



INTERREG IIIB NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME • INTERREG IIIB NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME

**MAIN PROJECT  
FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

**Project Name:** Small Town Networks

**Project Registration Number:** 02/01/17

**Measure:** Public Management and Spatial Planning

**Project Website:** [www.smalltownnetworks.com](http://www.smalltownnetworks.com)

For completion and submission to the Northern Periphery Programme Secretariat by:  
31 January 2006



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. Purpose

Small Town Networks (STN) springs from the European Spatial Development Perspective 1999, which advocates balanced development through co-operation. The STN Project is designed to foster the regeneration of towns using a “hands on” approach tapping into the enthusiasm and hard work of local people. The project offers a template designed to reinvigorate a sturdy sense of uniqueness of place whilst promoting collaborative networking of towns on both a sub-regional and trans-national basis. Although sponsored by public agencies, this is a long haul, low cost intervention built unashamedly around “bottom up” community planning principles. Joint working between communities means that experiences, good and bad, can be shared, developed and built upon.

### 2. Activities

In **Highland** the project has nurtured a network of 12 towns within the Inner Moray Firth where local “Initiatives” work towards the regeneration of their communities. Shared Project Officers facilitate, cross-pollinate and service the local volunteer groups. Local interaction and trans-national dissemination is promoted through a Towns Forum, which meets quarterly, by local newsletters, a dedicated web site and transnational conferences.

In **Central Finland** the key activity was the development of Town Centre Visions / Development Plans. This involved a lengthy process of community involvement, including: collecting ideas through Theme Groups and local Steering Groups; town centre development questionnaires for all users; Town Forums to inform the citizens about the new ideas for the town centre; designing Town Centre Visions; and publishing Town Centre Development Plans.

**North Karelia** had three goals: involving young people; renovating the city centre and boosting business activity. Seminars were developed to discuss relevant issues with local groups including the business sector and young people and work groups were established to develop and implement ideas.

In **Sweden**, the main aim was to implement networking as a tool for regional planning. Partnerships were developed to examine 6 themes around the overall issue of networking

In **Iceland**, the project revolved around co-operation between local municipalities, particularly in relation to cultural activities, education and business development.

### 3. Final Results

- Over 11,000 participants engaged with the Project in a variety of ways.
- 4 transnational conferences were organised with over 200 participants.
- Highland / Central Finland Project Officer exchange.
- Highland:
  - 86 projects were funded through the Community Chest with a value of €750,000 – a 6x multiplier.
  - Small Towns Charter agreed among the towns.
  - 10 Town Forum Meetings were organised.
- Central Finland
  - Three Final Reports published in coloured A3 format (including English summary) and delivered to key-players in Towns.
  - Separate abstracts leaflet printed for wider delivery. The Development Plans and other results introduced at open public events in Towns.
- North Karelia
  - Seminars organised to discuss regeneration needs with politicians, local people and entrepreneurs.
  - 7 Working Groups established, which published reports on their speciality.
- Vasterbotten
  - Networking and co-operation between local authorities and communities has developed strongly e.g. Skellefteå Voluntary Village Council.
- Iceland
  - Working Groups developed to examine methods of local co-operation.

## PROJECT INFORMATION AND OBJECTIVES

### 1. Background

The Council and its partners were concerned to identify ways and means of fostering small town regeneration. This reflected a longstanding deterioration in the population size, age structure dependency and economic productivity of such settlements, itself often a result of centralisation of key services. This change has arisen partly from 'market forces' and profit-maximisation in sectors such as retailing. It also reflects the ongoing reorganisation of many public services such as health care and public administration where the provider agencies are seeking operational specialisation and economies of scale. These circumstances are most pronounced in remoter peripheral areas, but can also affect settlements in close proximity to regional centres. A cycle of marginalisation and decline can leave 'failing' communities where critical shortages of 'social capital' impair the scope for self-improvement and revitalisation. Safeguarding the future for the residents of small communities in the Northern Periphery has never been more difficult or necessary to achieve if we are to retain a sustainable population base, productive economy and sound environmental management. It is an enduring need and ongoing process that requires continued effort. Our approach is practical and rooted in the belief that energising and empowering local community and business interests is fundamental to creating lasting change for the common good.

### 2. Origins

The STN Project had its origins in a previous Northern Periphery Programme Project – Inner Moray Firth Towns Study. A key finding of the *IMFTS* project was (*first*) the need for individual communities to 'fix' their own distinctive identities by drawing strands from their unique histories. Towns represent a huge cumulative investment put together by the collective efforts of many previous generations of citizens. They comprise a rich heritage of cultural, architectural, functional and organisational assets. Highlighting and honouring this past can help instil 'pride of place' and stimulate local projects, which draw on that particular history. However, successfully rekindling the sense of 'who we are and where we came from' is not *per se* a satisfactory coping strategy for community development. It can indeed foster introspection and isolation.

It must be linked (*second*) with an appreciation of local potential and future opportunities, cultivating an openness to change and particularly a willingness to embrace those facets which are capable of exploitation for the community's future wellbeing – building a shared sense of 'where we want to be'. This vision can be teased out by a variety of community planning tools including polls, surveys and interactive 'games' from which a priority action plan can be distilled by the community Initiative. Whilst such analysis can help build stronger, more confident and vibrant places, again it does not guarantee a successful outcome. Such a 'beacon' settlement can be a powerful role model for neighbouring communities, but it may also become a magnet drawing in and diverting investment and experimentation, which then reinforces the under-performance and decline of nearby towns.

The (*third*) and most important dimension for securing regeneration is therefore collaboration and co-operation within a regional context. Only by building links between communities can the necessary lessons and pre-conditions for improvement be transferred. Experiences, good and bad, can be shared, developed and built upon. Different options to fit different conditions can be experimented with, because one solution does not necessarily match all circumstances. (See Fig. 1).

#### → Place



#### → Progression



#### → Process



Figure 1 : Spiral of Progress

### 3. Objectives

The **overall objective** is to create the conditions for sustaining vibrant small towns that play an effective role in their wider sub region. The **key aims** are to:

- encourage and support local people to develop a vision for their own community;
- foster a network of small towns that routinely exchange local ideas and solutions;
- identify ways of regenerating small towns that can be utilised throughout the Northern Periphery and elsewhere in Europe;
- develop trans-national links and exchange experience with European partners.

Each Partner also had particular objectives as follows.

The project in *Central Finland* was based around the need to regenerate the commercial centres of three small towns, where co-operation is underdeveloped. This requires both business and commercial investment and environmental improvements. The aim is to work with communities and the business sector to:

- Develop new ways of co-operating between sectors and among the Project towns.
- Prepare development plans for the town centres based on this co-operative process.

Within *Highland* the project aimed to resource the process of change described above by the appointment of shared project officers to facilitate and service local volunteer groups. It also established a 'community chest' of seed finance, which the local Initiatives could draw on to kick-start modest priority projects of a social, economic or environmental nature. Local economic development was a 'cross-cutting' theme. In particular, the scope for establishing social enterprises as a means of tackling 'market and/or public failure' in local service delivery was to be explored.

