Winning through twinning: in the end is the beginning

Report on the conference on city-to-city cooperation between Flanders and Southern Africa
Winning through twinning: in the end is the beginning

Report on the conference on city-to-city cooperation between Flanders and Southern Africa
Table of contents

Introduction: In the end is the beginning 4

Conclusions: Winning through twinning 6

Keynote speeches
• The role of South African local governments in international cooperation, the case of Mangaung 13
• Winning through twinning: ten years of city-to-city cooperation in Flanders 18
• The role of local governments associations in city-to-city cooperation 25

Workshop – reports
Workshops on management of city links
• Decentralization and local governments in South Africa 31
• Other city-to-city cooperation: experience from VNG-I 31
• Management of municipal partnerships 33
• Specific characteristics of municipal partnerships 34
• New modalities of municipal international cooperation and city-to-city cooperation 34

Workshops with focus on youth and youth policy
• Crossing cultural boundaries through intercontinental youth 35
  How to create youth employment through youth policy 35
• Participation of youth in policy designs 36
• Linking youth department with other policy fields 37
• Volunteer management policy and youth animation 37

Closing remarks: Reassuring messages 38
City-to-city cooperation or twinning is a fairly recent element within the aid and development industry. Local authorities are entering a field which traditionally has been managed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or official development aid agencies. “Mangaung started an international partnership in 2004 by twinning with the city of Ghent. Our partnership is geared to development and based on our shared conviction that development is one of the local authority’s core responsibilities because it is the local authority which governs most closely to the people,” said Mr. Playfair Morule, Executive Mayor of Mangaung, in his welcome speech. He also stressed that, in his opinion, the debate about whether or not a local authority had to take part in international co-operation was irrelevant. “What really makes a difference is what is agreed as the best solution for the local people.” Their partnership with Ghent is a great help in this respect. Twinning is not an aim in itself, but a means. It has to equip the local authority to meet the pressing needs of local people. In other words, twinning exists to strengthen local democracy. This core message is still highly relevant in post-apartheid South Africa.
During the course of the conference, the Executive Mayor referred more than once to the wise words of Nelson Mandela: “Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another.” With these words, the former South African president expressed the essence of what twinning associations aspire to be.

South Africa therefore symbolically hosted the conference on city-to-city cooperation between Flanders and Southern Africa, which was held in Bloemfontein on Monday the 4th and Tuesday the 5th of October 2010. ‘Winning through Twinning’ was the title of the conference. The conference was organized by the VVSG, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities and needs to be situated in an exercise of building a (renewed) vision on municipal international cooperation (MIC), stressing the role of local governments as actor herein. In March 2011 a similar conference will be held in Santo Tomas Chontales, Nicaragua with the participation of all the Latin American partner municipalities. These regional conferences will conclude into an international conference on local authorities and international cooperation, which will be organized in the city of Ghent, between 17 and 19 October 2011. For more information regarding these conferences please consult the VVSG webpages (www.vvsg.be/internationaal) or contact us at (international@vvsg.be).

‘In my end is my beginning,’ wrote T.S. Elliot, the renowned English poet, and these words reverberated. At the end of the conference many delegates regarded this as more of a start than an end. They seized the opportunity to forge new and different links. Contact with colleagues far away is a particular feature of twinning which can be put to better use. Moreover, we can convert this to a different level, namely the exchange between colleagues from the south. For example, the partners of Essen and Bornem can learn a lot from each other about how to involve young people in the policy. Francistown (twinned with Genk) and Mangaung (twinned with Ghent) can share good practices with each other.

In order to encourage such initiatives, the VVSG should, in consultation with the southern associations of local authorities, organize more opportunities for networking. This would help to share good practices more widely and projects achievements which are presently somewhat isolated would have more impact. It is therefore important to pay attention to co-ordination and networking. For the VVSG, too, herein lies a new beginning at the end.
Winning through twinning

Nine city links (six in South Africa: Bornem-Nquthu, Dilbeek-Stellenbosch, Essen-Witzenberg, Geel-uMlalazi, Gent-Mangaung and Maasmechelen-Tshwane, two in Namibia: Harelbeke-Eenhana, Lommel-Ongwediva and one in Botswana: Genk-Francistown), twenty-two local authorities, four associations of local authorities (VVSG, VNG-I, BALA and SALGA), and one hundred and twenty-two participants from Flanders (Belgium) and Southern Africa participated at the conference. During two long and intensive days, they discussed with great enthusiasm and openness about good examples of twinning and the sometimes-arduous processes involved in establishing real partnerships. Delegates shared experiences and learned from each other.

The conference started with the speech of Mr. Morule, the Executive Mayor of the city of Mangaung, on the role of South African local governments in international cooperation. Followed by Mr. Termont, the mayor of the city of Ghent and their 10 years of experience of city-to-city cooperation in Flanders. To wrap up, the chairman of the VVSG, Mr. Martens, who at the same time is also the mayor of the city of Roeselare, explained the role of local governments associations in city-to-city cooperation. We have summarized the most striking conclusions and remarks of the conference.

The role of local governments in international relationships is changing. They now become actors in the global world where it seems that decentralization provides a better framework to enhance development in local government. Nevertheless, city-to-city cooperation is a recent feature within the development aid industry. Local authorities are entering a field that traditionally has been managed by Non Governmental Organizations (NGO’s) or other official development aid agencies. Local authorities are new players within development cooperation, but they operate from a different perspective and have a different focus than for instance NGO’s. Cooperation between two (or more) local governments results in a partnership between equal partners, as they are public bodies aiming for similar objectives. They can learn from each other on a peer-to-peer basis.

Political support is crucial for cooperation between local authorities. Political support is important for the continuity of the partnership. Even if the majority in
the local council is in favour of the partnership, it is essential to have the support of the opposition as well. Evidently, this is a challenge, as political preferences and choices often determine the twinning agenda. Political decision-makers only have a limited number of years to undertake action at local level, which influences the type of projects they choose for. Unfortunately, less visible topics such as environment, HIV/AIDS or waste management are not high on the agenda. In addition, coalition changes after elections both in Flanders and in Southern Africa can strongly affect the twinning relationship.

Involvement of the civil society can provide an important benefit to the city link. Civil society, local organizations, voluntary people are one of the pillars in the partnership between the local authorities that have the full political support of their councils and executives. Nevertheless, motivating volunteers and ensuring their long-term commitment is a challenge for the city-to-city cooperation.

City-to-city links can work on different topics within a program involving several departments within the municipality. This approach can broaden the scope and the public support. Youth can be linked with HIV/AIDS, social development, education. Linking municipal departments can be a matter of a personal approach: politicians that have a portfolio in different policy areas can use this as an opportunity for an integrated way of working within the twinning link. In addition, working together with other levels of government creates more possibilities. Also Marike Bontenbal underlined the importance of the fact that local governments need to link their twinning projects to development needs. Having international relations and the necessary organizational conditions available is not enough. City partnerships should be employed as strategic instruments to meet municipal development and planning objectives. This involves a number of challenges to local governments. Resources and skills need to be found to develop strategies for city-to-city cooperation. There should also be a political interest. Too often personal preferences dominate over development objectives. Furthermore institutional concern is crucial. Weak authoritative power of municipal development plans should be used as an instrument for development planning and allocation of international funds.

