

Strengthening Local Government through International Partnership

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This publication illustrates in what way the unique instrument of partnership can contribute to enlarging the performance of your local government, by increasing its capacity through collaboration across European borders. It mentions obstacles you might encounter in establishing or executing your partnership and provides practical solutions how to avoid them. In six concise chapters, you will get acquainted with the different forms of municipal international co-operation, the characteristics of a partnership, how to establish a partnership, the role of the local government and the community, types of partnerships, and possible obstacles and solutions in a partnership. A partnership contributes to cross-cultural understanding and learning, focussing on such complex issues as democratisation, participation and accountability, making it a dynamic instrument, also for your municipality.

Strengthening Local Government through International Partnerships

A dynamic tool for government and community



Colophon

This publication has been developed in the framework of the LOGO East programme.

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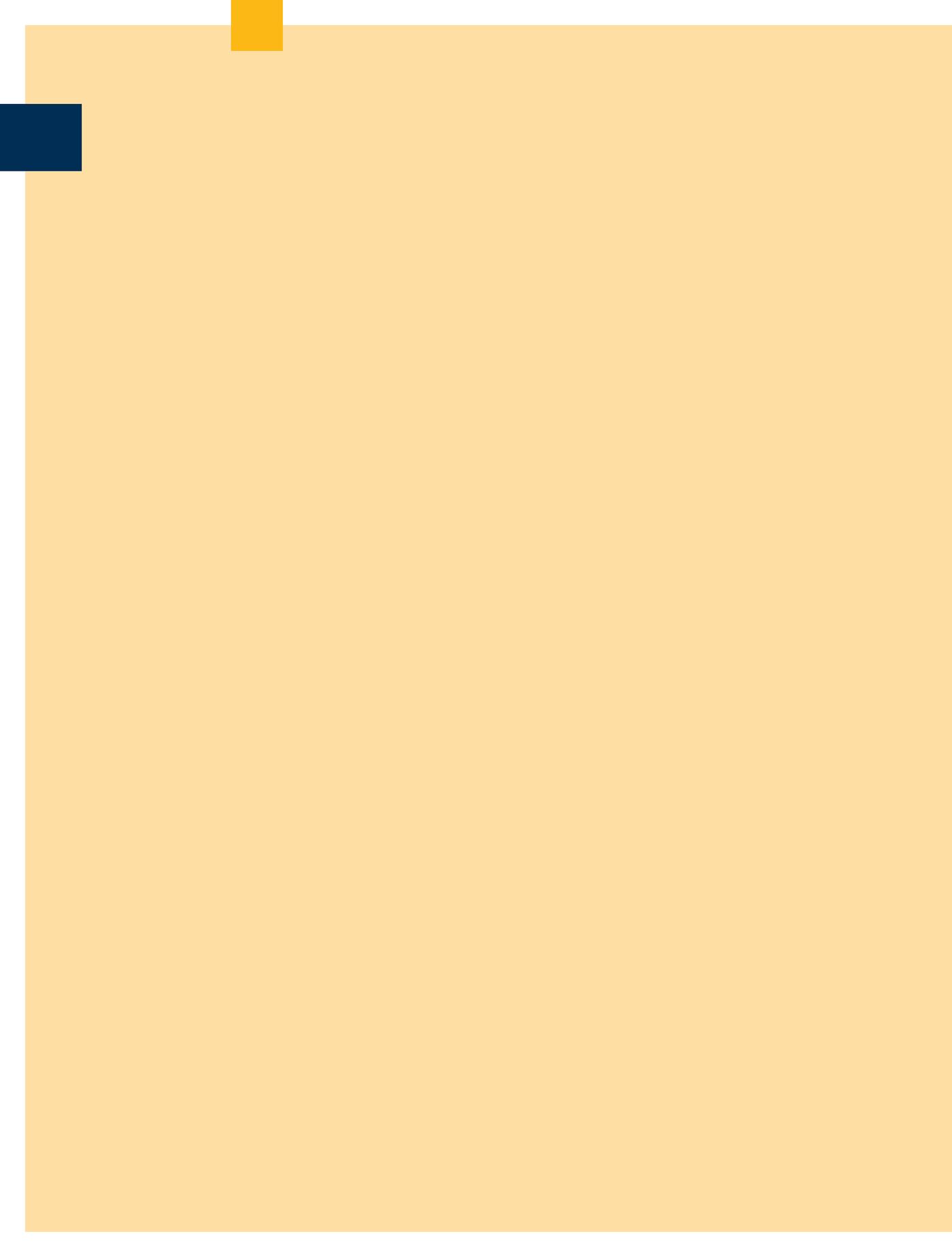
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Introduction

A partnership to exchange; exchange to learn; learn to improve; improve to strengthen

In Europe there are an estimated 30,000 partnerships between local governments in numerous countries. The partnership is thus one of the most common instruments by which local governments are active internationally. And rightly so because this instrument offers a vast number of opportunities to reinforce and upgrade the capacities of both local government and the community. Partnerships are not so much desired as necessary. The changes in today's world are creating challenges that are too complex for traditional structures and management methods to address. This is clear in the private sector but may be even more important in the realm of public problem solving, where government, non-profit organizations and businesses increasingly work together. Many of the most urgent problems that governments encounter call for flexible arrangements, constant adaptation, and expertise that require crossing boundaries between organizations, sectors and nations. This puts new responsibilities on the shoulders of municipal authorities: how to find solutions to meet citizens' demands, and always with limited or at least modest budgets.

In their search for solutions local officials welcome the fact that they can co-operate with foreign colleagues with whom they share common goals. Partnerships are a unique tool for this. In this publication attention is given to the co-operation between local authorities working together in Europe. The terms 'local authority' or 'municipality' is used, although this publication also applies to regional authorities. While the terms might vary their significance is clear – they are the many organizations that implement the work of government at the local and regional level. And the citizen is indebted to them all.

Your municipality may possibly already be actively involved in a partnership, or perhaps have plans to set up a partnership with an European local government. In both cases this publication will be of service. It sets out the partnership principle in detail, and with a practical touch. It makes clear how partnerships can contribute to improving and strengthening the capacities of local government staff by working over the frontiers with organizations that have faced a number of similar obstacles before. The objective is to help a partnership into being, or so structure it that it optimally improves and strengthens your local government.

This publication can be read in sequence as one whole, or indeed the reader can simply refer to relevant chapters or paragraphs that deal with specific subjects as sources of guidance and reference. The first chapter briefly explains what a partnership is, and how the phenomenon has developed from the early days to its current format. The second chapter describes the characteristics and advantages of

partnerships. This provides various arguments as to why a partnership can be useful and beneficial. Chapter 3 addresses the partnership cycle. This explains step by step how a partnership is ideally set up and structured. This has a follow-up in chapter 4 which looks at the way the municipality and the local community are incorporated into the implementation of the partnership. Chapter 5 describes the 4 different types of partnership and explains them with the help of examples from practice. The publication concludes with a chapter on obstacles and their possible solutions.

1 A unique instrument

1 What is a partnership?

There are various definitions of partnership. This publication formulates partnership as follows:

A partnership is a formal agreement between two (or more) local governments from different countries who have decided to work together for an extended period of time on a number of areas of their choice.

This sort of co-operative relationship may also be called a twinning, jumelage or tie of friendship. If they respond to the definition above then they can rightly be called a partnership. The definition still offers room for discussion as it is not always clear what is understood by a 'formal agreement'. Should an official partnership contract be signed by both parties for this, or is a formal decision by the municipal council sufficient? What exactly is 'for an extended period of time'? As is so often the case, in the words of Dutch poet Alec Beaufish 'if the definition is too strict and narrow, it risks becoming a dogma'. Clearly more important than the definition is the way the contract is created and detailed. The following chapters of the publication address this issue.