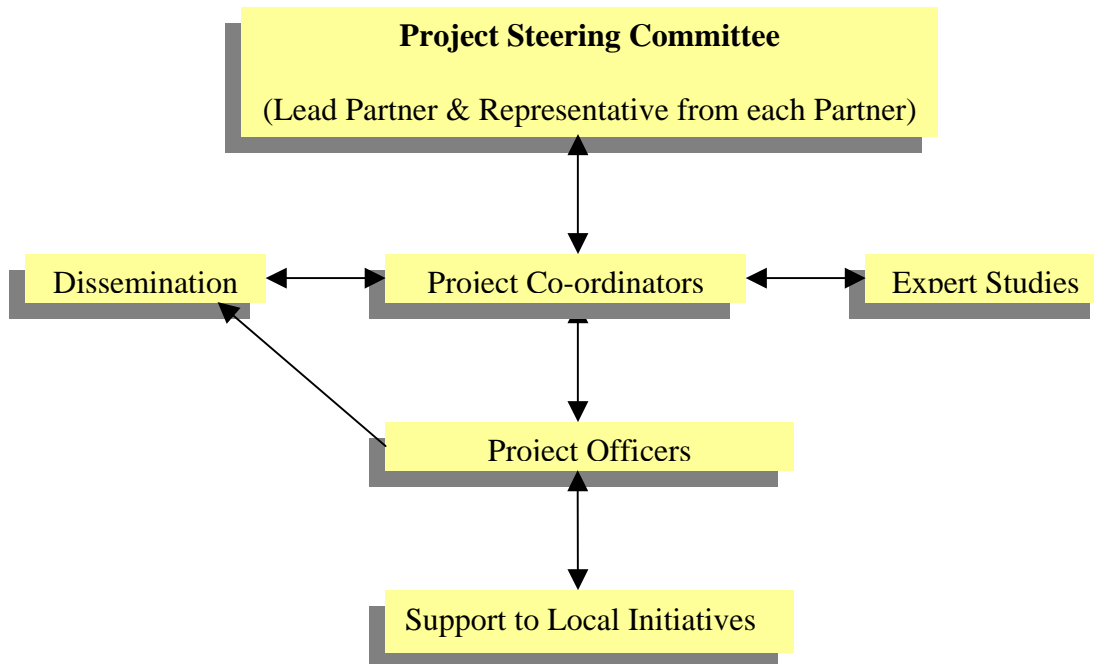
In *East Iceland*, the aim of the Project was to reduce competitive tensions and enhance the co-operation among four municipalities by collaborating on future projects and forming an agreement regarding their future development.

In *Sweden*, the Vasterbotten Kommunforbundet used the Project as a test bed for the application of a new approach to regional policy that takes decentralisation further down the chain of governance into the local municipalities and community structures. This will help the towns to make stronger inputs into the Regional Growth Programmes. The Project will also seek to encourage municipalities to co-operate more closely, particularly in strategic planning and public service delivery.

The Project in *Lieksa* had three goals: involving young people, renovating the city centre and boosting business activity. Seminars were developed to discuss relevant issues with various local groups including the business sector and young people and work groups established to develop and implement ideas. Their reports were published and the ideas begun to be taken forward, particularly in relation to the town centre and business activities.

#### 4. Project Management Structure

The overall management structure is shown below:



#### 5. Project Steering Committee

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) was responsible for the overall direction and delivery of the project. It was responsible for the control of the resources spent on the project, accountable to external auditors and formally managed the technical aspects of the project. The Lead Partner chaired the Committee through the Project Manager.

At each of these meetings the PSC received and considered both a progress report on the project and, where appropriate, the relevant six monthly PMC progress report (prepared using the set form). The PSC and the project dissemination conferences rotated among the Partner areas. In addition several PSC videoconferences were arranged to discuss relevant issues.

The lead contacts in each Partner are:

Mike Greaves  
The Highland Council  
[Mike.greaves@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Mike.greaves@highland.gov.uk)

Bernt Vedin  
Association of Local Authorities in Vasterbotten  
[Bernt.vedin@ac.komforb.se](mailto:Bernt.vedin@ac.komforb.se)

Risto Poutiainen  
Regional Council of North Karelia  
[Risto.poutiainen@pohjoiskarjala.fi](mailto:Risto.poutiainen@pohjoiskarjala.fi)

Elisabet Benediktsdottir  
Business and Regional Development Centre in East Iceland  
[austur@austur.is](mailto:austur@austur.is)

## 6. Lead Partner Responsibilities

The lead Partner was responsible to the PSC for the day to day management of the Project. This included the following key tasks:

- Preparation of the Project Plan.
- Setting up the Project financial systems.
- Appointment of external auditors.
- Commissioning and maintaining the dedicated web site.
- Maintaining contact with the NPP Secretariat.
- Preparation and circulation of 6 monthly progress reports in February and August of each year.
- Preparation and circulation of the monthly Project reports to the PSC.
- Organisation of the PSC meetings in the Lead Partners' area and assisting other Partners where appropriate.
- Organisation of the conference / seminars in the Lead Partner area and assisting other Partners where appropriate in the organisation of the conference / seminars in their areas.
- Organisation of expert technical studies within Highland.
- Supporting local Project Officers.
- Managing and disseminating the Project information.

## 7. Other Partner Responsibilities

The other Partners were responsible for:

- Providing financial information for inclusion in the 6 monthly report.
- Providing receipts to the Lead Partner for all expenditure.
- Providing project information as specified in the Interreg IIIb Northern Periphery Programme Progress Report for the timescale set out above.
- Ensuring that information on the dedicated web site, for which they are responsible, is kept up to date.
- Providing information on local projects for inclusion in monthly progress reports to the Lead Partner for dissemination to other Partners.
- Organising the PSC meeting and associated conference in their area
- Organisation of expert technical studies within their area.
- Managing and disseminating the Project information within their area.

## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

### 8. Activities

Five key activities took place on a transnational basis:

- Four transnational conferences were organised
- Creation of the Project web site – [www.smalltownnetworks.com](http://www.smalltownnetworks.com)
- Meetings of the Project Steering Committee
- Project Officer exchange between Central Finland and Highland
- Successful submission to NPP for an extension to the Project

The four conferences were the main transnational activities. Each country held a conference as follows:

*Iceland* – concentrated on youth issues

*Sweden* – concentrated on urban design and polycentrism

*Finland* – examined issues in relation to town centre regeneration

*Highland* – discussed best practice in small town regeneration with examples from Scotland, England and Northern Ireland.

Members of the Finnish Town Centre Managers Association attended the Finnish and Highland Conferences.

The individual Partners undertook a wide variety of activities as part of their own projects as follows.

