

# SERN ANNUAL REPORT 2013



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# The SERN Members in 2013

Aiccre Emilia-Romagna	Motala Municipality
Ass. of Municipalities Norrbotten	Mjölby Municipality
Ale Municipality	Mölnadal City
Arvidsjaur Municipality	Norrköping Municipality
Asp SudEst Parma	Norrbotten County Council
Bertinoro Municipality	Parma Province
Boden Municipality	Pellegrino Parmense Municipality
Borgo Val di Taro Municipality	Piteå Municipality
Brisighella Municipality	Ravenna Municipality
Cavriago Sevizi	Reggio Emilia Province
Cervia Municipality	Regional Development Norra Bohuslän (5 Mun.)
Collecchio Municipality	Regional Development Council Östergötland (Östsam)
Consortium of social cooperatives	Russi Municipality
Coompanion Skaraborg	Sala Baganza Municipality
Corniglio Municipality	Scandiano Municipality
Darvoce	Sinettica
Drivhuset Trollhattan	Smedjebacken Municipality
Falköping Municipality	Skövde Municipality
Felino Municipality	Söderköping Municipality
Forlì Municipality	Traversetolo Municipality
Imola Municipality	Trollhättan Municipality
Il Noce	Vänersborg Municipality
Kara Bobowski Soc. Coop.	Västra Götaland Region
Linköping Municipality	Unione "Terre Verdiane" (10 Mun.)
Jokkmokk Municipality	Unione dei comuni della Val d'Enza
Kalix Municipality	Älvsbyn Municipality
Matproducenterna i Norr	Ängelholm Municipality
Meldola Municipality	Östgöta Coop Center

# Introduction

The year 2013 represented a transition period in the framework of European Programming as by the transition in a new 7 year-programming period, which presents new challenges and new opportunities for Networks who based their activities on the transnational cooperation and exchanges.

SERN entered this new demanding stage with an important tool approved during the 2013 General Assembly: the Strategic Plan 2013-2015.

The strategy introduces the main objectives, driving themes of the Network and guidelines for the implementation starting from the clear statement that this strategy for the future come from the steps and the progress the members have taken and made in its past. It represents a synthesis of the Networks' experiences and values, which have contributed to define our mission and our identity. The strategy will help members in acquiring a stronger role in Europe and guide them in the development of innovative projects and relationships with the other members and with other partners in the European Union.

The strategy reaffirms that SERN specificity and unique trait stand in the links it aims to strengthen between Northern and Southern Europe across as different levels of government. While contributing to improving the quality of life and opportunities for the citizens of the participating areas, the key elements of SERN mission rest in the creation of mutual knowledge, the

fostering of active citizenship and contributing to the achievement of economic and social development.

The projects started during the year 2013 built mainly reflected the work done in the previous years. At the same time it should be pointed out that during 2013 many project proposals were submitted but only a very limited number was approved. The causes at the basis of this outcome are substantially two.

The first one is a general trend at European level that pertains the increased competition for EU resources at local and at regional level. If compared to 2010 at number of applications submitted under Programs like LLP or Europe for Citizens has almost doubled. This requires a more flexible approach (broader perspective) to the identification of sources of funding at EU level.

At the same time, the quality of the proposal developed requires improvement during the planning phase. In this respect, the Secretariat has been developing in the end of 2013 a double-track approach to project development reflecting the differences in terms of capacity present within the network. One track will be dedicated to those who are more familiar with EU project planning and that prefer following more traditional partner search and project development processes.

Alongside this opportunity, as from 2014, a step-by-step process for project development based on Project Cycle Management will be gradually

introduced as a driving process for the development of new proposals.

More attention put on the planning aspects is likely to lead to an increased quality of the projects with added value in terms of increasing the chances of approval and impact at local level.

## Activities

2013 represented an edge year for the projects developed within the SERN Network with five projects ended and three new projects developed. What is important to highlight is that all the project experiences and transnational meetings were the results of the training process developed by SERN through the project MaNTT – Managing Networks of Twinned Towns in 2011 for ended projects and through the project PLANET – Thematic Networks Planning Process developed in 2012.