2 Other forms of municipal international co-operation

Because a partnership is one of the oldest and best known forms of municipal international co-operation, it is often incorrectly used as a synonym for this. A partnership is actually one of the instruments a local government possesses to give form and structure to its international policy. The other instruments are:

- **International networks**

These are international platforms addressing a particular central theme, to which local governments participate to share information, know-how and experience. An example of an international network is 'Eurocities', a network of European cities, working together on a community vision for a sustainable future. Another example is 'Child-Friendly Cities', an initiative of the UN, based on the rights of the child. It is a platform targeting the wellbeing of the young in cities and urban centres from the idea that these young people are more vulnerable than is usually the case due to a shortage of playing space, green areas and locations free from traffic and pollution.

- **Study visits**

Here delegations of local governments visit each other to exchange experiences in a particular policy field, particularly in case local

government has shown to be a good example in that area. Themes can vary from waste management to crime reduction, to educational processes and youth unemployment.

- **Cross-border co-operation**

Local governments immediately to each sides of a national border often work together to find solutions to common problems such as water pollution or infrastructure. The best known of these are the Euregios.

- **Projects**

To solve common obstacles, exchange experience and raise financing, local governments may work on a project basis. Examples of such projects include rebuilding a city centre, or creation of a municipal service centre for local residents. The European Union stimulates these forms of municipal international co-operation with subsidies, often sourced from the European Interreg fund.

A partnership is a unique instrument compared to the above mentioned devices for municipal international co-operation, because:

- A partnership is not restricted by time. It can last as long as the participants desire. In most cases a partnership continues for a number of years, after which an evaluation shows whether partners should continue or not;
- A partnership is not limited to a single theme, subject or methodology. As many themes can be addressed as the partners might wish and can finance. From study visits to one-time initiatives such as a single co-operation project;
- A partnership can address both the municipal organization or its citizens.

These characteristics mean that partnerships are dynamic and versatile instruments.

3 Creation and development

The creation of partnerships can be traced back to the period immediately after the Second World War. Citizens felt the need to create links with citizens from countries that had recently been their enemies or allies with the objective of creating peace and bringing friendship to the peoples of Europe. It was an initiative to bring people together and in turn to reduce the chances of a repetition of the two world wars. These oldest forms of partnership had a strong ideological foundation and it is perhaps no surprise that most of the oldest are between France and Germany.

Another type of partnership also originated in the Second World War. Local governments in neutral Sweden offered extensive practical assistance to the Norwegians in German-occupied Norway. This co-operation resulted in concrete activities and practical support.

Towards the end of the eighties and the early nineties partnerships received a new impulse. These were the dynamic years of European integration. The European Union was working on its common market and as a part of this initiated many programmes to stimulate the mobility of citizens across the continent. In addition at this time the EU acquired new competences. Many of these lay in that area where local governments played a role. As a result the EU became more relevant and important for the local governments of the member states.

Then in 1989 the Berlin Wall fell. The rapid changes in political relationships and national state structures signalled the start of a further expansion of the EU. Not only countries in Central and Eastern Europe, but also municipalities in these areas started to search for new contacts and partners in Europe. As a consequence of these two parallel developments a strong need developed for the creation of new partnerships between local governments. On the one hand between the old EU member states from the position of reinforced role of local governments within the EU, and, on the other hand between the old member states and new member states, as symbol of the regained European unity, and to exchange know-how in local democratic government and 'Europe'. Particularly this latter development ensured a huge stimulus to the number of partnerships created.

This form of co-operation has successfully continued into our era. And local governments in the old EU member states offered support and technical assistance to their partners in the then EU candidate countries. Currently these governments in the new EU member states are offering support to the new neighbours of the EU. Students have grown into teachers.

2 Characteristics and advantages

1 Characteristics

The unique character of a partnership can not only to be traced to its origin and development, it can be further described by looking at its characteristics.

Multi-disciplinary instrument

Partners can work together on a large number of subjects in partnerships that they themselves have chosen. For instance local governments may work on learning from each other how waste can be handled, and how transparent methods of decision making can be organized. Others concentrate on exchanges between schools, music and dance groups and in this way provide their citizens with exposure and understanding of the background, culture and lifestyle of the other. Other local authorities may seek to set up projects together for instance to build or furnish housing for the handicapped, and improve the service provision of the municipality.

All these various activities taking place within the partnership can be categorized under know-how exchange, technical support and social-cultural exchange. This shows that partnerships are extremely versatile and dynamic instruments that can be used in many different ways to achieve many different objectives. Most partnerships thus do not restrict themselves to one category of work. It all depends on the interests, needs and creativity of citizens and elected representatives or municipal officials as to how a partnership can be used as useful instrument for improvement.

Colleague-to-colleague approach

A second characteristic of partnerships is that many activities are set up and implemented by means of a colleague-to-colleague approach. The idea behind this is that the best advisor is a person who handles the same subjects as you. There are many advantages to this. Firstly, a colleague has knowledge and experience of a subject, as he or she works with the same subjects as you. Secondly, a colleague can be approached as an equal which simplifies the working relation. Thirdly, contact with a colleague is structural and sustainable. In contrast to a consultant, you can always approach a colleague for advice or assistance without the requirement to pay for the services. The colleague-to-colleague approach is thus very cost-effective.

'The benefits of town twinning to the city of Galway include opportunity for an interchange of ideas, breaking down of barriers of fear and misunderstanding, and help to foster a better appreciation of our respective cultures'.

Galway City Council (Ireland)

(<http://www.galwaycity.ie/AllServices/YourCouncil/TownTwinings>)

2 Advantages

The previous paragraphs have mentioned some advantages of a partnership. Below a number of specific advantages are provided:

- **Learning from others' 'best practices'**

International contacts offer civil servants and officials the opportunity to work together with foreign partners. And to exchange information and knowledge to find solutions in many areas aimed at the improvement of local government.

- **Personal development**

International contacts offer staff the possibility to work in a different environment to their own and to share their knowledge and experience with others, and learn from others' knowledge and experience. Thus can they both learn new skills and teach new skills where these will be best used.

- **European awareness**

By working together with European partners, citizens and local officials become more aware of their role within the European community. This awareness building is advantageous to all because of the growing influence of EU regulations on local government.

- **Access to finance**

International and European funds often demand a local government working with a foreign partner before releasing finance. Partnerships offer access to financing for projects that might otherwise not have got off the ground.

- **Economic development**

By bringing together smaller and larger companies and organizations in a partnership it is possible to stimulate economic development. Many companies find it easier to do business with people they know. Particularly tourism is an economic sector that has been progressed with great success through partnerships.

- **Expanding peoples' vision**

The discovery that others have quite different solutions to old familiar problems allows people to expand their vision and insights.

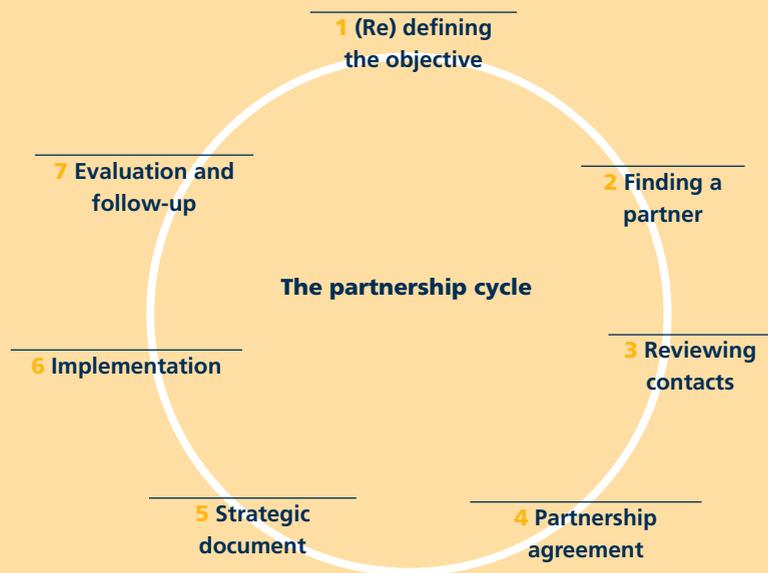
'Twinning provides the opportunity to find out more about the daily lives of citizens in other European countries, to talk to them and exchange experiences, and to develop joint projects on issues of common interest, such as local integration, the environment, economic development, and cultural differences'.