The ‘Youth’ policy topic provoked a critical note from the southern municipalities, as it is unable to create employment. In this respect youth provided an example of the cooperation that needs to be contextualized. Following local policy on youth, they can organize activities such as information sessions, entrepreneurship days, pilot projects... Furthermore, a local government is not a funding agency. Therefore, they have to look for other players in the field like youth organizations, sport clubs... and they have to cooperate with private initiatives.
On the other hand, a municipality needs to have a clear policy and strategy if it wants to sell its idea for youth support to the private sector.

Another issue related to youth policy is **youth participation at local level**. The need for a youth council as a structure in the youth policy domain is crucial according to the National Youth Development Agency of South Africa (NYDA). The voice of young people needs to be heard in the Integrated Development Plans (IDP’s). Some cities are struggling with the problem to involve young people in the public IDP meetings. It also needs to be underlined that there is still a large gap between policy making and planning such as in IDP’s on the one hand and implementing the projects for housing, road infrastructure,... on the other. Still, within the city-to-city cooperation, it seems of utmost importance to contextualize youth and involvement in youth policy. What has functioned in Belgium does not necessarily have the same effect in Southern Africa.

City-to-city cooperation often is a process of falling down and getting back up. The perception of both partners of the twinning link can differ strongly, as is also the case for the social, economic and cultural context. **Some twinning relations seem to be a mismatch**. There can be a mismatch in size, topics,... How can one deal with this kind of situation? The priorities in Southern African countries are often on other subjects than those of European municipalities. It can be a challenge to jointly draft the program of collaboration. It can be a tool for discussion but also used to identify similarities that connect both partners rather than focusing on the differences. It is all connected to the characteristics of the municipalities involved. Due to the similarities in characteristics rather than in the context, it is easier to learn from each other and exchange experiences.

**Reciprocity** is an important advantage of municipal cooperation as it can lead to more sustainable results. In Genk they are eager to learn how the huge amount of challenges in communities in the South are tackled, for instance in bottom-up participation of strategic planning through the ward developments committees. The reciprocal aspect in which a Flemish local authority also learns from its partner is a typical feature of the twinning link, but as a rule it still tends to be vague and insufficiently used.

An open line of **communication** between both partners is crucial to follow up the commitments made and actions agreed upon during a working visit. Obviously, the differences in organizational culture and available means need to be overcome. Communication should be direct and frequently. This is not always the case: unreliable internet or hierarchy may hamper the process and the creativity.
Local authorities have to think out of the box. They only focus on their own project but they have to look for other links within the city-to-city cooperation as such. The Cosmogolem (a social-cultural project) could connect more cities without an official Memorandum of Understanding. It makes links between cities and countries visible. It connects people. Other forms of partnerships such as triangular partnerships can work. Different working methods such as a steering committee, an active youth council,... can improve existing partnerships. A network of local authorities needs to be a dynamic network.

More coordinated twinning relationships instead of separate North-South partnerships must be put high on the agenda. In Belgium, this might raise problems, as one needs the support of local politicians. Another issue related to coordination is the difficulty to align interest and subjects in one global program. Furthermore, it is easier to sell the “message” to the citizens, if there is a clearly identified individual municipal activity.

However, for local governments it is an advantage to have integrated initiatives. Local authorities can seize the opportunity to forge new and different links. Contacts with colleagues far away are a particular feature of twinning which can be the catalyst for another approach, namely the exchanges between colleagues from the south.

Platforms and networking like this twinning conference used by different countries to share their challenges. It could also be an opportunity for local government associations, like the VVSG and the VNG-I but also those in the South, to determine their role in the future. They can accompany city-to-city cooperation in broadening their view on this kind of partnerships and bring the individual city link to a higher level. This event was definitely not the end but the beginning.
Keynote speeches

Mr Morule, Executive Mayor of Mangaung Local Municipality, Mr Termont, mayor of Ghent and Mr Martens, chairman of the VVSG and mayor of Roeselare, reflected, each from their point of view, on municipal international cooperation and the importance for local governments.
Despite South Africa is one of the youngest democracy in the African continent, it developed a niche as a middle power within the international milieu, with immediate effect. This Conference itself is the very recognition of South African local governments as profound role players in the international co-operation as well as in global politics. By virtue of their close proximity to the people, these spheres of government are better placed to play a significant role in the development process. Undoubtedly, the issue of institutional capacity of municipalities has always been at the centre stage of debates on enhancing service delivery.

In this context the National Cabinet has recently (December 2009) approved Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS), which presented a serious challenge to all South African municipalities to win the approval of their respective citizens as the service delivery agents of the developmental state at local level. Central and fundamental to our participation in international cooperation is giving precedence to the basic needs of local communities. And, our country is now on course in rebuilding and improving the basic requirements of a functional, responsive, accountable, effective, and efficient developmental local government.
The role of the South African local governments in international cooperation must also be considered within the dictates of the foreign policy as premised on the policy positions of the ruling party (ANC). Succinctly, these policy provisions embrace amongst others:

- Contribute to the eradication of poverty and under-development in South Africa and Africa;
- Promote peaceful resolution of conflicts in our continent and elsewhere;
- Contribute to peace, security and stability in Africa and the world;
- Build and consolidate strategic partnerships to advance our developmental agenda;
- Build the African continent’s institutions;
- Transforming of global political and economic institutions.

These ethical and normative considerations come to play when forging networks with both North and South trade blocs. Thus striking a balance between international co-operations that are solidarity-orientated and those development-orientated. At its 52nd National Conference held in Polokwane (2007) the ruling party (ANC) further rearticulated its role as an organization that was ‘...formed and it evolved as part of progressive forces across the globe in the fight against colonialism, racism, poverty, underdevelopment and gender oppression. It drank and continues to drink from the well of these progressive global experiences.’

In this context the foreign policy under the auspices of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation guides the provisions of any international cooperation between municipalities and their respective twin or sister cities or municipalities. Also, partnerships across the borders are considered as pledged in a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

It is our considered view that even our learned friends in the profession of international relations, would concur with us that this partnership narrows the historic political chasm between North (developed) and South (underdeveloped) countries. And, it further presents an element of interdependence between twining cities.

Through vigilance of the custodian department on international relations and cooperation, local governments are duty-bound not to dent country’s good reputation as a respected global citizen. It is worth noting that this post war and apartheid era has been characterized by other forms of international cooperation such as regionalism, sub-regionalism, trans-regionalism, etc., but now, nation states are increasingly focusing in steering global forces on local development in pursuit of the shared vision of the local population. This is indeed a salient trend in today’s global politics.
However, we are facing a significant dilemma and a challenge, a phenomenon inherent with regard to implementation of international treaties, that is, enforceability of agreements. Added to these challenges, antagonists of the twinning approach remain adamant in their misconstrued and misinterpretation of such agreements as expensive for local authorities and as a mere junket of individuals within municipal authorities at the expense of the public. However, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation has always been warning that such cooperation(s) should take place within the realistic parameters of institutional (or countries) capacity to implement decisions taken.

