

**CITY-TO-CITY LEARNING IN URBAN STRATEGIC
PLANNING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: UNEARTHING AN
UNDERGROUND KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY**

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DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Geography in the Graduate Program in the School of Agricultural, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, under the supervision of Professor Urmilla Bob.

I Sogendren Mogambary Moodley declare that the research work described in this thesis is my own original unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was not used. It is being submitted for the degree of PhD in Geography in the College of Agriculture, Engineering and Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.



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DEDICATION

The brighter day is rising upon Africa. Already I seem to see her chains dissolved, her desert plains red with harvest, her Abyssinia and her Zululand the seats of science of religion reflecting the glory of the rising sun from the spires of their churches and universities. Her Congo and Gambia whitened with commerce, her crowded cities sending forth the hum of business, and all her sons employed in advancing the victories of peace – greater and more abiding than the spoils of war.

(Seme, 1906: 407)

This research is dedicated to all the planning practitioners and activists on the African continent and beyond, who work tirelessly to improve the lives of the marginalized and voiceless citizens they serve. Their work often goes unnoticed, as their deliverables are intangible; unlike the postmodern buildings created by city architects or super-highways designed by road engineers.

Their craft involves unlocking of imaginations, inspiring vision as well as lobbying for change and new possibilities. It is hoped that this research will help develop a greater understanding of how urban planners learn, inspire more democratic planning practices and ultimately contribute towards the realization of Seme's (1906) vision of a regenerated continent that was envisioned more than a century ago.

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ABSTRACT

Despite international evidence strongly suggesting the need for urban strategic planning, most African governments still continue to under-invest in the establishment of bottom-up strategic planning frameworks. The seriousness of the consequences of such inadequate urban strategic planning responses and ineffective governance in developing economies has been flagged by the World Economic Forum (WEF), identifying it as a key global risk in 2015. What is of particular interest in their analysis however is the observation that governments of rapidly growing cities make very little time for learning from other cities to improve their own planning processes. Whilst the above assertion may be true, targeted research on city-to-city learning conducted predominantly in the global North is showing that cities are in fact quietly forming an international web-work of learning representing an almost invisible, underground knowledge economy. Given the highly conspicuous void in empirical research into city-to-city learning in urban strategic planning processes in the (southern) African context, this doctoral study focuses on a United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) case study using the experience of three African cities, Durban in South Africa, Otjiwarongo in Namibia and Mzuzu in Malawi, to shed light on the phenomenon of city-to-city learning. In particular, the research explores what insights are offered by the eThekweni Municipality's mentorship program with these selected Namibian and Malawian municipalities that begin to inform contemporary learning theory in southern Africa. Rejecting a grand meta-narrative in favor of a more pragmatist, hands-on and bottom-up, context specific interpretation of social reality; the research adopts a multi-conceptual lens by drawing from the urban planning and organizational learning disciplines. The study utilized a mixed methods approach with both qualitative (key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observation) as well as quantitative (census survey of a total of 34 respondents) data integrated into the study. The study yields a set of illuminating results which begins to challenge currently held definitions and learning terminology. More importantly, a learning model is developed with five clearly delineated stages in the city-to-city learning process. In addition, the research is able to distil the valuable lessons emerging from the in-depth case study to propose a broad, but coherent learning framework, with a set of strategic recommendations to guide future city-to-city learning processes. These recommendations which have been shared with the international learning stakeholders are already beginning to transform the learning landscape in southern Africa and beyond.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACBF	-	Africa Capacity Building Foundation
ALAN	-	Association of Local Authorities in Namibia
ANC	-	African National Congress
C40	-	Cities Climate Leadership Group
CDS	-	City Development Strategy
CEM	-	Council of European Municipalities
CEMR	-	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
CITYNET	-	City Network of Asia Pacific Cities
CLGF	-	Common Wealth Local Government Forum
CPT	-	Communicative Planning Theory
DBSA	-	Development Bank of Southern Africa
EMA	-	eThekweni Municipal Area
ESCOM	-	Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi Limited
EUROCITIES	-	European Cities
FBOs	-	Faith-based organizations
FLACMA	-	Federation of Latin American Cities, Municipalities and Associations
FMCU-UTO	-	Federacion Mundial de Ciudades Unides/ United Town Organization
GAWC	-	Global and World Cities
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	-	Gesellschaft fur Internatioanale Zusammenarbeit/ German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation
ICLEI	-	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
IDP	-	Integrated Development Plan
IGCTPA	-	International Garden City and Town Planning Association
IPPUC	-	Instituto de Pesquisa Planejamento Urbano de Curitiba / Curitiba Institute for Urban Planning and Research
IULA	-	International Union of Local Authorities

IUV	-	Union Internationale de Ville
LA	-	Los Angeles
LTDF	-	Long Term Development Framework
MALGA	-	Malawian Local Government Association
MDGs	-	Millennium Development Goals
MILE	-	Municipal Institute of Learning
NALAO	-	Namibian Association of Local Authority Officials
NDP	-	National Development Plan
NGOs	-	Non-governmental organizations
PLUS	-	Partners for Long Term Urban Sustainability
PSUP	-	Participatory Slum Upgrading Program
SACN	-	South African Cities Network
SADC	-	Southern African Development Community
SALGA	-	South African Local Government Association
SANPAD	-	South African Netherlands Research Program on Alternatives in Development
SCI	-	Sustainable Cities International
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goal
SMILE	-	Swakopmund Municipal Institute of Learning
SPSS 21	-	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SWAPO	-	South West Africa Peoples' Organization
SWOT	-	Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats
TDS	-	Town Development Strategy
UCLG	-	United Cities and Local Governments
UCLGA	-	United Cities and Local Governments of Africa
UIM	-	Ibero American Union of Municipal
UK	-	United Kingdom
UN	-	United Nations
UN-Habitat	-	United Nations-Habitat
US	-	United States
USP	-	Urban Strategic Planning

USPC	-	Urban Strategic Planning Committee
UTO	-	United Towns Organization
VNG	-	Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten/ Association of Dutch Municipalities
WACLAC	-	World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination
WEF	-	World Economic Forum
WUF	-	World Urban Forum

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Setting the scene

Never before in the history of humankind has the world experienced such unprecedented urbanization, with the planet today being a predominantly urban one (McGuirk, 2015). In acknowledging the present urban age as one of severe financial, economic, environmental, social and political crises, it is significant that the latest United Nations (UN)-Habitat's *State of the World's Cities* report has focused the spotlight on the developing world, highlighting that "today of every 10 urban residents in the world, more than seven are found in developing countries" (UN-Habitat, 2013: 25). It is not surprising therefore that the so-called "urban millennium" has now also been identified as the age of southern urbanization (Roy, 2014: 14). In fact, Parnell and Oldfield (2014: 1) argue that the new international distribution of cities has already shifted, with the global South now identified as the "new epicenter of urbanism".

Within the global South, however, what does this mean for Africa, which has increasingly become an urban continent, and, according to the UN-Habitat (2010), has the highest levels of urban population growth in the world? This is an especially vexing question given that while some African cities are developing rapidly others have persistent and increasing socio-economic and environmental challenges (Bob et al., 2014). These are linked to power dynamics and historical imbalances which bring to the fore issues of contestation and inequities.

In a sobering commentary on the urban development crisis in Africa, Pieterse and Hyman (2014) isolate the underlying reasons why significant proportions of urban dwellers in Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to live in slums and remain trapped in cycles of urban poverty. In their analysis, most African cities and towns lack the "institutional, financial and political resources to deal with growing levels of urbanization" (Pieterse & Hyman, 2014: 42). More importantly, they argue that despite international evidence strongly suggesting the need for urban planning and institutional frameworks underpinned by well-resourced, capacitated, effective, relatively autonomous and

democratic local government systems, most African governments still continue to under-invest in the establishment of such frameworks (Pieterse & Hyman, 2014).

The seriousness of the consequences of inadequate urban planning and effective governance in developing economies has also recently been flagged by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2015: 35), which has identified it as a key global risk in their latest global risks report, because it is supposedly “threatening the sustainability of urban development”. What is of particular interest in their analysis, however, is the observation that given the extreme pressures of urbanization, the governments of such rapidly growing cities make little time for “adjustment and learning” (WEF, 2015: 35).

The acknowledgment that much of the inequality in the 21st century actually stems from inadequate planning by local authorities and central governments was first made emphatically in the UN-Habitat 2010/2011 State of the World’s Cities Report, ‘Bridging the Urban Divide’ (UN-Habitat, 2010). In attempting to offer a solution to the crisis, one of the catalysts for change identified during the in-depth policy analysis conducted by UN-Habitat is the development of a sustained and clear city vision that provides a robust framework for urban strategic planning. Investment of substantial time and energy in building a collective city vision with all stakeholders is mooted as the first step towards building a more sustainable and inclusive city. The UN-Habitat (2010) World Cities Report, however, adds that a city vision must not only give a very clear sense of direction, but must also detail the exact steps that it will take to get there. It then goes on to cite as good practice the South African example of the eThekweni Municipality’s “Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2010 and Beyond”, an urban strategic plan, which outlines specific goals, strategic focus areas, programs, projects, budget allocations and performance indicators to emphasize the importance of translating vision into reality and ensuring that planning is put into practice (UN-Habitat, 2010: 157).

Two key points emerge from this discussion. First, it is evident that urban strategic planning in the developing world is now clearly in the international policy spotlight and is gaining more attention. Second, it appears that some cities in the global South - and in particular in southern Africa are in fact offering examples of good practice on how urban strategic planning and in particular city

visioning processes can help build more inclusive and sustainable cities. For the researcher, who is also engaged in active planning practice, these often undocumented examples are critically important to note, as they begin to challenge the tendency to instinctively look to the global North to inspire meaningful action in African cities.

Whilst such cases of inspiring practice may exist on the continent, to what extent are such good planning practices actually being emulated by other cities in southern Africa? If cities are learning how to embark on city visioning and urban strategic planning exercises, exactly how does this learning occur? Who are the key role-players in such learning process and how do relations of power in these processes influence city-to-city learning? More critically, has the quality of urban strategic planning improved as a result of these learning interventions? These are all fundamental questions that underpin the research undertaken, that deliberately uses three southern African cities as reference points, supporting the current move towards a geographical realignment of urban studies that begins to profile the work in cities in the global South.

In this introductory chapter, the research problem is presented and the case for pursuing the exploration of city-to-city learning in southern Africa is made. The research aim, objectives, question and sub-questions are made explicit before the research methodology is summarized. It concludes with providing an overview of the thesis structure and flow of subsequent chapters.

1.2. Discussion of research problem and motivation for the study

From a survey of the literature on city strategic planning, it becomes clear that cities are now responding in many ways to improve their urban strategic planning processes, with one of the lesser documented responses being their new tendency to look to other cities in a conscious attempt to learn, adapt or adopt these practices (Campbell, 2009; 2012a). For example, New York's former Mayor Bloomberg announced that in the preparation of New York's Strategic Plan that his City team:

...drew on the experiences of Berlin, for (their) renewable energy and green roof policies, from Hong Kong, Shanghai and Delhi for (their) transit improvements, from Copenhagen for (their) pedestrian and cycling upgrades, from Bogota for (their) plans for Bus Rapid Transit and from LA (Los Angeles) and Chicago for (their) plan to plant one million trees.

(UCLG, 2010a: 1)

It is interesting to note that Bontenbal (2009) makes the observation that the rapid growth of the number of city partnerships and networks internationally was so conspicuous that in as early as 2002, the UN-Habitat chose city-to-city cooperation as the theme of the World Habitat Day. According to the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG, 2006), as much as 70% of the world's cities are engaged in some form of international cooperation, sister city agreements, international city networks, partnerships and/ or programs. In citing investigations commissioned both by the UN-Habitat and the Partners for Long-Term Urban Sustainability (PLUS) Network which is a very well established international city network, Ishinabe (2010: 2) explains that city-to-city learning is one of the most effective means for city capacity development since it provides appropriate experience and expertise. This view has recently been confirmed by van Ewijk et al. (2015) through empirical research in a Dutch support program that demonstrates that city-to-city learning does effectively strengthen municipal capacity in the South.

De Houwer et al. (2013) in unpacking the various definitions of learning, acknowledge that there is no consensus about the exact definition of learning in the literature. For the purpose of this research however, learning in its most basic form is best understood as the acquisition of new knowledge, Campbell (2012a: 9) in his seminal work on how cities learn makes the point that learning in cities happens during the process of city-to-city exchanges, and more specifically during “technical visits of professional practitioners who actively seek new knowledge and good practice”. This is a useful although somewhat basic definition of city-to-city learning, which will be further developed on in later chapters. What is more important to note, however, is Campbell's (2012a: 9) assertion that cities are forming an international web-work of ties that represent what is now regarded as “an underground economy of knowledge”, with cities quietly responding to the demand and supply in practitioner-based knowledge determined by their respective city needs.

In a survey conducted by Campbell (2012a), it is demonstrated that city-to-city exchanges of professional practitioners seeking new knowledge and best practice reach tens of thousands each year. Campbell's (2012a) findings in *Beyond Smart Cities* has gained international recognition, and is regarded by the Secretary General of the UCLG as having the power to compel cities to rethink their strategies about learning. What is troubling though is that this important research survey included only one African city - the Dakar City Region - of a total of forty-eight international cities surveyed (Campbell, 2012: 225).

Furthermore, the key arguments developed in Campbell's (2012a) *Beyond Smart Cities* on the importance of building networks of trust to ensure successful learning have been based on in-depth research into the learning practices of four cities - Barcelona, Charlotte, Portland and Turin. All of these cities are established northern cities, and questions may arise on the applicability of such insights to developing cities on the African continent where the contexts and challenges are different from those in the global North. It is against this backdrop that an attempt is made to fill in the highly conspicuous void in empirical research into city-to-city learning in urban strategic planning processes in the (southern) African context. It is this surfacing and academic exposure of African economies of knowledge that is the primary motivator for the proposed research.

Whilst the careful documentation of how cities are learning from each other in the southern African context is important in its own right, the value of the research lies in its focus on a critical analysis of the actual learning process. As a practitioner working in southern Africa, it is strongly contended that this analysis is imperative in order to provide guidance in the form of a broad policy framework on how to improve city-to-city learning and hence improve the quality of planning practice. This view is supported by De Villiers (2009: 149) who argues that within the city-to-city cooperation literature, there is clearly a paucity of guidelines and principles to aid cities involved in practice. As will be explained in detail in the next chapter, this emphasis on honing in on actual planning practice with a view to improve planning outcomes is consistent with the tradition of a new breed of planning theorists working in a "practice movement", that emerged in response to a frustration with what Watson (2008: 225) terms as "armchair theorizing". Beyond enhancing practice, however, this analysis will also contribute towards the generation of new theoretical

knowledge, or at least the testing of prevailing theory – this time, however, from an African perspective.

In order to do this, the research uses the UCLG mentorship program that is currently underway in Africa as a case study and key point of reference. The UCLG is the umbrella organization for cities, local governments and municipal associations throughout the world, and is present in 140 of the 191 UN member states (UCLG, 2006). As the single global network of cities, local and regional governments, the UCLG's mission is “to be the united voice and world advocate of democratic local self-government, promoting its values, objectives and interests, through cooperation between local governments, and within the wider international community” (UCLG, 2014: 4).

The UCLG Urban Strategic Planning Committee (USPC) that is responsible for urban strategic planning internationally utilizes “city mentorship” as the predominant mode of city-to-city learning (UCLG, 2013a). Focusing on the UCLG's mentorship program between the eThekweni Municipality, Durban as the mentor city and selected mentee municipalities in Namibia and Malawi, expectations from the UCLG USPC at the commencement of the research process were high, with the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the respective municipalities, the overall program manager (as indicated in Appendix 4) and international donors eagerly awaiting the findings of the study (UCLG, 2013b). It is important to point out that the research design process allowed for the preliminary high-level findings emanating from the study to be fed back to the key stakeholders, resulting in an active shaping of the new direction of future UCLG and Cities Alliance supported city-to-city learning programs in the global South. This ability for academic research to directly impact and positively influence practice is consistent with the phronetic research approach that focuses on transformative action, as will be detailed in the next chapter.

1.3. Research aim and objectives

1.3.1. Research aim

The overall aim of the research is to conduct a critical analysis of contemporary city-to-city learning on municipal visioning processes in southern Africa, drawing insights from the eThekweni Municipality's mentorship program with selected African municipalities in Namibia and Malawi, in order to inform both the current theoretical debates around city learning and the development of a learning framework to guide strategic planning practice in southern Africa.

1.3.2. Research objectives

Within this overall aim, the five main objectives that guide the study are:

1. To explore the unique characteristics of eThekweni Municipality's city visioning experiences that are valued by mentee municipalities and adapted to their local contexts.
2. To unravel exactly *how* southern African cities learn from eThekweni Municipality's city visioning processes.
3. To gauge the effectiveness of the city-to city learning processes in the selected UCLG program.
4. To suggest the critical elements of an enabling policy framework that can guide more effective city-to-city learning practices in the urban strategic planning field.
5. To use the southern African insights gained in the study to contribute towards the building of new theoretical knowledge in city-to-city learning.

1.4. Guiding research question and key sub-questions

1.4.1. Research question

The overall research question being asked is:

What insights does eThekweni Municipality's (Durban, South Africa) current mentorship program with selected Namibian and Malawian municipalities provide to inform contemporary learning theory and to develop a robust city-to-city learning framework to improve the quality of municipal visioning processes in southern Africa?

1.4.2. Research sub-questions

The five research sub-questions are:

1. What is unique about eThekweni Municipality's city visioning experiences that are perceived by other southern African municipalities as worthy of being emulated?

2. If southern African cities are learning from each other about how to embark on city visioning exercises, how exactly does this learning occur?
3. Has the quality of urban strategic planning improved as a result of these learning interventions in the UCLG program being run in the selected municipalities?
4. What are the essential elements of a policy framework that can guide more effective city-to-city learning practices in this field?
5. How does the critical analysis contribute towards the building of new theoretical knowledge in city-to-city learning?

1.5. Summary of the research methodology

As an urban planner employed by the eThekweni Municipality, which is the name of the Metropolitan Council in Durban, South Africa, the researcher is responsible for managing the city's Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE). In working closely with the players involved directly in city-to-city learning mentorship programs and consciously drawing on the nuanced lived experience of grappling with how best to share urban strategic planning processes on the continent, the researcher is also constantly challenged to engage critically and impose a distance that is required for academic rigor. The challenges and opportunities that are presented in managing these tensions are detailed in the methodology chapter.

Before outlining the research approach adopted, this section provides some background to the case study. As alluded to earlier, the UCLG mentorship program that identified the eThekweni Municipality as a mentor to provide strategic planning support to the Mzuzu City Council / Mzuzu Municipality in Malawi and the Otjiwarongo City Council / Otjiwarongo Municipality in Namibia is used as a case study to provide insights on how the learning process unfolds. According to the terms of reference that guides the mentorship, the program is operationalized through City Future, which is a joint program of the UCLG and Cities Alliance, aimed at promoting City Development Strategies (CDSs) based on the Millennium Development Goals – MDGs (UCLG, 2010b).

The UCLG had selected Mzuzu City Council for participation in the mentorship program due to its strategic location in the northern region of Malawi, which effectively serves as the capital for

the entire Northern region (UCLG, 2010b). Growing at 4.2% per annum, it is the third largest urban center after Lilongwe and Blantyre (UN-Habitat, 2011: 8). With a population of just 150 000 people, Mzuzu serves a broader hinterland population of about 1.7 million and is regarded as one of the fastest growing cities in Malawi (UN-Habitat, 2011: 11).

In its inception report prepared after its first UCLG-facilitated visit to Malawi, at the invitation of the Malawian government in 2010, the eThekweni Municipality (2010a: 3) identified “the inability to develop relevant plans which help guide the development of the city” as the starting point in its acceptance of the offer to mentor the city. The UCLG (2010b) was very clear about the roles and responsibilities of each city in the mentorship process. It was expected that the eThekweni Municipality as mentor would “provide technical assistance in the areas of strategic analysis, including a pre-evaluation of the Durban lessons learned and to plan the next activities taking into account the local context” (UCLG, 2010c: 2).

Turning briefly to Namibia which has had a long and shared history of colonial rule and underdevelopment with its South African neighbor, the Namibian mentorship program with the eThekweni Municipality, unlike in the case of Malawi, was supported at a national level by the Namibian Association of Local Authority Officials (NALAO) and the Association of Local Authorities in Namibia (ALAN). With five municipalities identified by the Namibian authorities to be involved in a pilot project with the eThekweni Municipality, the ALAN (2012) report suggests that the project focus on enhancing strategic planning capacity not only in the participating local authorities of Otjiwarongo, Omaruru, Karibib, Usakos and Maltahohe but also in both ALAN and NALAO, the two key Local Government Associations in Namibia.

It is important to note that whilst the intention of the proposal was to pilot the CDS process in five municipalities identified above, during the process the larger and more capacitated Municipality of Otjiwarongo organically took on a lead role, with the eThekweni Municipality investing more time and energy in supporting this pilot. The intention was that Otjiwarongo could in turn play a support role to the other smaller pilot municipalities. For the purposes of this research, the Otjiwarongo Municipality is therefore focused on.

Otjiwarongo, which is considered one of the oldest towns in Namibia, is the capital of Namibia's Otjizondjupa region and given its strategic location, it serves as a node between the harbor towns, the Capital city and the northern regions (Otjiwarongo Municipality, 2009). As the case with Mzuzu City, Otjiwarongo is strategically located, forming the route axis for trade and cargo movements from the Walvis Bay Port to the rest of southern African countries. The first initial contact between the mentor and mentee cities was in July 2009 when the Namibian municipalities were exposed to the strategic planning process of the eThekweni Municipality. The relationship between the eThekweni Municipality and the Namibian municipalities is still actively being nurtured by the planners involved.

Moving to the approach adopted in the research, a mixed methods approach, characterized by the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data was adopted for the study as suggested by Creswell (2009; 2014) as the most appropriate approach for this type of research, considering the nature of the topic. The rationale for mixing methods is based on the fact that city-to-city learning is a complex phenomenon. This method was effective in that the qualitative research component allowed the development of an in-depth understanding of this learning process in the field of urban strategic planning that was then supported by quantitative research.

As the study involved a two phased approach starting with the qualitative data collection and analysis in order to explore the nature of city-to-city learning in the mentorship program, and then built onto a second, quantitative phase, the sequential exploratory design as indicated by Creswell (2009; 2014) presented itself as the appropriate option to addresses the research problem at hand. The detail of this design is presented in Chapter 4, which unpacks the research methodology used. In summary, however, the first qualitative phase of the research employed four methods: document analysis, observation, holding a focus group discussion and conducting a set of 18 in-depth key informant interviews to unearth the underground knowledge economy of learning. This was followed by a second quantitative phase where a social survey instrument was developed and administered to all municipal stakeholders involved in the visioning process in both participating municipalities in Otjiwarongo in Namibia and Mzuzu in Malawi. As alluded to earlier, consistent with the phronetic research approach, the findings emanating from both phases were presented back to the key stakeholders from all three countries and other global actors, to identify key tension

points in the program and in order to help stimulate debate and dialogue about new directions for future city learning programs.

The research project has been an interesting journey of re-discovery. Whilst having an insider perspective has certainly helped deepen and enrich the quality of the analysis, the rigors of scientific research called for an uncompromising discipline of constantly being fully aware of the researcher's own notions, ideas and prejudices on mentoring and strategic planning, and making a conscious attempt to limit the influence of these in relation to the data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will explore the mechanisms utilized to limit potential researcher bias in the study.

1.6. Thesis structure and chapter sequence

In this introductory chapter, the research problem and the motivation for the study has been presented, the research aims and objectives and its related research question and sub-questions outlined and an overview of the research methodology has also been provided. Employing a multiple set of lenses for a richer and in-depth understanding of the research problem, Chapter 2 explains the conceptual framework that guides the research. This is followed by a detailed exploration of the main themes in the literature in Chapter 3. The fourth chapter introduces the study area and provides details on the UCLG mentorship program and how this relates to international city-to-city learning. It also focuses on the case study and explains how strategic planning processes have been unfolding in eThekweni Municipality and how this has been influencing planning in the two selected cities of Mzuzu in Malawi and Otjiwarongo in Namibia. This chapter then unpacks the details of the research methodology spelling out the research design and the research methods that were employed.

Chapters 5 and 6 engage with the findings that emerged during the research. In order to facilitate a more coherent analysis, these two chapters are structured around key themes/ sub-themes that were identified in the literature review and that relate to the research sub-questions. Using these insights and the feedback from stakeholders who had the opportunity to engage with the research findings, Chapter 7 then develops a broad framework for city-city-learning in southern Africa that hopes to engender a more progressive and participatory strategic planning practice. The eighth and

final chapter synthesizes the entire research project, summarizes the key findings and recommendations before reflecting on possible limitations in the study, and suggesting key future strategic research areas emanating from this doctoral research.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction: the power of multiple lenses

Given the complex and evolving nature of modern cities and towns with their dynamic actors involved in a multiplicity of learning transactions, no single analytical lens will be powerful enough to help frame a useful view of city-to-city learning in the field of urban strategic planning. For the purposes of this research project therefore, a multi-conceptual theoretical framework (as depicted in Figure 2.1 below) is adopted which draws upon three bodies of knowledge in order to help frame the research. At the first, broader philosophical level, this research sets aside grand meta-theories in favor of a more pragmatist approach that hones in on contemporary, progressive southern African developmental practices, rather than attempting to locate itself in any generalized meta-theory. As will be explained in this chapter, it finds the critical pragmatism of Forester (2012) particularly appealing as it grapples with the influence of power dynamics in the often contested terrain of urban planning.

As the research is about urban planners and how they learn in a strategic planning process, the second lens is drawn from the traditional planning body of knowledge and focuses on the practice movement that again utilizes empirical knowledge to inform theory. This is consistent with the pragmatist approach aimed at improving planning practice. In addition, it pays particular attention to the pervasiveness of power and its influence in the planning process by drawing on the work of Bent Flyvbjerg, a post-Foucauldian planning theorist who encourages planners to employ a phronetic research approach that is committed to transform practices.

Since this research project is also about the actual process and mechanics of learning, the third lens draws from the field of organizational learning and finds knowledge creation theory a powerful lens to help to understand the complex geography of learning and innovation in urban strategic planning processes. This particular area of research is new as few theorists have ventured into a detailed exploration of how knowledge is created and shared between institutions within a planning

process, and the role that context and space play in this regard. Each of these theoretical lenses will be examined in turn.

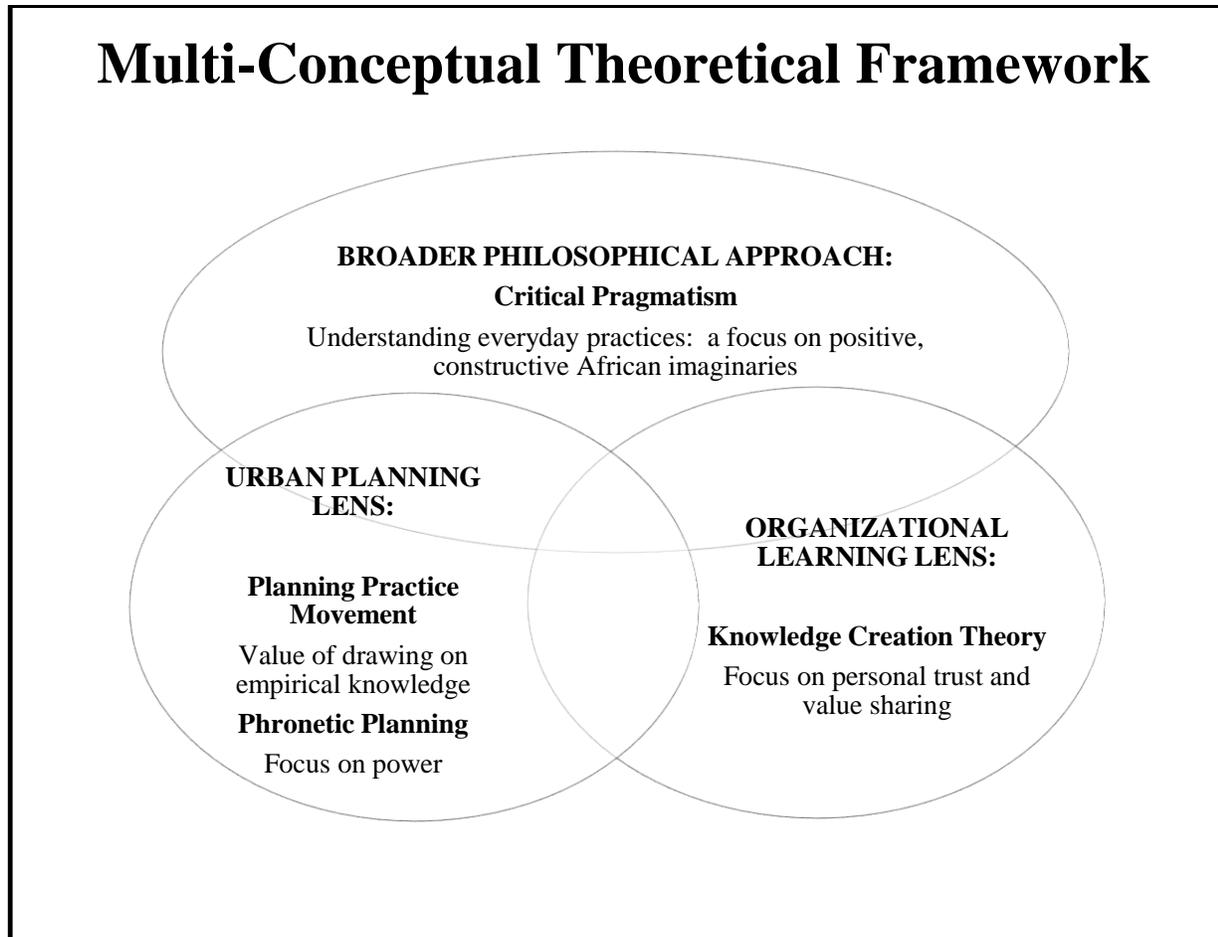


Figure 2.1: The multi-conceptual theoretical framework

2.2. Beyond meta-theory: the move to pragmatism

Working in the urban planning and development field in southern Africa, and confronted with the reality of not discovering an all-encompassing theory powerful enough to help interpret the complexities that cities face in the light of a legacy of colonial underdevelopment in Africa, this research at its broad philosophical level adopts a pragmatist view to interpret the research problem. What exactly does pragmatism offer and why is it useful in this case study research?

