

TOWN TWINNING IN BRITAIN SINCE 1945: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This latest version posted June 2009.

Introduction

This is the summary of findings from a research project on the history and geography of town twinning in Britain since 1945. The project was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and led by Dr Nick Clarke, School of Geography, University of Southampton. For more information on the project, including details of other publications (some of which are referred to in this document), see:

<http://www.soton.ac.uk/geography/research/ecs/twinning/index.html>

This document should be cited as: Clarke N (2009) *Town Twinning in Britain Since 1945: Summary of Findings* (School of Geography, University of Southampton, <http://www.soton.ac.uk/geography/research/ecs/twinning/index.html>). It is a working document and comments should be sent to n.clarke@soton.ac.uk.

Definitions

There is no settled definition of town twinning, neither in law nor in culture. There are strong views held on the question of definitions, however, by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, for example, and the Local Government Association (for England and Wales). These are that town twinning is just one modality of international cooperation at the local level – a modality characterised by formal twinning agreements, permanence of relationship, and formal recognition by local authorities. A historical perspective, however, teaches that such organisations are just two of many that have sought to represent, authorise, and discipline town twinning over the last 60 or so years. These organisations have included: in Europe, the Union Internationale des Maires, the Council of European Municipalities, and the European Council, Parliament, and Commission; in Britain, the Association of Municipal Corporations, the Foreign Office, the British Council, and the Local Government International Bureau; and at the international level, the International Union of Local Authorities, the United Towns Organisation, and various committees and programmes of the United Nations.

When they have provided funding for town twinning activities, as with the Rippon Programme (administered by the British Council during the 1970s) or Community Aid for Twinings (administered by the European Commission during the 1990s), these organisations have had some authority over the field. At other times, however, this authority has waned, not least because of the problematic definitions and categories held to by these organisations. ‘Official’ town twinning links are not the only partnerships formally recognised by local authorities. ‘Proper’ town twinning links are not the only partnerships of relative permanence in existence. ‘Official’ town twinning agreements are not the only formal agreements between localities (and the content of friendship agreements, sister city agreements, memoranda of understanding etc. is often

indistinguishable from that of town twinning agreements). Indeed, when the aims and objectives, participants, and activities of municipal partnerships are taken into account, there is often more diversity between 'official' town twinning links than there is between those links and others thought of as belonging to alternative categories (sister city links, North-South links, decentralised cooperation links etc.).

In view of the above, town twinning was defined for the purposes of this research project as *the construction and practice, by various groups and to various ends, of relatively formal relationships between two towns or cities usually located in different nation-states*. This broad definition covers what are often referred to as:

- *'Traditional' town twinning relationships*, associated with town twinning associations and/or municipal authorities in Western Europe, and cultural and/or civic exchange;
- *Sister city relationships*, associated with towns and cities in the USA and/or local economic development strategies;
- *North-South links*, associated with localities in the so-called Global North and South, and concerns for international development (this field is also sometimes referred to as *decentralised cooperation*, especially at the European Commission, and *city-to-city cooperation*, especially at the United Nations);
- *Interurban technical assistance projects*, associated with programmes to influence transition in post-socialist Europe and Asia (e.g. the UK Government's Know How Fund) or governmental capacity in the so-called developing world (e.g. the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Good Practice Scheme);
- *International partnerships*, associated with local governments and their multiple, contingent, instrumental relationships with other local governments.

It should be noted that considerable overlap exists between these categories which are not mutually exclusive. This applies especially to the last three categories.

While this broad definition of town twinning shaped the historical, geographical, and institutional coverage of the research project, a second, narrower definition did (re)emerge during the course of the project. This alternative definition is best referred to as *the ideal type of town twinning*. Many things have been claimed for town twinning over the years, sometimes to distinguish town twinning from other forms of municipal partnership (see above). Town twinning has been said to involve relatively formal relationships that are also relatively long-term, open, inclusive, and equal in character. These individual characteristics have been said to be logically interdependent. Formal relationships are meant to last longer than informal relationships. Long-term relationships are meant to allow for more openness and inclusiveness than short-term relationships. Open and inclusive relationships are meant to promote equality more than closed and exclusive relationships. We return to this second, narrower definition in the section below headed 'Questions, tensions, challenges'. The rest of this document takes the first, broader definition of town twinning.

Context and questions

Why is a geographer interested in town twinning? Human geographers are interested in the production of space and related things such as place, territory, scale, distance, and

proximity. These items are not given to societies. They are made by individuals and groups through practices of bordering, naming, educating, networking and so on. Town twinning is interesting to this geographer because, for more than 60 years, it has worked *to destabilise existing spatial arrangements by encouraging border crossing, extending networks across space, and pulling certain places into new relationships of proximity*, while at the same time working *to stabilise those very spatial arrangements by encouraging place-based identification and politics*. This broad and theoretical interest in town twinning translates into four less abstract concerns:

