



# **Transatlantic Environmental Cooperation at the Subnational Level**

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John J. McCloy Fellow in Environmental Affairs 2004

May 2005

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## **Acknowledgements**

Over the course of the past months, I have benefited from the support of several European and U.S. partners, who have helped me to carry out this project.

Foremost, I would like to thank the John J. McCloy Fund of the American Council on Germany for its generous financial support for this project. I am also grateful to my colleagues at Ecologic – Institute for International and European Environmental Policy for helping to scope the project and representing me in my ongoing projects at Ecologic during my absence.

Finally, I am particularly grateful to all the people I met and interviewed during my four-week stay in the U.S. for their time, interest in this project and their valuable insights that reconfirmed my interest in this topic and guided the writing of this report.

## Table of Content

<b>1</b>	<b>Background .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Project .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1	Aims of the Project .....	4
2.2	Selection of Case Studies.....	5
2.3	Methods and Approaches.....	6
2.4	Caveats .....	7
<b>3</b>	<b>Transatlantic Environmental Cooperation.....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1	Frameworks for Cooperation.....	7
3.2	Establishment of the Partnership .....	8
3.3	Objectives.....	10
3.4	Methods for Policy Learning .....	11
3.5	Participants in the Cooperation .....	14
3.6	Financing of Cooperation .....	15
3.7	Environmental Issue Areas.....	16
3.8	Impact of Subnational Cooperation .....	17
3.9	Reporting on Exchanges and their Impacts .....	19
<b>4</b>	<b>Challenges and Opportunities for Transatlantic Cooperation .....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1	Challenges.....	20
4.2	Opportunities .....	21
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions and Questions for further research.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Annex .....</b>	<b>26</b>
6.1	Questionnaire.....	26

## 1 Background

Many environmental problems are of a global nature and are characterized by their cross-border impacts. Therefore international and global efforts, such as those demonstrated in the large number of multilateral environmental agreements, are usually regarded as the best means to address these issues. Transatlantic cooperation on a number of environmental issues, however, is currently affected by present tensions in the transatlantic relationship. In fact, the conflicting perspectives on climate change, genetically modified organisms or the precautionary principle in the Convention on Biodiversity are frequently viewed as irreconcilable differences between the U.S. and Europe.

While recognizing that global issues deserve global responses, it is important to realize that all of these issues, as they pertain to Europe and the United States, involve local or land-use issues. A great deal of the implementation and practice of environmental protection aimed at addressing global problems takes place among sub-national actors at the local, regional and state level. For example, in the United States, most greenhouse gas emissions emanate from the transportation and building sectors and are accordingly dealt with at the local transportation level and in the building arena. Moreover, in the United States, one of the greatest threats to marine protection emanates from habitat loss and urban settlements along coastal areas: problems that must be dealt with locally. Consequently, local and regional institutions are key to effectively dealing with both local environmental problems and global environmental challenges.

Subnational authorities also play a crucial role in the formation of environmental policies at the federal level. Most likely the best-known example is California's vehicle emission standards setting. It was, after all, legislation adopted by California that prodded Congress to enact the first federal Clean Air Amendments "with teeth" in 1970.<sup>1</sup> Ever since, California has pushed further in the direction towards zero emissions and contributed to stricter emissions standards not only in other states but also at the federal level (and even internationally given its market size). Yet another example is currently evolving in the area of climate change policy. Since the Kyoto Protocol on climate change came into force the United States has been effectively on the sidelines. Yet 154 U.S. cities have their own plans to fight global warming - as part of a growing network organized by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives.<sup>2</sup> At the state level, Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic states joined in a Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative to develop a regional strategy for controlling emissions, including a multi-

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<sup>1</sup> State Environmental Resource Center: California's Motor Vehicle Emissions Program: <http://www.serconline.org/pdf/EmissionsBooklet8-5.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Rosanne Skirble (2005) US States Take Leadership Role in Addressing Climate Change, available online at: [http://www.axcessnews.com/environmental\\_021705a.shtml](http://www.axcessnews.com/environmental_021705a.shtml). See also ICLEI's International Framework for Local Action: Cities for Climate Protection at: <http://www3.iclei.org/localstrategies/summary/ccp2.html>.

state cap-and-trade program with a market-based emissions trading system.<sup>3</sup> These emerging initiatives in cities, states and regions within the United States might serve as a driver for the formation of environmental policy at the federal level. In fact, some researchers state that the U.S. almost without exception has had to come up with domestic environmental legislation first, before internationalizing it afterwards, and that more often than not those federal legislations were preceded by regulation at the state level.<sup>4</sup>

To sum up, subnational actors play a crucial role in both implementing environmental policies and contributing to the development of new environmental policies. In this respect, local and state actors complement the federal state and are potentially even in the position to temporarily overcome deficiencies at the federal level. However, it will generally not substitute for action at the federal level.

Given the important role subnational actors play in national environmental policy making and implementation, it is interesting to note that state and local governments on both sides of the Atlantic are increasingly cooperating in this area, in particular by sharing innovative policies and practices. For example, American environmental practitioners are learning from European urban environmental policies, such as the promotion of smart-growth or “green” buildings and renewable energy. Likewise, Europeans look to the U.S. for clean-up technologies and models of private financing to rehabilitate derelict lands.<sup>5</sup>

## 2 Project

### 2.1 Aims of the Project

The overarching aims of the project are twofold: First, the John J. McCloy Fellowship in Environmental Affairs, the funding source for this project, is designed to enable young Americans and Germans to conduct on-site research and interviews abroad for a period of up to four weeks. The aim of these stays is to foster knowledge and understanding between the two countries, and to support the establishment of working relations among experts. Second, McCloy Fellows in Environmental Affairs focus on a specific topic within their project; in this case Transatlantic Environmental Cooperation at the Subnational Level. In respect to the issue investigated, the overarching aim of the project is to better understand the functioning of transatlantic cooperation at the subnational level and its contribution to environmental policy making. Thereby, the project seeks to facilitate