### Highland

The main activities within Highland were:

- 10 meetings of the Towns Forum, providing an opportunity for networking.
- 3 new towns joined the Network.
- 86 Community Chest grants were approved totalling €123,000. The costs of the projects involved totalled €755,000.
- The various Project Officers were involved in a wide variety of activities. It is not possible to highlight all of these in the report. Three-year reports are therefore attached from Dornoch, Tain and Inverness Project Officers as examples of the work involved.
- 9 Newsletters were produced, which were widely distributed throughout Scotland and transnationally. Three examples are attached.
- One Inter-town tourist leaflet was produced. Copy is attached.
- An Inverness City Vision was completed and work started on Visions for the other towns. Copy is attached. This is the basis of a £6m investment programme for the city, supported by the Scottish Executive. A new City Partnership Office was created to implement the Vision.
- Community Surveys were carried out by several Initiatives, notably Golspie, Evanton and the Kyle of Sutherland. The latter is attached as an example.
- A Towns Charter was agreed among all of the towns, which set out how they would work with each other in the coming years. Copy is attached.
- EKOS consultants carried out an independent evaluation of the Highland arm of the STN Project as part of the monitoring process. This was strongly positive on the work of the network, but suggested various improvements that the Network is seeking to take on board. Copy is attached.
- Contact was made with the Borders region of Scotland, which is facing similar issues in relation to small towns. A study tour was arranged for members from local Initiatives to the Borders.
- The Highland Council is now part of the COSLA Small Towns Task Force, which is a national body lobbying for more funding for small towns in Scotland.

### Central Finland

The main activities in Central Finland were:

- Creation of local Theme Groups to work with the Project Offices in developing the three town centre strategies.
- A SWOT analysis of the three towns involved in the projects.
- A visioning conference to examine the future of the town centres.
- Production of Development Plans for the town centres
- Public consultation on the Development Plans, including production of abstract leaflets.
- An Implementation Seminar was organised together with consultant group for advising the further implementation of the Development Plans.

- Network creation and dissemination between other small towns in Finland was developed by offering knowledge and results of the outputs for external visitors (*Nilsjä, Valkeakoski, Alajärvi*), and giving presentation at the Summer Conference of Finnish Town Centre Management Association, held in Kuopio and Nilsjä.
- Town centre events, particularly marketing activities e.g. *Kauppalauantai* ("Bargaining Saturday"); "*Suomen Suurin Pihakirppis*" ("The biggest Courtyard Second hand-market")
- Development of a youth strategy in Saarijärvi.
- Relocation of the market place in Jamsa to the Central Square to enable it to become more of a focus for the town.
- Production of local Newsletter.
- Production of new marketing tools for Viitasaari e.g. guide maps; DVDs

### Lieksa

The main activities in Lieksa were:

- Setting up the Lieksa Youth Council
- Enabling the Youth Council to become involved in the City Board
- Various activities undertaken by the Youth Council e.g. NUPPI (education for young leaders)
- Seminar to examine business activity and the town centre and develop a strategy for the future
- 7 Work Groups created to help develop and implement the strategy
- Seminar to discuss town centre issues
- As a result funding was agreed to help develop the town centre

### Vasterbotten

The main activities in Vasterbotten were:

- Identifying the key issues for the project.
- Creation of local partnerships.
- Preparation of development strategies.
- Development of the Skelleftea Voluntary Village Council to develop ways of furthering local service provision.
- Ensuring that equal opportunity was maintained as a key cross cutting theme.

### Iceland

The main activities in Iceland were:

- Setting up of Towns Steering Groups
- Creation of Working Groups

## 9. Methodologies

Methodologies utilised in the Project related mainly to:

- The creation of Networks
- Public consultation
- Visioning

### Networks

All of the Partners sought to set up networks as a means of implementing their projects. In addition, the Project itself allowed for transnational networking. The transnational network, through conferences, the web, email and videoconferences allowed the Partners to learn from each other and begin to make more

extensive links. For example Alness in Highland and Lycksele in Sweden are making more permanent links through a “town twinning” agreement.

In Highland, the Towns Forum is the main network, where the members of the Initiatives can meet and exchange ideas. There is no doubt that this has been very successful. The exchange can be very simple e.g. the best type of plants to use in public displays to something more complex such as funding submissions and public consultation. Other networks have also been successful, notably the Project Officers who meet and discuss issues on a regular basis and can pass on good ideas and learn from the less successful projects.

In Central Finland, networks have also been used extensively to gain information, discuss issues, engage the community and drive forward strategies. The three towns involved in the Project – Saarijärvi, Jamsa and Viitasaari – are a network in themselves and each has their own internal networks. Networks of Working Groups were set up in the towns to develop strategies for the future of the various town centres, including Youth and Business Groups. These have been extremely successful in that they delivered detailed Visions and long term Development Plans. The Project has also sought to network with other small towns in Finland through offering knowledge and results of the outputs for external visitors (*Nilsjä, Valkeakoski, Alajärvi*), and giving presentation in the Summer Conference of Finnish Town Centre Management Association, held in Kuopio and Nilsjä, in June.

The key word for the Swedish partner has been networking and the partnership comprises established co-operation areas in Västerbotten like Southern Lapland, the Umeå region, the E12/Blue Route Alliance but also networking within a municipality and the interaction between the larger city and its hinterland as in the case of Skellefteå. The network allowed the organisations involved to examine better ways of co-operating e.g. co-operation in the Umeå region on a common library and a common switchboard.

In Lieksa, a network of small working groups was created to examine ways of developing the town, particularly the business centre. This led ultimately to the publication of a new town centre plan and initiative.

In East Iceland networks were set up among the various municipalities involved in the project. They were tasked with discussing potential ways for towns to co-operate. Unfortunately, political changes curtailed the work of the Groups.

### Public Consultation

Public consultation was a major part of the Project. In Highland, all of the Initiatives have had the opportunity to carry out local community surveys. These used various methodologies from employing professional consultants to a photographic survey carried out by the Kyle of Sutherland Initiative. The ultimate aim is the production of a “Community Plan” setting out how the residents wish to see their town develop. The KOSI Plan is appended as an example.

In Central Finland, public consultation was a major part of the Project. At each stage of the process from initial theme groups, through the visioning process to the publication of draft development plans, the public have been fully consulted. This was achieved through public meetings, publicity and the work of professional consultants.

### Visioning

Visioning has been a key tool in both the Highland and Central Finland Projects. Visioning can be defined as “articulating and describing a desired future.” Creating a vision involves a group of stakeholders in the community. They are asked what they value about their area and what they would like to see improved in the future. The advantages of using a group to do this work are to use their collective imaginations to create the most positive, practical, possible outcome for the project or resource; to enable shared authorship of the vision which will translate into a sense of ownership and commitment to seeing the vision realized; and, assuming the group represents diverse interests, to broaden support among the community at large. Once written, a vision statement helps to define a plan of action that can be used to attain the vision.

In Central Finland, theme groups were created to help develop the visions for the three town centres in conjunction with professional consultants. These were then used as the basis for the Town Centre Development Plans. In Highland, a City Vision for Inverness was published in 2003 setting out a vision for the city over the next 30 years. It also contained an Action Plan as the first step in attaining the vision. Development of the Vision allowed the drawdown of substantial central Government funds. Work also started on visions for the other towns in the Network, which will form part of the output for the extended project.

In both cases, the process was very successful, allowing a wide range of bodies to become involved in, and sign up to, the Visions and Action Plans.

## 10. Evaluation

Consultants EKOS LTD carried out the main independent evaluation of the STN project. They looked specifically at the Highland part of the Project and their final report is enclosed. Their main conclusions and recommendations were:

### *“Perceptions of Highland Council Staff & Project Officers*

As part of the study, formal structured interviews were conducted with Highland Council staff, in particular the relevant Area Development Manager and STN funded Project Officers. Overall there is a consensus that the STN is additional and is providing its member towns with the right kind of support to enable these communities to develop, implement, manage and deliver their own projects to ensure that these communities become vibrant places to stay. It is appreciated that the Community Chest funding only provides seedcorn finance, but it often a very helpful initial resource to enable community groups to lever in other funding. Furthermore it is important to recognise that beneficiaries of these projects are not just residents within the towns, but also smaller communities in the hinterland surrounding these small towns.

