Title: European Walled Towns: Sanctuaries of Peace and Dynamic Regenerated Hubs

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European Walled Towns: Sanctuaries of Peace and Dynamic Regenerated Hubs

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Abstract: For almost 25 years, the international not-for-profit association known as European Walled Towns (EWT), has been working to promote renewal, regeneration and sustainable development across Europe's most historic Walled Towns and fortified cities. Originally established as an international forum, EWT has grown into pan-European network of member towns drawn together by professional co-operation and mutual interest. One of the primary objectives of EWT is to support Walled Towns and their history, while also assisting them to meet the functional demands of the present day. Another objective is to establish projects that facilitate the exchange of knowledge, drive innovation and change, and generate research funds. The association has developed projects and participated in various European Union (EU) funded projects inquiring into the potential opportunities for, and threats to, Walled Towns. Although EWT's 100 members share common goals, their diverse and unique characteristics present significant challenges to developing common understandings of 'best practice', including, planning and conservation. Recently, EWT became a signatory to the UN Global Compact Cities Programme with the intent of extending its potential, not only in the realm of research but, also, to consolidate the principle of sustainable development, regeneration and conservation. This paper looks at the various research projects, in which EWT is currently engaged, and highlights examples of various Walled Towns driving change, innovation and regeneration.

Keywords: Regeneration, Walled Cities, UNESCO, Best Practice projects

1. Introduction

For almost 25 years, the international not-for-profit association known as European Walled Towns (EWT) has been working to promote renewal, regeneration and sustainable development across Europe's most historic Walled Towns and fortified cities. Originally established as an international forum, the EWT has since developed into a significant pan-European network of 100 towns across 20 countries, focused on professional cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the funding of research. One of the primary objectives of EWT is to support Walled Towns and their history while also assisting them to meet their present day functional demands. One of the primary objectives of EWT is to support Walled Towns and their history, while also assisting them to meet the functional demands of the present day. Another objective is to establish projects that facilitate the exchange of knowledge, drive innovation and change, and generate research funds. Indeed, thanks to European Union (EU) funding, the EWT has been actively engaged in a series of research projects and programs.

These programs not only offer benchmarking studies for the purposes of planning and regeneration, but also work to forge new alliances and adaptive capacities so as to assist towns meet the demands of an ever-changing economic environment, and cope with global market pressures. Critically, the work of the EWT is underpinned by a desire to retain both the character and these historic towns and cities.

Although EWT members share common goals, their diverse and unique characteristics present significant challenges to developing common understandings of 'best practice', including, planning and conservation. Recently, EWT became a signatory to the UN Global Compact Cities Programme (UNGCCP) with the intent of extending its potential, not only in the realm of research but, also, to consolidate the principle of sustainable development, regeneration and conservation. This paper traces the development of EWT and considers the various projects that the association and its members have been engaged in. In so doing its highlights examples of various Walled Towns driving change, innovation and regeneration.

2. The development of European Walled Towns

The EWT (then called the Walled Towns Friendship Circle, WTFC) was founded in Tenby (South Wales) in 1989. Initially, the EWT was established as an International Forum to promote the many mutual interests shared by Walled Towns in Europe. Through *The Piran Declaration of 1998* the EWT evolved to include shared values and an appreciation of their collective and historical significance,

> 'Walled Towns are unique inheritances from times long past and should be treasured, maintained and safeguarded from neglect and destruction and passed on to perpetuity as irreplaceable Time-stones of History' (European Walled Towns 2012).

The Piran Declaration also provided a mission to conserve these heritage systems for future generations similar to that of the UNESCO *World Heritage Convention*. The Declaration was the first step toward establishing a pan-European network of Walled Towns, which in different ways, necessitated a range of interventions across conservation, restoration, rehabilitation and regeneration to survive (due to present and future economic, socio-cultural and urban development pressures) (European Walled Towns 2012).