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.rggi.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Ochs, and Detlef Sprinz (2004) Europe Riding the Hegemon? Transatlantic Climate Policy Relations, Paper presented at the Berlin conference, p. 18; online at [http://www.fu-berlin.de/ffu/akumwelt/bc2004/download/ochs\\_sprinz\\_f.pdf](http://www.fu-berlin.de/ffu/akumwelt/bc2004/download/ochs_sprinz_f.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Dale Medearis & Brian Swett (2003) International Best Practices and Innovation – Strategically Harvesting lessons from Abroad; online at: [http://www.ecologic.de/download/verschiedenes/2003/medearis\\_swett.PDF](http://www.ecologic.de/download/verschiedenes/2003/medearis_swett.PDF).

the exchange of international best practices and innovation among state, regional, and local officials on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The general aims of the project are to:

- increase knowledge about the role of subnational entities in transatlantic environmental policy learning;
- enhance understanding of the working of subnational partnerships and other forms of transatlantic environmental cooperation;
- raise awareness about the role of subnational exchange;
- identify potential areas for future cooperation and best practice for Europe and the U.S.;
- address the issue of how the exchange of best practices is institutionalized (among states in the U.S. and between the U.S. and Europe);
- enhance awareness of existing opportunities for exchange at the subnational level;
- identify opportunities to render existing partnerships more effective;
- contribute to integrating environmental issues into existing transatlantic partnerships which so far have not addressed environmental policies; and to
- enhance mutual understanding among environmental experts and practitioners in Europe and the U.S. at the subnational level.

## 2.2 Selection of Case Studies

Due to the limited time available, only a small selection of partnerships and cooperations was considered in the project. This constraint also minimized the geographical balance of the case studies analyzed. The main factors for the selection were the availability of information about the partnerships as well as personal contacts. In this respect, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gateway to International Best Practices and Innovation<sup>6</sup> played a decisive role, as it provided a large amount of information about case studies and helped to establish contacts with professionals within the respective institutions. On the European side, focus was laid on cooperations with German partners to facilitate the collection of information. In the end, the study builds on analysis of the following case studies:

- Sister City partnership between Chicago and Hamburg;
- Bavaria-Wisconsin Regulatory Reform Working Partnership<sup>7</sup>;
- State-Country Partnership between New Jersey and the Netherlands;

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.epa.gov/innovation/international/partnership.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/cea/bavaria/>.

- State Partnership between Maryland and Schleswig-Holstein; and the
- Regional Partnership between the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC)<sup>8</sup> and the Verband Region Stuttgart<sup>9</sup>.

While the study focused on the aforementioned formally established partnerships, numerous individuals not involved in certified partnerships but engaged in more informal channels of environmental cooperation at the subnational level were also consulted. These included experts and practitioners with ongoing contacts to overseas projects, such as practitioners who studied abroad and kept in contact with their foreign colleagues, experts that met during conferences and continued to exchange information on certain environmental issue areas or non-governmental environmental organizations which benefited from looking across the Atlantic. Finally, a number of foundations were consulted about their role in supporting transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level.

### 2.3 Methods and Approaches

Given the aims of the project, this study relies only to a limited degree on existing literature on the topic, such as publications conducted by international organizations, NGOs and academic institutes. Apart from the fact that there is only limited available literature on the subject<sup>10</sup>, one of the project's objectives was the personal exchange among environmental practitioners. Therefore, the main sources of information were environmental experts and practitioners involved in transatlantic environmental policy learning. Interviews were mainly conducted in April 2005.

For interview preparation, identified experts were sent background information on the project and a brief questionnaire with a limited number of open questions (see Annex 6.1 Questionnaire). Questions touched upon the following topics, which also serve as an outline of the next chapter:

- Frameworks for Cooperation;
- Establishment of the Partnership;
- Objectives;
- Methods for Policy Learning;
- Participants in the Cooperation;
- Financing of Cooperation;
- Environmental Issue Areas;

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.novaregion.org>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.region-stuttgart.org/vrs/main.jsp?navid=65>.

<sup>10</sup> The main source found was: Dale Medearis & Brian Swett (2003) International Best Practices and Innovation – Strategically Harvesting lessons from Abroad; online at: [http://www.ecologic.de/download/verschiedenes/2003/medearis\\_swett.PDF](http://www.ecologic.de/download/verschiedenes/2003/medearis_swett.PDF).

- Impact of Subnational Cooperation;
- Reporting on Exchanges and their impacts; and
- Challenges and opportunities of cooperation at the subnational level.

Given the variety of cooperations and partnerships investigated, the interviews were not strictly constrained to this set of questions. In the process of the interviews, questions were altered, modified and added as deemed necessary or useful. Also, the interviews were not limited to the functioning and organization of transatlantic environmental partnerships, but were also used to touch upon local environmental policy issue areas, such as Brownfield redevelopment, urban planning, land use management or energy efficiency and green buildings.

## 2.4 Caveats

The restricted depth of analysis within the project means that the explanatory power of the following findings is limited. Due to the design of the project, the possibilities for collecting information from persons that are not involved in transatlantic cooperation were limited. Therefore it should be borne in mind that the information given by environmental experts and practitioners was usually not verified or validated by using other information sources. Only in a very small number of cases were conflicting views on specific partnerships expressed. Unfortunately, the project focused also almost exclusively on the American side of the partnerships and cooperations. The German counterparts were consulted only in the preparation phase of the project, which might result in biased findings.

## 3 Transatlantic Environmental Cooperation

In the following chapter the findings of all interviews and case studies are summarized and clustered according to the questions posed during the interviews. Given the limited time allotted for the project, summaries were not sent back for confirmation to the interviewees. Therefore, the sole responsibility for the following section is borne by the author.

### 3.1 Frameworks for Cooperation

A variety of different subnational environmental partnerships and cooperations have been evolving between Europe and the U.S. over the last decade. In respect to their framework of cooperation, partnerships differ mainly in their level of formality and their geographical extent:

- Forms of cooperation at the subnational level vary in their **level of formality**. Partnerships between public entities are embedded in official agreements between the respective authorities, such as partnership agreements, Memorandums of Understanding or letters of intent for



environmental cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Partnerships between other actors, such as non-governmental organizations, research institutes or environmental consultancies or individual practitioners in local authorities, which can certainly also contribute to transatlantic environmental cooperation, are usually not formalized through official agreements.

