Between local governments and communities

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

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3. Research questions and methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed theories on city-to-city cooperation, governance, globalization, knowledge exchange and mutual learning in municipal partnerships. This chapter will focus on the research questions that were formulated based on the literature and the methods used to address these questions. Pierre and Peters (2000) argued that the way governance is approached is important in relation to the operationalization of research. The ‘old governance’ approach, whereby a government body steers civil society actors, leads to framing research questions that assume that the government body exerts control over governance processes, the economy and society. If the ‘new governance’ perspective is adopted, the questions are more related to how the government body interacts with other actors in society. In his view, civil society actors can also operate autonomously. This research focuses on the process of cooperation between local government bodies and non-governmental actors and draws on the ‘new’ approach to governance, in which governments operate in partnerships with non-governmental actors.\(^{39}\) Also it is important to consider the way knowledge, learning and mutuality are conceptualized as well as the various partnership conditions (like trust, equality and power) that play a role in the process of knowledge exchange and learning. The previous chapter provided tools to operationalize these main concepts by identifying various kinds of knowledge, ways of exchanging knowledge, the types of learning that take place and the dimensions that play a role in mutual learning.

This chapter explains the choice to focus on Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships, reasons for selecting a multiple case study approach and qualitative research methods, and describes the specific methods used.

3.2. Why focus on Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships

To determine the focus of this PhD research, an exploratory research of existing municipal partnerships between Dutch municipalities and municipalities in various migrant source countries was conducted (February–July 2007).\(^{40}\) This research included

\(^{39}\) An analytical framework of governance is used to analyse governance processes from a neutral angle—in contrast to a normative approach where ‘good governance’ is central. A normative approach is also often used in policy approaches and evaluation of governance processes.

\(^{40}\) In total 5 key informants from VNG International, 2 other key informants and 27 municipal officers were interviewed. In addition, 3 representatives of partner municipalities were interviewed. The majority of interviews with local government policy officers were conducted by telephone. Respondent validation was used, by emailing all the relevant information to each respondent (see Bryman 2004: 274). This technique was useful for verifying concrete data; the date when the partnership was established, the cooperation themes and the associated budget. I also attended several conferences: on Municipal International Cooperation and the Millennium Development Goals; a meeting of the Netherlands Antilles Platform; and a meeting of the Turkey Municipal Platform. Lastly several reports and documents were assessed (see Van Ewijk 2007).
key information on the origin of the partnerships, the themes addressed as well as the involved partners and capacity (both in time and financial resources). The report was financially supported by the Dutch development agency Cordaid. Based on this preliminary research and in consultation with my supervisor, I decided to focus on the process of knowledge exchange and mutual learning in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships.

The core of the research consists of an in-depth analysis of five strategically selected case studies using qualitative research methods. More general information on other Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish partnerships was included to provide a broader context and to verify whether the case studies were in some way unique. Additional information was mainly obtained during meetings and conferences and through a telephone survey (see table 3.1 and annexes 1–5).

The Netherlands is an interesting case as it has a tradition of facilitating city-to-city partnerships; it is among the few countries where the central government has established support programmes for city-to-city partnerships, implemented by a Local Government Association (VNG International). Furthermore, the Netherlands is a small but important migrant destination country. The reason behind focusing on the practices of Dutch municipalities is also based on practical considerations (language and proximity) and my own professional experience.41 I selected Turkey and Morocco—the Netherlands’s two main migrant source countries—for several reasons outlined below.

First, mutuality was considered. As the focus of the research is on knowledge exchange and mutual learning, this motive was very important. The overall hypothesis of the research is that mutuality played an important role in the Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships, as the integration of Dutch citizens of Turkish and Moroccan descent into Dutch society has been a major issue for Dutch municipalities. Turkey, an upper middle-income country, and Morocco, a lower middle-income country, are also distinguished by important historical and population differences. These differences are likely to have an impact on the form and extent of mutuality within the partnerships; therefore, involving both countries was expected to provide the basis for interesting comparisons.

Second, the size of migrant groups and the number of municipal partnerships were considered. Morocco and Turkey are the top two source countries of non-Western migrants currently living in the Netherlands. The third main country is Suriname. Turkey and Morocco share a history as migrant source countries as in both countries first migrants were recruited to work in the Dutch industries, whereas Suriname (a former Dutch colony) has a very different migration history. A large part of the total number of linkages between Dutch municipalities and municipalities in non-Western migrant source countries are Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships. As of August 2007, 20 Dutch municipalities maintained linkages with

41 As a policy advisor (1997–2004) I organized several meetings for Dutch municipalities and housing corporations active in international relations, and I became fascinated by this form of international cooperation.
municipalities in Turkey and Morocco, which accounted for more than half of the total 39 municipalities involved in cooperation with non-Western migrant source countries (Morocco, Turkey, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, Ghana, Cape Verde and Indonesia) (Van Ewijk 2007).