European Commission

(http://ec.europa.eu/towntwinning/index_en.html)

3 The partnership cycle

Partnerships thus have unique characteristics and advantages that can significantly benefit local governments. But in what way can your organization make use of a partnership and how does this work in practice? A phased plan offers the easiest solution. The diagram below shows this plan in the form of a cycle: the so-called partnership cycle.



1 Step 1 (Re) defining the objective

Whether your municipality has a partnership already for years, or wants to start up a new one, the most important thing is that your organization must have a clear picture of what it wants to achieve with the partnership. A partnership is an instrument that can be used in many different ways and for many different purposes. For this reason a clear picture of the objectives is essential. A partnership can be used for economic development, improving the functioning of management, European cohesion, sustainable development, social cohesion, etc.

In the defining of your objective it is important that you make the circle of involved parties as wide as possible. By getting many people (municipal council, policy makers, community groups) to talk and make their contributions, you will achieve a greater and better insight into what a partnership could mean for your local government.

2 Step 2 Finding a partner

When the objective has been defined and broadly agreed it is time to find the partner. Success is to a great extent the result of finding the right partner. In this search you can use the knowledge, experience and contacts of the association of local governments in your country. They will be able to help you in assessing the many foreign contacts. It is important that as soon as possible you are clear about what sort of partner you need. Or if you already have a partner, you are clear as to what you need from them. It is often an advantage if the two partners have organizational similarities.

Making a clear profile that matches the objectives (what do I want to achieve?) is thus the most important step. The checklist below can be of help.

CHECKLIST PARTNER PROFILE

- 1 I am looking for a partner in an urban/rural environment
- 2 My partner has about ... inhabitants
- 3 My partner is located in(country)
- 4 My partner has the following geographical features
(e.g. near main roads, rail lines, port, river, mountains, airport, national border)
- 5 My partner has the following characteristics in:
 - economic area
 - social area
 - population age profile
 - educational institutions
 - ethnic diversity.....
- 6 and so on.

The more questions you can pose, the clearer becomes the profile of the partner you are looking for. As explained these questions emerge from the first step. What is the partnership's objective? Even though you may have been in a partnership for years the question is still very useful. Thereby you already have the answers to the questions above, and can concentrate on what matches your needs. You may have to confront a number of parallels that were not clear at the start such as unemployment, youth criminality, tourism, the ICT sector, etc. Around any of these themes you can decide to initiate the partnership process.

3 Step 3 Reviewing contacts

When a potential partner has been found, it is important to discover whether the partner indeed is the right one. This can be done by contacting various parties involved who may play an important role in the achievement of the objectives of your partnership (the mayor, council members, heads of schools, businesses etc.). The internet is often the fastest and easiest medium to use to find useful information on the subject. To get acquainted you can also start a small project for a limited period of time with your potential partner.

Even when you have had contact with a foreign partner for years it is useful to put some distance between you. It is often within a partnership one sees the same sort of project and the same individual people. By looking at what the other party has to offer with a fresh eye, new people can be involved and ideas presented in areas that previously were considered outside the partnership terrain such as minorities, trade unions, youth organizations, hospital staff, etc.

4 Step 4 Partnership agreement

When the preliminary contacts are satisfactory, you can progress to making a more formal contact and sign a partnership agreement. This contains the objective that both municipalities have chosen to underpin the partnership. When you formulate an objective for your partnership the following information should be included:

- At *what* target group(s) is the partnership directed (the municipality, individual elements in the community or both)?
- *What* do both members of the partnership want to achieve?
- *Why* do both partners feel it is important that these achievements are reached?

Because partnerships are typically set up and progressed for a longer period of time the objective should not be too specific. It may become outdated too soon. To avoid this you can put down the specific goals in a strategic document. Although the partnership agreement is not strictly legally binding, its official status can be underpinned and confirmed by the signatures of the most important representatives of the local governments. The text of the agreement can then be made available in the languages of the two partners.

Below is the basic structure of a partnership agreement. Texts that can serve as examples are shown in the chapter where the type of partnership is discussed.

Basic Structure Partnership Agreement

<i>Actors/interested parties</i>	<name> local government and <name> local government with which you entered
<i>Objective</i>	What is the objective of your partnership?
<i>Area of co-operation</i>	The areas of co-operation are derived from the objective (e.g. culture, economics, environment, healthcare, education, ICT, etc.)
<i>Implementation</i>	Sort of activities you undertake to give the partnership body (e.g. exchange visits, co-operation between various organizations, setting up of projects, etc.)
<i>Responsibility</i>	Responsible person for the partnership (municipality or municipality plus community, through a foundation, platform or association)
<i>Promotion</i>	Way the partnership will be brought to the attention of the population (e.g. media coverage, organization of activities that are open to the whole population, signs at the entrance to the town showing details of the partnership, etc.)
<i>Duration and evaluation</i>	Period for which the partnership agreement is valid. When will it be evaluated? (bi-annually, annually, at the end)
<i>Signature</i>	Mutually agreed on < date> by <name> <name> Mayor of <name> Mayor of <name>

If your municipality already has a partnership agreement it is generally not necessary to sign a new one (though it can offer promotional benefits). New ideas and approaches can always be set down in the strategic document.

5 Step 5 Strategic document

The strategic document is intended as a guide to the practical implementation of the partnership agreement. Here the plan as to how the objective of the agreement is to be implemented is described. The strategic document contains the following components:

- a The objective of the partnership
- b The specific goals derived from the objective
- c The activities intended to achieve the specific goals

- d The targeted results. It is important to describe these results as precisely as possible and make them measurable. This allows the work of the partnership to be quantified
- e The duration within which the results should be achieved
- f A clear description of who does what
- g A budget as to how the activities will be financed

The set-up of a strategic document is shown below. Texts that can serve as examples are shown in chapter 5, where the type of partnership is discussed.

Set-up Strategic Document

<i>Objective</i>	Use the objective as shown in the partnership agreement
<i>Specific goals</i>	These are the sub-objectives derived from the main objective that are required to achieve the main objective (examples of sub-objectives could include local development in the area, a cleaner environment, improved service provision to citizens, a better understanding of each others' cultures, etc.)
<i>Activities</i>	The activities necessary to achieve the specific goals above (e.g. seminars, exchanges, exhibitions, projects, etc)
<i>Results</i>	Results of the activities. Depending on what results are achieved one can decide whether to continue the partnership
<i>Duration</i>	By what date should the results have been achieved?
<i>Responsibilities</i>	Who is responsible for the achievement of which results (municipality or community, through foundation or association)
<i>Budget</i>	How are the activities to be financed and by whom?

6 Step 6 Implementation

In the strategic document there is clear differentiation between the tasks of the partners. As a result you have to look carefully at how the co-operation will be handled within your own organization. Depending on the type and objective of the partnership the local community can play an important role in the implementation of the partnership. Whenever this is the case you have to incorporate the relevant citizens' organizations in the organizational structure of the partnership. This is possible by creating a partnership organization from representatives of the local community. Whenever your partnership is managed by a municipal structure as foundation in which the community is represented, it should be very clear who is responsible for what.