In a lively conversation between theoreticians Stewart Clegg, Bent Flyvbjerg and Mark Haugaard on situating the power debate in the social sciences, Flyvbjerg traces the history of the pragmatic tradition of Aristotle, Machiavelli and Nietzsche, which he notes began more than two thousand years ago when Aristotle critiqued his teacher Plato for being far too abstract and theoretical to be of any value in practical life (Clegg et al., 2014). It is noted that unlike the intellectual tradition of Plato that isolates one in theory and academia, Aristotle's pragmatism allows one's work to "make a difference in practice" (Clegg et al., 2014: 303). As the research aims to do exactly this, make a meaningful difference in the quality of urban strategic planning practice, pragmatism is a useful guiding philosophy and does require some unpacking.

In an earlier exposition of central tenets of pragmatism, Cherryholmes (1992; 1999) explains that there are many versions of pragmatism, with varying points of emphasis, interpretations, and even reinterpretations. What unifies them is that pragmatists all "sought to clarify meanings of intellectual concepts by tracing out their conceivable practical consequences" (Cherryholmes, 1992: 13). Some of the more active pragmatists in the twentieth century that are identified in the voluminous literature include Dewey (1989), Putnam (1990) and Rorty (1991). Writing over 25 years ago, one of the earliest proponents of pragmatism, Dewey (1989) offers a useful definition of what pragmatism is and what it is not. As it captures the essence of the paradigm, it is worth recounting the observations of Dewey (1989: 32-33):

Pragmatism... does not insist upon antecedent phenomena but upon consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action. And this change in point of view is almost revolutionary in its consequences... [W]hen we take the point of view of pragmatism, we see that general ideas have a very different role to play than that of reporting and registering past experiences. They are the bases for organizing future observations and experiences.

Pragmatic research in this worldview is primarily driven by anticipated consequences, with research findings only important to the pragmatic researcher because of their “conceivable practical consequences”, and with the focus on the kind of community that the researcher wants to promote (Cheryholmes, 1992: 14). As indicated earlier, this research on city learning processes has as a key focus the explicit intention to improve the quality of urban strategic planning practices in very clear and practical ways, and therefore aligns well with the pragmatist tradition generally. But how does pragmatism as a broad tradition relate to urban planning more specifically?

Whilst much has been written about pragmatism, many theorists have argued that Schön (1983) through his *Reflective Practitioner* has perhaps been the single greatest proponent of this tradition in the field of urban studies and planning (Fischler, 2012; Healey, 2009; Hoch, 1994; 1996; 2007; Verma, 1996). It is therefore worth distilling Schön’s (1983) argument as a way of conveying the essence of a pragmatism that is useful for interpreting the complexities of city-to-city learning in an urban strategic planning process.

Forester (2012: 8) makes the important observation that Schön’s work had clearly demonstrated that an action, or as he puts it, a “practical move” goes beyond expressing an intention towards producing practical consequences that actually alters the situation at hand. More importantly, Schön clearly showed that sometimes such practical moves have unexpected consequences that orienting theories had failed to anticipate, especially in a context of highly complex settings that planners often find themselves in (Forester, 2012). Schön, it appears, was therefore beginning to link orienting theories to success or failure. When any action was taken which led to unsurprising results, then earlier expectations or orienting theories get confirmed. However, when unexpected results are produced, Schön argued that such theories are forced to be re-examined and adjusted in order to reach positive outcomes or at least avoid more negative outcomes (Forester, 2012).

In essence, Schön was able to develop a compelling explanation of the process of learning in action, and more importantly learning as a result of practical moves or action taken in a particular context. As Innes and Booher (2010) note, Schön was the first to make the point that learning happens not through argument or debate, but through moving in the world. For the researcher, who is actively involved in planning practices that attempt to transform environments, pragmatism

therefore has particularly great appeal. Moreover, given that this research is about planning practitioners involved in a learning process that necessarily requires them to rethink current approaches, adopting such an overall pragmatic stance is most useful in interpreting reality in African cities. As an African planner and researcher committed to transformation, taking time to consider how cities in Africa are thought of, and understood, is critical.

Yet, in surveying the literature on contemporary approaches to understanding African cities, it becomes apparent that there are large gaps in knowledge with respect to new ways of thinking about the sustainable development of African cities, and the complex and often messy processes that unfold therein. Hence it is very clear that the application of a grand meta-theory can do very little to help unravel the intricacies that play themselves out in African cities in the 21st century.

In a critical piece about the application of theory in African cities, Pieterse (2011: 13), who argues in a pragmatist tradition, makes the point that over the last two decades, understanding urbanization processes has been “dominated by either neo-Classical or neo-Marxist theoretical approaches”. Pieterse (2011) observes that what is most ironic is that even radical urban theory that draws on regime theory, regulation theory and/ or governmental theories in concert with Marxian political economy in order to explain how class based power dynamics unfold, actually all arise from Northern contexts. The problem, Pieterse (2011: 14) explains, is that these theories assume a “well-developed welfare state as an inheritance of Keynesian policies” – yet, interestingly, it is observed that none of these Keynesian legacies apply in African cities.

In searching for what is termed a new African urbanism, Pieterse (2011; 2013) bemoans this over-reliance on Western-derived theoretical frameworks. Many of such western discourses often mirror modernist assumptions about what constitutes viable cities. What is problematic with these frameworks, it is argued, is that they perpetuate notions of African cities as failures and in so doing, popularize the African narrative as one of doom and despair that are to be understood only in relation to the Northern city (Pieterse, 2011). Such a notion conflicts with the researcher’s lived experiences engaged in strategic planning in African cities which actually reveal exciting possibilities for city regeneration and renewal. More than lived experiences, however, the practice

of municipal visioning in southern Africa is slowly being identified as a positive narrative that appears to be transforming the planning landscape (UN-Habitat, 2010).

It is important therefore to begin to assert new understandings of the African city. Adopting such a pragmatic paradigm frees itself from the constraints of grand meta-theories, immerses itself in understanding what is happening in current practice, drills deep into the case study and pays careful attention to the context and meaning that planners involved in municipal visioning attach to city learning in an African context. This is a much more powerful theoretical lens to guide the overall research.

In fact, numerous urban theorists writing over the last decade including Simone and Abouhani (2005), Malaquais (2006), Harrison (2006), Watson (2009; 2014a), and Beall et al. (2010) have been actively calling for newer, and multiple alternatives in viewing African cities. Nearly a decade ago, Harrison (2006: 323) was one of the first African theorists to make a passionate plea for far more positive and constructive imaginaries:

...rather than seeing Africa as an incomplete or deteriorated example of modernity, we might focus on how Africa, and its many different parts, is – through the resourceful responses of its residents to conditions of vulnerability – in the process of becoming something new that is both part of and separate from Western modernity. This new imaginary may provide a conceptual opening that would allow us to think about Africa in ways that are more hopeful and positive; that acknowledge the success of Africans in constructing productive lives at a micro-scale, and economies and societies at a macro-scale, that work despite major structural constraints.

Similarly, although perhaps in a more measured line, Pieterse (2011: 14) again makes the case for a more dispassionate approach to what is termed the “real city, the real economy and the real social practices and identities” of citizens. Pieterse (2011: 14) argues for a much more layered and grounded account of “African cityness” and for a theoretical framework that takes the African city for what it is. Such a framework, it is argued delves deeper into understanding the everyday

practices in these cities in order to appreciate the complexities inherent in African cities (Pieterse, 2011).

It is important to acknowledge that to truly explore the complexities in such cities, however, one has to be sensitive to the issues of power and contestation. One of the limitations of the classical pragmatist stance as evinced by Schön's work is its neutrality or silence on issues around politics, power and conflict (Forester, 1999; 2012). It is here that the transformation of Schön's (1983) *The Deliberative Practitioner* by Forester (2012) to include thinking about power and conflict, political engagement and how learning takes place in these environments has been most illuminating.

Forester (2012: 9) argues that learning is far more than merely paying attention to just "the words" of one another's arguments, but by listening carefully to one another's stories and partaking in a range of what he calls "participatory rituals". Listening here, Forester (2012: 10) is quick to add, is not about words but about "meaning and emotion, about respect and relationships, about recognition and power". It is this dedication of careful attention to these aspects that Forester (2012: 10) characterizes what he terms "critical pragmatism". This case study research that involved the researcher immersing himself into the planning process, albeit as an active observer, allowed for an in-depth analysis of the rituals involved in the learning process, and the vigilance for the subtle potential play of power dynamics, perceptions of misrepresentations or perhaps the withholding of information. This approach of a more critical pragmatism therefore best serves the interest of the research project.

Having made the case for the adoption of a (critical) pragmatic approach as an overall guiding philosophy that is most useful in interpreting the reality in African cities, in the next section the focus of the lenses shifts from the broader philosophical approach to hone in on the field of planning theory. Given that the case study is about how learning occurs in a strategic planning process which is an important field of urban planning, assessing the value of contemporary planning theory in helping to interpret strategic planning practice is necessary and useful for an appropriate conceptual framework.

2.3. Planning theory: from communicative planning theory to phronetic planning

As a practitioner, it has been interesting to note the acceptance of the clear limits of planning theory in the contemporary planning literature. In a recent, hard-hitting critique of the value and credibility of planning theory, Harrison (2014) argues that with a few exceptions, planning theories have generally failed to respond to addressing realities in any consequential way. More specifically, in reflecting on the prevailing unease with planning theory, Harrison (2014) questions the relevance of planning theory. This is raised noting the perplexing question identified by Sanyal (2002) of whether any effort should actually be put into producing planning theory, given the findings of a social survey which revealed that very few planning practitioners actually consider planning theory to be of any use.

Essentially, Harrison (2014: 68) argues that the legitimacy and worthiness of planning theory ultimately rests on its ability to enhance planning practice in the ‘real world’, and as he puts it, it is here that “planning theory still struggles to make the connections”. What this analysis again reinforces is the power of adopting a pragmatic approach that steers clear of grand meta-theories, instead grounding itself in the lived realities of planners in practice.

It is against this background that a detailed overview of the history and trajectory of urban planning theory will be foregone in favor of a much more focused approach, highlighting the two most relevant planning perspectives that will be useful in informing the research. Both of these perspectives are consistent with the first overarching pragmatist paradigm. In essence, the conceptual framework adopted for this research best fits into what Watson (2002) describes as the planning practice movement in that it draws predominantly on empirical knowledge to inform theory. Given the researcher’s bias towards practice and the fact that a case study was employed to study detailed practice with the intention to improve the quality of planning on the ground, this communicative practice perspective is a useful lens to understand city-to-city learning.

However, it also finds a second more radical approach – that of Flyvbjerg’s (2002) Foucauldian analysis of power - very useful and therefore draws on Flyvbjerg’s (2004; 2012; 2015) phronetic

planning model that has been refined over the last decade in helping to interpret and analyze planners' actions in the case study. According to Flyvbjerg (2004: 284), phronetic planning research is an approach to the study of planning based on a contemporary interpretation of the classical Greek concept of phronesis which has been variously translated as practical wisdom, practical judgment, common sense or prudence.

Each of these planning influences will be explored here briefly as they are important approaches that inform how this research is framed. It is accepted, however, that Harrison (2014) would argue that even such a frame of reference; using case study research within the tradition of the planning practice movement and adopting a phronetic research planning approach to conscientize planners about the pervasive role of issues of power relationships within city-to-city learning may not go far enough. In defense, it is argued that this does however represent a useful beginning.

From a scan of the state of planning theory over the last decade or so, it is not unfair to make the observation that a common theme emerging from a survey of the planning literature is the unashamed attack on modernism. Whilst now slightly dated, perhaps the most comprehensive review of policy practice done by Wagenaar and Cook (2003) offers a very useful critique of the modernist legacy in policy analysis and argues that one of the cornerstones of the modernist program in policy and social reform specifically is the opposition between theory and action. Wagenaar and Cook (2003) argue further that this theory/ practice dichotomy is not a doctrine that can easily be dismissed given its entrenchment in the way we understand how we ought to relate to the world around us.

In the modernist scheme, Wagenaar and Cook (2003: 140) argue that “action is supposed to follow logically and automatically from knowledge” and, more importantly, any other action that is taken is seen as intuitive and at worst, blind. For these theorists, the notion of action as a mere appendage to knowledge has resulted in the down-play of the role of action in the way in which the world is understood. What is important to observe in this modernist paradigm, is the neglect of the transformative role of action – a critical theme that is actively pursued by the communicative practice tradition within planning. As Robert Beauregard comments in Mandelbaum et al.'s (1996: 106) now seminal text on planning theory, this clearly identifiable approach to planning theory has

emerged as a result of the “discursive/ communicative turn in planning”, with strong roots in the work of Jurgen Habermas and the 1980s enthrallment with postmodernism, and specifically issues of representation.

The work done by Habermas (1987) in relation to human beings’ interest in knowledge is of particular relevance to the learning aspects of this research project. Beside the technical and hermeneutic interests, Habermas (1987; 1990) introduces the concept of emancipatory interests in knowledge which involve critical reflection and are linked to the capacity to engage in dialogue with others, reason critically and think reflectively. These concepts are important as these are processes that the planners involved in the case study are often engaged in, as they reflect on their own experiences during the mentorship program.

What is significant about Habermas’s (1990: 135-136) assertions is that communicative reason and meaningful action is made easier when there is a “consensus created through shared ‘life-worlds’ - shared contexts, cultures, values and propositions about social life”. It can be argued therefore that practitioners from different cities sharing a common worldview engaged in dialogue on city challenges, according to the communicative planning practice tradition, will be able to engage in action that is transformative. This is an important notion that is useful to test when considering strategic planners’ actions in the case studies in Namibia and Malawi.

Still working within this communicative practice tradition but building on its foundation, there appears to be a cadre of planning theorists in the 21st century who, through drawing on empirical knowledge, are flying the flag of what is a theoretically important practice movement (Watson, 2002). In exploring the contribution that the practice movement (which in essence refers to the great diversity of writings that focus on the activity of planning and the practices of planners) has made to planning theory at the turn of the century, Watson (2002) argues that empirical accounts of planning practice can help to build a more useful and pragmatic kind of planning theory, compared with the more generalized procedural or even normative models that previously constituted planning theory. More recently, this view was further developed in an attempt to debunk the misconceptions surrounding the generalizability of case studies and more actively claim this space in the African context (Duminy et al., 2014).

The theoretical advances of this communicative planning theory which Watson (2008) argues is the dominant strand of planning theory, is powerful as it shines the spotlight onto the local context and the everyday practices of planners. More importantly, the focus on the processes of deliberation and decision-making in local practice by theorists including Vigar et al. (2000), Yiftachel and Huxley (2000), Lauria and Wagner (2006) and others, talk to the need of developing a much more situated and portable planning theory (Watson, 2008). Watson's (2014a: 63) more recent contribution that builds on the argument for more situated planning theory is a renewed call for planning to take a "view from the South", acknowledging the increasing awareness of the complexities inherent in southern contexts that are now challenging taken-for-granted planning assumptions of planning theory originating in the global North.

Exploratory research in the tradition of the practice movement, utilizing a southern case study that drills deep to excavate the nuanced meaning that planners give to learning demonstrates the point that Fainstein and Campbell (2012) make in their review of the state of planning theory and the role of praxis-focused research. They argue strongly that it is through in-depth case studies that a "more nuanced and varied picture of planning outcomes" can be conveyed, and that the dynamism of planning which is always embedded in local contexts can be best expressed (Fainstein & Campbell, 2012: 237).

Through the utilization of the case study of the UCLG mentorship program (the details of which will be unpacked in the next chapter), it is precisely this richness and depth of analysis that has helped provide useful insights into nuances of city-to-city learning in the global South. This communicative practice tradition does offer a useful way of engaging with reality in that it is pragmatic in its ideological stance and emphasizes the value of local understanding and context. For the researcher, however, it does not necessarily engage sufficiently with contestation, conflict and the pervasive nature of power.

These critical issues are focused on in the second and perhaps more radical school of thought that has been gaining momentum in the last decade within planning theory. In discarding mere communicative practice, Flyvbjerg (2002; 2012; 2015) draws on the works of Foucault in an

attempt to contribute to an arguably bolder intellectual tradition of phronetic research that is very strong on issues of power:

I would like to urge those of us who are committed to the further development of planning theory to build relations of power – and especially enabling power – into our conceptual framework. This will be done more readily once we ground our theorizing in the actual politics of city-building.

(Friedmann, 1998 cited in Flyvbjerg, 2002: 2)

This call for researchers to actively confront the messy problems of the day by getting their hands dirty can be traced back to the notion pursued by Aristotle that phronesis as an intellectual virtue cannot be obtained by stepping back and contemplating reality from an objective distance (Simmons, 2012). Instead, in the phronetic research tradition, social scientists are urged to “do politics with their research...instead of writing yet another paper or book”, thereby even challenging the prevailing measurement of the impact of academic work by citations in other academic work (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012: 3).

Flyvbjerg (2004) therefore provides a far more proactive role for planning theory and proposes a set of guidelines for a phronetic planning research. These guidelines whilst not necessarily providing planners with direct answers, certainly begins to enhance the capacities of planners to make practical judgments in the field. For a phronetic research approach that is sensitive to the pervasiveness of power, Flyvbjerg (2004: 284) asserts that three things need to be done. Each of these will be examined with the intention of exploring how this research aligns with the phronetic approach.

In the first instance, Flyvbjerg (2004) argues that the rationalism typical of most of the planning schools of thought must be given up. Instead, the almost taken for granted “truths” about the rational and progressive promise of planning should be replaced by an analysis of these truths, and of planning in terms of power (Flyvbjerg, 2002: 284). This first assertion requires the researcher to suspend all previously held notions of urban strategic planning and how learning in this field ought to take place. It speaks to the need for an in-depth analysis of how the learning process

actually unfolds, with special attention being paid to the subtle influences of power; how it may influence the city-to-city learning process, how geo-politics may influence learning outcomes, who makes decisions and critically how these are made in the learning process.

Secondly, Flyvbjerg (2004) advocates that the real problems in the communities in which planners live should be addressed, and that these must be done in ways that matter. It was this profound assertion that had challenged the researcher in the early stage of the research conceptualization to find a research question that mattered to the work being done on a daily basis. The notion of community here was broadened by the researcher to move beyond the literal meaning to embrace the urban strategic planning community in southern Africa. It also prodded the researcher to settle on a research methodology that really mattered to those involved.

Finally, Flyvbjerg (2004) argues that the results of the research must be communicated effectively and dialogically back to stakeholders – and their feedback carefully listened to and responded to as part of the research process. This is a major deviation from traditional academic research that does not prescribe critical dialogue with those who are the subject of the study. In this study, given its phronetic research stance, the city-to-city learning findings have been shared with the key stakeholders involved, including the international donors who funded the program and the UCLG program managers. Their responses were also listened to in an attempt to construct new frameworks for bottom-up learning. Adopting this paradigm in the research has yielded very exciting and transformative results and has already begun to re-shape the way planning practice has evolved in the case study, as will be explained in later chapters. Phronetic research planning has therefore been a catalyst for transformative African strategic planning practice in the context of city-to-city learning.

Whilst the phronetic research approach and its broad guidelines did have immediate appeal to the researcher, the earlier writings of Flyvbjerg (1998; 2001; 2004) admittedly lacked the methodological detail to practically guide this research. It was, however, the most recent offering by Flyvbjerg et al. (2012) in a dedicated publication on applied phronesis featuring concrete case studies that inspired the researcher to think more creatively about how to structure the research so

that effective practical change in the UCLG mentorship program would emerge as a direct result of the research.

In particular, the research conducted by theorists Sandercock and Attili (2012 cited in Flyvbjerg et al., 2012: 4) where the notion of “problematizing tension points” in a case study that was identified as a critical theme for phronetic research, triggered the researcher to search for potential tension points in the Southern African case study. These tension points are identified as power relations that are susceptible to problematization and thus most amenable to change, due to them being “fraught with dubious practices, contestable knowledge, and potential conflict” (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012: 4). By implication therefore, Flyvbjerg et al. (2012) suggest that even a little challenge, such as the problematization by a scholar, can cause a tipping of the scales and triggering of a change in the tension point. What is most useful, however, is the identification of a three-step procedure to be followed in working with tension points. Phronetic researchers are encouraged to:

1. Actively identify dubious practices within policy and social action;
2. Undermine these practices through problematization; and
3. Constructively help develop new and better practices.

(Flyvbjerg et al., 2012: 6)

In their case study, Sandercock and Attili (2012) follow these three steps in exposing the treatment of First Nation indigenous Canadians by fellow non-native Canadians. Having firstly identified the dubious practices, these phronetic researchers then used the mode of film to capture the injustices. This was then followed by a public screening of the film to the entire small community in their town hall as a means of problematizing the practice in order to undermine the prevalent practice. The film had persuaded the local Mayor to acknowledge the town’s past mistakes and the need to do things differently. Most encouraging, however, is that the researchers continued with the development of new and better practices. As these researchers put it, they valued becoming “actors in the flow of history rather than bystanders” (Sandercock & Attili, 2012: 164). In the Southern African case study, the research involved locating the tension points, clearly problematizing it, presenting it to all stakeholders and then through consensual collaboration finding an alternative that is acceptable to all players involved in the case study. Working in this

phronetic research mode, and becoming an actor rather than a bystander in the UCLG case study, is a powerful way to contribute to transformative planning practice on the continent for the researcher.

Having shifted the focus of the conceptual lenses from the first broader philosophical paradigm to the second more focused urban planning lens, the aspect of city-to-city learning is discussed in the next section. This is done in order to help frame a better understanding of the learning processes that city planning and development practitioners are engaged in, as they begin to craft new visions for their cities and towns in Africa.

2.4. Organizational learning and knowledge creation: Towards a geography of learning

As this research is fundamentally about how planning and development knowledge is transferred between municipal institutions during the process of crafting new visions for their municipalities, it necessarily has to also explore the terrain of organizational learning and knowledge creation. In this section these theoretical concepts are defined in relation to knowledge creation theory, which is a useful lens to help understand not only how learning happens, but to begin to explore the geography of organizational learning.

In an interesting study that maps the transnational flow of planning ideas and practice, Healey (2013: 1) argues that currently, notions about what places could and should be like and even how to develop them are “flowing around our ‘globalized’ and interconnected world with increasing speed and ease”. The issue that is less explored, however, it is argued, is how such concepts are transported and applied totally “detached from any connection to their origin and the conditions which made them ‘practically useful’ in the first place” (Healey, 2013: 1). Focusing on context and space and investigating why these may be important considerations in improving planning practice is therefore critical for this research project.

It must be acknowledged at the outset that, whereas the first two lenses (pragmatism and phronetic planning) have been relatively easier to frame, deciding on a powerful lens to help interpret the

complexities of city-to-city learning processes in post-colonial Africa has been more conceptually challenging. In navigating the organizational learning minefield, it has become clear that the bias in the literature is around learning in private institutions and specifically in firms, with very little adaptation of what organizational learning means for local government generally. This point is emphasized by Campbell (2012a) who acknowledges that not much has been written about deliberate city learning itself. Whilst important theoretical contributions like Macfarlane's *Learning the City* (2011) and Landry's *Creative City* (2000) do view cities in the light of collective action, they clearly do not sufficiently explore the "detailed mechanics of learning" (Campbell, 2012a: 55).

In order to develop a useful conceptual framework that will help gain better insights into the nature of city-to-city learning, especially for the southern African context, it is important to first obtain conceptual clarity on the notions of organizational learning and knowledge creation. Lyles (2014), in examining the relationship between these equally elusive concepts, argues that these two processes cannot be separated and are, in fact, mutually dependent. Kane and Alavi's (2007) interpretation of organizational learning as a dynamic process of creating knowledge and transferring it where it is needed and used is, however, most instructive. In the case study this would be seen as eThekweni Municipality planners and facilitators reflecting on their process of municipal visioning and packaging this information in a way that can be best transferred to their colleagues - who have themselves identified the need for the learning and will be able to utilize it in their respective organizations.

Key proponents of knowledge creation theory such as Nonaka (1994) and Sawhney and Prandelli (2000) acknowledge the intertwined nature of three components: (i) knowledge processes, (ii) knowledge assets, and (iii) context. Whilst the processes of knowledge creation both feed on as well as produce output knowledge assets - such as expertise, teams, patents or databases - recently writers have been making the case for a more detailed analysis of these knowledge assets as they could lead to key insights around how practitioners apply these assets so that results are achieved for their respective organizations (Shu et al., 2012). Of greater relevance to this study, however, is that in addition to process characteristics and assets, von Krogh and Geilinger (2014: 156) in reviewing the work of Nonaka and Konno (1998) note that knowledge creation processes are

embedded in the contexts or “spaces” of organizations, which can be either physical or virtual. Nonaka and von Krogh (2009) recognize that the process of organizational knowledge creation involves amplifying knowledge in social contexts, and selectively connecting it to existing knowledge in the organization. This new dimension of amplification and adaptation of knowledge to suit the local context is important to bear in mind, as the planning and development situations in Durban, Namibia and Malawi are context dependent.

Von Krogh and Geilinger (2014) in making a compelling case for reviving the debate on physical space in knowledge creation theory, bemoan the fact that research on the physical places from which organizational knowledge creation emerges has lost prominence due to the increasing attention being paid to virtual places. Focusing on physical space, they note that the places for knowledge creation are bounded sites existing either within or across organizational boundaries, as depicted in Figure 2.2 below.

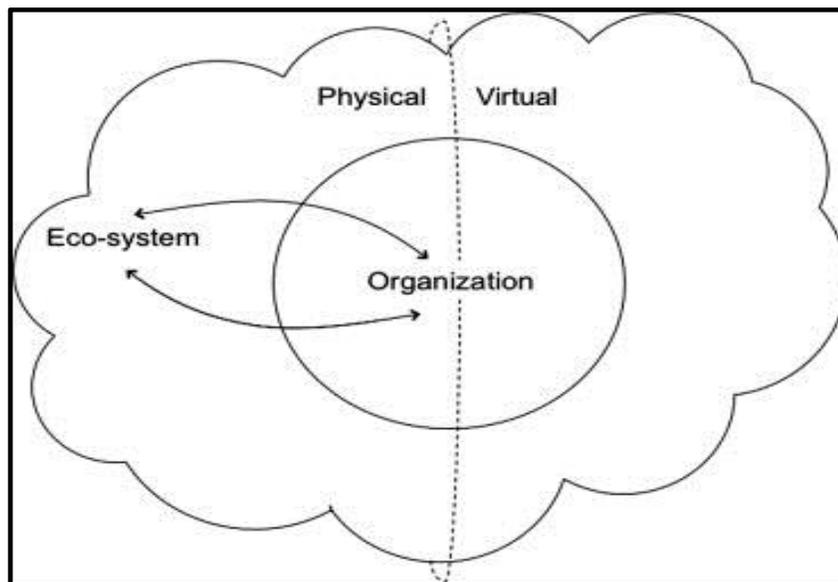


Figure 2.2: The spaces of knowledge creation (von Grogh & Geilinger, 2014: 156)

In unpacking Von Krogh and Geilinger’s (2014: 156) conceptualization of how organizations learn as expressed in the Figure 2.2 above, is the interesting notion of understanding how knowledge flows informally in what is regarded as an “eco-system of organizations that are in geographically proximate spaces”. Borrowing from the environmental sciences, the authors suggest that the

geography of learning is best appreciated when acknowledging these complex two-way informal flows of information from within a particular organization to other organizations that constitute the broader learning eco-system. In defining a very clear knowledge creation research agenda, Von Krogh and Geilinger (2014: 156) argue that there is an urgent need to pay attention to the social and informal aspects of knowledge creation across organizational boundaries. As this is exactly what this research project is about, using the conceptual lens of knowledge creation theory and the notion of knowledge being created in the space between organizations, or within organizational eco-systems, is not only useful as a conceptual lens, but may help fill some of the gaps in this research field, certainly in the African context.

This point about human interaction and collective learning between organizations being overshadowed over the last decade mainly due to advancements in communications and technology, and the focus on digital learning has been identified by many other writers. Campbell (2012a: 41) is also concerned that leading academic thinkers have been swayed in part by the “all-powerful digital revolution” towards focusing only on the global connectedness of networks and interactions with digital media - at the expense of delving into a critically important understanding of what makes connectivity important. In particular, Campbell (2012a) stresses the point that human interaction and human relationships and how these play a role in connectedness, have not been given theoretical prominence.