The debates on whether the role of governments in international cooperation is good or bad, is actually immaterial. What really matters is what offers or benefits are there for the twinning authorities. This is analogous to the earlier debates that ensued at the beginning of this decade on globalization, wherein the substance was whether globalization is good or bad. Whilst on the one hand others argued that good or bad, globalization is here and inescapable. On the other hand, some concluded: ‘take what is good for you and leave the rest’. Inversely, regarding city-to-city links, what matters most is what is consensually regarded as best for the local inhabitants.

Another dimension that must be considered as significant in international cooperation relates to the notion of politics-administration dichotomy. Agreements must be weighed in terms of how one leg of this dichotomy affects the other as well as striking a balance between the two. Furthermore, involvement of the local citizens, business and development agencies, civil society and interest groups, matter a lot in the decision making process. There is a multiplicity of non-state actors and these must be taken on board on local governance matters necessitating any international cooperation. If local governments do not act as unity actors when considering twinning agreements the state will not be bearing the burden of implantation alone. It is for this reason that Mangaung Local Municipality (MLM) vowed to broaden public participation in local governance.

Subsequent to the study-visit of the National Youth Commission to Belgium in 2002, which culminated into this significant milestone, twinning agreement, the MLM was the first local authority in the country to develop a sound local youth policy which constitutes the thrust of the city-to-city link. For the progress thus far, we further would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the City of Gent for its unwavering commitment in keeping our cooperation intact. Mangaung took the path of international cooperation in 2004, becoming twinned with the Belgian City of Ghent. This partnership is development-orientated and
stems from our considered view that development must be driven from the local sphere of government – for it is the closest to the people. In pursuit of Mangaung youth development policy, the twinning gave primacy to youth development and economic development.

We would like to share our experience that in accordance with the precepts of the partnership we have established effective youth coordination centres in all three areas of Mangaung – Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu. These centres were established through the financial assistance and expertise of our twin city, Ghent. Given the vastness of the municipal area, mobile youth centres are envisaged for rural areas.

Regarding youth development the MLM is working in close cooperation with business and academic institutions to identify economic development projects. These institutions include: Motheo Further Education and Training College; University of Free State, Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA); State Information Technology Agency (SITA); and Vodacom.

A task team comprising of representatives from these institutions has just completed a draft business plan on furniture refurbishment initiative. The document is currently under discussion.

The MLM further views the partnership in light of its economic development agenda, with a particular focus on the promotion of economic growth and sustainable livelihoods. They consider their networking as ideal towards building a strong and modern economy. They have identified four thrusts in this regard:

• economic diversification;
• employment creation;
• creating an environment conducive to economic growth; and
• developing into a regional economic centre.

To them, a partnership is ideal even for future investments in Mangaung. Their economy plays a significant role in the economy of both Motheo District and Free State Province. And, they hope this partnership will play a pivotal role in assisting us to create an environment that is conducive for sustainable economic growth and attracting investment in our area.

At the moment, they are well on course with regard to the implementation of the Multi Annual Programme under the auspices of their Youth Unit. Mangaung is now in the position of exploring his skills and experience by nurturing youth from other cities in the country. Recently they have hosted the youth component from Witzenberg, Western Cape, for training purposes.
In conclusion, the element of communication is also playing a pivotal role in keeping international cooperation intact. In essence it is indisputable fact that at the turn of the 21st century communication brought about many effects with regard to blurring technological, economic, political, and cultural boundaries. Nevertheless, they detected that poor communication existed between the youth components of the cities. Subsequently, they agreed on monthly teleconference(s) as a catalyst to foster good communication. The mayor is confident that if member cities adhere to the terms of the memorandum of understanding, often signed by twinning institutions, institutional capacity of many local governments would be enhanced accordingly since these spheres have access to limited resources.
Winning through twinning, experience of 10 years of city-to-city cooperation in Flanders

Mr. Termont, Mayor of the city of Ghent

The title of this keynote speech is: ‘Winning through twinning, experience of 10 years of city-to-city cooperation in Flanders’. However: it goes without saying that I will focus immediately, on the recent experiences in the city of Ghent. Mister Luc Martens, who is the president of the Association of Flemish Cities and Communities, will tell you all about the specific role of Local Government Associations in city to city cooperation, later today.

First of all, I paint a brief picture of what kind of city, Ghent really is. Today, Ghent has an outstanding reputation, both in Belgium and abroad. Being the second largest city in the country (with some 244,000 inhabitants), we have been presenting the city for years with the baseline ‘Effervescent city of knowledge and culture, accessible to everyone’. Ghent has found a perfect combination between ‘urban living atmosphere’, and knowledge and culture.

First and foremost, since 2007, Ghent is Belgium’s largest student city. Indeed, our city hosts approximately sixty eight thousand students. The overwhelming presence of so many young human resources is a sizeable competitive advantage in extending and pursuing the European knowledge economy. Knowledge evidently entails innovation and creativity, converting theoretic knowledge into innovative social and industrial applications. It is no mere coincidence that Ghent accommodates key scientific organisations such as the Flemish Institute of Biotechnology, the Interdisciplinary Institute of Broadband Technology as well as Ghent Bio-Energy Valley, established in our Port. Such invaluable assets are the number one reason why we are able to present such exceptional patents of nobility in the field of knowledge.

Of course, Ghent is an exquisite city of arts and culture as well. The city centre boasts an impressive and diverse cultural heritage, an alternative rock scene, several highly reputed museums (such as the Museum of Fine Arts and the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, the so-called “SMAK”) and internationally

* This speech was expressed by Mr. Wouter Boesman from the city of Ghent during the conference, as Mr. Termont was not able to make it to South Africa due to plane connection problems.
renowned festivals (such as the Festival of Flanders-Ghent, the International Film Festival, the Ghent Festivities, the Ghent Jazz Festival; and the five-yearly “Ghent Floralies”, the world famous Ghent Flower Show).

But of course, being a large and attractive city in a thriving region, Ghent faces the classic challenges that every major city faces: higher rates of unemployment and poverty, the difficult integration of migrants (over the past years, mostly people from Eastern Europe, from countries such as Bulgaria, Slovakia and Rumania), and poor housing in the 19th century belt around our city centre. Not all of these issues can be fully tackled by local government, but we, nevertheless, need to take action. We know that our colleagues in South Africa – although in a different context – face similar challenges, and hope to learn from their approach.

**Ghent is pursuing international cooperation.** To this effect, the municipal administration created an International Co-operation Programme team, within the Staff Offices Department. This team is managing the city foreign policy and the international relations. Ghent is affiliated to various European city networks (The mayor, for instance, is a member of the Executive Committee of EU-advisory network EUROCITIES), and the staff members are constantly examining European subvention opportunities for projects in the city. The International Co-operation Programme also includes maintaining the relations with seven so-called ‘sister cities’.

