Between local governments and communities

Knowledge exchange and mutual learning in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships

van Ewijk, E.

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Preface

23 April 2009. I am about to leave the Rotterdam tram after a field trip to Morocco. Three huge controllers look at me curiously. ‘You are carrying a lot, been on vacation?’ one of them asks. ‘No, to Morocco for my work’, I respond. One of the men reacts, ‘That’s far away!’ The other smiles, ‘That is also a vacation!’ The third one asks, ‘So what did you do over there?’ I answer, ‘A research about the cooperation between municipalities’. ‘Ha, ha, so nothing is happening, right?’ the first man reacts. ‘Actually a lot is happening!’ I respond. ‘Sure thing. Between those ‘chiefs’?, one man asks. I smile and say, ‘They have ordinary mayors and city halls in Morocco’.

To some extent this anecdote is illustrative of the general perception of city-to-city cooperation and of the engrained images many people have of ‘developing countries’. I became interested in city-to-city cooperation through my work experience in Kenya, where I often felt that I could offer little to the farmers who were interested in Dutch agriculture. Later on as a policy advisor in the Netherlands I organized meetings for Dutch municipalities active in international relations and I was inspired to learn more about this form of cooperation. I would like to thank the many valuable colleagues who motivated me to develop my ideas further and embark on this PhD: Isa Baud, Johan Post, and Ton Dietz of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and Paul van Lindert and Marike Bontenbal of the Utrecht University (UU).

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At the UvA I enjoyed the company of (former) fellow PhD researchers like Iris Monnereau, Anna Laven, Hebe Verrest, Mieke Lopes Cardozo, Benson Mulemi, Emmanuel Nyankweli, Mercy Derkyi, Inti Soeterik, Sanne van der Kaaik, Magali Chepli, Tara van Dijk, Hulya Kosar Altinyelken, Serana Nasango, Marloes Kraan, Koen Kusters, Elma Folmer, Josje Hoekveld, Joeri Scholten, Neeraj Mishra and Tara Saharan. I also appreciated the cooperation with staff members, including Michaela Hordijk, Maarten Bavinck, Niels Beereport, Ad de Bruijne and Virginie Mamadouh. My gratitude also goes to the Chair of the Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies, Joos Droogleever Fortuijn. The supportive staff-members Gert van der Meer, Marianne van Heelsbergen, Guida Morais and Puikang Chan were also very helpful in this challenging PhD trajectory. I really appreciate the interest, support and understanding of my colleagues at NCDO, especially Peter Heintze and Gabi Spitz, in light of my overly optimistic estimates about the time needed to finalize the thesis!

In the last research period I did not have much time for social occasions with friends but I trust we can catch up, Wendy, Anna, Angèle, Monique, Erwin, Petra, Hein and Karen! Dear Wendy; nothing works better to recharge the battery than walking ‘long’ distances while chatting all day! And what would I have done without my ‘extended family’? They were simply there when I needed them. First of all many many thanks to my parents, Jacques and Nel and my brother Joost. Furthermore Jessica, Emma, Mees, Cor and Lies, Anna, Julia and Ruben; thanks for your good company and encouragements. A special thanks for my mother Nel and mother-in-law Lies who were there for Rosa and Jonas, and helped us keep a more or less tidy house.

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