



How to make your *Twinning* a Success

The *EUROSITE* guide
for an effective Natural Site Twinning

June 1998

Foreword

A twinning should be like a journey with a friend. After the journey is over, you can part as friends and go your different ways to make new discoveries with new friends.

EUROSITE was founded in 1989 to manage the European Natural Sites Twinning Programme. The guidance in this report has been distilled from the experience of network members over the last ten years.

This guide is intended to be helpful and to be used by managers within the *EUROSITE* network to develop site-based twinnings. Twinning is a tool to help make information exchange become easier and to help managers help themselves improve standards of management for nature conservation.

The guide is intended to be reviewed and updated in the future as we learn more from new partners experiences and as *EUROSITE* tries out new ways of bilateral exchange.

I hope that the report helps you realise your plans for a new chapter in the history of your natural site.

E T Idle
President - *EUROSITE*

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1. What is the *EUROSITE* twinning programme?

1.1 Brief History

In 1987 - European Year of the Environment - the European Natural Sites Twinning Programme was launched with the financial support of the European Commission and the cooperation of nature conservation management organisations from the 12 Member States of the European Union.

In Rochefort, France, managers of 33 sites across Europe signed a Protocol of Agreement to take part in a programme of technical, scientific and cultural exchanges. The basis of the agreement was the twinings set up between natural sites.

The concept was similar to the twinning arrangements set up between European towns and cities to share cultural and social experiences. The objective of the Natural Sites Twinning Programme was comparable, that is to strengthen links between natural sites with similar habitats and similar problems to solve and to encourage the sharing of information about site management for nature conservation. Natural sites often have an important place in the minds and hearts of local communities, and so another important objective of the programme was to publicise the international importance of certain European sites to people and communities in the area surrounding the site.

At an early stage, working groups were established to examine four common areas of concern for the members of the network. These issues were management planning, grazing as a management tool, reedbed management and facilities for the public on nature reserves. Workshops involving the whole of the developing network were held to discuss these issues and to produce clear guidance on management standards.

New site-based twinings are promoted as part of *EUROSITE*'s programme of bilateral information exchange. This document is intended to provide guidance to site managers managing a twinning or those who wish to become involved.

1.2 What is special about a *EUROSITE* twinning?

EUROSITE pioneered the idea of bilateral information exchange to help the management of natural sites for nature conservation and developed a distinctive brand of twinning in the process, relying heavily on the involvement of site-based management staff for its success - people who get their hands dirty.

The result has been a symbol of excellence in information exchange which is widely recognised in the European conservation fraternity. Managers who get involved in a *EUROSITE* twinning benefit from access to a wide network of natural site managers across Europe and through the opportunity to become involved in other activities such as the *EUROSITE* workshop and special projects programme. Although valuable in itself, twinning has always been seen as a gateway to wider information exchange. Managers who become involved in the programme also benefit from support and guidance on managing their twinning from the Programme and Development office in the Netherlands. The use of the *EUROSITE* label can also be helpful in receiving support for projects and site management activities from decision makers.

1.3 Aims & Goals

The aim of *EUROSITE*'s twinning programme is to help raise the standards of management practice for nature conservation amongst site managers across the whole of Europe. One way of achieving this is through the transfer of information and expertise between site managers of two, occasionally more, natural sites with similar habitats and issues. This *bilateral exchange* of information is distinguished from *EUROSITE*'s *multilateral exchange* or workshop programme. *EUROSITE*'s short term strategy is to continue promoting site-based twinings and to improve the way in which they are supported, so that they are as effective as possible.

1.4 How do twinnings work?

There are a number of ways in which twinnings can operate. Your twinning could concentrate on one or more of these elements.

1. Through **Direct Exchange** of knowledge about management between two or more sites. The subjects for discussion and study can be included in a Memorandum of Understanding. Partners can also help each other to evaluate the effectiveness of current management techniques & practices.
2. Through **Collaboration** on specific research projects about subjects on which both partners wish to gather knowledge. It is always possible to include managers of other sites in the development or review of projects through, for example a short focussed workshop or seminar.
3. Through **Transfer** of knowledge from one site to another, where there is a gap in knowledge in the receiving site, with the aim of improving management on the latter site at the beginning of its development. Initially, there may be more tangible benefits for the receiving site than the 'donor' site.
4. Through **Exchanges** of staff, volunteers and students. Secondments of staff, rangers and students can be part of such a programme. Exchanges of volunteer staff can be very rewarding for those involved and can aid site management.
5. Through **Development** of mutually interesting projects for funding from the European Commission such as European Regional Development funds, INTERREG and the Leonardo da Vinci or *LIFE* Nature programmes.