- Partnerships at the subnational level vary widely in their **geographical scope**. In other words, there are state-to-state partnerships as represented by Wisconsin - Bavaria or Maryland - Schleswig-Holstein, regional partnerships as seen in the partnership between the NVRC and the Regional Planning Authority of Stuttgart or partnerships at the local level, such as the sister city partnership between Chicago and Hamburg. While usually restricted to a specific geographical area, some partnerships also looked at best practices from other regions and cities during their exchanges. For instance, a Wisconsin delegation visit was not restricted to Bavaria, but included meetings and sights in other German states and cities, such as Hessen, Dresden and Berlin. Unformalized partnerships usually do not restrict themselves to certain geographical areas.

### 3.2 Establishment of the Partnership

All investigated cooperations were formed with the help of personal contacts and networks. Also of importance were similar problems or issues faced by both parties or historical links between the geographical regions:

- Most partnerships investigated within this study came about through the **development of friendships between individuals** on both sides of the Atlantic. International conferences and workshops, as well as delegation visits, were frequently the occasion for the beginning of these international acquaintances. For example, the partnership between Wisconsin and Bavaria can be traced back to a conference in California, during which Jeff Smoller from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Matthias Weigand from the Bavarian Ministry for Regional Development and Environmental Affairs got to know each other. As they discovered that both states face similar environmental challenges, both actively pursued the establishment of a formal environmental partnership. Similarly, Jerilyn Perine of Block by Block, based in New York, was on a visiting delegation to Germany when she met Karsten Gerckens, of the Office of Urban Regeneration and Residential Development of the City of Leipzig, Germany, with whom she developed a longstanding working relationship.
- The interest in forming a cooperation and in actively engaging in policy learning stems on the one hand from the understanding that subnational actors face **similar environmental challenges** in Europe and the U.S.,

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<sup>11</sup> See for example: <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/Netherlands.PDF> and <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/cea/bavaria/moa.htm>.

such as traffic, land-use, clean air, water management or land contamination. On the other hand, **comparable socio-economic environments**, such as market based economies, democratic political structures, informed citizens, and strong environmental institutions, give rise to the assumption that innovative approaches and best practices are transferable to a high degree.<sup>12</sup> In fact, while the Partnership between Maryland and Schleswig-Holstein was facilitated by personal links, it was constructed around a specific environmental challenge. At the end of the 1990s, Maryland's Governor, Parris N. Glendening, made sure that smart growth was high on the political agenda.<sup>13</sup> Building on positive experiences through international exchanges on a project basis in other issue areas, Mr. Glendening actively sought out a suitable partner with a similar socio-economic environment and experience with smart growth. With assistance from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Schleswig-Holstein was identified as a suitable partner for a transatlantic environmental partnership. The NVRC had similar experiences. It hosted a large number of short term delegations, but was interested in establishing closer ties to one partner to embark on a deeper and more mutually-beneficial partnership. Based on environmental challenges and socio-economic characteristics, as well as personal links, the Verband Region Stuttgart was identified and selected. **Similar geographical characteristics** may also be taken into account for the establishment of partnerships. For instance, Maryland and Schleswig-Holstein regarded their similar geographical attributes, such as the Kieler Bay (Schleswig-Holstein) and the Chesapeake Bay (Maryland), as a particular potential for exchange.

- In a number of cases, **historical ties between the continents** helped to create a supportive atmosphere for the environmental partnerships. For example, Germans form the largest ancestry group in Wisconsin<sup>14</sup>, one of the reasons for several partnerships between Wisconsin and Germany<sup>15</sup>. Also German-Americans were pushing for the formation of the Sister City partnership between Chicago and Hamburg. In fact, some of these historical ties already included environmental policy learning. In his thesis, Christopher Gallasch looks at the historical policy transfer in the area of forest management. He demonstrates that the U.S. forest management systems, including administration, conservation practices and education,

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Matthew Corso, Director of the U.S. Sister Cities Network for Sustainable Development, points to the fact that most projects on environmental issues are implemented with partner cities in developing countries. However, this might be due to the larger funding opportunities for exchanges between the U.S. and the developing world.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/education/growfromhere/LESSON15/MDP/INDEX.HTM>.

<sup>14</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2003, German was by far the largest ancestry group in Wisconsin, with 42.6%.

<sup>15</sup> Examples are the partnerships with the state Hessen on education or the Sister City Partnership between Madison and Freiburg im Breisgau.

formed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are based to a large extent on German experiences.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.3 Objectives

Generally, the objectives of the partnerships are to mutually benefit through exchange. However, the objectives stated in the partnerships' founding documents vary widely in their scope and preciseness. Frequently, it is attempted to strike a balance between concrete objectives, aims and vagueness which allows freedom and flexibility for future actions:

- In the Joint Sister Cities Declaration of Chicago and Hamburg **environmental issues are hardly mentioned**. Along with cultural and economic cooperation and trade relations, the two cities declare their intention to “carry out wide exchanges in such fields as education, science and technology, sports and health and others to promote their prosperity and contribute towards further developing friendship between the people of the two countries.”<sup>17</sup> While a limited number of environmental issues might be part of the exchange of science and technology, environmental issues clearly do not play a major role in the objectives of the partnership.
- Some partnerships regard the environment to be of **equal importance** to other issues. For instance, the cooperative agreement between the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart states as an objective “the sharing of information and the promotion of understanding between the people of two geographic regions in support of business, institutions and agencies to develop cooperative initiatives in the fields of economics, education, culture, environmental protection, regional planning and administration”.
- Other Memoranda of Understanding do **focus specifically on environmental issues**. For example, Article 1 of the Memorandum of Intent between Maryland and Schleswig-Holstein states as an objective “the establishment and development of a framework for cooperation between the Participants concerning the promotion of sustainable development, conservation of energy, promotion of renewable energy, reduction of greenhouse gasses, development of environmentally friendly buildings, environmental aspects of management of land - both rural and urban – and other relevant issues which might evolve during the co-operation”.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the renewal of the partnership between the NVRC and the

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<sup>16</sup> Gallasch, Christopher W. (2003) US-German Relations in Forestry Since the Second Half of the 18th Century, Masters Thesis, Institute of Forest and Environmental Policy, University of Freiburg, Germany.

