

環日本海圏国際シンポジウム基調講演 I

## International Cross-border Networking of Local Governments: Its Trends and Possibilities

Drew Horgan

Secretary General The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA)

Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must begin by expressing my thanks to Shimane University President Izumi Kitagawa, Chairman of the Japan Sea Rim Research International Symposium and Professor Kiichiro Tomino, Executive Director of the Academic Association for Japan Sea Rim Studies who has led the organising secretariat of the Symposium.

I must say that I am very glad with the theme I have been asked to address: "Cross-border networking of local governments." Those who are familiar with the International Union of Local Authorities will know that this really touches upon IULA's core-business. I will present an overview of the current activities in the field today, while paying special attention to its trends and possibilities and IULA's role in it.

We can see today that thousands of villages, towns and cities have built up international contacts and developed, together with their partners programmes and projects to fight poverty and better divide welfare, to sustain processes of democratisation, to struggle for peace and human rights, in short, to work together for a better world. Municipalities are forming new partnerships with governments and donor organisations; from their own expertise, they can combat complex problems effectively. Especially in the past ten years, municipal international cooperation has become an impressive phenomenon, against the background of some important worldwide developments, that, as it were, encouraged international policy from the lower levels of government.

As, of course, many of you present here know, a worldwide research project was carried out in preparation of the 32nd IULA World Congress in September 1995, in The Hague, the Netherlands. The research showed that the afore-mentioned municipal partnerships can be very successful. Municipal international cooperation was found to be a quick-operational,

cost-effective instrument for the transfer of knowledge and expertise from colleague-to-colleague. The sustainable and long term character of the contacts prevents hasty decisions, also because of the active involvement of all partners in the process.

Since 1995, cross-border networking has continued to grow world-wide. I would like to compliment the Academic Association for Japan Sea Rim Studies which organises this important event today with the great efforts they have been making in further pursuing the concept of municipal international cooperation. It was an honour for IULA to be invited here as well as to the previous meeting, in Prague, which focussed in particular on East-West municipal cooperation.

The interest of researchers in Japan has helped significantly in keeping municipal international cooperation on the agenda. And when I say agenda, I do not only mean the agenda of municipalities or researchers, but also the agenda of international donor agencies. IULA is involved in a constant dialogue with the international donor community (e.g. UNDP, World Bank, European Union and bi-lateral donors such as Canada, USA, Netherlands, Sweden and more and more so JICA) who are becoming increasingly supportive of, and funding, decentralised cooperation/municipal international cooperation programmes. It is encouraging to see that cross-border networking of municipalities is an important topic and that local governments are increasingly seen as important actors in national development and international development cooperation.

IULA fully recognises the importance of good research being undertaken in this field. Therefore, I would like to invite the researchers that are present here to further discuss future possible ways to join forces with IULA, for our mutual benefit and the greater success of municipal international cooperation. I will come back to this at the end of my speech.

Besides the growing and continuing interest of donor agencies, IULA sees some further trends and possibilities for cross border cooperation of municipalities.

**TREND:** involvement of the citizens

During the last five to ten years, the role of citizens (groups) has become more important. Municipal international cooperation seems to have proven its ascribed ability of bringing development cooperation closer to the people. This is being supported by recent research

demonstrating that municipal involvement in international cooperation on the local level creates a wider/stronger backing by the society/citizens. In times of reduced budgets for international cooperation and more attention being paid to economic interests, this is an important aspect.

TREND: growing expertise in Municipal international cooperation

Whereas in the past the international cooperation activities of municipalities often only consisted of mayors making friendly visits to the twinning partner, it now covers exchange of experience and cooperation over the whole range of municipal activities. The increased amount of donor funding which has come available has further paved the way. While municipal officers in the beginning started out as amateurs in the field of Municipal international cooperation, they have gradually become professionals with a considerable experience abroad.

