

Twinning is winning

Can anyone out there remember Jan's surname? He was the chatty bloke who came over on the school exchange with the Belgian town. His dad was the mayor or something like that.

I need to get hold of him because our class has decided to try to twin Worthing, Grado and Blankenberge. Town-twinning is part of the EU's Europe for Citizens programme that our teacher was telling us about the other day. As this is the European Year of Citizens, our teacher asked us to produce presentations for projects the class might run itself. After we had come up with four or five schemes, we voted for the one we thought the best. And twinning won! So, as mum comes from Grado, and I've been going there since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, it suddenly struck me that Grado and Worthing have a lot in common. Both towns grew up as seaside resorts in the nineteenth century; both of them had their heyday in the 1950s and both are now having to compete with package holidays and low-cost flights. That makes them obvious candidates for twinning. Then, Cheryl had the brilliant idea of bringing in the Belgian school too, since Blankenberge's also a seaside resort. When we googled the town (we haven't been there yet), we found that it too had been built up at about the same time, and for the same reason! It's likely to be facing the same problems, so they could pool their resources – sharing history and creating links.

I've already e-mailed the mayor of Grado (mum helped me to write it in Italian) and got a really nice reply back. He seems enthusiastic, wanting to hold seminars on things like food and wine. I don't really see how Worthing can contribute much to any discussion on wine, but you never know. We've also contacted the mayor of Worthing, and she's keen too. She reckons we could arrange language courses and create what she called a centre of excellence for tourism. So, now all we need is to get Blankenberge on board and we've got three towns in three European countries. This is why Jan's surname would come in handy. Although parts of the Blankenberge website are available in English (and loads of other languages as well), I think it would be a nice gesture to write to the mayor in Dutch, but my Dutch is non-existent. The school's going on the return trip in spring next year, but it would be nice to get some of the groundwork done before we go. Who knows? We could finish up dining with the mayor (I just hope his English is as good as Jan's!).