Third, governance processes were taken into account. As will be discussed in the fourth chapter, the extent of decentralization is stronger in Turkey than in Morocco, implying that Turkish local governments have a broader mandate. Including both countries provides a basis for interesting comparisons. The centralized governance structure of Suriname in combination with the small total population (492,829 in 2004) and the concentration of inhabitants in the capital Paramaribo (approximately 200,000 inhabitants) were important reasons not to focus on this country. Because of the governance structure, Dutch municipalities have been cooperating directly with state ministries in Suriname, making Suriname a rather specific case and more difficult to link to the body of literature on city-to-city partnerships.\textsuperscript{42}

Fourth, geographic considerations were important. Both Morocco and Turkey are considered ‘new neighbour countries of Europe’ and have spurred interest among Western European countries about their role in the North African and Middle Eastern region as well as their role as trade partners. Turkey also has a specific status as EU candidate country. The second reason related to geographic considerations is a more practical one. The relatively short travel time between the Netherlands and Turkey/Morocco made it possible to visit both countries for fieldwork on more than one occasion, which was crucial for participating in exchange missions and conducting field interviews.

In conclusion, the Dutch-Moroccan and the Dutch-Turkish cases are well-suited for comparison as they share some characteristics but also have significant differences, and thus provide a good basis for examining the influence of context in C2C partnerships.

3.3. Research questions

3.3.1. Main research question

Based on the review of the theoretical framework the following central research question was formulated:

How does knowledge exchange in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships lead to mutual learning by local governments and other actors involved, and to what extent does the international engagement lead to the strengthening of local governance?

\textsuperscript{42} Since 2010, when Bouterse became the president of Suriname, many international and diplomatic relationships between the Netherlands and Suriname have been frozen, because Bouterse (the former dictator of Suriname) was sentenced to 11 years in prison for drug trafficking, and he is also under investigation for allegedly executing 15 opponents of his former military regime.
The research focuses on the strengthening of local government bodies, the establishment of new government arrangements and the strengthening of local government–civil society interfaces in the local governments under scrutiny. The focus and structure of the thesis are presented in a conceptual model in figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1 Conceptual model of the thesis**

### 3.3.2. Separate research questions

Chapter 2 discussed the roles of local governments in relation to other actors within their constituencies, in the light of the decentralization and globalization processes that are taking place. It discussed how local governments have gradually received more recognition for their role in development processes within their constituencies but also for their role in transnational cooperation. The involvement of several actors is generally considered to be a particular strength of municipal partnerships. Municipal partnerships between migrant source and destination countries have two key characteristics that distinguish them from other municipal partnerships: (1) the connection between international policies and issues related to ethnic and cultural diversity; and (2) existing transnational ties between municipalities in migrant source and destination countries through the diasporas. This specificity provides the potential for involving additional actors in the twinnings. Transnational linkages between
diasporas and source countries often have local dimensions. Translocal linkages or locally specific transnational ties are also reflected in some city-to-city partnerships. Based on this observation, the following research question was formulated:

1. How do national and local policies and translocal linkages influence the governmental and non-governmental actors involved as well as the themes and activities in the Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships?

Chapter 2 laid out the various ways of exchanging knowledge in municipal partnerships (ranging from field visits to seminars) as well as the type of knowledge exchanged (ranging from tacit, implicit or embedded to codified and generalized knowledge) as well as the kind of learning taking place (including copying, single-loop or double-loop learning, intended and unintended learning, formal and informal learning). Based on the literature review, differences and similarities were identified as building blocks for learning between the persons involved. City-to-city cooperation has the potential to facilitate the exchange of various kinds of knowledge (including tacit knowledge) through face-to-face contacts among peers. Moreover, there is a large potential for learning based on differences that may enable critical reflection on one’s own work processes. The second research question was formulated as follows:

2. How do local governments and other actors involved in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships exchange knowledge (i.e. which methods or strategies are used)? Which different types of knowledge are exchanged, and which kinds of learning take place within these partnerships?

The previous chapter also set out that as a result of decentralization processes local governments increasingly work as actors in governance networks in coordinating processes of local development. These networks of non-governmental actors include civil society organizations and the private sector. According to the literature, both local government bodies and civil society should be strengthened to enhance overall local governance processes. The literature on city-to-city partnerships stressed the importance of involving various actors in municipal partnerships. However, the research has mainly focused on the strengthening of local government bodies in the South. There is less evidence on the strengthening of civil society or the interfaces between local governments and civil society. The third research question was formulated as follows:

3. To what extent does the process of knowledge exchange and learning in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships lead to strengthened local governments, stronger local government–civil society interfaces and stronger broader governance networks?
Chapter 2 discussed that the objective of strengthening local governance in municipalities in the South is usually central, although there are also numerous learning possibilities by partners in the North. This orientation was mainly explained by altruism (a central starting point for approaching international cooperation in the North) and the impact of support programmes. Based on the wider body of knowledge on mutual learning on partnerships, various other potentially relevant factors for the extent of mutual learning were identified: openness to learn, trust, equality and power, and complementary resources. It was argued that city-to-city cooperation has the potential for equal exchange (with mutual trust in a central position) due to the peer-to-peer approach and longstanding relations. In municipal partnerships between migrant source and destination countries mutuality is expected to play a prominent role as the migrant destination countries have generally formulated their own objectives to be engaged in international relations from the start of the cooperation. Based on these observations the fourth research question was formulated as follows:

4. To what extent does knowledge exchange in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships, lead to mutual learning at different scale levels?