It is advised you pay careful attention to:

- Who is responsible for general co-ordination?
- Who is the first point of contact for the foreign partner?
- Who is responsible for which activities?
- Who must keep the community informed, etc? (media, bulletins, etc.)?
- Who handles the financial management?
- Who is responsible for income from sponsoring, subsidies and so on?

7 Step 7 Evaluation and follow-up

For the civil servants and officials, responsibility for the partnership is only one of their many tasks. Their normal daily work will not leave much time left free for the tight evaluation of the partnership. This may mean that interest in the partnership declines, especially if there are at that time no concrete results to show. To address this problem it is important that all those involved in the partnership remain enthusiastic and positive about it. For this reason it is useful to evaluate the partnership at regular intervals, both internally within your own organization (and if appropriate the organization in which the community is represented) and externally with your partner. In this way the involvement of all parties can be measured and targets and results can be adapted or upgraded. In this way the partnership will remain strong, effective and productive, and will not fade into a dormant state.

You can best undertake an evaluation of your partnership by looking at the degree the pre-agreed specific goals shown in the strategic document have been realized. On the basis of this you can decide to make adaptations to the objective and the methods used to achieve them. If, in spite of all efforts of concerned parties, the partnership does not succeed in delivering the forecast results then you must not be scared of (ultimately) ending the partnership. Management may decide, rather than to end a poorly performing partnership suddenly, to allow it to slowly fade away. This is bad for the image and reputation of international partnerships, and also bad for the local government that allows it. Such an approach generally only creates frustration.

4 Organization and implementation

1 Role of the local government

In municipal international co-operation the administrative and governing organization can fulfill four tasks. This is also valid in a partnership. The diagram below shows these roles.

The four roles of local government in a partnership



The four roles are as follows:

Creating context

This is the most passive form of support from local government with a minimal input of people and resources. The local government simply sets a policy by which it is made possible for others in the community to be internationally active. A part of this government role may include providing a small subsidy. It plays no active role in implementation.

Initial support

Here the local government invests initial support in the form of people and resources but still without being itself active in the partnership. The most important role is to support groups in their international activities. This can be done by making time available of civil servants or such facilities as rooms for meetings.

Providing knowledge

Here the local government for the first time plays an active role in international policy and practical participation. It often does this by making knowledge available and advice to the partnership and the provision of material assistance. Civil servants and officials from the municipal organization become involved and take responsibility for components of a particular theme.

Project manager

The most active role that a municipality can fulfill is that of project manager, a role that involves the most people and resources invested. Here the municipality and its partner themselves formulate projects, implement these and invest efforts in obtaining external financing to realize their objectives. An example is municipalities making use of the Europe for Citizens programme of the European Commission, that make finances available for partnership activities, or municipalities using a subsidy facility of VNG International (e.g. LOGO East programme).

Which role is the most appropriate for your municipality? Think first about the objective that you and your partner are seeking to achieve.

2 Role of the community

In chapter 1, it was pointed out that a characteristic of a partnership is the fact that it does not need to focus on the administrative and/or governing organization. It can also address the local community. If you would like to target the community in your project then it is also only logical that you give the community a role in the implementation of the partnership. A frequently met form is that your municipality brings together the community representatives who wish to be involved in the partnership, in the form of a platform, non-profit foundation or association. In this form of organization, citizens work closely together with the municipality to achieve the objectives of the partnership. So a representative of the municipality (council member or policy maker) also often holds a post in the organization.

Together with the municipal organization, the local community sets down which areas the project will address. These are often in the social-cultural domain. On the basis of this task allocation this organization seeks to aid in the achievement of pre-agreed objectives as these are set down in the strategic document. At the beginning of the year you can thus request the platform, foundation or association to submit a policy plan and budget (strategic document). This can then be presented to the council who will approve it, or not. At the end of the year the organization produces an annual report that is likewise presented to the council as a discharge of its responsibilities, and they in their turn discuss it and approve it, or not. This makes it possible to measure the effectiveness of the partnership and evaluate it. In turn agreement is possible and the citizens' organization can operate independently. Would you like to involve the community in the partnership, and if so how?

3 Implementation

The objective of the partnership will determine which of the four roles your local government should fulfill. At least in theory. In practice there are many municipalities with ambitious goals that choose only to play the role of offering 'initial support'. It is no surprise that here people are often disappointed with the results achieved. If a municipality formulates an ambitious objective then it is only right that it should play an active role in achieving it.

At its turn the role of the municipality determines who the partnership implementing parties will be. Then the implementing party determines what the final character of the partnership is. This is shown in the diagram below.

Organization and implementation of a partnership



If your municipality has formulated the objective, what role is preferable, who is the most important implementing party, and what is the type of partnership?

(role municipality).....(implementing party).....(type of partnership).....¹

If the municipality formulates the objective 'stimulate European community spirit of the population of the municipality', which role should they choose, who is the most important implementing party, and what is the type of partnership?

(role municipality).....(implementing party)... ..(type of partnership).....²

If your municipality wishes the partnership would like to equally target the local government and the community, which role is preferred? Who is the most important implementing party, and what is the type of partnership?

(role municipality).....(implementing party)(type of partnership)³

Type implementing party	Symbolic	Social-Cultural	Knowledge exchange and technical assistance	Active European citizenship
Community (foundation)	-	+	+/-	+
Local government	-	-	+	+

Implementation

The diagram above clearly shows how the role of the local government and the community determine the type of partnership. With a minimal involvement of each the partnership is only symbolic, an empty house without content and concrete activities. If the community is active in the implementation but the government is not, then the partnership is probably social-cultural in character. With a partnership targeting knowledge exchange and technical assistance the community often has a restricted role while the government has a more important one. With an active European citizenship partnership both the community and the municipality are strongly involved in the implementation.

The following chapter goes into further detail in the four types of partnership represented here. You can choose to look at what type of partnership best matches your objective and on the basis of that to structure your partnership.

1 'provider of knowledge' or 'project manager'. Your municipality is then the most important implementing party. The type of partnership is thereby knowledge transfer and technical assistance.

2 Your municipality can choose to take on a passive role of 'initial support' or 'creating context'. The implementation then lies with the community. The type of partnership then has a strong social-cultural character.

3 An active role of participation or management is desired of your municipality. In addition an active role of your community as implementing party is desired. When both fulfill an active role then the partnership is an active European citizenship type.

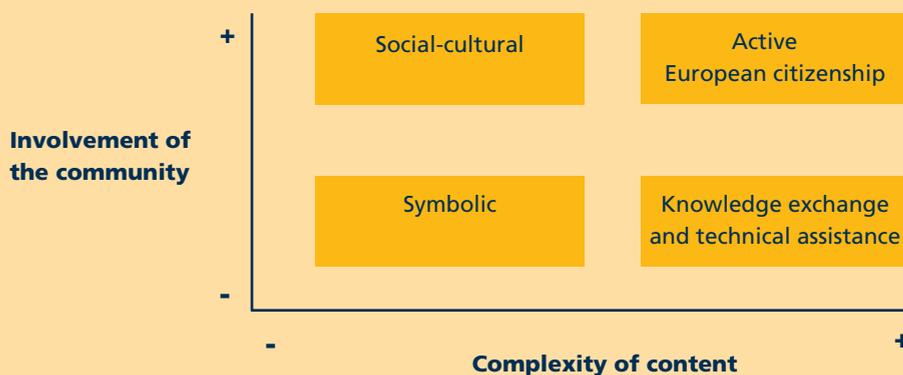
5 Types of partnerships

Hardly any partnership is the same. Each has its own themes, objectives and projects that are targeted, and ways in which they are organized. Nonetheless, these differences are not large enough to prevent types being differentiated. Generally all partnerships can be categorized on the basis of the following four types:

- 1 The symbolic partnership
- 2 The social-cultural partnership
- 3 The knowledge exchange and technical assistance partnership
- 4 The active European citizenship partnership

The previous chapter showed that the type of partnership is closely related to the role of the municipality and the involvement of the community. This criterion is however, not the only one to describe the type of partnership. This is also shown by another criterion, the complexity of activities involved. The diagram below shows the types of partnership according to these criteria. The Y-axis shows the involvement of the community in the partnership. This shows whether it is only involvement of the local government or whether the citizens are also involved in the set-up and implementation of the activities within the partnership. The higher up the Y-axis the more people from the community are actively involved. The X-axis shows the complexity of the activities that are to be implemented in the partnership. This shows whether the partnership has more of a specialist than a general character.

