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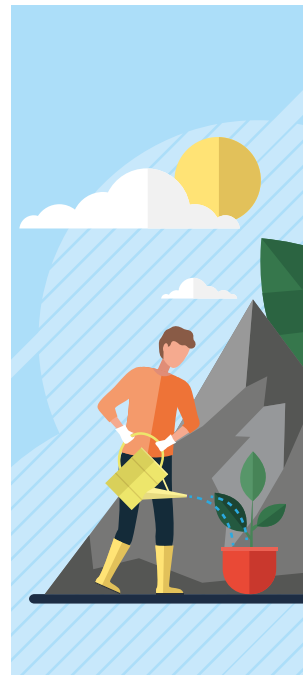
Info Magazine of the Verband Region Stuttgart

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL 25 Years of Transatlantic Partnership

INTERNATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL COOPERATION
How the EU Program Connects Cities Across National Borders and Promotes Sustainable Urban Development

PARLIAMENTARY SURVEY
How Important Is an International Profile for the Stuttgart Region?

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The Importance of the USA for Baden-Württemberg

EDITORIAL



For a regional organization like ours, global networking is no longer just an option, but a necessity – something that our American partners also emphasize. Challenges such as climate change or sustainable energy supply and mobility do not adhere to borders. They are global, but at the same time require concrete, adapted solutions for local implementation.

A partnership like the one with the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, which has now existed for a quarter of a century (Milestones p. 6), provides the ideal platform to discuss and further develop one's own approaches. The transfer and application of experiences across borders requires ongoing exchange – ideally at all levels and in all fields of regional work (Expert Contribution p. 10).

A flagship initiative that will greatly benefit our region is a roadmap for cross-border cooperation in applied research and science focused on climate resilience in both regions (Best Practice p. 16). Such successful international collaborations also tend to attract additional interest – not least from key funding organizations (Expert Interview p. 14).

What will our regions look like in another 25 years? No one can say for sure, but one thing is certain: they will benefit from the transatlantic friendship!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Lahl". The script is fluid and cursive.

Dr. Alexander Lahl, Regional Director

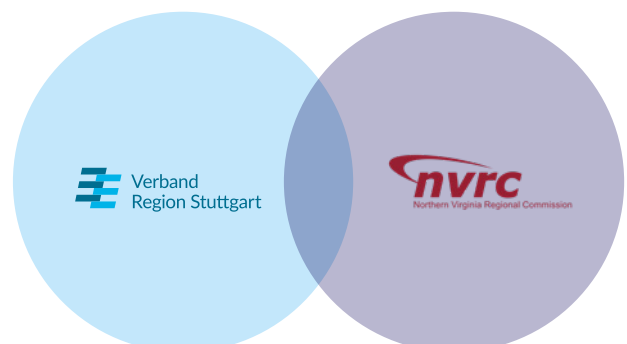




„Urbane Diplomatie“:
**25 JAHRE
FREUNDSCHAFT
UND
FORTSCHRITT**

“Urban Diplomacy”:
**25 YEARS OF
FRIENDSHIP
AND PROGRESS**

As one of the first transatlantic collaborations at the regional level, the cooperation between the Northern Virginia Regional Commission and the Verband Region Stuttgart is considered a model of success that has even been recognized by the federal government. It is time to highlight and celebrate this cooperation and explore its prospects for the future.



Transatlantic Partnership
MILESTONES



2009

Signing of the second contract extension for the partnership. Since its inception on January 14, 1999, the cooperation has been renewed every five years.



2012

The delegation of the Regional Assembly was presented with applications of renewable energy near Washington, D.C. At the same time, a workshop took place as part of the "Transatlantic Urban Climate Dialogue."



2018

The next Regional Council trip to Northern Virginia focused particularly on "green infrastructure" as well as environmental, climate, and water protection.



Long-distance relationships can sometimes drift apart – but in the case of the Northern Virginia and Stuttgart regions, the partnership has only grown stronger over the course of a quarter century.

The regional partnership between the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) and the Verband Region Stuttgart was established in 1999 and is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Similarities, as is often the case in partnerships, have been a key factor in the success of their collaboration: the NVRC area corresponds to the cultural region of Northern Virginia, which as part of the greater region includes four counties, five major cities, and four smaller towns. In this structure, the Northern Virginia partner region shares similar characteristics and conditions with the Stuttgart Region, particularly in terms of area, population, and population density. Both regions face the challenge of providing sufficient housing and tailored

infrastructure for their growing populations. From the very beginning, the focus has been on issues such as energy efficiency, climate change adaptation, and the development of green infrastructure.

Water management is a key issue in both regions: Northern Virginia is located in the Potomac River basin and, like its partner region Stuttgart, is actively involved in developing river landscapes and open spaces.

Especially in times when the transatlantic relationship at national level is subject to greater uncertainty than in the past, municipal and regional partnerships are more important than ever. One unique aspect of the cooperation between Northern Virginia and the Stuttgart Region is that it is not only characterized by direct exchanges between political decision-makers and administrations, but also by professional discussions on current topics and joint projects at the working level, including a staff exchange program. Additionally, the joint dialog involves institutions and stakeholders from business, industry, science and research.



2019

Visit from Northern Virginia for the 20th anniversary: The program for the 10-member delegation included a tour of the Remstal Garden Show and a meeting with the State Minister for the Environment.