### *Perceptions of STN Project Beneficiaries*

Mirroring the findings from the consultation programme the activities of the STN were viewed as providing additional benefits to participant communities that would otherwise not have been realised or the project would have been delivered at some point in the future, but with a reduction in the scale and quality. Benefits identified by beneficiary survey respondents encompassed:

- allow greater flexibility/recognition within the overall STN project of each towns individual issues and problems;
- new methods of encouraging greater community involvement;
- change in the appointment of Project Officers from part-time to full-time positions;
- improve the level of tangible outcomes and benefits from Scandinavian/European exchange trips;
- make administration and financial aspects of the local STN groups as simple as possible for volunteers; and
- greater clarification for local STN groups on the availability of funding and the types of projects likely to be successful for financial support.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

Our overall conclusion is that the STN has been effective in encouraging community-led regeneration in its component towns. Some towns are further advanced in this process than others, and these are the towns that have secured the greatest economic, social and community benefits from the initiative. Based on our analysis, we believe that the STN approach is delivering tangible benefits to local communities and that it should continue.”

The success and impact of the Project has also been recognised through an award in the Scottish Executive’s “Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning”. This is a national competition which seeks to recognise and encourage quality in planning.

No independent evaluation of the other Partners activities has been carried out. However, from the original Project Plan and the key activities/results the following points can be made.

The key outputs defined for Central Finland were three town centre Visions and Development Plans, improvement in citizen participation, improved town centre environment, increased entrepreneurship and increased co-operation among the towns involved. These have all generally been delivered.

- *Town Centre Vision* and *Town Centre Development Plans* have been worked out in co-operation with key players. Small town values, possibilities and resources have been shaped and can be used better in the future.
- A lot of effort has been made to have supportive atmosphere towards town centre development of Project Towns. Local experience of how to participate in town centre planning has increased. As a result of this advantages of town centre development are getting more response.
- Improved interest of town centre development issues of the Towns and the process as a whole among the participants. Participation process has been reasonably open and has reached good cover of interest parties and different sectors opinion. Face to face contacts have been the most wanted ways to get involved even it is also the most laborious way.
- Improved awareness towards town centre development of Towns because of the up-to date publicity. Nonexistent / minimal negative criticism towards the project has been interpreted as an approval for town centre development.
- The entrepreneurship has got new strengthens and creditability by growing cooperation, and highlighting the services of the centres. (More detailed description on chapter "Impacts already met")
- Project coordinators have been a significant resource for the whole process in the Towns, providing a neutral partner correspondent amongst the parties and project masters.
- Especially Jämsä -project is locally and even nationally well known for its openness and communicative planning methods. The Project in Jämsä has put on a solid footing in the community.
- Youth participation to development work has strengthened in the Towns; especially in Viitasaari, youth has taken part to the development planning process and arranged activities.

In Lieksa, the key outputs were to improve the local environment / economy and expand youth participation. In these respects, the Youth Council has been developed and given greater powers and now has an input to decisions made by the Municipality. The young people themselves have been more active. Work also commenced on a new project to the town centre aided by help and advice from the Central Finland Project Co-ordinator/Officers. Working Groups have been set up and their first reports completed.

The project in Vasterbotten had key objectives covering knowledge exchange between communities and increasing co-operation in delivering services. Local networks have been set up among Municipalities with ongoing discussion over issues of mutual concern. Strong efforts have been made to co-operate over service delivery for example co-operation in the Umeå region on a common library and a common switchboard in delivering library services. Another example is the "Skellefteå offers" initiative designed to create a strong partnership between shop owners in Skellefteå.

A similar project was intended for Iceland with the creation of a system to enable greater co-operation and collaboration between Municipalities. This commenced with the creation of inter town Working Groups set up to examine ways improving collaboration. Unfortunately, changes in the political system meant that commitment to the project was reduced and limited progress was made.

### SWOT Analyses

The main strengths of the STN as follows:

- experienced, professional and motivational Project Officers;
- permitted a range of projects to be developed in towns which would not have gone ahead without the work of the STN e.g. the town centre improvements in Central Finland;
- the Community Chest in Highland was a vital source of funding which greatly assisted with project idea development;
- high level of community ownership for projects developed within individual towns;

- acted as a catalyst within some small towns to re-enthuse the local community and previously disenfranchised community groups;
- ability to learn from and relate to issues facing other towns;
- opportunities for transnational face to face meetings with other Europeans;
- opportunities to learn from others and avoid their mistakes;
- enabling local entrepreneurs to be involved in developing key business areas;
- success in persuading young people to become involved in their home towns

The key weaknesses of the STN Project:

- maintaining commitment to the various Projects over time, as many involved are volunteers with limited time and capacity to become involved;
- the time taken to implement proposals e.g. town centre improvements can dissuade local people/entrepreneurs to become involved;
- time constraints placed on Project Officers in part-time positions, particularly in Highland;
- difficulties in involving volunteers; and
- lack of funding to undertake desired level/type of community projects.

The main threats to the project are:

- loss of match funding from sponsors;
- changes to the European/Northern Periphery Programme funding regime resulting in a loss of European funding;
- potential for “volunteer fatigue”;
- difficulties in recruiting/maintaining staff, particularly where posts are part-time

The main opportunities are:

- potential to expand the local projects by extending the overall Project;
- further develop transnational co-operation by recruiting a new partner(s);
- to bring towns together within the Northern Periphery area in the same manner as e.g. Alness and Lycksele; and
- potential to link with other European projects as Vasterbotten are seeking to accomplish e.g. with E12/Blue Route Alliance.

## Expenditure & Results

The bulk of the project expenditure went on four main areas excluding set up and administrative costs:

- Staffing
- Travel & subsistence
- Consultants
- Highland Community Chest

### *Staffing*

The staff involved in the projects were crucial to its success, particularly in Highland and Central Finland. In Highland, the Network is built around the commitment of volunteers who wish to become involved in the development/regeneration of their towns. Volunteers have limited time to give and need support, particularly in the early phases of creating a group. They need time to gain confidence and “learn the ropes”. There is absolutely no doubt that they need professional support to source funding, organise meetings/events, take minutes, research projects and liaise with the public authorities. Referring back to figure 1, many towns are in the “failing/inertia” element of the spiral and need strong support to begin the process of becoming “beacon” towns.

The EKOS evaluation stated that:

“Without question, the STN Project Officers have been a highly successful component of the STN Project. Their role has been vital to the start-up and development of the STN

within many towns and their work viewed as invaluable. The experience and enthusiasm brought by Project Officers has been as important as the day-to-day responsibilities they fulfil”

Indeed, the evaluation recommended that the hours of the Project Officers be extended or staffing resources increased.

Similarly, in Central Finland, the staff employed were critical in progressing their town centre visions and action plans - the key outputs for their project. They ensured that the public consultation took place, energised local people to attend Topic Groups, organised transnational conferences and managed external consultants.

