

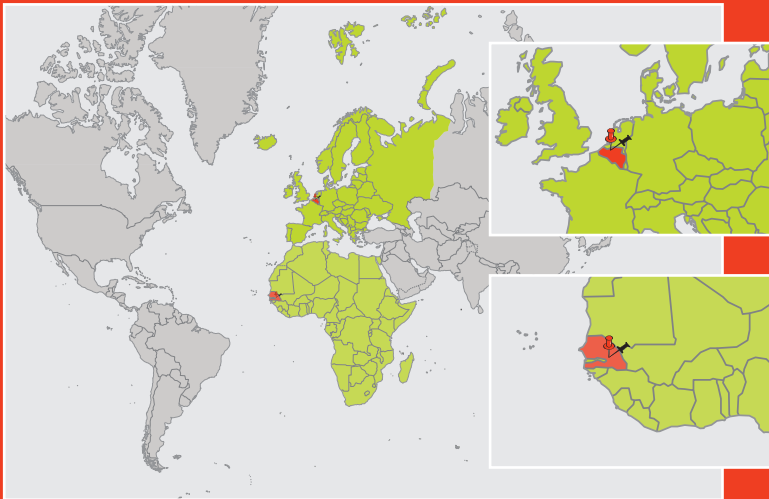
Sint-Niklaas • Tambacounda



**Municipal international
cooperation can go
through difficult times**

📍 **Tambacounda** is in eastern Senegal near the border with Mali, Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. The city is the capital of the eponymous region. Its number of inhabitants is 90,000, a number that is increasing fast. Tambacounda is situated along a busy thoroughfare between the West African interior and the port of Dakar 450 km away.

Sint-Niklaas and its boroughs of Belsele, Nieuwkerken-Waas and Sinaai have 73,000 residents.



Municipal international cooperation between Tambacounda and Sint-Niklaas was officially established in 2003. Mutual visits took place before the cooperation agreements were signed. The two cities found each other thanks to the cooperation of the NGO Bevrijde Wereld based in Sint-Niklaas and the Senegalese NGO Gadec. When Tambacounda was looking for a twin town, Gadec asked Sint-Niklaas. Tambacounda has also been in a partnership with the French town of La-Roche-sur-Yon since 1995.

The municipal international partnership between Sint-Niklaas and Tambacounda went through some tough times a few years ago. Agreements were not respected, the use of financial resources was not sufficiently accounted for and projects were not or barely implemented. It was only after an eighteen-month break that the two towns resumed their cooperation.

Municipal international cooperation goes through highs and lows.

Municipal international cooperation is very specific. What you do as a city can be felt immediately: you contribute to the development of a twin town and you support decentralisation, which is often still a fairly recent concept. There is considerable immediate involvement of local authority staff and local politicians. In the case of more 'traditional' activities in the South through members of the municipal council for development cooperation, there is somewhat more distance. On a personal level the cooperation with a town in the South can be very enriching as well. Anja De Wachter, who is the development cooperation expert of Sint-Niklaas, finds it easy to list several benefits of municipal international cooperation. However, cooperation is not always easy. The relationship between Sint-Niklaas and Tambacounda went seriously sour for eighteen months. The continuation of the projects under the federal programme was extremely uncertain. However, things turned around with the ar-

rival of a new council team in Tambacounda and cooperation resumed.

In what areas do Sint-Niklaas and Tambacounda work together?

'We concentrate on two themes: waste and the registry. Every year we set up a waste project in two or three of the 28 neighbourhoods in the city. The waste is collected with a donkey and cart. We mainly help with the start-up of this service in a neighbourhood. We buy the donkeys and carts, we provide organisational support, we help create a plan, etc. Then it is mainly up to the neighbourhood delegate (who is appointed by the mayor), the neighbourhood president (who is elected by the people) and the neighbourhood committee to manage the project. The daily operations are led by *Système Intégré de Nettoyement et de Valorisation des Déchets (SINVAD)*, an organisation with three members of staff: the coordinator, who is seconded from the Regional Development Agency,



one employee from the city payroll and a third employee whose salary is paid with resources from municipal international cooperation. SINVAD is responsible for providing reports on the project. The resources we make available through municipal international cooperation are transferred to a separate account of the city. Most funds are from the federal programme and some are provided by the city of Sint-Niklaas. Resources are also made available through the Flemish covenant for the registry project. The content of the registry project is mainly supported by the Tambacounda's French partner, La-Rochesur-Yon. Until now Sint-Niklaas mainly supported investments, such as the purchase of computers, a server, a copier and tills for temporarily storing cash before it is taken to the bank.'

We contribute more content input for the waste project.