2022

Visits to climate adaptation projects in Böblingen, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, flood protection in Winterbach, and dual training at Netze BW in Esslingen – these were some of the many topics covered during the most recent delegation visit from Northern Virginia.



2023

For the first time, there was an exchange at the staff level. Employees from Fairfax participated in job shadowing in the planning department. The main focus was on climate adaptation measures, but the S-Bahn was also tested.



Cooperation Agreement

1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019

Cooperation Declaration – Renewal 2019

Key areas of focus over the last five years:

01. Regional planning and development
02. Green infrastructure planning
03. Climate protection and adaptation measures
04. Sustainable energy management
05. Sustainable urban mobility and infrastructure
06. Ecological restoration and development
07. Applied research to support sustainable development at the local level
08. Economic development and workforce training

An international orientation at regional level is also particularly important in the Stuttgart Region, given that many globally active companies are based here, some with significant research and development departments in relatively small municipalities – such as Bosch in Renningen or Porsche in Weissach. These individual municipalities would hardly have the chance to gain international visibility on their own.

The relationship between the regions, with its comprehensive approach, also makes the Stuttgart Region attractive to others: on the "international partnership marketplace," the Stuttgart Region attracts many potential partners for cooperation and is better positioned to secure funding.

WHY IS THE NVRC SUCH A GOOD FIT FOR THE STUTTGART REGION?

The area of the NVRC (hereafter referred to as the “partner region” or, for simplicity, “Northern Virginia”) is located in close proximity to Washington, D.C., placing it within the metropolitan area of the U.S. capital. The city of Alexandria, for example, is just ten kilometers from D.C.

Similar to the Stuttgart Region, the partner region has a polycentric structure with charming cities and vibrant town centers shaped by colonial history. The region is one of the wealthiest, fastest-growing, and most innovative in the U.S. For instance, 70% of the world’s internet traffic flows through data centers in Northern Virginia. In 2018, Arlington was selected from over 238 location bids to host Amazon’s second headquarters – bringing with it a promise of at least 25,000 high-paying jobs. There are strong economic ties between Baden-Württemberg and the U.S. overall. The U.S. is the number one export destination for companies based in Baden-Württemberg. The state of Virginia is home to a subsidiary of the Waiblingen-based company Stihl, and until 2020, Daimler was present in D.C. with its former car-sharing service, car2go. Both Northern Virginia and the Stuttgart Region have stronger economies than some EU countries.

If the two regions were ranked as countries, their gross domestic product (GDP) would place them among the top 60 in the world.

What defines the partner region Northern Virginia and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission?



Impressive Potomac: waterfront promenade in the city of Alexandria at sunset

Not only in terms of strengths, but also in challenges and the corresponding development of strategies, there are several common denominators. Particularly on the topics of climate protection, climate adaptation, sustainable mobility, resilient and growing infrastructures, immigration, and in this context, the creation of housing. In some cases, it is easier for the Stuttgart Region to find comparable partners with similar characteristics abroad than within Germany. The international perspective also brings new impulses and inspires unconventional solutions, often fostered through exchanges in informal contexts.

While the political structure and areas of activity do not overlap 100%, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC), as a regional council, pursues similar goals to the Verband Region Stuttgart. However, unlike the Verband, the NVRC, in its role as a government authority, consolidates the interests of smaller administrative units. The NVRC coordinates regional efforts for four counties and nine cities in areas such as the environment, transportation, affordable housing, urban planning, health, and the military. Membership in the NVRC is open to all counties, cities, and municipalities in the Northern Virginia region with more than 3,500 inhabitants.



REGION STUTTGART

3,654 km²

2.8 million people

25% of the population of Baden-Württemberg

30% of the gross domestic product is generated on 10% of the land area

3.9% population growth – from 2,678,795 in 2010 to 2,787,858 in 2022

€145 billion GDP



REGION NORTHERN VIRGINIA (NVRC-“DISTRICT”)

