

3. The Partners

3.1. Public Partner: The city of Bremen's public administration

As explained in section 1.2., Bremen Online Services complements both the city's public administration reform efforts and the regional development strategy. As in any city with more than half a million inhabitants, Bremen's public administration is hardly a monolithic block. It consists of public agencies within seven divisions (justice; interior and sports; culture; building, planning, and environment, education; social and labor affairs; economics and harbor), each of which is headed by a senator, who make up the cabinet of the state and the city. The cabinet is led by the mayor and the second mayor, which, at the moment, head the justice department and the finance department, respectively. In addition, the city owns numerous independently managed agencies, which operate in (potentially) competitive markets, such as hospitals, libraries, waste utility, construction companies, personnel management and accounting. It also maintains partnerships and/or holdings in for example, banks, investment agencies, communication provider, theater, and parking garages (in all over 220 such entities).

The city plans to develop its public service delivery further into what is described as a principal-agent model: The city and its divisions and agencies act as the principal, which guarantees delivery, and steers and delivers core state functions (police, judiciary, and finance). Most, if not all, of the other services should be provided by two types of agents: the first ones build a "market of service delivery" characterized by competition, free agents, and service and framework agreements. To achieve this, the city plans to privatize the respective agencies active in this field. The second type is a "citizen commune" characterized by self-organization, decentralization, and contracts on services, goals and public funding. This is to exploit social engagement and competence from the bottom-up, and support it with public means.

Bremen Online Services will allow all agencies, public, private or from the third sector, to deliver their services in an electronic fashion. Because it also acts as an electronic counter, it can support new models of service delivery as well, where citizens will find the service they need without regard to the status of the particular service provider in question.

For the first three years, the Office for New Media and eGovernment (formerly IT) is in charge of the project. This office is part of the General Organization and Personnel division of the Senator for Finance, and sets the overall IT strategy for all city departments and enforces compliance with IT standards. The office partners with the other departments and their IT specialists, as the latter maintain the control over their own IT systems. In order to insure wide spread involvement throughout the city's departments, the office adopts a cooperative leadership style. It is also paramount to provide the individual departments with the necessary funding for personnel and IT resources so that they can participate in Bremen Online Services. After federal funding ends, Bremen Online Services will have to sell their services to these departments as well as to other local governments.

3.2. Private Partners

In order to achieve its objectives, the city partners with several private companies. Two types of partnership can be distinguished. The first group are partners who cooperate on building the project and commit resources to the Bremen Online Service Development and Operation company. Among these, the most important are the Deutsche Telekom and the Sparkasse Bremen (the local savings bank), in addition there are several IT-companies, which each cover a specialised market in infrastructure or application technology. The second group are local and regional service providers. The city wants to offer their services through the electronic single-window delivery counter.

The Deutsche Telekom views Bremen Online Services as an important market opener for electronic signature technology, which is a rather expensive technology and in which the Telekom's subsidiary, TeleSec, has invested a lot of development efforts. But there are overarching concerns as well. First, creating online traffic is the core objective for any telecommunications provider, and developing new services is a way to do so. But Deutsche Telekom's involvement is also justified by the privatization of the German telecommunications market and its consequences. The Deutsche Telekom once held the monopoly in the German telecommunications market, when it was the national PTT. Now, it is still by far the strongest player, but it needs to operate in a competitive market. Especially in bigger cities, new telephone companies run by public utilities or now-privatized public telecommunications providers present a challenge. In general terms, participation in Bremen Online Services means a better grounding for the Deutsche Telekom in the Bremen market, which is also being fostered by other projects with the city, such as providing public access points to the Internet in schools.

The Sparkasse Bremen, the local savings bank, has an almost 50 percent market share in private banking of all regional households. Together with the other local savings banks in particular and the whole banking industry in

Germany, it has introduced an prepaid purse feature on the common, standardized debit-card (ec-Karte). This feature, GeldKarte, is available to every owner of such a card, but it lacks usage. For the banks, use of this feature would mean increased balances of book money and less handling of paper money, especially coins. Also, with new card-reader technology, the GeldKarte is usable as a means for Internet payment. Thus, partnering with Bremen Online Services means for the Sparkasse Bremen not only an added service for its customers and an improved public image, but it might also help spur use of the the GeldKarte.

Several IT software developers have been and are involved in Bremen Online Services. Most significantly, a German start-up company which had acquired a significant market share in online banking software, Brokat, hoped to open a new market, electronic government, for its technological platform. However, specific demands of electronic services for the public administrations require a highly flexible and more complex infrastructure, which was ultimately not developed by this company. Other IT-partners have expertise in several fields of IT support in public administrations, but lack electronic signature, integration, and online-payment know-how. For these, partnering with Bremen Online Services is a strategic partnership to improve their own products as well.

Not as development partners, but as partners who offer their services via the same platform, several local, regional, and national service providers have been approached by Bremen Online Service. While their involvement increases use of the platform and makes its services more attractive, these service providers also benefit from cooperation. For example, the local public utility company not only offers its services, such as change of address or registering readings of water and electricity meters online, but issues signature cards in its customer centers and provides assisted access points. This, in the eyes of the public utility company, increases customer service and helps to keep customers. The same value proposition can be made for the local public transport company. Other service providers, such as the Deutsche Post or health insurance providers, are primarily partnering with Bremen Online Services because it allows them to be present in the One-Stop-Government feature and, as long as public funding is available, to gain experience with new signature and payment technology.