Chapter 4 will cover the context, with specific emphasis on the mandate and roles of local governments in Morocco, Turkey and the Netherlands. This chapter is related to the first research question. The cases studies will be described in the fifth chapter, particularly focusing on the types of actors involved. This knowledge is essential in addressing the remaining research questions. The second research question will be answered in chapter 6; research question three will be addressed in chapter 7; while chapter 8 will focus on question four. Chapter 9 will lay out the conclusions.

3.4. Choosing a multiple case study approach and qualitative research techniques

Knowledge exchange and mutual learning in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish partnerships was analysed based on a multiple case study approach. According to Robert Yin (2003: 3), the case study ‘allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events—such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, international relations and the maturation of industries’. Following Bryman (2008: 53), a study can be considered a case study when the cases are the focus of interest in their own right. In this research the municipal partnerships themselves are the focus of the research. The approach used in this research can be characterized as ‘multiple embedded cases’, as the case study involves more than one unit of analysis. In the municipal partnerships various projects and exchanges are taking place under the umbrella of the municipal partnership, so within a single case attention is also given to subunits (e.g., individual
projects within the programme). Using a multiple case study approach is generally considered more convincing than using only one case, as it is less vulnerable to misinterpretations and lends itself to drawing more powerful and robust conclusions (Yin 2003). Bryman (2008: 60) argued that the main argument in favour of multiple cases is that it improves theory building: 'by comparing two or more cases, the researcher is in a better position to establish the circumstances in which a theory will or will not hold. Moreover, the comparison may itself suggest concepts that are relevant to an emerging theory'.

3.4.1. Comparative and qualitative research
Ragin (1994) described three broad research strategies: (1) qualitative research on the communalities that exist across a moderate number of cases; (2) comparative research in the diversity that exists across a moderate number of cases; and (3) quantitative research on the correspondence between two or more attributes across a large number of cases. Following Ragin’s view (1994: 49), this research holds most characteristics of a comparative research as ‘comparative researchers interested in diversity, study a moderate number of cases in a comprehensive manner, though in not as much detail as in most qualitative research’. There are many different features related to the case studies in this research, such as differences in the extent of decentralization, governance systems, involvement of non-governmental actors in the framework of the partnership, differences in size of the municipalities involved, different socio-economic characteristics, a diversity of themes for cooperation, and differences in the way international cooperation is embedded within local government bodies. Instead of comparing ‘the’ Dutch-Moroccan case with ‘the’ Dutch-Turkish case, I aim to provide insight by a heuristic method of studying contrasting cases in various ways, providing the base for insight through diversity. The choice of three Moroccan-Dutch cases and two Turkish-Dutch cases is based on the idea that variety increases the chance of finding communalities and differences among the cases. Bryman (2008: 60) argued that the communalities among the cases can be as important as the differences. The research seeks to identify some general trends and—where possible and relevant—a comparison is made between the contrasting contexts of the Netherlands, Morocco and Turkey.

The dangers of choosing a multiple case study approach include the risk that the researcher might focus mainly on the ways in which cases can be contrasted and pay limited attention to the context (Bryman 2008: 61). However, Ying (2003: 13) argued that case study research is particularly well-suited to cover contextual conditions: ‘A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context

43 Bryman (2008) argued that another risk of using a multiple case study approach is that the researcher might choose to focus and structure the research too much from the very beginning, at the cost of a more open approach.
are not clearly defined. In other words, you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study'. For a comparative research of multiple cases involving three countries, it is important to include key contextual factors.

My research also has the characteristics of qualitative research, in which many aspects or features of a relatively small number of cases are studied in depth. Within the case studies the process of knowledge exchange and learning in various programmes (i.e. subunits) were analysed. The total number of five cases is small enough to be able to deal with a large number of features and to study the process of knowledge exchange and learning in some depth. However, including five case studies—instead of one or two—also implies that there are limitations to the extent of in-depth insight on the process of knowledge exchange and learning that can be secured.

### 3.5. Selection of case studies

#### 3.5.1. Selection criteria

This research focuses on two countries to allow for a meaningful analysis of the wider contextual factors relevant to the understanding of municipal partnerships. There were several main selection criteria for the case studies: (1) the linkages should have the characteristics of a 'partnership', whereby local governments are actively engaged in the cooperation; (2) the linkages should exist for at least three years and have formulated clear cooperation projects; (3) both linkages based on direct translocal linkages and linkages not based on such linkages should be included (the existence of translocal linkages was identified in the literature as an important aspect); and (4) both large and small municipalities should be included. The last criterion was found to be relevant because, depending on their size, municipalities have some unique features in relation to international relations policies. The four largest Dutch municipalities—with populations between 311,367 (Utrecht) and 779,808 (Amsterdam), also referred to as the G4 (CBS 2011)—have relatively large budgets due to their population size and due to some specific 'metropolitan problems', which entitle them to additional funds from the central government. Therefore, they are sometimes said to function as ‘regions of their own’ (Hoetjes 2009: 160). They have also formulated their own ambitions and strategies in the field of international relations and have their own separate international desks. The small municipalities (with less than 50,000 inhabitants) have small budgets and generally only a few actors are involved. The medium-sized municipalities (between 50,000 and 300,000 citizens) are somewhere in-between: some have considerable resources and a clearly international orientation, while most have less outspoken international ambitions (Hoetjes 2009: 160-161). All of these three