The following paragraphs further detail the different types.



1 Symbolic partnership

A partnership can be described as symbolic if the objective of the partnership goes no further than the sustaining of the relationship. Here one may speak of little to no involvement of both the local government and the community in the organization and implementation of the partnership. That a partnership loses its importance and content and thus becomes symbolic is generally no conscious choice. A symbolic partnership is created over time as a result of the local government and the community having too little interest in it. This is synonymous with a silent partnership. The inactive role suggests the stereotype of partnerships with no purpose. You should avoid this sort of partnership.

Objective

In a symbolic partnership only the relationship is of importance. The partners claim to be together but this is without content or concrete activities for most concerned.

Organization and implementation

- **Local government:** plays a minimal or passive role in a symbolic partnership. It offers at the most basic facilities such that the community can be active. The municipality gives no support beyond this.
- **Community:** The input from the community is also minimal. Few or no activities take place.

AMSTERDAM: PARTNER CITIES NO LONGER SYMBOLIC

In 2003, the city of Amsterdam reviewed and restructured its city partnership status. Its international co-operation had to be more businesslike and targeted towards real objectives.

Back in the eighties, in the same way as many other Dutch municipalities, Amsterdam set up links with foreign cities – in its case with Managua in Nicaragua - in solidarity with the young left wing Sandinista government; and with the South African town of Beira in sympathy with its fight against Apartheid. However, after some twenty years of friendship the purpose and wisdom of Amsterdam's partnerships was brought up for discussion. 'These old style partnerships are now a thing of the past for Amsterdam. The links with Beira and Managua seem to be restricted to an idealistic in crowd,' said Gerard Pieters, Head International Affairs of Amsterdam's city government.

Local politicians agreed that the city could more profitably seek its partners in those countries from where many of Amsterdam's residents hailed from: Surinam, Turkey, Morocco, Ghana and the Antilles. More recently contacts with cities from countries seeking to join the European Union over the coming time have been investigated. The co-operation must be closer and involve projects with clearly visible results; no symbolic links for unrestricted periods.

(Source 'Nieuw Amsterdams Peil', 26 September 2003)

2 Social-cultural partnership

A social-cultural partnership targets a greater involvement of the community, both in terms of participation as in organization and implementation. A wide variety of organizations from football clubs, music associations, schools and retirement communities to nature clubs scouting groups and so on participate. The content of the activities is not generally complex. They particularly target strengthening links with each other for purposes of mutual understanding.

Objectives

In a social-cultural partnership the community in a broad sense is central. Frequently occurring descriptive comments include: 'Citizens in our communities have an expanded insight into and understanding of each others' cultures', 'Our citizens have a more developed world view', and 'the partnership creates a feeling with our citizens of being European'.

Organization and implementation

- **Local government:** Their most probable role here is 'creating context'. The government ensures that the community can set up activities, that they are supported and stimulated with financial help, and with the assistance of civil servants or provision of space for discussion and practical activities.
- **Community:** The community is the most important implementing party of the partnership (via a foundation, association or platform). Activities are set up in which as many citizens as possible are involved.

Strategic document

<i>Objective</i>	< see partnership agreement > 'partners enter the partnership from the common understanding that a structural relationship between organization and citizens strengthens both communities. The partnership seeks to make a contribution to better understanding between the citizens of the two countries and thus sees itself as building block in the creation of the European community'
<i>Specific goals</i>	1 Young people have a positive opinion of the partner's country 2 Citizens see their municipality as a part of Europe
<i>Activities</i>	1.1 The organization of a theme week at partners' schools 1.2.The organization of exchanges between sports associations 2.1 Setting up exhibitions with a European theme 2.2 Discussion evenings with the partner about the municipality and Europe
<i>Results</i>	1 Most young people increase their understanding of each other's daily life 2 More citizens are aware that they have many things in common

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY FROM SPORT AND MUSIC

Since 2004 the municipality of Olen (Belgium) has had a partnership with the municipality of Bialogard (Poland). In the last three years of the partnership, many initiatives have been undertaken. These have been organized by various groupings and layers in the community and in various different activity areas. The initiative is primarily taken by citizens, but sometimes with the support of local governments. The municipality encourages this by means of financial contributions.

For Olen the partnership has had several advantages. It has promoted international understanding and for many people it has made 'Europe' real. It has also had the interesting effect of promoting a sense of community within our municipality, which is made up of three church communities. 'By organizing activities for everyone from these three villages, a strong sense of community spirit has been created', explains Inge Gerlo of Olen.

A good example of this was participation in the international volleyball tournament in Bialogard by a team of girls from three competing volleyball associations in Olen. They went as one Olen team to Poland and were successful. They won the first prize against teams from Maardu (Estonia), Akniste (Lithuania) and two secondary school teams from Bialogard! Another initiative involved inviting bands from our partner town of Bialogard for a four day visit to Olen. As part of this a theatre club, a percussion ensemble, and youth hostel and youth club were also all involved. It was a varied and successful programme.

The municipality did its best to involve as many people as possible from the town in the activities that were organized. 'When the Polish group visited Olen, it was not only participants who organized activities. We tried to get as many people in on it as possible. We wrote to all the Polish population in Olen, though not numerous, when something was planned' explains Gerlo.

VILVOORDE AND ANDALUCÍAN CULTURE

The partnership between Vilvoorde (Belgium) and Peñarroya-Pueblonuevo (Spain) dates from 1997 and its background story is exceptional. Vilvoorde is home to 1500 Spaniards, over 80 % of whom come from the area of Peñarroya-Pueblonuevo in Andalucia, some 80 km from Córdoba. The Spanish community in Belgium had naturally strong ties with the Spanish partner through the many personal and family connections. 'The initiative for the activities undertaken in the partnership lay mainly with the two Spanish associations in Vilvoorde. But it was not only them, youth associations and basketball teams also participated in the partnership's activities. In this way the partnership was carried on the shoulders of the community', explains Connie van Keer of the municipality of Vilvoorde.

Van Keer: 'The partnership's activities take place every three years. In 2006 we linked a visit to our annual town fair that celebrates Pentecost. In 2009 we will again leave for Spain. The theme of the activities varies per visit, but they always carry a cultural component. We also try to link the activities to a current European theme.'

3 Knowledge exchange and technical assistance partnership

A partnership aimed at exchanging knowledge and technical assistance is different to a social-cultural partnership in that it is not aimed at involving the largest possible part of the community. This type of partnership is aimed at co-operation between specific parts of society such as local government, companies or local institutions. As far as the contents of the partnership is concerned, concrete subjects are chosen typically with more complex content.

Goal

If you choose such a partnership, you must carefully consider the themes on which you want to co-operate with your partner. This type of partnership is based on specific themes. An example is the Slovakian municipality of Ľalec that maintains a knowledge exchange and technical assistance partnership with the Irish municipality of Westport. They mainly focus on exchange in the field of environmental care and sustainable development⁴.