The Canterbury Accord of 2008 was a further step in catalyzing this network of towns into a more formal body or as defined in the accord, 'an unincorporated association' operating under the law of England and Wales. The accord also formulated a constitution based on the principle of democratic accountability and solidarity. Ratified in September 2012, the main aim of the accord was to promote the many mutual interests shared by Walled Towns throughout the world. Although originating in Europe, the EWT does not preclude membership from outside Europe and now has members outside the political boundaries of Europe (European Walled Towns 2012).

The constitution, as prescribed by the *Canterbury Accord* together with its key objectives and activities, reveal a network whose mission lay well beyond that of a Friendship Circle. As a result, the association of towns is forward-looking and conservation focused while at the same time seeking to set the parameters for sustainable development and regeneration. Moreover, those members of the network, who were present at the signing, are now seeking

active cooperation. These are significant developments on *Piran* which, considered and emphasized mostly the 'safeguarding of Walled Towns from neglect and destruction' (European Walled Towns 2012).

2.1 The objectives and activities of EWT

The EWT Constitution acknowledges the desire of its members to exchange knowledge, history and culture for the purposes of developing open cities rather than enclosed or segregated enclaves. It also recognizes that Walled Towns are themselves under siege due to a lack of military activity. The paradox is that in peacetime the defensive walls are seen as obstacles to change rather than as vehicles for development. The challenge for EWT—in compiling these objectives and activities—lay in its ability to move away from 'survival schemes' in order to fuel a competitive and dynamic role in Europe's future development.

Table 1: Objectives listed in the EWT Constitution.

Objectives
To encourage friendship between the inhabitants of all ages in Walled Town communities
To support walled towns and their history in present day circumstances
To set up projects together to stimulate exchange and generate European and other funds
To convene regular symposia in member towns
To develop common strategies for proper methods of planning and conserving historic towns and their environmental context
To enlarge the network of members
To exchange knowledge and experience in many fields

Source: European Walled Towns (2012)

The principle objective of EWT still supports friendship between citizens and communities however, its also seeks to stimulate projects and symposia around ways to conserve history while simultaneously adapting to 'present day circumstances'. The most significant objectives however, promote direct participation, and support networks that facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange (particularly around planning and conservation). This may also be achieved through the generation of European funds. Indeed, these objectives truly indicate the intention of exceeding to European funded knowledge exchange programs. Similarly the activities in the EWT constitution are geared at the exchange of knowledge through professional cooperation; the organization of conferences, seminars, study tours and cultural events. Again an emphasis to support the listed objectives is set on the exchange of information through delegate visits, the circulation of newsletters and the establishment of a website. The association also seeks to develop and maintain a series of databases and communication networks. Crucially, and in the spirit of mutual cooperation, a significant number of EWT activities are geared toward 'developing and promoting common policies' even though there is significant diversity amongst the membership (EWT n.d.).

2.2   A knowledge-based economy and EWT

The principles of information transfer and exchange lay at the heart of cooperation in Europe and the EU. Indeed, the EU established these principles within its 'New Economy' policy framework in Lisbon. The summit was organized 'amidst growing awareness of the paradigm shift in the world economy driven by globalization and rapid technological development'. In Lisbon, Europe was setting a 'stable framework required for managing the structural changes involved in moving towards a knowledge-based economy'. One of the targets set was the establishment of a 'European Area of Research and Innovation' to develop the research community through high speed networks and mobility and ultimately encourage an exchange of experience (Single Market News 2000).

As a result of the summit, research and innovation is now supported by, and transmitted through, the EU funding system. It has been particularly important for programs focused on urban planning and development—such as the URBACT and INTERREG programs—which stimulate networks and projects catalyzing policy exchange and development. Although Walled Towns are unique there is thematic relevance, especially in re-proposing policy and adapting new policy in the realm of planning and redevelopment for towns in Europe. The unique characteristics of Walled Towns make them ideal candidates in planning policy development. The restrictions in spatial development, community and social segregation, dynamics in mobility and accessibility have proved to be recurrent themes for towns and cities in Europe and the solutions of some towns proved to be cardinal benchmarks. The EWT network therefore not only supports the European exchange of knowledge principle but also provides a forum and network which is ideal in benchmarking 'best practice' systems in planning for conservation.

