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The Formation of Cross-Sector Development Partnerships: How Bridging Agents Shape Project Agendas and Longer-term Alliances

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The Formation of Cross-Sector Development Partnerships: How Bridging Agents Shape Project Agendas and Longer-term Alliances

ABSTRACT

Cross-sector development partnerships (CSDPs) are project-based collaborative arrangements between business, government, and civil society organizations in support of international development goals such as sustainability, health education, and economic development. Focusing on public private partnerships in development cooperation, we examine different constellations of bridging agents and their effects in the formation of single CSDP projects and longer-term alliances. We conceptualize bridging agency as a collective process involving both internal partner representatives and external intermediaries in initiating and/or supporting roles. We find that the involvement of external intermediaries eases the formation of single projects and longer-term alliances. However, when projects are initiated by external intermediaries they tend to be repetitive and narrow in scope, whereas projects initiated by internal partner representatives often explore novel agendas and embody a greater potential for social innovation. Yet, the longer-term pursuit of these agendas beyond single projects may require external intermediaries in supporting roles. Findings help better understand micro-processes and collective practices of brokerage and alliance formation in transnational governance contexts and beyond.

KEY WORDS

Intermediation, brokerage, projects, project networks, public private partnerships, multi-stakeholder process, transnational governance, international development, institutional logics, social innovation

INTRODUCTION

Collaborations between government, business and civil society organizations have been identified as important means to address complex issues, such as economic development, health education, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability (Selsky and Parker 2005; Kolk, van Tulder and Kostwinder, 2008). Some refer to these collaborations as ‘cross-sector social partnerships’ (Selsky and Parker, 2005), ‘social alliances’ (Sakarya et al., 2012), or ‘multi-stakeholder processes’ (Hemmati, 2002; Gray, 1989). Such processes have become particularly important in international development and transnational governance contexts (see e.g. Murphy, Perrot and Rivera-Santos, 2012; Stadtler and Probst, 2012; Manning and von Hagen, 2010). Government agencies increasingly collaborate with businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners to accomplish complex development objectives (Bartley, 2007; Geppert, Matten and Walgenbach, 2006; O’Rourke, 2006). We call these arrangements

cross-sector development partnerships (CSDPs). In this study we seek to better understand the role of ‘bridging agents’ (BAs) in CSDP formation. We define BAs as individuals who promote partnership formation through interaction across organizational, geographic, and sector boundaries.

Despite the growing relevance of CSDPs, the actual formation of CSDPs is little understood. Prior studies (see e.g. Selsky and Parker, 2005; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b) typically borrow ideas from the more general alliance literature, according to which complementary partner capabilities (e.g. Dyer and Singh, 1998), resource dependencies (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1990), and trust (e.g. Gulati, 1995; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994) are important drivers of alliance formation (see e.g. Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b). We argue that, while these aspects certainly apply to CSDPs as well, CSDPs share specific features affecting their formation which we need to better understand. First, unlike many business alliances, CSDPs typically cross multiple – organizational, geographic, and sector – boundaries (e.g. Rufin and Rivera-Santos, 2012; Murphy et al., 2012). Second, CSDPs are typically project-based, i.e. they show a certain degree of uniqueness and complexity and are characterized by time limitations (Kolk et al., 2008; Selky and Parker, 2005, 2010). At the same time, CSDPs are often designed to promote longer-term objectives of development and transnational governance.

We argue that because of the boundary-crossing and project-like nature of CSDPs, BAs are critical in their formation. Following prior studies on the role of individuals in partnership formation (see e.g. Waddock, 2010; Kolk, van Dolen and Vock, 2010), we show how BAs translate complex and ambiguous conditions into collaborative opportunities and constraints (Strauss, 1978; Lingo and O’Mahony, 2010; Selsky and Parker, 2010). We further show empirically, based on an inductive case study, that bridging agency in the context of CSDPs is typically a *collective* process involving *multiple* individuals from both inside and outside partnering organizations. Rather than just focusing on internal (Kolk et al., 2010) or external intermediaries (Stadtler and Probst, 2012), we examine how different *constellations of BAs* – internal and external, in initiating and/or supporting roles – affect CSDP formation. In particular we look

at the effect of bridging agent constellations on the potential of CSDPs to promote social innovation, in terms of providing novel solutions to social problems (Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller, 2008), and on the ability to establish and sustain longer-term alliances beyond single projects. We argue in line with previous studies (e.g. Manning and von Hagen, 2010), that longer-term, yet project-based CSDP alliances can serve as repositories of knowledge, trust and collaborative practices, and can therefore be critical in overcoming time limitations of single CSDP projects and in promoting often complex, longer-term development and governance objectives involving multiple stakeholders (Hemmati, 2002; Van Huijstee, Francken and Leroy, 2007).

Our findings have important implications for transnational governance research. In particular, they help better understand micro-level individual processes supporting multi-stakeholder collaboration and the promotion of longer-term development goals (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Kolk et al., 2010). We suggest that BAs and longer-term alliances between BAs are critical in enacting project opportunities across sectors and in sustaining a 'going concern' between business, government, and civil society organizations. While a few studies have examined the role of 'bridging' or 'intermediary' organizations (see e.g. Brown, 1991; Waddock, 1991; Stadtler and Probst, 2012; Deephouse and Heugens, 2009) and relational processes (e.g. Le Ber and Branzei, 2009, 2010; Murphy et al., 2012) in promoting development efforts, our findings draw a more nuanced picture. We show for example that the involvement of *external* intermediaries, e.g. consultants, has ambivalent effects. While they ease the creation of project opportunities across sectors (see also Stadtler and Probst, 2012), project agendas that are initiated by these intermediaries tend to be narrow and repetitive, whereas projects initiated by *internal* BAs, i.e. representatives of partner organizations, are more likely to promote social innovation. However, in order to pursue longer-term collaborative efforts beyond single projects, internal BAs are likely to engage external intermediaries in supporting roles.

Our study also connects to research on brokerage in project and alliance formation (Burt, 1992, 2004; Obstfeld, 2005; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010), thereby supporting the emerging 'practice turn' in network and alliance research (Sydow and Windeler, 1998; Berends, van Burg, and van Raaij, 2010; Manning, 2010). In line with prior research, we argue that brokerage is critical in managing the complexity of competing institutional logics of action (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta and Lounsbury, 2011; Vurro, Dacin and Perrini, 2010), and in synchronizing activities across geographic and institutional distances (Maaninen and Muellern, 2009; Mair, Marti and Ventresca, 2012). However, we show that brokerage not just results from structural opportunities (Burt, 1992), but can be seen as an institutionalized process that is embedded in particular field contexts (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010), whereby broker role expectations are reproduced from project to project (see also Manning, 2010). We also show that in situations of high institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011), such as in the context of CSDP formation, bridging agency – or brokerage – should be studied as a *collective process*, rather than individual activity, characterized by an implicit division of labor between different BAs. We also advance the idea that BAs may be critical in developing latent, longer-term alliances spanning institutional contexts. These alliances not only bundle network contacts and resources for future projects (e.g. Manning and Sydow, 2011), but help build repositories of knowledge and practices across institutional and geographic boundaries (see similar Murphy et al., 2012).

We start with an introduction of CSDPs as specific types of partnerships. Then we explore the role of intermediaries in CSDP formation. We introduce bridging agency as a collective process and discuss the importance of longer-term project-based alliances as repositories of knowledge, rules and resources. Then, we introduce our data and method, and discuss major empirical findings. Finally, we derive more general propositions from our findings and discuss implications for future research.

CSDPs AS PROJECT-BASED AND BOUNDARY-CROSSING: THE IMPORTANCE OF BRIDGING AGENTS

Cross-sector development partnerships (CSDPs) are often described as a particular form of collaboration creating solutions for social or development issues that exceed the capacity and resources of any single – governmental, business or non-governmental – organization (Van Huijstee et al., 2007; Selsky and Parker, 2005; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a). Facing resource constraints in many developing countries and weak intergovernmental regulation (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000; Bernstein and Cashore, 2007), such collaborative arrangements have been identified as critical in promoting complex international development efforts, such as poverty alleviation and economic development, and in supporting transnational governance, e.g. the promotion of sustainability standards (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Bartley, 2007). One example is the joint effort by Daimler and the German Development Agency GTZ between 2001 and 2003 to design and implement campaigns to educate factory workers in South Africa to combat the spread of HIV. Selsky and Parker (2005, 2010) describe CSDPs as typically non-routine, novel, complex and project-based (see also Kolk et al., 2008). Furthermore, CSDPs differ from other forms of collaboration in spanning *multiple* organizational, sector and often geographical boundaries (Rufin and Rivera-Santos, 2012; Van Huijstee et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2012). Despite their growing importance, we still know little about the actual formation of CSDPs. We argue that both the project-based and boundary-crossing character of CSDPs are central conditions affecting CSDP formation, and that because of that individual bridging agents play a fundamental role in the CSDP formation process. Next, we elaborate these dimensions in more detail.