Organization and implementation

- **Local government:** The most likely role is participant or project manager. The local government is usually the main organizer and activity implementing party.
- **Community:** Groups from society can be involved in the implementation, but only where this concerns themes that are relevant to these groups.

4 <http://towntwinning.peskovnik.si> (5 oktober 2007)

Strategic document

<i>Goal</i>	< see partnership agreement > e.g. 'The partners enter a partnership based on a collective idea that a structural relation between our administrative and official organization will strengthen both our governments. Through this our partnership wants to realise an improved service to its citizens. Additionally, our partnership aims to contribute to strengthening the democratic local (or regional) administration in Europe'
<i>Specific goals</i>	1 Better service to handicapped people within our municipalities 2 Improved internal organization of our municipalities
<i>Activities</i>	1.1 Organizing a study visit for administrators and public officials concerning partner's policy for the handicapped 1.2 Exchanging 'best practices' on policy on the handicapped 2.1 Organizing a seminar with experts of the European Commission on good local government 2.2 Developing an HRM handbook for the partner
<i>Results</i>	1 A new policy plan on policy for the handicapped 2 An HRM handbook

WATER LINKS: CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THREE WATERBOARDS

Over recent years the waterboard Roer en Overmaas (Netherlands) has worked closely with the waterboards Someș Tisa (Romania) and Trans Tisza (Hungary). Together they developed a project to create a financial plan to recover the balance between income and expenditure of the Someș Tisa water board for expenditure against flooding. This project was co-financed by the LOGO East programme of VNG International.

'Improving the financial management of the Romanian waterboard, resulted in better maintained dikes, which increased the safety of citizens. An introduction of the Dutch model by the Romanians of a democratically elected waterboard management meant tax legislation was followed and income generated', explains Jacques van den Kleef, deputy director of Roer en Overmaas waterboard.

'The project created a much wider impact than expected: when the Dutch model was introduced this also meant a strengthening of local Romanian administration. The project gained the attention of the Apele Romane, the Romanian umbrella organization of waterboards, the Romanian government and indeed the Dutch Association of Waterboards', says Hans Lutgens, project manager of Roer en Overmaas Waterboard. 'Next to gaining experience in international co-operation in large, united Europe, the spreading of the Dutch waterboard model was also important for our own organization'.

NEIGHBOURLY HELP: SLOVENIAN TOWN SUPPORTS SERBIA'S ALEKSINAC WITH LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2005, to implement its local economic policy the Serbian municipality of Aleksinac entered into a partnership with the Slovenian Sentjur. 'We consciously looked at what would be the best choice for us in the long term', says Ivan Dimic, chairman of the municipal council of Aleksinac. 'The proximity of Slovenia meant benefits in terms of modest costs of transport and visits. What was important to us was that Sentjur obviously has experience with developing policy for local economic development in which citizens, business and other stakeholders have a major share, as this was also our goal. We are happy with the choice for Sentjur. They helped us enormously and I think this will lead to co-operation in many areas. This was our first co-operation, but definitely not our last'.

Over the past three years VNG International, in conjunction with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities in Serbia (SCTM), has implemented a grant programme, that is financed by the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR). This programme financed projects submitted by the Serbian municipalities and implemented in co-operation with EU partner municipalities and local partners. One of the projects financed by the Exchange programme was the project to strengthen local economic development in the Serbian municipality of Aleksinac, in co-operation with the Slovenian municipality of Sentjur.

According to Irina Slavkovic, Programme Manager of the Exchange Programme, Aleksinac has benefited enormously from the expertise of Sentjur. 'I think that in particular these partnerships between Serbia and municipalities in the EU, aimed at improving the lives of Serbian citizens, are crucial to convince Serbian citizens that their future lies in Europe and not in the past'.

4 Active European citizenship partnership

In 2005 the term Active European Citizenship was introduced by the European Commission. This means active participation by citizens in the creation of Europe. The Commission gives an important role to partnerships. Town twinning and local government partnerships represent a unique and dense network and therefore have a specific role to play in the challenges of today's Europe. Town twinning has real potential to enhance mutual understanding between citizens, foster a sense of ownership of the European Union and develop a sense of European identity⁵.

A partnership aimed at Active European Citizenship is characterized by the largest possible participation from the community to the partnership linked to practical and concrete activities with clear content that extends further than friendship or fraternization.

5 <http://towntwinning.peskovnik.si> (5 oktober 2007)

Goal

This partnership involves complex themes and at the same time a high level of involvement from the community. In this type of partnership it is important to determine precisely towards which goals the local government and the community each strive.

Organization and implementation

- **Local government:** the local administration is closely involved in the implementation and usually fulfils the role of project manager. It involves the community in this.
- **Community:** the community itself is closely involved in the execution of the partnership, together with the local government, whereby they strengthen each other. Pay close attention to who is responsible for achieving which results.

Strategic document

<i>Goal</i>	< see partnership agreement > e.g. 'The partners enter a partnership on the basis of the collective idea that a structural relationship between our organizations and our citizens will strengthen both our governments and communities. Our partnership will on the one hand want to realise improved services for its citizens and contribute to strengthening the democratic local (or regional) administration in Europe. On the other hand our partnership wants to contribute to a better understanding between the citizens of our countries and sees itself as a building stone in realizing a joint Europe'
<i>Specific goals</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Economic growth in our municipalities 2 A cleaner environment in our municipalities 3 Improved service to the citizens of our municipalities 4 Better understanding for each others culture
<i>Activities</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Organizing a seminar for business on economic co-operation 1.2 Exchanging economic know-how 2.1 Setting up a project for clean water together with NGOs and civil society and municipal water organizations 2.2 Organizing a lecture on European drinking water directives 3.1 Organizing a study visit regarding the municipality's policy on the handicapped 3.2 Exchanging 'best practices' on policy for the handicapped 4.1 Organizing an exhibition on each other's culture 4.2 Organizing an exchange programme between young people
<i>Results</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 At least three companies from our municipalities working together 2 The quality of drinking water in our municipalities has improved 3 At least three municipal services have been improved 4 The knowledge among the inhabitants throughout the country of the partner municipality has been expanded

INTERACTIVE: CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THREE MUNICIPALITIES

Since 1992 the municipality of Maassluis (the Netherlands) has had a partnership with Hatvan (Hungary) and since 1998 with Targu Secuiesc (Romania). Within this co-operation both the municipality and the community is very active.

In the beginning the contacts were primarily focused at the Maassluis twinning associations. They organized transport of medical equipment and exchanges between the Red Cross of both cities. The associations undertook exchanges for companies, and in the areas of sport, culture and education. In 2007 an exhibition travelled through the partner municipalities to acquaint citizens with the city of Maassluis. It showed photos, pictures and historical paintings. There were also many objects on display from the fishery and shipping sectors. Through these close contacts from the community, the municipality also adopted a more active approach.

The mayor of Targu Secuiesc and his staff explained Maassluis they needed knowledge and experience to improve the quality of their services to their citizens. 'It is mainly the tripartite approach that is interesting', says Mayor Karssen of Maassluis. 'We already had ties with Hatvan and by involving them in this we had an even better formula for supporting Targu Secuiesc. Hatvan had already taken the step of partnering with Maassluis. The co-operation with the Hungarian partner helped enormously, as they have more recent experience with the changes and possibilities as a result of entry to the EU than ourselves. It is a method of international co-operation, which is really beneficial: practical and concrete'.

'We invested a lot in learning about each others' organizations, context of working and culture,' says Bert van Ravenhorst, project manager and head of general affairs in Maassluis. We earned back our investments by developing close co-operation in a short period, and generating appealing results in many areas. At our last visit to Targu Secuiesc many of our points had already been adopted and implemented, such as an impressively improved website and new computers. Our municipality deliberately chose to leave direction to Targu Secuiesc and to act only as advisor'. Van Ravenhorst further emphasises that both the municipality and the community have developed such a strong relationship with each other that it would be unthinkable to end this co-operation.