1. *Care at a distance*. In recent years, philosophers and other scholars have debated the relationship between care and distance. In particular, they have wondered whether desires and capacities to care about and for other people diminish with geographical distance. This question has been applied to problems of war and peace (is it easier to accept the killing of people in distant places?), poverty (is it easier to accept the hunger of people in distant places?), trade (is it harder to do trust-dependent business with people in distant places) and so on. It is a question that town twinning research can help to answer. For more than 60 years, town twinning has been used in attempts to make people care about and for people in distant places.
2. *Urban citizenship*. In recent years, political scientists and other scholars have debated the rise of urban citizenship. They have noted that rights-claims are increasingly being made at the scale of the city (as opposed to, or in addition to, the scale of the nation-state). They have also raised concerns that urban citizenship can lead to discriminatory and exclusionary communitarianism, while the rights component of urban citizenship is being allowed to overshadow the responsibility component – which is important because decisions made in cities increasingly have effects elsewhere (and responsibilities attach to these effects). Town twinning research can help to think through some of these problems. For more than 60 years, town twinning has provided an avenue for identification with cities and participation in urban politics that has also been an avenue for engagement with the rights of and responsibilities to other people and places.
3. *The new localism*. In recent years, political scientists and other scholars have debated what some call ‘the new localism’. They have noted that local authorities increasingly seek to secure local welfare through local economic development, to compete for global investment capital, and to operate across multiple scales in partnership with diverse individuals and organisations. Some have viewed this new localism as a response to the regulatory crisis of the 1970s which demanded regulatory restructuring both upwards to the international scale (e.g. the World Trade Organisation) and downwards to urban and regional scales. Town twinning research, along with research on the larger historical field of municipal internationalism, allows this new localism to be viewed differently – as a longer-term phenomenon dating back to at least the late nineteenth century, and a broader-based phenomenon arising as much from the bottom-up activity of city technicians and peace activists as from the top-down activity of those seeking to regulate capitalist development.
4. *Urban policy mobility*. In recent years, political scientists and other scholars have debated urban policy mobility and the related fields of policy transfer, policy convergence, and technical assistance. They have identified actors in these fields including politicians, political parties, local policy professionals, international

experts, media personalities and organisations, think tanks, nongovernmental organisations, and international organisations such as the World Bank. Town twinning research can inform this debate by highlighting the role of already existing and especially founded intercity partnerships in urban policy mobility – a role that is active in that already existing partnerships can have particular characters that ‘rub off’ on technical assistance projects as they are pursued through town twinning and similar arrangements.

These are four ways in which town twinning intersects with current debates in academic geography and related disciplines. These debates are one context from which the research project arose. As such, they were reflected in questions guiding the research:

- Who have been the participants in town twinning in Britain since 1945?
- What have been their aims and objectives?
- Through what activities have these aims and objectives been pursued?
- What can the history and geography of town twinning contribute to debates on care at a distance, urban citizenship, the new localism, and urban policy mobility?

The rest of this document responds to the first three of these questions. Papers in academic journals have responded to the fourth of these questions. Details of these papers can be found at:

<http://www.soton.ac.uk/geography/research/ecs/twinning/index.html>

Methodology and acknowledgements

The research project ran from October 2007 to September 2009. It was divided into two stages, with the first stage focusing on the national and international picture, and the second stage seeking to colour and complicate this picture through local case studies.

The first stage involved:

- Archival work in the National Archives at Kew in London where can be found UK Government correspondence regarding town twinning from the late 1940s to the late 1970s;
- Analysis of data downloaded from the Local Government Association’s Database of Twinning Towns;
- Analysis of newspaper articles on town twinning generated by a Lexis-Nexis search of British newspapers from the last two decades;
- Interviews with representatives of relevant organisations including: the International Union of Local Authorities; the Council of European Municipalities and Regions; the Association of Municipal Corporations; the British Council; the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign; Towns and Development; the United Kingdom One World Linking Association; Oxfam; the Local Government International Bureau; the United Nations Development Programme; World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination; the Commonwealth Local Government Forum; and the Local Government Association.

Further discussion of these methods, along with fuller discussion of the findings they produced, appear in various working papers posted at:

<http://www.soton.ac.uk/geography/research/ecs/twinning/index.html>

The second stage involved 12 case studies of specific town twinning relationships. These case studies involved archival work in local record offices and interviews with representatives of local authorities, town twinning associations, and other relevant bodies. They were selected to cover the range of town twinning relationships, from what are often called 'traditional' town twinning relationships, to sister city relationships, North-South links, interurban technical assistance projects, and international partnerships. They included:

- Bristol's seven twinning relationships (with Bordeaux, Hanover, Porto, Tbilisi, Puerto Morazan, Beira, and Guangzhou);
- Sherborne's involvement in Douzelage (a network of twin towns, one from every member of the European Union);
- Two of Cardiff's international projects: Generation Europe (funded under the European Commission's Citizens for Europe Programme); and the Cardiff-Cochin good practice project (funded under the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Good Practice Scheme);
- The twinning relationship between Newport and Kutaisi;
- The North-South link between Warwick and Bo.

It should be clear from this description of the research methodology how the project relied heavily on the generosity of research participants. Many thanks are due to the individuals and organisations implicated above, including the Nuffield Foundation for funding the project. None of these bodies, of course, are responsible for what follows.

Town twinning is a large and growing phenomenon

The Local Government Association maintains a database of twinning towns that, when the data was downloaded for this project in June 2007, contained details of 2525 twinning relationships involving British localities. Details recorded in the database include: British community; overseas community; lead organisation; date twinned; link type (formal or informal); and status (negotiating, established, dormant, or expired). The data must be treated with caution for at least two reasons. Firstly, the LGA relies on local authorities to submit and update information about their links. Secondly, while the LGA has its own definition of town twinning (see above under the heading 'Definitions'), this has been inconsistently applied to the database over the years so that, for example, informal links have been admitted at some times and not others. As a result, the data can be assumed to favour relatively formal town twinning relationships that are recognised by local authorities and possess twinning agreements. Examples of less formal relationships are present in the database but are likely to be underrepresented. Undercounting is also likely to apply to those links identified as dormant or expired (since dormant or expired links may lack a responsible officer to forward this information to the LGA). With these qualifications acknowledged, the data have been used in this project because they are the

best available and the dataset is large enough to ensure that *general trends and patterns* are unlikely to be blown significantly off course by the omissions and inconsistencies thought to exist.