In general, projects have been defined as temporary systems that bundle resources for a limited time to accomplish rather novel and complex goals (Goodman and Goodman, 1976; Lundin and Soederholm 1995; Obstfeld, 2012). CSDP projects are inter-organizational projects (Hellgren and Stjernberg, 1995) that are designed to promote changes in the social, economic and/or natural environment (Hirschman, 1967). For example, the HIV training partnership of Daimler and GTZ was

organized as a project of three years to promote the reduction of HIV infection among Daimler factory workers and their social circles. Importantly, unlike projects in other industries, such as creative industries (Goodman and Goodman, 1976; Manning and Sydow, 2011), CSDP projects are typically not seen as ends in themselves but as means or steps towards larger development goals, e.g. economic growth, sustainability etc. (Hirschman, 1967). In the case of Daimler and GTZ, reducing HIV mortality in South Africa can be seen as the larger development goal. Because of this, CSDP participants need to manage a critical tension between promoting multi-stakeholder efforts through concrete, time-limited projects, and pursuing longer-term development goals. One important way to manage this tension has been the development of longer-term, yet project-based alliances between core project partners who jointly form so-called 'project networks' by connecting core project teams with flexible partner pools for potential upcoming projects (see in general Starkey, Barnatt and Tempest, 2000; Windeler and Sydow, 2001; Manning, 2010). For example, Manning and von Hagen (2010) describe how single CSDP projects in the coffee sector got connected within a longer-term alliance between a development agency and multiple global coffee roasters whose joint projects would eventually lead to the initiation of the Common Code for the Coffee Community – today a major sustainability standard in the coffee sector (see also Reinecke, Manning and Von Hagen, 2012).

At the same time, CSDPs typically span multiple – organizational, sector, and geographic – boundaries. First of all, CSDPs involve multiple organizations, such as development agencies, MNEs, NGOs, and local firms. For example, in the HIV project case, participants included Daimler, local suppliers in South Africa, a German development agency, and non-governmental organizations engaged in health services and education. What's more, CSDP partners are typically embedded in different sectors or institutional fields and thereby exposed to different logics of action, in terms of taken-for-granted rules and beliefs guiding decision-making (Ocasio, 1997; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Lounsbury, 2007; Vurro et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2012). For example, business partners are typically associated with profit orientation but

also with an interest in demonstrating social responsibility, whereas government partners focus on public benefits of their constituents (Rangan, Samii and Van Wassenhove, 2006; Eweje, 2006; King, 2007). Competing logics create situations of institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011; Vurro et al., 2010) which increases ambiguity and uncertainty in the process of alliance formation (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010; Selsky and Parker, 2010). Notably, as pointed out by Vurro et al. (2010), cross-sector arrangements may differ in the degree of institutional complexity in terms of potentially conflicting orientations and logics of action. However, in line with Murphy et al. (2012), we argue that, overall, cross-sector collaborations tend to be exposed to a higher degree of institutional complexity than typical business-to-business (B2B) partnerships. In addition, CSDPs often span geographic boundaries, as they involve both multinational organizations and local partners, which further increases complexity (Maaninen and Muellern, 2009).

Quite surprisingly, most studies on the formation of CSDPs (e.g. Selsky and Parker, 2005; Le Ber and Branzei, 2009, 2010; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b) have not paid much attention to these important distinctive characteristics. Instead most research on CSDP formation has borrowed ideas from B2B alliance research, e.g. by emphasizing the importance of complementary resources and capabilities (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b; in general Dyer and Singh, 1998); joint interests (Clarke and Fuller, 2010; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b), prior trust (Selsky and Parker, 2005; in general Uzzi, 1997; Gulati, 1995), and resource dependencies (Selsky and Parker, 2005, 2010; in general: Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) in promoting CSDP formation. What's more, many scholars have taken an overly rationalistic view on the ability of partners across sectors to select the 'right' partner and to make 'accurate' assessments of potential joint value creation (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b, p. 935).

Notably, some scholars have been more sensitive to the particularities of cross-sector arrangements. Essentially, Rivera-Santos and Rufin (2010) for example argue that the formation of cross-sector partnerships is typically characterized by high uncertainty; that initial trust is typically low; and that

potential partners are typically unfamiliar with each other's interests and orientations (see also Seitanidi, Koufopoulos and Palmer, 2010). For example, for corporate partners it is typically, at least initially, very difficult to develop an awareness of 'social issues' as a precondition for collaborating with NGOs or government agencies (Selsky and Parker, 2005). In effect, cultural and institutional distances between partners and their value systems may constrain their ability to recognize collaborative opportunities (see also Van Huijstee et al., 2007; Rufin and Rivera-Santos 2012; Bitzer and Glasbergen, 2010; Le Ber and Branzei, 2009, 2010). Most of the obstacles for partnership formation identified in the literature – lack of partner awareness of social issues, lack of familiarity with potential partners, cultural and institutional distance – relate to the boundary-crossing nature of CSDPs. Arguably, these challenges are amplified by the fact that most collaborations are project-based, i.e. non-routine, complex and limited in time, which further limits the ability of partners to become familiar with each other and develop collaborative capabilities. Interestingly, while the project-based character of CSDPs – along with their boundary-crossing nature – has been acknowledged (e.g. Selsky and Parker, 2005, 2010), and while some of the related challenges have been identified, we still lack a better understanding of how they are resolved in the partnership formation process.

We argue that in the face of these challenges, certain individual actors – bridging agents (BAs) – play a particularly important role. We define BAs as individuals who facilitate project and alliance formation by interacting across organizational, geographic, and sector boundaries, and by translating complex and ambiguous conditions into collaborative opportunities and constraints (see in general Strauss, 1978; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010). Our focus on BAs follows a recent debate on the importance of individual actors in facilitating and shaping cross-sector arrangements (Kolk et al., 2012; Waddock, 2010). Facing institutional complexity, individuals 'make a difference' (Waddock, 2010) by making sense of ambiguous situations (Selsky and Parker, 2010), and by framing collaborative opportunities (Kaplan, 2008; Rivera-Santos and Rufin, 2010). In addition, they may develop longer-term network relations across

organizations and sectors which can support collaborative efforts (Le Ber and Branzei, 2009, 2010) and which can help develop what Murphy et al. (2012) call a 'relational capacity for social innovation'. We seek to better understand under what conditions BAs may not only promote CSDP project and alliance formation, but also the potential for social innovation.

Our emphasis on BAs also connects to a long-standing debate on brokerage in the alliance and network literature. BAs resemble the 'tertius iungens' broker (Obstfeld, 2005) who brings previously unconnected partners together. BAs perform 'nexus work' (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010) by reaching out to potential project partners and by reducing ambiguity that stems from the initial inability of partners to recognize collaborative opportunities and constraints. This is particularly important in situations of institutional complexity where multiple logics of action confront each other (Greenwood et al., 2011; Lounsbury, 2002, 2007). As noted by Weick (1995), ambiguity does not come from lack of information, but from the co-existence of multiple potential meanings. BAs therefore often take the role as 'infomediaries' (Deephouse and Heugens, 2009) as they filter and interpret information, and thereby define situations and make partners recognize 'mutual interests' and possibly even interdependencies promoting collaboration. However, as we see in more detail later, BAs also pursue their own interests by tailoring collaborative conditions for potential partners such that they can benefit from the alliance in the longer-term. In so far, they also benefit from the lack of mutual awareness of partners prior to collaboration (Burt, 1992, 2004; Seitanidi et al., 2010).

While BAs can be critical in alliance formation in general, in the context of CSDPs they seem particularly important, as CSDPs cross multiple boundaries at the same time. On the one hand, BAs in our context interact with stakeholders that are embedded in different 'social worlds' (Clarke, 1991; Strauss, 1984), e.g. the worlds of business and public policy (King, 2007; Van Huijstee et al., 2007), which follow different logics of action and value creation (King, 2007; Le Ber and Branzei, 2009, 2010; Seitanidi et al., 2010). On the other hand, BAs interact across different geographic contexts which increases the

multiplicity of norms, agendas and value systems BAs need to deal with. In so far, our notion of BAs goes beyond the typical notion of broker in creative industries (Burt, 2004; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010), or the notion of boundary spanner in B2B supplier relations (Aldrich and Herker, 1977). Our notion, by contrast, resembles the concept of 'bridging agents' as proposed by Strauss (1978): individuals who catalyze differences and shape social practices across different social worlds and geographies (see also Mair et al., 2012), rather than just across organizations.

