**Transcript Axel Nissler - German Volunteers**

April 14, 2025, 10:30AM

**Brandon Ching** 0:05

Okay, can you briefly describe your background and what led you to start your company?

**Axel Nissler** 0:16

After 30 years in the supposedly normal corporate sector, I solved a social problem in 2020, not knowing that social entrepreneurship would then be called social entrepreneurship. For me or for us, the solution to the problem was very clearly centered on the fact that it should be set up as a non-profit, and we then implemented it with a form of company that was naturally closest to us or was closest to us, i.e. a G-U-G and G-G-N-B-H. Of course, we also looked at associations and all the other things.

**Brandon Ching** 1:00

And what is the core mission of your startup?

**Axel Nissler**  1:05

We, German Volunteers, organize the Volunteers for Sport events. And the encounter in sport, in volunteering, is a wonderful lever for bringing people from different bubbles together. And if I have good organizational software, I can also bring together people with disabilities, with a low level of education, with little knowledge of the German language, because people may have a migration background or refugee experience.

1:40

Exactly. So, we have created a digital infrastructure for volunteering. What is important, however, is that we have not only digitized the search and the offer in the form of an advertisement plate, but have also placed an organizational software behind it that makes the entire volunteer management possible, digitally possible.

**Brandon Ching** 2:06

And how did the political climate surrounding the German general elections 2025 influence your business decisions?

**Axel Nissler**  2:23

We don't really have high expectations of politicians and the administration. That's why the election now doesn't really change our business approach or the decision of the election. The tailwind that you might wish for has not materialized. To give you an example, when we founded in 2021 and were still nothing, we still got an appointment with the then Federal Minister of the Interior Seehofer and the State Secretary and administration relatively quickly.

3:10

We also got an appointment relatively quickly with Mr. Beuth, who was the Minister of the Interior and Administration in Hesse at the time, or with Ms. Milt, NRW and Administration. But the exciting thing is that after the third and fourth meeting, we were asked whether we could make the offer available for major national sporting events or in the federal state of Hesse-Volunteers or NRW-Volunteers, which is of course nonsense. In other words, if you think big, think nationally and set up a digital platform, which of course has no boundaries to a federal state or anything else, it's really challenging.

3:55

Knowing full well that such an engagement platform and such a digital infrastructure needs many showcases, along types of sport, along areas of engagement, along regions, but the region is probably not Hesse-Volontiers, but perhaps the Rhine-Neckar metropolitan region, where we have three federal states, versus Rhine-Main or northern Hesse. These are the framework conditions.

**Brandon Ching** 4:28

have you got to pivot or just your business model due to any potential or actual political shifts?

**Axel Nissler** 4:42

No, so at the moment no. Because when we founded the company it was clear to us that our business model could not be based on income from the public sector, because there was too little predictability and too little long-term planning. Donations are similar.

5:12

Let's see the refinancing of companies and partnerships with companies by creating or having created a new sponsoring category and thus creating real value or a real offer. the same applies to corporate volunteering and that also has its price for the partners for whom we fulfill it.

**Brandon Ching** 5:40

And what role, if any, did uncertainty play, or uncertainty around political developments in your decision making?

**Axel Nissler**  6:15

Not so much. What is surprising, not disappointing, is that both politicians are inexperienced in dealing with social entrepreneurs, just as unfortunate is the situation with charities, which also put up quite a wall. And organized sport is also putting up its own walls. In other words, we now have extensive partnerships with the German Athletics Association, triathlon, swimming and five other associations.

7:08

But the national elite sports association, USB, we are definitely on the move at divisional manager level, but the management or the board has not yet spoken to us, even though seven or eight people have told them that they should talk to us. So the established players find it incredibly difficult to even talk to startups that don't come from their culture. And politics is similar, as I said, it's unusual.

**Brandon Ching** 7:53

Have you actively engaged with policy-makers or advocacy groups regarding start-up policies?

**Axel Nissler** 8:03

Yes, of course we are a Send member. And what the social entrepreneur or Send as a single player has achieved nationally and regionally in the meantime is really great. When I think back four years ago, when I spoke to the people involved in the TechQuartier in Frankfurt, or also very nicely with Unternehmertum in Munich, they didn't see the topic of social entrepreneurship at all, very far away.

8:44

And when you saw the SIGU forum last week and see how many federal states now have very stable initiatives and that organizations like entrepreneurship are suddenly embracing social entrepreneurship, then a lot has happened. And I believe that even if there is perhaps not the same tailwind at the federal level as in the last three or four years, for the next three or four years, we can continue to expand and develop this at the federal state level.

**Brandon Ching** 9:35

How do you perceive the role of entrepreneurs in shaping political discourse and influencing policies? Do you believe startups should actively engage in politics or remain neutral?

**Axel Nissler** 9:48

It needs active engagement by A, interests in associations and B, also by the individual or many, many individual social entrepreneurs, i.e. also the people who are involved in social entrepreneurship.

**Brandon Ching** 10:12

Looking back, do you believe the elections have had a lasting inpact on your business strategy?

**Axel Nissler** 10:30

In relation to us? Not at all. A tailwind is something else. Of course, there could be a little more tailwind. But we haven't had any expectations in recent years and have built this up with strong partners, strong corporate partners.

10:58

At first we thought that social commitment, inclusion, integration and international understanding would be more attractive. But in fact, it's the by-catch that the companies get. First of all, it's a very simple service, exactly, for which they pay something in return. But docking with the CSA and HR department is fine. But it's the classic service, the classic service where the big lever for refinancing German Volunteers comes in.

**Brandon Ching** 11:58

And if you could propose a policy change to benefit start-ups in Germany, what would it be?

**Axel Nissler**  12:10

Opening up all support programs, all tools or that in all tools that the policy has to promote companies, non-profit and public-interest oriented companies are also considered and placed on a similar or the same level of priority.

12:39

Many of these funding programs or tools are simply not intended for non-profit GmbHs, non-profit AGs and so on.

**Brandon Ching** 12:49

What barriers do you see to implementing such changes?

**Axel Nissler** 13:02

In my opinion, the biggest barriers are not the proportion of people in politics and administration, but the interest groups around them. These are the traditional welfare percentages, organized sport and so on and so forth, who see many risks for their organization from new, innovative players and no opportunities. They are preventing this at the start.

**Brandon Ching** 13:46

Do you have any final thoughts on how politics and entrepreneurship intersect? Maybe anything that we haven't discussed that you think is important to include in the study?

**Axel Nissler**  13:58

Cooperate, collaborate, strengthen, bundle. There is no need to reinvent many things in this area either. Phineo and the Scala initiative are very strong players. In Duisburg, there is the Impact Factory and other Antropians who have eight or ten years of experience in making social enterprises big and supporting them. Yes, cooperating, thinking big, working together.

14:48

Exactly, because there is also a tendency for social enterprises to forget these elements at some point when scaling. Or that in many cases scaling is not possible because a social enterprise achieves this growth and this scaling on its own, but often has to give up its own identity or its own little plant in order to become stronger together.

15:28

Making the topic known. The topic of social entrepreneurship is completely unknown. I would say that nine out of ten people don't know that you can solve social problems and challenges with entrepreneurial approaches. And that applies to all groups. It also applies to traditional family businesses, large and small, and the people involved in very large companies.