



EUROPEAN PROJECT SUSTAIN: RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The 30th of December marks the end of the [SUSTAIN](#) project, which has been co-funded in the framework of the "Europe for Citizens" programme and aimed at promoting the cooperation between the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM) and the Local Union of Municipalities and Communities of the Prefecture of Chios (TEDK Chios) from Greece, in order to develop Twinning links of Municipalities-members of the two Associations with Municipalities from other EU countries.

For 12 months, the UCM and TEDK Chios, worked on promoting the participation of their members in Town Twinning, by analyzing the current situation in the Municipalities, sharing good and bad practices and creating useful tools for them to use.

From the cooperation of these two Associations in the framework of another European project that has been implemented in 2010, ([DECISIVE](#) project for the training of volunteers in the Municipalities of Cyprus, in order to support the development of Twinning with other European countries), the following facts had become evident:

- TEDK Chios has a significant know-how on running EU projects and supporting its members in managing their own projects, but lacked access to Europe-wide networks and information flows.

- On the other hand, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, through its Brussels Office, has created a vast network of partners able to provide access to information and Municipalities-partners all around Europe, but did not have a mechanism to support its members in submitting project proposals and implementing the actual projects.



The SUSTAIN project combined the comparative advantages of the two partners, thus creating beneficial synergies for their members: The Municipalities of Cyprus benefited from the analysis of their processes and their acquaintance with a more structured process of participation in Town Twinning and other European programmes, while the Municipalities in the North Aegean Region now have access to information from Brussels and the possibility to find European partners for their actions and projects.

Future major SUSTAIN activities:

January: Evaluation report

A common study visit to Brussels also gave participants the opportunity to get acquainted with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and understand the logic of Town Twinning and of the people working on it.

Within the framework of the SUSTAIN project, a number of tools have also been created, which will be supported by the two partner Associations and are expected to significantly assist the Municipalities of Cyprus and the Northern Aegean Region, in the process of participation in and implementation of Twinning actions and other European programmes. The tools include:

- An [intranet](#). The intranet has been developed as an internal section of the website of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, which gives access only to registered users. These users will have access to partner searches, completed projects which can be considered as good practices, practical guides and other useful information.
- A "[Practical Twinning Guide](#)" (in Greek), containing good practices, information, guidelines and tips for the successful implementation and use of the "Europe for Citizens" programme. This Guide will be a permanent point of reference, not only for the Municipalities and municipal staff of the Greek and Cypriot Municipalities that participated in this project, but also for all of those who would like to participate in the "Europe for Citizens" Programme in the future.
- An inter-municipal network of European Affairs Officers of the Cypriot Municipalities. This network which used to be active in the past, has now been reconstituted and re-activated. Its aim is the mutual support of its members and the constant recording of targets, problems and opportunities in the sphere of Town Twinning and other European Programmes. The network is also using the SUSTAIN intranet, in order to identify and exploit synergies and potential collaborations, with the support of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities.
- Support (advice, implementation guides and integrated examples) for the drafting of five-year "mini business plans" by the Municipalities, outlining their plans and objectives regarding Town Twinning and other European programs.

The benefits from the SUSTAIN project were multiple for all the involved stakeholders:

Union of Cyprus Municipalities: Building upon the interest of Municipalities and the knowledge that the DECISIVE project had created in 2010, the UCM obtained through the SUSTAIN project, a series of practical tools that we presented above, through which it can now effectively support the efforts of its members to participate in Town Twinning. Furthermore, thanks to the work and the final report of the expert of TEDK Chios, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities now has a much better knowledge of the procedures followed by its members when participating in European projects. The UCM knows, therefore, exactly which Municipalities, at which stage of their involvement in Town Twinning and precisely in what way, it can provide its assistance and expertise, in order to support their efforts in the most efficient way.



TEDK Chios: Just like the UCM, TEDK Chios gained through the SUSTAIN project, access to the practical tools of the project, through which it can effectively support the efforts of its members to participate in Twinning actions and other European programmes. In addition to that, it is extremely important that TEDK Chios gained, with no extra cost, effective access to a representation office in Brussels, which offers active presence in Brussels, finding partners, the possibility of timely information on European policies and actions, direct communication with European and international institutions, etc. TEDK Chios also got to know even better the Support Measures and the "Europe for Citizens" programme in general, as well as to develop a more direct relationship with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and other European institutions, such as the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and DG Regional Policy.



