



# Sister Cities and International Alliances

Can and should Australian local governments play an expanded role?

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### **Acknowledgements**

ACELG would like to thank the many staff of councils and other organisations interviewed for this research.

### **Citing this report**

Gooding, A., Gibbs, M., Woods, R., Pillora, S. & Smith, R. (2015) *Sister cities and international alliances*, Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, Sydney.

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**Published December 2015**

*Document version*      1.0



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## Preface

This research was initiated at the suggestion of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), Australia's peak local government body representing 560 councils across the country.

As part of its role representing local government on national bodies and ministerial councils, it became apparent to ALGA that there was very little understanding at the national government level of the role local government plays internationally through sister cities and other alliances. As part of ALGA's engagement in regional development policy and the growing interest by the Commonwealth to engage in international trade in Asia, it became apparent that there was a lack of appreciation that many councils around the country had established international relationships with cities around the world, especially in Asia. ALGA and the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) agreed it was therefore an area ripe for further research, both to inform other levels of government about the extent and nature of local government's involvement in international activities, and to outline the opportunities for local government participation in international alliances into the future.

It is hoped that this research achieves its aim of defining and investigating the cultural, social, economic and structural dimensions of local government engagement in international alliances, and to assist local governments wanting to play an expanded role internationally.

## Executive Summary

Engagement in international partnerships is a little-understood but surprisingly widespread local government activity. Nearly 30% of Australian councils have a sister city, friendship city, or similar relationship with a local, district or regional government in another country – and the number continues to grow. Yet there appears to be no formal collection of information relating to sister cities at either the national or jurisdictional levels by government agencies or local government groups.

In response, the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) decided to investigate the cultural, social, economic and structural dimensions of local government engagement in international relationships, as well as the opportunities for council participation in these relationships into the future.

### Research objectives and questions

This research had two key objectives. The first was to explore the current nature of Australian local government international relationships; examine the value of these arrangements for participating councils; determine how the relationships have evolved over time; and assess their future prospects. Within these broad parameters the study sought to address a number of research questions, which can be summarised as follows:

1. What are the key characteristics of current Australian local government international relationships?
2. How have these alliances evolved over time?
3. What is the value of these alliances for Australian councils and communities?
4. What are the prospects for the future development of these alliances and the role of local government in an international context?

The second objective was to draw on this research to offer some guidance for councils interested in establishing international relationships, or building on existing relationships.

### Research methodology

A multi-pronged approach has been used in tackling these questions. This included the completion of the following:

1. A review of the existing literature, including international and Australian studies of local government international relationships
2. An overview of the policy context of Australian local government international relationships
3. A survey of current international relationships
4. Conduct of case studies
5. Guided discussions with selected stakeholders
6. Synthesis of the material and preparation of guidelines for councils.

## Literature review

The literature review examines:

- **Key features of local government international relationships** – international relationships are, as a whole, described having the following characteristics:
  - They involve two or more local governments in different countries which make a commitment to link up
  - They are based on a relationship which is cemented by the signing of a formal agreement  
These relationships are usually intended to be indefinite or long-term
  - Each relationship is generally not limited to a single project
  - The relationships usually display some concrete examples of success.

The literature identifies four prime motivations for international relationships:

- Idealistic (such as the desire to promote peace and reconciliation)
  - Political (often linked to broader world developments)
  - Economic (development of new business and trade opportunities)
  - Capacity building (to strengthen governance).
- **Changing relationships and factors influencing changes** – the origins of international relationships can be traced to the mid-1800s when rapid industrialisation brought about a new spectrum of urban problems and new communication and transportation technologies allowed these problems to be discussed across distances. Motivations for developing these relationships have continued to be rooted in idealism, solidarity, politics, economic development and an interest in knowledge transfer, all underpinned by the desire to showcase and share local culture.
  - **Reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of international relationships** – researchers and academics have identified municipal relationship-building as a complex, long-term process, the success of which is underpinned by factors such as open communication, common problem solving, consistent leadership, credibility and cultural awareness and sensitivity. Some critical success factors include:
    - Creation of an enabling environment
    - Careful choice of partners
    - Broad-based community awareness and involvement
    - Quality management and business planning
    - Regular communication.

## The policy context

A study of the relevant state and territory legislation confirmed that the various local government acts were virtually silent on the subject of sister cities and other international relationships.

However, most of the acts provide councils with authority to undertake and participate in a wide range of activities relating to local community, cultural and economic development. A number of

councils have based their engagement in international relationships directly or indirectly on these concepts.

The situation is more complex at the national level. While the Australian Government has no direct control of local government, it does have primary responsibility for international relations and diplomacy. There seems to be some awareness in government of the engagement of councils in international relationships, and it has been suggested that local governments need to align their international arrangements with government policies.

Other federal policy settings relevant to local government have reflected the policy priorities and settings of the national government of the day. Two papers released during the Rudd and Gillard governments pointed specifically to a broader, more strategic role for local government and international diplomacy: *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* and the *Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct of Australia's Public Diplomacy*.

Notwithstanding this, government policies at both national and state/territory levels have been for the most part largely indifferent to local government engagement in establishing international relationships, as long as these remain broadly consistent with the priorities of these governments.

## Statistical snapshot

Of Australia's 556 councils, an online search indicated that 161, or 29% of councils participate in 392 international relationships involving a sister city, friendship city, co-operative arrangements or other forms of international relationships with councils or local administrative regions or sub-regions overseas. NSW has both the highest number of councils participating in these arrangements and the highest number of relationships, but only Victoria has over half the total number of councils so involved. Numerically and proportionately, international relationships are less common in Queensland and even less so in other jurisdictions, where the percentages of councils involved range from less than 21% to just over 12%.

While Australian councils have relationships with councils in 47 countries, only five of these (in order, Japan, China, USA, Italy and Timor-Leste) account for nearly 70% of the total number of current relationships. Japan and China alone account for over 46% of the relationships.

The most common activities (undertaken in over 60% of relationships) are educational and student exchanges. This is followed by cultural and art exchanges, in which nearly half of the relationships are involved. Trade and business development feature in just over a quarter of relationships. Only around 6% of relationships are focussed on community development.

## Case studies

As part of the research a number of case studies were undertaken to examine councils with international relationships in more detail in the context of the research questions. The case study councils include:

- Albury (NSW)
- Orange (NSW)



- Penrith (NSW)
- Ballarat (Victoria)
- Melbourne (Victoria)
- Mount Alexander (Victoria)
- Townsville (Queensland)
- Marion (South Australia)
- Greater Geraldton (Western Australia)
- Clarence (Tasmania)
- Darwin (Northern Territory).

The case studies provided an insight into the complexity and diversity of council-to-council international relationships and, in particular, the wide range of governance models, management processes and development strategies that councils have adopted. They have also suggested some of the factors that have contributed to achieving success in partnerships.

The case studies also identified some of the issues that have had a negative impact on these relationships, including an increasing mismatch in expectations and objectives in some older partnerships as Australian councils have questioned their original rationales of civic and cultural exchanges, instead wishing to move toward business and trade-oriented activities. Perhaps the most significant factor has been the strongly negative approach adopted by sections of the media which has had an impact on public sentiment. In this context it is understandable, but perhaps unfortunate that relatively few councils have sought to establish comprehensive external reviews of their partnerships.

## Stakeholder discussions

Guided discussions were conducted with key personnel from a number of local government associations and organisations involved in international relationships to gain an appreciation of their views about local government's role in these arrangements. Key points raised by the stakeholders included:

- **Key characteristics of successful international relationships** – a spirit of reciprocity is needed and it is important for local communities to understand the value of international relationships. Full council support is required along with an active community-based committee structure and governance support.
- **Internal and external factors** – while it is important to have enthusiastic champions, experiences should be shared with the wider community and council organisation. It is important to explain the need for regular face-to-face visits when establishing business-oriented connections, and openness and transparency is needed across the range of international activities.
- **Reviews and evaluation of international relationships** – a robust qualitative and quantitative evaluation framework is needed, although it was noted that there is no internationally accepted evaluation tool.
- **The value of international relationships** – the value of international relationships has, at times, been questioned, with overseas visits being the focus of negative media attention. A lack of clear outcomes and the absence of a robust evaluation framework can also contribute to the problem.

Maintaining relationships can be costly, with translation and staff exchanges quite expensive in an environment where councils are under pressure to reduce discretionary expenditure. Partnerships are tending to become more flexible and practical, creating mutual benefits for business.

- **Prospects for the development of international relationships** – sister cities and international activities are moving towards economic development and away from the traditional social and cultural exchange, and there is a new generation of advocates for some of the relationships built around international development partnerships, particularly those involving Timor-Leste. Local government should look to where it can add value to national objectives and make more effective use of existing programs and funds for international relations.
- **Relevance of guidelines and criteria for councils wanting to engage in international alliances** – best practice guides, case studies and general learnings would be helpful to assist councils wanting to establish new international alliances or improve existing relationships.

## Research findings

The study revealed a picture of surprising activity and variety in the type and nature of Australian local government involvement in international alliances. While there is considerable variety, there are also some clear trends:

- There has been a change over time in the countries providing the major share of new relationships from the 1980s from Japan to China and briefly, Timor-Leste.
- There has been a move away from relationships which embraced the “traditional” sister city movement themes of peace, reconstruction and reconciliation through a focus on civic, cultural and educational exchanges to relationships which have a much stronger emphasis on economic development and trade. There is still an expectation however that while newer relationships have a greater economic focus, the traditional forms of civic and other exchanges will continue.
- Newer forms of partnership have emerged in exchanges with local districts in Timor-Leste and councils in Papua New Guinea which had an initial focus on community development, but which since have developed into fully two-way partnerships which provide benefit to the councils and communities in both countries.
- Media pressure is likely to see the continuation of the trend towards an increasing emphasis on economic development and trade in order for participating councils to demonstrate value for money.
- Councils need to recognise the primary role of the Australian Government in international relations.
- While councils engaged in international relationships appear to find them useful, notions of public value and the wider community’s perception of this were among the most difficult to quantify in this project and is one area where further research is needed.
- Some guidance should be provided for councils contemplating whether to engage in an international alliance or to expand their existing partnerships.

Some general observations can be drawn from the research that may assist councils considering the establishment of new relationships or changes to their existing partnerships, as outlined below:

- ***Investigating and establishing international relationships – establish clear motives for forming an international relationship.*** Develop an understanding of the context within which the alliance will be formed and explore the fit between the prospective partners and research similar relationships. Investigate government policies and build on existing programs. Recognise there can be cultural preferences for multi-faceted relationships, and establish a formal partnership between the councils linked to a strategic plan.
- ***Managing international relationships*** – ensure that arrangements are supported by leadership and quality management. Incorporate an adequate level of resourcing for the relationship in council financial plans and annual budgets. Ensure that there is consistent contact with the partnership council, recognise the importance of face-to-face visits and the significance of the mayor.
- ***Maximising the benefits of international relationships*** – build flexible relationships. Improve the sustainability of the relationship and encourage other stakeholders to participate. Recognise that community development partnerships can benefit both partners.
- ***Developing and maintaining community support*** – ensure that the elected body is strongly supportive and involved; and engage with the media and the community.
- ***Reviewing and evaluating international relationships*** – establish a framework for robust qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

# 1. Introduction

## Background

Engagement in international relationships is a little understood but surprisingly widespread local government activity.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 30% of Australian councils have a sister city, friendship city or similar relationship with a local, district or regional government in another country, and the number continues to grow. Yet there appears to be no formal collection of information relating to sister cities at either the national or jurisdictional levels by government agencies or local government groups. A small number of organisations involved in specific aspects of promoting international relationships collect some data, but mostly only in relation to their membership or particular areas of interest.

Similarly, there has been limited academic research into these partnerships in Australia. Only two surveys (O'Toole 1999; Mascitelli and Chung 2008) and less than a dozen papers have been completed in the past 15 years. In addition, only a few councils involved appear to have published formal reviews of their own partnerships. As a result there is a lack of reliable, up-to-date information about these relationships.

In response, the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) decided to investigate the cultural, social, economic and structural dimensions of local government engagement in international relationships, as well as the opportunities for council participation in these arrangements into the future.

A number of other factors have contributed to the interest in undertaking research into local government's role in the international arena. Changes in cultural attitudes and increasing contact with Asia have led to questions about the relevance of the 'traditional' sister city model. In addition, cost pressures on councils and the perceived luxury of international travel for cultural exchange purposes has put these international relationships in an increasingly critical media spotlight.

At the same time, globalisation processes and greater interest in city-to-city and region-to-region economic and business relationships have encouraged many councils to be more active on the international stage. More informal international relationships involving councils have also emerged in the form of grassroots people-to-people community development processes.

But how exactly have these factors influenced the involvement of Australian councils in these relationships? What are councils trying to achieve with these relationships and what are the challenges they face? Can and should local governments in Australia play an expanded role in the international arena?

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<sup>1</sup> 'International relationships' refers broadly to sister city, friendship city, and other co-operative arrangements and activities between councils, local administrative regions or sub-regions internationally.

## Research objectives and questions

The first objective of this research was to explore the current status and nature of Australian local government international relationships, examine the value of these arrangements for participating councils, determine how these relationships have evolved, and assess their future prospects. Within these broad parameters the study sought to address a number of research questions which can be summarised as follows:

### **1. What are the key characteristics of current Australian Local government international relationships?**

Due to the lack of recent research it was important to establish some basic statistics such as the number of Australian councils engaged in such relationships, the number and location of the overseas partnering councils, the various types of relationships, how these relationships are managed, and the key outcomes achieved. This aspect of the project has also helped to identify gaps in the current data on international relationships and opportunities for additional research.

### **2. How have the bases of these relationships evolved over time?**

The study surveyed how these relationships have changed, both in terms of the nature of the relationships and the range of countries in which partnerships have developed. The historical, policy and other influences which have affected their evolution were also investigated.

### **3. What is the value of these relationships for Australian councils and communities?**

The study sought to identify the benefits of these relationships for participating councils and their communities, the key factors (both internal and external) which have contributed to the development of successful relationships, and what processes (if any) had been used to monitor or review these arrangements.

### **4. What are the prospects for the future development of these relationships and the role of local government in an international context?**

Finally the study reviewed plans and options for the development of these relationships and, more broadly, the prospects for the participation of councils in international relations.

The second objective was to draw on this research, in particular the literature review and the case studies, to prepare some guidance for councils interested in establishing international relationships.

## Research Methodology

A multi-pronged approach has been used in tackling these questions. This included the completion of the following:

### **1. A review of the existing literature including international and Australian studies of these relationships**

A literature review was conducted to provide a research foundation for the project and in particular to address issues such as:

- The key features of various types of local government international relationships, and the best typology for categorising these in terms of their rationale, key objectives, structure and governance arrangements, and the range of activities undertaken
- How these relationships have evolved and changed and the factors influencing these changes
- The process used to review and monitor the effectiveness of these relationships and the outcomes of these evaluations.

The literature review is described in Section 2.

## **2. An overview of the policy context of Australian Local government international alliances**

A brief overview of the policy context provided by the Australian and state and territory governments in which international relationships operate (see Section 3) was developed to provide a contextual framework for the project.

## **3. A survey of current international relationships**

The lack of an adequate dataset on international relationships meant that it was necessary to undertake some form of survey to provide current and more reliable information as a basis for the project. It was not possible to conduct a conventional detailed survey of all 556 councils in Australia. An alternative approach involving online searches and a review of websites and other online material related to Australian council international relationships was developed.

A detailed explanation of the process involved is provided in Section 4, along with the key outcomes. These were also used to assist in the selection of the case studies discussed in Section 5.

## **4. Conduct of case studies**

A number of case studies were completed to examine selected councils and their international relationships in more detail. Drawing on the survey outcomes, twelve councils were chosen initially to reflect both the diversity of the relationships and that of the councils themselves, with eleven agreeing to participate. These case studies involved a structured discussion with a person nominated by the case study council along with a review of relevant published material.

The selection and discussion processes along with a summary of the case study outcomes are described in Section 5. The complete case studies can be found in Appendix A.

## **5. Guided discussions with selected stakeholders**

Guided discussions were conducted with key personnel from a number of local government associations and organisations involved in international relationships to gain an appreciation of their views about local government's role in these relationships. The specific types of organisations approached and the key points raised in these discussions are summarised in Section 6.

## 6. Synthesis of the material and preparation of guidelines for councils

In the final phase of the project the outcomes of the research stages outlined above were brought together to provide overall findings. This material also formed the basis for the development of best practice guidelines for councils wanting to explore opportunities to establish new international relationships or develop their current relationships. The findings and guidelines are summarised in Section 7.

Two areas have been specifically excluded from the project:

- As the research concentrated specifically on international relationships, sister city and friendship city arrangements *between councils in Australia* were not addressed. While these provide interesting examples of inter-council collaboration and assistance, there are fundamental differences compared to international relationships, so they were excluded from this study.
- Similarly, councils across Australia work internationally on a range of issues including climate change, ecologically sustainable development, Local Agenda 21 and the sustainable development goals, to name a few. These relationships are not explored in this paper. Nor are the many initiatives of local government professional Australians facilitating staff exchanges with developing countries.
- While the value of international relationships to councils and communities formed a key question addressed in this project, surveys of community attitudes towards these relationships and interviews with media, community, business and other non-government representatives and stakeholders were not undertaken.

## 2. Literature review

*Town twinning is best conceptualised as a device, a repertoire, and a model. It has been used by numerous groups, with numerous interests, in numerous contexts, to numerous ends.*

(Clarke 2011: 124)

### Introduction

A key feature of the research was a review of Australian and overseas literature which focused on describing and understanding trans-national partnerships, especially those involving local government, that occur at the sub-national level, as well as empirical studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of such partnerships.

Published material was sought in electronic databases, including, but not limited to Academic Search Complete (Ebsco); Expanded Academic ASAP International (Gale); Google Scholar and Google; Political Science Complete (Ebsco); ProQuest Central; Sage Journals Online; Science Direct (Elsevier); Taylor and Francis Online; and Wiley Interscience. The review of the literature, with a strong focus on published research which provides empirical evidence on the basis of evaluations of trans-national municipal relationships, was conducted in order to address the following questions, linked to the research questions of the study as a whole:

1. What are the key features of local government international relationships?
2. How have local government international relationships changed over time and what are the factors influencing these changes?
3. How have these relationships been evaluated, and what are the outcomes of the evaluations?

A range of search terms were used in various combinations in order to access relevant material. The search terms used included, but were not limited to:

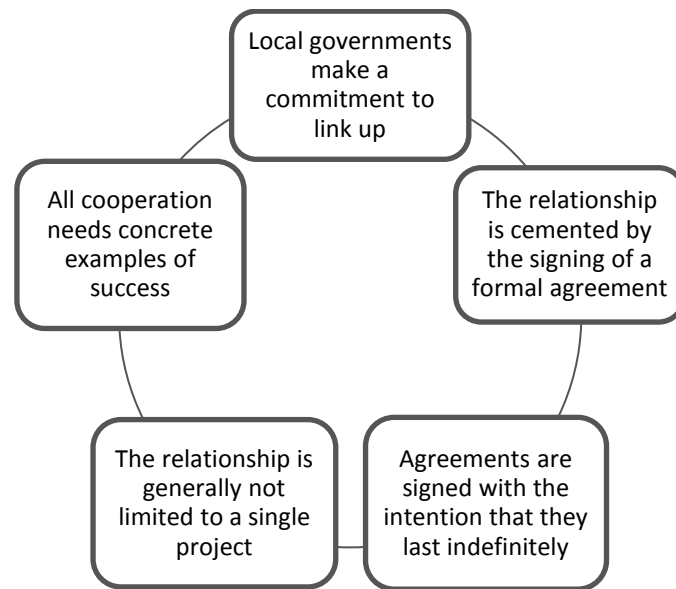
- Local government international partnerships/alliances
- Sister cities
- Municipal/town twinning
- City-to-city transnational linkages/networks
- Evaluation+ sister cities/municipal twinning/city-to-city linkages
- Motivation/benefits/outcomes and sister cities/town twinning.

### Key features of local government international relationships

#### Essential characteristics

Although given various names such as sister cities (Sister Cities International 2006), twin municipalities/towns (Council of European Municipalities and Regions 2007), or city-to-city partnerships (Bontenbal 2013), trans-national municipal relationships are, as a whole, described as 'a device, repertoire and model' (Clarke 2011: 124) having the following key characteristics:





**Figure 1. Characteristics of formal international municipal partnerships**

Source: Adapted from Cremer, de Bruin and Dupuis (2001); Tjandradewi and Marcotullio (2009: 168).

In considering definitions and labels, Clarke (2009: 498) cautions that there is little consistency in agreement between the labels used and the forms of relationship they are intended to describe, and little consistency in the way that local governments themselves conceive of these relationships. In similar vein, Grosspietsch (2009: 1284) notes that, ‘given the different definitions of twinning, it is not surprising that every local authority has adopted its own pattern of sustaining twinning’.

Alliances may also develop between states or provinces. Takao (2010), for example, refers to ‘sister-state relations’, which are an example of the transnational linking of sub-national governments, but not at the municipal level.

### Rationale and key objectives

On the basis of an historical review of the international city-to-city partnership movement, Buis (2009: 191) identifies three prime motivations for international relationships:

- **Idealistic** motivations, such as the desire to promote peace and reconciliation, cement historical bonds, express solidarity, or to contribute international aid to people living in poverty (Buis 2009; Baycan-Levent, Akgun and Kundak 2010)
- **Political** motivations, with municipal relationships responsive to, and in some cases reflecting, socio-economic and political milestones in various parts of the world (Grosspietsch 2009; Baycan-Levent, Kundak and Gulumser 2008)
- **Economic** motivations, such as searching for business opportunities, trade, investments and employment (Ramasamy and Cremer 1998; Baycan-Levent et al. 2010).

To these can be added **capacity building and knowledge transfer**, in order to strengthen urban and regional governance (Bontenbal 2013).

Idealism has been prominent in the history of international relationships, and the origins of the modern organised and increasingly widespread movement have been linked to efforts at peace and reconciliation in Europe following the Second World War. Clarke (2011: 117) provides a perspective that town twinning represents an attempt to 'extend care across space', or '[extending] care to distant strangers'. Debarbieux and Rudaz (2008) provide an example of another motivation for partnerships, namely to enhance solidarity between communities separated by nation states and history, but which nevertheless share geographical similarities. Mountain communities are the example these researchers provide.

The sister city movement is sensitive to general world developments and is responsive to, and in some cases reflects, socio-economic and political milestones, such as the expansion of the European Union (EU) after the 1990s (Baycan-Levent, Kundak and Gulumser 2008). In modern-day Europe it is often seen as a mechanism for advancing the European integration process and forging a sense of European identity.

In the 1960s and 70s the political motive was prominent for many localities which sought partners in countries for the specific purpose of supporting liberation movements, or in opposition to their own political systems (Buis 2009). At a somewhat different political level there is the 'global city' phenomenon. Since the 1980s 'world cities' (Freidmann 1986) have been described as nodes in the global economic system which function as centres of finance and trade, sources of political power, and cultural powerhouses. They have become evidence of the 'spatial organization of the new international division of labour' (Freidmann 1986: 69). According to Acuto (2010), twinning arrangements between global cities can be capable of integrating and leading new governance structures. It was evident through the conduct of this review that much of the literature focuses on city-to-city partnerships.

Political decentralisation and the development of new forms of the relationship between central and local governments have provided a conducive environment for local governments to reach out beyond their sub-national and national borders. Local and metropolitan governments in many countries increasingly have the legal power and autonomy to establish different kinds of cooperation with others, without mediation from their central governments (Tjandradewi, Marcotullio and Kidokoro 2006: 358). At the political level, municipal twinning is one means by which 'transnational municipal networking' on issues of urban management, policy, and decision-making can be formalised (Bontenbal 2010: 462).

The transnational networking of the larger cities in particular can also be seen to parallel the structure of the modern world economy, in which cities form the central nodes of global capital and investment flows (Bontenbal 2010: 462). An economic motive for twinning has thus become more prevalent in recent years. Economic motives include searching for business opportunities, trade, investments and employment (Buis 2009; Baycan-Levent, Akgun and Kundak 2010). Grosspietsch (2009: 1297) points to the recent increase in the importance of 'urban boosterism' and competitiveness and the need to enhance the position of a city in the global urban hierarchy. Sharp (2008: 637) similarly suggests that 'city level twinning activities with economically well-matched urban peers can leave the impression of being trade-centred'.

Capacity building and knowledge transfer in order to strengthen urban governance have been motivations for engaging in municipal twinning from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. Contact between practitioners within the context of municipal partnerships allows for both tacit and explicit or codified knowledge to be shared:

- Tacit knowledge includes knowledge shared by working together, conversational learning, learning by doing, and feedback
- Codified or explicit knowledge may be shared in rules, regulation, manuals, and codes of practice, as well as in professional training.

