

# Natura 2000 Twinning Workshop

Akerdijkse Plassen and Tiengemeten, the Netherlands  
30 November and 1 December 2016

## Twinning as a tool for exchange of good practice in site management

REPORT



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# Introduction

*Twinning:*

*“to be paired or coupled.” - dictionary.com*

*“a structured collaboration between people from two or more natural sites allowing synergies, joint working and learning for the benefit of Europe’s nature.” - eurosite.org*

The first European Twinning Programme, which linked 33 sites across Europe, was already launched in 1987. In 1989, Eurosita was established to encourage and further increase joint working between site managers. Since then it has coordinated natural sites Twinning in Europe.

In recent years, Eurosita has observed an increased interest in the subject of twinning. Twinning was regularly mentioned during the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Seminars and other Networking events, and various members of the Eurosita network have expressed their willingness and intention to set up a Twinning agreement. The European Landowners’ Organization (ELO) also sees an increasing interest in twinning activities with private landowners and managers of privately owned land. Apparently, Natura 2000 site managers, both public and private, see an important role for twinning in their work. To help site managers, landowners and other stakeholders to find interesting Twinning partners and to get the most out of these collaborations and knowledge exchanges, a (new) support structure is needed.

Eurosita and ELO believe that a (formal) Natura 2000 Twinning Framework will hugely benefit the exchange of knowledge and experience between public and private Natura 2000 managers across Europe. A growing support for this approach has been voiced by the members of both networks, as well as by site managers involved in the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process. The European Commission has also recognised the value of this process in achieving the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and has shown interest in supporting the further development of the existing twinning concepts.

In order to develop such a framework, Eurosita and its member Natuurmonumenten, in cooperation with ELO and ECNC, organised a Natura 2000 Twinning Workshop to look back and learn from past experiences and discuss and design the contours of a new framework. A very fruitful workshop was held in Akerdijkse Plassen and the Island of Tiengemeten near Rotterdam, on 30 November and 1 December 2016.

*“It would be great if the outcome [of the workshop (ed.)] would include some proposals on how to move ahead, including identifying elements from 'the past' that could be re-activated or up-dated and possibly some ideas on governance, for example what would be needed to support the initiative. Using the Natura 2000 Communication Platform should in anyway be*

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considered to promote twinning and also as the main future communication channel for and between twins. Probably some secretarial and facilitation support will be needed, it would be good to gather some ideas on what this could mean in concrete terms. We are confident that Eurosite will make out of this event an important step that will help us re-launching twinning initiatives between Natura 2000 sites.” François Kremer, Natura 2000 Coordinator, European Commission.

## Keynote presentations

### Nicole Nowicki

#### **Twinning of natural sites: towards a new Natura 2000 framework?**

Nicole Nowicki, co-founder of the first European Sites Twinning Programme, first Eurosite President and former Director – General. [Download presentation](#).

Nicole was there from the beginning, when there was ‘nothing’ in the European context and people taking care of the land were not yet proper site managers, but rather brilliant scientists, who had to regularly manage conflicts. Nicole (and her husband) identified a need to learn across borders and undertook a feasibility study on the concept of bilateral twinings between areas of importance under the Birds Directives. The main objective of the first twinning projects was having a communication tool to make it easier to work with local communities, exposing one’s own work and communicating with each other. After a tour through Europe, visiting site managers they knew in 12 countries, Nicole drafted a matrix to match twinning partners. The European Sites Twinning Programme focussed on the site managers, not the Directors. The idea was that the site managers would persuade their bosses. The President of the European Parliament and DG Environment were present when the first Twinning agreements were signed in 1987.

Many things were learned and there are many success stories. These experiences, both good and bad, were captured in the Eurosite twinning guidelines in 1999, updated in 2015 ([download document](#)). Nicole emphasizes “It’s not a marriage, it’s a walk together for a few years. There are high’s and low’s. You have to ‘end’ the collaboration, shake hands and become friends.”

During the first twinning projects, Nicole learnt that similar management issues were far more important than the size of the area and even the habitat type. You need to support the peer to peer knowledge sharing. There must be some connection on personal level and clearly defined areas of exchange: what do you want to learn? It also must be fun. Find a way so that it is full of life. There must be an open mind and desire to be together. Both sides need to feel they can ‘add’ to the twinning. It must be a two-way twinning. There must be respect and recognition for each other.

