

**Meeting on Thematic Networking
of
Twinned Towns**

Brussels, Wednesday 24 January 2007

CONTRIBUTION OF THE SWEDEN EMILIA ROMAGNA NETWORK

Brainstorming Session on Thematic Networking

– What further input to town twinning can the new Measure 1.2 provide?

This measure reflects and supports the ongoing trend of the transformation of the twinning relationships in the direction of an exchange more based on a set of substantial issues affecting local policy making.

It is therefore important to think about how town twinning is changing and evolving in the context of the EU integration process and how the traditional notion can be adapted to better suit the needs of the municipalities. .

A thematic network has indeed the advantage of being more flexible than a traditional town twinning project and facilitates the development of relations /exchanges bringing higher added value, especially for the smaller municipalities.

– Can you identify those suitable, already established and well-working methods that can serve thematic networking in the future?

SERN is a network born out of the need to develop an approach to transnational cooperation and town twinning more in line with the needs and the expectations of the local and regional authorities participating. The members collaborate on 5 policy areas through working groups in which the actors involved identify and implement project ideas that can involve both the local administrations and the community they represents (civil society, economic actors)

This is not a purely bottom up approach but a method that puts the local and regional administrations at the centre by assigning them a role of stimulating the local actors of the civil society. This has proved an effective approach, still to be refined, since it fosters a collaboration among territories and not merely local administrations.

Another important aspect is attention given to an extensive and intensive **exchange of information** on the respective local policies and legislative systems between the members of the thematic working groups. Such exchange was involving also the representatives of the civil society organizations interested in working on the issues. Another important point is the **continuity** in the process of collaboration by planning cooperation in the long-term perspective.

- **What were the problems already encountered and what kind of strategies did you develop to overcome them? Did you encounter difficulties in establishing partnerships?**

The main problem remains language, several partners (particularly among the Italian municipalities) do not have personnel with sufficient language skills. The problem has been partially solved through the use of interpreters but has generated high costs.

Another problem derives from differences in the administrative cultures. This problem has been dealt with by preparing as much as possible the meetings in advance by the contact persons and the SERN secretariat.

Difficulties are also linked to costs that frequent preparatory meetings can have. In particular the small municipalities but also the larger ones have limited resources available for this kind of activity. The SERN web platform offers the possibility of online meetings (that in part can substitute the face to face meetings) but many civil servants have low computer skills and have little time to practice.

What are the guarantees for successful co-operations?

- 1) The deeper knowledge about each other,
- 2) an effective methods and methodology for circulating information, regular and direct contacts among the members (the Secretariat/Coordination should not be a surrogate for it), a set of dedicated joint training sessions, the presence of cities of different sizes allows small municipalities to engage in actions with higher quality and added value, and allows them to acquire capacity to act in the European context.

- **Which kind of support do you expect from DG EAC or from Associations of Local Authorities?**

Maybe the creation of a forum for making consultations among the networks and between them and the DG more regular

Offer a web platform where networks can interact and discuss common problems

Brainstorming Session on Multi-annuality

- **Does the concept of multi-annuality serve your case?**

Yes, Continuity and results (in particular closer links among the citizens of cities and towns across Europe) can be achieved only in the medium long term, due to the very nature of the core issues at stake and the difficulties pointed out above.

What can you identify as the benefits and the dangers of multi- annuality?

Benefits: allows a planning of a structured approach to partnership through a gradual development of a solid (i.e. not improvised) process of cooperation, and an evaluation of the results and of the effectiveness of the network. It could help the network to act in a more strategic way.

Dangers: It could lead the creation of more inefficient networks or networks created ad hoc.