Municipalities: All Municipalities-members of the two partner Associations of the SUSTAIN project have benefited in a direct manner by all the above and can now use all the SUSTAIN tools, which solve a lot of their practical problems. They also now have access to expert help from their Associations, direct access to Brussels and a proposed process (blueprint) that they can follow for their involvement in Town Twinning and other European programmes. They also had the opportunity to meet other Municipalities and learn from their mistakes and their good practices. Finally, many of them had the possibility to become directly acquainted with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and other European institutions such as the CoR and DG Regional Policy.

European Union: The SUSTAIN project reached dozens of Municipalities in two European countries and has given to hundreds of officials, elected people and citizens, the chance to take part in a European action.

Especially in the seminar "The role of local and regional authorities in fostering European citizenship" that was held in Nicosia on June 7th, more than one hundred representatives of Local and Regional Authorities from the 27 EU Member States had the opportunity to discover best practices of projects that have been implemented within the "Europe for Citizens" Programme.

Representatives of the Municipalities of Cyprus and Greece who participated in the seminar, had the opportunity to meet representatives from other European Municipalities and to get to know the Committee of the Regions, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency and the activities of these two and other European institutions for the promotion of European Citizenship.

The SUSTAIN project has thus given the possibility to a lot of citizens, elected officials and municipal officers to get to know the "Europe for Citizens" Programme and in particular the measure 2.2. (Support Measures).

As it is already known, the SUSTAIN project has been co-funded through the "Measure 2.2. Support Measures" of the Europe for Citizens programme. This measure is a tool to develop the quality of projects submitted within Action 1 "Active Citizens for Europe". It also supports the exchange of experiences, expertise and good practices, as well as activities which may lead to the establishment of long-lasting partnerships and networks.

For more information on the Programme: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.php.

SUSTAIN Project: Study visit to Brussels

The study visit of the SUSTAIN project to Brussels took place from the 4th to the 7th of October. It involved 25 participants: 12 municipal officers from 11 Cypriot Municipalities, the Twinning officer of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, and 12 representatives of the Local Unions of Municipalities and Communities of the Prefecture of Chios and Lesvos (citizens, academics and officials of these Unions and their member Municipalities).

The two teams arrived in Brussels from Greece and Cyprus with different flights. So apart from their joint programme, which took place on October 5 and 6, the Cypriot team was able to attend two additional events.



More specifically, the group of participants from Cyprus arrived in Brussels in the morning of October 4th and almost immediately went to the Committee of the Regions, where they attended a seminar on: "The Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020: the role of local and regional authorities in the EU budget. Towards a genuine partnership approach". The same afternoon, the participants from Greece also arrived in Brussels. In the evening, the participants of the two groups attended together a dinner, where they met each other and the two officers of the Brussels Office of the UCM, who accompanied them throughout the study visit.

On October 5th, both groups went to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the EU, where they attended a presentation on the application process for the funding of Town Twinning projects and a discussion, during which, the participants were able to address their questions and to become better acquainted with EU officials who handle applications submitted by the Municipalities, for funding through the "Europe for Citizens" programme.



This visit was followed by a lunch and later the participants departed for the Committee of the Regions, where they attended a presentation of this European body and the 10th meeting of the "ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY" Commission of the Committee, thus getting a first taste of how the representatives of their Municipalities contribute to shaping the future EU legislation.

On October 6th, the participants visited the Brussels Office of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, where they initially attended a presentation of the Office and of the projects SUSTAIN and Pro-I3T, which will be implemented in 2012.

After that, the participants attended a workshop entitled "Process for the Participation to and the Development of European Programmes", during which the role of a Brussels office was stressed, and best practices were presented by:

- Mrs. Laura Bas Marian, Sustainable development officer of the organization Fundación Comunidad Valenciana-Región Europea (Spain)
- Ms. Blanca Soler i Tobella, Head of the Brussels Office of the Provincial Council of Barcelona (Spain)
- Mr. Gabriele Morgante, from the Brussels Office of the Region Veneto (Italy)
- Mr. Gustavo López, Director of European Affairs, Brussels Office of the Region of Murcia (Spain) and
- Ms Jackie Eveleigh, Senior European Policy Officer, East of England Brussels Office.

the discussions in the European Parliament for the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020. The same night, the Cypriot participants departed by plane for Cyprus.