44 ‘Partnerships’ are defined as highly structured forms of cooperation, with long-term commitments, concrete activities, a form of contract, and participating partners that are able to operate autonomously (Baud et al. 2001). See chapter 2 for definitions of other forms of international cooperation.
categories are represented in the case studies. As the G4 are involved in a relatively large number of C2C partnerships with migrant source countries they are well represented in the case studies. These various criteria show that the decision for selecting a particular case study was partly made through theoretical sampling: a process of selecting the case study according to the expected value of new insights it delivers for developing the theory (Flick 2006).

3.5.2. Selected cases
The selected cases include the municipal partnerships Rotterdam-Casablanca (Morocco), Zeist-Berkane (Morocco), Meppel–Al Hoceima (Morocco), Amsterdam-Kočaeli (Turkey) and Haarlem-Emirdag (Turkey). The municipal partnerships included as cases were established between 2000 and 2004, and were followed between 2007 and 2011. The cases included partnerships based on a direct translocal linkage (Haarlem-Emirdag), indirect translocal linkage (Zeist-Berkane, Meppel–Al Hoceima) and no/limited translocal link (Amsterdam-Kočaeli and Rotterdam-Casablanca). Both large (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) and medium-sized Dutch municipalities (Zeist and Haarlem) as well as smaller municipalities (Meppel) are included. The partnerships Amsterdam-Kočaeli (Turkey) and Rotterdam-Casablanca (Morocco) were selected as Amsterdam and Rotterdam are the only large Dutch municipalities with clear city-to-city partnerships. The other two large municipalities (The Hague and Utrecht) have also formulated policies on international cooperation with migrant source countries, but focus more on supporting initiatives by civil society actors.

Zeist-Berkane (Morocco) and Meppel–Al Hoceima (Morocco) were selected as they are the most active cooperation partnerships with Morocco. The linkage between Meppel and Al Hoceima was added at a later stage for two major reasons. First, I was able to acquire more data about Dutch-Turkish partnerships compared to the Dutch-Moroccan cases, as I had better access to the activities of the Turkey Municipal Platform. Second, at the same time, severe limitations in obtaining data for the Rotterdam-Casablanca case appeared, due to administrative problems in Casablanca and the sensitiveness of the topics involved (preventing radicalism and domestic violence). These obstacles made it difficult to participate in the exchange programmes. At the same time, interesting mutual exchanges were taking place between Meppel and Al Hoceima, and it was much easier to gather information on this case. It should be noted that there were many more available alternatives of Dutch-Turkish partnerships between medium-sized municipalities, for example the link between Almelo-Denizli. Practical reasons were decisive for selecting Haarlem-Emirdag as a study case. The Municipality of Haarlem is close to where I live and work, making it easier to participate in exchange processes and to meet collaborators for interviews.
3.5.3. **Two levels: partnerships and projects**

There are two important levels related to the case studies to be considered: (1) the level of city-to-city partnerships, and (2) the level of the separate projects that fall under the city-to-city partnership umbrella. The focus of this research is on the cooperation between different agents operating under the umbrella of the city-to-city cooperation in which the process of knowledge exchange and learning is central. The main partners operating in this process are the specific departments within the municipalities dealing with local governance issues and the NGOs involved (e.g. schools and migrant organizations). Within the case studies particular programmes were analysed more in depth as it simply was not possible to simultaneously follow all of the exchanges.

3.6. **Methods used for the case studies**

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, the pre-research in combination with an expert meeting provided a base for determining the focus of the main research. The core research made use of qualitative research methods to get insight in the process of knowledge exchange and learning. Data was mainly gathered by (1) analysing documents (e.g., policy documents, project proposals, evaluations and newspaper articles) depending on availability; (2) participating and observing during missions; (3) conducting face-to-face interviews with persons directly involved in the exchange programmes and other key informants not directly linked to the municipal partnership and (4) informal focus group discussions during the exchanges.\(^45\) The research made use of similar methods for all cases, although the operationalization was adjusted for each specific case as different kinds of initiatives were carried out and different sources of information were available.

