

1. Benefits that will likely accrue to the administrative area and the local community

At the administrative level, we would like to establish subject-specific exchanges in the different administrative areas. In doing so, both administrations can learn from each other and thus look beyond their own horizons. They can also develop new ideas in the area of implementing various topics as well as assistance in solving problems. County Waterford could therefore benefit from a twinning in the area of culture - such as the museums and cultural events - but also in the area of tourism in the case of an exchange. Similarly, we see excellent future-oriented administrative possible projects for County Waterford in the administrative areas of environmental and climate protection, which have development potential for both sides through joint exchanges.

Through a twinning with Märkischer Kreis, the citizens of County Waterford would have the opportunity to establish contact through clubs, schools and colleges. Getting to know each other's clubs can create closer ties within Europe. The people of both districts learn more about each other's lives and cultural customs, establishing tolerance, respect and friendship between the two nations. In the field of business, too, twinning relations with Märkischer Kreis would open up many new opportunities for County Waterford and its citizens.

Märkischer Kreis maintains twinning contacts with the district of Elbe-Elster in eastern Germany and with Powiat Raciborski in Silesia/Poland. County Waterford could thus also develop further contacts in Europe with our partner districts if desired.

2. The social, cultural and general interests of the administrative area and the local community, including similarities between both of our locations

Märkischer Kreis is striving for twinning relations with County Waterford, as many similarities between the two counties became apparent after extensive research. Through joint subject-specific exchanges in the administrative areas of culture, tourism as well as environmental and climate protection, both districts could develop together.

As depicted very impressively in the County Waterford image film, County Waterford has many recreational opportunities such as cycling, hiking and water sports as well as visiting cultural institutions or riding a narrow-gauge railway. It is evident that work-life balance plays a major role for the Irish population in Waterford and can be experienced very well in Waterford. Märkischer Kreis is also a region where there are good opportunities to experience this balance between work and leisure. You can see this in the presentation as well as the travel report, which we have enclosed with this letter. Märkischer Kreis is located in the Sauerland-Rothaargebirge Nature Park, which is one of the largest nature parks in Germany with an area of 3,827 km². Over short distances, the citizens of the district can visit cultural attractions, such as Altena Castle with the first permanent youth hostel in the world, but also practice their hobbies, such as cycling or hiking in the local forests on well-designed hiking and cycling/mountain biking trails. The topic "Middle Ages" plays a major role in Märkischer Kreis. A medieval festival takes place annually to celebrate Altena Castle and its museums. Here we see a great similarity to County Waterford with its Medieval Museum, Lismore Castle or the Viking Museum "King of the Vikings Museum". Exchanges of museums can certainly allow both partners to learn from each other's ideas. In Märkischer Kreis there is the association "Wasser-Eisen-Land" ("Water-Iron-Land"), which could be comparable to the "Waterford Industrial Heritage". "Water-Iron-Land" plays and promotes the industrial monuments in South Westphalia. Here, cooperation could also generate ideas for further development.

In the field of tourism, Märkischer Kreis offers a lot of hiking trails and a network of cycle paths. Here, too, we see a similarity to the Waterford-Green. The development and implementation of this impressive route and also the promotion of its former railway line is outstanding and provides a good

best practice example for the cycle paths of Märkischer Kreis. The many different leisure opportunities offered by County Waterford are particularly inviting to families in the Waterford region. Likewise, Märkischer Kreis is also establishing itself primarily as a holiday region for families. As County Waterford has a narrow-gauge railway, a ride on a narrow-gauge railway can also be experienced in Märkischer Kreis.

Märkischer Kreis consists of three river valleys – the rivers are called Hönne, Lenne and Volme. Likewise, County Waterford has the “three Sisters” Nore, Barrow and Suir. This common ground can also be used for both districts to discuss water and nature conservation concepts. Especially for tourism, development potentialities for the river regions could also grow up anew through corresponding cooperation. Direct exchanges between the touristic specialists or tourism associations as well as direct leisure institutions then create new opportunities for further development for both sides. Through a twinning relationship we also see the possibility of promoting the partner's region as a mutual tourist destination.

Ireland is a pioneer in the field of digitalisation. This is also an important building block in the future development of Märkischer Kreis in the areas of schools, mobile telephony, e-government and broadband expansion. Here, both partners could benefit from each other's experience.

In the field of economy, Märkischer Kreis, through its own company "GWS - Gesellschaft für Wirtschaft- und Strukturförderung" (Society for Business and Structural Development), pursues the goal of networking the various economic interests in Märkischer Kreis as an initiator and moderator. County Waterford is very well placed in the area of pharmaceutical companies and the glass industry with Waterford Crystal. Märkischer Kreis is one of the most important industrial regions in Germany, even though heavy industry was never located here, unlike in the neighbouring Ruhr area. The small and medium-sized enterprises located here are mainly active in the field of metal production and metal processing. Thus, a twinning can open up new sales markets for both sides. Since different economic sectors are present in each case, there is no need to fear competition, but rather cooperation possibilities are the desired goal. Pharmaceutical companies, for example, could establish a cooperation with Märkische Kliniken GmbH. County Waterford is home to the Blackwater-Barry's Tea gin distillery. Even though the Märkischer Kreis has been more into brewing beer and distilling schnapps in the past, the Woodland Sauerland gin distillery has been around for a few years now. Here, too, a cooperation could be conceivable.