After the visit, the participants completed questionnaires in order to measure their degree of satisfaction for the study visit. The questionnaire asked participants to indicate how satisfied they were, based on ten criteria, related to their expectations before the visit, the structure of the program of the visit, the degree to which the visit served the purpose of the SUSTAIN project, as well as the knowledge gained from the visit.

The workshop has been followed by a lunch and a presentation of its conclusions. The participants then discussed on the preparation of the next event (second 10-day visit of the expert of TEDK Chios to Cyprus). Subsequently, the participants visited the Directorate General for Regional Policy, where they attended a presentation and an extensive discussion on the issue of funding through the Structural Funds, but also the financial and political crisis that Europe is currently facing. A dinner was offered to the participants in the evening.



On October 7th, the group of participants from Greece departed from Brussels, while the group of participants from Cyprus visited the European Parliament, where they attended a small part of a panEuropean conference on Small and Medium Enterprises and a presentation of

According to the responses, the overwhelming majority of the participants were very or extremely satisfied with 8 of the 10 abovementioned criteria. Many, however, said that they had not understood the purpose of the visit before their participation (which is partly explained by the fact that many of them participated for the first time in such a visit to Brussels), and that they would prefer to have more practical and less theoretical or general presentations from the speakers.

SUSTAIN project: second 10 days visit of the expert of TEDK Chios to Cyprus

In the framework of the SUSTAIN project, the expert of TEDK Chios, Mr. Vasilis Kampouras, visited Cyprus from 20 to 26 November. The visit took place following the previous visit of the expert, which was held from 9 to 19 May, when Mr. Kampouras met representatives of Cypriot Municipalities, in order for him to assess the situation in each one of them, regarding their participation in European programmes and especially, in the "Europe for Citizens" programme.



Applying the expert's methodology, which has been proven to be effective in his first visit, this time three nationwide meetings have been organised, gathering representatives of Municipalities, including Mayors, Municipal Secretaries and officers. The first meeting has been organized on November 23rd in the Municipality of Limassol and has been attended by representatives from the Municipalities of Limassol and Paphos districts. On November 24th, the second meeting has been held in the Municipality of Strovolos, attended by representatives of the Municipalities of Nicosia district and of the [Occupied Municipalities](#) of Cyprus, while on November 25th the third meeting which took place in the Municipality of Larnaca has been attended by representatives of the Municipalities of Larnaca and Famagusta districts.

During these meetings, Mr. Kampouras presented the main points of the "Study reflecting the current situation of Cypriot Municipalities, regarding the use of Town Twinning and other European programmes". The Study presents in detail both the problems identified by the expert during his first visit, as well as his suggestions and proposals to the Municipalities in order for them to resolve these problems and improve their performance in the use of Town Twinning and other European programmes.

In his presentation, Mr. Kampouras, said that the Municipalities of Cyprus can be divided into three main categories depending on their characteristics in relation to the use of Town Twinning and other European Programmes:

- a) large and active Municipalities,
- b) small Municipalities with limited experience and
- c) Occupied Municipalities.

As Mr. Kampouras said, all the Municipalities, regardless of their category, have to face -more or less- the same problems:

- All Municipalities receive the information material sent to them by the Brussels Office of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, but this material is not adequately disseminated within the Municipalities (per section/department or per person).
- So far, none of the Municipalities has pursued or created synergies and wider partnerships or coordinated efforts, neither with other Cypriot Municipalities nor with the Union of Cyprus Municipalities.
- Usually there is no clear vision from the Municipalities (at political / Municipal Council level) on their approach to Town Twinning and other European programmes.