Table 2: Activities listed in the EWT Constitution

Activities
Holding regular symposia
Organizing conferences, seminars and workshops
Holding cultural events
Organizing study tours
Commissioning research
Establishing working groups
Preparing reports and publications
Developing and promoting common policies
Disseminating information on a regular basis eg. newsletters and website
Maintaining contacts with the media
Facilitating staff exchanges and delegate visits
Establishing and maintaining up to date databases and communication networks
Producing an annual report.

Source: European Walled Towns (2012)

2.3   EWT and consolidating the network

The main challenge for Walled Towns, is managing the transition from inaccessible urban and at times, closed socio-economic communities, to open, culturally diverse and economically prosperous hubs. Over the last five years, EWT and its members have developed projects and participated in various EU funded research projects targeting the threats and possible opportunities which the future holds. Although EWT's 100 members share common goals, their diverse and unique characteristics present significant challenges to developing common understandings and strategies.
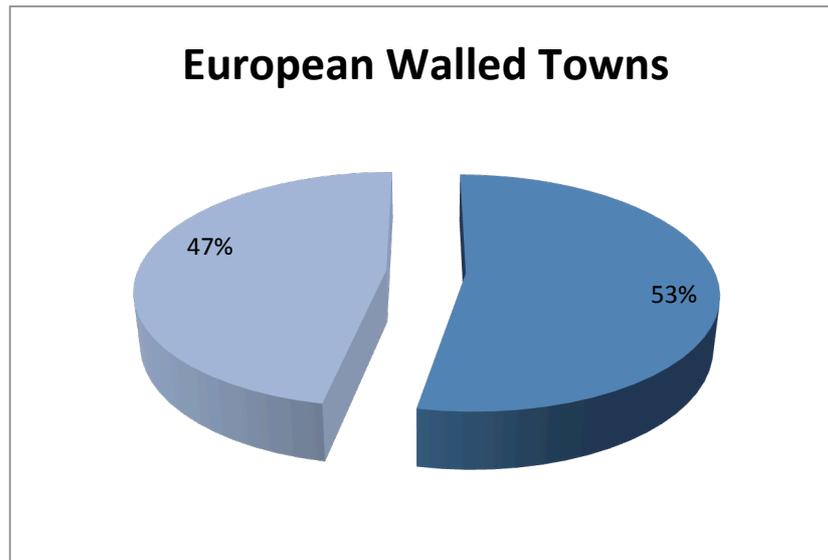

Figure 1: European Walled Towns, 47 per cent of European states
are represented in the association.

Despite this challenge, the association has been able to work toward one of its main targets, the enlargement of the network. Currently, the network represents 23 out of 49 states in the EU with membership varying in number from one up to 11 members per state. This is 47 per cent of the European continent and the association is heavily represented by the majority of the larger states as in the case of the United Kingdom, Spain, Netherlands and Turkey. Other states with a significant presence of fortified or Walled Towns are also highly represented. The smallest state in the European Union, Malta has four members as in the case of Italy and the Republic of Ireland. The membership criteria for towns are exclusively set to connect with active systems and therefore 'a town must be inhabited and have a significant portion of its wall intact and should be of historic interest to visitors and residents'. The network has developed and extends significantly through the associated members who are similar to corporate members or associations. These organizations represent other networks as in the case of the Irish Walled Towns, the Stichting Groene Hart (the Green Heart Foundation), the old Dutch Waterline and the Hispano-Portuguese organization Foro Iberico de Ciudades Amuralladas (FICAM). The latter has 47 member towns in Spain and Portugal.