### *Travel & Subsistence*

A key objective of the Project was transnational co-operation. This aspect of the project was designed to allow Partners to learn from each other, not only in regeneration initiatives but also in relation to cultural exchanges. The four transnational conferences were the major output for this element of the project. All four were successful. Over 200 delegates attended, including some not directly involved in the project e.g. Finnish Association of Town Centre Managers. The conference covered a wide variety of issues, including:

- Youth issues
- Town centre regeneration and environmental improvements
- Best practice in small town regeneration
- Networking

The conferences also provided an opportunity for delegates to visit areas of special interest in the host country. This enabled them to learn about projects that might be applicable in their own regions and towns, exchange ideas and meet people wrestling with similar problems as themselves. Discussions with delegates suggested that the simple idea that people “were not alone” and that others had similar problems was a boost. It gave hope that solutions could, indeed on occasions, had, been found and implemented. The conferences also provided an excellent opportunity to break down cultural barriers and discover that people from different backgrounds were fundamentally the same. From a Highland point of view, it opened the eyes of many delegates especially in relation to the different levels of service provision in Scandinavian countries. It gave them ammunition to fight for better services in their own localities.

### *Consultants*

The majority of the spend on Consultants was by Central Finland. Their support was critical in driving forward the Central Finland Project. They were involved in the visioning process and developing the programmes and action plans that followed. The consultants supplied skills not available within the Project Team itself e.g. production of 3 dimensional models. Without their skills, it would have been very difficult for the Project Team to meet targets for the key outputs – Visions and Action Plans.

### *Highland Community Chest*

The Highland Community Chest consumed approximately €123,000. The projects it helped cost over €750,000. These figures speak for themselves. The Chest was enormously successful and was a critical component of the Highland Project. The Chest had several roles.

- As a direct funder of small projects which would otherwise have not gone ahead.
- As a catalyst in delivering match funding for projects.
- Providing local Initiatives with a role in financial decision-making.
- Helping re-energise the community and strengthen community capacity.

The success of the Chest is clear. The EKOS report stated “It is encouraging to note that the number of Community Chest projects has exceeded the initial targets by a significant amount, 420% and 430% in 2003 and 2004 respectively.”

## PROJECT RESULTS

### Summary of Results

#### Transnational

- Over 11,000 participants engaged with the Project in a variety of ways.
- 4 transnational conferences were organised with over 200 participants.
- Highland / Central Finland Project Officer exchange.
- Extension to project agreed.

#### Highland:

- 87 projects were funded through the Community Chest with a value of €755,000 – a 6x multiplier.
- Small Towns Charter agreed among the towns.
- 10 Town Forum Meetings were organised.
- Benchmarking statements produced.
- Local community surveys / plans developed.

#### Central Finland

- Three Final Reports published in coloured A3 formula (including English summary) and delivered to key-players in Towns.
- Three Vision documents published
- Separate abstracts leaflet printed for wider delivery. The Development Plans and other results introduced at open public events in Towns.
- Various marketing events to help promote the town centres.

#### North Karelia

- Seminars organised to discuss regeneration needs with politicians, local people and entrepreneurs.
- 7 Working Groups established, which published reports on their speciality.
- Funding for new project on the town centre.

#### Vasterbotten

- Networking and co-operation between local authorities and communities has developed strongly e.g. Skellefteå Voluntary Village Council.
- Several projects launched to help maintain service levels in local towns.
- Co-operation / networking on equal opportunity projects e.g. tillväxt genom samverkan, a project seeking to get more women into business.

#### Iceland

- Working Groups developed to examine methods of local co-operation.

### Analysis

The objectives of the Project were set out in the original Small Town Networks extended submission dated October 2002 and in the Project Plan as follows.

“The original submission highlights the need for a positive platform for practical community regeneration work which is central to the future of the Northern Periphery as a vibrant and successful part of Europe. This requires active citizen involvement because this underpins the formation of ‘social capital’ and then nurtures it to reinforce a strong sense of community. A confident community can then invoke self-help, set its own goals, prioritise its own needs and mobilise its own resources. It can draw inspiration and help from its neighbours and the wider network. It can influence business, draw upon that sector’s commercial acumen, and where necessary (in circumstances of ‘market failure’) set up community enterprises. It can petition and campaign for appropriate assistance from local, regional and national government. These agencies in turn bring vital expertise and support but should also become more open and attentive to local community and customer feedback.”

## *“Highland*

Within Highland the new project will aim to resource this process of change by the appointment of shared project officers to facilitate and service the local volunteer groups. It will also establish a ‘community chest’ of seed finance, which the local Initiatives can draw on to kickstart modest priority projects of a social, economic or environmental nature. Local economic development will be a vital ‘cross-cutting’ theme. In particular, the scope for establishing social enterprises as a means of tackling ‘market and/or public failure’ in local service delivery will be explored. Community businesses have a place in strengthening the social fabric, in helping to create local employment, providing improved local services and in generating revenues for local charitable purposes. Where the conditions appear right several social investment ventures will be supported.”

*Comment: Shared Project Officers were appointed to support the various Initiatives. There are now seven officers carrying out a variety of work from taking minutes, through organising meetings and events to submitting funding applications and developing and implementing projects. Their work has been detailed throughout the Project through monthly progress reports, examples of which have been submitted as part of the 6 monthly progress reports. The Community Chest has been extremely helpful in developing projects, particularly as a “first brick in the wall”. As noted above, some 87 projects have been aided with a 6x funding multiplier. The projects supported by the community chest were varied, but many related to economic development, particularly tourism e.g. support for Alness in Bloom; development of community web sites; provision of tourist maps; support for a local museum; development of a wildlife hide and support for the Nairn Book Week. The one disappointment in relation to economic development was the lack of progress on community businesses. Support was given to one project and discussions took place over others, but the impact of the Project on social enterprise was limited. However, the Council has been pursuing community enterprise utilising it’s own business development company – Highland Opportunity Ltd.*

*Another key aspect of the Project was the desire to encourage communities to be more confident about themselves and get local people involved in their community. In this respect, the Project has been very successful. All of the communities now have their own Initiatives, the members of which are all volunteers, giving their own time and expertise. Many others in the community have become involved in particular projects. The exemplar of this is Alness, which over the last 10 years has turned itself from a “failing community” into a “beacon community” using local volunteers to create and maintain extensive public planting (flowers etc.), which have now become a tourist attraction in their own right.*

## *“Central Finland*

The project in Central Finland is based around the need to regenerate the commercial centres of three small towns, where co-operation is underdeveloped. This requires both business and commercial investment and environmental improvements. The aim is to work with communities and the business sector to:

- Develop new ways of co-operating between sectors and among the Project towns.
- Prepare development plans for the town centres based on this co-operative process.

Project officers would be employed to work with communities to develop a vision for each town centre, together with seed finance for small scale community initiatives.”

*Comment: Objectives set have been fulfilled in the following way:*

- 1) Developing co-operation between public and private sector, third sector and citizens in the local community
  - Local *Project Coordinators* were recruited and *Centre developing offices* were implemented for reinforce the communication and interaction between officials, groups and individuals (Coordinators occupations in annex)
  - Bottom-up methods were used – particular *Theme groups* were assembled for continual evaluation. There were implemented two *Youth Theme groups*, three *Entrepreneurs groups*, two *Town Environment groups* (Jämsä and Saarijärvi) and an *Event Organising group* (Viitasaari).

