



**Change of perspective:**  
Walking in each other's shoes  
for a day

Brandenburg, Germany





# General Information

<b>Title</b>	Change of perspective										
<b>Pitch</b>	Walking in each other's shoes for a day										
<b>Organisations</b>	Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Industrie- und Handelskammer) Potsdam, Cottbus and East Brandenburg										
<b>Country</b>	Germany										
<b>Author</b>	Alina Dreier (Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre)										
<b>Nature of interaction</b>	<table><tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration in R&amp;D</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lifelong learning</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Commercialisation of R&amp;D results</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Joint curriculum design and delivery</td></tr><tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mobility of staff</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of students</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Academic entrepreneurship</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Student entrepreneurship</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> Governance</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Shared resources</td></tr></table>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration in R&D	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lifelong learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Commercialisation of R&D results	<input type="checkbox"/> Joint curriculum design and delivery	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mobility of staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of students	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic entrepreneurship	<input type="checkbox"/> Student entrepreneurship	<input type="checkbox"/> Governance	<input type="checkbox"/> Shared resources
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<b>Summary</b>	<p>The initiative 'PerspektivWechsel' was designed by the Chamber of Commerce Potsdam to foster knowledge transfer between industry and academia and to increase the level of innovativeness of SMEs in the state of Brandenburg. A business representative and a university academic exchange their workplaces for one day to experience their exchange partner's professional environment. By getting a glimpse of working life in industry or in a higher education institution respectively, the academic or business representative has the opportunity to broaden their horizon and form new contacts that can result in long-term partnerships.</p>										



# Introduction & Overview

## 1. BACKGROUND

In 2006, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) Potsdam, located in the state of Brandenburg in Eastern Germany, founded the initiative 'PerspektivWechsel' (change of perspective).

It aims to bring industry and science closer together and to achieve synergies through professional mobility collaboration between universities and businesses. The programme matches representatives from businesses and higher education institutions (HEIs) respectively who switch their roles for one day to experience their exchange partner's professional life. "The exchange partners get to know each other, discover similarities – and maybe joint cooperation projects result thereof", explains Marco Albrecht, expert for technology and innovation at the CCI Potsdam.

Several studies analysed the innovation behaviour of German industry and discovered that innovation expenditures are declining for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). At the same time, the majority of SMEs in Brandenburg intend to uphold or even increase their level of innovativeness. This is expected to be achieved through several planned activities including cooperation projects with HEIs. One such activity is 'PerspektivWechsel', founded to counteract the diminishing investments in innovation funding.

CCI Potsdam based on the programme design on 'Sichtwechsell', which had been operated by the CCI Lüneburg-Wolfsburg, until it folded due to the lack of follow-through in moving the project forward.

Since its inception, the initiative has expanded from the Potsdam area to the whole state of Brandenburg. 'PerspektivWechsel' is currently led by the CCIs Potsdam, Cottbus and East Brandenburg in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The programme conducted its 10<sup>th</sup> exchange in 2016.

Last year for the first time, the programme focus was set on a specific region in Germany, the German Lusatia which is located in Southern Brandenburg. The region was chosen due to the structural change that currently occurs according to Lothar Probst from the CCI Cottbus. Therefore, participation was focused on HEIs and businesses located in the area.

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS

One of the best ways of understanding how businesses and academia work is to experience it first-hand. 'PerspektivWechsel' does this by allowing academics and business people to spend a day in the environment of the other. During their time they gain a better understanding of the demands and expectations of the other person. Through this time learning about the other

type of organisation 'PerspektivWechsel' facilitates the opening up of collaborative potential. They may be exposed to new knowledge and insights which would not arise out of other mechanisms such as networking events. The connection to researchers enables businesses to identify and expand their innovation activities. HEIs can gain knowledge of the needs of businesses, unlock some of their research and provide ideas for additional research and teaching.

Through this activity, the government in the state of Brandenburg intends to increase innovativeness and to support the regional economy.