1.5 Criteria

In order, to maintain the usefulness of twinnings to partners and the high standards associated with a *EUROSITE* twinning, participating sites should meet certain criteria. Firstly, they must be of European importance for their natural features (habitats and species) and should have a secure legal status or tenure. A management plan should be agreed and working or at an advanced stage of development. The site will usually have some form of public access and public facilities such as a visitor centre, although the latter is not an essential requirement. A complete list of criteria can be found in Annex 1.

EUROSITE ratifies a twinning through an application procedure. Site managers complete an application form (see Annex 2) which requests information about the site and the objectives of the twinning. The intention is not to weigh managers down with additional bureaucracy, but this simple procedure helps the *EUROSITE* Programme and Development Office to ensure that standards are maintained, that the site managers are clear about their reasons for wanting to twin and that an appropriate match is made.

As long as a site broadly meets the criteria, then a twinning can be accepted under the *EUROSITE* bilateral programme and *EUROSITE* will devote time and resources to assisting its establishment. Participants in a twinning will usually be members of the *EUROSITE* network.

2. So, You want to twin?

2.1 Your objectives, your questions, your expectations

The key to having an effective twinning is understanding why you have chosen to participate and what you might expect to gain from the relationship. Indeed, it has to be clear from the start to both partners what the main purposes of the twinning are.

In order to help you decide whether twinning is appropriate and effective for your site, you should consider the following questions:

- Are your objectives clear? Writing down your ideas or talking them over with a colleague (not necessarily one who knows the site) can help you clarify your objectives.
- Do your objectives for the twinning conform to the SMART test?

S pecific	Be as concise and precise as possible
M easurable	Identify what products or outcomes will result
A chievable	Don't over stretch yourself and your resources
R ealistic	Don't attempt to save the world! Think locally
T ime scale	Specify when you and your partners will achieve your goals

- What other ways are there to achieve your objectives? Is twinning appropriate?
- Are there existing sources of information available to help if you have a particular management problem?
- Is your area of research new or are there other sources of information available?
- Do you have the time to commit to the twinning? Estimate the number of days you may need to spend on the twinning. Do you need extra resources for your own travel costs or to host meetings?
- What can **you** give to the twinning?

Once the objectives are clear, and you are convinced that you would like to have a twinning, then the next task is to find a partner who is suitable for a twinning and who is also willing to be involved.

In some cases, it may not be possible to answer the above questions precisely or set clear objectives before a twinning is set up. Contact with a site manager from a different country may help to clarify objectives and answer these questions by helping you see your site in its European context. If this is the situation, then it is probably sufficient that you are aware of the need to address and resolve these issues at a very early stage.

2.2 What *EUROSITE* can and cannot do for you

EUROSITE can

- Help find a partner with similar interests and a desire to exchange information - *EUROSITE* has a lot of information about site managers who want to twin and receives requests from site managers around Europe who would like to twin with other natural sites. *EUROSITE*'s role is to try and match the demand with supply. After this initial help, it is up to the site managers involved to make the relationship work.
- Provide advice and guidance on setting up agreements between twinning partners, including examples of Memoranda of Understanding.
- Help site managers to decide if they wish to restart a twinning after the first 3 to 4 years, or if there is a problem to act as an intermediary or 'honest broker'.

- Help to ensure that twinings work effectively to meet the goals and aims of the partners and of the bilateral exchange programme (see above).

EUROSITE cannot

- Make a twinning work. This is up to the site managers involved.

2.3 What's expected of you?

Each twinning is different and involves more, or less work for the site manager than the next. There will be different types of projects running in different sites. Generally speaking, the twinning partners are expected to try and make the twinning be successful to the best of their abilities within the resources available. Specifically, they are expected:

- To implement the twinning work programme
- To make a brief annual report to the *EUROSITE* Programme & Development office, according to a standard format so that the benefits of the twinning can be communicated to the rest of the network.
- To ensure that the achievements of the twinning are regularly reviewed (this is recommended each year).

2.4 How to go about it

Firstly, an informal contact with the *EUROSITE* Programme and Development office can help clarify your thoughts and ideas and establish if there is a suitable partner available. At this stage, you will not be required to make a firm application or request for a twinning, but you will be asked for further information about your site's natural features, your problems on site, your main areas of interest and your ideal twin. *EUROSITE* will try to match you with a suitable partner.

A firm application can be made using the standard form attached in Annex 2. There is a registration fee for each new twinning and an annual supplement to the membership fee to cover administration costs. Contact the Programme and Development Office for current details. Participants will normally be *EUROSITE* members or intend to become members.

Once a suitable site or sites are identified, then an initial approach to its managers to discuss possibilities for twinning is advisable, well in advance of any planned twinning ceremony or launch. The level at which you make contact will vary depending on the type of organisation responsible for managing the site. However, the people who manage the site on a daily basis should be involved at an early stage. The people who make decisions about funding for the site or management policy should also be involved early on.