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Tips for the new framework:

- Look at existing tools;
- Make it as attractive as a matchmaker website on the Internet;
- Make your twinning dynamic, fun, inspiring, real and not just virtual;
- Encourage bottom up approach;
- Ensure that the principal stakeholders buy into the process;
- Celebrate in a wider context, be proud of the international importance of N2000.

## Patrick Nuvelstijn

### **Twinning in times of trouble**

Patrick Nuvelstijn, Coordinator European and International Affairs at Natuurmonumenten.

[Download presentation.](#)

After a short introduction about his organisation, the NGO Natuurmonumenten, Patrick reflects on the title of his presentation: Twinning in times of trouble. The first trouble is the depressing state of biodiversity in the Netherlands. In fact, his country is the champion of low biodiversity in the EU. The second trouble is the organisational focus on projects and (short-term) efficiency, instead of on long-term relationships.

However, for both troubles there is hope. The mean species abundance is stabilizing, so conservation efforts do matter and Natuurmonumenten can look back at several good twinning projects. One site manager says about his twinning experiences: "I got a broader view on species and habitats and can look at management issues from a European perspective. It also gave team spirit, inspiration and a broader connection to my own organisation".

Patrick reflects on the current Eurosite guidelines and specifically the aim. He suggests to not only focus on natural sites, but allow for more thematic twinning as well. To not only look for twinning partners that have 'similar' habitats or problems, but differences. Finally, he thinks we should not focus on twinning based on problems, but also based on solutions.

Patrick thinks Eurosite can facilitate twinning by:

- Showing what twinning is and showcase examples;
- Having a script / roadmap available for those interested;
- Providing a twinning framework;
- Highlighting possibilities / chances.

At the end of his presentation, Patrick provided his ideas for future twinning:

- You need to facilitate the twinning in your organisation, financially and organisational;
- Need a focal point in your organisation, one person or one unit;
- Support from the top;

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- Twinning should be modernised, with more focus on themes (see Patrick's list of suggestions in his [presentation](#)).

## Alec van Havre

### ELO and the ELO Pilot Twinning project

Alec van Havre, treasurer at Landelijk Vlaanderen and active member of ELO, the European Landowners' Organisation. [Download presentation](#).

Alec first introduces his organisation, the European Landowners' Organization (ELO). ELO represents a network of 58 national and regional organisations and is the voice of landowners and managers in relation to EU authorities and promotes multifunctional use of lands, forestry and nature management throughout Europe. Their mission: "Working together for a prosperous and sustainable countryside".

ELO organises many events, participates in projects and promotes good practice through awards. Special attention was given to the 'Wildlife Estate label' and the related BellEuropa award.

In 2015 ELO started a pilot on twinning, between five sites located in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. The participants were focused on achieving impact and results, and preferred long-term collaborations (no time scale was agreed). Questions they had: How do we get leverage from the twinning? How do we increase our capacity? How do we get access to other stakeholders? One element was essential: trust.

The pilot made clear what the key success factors were:

- Project should have added value in EU context and financially;
- Clear identification and description of environmental issues and related governance or management issues;
- Background information and data and clear situation description (area and audience);
- Identification of target audience and stakeholders;
- Coherent strategy that links individual actions;
- Quantification of impact and results through adequate monitoring.

Based on these lessons, ELO came up with a five-step method:

1. Full mutual understanding of the aims and context;
2. Clear, specific and measurable objectives;
3. Target audience for impact;
4. Solid understanding of logical and practical links between problems, objectives, actions and results;
5. Appropriate indicators for impact and project progress.

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# Michel Gerits

## Lessons learned on Twinning Copenhagen-Antwerp

Michel Gerits, architect, project leader and assistant coordinator, City of Antwerp. [Download presentation](#).

Michel participated in a town twinning through the Mayor Adapt Initiative, a programme about climate change adaptation. Antwerp was twinned with Copenhagen. Both cities face challenges with rainwater drainage, but one city - Copenhagen - already had a “water plan” and Antwerp did not. An opportunity for learning.

The visit to Copenhagen lasted four days. However, the entire process from preparation to closing of the twinning lasted eight months with the related additional time for all parties involved.

Michel explained that there were three parties in the twinning:

- The host, Copenhagen, with two experts and one person as ‘host’;
- The facilitator from Mayor Adapt, to assist with logistics and planning;
- The guest, Antwerp, with two experts to ‘learn’.