Using the LGA data, the number of existing twinning relationships involving British localities can be plotted against time to provide the graph in Figure 1 (see the end of this document for all figures). The graph suggests that, measured by number of existing twinning relationships, *town twinning in Britain grew exponentially for much of the twentieth century*. Each year, more and more town twinning relationships were added to existing relationships. We must recall, however, that dormant and expired links are likely to be undercounted in the data (see above). For this reason, the graph in Figure 2 describes the number of new twinning relationships involving British localities by decade. It suggests that, in each decade from the 1950s onwards, more and more new twinning relationships were established. Even when existing relationships are removed from consideration (because we cannot know how many of them remain active), the growth described is still of an increasing rate. What this means, at the very least, is that *town twinning is not some quaint pastime of a bygone post-war era, but is something current, something contemporary, something of recently growing incidence – and probably, therefore, of recently growing importance as well*.

So town twinning is a growing phenomenon. Because it has been growing for more than 60 years, this also makes it *a large phenomenon that touches many if not most towns and cities in Britain*. The 2525 relationships are spread across 1399 British localities. These localities are plotted in Figure 3 using circles proportional to the number of links in which each locality is involved. But for the occasional anomalous locality, the map looks similar to a population or settlement map of Britain. The overseas twins of these towns and cities are presented in Figure 4, the geography of which is discussed over the next four sections.

Various models of town twinning were constructed after the Second World War

This section and the next summarise an historical narrative of town twinning in Britain drawn from the LGA data discussed above, the research findings of historians working in the broader field of municipal internationalism, evidence from relevant UK Government correspondence held in the National Archives at Kew, London, and conversations with representatives of those national and international organisations listed in the methodology section of this document.

Town twinning emerged as an organised phenomenon in Europe after the Second World War. There had, of course, been relationships between towns and cities in different countries before this time, but these relationships had rarely identified themselves as town twinning relationships or thought of themselves as part of a larger phenomenon. *For a brief moment, the future of town twinning was relatively open. Among numerous models of town twinning from the immediate post-war period, two were particularly prominent and each was in dispute with the other:*

- The Council of European Municipalities wished to promote European unity and defend Christian civilisation from Communism through town twinning between localities in Western Europe involving religious or pseudo-religious rituals.
- The United Towns Organisation wished to promote world understanding and to preserve the French language through town twinning between localities in the emerging capitalist and communist worlds, and between localities in the so-called developed and developing worlds.

Town twinning was disciplined during the Cold War

In Britain, town twinning was never heavily organised from the top down and much of it arose from the bottom up – from local initiative. In the years following the Second World War, the UK Government's position on town twinning was one of benevolence (it cared about town twinning and wished it every success) but not beneficence (it did not care *for* town twinning and offered it no material support). This was because Government finances were tight at the time and town twinning was likely to succeed or fail primarily through local demand and support anyway. However, *during the 1950s and 60s, the UK Government was pushed into taking a position on town twinning* because of the interest shown in British localities – both directly and through the United Nations – by the Council of European Municipalities and the United Towns Organisation. Reluctantly, *the UK Government eventually came to support the CEM model of town twinning and so participated in the disciplining of town twinning in Britain*. This was because the UTO made impractical demands of British officials, refused to recognise other organisations in the field of town twinning, and adopted a confrontational tone in correspondence with British officials. Moreover, *the UTO was suspected of communist connections*. Support for the CEM model of town twinning amounted to: support for the Joint Twinning Committee, a clearing house for town twinning in Britain established in 1962 by the Association of Municipal Corporations (in response to requests from the CEM for an alternative clearing house to that offered by the UTO); opposition to a series of United Nations resolutions proposed by allies of the UTO during the 1960s; and funding for town twinning with localities in Western Europe via the Rippon Programme (a programme established in 1972 to prepare Britain culturally for entry into the European Economic Area the following year). As a result, *town twinning in Britain during the 1970s was characterised by predominantly civic and school exchanges with localities primarily in France and Germany*.

This can be seen in data from the LGA Database of Twinning Towns. British localities established relationships with communities predominantly in France and Germany in the decades following the Second World War. 50 agreements were made with French localities during the 1950s, and 76 during the 1960s. The corresponding figures for Germany were 40 and 60. With developments in the early 1970s (especially the Rippon programme), these numbers rose dramatically. 202 links were established between British and French localities during the 1970s, and 101 links between British and German localities. Not only did these numbers rise, indicating additional town twinning activity between Britain, France, and Germany. The number of countries represented in new links agreed by British localities actually declined during the 1970s, suggesting that

increased interest in French and German communities came at the expense of interest in towns and cities located elsewhere. Of all the decades since the invention of town twinning, the 1970s was the only decade in which this occurred (see Figure 5). *Town twinning activity in Britain really did become tightly focused during the 1970s on relationships with localities in France, Germany and, to a lesser extent, a few other Western European countries.*

There is little evidence of jollies, junkets, and jamborees

It was from civic exchanges with localities in France, Germany, and elsewhere that town twinning obtained its reputation for jollies, junkets, and jamborees taken by public officials using public money to visit desirable holiday destinations. In all of the research undertaken for this project, *little evidence to support this reputation was uncovered.* The accusation deserves a section in this report, however, because of *the poor reputation town twinning continues to suffer in Britain.*

This reputation can be established from coverage of town twinning in British newspapers. A search for the terms ‘town twinning’ and ‘twin towns’ in Lexis-Nexis generated a dataset of 234 articles from the last two decades that were substantial and had town twinning as their primary concern. Content analysis provided the following findings. In national newspapers, around one third of articles on town twinning have contained accusations of jollies, junkets, and jamborees. A further third of articles have contained responses to these accusations, usually from town twinning practitioners, usually emphasising the perceived benefits of town twinning. A final third have contained rather pompous expressions of amusement by journalists about particular town twinning relationships, whether because the two localities are perceived to be incompatible in aesthetic or other terms, or because one of the two localities is perceived to be particularly obscure or in some other way unworthy of international relations.