Also, rather than focusing on particular BAs, we seek to understand bridging agency as a *collective* process involving *multiple*, both internal and external, BAs who interact among themselves as well as with other stakeholders, in order to create collaborative arenas across multiple boundaries. Prior research in cross-sector contexts and beyond has focused primarily on activities and roles of individual brokers or broker organizations. For example, Stadtler and Probst (2012) focus in their study on the various roles of *external* intermediaries, e.g. consultants or development agencies. These roles include: mediator, facilitator, learning catalyst and legitimator. Intermediaries may be important in problem definition, consensus-building, setting rules, and negotiating costs and benefit (Gray, 1989; Das and Teng, 1998). Other scholars, in turn, have focused on various activities of *internal* managers and staff of partnering organizations in the process of partnership formation (Kolk et al., 2010), e.g. their ability and willingness to share information and to negotiate various interests within and across organizations as so-called 'boundary spanners' (see in general also Aldrich and Herker, 1977). By contrast, we shift focus from particular BAs to different *constellations of internal and external BAs* interacting in project initiating and supporting roles in CSDP formation, thereby taking account of the complexity of 'bridging' as a collective process rather than individual activity.

Finally, whereas a number of studies have focused on intermediary or 'bridging' *organizations* and their roles in partnership formation (Brown, 1991; Waddock, 1991; Doz, Olk and Ring, 2000; Stadtler and Probst, 2012), we focus explicitly on the role of *individuals*, thereby responding to the call for more

micro-level studies focusing on individual level interaction in CSDP formation processes (Kolk et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2012). Thereby we acknowledge the potentially critical role of individuals in framing and sense-making processes (Selsky and Parker, 2010; Waddock, 2010), in establishing trust under conditions of high uncertainty (Rivera-Santos and Rufin, 2010), and in nurturing longer-term network relations (Murphy et al., 2012). However, we also acknowledge organizational membership of BAs as an important – both facilitating and constraining condition – for their activities.

Next, we analyze how and in what constellations BAs affect the formation of CSDPs. On the one hand, we are interested in how different BA constellations affect the potential of CSDPs to promote social innovation, and the ease at which CSDPs get initiated. On the other hand, we seek to understand the role of different BAs in promoting longer-term alliances beyond singular projects to promote the pursuit of complex global development goals. Based on our findings we develop propositions for future research within and beyond the context of CSDP formation.

DATA AND METHOD

We employ an explorative case analysis using multiple comparable cases (Yin, 2003) to study the role of BA constellations in CSDP formation. In general, case studies help better understand socially complex processes which cannot be easily captured with survey-based designs (Siggelkow, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989). The engagement of different BAs in CSDP formation is such a complex process. To further explore various constellations of BA engagement and their effects, we use a multi-case design that allows to compare different project formation processes within the same case context (Yin, 2003).

The empirical context is the so-called ‘Public Private Partnership’ (PPP) program in European development cooperation. Following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and confirmed more recently by the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan 2011, European donors have been launching PPP programs in order to facilitate private sector contribution to international development cooperation (see

in more general, Van Huijstee et al., 2007). PPP development projects have been studied previously as particularly interesting cases of cross-sector partnerships (Selsky and Parker, 2010; Stadtler and Probst, 2012). They involve private firms, government-led development agencies, and local partners in developing countries; they are partly financed by the respective donor government and aim at implementing projects that lead to positive effects in both business and development. The public partner is expected to benefit from corporate know-how and financial support; private partners are expected to benefit from local know-how, the contact network and the legitimacy of public development agencies. PPP development projects typically last up to three years and address issues of economic development, environment, agriculture, water supply, health and education (BMZ, 2002; ADA, 2009). In so far, PPP development projects are fairly special 'PPPs' (Stadtler and Probst, 2012), and have little in common with PPP outsourcing models in construction or public service operation (see for the latter e.g. Kouwenhoven, 1993). Our focus, therefore, is not on the 'PPP model' as such, but on development PPPs as examples of international CSDPs. PPP development programs have been launched by 20 donor countries. This study is based on project-related data from two of these programs – the "PPP program" by the German Federal Ministry for Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the "Business Partnership Program" by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

As one of the first donors in Europe, the German BMZ launched its PPP program in 1998. Until today, over 1300 PPP projects have been implemented by German development agencies. Most projects have been implemented by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ, today: GIZ). GTZ has offices in over 130 countries with more than 17,000 staff. GTZ carries out international development projects for BMZ in different sectors, including agriculture, infrastructure, education, security, health, resource conservation, and peace-building. Modeled after the German PPP program, the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) launched its Business Partnership Program in 2005 and has been funding around 70 projects with approx. 20 Million Euro since that time. One author initially studied three PPP

projects involving the German agency GTZ in 2001/2; the other author applied the same research design to study five PPP projects conducted by ADA in 2010.

Our study therefore follows a replication logic as proposed by Yin (2003). The first round of cases was an exploratory opportunity to identify various conditions of PPP formation, including roles and constellations of BAs in this process. Replicating the design of this earlier study in the Austrian development context later on, allowed us to increase external validity of case findings and make theoretical propositions to inform future research. Although our total number of eight cases does not allow for any statistical generalization, it does allow us to substantiate and support inductive findings beyond single or dual case designs and support a 'generalization in small steps' (Diesing, 1971). As a limitation, our case data was collected retrospectively and does not follow a longitudinal design. Therefore, our focus of analysis is on various constellations of BAs and their effects on partnership formation, rather than on the actual *process* of partnership formation.

All the projects we studied (see Table 1) were launched at the beginning of each program – both of which are similar in design – which allows project comparison across program contexts. Extraneous variation thus is relatively low (Eisenhardt, 1989). Projects were initially selected based on suggestions of project coordinators, timeliness and availability of interview partners at the time the studies were conducted. Projects varied in terms of novelty of objectives at the time projects were launched. Also, whereas some projects would lead to longer-term project-based alliances between project partners, others were not followed up on. This diversity in features allowed us to study, retrospectively, the effect of different constellations of BAs in project formation.

In terms of data collection, overall 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews of 1 to 2 hours length each were conducted with project participants and project observers. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. For each project, at least two interviews were conducted: one with the project coordinator of the development agency, and one with the private partner coordinator. Additional interviews were

conducted with the head of the PPP program at GTZ, a senior project coordinator, and project stakeholders from non-profit development organizations. Interviews focused on the PPP formation process, the involvement of different partners, the formulation of goals and the role of prior relations for project initiation. Data collection was supplemented by secondary material, in particular project evaluations and project descriptions. Importantly, both interviews and evaluations informed about the degree to which particular projects were seen as innovative. Also, one author has extensive onsite experience as project manager at ADA (since 2012). In this position, the author has been able not only to get insight into additional PPP projects, but to track the extent to which previous projects have promoted longer-term project-based relationships and future projects, and what role BAs have played in this process. Informal conversations with project representatives and observations of meetings have given very detailed and on-the-ground information. Other studies on project formation (e.g. Bechky, 2006) similarly combine retrospective qualitative interview data with field observations.

For the analysis, we cross-tabulated interview and secondary material and analyzed data along core dimensions of interest, including key properties of projects (e.g. degree of novelty, follow-up projects), and constellations of BAs involved in project formation. More specifically, our focus on BAs led us to categorize different types of BAs – internal and external – as well as different ways in which they get involved – in initiating or supporting roles, and the effects of these constellations on both the formation of particular projects and the emergence of longer-term alliances. We support our findings with power quotes in the text, and proof quotes in tables (Pratt, 2009).

We start out with a brief description of each PPP project, the partners involved, the field context and important similarities and differences between projects. We then categorize BAs and patterns of involvement in project formation processes. After that, we elaborate how different constellations of BAs impacted project formation and the emergence of longer-term alliances.

The main objective of Project (3) was to help establish social and labor standards among shoe-making suppliers in India. It was among the first PPP projects targeting social and labor standards. Main project partner was ShoeRetail – a well-known shoe retailer in Germany – who collaborated with GTZ to have eight selected suppliers certified and comply with international labor standards at a time when labor standards were only beginning to affect business practice in the textiles industry. Certification included the abolishment of child and forced labor, better health and safety standards. At the end of the project, seven out of eight suppliers got certified.

Projects (4) to (8) were implemented by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). Project (4) focused on training measures in the Albanian textile industry in order to improve the employability of local sewers and raise the sector's productivity. Within the project – which was implemented by the textile company TexMaker (name changed) in cooperation with local training institutions – a curriculum was developed, teachers were trained and special infrastructure was installed to allow blended learning. The project was initiated and planned by an international textile consultant.

Project (5) aimed at developing ecologically friendly pomegranate cultivation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and was executed by the Austrian fruit and beverage producer DrinkMaker (name changed) together with local training centers and cooperatives. The firm's demand for reliable pomegranate supply motivated its engagement in building local capacities, know-how, and technical structures for the cultivation and further processing of this fruit. The project was quite unusual at that time and partly implemented by external consultants.

Project (6) promoted production and sales of organic Baobab seeds in final products (oil, seed cake) in Europe and Africa. The project was developed and implemented by the Austrian food retailer FoodRetail (name changed) in cooperation with a Senegalese production firm; main activities included the development of technical and personnel resources as well as product certification. The project was initiated by the Austrian applicant, who had been a consultant for the African firm before.

Project (7) aimed at developing a value chain for the manufacturing and distribution of organic fair-trade women's clothing in Peru. Supported by a local non-profit organization, the project was mainly executed by the young Austrian fashion company FashionRetail (name changed). It empowered socially disadvantaged deaf women to produce and sell creative, organic and high quality fashion products. This unusual project was initiated by a company's employee.

