentina. Also from time to time I return to a country where I worked before, and meet with local colleagues and stakeholders, which makes visible a broader development process beyond the short-term programme and project. Looking back on the situation ten years ago, I recognized a lot of capacity and institution building in Latin America. The countries here are not only economically better off, but have also increased their self-esteem.

Living in a developing region helps me to understand better the needs of the people. In many situations I now see the world from a southern perspective, which helps me to facilitate understanding between the International Donor Community and the beneficiary countries. An additional advantage of being a Mesopartner is that I have direct access to our partners and associates living and working in both hemispheres. Within our firm we practice daily so-called South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Mesopartner makes it possible to live as a global citizen and work for a better world. This really satisfies me.

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Ulrich Harmes-Liedtke - Partner
(uhl@mesopartner.com)



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My professional life can be divided into three phases: a seven-year period of working as an economist in a German engineering consulting company engaged in projects in Germany and later increasingly abroad. The second phase lasted about three years and focused on consultancy and evaluation tasks around innovation. The third phase spans the last 10 years and runs parallel with the history of Mesopartner. In all three phases I gained important experiences and insights and made relevant contacts which then helped me to get ready for the next phase.

The first phase saw me developing into a consultant and made me familiar with the economic aspects of the infrastructure side of LED. In the second phase, I learned about innovation management, consultancy at the national level and coordinating large-scale projects abroad (Indonesia). And in this phase I also met and worked with Jörg Meyer-Stamer. At the beginning of the third phase, I accepted Jörg's invitation to found Mesopartner with the initial intention of increasing the supply side for disseminating the PACA methodology.

As a 'mesopartner' I developed from a rather traditional consultant into a participatory and interactive facilitator and trainer. One of the key insights during this process was that methodologies and tools are useful to simplify and practically apply theoretic concepts, but that more important than the instruments are the principles behind them. This period also taught me that rapid appraisals can achieve the same and often even more than lengthy consultant studies and research activities, above all through the creation of motivation for change among local stakeholders.

Mesopartner provides a lot of flexibility and freedom for partners and associates. The legal form 'associated partners' allows us to act as freelancers who offer their services under one brand name. And this brand has received increasing attention during the past decade as a niche provider and developer of participatory approaches to development. In coordination with the other partners we can locate ourselves anywhere in the world – in my case Southeast Asia – and focus on consulting and training opportunities there. Mesopartner is not only a company but also an intensive learning network composed of partners, associates and key customers who constantly challenge each other. The annual Summer Academy on Economic Development and recently the JMS scholarship further stimulate and enhance this learning effort and experience exchange.

Mesopartner with all its parameters (scope of thematic focus and offerings, partners and associates involved, type of customers) looks largely different than it did ten years ago and I expect that in ten years from now it will look different again. It is exciting and strongly motivating to help balance this continuous transformation process shaped by internal and external forces, with the final objective of delivering development work in a more efficient and effective way.

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Christian Schoen - Partner
(cs@mesopartner.com)



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When I am asked about my time at Mesopartner and why I am working as a Mesopartner, there are mainly four reasons which come to mind: 1) the professional work with a small and aligned team of partners, 2) the opportunity of deep international learning experiences, 3) the powerful spirit to discover new fields of expertise, and 4) the ability to work internationally and live in the countryside.

The team

We are a very diverse team of partners with very different characters, different perspectives on things, different backgrounds and different expertise. Especially because of these differences we complement each other so well and are able to exchange information from different viewpoints. When I started in 2004 I never expected that a team of such diverse characters could become a synergistic professional team and even finally friends. But it was especially the joint learnings and the diversity of perspectives that strengthened our joint philosophy of how we think about our work and how we want to act in this changing environment.

Diversity of learnings

When I started in Mesopartner I can remember how nervous I was when I had to submit my first report, had to provide my first training, had to give my first speech or lecture. All these aspects were the basis of my own personal and professional growth. I became a facilitator, a trainer, a teacher at the University, a consultant and a coach. I learned about project management aspects and also about the different economic realities in sectors, regions and socio-economic value systems. Although we at Mesopartner work always around the topic of territorial economic development, we finally deal with human systems and interactions, which is one of the most exciting work areas. This diversity in my work enriches me personally as well as professionally.

The motivation to discover new fields of expertise

For a positive learning environment I personally very much need a team around me, the members of which also push each other towards approaching new themes and make use of our collective learning. Challenging each other for further discoveries is an important aspect not only to stay competitive but also to keep oneself flexible.

Working in different realities, staying grounded in the home countryside

In Germany I moved back to my rural home village of Elte several years ago. Our work provides me with the opportunity to combine two worlds, living in the countryside and working in Germany and internationally. I feel it is a great privilege to have this flexibility and to learn about these different realities.