### 3. STAKEHOLDERS

Once the programme was expanded to the whole state of Brandenburg, the three CCIs; Potsdam, East Brandenburg and Cottbus took on joint responsibility for the planning, execution and follow up of the exchange. This includes approaching suitable businesses that are motivated to engage in the initiative as well as identifying and recruiting matching partners from HEIs in the region. All three CCIs collaborate on the annual event. Last year, with the focus on the region of Lusatia, the CCI Cottbus took the lead in organizing the exchange.

The businesses involved are primarily SMEs located in Brandenburg. Large enterprises and corporations are not considered for the exchange as they tend to have research and development (R&D) departments in their organisations.

Suitable businesses are selected based on the expert judgement of representatives from the CCI. There is no fixed selection criteria. The HEIs and its representing academics are selected according to the specialisation and focus of the exchange partner's business field and are also limited to the state of Brandenburg. Usually, the participating businesses and HEIs do not belong to only one industry and faculty but across all disciplines depending on the response rate of approached businesses/HEIs.

However, in 2016, due to the focus on the area German Lusatia, the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg (BTU) played a major role in the initiative. As the biggest HEI in the region, the BTU supplied most of the participating academics for the exchange. Hence, businesses were chosen in account with BTU's available faculties, which are primarily focused on technology related topics.

Furthermore, the transfer office at BTU was deeply involved in recruiting academics for the most recent 'PerspektivWechsel'.

Additionally, the CCIs of the state Brandenburg cooperate with the State Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The ministry's support functions as an enabler for contacting businesses and HEIs and emphasises the status and credibility of the 'PerspektivWechsel' initiative.



# Implementation

## 4. INPUTS

Besides the participating businesses and HEI representatives, multipliers like the CCIs are essential for coordinating the activities and bringing together the exchange pairs.

In terms of human resources, there are three people responsible for the initiative, one per CCI. The labour costs for the three representatives of the CCIs are financed through the CCI itself as well as the costs for the accompanying journalist.

The programme is not government-funded and, therefore, there are no financial resources provided to the CCI for the execution of the programme. Costs that arise (e.g. travel costs) are covered by the participants or their organisations.

## 5. ACTIVITIES

Each year in Spring, the CCIs of Brandenburg decide on the execution of 'PerspektivWechsel'. From that point on, those responsible people start with the preparations for the exchange. The process is described as a 'dynamic process' by Mr. Probst. As soon as a company agreed to participate, the CCI representatives or technology transfer officers from an HEI set out to seek a matching academic. On average, four to six exchange pairs are formed per year.

Companies are selected based on their potential to increase their innovativeness by collaborating with academics. Thus, businesses are encouraged to identify and present potential project ideas to their academic partner in order to lay the foundation of a long-term partnership.

Businesses who engage in the exchange are not always at the same stage of development and therefore take different approaches to preparation. For some, it is necessary for the businesses to first evaluate their processes and become aware of problem areas before creating project ideas.

In other cases, businesses have already identified concrete weaknesses they want to investigate with academic support and approach the CCIs directly.

The exchange takes place over the course of two days, where both partners jointly visit the university the first day and the business the second day to exchange views about a common topic of interest.

Usually, the first day is spent in the HEI for the exchange pair to get to know each other and to discuss business processes, tasks, problems and core themes. The ideas and problem statements developed during that day are discussed further on the second day in the business, according to Mr. Albrecht.

However, every pair decides for themselves how they organise their exchange. For example, there were some academics who took a group of students to the company when meeting with the businessperson. Other times, the company representative gave a lecture at the HEI on their company's area of focus.

Every exchange is accompanied by a journalist who documents the meetings and writes an article about the exchange.

## 6. OUTPUTS

As of 2016, 'PerspektivWechsel' has existed for 10 years with approximately 50 exchange pairs, each consisting of one HEI representative and one business representative.

Primarily, the initiatives bring new contacts and connections between academia and industry and give both parties a better understanding of the environment where the other one is, including their processes, their priorities, their language, their main challenges, etc. This better understanding reduces most barriers for future cooperation.