- There is (bigger or smaller depending on the Municipality) understaffing and underemployment of personnel that has the defined responsibility to work on European programmes. The extend of this problem has diminished in the last years.
- Very often, the increased workload is "pushing" down the priority for the use of European programmes. The everyday routine comes first, leaving behind in the agenda, equally important but still more general and long-term issues that could be solved through European funding.
- Poor knowledge of the English language and terminology in a large proportion of the officers and sections who are potentially involved in European and international actions.
- Poor knowledge of the European programmes and their usefulness by elected and senior executives, e.g. the Heads of Departments.
- Reluctance to participate in European projects, especially when there is a previous bad experience.
- Difficulty to access information on European programmes and calls for proposals.
- Usually there is not enough time for submitting a proposal in order to participate in a European programme, as there is no long-term planning to ensure the timely detection and identification of appropriate opportunities. Moreover, the required workflow for preparing a proposal or participating in the projects of other partners (proper use of partner searches) is often huge or is liable to fail at any moment because of the existence of many different intermediaries (a lot of departments involved, need for approval by the Municipal Council, etc.), which do not always understand the process.
- Lack of sufficient knowledge among officers, regarding the needs of their Municipality and the long-term operational planning (e.g. 5-year term).
- Problems in the implementation of the projects, concerning the cooperation with other partners, the effective supervision of outsourced services and services in general, compliance with the time schedule, financial management, timely and satisfying absorption of resources and proper treatment of the subsequent administrative and management controls.
- Coordination and collaboration problems between the involved internal departments of the Municipalities or with the Municipal decision making centres.
- The project results are often not disseminated to the general public. Instead, they are even underused by the departments of the Municipalities and they often remain in the drawers of the services that have implemented them, without adding further value to the overall operation of the Municipalities. Moreover, no attention has been given to the involvement of citizens to projects, in order to ensure their maximum acceptance and use.
- Deficiencies finally exist in the standardization of the procedures and the "automation" of services, as well as in finding and implementing a case by case effective methodology. This is mainly due to the lack of experience in this area.



Press conference: 30th anniversary of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities

In the framework of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, a press conference was held on November 1st, during which, the President of the Union of Municipalities and Mayor of Limassol, Mr. Andreas Christou, referred to the course of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM) from its founding up to today, its major milestones along the way and its aims for the future.

Mr. Christou said that the UCM has to continue to provide support and upgraded services to the Municipalities and Local Authorities of Cyprus and noted a number of areas, which the UCM considers important for its successful evolution: use of European programmes to the biggest possible extent, closer cooperation between Municipalities both for creating joint Municipal services and for jointly claiming European funding, further development of the cooperation with the Union of Cyprus Communities, cooperation with all Ministries and especially with the Ministry of Interior, in order to handle issues relating to local government and to update various laws that relate to urban development. Moreover, the Union of Municipalities aims to introduce e-government as "The project that will significantly improve the operation of Municipalities, thus increasing their efficiency and the communication between Municipalities and their citizens and creating significant savings of resources..."

Then Mr. Christou mentioned some important milestones in the course of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, including the preparation of a draft for the Municipalities' Law and provision for Municipal Elections, as well as the Cooperation Agreements with the Committee of the Regions, the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece, the Malta's Local Council Association and the Local Union of

Municipalities and Communities of Prefecture Chios (now Union of Municipalities of Northern Aegean Sea). Finally, Mr. Christou mentioned the setting up, in July 2005, of the Brussels Office of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, which daily monitors the European decision making process relating to local government and provides Municipalities with reliable information on funding opportunities and European programmes.

Information kiosks: 30th anniversary of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities

In an effort to highlight its 30th anniversary, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities decided to set up, on November 5th, 19 information kiosks to present the Union and its members in all urban areas in various parts of Cyprus. The purpose of the kiosks was to give the visitors sufficient information about the history, role, achievements and contribution of the UCM, while, people who visited them were able to meet with Mayors and Municipal Councilors for further information.



More specifically, kiosks operated in the following Municipalities: Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Pafos, Strovolos, Ayios Dhometios, Lakatamia, Ayios Athanasios, Mesa Yitonia, Yermasoyia, Athienou, Aradippou, Ayia Napa, Paralimni, Geroskipou and Polis Chrysochous. Kiosks for the Occupied Municipalities operated in Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca.

28th Annual General Assembly of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities

The 28th Annual General Assembly of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities was held on November 8th, in the presence of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Demetris Christofias, the Minister of Interior, Mr. Neoklis Sylikiotis, leaders and representatives of political parties, former and current Mayors and other officials.



The first part of the General Assembly, which was held in the presence of its members, began with the speech of the President of the Union of Municipalities and Mayor of Limassol, Mr. Andreas Christou.



Mr. Christou firstly referred to the main achievements of the Union of Municipalities during the last thirty years and then noted that "there are still goals to be achieved, which demand the strong and constant effort both by the Union and the Municipalities". Mr. Christou also expressed his disappointment for the non-achievement

of the financial autonomy of the Municipalities and the non-institutionalisation of the annual grant from the Government to the Municipalities.