At this stage, a site visit is recommended. There's no better way to get to know your potential partners, their interests and their sites. If all goes well, then it should be possible now to decide on projects which are of mutual interest.

2.5 Publicity for the twinning

All publicity is good publicity as the saying goes. A launch ceremony attended by those involved can be a great start for the twinning and will certainly raise the profile of the site in the local area - one of *EUROSITE*'s original objectives for the twinning programme. Linking the launch to a special event on the site, such as the 25th anniversary of its establishment or the opening of a new visitor centre can be advantageous and will make sure that there is media coverage.

EUROSITE is able to provide limited publicity for twinings through its existing communication channels to its network members. *EUROSITE* also has publicity material about its objectives and work which could also be made available to partners for their use.

3. What makes a good twinning?

The recipe for a good twinning consists of many ingredients. Not all of the ones listed below are required for a successful twinning, because each situation is unique. These points are simply offered as guidance, drawn from the experience of site managers in the *EUROSITE* network.

1. Similar sites and a similar set of issues/ problems.

Sites which are a similar size or with comparable habitats are likely to have a lot of similar issues and are likely to be able to establish good links. It is not essential for the sites to be identical even if this were possible, as differences in habitat and management techniques also provoke discussion.

2. A willingness to cooperate and share information with each other

Without willingness to offer and receive information, the twinning will not work. There should also be an inclination to disseminate information to other natural sites and the *EUROSITE* network in the most appropriate way, perhaps through a workshop or through a report on good practice.

3. Clear and realistic objectives for the twinning from all partners

Before good progress can be made on information exchange, everyone involved has to be clear about what the twinning aims to achieve. Without clear objectives, momentum will quickly be lost and partners will become disillusioned.

At the beginning of the twinning, site managers should have as clear an idea as possible of their objectives for the site and how they may be able to benefit from an exchange with other site managers (see 2.1). If you cannot identify clear objectives at the start, then you should try to do so very early on in the twinning.

4. Clearly defined areas of study, research or exchange with tangible products and benefits

The products of the twinning need to be clearly defined as far as possible. Options include:

- development of best practice guidance in the form of reports or books or
- collaboration on a research programme
- preparation of a joint project proposal.

5. A common language

Speaking the same language makes communication and information exchange easier. This may seem obvious, but it is a fundamental consideration. Fluency is not always necessary, as enthusiasm and commitment to a joint project can help with communication. However, a special effort may be needed to facilitate communication, such as hiring a specialist interpreter, although this increases the costs (see Case Study 1).

6. Support from within organisations

Natural site managers are more likely to be successful with a twinning if there is support for the twinning within the organisation responsible for managing the twinned site. A clear policy on international relations is a good way of establishing what the limits of involvement are. Support can be in the form of simply allowing the site manager a little freedom and time in their work programme to become involved. Financial and moral support is also exceedingly important

CASE STUDY 1: *Groote Peel & Meinweg National Parks - NL* twinned with *Roztoczanski, Poleski and Kampinoski National Parks - PL*

How it began

The possibility of a twinning first came about in 1989 when the Director of Roztoczanski National Park in Poland visited Staatsbosbeheer staff at the Groote Peel National Park in the south east of the Netherlands. Interest in an exchange of experience of nature conservation management was mutual and contacts were quickly established. After visits by staff of both countries to each other's nature reserves, a Protocol of Agreement was drafted in 1994 based on the *EUROSITE* model. By then, interest in twinning had spread to two other National Parks in Poland and one other in the Netherlands. Finally, the agreement was signed by five National Parks in total.

The sites

The Groote Peel National Park is a large area of fens and bogs with specific bird communities of international importance and heavy visitor pressure. By contrast, the Meinweg National Park in the south east of the Netherlands is a complex of wet and dry heathlands, pools, recent mixed woodland and streams. There is an unusually high number of reptiles/ amphibians and a high number of bird species using this National Park. Together, the two sites compare very well with the Polish sites.

Roztoczanski National Park is an area of largely mixed woodland in the lower Carpathians in Poland. The woodland is dynamic, and mostly coniferous. However, the most important areas are the beech and fir forests. Bird and insect life are particularly rich. Poleski National Park is a very important marsh and lake area with extensive alder, birch and willow swamps. Therefore, water management is an important issue. Kampinoski National Park in the central Polish lowlands around Warsaw is largely a forest area but also includes inland dunes, marsh and bogs. The Capital has a very important influence on the National Park. Together the five National Parks cover over 55,000 ha.