(Devers-Kanoglu 2009: 207; Johnson and Wilson 2009: 211)

One of the main learning practices in municipal twinning contacts is ‘experiential’, or ‘reflective’ learning: on the basis of an experience, people change their conceptual perspective as a result of undergoing a process of internally examining and exploring the issue at stake through reflection. This creates and clarifies meaning and turns information into knowledge and, consequently, learning (Kolb, cited in Bontenbal 2013: 87).

A distinct form of these partnerships is the exchange of knowledge and expertise on local government affairs as a tool for local development and poverty alleviation in developing countries, or the ‘global South’. These have generally been described as ‘North-South partnerships’. Knowledge transfer is used as a means to support the institutional strengthening of local authorities in developing countries, as well as to support capacity building for civil society in those countries (Bontenbal and van Lindert 2009: 131).

There has been a strong and recent research interest into knowledge exchange and learning that occurs in North-South partnerships (Bontenbal 2013; Bontenbal 2010; van Ewijk and Baud 2009). This form of partnership brings together the idealistic and knowledge-sharing motives. They may also include economic objectives since, in the course of these partnerships, cities in the North often ‘complement their knowledge sharing with financial support to implement local-level development projects in their partner cities’ (Bontenbal 2010: 463).

#### Addressing the ‘junket phenomenon’

Several commentators point to a common criticism levelled at transnational partnerships occurring at the local level, namely public concerns about the waste of public money on international travel without visible benefits to the communities footing the bill. This phenomenon is often termed a ‘junket’ (see, for example Zelinsky 1991; Chung and Mascitelli 2009). More could be done by local governments to address community perceptions about international partnerships.

#### Who partners whom?

A municipality can have as many twinning partners as it wishes, and the basis for partner selection is diverse, including:

- similar or identical names (e.g. Toledo, Spain and Toledo, Ohio)
- historical similarities (e.g. bomb-damaged cities)
- historical connections between a pair of countries

- similarity of, or sympathy for political ideologies
- geographical similarities (e.g. mountain communities)
- infrastructural similarities, such as being a port or a primarily industrial city, or the seat of a major university
- similarities of status, such as being a capital city or regarded as a 'global city' or world city'
- personal connections.

(Grosspietsch 2009: 1291; Zelinsky 1991: 21-22)

Initially, inter-municipal relationships were based on some form of similarity, such as name, economic function, export structure or geographical location, 'or simply because of individual contacts and private initiatives' (Ramasamy and Cremer 1998: 449). According to Zelinsky (1991: 4):

The unwritten rule is that the two places should be roughly comparable in size and, more to the point, that they have the wherewithal for becoming compatible partners. Compatibility in turn implies some sharing of economic, cultural, ideological, historical, recreational or other type of concern or perhaps a beneficial complementarity of interests.

Zelinsky was writing in the early 1990s. More recently, however, issues of commerce and economic development in the internationalised global arena have increased in importance. Partnerships that develop with these primarily commercial motivations can build on a strong history of twinning between cities with shared economic interests such as manufacturing (e.g. Pittsburgh, USA with Sheffield, UK); oil (e.g. Houston, USA with Baku, Azerbaijan); and ports (e.g. Genoa, Italy with Rotterdam, the Netherlands) (Chung and Mascitelli 2009: 231).

A relatively recent addition to the inter-municipal relationship selection spectrum is that in which city-to-city partnerships are established between local governments in migrant source and migrant destination countries and communities (Van Ewijk 2012: 102). It is believed that such partnerships lead to mutual learning and actions that can have a positive impact on the integration of migrants in destination countries, as well as contributing to development in source countries.

### **Structure and governance arrangements**

International relationships should be established and sustained in a professional way with adequate resourcing, monitoring and ongoing quality management (De Villiers, de Coning and Smit 2007; Franco and Marmello 2014). Ideally, they should also be well integrated with local community strategic plans (Handley 2006: 10).

As noted by Franco and Marmello (2014: 76), inter-municipal cooperation is a form of organisational practice that can allow local government organisations to be 'more agile, flexible and dynamic to make their operation competitive with international standards of productivity, competitiveness and quality'. International cooperation allows councils to gain fame and recognition both nationally and internationally, enabling them to better function in a world characterised by increasing globalisation. This suggests that there is value in focusing on the role that public administrators and managers play in developing, building and sustaining cooperative relationships.

## Activities

*Twinning is constituted through circuits, networks and webs of cooperation and competition involved in the transfer of policy and knowledge which can be strategic, uneven and at times ambivalent.*

(Jayne, Hubbard and Bell 2013: 239)

Activities in which partner municipalities are engaged centre on notions of hospitality and reciprocity that can be conceived of as contributing to a 'reputation effect' for a town or city (Jayne, Hubbard and Bell 2011: 32). Organised events and programs are intended to be enjoyable. They include athletic and musical events, visits by theatrical, dancing and other cultural groups, language instruction, the staging of festivals and trade fairs, and the exchange of letters, publications and schoolchildren (Zelinsky 1991: 3).

These activities all serve the objective of advancing mutual understanding and friendship, and form the basis for sustaining other, more 'instrumental' objectives, such as those of a political, economic or educational nature (Jayne, Hubbard and Bell 2013; Shaw and Karlis 2002; Hsu 2003; Zelinsky 1999). At its heart, the objective of all municipal trans-national relationships is to provide an avenue for cultural exchange. That is, to enhance understanding and appreciation of the ways of life of each other at both the institutional and interpersonal levels.

## Organisational support

City-to-city cooperation receives support through supranational, national and local policy making (Bontenbal and van Lindert 2009). Organisations and associations that are active in supporting partnerships include:

- Sister Cities International (SCI) and its local affiliate, Sister Cities Australia
- The World Bank
- United Nations Development Program
- UN-Habitat
- The European Union
- EUROCITIES, which provides a forum for European cities, including metropolises
- CITYNET, which provides a forum for cities in Asia
- International City/County Management Association
- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

(Bontenbal and van Lindert 2009: 131; Furmankiewicz 2007; De Villiers 2009)

Of these bodies, Sister Cities International, and its Australian affiliate are described in greater detail in the boxes below.

### Sister Cities International (SCI)

Founded by President Eisenhower in 1956, SCI is a non-profit organisation which strives to strengthen the sister cities network through strategic institutional partnerships, grants, programs and support for its members. Its mission is to advance peace and prosperity through cultural, educational, humanitarian and economic development exchanges.

Programs of the organisation include:

- promotion of the three main areas of activity, namely boosting local industry and development, including opening doors for private sector investment; youth exchanges and mentoring opportunities; and community development, including raising funds or supplies for natural disasters in sister cities
- direct exchange funding for members
- best practice toolkits for advice on exchanges, fundraising, advocacy and other topics
- conferences and webinars.

### Sister Cities Australia (SCA)

Sister Cities Australia is the peak association for Australian cities, towns and shires that have a sister city relationship. The organisation started in 1979 as the Australian Sister Cities Association, and was from the start a voluntary non-government organisation that has functioned as a promoter and focus point for local government authorities with sister city relationships. The objective of SCA is to provide an umbrella of support and to promote the affiliations; and to provide a forum for cultural, economic and educational interchange.

Programs include:

- A register of affiliations
- Sister Cities Australia National Awards – categories include ‘community involvement’, ‘youth project’, ‘tourism and trade project’, and ‘assistance to a sister city’.
- Sister Cities Australia Newsletter
- An annual Conference.

Sources: Sister Cities International (2014); Sister Cities Australia (2014); Chung and Mascitelli (2009)

Buis (2009: 192-194) makes an argument for an international association of local government officials in international cooperation to be established, noting that:

- Dealing with city-to-city partnerships has become a profession like other professions in local government
- Current local government associations themselves are in need of strengthening before they can take up an international role in general, and in city-to-city partnerships in particular
- A strong and accountable local government association can have more influence on the inter-municipal partnership agenda, and spread the benefits beyond only those local governments involved in such relationships.

## Changing relationships and factors influencing changes

*The historical gaze makes clear that urban policy mobility is not new and cannot simply be confined to particular historical moments, such as the medieval and early-modern period or the last three to four decades. The historical method begins with organizations of various kinds, from municipalities to philanthropic foundations, and from municipal associations to international institutions.*

(Clarke 2012: 39)

The literature suggests that historical description and analysis is a key approach to understanding municipal twinning and international relationships (Zelinsky 1991; Hoedjes 2009; Clarke 2010). As an academic approach in itself, historical analysis is often used to examine the contribution that transnational relationships make to better understanding globalisation. Historical analysis has also generated insights into the mobilisation of urban policy, that is, how ideas and methods adopted in one locality are accessed and adopted in another locality. Historical studies provide a way to contextualise the ways in which cultural models are diffused, markets extended and relationships organised between public and non-governmental groups, and how relationships among individuals, groups and institutions are multiplying on a global scale (Saunier 2002).

The historical method examines archived documents and focuses on organisations of various kinds, from municipalities and municipal associations, to international institutions.

### Foundations

Zelinsky (1991) traces the origins of municipal twinning to the mid-1800s, and specifically to:

- the work of non-government groups such as the Rotarians, Freemasons and religious organisations
- the series of world's fairs initiated in the 1850s
- the proliferation of business and scientific conventions
- the work of organisations promoting social causes.

International visits and meetings took place in and between European cities towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly with the aim of exchanging technological knowledge. In the early years of the twentieth century there was an explicit move towards 'municipal internationalism' as rapid industrialisation brought about problems identified as 'urban', and new communication and transportation technologies allowed these problems to be discussed across distances (Clarke 2010: 174).

The most immediate precursor of today's organised transnational alliances among communities was the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) founded at Ghent, Belgium in 1913 (Grosspietsch 2009: 1284-1285). The IULA 'stood for the beginning of a new era of international municipal relations before any international organisation of nation states was established' (Gaspari, cited in Grosspietsch 2009: 1285). Connections and networks sustained through correspondence, conferences, exhibitions and journals allowed engineers, economists and councillors to discuss and

put into practice new ways of dealing with town planning, urban services and housing, amongst other municipal issues (Clarke 2010: 174).

### Post-war Europe

As an organised phenomenon, town twinning was ‘invented...in Western Europe in the years immediately following the Second World War’ (Clarke 2010: 174). Many commentators (see, for example Zelinsky 1991; Weyreter 2003) agree that the primary impetus for the modern movement was a strong motivation among several players to engage in transnational contact in order to pursue peace, reconstruction and reconciliation following the devastation of the War. However, at an informal level, twinning was already developing between cities as part of war relief – the relationship between Vancouver in Canada and Odessa in the Soviet Union, for example, was based on an allied port city offering assistance to a war-devastated port city (Hsu 2003: 3).

Weyreter (2003: 37) describes the first formal post-war town twinning as that which occurred between Bristol in the United Kingdom (UK) and Hanover in Germany. This relationship began when Bristol Council sent five ‘leading citizens’ on a goodwill mission to that severely war-damaged German harbour city. Initial contacts involved people from Bristol sending food and clothing parcels, with the Hanoverians responding with concerts and folk recitals as expressions of thanks (Handley 2006: 5).

Reflective of this post-War spirit of reconciliation, a special meeting of French and German mayors was held in Switzerland in 1948, which contributed toward the signing of twinning agreements between several German and French cities in the early 1950s (Zelinsky 1991: 6). The Council of European Municipalities and Regions, established in 1951, took a strong position to encourage international contacts at the local level, primarily in Western Europe (Buis 2009: 190).

### Sister Cities and the Cold War

The evolution of municipal twinning in the United States of America (USA) took a somewhat different course to that developing in Europe, although some USA cities did establish friendship partnerships with war-ravaged German cities and towns (Sister Cities International 2006: 9). Operation Town Affiliation, founded in New York in the early 1950s, was an early attempt at grassroots linkages between American and international cities, but it was the efforts of then-President Eisenhower through his People-to-People program that provided the impetus for the sister cities movement in 1956. The stated intention of the President was to ‘involve individuals and organised groups at all levels of society in citizen diplomacy...[to]...lessen the chance of future world conflicts’ (Sister Cities International, cited in Cremer, de Bruin and Dupuis 2001: 380).

Zelinsky (1991) notes that the Sister Cities movement may have been underpinned by the USA Administration’s overall Cold War strategy, and particularly as a tool for American foreign relations, especially with Japan (O’Toole 2001: 403). Political conflicts and debates over ‘culture’ heightened by the Cold War continued to have a strong influence on town twinning. Drawing on experiences in the UK, for example, Clarke (2010) describes the development of two models that British towns and cities could adopt:



- The Council of European Municipalities (CEM) model viewed town twinning as a means of bonding Christian Europe together and was itself connected to the Catholic Church.
- The United Town Association (UTO) model, which originated in France, was keen to use town twinning as a means to bridge the Cold War divide and also to offer a response to the emerging divide between the 'developed' North and 'developing' South.

The history of the conflicts and politics between these two models is well described by Clarke (2010:173), who writes that, during the Cold War, the British Government intervened because of fears about 'Communist penetration during town twinning', ensuring that, by the late 1970s, 'town twinning in Britain was associated with civic and cultural exchanges within Western Europe'. Narratives such as these provides evidence that an historical approach to understanding municipal cooperation across borders reveals much not only about municipal internationalism, but also about trends in national and international politics.

### Australia

The initial response of Australia to sister cities was slow (O'Toole 2001: 403), although several town affiliations existed before the establishment of the official American organisation. The alliance between Parkes, NSW and Coventry, UK, set up in in 1939, was possibly the first such international relationship (Rutherford 2000: 3). The first municipal twinning under the Sister Cities scheme in Australia took place in 1963, when Lismore, NSW established a relationship with Yamatotakada in Nara Prefecture, Japan (Takao 2010: 454). Lloyd (2010: 40) suggests that many early Australian partnerships arose from 'sentimental attachments to Britain and to the homelands of subsequent migrants'.

By 1978, 26 cities and towns had links with overseas cities, but regular communication was a problem. This led to the holding of the first Australian Sister Cities conference in Newcastle in 1979. This was the foundation for the establishment of the Australian Sister Cities Association, the peak Australian association for international relationships that provided a forum for cultural, economic and educational interchange.

### Internationalisation and globalisation

With the advent of contemporary globalisation towards the end of the 1970s, international urban networking experienced a boom period (Tjandradewi and Marcotullio 2009; Clarke 2010). Continued improvements in transportation and communication technologies, coupled with the internationalisation of production and the globalisation of financial markets, encouraged local governments to recognise that local welfare depends on decisions made elsewhere, and to 'seek to influence these decisions by acting across local and national borders' (Clarke 2010: 174).

Zelinsky (1991) carried out a comprehensive international survey of sister cities which showed that more than 11,000 pairs of sister cities in 159 countries had entered into twinning agreements by 1988. This survey showed that France, the then Federal Republic of Germany, the USA and the UK were the countries with the most twinings (each well above 1,000), while Australia, with 250 twinings at the time, was 20<sup>th</sup> on the list (Zelinsky 1991: 12).

The phenomenon in Europe underwent further growth after the formation of the European Union, and then again after the ending of the Cold War (Hoedjes 2009; Furmankiewicz 2007). The formation of the EUROCIITIES network in 1986 provided a further boost by becoming one of the organisations that provided support to sister city relationships. EUROCIITIES currently serves as a forum for the local governments of 134 large cities in 34 European countries (Baycan-Levent, Kundak and Gulumser 2008).

It is estimated that around 70% of local governments worldwide are currently involved in cooperation at the international level that is based on a formal agreement to work together and encourage knowledge exchange between their staff based on a colleague-to-colleague approach (Van Ewijk and Baud 2009: 218). Approximately 68% of these linkages have been supported through international associations (UN-Habitat, cited in Tjandradewi and Marcotullio 2009: 165).

### The Netherlands as a country example

A systematic approach to documenting trends in local government international relationships can provide inspiration for councils, and also be a key source of data in ongoing research. There is a wealth of historical data on the experiences of the Netherlands, for example, and key features of this history as ascertained from the literature, are described in the box below.

A key insight from the Dutch experience relates to the foundational role that international events and political contexts can have in shaping the various rationales, timings and subsequent history of twinnings. The result is that many partnerships that began forming in the early 1950s and have continued to the present may be rooted in distinct histories, objectives and relationship rationales.

### Summary

The origins of municipal twinning can be traced to the mid-1800s when rapid industrialisation brought about a new spectrum of 'urban' problems, and new communication and transportation technologies allowed these problems to be discussed across distances.

The primary impetus for the contemporary movement was a strong motivation among several players to engage in transnational contact in order to pursue peace, reconstruction and reconciliation following the devastation of the Second World War. The world-wide 'sister cities' movement was inaugurated in 1956.

Motivations for twinning have continued to be rooted in idealism, solidarity, politics, economic development, and an interest in knowledge transfer, all underpinned by the desire to showcase and share local culture.

### Insights from history: The example of the Netherlands

The political and administrative culture of the Netherlands is founded on a strong preference for consultation and consensus. A level of autonomy at the municipal level is guaranteed in the Constitution of 1848. Local governments have considerable room to establish and maintain international contacts, including twinning partnerships. Approximately 72% of Dutch municipalities are involved in such alliances. The Netherlands also houses a peak body, the International Co-operation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International), which undertakes a coordinating and supporting role in these initiatives.

Municipal twinning in its modern form started after the Second World War and was explicitly aimed at fostering peace and facilitating the process of reconciliation. Many Dutch municipalities established links with partners in other countries on both sides of the War. This early phase of twinning was largely confined to intra-European partnerships.

A second wave was driven by the new idealism of the 1960s. There was a move to fight inequalities and injustices of the world system by supporting people and governments in developing countries. New alliances were entered into with partners outside of Europe, and these were often partners who were seen as 'critical' or 'revolutionary' in the context of the times. During the 1980s these 'Third World twinings' were increasingly professionalised, privatised or organised into autonomous legal entities, assisted by national policies and non-government organisations (NGOs).

The third wave of twinings followed the political changes that had occurred in Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the 1980s. Dutch citizens became aware of the humanitarian and environmental problems in the former Soviet Bloc countries, and it led to partnerships motivated mostly by humanitarian concerns.

In the 1990s the focus remained on Central and Eastern Europe, but the motive was new: the prospect of European Union (EU) membership for these countries. Dutch municipalities were stimulated to strengthen their contacts with their colleagues in prospective member states and the aim was to bring local governance in those countries up to EU level.

A fifth wave took hold on the basis of the effects of globalisation and the challenges that local governments face with respect to developments outside their municipal borders. It led to twinings with municipalities of countries from which large numbers of immigrants had come to the Netherlands (such as Turkey, Morocco and Indonesia). By 2009 there were some 40 municipal twinings between Dutch municipalities and those in diaspora countries, and their number is increasing.

The most recent wave of twinning developed as a consequence of the United Nations (UN)-sponsored Millennium Campaign for Sustainable Development. This led to the involvement of Dutch municipalities and NGOs in helping others to achieve their Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>2</sup> A local government that participates in this process labels itself a 'millennium municipality'.

Sources: Hoetjes (2009); Van Ewijk and Baud (2009); Van Ewijk (2012)

<sup>2</sup> The *United Nations Millennium Declaration* (General Assembly Resolution 55/2), which was adopted by all of the then-189 member states of the United Nations (UN) on 8 September 2000, embodies a number of specific commitments aimed at improving the lot of humanity in the new century. These have been put forward as the 'Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs) (United Nations 2001).

## How have international municipal relationships been studied and evaluated?

*Taking the perspective of building both a strong local state and a strong citizenry provides an interesting methodological starting point for assessing the impact of city-to-city cooperation in urban governance.*

(Bontenbal 2009: 183)

Published research which provides empirical evidence is given particular attention in this literature review. In the search for evidence, that is, of studies which have evaluated municipal twinnings in order to review and monitor their development, effectiveness and outcomes, the following are the inclusion criteria that guided the search for literature:

**Table 1. Inclusion criteria for the evaluation studies**

Inclusion criteria
Peer-reviewed published research study focusing on an example or examples of formal municipal twinning (as described above)
Published in English or in an English Translation
Australasian literature published from 1995
International literature published between 2005 and 2014
Clear description of research methodology, limitations and findings

A total of 19 studies met the inclusion criteria.

### Approaches to understanding municipal twinning

Local government international relationships are understood from the point of view of several academic disciplines and approaches:

- The politics of locality, such as expressions of localism (Clarke 2009) and the shift to local governance and its emphasis on partnerships and networking (Cremer, de Bruin and Dupuis 2001: 378)
- The study of local governments as organisations, including the strategies that councils adopt when pursuing international alliances, and a focus on capacity building (Franco and Marmelo 2014; Van Ewijk and Baud 2009)
- Urban geography, including the contribution that studies of city twinning can make to advance urban theory (Jacobs 2012; Jayne, Hubbard and Bell 2011)
- Historical description and analysis, including making links to factors such as democratisation, decentralisation and globalisation (Clarke 2012; Saunier 2002; Hoetjes 2009) A focus on the symbolic exchanges of twinning and their associated protocols and practices (Zelinsky 1999).

Research methods used to study municipal partnerships include:

- Designing the research as a case study and using a mix of data-gathering methods in the case study sites (Franco and Marmello 2013; Tjandradewi et al. 2006; Bontenbal and van Lindert 2008)
- Document analysis, including for the purpose of reviewing the literature (Lloyd 2010; Zelinsky 1999) and historical analysis (Clarke 2010; Weyreter 2003)
- Surveys, including on-line surveys (Chung and Mascitelli 2009) and in-depth interviews (Bontenbal 2013)
- An ethnographic approach, including qualitative research to access meanings and reveal the processes of sister city relationships (Jayne et al. 2013).

The predominance of case studies in the literature suggests that this research strategy is highly suited for the study of municipal twinning. The strategy is useful when focusing on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 1981: 58) and which enables ‘detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships’ (Dooley 2002: 335). The methodological literature suggests that the case study inquiry:

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

(Yin 2003: 13-14)

## Outcomes of evaluations

*Cooperation between local authorities, similarly to other forms of inter-organizational cooperation, is governed by the idea of synergy, where the result is more than the sum of individual performances. Indeed, there is a joint effort of cooperation that allows common benefits to be reached.*

(Franco and Marmelo 2014: 86)

## Rationale for international municipal relationships

Researchers and academics identify municipal relationship-building as a complex, long-term process (Van Lindert 2009; Spence and Ninnes 2007). The movement reacts to broad social, political and economic developments and reflects milestones such as wars and economic crises (Baycan-Levent et al. 2008)

In recent years, there has been a particular focus on the contribution that twinning relationships can make to economic outcomes and to the development of new business and investment opportunities for each partner city or town (Jayne et al. 2013; Baycan-Levent et al. 2010). Sister city affiliations bring many benefits for both stakeholders and contribute to the socio-economic development of cities. Growth in tourism from sister city partners is a measurable effect (Baycan-Levent et al. 2010).

Development outcomes, especially in North-South partnerships, arise from having a consistent focus on activities that enhance general skills and specific urban planning, management and implementation capacities (Van Lindert 2009). The issue of mutuality needs to be addressed in a consistent way to avoid relationships between councils in countries with different levels of socio-economic development coming to be seen as being built on notions of paternalism (Spence and Ninnes 2007). The learning that takes place amongst local government personnel is based on similarity between the professionals involved, but also differences to learn from (Van Ewijk 2012). Mutual learning is more likely to take place if the process of knowledge exchange results in identifiable outcomes for both partners (Van Ewijk and Baud 2009). Sister city relationships may be exposed to critique at the level of cost-benefit arguments from both the public arena and ratepayer community groups (Chung and Mascitelli 2009: 234). Concern over whether the effort put into sustaining partnerships and dealing with regular visitors is leading to benefits for the locality may arise again and again for both elected and administrative leaders. Various commentators identify the need to take steps to avoid community concerns about twinning as a 'junket' (Jayne et al. 2011: 39; de Villiers 2009: 155; Chung and Mascitelli 2009: 231).

### What contributes to success?

The literature suggests that success in trans-national municipal relationships is underpinned by factors such as open communication (Bontenbal 2013), cooperating on problems or situations that are common to localities in different international jurisdictions (Joenniemi and Sergunin 2011; Debarbieux and Rudaz 2008), consistent leadership (Tjandradewi and Marcotullio 2009), credibility (Jayne et al. 2013), and cultural awareness and sensitivity (Franco and Marmello 2013; De Villiers 2009).

Key indicators for success in a partnership are a history of former relations between the localities; common interests; and the visible contribution of the relationship to economic benefits and new business and investment opportunities (Baycan-Levent, Akgun and Kundak 2010). These authors note that the existence of any former (historical) relationship with a sister city affects the relationship positively because it makes it easier to establish an economic partnership, while shortening the process and accelerating the economic partnership. As local-to-local cooperation increases, there are more opportunities to find the right 'fit' and context for local authorities to work together (Tjandradewi et al. 2006).