The project experiences saw the participation of 11 Swedish organizations (Molndal, Trollhattan, Motala, Mjoby, Pitea, Falkoping, Norrkoping, Norrbotten Lans Landsting, East Sweden region, Vastr Gotaland Region, Vanersborg,) and 14 Italian ones (Unione Terre Verdiane, Comunità comprensoriale Bassa Atesina, Cervia, Ravenna, Forlì, Borgo Val di Taro, Collecchio, Bertinoro, Traversetolo, ASP sud Est, Imola, Scandiano, Comunità Montana Acquacheta, Region Emilia Romagna) and European partners from Spain, Germany, Finland, Malta, Croatia, Poland, Denmark and Belgium.

The project activities described in this section, will be divided under 4 categories:

- Projects ended during 2013
- Projects started in 2013
- CREANET
- SERN as support organization for Covenant of Mayors

## Projects ended in 2013



### ***Network on the role of volunteering in local welfare and integration***

The project VOLWE developed in 2013 the process of evaluation of the activities with particular attention to the theoretical perspective and the discussion in work groups on the tools, methods and indicators for an efficient and coherent evaluation within a European project. Partners met twice: in January in Mölndal (Sweden) and in May in Fontevivo (Italy). In the last meeting particular attention was paid to the integration of roles and activities between public authorities and volunteering associations; the results of this discussion represented the answer to the needs pointed out in the beginning of the project when the partners set as objective to cooperate to approach items as:

- Changing the strategies for addressing and managing the public services
- Increasing the communication towards citizens
- Changing the cultural attitude
- Bridging the gap between resources and needs
- Involving the new generations

Indeed, no private or public actor is able to offer all the answers to citizen's complex needs, but all can help through active participation because social policies can't be just mending interventions, but also preventive and proportional, overcoming the partial approach for an integrated and global vision of the services, proposing quality as a core value and model for the evaluation of the caregivers, of the performances and the results.



## ***Network on young people and development***

Project partners met twice in 2013 in Spain to discuss the possible tools to face and overcome the lack of communication between municipality level and young people through a participative and open approach. The last event was the evaluation and follow up meeting where the effects of the project were discussed in transnational workshops according to seven themes: "Europe 2020 strategy", "Young employment", "Self-employment", "Support people with good ideas" and communication of youngsters with school, public administrations and companies".

During the whole project process young people have been engaged and actively taken part; indeed, they planned and organized events, met other young people and discussed different issues.

The project had the main positive consequence to make it possible for young people to travel and meet other young people in a structured and thematic framework.



## ***Network on dialogue between young people and public institutions***

The project had as background the main objective to promote a better and constructive dialogue between young people and institutions, both local and European, and to improve on the one hand the capacity of listening of public administrations and on the other, the knowledge of public life and institutions among young people, as well as the democratic principles which are the basis of our civic society both at local and at European level.



The project put together around 200 young people during 3 transnational meetings who discussed with formal (conference and workshops) and informal tools (radio broadcasts, use of social networks, creation of handicrafts) the main theme of the project.



### *Active citizenship and intercultural dialogue with migrant people*

The project aimed at studying a shared methodology and at creating intervention actions to improve the integration of migrant people. In particular, the following specific issues were discussed:

- Training and Education: raising the education level of the migrant people
- Work: qualifying the workers, developing competences that will be marketable, increasing the occupation after the suggestion of Europe 2020 Strategy
- Socialization: promoting the insertion of migrant people in the life of the communities
- Second generation migrants: understanding the dimensions and the social impact of the issue. This last theme was the focus of the thematic conference held in Malta in March where problems, new strategies and different approaches were discussed on the way to integrate second-generation migrants in the European society.