<sup>17</sup> Joint Sister Cities Declaration. Signed in Chicago on July 20, 1994, confirmed in Hamburg on August 25, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between The Maryland Department of the Environment, United States and The Ministry for Environment, Nature, and Forestry, Land Schleswig-Holstein, Federal Republic of Germany, signed 5 July 2002.

Verband Region Stuttgart mentions sharing of information and cooperative initiatives in the fields of “Regional Planning, Transportation Planning, Environmental Planning, Landscape Development, Demographic Analysis, Economic and Tourist Development, Traffic Management”, but also includes “Sports and Culture”.<sup>19</sup>

- Some partnerships not only point to environmental issues of particular interest but also to **specific environmental policy instruments and methodologies** which address these issues. For instance, the Memorandum of Understanding forming the Bavaria-Wisconsin Regulatory Reform Working Partnership aims to reach “a sustaining economic and environmental system in our states and beyond our states by way of self-responsibility of all parties” and to achieve “more cooperation between government and business than is possible under the command and control method”. It also states that “voluntary agreements and environmental management systems (EMSs) are the decisive aspects to achieving performance and therefore most important objects of exploration in the Working Partnership.”<sup>20</sup>

### 3.4 Methods for Policy Learning

Partnerships make use of different methods for exchange regarding environmental issues across the Atlantic. Depending on the financial means and time available as well as the working level of the participants, most partnerships employ several different techniques within their exchanges:

- **Short-term Visits** represent a frequently-used method for exchange. Usually these visits are less than one day in length and include brief presentations of best practices from different departments and site visits. While one partnership, namely that between New Jersey and the Netherlands, was actually initiated during such a short term visit of the governor, most short term visits do not take place within established partnerships but are organized on a case-by-case basis. For instance, New Jersey’s Department of Environmental Protection annually hosts approximately 6 to 8 delegations, which are interested in its environmental policies. Similarly, delegations that stay in the capitol frequently make site visits to best practice examples, such as Washington D.C.’s Anacostia

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<sup>19</sup> Partnership Agreement between the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, USA and the Verband Region Stuttgart, Federal Republic of Germany, signed 31 March 2004 in Stuttgart and Annandale.

<sup>20</sup> The level of preciseness is also expressed in the written objectives of the Missions. E.g. Wisconsin Bavaria 2004 Delegation’s Mission was to: “explore and understand Bavaria’s Policies and practices that take the long view in cooperatively promoting environmental excellence, economic growth and healthy communities;” and “to apply the lessons in areas of interest to the delegation using the Green Tier law, which is modeled after the Bavaria Pact, and other innovative approaches”.

Waterfront Initiative<sup>21</sup>. Several experts note however, that the information flows during short term visits are very much biased towards the visitors. Usually, there is not sufficient time to discuss environmental policies of the visitors' country.<sup>22</sup>

- **Longer Visits** for a number of days or a week are generally seen as a very productive method for exchange. Before the visit, there is often communication about the selection of issues of particular interest. Both the Wisconsin and Bavaria and the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart partnerships gathered extensive experiences in longer visits. The success of these exchanges is expressed by the fact that both aforementioned partnerships continued to organize longer visits. According to all participants this kind of exchange is very well suited for transatlantic environmental policy learning, as there is sufficient time to understand the characteristics and challenges of the hosting countries, to experience first hand the implementation of innovative methodologies and best practices, as well as to discuss open questions with the partners. Moreover, the exchange within the delegation itself and the dynamics of relationships between different stakeholders are also seen as major benefits. To cite Mr. Gibb, the NVRC's Executive Director, "This was the best experience of my entire career"<sup>23</sup>.
- As part of long-term visits but also as single events, **Workshops and Case Studies** are frequently regarded as one of the best methodologies for learning from each other. For instance, the city of Baltimore presented to its partners on the land-use planning in the Chesapeake Bay area, after which they together brainstormed about how to modify Maryland's land-use plan. As part of their first longer visit to Germany, the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart had a two-day retreat to identify issues of common interest, as well as opportunities for exchange and methods of cooperation. Providing both partners with a better understanding of the counterpart's expectations, the workshop was assessed as highly beneficial in this early phase of the partnership.
- Yet another method employed for transatlantic exchange is the organization of **conferences**. As part of the Wisconsin Bavaria Partnership a conference on new approaches to regulatory innovation was organized.<sup>24</sup> The NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart also plan to organize a conference on "Regional Planning for Competitiveness and Livability" in the near future. However, numerous exchanges through conferences take place outside of

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<sup>21</sup> More Information available at: <http://www.anacostiawaterfront.net>.

<sup>22</sup> As mentioned above, based on unsatisfactory experiences with short term delegations, the NVRC decided to establish a long-term partnership with a regional entity. See chapter 3.2 Establishment of the Partnership.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with the NVRC, Annandale Virginia, 28 April 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Information on the speakers and the program of the conference are available at: <http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/research/environmentalpolicy>

- formal partnerships. International conferences represent an opportunity frequently employed by individual experts to raise travel funding for travel abroad or to invite foreign speakers in order to exchange views on environmental policy issues.
- Telecommunications, including phone, internet, email and video conferences, play an important role in the cooperation at the subnational level. Several experts mentioned that one of the major benefits of transatlantic partnerships is to have the opportunities to informally ask foreign experts for suggestions and advice on short notice. Characterized by its low price and the fact that time difference does not play a major role, email exchanges seem to have become the method most frequently employed for this task.<sup>25</sup> However, the University of Madison organized for example a video conference. Yet another possibility is exchange via the internet. For instance, the North Eastern Environmental Taskforce, an environmental NGO based in Chicago, downloaded pictures and articles from the EPA's Gateway to International Best Practices and Innovation<sup>26</sup> to support their ambition to protect a steel mill as a heritage site. The internet was also used to gather ideas and inspiration for the management of such heritage sites.
  - For individual experts there are a number of opportunities for transatlantic exchanges on environmental issues through **Working Exchanges, Fellowships or Scholarships**.<sup>27</sup> Remarkably, most partnerships have thus far not considered taking advantage of these opportunities. As a result, most individuals who carry out research or exchange on environmental issues seem to do so without the framework of a transatlantic partnership.<sup>28</sup> The notable exception is the NVRC, which considered sending someone to gather work experience with their German partners. However, the exchange did not materialize. One of the reasons might be the language barrier, as the staff of the NVRC does not speak German – the working language at the Verband Region Stuttgart. However, there might be a less significant language barrier for partners coming to the U.S..

