Between local governments and communities

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

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Summary

International cooperation is not only an issue for international organizations, national governments and development organizations. An increasing number of other actors are also involved, including migrant organizations, citizens through private development initiatives, labour unions and local governments. I became fascinated by the partnerships between local governments as they approach development cooperation from a specific angle. Professionals involved in the municipal partnerships, are experts in specific policy fields, like waste management, fire safety, police affairs or youth participation and they exchange knowledge with "colleagues" that focus on similar issues. They do not necessarily have a lot of knowledge on development cooperation and the specific conditions of the country they are cooperating with. Even more interesting, I felt, are the linkages which have a large potential for mutual learning (learning at both sides), like the ties between migrant source and destination countries. What kind of actors are involved? To what extent does mutual learning take place? And to what extent do these partnerships lead to changes in governance arrangements? These were the leading questions when I started my PhD research. The research was my own initiative made possible by the trust, supervision and financial support I received from the University of Amsterdam, and NCDO, a Dutch expertise and advisory centre for citizenship and international cooperation. This summary provides the key findings on the separate research questions, followed by the main contributions to the literature.

Local governments in transnational space (Chapter 1 & 2)

Linkages between municipalities in higher income countries on the one hand and lower or middle income countries on the other hand are a specific type of partnerships; they are usually long term linkages based on a formal agreement including both governmental as well as non-governmental actors, like community based organizations, schools and companies. Municipal partnerships should be placed in a changing context of ongoing decentralization and globalisation processes as well as global political power shifts in order to explain their focus and assess their relevance. Starting as a means to promote peace building and reconciliation within Europe after the Second World War and later on poverty alleviation in the global South, linkages between the global North and South have increasingly focussed on strengthening local governance through a process of knowledge exchange and learning. Generally, higher income countries have assisted lower and middle income countries in strengthening local governance processes like service delivery, tax collection en working in multi-actor arrangements. This is particularly relevant as the roles of local governments are changing due to decentralization processes. City-to-city partnerships are also known for the (cultural) exchange between citizens which is said to be at the base of increasing awareness on global issues and fostering global citizenship. More recently the own interests of municipalities in higher income countries are more prominent on the agenda, like
learning on issues related to cultural diversity and economic development. These partnerships have a larger potential for mutual learning compared to the partnerships which have mainly focused on transferring knowledge from higher to lower income countries.

From 2000 onwards, Dutch local governments have established partnerships with local governments in Morocco and Turkey; two main migrant source countries to the Netherlands. In addition to the general objectives of strengthening local governance in partner municipalities, these new twinning arrangements seek to promote mutual understanding between migrants and host societies and to strengthen social cohesion and integration of migrants in Dutch municipalities through the exchange of knowledge with partner municipalities. Economic development can also be part of the objectives. A specific feature of these partnerships is the existence of transnational linkages and the involvement of migrants in the exchange process.

**Focus of the research & methodology (Chapter 3)**

By focusing on mutual learning processes of governmental and non-governmental actors involved in Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships, this research seeks to contribute to studies on city-to-city cooperation and mutual learning through partnerships. The research also aims to contribute new insight into transnational local connections, which have been understudied. The central research question was formulated as follows:

*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?*

In order to answer the central research question four separate research questions were formulated, focusing on;

1. **The influence of national and local policies as well as transnational linkages on the actors involved and the themes addressed in municipal partnerships;**
2. **Methods and types of knowledge exchanged and the types of learning taking place;**
3. **The extent of strengthening local governments, civil society actors, local government–civil society interfaces and broader governance networks;**
4. **The extent of 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 including analysing documents, participating and observing during missions (7 missions), conducting interviews (125) and various informal focus group discussions. The selected cases include the municipal
The field research took place between 2007 and 2011. 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.

**National policies, local policies and transnational relations (chapter 4 & 5)**

Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships were shaped and influenced by national policies, international cooperation policies of Dutch local governments and the existence of direct translocal linkages. First of all, the governance system in Morocco and Turkey is quite centralized despite decentralization processes taking place, making the competencies of local governments rather limited. At the same time, both in Morocco and Turkey, local governments are increasingly cooperating with non-governmental actors like privatized waste management companies or community based organizations while the number of civil society organizations is increasing. These developments imply a changing role for local governments. Compared to Morocco and Turkey, Dutch local governments have a large mandate and a relatively large budget; they have more freedom to formulate policies and dedicate budgets. They also have a relative freedom to engage in international exchange. During the research period two Dutch based support programmes (MATRA for cooperation with Morocco and LOGO East for cooperation with Turkey) were operational which had an important impact on the municipal linkages as they were directed at strengthening local governance processes in Morocco and Turkey and focused on specific themes. The economic slow-down which have set in 2008 have led to budget cuts at the national and local level, support programmes were not followed up and local governments have cut down on their international cooperation budget. The budget cuts also affected the relationship between local authorities and civil society; many local governments pulled out and left more to civil society organizations.