3,377 km²

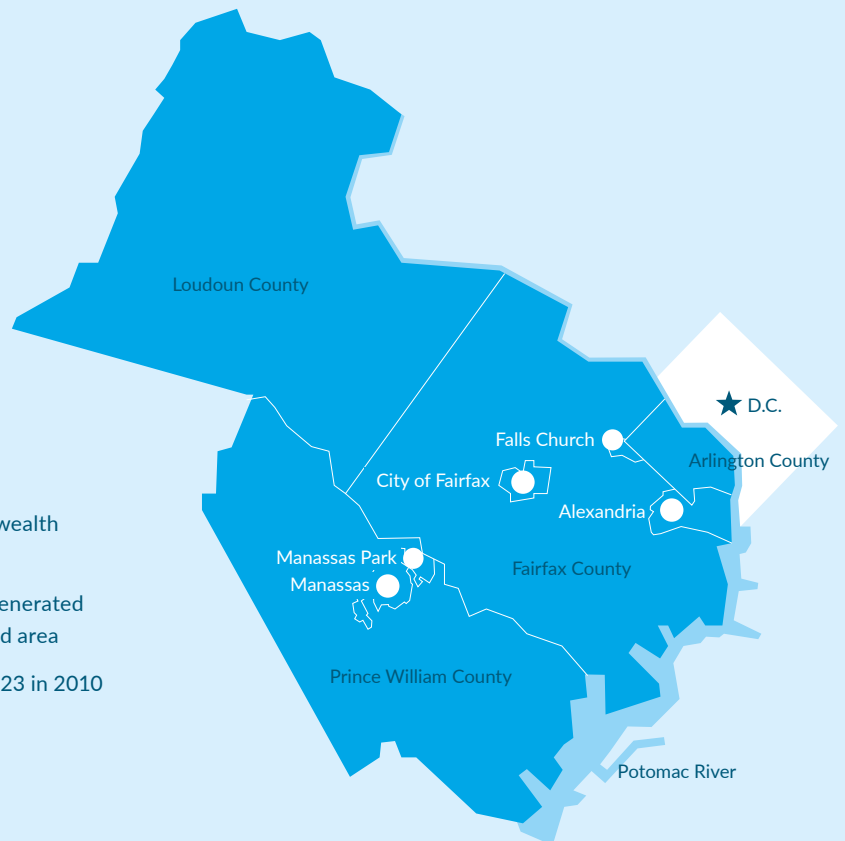
2.5 million people

29.3% of the population of the Commonwealth of Virginia

42% of the gross domestic product is generated on 3% of the Commonwealth's land area

14.1% population growth – from 2,230,623 in 2010 to 2,545,650 in 2022

€247.80 billion GDP



Successful cooperation in a small world

25 Years of Transatlantic Collaboration at the Regional Level



“The approaches to tackling challenges, and especially the available tools, are sometimes quite different, but good ideas and successfully implemented examples can be found on both sides of the Atlantic.”

Thomas Kiwitt,
Chief Technical Director,
Verband Region Stuttgart

The Stuttgart Region is “international” – and operates accordingly.

The Stuttgart region is home to people from over 140 countries, and its export rate stands at 72.2%. In addition to the well-known “global players”, many of the local medium-sized companies operate internationally. The region also meets international standards in terms of innovation, economic strength and cultural offer.

The major global transformation processes are having a corresponding effect: As in all metropolitan areas, the UN sustainability goals must be achieved, international agreements on reducing greenhouse gases must be implemented, and adaptation to climate change must succeed – without losing the region’s appeal or prosperity.

A substantive exchange with colleagues from other countries, both among political decision-makers and administrators, is essential for successful work. Or, as Dr. Dale Medearis, Senior Planner at the NVRC, puts it: “Global engagement is now a necessity, not an option.”



The Catoctin Creek Distilling Company uses machines from the Stuttgart region.



Friendly cooperation fosters the development of joint strategies for the future: Deputy Association Chairman Rainer Gessler (second from the left) with guests from the U.S. during their visit to the Remstal Garden Show.

Outstanding: The Cooperation with Northern Virginia

In 1999, the Verband Region Stuttgart and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) established one of the first transatlantic partnerships at the regional level. This brought together two regions that are quite comparable in terms of their size, economic power, and distinctly international population structures – therefore facing similar challenges. The approaches to overcoming these challenges, and especially the tools available, may sometimes differ greatly, but good ideas and successful examples can be found on both sides of the Atlantic. Certain stereotypes are evident: binding requirements for spatial development, strict regulations (such as those for thermal insulation), and the promotion of renewable energies through fixed feed-in tariffs are considered “typically European.” In contrast, the “American way” tends to focus on market-based approaches with less regulation, greater voluntary cooperation between administrative levels, and a more “pragmatic” collaboration between public and private entities.

These differing perspectives, along with the many nuances between them, are what make the exchange so interesting for both sides. Even though it is clear that, due to different legal frameworks, solutions can rarely be transferred directly and most cases require adjustments, this form of dialogue is particularly well-suited for developing new approaches.

The exchange includes direct dialogue between political decision-makers, consideration of current solutions, as well as joint projects, contributions to conferences, and even internships at the working level to gain a deeper understanding of work processes. Third parties are also involved, including businesses, social groups, and especially universities. Over the 25 years of cooperation, not only has a wide variety of stakeholders come together, but a remarkable range of topics has also been addressed.

This also explains why the Verband Region Stuttgart has been an active partner in European networks, particularly METREX and POLIS, since its founding and has participated in numerous EU projects. As a still-special model for regional task management, it is often cited as an example of successful urban-rural cooperation – whether as a destination for delegates involved in development cooperation, professional visitors from other metropolitan areas, or through EU programs for cooperation with partners outside Europe.

These activities aim to strengthen the Stuttgart region, initiate developments, and maintain alignment with international standards.

The following attributes are being pursued:

SMARTER:

- Professional exchange and dialogue on solution approaches
- Involvement of the scientific community
- Communication of new (research) findings within the region

MORE CONNECTED:

- Joint third-party funded projects
- Advocacy and agenda-setting for metropolitan interests

BETTER:

- Increasing the region's attractiveness and quality of life
- Visibility on the international stage



Old and New Future Topics: Impressions of the Collaboration.

Since the beginning of the partnership, the focus areas and exchange formats have evolved. Initially, the aim was to get an overview of competencies and approaches, and to ask, “What are they doing, and what might be interesting for us?” Common areas of interest were quickly identified: mobility and land use, energy supply and climate protection, the development of urban centers and more rural areas – but also more abstract topics such as political programming, the roles and perceptions of politics and administration, the relationship between administrative levels, and, importantly, communication in planning and participation processes.