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<sup>25</sup> Some partnerships, such as the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart, are in touch on a weekly basis.

<sup>26</sup> See: <http://www.epa.gov/innovation/international>.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance the American Council on Germany <http://www.acgusa.org>; the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies <http://www.aicgs.org>; Robert Bosch Stiftung <http://www.bosch-stiftung.de>; Fulbright Scholar Program <http://www.cies.org/> and others.

<sup>28</sup> In the cases analyzed in this study, the only working exchange took place between Hamburg and the D.C. office for Planning. Apparently, the Sister City Partnership between Chicago and Hamburg was not a decisive factor in the selection of a hosting partner for the expert from Hamburg.



### 3.5 Participants in the Cooperation

Actors involved in the partnership and actively participating in the exchanges depend only to a limited degree on the methodology used for exchange. Broadly speaking, all actors, from NGOs to local activists, businesses, academia, labor and policy making are represented in transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level. However, the range of actors taking part in **longer visits** and their working level differ from partnership to partnership.

- In regard to **different stakeholders** taking part in longer visits, a former partnership between Maryland and other states in Germany and Japan was equally composed of environmental policy makers, economic groups, labor and academia. Wisconsin's delegations to Germany were also composed of a large number of stakeholders, including senators, policy makers from the Department of Environmental Protection, business associations from the building, energy and printing industry, as well as environmental NGOs and individuals from academia. While participants of the NVRC's delegation to Germany were also diverse in character, the vast majority were policy makers from the NVRC and members of its board of directors.
- Not only the selection of stakeholder groups but also the **working level of the participants** varies between delegations on longer visits. Interestingly, one partnership experienced that participants during the second, longer visit worked at a lower level than had the participants of the first delegation. While the first exchange included presidents of banks, foundations and universities as well as secretaries of state departments, some stakeholders delegated down the opportunity to take part in the second exchange. As a result, the delegation became more heterogeneous in regard to the working level, which made the partners' search for suitable contact persons more challenging. Also, attracting funding for further visits became more difficult. Conversely, based on the success of the first long visit to Stuttgart and an increased interest in the partnership, the NVRC's second delegation to the Verband Region Stuttgart was composed of experts and decision makers from a higher working level. This facilitated both the implementation of best practices in Northern Virginia and the attracting of further financial support for the exchange.

In most cases the **selection of participants** was done on the basis of existing networks and personal relations. Often, the final approval of the official delegation is with the governor. Interestingly, the NVRC delegated the selection of the participants to the mayors of its counties. Given the high interest in the partnership and the exchange, a large number of mayors used the opportunity to participate themselves.

### 3.6 Financing of Cooperation

Different activities need different types of financial support. While the expenses of email and phone exchanges are negligible, the resources needed to organize longer visits or conferences are noteworthy:

- Most partnerships point to **Limited Financial Resources** for the organization of travels and visits. While the time for the organization of and the participation in exchanges is usually provided by the employing authority, subnational entities usually lack the resources for international activities. Funds for international exchange fostering business and economic development are the exception. As a result, environmental aspects are sometimes integrated into visits that mainly focus on economic development. For instance, New Jersey's governor was part of an economic development delegation when he learned more about environmental policy making in the Netherlands and decided to pursue the establishment of a transatlantic environmental partnership.
- To cover the travel and accommodation costs, many partnerships attract **Private or Business Donations**. Although the participants of the NVRC's delegations and Wisconsin's delegation to Bavaria covered their own costs, the financing of personal travel costs can constitute a major impediment for certain groups, such as those from civil society. Moreover, these groups rely on support from independent sources. As a result, even if business groups offer to sponsor NGO participation, it may be difficult for NGOs to accept this funding as their work relies to a large extent on financial and political independence.
- Aside from the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**, which has a limited amount of funding available to support international activities, **foundations** play an important role in the funding of exchange visits. Most of the delegations that embarked on visits received support from foundations, such as the German Marshall Fund, the Heinrich Boell Foundation or The American Council on Germany. Also, the U.S. Embassy in Berlin participated in this financial support. However, in recent years funding opportunities through these institutions has become scarce. For instance, the EPA's international program was significantly reduced and almost the entire environmental program of the German Marshall Fund was brought to an end.

Generally, no partnership possesses institutionalized funding for exchanges or conferences. Therefore, financing is sought on a case-by-case basis. However, the NVRC points to the fact that the costs of exchanges are frequently overestimated, as most lunches and dinners are sponsored by local business or authorities. In fact, a one-week visit to Germany cost each NVRC delegation participant about 2,000 U.S. Dollars.



### 3.7 Environmental Issue Areas

Generally, transatlantic partnerships cooperate on a wide variety of issue areas, such as education, business, culture, social and environmental issues. However, apart from the notable exception of Chicago and Hamburg, all partnerships analyzed within this study exchanged views explicitly on environmental issues among other topics.

The selection of issues to be addressed is mainly done through the identification of common challenges at the state, regional, and local levels, where practitioners foresee mutual benefits as a result of transatlantic exchange. In most cases, exchanges concentrated on a number environmental problems and challenges:

- Several partnerships gave a priority to **smart growth and Brownfield redevelopment**. The issues of smart growth, revitalization of city centers and Brownfield redevelopment played fundamental roles in the formation of the partnership between Maryland and Schleswig-Holstein. Also, given New Jersey's population density and the Netherlands' experiences, smart growth was seen as an issue important to both parties. Social and Environmental challenges within the area of urban planning, including Brownfield redevelopment, were also at the center of the working cooperation between Jerelyn Perine and Karsten Gerckens.<sup>29</sup>
- **Green rooftops** were the only environmental issue dealt with so far in the Chicago Hamburg Sister City Partnership. However, green rooftops and other infrastructure to minimize, absorb and cleanse storm water runoff were also of interest in the partnership between Wisconsin and Bavaria. **Energy efficient buildings** were seen as one particularly interesting issue in the New Jersey – Netherlands Partnership.
- To exchange information at a more detailed level, a number of partnerships spent some time on the **specific challenges** they face. For example, Maryland had the opportunity to present its land-use planning in the Chesapeake Bay area and to discuss challenges and opportunities with German colleagues, whereas the Germans were interested to learn more about a program of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the enhanced use of the internet for the participation and involvement of grassroots organizations.<sup>30</sup>
- The New Jersey – Netherlands partnership was initially intended to embark on **emissions trading** between both state entities. The project made significant progress, including the stated interest of a Dutch company to buy emission certificates from a counterpart in New Jersey. However, when the

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<sup>29</sup> In fact, the working relationship between Ms. Perine and Mr. Gerckens started during a delegation of international practitioners to Germany on the issue of brownfield redevelopment. During one of the meetings Karsten Gerckens explicitly asked for examples of shrinking cities outside Germany.

