

## Local Support for International Collaborations: UMT's Town Twinning

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The policies and practices of **local authorities have an important role in shaping international relations** of the states. The activities carried out by local authorities in the fields of economy, environment, health, tourism, culture, art and other fields have led to the emergence of local diplomacy over time. Local diplomacy also promotes civil society dialogue as a powerful instrument that facilitates the exchange of information and experience through collaborations involving non-governmental organizations.

**Town Twinning** stands out as one of the sustainable and effective methods for local authorities to establish collaborations at the international level. This relationship includes not only communication and information sharing but also more advanced dimensions of cooperation and partnership. One of the most essential features that distinguish

Town Twinning from other communication and collaboration relations is that it includes a long-term perspective. For this reason, town twinning must have higher-level objectives, unlike other short and medium-term collaborations. It is important for these goals to be adopted and internalized by citizens living in cities where Town Twinning activities are carried out. From this point of view, Town Twinning makes it possible to offer solutions to common problems faced by different societies by bringing together different local authorities within the framework of a common set of universal values and principles. Town Twinning is also a form of democratic and participatory approach that enables the use of resources more effectively and efficiently with its inherent experience sharing feature, thereby increasing the quality of service, supporting the improvement of citizen satisfaction and living standards and contributing to socioeconomic development.

**Town Twinning between Turkey and the EU Project (TWIN)** has attained its place as the most comprehensive example carried out in this field. The Project is funded by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II (IPA II). Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate for EU Affairs is the beneficiary of the project whereas the co-beneficiaries are the Union of Municipalities of Turkey, Union of Provinces, Ministry of Environment and Urbanization Directorate-General of Local Authorities. These institutions are main public actors that play a fundamental role in town twinning activities in Turkey.

TWIN Project aims to establish permanent bridges which will ensure information and experience sharing between local authorities in the EU member states and Turkey by strengthening the administrative capacity at local level during Turkey's EU accession. For this purpose, various actions have been taken in order to improve the capacities of local authorities in the 'EU Acquis' and 'Town Twinning' themes. Further to this, a grant scheme was developed as the continuation and supplementary of these actions. With a total budget of 2,6 m. euros, the grant scheme provided support for projects aiming at developing town twinning relationship between local authorities in Turkey and EU Member State and strengthening their roles on the EU accession process.

Within the scope of the first EU-funded grant scheme on Town Twinning, 23 projects were awarded under the themes of environment, energy, climate change, smart cities, recycling, sustainable tourism, youth and sports, culture, migration management and rural development. Maximum 130.000 euros were granted for the jointly developed projects of local authorities in Turkey and local authorities in EU Member States. Projects were carried out in 19 different provinces of Turkey, and mostly by municipalities in addition to governorates in cooperation with local their counterparts from Germany, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Portugal, Slovenia and Greece.

Bridges built through projects within Grant Scheme strengthened not only the local authorities but also the foundations of acquaintance between private sector, civil society and citizens. When concrete collaborations were added to these acquaintances, social and economic solidarity relations, which ensure the mutual flow of methods and information between local governments, have started to be established.

As in every issue, it is of great importance to evaluate opinions shared by different parties from an egalitarian perspective to solve the problems of the cities to meet their needs and to create environments where compromise-based decisions can be made. Through Town Twinning between Turkey and the EU Grant Scheme, these environments have been expanded from city borders to far beyond the country's borders. Thus, Town Twinning has once again been proved to have the potential to create an environment to make more egalitarian and agreeable decisions in terms of method and content.

Town Twinning still occupies an important place in strengthening human relations, creating bridges in the society and between public institutions and non-governmental organizations, and providing cultural and economic exchange. In the light of the experiences gained through the TWIN Project, Town Twinning also deserves to qualify as 'an effective local support for the sustainability of international collaborations'. Please visit [www.yereldeab.org.tr/towntwinning](http://www.yereldeab.org.tr/towntwinning) for further information.

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