The film for St. Patrick's Day #waterfordgreen shows a great scenery as well as many cultural sites in illuminated green. Over the past two years, we too have begun to impressively illuminate our Altena Castle during the series of events called "Glanzlicht". We think this shows the similar approach of presenting the points of interest to the public.

The aim of our twinning work is to bring people of both twinning districts into contact with each other. In addition to the administrative exchange, it is particularly important for us to involve the youth in the exchange. Many schools in Märkischer Kreis are European schools and want to convey the European idea. Here, many schools are interested in contacts to native English speakers so that, on the one hand, the students' knowledge of the English language can find additional application and development opportunities, but also to establish contact with a Western European country. With the possibility of using the European funding programme Erasmus+, schools have the opportunity to finance these exchanges through financial support from the EU. In addition, we have many sports clubs that also see new opportunities for development through contact with a partner club. Such as a swimming club in Märkischer Kreis, which organises an annual international swimming festival to bring together many partner clubs. And therefore gives young people the opportunity to get to know different nations and

promote the tolerance of each individual. This creates valuable friendships between the young people and participants, which will continue to influence their lives and work in the future.

Furthermore, Märkischer Kreis has the „South Westphalian University of Applied Science“ and the “University of Europe for Applied Science”; County Waterford has the Institute of Technology. Here, too, cooperation between students and the institutions is conceivable and desirable.

3. Development and achievements of the twinning between our locations

We would like to put the focus on the fields of youth, economy and tourism. The development of administrative exchanges would be desirable as well.

In the field of youth, we would strive for contacts between associations. School twinning could be initiated, but also youth projects could be developed by the administration, e.g. in the fields of journalism, music, art, sport, environment and so on. The “Märkisches Jugendsymphonieorchester” (“Youth Symphony Orchestra of Märkischer Kreis”) could have guest performances in County Waterford or also hold a rehearsal period and perform together with music students from County Waterford.

We would like to establish economic cooperation with the help of GWS “Society for Business and Structural Development”. By creating new sales markets, both partners could also benefit economically from each other. Perhaps Flahavans would also be interested in getting to know our small Sundwiger Albertsmühle, which produces muesli products as well among other things.

At district events, we strive to involve our twinning districts with a presentation of their district or, if appropriate, with cultural contributions, e.g. dance groups, musicians, but also institutions or participants from the twinning district, in order to promote the twinning. This way, different groups could get in touch with each other and the twinning, but also the twinning district can be promoted. Among other things, we hold the annual Puppet Theatre Days at Altena Castle. If there are puppeteers in County Waterford, we could well imagine that an English-language play could then also be performed here as part of our event.

Direct exchanges could be developed between the leisure institutions, e.g. narrow-gauge railway, museums but also tourism specialists. Lafcadio Hearn Gardens and our Sauerland Park also have similarities and here, exchanges with each other would be conceivable. Through a twinning relationship, we see the possibility of promoting each other’s regions as a tourist destination.

Artist exchanges through joint art exhibitions or art projects, but also exchanges between associations from the fields of sport and culture are areas that a twinning could develop. Furthermore, voluntary work e.g. the Red Cross, the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) and the youth fire brigade, are further areas and thus link the various groups.

Strengthening the European idea is very important to us. Especially nowadays, we see it as necessary to build closer ties within Europe through twinning connections. By getting to know other cultures, our two nations move closer together and valuable values are conveyed through the exchanges with each other.

4. Details of committee members and who will be involved

The District Chief Executive of Märkischer Kreis is Marco Voge. He is the highest municipal official and head of the district administration. The general deputy of the District Administration is Deputy Chief Executive, Barbara Dienstel-Kümper.

Märkischer Kreis has various political committees. Attached you find an example of a typical structure of a German district administration. The Cultural Committee is responsible for the area of the Department of Culture and Tourism, to which the area of twinning belongs.

The Cultural Committee is composed of representatives of the parliamentary groups of Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU), Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP), Unabhängige Wählergemeinschaft (UWG), Die Linke and Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

The Department for Culture and Tourism is also the responsibility of the Deputy Chief Executive, Mrs. Barbara Dienstel-Kümper, and consists of the specific areas museums, archives and regional library as well as promotion of culture with events, Youth Symphony Orchestra of Märkischer Kreis, Leisure- and Tourism association (Freizeit- und Tourismusverband e.V.) and twinning.

The following people are specifically involved in the twinning work: Head of Department Detlef Krüger and the twinning officers Isabelle Schöneborn and Holger Schroer. Likewise, project-related participants are of course also possible, e.g. if there should be an exchange with the nature conservation authority or a thematic youth project.