The exchange between the consulting agency Jupe & Pohl GmbH and Prof. Dr. Silke Michalk from the BTU in 2016, for example, fostered new impulses and new perspectives. The owners of the company had a number of interests in the exchange including accelerating the transfer of knowledge, establishing contacts, understanding recent developments in practice based topics (working time models, employee loyalty). In general it was thought that HEIs tended to link with larger companies in the region, in particular for the development of case material, even though the region predominantly consisted of SMEs. From the academic side, Prof. Dr. Silke Michalk gained better insights into daily business processes and problems within SMEs. She considers the exchange programme to be vital for the cooperation between HEIs and industry. She stated: "I believe, there is a lot of potential to further improve networking and to spur each other".

In some cases the exchange results in a new product. One example is the entrepreneur Daisy von Arnim 'Die Apfelgräfin' (the apple countess), where the collaboration resulted in the creation of a gift hamper for her business 'Haus Lichtenhain'. The 'apple countess' turned to the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development for support to improve and scale up their product portfolio. Prof. Dr. Jörn Mallok was able to provide his expertise in the sustainable economy to Mrs. von Arnim and participated in the development of the new product. The professor valued the opportunity to engage in the creation of innovative solutions for SMEs with the objective of further developing the region.

In 2010, one particular exchange between the CEO of IT company aibis® Informationssysteme Potsdam GmbH, Jürgen Busacker and Prof. Dr. Frank Bittmann, who teaches physiology and prevention, resulted in a government funded project. The exchange partners engaged in a joint project with the objective to develop a bio-sensor technology system for individual medical diagnosis of the sensorimotor system. The project was supported by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology through its funding programme 'SME Central Innovation Programme'.

## 7. IMPACTS

It is difficult to fully estimate the real impact of this exchange in terms of long-term partnerships as there are no systematic follow-ups.

However, the coordinators are aware that these connections have led to:

- ▶ some joint research results
- ▶ more relevant skills due to the business influence in the curricula and
- ▶ internships, theses and dual study options for the university's students.

The collaborations are expected in the longer-term to strengthen the relationship between academia and industry. This involves academics more willing to conduct research, considering industry needs and wants by engaging with entrepreneurs and businesses. At the same time, these exchanges are expected to solve problems and weaknesses of the companies and, therefore, strengthen the economy and industry as a whole in the state of Brandenburg.





# Support & Influencing factors

## 8. SUPPORTING MECHANISMS

There are several supporting mechanisms in place that facilitate the programme and, beyond that, support projects and cooperation resulting from the exchange. The HEIs' transfer offices play a major role and cooperate very closely with the CCIs by supporting the acquisition of participants from the HEI side.

Moreover, the state of Brandenburg provides grant funds such as the Innovation Voucher or the initiative 'Innovation Professionals Brandenburg'. The Innovation Voucher is collectible for SMEs in the Brandenburg region<sup>1</sup>. Hence, a project idea developed during the exchange between the academic and the business representative can potentially receive financial support of the government in the form of the Innovation Voucher.

Another financial support initiative is 'Innovation Professionals Brandenburg', directed towards SMEs employing students or innovation professionals. Thereby, salaries for every student worker or graduate employed as an innovation assistant are subsidised by the government for the first 12 months<sup>2</sup>. Thus, cooperation tied to an exchange are more likely to foster student mobility as these activities are eligible for state funding.

## 9. BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

The most vital element for a successful exchange in 'PerspektivWechsel' is motivation, both on behalf of the businesses and on behalf of the HEIs.

It is important to showcase the benefits to companies and the added value from participating in the exchange programme. Answering the question, 'what's in it for me?' is the most essential step in acquiring entrepreneurs for an exchange pair. For this purpose, the CCIs firstly need to make companies or entrepreneurs aware of weak spots in their business and then offer support to evaluate the problem closer with academic support.

In addition, there is a personnel shortage of qualified university graduates in Southern Brandenburg, which can be improved by stronger ties between regional businesses and universities.

However, the main barrier for a successful programme is the lack of time on both sides, the business people and the academics. As a result, initialising a first meeting between the exchange partners and creating the contact has proven to be quite difficult.

## 10. FUTURE CHALLENGES

Finding a matching academic for the businesses represents one of the major challenges for the CCI representatives and technology transfer officers.