Twinning became immensely popular in the wake of the Second World War. Such informal meetings enabled people from all corners of the world, unhindered by state borders, to get acquainted with foreign cultures and customs. They are
an ideal means to counteract ignorance and xenophobia. Unknown is – indeed – unloved. Unaccustomed practices or unusual habits may either ensue in anxiety or – worse – inappropriate feelings of superiority. Both improper sentiments have resulted in atrocities during the 20th century and, quite unfortunately, also in contemporary and recurrent abuse.

In 1958, Ghent first twin bond was established with the town of Saint-Raphael in France. The German cities of Wiesbaden and Melle, Tallinn in Estonia, the English city of Nottingham, Mohammedia in Morocco; and the Japanese city of Kanazawa, followed.

The idea to enhance world peace by creating twin city relationships is a noble aspiration as such. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the legislation of mayor Termont, Ghent intended to seek out new horizons – inspired, actually, by the positive outcome of our cooperation with Mangaung. We want to pursue active co-operation projects with all of our partner cities. We believe that city to city cooperation should be much more than just a symbolic partnership. It should aim at strengthening local government, be based on an equal relationship, be a long-term relationship, with structural roots and it should involve and balance politics, administration and civil society.

These principles are here in the city to city cooperation or city link approach. The lessons learnt by the administration of Ghent, through the cooperation with Mangaung, has laid the foundation of our other partnerships.

Since the month of September 2008, we were able to ‘revitalise’ our relationship with Tallinn and Kanazawa, in the fields of, amongst others, culture, education and ICT.

Our North-South cooperation policy is built on our firm conviction that it can only bring changes to become a better world! Poverty and the growing inequality between North and South, will be at the basis of more armed conflicts, uncontrolled migration, climate change, and so on. The consequences cannot be underestimated – and will affect the whole world, including the rich northern part. He who does not acknowledges this, will get at least a part of the bill. Some formerly ‘sleeping giants’ have already emerged – think of the so-called BRIC-countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South-Africa).

But a lot of work still needs to be done. If you look at the evolution of the eight Millennium Development Goals: it will not be able to reach those goals, if things depend on the decisions of national states in international organisations, solely. That is why, worldwide, the efforts of the lowest governmental level – that of the municipalities – are of major importance. Because, they have increasing power, as the level closest to the general public, to incite change!
The City Mission of Ghent, set up in 2007 by the mayor and aldermen, and the management team, states that Ghent should be ‘a creating city that unites all creative force to make Ghent an open, sustainable and (mostly) a solidary city’. A solidary city within its boundaries, of course (every single inhabitant should be able to profit from all the city has to offer), but of course, with the South as well. In March of this year, the City Council has adopted a resolution in which they declare their solidarity with all those that help, in any way, in realising the Millennium Goals, with the focus on Goal number 8: ‘The increase of international partnerships’.

Ghent also decided to increase their North-South cooperation budget from 0.5 euro to 2 euro per inhabitant. Today, the municipal Office of North-South Cooperation (part of the Staff Department) has got a budget of 1.5 euro per inhabitant, or some 362,000 euro. This budget is used mainly to enhance international solidarity within Ghent and its city administration. They support local NGO’s, invest in increasing respect of the general public in Ghent for the people that manufacture goods in far away countries, and organise own sensitization campaigns and events. Like the Nachtwacht, a big event with nationwide impact, aimed at strengthening the call for global action in reaching the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. More than 15,000 people came to Ghent in support of this call.

Local governments are rather new in the field of North-South cooperation. It used to be the playing field of bilateral development agencies and non-governmental organisations solely. But over the past years, local governments have shown that they bring their own specific knowledge and experience to the field. They are not competitors to the traditional actors – on the contrary, they add value.

On the 23th of September 2004, Ghent and Mangaung took up their particular bilateral relationship. On the 15th of September 2009, a new agreement was signed on the further cooperation until the end of 2013. The principle of city link was already advocated in 1971 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Since then, several governments (like for instance the South-African, Belgian and Flemish Government) have set up programmes to support city to city cooperation. The main goal is of course: making this world a better place for all of us, fighting poverty through local development.

A word of recognition and gratitude towards the Flemish government is due here. It has been mainly thanks to the incentives (financial and content wise) by the Flemish government that local governments were able to build a city link to what it is today: a vital, flexible and innovative cooperation that is much more
than just protocol visits back and forth. The focus of the Flemish international cooperation on South Africa has been a big support in the building of a cooperation, which is just one example of how a city link can actually work.

However, **challenges in city-to-city cooperation in general, are many.** Making plans is one thing, implementing them is, something completely different. The concept of capacity exchange is perfect, yet difficult to use in real life. It is much easier to have one partner, instructing the other, what to do. Too often in history of development cooperation was based on ‘carrying the cash’. These days city-to-city cooperation calls for equal partners. Still: evolving from the sheer exchange of experiences, polite site visits and flashy power point presentations, to actually implementing a creative solution that is a mix of experiences from both local governments, is, today still, not easy.

First of all: **communication and the understanding of different cultural perceptions is crucial.** For example: the perception of the written word is very different in Flanders and in South Africa. This has a big impact on the daily operations of the city link: the Ghent staff members tend to communicate their concerns by e-mail; their counterparts in Mangaung are often reluctant to put challenges and problems in writing before they are actually solved. There is no doubt that our colleagues in Mangaung are best placed to develop solutions to the problems they face. Yet we feel that the cooperation could assist them and allow all partners involved to learn from such situations.

Secondly: a **partnership is not only institutional and structural, it is above all a cooperation between people.** Civil servants can change jobs; politicians could not be re-elected. The challenge is intrinsic to our type of municipal cooperation across the globe, but still a difficulty remains: how to procure continuity, and avoid the loss of experience and information?

Then, it is of course easy to fall back into a traditional aid relation of donor versus receptor. This is a constant fight to this perception within the cooperation with Mangaung, since such a perception could have a major impact on the proceedings of projects. By acting as equal partners, both open minded and flexible in the search for innovative solutions to the problems addressed, ownership can be maximized – which is crucial. The sometimes complex regulations that come with the external subsidies that we receive for the city link projects (in our case, for the development of the youth policy and youth centres in Mangaung) has interfered in this fragile balance in the past few years. It has cost a lot of energy and patience on both sides to overcome this and to get back to our real work: building a better future for the people in our cities.
Then, at last, there’s the difficulty of how best to take joint decisions.

Nevertheless, the Ghent-Mangaung partnership has proven to be a very nice example of the power of decentralised international cooperation!

The process of selecting a partner city for the city of Ghent was carried out meticulously and took a lot of time. It was based on our own city profile, on our own strengths and weaknesses, and on the specific characteristics that facilitate the policy dialogue between both cities. You have all seen at least parts of Mangaung when arriving. Clearly, this is not an underdeveloped city. It is a lively place, with a strong local government that is acting on its major challenges.

