Between local governments and communities

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

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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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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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