Experiences over recent years have shown that there are significantly more businesses and entrepreneurs willing to participate than academics. In 2016, for example, 21 businesses agreed to take part in the initiative, whereas only 11 matching academics could be found.

The task is not to only find an HEI representative who has knowledge on the specific topic a company is operating in, but also to find someone who has enough time and the motivation to engage in the programme.

Furthermore, Mr. Probst states that the exchange partners need to arrange a mutually convenient date for a meeting, which turned out to be quite challenging as well.

### **11. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS**

The programme's success is mostly based on the CCI's and transfer offices' expertise in matching the right partners. Their high experience and regional industry knowledge facilitates the identification of suitable and interesting exchange pairs.

Furthermore, it is important that both exchange partners have a mutual understanding regarding their expectations of the initiative. The objective is to achieve a win-win situation for both the academic and the business representative. Therefore, both sides need to discuss problem areas and expected outcomes of the exchange beforehand.

Curiosity and open-mindedness are also key ingredients for a successful exchange and drive the exchange partners' willingness to make new experiences.





# Further Information

## 12. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Every two years, the CCIs invite all exchange pairs for an evaluation and a face to face feedback round. There, the participants report on their experiences and perceptions. A final report with stories on most exchange pair is published in the magazine of the CCIs in Brandenburg, which is produced ten times a year

## 13. SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

Every year the CCIs, together with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, decide on the future of the programme. The main driver for a continuation is the positive feedback from previous years. Mr. Albrecht notes that as long as the participants continue to benefit from the exchange and perceive the programme as a valuable experience, the 'PerspektivWechsel' will be supported.

The support of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture provides the programme with credibility (attracting exchange partners) and significance, thus improving its chances of sustainability.

Mr Albrecht mentioned that the CCIs plan on increasing dissemination measures to spread information on the programme to potential participants as well as other parts of Germany. The production of a video is being considered as a way to further market the programme.

## 14. TRANSFERABILITY

'PerspektivWechsel' can be easily scaled up if CCIs of other states agree to take on the responsibility and organise the exchange in their area.

Though it is advised to consider whether a certain region is suitable for the programme or not. Usually, in metropolitan areas, the collaboration is well governed and there is no immediate need to connect HEIs with the industry.

However, for a successful expansion of the initiative, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture should get involved more deeply and financial government aid should be considered as well, according to Mr. Probst.

Currently, Mr. Albrecht is in contact with CCIs from the state of Thuringia to discuss a possible transfer of 'PerspektivWechsel' to Central Germany.

## 15. AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

While there has not been any official recognition of the programme, other German states have contacted the CCIs showing interest in replicating the model

## 16. LINKS

PerspektivWechsel Article: [https://www.cottbus.ihk.de/blob/cbihk24/innovation/downloads/360064/470ddbcb84f7deae663c02756d81eb9/Perspektivwechsel\\_Beispiele\\_FO-RUM-data.pdf](https://www.cottbus.ihk.de/blob/cbihk24/innovation/downloads/360064/470ddbcb84f7deae663c02756d81eb9/Perspektivwechsel_Beispiele_FO-RUM-data.pdf)

PerspektivWechsel IHK Cottbus: [https://www.cottbus.ihk.de/innovation/Innovation/Netzwerke\\_Initiativen\\_Wissenschaftliche\\_Einrichtungen/Projekt\\_Perspektivwechsel/362948](https://www.cottbus.ihk.de/innovation/Innovation/Netzwerke_Initiativen_Wissenschaftliche_Einrichtungen/Projekt_Perspektivwechsel/362948)

News Article: <http://www.mwfk.brandenburg.de/cms/detail.php/bb1.c.446572.de>

## 17. CONTACT PERSONS



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## 18. REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ilb.de/de/wirtschaft/zuschuesse/brandenburgischer\\_innovationsgutschein\\_big\\_/](https://www.ilb.de/de/wirtschaft/zuschuesse/brandenburgischer_innovationsgutschein_big/)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilb.de/de/arbeitsfoerderung/foerderprogramme/brandenburger\\_innovationsfachkraefte/](https://www.ilb.de/de/arbeitsfoerderung/foerderprogramme/brandenburger_innovationsfachkraefte/)