Of the 12 town twinning relationships used as case studies by the research, three had been subject to allegations of jollies, junkets, and jamborees (the three Js). In two of these cases, accusations were made in a local newspaper that local public money had been used for overseas trips by council officials. Both accusations turned out to be poorly founded. One trip was funded by the Local Government International Bureau as part of a scheme to help local authorities in Mozambique prepare for the first local elections since civil war. The other trip was funded by the British Council as part of a scheme to enhance ‘the global dimension’ of citizenship education in British schools. The third case also involved an accusation in a local newspaper. This accusation was better founded in that local public money had been used for overseas trips and hospitality connected to this town twinning relationship. But the newspaper article was still wrong to reduce the relationship, as it did, to ‘an excuse’ for hospitality among council officials. Individual participants in the relationship, through school exchanges and other activities, have numbered many thousands over the years. In addition to city and district councils, institutional participants have included schools and universities, teacher training colleges, orchestras and choirs, academies of music, theatre companies, art galleries, churches, youth organisations and clubs, swimming and athletics associations, hockey and football

teams, rugby unions, manufacturers, workingmen's clubs, cooperative societies, women's guilds, ambulance brigades and so on. *This particular relationship, like most town twinning links, cannot be reduced to the occasional hospitality received by so-called dignitaries.* The final point to note here is that, in all three cases, the accusations appeared in a local newspaper but were sourced to members of the local political party in opposition at the city council (which, at the time, campaigned in local politics on issues of taxation and expenditure). It would be interesting to know how many other allegations about town twinning practices have been *reflections of local partisan politics* at least as much as the practices themselves.

The uses of town twinning proliferated after 1979

Town twinning was disciplined during the Cold War (see above), but this disciplining remained relatively light and *alternative models of town twinning were able to emerge or resurface during the 1980s and 90s:*

- In response to economic recession and the Thatcher Government's approach to local government, *town twinning for local economic development* was pursued, particularly with localities in the USA and China.
- In response to the Sandinista revolution and the Reagan Administration's foreign policy, *town twinning for international solidarity* was pursued, particularly with localities in Nicaragua.
- The potential of *town twinning for international development* was rediscovered during the 1980s within Britain's expanding and fragmenting development community. Links were established with localities in the so-called Global South. Conferences were organised and the United Kingdom One World Linking Association was established in 1984. Slowly, the United Nations began taking a renewed interest in town twinning for international development, as it had done two decades earlier in response to proposals from allies of the United Towns Organisation. It began to take local government more seriously at the Rio and Istanbul summits of the early to mid-1990s. Remarkably, in order to engage with the United Nations during this period, the Council of European Municipalities and the United Towns Organisation finally came together into one organisation: initially World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (est. 1996), then United Cities and Local Governments (est. 2004). With United Nations agencies including the UN Development Programme, Habitat, and the UN Volunteers Programme, *these organisations now promote town twinning as one modality of city-to-city cooperation which, in turn, they promote as one modality of a new international development paradigm for urbanised and decentralised times.*
- Meanwhile, *town twinning continued to be used in attempts to construct European union.* In 1988, the European Parliament adopted a report on town twinning and its contribution to European awareness. This led to Community Aid for Twinning, a funding programme established the following year and administered by the Secretariat General of the European Commission. This year – 1989 – also witnessed the fall of the Berlin wall. After this event, various authorities sought to support and influence transition in post-socialist Europe and Asia. The European Commission's Directorate General for External Relations established TACIS in 1991, a technical

assistance and know-how transfer programme to support democratic politics and market economics in the so-called Newly Independent States through, among other things, city twinning. A similar programme was sponsored by the UK Government. This programme, the Know How Fund, had a similar twinning component: the Local Authority Technical Links Scheme. Just as this research project began in 2007, another European programme came online for which town twinning is one eligible activity: the European Commission's Citizens for Europe programme that seeks to bridge the perceived gap between European citizens and their political institutions.

Town twinning is an internally diverse category; a device for producing proximity

The claims made so far in this document lead to three interrelated conclusions about the conceptualisation of town twinning:

1. *The history of town twinning should not be thought of as a history of stages, beginning with, say, post-war reconstruction in Western Europe, and progressing through, say, municipal entrepreneurialism during the 1980s, West-East technical assistance during the 1990s, and city-to-city cooperation over the last decade or so. Data from the LGA Database on Twinning Towns show that British localities did not turn away from France, for example, when they turned towards the USA, and they did not turn away from the USA when they turned towards Poland. Rather than a history of stages, the history of town twinning should be seen as a history of supplementations.* Links with German localities, for example, were supplemented by links with Chinese localities, and links with Chinese localities were supplemented by links with South African localities. Referring again to Figure 5, with the exception of the 1970s, every decade, localities in Britain have entered into twinning relationships with localities in more and more countries.
2. *With each supplementation, the category of town twinning has become more and more internally diverse.* Participant localities include large and small settlements in all regions of Britain. Overseas partners include, among many others, localities in areas thought of as Western Europe, the economic powerhouses of China and the USA, the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the developing countries of the Global South. Participant organisations at the local level include councils of various kinds but also charities, community groups, and social movement organisations.
3. *In view of this contemporaneous diversity, town twinning should not be conceptualised as a movement, as it often is in the existing literature, when it is not being conceptualised rather loosely as a phenomenon. This is because the term 'movement' suggests more coherence than can be found in the history of town twinning. Rather than a coherent movement, town twinning is a device (for destabilising existing spatial arrangements, encouraging border crossings, extending networks across space, pulling certain places into new relationships of proximity, and encouraging place-based identification and politics).* It may have its own repertoire of formal agreements, trade delegations, joint projects, exchange visits, art exhibitions, sports competitions and so on. But it is also one technology in numerous higher-order repertoires – the repertoires of peace activists, local economic development officers, international development professionals, desk officers at the

European Commission and so on. *As a device, then, town twinning is modular.* It has been taken up and used by numerous different interest groups, in numerous different historical and geographical contexts, with numerous different ends in mind. *There are now multiple models of town twinning in existence* – to be copied, combined, or elaborated.