Project (8) aimed at building up local structures for the processing of coconuts into fibers and the international distribution of its final products. In order to ensure supply and train local farmers, the applicant – the Austrian food retailer FoodRetail (name changed) – worked together with local Mexican cooperatives. The project was initiated by an agricultural consulting firm.

Next, we analyze in more detail the formation of these PPP projects, focusing on the role of BAs. Formally, PPP formation involves certain procedures such as the submission of a project proposal by the private partner to the respective coordination office of the public development agency. The proposal is then evaluated by PPP specialists at the agency and either accepted or rejected. This is followed by the joint formulation of a concept, including project objectives, partner contributions, and implementation. A contract is set up, followed by regular progress reports and a final report. Criteria of initial proposal evaluation include: significant contribution of the private partner; project goals in line with development policy agenda; significant positive regional impact; feasibility and cost efficiency; avoidance of free-rider effects, i.e. subsidizing firm activities which would happen even without public support. As interviews indicated, most of these criteria were initially perceived by participants as highly ambiguous. In reducing ambiguity, BAs played an important role. More concretely, we analyze how BAs get involved as part of a collective 'bridging agency' process and how their involvement affects project formation.

BRIDGING AGENCY AS A COLLECTIVE PROCESS: CONSTELLATIONS AND EFFECTS

Above we defined bridging agency as a collective process. BAs who participate in this process are both self-serving in pursuing individual interests (Burt, 1992) and contributing to collective goals of constituting and implementing joint project agendas (Obstfeld, 2005; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010). We recognize that the distinction between BAs and *other* individuals involved in project formation is blurry. However, we reserve the term 'bridging agent' for those individuals who actively contribute to building project arenas by interacting with other project constituents *across* rather than within organizational, institutional and/or geographic boundaries. Notably, other individuals, e.g. various managers and staff members of participating organizations who are not in direct contact with other organizations (Kolk et al. 2012), can be also important in disseminating and shaping project ideas. This study, however, focuses explicitly on BAs. Next, we describe types, constellations and effects of BAs.

Types of Bridging Agents

Our cases suggest that various individuals during project formation perform bridging activities. We distinguish between internal and external BAs. *Internal bridging agents* are employed at the main partner organizations – here: the development agency (as public partner) or the partnering firm. Internal BAs are not necessarily formal boundary spanners (Aldrich and Herker, 1977), but they are boundary spanners in practice (Levina and Vaast, 2005) as they engage in various interactions with individuals in other organizations and sectors – even beyond (or outside) their job descriptions. Also, internal BAs typically do not *manage* projects themselves, but rather help *initiate* them.

Reasons for becoming an internal BA can be manifold. For example, some internal BAs who work for the development agency may have become a primary contact person because of their regular involvement in industry meetings with the private sector; or they may have a career history in the corporate world; and/or they may be formally assigned to reach out to potential project partners. For example, the GTZ BA who was a key driver in initiating Project (2) works as an agriculture expert and as

such got well-connected with agriculture and food companies. Over time, communicating with food producers and retailers has become a central aspect of his work, partly because connecting to industry has been part of his professional identity, partly because his outreach activities have helped tease out potential collaborations in areas of sustainable farming, quality improvement etc.:

"I get things going. I make concepts. I talk to firms, because firms prefer a dialogue with technical experts rather than with administrators. [...] But I stay away from management."

In turn, partner firms communicate with development agencies through their own internal BAs. These are typically senior managers in supply and production, or experts in corporate social responsibility and corporate affairs. Some have particular experience in developing countries and got in contact with NGOs and development agencies through their personal career history. For example, the BA of CoffeeRoast who facilitated the formation of Project (2) is responsible for corporate affairs at his company. In his case, interactions with representatives from development agencies, such as GTZ, have been a result of his personal engagement in developing countries, in particular in Latin America, where he met several GTZ development experts: "...if you stay a little longer in a country [like this], you get to know the other Germans." Unlike in Germany, where encounters of representatives of public and private sector organizations are fairly rare, expatriate communities in developing countries often facilitate cross-sector contacts. Also, business operations in these countries tend to be more enmeshed with community development and international funding efforts.

Unlike internal BAs, *external BAs* operate as legally independent intermediaries between development agencies and business partners. Notably, other studies (e.g. Stadtler and Probst, 2012) conceive development agencies themselves (such as GTZ) *as* (external) intermediaries. We prefer a different distinction: whereas development agencies typically become the 'public' partner in PPP arrangements and hence do not take an 'external' role, there are some intermediaries, in particular freelance consultants, who directly promote project formation by interacting and negotiating with both

the public and private partner, but who are legally independent. Notably, a number of *other* stakeholders, e.g. local NGOs, business associations, and local institutions in developing countries, also play important ‘external’ roles either by facilitating or constraining, or by being affected by CSDP projects. Typically, however, they do not directly shape project idea generation, but instead are ‘brought in’ – through internal or external BAs – to satisfy project funding criteria and/or to facilitate project implementation. They hence become important external project constituents, but they do not take BA or intermediary roles in the more narrow sense. We focus here on the latter.

In our case sample, many projects (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8) involved external BAs, mostly in form of legally independent freelance consultants, in the project formation process. Again, reasons for taking external BA roles in the context of CSDPs can be manifold. Some consultants specialize in PPP projects in particular industries thanks to their industry expertise and prior engagements with development projects. Others occasionally operate as external BAs on a contract basis thanks to their career history and professional network in both development agencies and the corporate world.

For example, Mr. Schmidt, who was an important facilitator of Project (1), is a consultant specializing in textile-related projects given his related industry background. Over years, Schmidt has established contacts both with the GTZ and potential partner firms. Schmidt says:

“I know on the one hand the partnering firms and I have [on the other hand] established and maintained contacts with the GTZ through long-term experience. I know the circumstances on both sides.”

As another example, the external BA Mr. Becker, who helped initiate Project (2), first worked for the private partner, then as an independent consultant, then as an internal GTZ expert. His career history in both worlds made him a trusted expert in development projects involving private partners. In both cases, “knowing both sides” allows external BAs to identify project opportunities and facilitate interaction between both parties. However, the distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ BA can be blurry, as BAs, such as Mr. Becker, may switch from internal to freelance occupations over time.

BAs can be further distinguished by their order and way of involvement in project formation. More concretely, we distinguish BAs in *initiating and supporting roles*. BAs in *initiating roles* are those individuals who – in the context of particular projects – communicate initial ideas and often lead the project formation process. One example is Mr Schmidt in the initiation of Project (1). Using his established contacts with GTZ and textile firms, Schmidt initiated project formation by communicating project opportunities to private sector clients as well as GTZ. Schmidt remembers:

“I am the one who practically connected the partners [...], who developed the basic idea together with experts at [private firm] and who, during project implementation, monitored single steps.”

In other cases, initiating BAs are internal staff members of the private or public partner organization (see in detail below). No matter whether they are internal or external, initiating BAs typically share certain skills, in particular the ability to frame potential project agendas in the face of ambiguity in a way that is appealing to collaborating parties. This includes the ability to ‘translate’ objectives in an understandable way to both the private and public partner. Importantly, initiating BAs often start working on projects long before the actual proposal development. Their involvement typically begins around one year prior to the project launch and often continues until its end (typically after two or three years).

However, in order to be effective, initiating BAs typically rely on BAs in *supporting roles* as the project development process progresses. BAs in supporting roles can again be internal or external. In any case, their main role is to negotiate project terms more concretely with participating organizations and other stakeholders. This typically includes the formulation of project proposals. For example, the external BA Schmidt relied on internal BAs at both partner organizations who performed various supporting roles. In the case of Project (1), for example, early communication with the GTZ was handled by an internal GTZ textiles expert who supports project development mainly in Asian countries and who serves as an important gatekeeper of project ideas. He remembers:

„It started with a call from Schmidt: ‚Could this be a PPP project?’ [...] And then we sat together with [private firm].“

Our findings suggest that each constellation affects both the project agenda and the likelihood that longer-term alliances get established. Next, we explain main effects of bridging agency as a collective process, and then analyze how different BA constellations shape this process.

In general, bridging agency involves the translating and framing of structural conditions as opportunities and constraints for project collaboration, as well as the alignment of emerging project ideas with organizational, sector and geographical conditions. As part of this process, BAs collectively establish common ground among major stakeholders. This is not a harmonious process, but typically a process influenced by partially conflicting orientations and perceptions. Importantly, the recognition of ‘interests’ and ‘complementarities’ of resources and capabilities *result* from bridging processes rather than being an antecedent of project initiation, as often suggested in the literature.

Project (1) may illustrate this. In this case, Mr Schmidt – an external consultant – was the initiator. In other words, Project (1) is an example of *Constellation 3* (see Table 2). An important part of his initiating role was to be able to translate the introduction of the PPP program at GTZ into an opportunity for collaboration for private firms. Mr Schmidt explains:

“TexImport would have never learned about the PPP program without me. Many SMEs don’t even know this program exists. [...] CEOs might notice that there is a funding program, but they are too busy to think about it.”

