



HOW TO SET UP AND MAINTAIN A EUROPEAN NETWORK.

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Network “the Charter of European Rural Communities” exists since 1989. Some mayors of rural communities met each other during their holidays in Cissé, France. They decided to set up a twinning between small villages, one from each country of the European Union.

The activities of the network still expand and the members are increasingly involved in their Charter. In this document, we want to share our experiences regarding the establishment and maintenance of a European network.

2. ESTABLISHMENT

By starting up a European network, it is necessary to make appointments with each other about matters as the aim, the fee, the organisation etc. In this chapter we describe how the Charter did this.

Theme The theme of the Charter is “people meet people”.

Aim Form European unity, not imposed from above but created from below: Europe at the kitchen table. Therefore at all meetings and exchanges people stay in guest families. During the first years of the existence of the Charter the accent was on meeting each other and getting to know each other. Recent years the emphasis shifts to more content.

Membership fee Every member community pays € 400, -- a year.

Registration

- Cooperation is based on solidarity.
- The appointments are registered in “the Charter of European Rural Communities” and signed by all the mayors of the member municipalities or their substitutes. By signing the Charter the communities affirm the principle of unity and working together.
- The registered appointments include objectives and the elaborations of these objectives.
- The existence of the Charter is officially registered by depositing the Statutes at the official agencies in France, where the Charter was founded.

Organisation

1. Daily board.
 - The Charter has a president, also responsible for the secretariat and a vice-president, also responsible for the administration of the finance.
 - President, vice president, executive secretary and executive treasurer form the daily board and are the executive body.

- The president is appointed by the mayor's meeting for a period of 4 years with the possibility of one reappointment.
2. Presidium.
 - The Charter has a presidium of 6 members, chosen by the mayors for a period of 4 years with the possibility of reappointment.
 - The presidium prepares the Charter policy.
 - Mayors or substitute mayors of the Charter can candidate themselves for the presidium (if there is a function vacant).
 3. Mayors meeting.
 - The mayors meeting is organised once a year during the annual network meeting.
 - The mayors meeting is the decision making body.

Activities

- As agreed: an annual network meeting alternately organised by one of the members, mostly with grants from Brussels (Europe for Citizens Program action 1).
- Through the year several joint projects on the initiative of different Charter members
- Small meetings on the initiative of the mayor's meeting of the Charter.
- Bilateral or multilateral meetings on the initiative of the members.
- Several exchanges of individuals and groups.

Communication

The English language is the communication language. The members have the obligation to communicate with each other and to inform each other. Communication tools are the e-mail and the Internet site.

3. MAINTENANCE

To maintain a European Network, it is necessary to have an organisation that further indicates and works out the appointments that are made, that responds to developments and lobbies at the right places. It is important to choose which projects the network wants to organise. All network members should agree to this choice. Moreover it is required that the network has one or two people who will daily check the central e-mail address, who can answer questions, who watch over the accomplishment of the appointments that are made and have a total overview. In this chapter we explain how the Charter approaches this.

Enlargement

Since 1989 the Charter has grown with the enlargement of the EU. So on the principle: one member from each EU country, the Charter now has 27 members.

The enlargement is realised by using several resources. Sometimes one of the members knows a small village in the new EU country. But often also embassies and national associations of municipalities can help to find a new member.

Organisation

Most of the work is done on voluntary base. In some cases member municipalities have provide a few hours for an employee to do some international work.

1. Daily board.

- The board meets each other a few times a year.
- The members of the board prepare the presidium meetings.
- President or Vice-President is present at Charter meetings where more than two members are involved.
- The daily board is also responsible for recruitment of new members.
- The administrative support (executive secretary and treasurer) of the Charter has been coupled to the presidency. Those also are voluntary jobs. The Charter pays the real costs, such as telephone costs and travel costs.

President and secretary

- Maintain the daily contact with the members. Most of the contacts are by e-mail and telephone. Daily they are accessible to all questions from members.
- They are intermediary for members who want to organise activities.
- Monitor the content and organisation of meetings. If necessary they travel to members who need support in organising an activity.
- Make a periodical newsletter for all the Charter members and other interested people.
- Actually make the agenda's for the daily board, the presidium and the mayors meeting and are responsible for making the report of those meetings.
- Maintain the necessary and desirable network contacts
- Maintain the contacts with the official agencies such as the European Commission and European Movement International in Brussels.
- Have the total overview of everything that happens within the Charter.

Vice president and treasurer

- Are responsible for the Charter finance.
- Take care of the payments and collecting the fee.
- Provide a financial report during the annual mayor's meeting.

2. Presidium.

- The members of the presidium meet, apart from their assembly during the annual meeting, once or twice a year.
- They adjust the policy where necessary.
- They talk about the organisation of the Charter.
- The presidium prepares the mayors meetings. The Charter pays the travel costs and if necessary the costs for the stay during the meetings of the presidium.