PREJUDICE AND REALITY – A THEATRE PROGRAMME BY YOUNG EUROPEANS

In 2004 the French municipality of Nancy approached the German municipality of Karlsruhe and the Polish municipality of Lublin with the idea of a theatre project as part of their partnership.

'We consider our French-German partnership to be very important', says Verena

Denry, programme coordinator in Nancy. 'However it was also time to ask a municipality from one of the new member states to participate. Lublin was a logical choice for us, as we have maintained a friendship with them since 1988 and knew that they also have a university theatre. This helped the partnership grow'.

The project was developed by the university theatres of the three municipalities and consisted of four meetings. The first five-day meeting took place in Nancy in December 2004. Ten students from each town took part along with handicapped people from Nancy. They learned from each other to carry out a theatre project and preparing a play. With this play they wanted to challenge the audience to tackle national stereotypes and in an open debate to bring about an honest exchange of opinions.

'As a result of positive reactions, specifically from the EU, our project became visible for a larger audience. The result was that more people from our own communities became involved in municipal activities', says Denry. 'We are planning once again with the help of theatre to tackle the theme 'preventing violence'. We want famous authors from different countries to write texts about violence, after which these different national perceptions and experiences will be bundled in a stage play. We expect to commence in 2008.'

The council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) has developed the practical handbook 'Twinning for tomorrow's world'. This handbook provides multiple examples of twinning activities as instrument for European citizenship. This handbook can be downloaded from the CEMR website at <http://www.ccre.org>>publications>.

6 Obstacles and their solutions

If your local government has decided to enter into a partnership, this is an important step. But more than just a decision is needed to make the partnership a success. In 2002 VNG International conducted a survey among civil servants of international affairs into the main obstacles within partnerships. This question was raised during different training events of VNG International for participants from different European countries actively involved in implementing projects through and within partnerships. In this chapter we explain the most frequently occurring obstacles to success and what you can do to prevent them, or to overcome them. The obstacles are divided into internal (within own municipality) and external obstacles (within the foreign partner).

1 Internal obstacles and solutions

Initially obtaining and then retaining support is essential in order to maintain your partnership. Reality shows that, even when your partnership functions well, many citizens are not aware of its existence and administrators do not always see its benefits. Insufficient consensus for a partnership from the main actors, the administrators, the community and the media, is therefore one of the biggest obstacles.

Lack of administrative support

Elections mean changes to administration within a local government. It is not wise for your partnership to be too dependent on active officials. They can be succeeded by others who may have different personal opinions. The partnership must therefore be politically neutral, unaffiliated to a party, agenda or administrator. However, this does not mean that administrators should not be involved. On the contrary, mayors, aldermen and councillors often play an essential role in a partnership for example via lobbying for support, representing the local government with activities, obtaining financing, and co-ordinating activities. It is therefore recommended, that if a change of administration occurs in your municipality, to immediately get the new administrators acquainted with the partnership so that they can see the use and benefits.

Lack of support from the government organization

What applies to the local political administration is also important for central government. The results your local administration want to achieve with the partnership must also be known in the government organization and be widely shared. Otherwise the risk arises that non-involved employees will view the partnership as the exclusive domain of one or several co-ordinating public officials.

This makes the work of the project team vulnerable. Furthermore, other places within the organization may benefit insufficiently from the acquired knowledge and experience.

Lack of support from the community

One feature of a partnership is that you can involve the entire community in it. Of course the limited budget and the interest of the people mean that not every individual member of the community wants to be involved. This is a normal course of affairs and is not a problem. However, you should guard against the partnership being seen as a fun hobby for a small group of enthusiasts. If, for example, the partnership is primarily aimed at cultural exchanges between schools, whereby mainly teachers, pupils and some parents are involved, the rest of the community could feel left out that the partnership is of no use to them. In this way the support remains limited. It is good if your partnership involves as many groups as possible within the community, as is desired for the goal. The more people who feel involved and see the benefits, the more people will support it. This ultimately helps strengthen the partnership itself.

Lack of support from the media

Positive media attention is hugely important to generate support for your partnership. A story that ends up in the media as suggesting the partnership is a 'toy of the mayor' or excuse for 'working holidays' by municipal staff can have a long-lasting negative impact. There are different ways in which you can generate positive media attention:

- Appoint a contact person for the media who is good at public speaking. This could be someone from the information department or a council member.
- Press releases are an excellent way of achieving positive media coverage. In this way you will have some control over your own message and story.
- Create good contacts with the local media (television, radio, newspapers), so they have a positive approach to the partnership.
- Create your own media coverage via newsletters and a website.

Lack of financing

Although you can organize your partnership to be very cost-effective, the budget is usually limited. This does not have to be a problem as many of the activities within it can be done by volunteers. However, it is always easier if there are more financial resources than just money or the budget of the local government. This can be done via sponsoring, but also by making a funds appeal. Another simple (and often more effective) way of financing activities is to request a contribution in kind such as transport, dinners or the use of accommodation. Companies that take part in partnership programmes are often willing to contribute to activities (in kind or with money) as they sometimes derive good publicity from their efforts. The European Commission also supports partnerships via the programme 'Europe for Citizens'. More information on http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.html.

2 External obstacles and solutions

No common consensus

Even if your partnership starts enthusiastically, it can become difficult over the course of time if it transpires that you and your partner do not have a collective goal on which you are co-operating. Differences may be too large or expectations too different. If the co-operation no longer flows smoothly, then it is time to re-evaluate. It is often the case that expectations are not in agreement. We discuss several causes below.

Cultural differences

Working in an international environment is usually inspiring. You meet interesting and different people with new and creative ideas. But working in an international environment can also lead to misunderstandings, conflict and frustration. And people who have different habits, opinions and ways of doing things can also cause difficulty. It is not without reason that this obstacle is most frequently mentioned by the international partnership actors. Every individual brings their own cultural baggage. It demands time and patience on both sides to handle and deal with this. If you come into contact with people and situations from different cultures, keep the following things in mind.

- *New perspective*

In your daily work routine you may no longer be aware why you do some things the way you do. After all, you have always done them this way. Through your contacts in the partnership you will see how other people address the same matters. Be aware of how this might negatively affect you and how your behaviour might negatively affect others. The 'we don't do it that way here' syndrome can be found everywhere. And especially be aware of how these discoveries can allow you to improve your functioning.

- *Awareness*

Working on an international project makes you more aware of your own country's culture. You become aware of the similarities and differences and this also allows you to better analyze your own background (dealing with leadership, formal or personal relations, administrative culture, handling time and planning).

- *Learning*

The best way of dealing with cultural differences is not to see them as problems but as opportunities. You see how others have different views and you learn that problems can also be approached and solved in a different way. It places your own insights in a different perspective and you gain new knowledge and experience.

- *Ask questions*

Cultural differences sometimes become obstacles because we do not understand the background. We do not understand why the other person does something or acts in a certain way. The best thing to do is simply ask 'why'. Why do you do that? Why take this action? This is usually the most clarifying approach.

Language

If you work with international partners, you need to be able to communicate with each other. People must be able to understand each other to achieve something together. This is possible via an interpreter, but it is naturally preferable if you speak the foreign language concerned. It may thus be necessary, if within budget, that the partnership offers people language training. If, for example, this is not possible for financial reasons, then it is handy to find people in the partnership who can speak the desired languages. They do not need to have knowledge of the required theme. This avoids the need to hire expensive professional interpreters. Within your municipality there may be competent (young) people who have a good command of English and who are willing to work as interpreter for the partnership, either voluntarily or for a small payment.