In most cases, the document review stage was followed by participation in missions, followed at a later stage by interviews. Following this sequence enabled me to obtain valuable data about the partnership prior to the interviews, which I could build on during the interviews. Participating in missions was also a good way to introduce myself and inform the persons involved about the research. I emphasized that I would

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\(^{45}\) In addition I also tried to incorporate two other methods, which in practice did not work out as anticipated; e-research and film. I planned to use the internet as a study object, anticipating that it would provide valuable knowledge on the kinds of information municipalities choose to put on their website. An interesting example is the radical removal of the word ‘solidarity’ from the website of the Municipality of Rotterdam. In practice, it was difficult to use this method systematically as website information differed substantially from one municipality to the next. Inspired by fellow PhD researchers, I also planned to use film as an additional tool to capture the process of knowledge exchange and learning. I started recording in Kocaeli, Emirdag and Berkane during various missions. However, I found that recording was distracting me from following the exchanges effectively, especially as my time in one municipality was relatively short and intensive. Moreover, editing a short film is a time consuming activity and, as I was also involved in an evaluation research, I decided not to continue this method as it would have considerably delayed the PhD research.
return on my own as an independent researcher. I could not follow this approach in all cases (as discussed in section 3.6.2). Data triangulation was used where possible to verify the data.\footnote{Triangulation implies the use of more than one method or data source, which strengthens the validity and accuracy of data collection (Bryman 2004).}

3.6.1. Document review
The research started with an analysis of relevant documents: (1) documents obtained from the state (like evaluations of municipal international cooperation); (2) documents obtained from local government bodies (like policy documents, memoranda of understanding or other formal agreements, evaluations and speeches); (3) documents obtained from NGOs and private sources;\footnote{The documents under points 2 and 3 included both documents in the public domain (e.g., reports, information available on the internet etc.) and documents not in public domain (e.g., minutes of meetings, email correspondence etc.).} and (4) mass media outputs (mostly newspaper articles, digital and printed magazines, and in a few cases also local television programmes) (classification by Bryman 2004).\footnote{The criteria of Scott (1990: 6, in Bryman 2004) were helpful in critically assessing the quality of the documents: (1) authenticity (is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?); (2) credibility (is the evidence free from error and distortion?); (3) representativeness (is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, how untypical is it?); and (4) meaning (is the evidence clear and comprehensible?).}

46 The extent to which the cooperation was documented and how it was documented varied from case to case. One policy advisor from a Dutch municipality sent me the entire correspondence concerning the cooperation with their partner municipality. As I only had this kind of information for one municipality, I was not able to use it systematically as a tool; however, it did provide me with detailed information on the process and discourse of this particular partnership. It should also be noted that there was some bias in this case, as more information was available from the Dutch side of the partnership. Most project proposals and reports in the framework of support programmes were written jointly by the Dutch and partner municipality.

3.6.2. Participation and observation during missions
The second method was to make use of observation and participation techniques during exchange visits, conferences and meetings. It proved to be a crucial method for data collection as during the interviews it was difficult to capture some information, like getting insight into the equality of partner relations and power relations. My role as researcher could be classified as 'participant observer' (Bryman 2004). Generally, I observed but at the same time I was 'adopted as a member of the team'. In some cases I was also requested to participate actively, for instance by giving presentations (in Zeist and Haarlem) or by writing a short summary of the initial findings (in Zeist). I participated in the missions from Amsterdam to Kocaeli and vice versa, Haarlem to Emirdag and vice versa, Zeist to Berkane and vice versa, Al Hoceima to Meppel (not vice versa), and I did not participate in missions in the framework of the Rotterdam-
Casablanca partnership as the Municipality of Rotterdam felt that the topic (exchanges between police departments) was too sensitive.

I felt that the ‘observer’s paradox’—not knowing how the people studied would have behaved in case they were not being observed (Have et al. 1996)—did not really apply to this kind of observation. I was part of ongoing dynamic exchange programmes in which usually many different people participated. The participants had to accomplish their professional tasks during these particular meetings, as resources to meet each other were limited.

By participating in conferences and meeting, I had the chance to observe but also to meet and talk to a large number of persons involved (see also section 3.6.4). In the Netherlands, I participated in meetings organized within the framework of the municipal platforms for Morocco and Turkey. For the Morocco Municipal Platform, I could only secure access to some of the more open public meetings and not to the internal exchange meetings in the Netherlands. In contrast, all the meeting of the Turkey Municipal Platform were really open, and I attended five ‘internal meetings’ as well as the closing conference of the LOGO East programme in Ankara.

3.6.3. Semi-structured interviews

The most important research method was the use of semi-structured interviews with key persons at the local level. They included representatives of Moroccan, Turkish and Dutch municipalities (policy advisors and members of the administration) as well as representatives of NGOs and CBOs. In addition, key informants not connected to a municipality or NGO were also interviewed, like persons working at embassies, local government associations (LGAs) and private consultants working in the municipal partnerships. The semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees to share their knowledge as well as express their opinions and views. This type of interview tries to combine a set of clear topics to be addressed in the interview with enough space for the interviewees to give their own views. This type falls in-between ‘discourse unit interviews’, where interviewees get space to build on their own answers at their own pace, and the ‘turn-by-turn’ interview, where interviewees are manoeuvred into giving short answers to clear questions (Have et al. 1996).