De Villiers (2005; 2009) draws on organisational business alliance literature to examine the potential success factors of relationships. This evidence-based research suggests the following as elements that contribute to a successful inter-municipal partnership at the international level:

- It is important that an enabling environment exists. This can include national government policy and position regarding the sub-national tier's scope for pursuing international contacts.
- Partners should be chosen carefully on the basis of providing assistance to the community in reaching its specific goals. Resources should be concentrated by limiting the number of partners.
- Broad-based community involvement is important, including sub-alliances between the institutions, groups, organisations and the business sector.

- The level of community awareness of the twinning has a significant positive correlation with success. Higher citizen participation leads to a higher degree of sustainability.
- The initiative should be underpinned with quality management, including a business plan with clear objectives, goals, projects and planned activities.
- Regular communication involving all stakeholders.

(De Villiers 2009: 150)

Prioritising needs, clearly articulating intentions and capacity (and its limits), and recognising that relationship-building is a complex long-term process are key factors to achieving durable partnerships (Spence and Ninnes 2007). The sustainability of the volunteers that people the partnership committees and groups is important, including strengthening and deepening the networks between the various groups.

In order to ensure the long-term success of partnerships, some researchers suggest that there is a requirement for political support from higher levels of government as well as consistent leadership from senior level officials and decision makers (Tjandradewi, Marcotullio and Kidokoro 2006: 372), as well as organisational support from urban organisations and local government associations (Buis 2009). Other success factors in long-term relationships include:

- cost sharing and cost effectiveness, with projects that are simple, concrete and financially feasible
- free flows of information, including continued communication after specific cooperation activities are officially completed
- raising public awareness through intensive publicity,
- a demand-driven focus on both the recipient and benefactor sides.

(Tjandradewi, Marcotullio and Kidokoro 2006)

Van Lindert (2009) conducted a study into a long-term municipal partnership between Utrecht in the Netherlands and León in Nicaragua that demonstrated that a partnership can start off with isolated 'brick and mortar' projects, but then evolve into a catalyst for development. A long-lasting twinning agreement, intensified by feelings of mutual friendship and trust, allows for long-term, process-oriented cooperation that replaces amateurish aid efforts. At the same time, it can allow for civil society initiatives to be boosted. Development outcomes arise from having a consistent focus on activities that enhance general skills and specific urban planning, management and implementation capacities. Van Ewijk and Baud (2009) find that inter-municipal exchanges can lead to the involvement of 'new' actors, such as vocational schools and health organisations.

### **Gaps in the evidence base**

Researchers point to gaps in the evidence base that include:

- a lack of research in the Australian context.
- how partnerships help to bring good governance to localities in both developed and developing countries, and which factors promote or undermine mutual and collaborative processes (Bontenbal and van Lindert 2008: 479).

- why municipal cooperation is regarded as beneficial in areas such as the environment, health and education, but not for others, such as gender empowerment (Tjandradewi and Marcotullio 2009: 165).
- lack of a comparative framework that can provide a rigorous and valid method of measuring the performance of trans-national municipal partnerships (Chung and Mascitelli 2009).
- how perceptions of local government (and government as a whole) may influence the importance attached to, and levels of community involvement in international relationships.



### 3. The policy context

Before examining the outcomes of the survey Australian local government engagement in international alliances or the case study outcomes in detail it is helpful to discuss briefly the policy context in which these alliances have been formed. A study of the relevant state and territory legislation confirmed that the various local government acts were virtually silent on the subject of sister cities and other international relationships entered into by councils. On occasion these governments may work in formal and informal partnerships with councils to support international relationships, usually as part of their economic development strategies, but these arrangements are typically confined to capital city councils.

What most of the Acts do, however, is to provide councils with the authority to undertake and participate in a wide range of activities relating to local community, cultural and economic development. For example, the *NSW Local Government Act 1993* states in Section 8(1) that a council's charter includes the need "to exercise community leadership" and "to exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and actively promotes the multicultural principles". Similarly, the *Victorian Local Government Act 1989* (Section 3D) states that the role of a council includes "acting as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making", and "fostering community cohesion and encouraging active participation in civic life". A number of councils have based their engagement in international partnerships directly or indirectly on these statements or similar ones in other jurisdictions.

At the national level the picture is more complex. Although the Australian Government has no direct control over local government it does have primary responsibility for international relations. As a result there appears to be some awareness of the engagement of councils in international relationships. For example, the responses from government agencies discussed in Section 6 stressed the importance of local government recognising the primary role of the Australian Government in this area, and the importance of broadly aligning council-to-council arrangements with government policies.

One example of this involving the Australian Government is the Pacific Good Practice Scheme (GPS) which commenced in 2000. This was an extension of the broader Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme and was intended to provide councils in Papua New Guinea (PNG) with an opportunity to participate in the GPS (Storey 2009: 74). The Commonwealth Local Government GPS was established in 1998 by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) as a basis for the exchange of good practice and skills between local government practitioners to improve local service delivery and democracy (ibid: 72).

The Pacific GPS was based on a partnership between the CLGF Pacific Project, AusAID and the Government of Papua New Guinea, and sought to promote council-to-council partnerships and to fund "practical capacity building and technical support for projects which are designed to draw on the knowledge, skills and expertise of local councils in both Australia and PNG" (ibid: 74). Two of the councils described in the case studies, Orange City Council (NSW) and Townsville City Council (Queensland) were involved in these partnerships.

Other federal policy settings relevant to local government international relationships have reflected the policy priorities and settings of the national government of the day. Two papers released during the term of the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments pointed specifically to a broader, more strategic role for local government in international diplomacy – *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* and the *Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct of Australia's Public Diplomacy*.

In October 2012 the Gillard government released its *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*. The paper identified 25 national objectives for 2025: a roadmap to navigate the Asian century. Of these, a number pointed to a role for local government. One of the pathways under the national objective to develop deeper and broader relationships stated:

Support stronger relationships between State and Territory and local governments and their counterparts in the region, including by broadening and promoting sub-national relationships as well as the value of sister-city and sister-state relationships. (Commonwealth of Australia 2012)

Such sentiments were also reflected in the earlier 2007 Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct of Australia's Public Diplomacy. Chapters 7 and 8 of the Committee's report referred (in part) to the role of local government in strengthening diplomacy. Recommendation 8 stated:

The committee recommends that the Australian Government explore opportunities for greater and more effective collaboration and coordination with Australian capital city councils in promoting public diplomacy. (Commonwealth of Australia 2007)

The Committee also recognised:

... the contribution that government departments and councils such as the City of Melbourne make to project a positive image of Australia overseas. Their activities inform overseas audiences about various aspects of Australia and establish strong links with particular organisations or groups of people overseas. The committee is of the view, however, that there is potential for these individual efforts to connect better with one another and to make an even greater contribution to Australia's public diplomacy. (Commonwealth of Australia 2007)

The election of the Abbott Coalition government in September 2013 led to a major change of priorities. In October 2013 the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* was 'archived' (Nicholson 2013). Although the new government has pursued engagement with Asia it appears to have largely abandoned the framework set by the White Paper and therefore has not sought formally to support stronger partnerships with local government or to actively promote sister-city relationships.

In summary, government policies at both national and state/territory levels have been, for the most part, indifferent to local government engagement in establishing international relationships, stipulating only that they remain broadly consistent with the priorities of these governments and, in particular, the Australian Government. One exception has been the more proactive approach that was taken by the national government in relation to the Pacific Good Practice Scheme involving Papua New Guinea councils.

## 4. International relations statistical snapshot

### Introduction

As noted in the introduction, one of the research objectives of this report is to establish the key characteristics of current Australian local government international relationships. The need to do this reflects the lack of current data regarding these relationships. While there have been previous surveys of these relationships (for example, O’Toole 1999,; Chung and Mascitelli 2009), they are few in number and relatively limited in scale, partly because of the difficulties involved in conducting a detailed survey across hundreds of councils in seven jurisdictions. Consequently, there is a lack of basic information even about which councils actually have relationships and who their overseas partners are. Organisations such as Sister Cities Australia, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), and the Australia Timor-Leste Friendship Network have some information such as membership listings, but there is no single, comprehensive indexation of international relationships.

In surveying such relationships, local government websites provide a potential source of ‘passive’ information that can be accessed relatively easily and quickly. It was therefore decided to use web-based search techniques to survey council and third party websites in building a comprehensive indexation of international relationships. This approach was based on three assumptions:

- That virtually all the 556 councils across Australia now have a website of some sort
- That most councils with international relationships would make at least some mention of them on these sites
- In the event that a council did not have a website or if it had a site which did not mention a current relationship, there was likely to be a reference to the existence of this relationship on a third party website (for example, a media website).

Using the most current listings of councils available for each jurisdiction, a set of internet search inquiries was developed to ascertain the number, type and status of the international relationships of the 556 councils across Australia. The batch searches were created using combinations of council names and terms such as ‘sister city’. While council websites were the main sources, third-party sites were also examined, particularly when they referenced relationships that were not discovered in the initial scan of council sites. The results were also cross-checked against other sources including the listings provided by various Australian international relationship peak bodies.

The searches were conducted in November and December 2013. The process identified 161 councils for which there was online evidence of engagement in some form of international relationship. A basic analysis of this material was then conducted. As well as being a useful source of information in its own right, this also helped to identify a number of potential parameters which were used in selecting councils for the detailed case studies described in Section 5.

What has emerged from this process was a better picture of the nature and range of international relationships engaged by Australian councils. In interpreting the data, however, the practical limitations of this approach must be acknowledged:

- There was considerable variation in the level of detail provided on council websites regarding their international relationships. While the most common arrangement was for there to be a page devoted to international relationships, some provided more detail and even a page for each separate relationship if there was more than one. On the other hand some sites provided only basic information.
- A related issue was the level of difficulty involved in accessing this information on council websites. While many sites provided a direct link from the council's home page to the page or section on international relationships, others did not. Sometimes the easiest way to find this material was by using the site's internal search engine. This applied in particular when references to international partnership were found only in council reports published on the website.
- The lack of accessibility may have reflected the reluctance of some councils to draw attention to their international relationships in light of the adverse media and community reaction these partnerships can attract. In several instances, councils with relationships did not publicise them at all on their websites. Sometimes references to their existence could be found only on third-party sites, for example in articles published by local media, but there may be others in this category which this survey failed to discover.
- In a small number of cases, council websites referred to the existence of relationships but the information clearly had not been updated for several years. This may have been because of policies to update only key sections of their websites on a regular basis – and not others which may have been seen as having a lower priority.
- The lack of current information may also have been a result of the episodic nature of some active relationships, especially those in which exchanges take place only every few years. However a lack of updated material can also be a symptom of a decline in the level of activity, with some older relationships now existing in name only.

These limitations mean that the data obtained are incomplete and therefore has to be treated with considerable caution. As a result this analysis has concentrated on a limited range of parameters, as follows:

- The number and types of relationship, for example, sister city, friendship city or cooperative agreement. It has to be noted however that there are some inconsistencies in the use of these terms
- The dates of commencement of the relationships
- The partnership councils and countries
- The range of key activities undertaken related to these relationships.

The survey of council websites has assisted in improving the picture of the international relationships of Australian councils both at the national level and, to some extent, within each jurisdiction<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The data were current at the time of collection (2013/14).

## Key characteristics of current alliances

How many councils are engaged in international relationships?

Table 2 provides an overview of council involvement in international relationships across jurisdictions:

**Table 2. Australian councils - International relationships summary**

Jurisdiction	No. of councils involved	Total no. of councils	% of councils	% councils involved nationally	No. of relationships	% of national total
NSW	62	152	40.8%	38.5%	162	41.3%
Victoria	42	79	53.2%	26.1%	83	21.2%
Queensland	21	73	28.8%	13.0%	68	17.3%
Western Australia	17	139	12.2%	10.6%	43	11.0%
South Australia	11	68	16.2%	6.8%	20	5.1%
Tasmania	6	29	20.7%	3.7%	9	2.3%
Northern Territory	2	16	12.5%	1.2%	7	1.8%
<b>NATIONAL TOTAL:</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>29.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Of Australia’s 556 councils, the online sources available indicate that 161 councils participate in 392 international relationships with councils or local administrative regions or sub-regions overseas.

As mentioned previously, NSW has both the highest number of councils participating in these arrangements and the highest number of relationships, but only in Victoria is over half the total number of councils involved in a relationship. Numerically and proportionately, international relationships are less common in Queensland, and even less so in all the other jurisdictions, where the percentages of councils involved in international relationships range from 12% to 21%.

### Which countries have the highest number of relationships with Australian councils?

Table 3 summarises the most common countries with which Australian councils have established international relationships.

While Australian councils have relationships with councils in 47 countries, only five of these (in order, Japan, China, USA, Italy and Timor-Leste) account for nearly 70% of the total number of current relationships. Japan and China alone constitute over 46% of relationships nationally, and this pattern is broadly reflected across almost all jurisdictions. This likely reflects the role of these two countries as key trading partners and the proactive role of organisations and individual local governments in both nations in seeking relationships with Australian councils, as well as an increasing desire by Australian councils to establish economic ties.

Although a number of individual relationships between Australian and overseas councils appear to reflect links between local immigrant communities and localities in their countries of origin, there is surprisingly little impact on the numbers at the national level. Apart from China (which as noted

earlier also has other drivers supporting international engagement), countries which have strong community ties such as Italy, the UK, Greece and New Zealand are relatively modestly represented. Other countries which have become major sources of migration in recent years such as India (the origin of the second highest number of migrants to Australia between 2006 and 2011) are barely represented at all.

**Table 3. International relationships: most common countries by jurisdiction\***

Jurisdiction	Country	Number of Relationships	% within jurisdiction
NSW	Japan	37	23.0%
	China	31	19.3%
	USA	14	8.7%
	Italy	13	8.1%
Victoria	China	19	23.5%
	Japan	18	22.2%
	Timor-Leste	17	21.0%
Queensland	Japan	22	33.8%
	China	15	23.1%
Western Australia	Japan	10	23.8%
South Australia	Japan	11	25.6%
	China	8	18.6%
Tasmania	Japan	4	44.4%
Northern Territory	USA	2	25.0%
<b>National</b>			<b>% nationally</b>
	Japan	101	26.1%
	China	79	20.4%
	USA	35	9.0%
	Italy	27	7.0%
	Timor-Leste	25	6.5%
	<i>'Top five' (nationally) sub-total:</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>69.0%</i>
	UK	15	3.9%
	South Korea	11	2.8%
	New Zealand	10	2.6%
<b>Most common countries (nationally) total:</b>		<b>303</b>	<b>78.3%</b>

\* Based on countries with which there are 10 or more relationships and/or which have a 20% or greater share of the total within each jurisdiction (nationally for Australian figures)

Apart from Timor-Leste there are relatively few relationships involving developing countries within Asia and Oceania, let alone further afield. This is also reflected in the relative lack of engagement generally with councils outside of east Asia and Europe, in particular in Africa and South America, with only two relationships in each continent (see Table 4). There are a range of potential reasons

for this, including local administrative arrangements; a limited history of contact with these countries, particularly at the local level; and the lack of appropriate frameworks to support engagement.

**Table 4. International relationships – distribution across continents/regions**

Continent/Region	Number of countries	Number of relationships	% of Relationships
Asia	16	240	62.0%
Europe	20	86	22.2%
North America	2	36	9.3%
Oceania	5	21	5.4%
South America	2	2	0.5%
Africa	2	2	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

#### How are relationships distributed across councils?

While most councils have three or fewer relationships, there are 30 councils with four or more. These between them have 194 relationships, or almost half the national total. Some of these are capital city councils. Others, particularly in Queensland and Victoria, are the result of amalgamated councils ‘inheriting’ the international relationships of the previous councils.

In other cases councils have formed relationships with regions and then multiple relationships with councils within that region. A few have formed multiple relationships based on the ‘theme’ of the main industry of the local area, for example, mining. A small number have adopted a more strategic approach, seeking a number of relationships as part of a broader international engagement strategy.

#### What are the different types of relationship?

Table 5 outlines the different types of relationship by jurisdiction. Not surprisingly the most commonly used term is ‘Sister City’, though that covers a wide range of activities and levels of engagement.

The term ‘Friendship City’ is used to describe 15.6% of relationships. In most cases this seems to mean a less formal and/or a time-limited arrangement. Some of these relationships may be around a specific activity area, but many of them are centred on providing information, expertise or resources for local areas in developing countries (this will be discussed further in the next section). Often the council’s role in these relationships may be at arms-length, providing support to a local community group that undertakes capacity building and community development work with the partner community.

In addition there are a small number of cooperative arrangements which appear to be relatively informal and ad hoc, as well as a handful of informal arrangements. By its nature this latter group is likely to be underreported.

**Table 5. Type of international relationship by jurisdiction**

Type	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	NT	Total	%
Sister City	127	54	64	34	16	9	6	310	79.1%
Friendship City	27	21	3	6	3		1	61	15.6%
Cooperative Agreement	1	5						6	1.5%
Informal relationship		2		1				3	0.8%
Unknown	7	1	1	2	1			12	3.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### What is the range of activities undertaken?

Table 6 summarises the most common activity areas – beyond largely ceremonial ones such as mayoral visits – in currently active relationships.

This material needs to be treated with even more caution than some of the other data gathered in this survey for two key reasons. Firstly, a relatively arbitrary decision had to be made regarding what an ‘active’ relationship constituted. For the purposes of this study a partnership was defined as active if there was some online evidence of activity within the previous five years. Secondly, the range of activities identified is based on descriptions provided on the websites that were visited; in some cases these reflect the aims and objectives of the original agreement rather than the activities currently taking place. Even when they are up to date these descriptions may provide little information regarding the intensity or frequency of each activity; for example, the term ‘student exchange’ may mean an exchange visit every two or three years by one or two students, or it may refer to an active program of annual visits covering a number of students and schools.

Bearing these limitations in mind, the most common activities which occur in over 60% of relationships are educational and student exchanges. This is followed by cultural and art exchanges, in which nearly half the relationships are engaged. Surprisingly, trade and business development only feature in just over a quarter of relationships. Community development, which covers a wide range of capacity building activities, forms the core of all the friendship arrangements with Timor-Leste sub-regions (less than half of the Timor relationships are included as ‘active’ because there was no information available for the rest on current activities).

**Table 6. International relationships, selected current activity areas**

Area	Number*	% of active relationships*
Education, student exchange	108	61.7%
Cultural, art exchange	87	49.7%
Trade, business development	47	26.9%
Sporting	23	13.1%
Community development	11	6.3%

\* Not mutually exclusive



## The evolution of alliances

Has the rate of formation of new relationships changed?

Table 7 shows the rate at which *current* relationships were formed across half-decade increments (for those arrangements where this information is available).

**Table 7. Commencement year of international relationships by five-year period, 1939-2013\***

Period	Number started
1935–39	1
1960–64	3
1965–69	6
1970–74	3
1975–79	4
1980–84	35
1985–89	35
1990–94	36
1995–99	53
2000–04	57
2005–09	34
2010–13*	37
Unknown	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>

\* To date (November 2013)

As noted in the literature review, the oldest current relationship was established by Parkes Shire Council in NSW with Coventry in the UK in 1939. No other current relationships appear to have been formed between the outbreak of the Second World War and the 1960s.

From 1960 to 1980 only 16 current relationships appear to have commenced, though all the figures particularly those from this earlier period have to be treated with some caution. This is because of the high number of relationships for which the starting date is not known, some of which may be older arrangements from this period.

Between 1980 and 1995 there was a consistent pattern of in which approximately 35 relationships were formed every five years. In the ten years between 1995 and 2004, however, this jumped to between 50 and 60 relationships every five years. Post 2004 the rate of relationship formation dropped to that seen in the 1980s and early 90s.

### What have been the changes in partnership countries?

The growth of relationships with Chinese cities is demonstrated in Table 8, which shows the ‘top two’ countries in terms of new partnerships in each five-year period since 1980. Between 1980 and 1994 Japan dominated the formation of new relationships. In the 1995-1999 period China started to take over as the country with the most new relationships, with the exception of the 2005-2009 period in which Timor-Leste briefly took the lead.

As noted earlier, some of these changes appear to be the result of concerted policies in some partnership countries that encourage councils to actively seek international relationships.

**Table 8. International relationship formations – highest two partner formation countries by half-decade period, 1980-2013\***

Period/Country	Number Started
<b>1980-1984</b>	
Japan	13
USA	5
<b>1985-1989</b>	
Japan	10
USA	9
<b>1990-1994</b>	
Japan	26
China	4
<b>1995-1999</b>	
China	16
Japan	15
<b>2000-2004</b>	
China	16
Timor-Leste	10
<b>2005-2009</b>	
Timor-Leste	9
China	6
<b>2010-2013*</b>	
China	16
USA	3

\* To date (November 2013)

## Conclusion

These results suggest that while less than a third of councils engage in international relationships, new relationships continue to be formed with a stronger focus on economic outcomes. As such, these relationships form an interesting part of the move to establish international business and trade relationships on a region-to-region and city-to-city basis.

The survey results also suggest that while economic outcomes are becoming more important, this development has not necessarily been at the expense of the more traditional partnership activities such as education and student exchanges or, to a slightly lesser extent, art and cultural exchanges.

## 5. Case studies

### Case study selection

As part of the research a number of case studies were undertaken to examine councils with international relationships in more detail in the context of the research questions, and in particular the questions relating to the value of these alliances and their future prospects. Twelve councils were chosen initially to reflect the diversity of the relationships in which Australian councils are engaged and that of the councils themselves, based on the statistical analysis described earlier. Drawing on the outcomes of the statistical analysis described in Section 4, the following parameters were considered in selecting the councils for case studies:

- The distribution of councils engaged in international relationships across state and territory jurisdictions, with the proviso that at least one council was selected in each jurisdiction
- The type of the councils engaged in these relationships, for example, whether they are a capital city, urban, regional or rural council
- The range in the number of international partners each council has
- The types of relationships, for example sister cities, friendship cities, etc.
- The range and level of activities undertaken
- The dates when the relationships were established
- The characteristics of the partnership councils, in particular the countries in which they are located.

On this basis an initial selection was made of three councils each in NSW and Victoria, two in Queensland, and one each in the other jurisdictions. The majority of councils approached agreed to participate and the small number that declined were replaced by councils with similar characteristics, though in the case of one Queensland council that was unable to participate it was not possible to arrange a substitution within the timeframe of the study. It should be noted that these councils were selected to provide a broad representation of the full range of council and relationship types and are not intended to function as a statistical sample, especially at the jurisdictional level. In addition this research was prepared in late 2013 and early 2014. As a result there are likely to have been some changes in the intervening period in the international relationships described in the case studies.

The following table summarises the eleven participating councils and some of their key characteristics.

**Table 9. Sister city case studies**

State/Council	Council type (ACLG)*	Type/No. relationships†	Partnership countries	Selected activities (across all relationships)
<i>NSW</i>				
Albury	Urban regional – medium	SC 1	China	Business, school, education, health
Orange	Urban regional – medium	SC 4	Japan, New Zealand, PNG, USA	Cultural and student exchanges, community development, capacity building, economic development
Penrith	Urban fringe – very large	SC 3	Japan, China, UK	Student, cultural, business exchanges, economic cooperation, university and health links
		FC 2	Japan, China	
		Other 1	South Korea	
<i>Victoria</i>				
Ballarat	Urban regional – large	SC 1	Japan	Civic, school, staff and cultural exchanges, community development, economic exchanges
		FC 2	China, Timor-Leste	
		Other 1	China	
Melbourne	Urban capital city	SC 6	Japan, China, Italy, Greece, Russia, USA	Economic development, business representation, education, design, cultural exchange
		Other 4	India, China	
Mount Alexander	Regional agricultural – very large	FC 1	Timor-Leste	Community development, education projects
<i>Queensland</i>				
Townsville	Urban regional – very large	SC 6	China, Japan, South Korea, PNG	Community development, economic development, business representation, education and cultural exchange
<i>South Australia</i>				
Marion	Urban developed - large	SC 1	Japan	Cultural, school, higher education exchanges
<i>Western Australia</i>				
Greater Geraldton	Urban regional - medium	SC 2	China, Japan	Cultural, education, research and sporting exchanges
		Other 1	China	
<i>Tasmania</i>				
Clarence	Urban fringe – medium	SC 1	Japan	Cultural and schools exchanges
<i>Northern Territory</i>				
Darwin	Urban capital city	SC 5	China, Greece, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, USA	Cultural, youth and school exchanges, sporting events, community development
		FC 2	Ecuador, USA	

\* ACLG: Australian Classification of Local Government.

† SC = Sister City; FC = Friendship City.

Each case study involved a structured discussion with a person nominated by the case study council. This was a council officer directly involved in managing the council's international relationships, an officer with responsibility for the relevant council section or department or, in one case, a mayor who has had an instrumental role in developing and managing the council's international partnership. In a small number of cases two council officers participated in the interviews and in one example separate interviews were conducted with two officers who each managed distinct programs within the one council.