Drawbacks of the colleague-to-colleague approach

The colleague-to-colleague approach offers many benefits. There are a number of drawbacks you need to be aware of:

- *Lack of knowledge of the local situation*

The foreign colleague who has a great deal of substantive knowledge on the theme being handled, is not necessarily aware of the local situation in your country, and vice versa. It is therefore important that partners reserve time to inform each other on their country and their local situation in the municipality (politics, social, cultural).

- *Not every expert is a good advisor*

In the world of football only a few footballers have also had a wonderful career as football trainer or manager. A good player is not automatically a good trainer. Something similar may occur in your partnership. A good municipal expert with a lot of knowledge and experience in for example citizens' participation or transparent decision making, does not necessarily have the capacity to get this knowledge and skills across to others. This should be taken into consideration in selecting experts for an assignment within the partnership.

- *Personnel changes*

One of the largest benefits of the colleague-to-colleague approach is the close contact of two people who have trust and mutual respect for each other. But, this can be a drawback if one has to leave. The continuation of the partnership may be threatened if one of the

important colleagues disappears. Thus it is always necessary that the partnership is supported by many people within the municipality. In this way the departure of one good colleague will not threaten the entire partnership.

3 Recommendations

If you are aware of obstacles within your partnership, it will be easier to overcome them. To avoid, and if necessary solve obstacles, consider the following summary of recommendations. 'Repetition leads to mastery'.

Take your partnership seriously

Long-lasting and community-based twinings tend to lack an overall vision. They often develop in a more or less 'organic' way. A twinning should be a solid commitment between two dedicated partners. To be successful, the partners should agree on the objectives and the contents of their future co-operation. For that, it is important to have a proper policy document to underline this.

Lay down the results you want to obtain

Partners should determine for what purpose the partnership is intended. What results do you want to achieve in what period of time? Make sure who is accountable for what results. Define projects, tasks and outcomes. Be as specific as possible. Put it down in an agreement. Do not hesitate to evaluate this on a regular basis.

Look for a partner that fits

Meeting a future twinning town can be by chance, or by careful consideration. A certain similarity between the towns is called for. To find the right partner you can start by identifying all the characteristics of your own town. This helps to create the match. The local government association in your country can also act as mediator to find an ideal partner.

Create workable conditions

A solid basis for international co-operation within the organization consists of sufficient well qualified personnel, budget and a flexible attitude by all. A municipality must invest in good preparations and training of the staff involved. The ability to speak foreign languages, English in particular, is essential. For this reason consider engaging young people in the twinning.

Integrate the partnership in your organization

Your partnership must not be an isolated activity resting on the shoulders of one or two people. It has to have the political support of the mayor, councillors and the local council. Community-based activities add to the importance of a twinning.

Invest in your partner

Mind the gap that exists between cultures. Be aware of differences and consider undertaking action. Acquire new knowledge by consulting experts familiar with the partner's culture and read publications about the subject. Consider introducing language courses. Integrate young people into the activities to improve communication.

And build personal relations – the foundation of successful international co-operation. This often results in friendships that last a lifetime and these are the real 'lubricating oil' of twinning relations.

VNG International offers individual support and trainings on municipal international co-operation for local governments in Europe and beyond. For more information you can contact VNG International at www.vng-international.nl.



VNG International

International Co-operation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities

Committed to strengthening democratic local government worldwide

The key task of VNG International is strengthening democratic local government. It is a small, dynamic company annually managing some 60 plus projects and programmes with a focus on decentralization and capacity building. VNG International supports local governments, their associations and training institutions in developing countries and countries in transition.

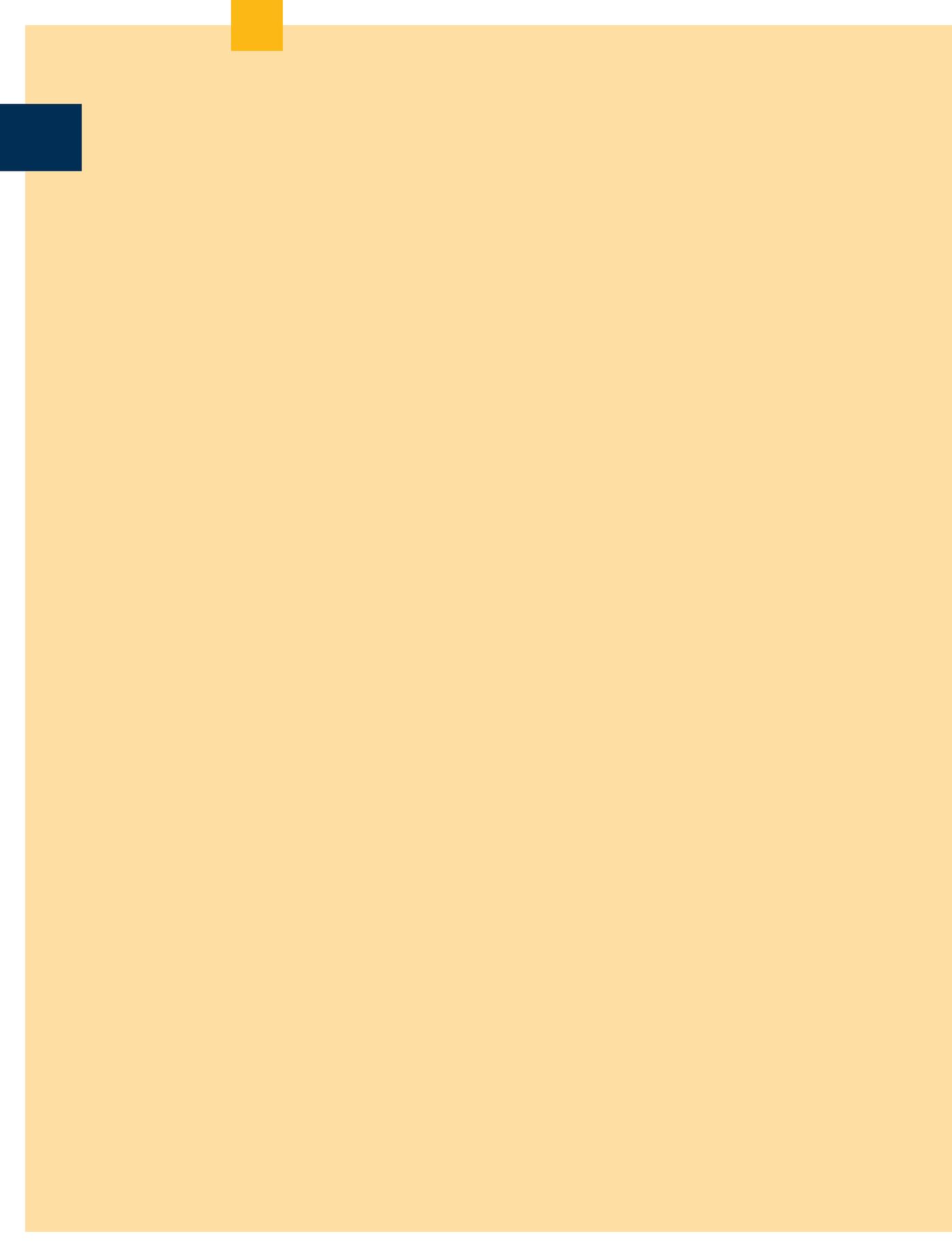
VNG International's approach

For VNG International, strengthening democratic local government means working on three inter-related levels:

- **the individual level**-training and motivating municipal staff and elected representatives
- **the organizational level**-advising local authorities on their organization structures and working methods
- **the institutional level**-adapting financial relations, laws and institutional arrangements

The VNG International approach builds on:

- Colleague-to-colleague co-operation
- Institutional linking





Buitenlandse Zaken

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