

Dreilinden's Theory of Change



Image: Eva Planet

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Dreilinden is a place name on the southwestern outskirts of Berlin. It was once home to a Bosch factory called Dreilinden Maschinenbau GmbH where during World War II thousands of people from many countries were forced to work producing war machinery. In 1944-45 that included Polish slave labourers from the concentration camp system. After finding out about this in the 1990s, Ise Bosch initiated oral history projects with survivors of Dreilinden Maschinenbau slave labour. Two books and a number of exhibitions in Berlin and Warsaw have since amplified the survivors' voices, memorialised their stories, and publicised this piece of local German history.

In 2006, when the time came to find a name for Ise's new human rights initiative, she wanted a name that was very close to her heart. Reflecting on the heavy history of Dreilinden Maschinenbau, Ise consulted with survivors to see how they would feel if a human rights organisation were to be called Dreilinden. She wanted to give the name "Dreilinden" a second life, one that honours the legacy of people who endured so much. The descendants agreed and Dreilinden gGmbH was born - with an aim to leave a legacy of joy.

Dreilinden also literally means "three linden trees." Our Theory of Change associates these three lindens with our three fields of work – grant making, impact investing, and advocacy. We envision these trees close together because they have a lot in common with each other:

- The roots of the three trees connect and touch – this is our organisational identity (*who* we are and *where* we come from).
- There are three tree trunks, with animals running up and down and jumping from one to the other – the basics of our work (the *why*, the *how*, and the *what*).
- The three trees photosynthesize together - our values (they are the same in all our activities).
- Their branches intertwine and mingle (the detailed specifics of what we actually do).
- Finally, high up among the treetops in the birds' domain – this is where our aspirations live.

Now let's take a closer look at this beautiful group of trees!

Roots level: Who we are and where we come from

Dreilinden was formed in 2006 by Ise Bosch, using funds from her inheritance.

As a member of the feminist lesbian community in both the US and Germany, Ise intended Dreilinden to be a funding mechanism with the central goal of supporting movements of people of diverse SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, Sex Characteristics) internationally¹.

Ise chose the structure of a non-profit limited liability company, which gives the people who run Dreilinden more freedom in day-to-day operations. Dreilinden is able to pursue its goal of supporting diverse SOGIESC communities worldwide with flexibility and a willingness to take risks, thanks to unrestricted funds from private sources. This allows us to support strategies that go beyond tried-and-tested approaches and ensure our capital has a catalytic effect. We recognise the challenges and flaws inherent in the current economic systems. We follow a stakeholder and not a profit maximising approach. Extractive business practices and policies accentuating inequities are in direct contrast with our values. We favour equitable approaches that align interests, factor in all externalities and use the power of capital consciously. We want our organisational structures to remain agile. Today, the Dreilinden team consists of six people, most of whom work part-time. All members are white and identify as queer. We take a relationship-based, partnering approach. We show solidarity with anti-racist endeavours. We struggle to understand class in local contexts and seek out partners who take class issues into account.

Trunk level: The *why*, the *how*, and the *what*

- **The *why*:** We believe that societies become stronger and more humane when they reflect the fluidity and entire spectrum of sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics - of ways to be, to identify, to express ourselves as human beings within and beyond the binaries of male and female, to love whomever we choose. We reject any hierarchical valuation of such identifications. Diverse SOGIESC rights are human rights that form the foundation of diverse and equitable societies.

¹ With a wave and thanks to one early reader, and the Australian/global research agency edge effect, we use the phrasing 'people with diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics' (SOGIESC). All people have SOGIESC; diverse SOGIESC refers to SOGIESC that exist outside of heteronormative, cisnormative, gender binary and endosexist assumptions. For more text, cf.

[TheOnlyWaysUp_Web.pdf \(edgeeffect.org\)](#), p.4. Accessed May 17, 2022

We believe that sustainable, self-led structures in local communities and active ecosystems of diverse SOGIESC entrepreneurs will best enable communities to manage, tackle, and overcome the challenges faced by diverse SOGIESC people.