'Absolutely. Our sustainability official, who in the meantime has become the head of the environment department, worked in Tambacounda for six weeks in 2011. She was really active in the field, provided many recommendations and established many contacts. That really pushed the project forward. The sustainability official also participates in a steering committee for municipal international cooperation in Sint-Niklaas. There is still a lot of work

to be done in Tambacounda and of course there are problems well beyond the scope of municipal international cooperation. Tambacounda does not have a landfill site that meets all standards, for example. Now the waste is first taken to a depot in the neighbourhood. Then the city takes the waste to a temporary landfill site, which is too small and too close to homes. A location was found for a permanent landfill site, but the entire procedure to start using the site has only just started. The funding is also far from complete. These efforts cannot be supported by municipal international cooperation alone.'

In 2008-2009 cooperation with Tambacounda almost completely stalled. What was the problem?

'Communication with Tambacounda had been difficult from the start. During the first years the city hall did not even have a phone. We had to send faxes to the governor's office across the street. Of course there was no internet either. The reporting by SINVAD was often also inadequate. Cooperation was very difficult and then we arrived to the point where the programmes, the plans were no longer executed. The city council at the time let things take its course. The SINVAD coordinator was committed to the waste and environmental issues, but he was lacked the drive to set things in motion. The



proverbial straw that broke the camel's back was that funds transferred from Sint-Niklaas were spent without any accountability. Was the money used in the local elections campaign in March 2009? We have no idea. La-Roche-sur-Yon had the same experience. Our relationship with the French town became a lot closer in that period. In October 2008 both mayors sent a joint letter to Tambacounda to inform the city that things could not continue this way. There was no response. The turning point came after the local elections of March 2009 and the appointment of a new city council.'

What did the break in cooperation mean in practice?

'In 2008 and 2009, the first two years of the federal project, there was no implementation at all. We did not include any resources, except for a mission. We had to explain why nothing was achieved in a report twice. If nothing had happened in 2010, the continuation of the federal project would have been useless. It was touch and go for a while. Ever since cooperation made headway again, we have been able to recover the resources of 2008 and 2009 and even clear some of the backlog.'

Was municipal international cooperation itself questioned?

'No, things did not go that far. We have

not discussed the termination of municipal international cooperation, but of course we had to start working together again as soon as possible. The final goal of municipal international cooperation is to improve the services to benefit the population. The victims of poor cooperation between two local councils were the residents of Tambacounda. We knew we had to be patient.'

How are things going now?

'In September 2009 another joint mission from Sint-Niklaas and La-Roche-sur-Yon left for Tambacounda in order to determine whether it was still desirable to remain partners. The answer was yes. A good coordinator was recruited for the waste project. We are in contact every week by email or phone. The cooperation with the new city council is as it should be again. The mayor has a great deal of confidence in his staff. He lets them do their jobs without interfering in everything they do or controlling everything. The trust between both cities has also been restored. For example, we have recently sent a letter to invite a technical delegation from Tambacounda in order to set up the federal file. We know that it is not easy for the mayor to disappoint any aldermen wishing to join the mission, but he understands that a technical mission is a lot more useful than a political one at the moment and he supports us in that respect.'



More about municipal international cooperation between Sint-Niklaas and Tambacounda

- ↘ **Continuity.** One problem faced in many relationships of municipal international cooperation is the continuity of cooperation. Staff changes often delay the project, as it takes time for new staff to get acquainted with it. Anja De Wachter: 'We are always uncertain whether a change of administration will benefit or harm municipal international cooperation. After the local elections of 2009 things improved in Tambacounda. By the way, staff changes do not only affect matters in the South. Things regularly change in the North as well. We have just gained a new sustainability official, who will need some time to settle in.'
- ↘ **North-North-South-South.** During the mission to Tambacounda in September 2009 Sint-Niklaas and La-Roche-sur-Yon were accompanied by a delegation from Ziguinchor, a Senegalese town with a registry that can be used as an example. This resulted in North-North-South-South cooperation. Anja De Wachter: 'The input of Ziguinchor allowed the creation of propositions that are in line with Senegalese culture. Together we created a plan of action. The final objective is to computerise the registry in Tambacounda. The cooperation even attracted the interest of the national Senegalese government.' In terms of waste Tambacounda is also gaining expertise from elsewhere in the country. A delegation went on a working visit to the Senegalese towns of Joal-Fadiouth and Kaolack. Anja De Wachter: 'Tambacounda has seen a lot there, but that knowledge has not yet or barely been put into practice. There is certainly a lot of room for improvement there.'
- ↘ **Mentality.** Waste is a major problem in Tambacounda. It is everywhere in the public domain. The waste collection with donkey carts in the neighbourhoods is a huge improvement, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Selective waste collection has not been addressed yet. An attempt at starting up a project on composting yielded little result. Anja De Wachter: 'We need to focus even more on raising awareness in order to change people's mentality thoroughly. For example, almost half of all collected waste is sand. People wipe their yard and throw the sand in the waste bins. Sand does not belong in there.'



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