Moreover, partners met in Finland in September and in Italy in November to analyze the different approach in the North and South Europe concerning this theme and the methodological issues at the base of the intercultural practice such as the new forms of support for migrant families, school as multiethnic reality and cooperative work as concrete opportunity for integration



### *Go green now project*

The contact people of each partner Municipalities participated in a final meeting in order firstly, to have an overall evaluation of the project starting from the results coming from the formats filled by participants at the end of each transnational meeting; secondly, to plan future cooperation in the perspective of creating a long lasting cooperation among the participating countries in order to study future specific project possibilities on the main issues coming out the discussion held during work groups.

The cooperation among schools was particularly important; indeed, thanks to one-year exchange, project partners could involve 15 classes to discuss and produce materials on the protection of the environment, recycling and energy efficiency tools. In particular:

- Group of children 3/6 years old focused its attention to exploring the nature;
- Group of pupils 7/10 years old focused its attention on recycling and reuse;
- Group of students 12/15 years old focused its attention on the use and the importance of water.

## Projects started in 2013



### **Active Engaged Generation**

The AGE project partners started their project with a coordination meeting in February 2013 where representatives of the participating countries defined the work programs and planned the events with attention to meet the partners' expectations and to divide properly the tasks.

The project entered the project main theme, active participation of elderly in the society, with two transnational events: the first one in Imola in May, focused on the practices to prevent elderly diseases in a socialisation perspective and the second one in Buje, Croatia, with a attentive focus on the intergeneration cooperation with expositions and the celebration of the day of elderly with joint events old/young people.

During 2014 the project foresees local activities in Sweden, Poland and Spain and the final conference in Italy in September.

[www.projectage.eu](http://www.projectage.eu)



### **EUC 4 BIZ *European cities network for business friendly environment***

The main objectives of the project were set by partners as 1. Exchange needs and to transfer know-how in supporting entrepreneurship on the European level;

2. Jointly develop guidelines and recommendations for creating favourable climate for entrepreneurship;
3. Create long lasting cooperation between twinned cities on this specific subject among different stakeholders. Project objectives will be achieved within 4 international events which includes seminars, workshops, study visits, final conference and two local events in each participating city/municipality, all followed by the pre-project situation research and development of presentation materials as local assignments.

During 2013, partners met twice with two transnational meetings, in April in Spain and in October in Poland. The seminars had the objective to present an overview of existing national, regional and especially local policies and measures directed to promotion of entrepreneurship by each partner of the project (municipalities), as well as constraints they are facing in development of favourable climate for entrepreneurship.

Moreover, the project foresaw local assignments and events includes dissemination of know - how transfer to local stakeholders and public and workshops with the aim to determine practical use of transferred European examples and best practice.

In 2014, partners will meet twice together with the development of local workshops in all participating cities.

[www.euc4biz.eu](http://www.euc4biz.eu)



### ***Raising awareness for eco friendly behaviours in waste collection***

The project started its activities with a coordination meeting in Spain in February in order to plan activities and strategies to reach the set objectives: promoting common values and strategies throughout the sustainability of

waste management as a part of wellbeing of the European citizens and increasing eco-friendly behaviours in recycling and reuse throughout interaction and participation among the European citizens.

The theme of waste management and the public communication among citizens on waste management and recycling were the two main issues discussed in the transnational meetings which took place in Poland in June and September. Particular attention was paid about the strategies on how to create an eco-friendly town in the image of its inhabitants and how to improve communication between local authorities and citizens on the waste collection.

Project will continue in 2014 and 2015 with other transnational meetings.

[www.eco-was.eu](http://www.eco-was.eu)



***European network on international relations policies and town twinning***

The project ended in December 2013 involved 260 participants, 14 partners from 6 partner countries. The project milestones consisted of 3 transnational conferences dedicated a specific target group: political representatives, official of local and regional authorities and representatives of civil society including NGOs and town twinning committees.