It’s important to get to know each other before the visit and understand expectations and aims. After the site visit, Michel realised that the programme was one-way. Copenhagen was teaching and showing, Antwerp was learning. But what was in it for Copenhagen? And did Antwerp have nothing of value to share? Avoid this by considering what the host can gain from the twinning as well. You need to understand your partners, so get on the phone.

Ideally, the schedule during a site visit has lots of air and focuses on inspiring, explaining, teaching and learning. Michel advises to plan ‘free-time’, ‘think-time’, ‘meeting-time’ and ‘sightseeing-time’. A mix of presentations, talking to each other, talking to partners and stakeholders, walking around and evaluation. Three tips about the site visit:

1. Don’t only show your success stories. It’s also valuable to learn from mistakes and experiments;
2. Evaluate on the spot and at the end of every day. Allow the programme to be adaptable, to accommodate last-minute changes and requests;
3. Consider the learning curve. The end of the visit is most important. In the beginning you are getting to know each other and getting started.

For the Natura 2000 Twinning Framework, Michel has some additional advice:

- Before you start, understand the workload. It is a lot of work, demanding, and at times stressful. But also extremely rewarding. Can you commit?
- Be prepared. Take time in advance. Have your questions ready;
- After the visit: Tell the story! Be the expert and share. Your mission as guest is to take it back home and communicate;
- As facilitating organisation: Have a brochure with tips and tricks for each phase and each party (host and guest).

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## Kazimierz Rabski

### **The touch of twinning**

Kazimierz Rabski, independent consultant and Chairman of the Society for the Coast (EUCC-Poland). [Download presentation](#).

Through photos and text, Kazimierz took us through his journey and experiences of the twinning between the Odra Delta Nature Park (Society for the Coast, Poland) and Eelder- en Peizemaden (Natuurmonumenten, the Netherlands). This twinning took place between 2010 and 2014. A Twinning Agreement / Certificate was signed by both parties, agreeing to regularly review joint working activities and sharing lessons on the Eurosite website.

The twinning planned for eight major activities, of which four were realised. Examples of successful twinning activities include:

- Bird monitoring in Odra Delta Nature Park made by Natuurmonumenten team;
- Study visit to “Eelder-en Peizemaden” by Society for The Coast team;
- “People - Nature - Culture = Connections” materials for comparative study;
- Information exchange.

Kazimierz gives special attention to the ‘WE Young People See Nature’ initiative, where Polish and Dutch high school students exchange and make photographs of nature. This resulted in 150 participants making more than 250,000 photos and the twinning partners getting a new look on nature education. <sup>1</sup>

Kazimierz concludes his presentation with his lessons learnt:

1. Programme should not be too ambitious, make it realistic;
2. Exchange visits are a crucial first step;
3. Concentrate on particular actions;
4. Involve local stakeholders

## Wouter van Steenis

### **Tiengemeten and Île Nouvelle - An estuary twinning**

Wouter van Steenis, ecologist at Natuurmonumenten. [Download presentation](#).

Wouter first gave an introduction on the history and development of Tiengemeten: an island in the Haringvliet estuary, before an agricultural island, now a place for nature and recreation, through restoration activities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://weyoungpeopleseenature.com/>

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In France, the island of Île Nouvelle, located in the Gironde estuary, was going through the same process. Eurosite helped start the twinning. In 2000 a first inspiration visit took place. The actual twinning happened between 2007 and 2011.

The two islands had several similarities, e.g. the wish to have a visitor centre, restore the island to nature, being an island. However, there were also differences, e.g. the tidal amplitude and fresh/salt water. The biggest difference however was the type of organisation responsible for the restoration: in France the local authority and in the Netherlands an NGO.

The twinning had a clear time frame. It would last for five years, with a visit planned each year. In total four visits took place. During these visits the twinning partners met with stakeholders, visited sites and organised joint working sessions. Throughout the five years, both organisations had a fixed group of 3-4 people that were present at all twinning events. Additionally, stakeholders and colleagues were invited.

In practical terms, the twinning resulted in inspiration, having a reference site, reports and the feeling that 'we are not alone' in such an endeavour. But there were also some hiccups that made the twinning challenging at times: e.g. the language issue, the different types of organisation, the speed of the restoration work, different interests and goals, and a lack of a clear ending.

Wouter's recommendations for the Natura 2000 twinning framework:

- Use a language you all know (or you want to learn!);
- Start with an explicit discussion on goals to be reached;
- Choose your Twinning partner based on shared goals;
- Joined interests, e.g. birds, plants, legislation, help the process;
- Good food!