- Particular *Project Monitoring group* in each Town has settled amongst the municipal officials and theme groups' representatives.
- 2) Creating the *Town Centre Visions* and the *Town Centre Development Plans* for each Town including the improvements of physical and functional design. Local key players, *Project Monitoring group* and *Consultant group* (Mikko Heikkilä Oy / Esisuunnittelijat Oy/ Tuomas Santasalo Ky) worked together to achieve the formula for the development plans. For helping the physical structure observation and projection of the central areas, has built 3-dimensional modelling (application base) for Jämsä and Saarijärvi town planning departments (designed by the Architech Agency Mikko Heikkilä Oy). Phases of the planning process in the Towns were to:
    - Collect developing ideas;
    - Circulating and analysing questionnaires among the citizens, decision-makers and entrepreneurs;
    - Creating the vision of the Town Centre;
    - Publishing the Town Centre Development Plan (+ more detailed River Plan in Jämsä Town).
  - 3) Activating the citizens, entrepreneurs and groups to arrange adventures, happenings, local market events as well as small environmental projects in Town Centres has been implemented by encouraging the local networks and handing out seed financing (Community chest) for event arranging.
  - 4) Best Practice examples developed during the project - Wide selection of participation methods have been utilised during the STN-project in towns. Project Coordinators has taken the main responsibility to organise the participation process.

#### *"Vasterbotten*

In Sweden, the Vasterbotten Kommunförbundet will use the Project as a test bed for the application of a new approach to regional policy, which takes decentralisation further down the chain of governance into the local municipalities and community structures. This will help the towns to make stronger inputs into the next generation of Regional Growth Programmes commencing in 2004. The Project will also seek to encourage municipalities to co-operate more closely, particularly in strategic planning and public service delivery."

*Comment: A key aspect of the Vasterbotten Project was the desire to get co-operation between municipalities in discussing future development and to involve the wider community where possible. In these respects the Project was successful. Municipalities co-operated on a variety of issues. Examples are the co-operation in the Umeå region on a common library and a common switchboard for the various municipalities. The equal opportunity theme had a strong impact on the area. The women in business project saw 26 new businesses created, for example.*

#### *"North Karelia*

The Regional Council of North Karelia will utilise the community regeneration model and toolkit to find new ways of working to help regenerate small town clusters around Lieksa. The Project will seek to reinforce communal spirit and co-operation with the core aim of improving the quality of local services, economy and the environment. A key target will be to increase the influence of young people through the use of information technology." As the project developed, renovation of the town centre became a priority, which linked to the need to boost business development in the town.

*Comment:* *Although the Lieksa part of the Project had a limited budget, it had a wide impact on the town. In relation to the youth issue, the status of the Lieksa Youth Council steadily increased throughout the period of the Project. It became more closely involved with the Municipality with representatives appointed to the various Council Boards. The Council also took part in various activities in relation their work e.g. a young leaders course and the organisation of a questionnaire for students about the town centre. The objective of reinforcing community spirit and tackling the local economy and environment was achieved through pursuing the regeneration of the town centre. The Municipality organised a Seminar in September 2004 to discuss town centre issues with contributions from Martti Wilhelms the Project Co-ordinator for Central Finland. This led to seven Working Groups being formed to look at*

*various aspects of business activity. There reports showed that the town centre was a critical issue. The Municipality are now looking at ways of achieving town centre regeneration with funding from the Council and the Ministry of the Environment. These are clear achievements that fully met the original objectives. Indeed these objectives were expanded partly as a result of the networking within the Project.*

### *East Iceland*

In East Iceland, the aim of the Project will be to reduce competitive tensions and enhance the co-operation among four municipalities by collaborating on future projects and forming an agreement regarding their future development. Key areas for co-operation will be:

- Public transport
- Education
- Recreation and Youth
- Public services

A local forum will be established to ensure wide discussion of issues. There will be an opportunity to utilise the “toolkit” devised in the previous Small Towns Project.

*Comment: Similar to the Lieksa Project, the East Iceland project had a limited budget. In addition, political changes during the life of the project had a significant impact on the work carried out. However, work was carried out particularly in relation to setting up Working Groups of the various municipalities to discuss how they could co-operate. The Groups looked at Youth, Family, Public Transport and collaboration. Some work was carried out in each of the Groups e.g. Youth Group Conference before the political changes took place.*

### Best Practice

Several examples of best practice have been developed over the life of the Project. In particular, the following have emerged:

#### *Regeneration*

The Network itself is best practice in how to regenerate small towns. Pouring money into places to help regeneration, whilst obviously welcome, can only go so far. You need to take local people with you. Imposing solutions from above and/or outside is not the answer. Small Town Networks offers an alternative local solution through involving residents and helping them build their own capacity and work to regenerate and develop their towns in their own way. Supporting local volunteer groups, providing seedcorn funding, developing Visions and Action Plans with local people, involving young people are all methods that work locally for each Partner. The transnational nature of the STN Project ensures that they can be disseminated and used elsewhere.

#### *Public Consultation*

In Highland the production of the Kyle of Sutherland Strategy involved a major public consultation exercise, which involved the use of photography. Local people were given cheap disposable cameras and asked to photograph the best and worst of their home area. The photographs were then used as the basis for developing the Vision and Action Plan. The technique also involved getting local people to act as managers of the project to help increase their confidence and community involvement. This is the first time this technique was used in the Highlands and possibly Scotland. The technique was picked up and used in the production of one of the Council’s local Development Plans.

Similarly, in Central Finland, a major public consultation exercise was developed to involve the public in developing the town centre Visions. These were central to the local Project. This involved the development of local theme groups covering young people, entrepreneurs etc. Again, like Highland, this was the first time such a technique was used in the area. See above under Project Results.

## *Visioning*

Visioning itself is a well-established technique but has been little used in the Project area. In both Highland and Central Finland, but particularly in the latter, the technique was used to involve local people and help generate Action Plans that can be used to regenerate towns.

### Achieved intended results?

Overall the Project has achieved the results set out in the Project Plan and this is backed up by the work of EKOS Consultants for the Highland Project. However, there are some areas where results could have been better. One of the main problems was engaging with the Third sector, which has not been as active as expected. The key points here are:

- The commitment of the business sector and entrepreneurs varied widely;
- There was a difficulty in getting local people involved other than “the usual suspects” – the people who tend to become involved in community issues;
- Although youth was targeted in the Project, the bulk of those involved were adults;
- In Highland, the Project had limited impact on Social Enterprises, although the Highland Council’s own company – Highland Opportunity – has been very active in this sphere;
- In Central Finland, the original aim was to implement a permanent form of co-operation between town centre development key players at the end of the Project. This was discussed but not implemented within the timeframe of the Project.

