



Education and Culture DG

'Europe for Citizens' Programme



SHARING FOR TOMORROW'S EUROPE:

## Thematic networking of Twinned Towns





## Introduction

This booklet highlights the new thematic networking measures introduced by the Europe for Citizens programme, which will help twinned towns to collaborate on issues of common concern. It outlines what thematic networking is, why we need it and how it works. It also showcases concrete examples of town twinning networks at different stages of their evolution.



## Tomorrow's twinning



The European Union is home to almost half a billion people and in a process of continued integration. The EU therefore needs the active participation of its citizens.

The Union is a cross-border community held together by the values of respect, tolerance, solidarity, non-discrimination, freedom of speech and the rule of law. Europe is a place where ideas are exchanged freely, where people are treated with respect and where they feel involved irrespective of their beliefs, gender or racial background. These values bind Europeans together and can give them a sense of shared identity.

However there remains a need to bring citizens closer to the EU, to deepen their sense of having a common European identity and to feel more actively engaged as European citizens. This implies involving Europeans more actively in the policy-shaping process and engaging in intercultural dialogue with citizens from other countries. Town twinning has long been an important mechanism for developing active European citizenship. That is the reason why the new Europe for Citizens programme gives it a prominent position, expands its forms and activities, and allows it to develop its potential.

To mark the advent of the new programme, this brochure introduces the innovative town twinning instruments now available, particularly the thematic networking tools. It also eloquently illustrates the efforts, progress, success and the results that previous initiatives in the field of thematic networking of twinned towns have yielded. This document clarifies the methodological aspects of the

thematic networking concept and points and sets us well on the road to tomorrow's town twinning. I can assure you that each of the profiled examples presents its own innovative aspects and highlights the future potential of this field.

I trust that this brochure will prove an inspiration to everyone who is interested in town twinning. I do hope you enjoy reading it!

**Ján Figel'**

Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth



## From reconstruction to the

### Engineering a European network

Town twinning has come a long way since the early post-World War II years. One of its longest-running examples is the twinning relationship established by the city of Braunfels (DE) and its French partner Bagnols sur Cèze in the late 1950s. This partnership has had a dynamic ambition to reach out and embrace new partners, from directly twinned towns to their twinning partners. In this way, a large co-operation network gradually evolved. Currently the network includes towns from Germany, France, the UK, Belgium, Austria, Hungary, Spain, Denmark, Slovakia, Romania and Italy.

In the past decades, this network has organised a large number of multilateral events. An important aspect of the co-operation has been its strong Europe-oriented approach: placing European issues on to the agenda, debating them and then putting this learning into practice at local level.

In the future, this dynamic network might face the challenge of taking up and consolidating a more strategic and focused direction. The new thematic networking measure can help networks of this kind set their priorities and work towards them.

**More information:**

[www.braunfels.de/staedtepartnerschaften](http://www.braunfels.de/staedtepartnerschaften)

The modern idea of town twinning in Europe was born as a grassroots initiative in the aftermath of World War II to heal the wounds of that traumatic conflict and to bring Europeans closer together in aid of the reconstruction effort. Today, more than 15 000 twinning links in Europe create a powerful and robust network of citizens who are playing an important role in constructing an ever-closer Union.

Twinning allows people 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 education, the environment, economic development, and culture. One key advantage of town twinning is that it involves large numbers of citizens directly, driving home the benefits of EU integration at the local level and helping citizens from different Member States to create a strong feeling of belonging and of a common European identity.

### Town twinning and the European Union

In recent years, the EU has been involved in an active drive to reach out directly to citizens and involve them more closely in the construction of a Union fit for the 21st century. In this context, town twinning is an ideal tool, providing a direct channel of communication between citizens and civil society, on the one side, and the EU institutions, on the other.

Prompted by the European Parliament, the Union began supporting town twinning in 1989. The European



## construction of Europe

institutions recognise that town twinning has long had a very strong active European citizenship dimension. This recognition has found its way formally into the new Europe for Citizens programme (2007-2013) in which the direct engagement of European citizens features prominently. This is especially true of Action 1 (of which town twinning is a part) of the new programme.