Secondly, Dutch local governments have formulated various international cooperation policies. A number of local governments had policies of actively engaging non-governmental organizations, other local governments only focused on exchanges between municipal departments, and a third group of municipalities only supported civil society initiatives (the last type of partnerships was not included in this research). Non-governmental actors (private companies, schools as well as women's, youth and migrant organizations) were involved in the partnerships Haarlem - Emirdag, Zeist - Berkane and Meppel – Al Hoceima. In the partnerships between Amsterdam - Kocaeli and Rotterdam - Casablanca fostering exchange between local government bodies was a central policy focus. The specific policies altered during the course of time; NGOs were involved before the research period, while economic development has become more important in the last years.
The existence of translocal linkages was identified as an important third factor that had an impact on the partnerships between migrant source and destination countries. In the partnership based on a direct translocal link (Haarlem - Emirdag), civil society actors already established linkages before local governments were engaged. For other partnerships these linkages were present but not as strong (Zeist - Berkane, Meppel – Al Hoceima) and new civil society organizations were involved once the local governments established linkages. Larger municipalities did not build their partnership around translocal links (Rotterdam-Casablanca, Amsterdam-Kocaeli) and as mentioned hardly any CSOs were involved in these partnerships.

Based on the various external and internal factors, the research analysed the variety of municipal partnerships and identified models centred on cooperation between local governments, ‘multi-actor models’ that include civil society organizations, and ‘multi-level models’, whereby the involvement of higher government levels also played an important role. A hybrid governance network model combining the multi-actor model and the multi-level model was identified as another possible model but this was model was not present in the case studies.

Knowledge exchange and learning (chapter 6)

Learning in Morocco and Turkey
Main exchange programs were financially supported by Dutch based programmes and topics addressed included waste management (Morocco and Turkey), cultural heritage preservation and fire safety and disaster management (Turkey) and the exchange between police and youth participation (Morocco). In Morocco and Turkey learning on service delivery like waste management and learning on working in partnerships with non-governmental actors was important for local governments involved as local governments were not used to work in multi-actor arrangements. The learning mainly occurred through peer-to-peer, on-the-job learning, during meetings and workshops and during field visits. The knowledge that was exchanged included so-called tacit and embedded knowledge; this is knowledge which is internalized by people, it concerns ways of doing things and it is understood by an individual but has not been systemically expressed (e.g. by writing it down). This form of learning therefore requires face-to-face contacts. Most policy officers involved already had theoretical knowledge which was obtained during education, but they lacked more practical knowledge. By being exposed to another country participants also obtained new ideas and it stimulated awareness creation, like the importance of protecting the soil underneath a waste disposal site or informing and involving citizens on issues like environmental preservation. The linkages at local level were ‘an open window or door to Europe’. Exposure was also relevant to create an understanding of the specific Dutch context like the governance system,
population density and climate but also the way people interact with each other. Just transferring knowledge in workshops settings was generally not sufficient to obtain these insights. Municipal officials and employees of other organizations also indicated that they gained more practical skills like conversation skills (mentioned by the youth in Morocco) writing EU project proposals (mentioned by a policy officer), improving English and working systematically (mentioned by many respondents). In addition the ties had a stimulating impact; professionals were encouraged in their own work by the interest from abroad. Important limitations to learning included a lack of knowledge regarding the context, inadequate preparation prior to the visits and poor facilitation of the knowledge exchange.

**Learning in the Netherlands**

Exchanges focusing on learning in the Netherlands were not supported by programmes and were less structured compared to the exchanges focusing on strengthening governance processes in Morocco and Turkey. Learning ranged from learning on cultural issues and ethnic and cultural diversity to learning by reflecting on one's own work processes (many respondents in the Netherlands mentioned overregulation and a lack of flexibility and creativeness). Dutch involved actors specifically increased their understanding of the position of Dutch citizens of Moroccan and Turkish descent and the exchange helped to create bridges towards migrant groups. For instance, mayors, police officers and a teacher explained it was easier to establish contacts as it was obvious they were sincerely interested in the background of migrant groups by visiting Morocco or Turkey. Learning regarding policies on diversity in Dutch society mainly occurred during exchange visits by partners from Morocco and Turkey to the Netherlands and vice versa. Limited use was made of peer-to-peer sharing, which made the exchange less profound compared to the exchange focusing on strengthening governance in Morocco and Turkey. The professionals on the Dutch side involved did mainly learn through the exchange of embedded knowledge, especially cultural knowledge. This implies field visits and face-to-face learning were also important for this kind of learning to occur.