It is this aspect of the importance of actors in open systems participating in a process of collective learning, despite there being no overt, explicit formal arrangements to govern the system (Campbell, 2012a) that is a particularly interesting notion to take note of. In an attempt to unpack this phenomenon, Campbell (2012a) introduces two centrally important and related concepts that are critical for understanding successful knowledge transfer between cities. The first is that of an innovative milieu identified by Aydalot (1986) and understood as the creation of an atmosphere of complete trust that is helpful for both “collaboration and creativity in a particular locality” (Campbell, 2012a: 43). The second idea, developed by knowledge management thought leader Nonaka, is referred to as a “ba” (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka et al., 2000). In an industrial management setting, this ba refers to the creation of a particular atmosphere, or openness, where managers and workers are without the “negative constraints of possible embarrassment, retribution or even fear”

(Campbell, 2012a: 44). The central argument in Campbell's (2012a) work is that the creation of these safe spaces, and the personal trust and sharing of values that is a key ingredient in determining whether those involved in city learning will reach out to others in learning networks in any meaningful or significant way. It is precisely these assertions that will be tested as the boundaries of the geography of institutional learning are pushed further.

2.5. Summary

In summary, the conceptual framework utilizes powerful lenses drawn from three bodies of knowledge (pragmatism as a guiding philosophy, urban planning and organizational learning) in order to guide the research. At the intersection of each of these lenses is a set of magnified commonalities that help define the research. Central here is the rejection of the grand meta-narrative in favor of paying careful attention to the nuanced details of exactly how planning and development practitioners engage with each other, and the context and meaning that they attach to city learning, particularly in the southern African context.

The conceptual framework also acknowledges the complex nature of contemporary society and the dynamic, politicized and often contested terrain within which planning and development occurs. It therefore values the empirical accounts of progressive planning practice as a way to build a more useful kind of planning theory. Critically too, it views urban planners as active agents of change and city transformation and, as such, it places emphasis on explorations of power relations and taking note of who controls planning processes. A final commonality is the focus on human interactions, the nurturing of close bonds and ties, on personal trust and the sharing of common values. These areas will be explored in the next chapter where a more detailed consideration of the key themes in the literature on city-to-city learning in urban strategic planning is undertaken.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

In building on the conceptual framework outlined earlier, this chapter acknowledges the complexity and dynamism of contemporary urban planning and development in (southern) Africa. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of the research project, it becomes clear that in setting out to review the relevant literature, there is a necessity to again draw on diverse bodies of knowledge in order to develop a richer and more powerful understanding of the literary lay of the land. This is important as these insights from theorists and knowledge practitioners from across the fields of urban development and management, city strategic planning, knowledge management and organizational learning will help inform the empirical analysis to be conducted in later chapters.

This chapter is structured around four key thematic areas. It begins by setting out the current broader international developmental context in which cities and towns find themselves grappling to respond to a set of newer, and more complex, urban development challenges. In an exploration of this first theme, attention is paid to how this manifests in Africa, given that this is the geographical interest of the study. Having developed an appreciation of these emerging developmental and planning demands, the second thematic area very briefly reviews the literature on urban strategic planning and city development strategies. More specifically it examines how the CDS is becoming an important tool to address new developmental demands, with a particular focus on how citizen engagement in urban planning is being identified as a central theme.

The stage is then set for a more in-depth engagement with the increasing evidence presented in the literature that views city-to-city learning as a mechanism to empower practitioners to be able to respond more effectively to this new urban agenda. In interrogating the literature on this important theme of city-to-city learning, four key sub-themes are explored, which relate directly to the research sub-questions set out in Chapter 1. Firstly, the terrain of defining exactly what city-to-city learning entails is navigated by seeking out the signposts held by leading writers such as Hafteck (2003), Bontenbal (2009), Tjandradewi and Marcotullio (2009) and Campbell (2012a). Having sought this conceptual clarity, a quick history of the rise of city-to city learning is presented. This is followed by a more detailed unpacking of the actual mechanics of city-to-city-learning, as highlighted in the learning literature. The fourth and final sub-theme within the area of city-to-city learning engages with the issue of the relationship between power, geo-politics and learning.

The last broad thematic area in this chapter explores the relationship between the learning and knowledge transfer process and the actual impact it has on improving the quality of practice. Admittedly, this area is not well documented in the international literature on learning. However, the work of leading researchers in the field is drawn in order to begin the process of conceptualization of a tentative framework for assessment of learning/ knowledge transfer processes. The chapter concludes with a succinct summary of the findings of the literature review and sets the scene for the next methodological chapter.

3.2. The call for a “new urban agenda”

At the seventh World Urban Forum (WUF) held in April 2014 in Medellin, Columbia, global leaders deliberated on the most pressing challenges facing cities and towns all over the world. According to the UN-Habitat (2014a: 2), participants at this international forum unanimously acknowledged the urgent need to promote what is now branded as a “new urban agenda”. It is this agenda that the UN-Habitat (2014a: 2) argues will have to overcome the challenge of the lack of adequate legal frameworks and planning which has until today resulted in the “relentless expansion of cities, intensive energy use, alarming and dangerous climate change impacts, multiple forms of inequality and exclusion, and increased difficulties in providing decent work for all”. In further unpacking what this new agenda will require, the UN-Habitat’s (2014a: 2) Medellin’s Declaration includes a “participatory planning approach that responds to present and emerging needs of the cities of the future” and “urban planning that promotes sustainable development”.

The call for a new urban agenda by the international development community at the WUF is most interesting in that it recognizes the need to rethink and re-prioritize action as the 2015 deadline for the MDGs fast approaches. In preparing for post-2015, many international organizations including the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, UCLG, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), Cities Alliance and UN-Habitat have all actively pursued the case for “a more holistic approach to sustainable urban development, where social, economic and environmental/ spatial aspects should be intimately connected through a stand-alone Urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)” (UN-Habitat, 2014a: 2). Over the last year great strides have been made, and an Open Working Group on the SDGs was established with a fundamentally

revised set of 17 goals drafted, with point of departure being that “the MDGs were in many ways palliative; they were not radical, transformative goals” (Munang & Andrews, 2014: 5). At the time of finalizing this chapter, the UN General Assembly at its September 2015 Sustainable Development Summit had just adopted the 17 SDGs and its related 169 targets (United Nations, 2015).

The new agenda, it is argued, is one that is radical and transformative. But what are the key levers that have been identified to trigger the change? It is encouraging to observe the assertion in UN-Habitat’s (2014a: 2) concept note on urban planning, of the critical role city governments themselves can play in contributing to this new urban agenda by “developing improved policies, plans and designs for more compact, socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities that foster sustainable urban development and are resilient to climate change”. On the international development stage, it is certainly becoming clear that old responses to new challenges are no longer effective, and that city governments will have to take the lead in developing better plans for more sustainable urban development. Moving beyond rhetoric, this assertion took expression in the form of a dedicated and stand-alone city-focused Sustainable Development Goal 11 and related 7 targets aimed at making “cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (United Nations, 2015: 26).

How does this new international movement for change, however, resonate on the African continent and what does this mean for planning and sustainable development in African cities? These are fundamentally important questions as recent empirical studies in African cities are showing that Africa’s urbanization is occurring without socio-economic and environmental benefits and requires a radical re-thinking (Cobbinah et al., 2015). In acknowledging this challenge, the third State of the African Cities Report released by the UN-Habitat and its partners, makes an impassioned plea is made to begin to “re-imagine the African city” by creating new paradigms for a more modern African urbanism (UN-Habitat, 2014b: 39). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that now, more than never before in the continent’s history, there is an opportunity to develop an inclusive vision that is appropriate to address the current and future needs of African cities (UN-Habitat, 2014b).

This third State of the Cities Report, in unpacking some of the majorly significant transitions, ranging from demographic, economic, environmental, technological to socio-political argues that such transformations “invite a complete rethinking of current developmental trajectories, so as to further facilitate and sustain Africa’s strategic repositioning in the world” (UN-Habitat, 2014b: 18). What is most pertinent for this research project, however, is the acknowledgment by these international agencies that whilst this new vision may incorporate some aspects of “western models”, a new African model that embraces informality, whilst planning for sustainability needs to be developed (UN-Habitat, 2014b). It is worth highlighting the sentiments of the Under-Secretary General of the UN here, who points to the importance of appreciating the value of shared contexts that prompt the need for much greater cooperation amongst African cities:

One thing is of particular importance in this context. Cities are not stand-alone entities. They are all part and parcel of often shared geographical, social, environmental and political contexts. Given that many of the challenges ahead are of a trans-boundary nature, this report seeks to stimulate local, national and regional cooperation among African cities and nations to re-imagine shared approaches to urban development and capture the most effective interventions to facilitate sustainable urban and other transitions in Africa.

(UN-Habitat, 2014b: 3)

In reflecting on what is being said about contemporary African city development, two important points are relevant for this research project. The first is the need to begin to pay more careful attention to how the cities in the case study are responding to these new challenges, and whether bold responses that embed participatory and sustainable practices are being crafted in the mentor city that serve to inspire and catalyze action in the mentee cities. It also speaks to the nature of urban strategic planning processes in African cities and whether these are powerful and focused enough to bring about the transformation that is envisioned – the focus of the second thematic area in this literature review. The second point is the latest acknowledgement by international developmental agencies on the urgent need for African cities to co-operate, work together and learn from each other as they begin to craft new and more sustainable responses to the current

development challenges facing them. This aspect of city-to-city learning is the focus of the second thematic area in the review.

3.3. The rise of urban strategic planning and the role of city visioning

The recent and urgent call for new visions for cities and for more participatory processes that result in sustainable city development has been sounded by international development agencies such as the UN-Habitat (2014a). At the same time, the literature shows that cities have actually been striving to achieve this goal through the preparation of urban strategic plans or CDSs since the 1990s. In fact, as early as in December 2002, Harris (2002: 2) reported that “well over 100 CDSs must have been undertaken” internationally. What exactly is a CDS and what distinguishes it from other planning instruments? According to the Cities Alliance (2002), which has been the biggest promoter of this planning instrument, the CDS process involves the formation of local stakeholder forums in which a vision and strategy for improving the city is developed on the basis of a socio-economic map of the city. The Cities Alliance had initially promoted the CDS approach in order to assist cities to respond to the challenges of globalization and decentralization through a focus on the poor with the ultimate goal being to achieve better socio-economic conditions for all citizens (Cities Alliance, 2000).

Another useful definition of urban strategic planning and city development strategies is provided by the UCLG (2010a: 11) in their policy paper on urban strategic planning which is viewed as merely “providing a methodology which helps cities identify their strengths and weaknesses, while defining the main strategies for local development”. Recognizing the role of urban strategic planning in helping decision-makers select appropriate goals that help them achieve a collective vision, a clear and very useful distinction is made between urban strategic planning and urban planning. It is suggested that urban strategic planning usually results in a tangible planning product such as a CDS. More importantly, for the UCLG (2010a), whereas land use planning, urban planning, comprehensive or integrated development planning are often legally binding instruments or laws, the point is emphasized that strategies are flexible tools for longer term orientation that is dynamic and can easily change and be adapted over time. Another important characteristic

highlighted in the policy paper is the notion of developing all aspects of the city, and “integrating technical, environmental, political, social and economic interests in the same territory” (UCLG, 2010a: 11). What sets apart urban strategic planning from the broader urban planning field is the systematic process involved in crafting a vision of a community’s future, and then prescribing a set of actions to achieve this long-term vision (Gordon, 2013).

Numerous writers have acknowledged the utility of the CDS as a complex proposal that is able to align the practices of municipal governments on the one hand with longer term aspirations, including economic growth, urban sustainability and ultimately quality of life on the other hand (Healey, 2007; Pieterse, 2008; Robinson, 2011). This alignment of aspirations points to the intrinsic need for citizen engagement in urban strategic planning processes. In a refreshing look at the city not seen from the traditional hierarchical configurations, but as “ordinary cities”, Robinson (2007) uses the examples of the CDS processes in Durban and Johannesburg to illustrate how city leaders and policy-makers in envisioning the holistic future of their cities are compelled to think about different and competing local demands within a particular locale.

In this critical piece, Robinson (2007: 4) accepts that the CDS in these two African cities is a powerful tool that aims to incorporate the diverse concerns and needs of citizens, business and local government, which it is argued, could mean responding to the “globalizing sectors of the economy alongside the needs of the poorest citizens, as well as appreciating the wide range of activities which contribute to the dynamism of cities”. This, it is argued, is a useful conceptualization of the CDS process emphasizing the opportunity for a critical engagement of what makes a city unique and distinctive and how these can be exploited to achieve particular developmental outcomes.

More than contributing to the dynamism of the city as Robinson (2007) suggests, the importance of active citizen engagement in urban strategic planning has been well documented in the literature. Whilst the focus of this research is not to explore the terrain of citizen engagement, it is worth noting some of key benefits of engaging city stakeholders in planning processes, as the case study does include a census survey of all stakeholders engaged in the visioning process in both cities. Wates (2014: 6-7) in a useful publication that describes exactly how people can shape towns and

cities anywhere in the world, identifies 13 benefits of citizen engagement, which are summarized below:

- i. Citizens bring additional resources to the process;
- ii. As local people are the best source of local knowledge they improve decision-making;
- iii. Working together on a common purpose often builds a sense of community;
- iv. Citizen engagement is largely a legislative requirement and therefore ensures compliance;
- v. Democratic credibility is built as citizen engagement accords with people's right to participate in decision-making;
- vi. Access to funding can improve as grant-making organizations often require citizen engagement;
- vii. Empowerment of citizens is a key outcome as involvement builds local people's confidence, capabilities, skills and ability to co-operate;
- viii. Appropriate design solutions or planning outcomes are most likely to be attained and plans can be tested and refined before adoption, resulting in optimizing resource use;
- ix. The education of planning professionals occur during the process as they gain greater insights into the communities they are meant to serve;
- x. A more responsive environment can result as citizen's changing requirements can be met;
- xi. Often quite simply there is a public demand for engagement and people want to be involved and appreciate being engaged;
- xii. Speedier development is reached as time-wasting conflicts are avoided; and
- xiii. Engagement embeds sustainability as people will own the process themselves.

From Wates' (2014) well-considered, almost exhaustive list, the case is certainly made for active citizen engagement in urban strategic planning processes. In a highly contested and politicized local government context where there is competition for scarce resources, however, the issue of citizen engagement in the actual decision-making process does come to the fore. Recent literature

indicates that citizen participation in urban planning is now being understood not as an alternative to the conventional decision-making process but as a “decision-forming partnership” and should be regarded as a collaborative planning exercise (Fagence, 2014: 4). Collaborative planning involves actively integrating inputs from residents into the planning and decision-making process (Faehnle et al., 2014). Whilst not explored here, it must be noted that how these often competing priorities and inputs are integrated and exactly whose benefits really count in this process is still the subject of much lively debate (Holden, 2012; Innes & Booher, 2013).

The UCLG in promoting the preparation of CDSs through its mentoring partnerships amongst its member cities has recognized the robustness of the CDS process and its ability to address a range of such competing priorities, as expressed in its “wheel of urban development” (UCLG, 2009: 3), depicted in Figure 3.1 below. Essentially, the CDS process is seen as cyclical; involving governance, social, environmental and economic priorities that the mentoring program can address based on the need at that time. Whilst this understanding is accepted in general terms, the researcher finds that this conceptualization by the UCLG may be misleading as it suggests that one priority follows another, when in reality this is not the case.

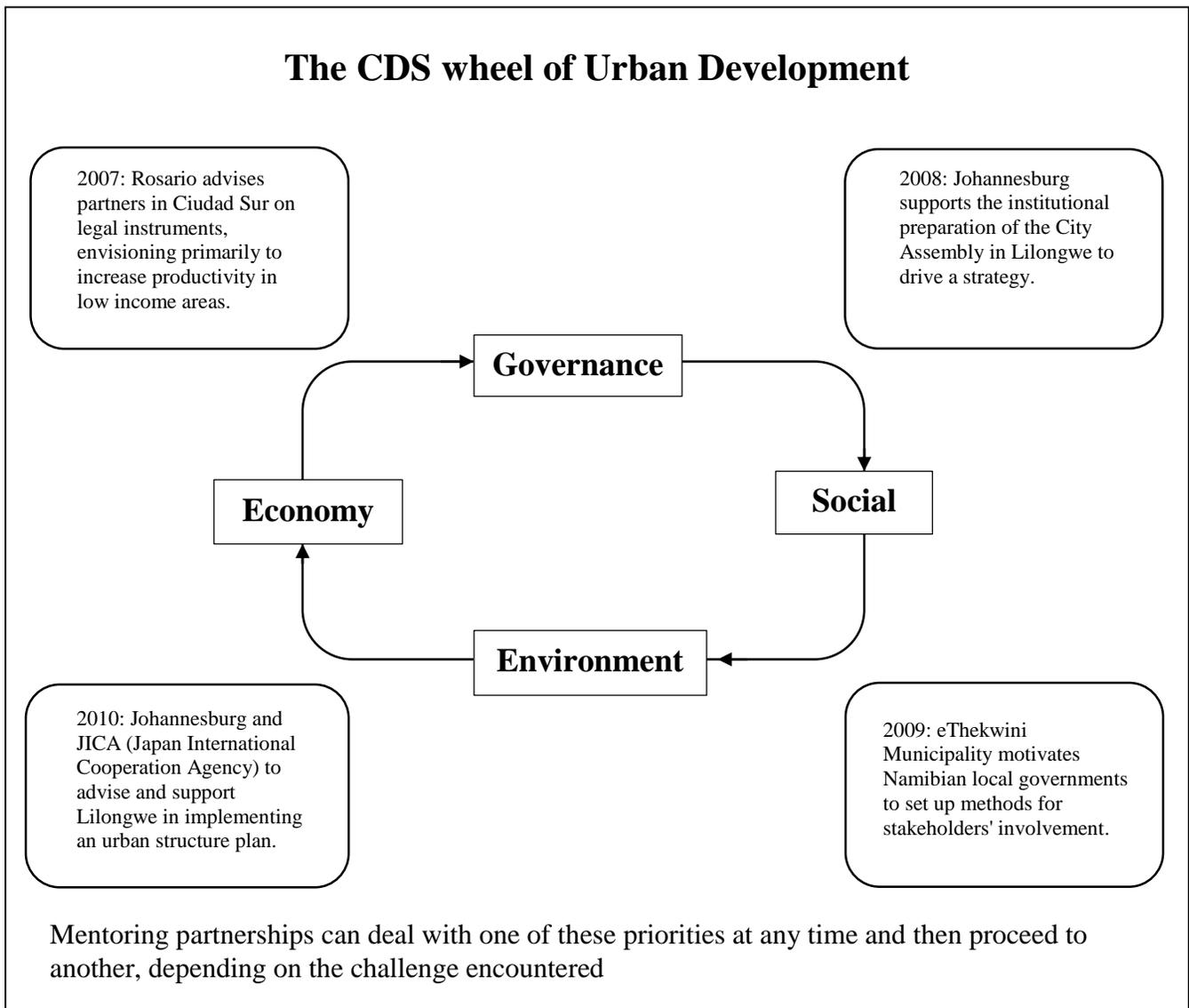


Figure 3.1: The CDS wheel of development (adapted from UCLG, 2009: 3)

Notwithstanding this arguably limited conceptualization referred to above, the emphasis on the decision-making around the setting of priorities in the crafting of a long-term developmental city vision is an important and useful one. This is a fundamentally important step and it is now recognized that stakeholder’s visions of the future city have actually played a critical role in “shaping urban development trajectories in industrialized cities throughout modern history” (Mah, 2012: 151). A city vision is best understood as a process that portrays an idealized situation and is represented through a set of goals for the future (Baud et al., 2014). Visions are essentially about

unlocking the imagination of city stakeholders. As Amin and Thrift (2002) point out, the process of imagining has emerged as one of the key ways of understanding the dynamic city in the new millennium.

Drawing from their own experiences, as documented in their publication capturing their lessons learnt in their long-term planning process, the eThekweni Municipality's planning team focuses much energy and attention in their mentorship program ensuring that their Malawian and Namibian counterparts construct realistic visions that can guide their city strategies, and that these processes allow for robust engagement with key stakeholders (eThekweni Municipality, 2011). Clark (2013: 8) in a working paper that explores the role of strategic planning in cities argues that the visioning process in seeking alternative futures for cities can be a very powerful platform for both "deeper democratic participation and debate, and a mechanism to crystallize clear options for the future". This view is expanded on using a South African example by van Marle (2014: 173), who in a critical reflection on the *Tshwane 2055* plan introduces the notion of a vision being transformative in that it is able to suggest a "blue print or framework for a new place".

Accepting the views of Clark (2013) and van Marle (2014), and the merits of clearly constructed vision statements formulated through deeply participative processes, it is interesting to gauge the extent to which the Malawian and Namibian City Council fully exploited the power of this tool. Whilst the visioning processes of eThekweni Municipality has been well promoted and has been identified as a good practice by these Councils, the important issue to be explored is how have these experiences actually informed the processes that were implemented on the ground in Malawi and Namibia? This is an area that will be engaged with in Chapter 5.

It is useful to note in closing this section that the notion of portability of ideas from one city to another has caught the attention of Robinson (2013 cited in Soderstrom, 2013: 13) who examines the mobility and circulation of CDSs as a form of urban policy, using the case of the active promotion of the Johannesburg CDS in southern Africa. It has been argued that the City of Johannesburg has been very active in promoting the notion that they helped "invent the model for city strategies now propagated across poorer country contexts by the Cities Alliance" (Robinson (2013 cited in Soderstrom, 2013: 13). What is of particular importance in the observation made by Robinson (2013 cited in Soderstrom, 2013: 13) is that CDSs themselves are good examples of

“models” that are circulated informally or formally which results in “strong resemblances in city strategies across different contexts and amongst cities”.

Even more critical is Robinson’s (2011) acknowledgement in her previous work that these city strategies are in fact significantly reconfigured as the policies are arrived at in particular places. What this points to is that in the mobility and transfer of knowledge around city strategic planning, there is not necessarily a glib importation of the model, but an attempt to adapt and adopt the process to suit the local context and specificity. How this process of learning about strategic planning actually happens is the subject of the next thematic area.

3.4. City-to-city learning as a proactive response to city planning and developmental challenges

In this section that makes the case for city-to-city learning as an important enabler for cities to begin to respond more adequately to their local development challenges, four key sub-themes are explored. The first involves defining the parameters of the somewhat messy concept of city-to-city learning, as opposed to municipal cooperation. Having shed some light on the notion of city-to-city learning, a brief history of this field is chartered next, identifying the key drivers behind this movement and the major milestones in the international learning trajectory. The stage is then set to begin to uncover the detailed mechanics of learning as an exploration of contemporary learning literature is undertaken, in order to understand how cities actually learn. After answering how cities learn, the question of who the key role players are is examined, with a view to understand what the literature suggests about the influence of vested interests and the extent to which geopolitical considerations may control the learning agenda.

3.4.1. Defining city-to-city learning

It is important to acknowledge at the outset of this literature review that city-to-city learning as a concept is not well explored in the academic literature. More common is the related, perhaps equally elusive notion of city-to-city cooperation. This concept will be tackled first, as city-to-city learning is considered a subset of municipal cooperation. Despite the voluminous collection of

writing in this regard and Hafteck's (2003) effort to begin to define and conceptually map the field, it is acknowledged that there is still no single definition for the concept of city-to-city cooperation. One point of convergence in the literature that Hafteck (2003) is able to identify are the common ideas of (i) an ultimate goal of achieving sustainable development, (ii) the notion of some form of partnership between municipalities at the center of the cooperation, (iii) a clearly defined area of jurisdiction of a local authority and, finally, (iv) the engagement and participation of civil society stakeholders. Tjandradewi and Marcotullio (2009: 165) look at how international agencies make sense of city-to-city cooperation, and note that for the UN-Habitat and World Federation of Towns and Cities, city-to-city cooperation includes "all possible forms of relationships between local authorities at any level in two or more countries that are collaborating together for mutual interest and benefits, with or without external support".

Similarly, Bontenbal (2009: 35) observes that the notion of city-to-city cooperation is an umbrella term covering all forms of relationships between local authorities "at any level, in two or more countries which are collaborating over matters of mutual interest and leading to sustainable development". More importantly, Bontenbal (2009) notes that even though the term city-to-city cooperation has gained ground as an accepted academic concept in recent years, there is still no discernible blueprint in the literature for the activities, actors, scope or contact frequency for city-to-city cooperation. Despite the high diversity in content, Bontenbal (2009: 36) is however able to discern five key general characteristics which set apart city-to-city cooperation as a unique form of international development cooperation. Each of these characteristics will be outlined briefly here as they provide a framework for understanding city-to-city cooperation, but more importantly they can be interrogated for relevance in the southern Africa context, using the findings of the case study.

The first characteristic of city-to-city cooperation identified by Bontenbal (2009) is a two-pronged approach of empowering municipal officials on the one hand, and simultaneously facilitating the effective participation of civil society actors on the other hand. The exchange of know-how and experience between local administration actors it seems is the key aim, with the goal of achieving sustainable development through improving municipal performance. In the case of eThekweni Municipality's strategic planning and visioning process, this could imply the transfer of skills from

eThekwini Municipality planning officials to Namibian and Malawian staff around how to develop a strategic planning process that promotes a more sustainable form of city development. The focus on ensuring civil society participation has also been identified as being important, not only as it assists in raising public awareness and public support, but in that it also has an important symbolic meaning (Mamadouh, 2002). This characteristic will be revisited in the later analytical chapters, as the reflections from the Namibian civil society participants from the city of Otjiwarongo in this regard were very instructive.

The second characteristic that is identified is the north-south aspect of the cooperation, given the intention to enhance local government capacity in the global South. This characteristic is not as relevant here, given the south-south focus of the mentorship program. Still relevant though is the aspect of capacity enhancement, this time rather than from north to south, it would mean between cities in the south. Local government capacity within municipalities and within Local Government Associations is an important theme and one that will again be interrogated in later chapters.

The third general characteristic is that of a long-term, formal bilateral partnership agreement between the two participating municipalities and their civil society stakeholders. It is interesting to explore the extent to which this is in place in the case study, and whether this is an important determinant in securing commitment to achieving outcomes.

The fourth characteristic relates to the securing of funding from northern donor municipalities' budgets. As the UCLG and the Cities Alliance are regarded as the global northern partners and play a key role in securing funding for the program, it is considered relevant here. The fifth and final characteristic identified by Bontenbal (2009) is that of mutual benefit and two-way capacity building and is most interesting. Whilst this is stated in theory, empirical evidence in the international literature does not necessarily substantiate this claim. Determining the extent to which mutual cooperation, joint learning and capacity enhancement occurs in this example of south-south collaboration is an important consideration that is also explored in the research.

It is this notion of building capacity in city-to-city cooperation that resonates most with the notion of city-to-city learning or peer-to-peer learning as described by van Ewijk et al. (2015) – a concept

that, as alluded to earlier, is only more recently gaining traction in the learning literature. For purposes of the research, Campbell's (2012a) conceptualization does, however, offer useful insights. Defining learning in its most basic form as the acquisition of new knowledge, Campbell (2012a: 9) makes the point that learning in cities happens during the process of city-to-city exchanges – “technical visits of professional practitioners who actively seek new knowledge and good practice”. During this process, Campbell (2012a: 9) argues that proactive cities begin developing a new dynamic of leadership incorporating the elements of “outside knowledge acquisition, development of internal capacities to learn and idea-exchanges on both policy and practice in order to influence strategic city changes in the long-term”.

Lee and van de Meene (2012: 199), in facilitating an investigation into learning in cities, similarly conceptualize learning as “a process comprising information seeking, adoption and policy change”. This aspect of translation into policy changes made on the assumption that adoption will be successful locally, has been receiving dedicated attention by numerous scholars (Peyroux et al., 2012; Temenos & McCann, 2012; Wood, 2014). It is Campbell's (2012a) notion of the acquisition of outside knowledge - in this case of municipal visioning and strategic planning from a mentor city as well as the development of internal capacities to learn by the mentee city - in order to improve planning practice and contribute towards long-term sustainability is useful in helping frame the research.

The idea of improving practice also resonates with Toens and Landwehr's (2009: 348) notion of “improvement-oriented learning” as opposed to the nominal concept of learning which focuses on mere change. In drawing on the work of Nullmeier (2003 cited in Toens & Landwehr, 2009: 349), they argue that improvement-oriented learning is learning which can be designated as an improvement, based on a set of certain pre-determined criteria. The applicability of this notion will be tested in the southern African case study, and will be revisited later. For now, however, it is timely to briefly trace the history of city-to-city learning before the detailed mechanisms of exactly how cities learn is dealt with.

3.4.2. A brief history of city-to-city learning

In tracing the chronological shifts that gave rise to increased city-to-city learning, Campbell (2012a) points out that environmental change in the 1970s was the main impetus for national policy-makers to begin to rethink the role of cities. In the last two decades, however, it was the triple action of decentralization/ democratization, metropolitanization and globalization that collectively produced a complete transformation in political and institutional relationships. Campbell (2012a) argues that national governments began a process of wholesale changes in governmental arrangements which saw the handing over of powers to local government all within the space of a single decade. It was these changes, it is further argued by Campbell (2012a), that brought incentives for cities to acquire new knowledge, as they were now thrust into an open environment, becoming more and more acutely aware of their knowledge needs in order to position themselves in a competitive global knowledge economy.

Accompanying these institutional changes, however, has been the exponential increase in the actual number of cities, with nearly 300 cities having moved into the intermediate to large-city range in the last 15 years, with another 250 to be added by 2025 (UN, 2010). Campbell (2012a) makes the point that this growth in the number as well as physical form of cities has had many important consequences for the city learning narrative. In a study conducted amongst 120 intermediately sized cities, Angel (2011) showed that a universal decline in city densities have resulted in escalating service costs of increasingly separated settlements. The issue of how to govern such changing cities and what institutional arrangements need to be put into place, Campbell (2012a) observes have been topics of interest that have motivated city-to-city learning exchanges.