### The concept of thematic networking

Adding to its capacity to connect citizens, town twinning also provides municipalities with a platform for co-operation. Towns usually co-operate with their own twinning partners, but quite often they also work with the partners of their partner towns. Towns can use this kind of networks, for example, to explore a particular topic or theme, to share resources or interests, to gain influence or to face common challenges.

In recognition of this reality, thematic networking of twinned towns has been introduced as part of the new Europe for Citizens programme. This reflects, to a large degree, the situation in the field where the need for a more theme-based focus has been expressed by many stakeholders. The new thematic networking measure has built on this situation and has given it a more strategic and structured direction.

### From 'kinder, küche and kirche' to 'creativity, competence and communication'

'Kinder, Küche, Kirche' (children, kitchen and church) are the so-called three Ks traditionally associated with the role of women in society until the 1950s. In recent decades, this has gradually been giving way to the three Cs of creativity, competence and communication, according to the organisers of a series of EU-funded thematic conferences.

Twinned towns Ostrów Wielkopolski (Poland), Delitzsch and Nordhausen (Germany) and Lecce (Italy) have decided to explore the theme of contemporary women and the challenges they face. Through a series of thematic conferences they have so far studied the status of European woman in the 21st century, how it has developed and how it is likely to evolve in the coming decades. They also focused on domestic violence and other problems facing women in vulnerable situations.

The meetings have enabled an exchange of know-how, experiences and best practices between those working in the field, such as women's NGOs, help centres, psychologists, police officers and school counsellors.

This example illustrates a strong thematic partnership with a commitment to an interesting and relevant theme which can serve as a catalyst to the development of structured co-operation and of a network built around this shared interest.



## Shaping the agenda - the league of villages

In a Union of half a billion citizens, it is potentially easy to overlook communities of just a few hundred or a few thousand. Inspired by the European Cultural Capital idea, the Dutch village of Wijk aan Zee declared itself Cultural Village of Europe in 1999, following the example of Tommerup in Denmark.

The initiative has since expanded into a network of 12 villages across Europe which work together to draw attention to the issues concerning small rural communities in the EU. One member of the network receives the distinction of Cultural Village of the Year and is placed under the spotlight for that year.

In 2005, a Union-supported Cultural Village caravan toured all the then 25 Member States over a period of 100 days with the aim of listening to country dwellers. The network has also formulated a charter for small communities.

This is an example of a network which originated from an urge to shape the agenda and to influence the policy-makers – which is exactly what the Europe for Citizens programme is about.

**More information:**

[www.cultural-village.com](http://www.cultural-village.com) and [www.therake.eu](http://www.therake.eu)

## Building tomorrow's

Town twinning has served the cause of European integration well. Since World War II, it has helped European citizens to better understand one another and find common ground. But the EU has become more complex and is facing both internal and external challenges, and this has had an impact on the town twinning movement. In the past, local authorities linked upwards, mainly to their regional and national governments. However, in recent years, as more and more common EU policies touch the local level, urban and rural communities have found themselves in an increasingly direct relationship with the Union. In a diverse and interconnected Europe, these local communities not only need to forge mutual understanding and respect, they also need to find new ways of communicating their concerns at the European level and, by the same token, handle European issues in a local context. By so doing, they will contribute to the shaping of an ever-closer Union not only of Member States but also of local communities and of European citizens.



## town twinning today

### Strength in number

One versatile way for towns to make their presence felt at the European level is through networking around a particular theme. Profiled networks allow cities, towns and villages to build common ground and to pool resources in order to influence the European agenda and to get more closely involved in the policy-shaping process. Such a thematic network also allows its partners to learn from each other and to exchange ideas when debating European issues in local contexts.

### Sharing common interests - back to school to learn about Europe

The Maastricht treaty of 1992 transformed the European Economic Community into the fully-fledged European Union. At the historic moment, the Saint Alban Town Twinning Committee (FR) realised that they, like many of Europeans, were not entirely aware of the ins and outs of the European construction process. Spurred on by this need to learn more about the European project, they set up the 'Ecole de l'Europe' (The School of Europe). Since then, the Ecole has organised workshops, meetings, round table discussion and other events designed to promote better understanding of the EU.