The outcomes of this process were combined with an analysis of council policy documents, reports, and other published and online material relating to the council's international relationships. The discussion with the council representatives and the analysis of published material covered the following themes:

- how each council's international relationship program was developed and the range of activities undertaken
- the program's management and governance structure
- the value of the program to the council and its partners, and any plans for its development
- key factors affecting the success of the international relationship program.

As part of each case study a number of key points were identified and for selected case studies a summary was prepared. The complete case studies can be found at Appendix A.

## Key case study outcomes

### How representative are the case studies?

The case study outcomes highlight a number of the trends indicated in the online survey. However, it is important to note that, partly as a result of the intention expressed earlier to explore the range of council and relationship types through the case studies rather than create a statistically consistent sample, there are some differences in the data. For example, the case study councils have a higher average number of relationships, with four partnerships per council compared to the 2.4 average of councils in the survey. Compared to the top five countries in the online survey, China is more highly represented and Japan under-represented in the case studies. The proportion of councils with partners in the USA is similar to the survey results, while councils with relationships with Italian councils are underrepresented.

Similarly, the distribution of councils with international relationships between jurisdictions was affected by the comparatively small number of case studies undertaken, combined with the commitment to ensure that all jurisdictions were represented. As a result (and also because one selected council withdrew when it was too late to be replaced), NSW councils with international partnerships were underrepresented, as also were Queensland councils to a lesser extent, while councils with partnerships in Tasmania and the Northern Territory were over-represented. Despite these differences the case studies help to flesh out the statistical analysis and provide context for the online survey findings.

## The evolution of international alliances

The case studies highlighted some of the significant differences in the rationales for establishing international relationships. These reflected to some degree the partnership country and the period in which the relationship was established, as well as the specific motivations of the councils involved.

Up until the 1980s relationships were largely established on the basis of historical links between councils. Examples included the presence of a large immigrant community with ties to a specific country or region (for example Melbourne City Council's relationship with Thessaloniki in Greece), specific events which directly or indirectly linked the partner cities (for example Clarence City Council's relationship with Akkeshi in Japan based on a shared history of whaling), or even simply a common name (for example Penrith City Council's largely ceremonial relationship with its UK namesake).

Increasingly however, councils, Japanese ones in particular, came to Australia in the 1980s and early 90s to seek partnerships based on more practical reasons such as the degree of similarity between the communities involved (for example, the City of Marion's relationship with Kokubunji). These relationships still, however, focused strongly on the traditional sister city values of advancing mutual understanding and friendship noted earlier. Many of the partnerships established in this era (such as those involving Clarence and Marion) still retain this focus, concentrating on activities such as civic, cultural and schools exchanges.

The growth in relationships from the mid-1990s with cities in South Korea, Taiwan and, above all, China coincided with changes in the objectives of international relationships sought by many councils in Australia, in particular a greater emphasis on economic outcomes such as trade and business development. Economic outcomes were also being sought by councils such as the City of Greater Geraldton as opportunities opened up for trade on a region-to-region and company-to-company basis, though these arrangements often retained a strong civic and cultural dimension as well.

The case studies indicate that a number of councils with Japanese partners have also started to question the relevance of relationships built predominantly around cultural and school exchanges. Some have attempted to refocus their relationships towards economic outcomes or, more modestly, to introduce trade or business components into their existing partnerships. In the main these attempts have not been very successful as the Japanese local governments concerned appear not to regard economic development as a priority, at least not in the context of international relationships.

The maintenance of a focus by Japanese councils on civic, cultural and school exchanges, combined with the desire of Chinese councils to incorporate such activities into other modes of international relationships, mean that civic and cultural exchanges are still the dominant activities in international relationships among the case study councils. Trade, business development and other related economic activities have become increasingly important but still feature in only a minority of relationships, and are usually coupled with cultural exchanges. Both of these trends reflect the findings of the online survey.

In the early 2000s a third type of relationship grew in significance: the establishment of partnerships between Australian councils and councils or administrative districts and regions in developing countries, in particular Timor-Leste. Several case study councils have such relationships: Darwin City Council and the City of Ballarat in conjunction with other partnerships, and the rural Shire of Mount Alexander as its sole international relationship. Pioneered by the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), the Timor relationships are primarily focussed on capacity building, community development, education and local infrastructure provision, as well as fund-raising activities to support such initiatives. Many of these relationships have now been in place for well over a decade.

A small number of similar partnerships have been initiated by councils involving local governments in other developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as the relationships established by Orange and Townsville City Councils with councils in Papua New Guinea. The latter council's relationship with Port Moresby, which was established in 1983, is one of the oldest international relationships in Australia with a focus on development, predating the emergence of the Timor-Leste arrangements by 20 years. Both these councils have also received Australian government funding through AusAID with the support of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).

Some of these developmental relationships have moved beyond the traditional aid-based community development model. They have become more equal partnerships between councils in neighbouring countries facing similar challenges, with an operational focus on networking, inter-organisational engagement and knowledge exchange. As a result the Australian councils engaged in these relationships have also benefited. Perhaps the most practical example is the range of professional development opportunities that participating council staff members from both partnership councils receive through exchanges and involvement in projects in working environments which are very different to those they experience at home.

These benefits are not confined to those councils involved in development-related relationships. In fact there has been an increasing interest in exchanges involving professional training, higher education and research in areas such as environmental management and health across all types of international relationship. While some examples such as Melbourne City Council's Government Leaders Training Program for officers of its partner city in China are closely related to local government, others such as Penrith City Council's university and health links with Kunshan in China have used the established relationship between the two cities as a basis to broaden networking between other institutions located in each city. In turn, these education and training programs also underpin the other economic objectives of international relationships. Whilst cross-council training and professional development is often integral to the relationships built around community development and capacity building with Timor-Leste sub-regions and with councils in Papua New Guinea, the programs in Melbourne, Penrith and several of the other case study councils have also been established with longer-term objectives to foster stronger economic ties.

As well as encompassing a wide range of activity types, international relationships also vary greatly in the level and intensity of engagement. Where the activities are confined largely to occasional civic or cultural exchanges or, in the case of councils like the Shire of Mount Alexander, where the single relationship is managed largely by a community organisation, the level of council engagement can be

very limited. At the other end of the scale are councils like Melbourne, which is closely and actively involved in multiple relationships. This variation is due to a range of factors such as each council's size and resource base, the basis on which the relationship was established, as well as its current relevance to the participating councils and the degree of support it enjoys in both communities.

There is also variation in the consistency of engagement across international relationships. While some councils such as Darwin City Council have adopted a broadly similar approach to all their relationships, others such as the City of Ballarat manage several relationships with a range of diverse objectives and activity levels. Sometimes this variation is associated with different relationship types, for example in councils such as Penrith there are differences between the range and intensity of activities associated with council's Japanese relationships and those undertaken with Chinese or South Korean cities. Councils involved with partnerships in developing countries may also have a different level of engagement for these relationships compared to their other alliances. Levels of engagement are also closely related to management and governance arrangements, which are discussed in the next section.

### **The management and governance of international relationship programs**

The case studies go beyond the online survey in revealing the diversity in the policy and governance approaches councils have taken in the establishment, development and management of these relationships.

For example, while some councils have detailed plans or policies governing their international partnership programs, most do not – though most at least reference these partnerships directly or indirectly in their overall council plans and strategies. The latter group includes councils like the City of Ballarat, which emphasises the importance of “sustaining the intercultural city” as a key priority and promoting exchanges with Ballarat's international partners as an explicit action.

Among the councils that do have specific policies relating to their international relationships, some like Melbourne City Council and the City of Greater Geraldton set specific goals and objectives for these relationships. In the case of Geraldton these goals also inform a set of principles and selection criteria for the establishment of new partnerships. Other cities such as Townsville and Orange, which have alliances with a development focus and which have received federal government funding and support, may also have to address government guidelines and requirements associated with these programs.

The international relationship governance frameworks adopted by councils are quite diverse and, in some councils with multiple partnerships different processes, have evolved for each relationship. While there are many variations specific to individual councils, the following are some of the more common approaches to the governance international relationships:

1. *Management largely or entirely in-house with limited community involvement, usually through a specific council department.* This approach is more commonly used in relationships which have a strong business and trade focus. Some councils involved in development-based relationships, for example Townsville, may also adopt this approach internally while reporting on the project to the relevant federal agencies.



2. *Participation of one or more council committees with community representation in the management of the relationship.* As might be expected this approach is more usual with partnerships built around community, civic and cultural exchanges, though some councils such as Greater Geraldton have established such committees to advise council on partnerships with an economic focus. Some councils have established a single committee that covers all or most of their relationships, while others such as Darwin City Council have created separate committees for each individual partnership.
3. *Delegating the management of the relationship to a community-based organisation, with the councils acting as an auspice and providing support.* This approach is often used by councils with partnerships focussing on capacity building and community development, for example the Shire of Mount Alexander's partnership with a sub-region in Timor-Leste.
4. *Sharing responsibilities for managing activities relating to these relationships with other organisations.* These include with local business associations (in the case of business and trade activities) or local institutions such as schools, universities and hospitals (in the case of education and health-related activities). Councils that have followed this approach for some or all of their relationships include Penrith, Melbourne and Greater Geraldton.

Councils also vary widely in the staff structures and internal processes put in place to manage these relationships, though as one would expect there is some correlation between the level of activity and the allocation of staff and other resources. For example, councils with partnerships involving a limited and intermittent level of activity, or in which the relationship is managed by a community organisation often adopt an ad hoc approach, allocating staff resources on the limited occasions when it is required.

In the case of relationships with more consistent and higher levels of activity, one or more council staff members may be delegated responsibilities relating to international relationships as part of their wider statement of duties, though even in these cases the episodic nature of partnership activities still mean that other members of staff are often involved in specific events such as receiving visiting delegations.

Councils with a large number of relationships and relatively high levels of activity such as Melbourne go to the extent of establishing specific branches, sections or departments specifically devoted to these partnerships. Melbourne has a Business and International Branch in which approximately half the staff resources are devoted to international activities, including international relationships.

#### **The value of international relationship programs and plans for their development**

Few of the case study councils have conducted comprehensive reviews of their international relationships. One exception is Melbourne, for which the UTS Centre for Local Government conducted a detailed review in 2009. However a number of other councils have undertaken internal reviews, while others such as Clarence City Council have examined options to expand their programs.

Most programs are also monitored to varying degrees through regular feedback mechanisms such as committee or departmental reports to council meetings, as well as through the reporting of the outcomes of specific visits and partnership-related activities. Where councils have adopted strategic

plans or policies which reference international relationship activities, these are also subject to regular review. Those councils which have received Australian Government funding or support through the CLGF program also have to prepare regular reports for the relevant agencies. As a result of these processes, the case study councils have formed a range of views regarding the question of whether councils and their communities are getting sufficient value for their engagement in international relationships.

While in most cases these views are positive, there are some qualifications. These qualifications reflect in part the shift in practice from initiating relationships with a focus on building international friendships and increasing the understanding of other societies through civic and cultural exchanges towards partnerships built around economic development and trade. Some councils still see considerable value in the civic and cultural exchange model. Darwin City Council, for example, considers its partnerships to be valuable not only in terms of their direct outcomes but also for the role they play in community development within the Darwin community, and in particular as a mechanism for engaging young people.

However other councils have questioned the relevance and value of the cultural exchange approach and have sought either to change (with limited success) their current partnerships to have a more business-related focus or, in the case of some councils including Greater Geraldton, Melbourne and Penrith, have adopted criteria which prioritise economic outcomes for the establishment of new relationships. One factor stressed by councils such as Melbourne and Penrith in developing international relationships centred on economic exchange and development is that the development of these partnerships is a long-term process which requires certainty and continuity of commitment, while the resulting benefits can be dispersed and take a long time to achieve.

Outcomes related to economic development, as well as in areas such as higher education and health, can also involve the establishment of partnerships between other institutions and business organisations in the local government area. In most cases councils can only encourage and facilitate, rather than direct these processes. This raises issues as they negotiate with partner cities whose governance arrangements often include direct or indirect responsibility for the corresponding institutions in their jurisdictions. This also raises the question of the level of resources that each council is prepared to commit to these processes, and the length of time it wishes to maintain that commitment, especially when they have limited direct control over the outcomes. Some councils such as Greater Geraldton, Melbourne and Penrith are prepared to maintain an extended period of support because of the anticipated future benefits. Meanwhile others such as Albury City Council have decided to take a less active role, communicating to its international partner and to the relevant organisations in Albury that they need to develop their own sustainable relationships independent of council.

The question of value in relation to partnerships based on capacity building and community development is somewhat different. All the case study councils involved in this type of relationship considered that they were effective in assisting the development of the partnership community, but what might be more surprising is the view that these relationships have benefited the Australian councils and communities as well. For example, Ballarat and Darwin councils saw their Timor-Leste

relationships as supporting their commitment to cultural diversity. The Shire of Mount Alexander also saw its Timor partnership as supporting the local community's high level of community engagement, while Orange City Council's relationship with Mount Hagen and Townsville's with Port Moresby are seen as providing practical benefits to these councils (for example through contributing to the professional development of council staff) and the community, as well as to their partners in Papua New Guinea.

It is difficult to discuss the question of value without considering the attitudes of the wider community. These were only indirectly ascertained through the responses of the case study councils, however the case studies do suggest a wide range of views. The Mount Alexander example suggests a high level of support from the community, but in other areas such as Albury and Ballarat community perceptions appear to have been influenced by strongly negative media treatments. Even alliances which share a similar focus on community development can be treated differently by the media, for example Townsville appears to have received more favourable coverage for its New Guinea relationship than did Orange council.

Due in part to these negative media portrayals, but mainly for unrelated practical reasons most of the case study councils are not seeking actively to expand their programs. An exception is Greater Geraldton, which already has three partners. Not only does the council have a detailed process and criteria to select new partners, it has currently two potential relationships under consideration. Even in this case, however, the relevant council policy allows for the addition of only one new relationship a year, to a maximum of six.

At the other end of the spectrum are councils like Clarence, which, as indicated earlier, compiled a report on options to develop additional relationships but eventually decided against doing so, and Albury, whose decision to take more of a backseat role with its sole current relationship was also noted earlier. In the main, the case study councils appear to be maintaining their current level of partnership engagements and commitments, though some are exploring options to increase the level and range of activities within these relationships.

### **Key factors in the success of international relationship programs**

Through the research process and, in particular, the discussions with council representatives a number of factors were identified as being important to the success – or otherwise – of international relationship programs. While some of these relate to the specific circumstances of individual council partnerships, most are relevant to international relationships more generally.

Some of the success factors identified included:

#### *Developing a strategic plan or policy*

While some effective international relationships had evolved organically, most of the successful partnerships appear to have been based on the adoption of a strategic plan or policy document which is linked to the council's forward plans and strategies, and which seeks clear but realistic outcomes. This applies in particular to relationships based on economic development objectives.

#### *Seeking a good match*

The adoption of a strategic approach also allows councils to establish criteria for selecting a partner which match their priorities in seeking an international relationship. The criteria could be used as a basis for councils to search for potential partners that share similar characteristics or which had common areas of interest. Alternatively, they could also provide a basis to search for councils and communities whose interests and needs complemented, rather than matched those of the Australian council.

#### *Matching expectations*

Linked to the 'matching' process is the need to make sure that the two councils involved in the relationship have similar expectations and objectives. As noted earlier, this is particularly important where the relationship is being established with councils in countries where local governments have direct control over a much wider range of institutions and a greater degree of autonomy and authority than most Australian councils, combined with a much larger workforce.

#### *Providing certainty and continuity*

Developing an international relationship is a long-term commitment, requiring continuity in council political support. Some councils noted that their international partners found it hard to understand how changes in leadership resulting from Australian council elections could affect a long-standing partnership. Equally important is adequate staffing and, in particular, continuity in terms of the personnel charged with managing the relationship. This is particularly the case with relationships in countries where a good understanding of the complexities of local customs and protocols needs to be developed and maintained.

#### *Recognising the importance of the role of the mayor*

Part of the differences in expectations around protocols relate to the position of the mayor. In some countries the role and powers of the mayor are much more substantial than in most Australian jurisdictions, with incumbents enjoying much greater community recognition. This means that in many partnerships there is an expectation that the mayors of both councils will be closely involved in leading regular exchange visits and other activities.

#### *Building a multi-faceted relationship*

While an increasing number of councils are seeking business and trade oriented outcomes, they have found that developing and maintaining civic, cultural, school and other non-economic exchanges are regarded by their international partners as being an integral and equally important part of these relationships. Other areas of common interest include council staff training, higher education and health exchanges, and joint research projects. This approach also requires councils to consider working with other institutions and organisations in their communities to facilitate the establishment of direct bilateral relationships with equivalent bodies in the partner council area.

#### *Recognising that community development relationships can benefit both partners*

As noted earlier, relationships with councils and sub-regions in countries like Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste which commence with a focus on the capacity building and community development of the overseas partner can also benefit the Australian council and community in different ways, for example through contributing to the professional development of council staff and by providing a

focus and framework for local community engagement around development issues. Some of these relationships are also evolving to become more equal partnerships between the councils involved.

#### *Engaging with the media and the community*

Negative media campaigns and community responses to international relationships have made some councils very cautious about expanding or continuing their international engagements. Other councils have taken more proactive approaches, for example through seeking resident participation in community committees, publicising successful projects and programs, as well as briefing journalists and inviting them to participate in delegations and exchanges.

## Observations

The case studies have provided an insight into the complexity and diversity of council-to-council international relationships and, in particular, the wide range of governance models, management processes and development strategies that councils have adopted. They have also suggested some of the factors that have contributed to achieving success in partnerships.

The research has also identified some of the issues that have had a more negative impact on these relationships. These have included an increasing mismatch in expectations and objectives in some older partnerships as Australian councils have questioned their original rationales of civic and cultural exchanges, instead wishing to move toward business and trade-oriented activities. Perhaps the most significant factor has been the strongly negative approach adopted by sections of the media which has had an impact on public sentiment.

In this context it is understandable, but perhaps unfortunate that relatively few councils have sought to establish comprehensive external reviews of their partnerships. It could be argued that councils should adopt greater transparency for their international relationships combined with greater engagement with the media to increase community understanding.

Another factor that needs to be considered is the selection of trade and business priorities as councils increasingly adopt an economic development focus. While these priorities need to be determined in partnership with the private sector, councils could do more to leverage their own assets, for example in the development of cultural infrastructure. It is also important to recognise that establishing and maintain international alliances with a focus on community development can have practical, as well as altruistic benefits for both the councils and communities involved.

## 6. Stakeholder discussions

### Introduction

As noted in the introduction, guided discussions were conducted with key personnel from a number of local government associations and organisations involved in international relationships to gain an appreciation of their views about local government's role in these relationships. Organisations involved included:

- Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)
- Council of Local Authorities for International Relations – Japan Local Government Centre (CLAIR)
- Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA)
- Sister Cities Australia (SSA)
- Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Sydney
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Department did not participate in a discussion but instead written responses to the interview questions were provided by DFAT state offices in NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

It should be noted that the individual views expressed in the stakeholder discussions and responses were not necessarily those of the stakeholder organisations, therefore respondents are not identified in the following discussion. For the same reason the comments made have not been attributed to specific organisations except in a few instances where these comments and/or their subject matter implicitly involved specific bodies.

### Key points raised by the stakeholders

#### Key characteristics of successful international relationships

A number of the stakeholders suggested that those involved in international relationships need to have an underlying belief that they can learn from others. There also needs to be a spirit of reciprocity; although Australian councils are more advanced in many respects than their counterparts in developing nations, they can still learn from the experiences of others. For example, many other countries recognise local government in their constitutions, an approach which Australia is yet to adopt. This places local government in these countries in a stronger position. Australia could also learn a lot from the broader service delivery functions exercised by councils in many countries.

The importance of local communities understanding the value of international relationships was also noted by those interviewed. Until this is achieved there will always be some scepticism. This underlies the importance of good robust data and evaluation frameworks.

One organisation interviewed suggested that a formal memorandum of understanding (MoU) should be established that clearly sets out what both sides expect to achieve from the relationship. The MoU should be established for a period of around ten years to ensure it endures beyond the election cycle. Mayors, councillors, the community and staff at all levels should also be involved in the relationship to ensure that it is not seen as an elite activity for the mayor and executive staff only.

Others suggested that it is essential to have full council support for international relationships and an active community based committee structure, as well as financial and governance support. The mayor, councillors and senior staff all need to be on side, as without support at senior levels the relationships will suffer. The relationship also needs similar support at the other end. Ebbs and flows in the partnership are a fact of life, however, and the occasional failure of individual projects should be expected. However the overall focus should be on learning from these failures rather than abandoning the relationship altogether.

Some stakeholders indicated that there has been a general transition in practice from engaging in formal international relationships to ones which are more productive and flexible in responding to changing circumstances. It was also suggested that councils should move away from establishing broad-ranging 'headline' agreements which attempt to cover a wide range of areas but which have little substance. Instead they should consider what they can do efficiently and effectively with their available resources and adopt a strategy and implementation plan that focuses on specific objectives that will achieve targeted results for their communities.

#### *Internal and external factors*

It was noted by some stakeholders that successful relationships are often driven by a specific individual, either an elected representative or a senior council officer. This is often a charismatic leader who is enthusiastic about forming international relationships. The support of others within council is essential, however; while connections made by individuals are important, they can make the mistake of neglecting to share those experiences with the wider community and council organisation.

It is also important to make clear the need for regular face-to-face visits when establishing business-oriented connections in Asia. It often takes multiple visits to establish relationships of trust with leaders in Asia, and there can be a long lead time before the business benefits manifest. The establishment of these relationships is assisted by having a single point of liaison within each council, not only to build person-to-person trust with overseas partners, but also to assist in interacting with other levels of government within Australia.

The increasing use of technology in councils is also presenting new challenges and opportunities in building international relationships. On the one hand, the use of telecommunications software such as Skype makes it easier to communicate with international partners. However, the assumption that councils and institutions in Asia will be at the cutting edge of new technology is not always correct; the experiences of stakeholders interviewed for this study suggest some may have only basic access to facilities that would be common in their counterpart organisations in Australia. Also, while Internet communication is useful, it does not as yet overcome translation problems.

It is important for councils to be open and transparent about what they believe to be the value of an international partnership and why this is important to the community. There have been cases where negative media and community views have been turned around by open communication about the benefits and arguments in favour of sister city relationships. Councils should also try to link their local activities with those of other levels of government.

### *Reviews and evaluation of international relationships*

Many of the responses highlighted the need for a robust qualitative and quantitative evaluation of international relationships, although it was noted that there is no internationally accepted evaluation tool. In most cases, the frequency of activities and the degree of engagement by local communities in the relationship appear to be the most commonly accepted metrics of success. In evaluating international relationships generally, it would be useful to examine not only what has been achieved, but also to consider why sister city relationships have not always sustained themselves or lived up to expectations. There is also a need to look at which relationships are enduring and why, and what sustains them, so others may learn from these successes and perhaps avoid some of the common trips and traps.

There is currently a trend for Australian councils to be approached by councils in China to host Chinese local government delegations. Councils are also being asked by state governments to assist in hosting Chinese local government delegations. This demonstrates a demand for ongoing international activity, and the data outlined in Section 4 of this report showing that councils have continued to establish new relationships also bear this out.

### **The value of international relationships**

A number of the responses noted that the value of international relationships has, at times, been questioned in the media and elsewhere in terms of whether they are delivering value to the community, with overseas visits in particular being the focus of negative media attention. Factors such as the lack of clear outcomes and the absence of a robust evaluation framework were also cited as contributing to the problem. In addition, ensuring that the relationships don't languish over time, and keeping the relationships alive when the initiator of the relationship leaves office were identified as key challenges.

Some respondents noted that maintaining these relationships can be costly, with translation and staff exchanges quite expensive in an environment where councils are under pressure to reduce discretionary expenditure. It was also noted that overseas partners face similar challenges. Overall however, this has not prevented the establishment of new relationships.

It was suggested that Australian councils had traditionally tended to focus on formalities, rather than productiveness or effectiveness, when establishing sister city relationships. This has changed in recent times, however, with partnerships now becoming more flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. The focus is now on building practical partnerships by creating mutual benefits for business, and this has largely been driven by Australian councils, with the partner city expected to respond accordingly. A number of stakeholders noted that international relationships are tending to have more variety and flexibility built in, with communities and local businesses having more direct involvement in the relationships.

Some organisations such as SSA and VLGA already provide support such as advice and information exchange and hold seminars and forums on relevant topics for their members, as well as annual conferences for councils involved in international relationships. The level of assistance these



organisations can provide is, however, very limited because of resource constraints and is consequently focussed on their membership only.