3. Mayors meeting.

- Once a year during the annual meeting, there is a meeting of the mayors.
- The mayor's meeting decides about the proposals concerning policy and organisation they get from the presidium. The mayor's confirm or reformulate the future policy of the Charter and inform each other about projects.

Activities

1. The big annual meeting:
 - Is alternately organised by one of the member municipalities.
 - From every Charter member a delegation of 10 persons comes to the meeting.
 - Member communities themselves are responsible for the composition of the delegations. The board of the Charter stimulates that the composition changes every year, so that more inhabitants of the member communities can experience the Charter.
 - The board also stimulates that a part of each delegation consists of young people.
 - Participants stay in guest families.
 - Every annual meeting has a theme.
The members of the Charter are all small villages (max. 5.000 inhabitants). The board of the Charter stimulates their members to involve the region in organising a big meeting, because it's hard for small villages to host and organise such a big meeting (270 participants) on its own.
 - The big annual meeting more and more becomes a network meeting, where people make agreements to organise projects together, both on volunteers and professional level. And that is just what the Charter aspires.
2. The multi annual project
 - For 2009 and 2010 the mayors meeting of the Charter decided to apply for grants from the Europe for Citizens Program in Brussels. The application for this multi annual project was approved and the Charter received a contribution of about € 145.000,-- to organise 10 activities in 2009 and 2010
 - During those two years delegations of the Charter members will participate at four conferences on local democracy. During those conferences there will be special attention for citizen's involvement at local, national and European democracy.
 - Moreover the multi annual project covers several meetings of young ones from the Charter communities, two big network meetings, a workshop for local organisation committees and a conference about the way elderly people live in the different EU-countries.
 - The organisation and hosting of the meetings is divided between the different member communities.
 - The organising member gets a financial contribution out of the multi annual project. The amount of the

contribution is calculated on the basis of the daily rate per country the EU has fixed.

- The participants get a contribution in their travel costs. Because the EU does not make a difference in the travel costs for the different EU-countries, the presidency of the Charter developed its own system. The bottom line is that members who are -regarding the daily rate of the EU- considered as "poor countries" get two times more contribution in the travel costs than the "rich countries".
- By signing and putting stamps on a letter of intend all Charter members are committed to the agreements in the multi-annual project.
- Also in the meetings of the multi annual projects, participants stay in guest families.
- Coordination and accountability of the project lies in the hands of president and secretary.

3. Projects.

Besides the multi annual project Charter members themselves organise projects, whether or not with European Grants. To get grants, the EU always requires one or more European partners. However, Charter members can always make a choice out of 26 potential partners.

4. Small meetings and bilateral contacts.

Out of the multi annual project, Charter members often organise small meetings with a few, or bilateral meetings with just one Charter partner. Sometimes those meetings have a special theme, sometimes they just want to get to know each other better. There are no grants or financial contributions for this kind of meetings.

5. Exchanges.

Individually or in groups there are exchanges between Charter members. For example if a student is searching for an internship in Europe, the Charter partners can organise it.

Communication

- Every member has appointed a communication officer to maintain mutual contacts. The communication officer has to speak, understand and write the English language.
- The central communication officer of the Charter has been coupled to the presidency (the secretary).
- The Internet site www.europeancharter.eu is used for contact, communication and to publish information. The Internet site ensures that all inhabitants of the Charter communities can read and see all about the different activities. Because the site contains reports from every project or meeting, minutes of the presidium and mayor's meeting, programs and a lot of photograph's. The Internet site is maintained by a web team, four volunteers from four different Charter communities.
- During the mayors meetings the language is English. The mayors, who want to, can bring a translator to the meeting.
- Periodical all members receive a newsletter which is made by the secretary of the Charter.

Local Committees The board of the Charter stimulates the members to establish local committees "Friends of Europe". The members of those committees are not allied to a municipality, but cooperate with the municipality regarding Charter matters. When municipal elections bear new politicians who do not want to invest in the Charter, these committees can ensure the continuity of Charter involvement of their community.

Youth is the future

1. The Charter advises municipalities and / or foundations "Friends of Europe" to invest in the young people of their community and to make them part of their organization
2. At the annual meeting every member has to have 4 youngsters in its delegation of 10.
3. During the annual meeting the young ones partly participate in the general program and partly they have their own theme and program.
4. One or two young representatives will be present at the mayor's meeting to inform the mayors about the plans of the Charter youth.
5. There is an annual meeting of all young representatives, similar to the meeting of the mayors.
6. Once or twice a year there is a meeting especially for the young people.
7. Within the multi annual project the youngsters also have own meetings and an own mission.
8. Especially for the multi annual project, the Charter has a (voluntary) youth coordinator.

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