

International Strategy for Odense Municipality

May 2009

1. Purpose

The internet and modern forms of communication and transportation – the whole gambit of trends that are part of our contemporary lifestyle – mean that all of us are to an unprecedented extent meeting, interacting, learning and playing with our global neighbours – frequently in brief, limited-time contexts relating to interests or activities.

Today, the world around us is much more complex, yet much more accessible. Odense is part of these developments and wishes to continue to be so in the future.

The aims of Odense Municipality's international activities are as follows:

Internally within our organisation:

- to support the municipality's vision, policies, strategies in general and the performance of the municipality's core tasks.

Externally:

- to generate added value for Odense's citizens, educational institutions and business community;
- to create added value for global developments. Odense must participate in the global community and contribute to underpinning and assisting communities that are less developed;
- to contribute to the branding of Odense;
- to support the international vistas of the city and its citizens by taking part in international activities.

2. Objectives

The following objectives have high priority for the international activities of Odense Municipality:

Objectives relating to the municipality's *internal* development:

- Odense Municipality's international efforts should contribute to continuously enhancing the skills of the municipality's employees;
- Our international activities should give municipal employees access to the latest technical knowledge and technology, thus ensuring that the municipality continuously performs its tasks at a high level of efficiency and quality;

- Odense Municipality's international activities should help to profile Odense Municipality as an attractive workplace, thus attracting new employees and retaining existing employees;
- Whenever appropriate, the municipality should use the forum of its international activities to influence international regulations and laws of consequence to municipal activities.

Objectives relating to the municipality's *external collaboration*:

- The municipality's international efforts aim to strengthen the city's citizens, educational institutions and business community in international competition, e.g. by attracting companies and investments from outside Denmark;
- Odense becomes internationally renowned for the qualities for which we wish to be known: a Sustainable City, a Healthy City, a Playful City and Hans Christian Andersen;
- Odense Municipality's international activities contribute to intercultural sharing, which underpins the further development of the city's international environment.

The objectives serve as guidelines for the international activities in which Odense Municipality participates. For this reason, it should always be possible to explain the municipality's involvement in international projects, networks and other initiatives on the basis of one or more of the municipal objectives.

3. Proposed measures

Aims and objectives do not achieve themselves but are achieved by continuing and strengthening the international activities that are already taking place within the organisation.

The following is a description of the measures proposed within the various types of international activities in which Odense Municipality participates. *(The proposed measures are listed on the last page, including who is responsible for what.)*

3.1 International projects

A project is defined as international if it involves a transnational project entailing a collaborative effort with one or more partners abroad. The projects will often involve funding from the EU or other international sources, but funding can also originate from Danish programmes and funds.

The EU has a number of programmes under which municipalities are also entitled to apply for support. Typically, a number of international partners apply for a project they intend to carry out together. From the municipality's viewpoint, taking part in EU projects can help to fund "extra" activities in a project that the municipality already wanted to undertake. In other words, an EU project can be the "icing on the cake". Project participation can also be used to realise a project for which funding is not earmarked, but where EU monies can ensure its realisation. In addition, participating in international projects can provide inspiration for our own experts and enhance their linguistic skills, etc.

Thus, international projects can help to fund subsidiary activities in a project that the municipality already wants to carry out or to pave the way for other projects that otherwise lack funding.

Consultancy tasks

Another type of project work involves municipal employees performing consultancy tasks. These activities are revenue-funded. The municipality places one or more employees at the disposal of an international project as an expert or experts. The municipality is paid for making the employee(s) available and other expenses are also covered. For this reason, participation is basically neutral in terms of costs and usually generates revenue; it can also be seen as enhancing the skills of the employees involved.

The competition for projects has stiffened in recent years, but this is also an area of growth, and it is possible to participate in projects under the auspices of the EU, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UN, etc. Usually, the municipality cannot submit a tender for a project alone, as the requirements for prequalification are high and the chances of getting a project funded are greater by entering into consortia with large consulting firms or with municipally-owned enterprises, for instance.

Odense Municipality's *internal* measures:

- ***Formal collaboration agreements with consulting firms, the National Association of Local Governments in Denmark, or other parties relating to consulting tasks.*** In such instances, clear guidelines must be drawn up for taking part in the consultancy, including working hours, budget, etc. Consultancy usually means that an employee will be seconded for short or prolonged periods of time, and that it will not always be known beforehand when an employee will be absent from the municipality, as he/she can be "summoned" at short notice. This requires the individual workplace to carefully consider how it will deal with an employee's absence to ensure that departmental tasks continue to be performed as required.

- Evaluation form

An evaluation model and a corresponding form have been created for completion at the end of all international projects. The evaluation of international projects is often

governed by the policies and objectives of the external sources of funding, e.g. the European Commission. An evaluation form for Odense Municipality's international projects can ensure evaluation and forward-looking adjustments to comply with Odense Municipality's policies and objectives.