Some stakeholders suggested that the ALGA, in conjunction with state and territory local government associations, could assist councils that are interested in developing international relationships but feel that they lack the strategic capacity to play an effective role on the international stage.

### Prospects for the development of international relationships and the role of local government in an international context

There has been a trend since the 1990s to steer sister cities and international activities towards economic development and away from the traditional social and cultural exchanges. Several respondents expressed the view that the two need not be mutually exclusive and that there is room for a range of activities, provided they have clear objectives and operate within a robust evaluation framework. In addition, there is now a new generation of advocates for some of the relationships to be built around international development partnerships, particularly those involving Timor-Leste.

Many of the responses suggested local government should look to where it can add value to national objectives. The *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* contemplated a value-adding role for local government, but it appears that the white paper has been largely abandoned by the current government. Despite this it was noted that local government in Australia has an important role in facilitating international relationships in this era of globalisation, and that local government could do more to get on the front foot by following up on trade negotiations between national governments. For example, following the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between Australia and South Korea in 2013, more business engagements between the countries are expected to occur, and the South Korean Trade Office and Austrade will be in a position to actively promote and support business engagements between local industries in the two countries.

Local government can also make more effective use of existing programs and funds for international relations and work more effectively with local businesses, though some stakeholders questioned whether council engagement in this area to date had achieved tangible results. Councils with well-established relationships might also be able to leverage these more effectively to establish new initiatives relating to trade and economic development.

It was suggested that ALGA and the state and territory local government associations should be more aware of the needs of local government in the developing world – particularly in the Asia Pacific region – and draw on the experiences of councils which already have relationships with communities in Timor-Leste. Council capacity building in developing countries was cited as one example of the role that Australian local governments could play. For example, in the case of Timor-Leste, government decentralisation policies mean that there is an increasing focus on building the resources and capacities of local administrations. Local government in Australia may need assistance in providing such support to developing countries to ensure there are mutually beneficial outcomes.

Some stakeholders however questioned whether local government should have a major role in international development, especially given the limited resources of councils. There are a lot of

organisations and agencies already operating in this area and there is a risk that if they are not properly coordinated, activities of local governments could duplicate or be inconsistent with programs already provided by the Australian government. More broadly, it was suggested council international relationships should be more closely aligned with the government's trade and development policies and priorities, for example in relation to existing bilateral trade agreements or, conversely, where sanctions have been put in place.

#### **Relevance of guidelines and criteria for councils wanting to engage in international relationships**

While some stakeholder organisations already provide advice for their members covering various aspects of international relationships, it was suggested that best practice guides, case studies and general learnings would be helpful to assist councils wanting to establish new international relationships or improve existing ones. Case studies should cover relationships with sub-national governments in different countries and with different cultures, and provide examples of the specific roles that Australian councils could play, for example, in areas such as financial management, governance and service delivery. There was also an identified need to examine how to embed international relationships in council business.

The DFAT responses suggested that strategies to encourage increased local government engagement in international relationships should acknowledge the primary and central role of the Australian Government in this area and be broadly in alignment with government policies. In addition, while national government agencies may be able to assist individual councils in this area, they have limited resources both in Australia and overseas, so expectations regarding assistance need to be managed. On that basis any commitments that local governments make in this area, including programs of international visits and trade missions, should aim to be self-sustaining.

## 7. Research findings

### Conclusions

This study set out to document Australian local government involvement in international relationships, and in doing so revealed a picture of surprising activity and variety, with nearly 30% of councils engaged in some sort of relationship and dozens of new partnerships created annually. These vary from single partnerships through to councils which have six, eight or even more partner councils, as well as from largely ceremonial relationships through to those which have a significant level of operational engagement. These relationships can encompass a wide range of activities and management structures, and often also involve other local stakeholders.

While there is considerable variety across extant international relationships, there are also some clear trends. The first has been the change over time of the countries with which new relationships have been formed since the 1980s, from Japan to China and, briefly, Timor-Leste. This, in turn, reflects another trend: a move away from relationships which embraced the 'traditional' sister city movement themes of peace, reconstruction and reconciliation through a focus on civic, cultural and educational exchanges, to relationships which have a much stronger emphasis on economic development and trade. There is a clear link between the latter and the rise of partnerships with Chinese cities and, to a lesser extent, those in South Korea.

At the same time new forms of relationship which echo the more traditional sister city model have emerged in the form of partnerships and exchanges with local districts in Timor-Leste and councils in Papua New Guinea. While these relationships may have had an initial focus on local support and community development, in some cases they have developed into fully two-way partnerships which provide benefits to the councils and communities involved in both countries.

These trends and, in particular, the increasing emphasis on economic development and trade are likely to continue. Apart from the pragmatic and practical forces driving this interest, there is also pressure from an increasingly critical media and, at times, a sceptical public to demonstrate that these relationships are providing value for money. Councils wishing to take a stronger role in these areas and, to some extent, in relation to community development, will however have to recognise the primary role of the Australian Government in international relations. While there appeared to be some momentum under the previous Labor federal government to engage with local government around these issues, this appears to have stalled under the current coalition government. There may still be opportunities, however, for local government to partner with the Australian government and in some cases state and territory governments in relation to specific projects.

Despite – or because of – the variety in relationship types, numbers and the nationalities of partner councils, it would seem that the majority of Australian councils engaged in international relationships find them to be useful. Notions of value and the wider community's perception of such value were, however, among the most difficult things to quantify, and this is one area where further research is needed. It is clear, however, that the practice of international relationships remains very popular with local government and that the number of these relationships is likely to continue to grow.

In this context it should be noted that a number of councils and stakeholders supported the proposal that some guidance be provided for councils contemplating whether to engage in an international relationship or to expand their existing partnerships. This is addressed in below.

## Guidance for councils

As noted above, international relationships have taken a variety of forms with a wide range of objectives, management structures and activities. There are, however, some general observations that can be drawn from this research which may assist councils considering the establishment of new relationships or changes to their existing partnerships, as outlined below.

### Investigating and establishing international relationships

#### *Establish clear motives for forming a relationship*

Several motivations for towns and cities to become involved in international relationships have been identified in the literature (see Section 2) and the case studies (see section 5), including:

- idealism and solidarity
- political motives
- economic and commercial motives
- knowledge transfer.

A number of researchers and academics put forward the view that it may not be a simple matter, or indeed desirable, to consider motivations in an isolated way, and that a range may be operating at the same time (Buis 2009: 191; Grosspietsch 2009). Nevertheless, there are strong grounds for suggesting that establishing clear motives for involvement should be the first step for any council wishing to explore international relationships.

#### *Develop an understanding of the context within which the relationship will be formed*

Irrespective of the initial reasons for seeking to form a partnership with a council overseas, it is important that any Australian council considering this step conduct some basic research into international relationships and understand the contextual factors within which relationships are formed. Sources of information include Sister Cities Australia and, where available, country-based associations which support these relationships.

The process of research should not be confined to just the objectives, benefits and costs for the council involved, or the consideration of specific partnership councils and their countries (though these aspects should be addressed). Investigations should also look at broader issues and concerns about international relationships. Some of these concerns have been highlighted in this paper and are discussed further below, but they include consideration of the overall policy environment and historical context, as well as the range of relationship types and management options available.

It should also be noted that current debates and literature provide strong evidence that relationships are formed in response to contextual factors that lie beyond the bounds of any specific council. These include especially:

- urbanisation

- politics and international relations
- new forms of intra-governmental relationships
- globalisation.

*Making a good match: explore the fit between the prospective partners and research similar relationships*

Another part of the research process should be establishing whether the proposed relationship has the potential to be a good match between the prospective partners. As identified by De Villiers (2005), the selection of a partner is a crucial consideration in the relationship-building process and contributes substantially to whether it succeeds or fails. This involves an assessment regarding the range of specific local qualities each partnership council and region can bring to the table, and whether there is the potential for synergies to emerge.

Cultural, ideological, historical, geographical, economic and other factors or elements can be the basis of complementarity (Zelinsky 1991: 4). For example, based on research carried out by van Ewijk (2012), partnerships have been found to have the greatest potential for mutual learning when partners bring in complementary resources that can create synergy. The similarity of, or differences between, twinning partners has been an important focus of research (Baycan-Levent et al 2010; Johnson and Wilson 2006; Tjandradewi et al 2006; Devers-Kanoglu 2009). Peer-to-peer learning that takes place flourishes thanks to both a certain degree of similarity and difference between participants.

This process should also help clarify the objectives of both councils concerned and what they seek to achieve by engaging in an international relationship. It is important to clarify the areas and levels of responsibility of each council; councils in many countries will have a much wider range of responsibilities and levels of authority than their counterparts in Australia. Councils should also investigate existing or previous relationships which share similar qualities; both successful and unsuccessful partnerships can provide valuable insights for councils wishing to embark on new relationships.

*Investigate government policies and build on existing programs and funding*

While this report has noted the relative lack of government policy relating specifically to international relationships, it is still important to research these policy settings as they can change over time. Ultimately the Australian Government has the overall responsibility for international affairs so it is important to be aware of current policies such as trade agreements or sanctions which could affect the basis for a new relationship. From time to time government policies may also provide support for specific projects, particularly those relating to trade or community development.

In addition, while state and territory governments offer little in the way of policy guidance specifically relating to these relationships, they may provide policies through which such relationships can be rationalised or contextualised within the ambit of local government, for example by encouraging councils to support the community or economic development of their communities.

### *Recognise that there can be cultural preferences for multi-faceted relationships*

As this report has noted there have been changing expectations in Australian and overseas councils with increasing interest in establishing relationships with a stronger emphasis on economic development and trade. It would be a mistake, however, in most cases to assume that these areas can be the sole focus of new relationships, as in many countries there is a preference for well-rounded partnerships including cultural and social ties, in addition to economic and trade exchanges. Adopting a multi-faceted approach to international relationships also provides the potential for entrepreneurial relationships to emerge in areas that might not have been envisaged in the original agreement. For example, traditional cultural and sporting exchanges might offer opportunities to expand the relationship into related areas such as the development of cultural industries, tourism or new sporting events.

### *Establish a formal partnership between the councils, linked to a strategic plan*

While many international partnerships are based on a written agreement between the participating councils, these can sometimes be open-ended with very broad objectives and little in the way of detail. Instead, these agreements should be closely integrated with the council's strategic planning processes and should incorporate:

- the aims and objectives of both councils
- how the relationship is linked with the council's strategic plans and budget
- proposed activities and areas of cooperation, and consideration of whether the relationship will be time-limited
- the key council officers/positions responsible for management of the relationship
- planned review and evaluation processes, including how often the relationship will be reviewed and whether it will have a fixed duration.

This is also in keeping with findings from the literature, such as the insight of De Villiers et al (2007: 3) that strategic alliances between communities should be based on sound management principles and a strategic approach, including a business plan. Handley (2006: 10) draws on models of partnerships in the UK to suggest that a strategic plan should be produced for all partnerships to make it more efficient and effective and to contribute towards fundraising efforts for the activities partners wish to pursue.

### **Managing international relationships**

Findings from the case studies suggest that the approaches of councils to the management of international relationships vary enormously, from those councils which have positions and even sections dedicated to the relationship, to those where the relationship is managed on a part-time, ad hoc basis. While it is appropriate that the level of management match the intensity of the relationship, it is important that the relationship be valued and seen to be valued by the council, and that it is managed professionally and competently.

Several studies identified in the literature review also provide insights into the leadership and management aspects of international municipal relationships. De Villiers (2009) highlights the need for quality management to enable local government organisations to move towards 'alliance

capability', which is central to sustainability. As a form of inter-organisational cooperation, there is value in ensuring that international relationships dovetail with overall community and corporate strategies (Franco and Marmelo 2014).

*Incorporate an adequate level of resourcing for the relationship in council's financial plans and annual budgets*

Obviously it is important that there are sufficient financial, staff, and other resources to support the range of activities committed to in the relationship agreement. The resource commitment involved should be incorporated in council's forward financial planning processes, especially as some international relationship activities are episodic in nature.

*Ensure that there is consistent contact with the partnership council*

One important aspect of establishing a professional relationship which was stressed by a number of councils was the importance of maintaining consistent contact with the partnership council, usually through having one officer as the single point of contact for the relationship. A number of reasons were identified for this, including the fact that it takes a considerable time to build up an understanding of the cultural protocols and customs involved in managing relationships with some countries and, more specifically, that there is the preference in some countries for a single contact point.

These findings are congruent with those reported in the literature. International research has found that sustaining relationships occurs especially through the wide repertoire of symbolic exchanges of twinning and their associated protocols and practices that are evident in numerous case studies (see e.g. Van Lindert 2009; Franco and Marmello 2013; Jayne et al 2013). Genuine partnerships, according to van Ewijk and Baud (2009: 220), require shared objectives, equality of power, trust, flexibility, appreciation of diversity and openness.

*Recognise the importance of face-to-face visits and the significance of the mayor*

The issue of making and receiving overseas visits as part of an international relationship is a deeply uncomfortable one for many councils, given the public perception of these as 'junkets', often heightened by negative media campaigns. It is important, however, to recognise that even with business-oriented relationships there may be an expectation that there will be face-to-face visits and cultural exchanges involving elected representatives, staff and community members from both council areas.

Associated with this is the high regard with which the position of Mayor is held in many countries where the role has a much wider range of responsibilities. This means that there can also be strong expectations from partner councils in these countries that the Mayor will play a central role in most partnership activities and that they will have the authority to make decisions in relation to it.

**Maximising the benefits of international relationships**

*Build flexible relationships*

As noted earlier it is important that the partnership agreement for any international relationship spell out in some detail the activities and areas of cooperation, but this should still allow for

opportunities for the relationship to diversify and expand into other areas. Even in establishing the relationship it is useful not only to look at synergies between the key industries, events and activities in both council areas, but also beyond these to emerging industries and activities.

*Improve the relationship's sustainability and encourage other stakeholders to participate*

As any relationship that is based solely on council-to-council contact is going to be vulnerable both financially and politically, it is important that councils consider ways in which the relationship can be diversified and made more sustainable, not only in terms of activities but also through the engagement of other stakeholders. These can include schools, universities, research centres, hospitals and private businesses based in the council area.

In most cases council can act as a broker in assisting to establish relationships directly between the relevant stakeholders in each council area. In other cases the relationship may be more complex, for example when a stakeholder in the Australian council's area is completely independent of council but the equivalent institution overseas is run directly by the partner council. Adopting this approach reduces council's workload in supporting the relationship and also gives the overall partnership greater critical mass.

The literature also suggests that political support from higher levels of government and consistent leadership from senior officials and decision makers (Tjandradewi et al 2006: 372), as well as organisational support from urban organisations and local government associations (Buis 2009) can all be all important in maximising the long term success of relationships. Other success factors in long-term relationships identified by Tjandradewi et al (2006) include:

- cost sharing and cost effectiveness, with projects that are simple, concrete and financially feasible
- free flows of information, including continued communication after specific cooperation activities are officially completed
- raising public awareness through intensive publicity
- a demand-driven focus on the part of both parties.

*Recognise that community development relationships can benefit both partners*

While there are assumptions that relationships based around developmental initiatives in developing countries such as Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea are intended solely to support the partner councils and communities in these countries, it is important to recognise that there are benefits for the Australian partner councils and communities as well. For example, council staff seconded to these locations gain valuable work experience in a very different environment, while councils in these countries have often developed innovative practices from which Australian staff can learn, for example in relation to community engagement.

Several studies (see e.g. van Lindert 2009; van Ewijk and Baud 2009; Bontenbal and van Lindert 2008) discussed in the literature review have focused on these issues. Of particular interest is a survey conducted in six cities involved in partnerships (Bontenbal 2013), between countries with developed economies and those with emerging/transitional economies. Professional learning was more explicitly experienced in the latter than in the former. Learning in the cities in developed



economies was found to be primarily unintentional and it remained undervalued. These opportunities could be made more explicit; in particular, the value of reflective learning, including enhancing 'soft' intangible skills, could be recognised as valuable.

### **Developing and maintaining community support**

#### *Ensure that the elected council is strongly supportive and involved*

Achieving full support is obviously not always possible, but relationships formed by councils which are sharply divided and in which there is strong opposition to the formation of new or additional international relationships are more vulnerable to being discontinued in the future. Even in councils with a high degree of support it is important to keep the elected body informed and engaged, especially if there is community or media opposition, through regular reporting and (as indicated earlier) by ensuring that the relationship is integrated with council strategic planning processes.

#### *Engage with the media and the community*

It is important to ensure that these communities are fully informed of initiatives to form international relationships and also that they are involved in the planned activities (van Ewijk and Baud 2009; Bontenbal and van Lindert 2008). The importance of such involvement is not only as a key motivation for the partnership, but also a factor that may contribute to its success (de Villiers 2005). Partnerships help to strengthen local government and civil society connections. They can lead to the involvement of a range of non-government and government actors, such as Chambers of Commerce (van Ewijk and Baud 2009) and artistic, social and community groups (Jayne et al 2013). Although community or media opposition can tempt councils into adopting a low profile in relation to their international partnerships, this approach can result in accusations of secrecy and even greater opposition. A number of councils examined for this report stressed the advantages of adopting a policy of pro-active engagement with the media and the wider community.

Examples include inviting local journalists on overseas trips, and seeking the involvement of local residents in activities related to the partnership, such as volunteer programs, school and sporting exchanges, or art or photographic competitions run jointly by the two councils. In addition, councils should make information about all their international relationships, including any reviews, easily accessible on their websites and ensure that this information is kept up to date.

### **Reviewing and evaluating international relationships**

#### *Establish a framework for robust evaluation*

As noted earlier, any partnership agreement should include arrangements for the regular evaluation and review of these relationships, with these reviews held at regular intervals. The process should involve a robust and comprehensive analysis of how the partnership has progressed in relation to its stated aims and objectives, its key achievements, as well as any areas of potential weakness.

In addition to regularly monitoring the international relationships of any given council, evaluation outcomes should be included in the organisation's strategic planning processes. Findings from this study suggest that while some councils have conducted reviews, most of these have been completed in-house. It may be worthwhile engaging external consultants to undertake this work in order to provide objectivity. Whatever the process and its outcome, the outcomes of any review should be

made public via the council's website and the conclusions used to guide the refinement of the partnership when the time comes for its renegotiation.

Drawing on the literature, reviews can address a range of evaluation questions, including those focusing on:

- the nature of the relationship, such as organisational commitment to the link and level of community-wide participation (Tjandradewi et al 2006: 360)
- the contribution of the relationship to social and economic development in the respective localities: urban planning, provision of local goods and services, environmental sustainability, and/or municipal human resource development (see van Lindert 2009: 177)
- longer-term outcomes for towns, cities and regions, including promoting freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital, and providing tolerance and increased understanding amongst diverse peoples (Handley 2006: 6-8).

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## Appendix A International Relationships – Case studies

State/Council	Council type (ACLG)*	Type/No. relationships†	Partnership countries	Selected activities (across all relationships)
<i>NSW</i>				
Albury	Urban regional – medium	SC 1	China	Business, school, education, health
Orange	Urban regional – medium	SC 4	Japan, New Zealand, PNG, USA	Cultural and student exchanges, community development, capacity building, economic development
Penrith	Urban fringe – very large	SC 3	Japan, China, UK	Student, cultural, business exchanges, economic cooperation, university and health links
		FC 2	Japan, China	
		Other 1	South Korea	
<i>Victoria</i>				
Ballarat	Urban regional – large	SC 1	Japan	Civic, school, staff and cultural exchanges, community development, economic exchanges
		FC 2	China, Timor-Leste	
		Other 1	China	
Melbourne	Urban capital city	SC 6	Japan, China, Italy, Greece, Russia, USA	Economic development, business representation, education, design, cultural exchange
		Other 4	India, China	
Mount Alexander	Regional agricultural – very large	FC 1	Timor-Leste	Community development, education projects
<i>Queensland</i>				
Townsville	Urban regional – very large	SC 6	China, Japan, South Korea, PNG	Community development, economic development, business representation, education and cultural exchange
<i>South Australia</i>				
Marion	Urban developed - large	SC 1	Japan	Cultural, school, higher education exchanges
<i>Western Australia</i>				
Greater Geraldton	Urban regional - medium	SC 2	China, Japan	Cultural, education, research and sporting exchanges
		Other 1	China	
<i>Tasmania</i>				
Clarence	Urban fringe – medium	SC 1	Japan	Cultural and schools exchanges
<i>Northern Territory</i>				
Darwin	Urban capital city	SC 5	China, Greece, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, USA	Cultural, youth and school exchanges, sporting events, community development
		FC 2	Ecuador, USA	

\* ACLG: Australian Classification of Local Government.

† SC = Sister City; FC = Friendship City.

## A.1 Albury City Council

### Development of council's international relationship program

Albury City Council is a major NSW regional centre located on the NSW-Victorian border with a population of 48,000. Albury's first sister city relationship with Merced in the USA commenced over 30 years ago but has been dormant in recent years so it has therefore not been considered in this case study. Council's current relationship with the city of Nanping in China grew out of plans to develop a trade in dairy livestock genetic material between a firm in the Albury area and Chinese interests wanting to establish a dairy industry. This relationship has been intermittently active in recent years but the outcomes of recent exchanges between several independent organisations may result in more sustainable relationships.

In 2002 council was approached by Nanping City to form a sister city relationship to assist this venture. This initiative was supported by the Australian Trade Commission. Council consulted with



Mr Lin Zhongle, Vice Mayor of Nanping and Mayor Patricia Gould planting of tree at Wuyi University. © Albury City Council

local community groups and schools and received a high level of support for the proposal and the added cultural dimension it would bring to the community. Consequently the then Mayor and General Manager travelled to Nanping in 2003 to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) establishing the relationship.

During the first two or three years there were a number of exchanges including art exhibitions and visits regarding health, education, waste water

and forestry management. However, after this initial period interest started to taper off, with council declining several invitations to visit Nanking.

In 2009 the relationship was reviewed in a report to council, which resulted in council resolving "to develop and nurture the Sister City relationship with Nanping" and to accept an invitation for the Mayor to lead a delegation from Albury to Nanping in April that year (Albury City Council 2009: 78). This delegation also included two council staff, two school principals, and a waste water consultant.

As a result of the visit, MoUs were signed between two Albury schools and two in Nanping to establish further exchanges and email contacts. Later that year 30 dairy bulls were exported to the Nanping area from an Albury based artificial insemination business. In addition, a second MoU was signed between the two councils reaffirming their relationship, and in 2010 contact was established between the Albury campus of Charles Sturt University and Wuyi University in Nanping with a view



to developing relationships around student/teacher exchanges, early childhood research and ecotourism.

In 2013 council facilitated a visit by a Nanping delegation involving representatives from schools, hospitals and universities. Further MoUs were signed between participating schools in Nanping and Albury to use Skype to establish conversations between schools and to develop exchange programs.

Nanping health delegates also visited a number of hospitals on both sides of the border and discussed intern exchanges. The Albury-Wodonga Chief Medical Officer is planning to visit Nanping to look at establishing joint conferences and symposia, and the University of New South Wales Rural Clinical School's campus in Albury is also looking at the possibility of students attending courses in Nanping as part of their final year. In helping to facilitate these international relationships between non-council organisations, however, Albury City Council has made it clear that it is seeking in future to have more of a 'backseat' role, requesting that the participating organisations further develop their international relationships without council assistance. The rationale for this is discussed below.

#### **Management and governance structure**

The standing relationship between the two councils is governed by the original MoU. A draft sister cities protocol was prepared but never formally ratified, although it reasonably reflects how the relationship is managed. The Director of Community and Recreation at Albury City has primary responsibility for managing the relationship within council, though assistance is provided when required by the General Manager's Executive Assistant, along with additional administrative support. In addition, there is a small internal staff committee whose membership includes the Director of Economic Development and Tourism that provides regular briefings to council. There is no community committee. On average the annual level of staff assistance is less than 0.5 FTE, though this varies greatly throughout the year.

Council's annual budget for the program of \$15-20,000 is entirely internally resourced, but expenditure varies from year to year. Other organisations involved finance their own participation.

#### **Value of the program and plans for its development**

While there have been some positive outcomes, particularly from the early phase of the relationship, council is concerned at the lack of sustainable, long-term outcomes. The strong negative media response to the mayor's 2009 visit to Nanping, and the election of a new council also seem to have contributed to the council's decision to move from direct engagement towards a role in which council only supports and facilitates the establishment of relationships between other organisations.

Another contributing factor has been the fundamental differences between local government administration in Australian councils and their counterparts in China, where the local authorities provide a much wider range of services, often, for example, administering health and education systems. In the case of Albury, this meant that council had little or no direct involvement in many of the program areas that the Nanping administrators were interested in; any engagement in these areas therefore had to involve authorities independent of council. This issue was exacerbated by the differences in scale between Albury and Nanping, the latter having a population of 2.5 million and a

much larger council administration. These differences have contributed to the perception that the relationship is largely one-way, with knowledge transfer and other benefits largely going to Nanping, which also appears to be more interested in preserving the relationship.