Of central importance here is the direct personal exchange, for example through delegation visits, active participation in conferences and specialist events, and joint project work. A new medium introduced during

as well as environmental education and the promotion of regional history. One colleague gained extensive insight into this task at a symposium on the further development of the Stuttgart Region Landscape Park. The promotion of cultural heritage – for example, at sites of the American Civil War or historic transportation routes – was incorporated as an attractive leisure offering, particularly for the Route of Industrial Culture in the Filstal.

Different approaches from those commonly used in Germany can also be found in the idea generation and communication of recreational offerings. For instance, the well-established “charrette” process in the U.S., used for developing planning designs, has influenced the ongoing development of the regional recreation concept. Additionally, the “Park & Trail Maps” offer interesting approaches for communicating the recreational offerings in the Landschaftspark.

Of particular interest is the improvement of the location quality. Northern Virginia has always been considered one of the leading business locations, but with the establishment of the new Amazon headquarters, it

The Silver Line connects the U.S. capital with the airport of the partner region.



Dulles International Airport, connected to public transit via the Silver Line.

the pandemic was video conferencing and webinars: initially established for direct exchange on protective measures, this straightforward method has since also been used to present much more enjoyable content. For example, the expansion of the cycle path network in the Stuttgart region or the development of Neckar Island as a local recreation area were presented to an interested audience in Northern Virginia.

The ecological enhancement of open spaces and the creation of recreational facilities as “green infrastructure” have been key focal points of the collaboration, as the Stuttgart Region Landscape Park offers direct opportunities for implementation. Remarkable examples can be found in Northern Virginia, with an extensive system of parks and themed trails provided for sports and recreation. These contribute to ecological and climatic improvements,

achieved a significant success in a highly competitive bidding process. In direct discussions with the officials in Arlington, it became clear just how extensive the investor’s requirements were. They showed how, as part of a strategic development policy, both social and technical infrastructure needed to be adjusted. Additionally, the availability of residential and commercial space had to be aligned to accommodate such dynamic growth.

Among the “hard” location factors critical to the success of attracting businesses is the expansion of the Metro “Silver Line”, a commuter rail connection that links the center of the U.S. capital with the international airport in the eastern part of the partner region.



New Approach: Partnerships between Universities and Regional Institutions in the transatlantic context.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTION Successful Solutions on Both Sides of the Atlantic

The initiatives for the use of renewable energy from the Stuttgart region, which were primarily focused on climate protection, were initially seen as somewhat niche and occasionally criticized. However, renewable energy is now recognized across the Atlantic as not only a contribution to climate protection but also an economic factor and a part of active regional development policy.

Public awareness has also increasingly focused on adapting to the impacts of climate change. Northern Virginia, which has always experienced large fluctuations between winter snowstorms and oppressive summer heat, has seen the development of the Potomac River – affected by tides and sea level changes – make it clear that flood protection must be given even greater importance and tackled comprehensively.

In this regard, a current focus of the cooperation has developed, which not only involves an exchange between political decision-makers and administrations but also includes regional research institutions, such as the University of Stuttgart and George Mason University (GMU). The institute, supported by NVRC and GMU, which advises municipalities on climate adaptation issues, highlights the potential that emerges from combining scientific research with practical application – especially in this field, where urgent action is needed.

Such partnerships between universities and regional institutions represent a new approach in the transatlantic context. This approach is currently being further developed, not only to optimize the options for dealing with climate change but also to strengthen the universities involved.

25 years of trusting collaboration show that institutions and people can be brought together, regardless of political “climates”, to jointly develop successful solutions for future challenges. They demonstrate that different backgrounds and experiences can be enriching and do not hinder collegial, even friendly, cooperation.

This provides an excellent foundation for continued intensive collaboration, especially if the essential principles of pragmatism and result-driven action for regional task management continue to be upheld in the future, as summed up by NVRC Director Bob Lazaro: “Get things done!”

Although the difficulties in expanding rail connections in the Stuttgart region are well-known, the direct comparison made it clear that retrofitting such infrastructure into a settlement structure heavily oriented toward car traffic is significantly more challenging. The solution developed from this – placing massive park and ride facilities directly at highway entrances or designing rail lines so that an additional station with parking access is built after the actual “final stop” – at least offers an approach to address the conflict between creating attractive town centers and providing parking for commuters from the surrounding areas.

Connected mobility is also of particular interest in this context: the expansion of cycle paths, along with accompanying measures such as lockers, repair stations, sanitary facilities, and rental systems, including their fees and terms, demonstrate how comprehensive the efforts are to supplement traditional, car-focused mobility services.

Northern Virginia is known as a global hub for digital infrastructure. The early expansion of transmission networks has led to an impressive number of data centers – large cube-like structures that dominate the landscape. While they do not generate direct sales, they contribute significantly to tax revenues and local value creation. In the future, the waste heat generated by these facilities is expected to feed into local heating networks, which would significantly increase the efficiency of the enormous amounts of energy they use.

Accordingly, energy supply is a crucial topic. In the promotion of renewable energy, the Stuttgart region initially provided input: the “Solarize Virginia” campaign by the NVRC was inspired by local measures to promote solar energy in existing buildings and new constructions, including the Neue Landesmesse. In the meantime, ambitious projects for large-scale photovoltaic systems are being developed – such as their medium-term use on open land around airports, which are well connected, close to major energy consumers, and present relatively few conflicts with agriculture, the landscape, or ecology.