Beyond the growing number and qualitative changes in cities that have driven them to learn from others, Campbell (2012a) also reiterates that with the process of decentralization, the democratization of local government during the 1990s meant that collective city leadership (elected officials, civil society, business, etc.) are now required to account to constituencies from below. Concomitantly, these local leaders who are expected to determine the direction of city growth need to be in touch with how other cities are managing their respective processes, hence the need for city-to-city learning.

Table 3.1: City-to-City learning timeline (Campbell, 2012a: 26 -27)

Period	Event
1891	Fabian Municipal Program
1904	First International Garden City Congress
1904	Formation of the British Committee for the Study of Municipal Institutions
1913	First congress of the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Associations (IGCTPA)
1913	First congress of the IULA/ IUV (Union Internationale des Villes) in Ghent
1919	League of Nations founded
1920	First town twinning : Keighley, West Yorkshire, UK and Poix du Nord, France
1932	Height of IULA membership
1947	UIM created
1951	Council of European Municipalities(CEM) created
1951	Monde Bilingue created
1956	Sister Cities program created
1957	United Towns Organization (UTO) founded under auspices of Monde Bilingue
1967	Sister Cities International founded
1971	UN General Assembly resolution on “city twinings as a means of international cooperation”
1972	UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm
1976	First Habitat Conference in Vancouver
1980s	Regional city networks founded (EUROCITIES, FLACMA)
1989	Formation of the Municipal Development Program in Africa (World Bank and Government of Italy, Porreta Terme, Italy)
1990	CEMR (formerly CEM) folded into IULA; Lomé Convention and “decentralized cooperation”
1992	Rio Earth Summit and UN-Habitat’s “Localizing Agenda 21” program launched
1994	CITYNET founded
1996	UN Istanbul meeting: WACLAC (World Association of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination) formed (IULA and UTO are both members)
1999	Cities Alliance (a “learning alliance”)
2000	First Africities Conference
2001	UN Istanbul +5 meeting
2002	Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg
2004	IULA merges with FMCU-UTO and Metropolis to form UCLG
2005	Centre for C2C Cooperation founded in Seville by UN-Habitat; C40 founded
2006	Global Urban Forum, Rio de Janeiro

In reflecting on Campbell's (2012a) city-to-city timeline above in Table 3.1, what stands out is the role of watershed moments when cities and city associations come together at international conventions, conferences or summits that herald turning points in the landscape of city-to-city learning. For example, the notion of city-to-city learning was clearly reinforced by the idea of "decentralized cooperation" which was first popularized at the European Union's Lomé Convention in 1990, and took the form of town twinning to foster better development strategies (Campbell, 2012a: 33). Important to note in this regard is that in South Africa alone, nearly 20% of all city-to-city partnerships involve decentralized cooperation (De Villiers, 2007).

Again at the 1992 Rio Conference, Campbell (2012a) argues, there was a global recognition of local governments themselves being development players in their own right, resulting in many countries subsequently decentralizing developmental responsibilities to municipalities, facilitating the promotion of city-to-city exchange. Bontenbal (2009) also makes the observation that the rise of city-to-city exchanges since the 1990s has further been catalyzed by a new shift in thinking away from merely managing cities towards actually governing cities, with a specific focus on improving the quality of local government. Campbell (2012a: 33) identifies the 1996 UN-Habitat City Summit in Istanbul, the 2001 Istanbul + 5 events that focused on horizontal cooperation, and the 2002 Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg as important efforts by the UN and its development allies in constituting what he terms an "international institutionalization and endorsement of municipalities' active participation in local urban development".

Perhaps the most significant of all of the meetings, however, will remain the Istanbul Summit in 1996, as it was here that the UCLG was conceived. As Campbell (2012a) observes, the creation of the UCLG, as a single voice of cities, authorized to speak in the UN has been a major milestone from the point of city learning. Against this bigger backdrop of the international trajectory of city learning, this research project, although small in scale is timely as it helps throw more light onto the nature of city learning using the UCLG program of city mentorship between Durban and two of its mentee cities, nearly twenty years since the inception of this important international agency.

3.4.3. Unpacking the mechanics of city-to-city learning: the importance of trust and human relationships in the knowledge economy

Having traced the history of city-to-city learning, this section turns its attention to exploring the actual mechanics of how cities learn. Before this is done, however, it is useful to very briefly unpack the concept of the “knowledge economy” and explore its relationship to city learning processes. This is important as the research suggests that southern African city-to-city learning processes are not well documented, and operate under the radar almost as an invisible or underground knowledge economy.

In a book that unpacks the relationship between the knowledge economy and space, Madanipour (2011: 7) investigates exactly what the term “knowledge economy” means, even questioning whether it exists at all in reality or whether it is just rhetoric. The conclusion reached by Madanipour (2011) is that defining the knowledge economy is not as straight-forward as it may appear, given that the concept of knowledge itself and the role that it plays in socio-economic behavior is quite difficult to define and actually measure. In the final analysis, however, Madanipour (2011: 9) notes that the knowledge economy primarily involves the “economic application of knowledge”.

The most cited definition of this elusive concept in the literature, however, is that of Powell and Snellman (2004: 201) who suggest that the knowledge economy involves “production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence”. Whilst this understanding has been accepted widely in the literature, the notion of the knowledge economy posited by the World Bank (2008) as involving organizations and people acquiring, creating, disseminating and actively using knowledge for broader socio-economic development, resonates more closely with the objectives of city-to-city learning. Viewing the knowledge economy through this lens emphasizes the importance of learning and innovation for city economic growth which is a key driver in city-to-city learning in the southern African context.

In identifying unique features of the knowledge economy, Powell and Snellman (2004: 200) highlight the rise of “innovation in organizational practices”, which interestingly include work

practice changes and design. This is particularly relevant to city-to-city learning processes where the design of urban strategic planning practices is critiqued and innovations adopted in order to ultimately improve socio-economic outcomes. In Powell and Snellman's (2004) study, three broad lines of research are pursued. The first focuses on the significance of theoretical knowledge as an innovation source and examines the role of newer science-based industries in socio-economic transformation. The second area examines the relationship between technology and productivity. It is the third area, however, that is most relevant as it focuses on the role of learning and innovation inside organizations, and studies the kinds of social arrangements that are most conducive to the generation and transmission of knowledge. An exploration of this facet of the knowledge economy; understanding the exact mechanics of knowledge generation and transmission and the social conditions under which the process is optimized is discussed next.

Toens and Landwehr (2009) observe that previously the policy literature on learning focused more on what was being learned by individuals and other political actors, rather than on how they learned from each other. So whilst city-to-city cooperation has enjoyed much acclaim as an effective mechanism for municipal capacity building, very little is known about exactly how the knowledge and capacity transfer takes place and about the actual learning practices experienced by the practitioners involved (Bontenbal, 2013). It is only until very recently that some light has been shed on this phenomenon.

This question of exactly how learning takes place has been explored in-depth by Campbell (2012a) in his seminal study on city-to-city learning. As alluded to in Chapter 1, while Campbell's (2012a) study has been a key reference point in this research there has been a lack of sufficient empirical data from Africa. This point is made visually clearer in Figure 3.2 below which globally maps city visits, indicating the host and visiting cities as well cities that are perceived to be innovative reformers (as represented by the diamond markers).

Whilst revealing the complicated spatial patterns of international city-to-city learning with cities crossing the globe in their quest for knowledge, more starkly Figure 3.2 exposes the absence of data on city-to-city learning in Africa. This, for the researcher is a trend that needs to be actively

redressed. As planners and geographers researching and working in a southern African context, it is important to acknowledge the responsibility to recognize the value of learning from different places. Robinson (2003) in a thought-provoking piece on post-colonializing geography laments that little theoretical or generalizable learning has taken place by western scholars from African scholarship. Tackling the issue of the marginality of South African academic scholarship, Robinson (2003: 14) maintains that South African research is often only used as a good “case study” in teaching contexts and as a useful “different voice” in many collections. This is an astute, albeit troubling observation, but helps in underscoring the importance of the current empirical research being done in Africa, and the contribution it can make in reclaiming the international city-to-city learning space.

Notwithstanding this gap, Campbell's (2012a) insights have revolutionized contemporary thinking on city learning with the introduction of three new concepts of learning typologies, orders of learning and styles of learning. Campbell (2012b) was commissioned by the UCLG in September 2012 to prepare a strategic paper on the international outlook for city learning. As the thought leader for the UCLG workshop on city-to-city learning in Barcelona, he built on the work in his book *Beyond Smart Cities* to include information from cities attending this strategic workshop.

It is important to note here that at this learning event, the researcher had an opportunity to present the work being done in Durban and in southern Africa. An engagement with Campbell on the need for more African research and on the learning processes led by eThekweni Municipality was initiated. The concepts of typologies of learning, styles of learning and orders of learning will be summarized below as they are very relevant to the case study. As indicated in Table 3.2 below, Durban is now the first African city to feature amongst other international examples of learning cities in Campbell's revised typology.

Table 3.2: Typology of city learning (Campbell, 2012b: 11)

Principle Types	Modalities of Learning	Example
Organize deliberate learning missions; have dedicated agency, and continuous operation	Large groups from individual cities working one-on-one or one-on-many cities	Seattle, Turin, Bilbao, Durban
Engage in episodic visits or exchanges		EuroCities (members), VNG or the UCLG group on decentralized cooperation, Sister Cities (members)
Share common (but limited) program objectives or campaigns	Small groups or individuals from one city working in one-on-one, peer exchange or city cluster on clusters	UNESCO World Heritage Cities, ICLEI agenda 21 cities
Members in regional or global associations		UCLG, Metropolis, Healthy Cities, EuroCities, CityNet, SCI
Engage casually in conferences, events, and network bulletins	Individuals in cities using passive networks	City Mayors, Local Government Information Network (LOGIN)

Through a useful categorization of types of learners, Campbell (2012b) makes reference to the purpose, motivation and intention of learning by cities. In this typology, some cities (as depicted at the bottom of the table) are represented by individuals or small groups that are involved only in casual and ad-hoc learning, whilst others in the middle are similarly represented but focused on special purposes or specific topics. There are those cities, however (as depicted at the top of the table), that involve larger groups who take part collectively in what Campbell (2012b: 11) describes as the “more intentional, committed and continuous pursuit of learning”. It is interesting to note that Durban is represented in this category, given its commitment to learning and the institutional mechanisms that it has put into place to promote city-to-city learning (eThekweni Municipality, 2010a). This will be further developed in the next chapter. In addition to proposing a learning typology, Campbell (2012b) suggests three broad learning styles: informal, technical and corporate. Each of these will be examined briefly, as the validity of this categorization to the case study will be tested in the southern African case study.

Informal learning for Campbell (2012a) implies that no formal organization of learning occurs, no written rules controlling learning practices exist, and that learning outcomes emerged organically with time. Campbell (2012a) draws upon the planning experiences of the economic regeneration in the city of Turin in Italy to unpack the informal learning style. Campbell (2012a: 105) points out that whilst Turin’s exposure to external knowledge came from a range of realms internationally, in Europe and locally the active mechanism was the rich “network of connections” between and among the various public, private and civic actors involved in these realms. This issue of trust and networks will be revisited shortly. In the meantime, what is of interest in the Turin example is that none of the institutions involved in the planning processes was specifically commissioned with the task of research and knowledge management; instead it was done on an informal and ad-hoc basis by various actors who worked together.

The second approach to learning identified by Campbell (2012a) is a more technical mode. In this mode, the key distinguishing characteristic is the evidence of some kind of independent think tank that is a direct or indirect part of the municipal structures. This think tank typically consists of professionals whose responsibility is research as well as idea-development for the city. Campbell (2012a: 124) cites the examples of Amman, Budapest, Curitiba, Lyon and Philadelphia as

examples of technical learners that have “institutional and budgetary commitment to generating, processing and storing knowledge”. The example of one such think tank – that of the Curitiba Institute for Urban Planning and Research (IPPUC) is provided by Campbell (2012a) to make the point that a technical team with a visionary leader (like Jaime Lerner, the urban planner and later Mayor of Curitiba) is able to adapt innovations from other cities and successfully implement these in environments that are often quite reluctant.

Corporate styles of learning, the third style identified by Campbell (2012a: 147), involves “formalized arrangements, including a bureaucracy, written procedures for rule making and less flexible means of decision-making and action”. Campbell (2012a) further notes that in corporate learning, as practiced in cities such as Seattle, Bilbao and Singapore; it is the formality of the structure that actually guides and moderates the learning process. In terms of this categorization drawn from the literature, the case of eThekweni Municipality through its apparent structured approach would perhaps best be characterized as having a corporate learning style. The critical question to note, however, is whether the eThekweni Municipality’s approach can fit into this categorization or whether it resists being pigeon-holed into such a model. This is an important point to note which is developed in later chapters.

The central thesis of Campbell (2012a), however, is that regardless of the learning style, city learning depends on the relationships amongst those engaged in a major city project, plan or event. Employing a powerful and novel social network analytical tool that groups data collected from his many interview respondents, Campbell (2012a: 111) presents the networks of ties between the key actors in a single picture to reveal what he terms “clouds of trust” or constellations of network ties between persons. In the Turin case alluded to earlier, the research undertaken by Campbell (2012a) uncovered a tight system of trusted ties among the players in the planning process – the critical ingredient responsible for Turin’s turn-around.

Campbell’s (2012a: 11) very compelling argument that what makes city learning successful are the informal leadership networks, referred to as “clouds of trust” is a fundamentally important assertion that will be tested empirically in the case study. In the analysis of the results from the case study, careful attention is paid to the nature of the relationships between officials from the

mentor and mentee cities, and the extent to which there is an interpersonal transfer of values between participants from each city. A unique opportunity is provided to test the applicability of the notion of “clouds of trust” identified by Campbell (2012a) in the context of stakeholders within particular cities to a community of stakeholders involved in city-to-city learning. In particular, during the interviews, focus group discussions and through the census survey, the issue of the importance of trust is explored, in order to validate Campbell’s (2012a) assertions in this regard. This application has, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, not been done before in the African context.

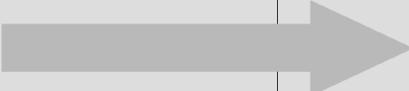
From a learning theory perspective, Campbell’s (2012a) assertion is in line with the earlier thinking espoused by knowledge management expert Nonaka (1994: 14) who argues that merely transferring information from one context does not make sense if it is “abstracted from embedded emotions and nuanced contexts that are associated with shared experiences”. It is this personal, human side that is fundamental in making mutual learning possible. This point about human interaction in city-to-city learning has over the last decade been overshadowed due to advancements in communications and technology, and the focus on digital learning. In fact, Campbell (2012a: 41) laments the fact that leading academic thinkers have been swayed in part by the “all-powerful digital revolution” towards focusing only on the global connectedness of networks and interactions with digital media - at the expense of delving into a critically important understanding of what makes connectivity important. In particular, Campbell (2012a) stresses the point that human relationships and how these play a role in connectedness have not been given theoretical prominence.

In an attempt to unpack this phenomenon, Campbell (2012a) emphasizes two centrally important and related concepts that are critical for understanding successful knowledge transfer between cities. The first is that of an innovative milieu identified by Aydalot (1986) and understood as the creation of an atmosphere of complete trust that is helpful for both “collaboration and creativity in a particular locality” (Campbell, 2012a: 43). As introduced earlier, the second idea, developed by knowledge management thought leader Nonaka, is referred to as a *ba* (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka et al., 2000). In an industrial management setting, this *ba* refers to the creation of a particular atmosphere, or openness, where managers and workers are without the “negative constraints of

possible embarrassment, retribution or even fear” (Campbell, 2012a: 44). The argument in Campbell’s (2012a) thesis is that it is this personal trust and sharing of values that is an essential ingredient in determining whether those involved in city learning will reach out to others in learning networks in any meaningful or significant way.

This state of creating and sustaining a trusting learning environment where participants from different cities can be free to ask questions without fear is what Campbell (2012a: 11) refers to as “third order learning”. This third dimension introduced by Campbell (2012a) of “orders” of learning, refers exactly to the extent to which cities are able to sustain an innovative milieu, or ba as articulated by Nonaka. In navigating Campbell’s (2012a) orders of learning as depicted in Table 3.3 below as one moves down the table so does independence in learning and self-determination increase. Whilst moving across the table there is a more defined purpose, and increased institutional capacity created for this purpose and ultimately the achievement of the creation of a trusting milieu. In the table, the example of Seattle is used as it had been a proactive in its approach by establishing a clear purpose for knowledge acquisition, developing its own institutional agency and moving towards the third order of learning which involved developing a trusting milieu.

Table 3.3: Orders of learning (Campbell, 2012a:11)

Category and Example	Purpose of Knowledge Acquisition (First Order Learning)	Presence of Agency/Institutional (Second order Learning)	Trusting Milieu (Third Order Learning)
Under Threshold (Pateros)	NA	NA	NA
Not Enough Knowledge (Tarragona)	 Undefined	?	?
Grazers Twinners	 Pre-defined		
Knowledge No cohesion (Mumbai)	 Partially defined		
Pro-Active (Seattle)	 Self-defined		

Drilling deeper into this key notion of trust and open dialogue as a successful ingredient for city-to-city learning, another interesting insight from the literature that sheds greater light on the mechanics of learning comes from the work of Johnson and Wilson (2006). It is argued that with direct face-to-face interactions between practitioners from the collaborating cities, the opportunities not just for one-sided, but for mutual learning is maximized (Johnson & Wilson, 2006). This happens because officials are from similar professional backgrounds and share a common framework, which is a critical component to sharing tacit knowledge.

What is also interesting from the literature, however, is the notion that beyond sharing this degree of similarity, it is difference that is considered to be of equal importance to practitioners involved in city-to-city learning (Johnson & Wilson, 2009; Van Ewijk, 2012). During interactions with practitioners from different social, economic, political and cultural contexts the “other” may provide an ideal opportunity for critical reflection of one’s own approaches (Wulf, 2001 cited in Devers-Kanoglu, 2009: 207). This is an important observation for the purpose of the research as

the planning and development contexts in South Africa differ radically from those in Malawi and Namibia.

It is on the basis of this experience that people change their perspective after a process of internal reflection that transforms information into knowledge and ultimately learning (Higgins, 2011). These “situations which are complex and novel, calling for situational understanding and awareness”, as argued by Higgins (2011: 583), should provide exactly those experiences to critically reflect upon. Again, a unique opportunity is presented to test these assertions in the UCLG case study, when planners from eThekweni Municipality share their stories of citizen-driven sustainable strategic planning that may be in contrast to those told by their Namibian and Malawian colleagues.

To conclude this section on the mechanics of learning, it is necessary to briefly explore how the contemporary learning literature views the concept of ‘mentorship’, as this is the official terminology used by the UCLG and is a key point of analysis, and indeed tension, in later chapters. Unsurprisingly, there are numerous definitions and portrayals of mentorship in the learning literature.

For the purposes of this review, however, Trorey and Blamires’s (2006) representation of mentorship as that of an older individual having an influence on both the professional and intellectual development of younger protégé captures the essence of what many authors also suggest mentorship is about. Another more specific definition is offered by Auger and Rich (2007: 394) who posit that mentorship “occurs when a role model offers support to another person and shares knowledge, expertise and experience with that person”. This is a useful conceptualization as it encompasses the intentions of the UCLG mentorship program.

Given the research project’s interest in relations of power, what is important to note from the literature is that mentoring is traditionally approached as a hierarchical relationship (Allen and Eby, 2007). A mentor within such a dyadic portrayal is, as Preston et al. (2014: 54) observe, synonymous with a “teacher, tutor, coach, counselor, consultant, advisor and professional guide”. Manathunga (2007) adopts a critical stance and from the position of Foucault’s conception of governmentality argues that mentoring could mask deep paternalistic mechanisms. Similarly,

Devos (2004) also points to mentorship relations being permeated by unresolved problems of power.

This conventional view of mentorship as a predominantly one-sided hierarchical relationship has, however, been more recently criticized (Linden et al., 2013). Acknowledging the ever dynamic organizational contexts, mentorship, it is suggested, should be approached as a “reciprocal learning relationship” (Linden et al., 2013: 641). Arguing along similar lines, other writers juxtapose the traditional concept of mentorship with a newer, more progressive notion of “peer mentorship” between fellow colleagues that promotes what is regarded as a best practice for learning (Badger, 2010; Huizing, 2012). This notion of peer mentorship draws heavily from transformational learning theory that focuses more on personally relevant experiences that “emerge through social interactions, peer dialogue and self-reflection” (Preston et al., 2014: 55). Explaining in detail the process of transformational learning, Preston et al. (2014: 55) suggest that there are three key preconditions: a critical reflection on a particular experience, participation in what is described as a safe dialogue about that experience and a process of learning from the experiences of others, all “in an emotionally open way”. Admittedly, this resonates very well with the methodology employed during the UCLG mentorship program, where space is created for intense social interactions and critical self-reflection, all facilitated in a safe space with clear ground-rules that protect anonymity and promote open sharing, as will be examined in the next chapter.

From the learning literature therefore it is clear that whilst traditional notions of mentorship point to a hierarchical one sided relationship, more recent understanding appears to portray a more reciprocal peer-based style of learning. It is interesting to note how mentorship is understood by the various stakeholders in the case study, and the extent to which new conceptualizations of mentorship have diffused into practice.

To summarize, the following key points stand out from a review of the mechanics of city-to-city learning from the literature. In the first instance, it is clear that whilst this field is being recognized as an important one, not much empirical work has been done in (southern) Africa. Even Campbell’s (2012a) seminal text on how cities learn does not offer perspectives from Africa. This creates a unique opportunity for the case study to test the concepts of learning typologies, orders

of learning and learning styles introduced by Campbell (2012a). More importantly, Campbell's (2012a: 111) assertion that regardless of learning styles, it is the "networks of ties" between key actors that reveal "clouds of trusts" which is the main ingredient for city transformation is an important argument that is engaged with in this case study.

The idea of practitioners sharing a common professional background, yet who are working in completely different contexts being a determinant for successful mutual learning has been espoused by Johnson and Wilson (2009) and Van Ewijk (2012). This is another interesting proposition to validate in the southern African context of the knowledge economy. Finally, on the concept of mentorship, the literature suggests that unlike traditionally held notions of mentorship as a hierarchical, one-sided, unequal and power-laden relationship, newer understandings of peer-mentorship suggest more equitable relations that promote learning (Linden et al., 2013; Preston et al., 2014). Given the geo-political considerations, the extent to which these newer conceptions of mentorship have been assimilated by southern African practitioners and the level of political acceptability of the term will be explored in later chapters.

In moving beyond understanding processes of mutual learning between practitioners to exploring the influence of other key national and international stakeholders, the next section begins to engage more critically with these geo-political considerations and the influence of power relations in city-to-city learning. It draws upon the work of writers in the field of politics, international relations and development studies as the literature on power relations in city-to-city learning processes in Africa is virtually non-existent.

3.4.4. Power, geo-politics and city mentorship: the role of key stakeholders in international city-to-city learning

Given the adoption of a phronetic research planning approach (explained in the previous chapter) and in drawing on the writing of Flyvbjerg (1998; 2001; 2004; 2012; 2015) who works in this tradition, an exposition of the pervasive nature of power in city-to-city learning processes is an important theme in this research. The works of Power (2010) and Johnson et al. (2012) have also been useful in thinking about how power manifests itself, who controls the city-to-city learning

agenda, how decisions are made, the role of multinational agencies and donors and even the possibility of new kind of colonization – this time of the mentee by the mentor municipality.

One of the lesser explored terrains in city-to-city learning is that of the role played by supporting agencies in strategic planning processes and the extent to which these agencies inhibit, control or actually contribute towards ensuring the building of more vibrant, inclusive and robust municipal visions and strategies. In the case study, three types of support agencies have been identified: Local Government Associations from Africa, the UCLG as the program manager and the Cities Alliance, as the program funder.

Turning firstly to an examination of the respective country's Local Government Associations it is important to understand what the international literature is suggesting about the role played by these associations and whether their effectiveness can shape the outcome of city-to-city learning initiatives. In research conducted explicitly to explore the role of Local Government Associations in increasing effectiveness of city-to-city cooperation, Buis (2009) argues that national policies that provide clear guidelines and objectives that govern municipal international cooperation have been until very recently non-existent. Using the example of South Africa, it is suggested that even where this was put in place by the Ministry for Provincial and Local Government, less than ten years after publication, the framework was "hardly known by the local governments in South Africa, let alone being used" (Buis, 2009: 193). More interesting, Buis (2009) points out that SALGA who had been consulted in development of the framework had itself never used the document in its policies.

Notwithstanding the absence of a clear national policy framework to guide the operations of Local Government Associations in relation to city-to-city learning, Buis (2009: 193) makes the point that Local Government Associations do have a "strong influence" on the agenda of city-to-city cooperation and offer a platform for exchange, learning and networking. This is an important assertion to be tested in the Malawian and Namibian contexts. Another critical observation made by Buis (2009) is that Local Government Associations themselves need to be strengthened before they can rise to the occasion of facilitating of city-to-city learning. In developing a model to depict the roles of Local Government Associations, Buis (2009: 194) concludes that most associations in the developing world are currently only able to "aspire to perform" rather than "perform the roles"

outlined in the model. For city-to-city cooperation to have meaningful impact, Buis (2009) argues strongly for the capacity development of Local Government Associations.

Given that in the Namibian case the mentorship program was managed through ALAN, this observation made by Buis (2009) is particularly useful, and will help probe the effectiveness of ALAN in assisting to deliver the learning outcomes. This is particularly important, as a weak ALAN would imply that the UCLG as international program managers based in Barcelona would have to play a greater role in managing a process that arguably should be driven from within the continent. Again, examining the extent to which UCLG Africa asserts itself in driving the learning agenda on the continent, the time and energy invested in the mentorship, its own capacity and resources for learning and, more importantly, its ability to engage strategically and lobby the UCLG as its international parent body, makes for very interesting analysis.

It is this international agency – the UCLG, which is the overall coordinator that brings together the various stakeholders involved in the mentoring program is the second key role-player that deserves attention. It is very significant to note in this regard that the UCLG has been mindful of the need to clarify its role in learning, and hence commissioned international city learning expert Tim Campbell to develop a strategic note that will help the organization reposition itself. In reviewing the role of the UCLG in the arena of city learning, very clear recommendations emerged which will be summarized here.

The first important recommendation was that the UCLG begin to formalize what is termed “an apex role” given that it sits at the apex of a global web-work of regions, cities, associations and partners (Campbell, 2012b: 10). The suggestion is that it no longer plays a direct role in city learning, but gears itself up to provide normative guidance to cities and promotes a new order of learning. Beyond this normative role, it was also suggested that the UCLG focuses more on demand assessment and systematically taking stock of needs in cities globally. The third proposal that emanated from the strategic note is not only of documenting and cataloguing practice, but monitoring outcomes in order to provide useful feedback to city practitioners. Finally, a key recommendation that emerged was to capitalize on the UCLG’s asset as a “recognized

intermediary” and to more actively forge alliances for strategic learning purposes (Campbell, 2012a: 12).

Whilst the strategic note was commissioned in 2012, the UCLG has not yet transitioned to play this apex role, and is still very much an active player, directing the city learning agenda in Africa. The issue to be explored in the case study is how African role-players perceive the UCLG, and whether or not this active role serves to undermine local ownership of city learning on the continent. This is a key issue to explore, as the literature on geo-politics and power warn about the role of international agencies. In particular, the work of Power (2010: 435) which contextualizes the role of Western development agencies by exposing what is regarded as “geo-political imaginations that enframe their orthodoxies” is instructive.

Power (2010) argues that it is impossible to even make sense of current development theory and practice without making reference to the geo-politics of non-Western societies. If Power’s (2010) analysis is accepted, any hesitation or delay to transition to a higher order apex role could be viewed as an attempt to exercise power and control. Clegg (2014: 389), in writing on circuits of knowledge and power, emphasize this point, arguing that modern power “is abstract, not personalized – it flows through things and devices”, suggesting that in the case study, continued direct involvement in city learning could be interpreted as a visible manifestation of modern power relations.

As outlined in the Conceptual Framework, the use of Flyvbjerg’s (2004) Foucauldian-based analysis of power relations helps illuminate an understanding of how power is exercised and distributed. In going back to Foucault (1980: 131-132), even “the production of knowledge by the more powerful about the less privileged and marginalized” is regarded as an expression of power relations. This is an important observation, as the UCLG is responsible for the production of knowledge on city learning in Africa, whilst the UCLG Africa regional network, it is argued, does not necessarily play an active role in knowledge production.

Accepting this notion of knowledge production as an expression of power relations, Johnson et al. (2012) observe that the process of knowledge production could manifest in two ways. It could be platforms for managerial dominance and control on the one hand or it could manifest as spaces for

exciting change on the other hand. It will be important therefore to test the extent to which the UCLG - as a powerful agency headquartered in the global North – either exerts its own impositions on the local mentorship actors or creates new spaces for deliberation where local actors can be seen as taking ownership of their planning processes. Again, given the paradigm within which the research is located, understanding the political geography of power relations at work here, with a view to transform future relationships and improve planning practice, is critical.