So, why did Ghent not obtain to link to one of the many cities in Africa that struggle with the lack of basic infrastructure, or a strong administration? They opted to collaborate with a city that is in some ways comparable to themselves. Although much can be said for the other option, they believe that it is important for an effective cooperation to have civil servants specialised in their field on both sides. This way, they can link their own Youth Department to the Mangaung Youth Unit. This may not be classic grass root work, it has proved to have a big impact in delivering more and better services to the Mangaung youth. Nowadays, they are working on environmental education. The fact that Mangaung has got its own ‘education officer’ in this field, means that they do not have to start from scratch, but that they can strengthen both approaches, of both cities. It allows both partners to derive added value from the cooperation.

The major advantage of cooperations as these, is that partner cities in the South are incited and supported to set up their own tailor-made projects of urban development. Local government is closest to the public. Hence, improving the quality of local government has a direct impact on the quality of life of the city inhabitants. That is why this kind of cooperation is a much more sustainable form of cooperation than sheer financial aid.

Since the start of our relationship with Mangaung, cooperation projects as regards economic development, youth policy, citizen participation, health and environment have been set up. Mangaung may be a lot bigger than Ghent, it faces similar problems. For instance: in Mangaung, three youth centres have been set up in cooperation with the Ghent Youth Department. Moreover, in these centres, a project of social employment was set up, to help underprivileged youngsters gain all necessary skills to find a decent job. Also the Environment and Waste Departments started a pilot project as well on separated waste disposal.

The start up of the Mangaung youth centres is a good example of how things can work. At the start of the city link, Mangaung had the ambitious plan to build a state of the art youth centre, centrally located. With only two civil servants
assigned to this task, they asked the Ghent Youth Department (which has about
30 staff members) for advice. Through visits back and forth, the essence of the
Ghent approach was translated to the Mangaung reality: a decentralized offer
of youth centres, that combine information, training and meaningful free time.
No copies of the youth centres in Ghent, but built on the same fundamental
programmatic building stones. This was not the result of brief working visits,
but of several training sessions for Mangaung youth workers in Ghent, and of the
assistance of Ghent youth workers in the implementation phase.
It is naïve to think that brief visits to different projects in both cities will suffice
to realize such complex projects. That kind of visits will often create political
turmoil and criticism of ‘tourist trips paid for by tax money’. Local governments
need to have the courage to upfront those critics with the facts: we are not on a
holiday, we are here to jointly define decent solutions to real problems, and imple-
ment them immediately.

Of course, a cooperation is not at all 'one way traffic'. Remember: it is about
equal partners. Ghent has learned from Mangaung as well, in the fields of citizen
participation, strategic planning and fire prevention and control. And, part of
their international policy has been inspired by the city link approach.
The City of Ghent uses its partnership with Mangaung in a whole different way
as well, by involving private organisations and schools.
The exchange of trainees and the set-up of cultural projects raise the global
consciousness of all those involved. A photography exhibition Yebo/Yes, where
two young photographers, Oliver Dowdle from Mangaung and Jonas Posman
from Gent, trade places for a month in 2009. The result is a fair and unvarnished
portrait of both cities through the eyes of a foreigner. The exhibition has shown
the Ghent inhabitants the surprising differences and similarities of both partner
cities. The expo comes with a very nice book.
Moreover: an educational brochure on South-Africa was written for teachers of
the fourth, fifth and sixth year of elementary school.

A city link is not a goal in itself, it is a means of bringing better services to our
people, and a medium to make citizens aware of the global context local gov-
ernments are working in. In such a context, where all challenges are global, the
solutions should also be. Local governments cannot do it alone: they will always
be needing support from other spheres of government. But before all: they will
always need the support of their own citizens!
This way, they want to make sure that this is not a cooperation of executives
and civil servants solely, but a relationship between two communities as a
whole. ●
VVSG, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, is quite well known in Flanders for its expertise within the field of local governments and for the organization of conferences and network events. Our main goal as local governments is to deliver good and efficient services to the people that live in our municipalities. Let me now sketch how we as VVSG – as local government association – try to support our local governments in enhancing their mission.

As association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, VVSG represents all 308 Flemish local governments and all 308 public centres for social welfare. We are the umbrella organization of all local governments in the region of Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. Our members vary from major cities such as the city of Ghent, to rural municipalities of about 5000 inhabitants. Apart from them, we also represent 118 police zones and 50 intermunicipal structural initiatives that deal with solid waste management for instance. If we elaborate a bit more on these facts and figures, our representation totals 7,350 democratically elected politicians in local governments and 160,000 civil servants working in local administration.

Support to local governments in enhancing their service delivery, means for VVSG playing a threefold role.
• First of all, we provide information, training and tailor made advice to all our members.
• Our second role lies in the fact that VVSG lobbies and advocates for the interests of local governments at regional, national and European level.
• Lastly, VVSG promotes the movement of municipalism, through organizing network events so that good practices and lessons learned within individual municipalities can be scaled up and applied by other municipalities. In order to deliver these services, VVSG employs about 120 people, divided into 10 teams of staff members, each and every one of them an expert within his or her own field.

All our activities are directed towards enhancing local governments in their role of strong first line authorities that act effectively and efficiently towards their local communities and citizens. Therefore we, as association of local governments, adhere the following four principles:
• principle of subsidiary
• strengthening local democracy
• enhancing the quality of local policy and good local governance
• aiming at sustainable development on a local and global level

Why does the VVSG find it so important to be active in the field of international cooperation?
Local authorities have a very similar task everywhere in the world, even if they operate in very different socio-economic circumstances. As mayors, as deputy mayors, as councillors, as civil servants we recognize these similarities. Therefore, in working together in partnership, institutional capacity development, reciprocity, colleague-to-colleague approach etc. are all elements that add an important value to our type of international cooperation. VVSG translates its threefold vision (Information & training, advocacy and networking) in supporting our members in developing their international municipal policy. And we have started that kind of intensive support to our members more than ten years ago. International cooperation at local level does not only mean that we have to promote solidarity between local governments and its citizens, but also that local governments do play an important role in the sensitization and awareness raising of their own local population. In that respect we subscribe the content of the Millennium Development Goals, especially MDG number 8, which stresses the importance of a global partnership.

But how do we support our members in developing their international policy?
Apart from the training and advice we offer, we play another role. Through our advocacy work, we have convinced our regional and national authorities to invest in
subsidy programmes ensuring co-financing for municipal international cooperation of local governments. In return, VVSG has been recognized by the regional and national governments in Belgium to play a role of guidance and accompaniment and manager. In this context regional conferences enhance our vision and work regarding municipal international cooperation. The objective is quite simple: reflect on the concept of city-to-city cooperation with as many stakeholders involved as possible (from Flanders and the partner countries). Those are unique momentum for having input from the North and South into a shared vision.

As umbrella-organization, VVSG keeps the panoramic view from the perspective of a helicopter. After ten years of experiences in municipal international cooperation we accumulated some remarkable findings along the years.

First of all, we have to conclude that city-to-city cooperation works! We also have to recognize it is still a rather new instrument: local governments are still sometimes searching for adequate tools to manage the city-to-city link, but as a form of international cooperation, it definitely works! For example, we have witnessed good practices of colleague-to-colleague trainings regarding waste management within a city link and we, as VVSG, are convinced of the usefulness of it. We need to underline that, recently, even the European Union has started to recognize local governments as actors in the field of international cooperation. I cannot stress the importance of this recognition enough.