Common issues

- forest management - maintaining natural processes
- improvement of rivers and wet valleys
- the hydrology of peatlands
- using National Parks effectively for environmental education
- management of large numbers of visitors

How it works

The protocol of agreement is planned to last for four years with an option to continue the agreement after this time. There are yearly meetings with focussed, specific themes and issues to address. They are held in rotation between the Netherlands and Poland. The costs of accommodation and field visits are shouldered by the host country. The visiting country pays for its travel costs. In this way the burden is not too heavy for any organisation to bear each year. The exchange programme is decided on a year by year basis at a meeting at the end of each annual visit. This meeting also reviews the success and results of the visit. Because of the language difficulties, an interpreter is used for the annual meeting

Box 1

Accomplishments

There have been five annual working meetings or seminars held on a variety of issues as outlined below:

- 1992 • Nature reserve management in the Netherlands
- 1994 • Nature reserve management in Poland and twinning Declaration
- 1995 • Nature and environmental education in National Parks
- 1996 • Education and recreation aspects of National Parks in Poland
 - Landscape ecological problems of Poleski National Park
 - Eco-hydrological problems in Kampinoski National Park
- 1997 • Bog restoration at Bargerveen Nature Reserve in the Netherlands (Bargerveen is already twinned with Clara Bog in Ireland.)
 - River enhancement and management of wet grasslands
 - Cooperating on education projects with volunteers and private organisations.
 - The relationship between National Parks and the rural economy

Benefits have included a book about hydro-ecology which is in production following the seminar held in Kampinoski in 1996 and the increase in staff understanding of management issues both in Poland and the Netherlands. The latter is difficult to measure.

Why it works

This twinning is unusual in that it involves five sites in only two countries. Conventional twinings are between two nature reserves in two countries. This broad base may be the reason why the relationship is so stable. Another ingredient for success is the similar problems and issues found in both countries which encourages cooperation with the aim of finding a solution. There is also sufficient difference between cultural and social conditions in each country to make them challenging problems to solve and for a fresh approach to be taken.

The habitats and species are also similar whilst being sufficiently different to stimulate debate and learning. The twinning agreement is open and flexible which removes the feeling that parties are obliged to be involved.

Twinings often rely on several individual's enthusiasm to make them work and there is certainly plenty of enthusiasm for the project and willingness to cooperate. This of course develops from an understanding of the benefits which both sides can gain from the Twinning. Support from a site manager's organisation is also very important and Staatsbosbeheer is certainly well aware of the benefits its staff can gain from involvement in international projects of this sort as they have an international policy on Twinning (see section 3).

The future

Review of the last 3 very active years of twinning is now due and the benefits and possibilities for future cooperation need evaluation.

Information exchange may become broader, involving different site management staff. Technical staff or people working at policy level could usefully spend time on an exchange visit in each other's countries for a month.

Linking staff experienced in a specific type of habitat management such as peatland restoration is also possible which may develop into a peatland special interest group or theme for a *EUROSITE* workshop. International audit of management plans or specific projects in this twinning is also a possibility.

Staatsbosbeheer, the Dutch National Forest Service and nature conservation agency, has a very clear position statement for internal use on the role which its staff can play in *EUROSITE's* twinning programme. The statement clearly sets out a policy direction and the costs and implications of that involvement. The value of such a statement as this is that allows all staff to know the limits. This is important even if the limits are strict. At least everyone knows where they stand.

7. Support from partners and the local community

In addition to support from within the management organisation, it may be necessary to obtain support from key partners or those stakeholders with a strong interest in the site such as local authorities and community groups. The value of support from the community could be immeasurable, particularly as the twinning may be the beginning of something much larger (see Case Study 2).

In some countries, there is also sometimes a distrust of initiatives which are associated with the word 'Euro-'. If this is the case, then action should be taken at an early stage to ensure that sufficient information is available and that the proposals are clearly understood.

8. *EUROSITE* twinings are based on site management

Although staff responsible for sites at all levels of responsibility can usefully be involved in a site-based twinning, it should be very closely linked to site managers and should not **just** be a 'cultural' exchange visit. It is especially important that the staff responsible for day to day site management should be involved. There have been situations where they were not aware that a twinning had been running on the site for some years.

However, the 'cultural' aspects of a twinning are also important, not least because experiencing a different culture helps managers to see their own site problems in a new way and may help them to see possible solutions.

9. A named contact

Each site involved in the twinning should appoint a named correspondent or maybe a small team to act as a contact point. This will normally be the site manager or person responsible for management on the site. The function of the contact is to:

- act as a channel for information flow between members of the site's management staff and other staff in the managing organisation and between the twinning partner and other members of the *EUROSITE* network.
- help the twinning to be as effective, efficient and successful as possible, through arranging programmes for exchange visits and other practicalities.