## Anita Prosser

### **Natura 2000 Twinning Framework – introduction to the work sessions**

Anita Prosser, Akta Partnership and Eurosite Board Member. [Download presentation](#).

Anita explains the context of this twinning workshop. Eurosite has a long history of twinning. Twinning now got political support from the European Commission and the topic emerged as a tool in the Biogeographical process.

During the 2015 Eurosite Annual Meeting a mini workshop on twinning gave the following results:

Eurosite and partners should

- develop a site-matching database;

- offer facilitation of the twinning process;
- provide models of twinning;
- organise partner finding workshops;
- provide information and funding;
- organise annual awards for the best twinning;
- provide standards.

During this workshop the idea of twinning should be taken a step forward by

- finding practical ways of creating the Natura 2000 Twinning Framework;
- identifying what we need to do and which resources are required; and
- identifying how Eurosite can develop quality standards.

## Workshop results

The work sessions were organised in a World Cafe style: four tables, four topics, four people per table and one facilitator per table. Participants changed table after approx. 15 minutes. In two days, a total of eight topics were discussed:

1. Process
2. Stakeholders
3. Governance structure
4. User
5. Role of Eurosite and partners
6. Getting started
7. Matchmaking
8. Thematic twinning

The main results of these sessions are presented in the chapters that follow.

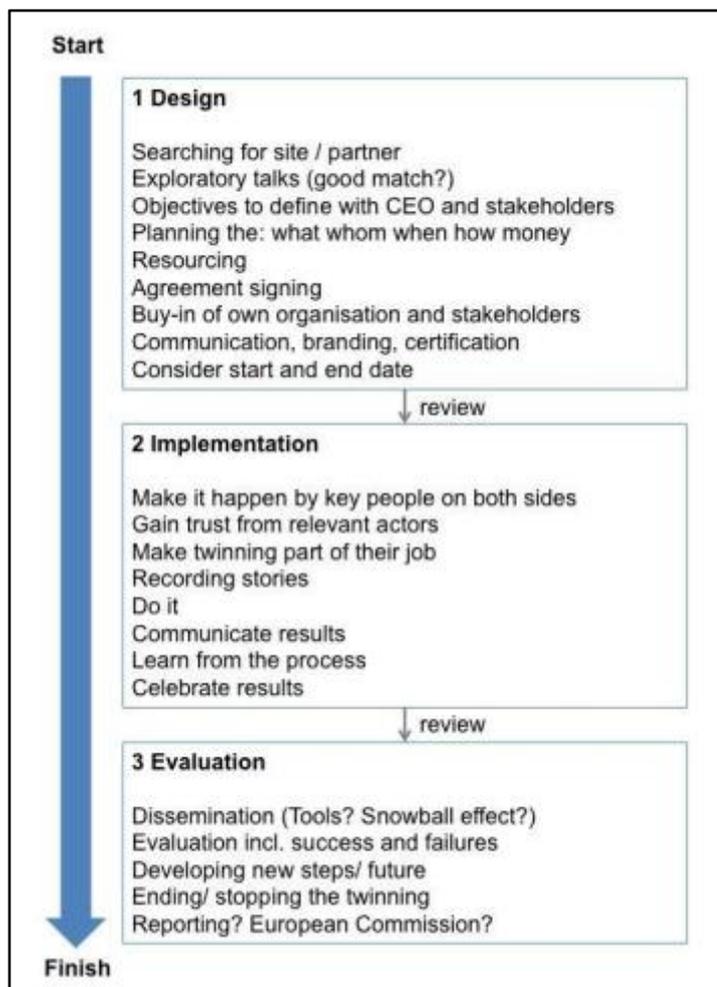
### 1. Process

Twinning has three major phases:

1. Design
2. Implementation
3. Evaluation

The design phase is all about getting the twinning started.

Meaning: finding a partner or site to twin with, getting to know each other



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and whether there is a match or not, setting objectives for the twinning, organising buy-in from own organisation so that time, money and other resources are available, signing the agreement and communication about the twinning.

Implementation is all about executing and actually doing the twinning. So, meeting, visiting, talking, sharing, organising, etc. It is important to record what is being said and done and to gain trust from relevant stakeholders.

Last phase is evaluation. Looking back, identifying lessons learnt and disseminating the results. If appropriate, reporting might be part of this phase as well.