As noted earlier, council has recently adopted a position which it has communicated both to Nanping and to the relevant organisations in Albury that they will need to develop their own sustainable relationships independent of council. Council is interested in learning how the most recent exchanges are progressing and what concrete outcomes they will achieve as a basis for determining its own future role in the sister city relationship; for example, Charles Stuart University's relationship with Nanping which has considerable potential for development.



Visit to Jianjin High School, Nanping © Albury City Council

### Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program

The attitudes of the council, community and the media towards international relationships are all key factors in the current status and future development of this relationship. Another is the political process – an Australian local government election can result in a new council with different policy directions and priorities. This contrasts with Chinese local authorities, which have more continuity and therefore more consistent support for their international partnerships. When seeking a relationship the implications of the sometimes major differences between councils in Australia and those overseas, particularly in China, in terms of structure, role and size also need to be considered.

The political climate and financial situation of local government are other important factors. Much of what councils have to do is prescribed in legislation and given that participation in international relationships is a discretionary activity, councils face pressure to periodically review their engagement in these relationships to see if it is still justified. It is easy to dismiss these relationships as “not core business”.

Therefore it is important to be very clear with the international partner, the community, and councillors about what the relationship is trying to achieve and whether it will offer value for money, especially when council is facing financial pressure. The case for an international relationship becomes easier to make when there is a clear commercial or community benefit.

#### Key points from the case study

- This relationship was initiated at the invitation of the Chinese city to support a venture involving a specific aspect of agricultural trade, however the level of interest in maintaining and developing the relationship has varied over time.
- A contributing issue has been the difficulties that can arise in managing the large structural differences between the councils involved. Chinese councils are often much larger than their Australian counterparts and usually manage a much greater range of services. This means that the Australian council often has to involve other institutions and organisations in the development of the relationship.
- As a result in this case there is a perception that the relationship has been largely one-way, with the benefits going primarily to Nanping. As a consequence, council is moving to a less active role, requesting that organisations with council-facilitated relationships with Nanping develop them independently in future. This reduction in the level of activity on the part of Albury City is also due in part to the adverse response council received from the local media to a visit made by the mayor to Nanping in 2009.

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## A.2 Ballarat City Council

### Development of council's international relationship program

Ballarat, a major inland Victorian regional centre with a population of 86,000, has several international relationships with varying formats and aims. The most recent arrangement involves a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a strongly-performing Chinese city and a focus on trade and economic development.

Ballarat initiated its first international relationship in 1988 with Inagawa, a small city bordering Osaka in Japan. The sister city relationship was based in part on the shared history of both cities in mining precious metals: Ballarat was historically a major centre of gold mining, while extensive silver

ore deposits were mined in the Inagawa region.

Since the establishment of the relationship the cities have taken turns sending civic delegations to each other every five years. In 2013 a delegation travelled from Ballarat to Inagawa to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the relationship, during which a new five year agreement was signed. In



Image supplied by City of Ballarat

addition to the civic visits, the two councils also facilitate staff exchanges, as well as extensive school and cultural exchanges. During the 2013 visit, talks were also held regarding potential economic exchanges relating to the wine trade and tourism.

In 2003 Ballarat entered into a friendship agreement with the Ainaro district of East Timor. This did not commit council to providing financial support to Ainaro but instead was based on the transfer of knowledge and skills, both at the council and community level. In 2005 council established the Ballarat Friends of Ainaro Community Committee (BFACC) as a special committee of council to provide funding support and to further develop the relationship.

Some of the initiatives undertaken as part of the relationship included holding workshops with members of the local administration, both in Ballarat and Ainaro; the appointment of an Australian Volunteers International (AVI) worker from 2008 to 2010; health delegations; grants and scholarships programs; school exchanges and forums; community forums; and fundraising campaigns. In 2012 a *Ballarat-Ainaro Community Action Plan* was developed for the period 2012-17.

In the 1990s council entered into a relationship with the Chinese city of Kunshan, which was supported by the Ballarat Chinese Community Committee. While there are historical links with Kunshan there has been no direct activity between the two councils in the past eight years. In 2009 council signed a friendship agreement with Kunshan’s neighbouring city of Nanjing, though this was confined largely to the establishment of a Nanjing-Ballarat Cultural Exchange Centre.

In 2013 council signed an MoU with Yangzhou, another major city close to Nanjing in China, to “strengthen and generate further mutual economic, cultural and social benefits” (City of Ballarat 2013: 86). Both cities are members of the League of Historical Cities which was established in 1987 with the aim of contributing to world peace by “transcending national boundaries and building on the common foundation of historical cities to strengthen affiliations between cities” (League of Historical Cities 2014). Part of the rationale for the development of this relationship was Yangzhou’s strong economic performance. It is one of China’s wealthiest cities and the MoU is seen as part of council’s broader strategy to build a strong trade and investment relationship with China. The MoU includes commitments to future exchanges, exploration of export opportunities, education linkages and tourism opportunities. Council invited Yangzhou to send a delegation to Ballarat in 2014 to strengthen ties between the cities.

Council has also received a number of business delegations from China. Council established a Multicultural Ambassador Program which has assisted in hosting these visits and provided presentation material translated into Chinese. Council has also facilitated the establishment of some Chinese businesses making major investments in the region.

Council’s active international relationships are summarised in Table 10.

**Table 10. City of Ballarat international relationships summary**

City	Year formed	Key features
Ainaro, Timor-Leste	2003	Friendship agreement: education programs; community development
Inagawa-cho, Japan	1990s	Sister City: civic visits; staff and education exchanges
Nanjing, China	2009	Friendship agreement: establishment of the Nanjing-Ballarat Cultural Exchange Centre
Yangzhou, China	2013	MoU: commitments to future exchanges, exploration of export opportunities, education linkages and tourism opportunities

### Management and governance structure

Council’s international relationships are linked to its Cultural Diversity Strategy and Economic Strategy (City of Ballarat 2009: 21). The former in particular emphasises the importance of “sustaining the intercultural city” as one of the four key priorities and promoting exchanges with Ballarat’s friendship and sister cities as an explicit action, while the latter also prescribes a number of actions relating to export and tourism development. Implementation of these strategies is reported annually to Council and the strategies are evaluated and reviewed every four years.

The Cultural Partnerships Officer within council's Cultural Diversity Unit has primary responsibility for supporting all three relationships. These include supporting visiting delegations, though experienced external contractors are also used to provide support for larger delegations. Staff engagement in international relationships varies but averages less than 1.0 FTE annually. Budget expenditure averages \$15,000 annually. Council's Intercultural Advisory Committee plays a significant role in assisting the implementation of the cultural diversity strategy by providing advice and support to council. The membership comprises of leaders from Ballarat's many cultural associations, networks and Government organisations.

**Value of the program and plans for its development**

Detailed recent reports to Council have emphasised the importance of the relationships, particularly with Inagawa and Yangzhou, in terms of supporting the city's cultural and economic goals. The relationship with Ainaro is also seen as important in supporting Council's cultural diversity strategy, as well as providing practical assistance to the East Timor district.

As noted earlier, a new five-year agreement was signed in 2013 between Inagawa and Ballarat, while an MoU was also signed recently with Yangzhou. The latter in particular is seen as a basis for the expansion of trade and economic contacts, not only with Yangzhou but more broadly in terms of the Ballarat region's wider relationship with the Chinese economy.

**Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program**

Council's commitment to support the program is particularly significant in the face of the strong criticism it has received from sections of the local media because of the costs involved in recent overseas visits. Despite the negative reactions Council has reiterated this support through the renewing of the partnership with Inagawa and the signing of an MoU with Yangzhou which will involve further exchanges. In doing so, Council has taken the view that the media criticism does not reflect the views of Ballarat's multicultural community and, moreover, that international

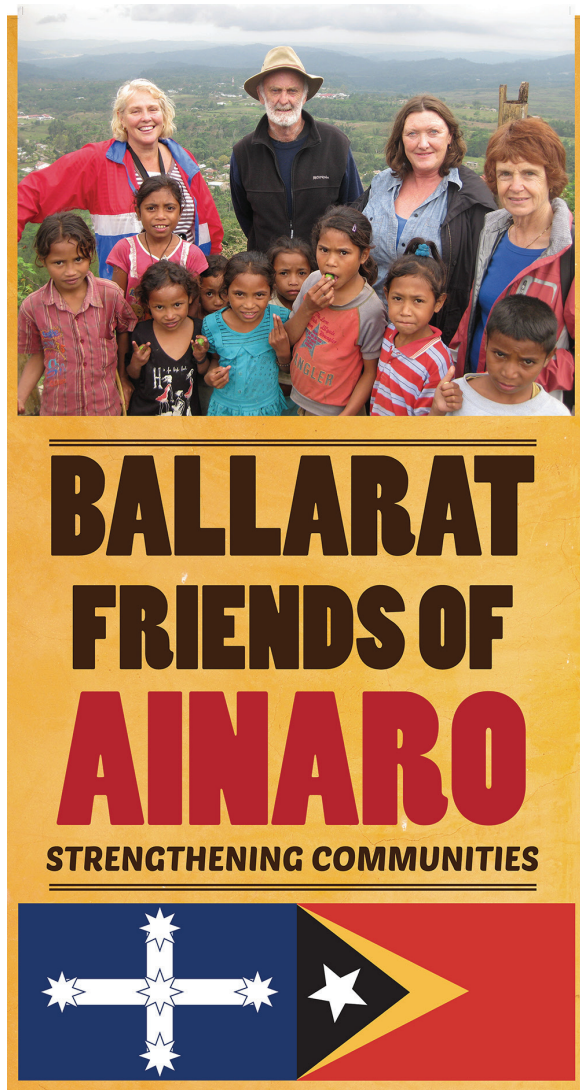


Image supplied by City of Ballarat

engagement not only has the potential to provide economic benefits but can also be culturally enriching for this community.

#### Key points from the case study

- It is possible for a council to have a range of relationships, with a range of distinct goals and different relationship types.
- Ballarat's most recent partnership with Yangzhou draws on the two cities' membership of the league of Historical Cities, but explicitly identifies the economic prosperity of Yangzhou as a key driver of the relationship.
- The relationship with Yangzhou, while important in its own right, is also seen as basis for developing Ballarat's broader economic relationship with China.
- All the relationships are seen as integral to council's cultural diversity strategy, which seeks to celebrate and support Ballarat's multicultural community.
- Council has maintained support for its international relationship program despite strong opposition in sections of the local media.

#### References

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## A.3 Clarence City Council

### Development of council's international relationship program

Clarence City Council has a population of 52,000 and in terms of population is Tasmania's second-largest council and the largest in the Hobart region. Somewhat unusually it has a sister city relationship with a small rural Japanese town, Akkeshi, the population of which is roughly a quarter that of Clarence. Despite the differences in population size, the cities also have a number of similarities. Both are in coastal locations on the 43<sup>rd</sup> parallel, Clarence in Australia's most southern state and Akkeshi on Japan's most northern island. This means that both areas are home to fishing, aquaculture and other maritime industries.

The relationship between the two councils is linked to the history of Australian whaling. The earliest confirmed contact between the two communities was in 1850, when a Hobart-registered whaling ship was wrecked near Akkeshi. People from the town rescued the crew and cared for them until they were able to return home.

In 1979 an author who was researching early links between Japan and Australia was asked by the City of Akkeshi to explore possible international relationships when she visited Tasmania. This led to a signing of a sister-city agreement between the two councils in 1982.

Since its inception the relationship has had a relatively modest level of activity, with exchange visits occurring every two years or so. Associated activities include school visits, civic visits, art and cultural exchanges and exhibitions. The Akkeshi relationship is also featured in other functions held in Clarence, for example food festivals. In addition, discussions have been held between the two councils regarding the management of natural areas, tourism, walking trails, climate change and aquiculture. Council also approached its counterpart in Akkeshi when the town suffered infrastructure damage during the tsunami in 2011, but there was little in the way of practical assistance that Clarence could offer.

### Management and governance structure

An officer in council's promotion and marketing section looks after the relationship, reporting to the section's manager who in turn answers to the mayor. The relationship also involves council's cultural events team, but on average the staff commitment would



Photo © David Bellamy

be less than one equivalent full-time position. Other expenses are funded entirely by council, with an annual budget of around \$5,000, with additional funding for specific projects. In addition, council provides \$10,000 to support student visits to Akkeshi.

A strategic framework and formal objectives have not been developed for the relationship, but this is not surprising given the low level of the relationship. However a policy has been developed in



relation to school visits, and reports are also prepared for council as needed, for example when visits are planned. Council's general involvement in international relationships is also reviewed annually through the budget process; while a more detailed review has not been carried out specifically in relation to the Akkeshi relationship, council has reviewed options more broadly regarding international relationships (see next section).

### **Value of the program and plans for its development**

Although Clarence's engagement in the relationship is fairly low-level and intermittent, there is some community awareness. The greatest community benefit has been through the successful school exchange program, especially for those learning Japanese. Akkeshi however seem to treat the relationship more seriously, though as with many relationships with Japanese local authorities the links are primarily cultural and educational, with little interest in exploring economic or business development opportunities.

Another factor which may limit the potential to further develop the Clarence – Akkeshi relationship is the disparity in the size of the communities, with Akkeshi being much smaller than Clarence. In this regard council has considered a report on the potential to establish additional relationships in the wake of the *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper published in 2012 by the Australian Government (Clarence City Council 2013). The White Paper recommended that stronger relationships be developed by state, territory and local governments with their counterparts in the Asia, especially in key nations such as major trading partners.

While the report identified some potential benefits council has decided at this stage not to pursue the development of additional relationships, partly because of the cost implications and the lack of specific grant opportunities to assist in their establishment. This decision may be reviewed in the future, though there would have to be clear benefits for the community. The Akkeshi relationship is likely to continue but remain largely unchanged in its focus on ceremonial, cultural and educational exchanges.

### **Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program**

The Clarence-Akkeshi relationship has been based on historical links and comparable geography, but it has had little in the way of measurable outcomes. As a result there has been some political sensitivity around visits to Akkeshi and what benefit the city is deriving. There is, however, community support for the schools exchange program. It appears that the identification of clear, measurable outcomes, especially for local businesses, would be a key factor in considering opportunities to establish additional relationships. If international relationships are to be sustainable they need to be on a stronger footing, with a clear framework and outcomes other than just cultural exchange.

### **Key points from the case study**

- As several Australian cities and towns with relationships involving Japanese cities have found, the primary interest of the partner city remains cultural and educational exchange rather than trade or economic development.

- As with some other relationships discussed in the case studies, the disparity in size between the two cities is also an issue. In this case however it is the small size of the overseas partner rather than the Australian council which may limit the potential to develop the relationship further.
- While historical connections may provide the impetus to initiate an international relationship, they are unlikely to be enough to sustain more than a modest ongoing partnership.
- A strategic policy framework with clear objectives and guidelines would provide a better basis for selecting and managing future relationships.

### References

Clarence City Council 2013. *Council Meeting Monday 30 September 2013 Agenda*. Clarence City Council, Rosny Park, Australia.

## A.4 City of Darwin

### Development of council's international relationship program

Like many of its capital city counterparts, Darwin has a higher than average number of international relationships, especially for a council with a population of only 76,000. In contrast to some other capital city councils which have adopted an increasing focus on economic development, Darwin's international partnerships retain a strong focus on cultural exchanges, community development and the provision of advice and practical assistance.

Darwin's first two relationships, with Anchorage in Alaska and Kalymnos in Greece, were established in 1982. The relationship with Anchorage was based on shared characteristics such as an isolated and, at times, challenging "frontier" location and Alaska's comparatively recent acquisition of statehood, an aspiration shared by many in the Northern Territory. In the case of Kalymnos, a key factor was the large number of Darwin residents who had come from the Kalymnos region.

Darwin's relationship with Ambon in Indonesia was established in 1988. Links between the two cities go back to World War II and Darwin's proximity to Indonesia; the city's significant south-east Asian population was also a key factor in the selection of an Asian city. Similarly, Darwin's partnership with the Chinese city of Haikou draws on historical links dating back to the Second World War, with Australian soldiers captured by the Japanese while defending Ambon being sent as slave labour to Hianan Island, where Haikou is located.

Darwin's relationships with these three cities have developed around programs of civic, cultural and educational exchanges, but have also involved the provision of practical assistance, particularly in the case of Ambon. In 2003 Darwin worked collaboratively with Médecins Sans Frontières to provide assistance in response to a rabies emergency in the city. Council also supported community fundraising for Ambon after inter-communal violence occurred in 1999.

Information exchange and practical assistance have also been key features of Darwin's relationship with Dili, the East Timorese capital and Darwin's closest large neighbouring city, which commenced in 2003. Prior to that date Darwin had been providing assistance to Dili after violence broke out in 1999. The city helped to house refugees, assisted in fundraising, and was a key source of personnel involved in aid and economic development for Dili. Council has also provided to Dili equipment and expertise through staff exchange and training to help restore and maintain sports facilities. Since the formalisation of the relationship Darwin has also initiated numerous community, youth and cultural exchanges, as well as assisting in providing practical support for projects such as helping to develop a library attached to a training centre and through exchanges involving council officers.

Council also has two friendship city relationships with Honolulu and Galapagos. While council's policy is to establish friendship city agreements as a precursor to a potential sister city partnership, these relationships are relatively low-key with little or no current activity.

Unusually for a capital city with an international program, Darwin's engagement in trade and economic development in the context of these relationships is relatively limited. It has received business delegations from Indonesia and China, and has provided symbolic support for Darwin

businesses to help “open doors” when visiting Asia, specifically given the respect and authority with which the position of mayor is held in many Asian countries. This comparative lack of engagement reflects the limited direct role that local government plays in economic development in the Northern Territory. However, one aspect of economic development that council seeks to promote through these relationships is tourism, a key industry for the city.

Darwin’s international relationships program is summarised in Table 11.

**Table 11. City of Darwin international relationships summary**

City	Year formed	Key features
<i>Sister Cities</i>		
Ambon, Indonesia	1988	Cultural and school exchanges; response to medical emergency; Darwin to Ambon yacht race.
Anchorage, USA	1982	Cultural exchanges; fire services exchange.
Dili, East Timor	2003	Cultural and youth exchanges; community development and capacity building; information exchange and assistance re waste management
Haikou, China	1990	Cultural and school exchanges; war memorial project
Kalymnos, Greece	1982	Cultural exchange; English language scholarship program; online schools “virtual” exchanges
<i>Friendship Cities</i>		
Honolulu, USA	2009	Based on shared military history; yet to be formalised
Galapagos, Ecuador	2010	Based on shared characteristics of the two cities

### Management and governance structure

Council’s program of international relationships supports one of the five goals identified in its 2012 strategic plan: Goal 4 – “Darwin is recognised as a welcoming and culturally rich and diverse city”. This includes specific strategies to promote Darwin as a tourist destination and to “embrace national and international relationships” (City of Darwin 2012: 29).

The international relationships program is managed through a Sister Cities Policy with the objective of “attain[ing] cultural, social, economic and educational benefits for the City and its Sister City partners” (City of Darwin 2010: 1). This policy establishes a two-tier framework, with ‘Sister City’ relationships providing a formal agreement as the basis for a more substantial engagement. ‘Friendship City’ links typically involve less formal arrangements and lower expectations of engagement. They may be short-term or used to support programs run by other sections of the local community, and are also used as a stepping stone to establishing more formal Sister City arrangements.

The policy also establishes general (including demographic, locational and accessibility), economic, cultural, social and educational criteria for consideration in choosing or reviewing a relationship. When existing relations are reviewed they are also assessed against factors such as the level of communication with the sister city; the history of the relationship, including benefits and outcomes

to date; and current and proposed projects. In addition the policy provides specific and quite detailed guidelines for the planning and development of sister city-related projects, as well as regarding travel subsidies and dealing with visiting delegations.

The project is managed through council's Senior Community Development Officer – Liveability, who is located in the Community and Cultural Services Department. The Department head in turn answers to council's CEO, but the position also involves working directly with the Lord Mayor's office. Other staff across the council may be involved in specific projects related to their expertise. The international relationships program involves an average of just under one FTE position annually, along with an additional \$30,000 in program funding.

The program has a strong emphasis on community development within Darwin, which influences how it is managed. Each relationship has a separate advisory community committee involved in its management. These comprise two elected representatives from council and up to six community and two youth representatives, with the engagement of young people being a specific focus, particularly in the Dili relationship.

The degree of community interest and engagement in these committees varies over time, but has become stronger in recent years. While there is some question over whether the formal committee structure is the best approach because of the time commitments required, council has tried to make committee engagement more flexible, for example by using different venues and through the use of Skype to facilitate virtual attendance at meetings.

#### **Value of the program and plans for its development**

The program is seen as valuable in terms of the outcomes it delivers, not only for the partnership cities (in which the relationship has frequently received a higher level of positive publicity than it receives in Darwin), but also for the role it plays in community development within Darwin and, in particular, in engaging young people. It is likely to continue to be supported through the strategic plan, especially in light of the Northern Territory government's desire to promote Darwin's role as a gateway from Australia to Southeast Asia.

#### **Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program**

The use of a community development model as the basis for managing the international relationships program assists in promoting its value, particularly among young people. Other positive factors include Darwin's role as a capital city, its large and diverse multicultural community, and its proximity to Asia. Its capital city status also means that the city has a number of consular representatives as well as a significant presence of NGOs with whom the council can engage when developing projects. In addition council participates in the NT government's international engagement coordination group which includes representation from all government agencies involved in this area.

More generally, council's experience suggests that the development of successful relationships requires a strong and ongoing commitment from both participating councils. Each council has to understand why it is involved, what the benefits are, and what it can contribute to the relationship. The relationships are also most effective when there is a key contact on both sides, the absence of

which can be implicated in the relatively low level of activity in council's friendship city arrangements.

Finally, as several other of the case studies indicate, the media (and in particular the local media) plays a significant role. Negative publicity can not only affect elected representatives, but also discourage and demotivate volunteers and committee members, making them feel ashamed to be associated with the program.

#### Key points from the case study

- Darwin's isolated location, proximity to Southeast Asia, multicultural population, and its role as a capital city have all helped to provide a basis for developing strong relationships with cities in Asia, as well as in Greece and the United States.
- Unusually, for a capital city with an international program, Darwin's engagement in trade and economic development in the context of these relationships is limited, though it has used the relationships to assist in promoting the city as a tourist destination.
- The program does, however, have a strong commitment to community and cultural exchange, as well as to community development, both in the partnership cities and in Darwin.
- A key part of the community development program is a commitment to youth engagement, including a policy that each sister city advisory committee will have two places reserved for young people.
- The community development model is based on the establishment and support of separate advisory committees for each relationship. However there is a considerable workload involved in servicing these committees.

#### References

City of Darwin 2010. *Sister Cities Policy*. City of Darwin, Darwin, Australia.

City of Darwin 2012. *Evolving Darwin Towards 2020 Strategic Plan*. City of Darwin, Darwin, Australia.

## A.5 City of Greater Geraldton

### Development of council's international relationship program

Geraldton is located 420 km north of Perth with a population of around 36,000, and is a major seaport and service centre for fishing, tourism, agriculture and, in particular, the mining industry. Geraldton Council has had a relationship with Kosai, Japan for many years, but recently adopted a more strategic focus in developing additional sister city and partner city arrangements, particularly with Chinese cities.

Greater Geraldton's first sister city relationship in 1998 was established with Kosai in Japan by the previous Geraldton council. This relationship, which has remained focussed primarily on cultural and educational exchanges, was to remain council's sole international partnership for 15 years. In 2013 the council adopted a policy to "provide the goals, objectives, selection criteria and process management of international relationships" for the recently-amalgamated City of Greater Geraldton. The policy, which is discussed in the next section, underpinned council's intention to build direct international business and trade relationships, particularly with Chinese cities, as part of a strategy to diversify the region's economy beyond mining to areas including tourism, food production and processing, agriculture, renewable energy, and minerals processing. Part of the strategy is also to attract Chinese tourism, as well as visits by Chinese government officials and business executives directly to the Mid-West region, many of whom would normally visit only Australian capital cities, to increase awareness of the region's potential for investment.

In 2013 council signed a sister city agreement with Zhanjiang City in China consistent with the new policy. This relationship carried a much broader ambit than the one with Kosai, with a stronger focus on economic development and tourism, but also supporting as student, cultural and sporting exchanges. Council has also signed a MoU to establish a strategic partner city relationship with Zhoushan in China, and is exploring the potential to create similar relationships with Linfen, also in China, and Bukittinggi in Indonesia.