Questions, tensions, challenges

Alongside these conclusions, the research led to some questions for town twinning that connect to some tensions in town twinning theory, some challenges for town twinning practice, and, in the final section of this document, some thoughts about future research on town twinning and related problems.

Repertoires of town twinning and tourism have often overlapped, producing problematic geographical imaginations

Consider three examples of how ‘town twinning’ and ‘twin towns’ have appeared in local newspapers (see above for a fuller discussion of this part of the research). On the 20th anniversary of Wellington’s link with Immenstadt, among the speeches was one on the ‘common heritage’ shared by ‘we Europeans’ (*The Wellington Weekly News*, 9 June 2004). At a town twinning event in East Grinstead, representatives of Schwaz played music for residents of East Grinstead while dressed in ‘traditional Tyrolean costume’ (*East Grinstead Courier*, 13 May 2004). At a similar event in Linlithgow, representatives of Guyancourt entertained residents of Linlithgow with ‘typical French activities’ such as crepe making (*The Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*, 27 August 2003). In these examples – three of many that could have been used here – *town twinning is implicated in the reproduction of problematic geographical imaginations.* Under the sign of town twinning, Europe is constructed as an unchanging and homogeneous continent (‘our common heritage’), or as a continent of unchanging and homogeneous regional and national cultures (‘traditional Tyrolean dress’, ‘typical French activities’).

How is it that town twinning becomes implicated in the reproduction of problematic geographical imaginations? Is town twinning just a modular device that gets taken up and used by groups and organisations, some of which exhibit problematic geographical imaginations? Or is there something in the design of town twinning that makes it particularly well-suited to the reproduction of these imaginations? The examples of local newspaper coverage presented above suggest one answer. Events involving ‘traditional’ and ‘national’ music, dress, and food are reminiscent of tourist itineraries. Tourism scholars have had much to say about how the tourism repertoire tends to militate against open encounters with the Other. The tourism repertoire – comprised of flights, short visits, hotel stays, coach tours, sightseeing, cultural shows etc. – tends to produce the Other as something spectacularly different, something exotic, something consumable. The town twinning repertoire is meant to be distinguishable from the tourism repertoire – at least in the ideal type of town twinning (see the section above headed ‘Definitions’). Intentionally and explicitly, it is meant to include long stays, repeat visits, home stays, language learning etc. In practice, however, the town twinning repertoire has tended to

include coach tours, sightseeing, cultural shows and so on. *It is this overlap with the tourism repertoire that makes town twinning particularly well-suited to the reproduction of problematic geographical imaginations.*

Development projects involving town twinning vary from uncritical modernisation projects to projects informed by critiques of modernisation theory, though few of these projects acknowledge processes of uneven development

Town twinning is used in international development. *Projects using town twinning in this way can often be uncritical of modernisation approaches to development.* By seeking to provide ‘technical assistance’ to other local authorities, to build governmental capacity in other places, and to share ‘best practice’ with other professionals, local governments and their officers in Britain can often forget or deny a number of things: that ‘technical assistance’ is rarely simply ‘technical’ (as opposed to ideological or political); that low governmental capacity is but one small part of a much larger development picture, and is sometimes tied very directly to high governmental capacity elsewhere (see below); and that ‘best practice’ often describes policies that work well in one particular local context and not in others – especially since most policies only travel once reduced to skeletal models of themselves.

This is not to say that all development projects using town twinning are uncritical in this way. *Relationships that call themselves ‘North-South links’ tend to be rather well informed by critiques of modernisation theory* that emphasise participation, ownership, mutual and reciprocal exchange etc. For example, the United Kingdom One World Linking Association’s *Toolkit of Good Practice* contains 26 chapters of agonising over problems like paternalism and ethnocentrism. The conclusion is not that development does more harm than good, nor that localities should stop interfering in lives elsewhere, but that, for development to do more good than harm, it must be a self-reflexive and critical process. *Town twinning can actually support such a process.* The ideal type of town twinning describes relatively formal relationships that are also relatively long term, open, inclusive, and equal (with each of these characteristics feeding off the previous one – see the section above headed ‘Definitions’). When technical assistance projects operate through such relationships, they can build on a basis of understanding and trust that has sometimes been laid down between participants over decades. The converse is also the case – that technical assistance projects operating through relatively informal, short-term, tightly circumscribed relationships can lack this basis, leading to misunderstanding, distrust, and inappropriate action.