Have et al. (1996) pointed to the dilemma of exercising control over the interview versus maintaining a certain kind of naturalness of a less structured interview. As I will discuss in paragraph 3.7, I felt that this dilemma or tension also applied to this research. The most challenging part of the interview was trying to capture what the interviewees had learned. To access this information I adopted a very open approach, especially in the beginning of the interview. I used the knowledge I had obtained about different kinds of knowledge and learning. In most cases I asked for examples about what people had seen, what they had learned and what they felt was useful for their own work. A list of topics

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49 The Morocco Municipal Platform was operational in the period 2001–2010, while the Turkey Municipal Platform was functional 2004–2010.
was prepared to make sure that the most important items were addressed. The issues varied from one interview to the next and were heavily dependent on (1) the background of the interviewees, (2) their organization, (3) the position and function within the organization, and (4) the knowledge already obtained by studying documents or from other interviews. Several key topics were covered in the interviews (see also annex 3):

- Start of the cooperation (who took the initiative, who was involved),
- Objectives and motivations to engage in C2C cooperation,
- Themes and issues addressed in the cooperation,
- Organizational and individual actors involved,
- Types of knowledge exchanged,
- Ways and methods of exchanging information,
- Types of learning taking place,
- Implementation of lessons learned,
- Views of the interviewees on the process of exchange and learning as well as partnership processes.

As it was nearly impossible for respondents to make a clear distinction between what was learned at each specific exchange, a broader stance was adopted in also assessing learning which had occurred during prior exchanges. Insights also often evolved over time. When possible, I tried to conduct recurrent interviews with the most important key persons; in most cases these were the coordinators of the municipal linkages at the municipalities, the coordinators of VNG International and some other key informants. According to King and McGrath (2004), recurrent interviews are valuable for expanding and clarifying findings, and can help capture some sense of the temporal dynamics.

In total 125 interviews were conducted, out of which 100 were with representatives of local government and non-governmental organizations in the case study municipalities. In total 49 interviews in the five Dutch municipalities, 30 in the three Moroccan municipalities, and 21 in the two Turkish municipalities were conducted. Of the 100 interviews, 58 were with representatives of local governments and 42 with representatives of non-governmental organizations. Recurrent interviews with coordinators and key informants were counted as one interview. In addition, I also interviewed 25 key informants, who had unique knowledge about the partnerships and had been involved in the exchanges between the municipalities, but did not directly participate in the selected case studies (see also table 3.1). Most interviews lasted one to one-and-a-half hours, with some exceptions. As mentioned, valuable information was also collected during meetings with Moroccan and Turkish delegations on official visits to the Netherlands and while participating in Dutch delegations to Morocco and Turkey. These visits also offered the possibility to meet and talk to a wider range of actors. In

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50 An overview of the number of interviews conducted in all municipalities as well as a list of respondents can be found in annex 1 and 2 (along with the timeframe of the fieldwork).
some cases these meetings were like mini-interviews, while in other cases they were more like focus group discussions (see also section 3.6.4). (These short interviews are in addition to the 100 C2C participant and 25 key informant interviews).

In the north of Morocco most of the interviews had to be conducted in Berber; in Casablanca French was most appropriate; and in Turkey most interviews had to be held in Turkish. Various translators assisted me in each locality. Some of the interviews in Turkey could be done directly in English and some in Morocco directly in French. I was able to verify most of the information in French or Spanish (in Morocco), and in English (in Turkey). For the more informal communication, I generally could manage well enough with my knowledge of English (Turkey), French (Morocco) and Spanish (in the north of Morocco).

3.6.4. **Focus group methods**

While participating in the missions I was able to talk to small groups of participants when the schedule allowed. Initially I intended to organize more structured focus group discussions (interviews with several people on a specific topic or issue), but in practice this was difficult to achieve. For most exchange visits an intensive programme was prepared, leaving little time to organize sessions for my own research purposes. I also felt that it was more appropriate to follow a more conservative schedule of fewer meetings, instead of insisting on more meetings amidst the participants’ overloaded work schedules. However during most missions there was time for spontaneous discussions with small groups of people. Most of these ‘organic’ focus group interviews were either with groups of representatives of municipalities in the Netherlands or representatives of municipalities in Morocco and Turkey. Examples include the meeting held in Berkane (Morocco) with a group of young people who participated in an exchange programme with Dutch students. I also met with team members of Emirdag/Afyon who participated in a waste management programme, and who were willing to discuss their experiences during a conference in Ankara. Also, the discussions with delegation members in the evening hours in hotel lobbies served as focus group discussions. These meetings helped to verify the collected data and provided also additional data.

3.6.5. **Processing and analysing data**

Nearly all interviews were recorded, and nearly all recorded interviews were transcribed word for word. Only a few respondents did not want the interviews to be recorded, and in a few cases it was not possible to make a recoding due to technical problems. The interviews conducted with the assistance of translators were transcribed directly from the original Turkish or Berber into English or Dutch, thus retaining as much of the original data as possible. I contracted two students to do this job (a Turkish student based in Ankara and a Dutch student of Moroccan descent from the University of
Amsterdam). Native Dutch students assisted with the majority of interviews conducted in the Dutch language, while I personally transcribed a substantial number as well. The valuable information obtained during the missions and conferences was quickly noted down during and after the meetings and encounters, and elaborated at a later stage (usually the same or the following day). The transcribed interviews—as well as field notes, notes on conferences and meeting and the few interviewees that were not recorded—were all coded and analysed using Atlas-ti software.