RETHINKING URBAN TRANSFORMATION



Why the European Union is promoting cooperation between regions beyond Europe's borders.

With the “International Urban and Regional Cooperation Action” (IURC) programme, the European Commission has a deliberately decentralised instrument to promote cooperation in the field of sustainability and infrastructure issues. The aim is to create a breeding ground for innovation through practice-orientated exchange between cities, metropolitan areas and the so called “functional urban areas”. The programme target regions outside Europe, including North America (IURC NA) – the Verband Region Stuttgart is currently exchanging ideas with the Greater Boston area in the field of transport within this framework. What added value does looking across the pond bring for the cities and regions of the EU?

INTERVIEW

with economist Sandra Marin Herbert. She has many years of experience in promoting international cooperation between cities and regions, has already launched numerous transformative initiatives at local and regional “government level” and describes herself as a “connector”. For the IURC programme, Sandra Marin has coordinated the network of EU cities and regions in Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the USA.

"By positioning EU regions as centers of expertise in strategic areas, the IURC provides them with international recognition and enhanced market opportunities for local businesses and universities."

Sandra Marin Herbert

What advantages do cities and regions have if they participate in the IURC programme?

The IURC programme allows cities and regions to gain fresh insights from global peers, helping them find innovative solutions to shared challenges. It enables them to showcase their own best practices, enhancing international visibility and positioning them as leaders in urban sustainability and regional innovation. Beyond knowledge exchange, the programme also opens new market opportunities for local stakeholders. For example, Mannheim used the IURC to accelerate the launch of a freight railway to Chongqing, while Almeria's water company secured a \$50M contract in Los Cabos, Mexico to implement a similar public-private partnership water management system after a study tour in the Spanish city. Such examples highlight how participation can drive tangible benefits for both cities or regions and local businesses by expanding access to new markets and partnerships.

What boxes does the promotion of sub-national and at the same time supra-European cooperation at regional level tick that the EU cannot cover as well with other programmes?

The IURC boosts the global profile of European regions, enhancing their international role as trusted and relevant partners contributing to the green and digital transition. By connecting regions with partners outside the EU, the programme fosters networks of “urban excellence”, where cities and regions work together to lead the international exchanges on sustainable urban development and innovation. By establishing such long-term partnerships, IURC builds a global platform for European expertise to thrive on the world stage. The case of Verband Region Stuttgart and their collaboration Greater Boston and North Virginia Region is an example.

What criteria are used to compile the topic networks and “pairings”, since regions never have completely corresponding structures?

Thematic networks are defined according to priority topics in line with the European Green Deal, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Urban Agenda for the EU and the New Urban Agenda of the United Nations. Pairings are matched according to common challenges under these thematic networks where solutions can be adapted to different scales and governance structures. Cities and regions who have already worked with non-EU counterparts in the frame of the programme, often bring added value, offering tried-and-tested approaches that can be adapted across varying governance models. This ensures that solutions exchanged are scalable and practical, enhancing the impact of the cooperation while expanding existing EU-partner country relations at the national and subnational levels in priority areas.

How can the partnerships and networks be turned into real laboratories for urban transformation and transatlantic “regional diplomacy” rather than just a “paper tiger”?

The IURC programme is a facilitator that provides tools and connections, but real success depends on how cities and regions use these opportunities. To go beyond pairings, cities and regions must align their strategic goals with programme objectives, creating actionable Urban Cooperation Action Plans that focus on delivering measurable results. By positioning EU regions as hubs of expertise in strategic areas, the IURC allows them to gain international recognition and offer market opportunities for local business and academia. Participants should also be leveraged to create synergies with other funding resources, ensuring the long-term implementation of shared solutions.

One advantage of co-operation at regional level is that the projects are developed where they are implemented. How can the results of the collaborations be secured and transferred to other regions in Europe?

The IURC ensures that knowledge gained from these collaborations is systematically captured and shared. The IURC Knowledge library and the European Urban Initiative PORTICO platform are key tools that allow cities and regions to access and disseminate best practices and successful case studies. In addition, the programme's thematic clusters through regular webinars, events and study visits help to further institutionalize these exchanges, ensuring that lessons learned are continuously transferred to other regions. This structured approach guarantees that successful outcomes are not limited to a pairing but shared broadly, benefiting the entire IURC network.

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IN PARTNERSHIP FOR TRANSATLANTIC CLIMATE ACTION

Since the beginning of a wonderful transatlantic friendship 25 years ago until the present day, the partnership between Northern Virginia and the Stuttgart region has been characterized not only by inspiration and the development of strong professional and personal networks across various levels but also by visible achievements. Time and again, one region introduces a promising concept, which the other region further develops and perfects within the framework of its programs.

Put the Sun on Your Roof

A North American success story based on examples “made in Germany”.

Inspired by the work of the Verband Region Stuttgart, the NVRC set out to adopt strategic energy plans for cleaner and more efficient energy use. In 2014, with Solarize NOVA, the NVRC implemented a flagship program for promoting private solar installations, drawing on regional planning examples and experiences from the Stuttgart region. The program is based on two pillars: free site assessments with ongoing consultations and bundling demand through bulk purchasing to make solar installations more cost-effective and efficient, along with the development of a “solar map”. The solar map, created in collaboration with George Mason University in Fairfax, highlights the potential for solar energy generation on the rooftops of private and commercial buildings. As an incentive, the map also provides information on potential energy cost savings and environmental benefits, such as the reduction of CO₂ emissions.