From these three conferences a number of elements were identified as key:

- Management – how to organise and manage international relations successfully
- Commitment – of citizens, of politicians, stakeholders and local administrations in EU projects
- Communication – how to better inform and involve public and citizens

Particular attention was paid to the definition of an efficient communication strategy. Indeed, it is possible to imagine communication in a 3-D model with the 3 axes "private-public", "one-way-interactive" and "top down-bottom up" and very often international relations communication is characterised by the definition "private/one way/top down". In order to have a more effective and positive communication it is vital to change the strategy and create an interactive communication, go for more bottom-up communication and more public.



SERN was a partner in the project proposed by the Association of Polish cities on twinning cooperation as a tool for active citizenship in the framework of the European Year of Citizens. The project saw the participation of the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic, Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia, German section of the council of European Municipalities and regions and French association of the Council of European Municipalities.

Two conferences were organised with almost 300 representatives of local governments from 7 countries. The first meeting took place in Gdansk in May 2013 and its main focus was on the sources and possibilities of financing twinning cooperation. The second conference was held in Krakow in September and was devoted to citizen activity as well as methods for involving local communities in twinning.

The third part of the project was a contest for young people who were to make short videos depicting town twinning as seen by the young generation.

Representatives of some SERN members participated in the conference as speakers to introduce some specific projects such as Forlì, Scandiano and

Vanersborg municipalities ones. Moreover two young people of Borgotaro won the video contest with their film entitled “where cultures meet”.



**ALL THE PROJECTS OF THESE TWO SECTIONS HAVE BEEN CO-FINANCED BY THE PROGRAMME EUROPE FOR CITIZENS measure 1.2 and measure 2.2.**



### *Network on creativity in pre-school education*

The Comenius network CREANET on creativity in pre-school education, led by the Municipalities of Scandiano ended with the presentation of some observations and recommendations resulting from the research activities, the exchange of best practices and the annual conferences. Creativity was approached by focusing on two specific aspects represented in two working groups: creativity and contexts and creativity and expressive languages. In all meetings, the presentation and discussion of good practices were an important moment to present 36 projects and activities.

CREANET identified five specific elements that can encourage childhood creativity within early years' settings:

1. The possibility of exploring with spaces and materials;
2. Extended and relaxed time;
3. Social interaction/collaboration among children in open problem-solving situations;
4. A mix of different symbolic languages and systems;
5. The role of the pre-school teacher.

The project ended in September 2013 with a final conference located in Reggio Emilia and Scandiano, Italy.



### ***SERN as support organization***

During the 2013 General Assembly, there was the formal signature of the agreement between SERN and the Covenant of Mayors Secretariat to let the Network become support institution of the European association engaged in the environment framework for local sustainable energy.

To be support institution means to spread information about the Covenant and to promote practices and tools to help members to achieve their objectives set in the agreement. In this perspective, SERN organised during the general assembly a seminar, which aimed to present the Covenant of mayors and to promote the exchange of practices on how to implement the sustainable energy action plan starting from the experiences of some members of the Network who planned and implemented it. The seminar was the occasion to identify elements of convergence for some shared projects as for the 50-50 project.

The 50-50 is a project of network level focusing on the behavioural changes among school's staff and pupils in close collaboration with local authorities in order to become active actors in the energy saving process. It is possible to identify two specific objectives: 1. To increase awareness locally and particularly in schools on energy saving attitudes and choices: 2. To foster transnational large-scale process on energy saving with a multiplier effect in terms of exchange among participating schools and organisations. This project will contribute to the Covenant of Mayors objectives and aims.



## SERN Executive Board 2013

The executive board members met three times during 2013: in March in Forlì, in April in Scandiano with the occasion of the General Assembly and in November in Skovde.

The most important theme of discussion was the definition of the **SERN Strategic plan 2013-2015** and its guidelines for implementation. The most important meaning of the new strategy is represented by the motto “the future comes from the progress made in the past”.

Particular attention was paid to the driving themes of the network that constitute the framework of reference for the members and the Secretariat in the definition of the activities, which are: 1. employment, 2. energy and environment, 3. learning and education, 4. local economic development and 5. social inclusion.