The third support actor is the Cities Alliance, which has funded the UCLG mentorship program both in Malawi and in Namibia. Whilst their role has not been highly visible as it has been predominantly responsible only for program funding, it is important to analyze the role played by the funder in order to understand how this agency shapes the direction and outcomes of the strategic planning process. Many critical scholars in the field of international development view global governance as a set of practices in which the interests of international capital gets inserted into local sites. This, it is argued, is achieved through mechanisms that appear to be somewhat neutral and technical in nature, but are in fact political and represent vested interests (Rai, 2004; Murphy, 2008). These are important observations in the literature that call for greater scrutiny of the intentions and actions of actors such as global funding agencies. The southern African case study presents a unique opportunity to assess the extent to which the Cities Alliance, as a global funder, represents a particular interest, and how local actors perceive their involvement.

More importantly, in order to understand the pervasiveness of the relations of power, the case study includes an in-depth interview with a member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat who is asked to reflect on the learning process and what it means for an international funding agency. From the critical literature in international development, it is clear that many funders, donors and international agencies are less sympathetic to the notion that local interests may not align with their own. Walters (2004: 36) captures this view most eloquently, when he insists that the “governance discourse will not concede that its ‘others’ may have interests that are fundamentally incompatible or antagonistic to the present order of power, that their ‘exclusion’ is a structural effect rather than a remediable anomaly, or that inclusion would imply a fundamental reordering of this system”. Whilst Walters (2004) makes particular reference to the urban poor in governance

discourse, his critical commentary may equally apply to understand how international agencies engage with local actors in urban strategic planning practices in southern Africa.

This line of argument is pursued by Hout (2012) who studies the role of donor agencies in the political economy of international governance. Hout (2012: 406) makes a compelling case when he suggests that many donor agencies have tended to focus their programs on relatively technical issues, and were “preoccupied with the sequencing of reforms, rather than with the concrete impacts that such reforms were having on power relations in the countries concerned”. In an analysis of why this is so, Hout (2012) posits that the actual way in which donor agencies function in relation to the environment in which they work, and their own operational features limit their ability to appreciate the local political contexts. More importantly, he argues that the conceptualization of what proper development policy entails is often inadequate. Hout (2012: 407) suggests that development is very narrowly focused on improving people’s livelihoods and “doing development”, which involves the successful implementation of programs and projects. Their greatest miscalculation, according to Hout (2012), is that whilst they are concerned *about* the political context that they function in, they do not concern themselves *with* politics in their respective partner countries. What does this mean for agency staff in the field? Hout’s (2012: 418) analysis in this regard is extremely instructive:

For staff, ‘doing development’ implies managing and implementing programs and projects, and disbursing funds to partner organizations – predominantly governments but also to others – in order to obtain results. The depoliticized understanding of development is instrumental for development professionals, as this helps them focus on the key elements of their work, without being ‘distracted’ by the potential conflicts of interest among their partners and the power implications of development processes.

Perhaps the most concerning trend identified by Hout (2012) is that it is very unlikely that the current conceptualization of development will give way to a new approach that allows for a more robust engagement with politics and power relations. This southern African case study therefore allows for the testing of this profound theoretical assertion, either confirming that international agencies are still incorrectly focusing their efforts or suggesting that indeed bold new approaches are being chartered, challenging contemporary international development literature.

3.5. The impact of city-to-city learning on strategic planning practice

Having contextualized the international and African developmental challenges that cities are currently grappling with and the need for bold new imaginaries, this chapter then briefly unpacked the characteristics of CDS's before exploring the terrain of city-to-city learning. The pervasive nature of power was then examined in order to uncover how geo-politics could manifest itself in the terrain of city learning. What remains to be explored in this thematic review of the literature is a consideration of the impact that city-to-city learning is having on the quality of planning practice.

It is argued that city-to-city learning is an important end in itself, given the effort, energy and amount of resources spent in this process. At the same time however, it is important that learning yields developmental outcomes in the form of some improvement in the quality of urban strategic planning practice. As alluded to earlier, the literature is very thin in this regard, as few empirical studies have been conducted that pays particular attention to an examination of the impact of learning on strategic planning practice. It is argued that in this vacuum, a useful starting point may be to begin to develop an appreciation for the critical defining elements of a more successful city learning partnership. An attempt at such a framework is the object of the next section.

3.5.1. Guidelines for assessing the effectiveness of city-to-city learning

Accepting the premise that the mentorship of one city by another with the objective of the development of a municipal strategic plan can be regarded as an example of governmental policy transfer process then the scope for guidance from the literature is slightly increased. In a landmark study by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 5), policy transfer is best understood as a process by which “knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting”. This does seem like a useful definition that can be applied to the case study where particular knowledge about strategic planning from Durban,

South Africa is used in the development of town development visions and strategies in the Namibian and Malawian towns and city contexts.

The Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) study was important at that time as it recognized that policy transfer studies accepted that such transfer processes led to or will lead to the successful implementation of the respective policies. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 6) noted, however:

...it is becoming increasingly apparent that policy transfer can, and often does, lead to policy failure. So, there is a need to explore the relationship between transfer and policy success or failure.

More than this groundbreaking observation, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) offered a conceptual framework that has since been used by numerous other researchers. Essentially, as part of the framework they pose six important questions which are repeated here (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000: 8):

- Why do actors engage in policy transfer?
- Who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process?
- What is transferred?
- From where are lessons drawn?
- What are the different degrees of transfer?
- What restricts or facilitates the policy transfer process?

These are all important questions that will be useful to bear in mind in the case study in thinking about the process of city-to-city learning and the knowledge transfer process.

It is interesting, however, that in a more recent publication Fawcett and Marsh (2012: 162) have again acknowledged that the relationship between the process of policy transfer and its actual outcomes is not only of growing importance, but is also still a very under-researched area. In particular they apply their minds to the vexed question of what exactly are those factors that affect the success, or otherwise, of policy transfer, given the poor outcomes of policy transfer.

Closer to home, De Villiers (2009: 150) who conducted a comprehensive study of all 285 municipalities in South Africa in 2005 makes the claim that most city-to-city partnerships actually fail, quoting a study conducted within South Africa as an example, where only 13% were rated as highly successful. More alarming, however, is that a subsequent study showed that an estimated 51% of the partnerships identified in 2004 were abandoned by 2006, and only 7 of the 50 investigated were worthy of being emulated (De Villiers, 2009: 150).

Using these South African insights and drawing from research done in US cities, De Villiers (2009) identified some key factors in successful and sustainable city relationships. What is most useful about De Villiers' (2009) contribution is the development of a planning and management framework which built into it a range of critical success factors. Whilst the entire framework will not be described here, an attempt is made to isolate the key success factors as identified by De Villiers (2009: 150-151). This is done in order to correlate these factors with a set of related questions that can be applied to the UCLG case study. The intention is to create a broad framework for assessing the effectiveness of city-to-city learning, as reflected in Table 3.4 below. What stands out from the table is the importance of the early creation of an enabling environment to support the partnership, the establishment of organizational and institutional mechanisms such as staff structures and agreements as well as softer but equally important issues of leadership, attitudes and values.

Table 3.4 Extrapolation of success factors in learning (adapted from De Villiers, 2009: 150)

De Villiers (2009) Success Factors	Key issues related to the UCLG Case Study
1. Enabling environment to facilitate partnership: role of governmental and other agencies	1. Who was responsible for initiating the partnership and how well supported is it by spheres of government and governmental agencies?
2. Partnership selection	2. Who matched the mentor and mentees and how well was this done?
3. Municipal council support and management commitment	3. Does the Council support the initiative and is the management aware and behind the program?
4. Broad-based community involvement and participation, including sub-alliances between institutions	4. Are the citizens in the respective cities involved or aware of the processes underway?
5. Quality of the management of the partnership	5. Who manages the entire process and how?
6. Strong committed leadership	6. Who leads the process over time? Is there continuity from a political and community perspective?
7. Effective and permanent organizational structures and staff	7. Who is responsible for the partnership on an on-going basis, and are there organizational structures and staff in place to oversee the partnership?
8. Institutional agreements governing the relationship	8. Is there a long-term Memorandum of Understanding that is signed between the parties?
9. Relationship maintenance through reliable communication media	9. How often is the relationship maintained and how?
10. Regular exchanges and relationship building with similar personalities on both sides	10. How often do the cities meet and who are the personalities on each side that maintain the relationships?
11. Attitudes and values of trust, reciprocity, commitment, understanding, cultural sensitivity, positive attitude towards risk, and flexibility	11. Is there mutual trust and reciprocity on both sides?
12. Ability to access on-going financial resources	12. How does the project ensure financial sustainability and does this jeopardize the relationship?
13. Regular evaluation and revision of terms of agreement and relationship	13. Is the partnership monitored and evaluated on an on-going basis?

In particular, De Villiers (2009: 155) identifies three key areas of “alliance capability, institutional support and alliance lifecycle” which provide a useful starting point for developing a more detailed assessment framework. It is interesting to note too that De Villiers (2009: 155) acknowledges that more research is required in establishing the context in which the framework can be applied, accepting the differences due to “geographical orientation of relationships, city size, resources applied and the size of the relationship portfolio”. These are important considerations that will be drawn on as the study is amongst eThekweni Municipality, a large well-resourced metropolitan authority in South Africa, and smaller, less- resourced municipalities in Namibia and Malawi. Beyond the size and complexity, each operates in unique development and planning contexts.

3.6 Summary and key conclusions emerging from the literature

Given the multi-disciplinary nature of the research project, this chapter drew from the fields of urban development and management, city strategic planning, knowledge management and organizational learning to set out four thematic areas. It began by setting out the broader international developmental context, reflecting on the recent UN-Habitat’s (2014a: 2) Medellin’s Declaration that calls for a “new urban agenda”, encompassing a more participatory planning approach that promotes sustainable development. It showed also that this radical and transformative agenda places more responsibilities on city governments to develop better plans for sustainable development, thereby placing urban strategic planning in the international urban development spotlight. It then showed how this call resonated with African city leadership who made an impassioned plea for a complete rethinking and re-imagination of the African city. This call was made whilst urging that this not be done in isolation from each other, but through working collaboratively and learning together as African cities in the region, in order to reposition the continent on a more sustainable development trajectory (UN-Habitat, 2014b).

Having set this international and African developmental context, the chapter then briefly reviewed the literature on urban strategic planning and the CDS as a tool to help realize the vision of more sustainable cities. Employing the UCLG (2010a: 11) definition of urban strategic planning as “providing a methodology which helps cities identify their strengths and weaknesses, while

defining the main strategies for local development”, the distinction made in the literature between strategic planning and the broader area of urban planning was stressed. The defining characteristics of flexibility, longer term orientation and the ability to integrate all aspects of city development, was also emphasized.

What stood out in this review of urban strategic planning, however, was the significance that commentators placed on active citizen engagement in municipal visioning processes and the alignment of municipal government practices with the long-term aspirations of citizens and other key stakeholders. The notion of “collaborative planning” as actively involving residents in decision-making processes, as espoused by Faehnle et al. (2014), was also useful as it provided a frame of reference to measure engagement processes in Namibia and Malawi. Similarly, Robinson’s (2011) interesting observation of not just the portability and mobility of city strategies, but the explicit attempt by cities to adapt and adopt practices to suit the local context provided an opportunity to test the validity of this assertion in the southern African context.

Exactly how this process of learning between cities unfolds formed the basis of the third thematic area in the chapter. In this important section, the terrain of defining exactly what city-to-city learning entails was carefully navigated, noting the difference between city-to-city learning and city-to-city cooperation. Campbell’s (2012a: 9) definition of learning as the acquisition of outside knowledge obtained during “technical visits of professional practitioners who actively seek new knowledge and good practice” in order to improve planning practice was most useful in helping to frame the research.

A quick journey through time to review the history of the rise of city-to city learning was then conducted, followed by a more detailed unpacking of the actual mechanics of city-to-city-learning, as highlighted in the learning literature. Before this was done, however, the elusive concept of the knowledge economy, defined by the World Bank (2008) as involving organizations and people acquiring, creating, disseminating and actively using knowledge for broader socio-economic development, was clarified. This was important to note, as the research suggests that city-to-city learning processes in southern Africa are certainly not well documented, and operate almost as an invisible or underground knowledge economy.

Using Campbell's (2012a) seminal study on city-to-city learning as one of the key references, the question of exactly how learning takes place was then explored in-depth, in order to test the concepts of learning typologies, styles of learning and orders of learning. The critical question posed in this section was whether eThekweni Municipality's approach can be fit into neat and ordered categorizations as defined in the predominantly northern-based literature, or whether it resists such type-casting given the uniqueness of the context in southern Africa. Perhaps the most significant finding from the literature on learning, however, is Campbell's (2012a: 111) assertion that irrespective of city learning styles, it is the "networks of ties" between key actors that reveal key "clouds of trusts" that is the most critical ingredient for city transformation. The issue of trust and human relationships in city learning processes was identified as a very important theme to be empirically tested in the case study. Similarly, the notion of practitioners sharing a common professional background while working in completely different contexts being a key determinant for successful mutual learning, as suggested by Johnson and Wilson (2009) and Van Ewijk (2012), is yet another key proposition to validate in the case study.

The chapter then considered the fourth theme that explored the role of key stakeholders in the learning process, in an attempt to uncover the pervasive nature of power and how this may influence decision-making. In reviewing the admittedly limited literature on power, geo-politics and city-learning, critical observations stood out. Firstly, from the literature on the role of Local Government Associations in city learning, it was clear that whilst these associations do have a strong influence on the agenda of city learning and offer a platform for exchange and networking, they have to be strengthened considerably before they are able to facilitate city-to-city learning processes themselves (Buis, 2009). This point is critical for the case study, as it implied that a weak ALAN and Malawian Local Government Association (MALGA) meant that the role of the Barcelona-based UCLG will need to be more influential.

Secondly, in reviewing the role of the UCLG, the literature showed that there have been calls for the UCLG to transition to a more strategic apex role, from its current active role in directing learning on the continent. The works of Power (2010) and Clegg (2014) writing on circuits of knowledge and power began to sound some alarm bells in the case study, suggesting that continued and direct involvement in city-to-city learning without a plan to transition to a more coordinating and monitoring role could be construed as the exertion of power relations. From the work of

Johnson et al. (2012), however, it was interesting to note that the terrain is indeed fluid, dynamic and contested. Platforms could either be created for managerial dominance or could manifest as spaces for exciting transformation. This is a critical observation from the literature, and interestingly the research begins to serve as a catalyst for such change, as it forces the key stakeholders involved in the process to reflect critically about the issue of power and control.

Thirdly, in a review of critical literature in international development, in order to understand the role of the Cities Alliance as an international funder in the program, a gloomy outlook emerges. Hout (2012), having conducted in-depth research in this field, suggests that most donor agencies have incorrectly depoliticized their efforts and focused on managing programs to achieve measurable results, thereby ignoring the power implications of the very development processes that they are involved in. The southern African case study, it was noted, provided a unique opportunity to begin to test the extent to which this assertion holds true.

The final thematic area in this chapter considered the relationship between the learning and knowledge transfer process and the actual impact that this has on improving the quality of practice. The results from the literature whilst not extensive, was disappointing with most studies revealing that city-to-city cooperation initiatives showed little developmental impact (De Villiers, 2009). The urgent need for a robust framework to guide city learning processes clearly emerges. It is the intention of this research project to use the insights gained from the case study – the details of which will be unpacked in the next chapter – to help in the construction of such a framework that will inform design considerations of future African city learning practices.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STUDY AREA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapters the background, context and rationale for research on city-to-city learning, including its aims and objectives have been outlined. This was followed by a presentation of a multi-conceptual framework that set aside grand meta-theory in favor of a more pragmatic approach to viewing the complexities of urban planning and development in African cities. This framework drew inspiration from the dynamism of the planning practice movement, with a deliberate bias towards power-sensitive phronetic research on the one hand, whilst also being influenced by the value and utility of knowledge creation theory in helping to interpret the changing geographies of city learning, on the other hand.

In the first part of this chapter an introduction to the study area is provided. Given that the research involves analyzing the case study of the UCLG mentorship program between the mentor city of eThekweni Municipality, Durban in South Africa and the mentee cities of Mzuzu in Malawi and Otjiwarongo in Namibia, the backgrounds of these cities and their strategic planning processes are briefly presented. Before this, however, more information on the UCLG mentorship program itself (its aims, objectives, source of funding and key supporting role-players) is also given, as this is useful in helping to contextualize the study. In the second part of this chapter, the details of the research methodology are unpacked, covering the broad research approach, the research design, research methods employed as well as highlighting key methodological considerations.

4.2. The UCLG mentorship program: The case study of eThekweni Municipality, Durban as mentor and Otjiwarongo, Namibia and Mzuzu, Malawi as mentee cities

4.2.1. Background to the UCLG mentorship program

As a starting point, it is useful to note that the mentorship program is driven and coordinated by the USPC of the UCLG. According to the UCLG Annual Activity Report, this Committee “responds to the growing need to create spaces for discussion and exchange between cities, and offers advice to improve the quality of local policies on urban strategic planning, with special emphasis being placed on a south-south cooperation, in response to the need to share first-hand experiences on pro-poor policies and informality” (UCLG, 2012: 2).

The focus on the global South and on a more developmental and pro-poor agenda is unsurprising, given that the leadership of the UCLG USPC comes from the southern cities. The Committee was formed in Jeju, South Korea, in 2006 with the Mayor of Rosario, Argentina as Chairperson, and the City Manager of eThekweni Municipality as Vice Chair (UCLG, 2011b). Funded by the Cities Alliance and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the focus of the Committee has been around four key areas: (i) the preparation of a global policy paper on urban strategic planning; (ii) serving as a sounding board on planning matters for international networks and the Cities Alliance; (iii) redefining the concept of decentralized international cooperation between cities of the global South; and (iv) the promotion of urban strategic planning through mentorships, partnerships and learning exchanges (UCLG, 2011a).

Through its City Future project, it is clear that the support of mentorship programs and learning exchanges are key to its mandate, with the following active city-to-city learning initiatives presented in its report to the UCLG Executive Bureau: (i) Lilongwe and Johannesburg, (ii) Mzuzu and eThekweni, (iii) Blantyre and Ekurhuleni, (iv) Xai-Xai, Inhambane and Porto Alegre, (v)

Maputo and Belo Horizonte, (vi) Mombasa and Bergen, (vii) Ciudad Sur and Rosario, and (viii) Namibian cities and eThekweni (UCLG, 2011a).

Significantly too, it has identified the promotion of inter-regional learning on urban strategic planning and the up-scaling of the action learning as strategic priorities for 2012-2015, ((UCLG, 2011a). This was again confirmed in its report to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry that the emphasis of the USPC is on the mentoring program around city/ town development strategies (UCLG, 2011b). Writing in his capacity as the Co-chair of the UCLG USPC, the former City Manager of the eThekweni Municipality outlined the rationale for the UCLG mentorship program. Essentially, the case for city mentorship and decentralized cooperation was made along the lines of improving municipal planning capacities, sharing collective knowledge and wisdom, and enhancing local innovation (UCLG, 2009). What is powerful in the statement is the careful articulation of an environment of mutually reinforcing coaching and collective partnering which emphasizes the spirit of enriching dialogue between the cities (UCLG, 2009). In the message too is a clear call for using the spaces created by the UCLG to promote local experiences and “giving a voice to the South” (UCLG, 2009:1). This notion of repositioning the global South as articulated by the Chairperson of the Committee is important to note and will be considered again in later chapters when the geographies of learning are explored.

It is necessary at this point to clarify here how the UCLG defines the geographical boundaries of southern Africa and which countries are included in this definition. Given that the research makes reference to southern Africa, having a geographical fix is important. According to the UCLGA (2014: 32), the following ten countries form part of its southern Africa delineation: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In contextualizing the mentorship project, it is also useful to point out that in addition to the program management role played by the UCLG there are Local Government Associations in each of the respective cities that play a support role and the Cities Alliance that is the program funder, which is also an important role-player in the process. These role-players are summarized in Figure 4.1 below. The international nature of the mentorship project is made explicit in the diagram which

shows that the UCLG plays the role of program coordination, managing by remote control from Barcelona, Spain with very little role being played by UCLG Africa. The Local Government Associations in each country offer varying levels of support to the respective cities in each of the three countries, whilst the Cities Alliance with its Head Office at the time in Washington, D.C. managed the funding from its program office in Johannesburg.

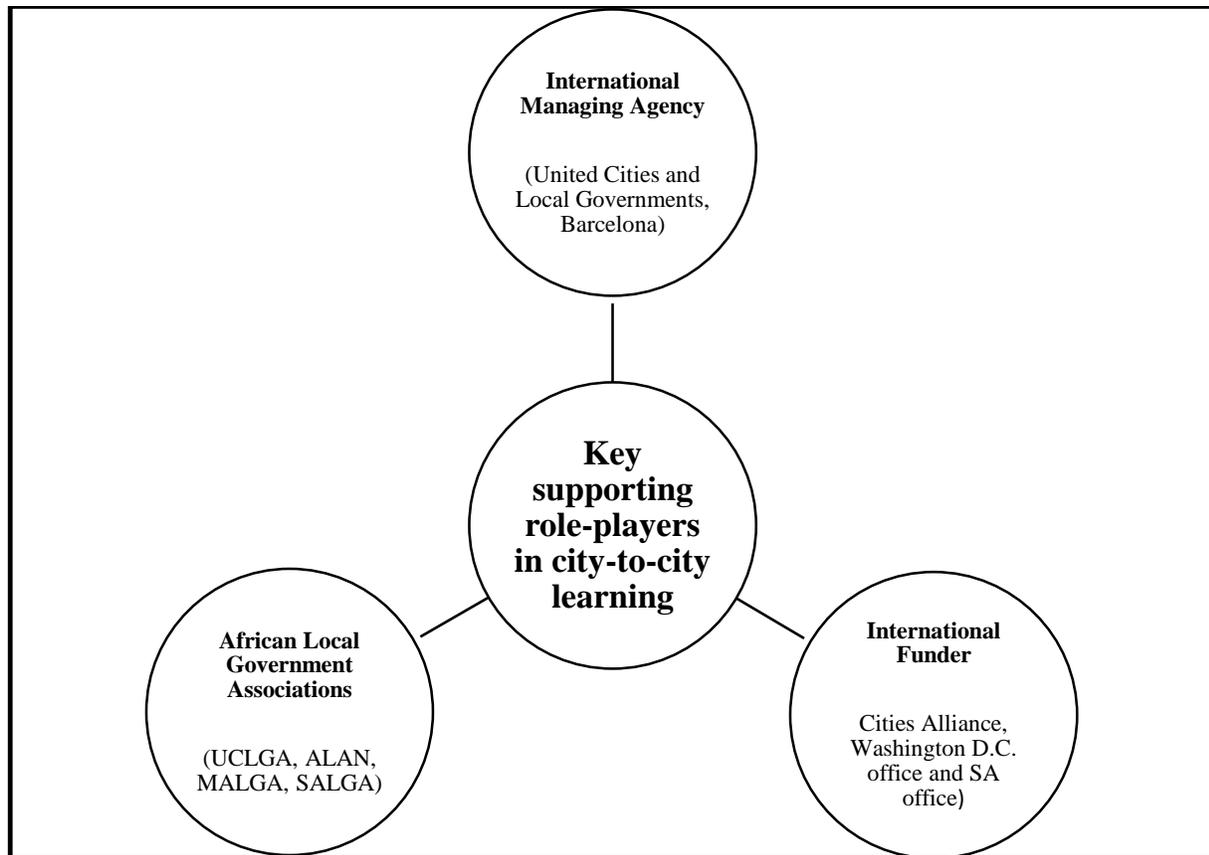


Figure 4.1: Key support agencies involved in the mentorship program

It is also important to note that there are at least eight active city-to-city learning processes underway within the UCLG mentorship program. A full and complete study of all these mentorships will be an interesting and important research project in its own right. However, the scope of this research is limited to a critical analysis of only two mentorships, both of which involve eThekweni Municipality in its role as mentor to Malawian and Namibian cities and towns.

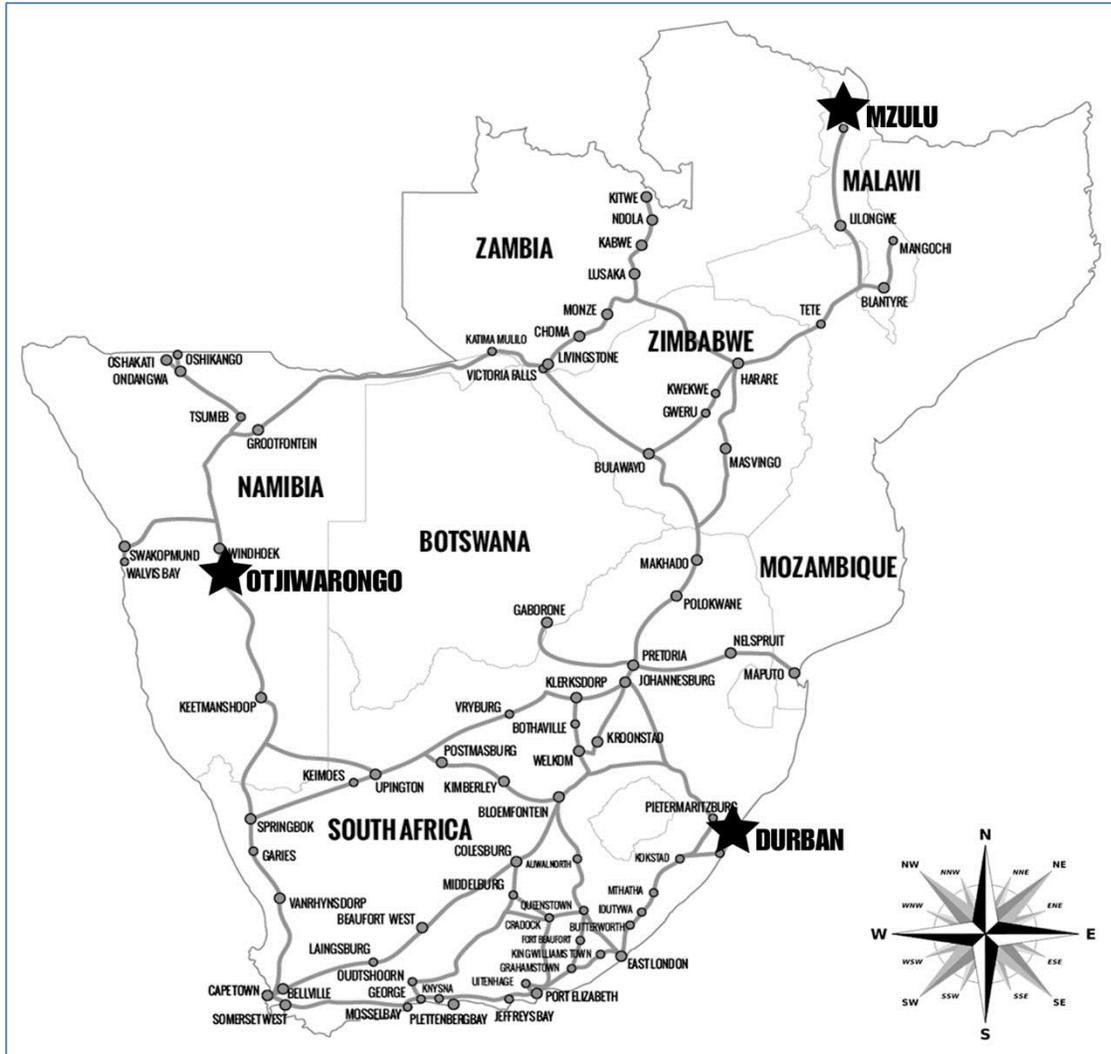


Figure 4.2: Locality Map indicating comparative location of three selected cities of Durban, Mzuzu and Otjiwarongo

Source: <http://www.intercape.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/RouteMapLRGnov14.png>

The eThekweni Municipality’s mentorship program, with the respective cities in Malawi and Namibia as managed by the UCLG, provides an excellent case study to understand how city-to-city learning occurs within urban strategic planning processes in southern Africa. Given the overall pragmatic stance adopted in the research, and the focus on improving the quality of practice, the adoption of a case study proved most suitable. More details on case study research and its advantages will be returned to in the second part of this chapter, where a fuller consideration of the research methods is undertaken. What is useful to consider next, however, is an overview of

the eThekweni Municipality and its strategic planning process that is being shared with its two African counterparts.

4.2.2. The eThekweni Municipality, Durban, South Africa

4.2.2.1. An overview of the eThekweni Municipal area

The eThekweni Municipal area which is located on the east coast of South Africa in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal spans an area of approximately 2 297 km² and is home to nearly three and a half million people (eThekweni Municipality, 2014a). Consisting of a diverse society which faces various social, economic, environmental and governance challenges, eThekweni's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in constant 2005 prices, amounted to R210 billion in 2012 and importantly comprises 65.5% of KwaZulu-Natal's GDP and 10.7% nationally (eThekweni Municipality, 2014a).

In an appendix to its publication on the lessons learned in its process of long-term planning for urban sustainability, the eThekweni Municipality (2011) provides a useful snapshot of the eThekweni Municipal profile, and in particular of its natural assets which are summarized here. Characterizing the Municipal area by subtropical weather and almost 320 days of sunshine per year, the summary boasts of its “63 114 hectares of open space; 18 catchments; 17 estuaries; 4 000 km of rivers which provides approximately R3 billion in value for core ecological/ biodiversity assets that deliver free environment goods and services to residents per annum (assessed in 2002)” (eThekweni Municipality, 2011: 52). As a result of this environmental contribution, it further argues that essentially the city also “registers financial benefits from cost savings on goods and services” (eThekweni Municipality, 2011: 52).