Several considerations:

- After phase 1 and phase 2 it is good practice to review the process. Invite an 'outsider' or twinning facilitator to help you;
- Organisations interested in twinning should have a focal point to drive process and mobilise resources;
- Twinning can be site to site, issue to issue, idea to idea;
- Finding a partner to twin with can be done 'online', via an information tool, website or something like 'tinder4nature'. But there should also be a human part, a role for a facilitator matchmaker - Eurosite and/or partners;
- Existing working groups around certain themes are a starting place for twinning;
- You need to consider governance of the twinning, how and when to do 'checks and balances' and make sure results lead to impact.

## 2. Stakeholders

Stakeholders were recognized as an important element of the Twinning process. There is an added value in both informing the stakeholders about the twinning and getting them directly involved.

During a quick listing exercise at the beginning of this session a list of possible stakeholders in a twinning process was generated. The exact list will vary from case to case, but it was clear that the number of stakeholders, in a local community, which could directly or indirectly be involved can be very long and requires some careful thinking.

An example of stakeholder list generated in this session (this may not be an exhaustive list). Some of the listed stakeholders need to be explored in more details for each individual case:

- Agriculture
- Cultural centres
- Emergency services (e.g. fire services)
- Fisheries
- Forestry
- Hunters
- Landowners

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- Leaders of opinion (e.g. church, organised religion)
  - Local authorities (e.g. municipality)
  - Local community
  - Local entrepreneurs
  - Local nature groups
  - Media
  - Producers of local products who rely on Natura 2000 sites
  - Schools (Information => education => involvement from students/ schoolchildren)
  - Scientists and research staff universities
  - Site managers
  - Stakeholders who have an economic incentive and those with an ideological incentive
  - Tourism and recreation sector
  - Tourists
  - Utility providers

**Indirect stakeholders:** Informing the local community about the twinning with sites in other countries can help raise their sense of pride of the area they live in and raise their awareness about the importance of nature and biodiversity in general, or about more specific issues twinning might be focusing on.

**Direct stakeholders:** Some of the issues the local community is having could be an integral part of twinning, in which case the local stakeholders should be fully involved right from the start – in preparing the twinning and in exchange visits and learning from the local communities of twinning partners.

There are several ways to do the stakeholder analysis, to help determine who to involve, when, why and to what extent. One of such tools is a “Stakeholder management matrix” (e.g. [influence versus importance](#)). However, it is important to remember that stakeholders can move from one ‘box’ to another. Stakeholders should be considered both from the perspective of the person making the matrix, but also from the perspective of those ‘inside’ the matrix. Stakeholders might think they are important and influential, but they might not be, and vice versa.

A few suggestions were given for good stakeholder management and involvement:

- Step 1: Determine the goal of the twinning;
- Determine the objectives and needs of the stakeholders and include them in twinning design;
- Involve stakeholders in site visits / face-to-face meetings;
- SEM = Strategic Environmental Management;
- Hold regular stakeholder meetings;
- Use skills, expertise and experience of all stakeholders involved;
- Tools like ‘the ladder of participation’ can help as well ([link](#)).

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### 3. User

Identifying the *user* depends on the aim of the overall twinning programme. Is it a tool to implement the Natura 2000 network and embed it in society? Or is it a site management tool to help site managers? If the first - then all the stakeholders involved in the Natura 2000 site should be considered when defining the twinning exchange, to prevent breach of trust. This is a holistic approach. If the latter (site management tool), then the *user* will be the landowner or site manager with a mandate. In any case, they are legally responsible and feel the commitment towards their site and a successful outcome of their twinning.

For a thematic twinning, the *user* can be all kinds of stakeholders, not even necessarily responsible for site management. This is a more focused approach.

Neither approach is good or bad, but should be determined beforehand!

Another way to determine the *user* is to look at who is directly or indirectly involved in the twinning. Directly are the users, indirectly are the stakeholders.

What motivates the *user* to do a twinning:

- Need for inspiration, learning and exposure of their work / site;
- Increase knowledge;
- Sharing practices;
- Peer to peer exchange;
- Having a certain need, problem, issue, question;
- Opportunity to reflect on his / her own project / site;
- Opportunity to get an outsider's perspective on his / her own project / site.

Barriers that prohibit a *user* from doing a twinning:

- Initial investment before results are felt: long term partnership vs short term problems;
- Hard to find a partner: who is doing what? You don't know each other (yet);
- The Boss / organisation is not interested in twinning;
- Time and budget.