10. Continuity of staff

Many twinings rely on a single enthusiastic manager who starts up the twinning and drives the process forward. If he or she leaves the organisation, then the twinning can come to a premature end. Once the relationship is formalised, then it may be sensible to spread the load across a broader base of management staff so that there is a greater chance of success. This also has the advantage that the workload will be more evenly shared across the organisation.

11. Broad involvement of management staff in an organisation

A broad range of management and managerial staff can benefit from a twinning. Depending on the sites and the organisational structure, there is potential to involve rangers, wardens, district officers and policy staff. A broad base of staff means that the twinning is more likely to be successful and could have other benefits such as team building.

12. Being prepared to commit resources

In a similar way to carrying out management tasks, time and money has to be set aside in budgets for essential costs associated with a twinning. Costs will vary from twinning to twinning.

A good start means a good finish!

Ending an agreement should not be seen negatively. A twinning may end for a perfectly good reason, such as having achieved its objectives. In this case, it is far better to remember the exchanges and benefits you have had and friends you have made. You should always try to end a twinning on a positive note if possible. A model letter that could be used for this purpose is set out in Annex 5.

Box 2

4. Producing a Memorandum of Understanding

Once you have reached the stage where you want to formalise your twinning arrangement, you may wish to draw up and agree a joint statement between the organisations involved, in a common language. This should set out the what the relationship intends to achieve, the parties involved and the duration of the twinning. This document is usually called a *Memorandum of Understanding*, although it is often referred to as a *Statement of Intent*, *Memorandum of Agreement*, or *Protocol of Agreement*.

A Memorandum of Understanding is valuable because it indicates that there is a serious commitment between the parties involved in the twinning to make it successful. It also indicates that there is strong support for the twinning within each organisation. As far as possible, the Memorandum should clearly set out the purpose of the twinning and each party's responsibilities. A Memorandum is also useful as a tool for organisational planning and the allocation of resources.

4.1 What should the Memorandum contain?

A Memorandum of Understanding is similar to a brief management plan for a nature reserve in that it sets out a direction (*management objectives*), specifies how those objectives will be achieved over a defined period (*management actions or projects*) and sets a time for review and evaluation. Joint applications for financial assistance can be part of the Memorandum. Annexes 3 and 4 give further guidance and examples.

A Memorandum of Understanding should contain at least the following elements:

- **Clear objectives**

See Annex 3 & section 2.1

- **Clear responsibilities and the 'ground rules'**

See Annex 3

- **A named contact**

See Annex 3 & section 3.3

- **Areas of cooperation and a work programme**

See Annex 3

- **A duration for the twinning**

Experience shows that the most effective duration twinings set time limit of three or four years. Memoranda which do not specify a duration run the risk of meandering or losing their way. Three or four years is usually the maximum period for financial and resource planning for most organisations. So, it is only realistic to expect a twinning to last this long, at least initially.

- **A review clause**

After the agreed period of time has elapsed, achievements and progress can be evaluated and any new options considered. At this time it should be assessed whether or not the twinning should:

- continue under the same conditions or with new ideas and products
- bring in another partner
- be drawn to a close so that partners can look for a new twinning with other partners.

A clause setting out this situation will make this clear to all parties from the beginning. See Annex 3 for suggested wording.

- **An end clause**

Parties should not feel that they are irrevocably bound to the Memorandum or feel guilty if they want or need to break off the agreement. Therefore, an opt out clause for both parties is recommended so that if circumstances change for any reason there is the option to stop the agreement. Ironically, knowing that one can opt out of an agreement if the need arises can help to build a sense of security about the relationship on both sides and can contribute to the success of the twinning (see box 2).

- **Financial Arrangements**

See Annex 3

4.2 Preparing the Memorandum

Who is the Memorandum prepared for?

First and foremost for the managers of the reserves involved. The Memorandum of Understanding could also be used as a public statement of the twinning relationship.

Who should prepare it?

This depends very much on the internal structure of the organisation responsible for management. Although whoever writes the text should involve those staff directly concerned with the management of the site.

Who endorses the Memorandum?

Clearly, this should be decided and agreed by the organisations involved. The agreement should represent a high degree of commitment from the organisation and is therefore likely to be at a senior level. Public support from politicians or from local community group leaders and interest groups may also be necessary, depending on the site's administration.

What is EUROSITE's role?

EUROSITE's function is to advise on the drafting of the Memorandum as needed and to endorse the final document.

How to prepare the Memorandum?

The following ideas may help to start the process:

- a short meeting with your own colleagues to brainstorm objectives and possible activities and projects. You will probably already have some good ideas on your objectives for the twinning. The opinions of your colleagues will help to clarify them.
- prepare first draft and circulate to colleagues within each organisation for comments
- make necessary changes
- agree final draft and submit to political masters for approval

How should the Memorandum be presented?