Moreover for the development of the Network, three priorities were identified as increase the participation of members and their level of commitment, increase the number of members and increase the size and number of the projects. In relation with the project results already achieved, it is essential to valorise the results with an improved dissemination and communication towards all stakeholders.

The Executive Board approved the 2012 balance sheet and 2013 budget proposal.

### *New members who joined the Network*

Five organisations asked to join SERN in 2013 both public organisations and private one.

-Municipalities of **Corniglio** and **Pellegrino Parmense** (Parma Province);

-**Unione dei comuni della Val d’Enza**

-**Consortium of social cooperatives** located in Pordenone (Friuli Venezia Giulia – Italian North- Eastern region at the border with Slovenia)

-**Volunteer association “Il Noce”** (Friuli Venezia Giulia)

### *Members of the Executive Board 2013-2015*

**Swedish members from**

**Ostergötalan:** Eva Andersson, Jan Owe-Larsson, Camilla Egberth.

**Swedish members from Västmanland:**

Paul Akerlund, Marie Dahlin, Gunilla Leven, Marie Ekman;

**Swedish members from**

**Norrbottnen:** Akel Eltoft, Kent Ogren, Jerry Johansson, Ann-Katrine Samfors.

**Italian members:** Francesco Castria, Patrick Leech, Valentina Morigi, Stefano Corradi, Francesco Trivelloni, Mirco Cantelli, Matteo Daffadà, Mirko Capuano, Paolo Bianchi, Marco Monesi, Gianluca Manelli.

**Chief of the Executive Board:**  
**Eva Andersson**

**Vice chairman of the Executive Board:** Patrick Leech

# SERN General Assembly 2013



The 2013 General Assembly took place in Scandiano from 11 to 13 April and it represented the occasion to know better the Italian economic and social reality of that area thanks to various study visits and workshops and to exchange opinions and comments with four valorisation workshops based on project experiences developed within SERN.

The themes of the study visits were the tile industry and design in particular in the field of ceramics and the public-private partnership and social inclusion approach. Even though the issues were very different, their common element was the cooperative approach in both experiences. The valorisation workshops were focused on:

- New skills for the social and health sectors, presented through the results of the thematic networks ELCANET, SKILLS and PIECES
- Planning and management skills in EU projects, presented through the innovative elements emerged from the capacity building projects PLANET and EUNET
- Quality in Early Childhood education and care with particular attention to the results achieved thanks to the CREANET project
- Dissemination seminar for the Covenant of Mayors, aiming to promote the implementation of the sustainable energy action plans.

During the Assembly, the delegates were called to express their vote on five issues: the 2012 annual report, the financial report 2012 and the budget proposal 2013, the SERN Strategic plan 2015, the election of the Executive board 2013-2015 and the election of the board of Auditors 2013-2015.

The description of the strategic plan was important to show all the members the work made the representatives of the Executive board and the secretariat in order to give sustainability in a long perspective to the Network. Indeed, the members of the network will continue to be fully engaged in implementing the EU 2020 strategy. The European context remains in fact fundamental for both the identification of the driving themes and the creation of priority areas of cooperation; nevertheless, the main focus remains on active citizenship.

# Economic and Financial report

## INCOME STATEMENT

The income statement of SERN for the year 2013 shows a total income of € 158.364,76 which equals to an increase of 17.540,69 € in comparison to the budget proposal approved by the General Assembly in April 2013. After operations the Income statements indicates a surplus of 173,60 €. However, following the decision of the Board in March 2014, a total of € 3.640, 14 € of credits that have been judged partially as non-collectable and therefore € 3.640,14 have been added to the Fund for the devaluation of credit and in parallel credits for unsettled fees for € 6.584,00. This has led to an income statement deficit of € 3.515,82.