<sup>30</sup> Information about the Chesapeake Bay Foundation at <http://www.cbf.org>.

Bush administration officially rejected the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, less politically sensitive issues were sought for further cooperation.

- **Public environmental policies and corporate governance** were at the center of the exchanges between Wisconsin and Bavaria. Issues discussed were the substitution of regulatory policies through the application of credible environmental management systems, different approaches and systems for achieving pollution prevention and control, as well as environmental benchmarking, NO<sub>x</sub> control and decisions on energy mix.

This list, however, is not exclusive. Partnerships and cooperations exchanged views and experiences on the entire environmental agenda, ranging from sustainable agriculture to environmental justice, river restoration, traffic calming, supply chain environmental management and waste management and recycling. Also, the deepening of relations through academic cooperation and opportunities for further cooperation through sustainable community partnerships were discussed.

### 3.8 Impact of Subnational Cooperation

The impacts of transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level are numerous, ranging from new ideas for projects to the adoption of new legislation, reflection on existing environmental policies, increased effectiveness and enhanced self-esteem. In fact, there are so many impacts that the following list only represents a very limited selection of examples. Instead of going into detail addressing what specific results were achieved, an overview is given on how broad and manifold the impacts are:

- Some of the strongest impacts of transatlantic exchanges are **inspirations from best practices**, including projects, policies as well as methodologies and approaches to policy making. For instance, the NVRC had only modest expectations for the partnership before embarking on the exchanges. In the end, however, participants were overwhelmed by the amount of information and lessons learned during their visits. While the best practice examples are certainly not always directly transferable, they nevertheless give an important stimulus for the setting of higher environmental goals. An example for this kind of inspiration is the visit of Wisconsin's delegation to an environmentally-friendly power plant, which operates in the city center of Berlin. None of the members of the delegation had imagined it possible to operate an energy plant in an urban area without major environmental conflicts. Given the fact that Wisconsin might have to construct a new power plant in the near future, the visit was used to learn more about the abatement of noise and other emissions, internal management (including software) and public relations (information centers and information for the general public). The list of similar experiences is extensive.

- Not all best practices merely remain ideas. A number of **realized projects and environmental policies** can be traced directly back to transatlantic cooperation at the subnational level. Specific examples are green rooftops in Chicago, which were built following a visit of Chicago's mayor to Hamburg. Also, techniques of Sydney's stadium's water supply and sanitation, which is fully integrated into the public space, were integrated into the planning of a new Stadium in Washington D.C. as part of the Anacostia Riverfront project. Traffic calming in Arlington was a direct result of the exchange between the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart. In respect to policy making, Wisconsin's entire green tier legislation was modeled after the Bavarian Pact<sup>31</sup>.
- The participation of decision makers, such as senators, secretaries of state departments or mayors, but also representatives of groups not usually associated with environmental policies, such as business associations, led to a **new and increased interest in environmental policies**. Also, the lesson of learning from abroad led to a paradigm shift in a number of institutions.
- New Jersey was inspired by the Netherlands about how to **report on policy making** to the public. Ever since the exchange, New Jersey's DEP has reported in a more holistic way on its environmental achievements and remaining challenges, emphasizing the interlinkages between ecosystems. Wisconsin benefited from the symbol and the slogan of "self-responsibility", which helped to facilitate public understanding of the concept and to gather political support.
- All partnerships which organized visits to the partners report that an extraordinary **transformation of the relationship among different stakeholders** took place. All participants testify that one of the major benefits from the visits was the new working atmosphere after the return. Based on the knowledge of the partners and the more private interaction during the visit, partners were more willing to listen to different opinions and were able to work more closely and productively regardless of political affiliations or beliefs.<sup>32</sup> This observation can also be made when foreign experts come to workshops on highly debated issues. For instance, a German expert brought to a local workshop on the redevelopment of a brewery in New Brunswick, New Jersey, changed the entire atmosphere of the event. Comparable to a guest at a family dinner, his presence alone

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<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.stmugv.bayern.de/de/wirtschaft/index.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> An example of this new trust and spirit of cooperation might be the new form of building permits in Wisconsin. After the trip it was discovered that the building association's real problem was not the unnecessarily high environmental standards, but the large amount of time required to get a building permit. To speed up the process, EIAs were outsourced to the building industry, which was regulated, however, with strict quality conditions, monitoring requirements and high penalties. In the end, all benefited from this solution: The DEP has more resources for quality control, while the permitting process takes less time.

brought about a friendlier and more objective interaction between all participants present. Common verbal attacks were avoided and participants began to leave their entrenched positions.

- Yet another important issue is that international exchanges force participants to **reflect upon their own work**. Experts participating in exchanges are often asked to explain their ongoing activities in a holistic and general way. In contrast to their daily activities, they are forced to recall the initial objective of the project and the reason behind it. This often contributes to a productive reassessment of day-to-day work. Also, the preparations of exchanges and the search for best practices stimulates internal discussions about personal work and performance.
- Last but not least, transatlantic environmental cooperation can **contribute to increased self-esteem and a better working atmosphere**. For participants it is often satisfying to see that other states struggle with similar environmental problems and that there are no quick fixes. Also appreciated is of course the fact that delegations make the effort to travel across the Atlantic to learn from each other.