In view of the local elections, Mr. Christou invited everybody "to keep on a high level and walk together, through the democratic process, to the path of progress, development and prosperity."

The President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Demetris Christofias, from the podium of the General Assembly, expressed the direct support of his Government, which aims at the substantial improvement, strengthening, reform and modernization of the local government in Cyprus and pledged that his government will remain in solidarity with the Local Authorities, despite the current difficult economic conditions, just as it did the previous three years with a series of decisions and measures that were implemented.



In his address, the Minister of Interior, Mr. Neoklis Sylikiotis, said that Local Authorities are the natural ally of the Government and the Ministry of Interior for the successful implementation of a wide range of crucial and innovative policies, which are currently under way.

The Minister described as urgent, the adoption of two acts tabled in the House of Representatives, concerning the voluntary unification of Communities and the consolidation and codification of the Laws of Municipalities and Communities.

The 28th Annual General Assembly of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities also had a celebrating character, since the Association completed 30 years of existence and action. In his address, the President of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, Mr. Andreas Christou, referred to the 30-year course of the Association and presented the efforts and achievements of the Union during the last years, which will continue, as he claimed.



On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Association, a number of Diplomas were awarded to the founder and initiator of the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, Mr. Lellos Demetriades, the former Presidents of the Union Mr. Michalakis Zampelas and Mr. Demetris Kontides, as well as to former Mayors who served the Union of Cyprus Municipalities, from its founding until today.

Six new Municipalities in Cyprus

The establishment and operation of the Municipalities in Cyprus is governed by the Municipalities' Law, approved in October 1985 (Law 111/85).

An important provision of this Law is that a referendum can be held in a Community or group of Communities, which have a population of over 5000 inhabitants, among the registered voters in these areas, to determine if they desire to declare their area as a Municipality (Article 4). If the result of the referendum is in favour of designating an area as Municipality, then the Council of Ministers declares the region as a Municipality with a relevant Decree,

which is published in the Official Journal of the Republic, and promptly starts the implementation of the provisions of the Municipalities' Law in the newly created Municipality.

The above section was amended in 1992 to give the power and authority to the Council of Ministers to order for a referendum in Communities or clusters of Communities with a population less than 5000 inhabitants, if such an area has the financial ability to operate effectively and efficiently as a Municipality.

Based on the above provisions of the Law, referendums took place in Cyprus during last July, which declared six new Municipalities: Ypsonas, Livadia, Yeri, Sotira, Tseri and Dromolaxia-Meneou. The new Municipalities were established officially on October 21st, by Decrees of the Minister of Interior, and thus the number of Municipalities in Cyprus has now increased to 39.

Press meeting on the Cyprus Presidency of the EU Council

On November 17th, a press meeting has been co-organized in Cyprus by the Press and Information Office (PIO) and the Cyprus Office of the European Parliament, in order to discuss the role of the media in covering the Cyprus EU Presidency in 2012 and significant policy areas that it will deal with. Mr. Andreas Mavroyiannis, Deputy Minister to the President for European Affairs and Mr. George Vassiliou, Former President of Cyprus, stressed that the meeting was crucial, because the personnel of the media is an important partner for a successful Presidency. The participants were informed by Mr. Vassilis F. Demetriades, Head of the European Affairs Unit, Ministry of Communications and Works, on the specific topic "The EU Maritime Policy", that has been set as a top priority for the Cyprus Presidency.

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THE UNION OF CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES

The Union of Cyprus Municipalities was established in 1981. Even though membership is voluntary, all municipalities (33), accounting for 65 per cent of the population of Cyprus, are represented.

The main objective of the Union is to contribute to the development of local government autonomy, as well as to act as spokesman of local government interests vis-à-vis the central government and other national organisations and institutions.

The Union's decision-making power is vested in the General Assembly, which may look into and decide for all issues. The Executive Committee implements decisions taken by the General Assembly. The President of the Union represents the Union before any authority, while the Secretary is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Union.

The Union follows closely and participates in international activities related to Local Authorities and in recent years, especially after the accession of the Republic to the EU, it takes an active stand and develops relations with organisations, institutions and departments of the European Union that concern Local Authorities. In this regard, the Union has, since July 2005, opened an Office in Brussels.

UNION OF CYPRUS MUNICIPALITIES

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