3.2 International networks

Odense Municipality is a member of various international networks and organisations. The latter are organisations which promote the interests of their members in specific or general areas. The work and activities of the organisations differ, and there are different ways in which the members can actively participate:

- by participating in projects launched by the organisations, typically under EU programmes like INTERREG and the Seventh Framework Programme;
- by providing lecturers for seminars, workshops, etc.;
- by participating (politically) in board work. It will often be possible to get a seat on the organisation's board. Usually, the position on the board will be filled by a politician, but it can also be a municipal employee;
- by participating (politically) in meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops to which members are invited by the organisations. This can also involve participation by employees.

Odense Municipality gives high priority to network participation as a source of underpinning strategic objectives, including keeping up to date with the latest technical knowledge, as an option for applying for project support, attracting business tourism, etc. For this reason, the departmental services give an account each year of the networks in which the service unit's departments take part, explaining what they have gained from this in terms of the strategic objectives. If a municipal service does not participate in international networks, the reason for this is stated.

Expenses for taking part in international networks are incurred within the department's budgetary framework.

3.3 Other types of international activities

In addition to international projects and networks, Odense Municipality participates in other types of international activities. This includes twin-city activities or international activities that are frequently without a clear, predefined result or timeframe. This includes the receiving of visitors, where public/private enterprises can obtain assistance for officially linking Odense Municipality to a visit from abroad or organising the service units' reception of visiting specialist/expert delegations from abroad.

Odense Municipality's internal measures:

- Twin Cities

At present, Odense Municipality has relationships with twenty twin cities, fourteen or fifteen of which are active to various extents. Criteria/goals are laid down for the twinning activities, and existing twin-city relationships are reviewed on this basis to assess the scope of collaboration. For cities where relationships will be continuing, a collaboration agreement is drawn up outlining specific projects/initiatives for the next two to four years. A list of contacts, etc., is also drawn up.

The actual activities entailed by the future collaboration with the various twin cities will be organised together with the city's business community, the university and other parties, to link up their various interests and reinforce the "door-opening" effect.

- Quality assurance for the receiving of visitors

A quality assurance concept for the receiving of visitors is being prepared. The concept includes the framework for the reception, the collaboration/contacts with educational institutions, companies, etc.

3.4 City councillors

The participation of city councillors in EU projects, conferences, networks, etc., is a good way to gain inspiration and forge networks with foreign politicians and also provides an opportunity to learn about a specific area in more detail.

Odense Municipality's internal measures:

- Agreements for city-councillor participation in international activities

At the start of each new city council term, each committee agrees the scope of councillor participation in the international activities under the respective committee areas. This includes creating an overview of the councillors' linguistic skills and their areas of interest as they relate to the international activities.

At the time of constituting the committees, the members' involvement in international activities within the members' areas of interest – e.g. libraries – is also agreed. This includes participation by the councillor concerned in the relevant international activities in the area throughout his/her four-year term.

3.5. Other internal measures

- Annual reporting to the Finance Committee regarding the municipality's international activities

- Performance contract with the South Denmark European Office (SDEO) in Brussels

A one-year performance contract/collaboration agreement is drawn up with the SDEO, in which specific collaboration targets and goals are laid down. The SDEO should be used as a means of instructing employees involved in project-application efforts

(frequent holding of seminars, possibly together with others (SDU, RSD)), to retain expertise in-house.

- Offering language courses for employees and city councillors

Employees and city councillors are offered language courses in groups based on the requirements of the organisation. The requirements for this are determined twice a year.

- Collaboration with SDU/local networks/associations in the municipality regarding courses in cultural understanding

Employees and councillors about to engage in international collaboration are offered the opportunity to meet with representatives from SDU or other local networks/associations relating to cultural understanding.

- Additions to the project-remit template concerning external funding and inspiration

Points are added to the project-remit template which the project manager is requested to look into:

- whether relevant funds are available that can be applied for as sources of external funding;
- whether other organisations have successfully performed a similar activity and whether it would be appropriate to visit them;
- whether it would be relevant to incorporate an international dimension into the conceptualisation of the project, and whether a project has a long timeframe but can be included in the planning of activities relating to the performance described in the remit.

- Amendment of delegation authority relating to employees' trips abroad

The delegation authority currently in effect, which requires employees' trips abroad to be approved at a director and councillor level, is regarded as very bureaucratic and it is desired to amend this procedure. The delegation authority is included as part of Odense Municipality's accounting regulations. It is expected that a number of amendments to regulations will be submitted to the City Council in late 2009, and the specific amendment of delegation authority will be included in this presentation.

- Expanding the website to include information about the municipality's international activities

Expanding the existing website to include a more professional perspective, in terms of both the Danish and English versions of Odense.dk: what does the municipality have to offer international partners, what projects is the municipality taking part in, how are they organised, what are the strengths, etc.