As clearly, fairly and helpfully as possible. You should aim to make the Memorandum understandable to partners and the outside world and remember that it is agreed in a spirit of cooperation. Try to make sure that the memo makes responsibilities and obligations clear, but avoid pseudo-legal terms as far as possible.

Annex 3 sets out recommended sections and suggested wording along with further guidance and an example. This 'model' is available from the EUROSITE office in Tilburg on diskette in Wordperfect for Windows, Word for Windows, AppleMac ClarisWorks 4.0 or as ASCII text. Two examples of Memoranda can be seen in Annex 4. More are available on request.

CASE STUDY 2: *Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin, France* twinning with *Somerset Levels, United Kingdom*

Background

This twinning developed originally as a straightforward exchange of information between two natural sites across the Channel and has matured to a relationship where organisations from the surrounding region are heavily involved in information exchange. These include Somerset County Council, local communes in Normandy, Parc Naturel des Marais du Cotentin du Bessin, English Nature and the RSPB.

One of the obvious products of the twinning is the involvement of both sites in a project funded by the EU LIFE Environment programme to demonstrate the development and use of multipurpose reedbeds in local situations. Another was a workshop held in April 1997 under the *EUROSITE* banner on the creation, restoration and use of reedbeds attended by site managers from across Europe.

How it began

During the designation of the Parc Naturel, a group of representatives from Somerset County Council was present and this led to a twinning agreement being signed in June 1991 for a period of three years. This agreement was renewed in May 1995 during the opening ceremony of the experimental sewage treatment station at St. Jean-de-Daye in France.

The sites

The Somerset Levels and Moors and Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin are both wetlands of international importance with a wealth of wildlife, particularly birds. They have similar land forms, habitats and patterns of land use. On both sites, local agricultural communities with a strong sense of identity and tradition play an important part in maintaining the nature conservation value of the land.

The Somerset Levels and Moors is a large area of unimproved grazing marsh. The Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin is one of the most important grazing marshes in France

Common issues

- Management of water levels
- Management of sensitive natural areas
- Development of Green Tourism projects (Rambling, Interpretation)
- Conservation of natural heritage through management agreements (i.e. Agri-Environment measures)
- Environmental restoration of peat workings (creation and management of reedbeds)
- Conservation of the built heritage (cob houses, thatched roofs)

How it works

Originally a political arrangement with representatives from the Parc Naturel and the County of Somerset the twinning rapidly evolved into more of an exchange of technical expertise.

The links which have been established are therefore characterised by exchanges based on case studies and meetings between users.

Box 3

Since 1991, there have been meetings on average once a year, at one or other of the sites, tackling the following subjects:

- Agri-Environment measures
- Management of sensitive natural areas
- Green Tourism
- Traditional earth houses (Cob)

In addition, collaboration on the LIFE project on reedbed restoration and preparation of the 28th *EUROSITE* workshop has increased the number of exchange visits.

Why it works

The sites are similar in many respects. From an ecological and farming point of view, land management practices are similar. Both sites have an important tourist industry and very robust local communities, which are still firmly connected to the land.

The sites are relatively close to each other, making exchange visits easy to arrange and affordable. However, language is still a problem and potentially a barrier to good information exchange. This means that a special effort from each partner is necessary.

There is a broad base of organisations involved from a variety of sectors including local and national governmental organisations and national NGOs. All are committed to the project and recognise the common benefits which have been achieved.

The future

The spirit of the original twinning was to be as practical as possible and this has been maintained over the years. The implementation of the LIFE project has led to the development of focussed working links which have become permanent.

The work achieved on a site can be used as a valuable demonstration to those local organisations involved with another site. In the future, the work done on both sides of the Channel can be used to open up new perspectives.

The districts of the Somerset Levels and Moors are working towards a working group based on the example of the Parc Naturel.

The experiences with restoration of reedbeds at Ham Wall in Somerset will serve as a reference point for similar approaches in the marshes of *Cotentin et du Bessin*.

The relationship between the County Council and Parc Naturel authorities has reached such a good level that an obvious next step is to develop a twinning between populations of the two areas.

Box 3

5. Keeping a twinning alive

5.1 Review

Review and evaluation are necessary for a number of reasons:

1. To help partners in a twinning make the relationship work

2. To provide feedback to the *EUROSITE* network.

The annual review which is sent to *EUROSITE* will be made available to the members of the network, Board and Council in the form of an overview of twinning activities. Through this, *EUROSITE* members may be able to make links with existing twinning partners learn from them or to potentially create new twinings.

3. To demonstrate to senior managers in network member organisations the tangible benefits of twinings for their sites and staff.