According to its 2014/ 2015 IDP, the eThekweni Municipality (2014a: 80) records the achievement of “a number of significant social, environmental and economic development advances”, since the new democratic municipal dispensation in 2000. It notes that the majority of the citizens now have increased access to a wide range of basic services, and that more opportunities have been created for their participation in the economy (eThekweni Municipality, 2014a). From Table 4.1 below, it

is clear that whilst significant strides have been made, the service delivery backlogs are high, and based on current funding levels will only be addressed over the next four decades.

Table 4.1: Summary of eThekweni Municipality’s service backlogs (eThekweni Municipality,

Basic Service	Existing Backlog (consumer units) as at 30 June 2013	Delivery ranges per annum	Timeframe to address based on current funding levels*
Water	71 494	2 000-2 500	29-36 years
Sanitation	218 248	8 000-10 000	22-27 years
Electricity	290 393	8 000-13 000	22-36 years
Refuse removal	0	1 500-2 000	0 years
Roads	1 118.2 kms	10-15 kms	74-111 years
*The timeframes indicated depend on the rollout of funding/ subsidies.			

2014a: 44)

Economic growth and job creation is an important theme in its plans, and as such the Municipality notes that it has been accelerating further development opportunities in order to create sustainable business to grow in its already established economic base (eThekweni Municipality, 2011). It does this through the introduction of a number of infrastructure investment plans and major projects in order to act as catalysts to the economy. Some of these include the Dube Trade Port and King Shaka International Passenger Airport, the 2010 World Cup Stadium (Moses Mabhida Stadium), the Port Expansion and various shopping malls (eThekweni Municipality, 2011).

Whilst the eThekweni Municipality does have a set of clear economic development plans, it acknowledges its challenge around inequality. It accepts that “the number of people living in extreme poverty in the eThekweni Municipality area has increased, mostly affecting Black Africans and this is a result of a legacy of apartheid and racial exclusion which created poverty gaps, wealth disparities and inequality between racial groups” (eThekweni Municipality, 2011: 53). Whilst it accepts that an estimated 44% of the total households earn less than R1 500 per month, it has embraced the challenge and suggests that this has created a window for change with the strategic thrust of the Council’s strategy on the strengthening of the economic base of the city in order to generate jobs and income (eThekweni Municipality, 2011: 53). It is perhaps timely to

now turn to an examination of the strategic planning process of the Council on which the mentorship of the Namibian and Malawian cities is based.

4.2.2.2. Background to eThekweni Municipality's strategic planning process

Robinson (2007: 4), in her commentary on Durban's visioning process, makes the point that "eThekweni, on many criteria South Africa's second city, routinely falls off the map of urban studies, and specifically of global and world cities (GAWC) analyses". The reason for eThekweni Municipality's exclusion, Robinson (2007) postulates, is due to a predominant way of viewing cities which has dominated urban analysis over the last twenty years. With the growing importance of globalization projects, and encouraged by both business and policy-makers; scholars of cities, Robinson (2007) further argues, have come to privilege the global outreach of cities, especially those that are part of certain selected trans-urban networks. What is refreshing about the conceptual approach of Robinson (2007), Smith (2001) and Amin and Graham (1997) is their alternate way of looking at cities as ordinary. Useful too, is their focus not just on the city's specialization, but on its diversity, and more importantly tracking networks beyond the physical place of the city to include engaging with the very diverse socio-economic aspects of the city.

The details of eThekweni Municipality's approach to strategic planning is well documented in two of its publications, *Making City Strategy Come Alive* (eThekweni Municipality, 2004) and *The Power of Imagination* (eThekweni Municipality, 2011a). From these publications, it can be argued that this aspect of engaging and even celebrating diversity, allowing for different voices in the city to be heard, and acknowledging competing interests in a visioning process is one of the defining characteristics of the eThekweni Municipality's strategic planning approach. According to the eThekweni Municipality, its explicit intention was to develop a visionary plan aimed particularly at "inspiring citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business and government to work together to achieve long-term goals" (eThekweni Municipality, 2009: 3). This is an interesting starting point that sees citizen involvement not as part of a consultative process where the Council itself is seen as the driver of a plan that merely requires the buy-in from its stakeholders.

The thinking behind its participatory approach to development, it is argued, is embedded in its complete redefinition of the goal of the entire organization in as early as 2001. According to Dlamini and Moodley (2002: 7), a new purpose statement for the eThekweni Municipality was crafted, in which “a new understanding of people being the focus of local government’s existence was developed”. What has inspired many other cities about the eThekweni approach is its design of a “single holistic process that moves from strategic and visionary statements of intent, through to a process that combines planning and budgeting for development, through to implementation and evaluation” (Dlamini & Moodley, 2002: 7).

As depicted in Figure 4.3 below, the strategic planning approach focuses on a clear separation of what is strategic from what are more operational issues. The planning process commences with the determination of a long-term vision initially set out for 20 years in the eThekweni Municipality’s (2001) Long-Term Development Framework (LTDF), and then reworked to longer timeframes to achieve longer term outcomes of up to 60 – 80 years and contained in its Imagine Durban Long-Term Plan (eThekweni Municipality, 2009). The strategic priorities for five years are informed by a detailed needs assessment process where engagements are done with the community, business and other city-wide stakeholders. The emerging strategic focus areas then inform the strategic budget allocation of the municipality which drives the operational Council programs and projects. The entire process is cyclical with monitoring and evaluation processes built into the system.

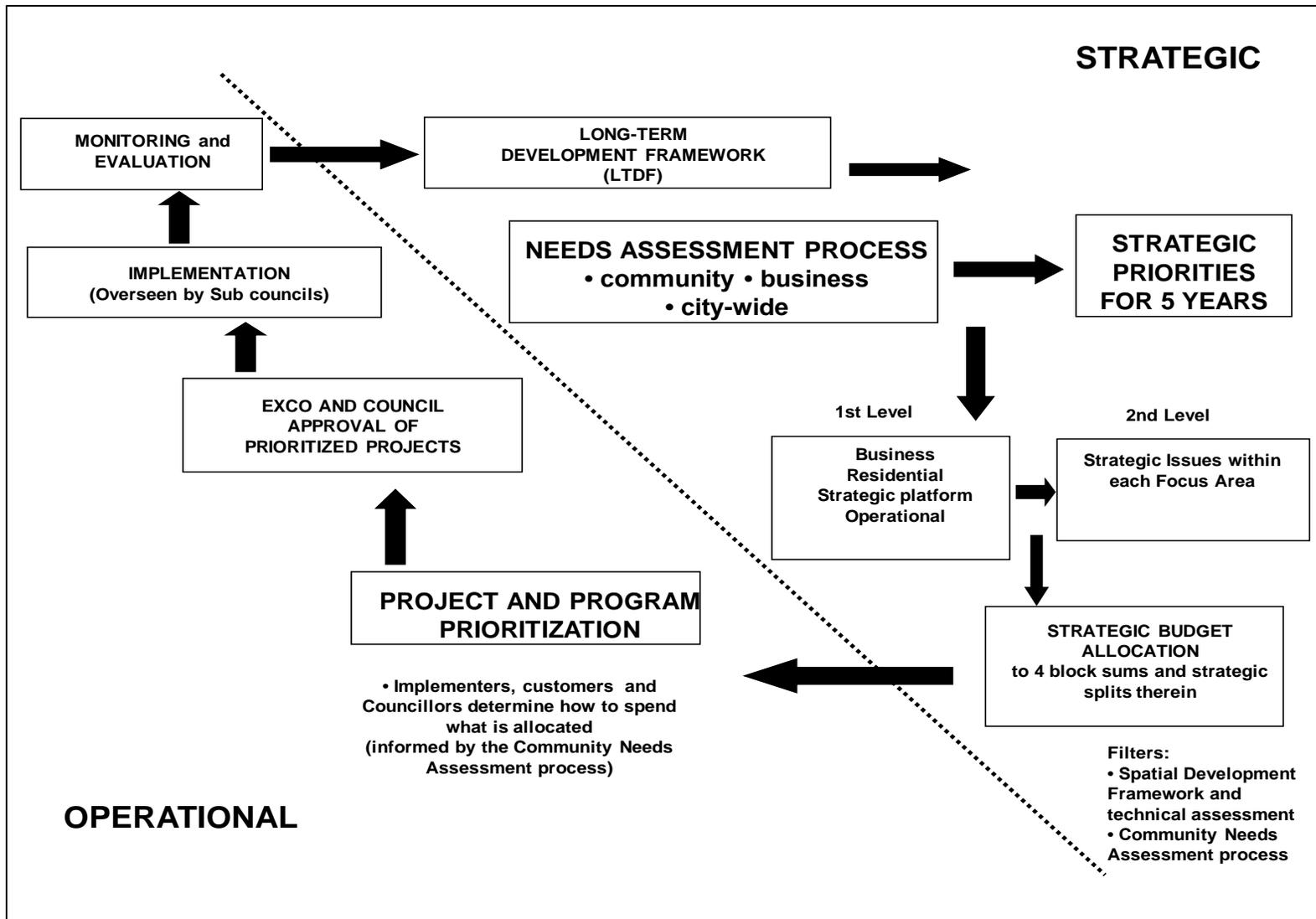


Figure 4.3: The eThekweni Model: A single holistic developmental management approach (Dlamini & Moodley, 2002: 8)

This longer term planning process directly informs its medium-term planning process that sets out its strategic priorities for five years, as articulated in each of its IDPs prepared over the longer term. This persistent adherence to the translation from vision to action appears to remain a recurrent theme. This is evident even in the eThekweni Municipality's (2014a: 80) latest revised IDP that reiterates the eThekweni Municipality's "commitment to developing a 'caring and liveable city' will be the focal point of the 2012/13 – 2016/17 IDP, with a specific emphasis on the alignment of the Municipal Vision, strategy and implementation".

In contrasting Johannesburg's 2030 planning initiative with Durban's LTDF and IDP process, Robinson (2007: 9) again acknowledges the bottom-up approach of Durban, observing that Durban's strategic planning process was shaped by a strong participatory approach, part of which actually involved "adjusting budget splits - the proportion to be spent on different council priorities". Beyond its ability to translate vision into implementable action, some of the other unique characteristics of the strategic planning process included the "fostering of partnerships with key stakeholders in the community in order to develop strong ties of trust, engaging political leadership, working with schoolchildren, taking risks and experimenting and embracing new opportunities" (eThekweni Municipality, 2011: 18-28). These factors are important to highlight here, as the eThekweni Municipality's narrative of a participatory long-term planning process is what forms the basis of learning and mentorship with the Namibian and Malawian cities, as will be explored in the next chapter.

In this section, a short summary of the eThekweni Municipality profile and the defining characteristics of its strategic planning process have been provided. In the next section, more details on the background to Mzuzu City and its strategic planning process are given. Whilst both cities in this case study are grappling with complex sets of urbanization challenges, most notable in a comparison of the cities is the contrast between the size and complexity of the challenges.

4.2.3. Mzuzu City, Malawi

4.2.3.1. Background to the Mzuzu Council Area

Located 367 km north of capital city of Lilongwe, 300 km from the Tanzanian border and 47 km from Lake Malawi, Mzuzu due to its strategic location in the northern region of Malawi, effectively serves as the capital for this region (UCLG, 2010b). The UN-Habitat (2011), which commissioned an urban profile on the city, also acknowledges Mzuzu's important role as the hub not just of government administration, but of business, industry, commerce and services for the entire northern region of Malawi. Significantly too, besides being the largest commercial and industrial center in Malawi, as shown in Figure 4.4, Mzuzu dwarfs the other neighboring economies in northern Mozambique, eastern Zambia and southern Tanzania (UCLG, 2010a).

Compared with its mentor city eThekweni Municipality's population size of 3.5 million people, Mzuzu City has a population of just 150 000 people, whilst serving a broader hinterland population well over 1.5 million (UN-Habitat, 2011). In aerial extent too, Mzuzu with its total surface area of 228 km² (UN-Habitat, 2011) is approximately one-tenth the size of the eThekweni Municipality area. Growing at 4.2% per annum and regarded as one of the fastest growing cities of Malawi, it is the third largest urban center after Lilongwe and Blantyre.

Mzuzu which obtained its "city status" in 1975 has grown significantly since then, and most notable is its youthful population, with nearly 41% of its citizens being under the age of 14 years (UCLG, 2010b: 5). One of the key governance challenges is the slow pace of decentralization as evidenced in the conspicuous absence of elected councilors. According to the UN-Habitat (2011: 15), "good governance has not been achieved in Mzuzu due to lack of popular participation by the communities, who are represented by civil society representatives, development and humanitarian organizations and other key stakeholders in the Community Development Committees".



Figure 4.4: Locality Map of Mzuzu, Malawi

The UN-Habitat (2011: 8) urban profile further notes that of the 15 wards in the city, nearly 75% of these have developed as unplanned settlements and whilst they have been upgraded by providing piped water, roads, market centers as well as plot demarcations, the report also records that over 60% of the population in 2011 live in unplanned settlements. In response to the set of urbanization challenges raised above, the Malawian Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development working in partnership with the UN-Habitat introduced the Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP) in Mzuzu as well as in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Zomba (UN-Habitat, 2011).

The urban profile for Mzuzu City, which was prepared under the auspices of the PSUP is an important document that sets out the key challenges faced by the city in the areas of governance, land and housing, slums, basic urban services including water and sanitation, local economic development, gender and HIV/AIDS, energy, disaster risks, environment, and waste management (UN-Habitat, 2011). These challenges are meant to be addressed in a systematic and programmatic manner. However, as will be outlined in the next session, there has been no strategic planning process responsible for guiding the orderly development in the city.

4.2.3.2. The strategic planning process in Mzuzu

In reflecting on the history of planning initiatives since the 1970s in Mzuzu, it is clear that there have been a number of plans, some of which are obsolete and others that are in a state of review. For ease of reference these are tabulated in Table 4.2 below, based on the findings from the UCLG (2010b) commissioned report on the mentoring process in Malawi. From Table 4.2 it becomes clear that there have been a range of planning interventions that have been embarked upon by the Mzuzu City Council over the last four decades, from Outlining Plans to Structure Plans. These were the precursors to the present day CDS.

Table 4.2: Summary of planning interventions in Mzuzu City Council (UCLG, 2010b: 5)

Date of planning initiative	Planning Interventions in Mzuzu
1971	First Outlining Plan
1978	Update to Interim Structure Plan (never approved)
1991	Urban Structure Plan finalized; ministerial approval in 1995
2008	Reviewing process started leading to the preparation of a City Development Plan 2009–2014
2008	Socio-economic profile of the City
2011	Mzuzu Urban Profile
Current	Mzuzu CDS

Whilst the long history of plan development is indeed acknowledged, it is interesting to uncover the starting point for the eThekweni Municipality’s offer to mentor the Mzuzu City Council. The eThekweni Municipality (2010a: 3) in its inception report on the mentorship process written up after the first visit to Malawi, identified the “inability to develop *relevant* plans which help guide

the development of the city that has been cited as one of the reasons which have negatively affected the city”. Recognizing the capacity needs in Mzuzu, the eThekweni Municipality (2010a: 3) viewed the partnership as an “opportunity to address this matter and agree on the desired state of development which is in line with the Mzuzu City Assembly’s vision”.

The need for urgent capacity development to undertake strategic planning was also raised in the UN-Habitat (2011) urban profile. The report suggests that “the ability of the Mzuzu City Council to deliver services and respond to other needs of the city is highly dependent on its capacity to facilitate and participate in urban development” (UN-Habitat, 2011: 34). In arguing for the need to create an enabling environment for the delivery of social infrastructure and basic urban services, whilst recognizing the lack of necessary skills and knowledge to do so, the UN-Habitat (2011) report recommended key areas of training including leadership, results based management, participatory planning and participatory budgeting which it suggested would “build the city council’s capacity, improve their skills and knowledge will accelerate urban development” (UN-Habitat, 2011: 34).

In this context, when the Mzuzu City Council was engaged with the urban profile process, it seems that the offer by the UCLG for an opportunity to be mentored by eThekweni Municipality in the field of participatory urban strategic planning, was perfectly timed (UCLG, 2010b). As outlined in the terms of reference that guided the mentorship, the program was operationalized through City Future, which is a joint program of the UCLG and Cities Alliance, aimed at promoting CDSs based on the MDGs. The UCLG (2010b) was very clear about the roles and responsibilities of each city in the mentorship process. It was expected that the eThekweni Municipality as mentor “provide technical assistance in the areas of strategic analysis, including a pre-evaluation of the Durban lessons learned and to plan the next activities taking into account the local context” (UCLG, 2010a: 2).

More specifically, the responsibilities of the Mzuzu City Council has been documented in the Terms of Reference by the UCLG (2010c: 2) as follows:

(i) Provide a pre-need assessment on challenges of members related to urban development, urbanization and poverty reduction in the country; (ii) prepare the mission activities, mobilize relevant local actors to be involved; (iii) describe the expectation to the mentors regarding specific inputs; and (iv) provide accommodation transport and any operational requirement for the mentor.

Whilst recognizing that Mzuzu City Council's capacity to develop and implement plans are far from eThekweni's, the essence of the spirit of the partnership is captured in the following sentiments, as recorded in eThekweni Municipality's (2010a: 4) inception report:

... there is a need to look at the *potential* that each city has to turn around things for the good of its residents in the short-term and for the possibility of becoming a stronger regional player in the longer term.

It is this vision of making a contribution to the growth of a stronger African region that has been a strong motivator for the eThekweni Municipality to provide support not only to its Malawian counterpart, but to its western neighbor. The background to this mentorship process with Namibia is turned to next.

4.2.4. City mentorship in Namibia

4.2.4.1 Setting the development context in Namibia

South Africa and Namibia have a long and shared history of colonial rule and underdevelopment, with Namibia gaining independence itself from South Africa only in 1990 (UCLG, 2014). Before zooming into the Otjiwarongo Municipality, it is important to briefly contextualize the development scenario at a national context in Namibia. Most striking in comparison is that of population size and density; with the eThekweni city population greater than the entire country population of just over 2.1 million people in Namibia, as tabulated in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Comparison of the Namibia and South African development contexts (UCLG, 2014: 3)

	Namibia	South Africa
Independence and political system	Republic of Namibia 1990: independence from South Africa	Republic of South Africa 1960: independence from British rule 1994: formation of a democratic government
Population in 2013	2.1 million 2.56 population/ km ²	53 million 40.19 population/ km ²
Economy GDP/ capita in 2013	US\$ 5 656 Industry: 30.9% of the GDP Service: 59.4% of the GDP Agriculture: 9.6% of the GDP	US\$ 6 847 Service: 68.3% of the GDP Industry: 29.2% of the GDP Agriculture: 2.4% of the GDP Mining industry: 9% of the GDP
Administrative division	14 regions and 121 municipalities	9 provinces and 55 districts: 9 metropolitan areas and 46 district municipalities subdivided into 284 local municipalities
Role of local government	Services provider to citizens: water supply, cemeteries, sewerage and drainage, tourism promotion, street and public spaces, buy and sell land and buildings, etc.	Water and sanitation services, refuse collection and disposal, town planning, urban roads, gas services, district heating, electricity, health infrastructures, tourism promotion, etc.
Sources of local government revenue	Rates: 30% Electricity supply charges: 30% Water rates: 30% Other: 10%	Grants and subsidies: 50% Own contributions: 24% External loans: 18% Other income and donations: 8%

The vast geographical extent of Namibia is appreciated when one compares its population density of 2.6 people per km² in relation to South Africa's 40.2 people per km². From a local government finance perspective, the table shows a glaring difference between Namibian and South African municipalities, with the former drawing 90% of its rates, water and electricity charges to fund themselves, whilst the latter relies on grants and subsidies for its municipal functioning. With regard to urban governance in Namibia, ALAN notes that unlike South Africa's "spheres of government", Namibia has a "3-tier government structure"; with Central Government comprised of several ministries and departments; 13 regional councils; and 56 local authorities made up of three categories of local government which include municipalities (Part I and Part II), town councils and village councils (ALAN, 2010: 2). As in South Africa, however, Namibia's cities,

towns and villages are responsible for the provision, operation and maintenance of most municipal infrastructure including roads, drainage, water supply, sewerage, street lighting and solid waste management.

While some local governments in Namibia have developed local level policy and regulatory instruments to help govern these functions, ALAN in their proposal to Cities Alliance for funding of their CDS note that “many municipalities lack resources, both in terms of monetary funds and institutional capacity, required to effectively execute their municipal responsibilities” (ALAN, 2010: 3). ALAN (2010) further accepts that the Central Government has several national strategic frameworks in place to guide development processes and implementing economic and social programs nationally. One such document is the overarching Vision 2030, which aims to transform Namibia from a middle income country to a highly developed nation by 2030. The 3rd National Development Plan (NDP) is also in place and is the five year development plan of Central Government (ALAN, 2010).

ALAN’s (2010) proposal contextualizes the urbanization challenge, explaining that following independence from South Africa in 1990 and the subsequent end of the apartheid system of controlling the movement and settlement of people based on race, Namibia’s urban areas saw an increase in informal settlements. In-migration to urban areas, ALAN (2010) contends, is typically motivated by the search for employment and a better quality of life, fuelled by the degradation of soil and unsustainable farming practices in rural areas. As is the case in Malawi, the issue of a general lack of skill and institutional capacity that also affects both the short- and long-term planning efforts of local governments has been identified by ALAN (2010).

An important acknowledgement is made by ALAN who accepts that while partnerships between the three tiers of government has been envisaged, “inter-governmental cooperation is lacking with national and regional development plans not necessarily corresponding with local level needs” (ALAN, 2010: 4). This has been the starting point for a bottom-up process of strategic planning driven by municipalities in Namibia, supported by ALAN and the National Ministry. The Otjiwarongo Municipality is one of five municipalities supported by ALAN and has been taking the lead in the development of the CDS with support from the eThekweni Municipality.

4.2.4.2. Background to the CDS process in Namibia

As outlined in the ALAN (2010) proposal, it was as early as in June 2007 that the Cities Alliance granted ALAN nearly US\$ 90 000 to support the preparation of the CDS funding proposal. The purpose of the grant was to undertake a preparatory study that would, according to the ALAN (2010:1) proposal:

- (1) define the steps needed for Namibian CDS process;
- (2) develop and implement a selection process to identify pilot local authorities;
- (3) develop a guide for the study phase of the CDS project;
- (4) run a CDS workshop;
- and (5) empower the community around governance issues and mobilize them in local government activities.

The ALAN (2010: 2) proposal also identifies the use of CDS processes as a powerful tool to help local authorities in Namibia build institutional capacity and mobilize available resources to effectively tackle development challenges. It further views the CDS process as aiding grassroots governance and democratic decentralization in local governments by exemplifying the ability of local authorities to perform effectively and efficiently when given due authority from Central Government. The ALAN (2010) proposal spells out the five stages in the CDS preparation process as outlined in Table 4.4 below. Essentially it follows a typical strategic planning process, commencing with an initial assessment before the formulation of a Vision. Having defined a Vision, key strategic thrusts are crafted with target indicators for each strategy which is then followed by a stakeholder report back session. The final stage involves actual implementation guided by action plans driven by a task force that is responsible for ensuring that adequate financing for implementation is secured.

The proactive role of ALAN as the Local Government Association is interesting in this case, as the proposal records that ALAN will encourage local authorities to act on lessons learnt and undergo pragmatic CDS processes (ALAN, 2010). In particular, it documents the role of ALAN as focused on strengthening inter-regional relations and emphasizes the need to increase local authority's decision-making power through both capacity building and resource allocation, ultimately to ensure CDS processes are efficient, effective and legitimate (ALAN, 2010).

Table 4.4: Stages in the CDS process: CDS proposal application (ALAN, 2010: 5)

Stage	Tasks
Stage 1: Initial Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying key economic drivers • Scanning economic, public service delivery, environmental, spatial/ built form, and social conditions • Scoping in on key issue areas and dynamics • Benchmarking performance with similar/ competing local authorities
Stage 2: Formulating and Analyzing a Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a vision statement of where the Local Authority wants to be, in 10 to 15 years • Soliciting community and business input when formulating Vision • Conducting a “SWOT” Analysis of the Vision
Stage 3: Setting Strategic Thrusts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting 3 to 5 strategic thrusts (actions) with intent of producing results within a given period • Identify key targets and indicators for each strategic thrust
Stage 4: Building Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminate information about CDS and share strategic thrusts with the larger community • Report back to key stakeholder groups and modify strategic thrusts based on useful feedback
Stage 5: Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an Action Plan for each strategic thrust • Establish Implementation Task Force for each strategic thrust • Identify high-profile, low-risk initiatives or “quick wins” • Identity, assess, and procure financing for each strategic thrust

In this mentorship program with the eThekweni Municipality, unlike in the case of the Malawi, the local process facilitation support has been provided by NALAO. The ALAN (2012) report suggests that the project is innovative in that it seeks to enhance strategic planning capacity not only in the participating local authorities of Otjiwarongo, Omaruru, Karibib, Usakos and Maltahohe but also in both ALAN and NALAO, the two key Local Government Associations in Namibia.

Whilst the intention of the proposal was to pilot the CDS process in five municipalities identified above, during the process the larger and more capacitated Municipality of Otjiwarongo took on a lead role, with the eThekweni Municipality investing more time and energy in supporting this pilot, so that Otjiwarongo could in turn play a support role to the other smaller pilot municipalities. The first initial contact between the mentor and mentee cities was in July 2009 when the Namibian

municipalities were exposed to the strategic planning process that eThekweni Municipality engaged in.

4.2.4.3. Otjiwarongo: Lead pilot municipality in CDS/ Town Development Strategy (TDS) process

Otjiwarongo which is considered one of the oldest towns in Namibia is the capital of Namibia's Otjizondjupa region and given its strategic location, serves as a node between the harbor towns, the Capital city and the northern regions (Otjiwarongo Municipality, 2009). More importantly, as depicted in Figure 4.5, it forms the route axis for trade and cargo movements from the Walvis Bay Port to the rest of southern African countries. Interestingly too, internationally Otjiwarongo is world famous and is branded as the cheetah capital of the world (Hughes, 2013). Otjiwarongo has been the lead municipality, ahead of the other four pilot municipalities mentioned earlier, and had been targeted by eThekweni Municipality for capacitation in order that it can then support the other municipalities within Namibia.

According to the Otjiwarongo Municipality (2014), the town has a population of about 40 000, 38% of whom live in informal settlements where most residents are unemployed or low income earners. Given these economic challenges, the Otjiwarongo Municipality has intensified public private partnerships and has put in place an economic development program aimed at attracting more investments to the town. In terms of governance and participation, the Otjiwarongo Municipality (2014) reports that it has established community committees on various focal areas such as mining, economic development, tourism, markets and agriculture in order to identify and articulate the needs and aspirations of their residents with an overall goal to finding solutions to their municipal challenges.

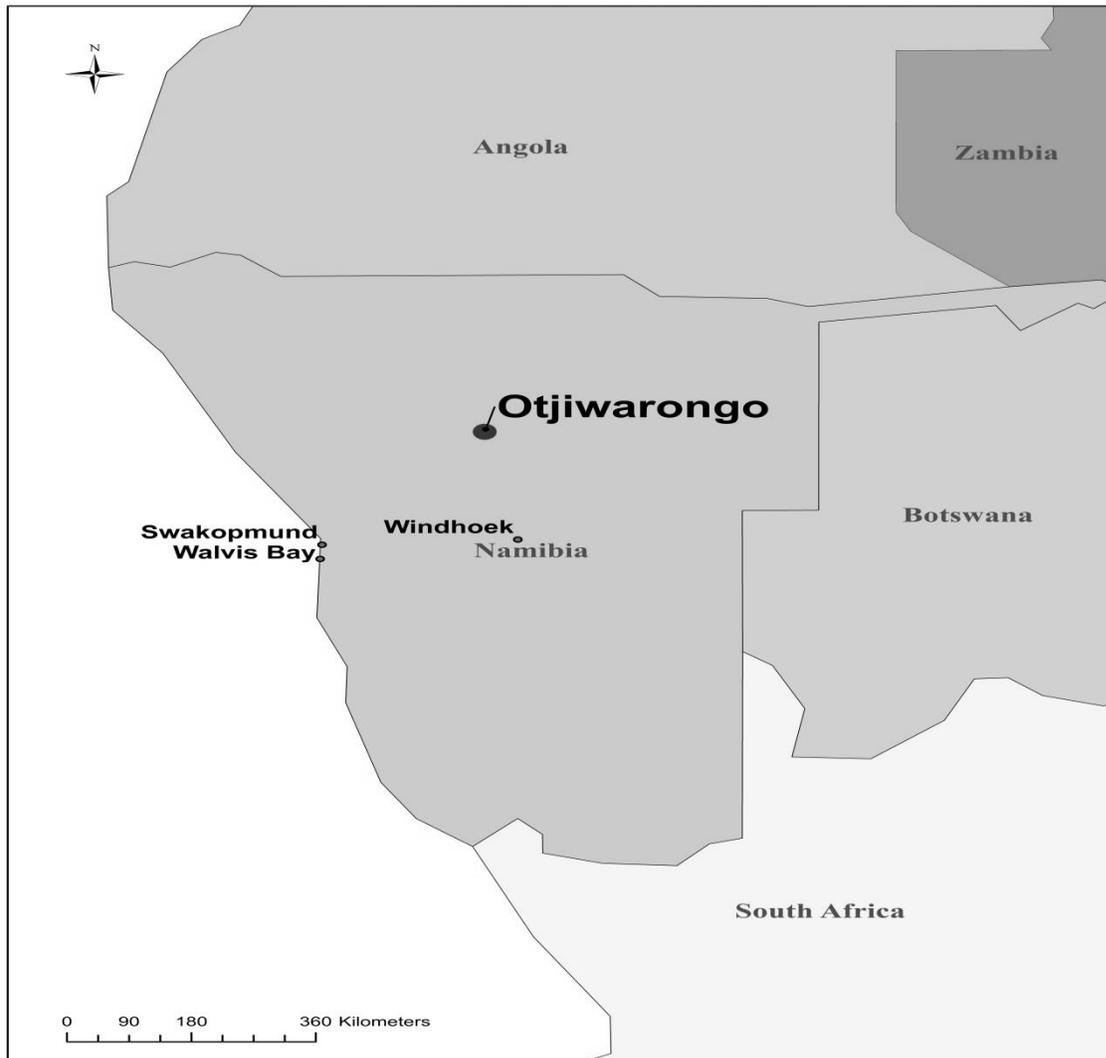


Figure 4.5: Locality map of Otjiwarongo City, Namibia

It is against this backdrop of citizens’ needs and the desire to engage with the citizens to satisfy these needs that the Otjiwarongo Municipality “embarked on a journey of formulating the 2009-2013 Strategic Plan” (Otjiwarongo Municipality, 2009: 9). It is noteworthy that despite the high level of unemployed and service delivery challenges, the UCLG (2012) who commissioned a peer review research project in Otjiwarongo, found that there was a high degree of mutual confidence between the people whom the municipality serves and the Council itself.