Discussion of short-term relationships continues under the next heading. The final thing to add under this heading is that *few development projects incorporating town twinning appear to be informed by dependency theory* – the position that underdevelopment in some places has often been connected to development in other places through processes of uneven development. Doreen Massey has applied a version of this position to towns and cities in her recent book, *World City*. She has argued that cities such as London should respond to needs elsewhere because those needs often connect to decisions made in the meeting rooms of London and similar cities. But she has not suggested that

responsibility should involve assistance to other localities (technical assistance, capacity building, best practice transfer etc.). Rather, it should involve changes ‘at home’. One example she gives concerns healthcare. A place can respond to healthcare needs in another place by advising managers in that other place on how best to organise their healthcare provision. Alternatively, it can look at all the doctors, nurses, radiographers etc. trained in that other place yet working elsewhere (especially in cities such as London) and seek to address this *cause* of low capacity. Another example emerged from the present research project on town twinning. Technical assistance programmes have sometimes funded local authorities in Britain to share their expertise on waste and environmental management through existing or especially created town twinning relationships. This has been welcomed by some overseas authorities struggling to process rising levels of waste in their localities. But it also poses a number of questions. Are British local governments best placed to advise others about environmental matters? Can environmental problems best be addressed if other countries learn from Britain about management? What about if Britain were to learn from other countries about, say, lifestyles that produce less waste in the first place? This, of course, is a version of that larger question of whether global environmental problems should be viewed as the result of low governmental capacity in the so-called developing countries or high-consuming lifestyles in the so-called developed countries? The answer usually given is that both are important. But the former appears to take precedence over the latter in many development-oriented town twinning relationships.

Long-term relationships have their strengths but fail to respond to contemporary demands of mobile and proliferating borders, and for accountability

Long-term relationships have their strengths. In the ideal type of town twinning, they lead to open, inclusive, and equal relationships. They allow for long stays, repeat visits, home stays, language learning – those things that distinguish the town twinning repertoire from the tourism repertoire. They can generate understanding and trust, both of which are crucial if development projects are to achieve meaningful participation and exchange (see above).

Long-term relationships, however, appear out of time at the beginning of the twenty-first century when at least two movements demand something different.

- The first describes *the mobility and proliferation of significant borders in the world.* Town twinning relationships are always established at particular geopolitical moments. They span borders of significance for some reason or other at that particular time. This was the case with national borders in Western Europe after the Second World War, with borders between the West and East during and immediately after the Cold War, with borders between the North and South during the 1980s and 90s etc. So what happens when time moves on? If town twinning relationships are relatively formal, long-term, even permanent, then towns and cities may enter into a small number of links and service them well (instead of adding more and more new agreements and spreading resources thinly across them). But the significance of the borders spanned by these relationships may change over time. What once seemed significant, necessary, radical even, may no longer seem important. These thoughts

suggest some questions. Are the borders crossed by existing town twinning relationships still significant? Are they still as significant as the borders between, say, Britain and Iraq or Afghanistan? What about the sub-national borders between, say, Liverpool and Winchester (two cities at opposite ends of deprivation rankings), or Hackney and Richmond upon Thames (two boroughs of the same city at opposite ends of deprivation rankings)? Can additional long-term town twinning relationships be added to each locality's portfolio as the world's geography changes over time? How many relationships can a locality realistically service given the limited resources available for such activities? Some of these questions assume that town twinning is always used *to bridge between different communities*, when sometimes (as we have seen) it is used *to bond together similar communities*. But some of these questions are relevant for all forms of town twinning.

- The second movement describes the rise of what Michael Power has called *The Audit Society* (in a book with this title). Increasingly, organisations must give accounts of their activities to stakeholders, whether those stakeholders be the shareholders of private corporations or the citizens of nation-states, regions, or localities. For this to happen, performance must be measured against targets at regular intervals. One unintended consequence of this has been the shortening of timeframes in organisations. Long-term projects have been substituted for projects that generate results in time for the next round of reporting. This has been happening with town twinning in that new forms of international partnership have emerged in recent years that allow benefits to be demonstrated rapidly to constituents. Existing town twinning relationships have also become organised increasingly through short-term projects that participants tend to approach carrying objectives, targets, milestones and so on. The intention is to be accountable, and this is difficult to fault. But the strengths of long-term relationships (detailed above) are being lost in these developments. This is a challenge for town twinning practitioners: *how to combine the strengths of long-term relationships with the demands of accountancy (or, for that matter, of mobile and proliferating borders)*.

Future publications and research

Much of what is summarised in this document appears in full in other publications. These include working papers and articles in academic journals. The documents themselves or details of them get posted on the project website as they are completed. This website can be found at:

<http://www.soton.ac.uk/geography/research/ecs/twinning/index.html>

There is an outline for a book on the history and geography of town twinning in Britain since 1945. A decision has not yet been taken on whether to write this book or not. The outline is reproduced here for information and to invite comments (to n.clarke@soton.ac.uk):

Town Twinning in Britain Since 1945: Community Between Space and Place

Introductions

1. Recognising town twinning
2. Conceptualising town twinning

Intersections: The promise of town twinning

3. Space, place, community
4. Care at a distance
5. Urban citizenship
6. The new localism
7. Urban policy mobility

Inventions from 1945

8. Inventing town twinning after the Second World War
9. Disciplining town twinning during the Cold War
10. Town twinning for European union
11. Jollies, junkets, jamborees: The problem of hospitality
12. Geographical imaginations: Road signs, local newspapers, tourism

Supplementations from 1979

13. Municipal foreign policy and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign
14. Sister cities and local economic development
15. International development and North-South linking
16. Technical assistance from West to East and North to South
17. Fast society and friendship

Conclusions

18. Models of town twinning
19. Questions, tensions, challenges

As for future research, some of the claims summarised above are made boldly for they are supported by substantial evidence and assumed, therefore, to be relatively settled. These include that:

- Town twinning is a large and growing phenomenon;
- Various models of town twinning were invented after the Second World War;
- Town twinning was disciplined during the Cold War;
- The uses of town twinning proliferated after 1979;
- Town twinning has developed over time not through a series of stages but through a number of supplementations;
- Following these supplementations, town twinning has become an internally diverse category;
- Town twinning is not a coherent movement but a modular device or technology.