- **The *how*:** When we look at structural change, our eyes are always fixed on the long term, as opposed to short-range goals that might be easier to see.

We believe that the people living in a given context are best placed to decide where and how resources should be focused and spent. Therefore we transfer as much decision-making power as possible to the people and groups who know most about that particular context. Careful selection of partners, and then a highly trusting attitude towards them, have proved to be the most fruitful approach for us in the long run. We have learned that entering a partnership on the premise of trust adds value to cooperative efforts, and makes difficult work more doable.

As a funder and investor, we act with the necessary agility and a calm focus on the long-term horizons. We are always ready to divert our path and let go of plans if required. We know that we make mistakes. We want to learn from those mistakes and never lose our enthusiasm for innovative ideas.

- **The *what*:** Dreilinden is a holder of capital. Through grants, advocacy and investments, we foster and create pipelines to fund grassroots and local entrepreneurs. We are convinced that philanthropic and investment efforts must be coordinated across all measures.

Different forms of capital are needed, from grants and investments to blended solutions. We call this approach “holistic impact”. We seek to build well-informed donor and impact investment communities in the service of diverse SOGIESC issues. We actively work towards reducing donor dependency and promote autonomous resourcing and sustainability.

We primarily focus on diverse SOGIESC causes in the Global South and East. We also fund initiatives in the Global North in cases where we see opportunities for outsized positive impact in the Global South and East over the long term.

We focus on the most marginalized within the spectrum of diverse SOGIESC, in particular LBQ women, womxn, trans, and inter people. We have recognised that these groups have the greatest potential for revolutionary change.

Photosynthesis: Our values

Trust: We recognise power dynamics and strive to work collaboratively

We trust that our partners will act in the best interest of their communities, and we communicate openly and transparently. Our partner selection is based on our global networking, experience, and expertise. Trust also means that we aspire to interact with our partners as equals.

We recognise the existence of diverse power dynamics. Trust forms the foundation of a collaborative working relationship. To build trust, we communicate as openly as we can. Particularly in cases where the other side is highly dependent on our decisions and actions, we consciously take leaps of faith and strive to build trust over time. We put breaches of trust in context and communicate them constructively.

Sustainability: We act purposefully and in the long term

We prioritise the long-term needs and interests of the communities we aim to serve, within our own constraints. We want to be a reliable partner whom they are able to count on.

We enable the creation of frameworks and structures that are self-sustaining and have the potential to impact on communities beyond our own commitment. We have a holistic understanding of our responsibility, and we take that responsibility to heart. We recognise that we are creating financial dependencies and strive to reduce those over time.

We take a long-term perspective and endeavour to foresee future trends and developments. We adjust our own priorities in line with the changing circumstances and parameters in the communities. We expect temporary setbacks. We act independently, thoughtfully but swiftly, and if necessary we can improvise. As far as possible, we aim to stand by our partners' side, even in difficult situations.

We retain the freedom to diverge from our path, but aim to show consistency in our conduct.

Innovation: We think intersectionally and venture off the beaten path

We strive to achieve the highest possible impact for SOGIESC communities, including purposely taking risks to achieve that. We think intersectionally and go beyond preconceived approaches. We actively work towards dismantling barriers and silos, even when we are pushed to our own limits. We strive to inspire others through our work and conduct active dialogue with stakeholders.

Branches level: What we actually do

We follow an holistic approach by combining the power of the “three lindens” – **grant making**, **impact investing**, and **advocacy** – in the design of our activities:

- **Grant making:** Our aim is to help build sustainable, self-led structures that represent and support local communities. We focus on constructing pipelines to grassroots organisers, while prioritising support for the most marginalised. To remain agile, our grant-making strategy is primarily focused on **regranting**. We aim to build a solid donor infrastructure by strengthening movement-led funding mechanisms. When we support organisations directly, we make **core support grants** – grants with few to no strings attached. We work with trusted partners who are deeply embedded in grassroots movements and have a strong participatory ethos. We support **property purchases** in selected countries to increase access to safe spaces and strengthen the autonomy of local organisations.
- **Impact investing:** We aim to facilitate the economic empowerment of diverse SOGIESC communities. We invest in businesses that are owned or led by diverse SOGIESC people or that specifically cater to queer communities (diverse SOGIESC enterprises). We provide flexible and patient capital to **diverse SOGIESC enterprises** in the form of seed, venture, and later-stage investments as well as private equity, debt, and hybrid solutions – always under the premise that we will avoid doing harm and will prioritise the most marginalised. We provide diverse SOGIESC enterprises with the capital they would otherwise not have access to. We combine our investment activities with critical **mentorship programmes** to equip entrepreneurs with the knowledge they need. We provide grants that promote an **active ecosystem of diverse SOGIESC entrepreneurs**. Through all these activities, we increase and create investment opportunities for other investors with the goal of establishing this new asset class.
- **Advocacy:** We use our position as a grant maker and holder of capital to advocate for more and better funding. The communities need access to additional sources of flexible funding, thereby further diversifying their income streams.
 - **On the grant-making side**, our advocacy aims to mobilise more and less-restricted funding from diverse sources. We **engage with potential donors** to raise awareness and increase the sense of urgency for funding more diverse SOGIESC causes in the Global South and East. We do this directly by inspiring donors to allocate more funds to diverse SOGIESC-inclusive grant making and empowering staff in government agencies and foundations to include diverse SOGIESC groups, particularly at grassroots level, in their portfolios. We also encourage individuals to

give more. We do that indirectly by **developing and advocating methods of trust-based philanthropy** that centre on communities' goals rather than donors' perceptions. We work to strengthen self-reflection and awareness about power structures in philanthropy and support networks of progressive funders. We want the philanthropic and development cooperation sector to **broaden notions of gender** and advocate for that goal.

- **On the investment side**, we want to use Dreilinden's capital as a catalyst for others to follow our journey towards mission-aligned investing in general, and queer lens investing in particular. We fund **research** to facilitate discussions and discourse in the new field of queer lens investing. We publish and chronicle our own experiences of investing with a queer lens in the Global South and East. We initiate and actively participate in working groups, industry events, and other platforms. Our aim is to create **a community of like-minded investors**.

In order to devise, promote, and implement the most innovative approaches, we view our trio of trees as an ecosystem that is constantly evolving and interacting with each other and the diverse SOGIESC environment – one where different disciplines, themes, and forms of engagement cross-pollinate. For example:

- By helping diverse SOGIESC communities acquire safe spaces of their own (via grants, loans, or equity), we improve the chances of more CSOs and enterprises being developed there, thus creating an infrastructure of NGOs with autonomous income streams and at the same time a pipeline of investment opportunities for other direct investors.
- We give grants to foster active ecosystems of diverse SOGIESC entrepreneurs. Those ecosystems support entrepreneurial networks, encourage peer learning, and inspire other entrepreneurs to follow suit. Once queer businesses gain greater visibility and there is a continuous flow of new queer businesses, this will attract the attention of investors willing to fund the journey of those entrepreneurs. In turn, queer-led businesses will lift up other entrepreneurs, and provide employment opportunities to members of the communities. This will increase inclusion as well as economic stability.
- We use our role as an investor to actively engage in dialogue on diverse SOGIESC* issues. When we contribute to investment funds, we work directly with investment managers to increase their understanding of and sensitivity towards SOGIESC topics. We encourage them to develop strategies to become more inclusive within their own organisations, internal processes, and portfolio structuring.

Finally: Treetop level, the birds' domain

We hope to create a useful narrative about giving and investing in a spirit of trust and solidarity. We hope that by telling our story well, we can have a long-term, outsized impact on the fields of philanthropy and impact investing.

We encourage ourselves and others to celebrate our successes and aim to leave a legacy of joy.

Ise, Claudia, Majbritt, Sabine, Ute and Stefan

Hamburg, November 2022