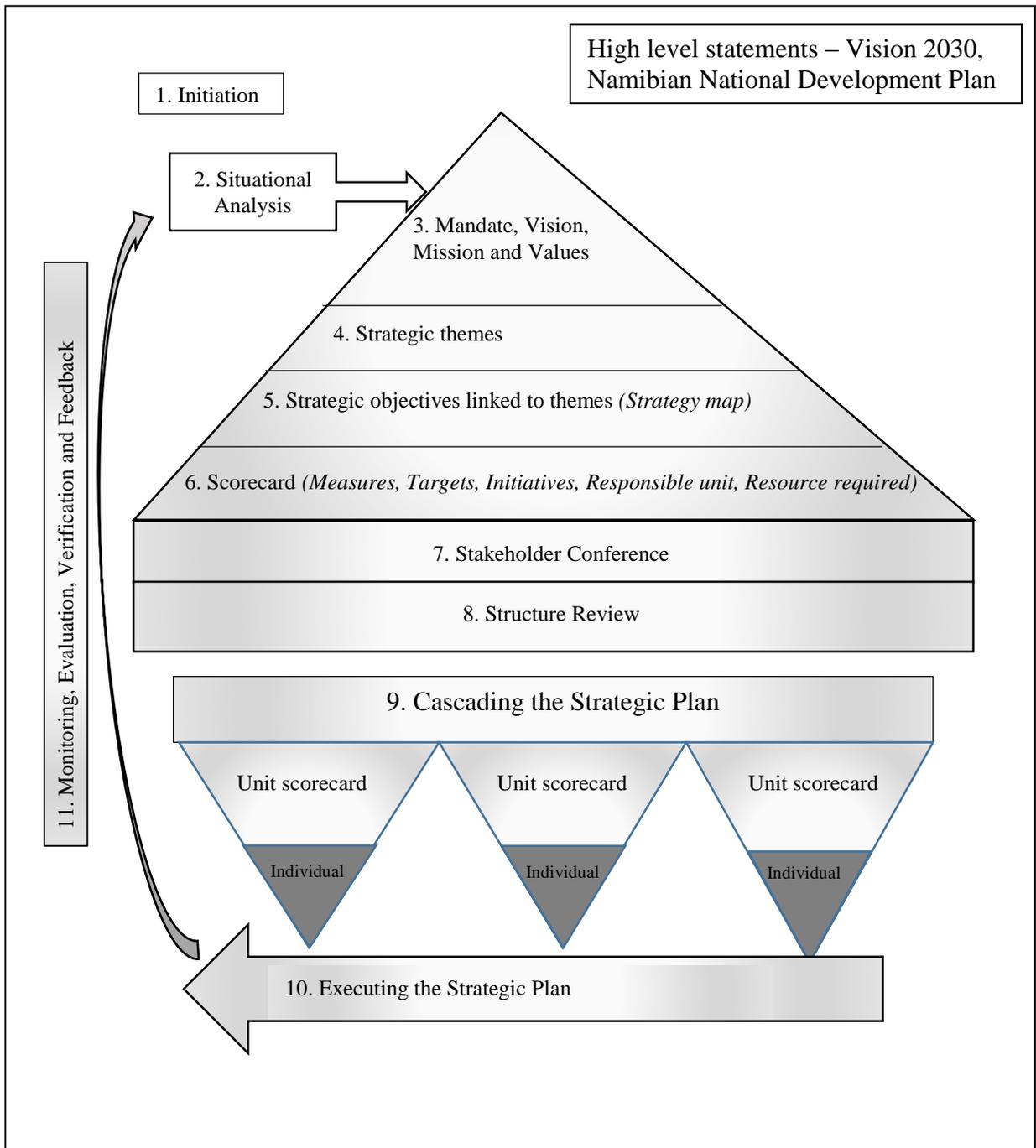


Figure 4.6: Summary of the Otjiwarongo Strategic Planning Process (adapted from Otjiwarongo Municipality, 2009: 57)

Turning to make a quick observation on the strategic planning process, it is interesting to note the similarities in the Otjiwarongo strategic plan (as reflected in Figure 4.6 above) and that of eThekweni Municipality. The translation of a 2030 vision that aligns to the National Plan, preparation of a set of values to guide development, design of strategic objectives linked to the thematic areas and embedding into a scorecard with measurable targets that inform individual performance plans show a great resemblance to the eThekweni Municipality's approach. In particular, as indicated by the triangles in the bottom of the diagram, careful attention is paid to translate the plan into action through adopting both unit scorecards and individual scorecards. This is an area that will be focused on in the next chapter where analysis of how the learning took place and the impact of the mentorship will be explored.

In this first part of the chapter, the study area has been described, paying particular attention to explaining the background to the UCLG mentoring program. A synopsis of each of the three municipalities and their strategic planning process was then given, commencing with the mentor city and then outlining the contexts in the municipalities of Mzuzu, Malawi and Otjiwarongo, Namibia. Moving onto the second part of this chapter, the focus now shifts to examine the research approach, design and methods and concludes with some methodological considerations.

4.3. Research approach and design

As outlined in the conceptual framework chapter earlier, the research adopts a pragmatist lens and fits best within the social constructivist worldview, given its search for the varied and complex meanings that planners working in urban strategic planning processes give to city learning, in the southern African context. As a broad methodological approach the use of a case study that allowed for an in-depth exploration of how cities learn within a mentorship program best suited the objectives of the research.

Yin (2013: 2) explains that a case study investigates “a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in its real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”. This is a useful guiding definition as city mentorship is a contemporary phenomenon that the UCLG is very committed to, and an exploration of city-to-city learning in the three African cities provides a vibrant real world context. Very much driven by the distinctive “desire to understand complex social phenomena”, Yin (2013: 4) suggests that the advantage of

case study research is that it allows researchers to focus their attention on a particular case, whilst retaining a holistic and real-world perspective. In a critical review of qualitative case study research, Hyett et al. (2014: 2) similarly note that this type of research allows for “careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, historical background, physical setting, and other institutional and political contextual factors”. It is also pointed out that a social constructivist approach to such research enables the researcher to have a personal interaction with the case, and where there is a relationship between the researcher and the informants (Hyett et al., 2014). This clearly resonates with the current research project as the researcher is known to and accepted by all the informants, which allows rich and in-depth insights on city learning processes to emerge.

Beyond these compelling methodological considerations for the employment of case study research, it is important to note the ideological and philosophical bias towards this method. As indicated in earlier chapters, this research is fundamentally concerned with improving the quality of planning practice, and is located within the theoretical tradition of the growing practice movement. Moreover, the phronetic research bias outlined in the conceptual framework chapter advocates that the real problems that matter in the communities in which planners live should be addressed, and that these must be done in ways that matter (Flyvbjerg, 2004; 2012). The use of a real-life case study therefore best suited this imperative.

Consistent with the pragmatic approach adopted in this research, a mixed methods approach has been utilized, with both qualitative and quantitative data integrated into the study as suggested by Creswell (2009; 2014). The rationale for mixing methods is based on the fact that city-to-city learning is a complex phenomenon, and in order to develop a thorough in-depth understanding of this process in the field of strategic planning, using predominantly qualitative research, supported by quantitative research has been most useful. Greene (2012: 757) indicates that “mixing in a mixed methods study can be conducted at the level of method, methodology or paradigm/ mental model” with the latter including philosophical orientations and assumptions. It is useful to emphasize that this study specifically mixed techniques or methods in the use of both qualitative and quantitative tools within a broader critical pragmatic approach.

Regarding the research design, decisions were made about the timing, weighting and mixing of methods. As depicted diagrammatically in Figure 4.7 below, the sequential exploratory design as indicated by Creswell (2009; 2014), presented itself as the appropriate option to address the research problem at hand. In this study, the design involved a two-phased approach, starting with qualitative data collection (involving four methods which are unpacked in the next section) in order to explore the complex nature of city-to-city learning in the mentorship program. This is then built upon through the second, quantitative phase involving a census survey.

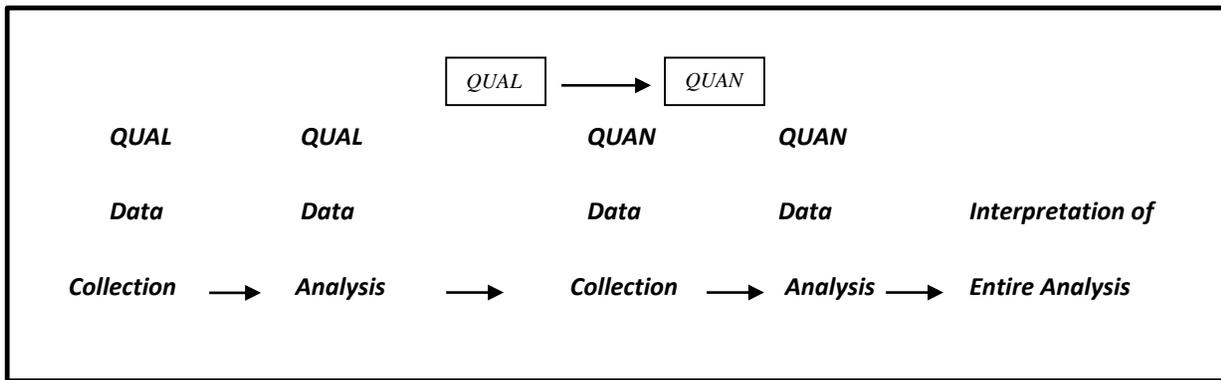


Figure 4.7: Sequential research designs (Creswell, 2009: 209)

In terms of the sequential research design adopted in this study, document and textual analysis was used initially to provide background information, context and conceptual clarification. This was followed by qualitative research (specifically focus groups, key informant interviews and observations) aimed at detailed probing and understanding of issues linked to city-to-city learning in specific contexts which was the main intent of the study. The census survey was a complementary tool to understand trends and examine whether critical issues unearthed during the qualitative research were of broader concern to participants who attended the workshop.

4.4. Research methods

In the first qualitative phase of the research, four deliberate methods were utilized: document analysis, holding a focus group discussion, conducting key informant interviews to unearth the underground knowledge economy of learning, and on-site field observation watching planners from the eThekweni Municipality in visioning workshops in Namibia and Malawi. The results from

this phase was then used in the second quantitative phase where a social survey instrument was developed and administered to all participants involved in the respective visioning processes in the two municipalities. Each of these methods is outlined below.

4.4.1. Document and textual content analysis

Content analysis offers a sound methodological frame for researchers that are conducting rigorous and systematic reviews (Seuring & Gold, 2012: 545). For the purposes of this research project, which required a study of key documentation pertaining to the mentorship program, the first qualitative method employed was the analysis of the written text. During the research project, it proved to be very useful in complementing and augmenting respondent's perspectives obtained during the focus group and key respondent interviews, and certainly confirmed Schram's (2014: 2624) contention that content analysis is "very suitable for mixed methods studies".

This method was necessary as vital information on processes and policies are contained in municipal and UCLG documentation. Key reports and narratives authored by the eThekweni Municipality's Strategic Planning Unit were analyzed thematically. The reports, learning notes, terms of references, funding proposals, and other documentation of the UCLG's USPC were also analyzed to provide useful insights into how notions of power are conceived, as well as to fill in key knowledge gaps about the mentorship program.

Analysis of the key discursive moments in the planning process is important in order to understand how the mentorship program has shaped the way the visioning process has unfolded in the respective cities. It must be acknowledged here that given that the researcher is an official employed by the eThekweni Municipality, it was easier to scope the documents that are available within the Council and its key partners and funders. Notwithstanding this, however, it must be noted that permission was obtained to make reference to key documents reviewed. All documents have been regarded as being in the public domain and do not contain confidential or sensitive information.

4.4.2. Focus group discussions

In order to better understand the mentorship process, the planning methodology and the role played by the eThekweni Municipality planners and facilitators in the mentorship program, a focus group was conducted in the first phase. Given that the focus group environment is most helpful for participants to discuss perceptions, ideas, opinions and thoughts (Krueger and Casey, 2000), this method was a useful tool as the group had specialist knowledge that was shared as they collectively reflected on the mentorship program. In addition, given that the planners and facilitators had a common sense of belonging as they had all been involved in the program and were committed to the city learning process the focus group helped them to feel safe to share information (Vaughn et al., 1996).

From the literature on conducting focus group research it became clear that it was the interactions that occurred among the focus group participants that could help yield important data that would not have emanated from interviews (Morgan, 1988; Halcomb et al., 2007; Gibbs, 2012; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). More importantly, literature suggests that during the focus group sessions, an environment could be created where participants could reflect on challenges and actually devise solutions (Duggleby, 2005; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Doody et al., 2012). This is also emphasized by Cameron (2000: 101) who makes the point that focus groups are an invaluable research tool for geographers to use as they “can generate insights and understanding that are new to both participants and researchers”.

In the field, these assertions were easily confirmed, and the researcher was surprised at the powerful insights emerging from the focus group participants. Interestingly, in the spirit of the practice movement and its transformation imperatives, the focus group session created a unique opportunity for intense introspection around the project. More importantly too, it served as a catalyst for improving the quality of future city-to-city learning engagements not only in the UCLG program, but in other city-to-city learning initiatives to be embarked upon within the southern African context.

A concrete example of how this was done was through the dissemination of some of the eThekweni Municipality's focus group findings with the UCLG program manager and Namibian planners in a mini-review meeting held in Swakopmund, Namibia. Whilst ensuring confidentiality of the participants, the relevant suggestions on how to improve the subsequent phases of the learning engagement that emanated from the focus group were shared in a spirit of wanting to improve practice. These recommendations were well received and were implemented within three months of the meeting. One of the hallmarks of phronetic research, for Flyvbjerg (2004), is that results of research are shared with the stakeholders involved, and these responses from stakeholders are further considered by the researcher. This type of research that is able to transform planning processes as it unfolds holds great value particularly in developing cities with scarce resources and long lead times for implementation.

The focus group was selected through purposeful sampling which Cameron (2000) suggests is useful when participants are chosen on the basis of their shared experience in relation to the research topic. In this case all five planners and facilitators in eThekweni Municipality who were directly and indirectly involved in the mentorship program participated in the focus group workshop, providing a "common communicative ground" (Hyden & Bulow, 2003: 311) around which reflective discussions could take place. Whilst the focus group schedule was used to initiate discussions, participants felt free to share openly and honestly. The researcher also probed where necessary in order to unearth hidden characteristics or tendencies in the learning process. Whereas the focus group discussion was scheduled for three hours, participants were willing to continue after five hours, as they felt the session almost cathartic, allowing them to introspect and reflect in a safe and controlled space.

4.4.3. Key informant interviews

Whereas the focus group workshop was used to enrich the depth of understanding of the nuances of the mentorship program from the perspective of the eThekweni Municipality planners and facilitators, all other selected key role-players involved in the process were interviewed. The perspectives and insights of each of the informants were important in order to build a richer picture of city-to-city learning. This was done through the careful and deep probing into the areas informed

by the research questions, and sub-research questions in order to unearth the latent underground knowledge.

With regard to the selection of interview respondents, Rubin and Rubin (2005) in commenting on the importance of selecting the right interviewees in qualitative design process, advise that three requirements should be fulfilled. These include that the respondents be knowledgeable, willing to talk, and represent a range of views. For this research, given that the mentorship program is a closed one, involving a fixed number of known protagonists, the issue of key informant interviewee selection was substantially less complex. The criteria for inclusion related to direct involvement in the UCLG mentorship program in the role as planner, facilitator, funder, manager or Local Government Association support staff.

As indicated in Table 4.5 below, a total of 18 interviews were conducted, drawn from international agencies, Namibian and Malawian planners/ facilitators and support staff as well as support staff from within eThekweni Municipality, including two of the key staff (planner and facilitator) who were part of the focus group workshop. This was deemed necessary in order to elucidate more in-depth responses. During the interview process, other key respondents who were identified as important holders of knowledge were also included as key informants.

Valenzuela and Shrivastava (2008) identify four categories of qualitative interview design: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, the standardized open-ended interview and the closed, fixed-response interview. Whilst the intention prior to the research was to employ the general interview guide that is more structured than the informal conversational interview, it was found that during the actual interview, the researcher went beyond the confines of what is deemed to be traditional general interview. This was due to the researcher's familiarity with each of the respondents and the in-depth knowledge of the subject.

In re-visiting the literature after the initial set of interviews, it was discovered that this more relaxed, creative and postmodern way of interviewing, based on intimate content knowledge and having a repertoire with the informants is best described as the comprehensive interview (Kauffman, 1996; Jovanovic, 2011). As a more recent advancement in interviewing, the

comprehensive interview was conceptualized to overcome what Ferreira (2014: 120) regards as a “methodological formalism of the structural-functionalist heritage” within qualitative research. Ferreira (2014: 121) makes an important observation that this type of interview can no longer be considered as a neutral, impersonal and standardized information gathering technique, rather it is viewed more as the coming together of “voices that perform a reciprocal dialogue” within the interview situation.

Table 4.5: Breakdown of key informant interview respondents

AGENCIES AND KEY ROLE-PLAYERS	ROLE	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
1. International Agencies		
Cities Alliance, World Bank	Funders	1
UCLG – Spain	Mentorship program managers	2
UCLGA – Morocco	Mentorship program managers – Africa	1
2. Mentee Municipalities		
2a. Namibian Role-players		
ALAN	Local Government Association Coordinators and providers of support to mentee municipality	2
Otjiwarongo Municipality	Mentee Planners / Facilitators	2
2b. Malawian Role-players		
MALGA	Local Government Association Coordinators	1
Mzuzu City Council	Mentee Planner, Lead Facilitator and support facilitator	4
3. eThekweni Municipality: other insights		
Former City Manager, Head of Inter-Governmental Relations, Planner, Lead Facilitator, Long-Term planning manager	Having either a direct or indirect involvement in the project, they offered additional insights on the process	5
Total Number of Interviews		18

In unpacking the central traits of the comprehensive interview, which allows for a greater degree of improvisation, whilst ensuring that the interviewer imposes least on the respondents point of view, Ferreira (2014: 4) cautions that this type of interview requires detailed knowledge of the research theme, planning and experience in managing the process with “some level of comfort and colloquialism”. This point is well taken, and during the research process, particularly after the first five interviews, the researcher’s level of confidence increased which allowed greater comfort, ensuring that the quality of the interactions improved with time.

4.4.4. Field observations

Admittedly, the fourth qualitative method used in the study played less of a significant role, as it was limited to the researcher observing the urban strategic planning workshops during the

mentorship program. This proved unproblematic, since the researcher was an official of the eThekweni Municipality and considered part of the broader mentorship team, and had full access to all the sessions that were conducted during the various interventions in South Africa and abroad in all three municipalities. This included the tailor-made training programs and attending the strategic planning workshops in the community led by the lead facilitators.

It is important to note that to prevent researcher bias, the researcher was careful not to play a lead role in the process, and did not actively facilitate any of the sessions in these two municipalities. In addition during the workshops, when introduced, the researcher declared his research interest upfront. The researcher's observations at each of the workshops were carefully recorded in a research journal. These notes were useful in informing the analysis and whilst not as critical as the key informant interviews or focus group sessions, they did assist in developing a more nuanced picture of the stakeholder engagement process.

Whilst being a researcher and practitioner did pose some challenges, it is strongly contended that in being a practitioner in the field of city-to-city learning, and a known "insider" to the key role-players in the mentorship program, one of the major strengths that enriched the quality of the research was being able to experience first-hand the emotions, feelings, narratives and "back-office" stories of the planners involved in the mentorship program. Regarded as one of their own, the level of honesty in the reflections of the key actors ensured that the data that was more reliable and allowed the researcher a wider spectrum for reflection and introspection. As Chao and Tian (2013) posit, this type of field observation allows multiple perspectives of reality as well as alternative interpretations of data, because the research takes place in the real setting of the activities actually being observed.

In summary, the qualitative phase one of the study involved the use of multiple research methods from desk-top document analysis, to conducting an intensive focus group workshop with six key eThekweni Municipality planners and facilitators involved as mentors in the program, to holding eighteen in-depth interviews with relevant role-players complemented by ongoing field observation that helped enrich the research experience. The quantitative phase two of the study is what will be outlined in the next section.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, aimed at uncovering insights into how cities learn within urban strategic planning processes, the qualitative aspect of the research intended to provide in-depth insights from the practitioners themselves. The second phase, however, was designed merely to augment the data received from the first phase, in order to understand how the beneficiaries of the visioning process - as compared to the practitioners themselves - viewed the mentorship program. It must be acknowledged that it seems that this phase did not yield the depth of insights that was initially envisaged. In retrospect, this is perhaps understandable as the beneficiaries were not intrinsically involved in the mentorship program and city-to-city learning was not an issue that was important to them. What mattered for them was the strategic planning process itself and what it would yield for them as key stakeholders. Notwithstanding this, their responses did provide a useful perspective especially in terms of their perceptions of the impacts of the mentorship program.

4.4.5. Census survey

It is in the context outlined above, that a survey questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed and administered to all participants involved in the visioning process in each of the two municipalities. Thus, a census survey of the entire targeted population was undertaken.

Whilst uncomplicated, this component of the research involved significant logistical planning and preparation. It involved the researcher accompanying the facilitation team to their assignments on-site in the respective municipalities in both Namibia and Malawi. This required the careful alignment of the research phases with the designated times of the visioning workshops, which were not held at the scheduled times due to funding and other operational reasons. Fortunately these delays did not affect the timing of the research significantly.

In each of the cities, the researcher and the research topic was introduced to all workshop participants and the fact that the results were to be fed back into the program in order to improve the quality of city-to-city leaning was made explicit, and appreciated by all participants. At the end of each workshop, the questionnaire was administered by the researcher to each of the key stakeholders that were invited by the respective Councils for the visioning exercise. One of the

ways to ensure the neutrality of the researcher was to minimize his role during the workshop and to ensure that his colleagues from the eThekweni Municipality were seen as key protagonists.

A total of 10 questionnaires were administered in Otjiwarongo as 10 key stakeholders were invited to be part of the visioning process. In Mzuzu, the workshop was larger with a total of 24 participants, comprising of senior officials from line departments in the Council and all 14 Councilors, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. All participants at the visioning workshop were asked to complete the questionnaire, and given that they recognized the importance of participating in the census survey, a 100% response rate was achieved.

Once all the data was collected, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 was then used as the tool for quantitative data analysis. Simple descriptive statistics were employed in describing the responses among the options provided in the questionnaire. The findings were presented using tables and bar and pie charts.

With regard to the qualitative data from the focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and field observations, these were analyzed into thematic categories in line with the research objectives. In addition, data obtained from document analysis was integrated into the emerging themes allowing for a more powerful reinforcement of key concepts arising from the primary data sources.

4.5. Some key methodological considerations

In attempting to unearth what is perceived to be an underground knowledge economy that operates in the city-to-city learning processes unfolding in the field of urban strategic planning, there is a strong case to be made for “backyard research”. As alluded to earlier, given that the researcher is employed by the eThekweni Municipality, in examining the quality of the data produced, it is argued that having this “insider” access to and familiarity with the research participants did facilitate the more frank, open and honest discussions. This is especially noteworthy, given the reflections regarding sensitive issues such as the politics of power dynamics in city learning. At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that in interviewing immediate subordinates and seniors from within the eThekweni Municipality, and colleagues from the UCLG and participating cities with whom the researcher enjoys a cordial and sometimes close professional relationship, comes with its own challenges.

The researcher was therefore forced to impose a strong sense of discipline and separate out the research imperatives from the professional program objectives. As the researcher has had significant experience in the field of city-to-city learning on the continent, he was constantly challenged to become fully aware of his own notions, ideas and prejudices on mentoring and strategic planning, and made a conscious attempt to limit the influence of these in relation to the data collection and analysis. This process referred to by Burns and Grove (1987), Chan et al. (2013), Gearing (2004) and Tufford and Newman (2012) as bracketing, which involved suspending or laying aside what is known about the experience being studied, was a useful mechanism to limit the influence of researcher bias. This is also linked to a reflexive methodological orientation which entails employing a “methodological self-consciousness, namely, a researcher’s consciousness of her or his own assumptions and prejudices” (Hibbert et al., 2014: 283). As pointed out by Berger (2015), reflexivity has been increasingly recognized as a crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge through qualitative research. In this tradition, researchers are challenged to critically question their numerous connections with their surroundings, including their limits and prejudices as well as their “role of researcher-participant relationships” (Hibbert et al., 2014: 283).

Another important methodological observation to be noted is that the research project itself, with the researcher's critical enquiry into issues of power and control, assessing levels of comfort with the concept of the 'mentorship' label, and the probing for alternate models for managing learning actually served to bring the planners within the two cities closer together. This could arguably be attributed to the appreciation of the genuineness of the eThekweni Municipality's team to build a more democratic and locally-controlled learning process.

4.6. Summary

This important intermediate chapter played the role of linking the first three introductory chapters that set the research agenda, outlined the conceptual framework and provided a window into the literature. The next three chapters present and analyze the findings of the research and crafts key recommendations on future city-to-city learning. This chapter played a critical contextual role; explaining what the UCLG mentorship program was about in relation to its aims, objectives, funding and institutional arrangements. It introduced the key role-players from the Barcelona-based UCLG to its African Local Government Associations: the UCLGA, ALAN, SALGA and MALGA. It then provided an overview of each of the respective participating cities in eThekweni, Mzuzu and Otjiwarongo, outlining their unique strategic planning processes.

The second part of the chapter then focused on the research approach and design. It explained the rationale behind employing the use of a case study as an overall methodological approach given its ability to allow an in-depth exploration of how cities learn from each other. It also noted how the case study methodology is consistent with the phronetic research approach and the practice movement that the research identifies with.

It then elaborated on the mixed method approach adopted, as both qualitative and quantitative data was integrated into the study. With regard to the research design, it explained that the sequential exploratory design as indicated by Creswell (2009; 2014) presented itself to be the most suitable design option, commencing with the collection and analysis of qualitative data before the collection and analysis of the quantitative data.

The chapter then detailed each of the five research methods (content analysis, focus group discussion, key informant interviews, field observations and the census survey), explaining why each method was most suitable, and reflecting on its advantages and challenges, where these were encountered. The sampling approaches for each of the data collection approaches were also included. Having closed the chapter on key methodological considerations, the stage is now set for a systematic and critical engagement with the findings of the data that emerged from the study. Chapters 5 and 6 are to be read together, as they thematically present the findings and analysis of the results obtained using the five methods explained in this chapter. Based on these findings, Chapter 7 begins to craft a framework for future city-to-city learning in the field of urban strategic planning in order to improve the quality of practice in southern Africa and the global South more generally.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: GETTING TO GRIPS WITH CITY-TO-CITY LEARNING

5.1. Introduction

Having presented the conceptual framework that guides the study, the key debates and thematic areas in the relevant literature, a detailed background to the UCLG case study, as well as the methodology underpinning the research; the stage is now set to begin to engage with some of the key findings that emerged during the research. In order to facilitate a more coherent analysis, this chapter and the next are structured around key themes/ sub-themes that were identified in the literature review and that relate to the research sub-questions.

Given that the point of departure of the research is urban strategic planning and, in particular, the eThekweni Municipality's approach to strategic planning which is being shared with other municipalities in Africa, this chapter begins presenting the views of the various respondents on eThekweni Municipality's strategic planning process. It is important to understand the reasons why eThekweni Municipality's strategic planning process has been regarded as useful to learn from and replicate, and why this may be important for future strategic planning in southern Africa.

Having set the strategic planning context around which the learning happens, the analysis then proceeds with an in-depth exposé of how focus group participants and interviewees understand the notion of city-to-city learning and what it means to them. Central in this analysis is the focus on the level of comfort with 'mentorship' label, which is used in this research as a useful proxy to probe their awareness of the manifestations of power dynamics and the role that geo-politics may play in the process. Particular attention is also paid to exploring who actually learns and who benefits, and whether there is a sense of mutuality and reciprocity in the city-to-city learning relationship. Inherent in this discussion is the issue of whether cities are learning or just individuals, and whether systems are in place to spread these lessons beyond the individuals that benefit from other cities experiences.

The third area of analysis involves unpacking exactly how city-to-city learning happens in this case study, given that no formal UCLG or eThekweni Municipality documentation exists that explains how the knowledge transfer and exchange process actually happens, what learning methodology is followed, if any, the underlying assumptions of the learning process and mechanisms embedded to ensure sustainability and longer term ownership of this process. The fourth and fifth area of analyses around the politics of city-to-city learning and the impact of the program is considered separately in the next chapter.

