

The institutional framework of the China-Europa Forum

The forum is a joint adventure, a shared asset and trusting relations rather than an institution. However it does need to be backed by institutions to ensure its ongoing existence, coordinate the various activities, mobilise diverse sources of funding and take root in society. Until 2007 a centralised setup was the only solution since it was being created from scratch. In 2008 the China Europa Forum Foundation gave it a tangible institutional framework for the first time. Then, the workshops of the third meetings were chosen and led in a decentralised manner. The workshop organisers in China found the funding on site to host the event. The decision was taken that each workshop in Chinese and European society would be in the future underpinned by four “pillars”: geographical, social, intellectual and media pillars. Progress was slow but sure. Workshops grouped together, making it possible to envisage independent coordination at this intermediary level. The institutional centralisation of the Forum did not facilitate the seeking of funds, which proved easier to obtain for individual workshops or for groups of workshops than for the Forum as a whole.

We thus feel the Forum’s institutional structure must reflect its decentralised nature. The city of Chengdu, in China has henceforth decided to play host in the long term for some dozen workshops and has set up permanent staffing to this end. This is an example for all. *We need to design and set up with you this structure featuring decentralised poles.*

The first issue is to *root each workshop in a region or city* both in China and Europe. Experience has shown that workshops rooted in local society have the best long-term organisational prospects. Many Chinese cities already have European twins. Twin cities can act as a springboard for workshops. As the Forum raises its profile and gains in credibility, playing host to a workshop can be of interest to a city or a region, demonstrating its international and inter-cultural vocation, and can reinforce excellence clusters which already exist.

Whenever possible, please strike up dialogue with your home cities and regions, find out whether they are engaged in Euro-Chinese twinning operations, tell them about the richness of the Forum and its future potential. In response to the inevitable question of how much local authorities would have to allocate in terms of budget, we have estimated that supporting a workshop requires a budget of around €30,000 a year, and €100,000 for a group of workshops. A region or city which would like to organise the Forum’s plenary sessions at the triennial meetings would have to commit to a financial contribution of €300,000 to 400,000.

Other institutional setups can be imagined, such as the long-term involvement of universities, research centres, science academies, foundations or corporations. Each partner must simply sign the Forum Charter stating the objectives, open ethics and mutual respect inherent in the Forum. They must also accept the work setup, especially the website. In return, they benefit from human networks, management tools, the logo and the Forum working methods.

We are looking forward to hearing your proposals and will support any initiatives you undertake.