Second, although international cooperation does not belong to the key competences of a local government, it remains a political commitment and choice of the mayors and deputy-mayors and local councillors. This commitment is necessary to provide the backing for the trend of further professionalizing the staff within the Flemish local governments, not only in general terms, but also specifically related to the international cooperation. More and more, civil servants are becoming experts in terms of managing the city-to-city cooperation and sensitization activities in their own municipalities. And this is a very positive trend!

Thirdly, we can observe that the activities regarding sensitization of citizens for international cooperation do deliver good results. People that normally do not come into contact with the complexity of international cooperation and the structures and causes behind poverty, now are being reached through awareness raising activities organized by the local government. Local governments in Flanders are now even taken into account as actors in international cooperation by Flemish nongovernmental organizations (ngo’s). Whereas in the beginning, ngo’s did not trust local governments to have their say in themes regarding
international cooperation, nowadays various activities are being implemented in close coordination with the ngo’s. Like an event on the 11th of September in Ghent, where this coordination between ngo’s and the city of Ghent was able to mobilize more than 15,000 people to demand the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and Belgium’s commitment to it.

Lastly we – meaning VVSG and the local governments – have succeeded in convincing the Flemish regional government as well as the Belgian federal government to invest in subsidy programmes for co-financing of municipal international cooperation. This has not been easy, but we see it as an important result.

**Challenges**

There are some remaining challenges regarding the future of our municipal international cooperation programmes – this struggle of convincing the national and regional authorities is not fully over yet, and is part of the following five challenges we are facing.

1. **Ahead of us, still lies the challenge of convincing the Flemish and federal governments** of the specificity of our line of work leading to appropriate financial and administrative procedures and formats for local governments. Local governments are public bodies that operate in a very different manner as compared to nongovernmental organizations or civil society organizations. So we have to keep up the advocacy work. We have to involve the subsidizing governments more and more in our work, showing them the results and the added value of municipal international cooperation. We need to invest more in documenting and thus demonstrating these results.

2. As VVSG we need to tackle the impact level. Flemish local governments have established some 40 city links throughout the world, mainly in Africa and Latin America. In some countries, like South Africa, there are six of them, in other countries, only one Flemish city link is present. These city links can be regarded as single and isolated islands within an ocean of local governments. Within VVSG we started reflecting on how to break that isolation. How can the city links have more impact and share more lessons, how can for instance missions and delegations be coordinated more, how can more local governments benefit from the efforts within one city link. An idea might be to involve neighbouring local governments in training workshops, looking at new modalities and stimulating network events and exchanges ‘South-South’. We hope that regional and international conferences can be the starting point to start exchanging experiences and good practices.

3. Another challenge that lies ahead of us, is quite connected to the former one. But it concerns specifically the federal programme on municipal international
cooperation. As you might know, this programme subsidized by the federal Belgian government started in 2008 and lasts up until 2012 and it is coordinated and managed by us, VVSG. From next year on, we will be reflecting upon and discussing about the architecture of that new programme. One idea might be to organize joint planning sessions in preparation for the new federal programme. We have currently three municipal partnerships between Flanders and South Africa operational in the federal programme, and the others might join us. Would you think it feasible to have planning workshops together so that we can jointly present one Flemish-South African programme to the federal government? It is a question and a proposal at the same time that I want you to reflect upon during the coming days.

A penultimate challenge, we can find in the fact that among local government associations we need to have still a lot more coordination. This is not only a case of efficient use of resources, but also of our reply to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Perhaps the most difficult challenge of all – from the European perspective – is to bring life into these ideas and set aside our different approaches. But wouldn’t everybody in the end benefit from one local government association programme for South Africa instead of all the European local governments associations being active here each with different approaches, modalities, funding, etc.?

A last and final challenge is certainly not the least one either. Within VVSG we have been debating the last year whether we should extend our field of cooperation to another field. In the academic literature, international cooperation for local governments is composed of two aspects: first the direct city link between two local governments, which is called MIC – municipal international cooperation. Second, from the perspective of local government association, such as VVSG, another component also appears, which is called ACB – Association Capacity Building. The latter means that a direct cooperation partnership between local governments association from different countries is established. We can see the advantages of this type of cooperation, but at the same time it is a major challenge. Therefore, up until now, VVSG has not yet fully decided whether to embark on such an ACB component with our limited resources and means. I for one am very eager to hear about the experiences of the other local governments associations regarding international cooperation.

At the end of the day, we all want our local governments to be strong, to provide quality services for their citizens and to operate in an efficient way. So that if our citizens are in need of a municipal service we can provide a qualitative service.
Workshop – reports

Let us look closer to the ten workshops in which the participants discussed during two days. The first five are more focusing on city-to-city cooperation in general while the last ones are focusing on the topic youth.
Management of city links (first day)

Decentralization and local governments in South Africa

Local government is young in South Africa (just above 10 years old). The legislation that governs local governments in South Africa is based on the White Paper on Local Governments. Still a number of factors (political, administrative and fiscal) have to be taken into consideration for effective decentralization to be translated into good local governance. However, decentralization is a better tool to enhance development in local governments. Nevertheless, community participation is not a substitute for good governance.

- **Dynamics between globalization and decentralization.** The role of local governments in international relations needs to be strengthened and perhaps redefined. Local governments have to become actors in the global world.
- **Professionalization versus activism.** When appointing municipal employees one must balance professionalization (having the skills) and activism (having hands-on understanding of the local community and their specific characteristics).
- **Equitable share.** South African cities are expected to raise their own revenue. Current review of the equitable share formula – how do we balance resources between affluent and poorer municipalities taking into consideration that only 10 million out of 50 million people have a job that contributes to the economy.
- **Decentralization process in Namibia and Botswana.** In Botswana, approximately 80% of the funding is coming from the Central Government. The municipal resources are also centralizing. Therefore, local authorities have no real decision making powers. Namibia is also facing a similar challenge where mayors have no executive power. Therefore, programmes assisting in the development of a citizen budget guide for instance are welcome.
- **Platforms like twinning conferences** may be used by different countries to share their challenges. The opportunity should be taken to share good practices.

Other city-to-city cooperation: experiences from VNG-I

VNG (Association of Dutch Municipalities, the Dutch counterpart of VVSG) has a daughter company, VNG International (VNG-I) that is focusing on the international relations of Dutch Municipalities. VNG-I is responsible for the management and implementation of the twinning programme for Dutch municipalities, called Logo South. During the discussing, a few issues were raised.

- There should be more focus on teaching young people specific skills that can be
used for employment. There is a lack of skills especially among youngsters in South Africa who cannot find a proper job.

- There is a need to train councillors. Not only to focus on the officials but also on councillors going on exchanges and learn from each other. The educational level and qualifications of Councillors in South Africa are below level. Therefore schooling is necessary for them. Also in Belgium, not all councillors have the same level of education of work either. However, the overall level of education in Southern African Countries is not as high as in Belgium, so it seems. In Belgium, you can expect a minimum level.