5.2 Involvement of other sites and site managers in the *EUROSITE* network

Twinning has always been viewed by *EUROSITE* as a way of entering into the activities of the wider network, a metaphorical gateway.

When a workshop is held at one of the twinned sites, it provides an opportunity for site managers in the network to meet with other managers with similar sites and learn from each other. Experiences are made more widely available to the network in this way.

Twinings have also enlarged the network through attracting new *EUROSITE* members. Therefore, *EUROSITE* encourages twinning partners to look for opportunities for wider involvement in the network through their twinning.

6. Other ideas for bilateral exchange

EUROSITE's new strategy is to encourage site managers to become more actively involved in site-based twinings. This guidance report helps to do this. The strategy also explores new ways of bilateral exchange. Several new ideas or focuses for bilateral exchange are proposed in the strategy paper and these are summarised below:

Focus 1. Natural Site Twinings: Ecological Networks: Natura 2000, Emerald & EECONET

Through the Habitats and Species Directive, Member States of the European Union (EU) are committed to making a contribution to the Natura 2000 network of important European natural sites and to ensuring that they are maintained at or restored to favourable conservation status.

Broad guidance is given in the text of the Directive on favourable conservation status and natural site managers in many countries are making good progress in establishing what this means for habitats listed in Annex I of the Directive.

In some countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, ecological networks - such as EECONET and Emerald - are more readily understood. Other countries are outside the European Union's influence but are planning to accede to the EU in the not too distant future.

Therefore, there is great potential for exchanging knowledge about habitat management between managers of natural sites with the same habitat types and species in order to ensure that similar habitats are managed to a consistently high standard.

Efforts would be directed to the most important habitat types i.e. those which have a high priority because of their rarity and fragility.

Focus 2. Natural Site Twinings - Bird flyways

Migratory bird routes traverse many countries and the birds use many sites for breeding, wintering or on passage. Coordinating site management work on sites along these flight paths can provide obvious conservation benefits for the species and others associated with the particular habitat type. In addition this strong connection between sites is likely to ensure that the twinning works well. *EUROSITE* has already demonstrated the success of this concept with its long-running Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) network.

Focus 3. Twinings between managers

Managers of nature reserves hold conservation experience in their hands. They know best how to manage habitats and species. Site managers are the network's greatest resource. Investment in their training is a good investment as their knowledge can be passed to others and will be retained for a long period.

Focus 4. Cross - border Twinings

Natural features and sites often cross National boundaries making integrated management more difficult. Site Twinning is a means of improving coordination of management if necessary and skill sharing. Cross border twinings can also be a way of focussing political attention on management problems. There are many European initiatives which aim to address problems in cross-border areas. A *EUROSITE* twinning can help a worthwhile project become a successful project with fund-providers, particularly in the EU.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the members of the Twinning Committee who met in May 1996 and initiated the preparation of these guidelines. Special thanks to Philip Bossenbroek (*Staatsbosbeheer*), Jean-Baptiste Wetton (*PNR Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin*), Guillemette Rolland (*SEPNB*), Ian Robinson (*RSPB*), Hubert Brabant (*EDEN 62*), Christian Perennou (*Tour du Valat*) and others for commenting on the drafts. Charles Poinsot - *Nord-Sud Environnement* - translated the guide into French (Tel/Fax : +33 4 67 73 40 52)

A special thanks to all those site managers who have participated in *EUROSITE's* Natural Sites Twinning Programme over the last ten years. Their experience has been essential in the preparation of these guidelines.

EUROSITE is grateful to *Vereniging Natuurmonumenten* in the Netherlands for its financial support of the *EUROSITE* Bilateral Exchange Programme.

Further Information

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Annex 1:

***EUROSITE* Twinning Programme
Criteria for the Selection of Sites**

Annex 1: *EUROSITE* Twinning Programme Criteria for the Selection of Sites

The criteria for the selection of sites to be included in the network of twinned sites are designed to ensure that the *EUROSITE* Twinning Programme fulfils its symbolic and practical aspirations.

The following criteria are considered necessary for a successful application:

1. *Security of Tenure:*

The site should have a secure, legal status, with nature conservation activities being guaranteed for the long term by an established nature management organisation. The security of the site should be based on the following factors:

- land ownership - the organisation responsible for management of the site should own all or part of the land within the protected area concerned.
or
- long term leasing - the organisation responsible for management of the site should lease all or part of the land within the protected area concerned for a period longer than 10 years.
and
- strong legal protection - the site should be protected through legislation of at least national importance.

In a case where a secure situation does **not** exist, there should be a likelihood that a secure situation will be reached in the foreseeable future. It is possible that the stability of some sites may be helped by a twinning arrangement.