Today, ten per cent of full EWT members are connected to sites that have global historical significance (ie. Sites of universal value). These Towns are either inscribed for their own merit as fortified cities (as in the case of Valletta (Malta), Dubrovnik (Croatia), St. Petersburg (Russia) and Elvas (Portugal)) or have been recognized by World Heritage classification (for

instance, Pecs (Hungry), Gradara (Italy), Egirdir (Turkey), Montreuil-Bellay (France)). Although other members of the association may not have been recognized as world heritage, these sites are usually of regional of national significance. Others are equally important because of their group value, as in the case of the Irish Walled Towns, the Dutch Old Water Line or the Maltese Harbour Fortifications.
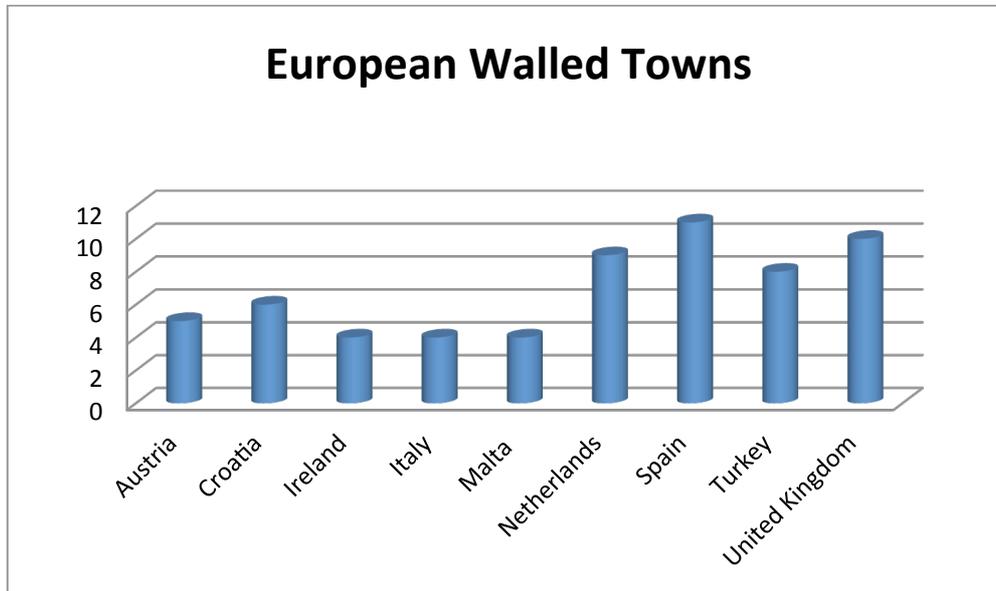
European Walled Towns

Figure 2: European Walled Towns, members with 4–11 towns in the association.

The network is as important not only for the heritage value the association represents but also because of the examples of restoration and regeneration, and equally for the 'best practice' projects developed through the years.

2.4   Implementing the EWT objectives

The EWT has rigorously maintained the objectives of the constitution, which binds its members together. Twenty-two years on from the inaugural meeting in Cardiff (1991) regular symposia and meetings continue to be held. Most are funded by the members themselves. These meetings have spurred on the development of new networks, which together, have been successful in attracting funding as well as further cooperation and engagement.

One EWTs most successful research projects is 'Archway'. Archway was developed under the INTERREG IIIC programme and launched in 2004 (Archway 2009). The INTERREG IIIC programme was financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). INTERREG IIIC seeks to strengthen economic and social cohesion across the European Union (EU) by promoting cross-border and interregional cooperation (INTERREG n.d.). Archway was developed to research access and regeneration of Cultural Heritage in Walled Towns. The scope of the project was to address the problem of developing 'vibrant modern environments within the constraints' imposed by Walled Towns. The project addresses the perennial problem of striking the right balance between encouraging development and finding ways of attracting more visitors without jeopardizing the distinctive nature of Walled Towns and cities. This research involved the analysis of a range of issues such as transport

development; spatial planning; conservation, protection, enhancement, and management of cultural heritage; and tourism development. Archway also addressed the improvement of access within and around Walled Towns for those with mobility problems (Archway 2009).