Success factors for a good twinning:

- Similar synergy (stakeholders, objectives, ...);
- Does not have to be perfect;
- Common objective;
- Dealing with new actors;
- Celebrate: BBQ, reception, events;
- Need to communicate with stakeholders;
- Get to know each other;
- Similar habitat to some extent;
- Knowing the site management problems, listing them and forming groups around them and making things accessible to talk about.

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## 4. Role of Eurosite and partners

### Possible Natura 2000 Twinning Framework structure

Three main roles were identified for the Twinning 'Network' or facilitator:

1. Provision of an online tool / dating site;
2. Assist with stakeholder management and involvement;
3. Assist with embedding twinning into all levels, from bottom-up.

With regards to the online tool / dating site:

- Thematic and site twinning, often both;
- Identifying new issues / think tank for ideas;
- Use the Natura 2000 database, database for monitoring and data processing;
- Organising twinning events / Twinning market at Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process events;
- Use Natura 2000 Platform for promotion of Twinning.

With regards to the stakeholder management:

- Have shared objectives;
- Identify needs for Natura 2000 pro-actively. Use the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process;
- Support twinning partners in defining goals, measuring progress and communicating results.

Additionally, there should be a role for the European Commission, related to validation, funding and recognition through awards.

### Possible specific roles for Eurosite / other partners...in the Natura 2000 Twinning Framework

1. Contact between European Commission and twinning partners (hub);
2. Controls quality standards and sets up a label (long-term);
3. Helps and spreads know-how of getting twinning programmes into LIFE programme;
4. Finds and supports connecting of partners;
5. Informs and promotes about twinning at each event + media + website + newsletter;
6. Introduces a group to check and control if partners meet the goals that they planned;
7. Sets up a support system in difficult situations to reduce barriers, frictions, etc.;
8. Celebrates the twinning and sets up / supports an award process;
9. Reviews and evaluates;
10. Helps twinning partners to achieve results;
11. Database of experiences: trial and error, good and bad experiences;
12. Facilitates, not directs;
13. Develops and makes available toolkit / step by step approach (build in social, cultural aspects and Natura 2000 theme);
14. Resourcing directions: where to get funding at appropriate level.

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## 5. Getting started

### Tasks

Group members at the workshop identified key tasks and milestones for the establishment of a functional Natura 2000 Twinning Framework. There may still be some gaps and those mentioned may not necessarily be in the right order.

1. Write up the notes of the Eurosite twinning workshop to help;
2. Develop a new concept for European Natura 2000 Twinning;
3. Develop a partnership or consortium of relevant partners with European outlook, who will sponsor the proposal.
4. Achieve ownership of the proposal from the partnership;
5. Put together a budget proposal for the following costs:
  - a. A first meeting of the twinning partners;
  - b. The management costs of a twinning;
  - c. The management costs of managing implementation of the framework;
  - d. The costs of 'match-making';
  - e. Costs associated with promotion of twinning as a tool;
  - f. Other costs;
6. Develop an IT system to manage twinning, or build on existing EU systems, e.g. Natura 2000 Viewer and Natura 2000 Communication Platform.
7. Design the structure of the twinning framework using the ideas gathered in the workshop;
8. Test the draft framework with the European Commission. Is it on the right track?;
9. Promote the twinning framework to member states and site managers.

### Potential Barriers

This is not an exhaustive list, more barriers will be identified once the framework is drafted.

- Political – high level decision makers in an EU member state have a lack of will to make things happen for reasons of: lack of resource, language ability or priority, and many other;
- The management of a twinning arrangement could be seen as very onerous (heavy). The view was expressed that this is because Natura 2000 is seen as being overly bureaucratic;
- Lack of money to make things happen;
- There is a sense of Natura 2000 'fatigue', which means that anything to do with the EC is seen as being heavy and onerous;
- Designing the structure of the twinning framework is a large piece of work. The participants did not discuss this in detail as this is covered elsewhere. However,

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ideas were stated to develop a twinning tool box which would include guidance on communication tools and branding of your twinning.

## Success Criteria or results

Success means that.....

- there is real change happening on the ground;
- local communities have a better understanding of Natura 2000 network sites as a result of twinning;
- the image of Natura 2000 network sites is improved;
- there is cultural enrichment;
- benefits because of twinning are very visible. People can point at benefits and say “that happened because of the Natura 2000 site and our twinning”;
- local people feel more ownership of Natura 2000 sites and are proud about their designation;
- there is good cooperation between Eurosite, ELO and other partners;
- strong bridges are built between local stakeholders and barriers are down (at the site level).