### 3.9 Reporting on Exchanges and their Impacts

Interest in the experiences gained from environmental cooperations is high. This is expressed in the number of staff members that wish to participate in all forms of exchanges, not only visits but also presentations, conferences and workshops. To facilitate further dissemination of information, partnerships report their activities in different ways:

- **Internal and external presentations** about lessons learned are a method frequently used to disseminate information and to discuss the results of exchanges. This kind of reporting is used by most partners involved in transatlantic environmental cooperation.
- Partnerships that participate in longer visits or organize conferences or workshops usually write **reports** about these activities. Examples include a report from the exchange between the NVRC and the Verband Region Stuttgart<sup>33</sup> and the close out report of the first phase of the partnership between Wisconsin and Bavaria<sup>34</sup>.
- Some participants of delegations also wrote **papers and other forms of publications**. However, this is mainly done on a case-by-case base. As a result, there is only a limited amount of published information available on the partnerships. However, some partnerships were successful in achieving coverage in the **local media**.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.novaregion.org/pdf/GermanRptFinal.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/cea/bavaria/phase1/closeout.pdf>.

- Also, many partnerships state the intention to use the **Internet** to make the partnerships and their activities better known. However, apart from the EPA Gateway to International Best Practices and Innovation website, which gives a general overview of activities and impacts, the only partnership with detailed website coverage is Wisconsin – Bavaria.

Partnerships generally use a number of different opportunities to inform other experts and the general public about their activities and their impacts. However, one can observe that there is **no specific strategy for information dissemination**. Notably, one partnership stated that there was little intention to disseminate information about the exchanges. In fact, the annual report did not mention a visit to Germany, as some officials in the Department were concerned about being forced to justify that travels to Germany are in the best interest of the State.

## 4 Challenges and Opportunities for Transatlantic Cooperation

Partnerships surveyed in this study are heterogeneous, varying on several issues. They involve different policy levels, geographical scopes and actors. Moreover, they use different methods for exchange and even have different objectives. Consequently, general comparisons and conclusions are transferable only to a limited degree. However, it was not within the scope of the study to generate conclusions that are applicable to all transatlantic environmental cooperations at the subnational level. Rather, this study attempts to identify innovative methods for policy learning and opportunities in order to render them more effective. Therefore, the following gives an overview of the challenges subnational partnerships face and the opportunities they have for becoming even more effective.

### 4.1 Challenges

After analyzing the selected case studies, a number of challenges were pointed out that transatlantic environmental partnerships and cooperations at the subnational level face:

- A large number of partnerships and cooperations pointed to the fact that **funding for transatlantic environmental exchange is scarce**. As foundations scale down their support for transatlantic environmental exchanges, private or business sources are looked to more frequently for financing. However, this might pose a problem for certain actors, such as civil society groups that do not possess the necessary funds to participate in costly exchanges but do not want to undermine their credibility by accepting money from businesses with specific political interests.
- Yet another challenge is the **prejudice** that exchanges, and in particular visits, constitute mainly a private pleasure and bring about only limited

- benefits for the home state. Moreover, people frequently believe that best practice examples are not transferable. For lack of understanding, there is the prejudice that European environmental policies generally interfere in the market and thus impede economic development.
- A number of partnerships see the potential of becoming **unbalanced**. This regards less the potential to learn from each other than the means to organize the cooperation. Some European partners, in particular states, have more resources than their transatlantic counterparts to engage in international exchanges. Also, the language was seen by some partnerships as a challenge. While Europeans were usually able to read and speak English, many visitors from the U.S. were not able to communicate in their partner's language.
  - One of the biggest challenges seen is the issue of **succession of active individuals**. As mentioned in Chapter 3.2, "Establishment of the Partnership", a large number of cooperations trace back to personal relations and friendships. In addition, the activities of all cooperations rely to a very large degree on the commitment of individuals that work to provide the partnerships with content. Therefore, it is difficult to sustain the level of cooperation if people actively involved in the exchanges, who are often also the initiators of the partnership, leave the office or switch jobs.
  - **A change in government or political leadership** may also present a challenge. In particular, some partnerships were scaled down after a change in the administration. Without the support from the new governor and with parts of the staff leaving, it became difficult to continue the recently launched exchanges. However, other partnerships, which had already proven to be successful, were able to continue their work under different administrations.

## 4.2 Opportunities

Transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level entails a number of opportunities. The following are a number of possible avenues:

- Expand the number of partnerships by **bringing in new actors and creating new partnerships**. This is particularly true for entities which work on similar environmental problems, but have gathered different experiences. For example the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCE) has a long history of emissions trading. However, there is no active exchange between the CCE and the newly created European Emission Trading Schemes and their trading platforms. In fact, the development of different and perhaps even incompatible systems within the U.S. and the EU could be avoided.
- Given the fact that, despite differences in the legal systems and applications across the Atlantic, best practices and innovation in regard to planning and development policy, new technologies, voluntary approaches,



and pilot projects are highly transferable, there is wide scope to exchange information on **additional environmental issues**. Topics mentioned during the interviews were numerous. New Jersey stated interest in learning about impact assessments on offshore wind energy, and Chicago might benefit from Hamburg's experiences in renewable energies, as it is considering setting up a wind park. Another example is New York, which might potentially benefit from the experiences made with congestion pricing in London or the road toll system in Germany. The U.S. partners thought that public information policies<sup>35</sup> or standards on certain substances, such as mercury<sup>36</sup>, could be of particular interest for their European partners.

- Given the different experiences among the partnerships analyzed in this study, it appears that exchanges can be made **more effective**. A repeated statement was that it is important to identify specific issues and to exchange views not only on the projects or policies as such, but also on their planning and creation processes. The utilization of workshops or cooperation on specific environmental issues, such as a land-use plan, might be promising in this respect. Yet another possibility for increasing the impact might be to include high-level decision makers in exchanges. In particular, the NVRC considers the integration of high-level politicians to be crucial in gaining sufficient support to implement innovative projects and policies upon return.
- The use of **monitoring systems and evaluation schemes** can contribute to rendering partnerships more effective and to internally and externally justifying the effort and financial means invested. Thus far, most partnerships have used only informal feed-backs to enhance the quality and the impact of their cooperation. Positive results of these schemes would prove beneficial for attracting political and financial support for the partnerships. In fact, Chicago's Sister Cities International Program is considering the establishment of an internal evaluation scheme for its various Sister Cities programs and their respective committees.
- Thus far there has been only limited **reporting of the impacts of the partnerships**. Documented results, for example on how improved environmental protection was achieved without losing competitiveness, would certainly make the argument for transatlantic environmental cooperation stronger.