Due to the boundary-crossing nature of PPP development projects, interest in collaboration does not ‘exist’ but needs to be *generated* through bridging agency. This involves a sense-making process in which emerging project agendas are aligned with decision-making criteria of participating organizations. More concretely, in the case of Project (1), Schmidt managed to communicate the PPP program to the private partner TexImport as a *funding opportunity* which resonated with familiar notions of government support for business activities. At the same time, Schmidt communicated TexImport’s plan to qualify textile workers in Turkey to GTZ as a means to raise education levels in the region which resonates with a typical *development objective*. The BA at GTZ remembers:

“In this case it was pretty clear. [...] This whole domain of vocational education plays a huge role in most countries. [...] It’s relatively easy to find a connection [to established development agendas].”

In order for this project to have a regional impact beyond the benefits for TexImport’s operations, the internal BA of GTZ then negotiated with Schmidt the involvement of a local training school, and the responsibility of TexImport in helping train an additional number of textile workers.

Whereas similar processes of translation, alignment and adjustment to reach common ground can be found across projects (see also Table 3), the way in which project ideas get developed *differs* depending on the constellation of BAs involved. Findings suggest that projects initiated by internal BAs (Constellations 1 and 2; see Table 2) tend to show a higher degree of novelty thus promoting social innovation, whereas project ideas generated by external BAs (Constellation 3) tend to show a high degree of resemblance with project types collaborating parties are already familiar with.

To explain this, let’s take a closer look at Project (1). As an external BA, Schmidt depends on his ability to get private firms and development agencies to collaborate. In other words, his business model is to propose projects with a high likelihood of success. Using his expertise in both sectors, he does that by using mutually familiar reference terms to frame project opportunities. Promoting education is an established category in development circles. Qualifying workers is also a regular part of establishing operations in the private sector. In other words, a familiar ‘problem’ – lack of education – was framed around a familiar practice – qualifying workers. Schmidt concedes, for example, that his private client would have qualified workers with or without GTZ support:

“[The training program] was supposed to run without the GTZ – and it would have been implemented in a similar way, but the difference is that through the PPP program we were provided a better foundation for implementation.”

A similar pattern can be found in Project (4). Again, an external consultant would frame a qualification measure in terms of a ‘valuable development initiative’. By enacting familiar frames of reference, external BAs lower the likelihood of conflict or misunderstanding to occur in the project formation process, and,

in turn promote trust based on the familiarity of topics, even if partners are unfamiliar with each other. However, officials at development agencies also recognize the repetitive nature of such projects as a limitation. With respect to Schmidt, one GTZ representative remarks:

“This type of project is usually textile firms who relocate and improve the qualification of suppliers and training schools. In principle, this is an interesting project category, but we have done this so many times – we don’t need to necessarily continue with this.”

By contrast, projects initiated by internal BAs – *Constellations 1 and 2* – tend to be characterized by a higher degree of novelty for participating organizations. One example is Project (3). The main reason for the private partner to approach GTZ was the firm’s perceived inability to handle NGO complaints about the violation of labor and social standards. The internal BA communicated the situation to GTZ as an open agenda inviting numerous possible solutions. Similarly, in Project (2), the private partner – a coffee roaster – faced a situation where coffee supply from Peru was relatively cheap, yet the quality was insufficient. Raising quality through standards and government regulation, however, would require the involvement of local institutions, such as the Coffee Chamber, which goes beyond the scope of the firm’s own political management capacity. Only by involving a legitimate government agency – the GTZ – such a project could be implemented. The BA of the GTZ remembers:

“[As a private corporation] you cannot do it on your own. You have to work with the GTZ as an institution, because otherwise you lack credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the Peruvian Government. You need credibility to actually build up willingness on the government side to engage in changing legislature.”

While some projects that are initiated by internal BAs would be negotiated entirely by internal BAs – Constellation 1 – other projects would involve external BAs later in the process – Constellation 2. Project formation under *Constellation 1* is often perceived as a difficult negotiation process. One major difficulty relates to differences in logics of thinking and operating, and barriers of understanding between private firms and public development agencies (see also quote in Table 3). That is, project formation processes involving entirely internal BAs (without external support) tend to be most conflict-laden. The BA of the

private firm in the initiation of Project (3) for example remembers the difficulties involved in establishing a mutual understanding of what a PPP collaboration might entail for both parties:

“We took a long time since we kept miscommunicating. For the GTZ to understand what we want, what’s important to us, and, on the other hand, to understand what the GTZ means when talking about ‘PPP’. [...] Several meetings took place where people got a feel for the other party, because initially no one knew what to expect from the other side.”

Interestingly, however, this project eventually developed a new step-wise approach of certifying labor standards at supplier firms which served as a role model for future certification projects. In other words, Project (3) turned out to be an important social innovation. Similarly, Project (7), whose formation involved complex negotiations of interests, goals and expectations (see quote Table 3), eventually resulted in an innovative concept for creating organic and high quality fashion products combined with empowerment of socially disadvantaged deaf women in Peru. Interesting in both cases is the willingness of internal BAs to engage in this thorough process of framing collaborative opportunities – in spite of lacking project templates. Interviews suggest that a shared going concern among individual BAs – beyond organizational incentives – played an important role in pursuing joint efforts despite conflicting organizational frames. However, as interviewees concede, project negotiation processes could have easily failed as partners seemed barely able to manage the complexity involved.

By contrast, project formation processes under *Constellation 2* were typically perceived as less tedious, while still leading to rather novel project agendas as compared to formation processes under *Constellation 3* (see above). In *Constellation 2*, internal BAs were able to decouple the negotiation of project objectives from the administrative process of project formulation. After reaching commitment and a going concern, internal BAs would delegate authority of implementation – including the design of proposals – to external experts. In the case of Project (2), for example, the two BAs engaged an external consultants with professional experience in both worlds to craft a proposal (and to reach out to local partners) on behalf of the two internal BAs. While the BAs had agreed on implementing new coffee quality

The Role of BAs in Longer-Term Alliances

Several projects we studied followed previous projects involving the same core partners and thus triggered the development of longer-term alliances. Interestingly, however, only those projects which involved external BAs in the formation process – either in initiating or supporting roles – got embedded in longer-term alliances. In *Constellation 3* – with external BAs as initiators – interviews indicated a strong motivation of external BAs in generating repeat business with the development agency. For example, Mr Schmidt, who initiated Project (1), got involved in a number of projects with GTZ prior to Project (1) – yet under a different program: CoTrade. When the PPP program was launched, Schmidt was one of the first to successfully use the new funding opportunity:

“When CoTrade ran out, Schmidt quickly understood the principle of PPP and actively put it into practice. He basically sold PPP to [private firm]. [...] We had a project in Turkey; that was one of the first, and now in Bangladesh. That way, Schmidt [...] had a new source of income.”

A similar pattern can be observed for the initiator of Project (4) – an external consultant who launched a series of similar projects together with ADA (see Table 4). In both cases, qualification of workers was the focus of multiple projects which connected well to both the development agenda at that time, and the operational agenda of firms setting up business units in developing countries. The external BA, in both cases, would become the coordinator of a longer-term alliance and repeat initiator of similar project types – together with the development agency and various firms in the same industry, e.g. textiles.

Interestingly, some projects that got initiated by internal rather than external BAs also became embedded into a longer-term alliance. In particular, projects formed under *Constellation 2*, such as Projects 2 and 5, became part of longer-term collaborative efforts. For example, Project (2), which focused on sustainable coffee growing practices in Peru, followed a prior project in Colombia involving the same partners. At that time, both GTZ and the private partner shared an interest in ‘organic coffee’ – the GTZ (along with the Colombian government) saw organic coffee as a way to give coffee farmers better career

opportunities and to make it less attractive for them to enter the cocaine business. For the coffee roaster, organic was a potential new market segment of high quality coffee for environmentally conscious consumers. The BA of the roaster remembers:

“At that time, the PPP program did not even exist. We were probably one of the first to collaborate with the GTZ in that sector. The Colombia project was in a way already a ‘PPP’ project. [...] The Peru project [ie Project (2)] was then an official PPP.”

Unlike projects under Constellation 3, the main driver for the two internal BAs of Project 2 to continuously work together – even across funding programs – was their shared going concern (see also quote in Table 4). Both internal BAs formed an alliance coordinating a series of interrelated projects. Thereby, each internal BA would rely on the ability of the counterpart to leverage organizational resources. The private firm BA explains:

“All my contacts with GTZ go through [GTZ BA]. Since I am still unable and unwilling to understand how the GTZ works I am perfectly fine with knowing Mr. [GTZ BA] who helps me find my way. Because I don’t understand the organizational maze of the GTZ. Mr. [GTZ BA] does not know our structure either.”