## Matchmaking success factors

1. Adoption of twinning concept;
2. Wish to work together on Natura 2000 sites and themes. Consider partnerships within and between Natura 2000 sites;
3. “TWINdr”-like platform available for searching (user friendly and not bureaucratic, clear objectives, priorities for Natura 2000 + promotion of platform);
4. Need for a go-between who takes the lead according to the situation / objectives of the twinning. Coaching by representatives of facilitator / twinning programme;
5. Need to focus on improving condition of Natura 2000 sites and / or species;
6. Pilot sites? Showcases + promotion of existing examples;
7. Award or prize system;
8. Creating opportunities to meet, talk and develop twinning.

## 6. Thematic twinning

Throughout the workshop and earlier discussions, a clear distinction between thematic and site twinning was made. In this session this topic is considered in more detail.

- You can build a thematic twinning out of a series of site twinings - gathering knowledge database;
- Site is entry point for different stakeholders to get engaged;
- In thematic twinning there might be a danger to reduce scope in stakeholder involvement;

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- Commitment of more than three sites to work on one common theme;
  - Important to keep both strands!;
  - Thematic twinning: common challenge to solve together. Find solution together;
  - Thematic twinning could deliver more tangible outputs for decision makers. => Find a way to solve a problem across the range of sites and find funding for it;
  - Site-site long-lasting relationship;
  - Thematic is complementary to site twinning;
  - Policy could guide selection of themes;
  - Twinning should contribute to define policy;
  - Theme will attract interested sites to participate;
  - By reducing to one theme you reduce synergy of Natura 2000 (all relevant actors in Natura 200 zone able to be involved, even if less concerned by the theme);
  - Broader themes than nature: e.g. communication, recreation.

## 7. Way forward

The aim of the workshop was to design the contours of a new Europe-wide Natura 2000 Twinning Framework which could also be applied to other protected sites. The fruitful discussions and input from participants made it possible to make a first outline. The following sections present the motivation, vision and concept for such a framework based partly on the results of the workshop.

### Why and how - our motivation and vision

Eurosite and ELO, together with their networks, are working towards a Europe where nature is cared for, protected, restored and valued by all, with prosperous and sustainably managed countryside. The key to achieving this are people - especially the rural stakeholders - that feel connected to and care for their environment and their fellow citizens.

“Just living is not enough... one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.”

– Hans Christian Anderson

In Europe, the Birds and Habitats Directives (the Natura 2000 network), play a central role in biodiversity and nature conservation. The European Environmental Agency (EEA) published a comprehensive overview of the [state of nature in Europe](#). Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director, said, *“The results are mixed but clear. When implemented well, conservation measures work and improve the status of habitats and species on the ground. Such improvements remain limited and patchy, and unfortunately Europe’s biodiversity is still being eroded overall and the pressures continue. We also need to understand that when dealing with maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, it takes time for our actions to make a difference on a large scale. Therefore, we need to reinforce our effort and actions.”*

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To ensure the long term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, we need to focus on the effective implementation and management of the Natura 2000 network - this is also one of the conclusions of the recently completed Fitness Check of the European nature directives. Over the years, site managers and landowners have gained experience and expertise in the management of their Natura 2000 areas, through trial and error and using (local) knowledge. But why would we let each site manager or landowner re-invent the wheel when they can do better by learning from others? Eurosite and ELO, as network organisations believe in the strength of sharing - learning from each other through exchange. The exchange of success and failures, of solutions and experiences, of good practice and research and friendship for the benefit of Europe's nature.

**Summary: By facilitating the effective exchange of good management practices in Natura 2000 sites, their biodiversity will be maintained and enhanced, and landscapes and ecosystems will be preserved and improved.**

## What - our concept

There are different ways to facilitate effective exchange of good site management practices. Twinning is: "a structured collaboration between people from two or more natural sites allowing synergies, joint working and learning" is the one we see as the most effective one.

Why is twinning important?

- ⇒ We believe in the strength of those involved in the twinning meeting each other in person, seeing the site and management practices with their own eyes and meeting the stakeholders involved. There is no substitute for direct, on the ground experience.
- ⇒ A structured exchange increases the learning curve by allowing for both planned and unplanned learning experiences, setting goals, evaluation of the process, a timeframe with start and end point, which stimulates (and forces) you to take action.
- ⇒ It provides valuable life experiences, both positive and negative: fun, friendship, laughter, passion, but also stress, frustration and disappointment. You get to know another culture and experience it and you might make new friends. Making things real in this way reinforces learning.