**Role of migrants**

A specific characteristic of the linkages between migrant source and destination countries is the active involvement of migrants and migrant groups. They fulfilled an important role as (1) initiators of several municipal partnerships and projects; (2) translators and interpreters (the majority of native Dutch professionals did not speak Arabic, Berber, French or Turkish); and (3) facilitators, sharing their knowledge and networks. Their expertise was particularly important in overcoming cultural differences; most migrants possessed limited knowledge on governance arrangements. Overall, limited use was made of their knowledge and networks. A disadvantage of the active role of migrants was that in some cases migrants, often unintentionally, took over the communication with the local counterpart excluding Dutch professionals and this way their expertise was not fully utilized.
Untapped potential
Despite the various forms of learning taking place, in all three countries there was a potential for deeper forms of learning. In most cases lessons were not put into practice, mainly due to the limited mandates of local governments and their dependence on upper levels of government. Several attempts of non-governmental actors to learn from international exchanges stalled because they were not backed up by the local government actors, which indicate the relevance of some form of commitment of local governments to pave the way and support civil society initiatives.

Strengthening local governments, local government–civil society interfaces and broader governance networks (chapter 7)

Classic local government network model and multi-actor model
The research demonstrated the predominance of two governance network models: a classic network model, whereby local government bodies were strengthened, and a multi-actor model, whereby also exchanges between local governments and CSOs and between CSOs were central. In nearly all Moroccan and Turkish local governments sections or departments were strengthened. In Berkane and Al Hoceima (Morocco) waste management was privatized and improved. In Emirdag (Turkey) the international exchange with Haarlem assisted in the establishment of a new waste management system. The capacity of the fire department in Kocaeli (Turkey) was strengthened through obtaining new knowledge and equipment, and a department for the preservation of cultural landmarks was set up. Cooperation between the police departments of Rotterdam and Casablanca also led to learning by police officers, but there was no conclusive evidence that the capacity of the department as a whole was strengthened (this was a new exchange programme, started in 2008 and not supported by nationally funded programs). The municipal partnerships did lead to some—but very limited—strengthening of local government bodies in the Netherlands. Personal learning did occur but this was not embedded within the local government body.

The partnerships did also contribute to establishing improved relations between local governments and non-governmental actors. This was apparent in the exchanges that focused on youth groups in Morocco as well as waste management and environmental awareness rising in Morocco and Turkey. The presence of ‘Dutch colleagues’ helped to address sensitive issues like youth participation in Morocco. This study found only modest evidence for the strengthening of civil society in Morocco and Turkey, but its contribution is still relevant in the light of important ongoing changes in these countries. Local government–civil society interfaces were strengthened, especially when local
governments actively involved civil society actors. In the Netherlands local governments
did also improve their cooperation with civil society, especially in relation to Dutch
citizens of Moroccan or Turkish descent, but the research indicates that there is still a
large untapped potential.

*Broader governance network models*
There also was some evidence of multi-level network models, whereby both local
government bodies as well as broader governance networks were strengthened. This
was particularly the case in the exchange on fire safety in Turkey, whereby different fire
brigades started to cooperate and compiled an initial inventory of the equipment of fire
brigades in south-east Turkey, with the aim of strengthening the sector at large. In the
Netherlands the exchange did not lead to the strengthening of broader governance
networks. Dutch municipalities did exchange knowledge on international projects in
Morocco and Turkey, but the exchange on practices in the Netherlands was limited, and
the exchanges were not linked to higher governmental levels.

**The dynamics of mutual learning (chapter 8)**
The research set out a framework for analysing mutuality in municipal partnerships
along three key elements:
(1) Identifying the different kinds of actors and their objectives for engaging in
international exchange programmes.
(2) Identifying the different kind of projects at different scale levels under the umbrella
of the municipal partnership.
(3) Analysing five dimensions for the dynamics of mutual learning in municipal
partnerships which were based on earlier research findings.

First of all, mutually is connected to the learning objectives set out by various actors
involved. Moroccan and Turkish local governments were generally mostly interested in
strengthening services, Dutch municipalities wanted to build bridges with migrant
groups but they could also have altruistic motives (providing aid) and international
cooperation fitted in the social responsibility policies of companies. It is important to
note local governments and nongovernmental actors did not always formulate clear
objectives for their own learning or for mutual learning. Secondly, mutual learning did
not always clearly occur at a specific project but it did take place at the level of the
municipal partnership. For instance, in waste management projects knowledge transfer
from the Netherlands to Morocco and Turkey was often central while Dutch actors
mentioned their own learning was limited, while at the level of the municipal
partnerships several other exchanges were more targeted at learning by Dutch actors.
So mutual learning did occur at the level of the municipal partnership.