2. *Habitats/ landscape/ ecology:*

The site should be of European importance for fauna or flora and should be recognised internationally for its ecological interest. At least some of its habitats and species should be listed in the 1992 EU Habitats & Species Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) or the 1979 EC Birds Directive (Council Directive 79/409/EEC). Ramsar sites are also included

3. *Management:*

A management plan including management objectives should have been drawn up or be in the process of development. Management standards should be high, and the site management organisation should have a policy of keeping in touch with new developments in nature conservation. Each site has specific priorities for nature conservation and these aspects will be taken into account in the process of identifying suitable partners.

4. *Public Access*

The site should be open to the public to some degree, and preferably have a visitor centre or some other permanent facility on site or close by, which could be used for displaying information about the twinning. This is not essential for an application to be successful, but there are obvious advantages for the site manager in terms of increasing support from the general public for the twinning and through this, management activities and projects on site.

Natural sites often have an important place in the minds and hearts of local communities. It is important for the public to understand why sites are twinned and this is best achieved through direct contact with people and communities in the surrounding area. Therefore, the manager or management team involved in the twinning should also have some experience in working with local communities.

5. *Evidence of investment in the twinning*

It will be important to indicate at the outset, the way in which the management of the two sites are likely to benefit from a twinning arrangement and to show that the resources (staff, volunteers, money) are sufficient to sustain the twinning. A clear coordination team or person for the twinning should be indicated.

Annex 2:
***EUROSITE* Twinning Application Form**

EUROSITE

Le réseau des organismes
pour la gestion du patrimoine
naturel européen

The network of
organisations managing
Europe's natural heritage

Twinning Application Form

1. General Information

Site Name:

Administrative area:

Country:

Area (ha):

Ownership of the land/tenure:

(tick those that apply)

- Private NGO
 Government Other (s)

.....

1.1 Organisation responsible for the management of the site

Name:

Address:

Status: Private NGO
 Government Other
.....

EUROSITE member? Yes/No

1.2 Contact person:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-Mail:

Preferred language: English
(please tick one) Français
 Other(s):

1.2 Site Manager:

Address:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-Mail:

Language(s) spoken:

English Français
 Other(s)

.....

2. Legal Status of the Site

International

- Birds Directive Site
 Ramsar Site
 Habitats Directive
 Biosphere Reserve
 Other(s)

.....

National

- National Park
 National Nature Reserve
 Other(s)

.....

3. Natural Features

3.1 Key habitat types:

Habitat EU Directive?¹

1.
2.
3.

3.2 Key species

Flora

Scientific Name EU Directive?¹

1.
2.
3.

Fauna

Scientific Name EU Directive?¹

1.
2.
3.

¹ Please state whether the habitat or species is listed on the EC Habitats & Species Directive

4. Management

4.1 No. staff in management:

4.2 Key Management Objectives

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

4.3 Key Management Activities

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

4.4 Site manager's special skills

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

5. Key Partners

- Schools
- National NGOs
- Community/ Volunteer Groups
- Other (s)
- Local Govt.
- Local NGOs

6. Use of Site

6.1 Economic Activities

- agricultural
- silvicultural
- piscicultural
- others
- pastoral
- tourism
- hunting

6.2 Principal Users

-
-

7 Education and Research

7.1 Visitor & research facilities available

- visitor centre
 - information signs
 - parking
 - audio-visual
 - library
 - sleeping facilities
 - Other(s)
 - nature trails
 - observatories
 - sanitary
 - refreshments
 - laboratory
-

7.2 Information available to visitors

- general info
 - info on facilities for disabled people
 - topographical maps at scale
 - slides/ videos
 - posters, post cards, etc.
 - scientific information
 - aerial photos
 - Other information
-

8 Twinning

8.1 Your objectives

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

8.2 Projects

Outline your ideas for collaboration projects:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

8.3 Resources

Indicate the resources (time, money, staff and volunteers available to support a twinning)

-
-

8.4 How long do you want to maintain a twinning arrangement?

-

8.5 Have you been involved in a twinning before? (please give details)

- Yes
- No

-

8.6 When do you plan to start?

-

Annex 3:
Model Memorandum of Understanding

Annex 4:
Real examples of Memoranda of Understanding

Annex 5:
Suggested letter to end a twinning

Date

Dear partner

EUROSITE TWINNING BETWEEN SITE x and SITE Y

It seems such a short time since we signed our agreement to share knowledge about site management. Unfortunately, all good things must end. We have learnt a lot from each other during the twinning, but now it is time to move on.

We would like to thank you for your positive approach to our twinning relationship over the years. We have thoroughly enjoyed our visits to your site and enjoyed the fresh views which the visits of you and your colleagues have brought to our site management.

We wish you and all the staff at your reserve best wishes for the future and hope that your management goes from strength to strength.

Success with your future twinning adventures!

Yours sincerely