By 2022, Solarize NOVA led to the installation of 10% of all solar systems in Northern Virginia – these systems have a total capacity of 8.5 megawatts and offset 9,100 tons of carbon emissions annually.



Action Plan for Greater Climate Resilience

Universities and the “hands-on experts” from NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart conduct applied research based on subnational knowledge transfer.

The George Mason University Climate Center, founded in 2022, developed a plan for the expert staff of the two “regional governments” and stakeholders from academia to turn their experiences into practical concepts. Key focus areas include cooling urban heat islands, green planning for improved social inclusion, efficient and cost-effective strategies for creating climate-resilient cities and habitats, trends in land use development, emergency monitoring systems for heavy rainfall events, and models for municipalities to manage the impacts of climate change. Specifically, research is being conducted on the potential of green roofs and stormwater management, as well as the interaction between green and grey infrastructure to mitigate flooding from storms.

On a broader level, the goal is to develop political strategies for implementing regional solutions. The results of this collaborative research will serve as a showcase, providing both the region as a whole and individual municipalities with greater potential to secure funding and implement pilot projects.

Climate Action Without Borders

How Northern Virginia and the Stuttgart region are developing solutions for urban areas through the “Transatlantic Climate Dialogue” and beyond.

From the “Transatlantic Climate Dialogue” to a long-term model for regional cooperation across the Atlantic: In their search for solutions for sustainable energy and climate planning, the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart first leveraged synergies with existing international networks, such as METREX, the network of European metropolitan regions.

In 2008, at the invitation of the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart, the 40 largest metropolitan regions of Europe and North America gathered for the regional climate conference “2008 METREX.”

The conference focused on how to elevate integrated, holistic, and long-term energy plans to a consistently high standard through closer collaboration between European and North American partners. The collaboration between the NVRC and Verband Region Stuttgart was recognized as exemplary by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment and the Federal Foreign Office. At the launch of the “Transatlantic Climate Bridge” in 2008 – a platform promoting cooperation and knowledge exchange on climate and energy policy between Germany and the U.S. – this partnership was presented as the “first pillar” of the initiative.

Between 2010 and 2015, the Stuttgart and Northern Virginia regions had the opportunity to participate in the research project “Transatlantic Urban Climate Dialogue,” funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Technology at the time. The goal of this exchange was to explore regional and local strategies for climate protection and the use of renewable energy. With support from the Environmental Policy Research Center at Freie Universität Berlin and the involvement of additional partners from the Ruhr region and the Canadian province of Ontario, a total of six workshops were conducted as part of this “Transatlantic Climate Dialogue.” These workshops focused on topics such as renewable energy in urban settings and sustainable mobility, and they also presented pilot projects for various cities in the Stuttgart region. Beyond the practical and professional benefits, the climate dialogue also enhanced the international reputation of the Verband Region Stuttgart as an innovation driver in regional planning. In particular, the development of “green infrastructure” and the preservation of open spaces through green corridors gained recognition in academic publications, media, and political institutions in the U.S. The collaboration between the Verband Region Stuttgart and the NVRC, supported by federal and state agencies, continues to be recognized nationally in Germany and is considered one of the few examples of continuous transatlantic cooperation at the regional level.



Susanne Wetterich
CDU/ÖDP

ASK THE PARTY
Region Stuttgart International

A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

After 25 years, the cooperation of the Verband Region Stuttgart with the NVRC is regarded nationwide as a leading model for the international transfer of strategies and innovations. What aspects and perspectives of transatlantic cooperation are particularly important to the Regional Assembly? What insights have the members of the assembly gained personally from the exchange? What do they consider especially important when it comes to the region's international positioning? Together with the Regional Assembly, we look forward to many more rounds of contract renewals for the partnership with the Northern Virginia Region.



A Partnership That Strengthens Us

Our region is the driving force behind economic development in Germany. The greater Stuttgart area also holds a leading position across Europe. This success didn't just happen overnight. It is the result of the hard work and dedication of generations – of inventors and innovators, of women and men in science, and of courageous individuals who founded companies, led them to success, and earned them worldwide recognition. And it was only possible because the political and administrative leaders consistently recognized the signs of the times and made the right decisions.

Success is not something we can rest on. It is our responsibility to ensure it for the future as well. Since the founding of the Verband Region Stuttgart, our political group has been committed to ensuring that the framework conditions for further development are in place.

By engaging with other regions, we can learn valuable lessons and gather useful ideas for our own work. The Northern Virginia region is an excellent example for this kind of exchange – it's an urban area with a similar population size, a strong economy, and significant population growth. The challenges they face, such as housing, commercial space, transportation, and quality of life, are quite like our own.

Just as our landscape park program or the Remstal Garden Show were of interest to the leaders in Northern Virginia, we can also gain inspiration from the region near Washington D.C., around the Potomac River, regarding the development of recreational spaces and riverfront landscapes.

70% of global internet traffic passes through the data centers in Northern Virginia. As the digital market continues to expand rapidly, the infrastructure there will need to evolve just as quickly to keep up. We need this kind of dynamic progress here as well. Other key topics, such as air quality, airport connectivity, electric mobility and autonomous driving, as well as environmental and climate protection, are central to both regions. In short, there's a lot to discuss. We look forward to the visit and to continuing our partnership with Northern Virginia!