At these gatherings, ordinary citizens are brought together with politicians, diplomats, parliamentarians, researchers and experts. The Ecole's 'pupils' appreciate the chance to quiz 'teachers' and the user-friendliness of the formula. And the idea is spreading. Saint Alban's Italian twins of Salgareda have also created their own school. They have now decided to create a Europe-wide network to carry out the idea of European schools.

This is an illustration of a strong ambition to assemble a network based on similar interests in a particular area – in this case learning more about the European integration process. The idea of the Ecole has the potential to spread further across Europe, allowing more towns to join the network.

#### More information:

<http://perso.orange.fr/ecole.europe>



## EU Support for thematic networking

The implementation of the Europe for Citizens programme is guided by certain principles which aim to strengthen its impact. These include a stronger thematic focus; encouraging the development of larger networks and structured co-operation; and paying special attention to disseminating project results. The new thematic networking measure has been designed and developed in line with these principles and seeks to bolster the strategic aspect of town twinning activities.

### Support for networking events

This measure supports thematic conferences and workshops, which should serve as milestones for networking and should encourage the development of long-lasting, dynamic and multifaceted co-operation between twinned towns. This objective is reflected in the conditions set for the participation of prospective beneficiaries.

Each municipality involved must be twinned with at least one other municipality participating in the project - or a twinning relationship must be formally in preparation. This ensures that the network has a solid basis, its networking effort has continuity and that all partners are committed to joint efforts. A thematic conference or workshop should have at least 20 participants from at least three municipalities from three different participating countries. This is to underline the ambition to achieve true Europe-wide co-operation, while not setting the threshold so high that it prevents smaller networks from participating.

For the same reason, at least a quarter of those taking part

ought to come from eligible countries other than the host country. Priority goes to projects which involve partners both from newer and older Member States.

A project may cover either a single event or a maximum of two conferences or workshops held in different eligible countries during the same application phase. Each event should last between one and three days.

Lump-sum funding is available for the communication and dissemination of the results.

### Support for multi-annual projects

The Commission realises that it can be difficult to pursue a particular thematic avenue with one-off EU support. For this reason, the Commission has developed the possibility of applying for multi-annual support under the new Europe for Citizens programme. Multi-annual projects involving established networks will take them a step further and provide them with the opportunity to present an action plan involving a whole range of activities.

This new feature complements and further develops existing project models by providing a new opportunity to those who want to embark on more strategic and structured co-operation. Multi-annual support allows participating municipalities to structure their activities and to focus on important thematic issues, relevant at both the local and European levels, thus bringing a certain degree of fresh intellectual dynamism and creativity to the town twinning field.

Multi-annual projects must involve at least five twinned



towns from five different participating countries, the majority of which have to be Member States.

The applicants have to submit a formal document confirming the commitment of all partners of the network to the project. Multi-annual support is available to networks with a track record of joint activities over at least the past three years. This threshold ensures that co-operation between network members is well-developed, while not excluding relatively young networks.

The funding system recognises the need to plan and coordinate the activities of the network. It also encourages the communication and dissemination of the results.

#### A wide range of options

As the case studies in this booklet illustrate, the support provided by the Europe for Citizens programme can be useful in many different circumstances. It might be of interest to long-established networks working around a particular theme or exploring a variety of mutually beneficial themes. It can also encourage well-developed networks to find a clear thematic focus. Finally, it might also work the other way around, helping twinning projects with a clear theme to create and forge a well-developed network. Once in a formed network, the partners involved can work together in a variety of ways. But as networking requires coordination in order to ensure a clear thematic focus, the partners may consider establishing a separate legal personality for their network, or employ their local twinning committees in this coordination role. Existing networks rely on a variety of solutions, which could prove useful to others. These include a charter of rules and procedures, a secretariat, a presidency, a steering committee, permanent working groups, etc.