- Additionally the relationship between Councillors and officials is not the same in both countries. In South Africa, there is often a lot of distrust between the two. Whereas in Belgium there is more trust and Councillors rely on the information they receive from their officials.

- Political preferences determine the twinning agenda. Taking into account that there is a strong pressure to deliver for politicians as they only have five years to spend. Therefore, they often respond to emotional issues that are important for the community. Results need to be quick and visible in terms of housing, schools,...Other issues like environment or HIV/AIDS will not be put so high on the agenda.

- Mismatch of partners. There can be a mismatch of size, urban/rural or even in topics or projects you will cover. For instance: what can a Dutch city contribute to the discussing of HIV/AIDS because in these countries they do not have to deal with this on such a large scale? Mr. Pretzer from Buffalo City that has a twinning relation with the municipality of Leiden (The Netherlands) explains that in the case of Buffalo City-Leiden in number of inhabitants there is a big difference between the two partners. Nevertheless, the twinning relation is very successful. The size does not matter, the similarities and characteristics of both cities do. Those factors will determine the twinning relation.

- There should be an involvement of civil society. This is really lacking in South Africa. How can there be more participation of civil society within the twinning programme? The problem in South Africa is the absence of real funding for volunteers or NGO’s who want to engage in a city partnership whereas in Belgium this is the case.

- Need for a designated coordinator in the municipalities who run the twinning partnerships, particularly in South Africa. Here can be a role for SALGA (South African Local Governments Association) to motivate, to try to convince municipalities to make funding available for such a coordinator. In Flanders, a municipality needs to have such a coordinator if they want to get money from the national government. This is an incentive for Belgian municipalities to subscribe in a subsidy programme and to install a coordinator. This incentive is lacking in South Africa.

- New initiative from the Dutch programme: a more coordinated twinning. Not the separate North-South partnerships but putting them more together in one programme. Therefore, you can get more South-South exchanges and more activities in which all the municipalities are engaged instead of individual partnerships.

- There were some remarks on this initiative. In Belgium this will not work because
in a municipality you need your political by-in from the local politicians. An individual twinning would generate more. If it gets coordinated, it would be reduced. The Southern partners added that it will also be difficult to align interest and subjects. If one municipality is working on housing and the other on waste management. How can you align this in one project? Furthermore, you need to justify these twinning relationships to the local taxpayer. Twinning is something people can relate to and in a coordinated programme, it is much more difficult to sell it as a municipal activity.

Management of municipal partnerships

• **A good jointly developed development plan** that also includes an international level strategy is required. There is a need to be more pro-active instead of re-active. Also, the plan needs to be cleared within or by the IDP. Human resources are necessary. A city council also should set out priorities in spite of the fact that international relations not always are a priority for local governments. It is often regarded as an extra.

• **Clear benefits can lead to investment in human resources.** The big difference between the North and the South is the lacking of a person in charge in the South. In the North, the government funds a North-South coordinator. Therefore, the local government should also have to support and invest in human resources. The disadvantage for Belgian municipalities is the bureaucracy. In the North, they have to invest a lot of time in planning which is not fair compared with the time of execution. The planning should be minimized.

• **There should be communication as often as possible.** Not only on an internal level (so that everyone within the own local government can see what moves within the city link) but also on an external level with the partner. This communication should be direct, on the highest and other levels.

• **Leadership is the cement that holds us together.** It is critical and there must be involvement from the highest level within the cities. In addition, it is a challenge to push the city link to a certain level. There should be willingness of both administrations.

• **Monitoring the agreement.** Evaluation of an agreement or strategy is very important. There is a missing link if there is no real format for the monitoring. An agreement on monitoring should be linked to the IDP.
Specific characteristics of municipal partnerships

- **Reciprocity** of city councillors is a basic principle. Sometimes there could be different interpretations on both sides. Reciprocity should not always be on the same level. Sometimes it is more about a personal learning rather than strengthening the capacity of all. Try to mirror all different projects like for example a photography project: in both cities, they do the same thing, but from a different perspective (i.e. a South African photographer making photographs in Ghent, a photographer from Ghent producing images from Mangaung).

- **Colleague-to-colleague approach.** Youth officers work with youth officers from another city. They share experiences and a pool of expertise that might (not) be compatible. There are a lot of advantages but also some dangers. Sometimes a colleague might capture the programme and not share information. It is sometimes balancing between continuity versus high turnover. One person can be there for a very long time and this can really be very beneficial for the twinning. On the other hand, he or she may have too much power and information.

- **Capacity development.** There is a difference in reading and understanding capacity development. What is the added value of capacity building in twinning? There is a long-term strategy, rather than a NGO who comes and does a quick fix. The commitment attains to some results. There is also an understanding for bureaucratic processes.

New modalities of MIC and C2C

Preconditions for new modalities like triangular partnerships

- There should be some kind of **equality** between all the partners. This is not so necessary in the beginning while the entire partnership can grow closer to each other. Equality means similar processes and structures to compare to each other and a shared vision on how to work with each other.

- A network of several cities is **very dynamic.**

- **Different kind of tools of working together can connect people.** For example: the Cosmogolem (a social-cultural project). This project makes the link between existing city links but also with other cities that have their own Cosmogolem. It does not always have to be a city-to-city cooperation as such.

- Nevertheless, how manageable is it to have more than one link with the South or North? Working with a **steering committee** or active youth can improve the partnership. In addition, the inclusion of members of staff of other departments of the local government can make an important contribution in improving the twinning link.

- There are no **boundaries to the numbers of partners.** However, it depends on what kind of cooperation the local authorities have. For capacity building, more partners could be difficult. Nevertheless, working together on a project it can be an advantage to have several partners.
Focus on youth and youth policy (second day)

Crossing cultural boundaries through intercontinental youth

The Belgian NGO JINT (Youth International) has a responsibility for youth work in an international context involving programmes with exchanges. Mostly they work with European countries. JINT also trains youth workers and they are providing support in South Africa. Their research has shown that youth must be well prepared before an exchange takes place. This can be done by explaining what partnership means, also debriefing and reflecting after the trip is very necessary. So where do things go wrong? Very often, it goes wrong as well in the preparation, as in the ways of participation and evaluation. Therefore, JINT has developed a framework for youth mobility projects. This framework is based on ten principles starting with accessibility over clear roles and objectives through monitoring and evaluation. These principles can inspire and motivate participants. During the workshop, three main questions were raised.

- How does a municipality get financial support? There is a possibility through the Flemish government but never for 100%. If you want to obtain money from the European Union, you must take into account that the need of having experience in project writing and competencies in creating partnerships are required.
- How do you prepare participants? The most important thing is thinking about feedback activities before youngsters go on an exchange.
- What are the benefits qualifications after the training and exchange? JINT gives non-formal education, which does not result in formal qualifications. However, a debate is taking place in Flanders on developing a framework and recognition for non-formal training. Nevertheless, formal skills qualifications do not constitute the main aim of exchange.

How to create youth employment through youth policy

City of Ghent and the city of Mangaung are working together on creating job opportunities through youth policy. Main question: what is the role of local governments to address youth unemployment problems?