A letter of intent has been signed between the Durack Institute of Technology, located in Geraldton, and Guangdong Ocean University (GDOU) to undertake joint research into the farming of sea cucumbers, for which the WA Department of State Development (DSD) has identified a big demand in China. Other tangible outcomes include the opening of an office in Geraldton by a Chinese-backed company that will create over 100 jobs, and the commencement by a local grammar school of classes in Mandarin. Greater Geraldton also assisted in sponsoring a Sino-Australia basketball challenge in 2013. Greater Geraldton's international relationships are summarised in Table 12.

### Management and governance structure

As noted above council recently reviewed its previous sister city arrangements, adopting a policy with a more strategic approach to establishing international relations. The new policy is based on a two-tiered approach: in the first tier are sister city arrangements, which are more formal and which cover on all aspects of a city-to-city relationship; and "strategic partnerships" which are the "second tier", with less formal arrangements which may focus on a specific area, for example, research or tourism (City of Greater Geraldton 2013: 1). The policy notes that council may have a lower financial

commitment to these second-tier relationships, which are also likely to have “higher community stakeholder involvement” by external stakeholders (ibid: 2).

**Table 12. City of Greater Geraldton international relationships summary**

City	Year formed	Key features
<i>Sister Cities</i>		
Kosai, Japan	1998	Focus on cultural and educational exchanges
Zhanjiang, China	2013	Multi-focus relationship; emphasis on economic development; research; sporting, cultural and education exchanges
<i>Strategic Partner City</i>		
Zhoushan, China	2013	Multi-focus relationship
<i>Relationships under consideration</i>		
Linfen, China	n/a	Economic development
Bukittinggi, Indonesia	n/a	

The policy establishes goals and objectives for both first and second tier relationships. The goals relate to economic development, cross-cultural development, and international cooperation. Specific objectives supporting these goals include supporting council’s strategic priorities, increasing private sector investment in the region, supporting economic growth, promoting the region as a tourist destination, and establishing relationships between cultural and educational institutions.

The policy also applies a number of principles and selection criteria for the establishment of new international relationships, which are approved in the first instance by council’s International Relations Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC). This limits the creation of sister city relationships to one per year up to a maximum of six, while the selection criteria provide a range of parameters to assess prospective cities. Such parameters include whether there are any existing relationships with the proposed partner city, whether it has a similar or higher GDP to Greater Geraldton, and whether it has favourable growth rates and strong prospects for trade. If there are multiple candidates that meet the criteria, those with a port and airport which could facilitate trade and exchanges with Greater Geraldton are prioritised, as are Chinese cities at the Prefecture level or above.

IRDAC comprises two councillors, one of whom is the chair, along with a range of other stakeholders and two community representatives. As well as assessing proposals for new relationships, IRDAC is responsible for overall coordination of council’s international relations. Each partnership should have a relationships plan which outlines the objectives, goals and key focus areas, along with the main stakeholders and key performance indicators. Each relationship will also be subject to an annual review and audit. Council’s relationships program is managed by the Economic Development and Foreign Affairs Officer. This position answers to the Manager, Marketing, Land and Property Development, but also works closely with council’s CEO and mayor because of their roles in representing the city in international relationships. One staff member works full-time on council’s international relationships, and the program has an annual budget averaging \$40,000.





In July 2014, Geraldton Basketball Association Young Guns Team (20 athletes) toured in Shanghai, Zhoushan and Beijing for a youth basketball challenge. Photo © City of Greater Geraldton

### Value of the program and plans for its development

The program is seen as being successful in its aims of increasing the visibility of Greater Geraldton and the Mid West Region and in attracting increased international visitation, particularly from China. In turn this increased contact has supported the development of direct business and trade relationships as part of council’s broader objective to help the diversification of the region’s economy. The program is also seen as being valuable to the partnership cities for similar reasons. The international relationships policy is seen as a long-term strategy. Although the appointment of a new chair to IRDAC may cause some changes, the program has built a strong momentum and is likely to continue.

### Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program

Several factors appear to have contributed to the success of the program to date. These include the emphasis on building “people-to-people” relationships – for example through social, cultural, educational and sporting exchanges – as an integral part of developing longer-term economic development and investment links. This requires a long-term strategy, for example attracting young people to the region through sporting and cultural ties can assist in drawing older people as tourists or even to invest in the region.

Related to this multi-faceted approach is the decision to use the international relationships program to improve the sustainability of the regional economy by assisting it to diversify away from a high reliance on mining to agriculture, food production, tourism, and other industries mentioned earlier. This means the program is closely integrated with council’s overall strategic objectives.

Council’s role as a facilitator through its international relationships program is also important. There is still a much greater degree of involvement by the state in the business sector in China, so a direct link between council and both its counterpart in China and other levels of Australian government is a crucial factor. In this regard council is able to assist the local Chamber of Commerce in developing a relationship with its counterparts in the Chinese partner cities.

While there has been some opposition to the program, including from some councillors, this has not been widespread, partly because of Geraldton’s diverse multicultural population, and also because of the direct contribution by Chinese visitors to the local economy through spending in local shops and businesses.



The Chinese Consul General in Perth, Dr Huang Qinguo and his wife visited Geraldton in May 2014. Photo © City of Greater Geraldton

### Key points from the case study

- Council has developed an international relationships policy with clear goals, objectives, and processes to establish and manage relationships.
- Integral to the policy is the role of the International Relations Development Advisory Committee, which advises council on new relationships and coordinates activities associated with the program.
- While economic development is a key objective, the other objectives of cross-cultural development and international cooperation are integral in establishing ‘people-to-people’ relationships.
- These people-to-people relationships and related strategies, such as encouraging direct visitation to the region, are also seen as critical in developing longer-term economic relationships, including investment.
- The international relationships program assists in diversifying the regional economy away from its strong dependence on mining.
- Council’s international relationships are seen as crucial in facilitating other links between the state and the private sector in Chinese cities.

### References

City of Greater Geraldton 2013. *Council Policy CPO24 Establishing International relations*. City of Greater Geraldton, Geraldton, Australia.

## A.6 City of Melbourne

### Development of council's international relationship program

The City of Melbourne is a capital city council with a population of over 116,000. Like most of its capital city counterparts, it has an extensive international relationship program which, in Melbourne's case, is closely integrated with council's business development strategy. Melbourne's international focus has its roots in the city's historical role as a major port and a base for investment, trade and manufacturing. A "sister port" arrangement initiated in 1974 between the Port of Osaka and the Port of Melbourne contributed to the establishment of the City of Melbourne's first international relationship, with Osaka, Japan in 1978.

This initial engagement has expanded into six 'sister relationships', one 'strategic alliance', three 'cooperative agreements', and council's involvement in a number of other international relationships and forums. Melbourne's relationship with Tianjin, China, established in 1980, was the first connection between an Australian and Chinese city. Similarly, its relationship with St Petersburg was the first (and so far the only) Australian council relationship with a Russian city.

Melbourne has developed relationships with cities that have some similar characteristics. For example, most of its sister cities are, like Melbourne, the second largest urban centre in their country and, with the exception of Milan, Italy, all are also major port cities. Many have a long history in trade, and some are significant manufacturing centres, while the relationships with Tianjin, Thessaloniki, Greece and Milan have drawn on the support of Melbourne's large Chinese, Greek and Italian communities (see Table 13).

Council's international engagement program includes a full range of activities including ceremonial and civic activities, investment attraction, business development, education and training, cultural events and exchanges, community events, environmental sustainability, and promotion. However, there is a much greater focus on business-related activities in Melbourne's relationships with Osaka, Tianjin and, to some extent, Milan. The connections with Thessaloniki and St Petersburg are mainly based on cultural activities, while the connection with Boston, USA has a focus on educational exchange.

There are also activities which are specific to each relationship. For example, Melbourne's Japanese sister city, Osaka, is the secretariat of the Business Partner City (BPC) Network, a network of the business cities and chambers of commerce in the Asia-Pacific region. Melbourne was invited to join the network in 1998.

Melbourne has also established a business representative office in Tianjin as a partnership between the council, RMIT University, Taylors' Group, and the Australia China Business Council (Victoria) with the aim of leveraging business opportunities arising from the city's links with Tianjin. The office is now wholly owned and operated by the City of Melbourne the council and facilitates business and investment links between the cities. An important component of this relationship is the Tianjin Government Leaders Training program which is a joint partnership between the City of Melbourne, the Tianjin Municipal People's Government and RMIT. Senior business and government leaders

participate in a 12-week business management course at RMIT, focusing on international business management and developing working relationships with their Melbourne counterparts.

In 2008 Melbourne entered into a strategic alliance with New Delhi, India; the first relationship between an Australian state capital city and an Indian city. The alliance grew out of a wish to explore opportunities after the Commonwealth Games, which Melbourne hosted in 2006 and New Delhi in 2010. The alliance also aims to exploit the benefits of the increasing business and cultural ties between the cities. The city also signed a MoU with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) in 2006 to promote two-way trade between Melbourne and India. In addition Melbourne currently has 'cooperative agreements' with three Chinese cities, though these are much less active than the sister city and strategic alliance relationships.

The key characteristics of Melbourne's current international council-to-council relationships are summarised in Table 13.

**Table 13. City of Melbourne international relationships summary**

City	Year formed	Key features
<i>Sister Cities</i>		
Osaka, Japan	1978	Melbourne's first sister city connection following a sister port relationship between the ports of Osaka and Melbourne. Japan's second-largest city and a manufacturing centre. Secretariat of the Business Partner City Network.
Tianjin, China	1980	First relationship between an Australian and Chinese city. Tianjin is China's third-largest city and a major port. Melbourne has a business representative office in Tianjin and jointly runs a Government Leaders Training program with Tianjin.
Thessaloniki, Greece	1984	Supported by Melbourne's large Greek community. Thessaloniki is also a port and Greece's second-largest city
Boston, USA	1985	A major port and education centre. Common engagement in areas such as education, healthcare, biotechnology and culture.
St Petersburg, Russia	1989	The first and only relationship between an Australian and Russian city. St Petersburg is a port and the second-largest Russian city.
Milan, Italy	2004	Italy's second-largest city. The relationship acknowledges Melbourne's large Italian community. Emphasis on design.
<i>Strategic Alliance</i>		
New Delhi, India	2008	Aim is to increase the benefits of business and cultural ties between the cities. Includes a number of exchange programs.
<i>Cooperative Agreements</i>		
Fengxian District, China	2002	Less active than the above relationships; mainly related to government leadership training and business exchanges. The Nanjing relationship also supports Victoria and Jiangsu Province's sister-state relationship.
Nanjing, China	2002	
Guangzhou, China	2003	

In addition to its connections with individual cities, Melbourne is involved in a number of international local government initiatives. These include the BPC Network, which has 14 members in the Asia-Pacific region. The BPC aims to support the mutual economic development of each member city and, in particular, to create opportunities for links between small- to medium-sized enterprises throughout the network. Melbourne is also a member of the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, which is a network of international cities committed to addressing climate change, as well as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI).

### Management and governance structure

In 2010 council adopted an International Engagement Framework (IEF) as the basis for its engagement in existing long-term international relationships, and for any new city-to-city partnerships.

The IEF was based on a review of council's international relationships program conducted by the UTS Centre for Local Government in 2009. The review assessed international trends in city-to-city programs and benchmarked Melbourne's program with other Australian capitals and comparable international cities (Manchester, Glasgow and Johannesburg). The IEF notes as a key conclusion of this review that:

...there is a widespread international trend to more varied and flexible forms of international partnerships of a short-term nature that focus on one or two areas of cooperation. While the long-standing and underlying concepts of goodwill that global citizenship implies are at the heart of the international city partnerships movement, most cities are now seeking practical advantages to benefit from their international activities. These benefits take a variety of forms, such as economic, educational, cultural and sporting for example. (City of Melbourne 2010: 2)

Council's Enterprise Melbourne Advisory Board (EMAB) considered the report and reaffirmed that Melbourne has "a legitimate role to play" in international engagement, with objectives including the promotion of the city's export capabilities, profiling the city as an attractive destination for business investment, facilitating international learning, and supporting Melbourne's cultural diversity. However EMAB also proposed that council refresh the image of the program by adopting a more flexible project-based approach to new partnerships, while tightening the focus of existing ones.

The IEF recommended that these objectives and an additional theme of participation in international governance activities should be prioritised in relation to the financial and human resources provided by council to support international engagement. It allocated 50% of these resources to building prosperity, with the rest shared between facilitating learning; supporting community, cultural and civic linkages; and participation in international governance. The IEF noted that this does not necessarily mean that there would be no additional sister-city engagements, though in practice no new relationships have been developed since the review. Council would now look at specific projects on a case-by-case basis with an emphasis on mutual benefit. Other factors to be considered included growth prospects in the relevant industry sector, potential direct benefits to the city, synergies with other levels of government, and local relevance. The IEF recommendations are reflected in the 2013-17 Council Plan (see below).

Management of the engagement program is the responsibility of the Business and International Branch, which is one of four branches within council's City Business Division which also handles tourism, corporate affairs, events and strategic marketing. The Division's director reports to council's CEO. In addition the elected council has a portfolio arrangement and the Division falls within the economic development portfolio. The relationship with Boston is the only one which involves a community committee.

There are 19 staff in the branch, about half of whom are active in international engagement. In addition, council maintains an office in its Chinese sister city of Tianjin which has a full-time contractor and two local staff. Council's engagement in the international engagement program is funded entirely by the organisation. In 2009 council commissioned an evaluation of this office which concluded that while it provided good value for this investment, some work was needed to enhance its governance networks and to improve its leverage.

#### Value of the program and plans for its development

Being a capital city means that Melbourne has a slightly different role to other councils in Victoria, especially as people overseas are more likely to be aware of capital cities rather than states or regions. Therefore Melbourne's role in an international context is significant and also means that council has a quasi-diplomatic function in dealing with diplomatic representatives based in the city. In addition the council has sought through the program to increase the international profile of Melbourne. Some of the benefits of these international relationships are realised over a longer timeframe. For example, Melbourne is now reaping the benefits of the Tianjin Government Leaders Training program, run since 2001, as a number of the 250 alumni are now reaching senior administrative positions.

Consistent with the International Engagement Framework, the *Melbourne City Council: Council Plan 2013–17* identifies "a globally connected municipal economy" as one of council's four-year outcomes within its goal of "a prosperous city". To achieve this outcome one of the plan's four-year priorities is to: "Build on city-to-city connections and identify opportunities in BPC [*Business Partner Cities*] member cities within the ASEAN region for the municipality's businesses" (City of Melbourne 2013: 22-23).

Melbourne's international partners appear to share similar motivations for participating in these relationships. While there is a wish to build connections between cities and people of goodwill, developing business relationships is a key driver, particularly for its international relationships in China and Japan. Given the worldwide trend toward urbanisation, Melbourne's positive record in relation to the delivery of services relating to sustainability and liveability has also contributed to the interest of a number of international partners.

#### Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program

In Melbourne's case a key success factor has been a strong and equal commitment on both sides of each relationship, as demonstrated in the officer-level relationships developed in Tianjin. Political changes can also be an issue as new mayors and councillors may be sceptical initially regarding the

value of international relationships, but they have usually come to recognise the program's importance and support its development

A range of other factors affect the success or otherwise of council's international relationships. Initiatives related to the international engagement program such as overseas mayoral visits are always reported in the media, so these need a strong supporting case and to be carefully managed. In building this case it is worthwhile identifying the extra value that cities can offer through these relationships. The *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper recognised the importance of local government engagement in building extra layers in Australia's bilateral relationships. In part this is because some things are easier to do at the local government level rather than at the federal or state levels, for example providing case studies of practical examples of on-the-ground service delivery.

#### Key points from the case study

- As a capital city Melbourne has an international role, including dealing with diplomatic representatives and increasing the city's international profile. This means that it operates in a different context to most other councils.
- Council has developed a strategy of seeking to establish relationships with cities that have similar characteristics in terms of their national status and role in international trade. In addition, the city has sought to reflect and engage with elements of its large multicultural community in establishing these partnerships.
- Council has sought to engage in and support international relationships through various agencies, for example through its membership of the Business Partner City network, the establishment of a business representative office in Tianjin, and in the development of international training programs.
- Council's international relationships program has been externally reviewed and benchmarked. Based on the outcomes of one such review it adopted an International Engagement Framework (IEF) as the basis for its ongoing engagement in existing relationships and for any new city-to-city partnerships.
- The IEF not only identifies goals and objectives for the program, it also seeks to allocate the relevant staff resources to programs and projects related to these objectives.
- Some of the benefits of international partnerships are realised over a long period of time, for example engagement in training staff from partner councils can bring positive results when the officers involved reach leadership positions.

#### References

- City of Melbourne 2010. *International Engagement Framework*. City of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.
- City of Melbourne 2013. *Melbourne City Council: Council Plan 2013-2017*. City of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.

## A.7 City of Marion

### Development of council's international relationship program

Marion, a council in the southern suburbs of Adelaide with a population of around 84,000, has been involved in a partnership since 1993 with Kokubunji, a suburban Tokyo council. The intensity of the relationship has varied over time, partly as a result in changes in the elected bodies of both cities. The partnership was initiated by Kokubunji at a time when a number of Japanese councils were seeking international relationships. A delegation from the city visited a number of councils around Australia before selecting Marion. It was agreed that the relationship would be based around civic, cultural and school exchanges.

The relationship got off to a promising start with a number of exchanges occurring in the first few years. Unusually for the time, and for Japanese relationships generally, the relationship included some trade initiatives, for example the supply of Australian native flowers for Japanese festivals, but over time these dropped off and the level of engagement generally began to decline. This was due in part to changes in the elected representatives of both councils, which meant that those who had initiated the relationship were no longer involved. However school exchanges have continued. To complement these, and to help support the relationship, the Mayor has worked with Flinders University and a Tokyo university to develop an exchange program, commencing with a two-week “taster” course in English at Flinders for Japanese students which may start next year.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the relationship the current mayor of Marion visited Kokubunji to accompany a school delegation, and returned in 2013 for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. She has also worked with the former Kokubunji mayor to re-build the relationship. However the newly-elected mayor of Kokubunji has recently declined an invitation to make a return visit, a response which has cast some doubt on the future of the relationship.

### Management and governance structure

Council has adopted a Sister Cities Policy which acknowledges the current Kokubunji relationship and proposes that future relationships be established for their “strategic relevance” to Marion based on a range of economic, cultural, social, educational, humanitarian and other selection criteria (City of Marion nd). Establishing new relationships is a three-stage process in which a Sister Cities Friendship Group makes the initial assessment, before it is adopted by council and then formalised by an exchange of a MoU with the partner city.

The friendship group should include the mayor, two councillors, and a number of community members. The policy was adopted in November 2013 and but at the time the case study was conducted the Friendship Group has yet to be established. In addition, while the policy indicates that council staff will support the group, there does not seem to have been any formal allocation of staff resources to support the existing relationship with Kokubunji.

The Kokubunji relationship is largely managed by the mayor herself with the support of her executive assistance and council's communications unit only when required. Between civic visits little support is needed from council, especially as the schools look after their own exchanges. The relationship also receives little financial support from council, and on her last visit the mayor paid



almost all of the travel and accommodation expenses involved herself. The requirement for self-funding was also extended to community members participating in the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary delegation, which resulted in minimal public participation.

### Value of the program and plans for its development

Partly because of its low-key nature the relationship has received limited community recognition in recent years, although there has been strong support from families involved in the schools exchange program. The largely self-funded nature of the visits by the mayor and members of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary delegation also suggest both a mixed attitude in council towards the value of the relationship and concern at the potential for negative media coverage. The recent response from the Kokubunji mayor declining the invitation to visit Marion suggests that there is decreasing interest in that city as well.

### Key factors which affect the success of an international relationship program

While the role of the mayor and councillors is critical, given the political nature of local government the Marion experience suggests that to succeed an international relationships program also needs a degree of consistent support from the council administration and staff. This is particularly important as international partnerships take time to nurture and can't just be put on hold if there is a change in political leadership on either side.

It is also important in the first flush of enthusiasm for a new relationship to establish systems and agree on the contribution each side will make, as well as committing to review the partnership every few years so that there is a degree of accountability and to ensure that the relationship does not lose momentum. It would seem that in the case of the Marion-Kokubunji relationship that once the initial "honeymoon" phase was over the two cities struggled to find a strong common basis for maintaining the relationship. This suggests that international partnerships also need a consistent minimum level of activity to ensure continuity.

As with a number of other partnerships the Marion experience also suggests that engagement with the local community and the media to explain the nature and purpose of the relationship and in particular to highlight the positive initiatives and outcomes associated with the program are also important.

### Key points from the case study

- While the Marion-Kokubunji relationship had a positive start, its subsequent chequered history suggests that either the cities actually had little in common or that the relationship might have lacked an appropriate structure.
- New relationships should spell out the contribution each council will make, establish appropriate protocols, and make provision for regular reviews of the partnership.
- Changes in political leadership on either side of an international partnership can contribute to the decline, or even the demise the relationship. To prevent this there needs to be a strong commitment from the council administration to maintain these relationships.

- Apart from the practical benefits of having a number of exchanges, visits and other activities associated with an international partnership, these also help to provide a critical mass for the relationship in terms of community engagement and positive media coverage.
- International partnerships need strategies to engage with the community and to demonstrate to the media the positive benefits of such relationships.

### References

City of Marion n.d. *Sister Cities Policy*. City of Marion, Adelaide, Australia.

## A.8 Mount Alexander Shire Council

### Development of council’s international development program

Mount Alexander is a rural shire located in central Victoria centred on the town of Castlemaine with a population of 17,600. Along with a local community group the council has signed a friendship agreement with a sub-district in East Timor, one of a significant number of such community development arrangements established with the support of the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA).

The VLGA has been a “strong advocate for ‘grassroots’ support for the re-building of East Timor”, encouraging the establishment of a number of friendship agreements between councils and sub-districts in the country (Mt Alexander Shire Council nd). A feature of many of these agreements has been a high level of community engagement through the creation of local community groups, many of which take the lead in maintaining the relationship and initiating and managing projects.

In the case of Mount Alexander there was strong community interest in establishing an East Timor relationship. Following a mayoral visit to Dili an agreement was signed in 2009 between the Lolotoe sub-district administration, Mount Alexander Council, and the Friends of Lolotoe to “work with the people of Lolotoe so that they are able to achieve the goals they have for their community”. Lolotoe is a sub-district located in a rugged mountainous region over 180 km from Dili, with a population of 8,000 who rely largely on subsistence farming.

The Friends of Lolotoe have assisted the Lolotoe community with initiatives including student scholarships, upgrading student accommodation and school buildings, providing education materials, support for the community library, and sanitation projects. The group has undertaken a number of fundraising initiatives including a fun run held for the first time in 2013, and the sale of coffee grown by East Timorese farmers.



Photo courtesy of Friends of Lolotoe

In 2014 council and the Friends hosted a civic reception for a study group from Lolotoe who also visited a number of schools, businesses and historic buildings, as well as touring council infrastructure including roads, bridges and water management facilities.

### Management and governance structure

The Friends of Lolotoe is an incorporated association. While council had a key role in establishing the friendship agreement, the organisation is run independently. Council does provide some support to the group, for example through the recent civic reception and the nomination of a councillor to its

committee. However there is no staff member specifically designated to liaise with the group, which in many respects is treated in a similar way to other community groups and organisations in the Mount Alexander area.

Council does not provide any regular funding to the Friends of Lolotoe. However the group can apply for funding from council's "Strengthening Community" grants program. It has also received support from other council funding programs, and donations from individuals and local businesses to supplement fundraising activities. In the last financial year the group's income was around \$10,800.

#### Value of the program and plans for its development

While it is not a large scale project, the relationship has clearly been successful in supporting the development of the small Lolotoe community and in providing a range of practical benefits, particularly in relation to education and information exchange. In this regard the VLGA's initiative to build grassroots support for communities in East Timor appears to have been very effective in Mount Alexander. The establishment of the Friends of Lolotoe and the continued community support for the group are consistent with the high level of community engagement found in the Mount Alexander community, which has a strong history of volunteering around issues such as environmental sustainability, caring for the community, and caring for the environment.

In turn these attributes have been reflected in the priorities of elected councillors. Council has seen its role as going beyond the traditional areas of local governance to address the interests of the community more broadly, including providing leadership, even in areas for which it has no direct responsibility such as the Friends of Lolotoe initiative.

However, the long-term future of the partnership is uncertain. While the VLGA is continuing to support its grassroots

development strategy in relation to East Timor, it also has to respond to a range of other issues closer to home. Similarly in Mount Alexander while there is continued interest in the Friends of Lolotoe group, there are also competing priorities for local community engagement. The four-year council plan adopted in 2013, and council's current annual plan both make no mention of the Lolotoe relationship, though this is consistent with the independence of the Friends of Lolotoe group and the fact that it is treated similarly to other community organisations. Council also has no declared plans to develop other international partnerships.