4. Organising

The strategy is realised through an organisational process based on establishing a single point of contact to the municipality and a network across the administrative

units which will support the broad embedment of international activities within the organisation.

Single Point of Contact (SPOC)

The specific tasks involved in SPOC basically consist of having a single point of contact to serve as the municipality's public interface for the reception of the city's visitors, etc., and as a venue to which interested parties can submit queries and which takes care of responding to queries/forwarding them to the proper recipients.

The SPOC aims to underpin and be a driving force in developing *external* collaboration with the business community, educational institutions, etc., and the *internal* collaboration with the service units via the network. It will also be responsible for the annual reporting to the Finance Committee. Obviously, this can only be done together with the service units.

The SPOC function is managed by the Mayor's Department, where one FTE is earmarked for performing this assignment.

Internal network

The network is made up of representatives from the service units' management secretariats and from the Director Secretariat, as this is where the service units' central knowledge about upcoming projects, strategy charts, contracts, etc., is located, and the contacts from the management secretariats are dispersed throughout the service units' departments.

The network members meet as required, share knowledge and coordinate the "use" of the SDEO's expertise, participate in twin-cities projects and with the city's partners (educational institutions, the business community, etc.) and coordinate reporting activities for the Finance Committee, etc. This network will be given a boost by having a single point of contact.

Project consultancy

An important factor relating to entering into international projects is having a consultancy function to assist in applications for project resources, provide advice relating to the drafting of project applications, and for the further administration of participating in international projects.

The advisory services will be provided by increasing the use of the SDEO's expertise, and network members will be responsible for supporting their own departments when preparing applications. High priority will be given in the internal network to knowledge sharing, including project consultancy based on the many lessons learned by the Department of Culture and Urban Development in preparing EU applications.

5. Communication

At the commencement of each project within Odense Municipality, a communication plan must be completed to ensure that communication aspects are incorporated into the planning from the outset (see Odense Municipality's project manual). This also applies to international activities and to any projects launched in this context.

General communication strategy for international activities

A good communication strategy will contribute to heightening the profile of our international activities. The catchwords for the overarching communication strategy for all international activities under the auspices of Odense Municipality are **openness** and **visibility**.

For this reason, openness should be as prevalent as possible, also in connection with international activities, both in-house and externally, because we have so many good, useful experiences to share regarding our international activities.

Communication plans must include a plan for both in-house and external communication.

In-house communication

Obviously, colleagues and relevant people within the organisation should always be informed.

Knowledge-sharing – both with close colleagues and the rest of the organisation – is essential. One should always consider who could benefit and who could be involved, including departments and colleagues in other service units.

In-house communication and knowledge-sharing can be done in writing via the staff newsletter, the employee portal, or verbally at staff and departmental meetings.

External communication

As many of the international activities make it possible to try out new things that otherwise would not have been possible within the municipal budgetary framework (e.g. info stands in the city centre), the activities will often include stories of major and minor importance that are well suited to being communicated to the media.

Some international activities are better suited for local media, while others may be so important and innovative that they are interesting to nationwide media (e.g. buying bus tickets via text messaging). The external communication plan should always remember to angle a story from the citizen's perspective ("What's in it for me?"). The stories that leave a lasting impression are those showing Odense "in the lead/on its toes".

Examples of external communication methods include marketing materials, press releases and direct contact with selected media.

Proactive communication can occur through trade journals, etc. International activities are a good line of approach for profiling the municipality in technical/professional circles. Good branding of Odense.

Information about Odense Municipality's international activities is presented on the municipality's website.

7. Following up on international strategy

At the end of 2011, the international strategy will be evaluated for the purpose of assessing whether it needs to be adjusted.

Appendix: Measures Proposed under the International Strategy

Assignment	Responsible	Budget	Timeframe
Formal collaboration agreements with consulting firms, the National Association of Local Governments in Denmark, or others	SPOC together with Department of Culture and Urban Affairs		2009
Evaluation form	SPOC		2009
Twin Cities	SPOC, together with the service units and external partners		2009 and beyond
Quality assurance for the receiving of visitors	SPOC		2009
Agreements for city councillors' participation in international activities	All service units at the time of constituting		2010 (at the time of constituting)
Annual reporting to the Finance Committee	SPOC, together with the service units		Annually, from late 2009
Performance contract with the SDEO in Brussels	SPOC		2010
Offering language courses	KC, HR	Participant funded	
Courses in cultural understanding	SPOC/KC HR	Participant funded	2009
Additions to project-remit template	Director Secretariat		2009
Amendment of delegation authority	KC, Finance Committee		2009
Expansion of website	SPOC, together with Communication and the service units		2009 – ongoing
Project consultancy	Network members, and SDEO		2009
Networking	SPOC, as well as the service units' management secretariats and the Director Secretariat		2009

SPOC	Mayor's Department	Mayor's Department earmarks 1 FTE	2009 and beyond
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