

Achieving the millennium development goals through city-to-city partnerships

Origins, history and context of city-to-city partnerships

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Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, warm greetings from the historic South African town of Stellenbosch, that dates back to the year 1679. City-to-city relationships truly tie together communities from all over the world. Although the exact number of city-to-city partnerships globally is not known, let me give you a few facts. Did you know that approximately 56% of Europeans live in twinned cities, that 70% of the world's cities have developed city-to-city international cooperation and 68% of these cities are affiliated to one or more international association of local authorities (UN-Habitat, 2005). In France and Germany the percentage is the highest but in the United States only about one sixth of cities and towns have links of one kind or another (UNDP, 2000). These links involve 1,200 states, counties or communities in more than 2,500 relationships in 134 countries (Hafteck, 2003:339; SCI, 2006). In the Netherlands three quarters of all Dutch municipalities are in some way or another involved in municipal international cooperation (UNHSP, 2000). Although the Council for European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR, 2004), estimates there are nearly 30,000 twinning links in Europe, the United Nations Development Programme estimates the number of official global city-to-city links to be between 15,000 and 20,000 (UNDP, 2000).

Countries in the South also have such agreements in place. New Zealand, for instance, has 145 sister city agreements, Australia 322 affiliations, and South Africa 241 city and regional relationships with 45 different countries.

There are many reasons for the growth in city-to-city partnerships. It has been realized by the world community that all development ultimately takes place at the local level, and local is becoming more and more important in the international arena. In addition it is also realized that local communities have a larger role to play at the global level. The United Nations, for instance, recently said: "The rise of civil society is indeed one of the landmark events of our times. Global governance is no longer the sole domain of Governments" (UN, 2004:3), and according to the UNDP: "It is being said that the twenty-first century will be the century of partnerships, involving central governments, local governments, civil society organizations and the private sector" (UNDP, 2000:6).

Different terms are used to describe city-to-city relationships and they include: sister cities, twin cities, friendship cities, *partnerstadt*, *jumelage*, decentralised cooperation, municipal international cooperation, city-to-city cooperation (C2C), and *stedenbanden*. This type of diplomatic activity is also called paradiplomacy or low diplomacy. A distinction can be made between the "high" policy of diplomacy which is in the domain of national governments, and the "low" form of diplomacy which is entered into by non-central governments. This *low* form includes cultural, educational, economic, and urban managerial exchanges and forms part of multi-layered international relations across all governmental levels (Hsu, 2003:197).

The origins and history of city-to-city partnerships

According to the Local Government International Bureau in the UK, the first recorded twinning was between Keighley, West Yorkshire, and Poix du Nord in France in 1920, but after the end of the Second World War the concept spread at a rapid rate. It was seen as an effective tool in the process of promoting peace and reconciliation. The first twinning after World War Two was between Bristol in the United Kingdom and Hanover in Germany in 1947, followed by twinings between Oxford and Bonn, and Reading and Düsseldorf (Weyreter, 2003:37). The first Franco-German twinning occurred in 1950, and the forerunner of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) was established in 1951. The main aim of the CEMR was to unite Europe in a rebuilding effort with local government acting as facilitator between national governments and local communities. Two partly overlapping objectives were

pursued: firstly, peacekeeping and international understanding, and secondly, the promotion of European integration (Kern, 2001:9). This was followed in 1956 by an organised twinning programme in the United States that grew out of the People-to-People programme inaugurated by President Eisenhower. This initiative was later reorganised as a non-profit organisation called the “Town Affiliation Association of the United States” in 1967, with an operating wing called “Sister Cities International”.

Whereas the European origin of twinning was more focused on the community level, the programme initiated by Pres. Eisenhower focused more on the individual or ordinary citizen as a diplomat to promote peace and understanding. A new term “Constituent Diplomacy” or “Citizen Diplomacy” was therefore introduced which emphasised that citizens can participate directly in international affairs as citizen diplomats (Hsu, 2003:152).

But city-to-city partnerships at this point were between developed Northern hemisphere countries, mostly in Europe. In order to promote twinings with countries in the developing world, the United Towns Organisation (UTO) successfully lobbied at the United Nations, which led to the adoption by the UN General Assembly of a resolution on “city twinings as a means of international cooperation” in 1971, endorsing the concept of cooperation twinings between cities of the industrialised world and of the developing world (Hafteck, 2003:339). These cooperation twinings, also called North-South twinings, were used as a means of outreach to Third World countries. They gained progressive momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, and became more technically oriented and project-based. During the 1980s the nature and goals of twinning changed, and twinning arrangements also grew between Europe and America with the Soviet Union, and with Eastern Europe (Zelinsky, 1991). Another subsequent development was the concept of Decentralised Cooperation (DC), first embodied in the European Union's Lomé Convention in 1990 (UN-Habitat, 2001:4).

According to the UNDP, the concept of twinning has changed and: “Linking has evolved from its origins as a modality for confidence-building between European towns into a global phenomenon encompassing friendship, solidarity, culture, awareness-building, international understanding, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and, in recent years, good governance” (UNDP, 2000). The participants

have also changed. When city-to-city cooperation began, links were almost always between town halls, but now involves a much larger number of role players. (UNDP, 2000).

The nature of city-to city partnerships can also be defined in terms of its geographic orientation:

- North-North linkages comprise most of the place-twinning in the world. They focus on socio-cultural issues and exchanges of people, are used to forge European unity and increasingly include technical/professional cooperation activities and economic development components (UNHSP, 2002).
- North-South links are often aimed at development cooperation. But, according to the UNDP, the number of links between North and South is small compared to the worldwide figure, totalling an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 links (UNHSP, 2002).
- West-East links started before the end of the Cold War, and was primarily being promoted through the embassies of the USSR.
- South-South links have been strongly promoted in recent years. The idea behind these links is that communities from Southern areas are dealing with the same type of problems, and therefore can learn from solutions developed by one another. (UNDP, 2000).

