# Partner search from West Sweden

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| **Programme:** | Europe for Citizens Programme, Measure 1.2 Thematic Networking of Twinned Towns |
| **Deadline:** | 1st of September 2013 |
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| **Organisation:** | The Municipality of Falkenberg is situated on the west coast of Sweden. The municipality consists of the town of Falkenberg situated by the seaside, where more than half of the 41 000 inhabitants live, and a rural area that extends as far as 50 km to the east. The total surface area of the municipality is 1115 km2.The welcoming sea shores and the variety of rural surroundings make Falkenberg a popular summer resort. Besides tourism, the economy is also based on agriculture, forestry, small and middle range mechanical industry and commercial services.  While being a growth municipality in terms of population and economy, Falkenberg is faced with a number of challenges. Due to tourism, the number of inhabitants doubles during the summer months and activities such as summer theatre and festivals contribute to a vibrant town centre where retailers are busier than ever. During rest of the year the situation is however quite different. Falkenberg competes then for customers with external shopping centres and neighbouring cities offering a wider range of options with regards to retail and services. As a result, there is limited activity in the city centre outside summer season. Other challenges include the global one of an ageing population, which is augmented in Falkenberg by the fact that young people that leave the town to pursue higher education do not return after graduation. This is partly due to the low demand for highly skilled workforce among the traditional local industry. Compared to the national average, education level is therefore low.  The town is the main provider of public and private services within the municipality. The well-being and quality of life in the rural part of the municipality is therefore also dependent on the town’s attractiveness and sustainable development. An attractive and inclusive town draws new inhabitants, investments, new business and tourists. |
| **Project idea:** | Falkenberg Municipality is looking for European partners interested to participate in a project in the frame of the **Europe for Citizens Programme, Measure 1.2 Thematic Networking of Twinned Towns**. The project will aim to the exchange of experiences and knowledge on how to maintain, enhance and develop a small town centre.  An attractive town has a city centre which is welcoming, vibrant and well-kept. This as a whole strengthens the preconditions for development and growth and improves the satisfaction of inhabitants and visitors. A vibrant city centre is the result of a balance between the wishes and needs of the people living and working there, the selection of services provided and the state of the urban environment. These three components have to interact in order for the town to develop and maintain a vibrant city centre. Although a holistic approach is believed to be a premise for success, these three elements may also be addressed through separate actions.  With this project, Falkenberg aims to focus on the “people” aspect, i.e. on the dialogue with inhabitants, individual businessmen and concerned property owners. It is important that the wishes and concerns of the inhabitants are taken into account at an early stage as participation in the decision-making process leads to a raised sense of pride for inhabitants of the municipality and its city centre. This in turn increases the willingness of people to take responsibility and care of their city. Falkenberg is interested in further developing their methods to increase the participation of inhabitants, businesses and property owners in the decision-making process in the municipality. The municipality has already worked successfully with involving citizens in decision making and would therefore like to use citizen dialogue not only to an end in itself but also as a method to develop the two other areas explained below.    An attractive town also provides a wide range of services, including retailing, housing, offices, public services, restaurants, cafés and cultural offers that take place both indoors as well as in the public places. An important aspect is to develop a city centre that is lively even after working hours and throughout the year, which would benefit both inhabitants and visitors. Falkenberg is some way away from achieving this outside of the summer months and would like to have an exchange with other municipalities around how a town can retain and attract commercial services all to their centre.  Finally, an attractive town has an urban environment setting and a spatial planning, including the design of buildings, squares and streets, which enhance the strengths and qualities of the existing natural and built environment. Two examples in the case of Falkenberg are the river Ätran passing just by the city centre, and the “old town” both offering unexplored opportunities to enhance the attractiveness of the city centre. Falkenberg would therefore like to look at how to maximize the environmental strengths of a town through spatial planning.  Falkenberg is particularly interested in cooperating and sharing knowledge with other municipalities in Europe that are or have been in the same situation and have experience in developing a small town centre by actively involving the inhabitants and the local community. Falkenberg Municipality looks particularly forward to inspiring exchanges with towns having modern sustainable urban environments. The municipality is interested in learning about other good examples of different types of activities to boost the liveliness of a town centre, such as temporary installation (play, art, culture, sports, etc.), sustainable transport routes, parking, bicycle and walking paths and public transport. The latter focused on a small-scale city centre.  The activities carried out in the project would be:   * Study visits * Workshops * Lectures by researcher/experts * Seminars   If you find this proposal interesting, please do not hesitate to make contact for further details at latest the 18th of June. |
| **Partners searched:** | Falkenberg is looking for cities/municipalities with knowledge and experience on how to maintain, enhance and develop a vibrant city/town centre. Municipalities that harbour modern architecture in existing and older urban environments are of particular interest with different types of activities to boost the liveliness of a town centre, such as temporary installation (play, art, culture, sports, etc.), sustainable transport routes, parking, bicycle and walking paths and public transport. |
| **Key words:** | Vibrant city centre, attractive city, sustainable city centre, dialogue, involvement, urban environment |
| **Project period:** | March 2014 - September 2015 |