TREND: more business-orientated approach

Over the past few years, the debate of the effectiveness on international cooperation has and still is taking place in many countries. A central issue in this discussion is the question: how far can we or are we allowed to take into account our own (economical) interest in development cooperation. This question is not only valid in international cooperation with the South, but also with countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

TREND: networks of municipal international cooperation

Increasingly we can see today the forming of more advanced forms of cross border cooperation in programmes such as the European Union funded Urban-Latin America (URBS AL) and the Asia Urban (ASIA URBS). Within these kinds of programmes municipalities engage in projects within groups of like-minded municipalities, dealing with the same issues. This offers great opportunities for learning and for the transfer of know-how and experience. Of course, it seems only logical that the more municipalities participate, the more can be learned from one another. In this respect, I can mention a very interesting promotional project undertaken by IULA. This so-called NEWS programme focussed on trilateral municipal cooperation and actually dealt with a very innovative project managed by IULA member, the Dutch Association of Municipalities (VNG). Under this project, triads were formed between municipalities from Nicaragua, the Netherlands and either the Czech or Slovak Republics. This project has been very successfully evaluated and as a result, IULA was asked to give wider publicity to it and to disseminate information on this NEWS project

among the worldwide network of IULA. During last spring's IULA World Congress in Mauritius, over 300 delegates participated in a workshop organised by IULA on this subject. IULA continues to further promote this concept and to facilitate new trilateral cooperation activities.

When looking into the future, we can only conclude that Municipal international cooperation has made progress since the 1995 IULA World Congress. Most municipalities nowadays participate in some sort of international cooperation, while at the same time, most international donor organisations now are cooperating with municipalities in one way or the other. This growing attention and number of activities certainly offers lots of opportunities for the future.

#### Possibilities: Peace and solidarity

Cross-border cooperation by municipalities would seem to have great potential to bridge political tensions between central governments. It has always worked that way in Europe, where after the second World War many so called "jumelages" were established, between Germany and other European countries, France in particular. As you will know we have seen the same development in sister cities relationships between Japan and the USA. But still today, there are lots of possibilities for cooperation on a municipal level, to avoid political tensions and to work towards peace and solidarity. I see possibilities very near here: cooperation around the Japan Sea. Increased municipal international cooperation could pave the way towards better relations between the countries around the Rim.

#### Increased collaboration of Municipal international cooperation actors

For the further development of Municipal international cooperation around the world, it is extremely important that we make some real steps forward now towards increased cooperation. We need to further analyse the practices and impact of Municipal international cooperation and to collect further data on this. I very much applaud the efforts that have been made by the organisers to keep the Municipal international cooperation-researchers group going and I would like to invite the researchers that are present here, to further join forces with IULA. Very concretely, this could be done in a number of ways of which I would like to mention just a few.

- One way would be to continue to organise this kind of seminar on a regular basis. IULA and the organizing group today could join forces in the organisation of these events and we

could profit from each others networks and contacts as well as of course the research findings. The researchers group could even become an associate member of IULA and be an integral part of the IULA “family.” In this case it would seem logical to organise a researchers seminar in conjunction with IULA Congresses and/or World Executive Committees.

- Another possibility for closer cooperation would be to exchange and combine research data. This would greatly increase the impact of all our work. In this respect IULA about to start up a Municipal International Cooperation Information Centre. We would like to collaborate closely with Municipal international cooperation researchers in Japan and anywhere in the world, aiming to keep improving the quality of information provision in the field of Municipal international cooperation in a more coordinated way. Of course, research data would reach a much larger public in this way. Information provision via the Internet is also intended. Although IULA is now very close to getting some start-up funding for this Municipal international cooperation Information Centre, we could in the future perhaps also join forces in, for example, searching for new donors. A joint effort in the search for donors could for instance lead to the production of publications on Municipal international cooperation, both in English and Japanese, while using the IULA network to achieve a greater impact and a wider dissemination of know-how.

- Yet another possibility for the future would be to collaborate within the framework of IULA’s Capacity and Institution Building Platform. This CIB Platform as it is called, is a network of practioners which regularly meets in conjunction with IULA meetings in order to exchange experiences about, and develop new joint initiatives in, Municipal international cooperation project work, as well as projects in the field of strengthening associations of local governments. The CIB Platform is the part of IULA’s overall structure which is primarily interested in networking and in building on contacts with in IULA for development cooperation purposes. I could very well see a task force of researchers becoming part of the Platform and I would be most interested to further discuss these possibilities for further collaboration with you.