



## The Initiatives of Small Twin Towns as a Major Factor to Support European Integration at Local Level. The Experience and Future Co-operation of Sepopol, Lagendorf and Pravdinsk

29th June–1st July 2001.



**T**he small Polish town Sepopol has less than three thousand inhabitants, it is situated close to the Russian Kaliningrad District border, and in recent years it has been heavily affected by the collapse of rural economy due to the bankruptcy of many state farms. So perhaps more than most projects, it was a great help when the EU Town Twinning programme was able to help finance a conference there last year. In 1993 Sepopol, in the Warmia and Mazuria region, had signed a town twinning accord with Lagerdorf in Schleswig-Holstein, North Germany. With "The Initiatives of Small Twin Towns as a Major Factor to Support European Integration at Local Level. The Experience and Future Co-operation of Sepopol, Lagendorf and Pravdinsk"-conference it staged a successful programme with many participants from Lagendorf, as well as from Sepopol's other twin-town, Pravdinsk, in the Kaliningrad District (the latter, being in Russia, didn't fall directly in under the EU funding for town twinning).

**T**he conference focused on three major themes. First day was devoted to exploring town twinning: the ideas, the history and the experiences which lies behind; the use of the internet and other information technology in the development of contacts, as well as a presentation of plans for future contacts between the three towns. The second day, with participation of a large number of prominent experts and scholars, focused on the advantages, challenges and dilemmas of integration into the EU for towns the size and nature of Sepopol. A session where the EU-experiences at local government level in Lagendorf came to the fore as especially helpful. The last day revolved around the theme of tourism, realising its potential as both a stimulator of twinning contacts and, importantly in the case of Sepopol, as a vehicle for the development of local economy.

**A**part from these more serious and official discussions, the three-day conference also offered numerous occasions for less formal exchange between guests and citizens of Sepopol, not the least being the incorporation into the programme of parts of the celebrations in honour of the 650th anniversary of the Sepopol Municipal Charter, as well as several artistic performances, emphasising the necessary cultural dimension in town twinning. All of which significantly contributed to further develop contacts already well established.

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Countries involved : Poland, Germany and Russia (Kaliningrad)

Persons involved : 400–500