

The Benefits of Twinning

The former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim, recently urged the world to imagine the benefits that would accrue if East-West polarization did not exist. Many problems today considered insoluble would be overcome – from regional conflicts in developing countries to the ever-increasing wastefulness of the arms race.

International cooperation would replace confrontation were we to overcome the paralyzing polarization which presently exists between East and West. The arms race is the direct result of the fundamental problems of tension and breakdown of trust between East and West. A prerequisite to progress in arms control and movement toward disarmament is a new spirit of mutual understanding.

Municipalities have long shown leadership in the development of human relations through the twinning process. The concept of cities and towns joining together to achieve mutual objectives has led to many instances of affiliation for purposes of commerce, trade and defence. It is a common occurrence that problems which seem massive and insoluble at the national level become more manageable at the local level. The public can frequently identify with the concerns of a similar public in a comparable city or town in another place, either in the same or a different country.

Whether focussing on cultural exchanges or trade opportunities, twinning becomes a practical learning experience. For, in exposing different cultures to one another in a manner that promotes openness and understanding, twinning provides a cultural link fostering the development of lasting bonds between one society and another.

In Canada, twinning has become a well-established tradition. There are approximately 200 cities and towns twinned with sister municipalities in this country or with municipalities abroad. For example, my home city of Edmonton, Alberta, is twinned with