Based on previous experience with twinning and insights gained from the workshop, the twinning framework is comprised of two components:

1. The 'software' - a programme run by a dedicated Secretariat;
2. The 'hardware' - a set of accessible and easy-to-use resources.

The two components support each other and are equally important.

A twinning consists of five phases: matchmaking, design, implementation, evaluation and celebration. The Twinning Framework programme has the following responsibilities during each phase:

Phase	Tasks
Start Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development and maintenance of twinning framework;</li> <li>- Contact point for European Commission;</li> <li>- Provide evidence base for lobbying to make things happen at high level politics in member states;</li> <li>- Contact point for potential and existing twinning partners;</li> <li>- Controls quality standards and sets up a brand (long-term);</li> <li>- Promotion of twinning concept through events and media;</li> <li>- Build a knowledge base (database) of best practice in Natura 2000 site management;</li> <li>- Development and maintenance of resources;</li> <li>- Secure funding to support the twinning framework;</li> <li>- Assist with setting up focal points in organisations that organise and facilitate twinning in their own organisation and can organise support from the top;</li> <li>- Facilitates access to data about sites;</li> <li>- Organise working groups around relevant themes and stimulate twinning if appropriate synergy is observed.</li> </ul>
Matchmaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate matchmaking phase - finding a partner(s) to twin with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Matchmaker role (pro-actively linking people and sites) ;</li> <li>- Online tool for finding a match (“TWINdr 4 nature”);</li> <li>- Matchmaking events;</li> <li>- Support people who want to twin;</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Communicate with and assist focal points with finding sites and / or people for twinning (bottom-up, peer-to-peer);</li> <li>- Check if there is sufficient synergy and trust between people and on topics and provide go / no-go advice.</li> </ul>
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate design phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide coach / facilitator;</li> <li>- Provide resources;</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Provide assistance as to where to get funding;</li> <li>- Ensure a twinning is two-way: all parties gain from the project;</li> <li>- Organise and facilitate conversations between people who are interested to start a twinning: create opportunities to meet, talk and develop the twinning;</li> <li>- Ensure all design steps are covered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear start and end date;</li> <li>- Stakeholder analysis;</li> <li>- Goals, results and impact, focus on concrete actions;</li> <li>- Clear description of site, issues, current strategy, management, governance, etc.;</li> <li>- Monitoring framework;</li> <li>- Twinning team and their role and responsibilities;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need for facilitator and description of his / her role;</li> <li>- Understanding of workload and commitment from team;</li> <li>- Review design phase (with an outsider).</li> </ul>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate implementation phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assist with agenda setting for actual site visits;</li> <li>- Do's and don'ts during a twinning;</li> <li>- Facilitate regular review of twinning and whether goals are being met;</li> <li>- Promote face-to-face meetings and site visits;</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Set up a support system in difficult situations to reduce barriers, frictions, etc.;</li> <li>- Help twinning partners to achieve results;</li> <li>- Develop a communication channel for twinning;</li> <li>- Support twinning partners to perform good stakeholder management.</li> </ul>
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate evaluation phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitation / coach;</li> <li>- Format for evaluation;</li> <li>- Outside evaluation;</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Organise channels to celebrate the twinning and set up / support an award process;</li> <li>- Support people to share the story and twinning experience within their organisation, network and broader;</li> <li>- Show that twinning allows for real change happening on the ground / make benefits visible.</li> </ul>
Celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Celebrate success at various stages of twinning process to keep the cooperation spirit and motivation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Celebrate the signing of the twinning agreement;</li> <li>- Include small celebration element into twinning activities;</li> <li>- Celebrate the successful closure of twinning and promote results.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The following resources need to be developed for a well functional Natura 2000 Twinning Framework (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Script / step by step approach / roadmap and do's and don'ts for each phase of twinning, considering social and cultural aspects and the Natura 2000 theme;
- Database of twinning examples and cases;
- Overview of different models for twinning (twinning lite, thematic twinning, etc.);
- Templates that support twinning partners in their process, e.g.
  - Twinning proposal template, incl. budget proposal for twinning costs;
  - Evaluation form;
  - Monitoring framework;
- IT system to manage the twinning;
- Matchmaking tool to find a twinning partner