This alliance, however, is complemented by the external BA Mr. Becker who got involved as a supportive consultant from early on. In the first project, Mr. Becker already got involved as independent consultant. In later projects, Mr. Becker got involved again – in particular for formulating proposals and for coordinating local partnerships. For both internal BAs it was critical to involve Mr. Becker in order to continue their alliance and professionalize project initiation. Like in the case of Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Becker shared an interest in ‘repeat business’. Yet, unlike Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Becker – as a supporting BA – had limited influence on the project agenda. His role focused on institutionalizing the process of project formulation as well as the coordination of local networks – coffee producers, Coffee Chambers and other stakeholders – on behalf of the two internal BAs.

Effects of Longer-Term Alliances on Project Initiation

Our findings suggest that longer-term alliances serve as repositories of resources and practices for repeat project initiation and implementation. However, the way they do that is influenced again by different BA constellations. We find that alliances that are initiated by external BAs (Constellation 3) replicate projects in terms of goals, scale and scope, whereas alliances that are initiated and coordinated by internal BAs, yet supported by external BAs (Constellation 2), develop projects which build on each other and thereby embody the continuous potential for social innovation. In other words, projects under Constellation 2 extend and further develop prior project agendas.

As noted above, alliances that are initiated and coordinated by external BAs largely follow the principle of repeat business. Thereby, external BAs repeatedly manage to translate private firm interests and public development policies into projects of a similar type. Mr. Schmidt's projects, for example, have been labeled the 'Schmidt model' by representatives of the development agency, i.e. textile worker qualification projects in different developing countries. A GTZ BA remembers:

„Mr. Schmidt took this role in other projects – crafting a concept with firms in line with the model he developed with TexImport. And these proposals would arrive here pretty complete, so we did not have to do much anymore.“

By contrast, alliances coordinated by internal BAs would typically bring about project agendas that built on each other over time. This can be illustrated by the alliance around Project (2). The two internal BAs, who initiated the longer-term alliance, represent organizations that are interested in 'up-scaling' rather than replicating project initiatives. Since initiating CSDPs is not their main 'business' but rather a means towards achieving longer-term organizational objectives, their alliance accordingly served a larger agenda. More concretely, from the viewpoint of GTZ each project addressing sustainable coffee growing practices is a step towards establishing sustainable practices at a larger scale – across countries and industries. Likewise, for CoffeeRoast each PPP with GTZ is a step towards establishing (and leading) a new market for sustainable coffee. As a result, the project agenda would extend from project to project. For example, while the predecessor project in Colombia aimed at qualifying cooperatives in environmentally

sustainable coffee growing practices, the Peru project went a step further by implementing coffee quality standards at the national level.

At the same time, the repeat involvement of Mr. Becker as a supporting external BA was an important means for institutionalizing and ‘pre-negotiating’ project formation and implementation practices (see also Table 4). In other words, unlike Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Becker – in his supporting role – served to ‘replicate’ project formation and implementation practices while supporting the longer-term alliance agenda of the two internal BAs of GTZ and CoffeeRoast. The GTZ BA remembers:

„We planned the [Peru] project long in advance. [...] Becker prepared this basically, but the [CoffeeRoast BA] officially read it and said yes let’s do it this way and then submitted it officially to the PPP office. But we prepared it together.“

In sum, the constellation of BAs involved in project formation has an important impact not only on the likelihood that longer-term alliances can emerge, but on the types of projects such an alliance can help initiate over time. In general, the involvement of external BAs may help form and sustain longer-term alliances. Yet, only if the alliance is coordinated by internal BAs it is likely to result in follow-up projects that promote larger development goals rather than merely replicating prior project agendas.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Cross-sector development partnerships (CSDPs) have become important forms of collaboration between business, governmental and civil society organizations in international development (Selsky and Parker, 2005, 2010; Kolk et al. 2008). CSDPs are typically project-based and cross multiple – organizational, sector, and geographic – boundaries. Because of that, we have argued and shown empirically, based on public private partnerships (PPPs) in development cooperation, that the formation of single CSDP projects and longer-term, yet project-based alliances is facilitated and affected by bridging agents (BAs), i.e. individuals who interact across multiple boundaries, and translate ambiguous conditions into collaborative opportunities and constraints (see also Strauss, 1978; Lingo and O’Mahony, 2010).

More concretely, we have shown that bridging agency is a collective process involving both internal and external BAs in initiating and supporting roles. Internal BAs are representatives of main partnering organizations; external BAs are intermediaries, e.g. consultants, who operate on behalf of partners, but are legally independent. BAs in initiating roles start project formation processes and typically lead project agendas; BAs in supporting roles get involved by initiating BAs, and help negotiate project terms with participating organizations. Based on case evidence, we have identified three main constellations: all BAs are internal (Constellation 1); initiating BAs are internal, but supporting BAs are external (Constellation 2); initiating BAs are external, and supporting BAs are internal (Constellation 3). We now develop concrete propositions for future research on the effects of various BA constellations on CSDP project agendas, and the emergence and character of longer-term CSDP alliances.

First, our findings indicate that BA constellations in CSDP project formation affect both the formation process and the characteristics of projects. On the one hand, the involvement of external intermediaries in either initiating or supporting roles (Constellations 2 and 3) facilitates and accelerates project formation, whereas formation processes that do not involve intermediaries (Constellation 1) are typically experienced as conflict-laden and tedious. This is the case for example in Project (3) (Labor and social standards in India) whose initiation suffered from ongoing misunderstandings due to institutional barriers between private and public partners. This confirms the problem of cultural and institutional distance in CSDP formation (Van Huijstee et al., 2007; Rufin and Rivera-Santos, 2012). By contrast, the formation of projects initiated by external intermediaries (Constellation 3) was perceived by participants as rather seamless. Even the complex Project (2) (Coffee quality standards in Peru) was accelerated through an external consultant who reached out to local partners and drafted the project proposal on behalf of project partners (Constellation 2). This finding corresponds with prior studies emphasizing the facilitating role of external professional intermediaries in sense-making and reducing environmental ambiguity across organizational, geographic and institutional boundaries (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010;

Maaninen and Muellern, 2009; Stadtler and Probst, 2012), which, in effect, accelerates the negotiation of collaborative agreements (see also Berggren, Soederlund and Anderson, 2001). Intermediaries with domain expertise may thus support very complex multi-stakeholder processes that span sector and geographic boundaries (Hemmati, 2002). We therefore propose:

Proposition 1: The formation of CSDP projects is facilitated and accelerated by the involvement of external bridging agents in either initiating or supporting roles (Constellations 2 and 3).

On the other hand, we show that those CSDP projects which are initiated by external BAs (Constellation 3) tend to replicate project templates which are very familiar to partnering organizations, whereas CSDP projects initiated by internal BAs (Constellations 1 and 2) are more likely to show a certain degree of novelty in terms of project objectives thus promoting social innovation. Examples of familiar project templates include two projects initiated by external consultants (Project 1 and 4) which target the qualification of textile workers – a project type both private partners and the development agencies were familiar with prior to project initiation. In both cases, external BAs communicated envisioned project goals to private partners as ‘regular training programs with public funding’ and to development agencies as ‘vocational education projects with private expertise’ (see for a very similar example, Selsky and Parker, 2010). By contrast, examples of more innovative projects include a step-wise certification of labor standards in India (Project 3); the nation-wide implementation of coffee quality standards in Peru (Project 2), and training of hearing-impaired textile workers in Peru (Project 7). All of these projects were initiated by internal BAs and were largely unprecedented in terms of objectives and partner constellations. Some of these projects would become important pilots for future projects.

To explain these differences, insights from the prior literature are useful. Prior studies show that professional project businesses rely on economies of repetition and recombination (Davies and Brady, 2000; Grabher, 2002; Manning and Sydow, 2011): Professionals and organizations whose survival depends on the regular initiation of projects with various partners, e.g. film producers and consultants, select and frame projects based on their potential to exploit existing capabilities and practices (Manning and Sydow,

2011). In particular for consultants who 'sell project ideas' to potential clients, referring to established and accepted templates is an important source of trust and means to overcome resistance (Sturdy, 1997; Glueckler and Armbruester, 2003; Fincham, 1999). This seems particularly true for multi-stakeholder projects whose boundary-crossing nature increases potential misunderstandings and resistance and narrows down the scope of project themes all major partners can easily agree on (Seitanidi et al., 2010; Rivera-Santos and Rufin, 2010). As mentioned above, CSDP formation is often constrained by a lack of trust between partners due to the fact that, at least initially, they are quite unfamiliar with each other's interests and orientations (Rivera-Santos and Rufin, 2010; Gulati, 1995). Because of this, focusing on very familiar topics helps external intermediaries establish 'swift trust' (Meyerson et al., 1996) between potential partners who otherwise lack commonalities.