The amount of incomes for the institutional activity of SERN amounts to € 81.071,23. The incomes from fees of the new member has been substantially lower than estimated due to the fact that 4 out of 5 new members have joined the network in late 2013, this has implied a recalculation of the fees to be allocated to the financial year 2013. Considering the full fees of the members for the year 2014 the total amount equals approximately 2.900 €, a figure in line with the 2013 budget estimates. To note also € 3.532,14 of contingent assets which pertain mainly additional incomes generated in 2014 by the project GUT as a result of the reporting to the European Union.

On the expenses side, the total amount of resources spent for institutional activities amounts to € 80.897,63. The main component pertains staff costs (€ 57.976,81). Including the staff costs allocated to the projects the total amount for staff costs equals € 69.280,74, a 2% decrease in comparison to 2012. The two other main items of expenditure have been Missions and General Expenses. Both have been lower than the budget estimates of approximately 15% and have been lower of the expenses of the year 2012. There has been an increase in the expenditure for regional taxation mainly due to an increase in the tax anticipations for 2014.

The total incomes and expenditures for EU funded projects equals € 77.293,53. Both CREANET and EUNET were successfully concluded in the autumn of 2013. The CREANET final report has been approved in February 2014 while the EUNET final report is expected to be approved by the EU's Executive Agency by May 2014.

## BALANCE SHEET

The balance sheet of SERN for 2013 shows total assets for € 122.729,70. This amount is divided into Cash (€ 70.393,90) and Accounts Receivables i.e. Credits (€ 52.335,81). The liabilities instead consists of a total Fund Balance of € 50.2505,87, € 5.715,00 of Membership Fees 2014 paid by some members in 2013 and Accounts payables i.e. Debts for € 70.453,26.

Unsettled membership fees constitute approximately 36% of the Account Receivables while 57% concerns final payments of the EU grants. The figures concerning the receivables of EU projects are based on the final reports approved or submitted to approval to the European Commission.

As far as liabilities are concerned, the main item pertains section C of the balance sheet i.e. Account payables. In this section the largest amount refers to debts towards to project partners or participants (54% of the total debts). Debts towards employees (C1 and C 5) constitute the other main source of payables (27%).

## GENERAL REMARKS

The fund balance over the past 5 years has constantly increased thanks to a surplus from operations in the Income Statement.

At the same time it should be noted the surplus has been declining in quantitative terms each year. This has been due to the fact that the surplus has been linked to the staff and overhead costs reimbursed by the EU funded projects in which the organization participated. The participation in EU projects, however, is not a certain source of funding and should not be therefore as a structural component of the incomes of the network (as shown by the Budget Proposal 2014 approved by the Executive Board in November 2013)

The amount of fees has been covering between 2011 and 2013 approximately between 80%(2011) and 90%(2013). This indicates that the current level of incomes from the membership fees does not cover the full costs of the institutional activities of the organizations.

## Indicators

The guidelines approved by the SERN Executive Board included a process of reporting and follow-up to be established in the context of the Network. Such tools do constitute an important instrument to evaluate progress in the areas of cooperation covered by the Network since they will add a qualitative character to the evaluation of the outcomes of the different project groups. The guidelines include also some quantitative indicators concerning the activities started or implemented in 2013.

The number of projects submitted (12) has been slightly lower the previous year (14) however; the percentage of approved projects has decreased substantially (3) due mainly to a sharp increase of the competition.

Special attention has been given by the Executive Board to the electronic platform. The number of visitors to public pages has increased while the number of users logging into the platform is in line with the previous year.

INDICATORS	
<b>Number of EU projects submitted at EU level in 2013</b>	12
<b>Amount of EU grants requested</b>	€ 1.828.000,00
<b>EU grants for projects approved in 2013</b>	3
<b>Amount of EU grants awarded in 2013</b>	€ 138.000,00
<b>Number of members involved in activities</b>	38
<b>Number of logins to the platform in 2013</b>	2.172
<b>Number of members that logged in 2013</b>	134 out of 284
<b>Visits (unique visitors) to the public pages in 2013</b>	3.621 (13.721 page visits from 67 countries)