The research findings related to the five dimensions of mutual learning include;
1) *Similarity between professionals* (necessary for establishing dialogue and trust) was important in exchange processes. However, the learning was not always adequately facilitated and its potential was only partly used. This is particularly applicable to the Dutch municipalities, which made only limited use of peer-to-peer learning.

2) *Differences between partners* (something to learn from) and the recognition and appreciation of differences appeared to be an important base for learning. Generally exposure to a different context was important for being able to think 'outside the box'. Differences were at the same time also perceived as a limitation for learning. A lack of openness to draw lessons from practices in Morocco and Turkey arguably also limited leaning possibilities.

3) *Complementary resources* played an important role as Dutch actors – through nationally funded programmes provided the bulk of the financial resources. Despite the resources put in by Moroccan and Turkish actors and the open and equal exchange, projects were still characterized by a donor-recipient perspective. The small municipal budget for international cooperation of Dutch local governments, combined with the impact of the South-focused support programmes, limited the extent of learning by Dutch actors.

4) *process-based building of trust* through continuous collaboration—a key characteristic and strength of city-to-city cooperation—was important for the exchange programmes that focused on strengthening local governance in Morocco and Turkey, but this potential was not always exploited by exchanges focusing on learning by Dutch municipalities.

5) *Power differences* between the different actors did not seem to play an important role in the exchange processes. Generally speaking, the exchanges were very open—especially between peer groups.

*Adding a sixth dimension*

The *existence of translocal linkages* appeared relevant for analysing mutual learning in partnerships between migrant source and destination countries and was added as a sixth dimension. This was reflected in (1) the involvement of Moroccan municipalities in issues related to the integration of migrants in Dutch society; (2) private development initiatives by migrants; and (3) the importance felt at different scale levels for 'getting to know the other', combating prejudice and building bridges. This form of raising awareness on global issues was particularly relevant for the relationships at the local level between the Netherlands and Morocco and Turkey. Despite the short physical distance and the long presence of large migrant communities in the Netherlands, knowledge on these countries is still limited and there are strong prejudices on both
sides. The municipal partnerships should also be placed in time; many were established shortly after major shocking events like 9/11 and the murders of politician Fortuyn and filmmaker van Gogh which increased tensions within Dutch society, especially towards migrant groups with an Islamic background. Based on these findings it can be concluded that one of the first and most fundamental objectives for initiating municipal partnerships, building bridges, peace building and raising awareness on global issues appeared to be particularly applicable for Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships.

Main contributions of the research (chapter 9)
This study has a number of key contributions to several research fields.

(1) The decentralization and globalization debate
The research analyses the challenges at the local level as well as the possibilities and limitations of translocal linkages between different geographical locations. This focus is particularly relevant as the local level is still underrepresented in the globalization and transnational literature, while important changes in terms of economic development, geopolitical power shifts and governance systems are taking place. The research contributes to the scarce body of knowledge on decentralized international cooperation, by setting out the specific characteristics of these partnerships, like peer-to-peer exchanges and transnational linkages. This is particularly relevant as an increasing number of actors are involved in international cooperation, and these actors increasingly work in multi-actor partnership arrangements.

(2) Transnational governance networks
The research shows that when assessing governance networks, the aspect of learning could be placed in a more central position, in order to obtain a better understanding of these networks. In the literature on governance networks, little attention is being paid to learning models, especially to mutual learning and transnational linkages. Authors mainly refer to interactive governance networks and power dimensions in networks. In the literature that focuses on municipal partnerships, the process of knowledge exchange and learning has been studied, but both sides of the partnerships have not been equally covered.

(3) Characteristics of C2C partnerships as well as learning and mutuality in partnerships
By focusing on the linkages between migrant source and destination countries, which are seen as having a large potential for mutual learning, the research contributes to the general body of knowledge on municipal partnerships. The research shows that an open approach to mutual learning, without predefined conceptions about the direction of the knowledge exchange, can broaden the scope of the learning. The research also illustrated the usefulness of maintaining a broad definition of learning as personal
learning cannot always materialize into the implementation of lessons learned due to institutional constraints. By building on research on partnership processes in which aspects like trust, equality and power were identified as important factors influencing cooperation and exchange and analysing the various factors and conditions that play a role in fostering and limiting mutual learning, the research aimed at increasing the understanding of what is required for mutual learning to take place.

(4) Governance network models
The research identified various governance network models and showed that municipal partnerships as a form of governance network are very diverse and include multi-actor and multi-scalar arrangements (which provide the opportunity to also strengthen local government–civil society interfaces). These models can be instrumental in assessing municipal partnerships and more general governance networks. An analysis of mutual learning in municipal partnerships can also be important for demonstrating the wide array of mutual benefits in North-South partnerships, beyond economic exchanges.