### The power of networking - in pluribus unum

The EU is an alliance of European countries. Similarly, the Charter of European Rural Communities is a coalition of European villages, one for each Member State. It was founded in 1989 in Cissé, France, among the then EU of 12. It has since grown with subsequent enlargements, and will soon embrace Romania and Bulgaria. The Charter members sign up to a relationship of solidarity, social and cultural exchanges, intercultural communication, and exchanges of ideas between their respective citizens.. Delegations of all Charter members meet at least once a year and the venue rotates between the various member municipalities. One of the Charter's main objectives is to provide its members with insights into how people in other parts of the EU live. To do so, it organises exchange programmes through which people from one village go and stay with a family from another village. This provides the basis for a network that gives the Charter members the opportunity to set up all kinds of joint projects. The Charter also has an executive board with an elected president and deputy president. In order to consolidate the Charter's activities and goals, the board has recommended that the network set up a voluntary 'Friends of Europe' group in each member village in order to consolidate their coordination and networking efforts. The main language of communication is English, but in order to facilitate interaction between the groups, French and German are also working languages.

This is another example of a strong, well-developed network built on strong common ground. The mechanisms used to run this network of small municipalities are very interesting and can serve as an example for other networks.

More information: [www.europeancharter.eu](http://www.europeancharter.eu)



## Circle of stars

Douzelage is a town-twinning network of 25 towns, each in a different country in the Union. Derived from the French word 'douze' ('twelve') and 'jumelage' ('twinning'), the network was originally conceived by the Granville (FR) and Sherborne (UK) Twinning Associations as a union of towns and cities in the then EU Member States. Although the network has since grown significantly, it has decided to keep its name.

The fundamental purpose of Douzelage is simply to foster opportunity and friendship amongst its member towns. It revolves around a number of activities, including cultural, sporting and educational exchanges. Education has always been one of the most important features of the many events and projects organised by the network.

Douzelage has an effective operating system. Delegates from the member towns meet at least once a year in a different town by rotation to discuss procedural and constitutional matters, and more particularly to initiate new inter-town projects and be updated on on-going initiatives. In parallel to these gatherings, education meetings take place. These gatherings are often attended by the local MEP and local public figures. An elected international president and two vice-presidents coordinate Douzelage's activities. English and French are the network's chosen language in order to facilitate effective exchange in a multilingual Europe.

Large membership provides interesting challenges in putting together effective mechanisms of co-operation for more internal cohesion and the productive sharing of resources. In addition, Douzelage is an interesting example of a network with a diverse portfolio of activities – organising, on average, 20 different events per year. The concept of thematic networking could encourage this network to find a more concentrated thematic focus and produce even more tangible results. Using the multi-annual approach, this kind of expanded networks may become more stable, develop a better framework for their activities and address organisational matters well in advance.

More information: [www.douzelage.org](http://www.douzelage.org)



## Thinking out of the box

Innovation and lateral thinking are at the heart of the new Europe for Citizens programme. When contemplating a town twinning thematic network, partners should not be afraid to think out of the box. Non-conventional partnerships between actors from diverse fields can often pay huge dividends by allowing the different players to learn from one another.

Experiences that worked successfully in one field can often be transferred to other areas. Furthermore, the experience gained from one field can be a source of inspiration and of new ideas for another. The new programme encourages this kind of cross-fertilisation among its different actions. As far as thematic networking of twinned towns is concerned, links with Action 2 (civil society projects) and Action 4 (devoted to the remembrance of victims of Nazism and Stalinism in Europe) will be encouraged.

Furthermore, thematic networks are encouraged to consider taking in new actors from a wide range of fields, including the NGO sector, schools, enterprises, academics, trade unions, sport organisations and more. Such diversity not only provides valuable lessons to those involved, but also enables networks to develop knowledge in a wide range of themes.

In addition, the Europe for Citizens programme encourages project promoters to seek new synergies with other EU programmes with a citizenship dimension, such as the Lifelong Learning, Youth and Culture programmes.

## All the colours of the policy spectrum

Launched on the back of several town twinning relationships, the Sweden Emilia-Romagna Network (SERN) aims to broaden and deepen the relationship between Swedish and Italian local and regional authorities in a broad range of policy areas through a cross-cutting horizontal approach. The network seeks to foster a local approach to transnational relations by involving a variety of local actors, such as municipalities, regional governments, educational institutions, civil society and economic actors.