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<sup>35</sup> Guarantees to decide on applications for building permits within a limited time had the potential to cause an imbalance in information levels. While industry was able to plan for a number of years, public authorities and environmental groups had only very limited time to work on the issues. To better balance the information, industry agreed to open up their sources and to provide free access to their information. In addition, one company provided funds to an NGO to hire an independent consultant. The cooperation led to a faster decision on the application because potential conflicts were identified very early in the planning stage.

<sup>36</sup> While European countries focus very much on the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the U.S. is more active in regulating mercury pollution.

- An increase in the **dissemination of information on the partnerships and their impacts** should present an opportunity to make the benefits of transatlantic cooperation at the subnational level more widely known. In addition, it might contribute to an exchange between different partnerships or facilitate the creation of new ones. Modern information technologies, in particular the internet, could support this ambition.
- An enhanced **coordination of different initiatives** within the geographical scope of the partnership might lead to spill-over effects and strengthen the partnership. Frequently, a focal point that coordinates all international initiatives that take place within a region, city or state is lacking. For example, student or working exchanges could be used to bolster the environmental partnership.
- The **use of existing institutions** might prove beneficial to increasing the exchange on environmental issues across the Atlantic. For instance, there are numerous sister cities programs<sup>37</sup>, but many of these do not yet include exchanges on environmental issues.
- While it might prove difficult to coordinate the timing of the creation of partnerships, it might be beneficial to launch these initiatives at an **early stage of the election cycle**. In so doing, there would be more time to demonstrate the benefits of transatlantic exchanges, before the administration and the political support might change. However, a stronger involvement of the community and civil society groups could also increase the likelihood for enduring cooperation.

## 5 Conclusions and Questions for further research

The study clearly demonstrates the numerous benefits from transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level. Numerous partnerships have successfully exchanged views on how to best address environmental problems and sustainable development issues that are faced by both sides of the Atlantic at the local and regional level. Testimony to this is given by legislation, implemented projects and transferred ideas. Moreover, there are several intangible benefits of these exchanges, such as better cooperation among different stakeholders, enhanced working atmosphere or self-reflection of work. However, the study also confirmed challenges and impediments to exchanges at this level. Moreover, it seems that there is little guidance on how to best organize and institutionalize these exchanges, not only at the national level but also within the different organizations. Therefore, it might be assumed that there is potential for even more effective and efficient partnerships and exchanges on environmental issues.

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<sup>37</sup> For a list of sister cities registered with Sister Cities International see: <http://www.sister-cities.org/icrc/directory/index>.



Partnerships can learn from each other both in terms of content and in terms of organization, fund seeking and communication.

Given the large variety of different partnerships investigated, each with a unique setting and particular characteristics, the study certainly entails a number of inspirations and potential good practices examples. However, it does not identify the “magic wand” which is able to enhance the effectiveness of all partnership at the same time. Indeed, the next step in the direction of enhanced transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level should comprise further research and investigation on a number of critical issues:

- Partnerships consist of at least two parties. Therefore, a **balanced view** on all parties involved is crucial. However, this report looked exclusively at the American members of transatlantic partnerships. As a result, a first logical step would be to approach the German side as well to increase the knowledge about the German partners’ objectives, benefits and challenges.
- Given the large variety of different partnerships, a **more systematic approach for analysis** is needed to get a better understanding of the functioning of subnational partnerships. Issues to be considered should not be limited to the areas touched upon in this report, but should also entail issues areas such as the election cycle, the monitoring of impacts or the evaluation of the effectiveness of partnerships.
- Detailed **case studies** on the impacts of partnerships should prove to be beneficial in giving a first evaluation of the different aspects of transatlantic environmental partnerships at the subnational level.
- A more intensive dialogue and exchange between several partnerships could launch a process of self-reflection and optimization. Therefore, **institutionalization of exchange among partnerships** should be a question for further research. In particular, it would be of interest to what extent existing institutions, such as ICLEI or Sister Cities, can contribute to such a process. Also, it could be looked at how to support the integration of environmental issues into existing partnerships that have not yet touched upon environmental issues.
- Generally, there is no institution or central body which frames transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level. This leads to little awareness about the number of programs and funds providing support for transatlantic exchange, as well as under-exploited potential for synergies. A more centralized structure might prove beneficial by acting as a **central information hub**, such as an internet portal, or by supporting the creation of a **network of environmental experts** interested in transatlantic exchange. Moreover, such a new body could also contribute to mitigating the problem of succession and thus facilitate the creation of long-term partnerships.

- Yet another question arises in regard to **feedback into national and international policy making**. The identification of common solutions to environmental problems at the state and local level might contribute to finding common ground and developing common positions at the national level as well as in international relations. It should be investigated if there are examples in which policy learning at the subnational level successfully influenced policy making at the national or international level.

This list is only the beginning of possible questions for investigation. I am looking forward to my own and others' research in this field and hope that it contributes to successful transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level.

## **6 Annex**

### **6.1 Questionnaire**

The following represents a rough overview of the issues I intend to cover during the interview. However, I am curious to learn generally more about environmental policy learning in the United States and am looking forward to including further issue areas for discussion that seem of importance to you.

#### **Establishment of the Partnership**

- When was the partnership established?
- What situation / contact led to the creation of the partnership?
- How was the partnership established?
- Was there any help from foundations etc. to get it off the ground?

#### **Objectives of the partnership**

- What issue areas were covered within the partnership?
- What was seen as most promising?
- What roles do environmental issues play?

#### **Methods of Learning**

- What means of policy learning were used (Workshop, internet, exchanges etc.)
- What persons and departments were involved in the processes?

#### **Impact of subnational partnership**

- What explicit lessons/policies were learned?
- Was the impact evenly distributed among the partners?

#### **Dissemination of information and best practices**

- Where there requests for information from other subnational entities?
- Were there active attempts to disseminate the information to other subnational actors?
- By what means?

#### **Evolution of the partnership**

- Did the partnership evolve over time?
- Did actors change (partners/departments etc.)?
- Were new issue areas included?