Photo courtesy of Friends of Lolotoe

### Key factors which affect the success of an international relationship program

Clearly the support of the VLGA provided both a catalyst and a framework in which the Mount Alexander–Lolotoe partnership could be developed alongside a number of similar arrangements involving other Victorian councils. At the local level, leadership by the mayor was a critical element in establishing the relationship, as was the active dialogue council engaged in with Mount Alexander’s strongly engaged local community regarding the proposal.

### Key points from the case study

- The Mount Alexander–Lolotoe relationship is a successful example of a practical international partnership focussed on community assistance between a small rural Australian community and an isolated sub-district in East Timor.
- The commitment of the VLGA to a grassroots model of development was a crucial element in establishing this relationship.
- Equally important was the commitment of the mayor, the presence of an engaged local community with a strong history of volunteering, and an active dialogue between the council and the community.
- Although it is a party to the friendship agreement, council has only limited involvement in the ongoing management of the international relationship, which is for the most part handled independently by the Friends of Lolotoe.
- This model of international relationship is advantageous for a small rural council like Mount Alexander which has limited resources but an engaged community; however if community interest were to decline the relationship is unlikely to be in a position to obtain significant support from the council.

### References

Mt Alexander Shire Council n.d. *Friends of Lolotoe*. Mt Alexander Shire Council, Castlemaine, Australia.

## A.9 Orange City Council

### Development of council's international relationship program

Like many other councils, Orange established a range of relationships primarily around cultural and educational exchanges. The strongest international partnership is with the City of Mount Hagen in Papua New Guinea (PNG) which was assisted with the support of AusAID funding, and is the main focus of this case study<sup>4</sup>. According to the Council website 'The Sister Cities program aims to encourage fruitful relationships with the Council's four Sister Cities through personal exchanges of information and support of cultural and academic visits' (Orange City Council nd) The four sister city relationships engaged in by Council are summarised in Table 14.

**Table 14 City of Orange international relationships summary**

City	Year formed	Key features
<i>Sister Cities</i>		
City of Orange, USA	1963	Cultural exchanges
Timaru, New Zealand	1986	Cultural exchanges – low level of activity
Ushiki, Japan	1990	Cultural and student exchanges
Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea	1995	Community development, capacity building and economic development

### International relationship with Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea

Orange City Council established the partnership with Mount Hagen Urban Local Level Government in 1995. Mount Hagen is located in the West Highland Province (WHP) of Papua New Guinea, situated to the north of Australia, and has a population of 60,000 people, making it the third largest city in PNG. Orange City Council, situated in Central NSW, supports a population of 38,000 people.

The Mount Hagen partnership was set up initially to assist with capacity building. It was initiated by a local teacher who had taught at Mount Hagen High School who then encouraged the Council to establish a formal relationship. The objectives were initially focused on building skills (capacity) of staff at Hagen Council. Orange City Council subsequently received funding from the Australian Government AusAID to strengthen their existing capacity building efforts. This was supported by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) which provided administrative support and also acted as a broker bringing together a number of partnership agreements and AusAID funding applications as well as providing information exchange (Sykes 2010: 213).

A key initiative undertaken within this sister city framework was assistance with an urban plan for Mount Hagen, the first of its kind in PNG. Key elements of the plan included waste management, water and sewerage supply, traffic and pedestrian plans, sporting and recreational facilities, and

<sup>4</sup> The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) assumed responsibility for providing advice to the Government on aid policy and managing Australia's overseas aid program on 1 November 2013, following the abolition of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) as an Executive Agency.

capacity building for women's groups. The plan enabled Mount Hagen to attract national government funds as well as international funds to provide for specific infrastructure projects (ibid: 216).

A further development which was designed to facilitate opportunities for companies in Orange was an Economic Development Agreement between Orange City Council and the PNG Western Highlands Provincial Government in 2010, particularly those involved in mineral resource development. This included proposals to support the development of partnerships with businesses in Orange with a focus on mining, environmental protection and governance support, facilitate business networks and contacts within and between the private sector in both cities and to encourage farmers in the Orange area to access itinerant workers in the WHP (ibid: 218).

Over time the objectives of the partnership were extended to include professional development opportunities for Orange City Council staff and to emphasise internal organisational learning and collaboration, in recognition of the fact that the process of building capacity in Mount Hagen also developed the capacity of the Orange City Council team involved in the process:

The capacity building exercise included providing opportunities for the officers of Orange City Council to undertake complex inter-organisational and inter-cultural learning and project management. This approach required a management style that created ownership and partnership in a sophisticated model founded on empowerment of the stakeholders.... This skills base is advantageous to not only the Hagen partnership but transferable to the community networking and empowerment demands in Orange City. (Sykes 2002: 7)

### **Management and governance structure**

The City of Orange has an established Sister City Committee comprising of councillors and community representatives. Council doesn't have a specific policy for the Sister City relationships overall, however it did develop a strategic plan for the Mount Hagen partnership specifically. The project was managed for many years by Council's Director Enterprise Services. Other members of staff have been involved in specific projects within the sister city arrangement related to their expertise. Community involvement in Orange's sister city arrangements has varied over time, but is reported to be particularly strong in the partnership with Mount Hagen.

### **Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program**

In terms of establishing and developing the relationship, the following factors were cited as key:

- obtaining high level support in all the organisations involved, for example the General Manager from Mount Hagen formally requested help in developing the town plan
- funding, in this case from AusAID, which was facilitated by CLGF proved to be essential to maintaining and developing the program over time
- comprehensive training for Australian staff in working in PNG
- embedding the partnership in the delivery program of council
- keeping a focus on the sense of discovery, building networks over time, and establishing trust and goodwill between the partners.

Factors which have adversely affected the partnership have included some media perceptions that trips associated with the partnership are 'junkets'. For example, an article in the local paper attacked Council for sending three senior staff to PNG. The nature of the involvement of council staff had to be explained to the journalist. The amount of voluntary time contributed by staff, including weekends and evenings tied up in travelling and writing up the results of the visit was not widely understood. Another difficulty was council requirements regarding expenditure essential in the context of working and travelling in PNG. The necessity of this expenditure was difficult at times to explain to council corporate staff.

Factors which have been pivotal to the ongoing success of the partnership included the shift from a focus on capacity building carried out by a wealthy country in a poor country, to viewing it more as a relationship between neighbours with similar challenges. The benefits were increasingly seen in terms of the learning gained for both parties, the mutual commitment and goodwill, and being able to demonstrate the economic benefits of the relationship for both parties and their local economies.

#### Key points from the case study

- Of the four sister city relationships supported by Orange, the partnership with Mount Hagen in PNG is the strongest and best documented.
- The funding of the capacity building program by AusAID with the support of CLGF enabled wide-reaching development initiatives for Mount Hagen.
- Over time the relationship shifted focus from capacity building to networking, open exchange, and extensive inter-organisational learning. This process helped to empower and build the capacity of council staff and other stakeholders in both Mount Hagen and Orange
- Economic development opportunities were fostered through the partnership, again benefiting both the Orange and Mount Hagen communities.
- Success factors included strong leadership by elected officials and senior employees of both Mount Hagen Council and Orange City Council.

#### References

- Orange City Council n.d. *Sister Cities*. Viewed March 2014.  
<<http://www.orange.nsw.gov.au/site/index.cfm?display=147021>>.
- Sykes, S. 2002. *Building capacity for sustainable resource management through Sister City arrangements*. Presentation to the International Local Agenda 21 Conference 2002, The Regional Institute Online Publishing, Erina, Australia.
- Sykes, S. 2010. Mutual capacity building: Mt Hagen local government and Orange City. *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*, 7: 213-220.



## A.10 Penrith City Council

### Development of council’s international relationship program

Penrith City Council is an outer suburban council located in western Sydney with a population of 178,000 which has a large international relationship program with an increasing focus on business relationships and economic outcomes. Council established a sister cities committee in 1983 when there was widespread community interest in establishing relationships with Japanese cities to encourage cultural exchange. This approach characterised the first two relationships established in the 1980s: a sister city relationship established in 1984 with Fujieda City; and a friendship city relationship with Hakusan City in 1989, which was developed through the Fujieda connection. In 1989 Council also established a sister city relationship with Penrith in the UK, though this remains a low-key, mainly ceremonial connection based on the councils’ common name.

Commencing in the 1990s council has adopted an economic focus in its international relationship program, looking to establish relationships with clearer business outcomes. An economic cooperation agreement was signed with Gangseo-gu in South Korea in 1994, and a sister city relationship established with the Xicheng District of Beijing, China in 1998. In 2003 Council also established a friendship city relationship with Kunshan in China. Council’s international relationships are summarised in Table 15.

**Table 15. Penrith City Council international relationships summary**

City	Year formed	Type and key features
Fujieda City, Japan	1984	Sister city; student and cultural exchanges
Hakusan City, Japan	1989	Friendship city; student and cultural exchanges
Penrith, UK	1989	Sister city; largely ceremonial relationship
Gangseo-gu, South Korea	1994	Economic mutual cooperation agreement; business exchanges; staff visits and training. Also an MoU signed between Penrith Business Alliance and its Gangseo-gu counterpart and between council and the South Korean consulate
Xicheng District, China	1998	Sister city; business exchanges
Kunshan, China	2003	Friendship city; business exchanges; staff visits; sister schools arrangements. University and health links

While the direction of its relationships has changed, council has found that cultural exchanges and activities are still an essential ingredient in establishing links with Asian cities. They remain the exclusive focus of council’s relationships with Japanese cities, which have not been interested in establishing economic ties, but they are also a key component of council’s more recent partnerships with Chinese and South Korean cities. However, in the case of the latter arrangements, both sides also had a strong interest in pursuing economic relationships. Consequently, while council still wishes to maintain its Japanese links, the Chinese and South Korean relationships have assumed greater importance.

Council's current program involves a wide range of activities, including cultural and educational activities such as student exchanges, arts exchange programs, exhibitions and performances, and ceremonial activities with most of the partnership cities. There have also been visits by partner council staff, for example early childcare staff, as well as senior officials.

Based on council's international relationships, a number of independent partnerships have been established between educational and other institutions in Penrith and its partner cities. For example, sister schools relationships have been established and the University of Western Sydney currently sends two interns annually to work on a new university building project in Kunshan, China. Agreements have also been established between hospitals in Kunshan and Penrith. Currently a key area of interest for Chinese health experts is the study of the treatment of obesity, diabetes and other conditions linked to the increasing impact of Western diets in China. Representatives from Kunshan have visited Nepean Hospital in Penrith to look both at specific approaches to treatment, and the broader operations of the health system.

However, as indicated earlier, Council has an increasing focus on fostering business relationships and works closely with the Penrith Business Alliance (PBA), an external economic development entity combining the previous local economic development corporation and council's local economic development department. The PBA was established in 2009 to support local job creation and economic development with a board comprising majority representation from local industry plus three council and two community representatives.

The PBA has been very active in supporting and developing business relationships with council's partner cities in China and South Korea. In 2011 an MoU was signed by the PBA with the Gangseo-gu Chapter of the Seoul Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which complements the agreement between the two councils (Penrith Business Alliance 2011). Council, however, still plays a key role as a facilitator, drawing on the high regard with which the position of mayor is held in many Asian cultures and the consequent expectation that the mayor will be involved to some degree in the development of these relationships.

A range of business groups from Penrith have visited council's partner cities in China and South Korea, and there have been a number of visits by business delegations from these cities to Penrith. Currently there is a strong interest in China in investing in Australia, and the PBA is trying to encourage Chinese applying for business visas to Australia to consider investing in Penrith.

In addition council signed an agreement in 2010 with the South Korean Consulate to jointly promote public service training programs and support economic and cultural exchanges, as well as promoting joint research projects as part of the 2011 South Korea-Australia Friendship Year. Council has received delegations from a number of different levels of government in South Korea. It has also become a leader in receiving fee-paying delegations undertaking study tours, in the last financial year receiving 30 such visits from Chinese and South Korean cities.

#### **Management and governance structure**

The program is managed by council's Partnerships and Events Officer, under the supervision and with the assistance of the Marketing Partnerships and Events Coordinator. Other staff assist with the

additional workload when overseas delegations are visiting, but average staff engagement is around 1.5 to 2.0 FTE.

While international relationships are the main focus of the Partnerships and Events Officer, this position also assists in events management when required. These positions form part of Corporate Communications and Marketing, which reports directly to the general manager.



Mayor Ross Fowler OAM with sister cities South Korea and Japan at the celebration of 60th Anniversary of the Municipalisation of Fujieda City, Japan. 2014. Photo © Penrith City Council

Council has a Penrith International Friendship Committee which is a committee of council predominantly focussed on the Japanese relationships, though it assists with activities involving other cities (Penrith City Council 2014). With the exception of the chair, who is a council representative nominated by the mayor, all of the members are community volunteers. The committee is made up of a broad cross-section of the community and, in particular, the parents of student exchange participants. In relation to the Chinese and South Korean relationships, the PBA plays a key role as described earlier.

Council's international relationship program does not have a specific strategic framework or specific objectives, though it forms part of council's promotion and marketing strategy and council's economic development and employment objectives though council's links with the PBA. Council allocates \$10,000 annually to the Friendship Committee, and around \$70,000 is provided through Council's budget for activities related to the international relationships program.

### Value of the program and plans for its development

From council's perspective the program appears to be working well, especially as it is also providing benefits to the wider community. Indeed part of Council's rationale for working with the PBA in developing the Chinese and South Korean relationships was to provide economic benefits to community.

The program has also helped put Penrith on the international stage. Though the outcomes of such gains are often long-term, there have been some short-term, practical outcomes to council's international relationships program. For example, two senior officials from South Korea came to spend 18 months with council. As these officers had to rent houses, purchase cars, and incur other expenses in the city during their stay, this provided a direct economic benefit to the local community. The program also provides a range of practical benefits to the partnership cities, for example in the development of business relationships, and in local government capacity building through professional exchange programs.

Council is yet to conduct a formal review process, but one is being finalised which will look at how the program could be developed in a more strategic way. As part of this review process, council will seek input from other councils in Australia as well as its international partners. One question the review is likely to look at is whether the Japanese relationships have reached their limit of usefulness. While there is no desire to terminate these relationships, it is likely that there will be a greater focus on the Chinese and South Korean relationships where there is the greatest interest and potential for mutual benefit. Council has little to no scope to expand its international relationship program, so is not actively seeking additional relationships, though it may consider forming new relationships for specific purposes.

### Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program

As a general observation, international partnerships run well when management accepts their value to council and they have the support of the general manager. A key component in the success of council's program has been to make the Partnerships and Events Officer the single point of contact for council's communication with its overseas partners, giving these partners a degree of certainty. This also means that this officer can develop a detailed understanding of the appropriate protocols in communicating with each partnership council and gain the respect of their counterparts in these cities, as well as an understanding of all the issues involved in managing each relationship. To consolidate and make accessible these insights, the officer previously in this position also developed a handbook outlining the specific etiquette and customs involved in each relationship to assist in briefing delegations going overseas.

Another issue which needs to be managed is the expectation from the overseas partners that their visits to Australia will be reciprocated. In agreeing to reciprocal visits, however, council has to consider potential negative media coverage and community perceptions that these visits are just a "holiday". Penrith City Council has been successful in deflecting such criticism by always having an economic focus for its visits, and by minimising the costs involved. For example, council might pay the fare for the mayor in leading a delegation, but the international partner might cover

accommodation costs, and the members of local business community who are participating in the delegation might pay their own way.

#### Key points from the case study

- While council's initial relationships were based on civic and cultural exchanges, more recently it has sought to concentrate on building economic ties. However it has discovered that cultural exchanges and activities are equally important in building these economic relationships.
- Council has acted as a facilitator to support the establishment of independent relationships between education and health institutions within the jurisdictions, and has also worked with a local business alliance to foster business relationships with its Chinese and South Korean partners. Councils can make a critical contribution in this role, drawing on the high regard with which the position of mayor is held in parts of Asia.
- Having a specific officer as the single point of contact for communication with council's overseas partners means that this person can develop a detailed understanding of the appropriate protocols. This approach also provides greater certainty for these partners.
- Council has successfully leveraged its South Korean relationship to develop wider training, research and exchange programs, as well as establishing a unique role in receiving fee-paying delegations from South Korea and China.
- A partnership program can have both long-term and direct, short-term benefits, the latter including gains from the expenditure made locally by visiting delegations and staff on exchange.
- The expectations of overseas partners regarding reciprocal visits to their cities need to be carefully considered in light of the potential to create negative perceptions in the local media and community.

#### References

- Penrith Business Alliance 2011. *Memorandum of Understanding between Penrith Business Alliance and Gangseo-gu Chapter of SCCI*. Penrith Business Alliance, Penrith, Australia.
- Penrith City Council 2014. *Penrith International Friendship Committee 2014 Annual General Meeting Chairpersons Report*. Penrith City Council, Penrith, Australia.

## A.11 Townsville City Council

### Development of council's international relationship program

The City of Townsville is a major regional city located in north Queensland with a population of 184,524. The council has a number of international relationships, including one with Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea (PNG). This relationship, which has received federal government support and is managed separately from council's other relationships, is the focus of this case study.

Townsville City Council has relationships with six cities, the oldest of which was established in 1983 with the Papua New Guinean National Capital District Commission (NCDC), which administers Port Moresby and its surrounding districts. Since then it has formed another five relationships with Asian cities. While these relationships initially had a focus on trade and investment, in current practice they appear to be based more on educational and cultural exchanges. Some of the relationships do, however, also involve business exchanges alongside other activities. For example, in the case of Port Moresby, the relationship has developed into a capacity-building partnership, while in the case of Changshu, China there have been a number of exchanges based on environmental and sustainability projects.

Townsville's international relationships are summarised in Table 16.

**Table 16. City of Townsville international relationships summary**

City	Year formed	Type and key features
Port Moresby, PNG	1983	Sister City; capacity building; trade and investment; cultural exchange
Shunan, Japan	1990	Sister City; sporting, cultural and educational exchanges
Iwaki City, Japan	1991	Sister City; educational and cultural exchanges
Changshu, China	1995	Sister City; environmental and sustainability initiatives; business exchanges
Suwon, South Korea	1996	Sister City; trade; educational, sporting and cultural exchanges
Foshan, China	2006	Friendship City; cultural exchanges; exploring opportunities for business and further cultural exchanges

### Development of council's relationship with Port Moresby

As noted earlier, the relationship with Port Moresby is the Council's oldest. It was initially established as a "traditional" friendship and cultural exchange partnership, with economic development also being a key driver. The relationship has matured to the extent that Council states that some \$500 million in two-way trade is now flowing annually between the two ports (Kirk, 2014: 2).

The relationship changed in 2000 when the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) initiated a scoping study to develop the Good Practice Scheme, which was aimed at assisting Port

Moresby to improve service delivery. This led to the establishment of a capacity building project in 2002 with the NCDC in Port Moresby. The project, named Hetura (“mateship” in the Moto language of the Port Moresby area), is co-ordinated through the CLGF’s Good Practice Scheme with funding from the former AusAID.<sup>5</sup> Townsville City Council provides support to the project through the contribution of staff time (Hammond 2012: 22).

The overarching goal of Project Hetura is to “strengthen management, planning and governance within the NCDC and to improve the capacity of the organisation to deliver efficient, responsive, accountable services to the community” (Gheller 2010: 205). In implementing the project a partnership model has been adopted by the participants “built through a relationship of trust and good-will developed over time between the two organisations” (ibid: 206)

Under Project Hetura a number of officers of Townsville City Council have made several visits to the NCDC, working closely with local staff to assist with policy development and restructuring, and providing mentoring and capacity building.

Phase 1 of Project Hetura operated from 2002 to 2008 and included the following activities:

1. *Structural changes* – including strengthening planning, lands and building services functions; strengthening corporate planning processes; the establishment of compliance functions; customer service improvements.
2. *Policy and legislation* – representations to National Government to seek legislative changes; amendments to masterplans; preparation of Local Area Plans.
3. *IT systems* – including an IT systems audit and needs analysis; upgrades to the property database; improvements to network connections between buildings; the standardisation of equipment.
4. *Records management* – the establishment of a centralised records management system.

As indicated above, Project Hetura was built upon the pre-existing sister city relationship between the two cities formed in 1983. Officers from Townsville City Council and the NCDC further developed the relationship to build a strong foundation for the delivery of Project Hetura. This has resulted in the parties being better able to resolve any complications that have arisen throughout the project. Towards the end of Phase 1 in 2008, Townsville City Council amalgamated with the neighbouring Thuringowa, and Project Hetura was placed on hold by the newly formed council during the development of a new structure and review of services. During this period the NCDC progressed the project. Phase 2 commenced in 2010 and had concluded by June 2013. Phase 2 included IT, human resources management, planning and waste management. In early 2013 a new partnership project involving councils in Australia and the Department of Provincial and Local Level Government in Papua New Guinea was being considered.

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<sup>5</sup> As noted in reference to the Orange City Council case study, DFAT assumed responsibility for Australia’s overseas aid program on 1 November 2013, following the abolition of AusAID.

## Management and governance structure

At the time this case study was being researched, Council’s Economic Development Unit had overall responsibility for administering Council’s international relationships in conjunction with council’s events team, though these arrangements were under review. The more “traditional” sister city relationships are also overseen by Townsville City Council’s Sister City Committee.

Council’s Port Moresby relationship is managed separately, however. There is one officer with general management responsibility for this partnership, who fulfils this role alongside her full-time management position within Council’s Planning Department. This officer also reports regularly to Council’s CEO, who provides guidance, ideas and feedback. There is strong CEO and executive staff support for the scheme.

Project Hatura was reported on formally to the former AusAID via the CLGF. Progress reports are also provided to the Sister City Committee, though this does not provide much input to the program. All of the councils participating in the CLGF Good Practice Scheme also get together to share information and approaches.



Photo © City of Townsville

## Value of the program and plans for its development

The value to Townsville City Council of the Port Moresby relationship has mainly been in the ability to offer learning experiences and professional development opportunities to employees working in Port Moresby on the agreed projects. Employees working on the front line in council are the ones offered the opportunity to work on the projects in Port Moresby, offering a completely different work environment and the opportunity to develop very different solutions for the NDC than would apply in Townsville.

On their return from Port Moresby, Townsville City Council officers are requested to complete a report on the activities undertaken, what worked well, suggestions for improvements to future visits, and the value of the project overall. This allows the partnership to build on those aspects which did work well, and improve areas not working as well. The partnership is two-way, with employees from the NDC visiting Townsville to gain hands-on experience by working alongside Townsville City Council officers and participating in training programs.



It was noted that it is often very difficult to quantify the achievements of international alliances. In 2011 an external report was prepared for Council assessing the value of the sister cities program. While this report has not been released publicly it is understood that it found that program has had a positive impact, especially given its relatively modest cost. As noted earlier, at the time the research for this case study was being conducted the sister cities program was being reviewed but it appears that council was seeking to increase community engagement within the existing relationships.

#### **Key factors which affect the success of the international relationship program**

Officers interviewed for this case study said that it is important to have an officer driving the Port Moresby partnership within the council, as it would be very easy for the partnership to be overtaken by other everyday priorities. It is also important to take a long-term view, as the results might not be seen immediately. Ongoing council and senior executive support is also vital. A lot also depends on how successful council is in promoting its partnerships and mobilising community support to use the relationship as a networking opportunity. The attitude of the federal government towards council engagement in international relationships was also important in creating an environment in which councils can “sell” these relationships to their communities.

In the case of Project Hetura, the local media has reported positively on the program, and the Chamber of Commerce is a strong supporter. The council is also strongly behind the program and the responsible officer reports regularly and transparently on the costs involved. Fortunately, politics have never disrupted the partnership. It is however difficult as noted earlier to quantify the outcomes. There are also a number of practical operational issues which can affect a partnership, for example changes in staff and council administrations both in the Australian and overseas council, as well as the potentially disruptive impact of external factors such as council amalgamations.

#### **Key points from the case study**

Some of the lessons learned from Council’s international relationships, and in particular the Port Moresby partnership, include:

- Engaging with the business sector and the local media can be a key factor in developing community support and facilitating the development of economic, cultural and social networks around international partnerships.
- Delays, particularly in implementing community development-related projects, are common and should to be factored in on both sides. It is also easy to overestimate what can be achieved, so it is important to develop a realistic program of activities initially.
- Participation in such partnerships also provides Australian council staff with unique opportunities to operate in a different work environment, and to gain experience developing different solutions.
- Relationships with a community development focus may have to be run separately within council from more “traditional” international partnerships because of external funding requirements and other factors, but promoting understanding and transparency can be assisted if progress reports are provided to council’s sister cities committee or its equivalent.

- Maintaining continuity of staff involvement in international partnerships is desirable, as changes in personnel can cause complications or delays in the development of the relationship. It is inevitable, however, that both operational changes such as council elections and staff turnover, as well as external disruptions such as council amalgamations will affect these relationships.
- It is sometimes difficult to maintain momentum in international relationships, particularly those with a community development focus, between staff visits.

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