SERN strives to introduce a European dimension into the day-to-day activities of its member organisations through a deeply rooted partnership which is both vertical, involving multiple levels of government, and horizontal, embracing different civil society actors. It operates through working groups which enable local actors from both countries to exchange information and good practice, as well as to develop innovative joint projects.

SERN is formally established as an association and it has a secretariat coordinating the work of the network. Although it is concerned with a whole array of fields, SERN focuses on five priority areas: the environment, entrepreneurship, education, the social economy and tourism. These themes have two elements in common: they represent key political priorities at local/regional level and they touch directly upon the daily lives of the citizens.

SERN is a good example of a strong network engaged in a plethora of activities, which is both made possible and enriched by the multitude of participants, including local authorities, universities and civil society partners. (Although not entirely eligible for support under the thematic networking measure in its current format, this network has been showcased because of the innovative elements it provides and its versatility.)

More information: [www.sern.eu](http://www.sern.eu)



## Sharing the benefits

Town twinning projects and thematic networks are of direct value and benefit to the people and organisations involved, but they also have a broader knock-on effect which ought to be maximised. For instance, citizens involved in all twinning initiatives will go away and tell their family, friends and colleagues about their positive experience.

Similarly, towns and municipalities may be inspired to start their own networking initiatives by the achievements of a particular twinned town or network.

But this multiplier effect should not just be left to chance. Planned promotion and awareness raising, as well as dissemination and exploitation of results are crucial components to the success of any initiative. In order to optimise the impact, each project needs to find the best way of publicising its activities and providing interested partners with access to its results.

### Tools of the trade

Dissemination is all about spreading the good news. It involves finding ways of informing all relevant stakeholders and audiences about the various results and of your town twinning network. In contrast, exploitation revolves around utility and entails ensuring that others benefit from your experiences and enabling them to apply the good practices you establish in their own contexts.

A number of tools are available to maximise the reach of your dissemination and exploitation activities, including

interactive websites, training packs, newsletters, DVDs, workshops, conferences, databases, discussion forums, and much more. In fact, networking itself is a good tool for dissemination and exploitation, as members can share ideas and good practice, and new members can learn from older ones.

The European Commission will develop new tools for disseminating results at the European level so that partners from different EU member states can learn about results and lessons of the funded projects and make further use of them.



## Go forth and multiply

Specchia (IT), Busko- Zdrój (PL), Haukipudas (FI), Steinheim (DE) and Szigetszentmiklós (HU) first twinned up in 2003 – and right from the start the network had a thematic focus (environment, health and education). By linking twinning activities to particular topics, the network not only facilitated citizen exchanges, it also managed to improve understanding on numerous issues. Such direct exchange stimulated mutual learning, the transfer of good practices and creative joint development in selected areas.

Although new, this town twinning effort has already yielded remarkable results, such as a working group on 'school co-operation' and EU-backed Comenius (school education) projects. Other successes include the setting up of entrepreneurial activities by some towns in other partner towns; a parallel e-voting experiment in two municipalities; student exchanges that resulted in the production of travel guides; the launch of a cultural prize and the naming of roads in honour of partner towns.

In addition to running successful initiatives, the network has worked hard to promote and communicate its success. This is achieved through a variety of tools, such as websites, brochures, press releases and posters around towns. The network has even attracted the attention of Italian and

Hungarian national television, each of which produced documentary reports on one of its conferences.

Its impact and evident success has inspired other municipalities in the districts concerned to take part in town-twinning exchanges. The network has also motivated others to follow its example through specific information campaigns. It has also been invited to international conferences to present its methodology, successes and results.

The Specchia network has not only achieved remarkable results, it has spread them effectively both to partners and the wider public. This makes it a very good example of dissemination.

**More information:**  
[www.steinheim.de/112.html](http://www.steinheim.de/112.html)



## Practical information

General presentation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-2013 and related activities, events, best practices etc. can be found at:  
<http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship>

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The Europe for Citizen programme guide is accessible at:  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/guide/index\\_en.htm](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/guide/index_en.htm)

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More information on town twinning grants is available at:  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/action1/towntwinning/index\\_en.htm](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/action1/towntwinning/index_en.htm)

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For familiarisation with the dissemination and exploitation of results concept, visit:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/valorisation/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/valorisation/index_en.html)

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