One of the most significant advantages to INTERREG funding (and most EU funded research programmes for that matter) is the framework in which the research is undertaken. Under INTERREG funding provisions, all projects must be structured in such a way that it facilitates an exchange of knowledge between the project team and the professional and academic bodies working in the field (INTERREG n.d.). Archway itself, held five sets of themed workshops that led to the publication of five separate 'best practice' guides dealing with particular topics, namely; spatial planning, transport, tourism development and management, cultural development and conservation. The partnership was also obliged to develop the website as a forum for developing, sharing and debating best practice. Broader results of the operation included, getting partners involved in an interregional learning experience and strengthening the policy settings for the EWT (Archway 2009).

In the long-term, the Archway project was intended to 'contribute to the sustainable and spatial development of Walled Towns and stimulate job creation, both within the towns and in the areas around them'. The total budget to finance Archway project was €792, 800 over three years with an ERDF contribution of around 60 per cent. Other contributions came directly from the partners. There were nine partners in total led by Chester City Council (Archway 2009).

Archway however, has not been the only project managed by EWT. Another project for instance, targeted a more innovative form of network development through TEKnet. The evolution of TEKnet came as a result of Archway and it established a database or portal for the 'sharing of information and skills among technicians, officers and managers of the EWT member towns and also the dissemination of knowledge amongst scholars, students and researchers'. Currently the host of TEKnet are the Spanish member towns. The principle was endorsed during the 2007 Plasencia Symposium. An additional research portal has been created by David M Bruce (forthcoming), the Academic Adviser to European Walled Towns for Friendship and Professional cooperation. This is open to members and academics or research students.

2.5 EU funded benchmark projects in research for regeneration

The members of EWT have also been actively engaged in research relating to regeneration. Indeed, five EWT administered projects (funded through EU programmes and agencies) are now considered benchmark projects and pilots for 'best practice'. These are outlined below.

Gemeente Hellevoetsluis (GH) (The Netherlands) has been heavily engaged in promoting its niche tourism based on the historical maritime fortifications. With the help of INTERREG funding, the North Sea Region Programme has been able to fully restore Fronts I and II. Wok on the nautical workcentre near the Drydock Jan Blanken has also been completed as has the reconstruction and rehabilitation areas of the harbour (sections dedicated for hosting historical ships and maritime events).

Valletta (Malta) has also been very active over the last five years as a result of INTERREG (Pagus), URBACT (Surch) and (Hero) funding. The Pagus project was significant in showcasing transit projects but was also used to create position papers for new transit projects

for Valletta. The project was developed in cooperation with the then Ministry of Urban Development of Roads. The URBACT projects—Surch and Hero—were innovative regeneration research programmes. In the former, research was directed at social inclusion partnerships through voluntary organizations in the city neighbourhoods. The Hero Action Plan sought to improve accessibility to the Marsamxett quarter in order to attract visitors as well as enhance cultural and economic activity. This project was funded by Cultural Heritage Integrated Management Plan (CHIMP) and the EU.

The local government in Lucca (Italy) participated in Energy efficiency in City Logistics Services for small and mid-sized European Historic Towns (ENCLOSE). Funded by Intelligent Energy Europe, this project sought to develop Sustainable Urban Logistics Plans (SULP) for small and medium sized historic towns in order to achieve significant reduction of energy and environmental impacts. One of the main initiatives focused on the applicability and benefits of energy-efficient and sustainable urban logistics measures specifically targeted to European towns through the implementation of 1. pilot operations in leading towns (in Italy, Norway and The Netherlands) and 2. the compilation of feasibility and transferability analysis in six towns in Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Rumania, Spain and the United Kingdom (Intelligent Energy Europe n.d.).

A project in the Austrian walled town of Friesach extended its tourism route beyond the city boundaries. Here, the Romanesque routes of European Heritage extend from Germany and link Austria to Slovenia and Italy. The Romanesque heritage assets form a cultural-tourist route. The initiative was part-funded by European funds and is currently a Major Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. This created an association of eight countries with the goal being the promotion of cultural heritage tourism through regional tourist boards (Romanesque Heritage n.d.).