### Implementation in the partner organisations, local areas, regions and nations?

In Central Finland, this was achieved through:

- Local partner organisations, including schools, institutes, projects and organisations have been part of the communication network and stimulated to cooperate with the Project.
- The Regional Council of Central Finland had a representative on the Steering Committee, and reported the aims and results of the Project.
- The Regional Road Administration committed to cooperation on the environment and as a result the Project Towns implemented a separate Main Roadside Environment Improvement Project with the Regional Road Administration.
- A practical partnership was created with the National Town Centre Management Association; implemented, in particular at the Small Town Visions Conference in June 2004 held in Saarijärvi. As a result of the Conference, the awareness of small town problems, issues and practices was shared amongst the delegates and the future development of Market places was raised at a national level – the detailed study of market places will be implemented on 2006.
- Town centre projects and organisations in Finland have been founded and benchmarked, partly through help of the network.
- The Finnish Ministry of Environment and The Central Finland Chamber of Commerce was kept informed of progress on the Project. Both had representatives on the separate Quality group of consulting work.

In Highland

- The various local Project Officers worked closely with Partner Agencies in implementing the project. These ranged from national agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forestry Commission through Regional Agencies such as the Council itself to local groups, including Community Councils and Heritage Societies. In this respect results have been passed on informally through networking or when formal reports were required to be prepared for the public organisations.
- All of the local Initiatives have both Senior Council Officers and elected Members sitting on their committees, enabling results to be distributed where appropriate to Council Services/Officers.
- At a national level, dissemination of results has been via presentations by the Project Manager and through his input to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities’ Small Town Taskforce of which he is a member.

## Impacts

### *Overall Project*

The key impact of the Project was the ability of participants to learn from each other in relation not only to the work of the Project itself but also to the cultural exchanges that took place at each transnational conference. It is not possible to enumerate these impacts. An exchange of ideas does not lend itself to this. There is no doubt however that the impact was significant. The best example was the co-operation between Highland and Central Finland over the regeneration of town centres. Project Officer exchanges and site visits allowed wide discussion of ideas, analysis of problems and sharing of experiences that influenced the development of the Visions and Action Plans for Saarijaarvi, Viitasaari and Jamsa. This had a “knock on” effect when the Project Co-ordinator from Central Finland worked with representatives of the City of Lieksa in developing their work on their own town centre.

The cultural impact of the project cannot be underestimated. Before it started, Partners had limited knowledge of each others countries and regions. The opportunity that the Project provided to take local volunteers to transnational conferences and provide a “taster” of that culture had a substantial impact on those attending. This ranged simply from learning about local mores (food, music, culture, art etc.) to more detailed work on individual issues. For example, Highland delegates learned much about how Scandinavia deals with waste disposal, which was put to use when considering the development of new wastewater treatment works in local towns. It is also clear that the simple fact of finding out that others had similar problems and that “they were not alone” had a major impact on local volunteers, notably in Highland. This came over time and again in discussions and undoubtedly helped them with their local projects giving them confidence and knowledge in dealing with their own problems.

This breaking down of barriers between cultures and countries and the exchange of ideas and experiences are perhaps the key legacies of the Project.

Individual projects had their own impacts.

### *Highland*

The EKOS evaluation of the Highland Project highlighted the main impacts. The overall impact is summed up by the following extract:

*“In general the Project has provided a positive mechanism to instil community-led projects in the Inner Moray Firth member towns and thus enhance the regeneration process. Indeed for the majority of towns, the STN was viewed as highly additional where many of the community activities would have not gone ahead or done so at a later date and a reduction in scale and quality.”*

The Evaluation only examined employment creation as they considered that a detailed impact assessment should only be carried out after the completion of the project. In relation to employment creation the impacts were estimated at:

- 3.4FTEs for the Inner Moray Firth area
- 3.7FTEs for the Highland Council area
- 4.0FTEs for Scotland

The project clearly had a number of other impacts, which are difficult to evaluate e.g.

- The various local communities have been energised with residents becoming much more involved in community life.
- The Community Chest helped deliver 86 projects with over £750,000 of spend.
- The Community Chest projects themselves had impacts on their local area e.g. small-scale environmental projects help improve the towns.
- Co-operation among the towns has increased and they are now beginning to look at issues at the wider level as opposed to individual towns.

Future impacts are likely to be greater co-operation among towns, now that the Project has shown what can be achieved; new towns are likely to join the Network (approaches have already been received); continued increase in community capacity and a greater propensity for Initiatives to learn from others and not simply go their own way.

### *Central Finland*

#### *Impacts already met:*

- The consciousness of community strength and possibilities has grown in the Towns
- The Visions have stimulated discussion of the development potential of the central areas.
  - In Jämsä, the Jämsä Riverside and the Main Square has found to be the main areas to highlighted and developed.
  - In Saarijärvi, the new commercial facilities and market square has got position motion by the Centre Development plan.
  - In Viitasaari, has got the plans to connect functionally the new market area (by the main road) to the old Market place surroundings, and highlighted the lakeshore
- Business activity has grown in the central areas over the period - very few empty business premises are unoccupied; Viitasaari Centre, especially, has grown its regional commercial standing position; Saarijärvi has stopped the deterioration of the Centre.
- The Market places of Jämsä and Viitasaari have new settings and are comparatively lively; following the development plan, also the Market place of Saarijärvi will be relocated in 2006.

#### *Future impacts:*

- Future cooperation between the key players in the towns will be easier as a result of the project.
- Internal cooperation among local interest groups in Towns will continue to grow.
- Achieved reliability to common progression will bear-fruit.
- Physical, functional and social development of Town Centres will proceed based on previous experience and the formulated Town Centre Visions and Development Plans.
- The positive development on business opportunities in the Town Centres will continue.

### *City of Lieksa*

The impacts of the Lieksa project were:

- Greater empowerment of young people.
- Increase in the number of young people involved in their community.
- Better understanding of young people's issues by the local municipality.
- Greater involvement of entrepreneurs in community development through a positive experience with the project.

Future impacts are likely to be similar as the project progresses. Turning the city centre reports into actions will have a major impact on the local economy and environment as the town centre is improved.

### *Vasterbotten*

In Vasterbotten, the impacts related to the greater co-operation among local government organisations and the realisation that such co-operation can have significant advantages. Co-operation on such matters as library services has improved service delivery to residents and helped reduce costs. In the future, as co-operation extends further, these impacts are likely to be increased.

### *Iceland*

Although the project in Iceland was, to a degree curtailed, the impacts were similar to Vasterbotten with municipalities beginning to co-operate on various matters which will have a direct impact on service delivery and improvements for local residents.

## TRANSNATIONALITY

Transnationality in the Project was based on several themes:

- Use of the web site;
- Transnational conferences;
- Project Officer exchange; and
- Information/cultural exchange

### *Web Site*

The web site was developed quickly after approval for the Project. It was designed such that each Partner could use it as a resource and update and customise it for their own use. It would also enable Partners to view and download information from all other Partners. It also included a Forum initially. It has to be said that the web site did not work as well as we had hoped. The Forum was eventually deleted as it was not being utilised and only limited information was being placed on the site. I believe that the problem was that no one person had overall responsibility for the site and everyone assumed that someone else would update it. In future, therefore, I would be ensuring that the web site was the responsibility of one officer and that all Partners are signed up to its use. Regular monitoring of content is also a must-do. This relates back to the lack of a single responsible person who could do this work and actively persuade Partners to update the site.