Trends and current status of city-city-partnerships

City-to-city partnerships have grown at a rapid rate during the past two decades for three reasons: urbanisation, globalisation, and “the fact that city governments have taken initiatives to assert their place in the world” (UN- Habitat, 2001:3). These relationships have also been influenced radically by the recognition of various civil society stakeholders as partners in policy formation at local, national, regional and global levels during major United Nations conferences held since the 1990s which include (UNDP, 2000; UNHSP, 2002):

- The Rio Earth Summit 1992, and the acceptance of Agenda 21 which recognised that global problems have their roots in local actions and that cities are thus key actors in the quest for sustainable development.
- The Istanbul City Summit 1996 and the resultant “Habitat Agenda”. Here, the United Nations recognised, for the first time, the status of local governments as the closest partners of national governments for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.
- This was followed by the Millennium Declaration and the Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg during 2002 in which the important international developmental role of local government was again stressed.

But a landmark event for local government was the founding of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in Paris on 5 May 2004 which strongly supports city-to-city partnerships as a vital contribution to the construction of a peaceful and sustainable developed world (UCLG, 2004). This was followed by the Cardoso Report on UN-Civil Society relations which states: “Civil society is now so vital to the United Nations that engaging with it well is a necessity, not an option. It must also engage with others, including the private sector, parliaments and local authorities” (UN, 2004:9).

Many approaches exist to categorise local international relationships. But in order to deal with these issues systematically, I propose that all such city-to-city partnerships be categorised into one of three types, which all involve local government, are closely related and may over time move from one to another (De Villiers, 2005). The first of these is municipal international cooperation.

MUNICIPAL INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- Municipal International Cooperation (MIC) is a name for the international relations of **municipalities**.
- It normally entails a short or long term agreement between two or more municipalities, or membership of an international network of municipalities.

- The aim is normally technical cooperation through learning and capacity building initiatives between Northern, and Southern or Eastern municipalities, or municipalities working together on a certain theme or initiative (e.g. Local Agenda 21).

Examples of MIC include funding schemes aimed at promoting technical cooperation between municipalities (e.g. Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme (UK), and the EU's TACIS City Twinning Scheme), and technical cooperation networks between groups of cities (e.g. EUROCITIES and Climate Alliance in Cities). But whereas MIC involves international relations between local governments, sister cities and city twinning also involve the large community.

SISTER CITIES AND CITY/TOWN TWINNING

- In a sister city or a twinning of communities, 'town' and 'city' refer not to the local government, but the **whole community**, including civil society, the business community, the education sector, and the municipality.
- The local government plays a facilitating role but the primary bond is between communities.
- The main aims range from cultural exchange and friendship, to marketing and economic development, and this form of relationship, which has a long-term focus can also be seen as organised or facilitated **citizen-to-citizen diplomacy**.

But according to the UNDP, linking "has moved a long way from traditional twinning into many areas of development cooperation" (UNDP, 2000:24). This third type of city-to-city partnership is in essence a form of decentralised cooperation.

DECENTRALISED COOPERATION (DC)

- In many instances, DC takes the form of a twinning, involving international development agencies, who channel official development assistance (ODA) through the relationship. But national government is also normally involved in approving and signing these agreements.

- *“Today, decentralised cooperation continues as an evolving concept located at the intersection of its two parent fields: development cooperation and international municipal relations”* (Hafteck, 2003: 333).
- In short, it can be seen as linking or **twinning for development**, and constitute mostly North-South partnerships.

Examples of DC in South Africa comprise 20% of all city-to-city partnerships. These are funded by the development agencies of Sweden, The Netherlands, Belgium, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany and Norway.

So how can city-to-city partnerships in the three different forms contribute to reaching the millennium development goals? It can be argued that all three types of city-to-city partnerships are needed. Firstly development aid is needed channelled through municipalities in the form of decentralised cooperation, Secondly, municipalities need to assist partners in the South with capacity building and knowledge exchange as a part of municipal international cooperation programmes. Thirdly, sister city partnerships involving the whole community is needed for the channelling of voluntary aid, as well as a means of stimulating trade at the local level. Many African countries have expressed the need for trade as a means to upliftment, instead of just focusing on aid.

The United Nations guide to reach the millennium development goals stresses the importance of community involvement: “Perhaps the most important change needed in managing cities is to foster a collaborative partnership between local authorities and communities, with strong support from the national government” (UN, 2005:76)

The way forward

So what can we do to effectively bolster and use city-to-city partnerships for future development? A few thoughts on the matter:

- A common terminology must be used and academic research about the topic must be encouraged, as a severe paucity of research exists.

- All three forms of city-to-city partnerships need to be used and encouraged. As more emphasis has recently been put on MIC and DC, it is important not to neglect the sister city type partnership, which includes the whole community.
- As there is already a world body of local governments in the form of UCLG, should there not be a global body coordinating and assisting with community-to-community relationships and citizen diplomacy? Should Sister Cities International not become a global organization, as global dissemination of best-practice is urgently needed?
- Other funding models must be found and synergies created through city-to-city partnerships. Many countries are for instance spending vast amounts to market themselves internationally. Should some of these funds not be channeled through these local international links leveraging the goodwill that already exists?

Ladies and gentlemen, this brings me to the conclusion of my presentation. Many city-to-city partnerships fail, but we are fortunate that enough information and best-practice principles exist to ensure their success. I sincerely believe that we have not even started to unlock the true potential of the three types of city-to-city partnerships as outlined in this presentation, in order to reach the millennium development goals by 2015.

I thank you

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