Other claims have been made in this document with a more speculative tone. They invite further consideration and include that:

- *There is little evidence of jollies, junkets, and jamborees.* Certainly, little evidence was uncovered by the research to support accusations of the three Js. But this was a relatively small project that lacked the resources to investigate every accusation out there in the press and elsewhere. It is possible that not every accusation can be sourced to partisan politics at the local level (as in the cases discussed above). Only another study focused on this specific problem could provide confirmation of this one way or the other.
- *Technical assistance programmes can address problems of misunderstanding, distrust, and inappropriate action (often connected to larger problems of paternalism and ethnocentrism) by working through long-term town twinning relationships.* This was suggested by some of the case study research from Stage 2 of the project. It could only be confirmed by a comparative study of technical assistance projects where some operate through existing and long-standing intercity relationships and others through especially created, short-term relationships.
- *Town twinning relationships are increasingly subject to the shortened timeframes of Audit Society, so that newly established relationships are increasingly contingent and instrumental in character, while existing relationships are increasingly organised through contingent and instrumental projects.* Again, this is something suggested by the research but demanding of confirmation. A survey of town twinning relationships could be used to establish whether a shift has occurred over the years from what are often called ‘traditional’ town twinning relationships (characterised by their relative formality, permanence, and open agendas) to what are often called ‘international partnerships’ (characterised by their fixed timeframes and tightly defined objectives and activities). A sample of relationships could then be evaluated against relevant criteria including accountability but also participation, ownership, exchange and so on.

These are some areas for future research on town twinning and the related categories of North-South linking, decentralised cooperation, city-to-city cooperation, and international partnership. There may well be other areas more obvious to practitioners in the field. After all, this has only been a small study and many questions are likely to remain. This document ends by detailing the two most immediate options through which future research might be pursued:

- This research project was funded by the Nuffield Foundation, an organisation that invites research proposals from academics and funds a proportion of those received. Another funding proposal could be submitted in this way – to the Nuffield Foundation, or the British Academy, or the Economic and Social Research Council, or the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
- The Economic and Social Research Council also funds PhD studentships in collaboration with public sector, third sector, and private sector organisations. These are called *CASE studentships* (Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering). Research projects are designed by academics in collaboration with officers in partner organisations. Proposals are submitted to the ESRC. Once approved, students are recruited. Projects last for three years and are supervised jointly by academics and

officers in partner organisations. The cost to partner organisations is £4000 per year (£12,000 in total). Partners in recent projects have included national organisations such as English Partnership and Oxfam UK, regional organisations such as One North East Regional Development Agency, and local organisations including Birmingham City Council, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Kingston-upon-Hull City Council, Fife City Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council. Please contact n.clarke@soton.ac.uk to discuss potential CASE studentship proposals on any topic referred to in this document.

