



# CONNECT: WORKING TOGETHER AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

RESULTS FROM THE FIRST  
CONNECT KNOWLEDGE  
EXCHANGES



# CONNECT: FLEXIBLE AND PARTICIPATORY EXCHANGES AROUND THE WORLD



In 2017, the pilot phase of CONNECT was set in motion, carrying out knowledge exchanges in three EU partner countries. Now, concrete results are in from the exchanges in Ghana, Colombia and Cambodia. What can we learn from the pilot experiences?

## COLLEAGUES EXCHANGING WITH COLLEAGUES

Building on the knowledge of, and experience with decentralised cooperation, PLATFORMA and VNG International developed and piloted CONNECT.

CONNECT facilitates short-term exchanges among municipal colleagues from different parts of the world, but from similar organizations. The goal is to provide practical, technical assistance, and to capture and disseminate knowledge on very specific challenges that local governments are facing.

Knowledge exchanges take place on the basis of specific requests received from local and regional governments in EU partner countries. Then CONNECT makes the match with colleagues from European countries.

“The CONNECT exchange started a clear dynamic for change in Agona West, leading to concrete action”



**PAUL MULDER**  
POLICY OFFICER ALMERE

## PILOT EXCHANGES

In 2017, CONNECT facilitated three pilot exchanges, matching municipal colleagues from:

- Almere, the Netherlands, with Agona West, Ghana
- Sandgerði, Iceland, with Pursat, Cambodia
- Tarragona, Spain, with Angelópolis, Colombia

These exchanges lasted an average of five days. In each exchange, two European colleagues travelled to an EU partner country. They primarily worked with municipal staff and elected officials; other organizations were invited where relevant. Women made up 40% of the participants.

Thanks to such broad participation, municipal staff members were able to gain new perspectives on the issues at hand. European staff shared their personal experiences and were flexible about adapting the programme to real-life needs. This helped make the exchanges more relevant.

## BEHIND THE SCENES OF CONNECT

The 2016–2017 pilot phase served to build the foundation of CONNECT, as we carried out the CONNECT exchanges, created forms, developed and tested monitoring and evaluation tools, set up a communication strategy, and created preparatory training materials for participating local and regional governments.



## CREATING UNDERSTANDING AND TRUST

A key feature of CONNECT is the careful selection of European expertise. As we studied the findings and results, it became clear that CONNECT's colleague-to-colleague approach created deep understanding and trust from the start, which led to great results. Together, participating colleagues worked to discover and acknowledge the truths behind local situations in the field – and sought the best answers and solutions to the challenges.

This approach called for a variety of tools, ranging from discussions and round-tables to work sessions and field visits. Joint reporting and self-evaluation by local and regional governments also helped strengthen ownership and commitment.

## BUILDING ON EXISTING PRIORITIES AND PLANS

The CONNECT exchanges were not about creating something entirely new. Given their short-term nature, and the need to align with local realities, they focused instead on updating and revising existing local plans, making them more concrete and operational – and benefitting from new, foreign perspectives.



## PILOT EXCHANGE SHARING EXPERTISE ON COLOMBIAN ECOTOURISM

Angelópolis, Colombia, asked CONNECT for help to develop ecotourism in their municipality and region – and were matched with municipal colleagues from Tarragona, Spain.

In the exchange, they worked to define tourism development – and to create an updated strategic plan, identifying opportunities for developing local tourism. Experts provided input on mobilizing stakeholders as well.

All this resulted in improved perspectives on, and more knowledge about opportunities – and an initial exploration into new strategy options. The team observed changes in attitude, as local authorities saw the need to open processes to all relevant parties. And to top it off, they developed new ambitions and much more confidence!



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## A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

An overview of the results and observed changes revealed a vast array of changes that will certainly continue to indirectly influence activities, approaches and ways of working.

Participants mentioned that they gained knowledge, new understandings – and strengthened their skills and competencies. Changes occurred on an individual, organisational – and to a lesser extent – a community level.

## HOW DID EUROPEAN COLLEAGUES BENEFIT?

Participating European municipal staff members reported that they gained a better understanding of the challenges that local governments in EU partner countries face. Their CONNECT experiences strengthened their current expertise, allowed them to see their own municipality from a new perspective, enriched them personally, and extended their network. They also felt committed to continuing the CONNECT relationship, if and when the opportunity arises.



### PILOT EXCHANGE IMPROVING SANITATION IN GHANA

When local municipal authorities in Agona West, Ghana requested help with their sanitation plans, CONNECT matched them with colleagues in Almere, the Netherlands.

In a very short time, the exchange resulted in concrete and realistic sanitation plans. Other deliverables included identified stakeholders, an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, an updated communication plan, a core communication message, and a communication calendar.

Possibilities for revenue generation were identified, including recycling, composting, and bio-gas. Local authorities gained a better understanding of shared responsibilities and the role of communication. In the weeks following the exchange, demands for household toilets also increased, because citizens had learned more about good sanitation standards.



## VALUABLE LESSONS LEARNED

The colleague-to-colleague approach works, and makes these short-term missions worthwhile and effective. We also learned that:

- Colleague-to-colleague assignments must have a highly specific focus.
- Concrete, practical tools (that can be applied during the exchange) contribute to motivation, confidence and concrete action.
- Flexibility of all participants is key.



### PILOT EXCHANGE **HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN CAMBODIA**

Pursat, Cambodia contacted CONNECT to request assistance in the field of human resource management. CONNECT matched them with municipal colleagues in Sandgerði, Iceland.

Activities during the exchange included conversations with staff, a workshop, self-reflection and self-assessment activities, and a joint evaluation meeting.

Participants said the exchange helped make their vision more concrete, and contributed to staff motivation. Other results included better insights into ways to motivate staff without extra available budget, experiencing a new type of interaction between the board, line managers and staff, and increased understanding and trust among staff and leaders in dealing with HR development.

## MOVING FORWARD, CONNECT WILL FOCUS EVEN MORE ON:

- Stimulating links with other development programmes in the municipalities, to ensure synergy and to facilitate follow-up.
- Ensuring synergy with ongoing PLATFORMA member programmes.
- Improving the involvement of national associations of local and regional governments with CONNECT.
- Developing a space for online exchanges, to stimulate further engagement and more exchanges between CONNECT participants.
- Pro-actively pointing participants to funding opportunities, for continued cooperation.
- Make preparatory training more specific and pragmatic, and make it broadly available online.

“It is essential to facilitate tailor-made exchanges among local and regional governments around the world. That’s why the European Commission supports CONNECT.”



**NEVEN MIMICA**  
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

Photo: © European Union

# ARE YOU WORKING FOR A EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITY?

CONNECT has proven that colleague-to-colleague exchanges work. They are short-term and applying is easy and quick. The only investment is your time and knowledge. Help your colleagues in municipalities around the world!

Ready to connect? Find out more!  
[www.connectfordevelopment.eu](http://www.connectfordevelopment.eu)

“CONNECT participants are experts and colleagues at the same time”



**HELGA JOHANNA  
ODDSOTTIR**  
HR ADVISOR, SANDGERÐI

To read the complete report *CONNECT: Pilot Phase Evaluation 2016–2017*, please contact [connect@ccre-cemr.org](mailto:connect@ccre-cemr.org) and request a copy. This evaluation was carried out by ACE Europe and validated by PLATFORMA partners.

## CONNECT

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