

Success Story

Joint research for better air quality

inter 3 leads Berlin "Citizen Science" project in international consortium

Committed citizens measure the quality of their street air, interpret the results, and share the data obtained - even if they have no scientific training or special technical know-how. If this succeeds, it is an example of "Citizen Science." Since the end of 2021, the COMPAIR project, funded by the European Union as part of the Horizon 2020 programme, has been precisely following this path. Fifteen organisations in six European countries have come together for this. They want to close gaps in existing air quality data in local pilot projects, develop effective social actions and ultimately influence local policies. All in line with the goals the EU has set for improving air quality.

Berlin will be centre stage for two of these pilot projects, and Dr. Shahrooz Mohajeri, partner and managing director of the Berlin Institute for Resource Management inter 3 GmbH, finds it consistent, but not self-evident, that the company he leads is part of COMPAIR and implements the local pilot projects. Almost 25 years ago, an economist, a political scientist and Mohajeri, as an environmental process engineer, founded the non-university research institution inter 3 out of the Technical University of Berlin. Their common goal was to conduct interdisciplinary and application-oriented research. One of the first major tasks was a study for the EU Commission on the privatisation and liberalisation of the EU water market.

EU projects are places of intercultural learning

"The project was very successful. I drew two conclusions at that time. Firstly, you learn much more in a transnational project than in a national project, because the intercultural and political-legal differences are considerable. And secondly," Mohajeri says with a twinkle in his eye, "managing and implementing EU projects is insanely challenging, we'll never do another one." And inter 3 held out for a long time. But about four years ago, Mohajeri began to rethink his stance. After all, he thought, the EU project world might have simplified by now. In addition, inter 3 hired some employees whose lingua franca was English. So, the company opened its eyes and ears to the EU again. And as sometimes happens when you are ready for change: Last year, Berlin's Heinrich Hertz Institute (HHI) came knocking at Berlin Partner's door because the institute was still urgently looking for another partner for a consortium that wanted to apply for an EU project. The Enterprise Europe Network at Berlin Partner got involved and started looking. After a tip-off from the circular economy sector, inter 3 was identified as a possible partner. So, the EU experts established contact between



Mohajeri and the coordinator of the consortium, who is based in Belgium. "We quickly realised that the project was very interesting in terms of content, and we particularly liked the involvement of the population in the process. And since we are good and experienced at describing ideas in complex projects, we said yes," he recalls. They then had to be challengingly quick with the application, but the positive response from the EU to the outline also came quickly, and finally the consortium successfully submitted the project application. Berlin Partner and the Enterprise Europe Network supported the project with a "Letter of Support".

Regular contact with Berlin Partner and the Enterprise Europe Network

For inter 3, it has paid off to establish and maintain a loose but regular contact with Berlin Partner and the Enterprise Europe Network. Mohajeri describes it like this: "We have exchanged ideas again and again, there have been joint projects and overall, a give and take from which hopefully both sides benefit!"



The regional pilot project will start in February 2022. Vlatko Vilović, who supervises COMPAIR from the inter 3 side, describes the procedure: "We work in 5 phases in the project, each phase, building on the results of the previous one. In addition, we aim at learning on the individual level as well as for the community. Very specifically, we start with a co-creative workshop to gather stakeholder needs so that they can inform the design of the experiments." Citizens are called upon here as well as businesses, politics, and science. Two concrete applications are being piloted. In one, air quality is tested with mobile or stationary measuring sensors. In the other, roads are temporarily closed, and the air quality is measured before and during the closure. The results are visualised in a generally understandable way and discussed in order to find solutions for improving urban air quality together with politicians.

Diversity within the project

It is important to Vilović that the citizens who participate are as diverse as possible and represent a colourful Berlin. "We have good contacts in numerous Berlin initiatives that care about environmental protection and civic engagement." A good basis for finding the right people. The whole project is ambitious, playing on the levels of technology, behavioural change, and support for environmental policy decisions. It is this diversity that makes COMPAIR, which describes itself as a "citizen science initiative", so interesting.