These are my four reasons why I am looking forward to the next decade of our Mesopartner work.

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Frank Wältring - Partner
(fw@mesopartner.com)





“ Over the last 10 years I have worked with Mesopartner in different ways. My first experiences were as a customer during my role as a senior LED expert working for the GTZ. I saw the guys from Mesopartner as these very creative gurus who could summarize very complicated analytical models into simple presentations and fun training sessions. I remember how Jörg could convert a conversation between mini workshops into a working paper in a matter of hours. During this time I learned that even complicated issues can be explained in simple terms if you can figure out the essence of a theory and its practical applications. I also came to appreciate the importance of visually recording the dialogue during workshops and diagnosis and came to realize how important a shared perspective is for economic progress.

Over time my relationship changed from that of a customer to an associate and shortly thereafter a partner in 2008. Suddenly my customers looked at me to provide guidance in terms of process design, institutional change and recording insights gained during diagnosis into publications. During this time I came to appreciate how all the Mesopartner partners and associates are working in completely different themes and regions, but how central the theme of process consulting, facilitation and social change is. The other very important sub-title to our work is that of capacity building, not just during formal training events. We build the capacity of the clients that we work with during meetings, while designing events, preparing and conducting fieldwork and recording and internalizing findings. Everything we do ends in organizations involved in economic development doing things differently after our intervention.

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Shawn Cunningham - Partner
(sc@mesopartner.com)





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I worked for six years with the Dutch Development Cooperation in Pretoria, focusing on youth development. This was a job I thoroughly enjoyed doing, since this was soon after the advent of the “new South Africa”. My task soon expanded to include a focus on local government planning in South Africa where many developments and changes were also happening. After a huge growth spurt with the Dutch Development Cooperation and six years later, it was time for me to grow in new directions.

I ventured out on my own in 2000, joining a team of consultants who were working on various topics in development, and it was during this period in 2001 that I came into contact with Mesopartner when the team was invited to a PACA training in Ballito, KwaZulu-Natal. Since I was following a university study on local government support for business development, I was hugely interested in what this training would offer. Needless to say, the training, the methodologies and the practical encounters with real business people during planned interview sessions left me hooked and eager to learn more. I was soon invited to many more Mesopartner training sessions, including training on the Hexagon of LED, after which I was offered a job working with the InWEnt (now GIZ) team to assist in the rolling out of the Locati training – predominantly focused on the Hexagon of LED.

This catapulted my connection and association with the Mesopartner, and soon I was referencing and making use of their practical tools and methodologies to engage with several stakeholders in LED. I was even more motivated when I discovered that the tools and methods assisted in demystifying the concept of LED to people at grassroots level, but were just as effective in engaging LED practitioners as well as scholars on the subject.

The height of my association with Mesopartner was of course my first participation in the Summer Academy in Duisburg in 2006, which showcased not only new insights into LED, but also highlighted the similarity of LED challenges in diverse countries. The Academy allowed a great exchange of experience and lessons among practitioners from various countries. I was impressed by the approachability of the Mesopartners, as well as the practical, simple tools which assisted me to connect the dots in often complex contexts.

I soon became a Mesopartner Associate and in 2012 was offered the incredible opportunity to become a partner. There have been many developments and transformations in the world, regional and local economies since my first encounter with Mesopartner in 2001, and the firm has maintained its relevance throughout this dynamic evolution, having transcended their label as the ‘PACA guys’. The team’s continued commitment to finding more effective and efficient mechanisms to work and contribute to development processes in a complex world keeps me hooked.

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Zini Godden - Partner
(zgi@mesopartner.com)





“ The unique thing about Mesopartner when I was first introduced was the philosophy of equipping and empowering people in communities to appreciate that they were capable of more than they ever realized. Mesopartner was all about the search for better tools and approaches to give the insight and confidence to people which allow them to rise above their circumstances and become champions for change and a better life. For me it was never about Mesopartner delivering a product, it was always about finding new and innovative ways to equip and empower communities to realize their potential. ”

Colin Mitchell - Associate
(cm@mesopartner.com)





“ It has been a great experience to work with Mesopartner. I started in 2003 in Hazyview, South Africa, with Jörg Meyer-Stamer, Christian Schoen and Shawn Cunningham. A memorable time! Since then, I have come to apply very valuable concepts and tools to my development practice and feel grateful to have become part of a network of reputable and friendly people.

Having learnt the PACA methodology in South Africa, I had the great privilege of introducing it in North Africa in 2007 and applying it in the Middle East, a region where participatory processes were not very widespread and where a number of breakthroughs have been made, especially for the benefit of women.

Working with Mesopartner, I have learnt always to improve my development practice and innovate. So thank you all for this experience, and I look forward for the next ten years of cooperation!