- A municipality is unable to create employment for youngsters, but they can provide them with skills. The main goal is that young people are able to get a job after the training.
- It is also important to have a public-private partnership. Often a municipality has a lack of resources. Nevertheless, the need of funding young people is high. A municipality is not a funding agency.
- Looking for other players in the field and see how they can help.
- Enhancement of the involvement of young people.
• **Provide an exit strategy.** This can be in two ways i) positive discrimination: employ some of the trained unemployed; ii) non-profit cooperation

• A local authority can **organize different activities** such as information sessions, entrepreneurship days, pilot projects. A mix of different actions is possible considering the difference between all the municipalities.

• **Coordination is needed.** Municipalities need a clear policy and strategy, for instance when selling an idea to the private sector.

• **Young people** also have to come up with ideas and initiatives.

• A municipality should **mobilize** youth and contact youth after they graduate.

**Participation of youth in policy designs**

• Concerning the city-to-city link, it can be useful to **work on different topics.** This can broaden the scope.

• Drafting a programme together is very important, by ways of two partners that can discuss on what mutual topics they can work together. **The programme can be used as a tool for discussion.**

• Also, the emphasis on capacity building is important, because there is a mismatch of skills of young people which creates problems for finding a job.

• **National guidelines,** especially in the South, should inform twinning programmes concerning youth policy.

• **Difficulty to maintain youth in participation.** The NYDA (National Youth Development Agency of South Africa) stressed that youth councils are needed as a structure. In addition, the importance of involving young people in the IDP’s (Integrated Development Plans) is high. Youth must find their way to express themselves in the IDP’s. It is important that young people can consult the IDP-document, by ways of holding the municipality accountable if decisions are not implemented. Therefore, the attendance of young people in the ward committees can be useful.

• **Challenges for local authorities:** the reconsideration of the location of the youth department in the municipality building. Not too close to the mayor or councillors office. The re-structure of the youth departments. Nowadays in most municipalities this department is understaffed and under resourced. There should be a good link with other departments as well on the local as on the national level.

**Linking youth department with other policy fields**

Youth is a large group in society that has links with all kinds of departments like HIV/AIDS, social development, education,... Take into account that there is a big difference between policy fields in Flanders and in South Africa, and also in Namibia and Botswana including the difference between a national youth policy and a local youth policy. Strong message: as a municipality, you have **to trust the youngsters** in the first place and pro-
vide a budget so they can do things. You can translate this to the national governments who need to give local municipalities financial support so they can do develop their (local) youth policy.

Linking youth policy with other policy fields can be somewhat chaotic. It is a matter of personal approach. When a politician has a portfolio on different departments it creates opportunities. However, there are some preconditions of linking:

- **Place of youth coordinator.** In the case of Nquthu the coordinator desk is near the library. It creates possibilities of working through the youth desk with arts and library.
- **Steering committee:** those people can play a very important role in linking more policy fields through youth policy.
- **Attracting new stakeholders** on a more central level like the Department of Education. Working with other levels of government makes more possible.

**Remark:** Where is the participation of the youth itself? It is important that youth is involved in the policy field. They can make connections with other policy fields according to their own priorities.

### Volunteer management policy and youth animation

- **There is a need to be clear to the volunteers about objectives, expectations and commitment.** Some people see it as pure volunteering while others see it as a potential job opportunity. Volunteers need to be motivated. They need to have the passion in order to function as a volunteer. It requires a strong sense of commitment and purpose. A clear volunteer management with a policy and strategy can make sure that volunteers stay in the project for a longer period.

- **Remuneration** is a challenge for local governments and comes in different forms. It is something that needs to be taken into account. It can come through by training, or by skills development programmes and capacity building. By linking volunteering to clear objectives for the volunteer, for example in three months you will get these skills, young people are more motivated and will stay for a longer period. It can also be recognized with a proper accredited certificate instead of a certificate of attendance that does not have any value on the job market.

- **City-to-city cooperation:** capacity building for volunteers. Local governments can offer assistance to NGO’s in relation how they can set up a volunteer policy. However, municipalities need to be the example themselves. How can someone volunteer within the community without knowing what you are doing by time and effort for your community? You need to figure this one out before asking other people.

- **Not only involve young people as volunteers but also look for older people.** They have the skills and wisdom to guide the youngsters.
Thank you for participating!
Mr Martens, Chairman of the VVSG and mayor of Roeselare

I have the feeling that during the past two days we have built up a relationship between the different countries and between the different municipalities across the countries. And I feel that friendly relationships have been built between all of us, participants to this conference. And this is my first conclusion: these discussions have been held in the most constructive atmosphere. Perhaps we did not all agree on everything and we certainly don’t have to, but we discussed with each other and respected each other’s views. That, to me, is important.

Then, to me it has been an interesting two days. First of all as president of the VVSG, it has been an honor for me to attend this conference. An honor and a pleasure at the same time, to see you participating that actively and massively in this conference. It confirms my feeling that we, as local government association, need to continue investing in this international cooperation. And I can assure you that we will keep doing so.

But – apart from that – for me this has also been an interesting two days of listening and learning from your experiences regarding city-to-city cooperation. In the beginning I mentioned that apart from being chairman of the VVSG, I am also the executive mayor from the city of Roeselare. And with the city of Roeselare we are new within this field of city-to-city cooperation. Recently, we have established a city link with the municipality of Dogbo in Benin.

Before this conference, I have to admit, that I was wondering what concepts like reciprocity, peer-to-peer approach and – to some extent – partnership meant. And I was thinking about and reflecting upon how we – as the city of Roeselare – could best translate these key concepts of the twinning to our own municipal partnership with Dogbo.

I also have to admit that not all of these concepts have become entirely clear to me, but it gives me a better idea of the discussions that are so lively present within the context of city-to-city cooperation. I certainly have received sufficient input during these days to assist my fellow councilors, deputy mayors and civil servants in the discussions regarding the city-to-city cooperation with our twin city in Dogbo.
One thing that strikes me though, that I want to share with you. I find it remarkable how many local governments in Flanders and in Southern Africa are active in the field of city-to-city cooperation. I have certainly been impressed with both the quantity AND the quality of these city-to-city cooperations between Flanders and Southern Africa. I cannot stress how impressed I am by this. At the same time, it reassures me thoroughly. It reassures me, as mayor of the city of Roeselare, to know that we are not alone in this. And to know that there is already a lot of expertise, experience present and increasing professionalism in Flanders and in Southern Africa that can help us.

A city link, is all about a partnership. On the banner here behind me, there are the wise words of a Guatemalan mayor, and I quote: “A city link is about going hand-in-hand, helping your companion when they stumble so that you can continue travelling the road together”. It certainly reassures me to know that if we, within the city of Roeselare, will stumble – and I know we will – or if our partner city of Dogbo in Benin stumbles, it reassures me then to know that there are so many local governments that can help us to find the joint road together.

Thank you.
Winning through twinning: in the end is the beginning

Report on the conference on city-to-city cooperation between Flanders and Southern Africa

 vvsg