3.6.6. Linking the cases to other Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish partnerships
In addition to the case studies, useful information on other Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships was obtained in various ways. First of all, I attended meetings of the former municipal platforms for cooperation with Morocco and Turkey as well as other meetings and conferences organized in the framework of exchanges between Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish partnerships. Second, I organized an expert meeting and a seminar on the municipal linkages between migrant source and destination countries, focusing on Dutch municipalities engaged in these partnerships. In January 2008, after finalizing the initial inventory research and the research set-up, I organized a meeting with a group of ten experts (including scientists and practitioners) in which I presented my research proposal. This expert meeting provided me with a lot of input and ideas how to focus my research (as well as with some research data).

One year later in 2009, I organized a seminar on city-to-city cooperation with migrant source countries in cooperation with NCDO, VNG International and the University of Amsterdam. The main target group were practitioners (working with local governments and non-governmental organizations) but also some academics. Around 75 people participated and four working group sessions were organized. The seminar provided a wealth of data, including data on the case studies, which was used as an additional source in the research.

At the last stage of the research, telephone interviews with twelve contact persons for international cooperation of Dutch municipalities were carried out (April–March 2011). Through the telephone interviews, I sought to broaden the scope, to obtain knowledge about recent developments and acquire information about the potential for continuation of the partnerships after the end of the support programmes (in light of the 2010-2011 budget cuts).

51 The seminar was held on 29 January 2009 in the municipality of Utrecht and was titled ‘It doesn’t stop at the municipal border’ (Het stopt niet bij de gemeentegrens). The seminar was financed by NCDO, a Dutch expertise and advisory centre for global citizenship and international cooperation, which also supported the first part of this PhD research.

52 The workshops focused on 1) cooperation between governments and civil society, 2) connecting international relations to integration, 3) strengthening local governments in partner municipalities, 4) partnerships, knowledge exchange and learning.

53 Interviews by telephone were conducted with all coordinators of international relations of the LOGO East programme focusing on cooperation with Turkey (see annex 4).
Through this methods, as well as by participating in meetings and conferences, data on all Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish partnerships was gathered, providing interesting information on mutual learning for partnerships not included as case studies in the research. Some of these findings are incorporated in the dissertation as separate text boxes. The various research methods and the number of people interviewed as well as the number of missions are presented in table 3.1. Annex 1 and 2 provide further information on the interviews conducted, annex 4 presents an overview of telephone interviews and in annex 5 policy-oriented conferences and meetings are presented.

Table 3.1 Key information on interviews and participation in missions and meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main research: 5 case studies (2008–2011)</th>
<th>the Netherlands</th>
<th>Morocco</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study interviews</td>
<td>49 (29 LG, 20 NGO)*</td>
<td>30 (16 LG, 14 NGO)</td>
<td>21 (13 LG, 8 NGO)</td>
<td>100 (58 LG, 42 NGO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General interviews</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in missions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in meetings at the national level</td>
<td>Turkey platform: 5 Morocco platform: 2 Seminar (January 2009)</td>
<td>Conference MATRA programme (October 2009)</td>
<td>Final conference LOGO East (January 2010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey/telephone interviews: all Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships (2011)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*LG: Respondent from local government
NGO: Respondent from a non-governmental organization

3.7. Reflection on methodology

The ideal research conditions are easily imagined: working with good and independent translators; enjoying sufficient time and a quiet working environment conducive to conducting interviews; interviewing NGO representatives separately from local government officials and others. However, these ideal research conditions rarely materialize: people walk in and out offices; telephones constantly ring during interviews; interviewees suddenly are only available for half of the planned time; interviews take place in a noisy railway station. Probably everyone who has conducted research recognizes these scenes. There were many moments when the situation was far from ideal, and I had to improvise to capture reliable data. Below, I will briefly discuss the main problems and how I solved them as well as offer a few reflections on the research process.
3.7.1. **The language barrier**
For the interviews conducted in Morocco and Turkey, language was an important barrier to overcome, as I had to rely on translators for most of the interviews. Some translators were fantastic, while others were less impressive. Luckily I could verify most of the information in French or Spanish (in Morocco) and in English (in Turkey); however, it did imply delays and added an extra layer in the communication, potentially causing confusion and misinterpretation. Doing interviews in the north of Morocco was somehow easier compared to Casablanca; the planning and scheduling of interviews was more flexible, and it was easier to arrange translators informally. Also, my knowledge of French and Spanish was generally sufficient for participating in general conversations in the north of Morocco. In Casablanca I tried to schedule my appointments and involve a student as translator to support me, but found that the common way of scheduling was to send the time and place of the meeting at a very late stage per SMS. By the time I had confirmed the appointment, it was not always possible to find a translator. Also, for the interview with the police in Casablanca I felt it was best to go without a student, due to the possible sensitivity of the information. Therefore, I conducted these interviews personally in French.