By contrast, internal BAs are typically less interested in establishing 'swift trust', but in promoting the longer-term agenda of their own organization. CSDP initiation is thus not an objective in itself (as it is for professional intermediaries), but a potential means towards achieving organizational goals. The willingness of internal BAs to engage in sometimes difficult search and negotiation processes with potential partners is much greater, whereas professional external intermediaries (in initiating roles) act upon a 'business logic of intermediation' where opportunity costs increase the longer particular project formation processes take. In addition, project formation processes initiated by internal BAs tend to be more 'decentralized' than processes initiated by external BAs who 'pre-package' project ideas for all partners. Decentralization increases the potential for 'parallel idea development' and the exploration of new project themes (Lazer and Friedman, 2007). Notably, however, as pointed out earlier, the engagement of intermediaries in supporting roles at a later stage increases the likelihood that such projects will eventually take place. We propose:

Proposition 2: CSDP projects which are initiated by internal bridging agents (Constellations 1 and 2) are more likely to result in novel collaborative project agendas promoting social innovation, than projects initiated by external bridging agents (Constellation 3).

We also examined the role of BAs in the formation of longer-term, yet project-based alliances (see in general e.g. Manning and Sydow, 2011). Such alliances – which often expand into ‘project networks’ (Starkey et al. 2000; Windeler and Sydow, 2001; Manning, 2010; Manning and von Hagen, 2010) – are particularly important for pursuing often complex longer-term development agendas. They serve as repositories of resources and practices facilitating follow-up project initiation.

However, not every project leads or gets connected to a longer-term alliance. Our data suggests that in particular the involvement of external BAs (Constellation 2 and 3) makes the emergence and continuity of project-based alliances more likely. There are various reasons for that. In the case of Constellation 3, this tendency can be explained largely by the interest and ability of external intermediaries in initiating roles to generate ‘repeat business’ with the same clients (see in general Glueckler and Armbruester, 2003), and the related ability of these BAs to repeatedly frame new projects around familiar agendas (see also above). More surprisingly though, some projects which were initiated by internal BAs (such as Project 2) also became part of a longer-term alliance, whereas other projects (such as Projects 3 and 7) were one-off collaborations. In the former case, again the involvement of external BAs – in supporting roles – is critical. As intermediaries professionalize and accelerate project initiation (see above), their engagement also facilitates follow-up collaboration between internal BAs. This is because intermediaries lower coordination costs and increase the likelihood that internal BAs from different partnering organizations can repeatedly collaborate despite internal resource and time constraints. By contrast, in Constellation 1, changing organizational agendas and the absence of external BAs makes continued bridging agency for repeat collaboration more difficult. We propose:

Proposition 3: The involvement of external bridging agents (Constellations 2 and 3) facilitates the formation of longer-term CSDP alliances beyond singular projects.

Longer-term alliances are typically coordinated by the very BAs who also initiate singular projects. Because of that, project initiation within existing alliances is hugely affected by the alliance coordinator (see in

general, Gerwin and Ferris, 2004; Manning, 2010). Alliances that are coordinated by external BAs tend to exploit and replicate established rather than explore new project agendas, team formation and implementation processes. For example, Mr. Schmidt initiated a series of projects which all involved qualification of textile workers, in collaboration with the development agency and small or mid-size private firms. As noted above, consultants as project entrepreneurs share an interest in developing exploitable project capabilities and in achieving economies of repetition (Grabher, 2002; Davies and Brady, 2000; Manning and Sydow, 2011). By contrast, alliances that are coordinated by internal BAs, such as the alliance between GTZ and CoffeeRoast around sustainability-related projects in the coffee sector, may bring about a series of projects whose agenda builds up over time. As representatives of large organizations with longer-term, typically global strategic mandates, internal BAs from both partners share a concern in scaling up and extending collaborative initiatives (e.g. increasing the market for sustainable coffee, and increasing the community impact of sustainability initiatives), which promotes continuous exploration of new, yet related project agendas. However, the repeated use of external BAs, e.g. in writing project proposals, promotes replication of project implementation practices that get reconnected to changing project agendas. This is an interesting example of collaborative paths (Manning and Sydow, 2011) which not only bring about partnership-specific logics of collaboration (Le Ber and Branzei, 2010), but develop a longer-term developmental logic. This suggests that Constellation 2 – internal BAs in initiating, external BAs in supporting roles – is most likely to promote what Murphy et al. (2012) called a longer-term ‘relational capacity for social innovation’. We propose:

Proposition 4: CSDP alliances that are coordinated by external bridging agents (Constellation 3) are likely to promote series of projects that are similar in scale and scope, whereas CSDP alliances that are coordinated by internal, but supported by external bridging agents (Constellation 2) are likely to promote series of more innovative projects supporting a longer-term development agenda.

Our findings have important implications for analyzing micro-foundations and individual-level dynamics of multi-stakeholder collaboration and transnational governance (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Kolk

et al., 2012; Waddock, 2010). Our findings suggest that individual BAs are critical in enacting collaborative opportunities across sectors and in influencing what many have called ‘mutual interests’ or ‘common ground’ between business, government, and civil society organizations (Gray, 1989). Whereas prior research has already noted the importance of ‘bridging organizations’ and intermediaries (e.g. Brown, 1991; Waddock, 1991; Stadtler and Probst, 2012), we have not only shown that both internal and external bridging agents are important, but that the various ways in which they get involved have a huge impact on cross-sector arrangements. In particular, our study suggests that the involvement of external intermediaries has ambivalent effects. When intermediaries – here in particular: consultants – *initiate* CSDP projects and longer-term alliances, they are likely to *hinder* the promotion of innovative development agendas, as they tend to exploit familiar project templates to lower resistance and to ‘sell’ project opportunities to clients. Conversely, when intermediaries enter project formation at a later stage – in *supporting* roles – they may *facilitate* innovative CSDP projects as well as the formation of longer-term alliances pursuing innovative goals. This is because they help professionalize the implementation of collaborative project ideas which may emerge from often idiosyncratic bridging processes between representatives of partnering organizations. Future research on multi-stakeholder processes (e.g. Hemmati, 2002) needs to pay more attention to these dynamics.

Our study also indicates the importance of the project-based nature of CSDPs in affecting the dynamics of multi-stakeholder processes in international development (Manning and von Hagen, 2010). Rather than designing continuous collaborative operations, development partners – facilitated by individual BAs – typically develop particular projects in the short term and ‘latent relationships’ in the long term (Hadjikhani, 1996; Starkey et al., 2000; Manning and von Hagen, 2010) which get re-activated through BAs as new opportunities arise, such as new funding opportunities for particular projects. Future research needs to better capture the project-based dynamics of these relationships and their partly informal character. In particular to understand larger global multi-stakeholder initiatives (see e.g. Djelic

and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Wijen and Ansari, 2007), it seems paramount to elaborate the drivers and dynamics of longer-term, yet project-based collaborative efforts and the role BAs play in this. This may also help flesh out the very interesting, yet underdeveloped notion of a 'relational capacity for social innovation' as proposed by Murphy et al. (2012) in their recent article.

Our study finally has interesting implications for research on brokerage and intermediation in the formation of inter-organizational projects and alliances (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005), and the emergence of collaborative practices under institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011; Mair et al., 2012). Our study confirms the importance of intermediaries in enacting collaborative opportunities within ambiguous environmental contexts (Obstfeld, 2005; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010). In addition, our study suggests that exposure to competing institutional logics, such as in the domain of international development, promotes the professionalization of intermediary roles (see also Lounsbury, 2002, 2007; Mair et al., 2012). Beyond international development, we can expect such a process of professionalization of intermediary roles to also matter in the context of public private partnerships in construction and infrastructure development (Kouwenhoven, 1993), or in other contexts where different institutional logics come together. Our study further indicates that, because of that, 'business logics of intermediation' may emerge in particular at the intersection of such competing logics (here: business and public policy; Rangan et al., 2006). This has interesting implications, as it suggests that intermediation is likely to also *follow* certain logics rather than just mediate them, which, in turn, may affect the ways competing frames of action are reconciled on a regular basis.

Our findings also add to the emerging practice turn in project and network research (Sydow and Windeler, 1998; Berends et al., 2010; Manning, 2010). We show that, in particular in situations of high institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011), bridging agency in the formation of inter-organizational projects can be expected to be a collective process involving multiple internal and external BAs, rather than a set of activities performed by particular entities (Doz et al., 2000). Over time, collaborative practices

of brokerage may institutionalize whereby certain divisions of labor may emerge between initiating and supporting bridging roles. Such a practice-sensitive perspective may counterbalance primarily structural perspectives on brokerage which have focused on the enabling and constraining position of brokers vis-à-vis others (see e.g. Burt, 1992, 2004; Obstfeld, 2005). In particular our study suggests that not only the involvement (or lack thereof) of external intermediaries impacts project formation, but the way in which intermediaries get involved. Also, our study suggests that brokerage has to be seen as a process involving not only inter-organizational, but inter-sectoral and inter-geographical boundary-spanning (see similar Maaninen and Muellern, 2009). Longer-term project alliances and networks, which are typically coordinated by BAs, may thereby serve as important repositories of trust, collaborative resources and practices across multiple boundaries.

