

**AN ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA TO OPEN THE AUSTRALIAN SISTER CITIES  
CONFERENCE, DEVONPORT MONDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2012**

Good morning everybody. As Governor of Tasmania it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to Devonport for the 2012 Australian Sister Cities Association National Conference. Now I should confess straight up that until I was invited to Devonport I did not know that there was an association of Australian Sister Cities let alone that it held annual conferences. Of course, I was well aware that many cities and towns in this country had developed sister city relationships with other cities and towns, usually in another country. Then I thought what a good idea for all those cities that have a sister relationship or relationships to form an association and get together on a regular basis to exchange ideas and experiences that will enhance existing relationships and perhaps help develop new ones.

I started to look into this and found that the earliest form of sister city relationship, often called town twinning, can be traced back to 836 when the German city of Paderborn and the French city of Le Mans established a sister city relationship. The practice was continued in the European Union after the Second World War as a way to bring European people into a closer understanding of each other and to promote cross-border projects of mutual benefit. For example, Coventry twinned with Dresden as an act of peace and reconciliation, both cities having been heavily bombed during the war.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/1C07A195-EF04-454D-81B8-ADAEE15058FC/0/ICC9908.pdf> accessed 6th November 2012

Here in Australia a group of people became aware that in America sister cities across that nation came together annually to discuss matters of mutual interest and benefit and so they decided that as there were nearly 30 sister city affiliations in this country we should follow suit. The first sister city conference was held in Newcastle in 1979 and it was so successful that 3 years later this association was formed and has gone from strength to strength ever since.

My researches told me that there were several key issues to creating and maintaining a vibrant sister city relationship. The first, an obvious one, like a marriage, is to find a compatible partner and that means that the prospective sisters must have a number of things in common; perhaps the two communities are about the same size; have a common environment; or perhaps share a common history, or have similar economic interests. The second is that the sister city relationship must involve the whole community; the schools, the symphony orchestra, the sporting bodies, the Chamber of Commerce, the local authority and so on, but I have no doubt that you all know that better than me.

However, I think that fundamental to a successful partnership is preparatory groundwork. My limited experience is that it is all too easy to dash off a statement of intent or a memorandum of understanding with language that is lofty, but lacking in precision or

detail – like “we will strive to work together to develop and enhance mutual good will and a meaningful relationship that will enrich the cultural, business and sporting endeavours of our two cities.” It doesn’t really mean anything does it? Any sister relationship that has only identified those goals is doomed to failure I would respectfully suggest. I would think that benefits from a permanent long term sister city relationship will only flow if both sides have gained a deep understanding of each other’s nature and culture and this takes time, like a long courtship. I think that sometimes the memorandum of understanding is too hastily signed and it is hoped that mutual respect and insight will subsequently develop.

After all a sister city relationship or twinning as it is often called, is a people to people exchange. With respect to the expression “people to people exchange” Walter Leitermann. Deputy Secretary General, Council of European Municipalities and Regions/German Section said:<sup>2</sup>

“Now, this is indeed a very broad concept of involvement: it is not restricted to institutions, or experts or age-groups. As a matter of fact everybody living in the community is addressed and is regarded as a player in the twinning relationship. Twinning relies very much on private initiative and everybody’s determination to make use of the opportunities created by the twinning arrangement.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.runder-tisch-usa.de/chicago/site/statements/walterleitermann.html> accessed 6th November 2012

Another important feature in the concept of twinning is: learning understanding and developing.” He continued, “Twinning is about learning that there are different cultures, traditions and values. Learning is a precondition for understanding; understanding of different approaches to solutions; understanding of different ways of thinking. That leads, eventually and hopefully to a situation, where people start to question their own concept of how things should be done and have to be done; it leads them to accept variety and learn to live with variety.

So twinning is an "educational programme" designed to fight parochialism and mental stubbornness.” Such a programme is not borne of a hastily contrived memorandum of understanding. It is something that has to be developed slowly and will only be truly successful if the whole community is eventually involved and everybody in that community has a clear understanding that they have embarked on a learning exercise to be approached with tolerance and an open mind. Such a programme or relationship might begin with school exchanges, although unless there is commonality of language this is not a really productive start. A number of Tasmanian schools go in for school exchanges. The visitors are often brought to Government House with their host families, but it always seems to me as if that the language barrier divides, rather than joins, the children from the two countries. I think that when the people of the two cities do not share a common language a more productive start is to do things that the people can

do together like make music, or play sport for this will gradually lead to an exchange of ideas and a better understanding of different cultures. It takes some time to grow, but if it is done slowly and carefully before making a commitment to become sister cities I think that it is likely to lead to a much more productive long term economic and culture exchange.

But here am I using up valuable time talking to you about things of which you are no doubt very well aware. So, I'll do what I came here to do and that is to open your conference and as I do so I hope that you all find it interesting, informative and stimulating and that our visitors all have a wonderful time in our beautiful State.