In one case I felt I could not refuse the offer of a mayor to provide me with the assistance of one of his employees in translating interviews, despite his position with the municipality and his limited capacity in the English language. I felt I was able to compensate for the possible bias by having the original answers translated and securing information from the same informants in other ways (like informal meetings and through translated emails).

3.7.2. **The timing and planning of the five case studies**
I found the combination of using both interviews and observation while participating in missions very useful to analyse the process of knowledge exchange and learning. As discussed, using observation was particularly relevant for analysing partnership processes. Timing and planning my fieldwork was challenging as I had to plan fieldwork in ten municipalities (five in the Netherlands and five abroad). One of the main challenges was the timing of the first missions, followed by conducting the interviews. As discussed earlier, it was not always possible to find this balance. As my time spent in Morocco and Turkey was limited, I also had to be efficient in planning my interviews. Several representatives from Turkish and Moroccan municipalities and non-governmental organizations were also interviewed when they were visiting the Netherlands on an exchange programme.

In 2010, I participated in two evaluations focused on city-to-city cooperation, which were not part of my PhD research.\(^{54}\) This resulted in a delay in my PhD research;

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\(^{54}\) I participated in two evaluations of city-to-city cooperation. In the first one, a team of researchers from the University of Amsterdam and the Utrecht University evaluated the LOGO South programme (implemented by VNG International and financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In the second, together with a researcher from the Utrecht University, I was involved in the evaluation of city-to-city
however, at the same time, it provided me and my mentor with valuable relevant experience and new ideas to apply in my PhD. Moreover, in combination with my part-time work schedule, I was able to spread the fieldwork over several years. This proved to be an important advantage as this kind of research would have been very difficult with a concentrated fieldwork period of one or two years.

3.7.3. Building up trust
Perhaps my biggest fear was not having enough time to build up a sufficient level of trust for conducting the interviews. Fortunately, I was able to meet the various respondents on more than one occasion; often I felt that I was fully accepted as a team member, and I truly enjoyed being engaged in the process. Generally the hospitality and openness of the people I interviewed was really amazing. I am sure certain people kept information, and I also felt that some people were just not willing to be openly critical about their partners. However, I was also struck by the openness of respondents about the functioning of their own municipality and about more problematic aspects, like distrust, false starts of the cooperation and misunderstandings. I also learned to read better between the lines and to understand what the respondents actually wanted to say when they used general phrases (e.g. to avoid embarrassing someone). Especially in Morocco and Turkey, people had well-developed skills to succinctly express what they really wanted to say. I felt that my age, work and life experience helped me make connections and establish good relationships with respondents in a relatively short time. Attending the meetings of the Morocco and Turkey platforms, which was a time consuming exercise, was also important for building trust, because it allowed me to become a familiar presence among the platform members. Especially at the meeting in Ankara, it was very helpful to meet some people and to approach them later on by email and phone calls to obtain some additional information.

3.7.4. Learning about learning
As already discussed, Ten Have (1996) pointed at the dilemma between exercising control over the interviews and maintaining a certain kind of naturalness in a less structured interview. I felt that this tension was particularly evident in studying learning processes and partnership conditions. I choose a very open approach for conducting the interviews, especially in relation to the topic of partnership conditions. For instance, I asked people to share generally their experiences, without explicitly mentioning all the partnership conditions (like power, trust etc.). I feel that such questions might have 'steered' their perceptions (for example, explicitly asking if power differences played an important role in the relationship). To study the partnership conditions, my own observations were also quite valuable. By participating in the missions, I was able to see partnerships between Dutch and Nicaraguan municipalities, assessing the role of LBSNN (Landelijk Beraad Stedenbanden Nederland-Nicaragua). The evaluation was conducted upon the requests of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see annex 7).
how the various actors interacted with each other. As already described, in the tightly-packed timing of the exchange programmes, I felt I was also able to observe the true dynamics of the partnership processes. Having more time to conduct more follow-ups with the interviewees would have provided more in-depth knowledge.

3.7.5. Grasping the reality of inter-municipal relations
In the literature government and civil society are often put in opposition to one another. In reality I found that they were often connected in various ways, for instance, through personal contacts. Due to the limited time spent in each municipality, it was difficult to obtain good insight in the relationships between local government and civil society actors. Although the people were quite open and definitely not telling a ‘fairy tale’ story about the relations between local government and civil society, I felt that a researcher would ideally need to spend more time in one particular location to get the full story. I also feel that an additional one or two weeks—or even a month—per case would still not be sufficient. I tried to partly overcome this limitation through the interviews with key informants knowledgeable about the specific context and not directly linked to the cases. This provided relevant additional information about the local contexts in general and the municipal partnerships in particular. The next chapter will provide the context of the research by focusing on the governance processes in Morocco, Turkey and the Netherlands.