Valerie Hindson - Associate
(valhindson@gmail.com)

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My first contact with Jörg was in 2002 when I began corresponding on the PACA approach. I had heard about the approach from a colleague and wanted to know more. Then followed an invitation to attend a PACA training workshop and exercise in Hazyview, which took place in 2003. After the Hazyview training, I began working with the PACA approach, and not long after I became a Mesopartner associate.

There were a number of reasons why I was attracted to Mesopartner. I found it very helpful to have a holistic conceptual framework, the LED Hexagon, within which to think about the various dimensions of LED and how they related. The second reason why I was drawn to Mesopartner was to have access to the process tools that Jörg and the other partners were developing. These tools, I saw, enabled participants to rapidly understand the meaning of LED and to rapidly take action to improve their local economies. The approaches with which I had been familiar until then required much energy, time and resources for much less impact. I saw that people involved in a PACA exercise were empowered both because they could rapidly grasp the concepts and process tools and because these tools enabled them to systematize and make use of their own local knowledge. It drew upon and strengthened their own capacities.

Looking back over the last 10 years, perhaps the most important factor in the success of this approach is the quality of the relationship that one establishes with the national facilitators and the local team. The PACA approach works best when there is a combination of conceptual clarity and process rigor with deep knowledge of the national and local conditions, including the economy, the institutions, the culture and the actors. This can only happen when the capacities of the external facilitator, national facilitators and local team are effectively combined. When the dialogue between all three is good, then everyone is strengthened and the process works well. This is my key learning.

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Doug Hindson - Associate
(doug.hindson@gmail.com)





“ When I was doing a practical placement for InWEnt (now GIZ) in the Peruvian Amazon region in 2002, I came into contact with Mesopartner thinking because I had done a first PACA application with a Bolivian consultant. Although it was by far not the kind of analysis we would do nowadays, I was very impressed by the way in which you could do a participatory appraisal process, motivating local stakeholders to take the leadership in the development and implementation of creative LED initiatives. By the way, this PACA in Peru helped me to get into deep contact with the local people. Perhaps this was also one reason why I have been living in Peru for more than 10 years now and building a small bamboo house in the Amazon region.

Later when I was working as a LED programme coordinator in the Regional Office for the Andean Countries of InWEnt in Lima, we were closely cooperating with Mesopartner and developed some new methods such as the LED-Café. Later we adapted Mesopartner's LED Compass to the Peruvian context when I was advising the municipality network REMURPE.

Then in 2009, when I decided to work as a freelance consultant, I happily accepted Mesopartner's offer to be one of their associates. It is great to work in a horizontal learning network with colleagues all over the world, and I really like the deep insights about systemic thinking and innovation. In interesting discussions with my colleagues and experiences on the field, I also became aware that the method was just a vehicle to achieve major changes to improve local competitiveness.

Anke Kaulard - Associate
(ak@kauco.de)

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Local people are the only unit that can make the system work: this was our team's main learning from a number of PACA exercises in different communities in Armenia.

Although I only joined the Mesopartner team as an associate in 2011, we had already brought some Mesopartner tools, particularly PACA, to Armenia in 2005. Since then about 23 PACA exercises have been conducted in Armenian communities. The principles underlying Mesopartner tools – participation, quick wins, systemic competitiveness – made these tools very effective for our reality. This kind of approach motivates and encourages local people to join their efforts towards the development of their communities, as well as creating an atmosphere of cooperation in a community which is really crucial for local development.

After piloting these methods in several communities of Armenia, we implemented this approach as a basis of the Armenian national strategy of local economic development and SME promotion. PACA, Compass, Genesis and participatory value chain analysis are tools that proved their effectiveness in our reality by creating jobs, income and economic linkages throughout the country.

We created a network of young professionals who are implementing local economic development exercises in Armenia using Mesopartner tools. We are now enlarging the scope of our work so that more and more communities can benefit from this process. But most importantly, we are expanding our knowledge and bringing new innovative tools to Armenia, as the learning process is a process with no end.

”

Varazdat Karapetyan - Associate
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I have been a Mesopartner associate since April 2012. The main project I have been involved in since then is – besides writing some tenders for various donors – the development of a cluster development guideline for the IDB in the Caribbean.

Additionally, I have been involved in many intense internal discussions on how to sharpen Mesopartner's orientation towards systemic approaches, taking into account the recent development and findings in complex adaptive systems research. The enthusiasm of all the partners to engage in this discussion and critically reflect on their own approaches to make them more effective on a systems level has been very motivating for me. Their inputs based on their extensive experience in working in the field added a lot to my understanding of systemic economic development. Hence it has been an interesting and motivating learning experience and I am looking forward to applying all these insights into projects by other partners of Mesopartner.

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Designed by Golden Sky, Vietnam
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Printed in June 2013

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