Dr. Angela Brück
BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN



Andreas Hesky
FREIE WÄHLER

Engaging in Dialogue and Embracing New Perspectives – Now More Than Ever

25 years of partnership with Northern Virginia, 25 years of transatlantic dialogue at the regional level on current challenges, strategies, and ideas – this is more than just a reason to celebrate. It's an opportunity to reaffirm our shared responsibility to deepen this dialogue and strengthen it with fresh perspectives, especially in light of the rapidly shifting political landscape in recent years.

Both regions are undergoing vital transformations, responding to global ecological and economic challenges to ensure future viability. With similar structures and conditions, both regions are well-positioned for a productive exchange of knowledge and experience.

When engaging with other cultures and countries, the exact value may not always be clear from the outset. True engagement requires a willingness to question our own perspectives, embrace new ideas, and stay open to learning from one another.

In this, one shared goal stands out: to confront crises with democratic resilience and to leverage this partnership, even in small ways, to strengthen democratic cooperation. By doing so, we can collaboratively shape the transformation processes, while embracing our cultural differences.

The Verband Region Stuttgart and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission have successfully implemented all of this for the benefit of both sides through their cooperation to date. Anyone who has observed the U.S. over a longer period can see the significant transformation that has occurred there in recent years. As a region, we can draw inspiration from the American desire to actively shape the future.

The next 10 years will present major challenges for Western democracies. However, one thing is certain: if we remain open to each other's approaches, we will continue to benefit from each other's strengths in the future.

Tackling Global Challenges Together, Learning from Each Other, Securing Peace!

Building international partnerships strengthens the region's economic standing and, in the spirit of grassroots democracy, contributes to peace, understanding, and friendship between nations. It was the right decision for the region to establish an international presence soon after its founding – this includes the partnership with Northern Virginia, representation in Brussels, and participation in numerous international networks like Metrex.

Considering changing geopolitical conditions and the local economy's reliance on exports, it remains crucial to nurture and expand regional partnerships and networks. After all, the Stuttgart region – its economy and its people – is an international one. Looking beyond our regional borders offers new ideas and learning opportunities. Travel broadens the mind, as do connections with other regions. The major global challenges can only be solved together: climate protection, integration, job security, fostering social cohesion, and creating affordable housing, to name just a few. The Stuttgart region has a strong culture of hospitality. It is important to preserve this, and international partnerships and tourism play a key role in helping to do.

We can take pride in maintaining and nurturing the 25-year partnership with the culturally rich Northern Virginia. Numerous interactions with our friends from Northern Virginia have highlighted the deep and vital relationship between the U.S. and Europe. What happens on the international transatlantic stage is reinforced and supported at the regional level.

We, the Freie Wähler, stand for a Stuttgart region that embraces diversity and openness to the world. We are convinced that cooperation with Northern Virginia will help strengthen and expand the German-American friendship. We are committed to this cause and look forward to many future encounters with friends from around the globe.



The Valuable Perspective Beyond Our Borders

Europe stands for peace, security, and prosperity. No country in the European Union benefits as much from Europe as Germany, and few regions benefit as greatly as ours. This is why it was a wise decision for the Stuttgart region to promote networking in Brussels and open its own office there back in 2002. By actively participating in numerous European networks, such as METREX, the region has ensured that its unique interests are consistently heard in Brussels. Especially during times of economic transition, we aim to further strengthen the work of our European office.

Another potential project on the European stage could be the Stuttgart region's bid to become a European Capital of Culture. With our rich and diverse cultural landscape, this initiative could set entirely new highlights for our region.

Setting New Accents and Shaping Change Together – this characterizes the 25-year partnership between the Verband Region Stuttgart and Northern Virginia perfectly. When the partnership was initiated in 1999 under Regional Director Dr. Bernd Steinacher, many of the global challenges we face today were only beginning to take shape. Now, 25 years later, this partnership endures, showing just how solid the foundation of this relationship has become. The shared challenges faced by densely urbanized areas – such as climate change, economic transformation, and migration – are becoming increasingly complex. In such times, looking beyond our own region can only be beneficial. This broader perspective is valuable not only for members of the regional assembly but also for administrative staff on both sides of the Atlantic.

For example, two employees from Northern Virginia spent time with us two years ago to gain insights into our work. And back in 2012, we hosted scientists and experts from North America for a transatlantic climate dialogue. We hope that this dialogue will continue at the local and regional level, fostering mutual benefit and understanding. We eagerly look forward to more insightful exchanges and the next five years of cooperation with Northern Virginia.

AfD Supports the Partnership!

The core of the AfD's economic policy is a strong economic base in Germany, with a focus on supporting the middle class. We aim to be a reliable partner through policies that promote innovation and technology. Entrepreneurship and investment readiness can only thrive in an environment that encourages investment and innovation.

The Verband Region Stuttgart (VRS) can now look back on a successful 25-year partnership with the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC). Throughout this partnership, the exchange of information, experiences, and insights has been central, as well as collaboration in areas such as regional and landscape planning, economic development, transportation, and a differentiated approach to "climate protection".