Finally, a range of projects are underway in Nicosia, home of the last divided walled town in Europe. In Nicosia, a 'bufferzone' has divided the city in two for generations, resulting in separate and uneven levels of development—including differing levels of economic growth, social stability and urban texture. 'In 1979, representatives of the Greek and Turkish areas agreed on closer cooperation in preparing a common Master Plan'. The redevelopment plan is based on eight principles, which seek to regenerate the area in a sustainable and integrated way. Co-funded by the ERDF (approximately €39 million) and Republic of Cyprus, projects include, the restoration and re-use of historic buildings and façades, the upgrading the public utility infrastructure, and development of a public transportation system. These activities are supported by a range of social regeneration projects co-funded by the ESF (approximately €90,000) (European Urban Knowledge Network 2011).

2.6 Regeneration through redevelopment

The experience gained from transforming any town or city is highly valuable, let alone a Walled Town. The regeneration of Walled Towns from war machines to playgrounds or sanctuaries of peace is an intrinsic part of European history and heritage (as well as EWTs). Tourism and recreation are the contemporary tools by which the memory of war is reinterpreted and relived through an authentic fabric. A number of Walled Towns have a story to tell in the regeneration process, which may be deemed innovative in terms of re-inventing the ethos of the town.

In the United Kingdom there are two benchmark examples—Tenby and Chester—of these transformations and adaptations. Tenby is renowned for its 13th Century walled systems but in recent times, it has invested in developing its seaside tourism. Today, it is known, not only for its walls but also for its miles of European Blue Flag beaches. Chester also has long history in tourism however in 2002 it added to this heritage by being granted Fairtrade City status. This marked its potential as both a tourist venue and a socially powerful and progressive shopping hub.

Similarly, Valkenburg aan de Geul (The Netherlands) is becoming a shopping city with plans to build a new shopping centre with underground parking. The project will also focus on promoting and supporting smaller stores. Additionally, the shopping centre is seeking to become a pedestrian-friendly and wheelchair-friendly zone. Valkenburg aan de Geul is also a landmark for cycling tourism and sport, hosting the UCI Road Cycling World Championship and a stop on the Tour de France.

Other towns like Meppen (Germany) and Montreuil-Bellay (France) have been blessed by historical decisions, which have assisted their transformation. Meppen, in 1977, became the administrative seat of the newly formed district of Emsland. As part of the post-war, Marshall Plan, the American army converted 200 hectares in Montreuil-Bellay into an administrative hub. However in 1965 when the American troops left, the Mayor succeeded in buying back this property for the town. This area was then redeveloped into an economic space benefiting from a direct rail link to the national rail network. Today, the 'Méron Business Park' is one of the most active industrial sites in the area.

Elsewhere, the strategic introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) has contributed to many valuable, though less visible interventions for several Walled Towns. Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain) for instance, now hosts the Arabarri consortium, which manages the conservation and planning schemes of the Walled Towns of Alava. It also hosts TEKnet or TEKgate for the EWT.

2.7 Shape of things to come: Joining the UN Global Compact Cities Programme

The new president of EWT, Joseph Spiteri, appears to have taken up the baton of his former president by perusing a mission of knowledge exchange. Indeed, in the EWTs February newsletter he noted, 'We need to exchange ideas and explore how best we can work together. I intend to engage in discussion with you all, and give you the opportunity to let me know what you expect the EWT to do for your respective Cities …'. To this end, EWT recommended a decision to join UN Global Compact Cities Programme in May 2013. The new presidency also revived the necessity for the formation of consortia to re-apply for EU funding following the introduction of new themes based on the ten principles of the UN Global Compact Cities Programme. In so doing, the EWT is seeking to reposition itself within a global context while also reconstituting the Walled Town within the knowledge based economy. ICT, it is thought offers a range of regeneration possibilities and more eco-friendly solutions to re-launch walled cities as intelligent cities. Taking stock of the regeneration projects of the EWT members and the various 'best practice' projects will ultimately assist in forging principles and guidelines for Walled Towns to survive the pressures of economic and cultural change and the strains of global recession. The EWT is forging alliances to retain and maintain their character and keep pace with an ever-changing global dimension as sanctuaries of peace.

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