### *Transnational Conferences*

The transnational conferences were a key aspect of the Project and were extremely successful. Four conferences were held, one in each in country. As noted above, they covered a wide variety of topics from youth issues, through spatial planning and town centre regeneration to best practice in small town regeneration. Each conference attracted delegates from all Partners, with over 200 attending in total. The Central Finland and Highland conferences also attracted delegates from outwith the Project, notably the Finnish Association of Town Centre Managers. The conferences enabled the participants to hear about projects in other countries and allowed them to network widely with colleagues. For those attending they were undoubtedly of benefit, although this is from anecdotal feedback as opposed to any rigorous evaluation. However, participation was limited due to a mixture of costs and, perhaps as important, lack of time. Many Initiative members in Highland could not attend the conferences due to work/children commitment. There is no obvious solution to this but it needs to be examined. The EKOS report highlighted the mixed response to the exchange trips with some viewing them as “luxuries”. Other, however, appreciated the benefits. As the report states, more tangible benefits are needed. This is undoubtedly true but it does take time for tangible benefits to emerge. These are now happening with Alness working closely with Lycksele and Dornoch beginning to work more closely with Stromsund in Sweden, a Partner in the extended Project.

### *Project Officer Exchange*

Project Officers were exchanged between Highland and Central Finland. Iiris Tukiainen spent a week looking at a variety of town centre projects in the Highlands where such projects have been carried out over the last 20 years. She had an opportunity, therefore, to hear about both the successes and failures. Jim Harbison, the Highland Project Co-ordinator spent several days in Central Finland gaining an insight into the local project.

### *Information Exchange*

The Project Co-ordinators / Officers acted as conduits for information exchange throughout the project. This ranged from simple information request e.g. contact names to more complex queries in relation to how local municipalities operate. Information exchange also took place at the various conferences, when delegates had the opportunity to network with Partner delegates and discuss issues in more detail.

However, exchange of experience must at some stage also be transferred to action where Partners' methods or solutions are implemented elsewhere. A good example of this is Skellefteå where a study trip to Alness with Skellefteå Voluntary Village Council (an umbrella organisation for village development

associations) to study and to learn about rural development. One major impact from that study trip was how to involve local residents in the local development work. Another tangible impact is the work to create Village Halls or Service Points in the villages to work with co-ordination of both private and public services to the community. (Through this initiative Skellefteå has joined another Northern Periphery project aiming at developing these village halls even further.). Similarly, experiences with town centre pedestrianisation / environmental improvements in Highland provided were extremely useful in the work being carried out in Central Finland. Project staff in Central Finland studied methodologies in Highland and provided new ideas to improve the citizen's participation, for example: how to stimulate voluntary work in environmental maintenance.

The major problems with transnational working related more to the administration of the Project. Finding opportunities from the Steering Committee to meet was extremely difficult. Videoconferencing was eventually the main route whereby the various managers met. Whilst this worked to a degree, it is not as satisfactory as face-to-face meetings. In future, it would be better to build meeting into the costs and place dates in diaries well in advance. Finding suitable locations with minimum journey times is also critical and it may be that somewhere such as Copenhagen is the most appropriate solution.

The difficulties in ensuring that all Partners provide the information required for six monthly Progress and Financial reports should never be underestimated. Whilst it is recognised that everyone is under increasing work pressures, ensuring that Partners meet deadlines and provide the appropriate information has proved extremely difficult. The Financial side in particular has created problems. The financial spreadsheets provided by the Secretariat work well but can be daunting when you first use them. Partners need to have people in place who fully understand the systems to ensure that the correct information is forwarded timeously. It is appreciated that the Secretariat runs excellent seminars on these issues but it is clear that the Secretariat and Project Managers / Co-ordinators must do more to get the message across.

Notwithstanding the above issues, transnational co-operation will continue after the Project ends. This will be at two levels.

The Project Steering Committee have already discussed the need to examine ways of continuing the Project either via NPP/other European funding or continuing co-operation with internal funding only. The latter will clearly be more difficult as everyone these days is looking at partnerships and match funding. However, there is a commitment to make every effort in this direction and Partners will be meeting in April 2006 to discuss the issue in more detail.

Locally, links between towns are beginning to emerge as noted previously. The Alness - Lycksele link is the obvious one but others are discussing the matter. The Highland Council still intends to support these links no matter the outcome of the more strategic discussions noted above. The Council will continue to fund the web site, for example, and will seek local funding for exchange trips.

## DISSEMINATION AND TRANSFER OF EXPERIENCE

### Organisation Dissemination

Dissemination of information within Partner organisations has mainly been through local networking. In the Highlands, for example, the Project Co-ordinator disseminates information electronically to a range of people in the various organisations involved in the Project. This ranges from sending out copies of the Newsletter through making conference presentations available to highlighting ideas/projects that are considered relevant. It also involved making presentations on the Project to various parts of the organisation. Other Partners have carried out similar activities.

### Other Dissemination

Outwith Partner organisations, information dissemination has taken place in a wide variety of ways.

In Central Finland, the dissemination was implemented locally and regionally by active publicity - the main tools were:

- Offices with easy-accessibility;
- Public seminars and briefing;
- Cooperation with local media;
- Project newsletter, "Netwörkki" - aprox. 5 vol. / year, since autumn 2004;
- Advertisements and announcements on web sites of the Towns.

At a national level dissemination was through:

- Taking part in national Town Centre Management Association's network; conferences twice / year; town centre managers' e-mail discussion network.
- Arranging the transnational *Small Town Visions Conference* in Saarijärvi June 2004 (mentioned above)
- Receiving visitors from other Finnish small towns (Nilsinä, Valkeakoski, Alajärvi) and projects (Northern Ostrobothnia) to introduce the aims and methods used in Project Towns

In Scotland, a variety of methods were used, including,

- The Project Manager/Co-ordinator have made presentations to a wide mix of bodies throughout Scotland. Indeed the Manager has given evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee on issues relating to small towns.
- A study tour of the Borders area of Scotland enabled the Project to be widely discussed and contacts made.
- At the more local level, Highland Project Officers have carried out the same function, talking to local groups who could become involved in the work of the Initiatives.
- Publication of the STN Newsletter.
- Widespread use of press releases.
- Entering competitions e.g. Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning.

## CONCLUSIONS

Small Town Networks is a successful Project. In numerical terms it met or exceeded the various targets in the Project Plan. The Highland Community Chest exceeded all expectations and new towns came into the network; Central Finland published its Visions and Action Plans and Lieksa increased youth participation in the local Municipality and followed Central Finland in developing a strategy for the town centre. Looking beyond the numbers, it has helped re-energise local people and get them involved in their communities. It has developed transnational links where there were none before. It has helped put small town issues on the political map. Sustainable regeneration is ultimately not about quick fixes or superficial makeovers of communities by big business or big government— it's a long sometimes bumpy journey of shifting destinations that must be deeply-rooted within communities. STN aims to build social capital and unleash the dormant potential for local self-help. Failing places are locked in a cycle of decline – successful towns embody pride of place, perform niche roles and play to their special strengths. They are receptive to change and seek opportunities for collaboration locally and globally. STN offers an innovative and portable brand of professional facilitation and partnership designed to nurture community capacity and confidence.