According to the latest NVRC data sheet (09/2024), the region excels in employment in the "professional, scientific, and technical services" sectors. A transfer of knowledge from these areas to our Stuttgart region could be crucial for our export-oriented companies.

We see opportunities here for German future technologies, which we urgently need strategically – not only to create real value and jobs in the region, but also to prevent the relocation of companies and skilled workers out of our region, and the resulting loss of jobs. This partnership directly represents both German and, above all, regional interests "locally and directly on-site", without the overly bureaucratic and cumbersome administrative processes of Brussels.

With 12 regional council members, the AfD is now the fourth-largest faction in the Regional Assembly. Our faction includes economic experts, company founders, and entrepreneurs, some of whom have long-standing experience in foreign trade with the U.S.

We wish this partnership and all those involved much success in the future and offer our participation and support for this cross-border collaboration.



Albrecht "Charlie" Braun
FDP



Paul Russmann
DIE LINKE/PIRATEN/SÖS

Information Instead of Isolation

Who needs America? You have to fly there – what a hassle. And Northern Virginia? Well, that's in America too. Just great. Let's be honest, dear readers: We already have far too many people who don't want to step outside their front door. Isolation used to be an American foreign policy tactic – and we wouldn't be celebrating 75 years of the Bundestag and democracy if that approach had endured through our darkest times. But it didn't. Neither at the very top nor here in our region. Here, we see prosperity and flourishing, occasionally interrupted by banter and grumbling. Never mind. "Information instead of isolation" is the formula for successful politics. Learning from each other, improving together, opening our eyes and minds – that's what we stand for.

An important piece of this puzzle is the partnership with Northern Virginia. Why not Southern Siberia? Sure, why not – if the circumstances were different, we'd be open to it. Openness to the world is our strength. It's not something you can force; it's something you must have and live. Encounters with others enrich us. Battle cries leave only victims in their wake.

The Verband once described this partnership as a "regional bridge across the Atlantic". The Northern Virginia Regional Commission titled their brochure for the 25th anniversary of the partnership, "Successful Policy & Technology Transfers". The FDP Regional Faction wholeheartedly hopes to see this partnership reach its 100th anniversary. And if by then Southern Siberia and other regions from the East and West are also part of it, that would be a success. This defines our path forward: expanding this into a network of friends.

The foundation? A climate change conference was the starting point of this partnership. Ecological economics in the face of the global challenges of our time can be the basis for this network. Including the transfer of technology and knowledge, as already happens between the research institutions in our regions. And if we need to fly to make this happen? Then we'll plant nine trees per participant to offset the CO₂ emissions. Or we'll do it using the technology we develop – together.

Think Global, Act Local

The new Die Linke/Piraten/SÖS faction has officially formed in the Stuttgart Regional Assembly. This cross-party alliance consists of representatives from Die Linke (The Left), the Piratenpartei (Pirate Party), and the Wählervereinigung Stuttgart Ökologisch Sozial (SÖS) (Stuttgart Ecological Social). During the upcoming term, the five-member faction will actively work in various ways to promote a social, climate-just, people-centered, and culturally vibrant Stuttgart region, remaining the social and ecological conscience of the regional assembly.

Unlike some others, we think outside the box. That's why we welcome international collaborations, such as the partnership between the Verband Region Stuttgart and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, and the focus on key issues: climate change, renewable energy, landscape planning aimed at climate adaptation, and improved mobility through the expansion of rail infrastructure.

Especially in times of rising populism, we see engaging with like-minded individuals who stand against this as crucial. Collaborating with all those in our partner region, Northern Virginia, who are committed to a socially, ecologically, and economically just transformation, is also valuable in a global context. At the same time, change often starts on a small scale: with us, in our families, or in the communities of the Stuttgart region.

"Think global, act local" – this is the motto of our Die Linke/Piraten/SÖS faction. We firmly believe that local and regional knowledge is valuable everywhere, and that exemplary action at the municipal and regional levels, on both sides of the Atlantic, is a crucial building block for a sustainable future.

The 2030 Agenda states this powerfully: "We can be the first generation to succeed in eradicating poverty and, at the same time, perhaps the last generation that still has the chance to save our planet." The United Nations has formulated 17 Sustainable Development Goals to enable a better future for all people. This is why we aspire to responsible neighborhood cooperation within our global village.



Approx. **€80** Billion

or 26.4% of direct investments from Baden-Württemberg companies, went to the USA in 2018. The USA is the most important foreign trade partner for the region. In return, US companies account for 8.2% (or €4,4 billion) of direct investments made in the southwest of Germany. (StaLa 2021)



3.2%

That was the share of U.S. students among international students in Baden-Württemberg in 2021. In the higher education sector – that is, all institutions of post-secondary education – the USA ranked 7th among countries of origin. (StaLa 2022)



280 U.S. Companies

are based in Baden-Württemberg.
(Staatsministerium BW/State Ministry
Baden-Württemberg 2022)



€39.395 Billion

worth of goods was exported from Baden-Württemberg to the USA in 2022, making it the top destination for exports among individual countries. In comparison, exports to the entire EU amounted to €123,410 billion. (StaLa 2023)



86,451 Overnight Stays

by U.S. visitors in the Stuttgart region in 2023, making the U.S. the largest foreign market in terms of visitor stays, as it has been for many years. In comparison, 66,881 overnight guests came from Switzerland. (RSMT GmbH 2024)

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