Our study also has some notable limitations which need to be addressed in future research. *First*, we have limited information about the actual process of bridging across organizations and sectors. Longitudinal studies are needed to get a deeper understanding of how internal and external BAs interact over time. As part of this, future studies may reveal how bridging agency involves learning processes prior to and across CSDP projects (see also Murphy et al., 2012), and how BAs enter potentially conflicting situations and how they effectively resolve them. *Second*, while focusing on BAs, our study has neglected other potentially important individuals (e.g. internal staff members) and stakeholders in project formation processes, such as local partner firms and institutions. We encourage future studies to consider a more ‘complete’ analysis of interactions between individuals and organizations involved in project and alliance formation. *Third*, and related to this, our study has focused on interactions between public development agencies and private corporations. Future studies should compare our findings with contexts involving civil society organizations, e.g. NGOs, or other types of public agencies. *Fourth*, our study points to the importance of the career history of BAs and its impact on their particular role and effectiveness in project formation. Future studies with more detailed information on BA engagements over time could analyze

the co-evolution of career patterns and BA engagements. *Fifth*, while we acknowledge the importance of institutional complexity in promoting the need for BAs, future research could treat institutional complexity as a variable and generate more nuanced insights into how various degrees of complexity affect or get affected by bridging agency. *Sixth*, our study lacks objective data on project outcomes. While we looked at the potential of projects to promote longer-term alliances as well as social innovation based on their perceived novelty, other performance measures, such as particular cost-benefit outcomes for partners and other project stakeholders could shed more light on the effect of bridging agency on 'value creation' (Austin, 2010; Seitanidi et al., 2012a, 2012b). *Seventh*, we acknowledge that the effectiveness of bridging agency may be influenced by a range of conditions we neglect in this study, including cultural context, the history of collaborations, nationality of individuals and organizations, institutional distance between participating countries, funding conditions etc. We suggest that such contingencies should be included in a survey design that analyzes the role of BAs in CSDP formation along with other facilitating and constraining factors.

In conclusion, our study has developed a more nuanced understanding of how different constellations of BAs affect the initiation of cross-sector partnerships in international development. Our findings may not only stimulate further research on bridging agency in partnership formation, but also encourage public agencies as well as firms to pay attention to the critical roles and skill sets of BAs both within and outside their organizations in order to assess their ability to effectively enter cross-sector collaborations and to thereby contribute to the solution of complex problems in society today.

TO DO: Add Matthew A. Koschmann, Timothy R. Kuhn, and Michael D. Pfarrer

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Overview of Projects and Project Partners

Project Number/Title	Public Partner	Main Private Partner	Additional Participants
(1) Qualification of textile workers in Turkey	GTZ	TexImport (Textile Manufacturer)	Consultant (Mr Schmidt), Local Training School,
(2) Improving coffee quality and farmers' conditions in Peru	GTZ	CoffeeRoast (Coffee Roaster)	Local Coffee Chamber, Consultant Mr Becker
(3) Certification of labor standards in shoe factories in India	GTZ	ShoeRetail (Shoe Retailer)	8 Local Suppliers
(4) Qualification of textile workers in Albania	ADA	TexMaker (Textile Manufacturer)	Local Training School, Textile Consultant Mr Lehmann
(5) Promotion of sustainable fruit farming in Bosnia	ADA	DrinkMaker (Beverage Producer)	External Consultants
(6) Ecological oil production in Senegal	ADA	FoodRetail (Food Retailer)	Local Supplier / Senegalese production company
(7) Production of 'green fashion' with hearing-impaired women in Peru	ADA	FashionRetail (Fashion firm)	local non-profit organization
(8) Coconut processing in Mexico	ADA	FoodRetail (Food retailer)	Mexican cooperative, consulting firm (Mr. Kunz)

Table 2: Constellations of Bridging Agents

	Initiating BAs are internal	Initiating BA is external
Supporting BAs are all internal	<p>Constellation 1: Project gets initiated by internal BA at public or private partner organization who directly negotiates project orders with BA at other partner organization (Projects 3, 7)</p>	<p>Constellation 3: Project gets initiated by external BA who negotiates project orders with Internal BAs at public and private partner organization (Projects 1, 4, 8)</p>
Supporting BAs are partly external	<p>Constellation 2: Project gets initiated by internal BA(s) at public or private partner organization who negotiate project orders using external BA (Project 2, 5, 6)</p>	Not relevant since internal BAs need to get involved at some point

Table 3: Effects of Bridging Agency on Project Formation (Part 1)

Main analytical dimension	Examples and illustrative quotes
General effects of bridging agency on project formation	<p>Aligning emerging project orders with organizational, sector, and geographic context structures (Example: Project 3)</p> <p>“How softly can I handle this? What can I justify vis-a-vis consumer groups , Where is the border? [...] And then there are national laws. [...] To what extent can I intervene locally? How much can I influence local suppliers? [...] These were the important questions.” (GTZ Internal BA Project 3)</p> <p>Establishing common ground among key project partners (Example: GTZ-Daimler HIV education project in South Africa)</p> <p>“After all, it is crucial that everybody can achieve their goals. And if we have a partner who [agrees to] really take care of establishing medical infrastructure and education programs around factories [Example: Daimler in South Africa] then this is great! And if the partner requests to have a Mercedes star printed on every fourth condom this will be OK also!” (GTZ Internal BA)</p>
Constellation 1: Bridging agency initiated by main partner representatives	<p>Shared going concern leading negotiations (Example: Project 3)</p> <p>“How easy can ShoeRetail deal with ‘social standards’? [...] This question is not just about ShoeRetail. [...] It is very situation-specific. [For example], India has a crappy industrial relations system which does not work in practice. So I cannot force a company to accept trade unions. [...] The South is dominated by Hindu religion; the North has a lot of Muslims. In the North the workforce is men only, in the South it is mostly women. I cannot talk about ‘discrimination against women’ here.” (GTZ Internal BA)</p> <p>Articulating opportunities and negotiating project orders as a tedious process</p> <p>“We experience every day, when we go out and contact firms, how difficult it is to convey – point 1 – who we are and – point 2 – what these business partnerships actually entail. It is very difficult to communicate.” (ADA Internal BA)</p> <p>“It is huge work to develop projects with enterprises, this can take months. [...] Just the process of writing up project descriptions. Firms cannot do this, we need to do it.” (ADA Internal BA)</p>

Table 3: Effects of Bridging Agency on Project Formation (Part 2)

Main analytical dimension	Examples and illustrative quotes
<p>Constellation 2: Bridging agency initiated by main partner representatives; use of external agents during the process</p>	<p>Shared going concern leading negotiations: Example Project (5)</p> <p>“As a small farmer from Austria I cannot build up [infrastructures] in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I am a business person, I can get things started, but it is not my job to build up whole infrastructures by myself.” (Internal BA DrinkMaker)</p> <p>Speeding up and professionalizing the process through external consultants (Example: Project 8)</p> <p>“Those projects are often relatively complex in terms of topics and the way things are organized. Therefore it is a logical consequence that Dr. Kunz [a consultant] gets engaged here. [...]” (Internal BA FoodRetail)</p>
<p>Constellation 3: Bridging agency initiated by external agents (consultants); use of internal agents to ‘sell’ the project</p>	<p>‘Selling’ of project opportunities to potential private partner firms (Example: Mr. Schmidt, Project 1)</p> <p>“I heard about this new program [PPP] and then I thought about who could benefit from this. Then I talked to a number of firms that I know and I got TexImport interested in that.” (External BA Mr. Schmidt)</p> <p>Packaging of familiar project templates to ease the process: Example Project 4</p> <p>“With ADA we had no problems, because this consulting firm which carries out those projects of course know a lot about how to do it. [...] They know which direction to take, and hence prepare everything very well.” (Internal BA TexMaker)</p>

Table 4: Formation of Longer-Term Alliances

Main analytical dimension	Examples and illustrative quotes
<p>Drivers of formation and coordination of longer-term alliances</p>	<p>Internal BAs as initiators: Follow-up collaboration led by going concern (Project: 2)</p> <p>“To make it a PPP project in this concrete form this was my idea. [...] We have agreed to continue this effort and that everybody then keeps their eyes open in their organization in order to see what’s possible.” (GTZ Internal BA)</p> <p>External BAs as initiators: Interest in repeat business (Project 4)</p> <p>“We already had a project completed with Sequa [Development agency], and after this ran out we asked ourselves what else you can do. And the consultant Mr Lehmann who always helps us in this matter then approached ADA and told us: Hey, we got an opportunity for funding!” (TexMaker Internal BA)</p>
<p>Effects of longer-term alliances on project formation</p>	<p>Emerging routines of project initiation and partner involvement roles</p> <p>“The consultant of course initiated that because he already had all the contacts, and he has done it a couple of times with ADA, [...], he is our trailblazer, and he knows how to do it.” (TexMaker Internal BA, Project 4)</p> <p>Use of network-based project knowledge and experience: Example Project 2</p> <p>„We prepared this quality improvement project together, and I said I would like to work with you on this, but not in a regular program. [...] Then PPP came along and that was the optimal vehicle for us to get our project implemented.“ (Internal BA CoffeeRoast)</p>