Figure 1: Total twinning relationships involving British localities over time

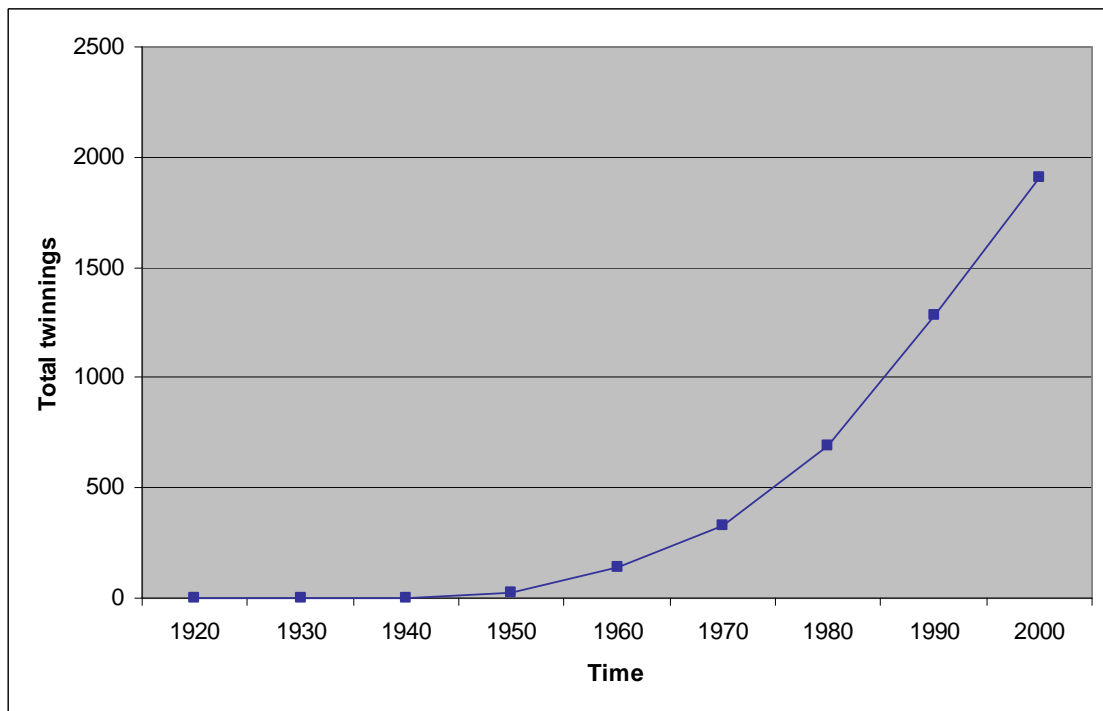


Figure 2: New twinning relationships involving British localities by decade

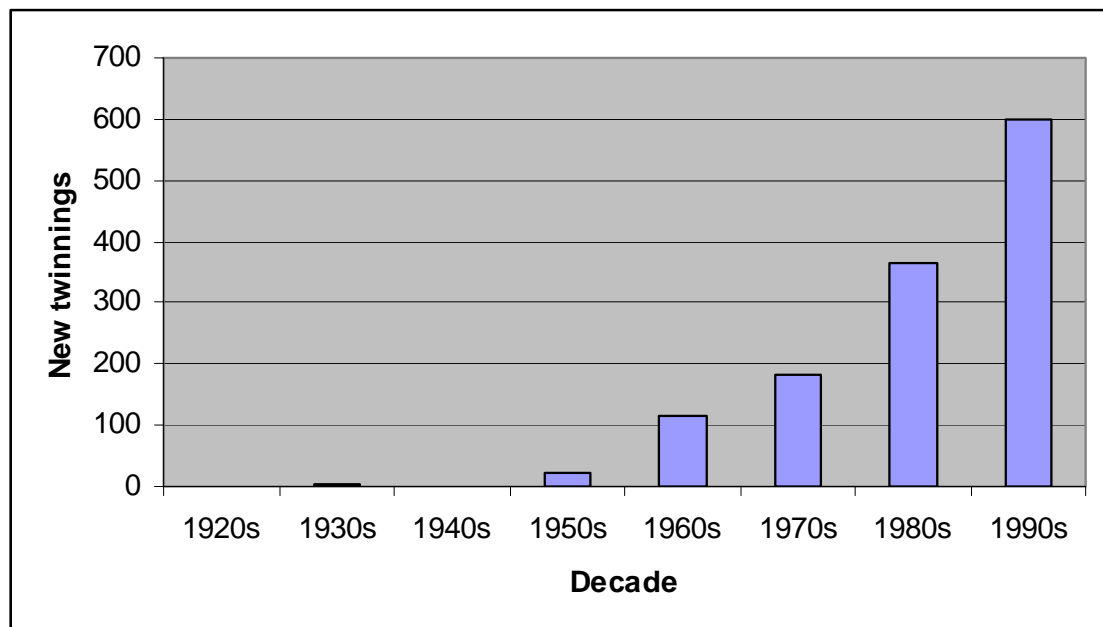


Figure 3: Twinning relationships by British locality

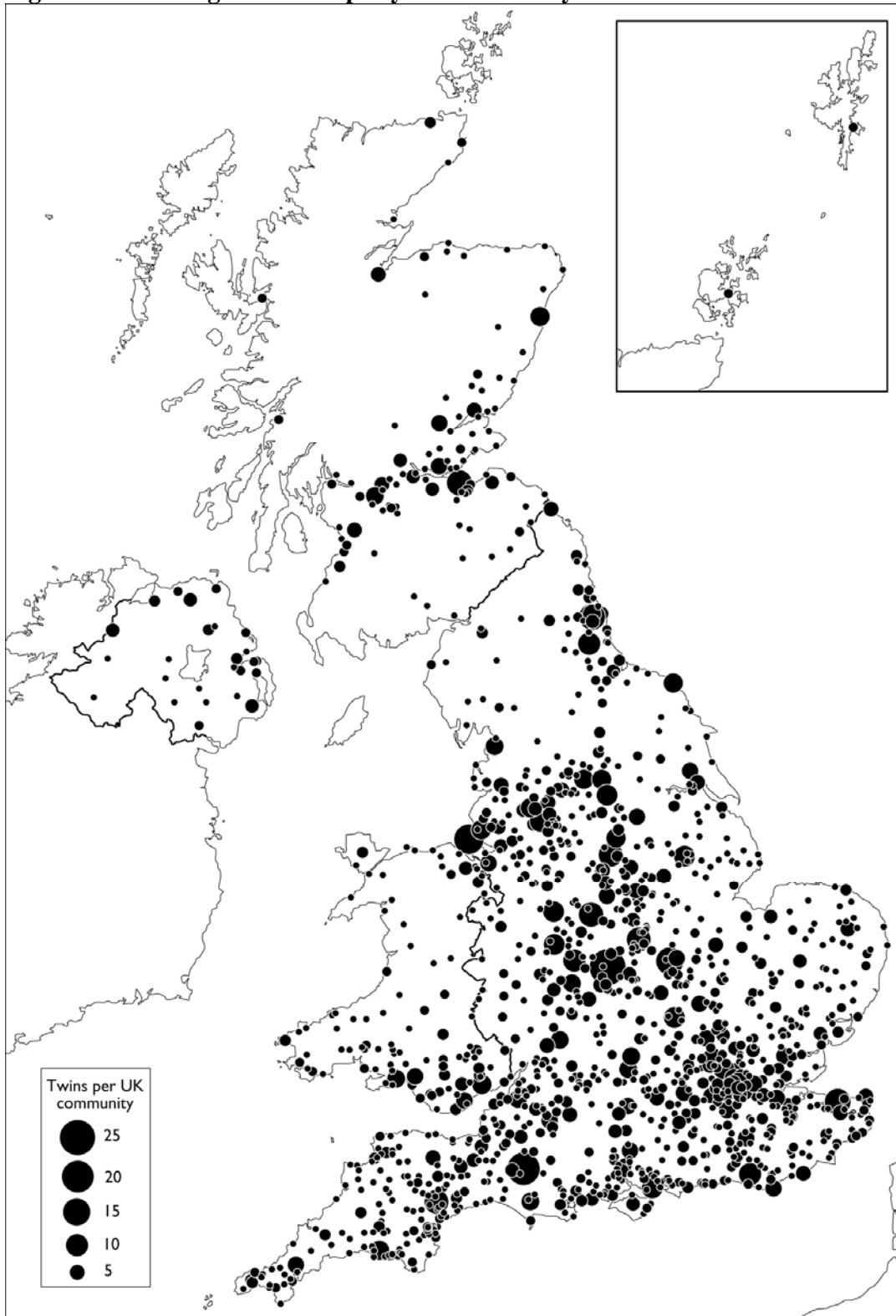


Figure 5: Overseas countries represented in new twinning relationships involving British localities by decade