Generally as a structuring mechanism for both these two chapters, each thematic area commences with a summary of the findings that emerged from the eThekweni Municipality's focus group workshop comprising of planners and facilitators responsible for the "mentoring" of their Namibian and Malawian colleagues. This is then compared and contrasted with the views that emerged from the series of in-depth interviews that followed with key informants from (i) the staff of the UCLG responsible for overall program management based both in Spain and Morocco; (ii) the Namibian and Malawian local municipalities and Local Government Associations responsible for facilitating and executing the strategic planning processes after being "mentored" by the Durban planning team, (iii) a member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat responsible for co-managing/ funding the mentorship program and, finally, (iv) from key independent players connected with the strategic planning process over time. These insights from the practitioners involved in the mentorship program are then complemented with the findings that emerged from the survey conducted with respondents that participated in both the Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu stakeholder visioning workshops.

After the insights from the various respondents are presented in each thematic area, an in-depth analysis is conducted in order to explore the possible reasons why such views are held and in particular to examine the potential manifestation of power relationships and geo-political dynamics. This analysis is enriched by testing whether these African voices support the contemporary city-to-city learning literature and begins to reveal some of the difficulties of challenges of simple application of learning theory developed in the global North to complex and unique contexts in southern Africa. The analysis concludes, where possible, with teasing out some

preliminary recommendations for enriching planning practice that will be further developed in Chapter 7 that crafts a learning framework for more progressive, participatory urban strategic planning practice. Before the thematic analysis commences, however, it is important to present an overview of the profile of all of the key interviewees and the respondents that participated in the census survey in both cities. This is dealt with in the next section.

5.2. Overview of the demographic profile of respondents

As indicated in the methodology chapter, a total of all eighteen practitioners from the respective municipalities, Local Government Associations, funders and international agencies who were directly involved in the mentorship program were willing to participate as key informant interviewees in the research. The insights from these interviews together with the rich insider perspectives provided by the five focus group participants from the eThekweni Municipality was then complemented by the data that emerged from the census survey of all 10 stakeholders who had been part of the visioning workshops in Otjiwarongo and the larger grouping of 24 stakeholders in Mzuzu. In this section, an overview of the demographic breakdown of all respondents is provided in terms of gender, age, level of education and affiliation.

Table 5.1: Gender breakdown of interviewees and focus group participants (n=24)

Gender	Interviewees		eThekweni Focus Group participants	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Female	6	33	4	80
Male	12	67	1	20
Total	18	100	5	100

Reflecting on the gender composition of the interviewees, what stands out most from Table 5.1 is that two-thirds of all interviewees who participated in the case study were male. As explained in the methodology chapter, all senior planners, facilitators, municipal managers and program managers who were directly involved in the mentorship program were interviewed. From this result, the persistent patriarchal nature of the planning profession becomes most evident. Whilst the focus of the research is not to explore issues of gender equality in urban strategic planning, it is certainly worth noting that the experience from this southern African case study does appear to

confirm the observation in the literature on gender and planning that the experience of a small subsection of society continues to shape the governance and planning of cities (Escalante & Valdivia, 2015).

The concern with this trend, as highlighted by Ciocoletto (2014 cited in Escalante & Valdivia, 2015: 115) is that ultimately the built environment may begin to respond predominantly to the needs and interests of those managing it. In this case then, it could be argued that urban strategic planning processes, due to the inherent composition of those managing them, may not best serve the interests of women in the respective cities. This is an important observation not only to be highlighted as a key consideration in the learning framework in chapter 7, but to be flagged as a critical area for more focused research in southern Africa.

Having noted the skewed gender representation of the interviewees, it is interesting how this is most starkly contrasted with the eThekweni Municipality focus group participants, where only 20% was male. Given that the eThekweni Municipality focus group comprised of senior managers and urban planners who were directly involved in the program, the higher proportion of women in this group could be attributed to the eThekweni Municipality's transformative agenda to ensure greater women representation in management. Regardless of the many complex reasons for this unique trend in this municipality, the need to think about gender equality and how representation in decision-making impacts on the built environment, remains critical. Neglecting this will allow urban planning to reproduce, rather than actively challenge, gender stereotypes as Moser and Levy (1986) cautioned nearly thirty years ago in their seminal work on theorizing gender in urban planning.

Table 5.2: Gender breakdown of survey respondents in Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu City (n=10 in Otjiwarongo and n=24 in Mzuzu)

Gender	Otjiwarongo		Mzuzu City		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Female	2	20	5	21	7	21
Male	8	80	19	79	27	79
Total	10	100	24	100	34	100

With only 2 female participants at Otjiwarongo and just 5 participants in Mzuzu, Table 5.2 above again highlights the glaring gender disparity this time in terms of stakeholder participation at both

the mentee municipalities. This is an important observation to note as the invited stakeholders were responsible for reflecting on strategic challenges faced by the citizens and participated in crafting long-term visions and strategies for their respective cities. Given the recent research on urban planning from a gender perspective conducted by Escalante and Valdivia (2015: 116) which shows that women are “experts about the places where they live”, it is clear that greater engagement with women could have enhanced the creation of a more robust and inclusive vision statement. Earlier studies also confirm this trend of not maximizing women’s participation in planning. Todes et al. (2010: 81) in a study exploring the extent to which women are being incorporated into urban strategic planning processes found that “women’s participation remains uneven and partial and the transformative potential offered by the new spaces for participation has not been realized”.

To reiterate, whilst it is acknowledged that the specific focus of the research is to explore how cities learn from each other in the field of urban strategic planning and not on critically analyzing the impact of gender and how this plays itself out in the process, the low levels of women’s participation in the visioning workshop does clearly sound an alarm bell for the learning agenda. Whilst great strides have been made in the mentorship program to engage with citizenry, the need for more effective strategies to ensure greater participation of women in city visioning processes is a key recommendation that will be proposed in later chapters.

Table 5.3: Age breakdown of interviewees and focus group participants (n=18 for interviewees and n=5 for focus group participants)

Age categories	Interviewees		eThekweni Focus Group participants	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Under 30	1	6	-	-
30 – 39	-	-	1	20
40 – 49	9	50	3	60
50 – 59	8	44	1	20
60 and over	-	-	-	-
Total	18	100	5	100

In considering the age breakdown of interviewees and focus group participants, from Table 5.3 above, it becomes evident that very few respondents are under 40 years, with no respondents over 60 years. The fact that 60% of focus group participants and half of all the interviewees are between 40 to 49 years old does make sense as they are mid-career professionals leading strategic planning

processes. However, a slightly different picture emerges from the results of the census survey. As reflected in Table 5.4 below, nearly 10 percent of all the total respondents were under the age of 30 and over the age of 60. This is understandable as the workshop included officials, political leadership and representatives from civil society, and not just mid-career professionals.

Notwithstanding this limited inclusion of younger and older voices, the overwhelming majority of respondents (76%) were between the ages of 30 and 60 years old. Not recognizing young people as a group with specific aspirations and needs has been identified in the development literature as a concerning trend. For example, Brkovic and Brkovic (2014) argue that urban planners and designers who are involved in developing and designing places normally follow standard procedures which exclude the involvement and participation of younger people. In citing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that recognizes the need for change and recommends the active involvement of children in different areas and decision, Brkovic and Brkovic (2014) make the strong case to apply this in decisions that are made in the field of urban planning and development. Again, in crafting recommendations for deepening participation in the program, the need for greater inclusion of younger people will be emphasized.

Table 5.4: Age breakdown of survey respondents in Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu City (n=10 in Otjiwarongo and n=24 in Mzuzu)

Age categories	Otjiwarongo		Mzuzu City		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
No response	-	-	2	8	2	6
Under 30	1	10	2	8	3	9
30 – 39	-	-	7	29	7	21
40 – 49	2	20	8	32	10	29
50 – 59	7	70	2	8	9	26
60 and over	-	-	3	13	3	9
Total	10	100	24	100	34	100

Similarly too, the need to include seniors in future participatory processes will also be noted as a key recommendation to be made, as this is now an important emerging trend internationally. Raymond et al. (2014) bemoans the fact that whilst contemporary discourses on aging do promote active participation as an ideal framework from which to encourage older people’s life satisfaction, often such a vision of participation is neither meaningful nor accessible to older adults and suggests the urgent need for a widening of the definition of participation. From the case study, it is clear

that more can be done to actively promote the participation of marginalized groupings of women, children and the aged in future iterations of the visioning process.

Moving on to an analysis of the level of education of respondents, it is important to note that every focus group participant and interviewee held postgraduate qualifications. These respondents were highly trained senior municipal officials with many years of experience working in the built environment. The fact that all participants in the eThekweni Municipality focus group held Masters Degrees in Urban and Regional Planning and had spent significant years working in a municipal context on strategic planning, clearly demonstrates that high level planning capacity does exist in some African municipalities. The challenge is around how such expertise and experience can be effectively harnessed to build capacity within less developed municipalities in southern Africa. The findings in this case study of the mentorship model used by UCLG to enhance capacity through city-to-city learning is therefore useful in helping provide recommendations to guide knowledge transfer between planning practitioners.

Table 5.5: Level of education of survey respondents in Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu City (n=10 in Otjiwarongo and n=24 in Mzuzu)

The level of education of the respondents in the census survey in Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu City Council, as indicated in Table 5.5 showed differences between the two cities. Whereas half of

Otjiwarongo’s stakeholders participating in the visioning process held either only a primary or secondary school education, this was significantly lower at 21% in Mzuzu. Similarly, the percentage of respondents with undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in Mzuzu more than

Highest level of education	Otjiwarongo		Mzuzu City		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Primary	1	10	-	-	1	3
Secondary	4	40	2	8	6	18
Certificate/ diploma	3	30	10	42	13	38
Undergraduate degree	1	10	5	21	6	18
Postgraduate degree	1	10	7	29	8	23
Total	10	100	24	100	34	100

doubled those in Otjiwarongo. This can be attributed to Mzuzu being a much larger city and the critical factor that the Mzuzu visioning process included more officials in its process than Otjiwarongo. This aspect of affiliation or sector that the respondent represented whilst participating in the visioning workshop will be considered as the last demographic factor in this section.

In considering the data from the census survey, it is important to note that the Otjiwarongo stakeholder workshop comprising just 10 participants was much smaller with targeted stakeholders from civil society and with no political leadership. The approach in Mzuzu City Council was structured differently as their initial visioning process included all their political leadership and senior officials as well as Local Government Associations, as indicated in Table 5.6. below. This was done deliberately, as Malawi had just held their local government elections in May 2014 and wanted to canvass the views of their political leadership before engaging with the broader stakeholder base (including NGOs, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and other interest groups). All Malawian municipalities were without councilors since March 2005 when local government elections were scheduled but never held (Tambulasi, 2011).

Table 5.6: Affiliation of survey respondents in Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu City (n=10 in Otjiwarongo and n=24 in Mzuzu)

The Otjiwarongo visioning process included 2 representatives each from NGOs, business leadership and faith-based groups. Whilst this was a much smaller workshop than Mzuzu, having different civil society voices did allow for vibrant discussions and debates.

Having presented an overview of the demographic profile of all the respondents, it is worth

Affiliation	Otjiwarongo		Mzuzu City		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Political Leadership	-	-	10	42	10	29
Official in municipality	3	30	10	42	13	38
Local Government Association	-	-	4	16	4	12
Non-governmental organization	2	20	-	-	2	6
Faith-based organization	2	20	-	-	2	6
Business leadership	2	20	-	-	2	6
Other community organization	1	10	-	-	1	3
Total	10	100	24	100	34	100

reiterating that no claims can be made on representivity to the larger population. As a case study of the UCLG mentorship program, all planners, facilitators, program managers, funders and other officials directly or indirectly involved in the process were interviewed and all stakeholders participating in the visioning program agreed to participate in the survey. The stage is now set to consider the perspectives offered by a total of 52 respondents from southern Africa.

5.3. eThekwini Municipality’s strategic planning process: unpacking good practice

Whilst it has been accepted that the eThekwini Municipality does have important lessons to share from its experiences in strategic planning, as acknowledged by various international development

agencies (UN-Habitat, 2010; UCLG, 2009; UCLG, 2010b), there has not necessarily been an attempt to understand exactly why eThekweni Municipality itself considers itself worthy of emulation and why those that are involved in the mentorship program have been attracted to the eThekweni Municipality's experience. Moreover, from the document searches conducted there was no record in the form of academic publications, reports, notes or formal documentation explaining how it came to be that African cities identified the eThekweni Municipality as a case of good practice. This was an important first gap that the research aimed to fill and as explained in Chapter 1, is the first research objective.

In analyzing the various responses from across the research participants, five common characteristics of the eThekweni Municipality's planning process as a case of good practice have been distilled. Documented here, these are useful in their own right as they serve as a significant area of learning for other African cities. Each of these characteristics is considered briefly.

5.3.1. A long-term planning horizon

The first interesting observation about the eThekweni Municipality's approach to strategic planning was its explicit intention to produce a long-term plan that went beyond the legislative mandate of a five year term. Most cities normally did not exceed this mandate, but focused on ensuring compliance. During the focus group interview with eThekweni Municipality's planning officials, there was consensus that making this strategic decision was:

A defining characteristic of the process, that set the framework for long-term sustainability in the municipality.

Lead Planner, eThekweni Municipality

The Imagine Durban Planning process with its 80 year planning horizon opened up possibilities for greater creativity and innovation, which typical five year plans did not always enable. For the planners within the municipality this was important as it allowed them the space to embark on projects that yielded results over the longer term and were not constrained to the typical five year political term of office.

In probing for how this approach that differed so radically from other cities came to be, and what underlying conditions facilitated this, an interesting insight was offered by the former City Manager of the eThekweni Municipality:

In some ways it was because eThekweni's model was so different to Johannesburg, for example. In Johannesburg they had to respond to a financial crisis. The eThekweni model, however, grew out of a very unique political context in Durban and the need to begin to include people and build a much more united and longer term view of the city. This long-term vision had to be about big-picture strategic things.

Former City Manager, eThekweni Municipality

From the insights gained during the interviews, it became clear that there was a unique window of opportunity created in early 2001 for the municipality to design a long-term vision that was to help channel the energy and action of the city towards achieving the goal of improving the quality of life of its citizens. The power of a long-term CDS to harness these energies, as evinced in this case study has been well documented in the CDS literature (Healey, 2007; Pieterse, 2008; Robinson, 2011).

The creation of this vision and its achievement, the city leaders recognized, however, could not be realized alone. The issue of engaging all stakeholders in a bottom-up participatory process was the next important defining characteristic that emerged from the respondents.

5.3.2. Participatory planning rather than merely consultative

From the time when we started this process, I personally found the aspect of the involvement of the community useful, and the fact that it was a simple and straight-forward process and I was able to grasp exactly what eThekweni was trying to do.

Lead facilitator, Otjiwarongo City Council

The approach in terms of long-term programming in eThekweni is useful; but then developing an accord (an agreement signed by all participants) which is really participatory in nature is what we are also now doing in Mzuzu.

From the reflections above, it is apparent that the issue of engaging stakeholders in a simple, but highly inclusive visioning process appeared to resonate with the African planners interviewed in the case study, who had been inspired by the stance taken by the municipality. This was probed during the focus group interview with the eThekweni Municipality's planners who had been architects of the process. The planners and facilitators spoke with great passion about the genuineness of their early participatory strategic planning processes. They confided that being activists against the apartheid state, they were given a unique opportunity to build a more developmental local state by crafting planning processes that they argued heard the voices of ordinary people. The strategic planning process was therefore designed deliberately as highly inclusive; for them citizen engagement was not seen as an add-on or as a means to secure strategic plan approval. These assertions made by the municipality's practitioners have not been tested through independent interviews of key civil society stakeholders in Durban, as this falls beyond the scope of the study.

What is useful to note here, however, is that in a paper on democracy in Durban, Ballard et al. (2007: 266) do acknowledge the rigors of the eThekweni Municipality's participatory planning process, and concede:

The evidence from Durban suggests that local democracy is being forged in distinctive and vibrant ways in post-apartheid South Africa, even if these are necessarily embedded in emergent systems of power relations which frame and limit opportunities for re-distributive and developmental outcomes.

The point that citizen engagement is a critical component in city development strategic planning processes has been made clear in the literature (Healey, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Fagence, 2014; Wates, 2014). More recently too, as outlined in the literature review chapter, there has been an urgent call made for the development of a new urban agenda by UN-Habitat (2014a). One of the requirements for such an agenda articulated by UN-Habitat (2014a: 2) in the Medellin Declaration

is a “participatory planning approach that responds to the present and emerging needs of the cities of the future”. This issue of participatory citizen engagement in urban strategic planning is therefore one area that certainly warrants more attention. As this is not a core focus of this research, it is again merely flagged as a future area for research attention.

5.3.3. An integrated and holistic approach to development

In reflecting on their early experiences of strategic planning, the eThekweni Municipality’s planners during the focus group interview acknowledged that they had learned difficult lessons in the first few years of planning. They openly and frankly admitted that their focus had been on service delivery and focused on a pursuit of achieving targets in order to respond to high expectations of the electorate. In the race to redress infrastructural backlogs, the goal of creating total living environments had therefore been severely compromised. This realization led to a radical rethinking of the entire development approach. Every effort was made to ensure that the planning process was integrated and all aspects of development were weaved into a collective whole through a focus on achieving a common outcome of improving the quality of life of citizens, rather than achieving service delivery outputs.

The sharing of this narrative that stressed the need for integration and an outcomes-based approach to development, struck a chord with their southern African counterparts:

The eThekweni story starts with the acknowledgement that despite its good service delivery record the community survey that was done revealed high levels of dissatisfaction from the residents. This was due to not being outcomes-focused and not necessarily taking all the communities with them. In responding to the results of a survey, a more participative approach was then adopted. This was quite an eye-opener for us in Namibia.

Senior ALAN official

The eThekwini Municipality planners have since recognized the value of the narrative and use it as a starting point in their interactions with other municipalities. The combination of the frank and honest reflection, together with the results that it had achieved presented a compelling case for emulation.

5.3.6. Strategy that translates into action

Since they (the eThekwini planners) had actually done it already...implemented their strategy..., and when we went there they shared with us tangible things that they had been through was great!

Lead facilitator, Otjiwarongo Municipality

The greatest value in the planning process, particularly for the mentee cities it seemed, was the fact that that the plan was actually implemented. They were impressed that the eThekwini Municipality's Vision did not remain on a shelf, but was translated into detailed strategies, programs and projects which were budgeted for, and then embedded into a performance management system which was monitored on a quarterly basis each year to ensure that the implementation instilled confidence and legitimacy in the planning process. This was an area that mentee cities felt that their own planning processes could learn the most from.

5.3.7. Joint ownership of plan

The last commonality that emerged from the interviews with respondents was that what also set apart the eThekwini Municipality's process from other processes was the joint ownership of the plan by political and administrative leadership. By having such joint ownership, confidence was instilled among the public stakeholders to engage and be regarded as equal partners in such a process. This point was further delved into in the interview with the previous City Manager who was asked to reflect on ownership of the process.

On the one hand there was very clear ANC leadership and on the other there was strong management leadership; we were not afraid to put our heads down and just get things

done. We led and made things happen. This route of bringing people together has since then been followed by many other municipalities who took our lead.

Former City Manager, eThekweni Municipality

In summary, what the findings from the interviewees and focus group respondents have shown is that there are clear and measurable characteristics of successful strategic planning processes. The five areas that have emerged from the interviews surfaced as consensual, common areas that respondents had identified. These areas were not contested or debated by the participants and each of these was valued and recognized as worthy of being emulated. As such, these characteristics are important to note in terms of the content of strategic planning and do provide a useful yardstick to measure such good planning practice.

In order to gauge the perceptions of eThekweni municipality's visioning process of those not directly involved in the mentorship, but who participated in the strategic planning workshops two questions were included in the survey. The first broader question tested respondents' general satisfaction with the usefulness and relevance of eThekweni Municipality's visioning process, whilst the second question isolated five key aspects of the process and surveyed respondents' level of satisfaction with each.

Before these survey results are presented and analyzed it must be noted that these results merely indicate respondent perceptions. As acknowledged by Dhingra and Dhingra (2011: 63), perception is a "very complex cognitive process that yields a unique picture of the world, a picture that may be quite different from reality". It is important therefore not to overstate the findings in this regard. Moreover, such perceptions are based only on what they would have encountered during the course of the workshop, through short presentations from their respective city planners on how their city process was modeled on eThekweni Municipality's own experiences as well as through informal interactions with the Durban planners during the workshop. Whilst the respondents' exposure to, and understanding of the municipality's journey of strategic planning was limited, they are useful in painting a picture of how the respondents' perceive and judge eThekweni Municipality's process, especially since they were not exposed to it in any great detail.

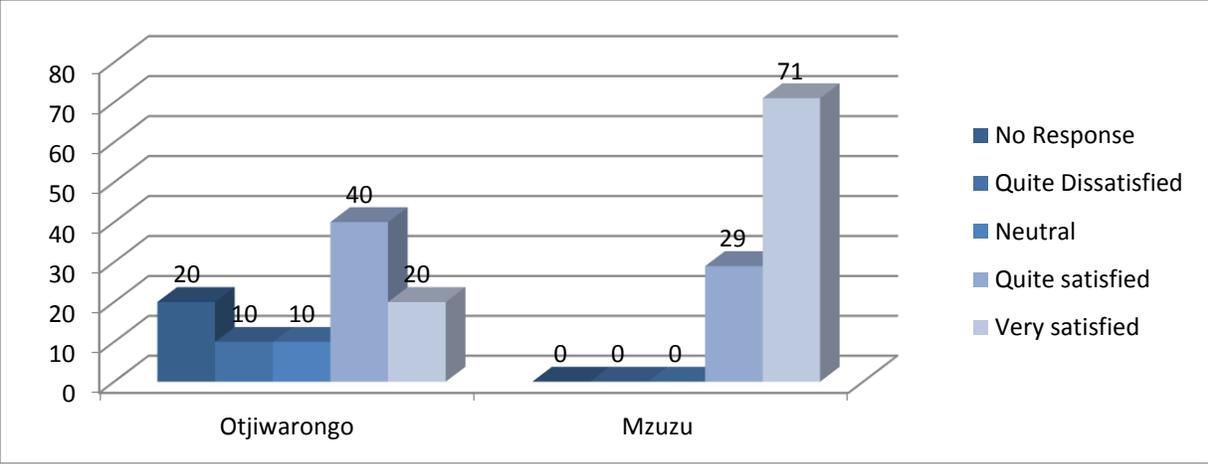


Figure 5.1: Comparative analysis of Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu survey respondent satisfaction with the relevance and usefulness of eThekweni Municipality’s visioning process in percentage (n=10 for Otjiwarongo and n=24 for Mzuzu)

As indicated in Figure 5.1 above, it is clear that most participants at both workshops were satisfied with the eThekweni Municipality’s strategic planning process. Of the 88% of total respondents who were satisfied, 32% were quite satisfied and 56% were very satisfied. It is interesting that even though these respondents did not have many years of exposure to the eThekweni Municipality’s experience like their own municipal planners and facilitators, only 6% chose not to respond to this question, with none of the Mzuzu respondents choosing not to respond.

Their higher level of satisfaction (71% being very satisfied as compared to 20% in Otjiwarongo) could be attributed to the fact that Mzuzu’s visioning process ran over two and a half days and not just for a day as was the case in Otjiwarongo. There was therefore relatively more time to reflect on the eThekweni Municipality’s process in Mzuzu and to interact and engage with the eThekweni Municipality’s planners. During this time, they were exposed to all aspects of the eThekweni planning process from participation, budgeting, implementing to how the plan was monitored and evaluated. Key components of the process would have resonated with them, which could explain their high level of satisfaction.

Table 5.7: Analysis of both Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu survey respondents’ perceptions of key aspects of the eThekweni Municipality’s visioning process in percentage (n=34, in %)

Level of satisfaction	No response	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
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Strategic	6	3	3	6	32	50	100
Highly participatory	12	3	6	3	29	47	100
Budget alignment	9	-	3	9	41	38	100
Action plan alignment	6	6	3	-	35	50	100
Performance managed	6	-	6	3	26	59	100

With regard to respondents’ perceptions of specific aspects of eThekweni Municipality’s strategic planning process, there appears to be general satisfaction with all aspects. What stands out from the data, however, is that the highest rating emerged in the areas of plan implementation and performance management, with 85% of all respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that eThekweni Municipality’s process was worthy of emulation. In attempting to make sense of this result, it is fair to intimate that civil society representatives appreciated and valued a process that actually delivered on the ground. Any process that involves consultation and does not follow on to yield results is unproductive and often disempowering for those being consulted. Equally, as Mzuzu respondents included officials and politicians who were not directly involved in leading the planning process, the results showed that municipal officials also recognized the value of plan implementation and constant evaluation. For these officials associating with a plan which was able to yield tangible results ensured both legitimacy and credibility not only to the process but to the municipality.

It is also worth pointing out the majority of the respondents (82%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the notion of the eThekweni Municipality’s planning process as a strategic one. This is particularly important as the strategic planning orientation lends itself to longer term planning and the emphasis on engaging with key stakeholders to ensure a more sustainable future and improved quality of life, rather than focusing on short-term service delivery issues only.

These survey results which complement the insights from the in-depth interviews is useful in understanding what is valued as important in strategic planning processes both to planners leading the process and to those that engage in the visioning exercise as participants. Whilst this may be the case, the more critical issue revolves around understanding exactly how cities recognize the value of such good practice in other cities. In other words, how do they know who to learn from; is this identification of good practice cities as a result of systematic research or is it a hit-and miss approach, or is it perhaps based on a system of referrals?

A fundamentally important revelation was made during the interview with a member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat that has helped unravel the complexities of city-to-city learning.

I am not sure whether cities are really doing their homework, making an assessment and approaching cities strategically. City-to-city learning is where in a facilitated process this happens, actually through brokering... where a common platform has been created by say the UCLG. The problem is that this brokering role is totally hidden – no one knows about it, and it is not recorded in any of the official documentation.

Member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat

This key insight clearly reinforces the notion of an underground knowledge economy in city-to-city learning. Undocumented, and completely under the radar, what emerges is the notion that cities often rely on an important brokering role played by a third party agency that goes between themselves and the cities that they ultimately partner with; matching a latent demand for knowledge with a potential knowledge supplier. Expressed in matrimonial terms, it seems that cities enter into an arranged marriage of sorts, relying on the expertise of the go-between to ensure success of their courtship. In probing to uncover what it is that attracts the attention of the go-between to the mentor city, it emerged that investment in knowledge management is the single most important factor that attracts potential partners.

In particular, from an analysis of the responses from across all 18 key informants, the fact that the eThekweni Municipality made the conscious effort to document the history of its strategic planning process was a significant issue. In probing during the interview with the former City Manager, it

emerged that it was his intervention with the UCLG at an international event that alerted them of eThekwini Municipality's robust strategic planning process that had led to the eThekwini Municipality as being identified as a mentor to other African cities. The UCLG then strategically facilitated the pairing of these cities with the eThekwini Municipality. This brokering role by the UCLG also resulted in the eThekwini Municipality being paired with the Brazilian city of Sao Paulo where Sao Paulo was regarded as the mentor city sharing its expertise around human settlements with its eThekwini Municipality counterparts.

What is critical to highlight here was the intention of the former City Manager to position the Municipality as a potential center of learning on the African continent so that its good practices could be disseminated within the region on the one hand, whilst ensuring that international good practice from elsewhere in the global South could be received as part of the eThekwini Municipality's own learning agenda. In order to facilitate this learning culture, the municipality invested in documenting their own processes, and had a team of highly trained planners who were willing and able to share this knowledge which was the catalyst in ensuring that the eThekwini Municipality consolidate its position as a learning city. Interestingly, this knowledge management decision to preserve the institutional memory of the organization not only appealed in the first instance to the UCLG, who played the role of the go-between, but to the mentee cities themselves, and to the Local Authority Associations. ALAN, for example, was concerned that in Namibia the loss of memory in local government was one of the single greatest threats they were facing. The UCLG itself also recognized the practice of the eThekwini Municipality to consciously document its processes as critical, and over the last few years has partnered with the eThekwini Municipality to ensure that all the UCLG learning events are captured through a set of learning notes.

The eThekwini Municipality planners themselves also acknowledged this commitment to documenting, learning and sharing. As one official suggested:

eThekwini appears to be more open than other cities to learning; they play in learning spaces and are much more accessible.

Head of Policy Office, eThekwini Municipality

In probing the reason for this openness, it appeared that this was part of the organizational culture that was intentionally being created at that time. Officials observed that there was a concerted effort from the former City Manager to position eThekweni as an international center of learning. Marketing of the city processes also seemed important to the eThekweni team, and in particular, active networking in international circles. From the analysis, it emerged that having city leadership or a champion who could see the value of knowledge management and sharing international good practice was key:

Having the City Manager play a key role in networks such as the South African Cities Network (SACN) and the UCLG cannot be under-estimated... ultimately personalities play such an important role.

Lead facilitator, eThekweni Municipality

More than just the active marketing of itself and the intention to share information internationally though, the eThekweni municipal planning team made the point that what mattered was the quality of the sharing and engagement. In this regard, an astute observation was made by ALAN:

The Durban story has been powerful because it has an honest candidness about it.

Senior ALAN official

This point about being able to reflect and share openly also emerged from the eThekweni Municipality's participants themselves. They stressed that the conditions were always created by the city leadership to engage without fear of retribution, to critically look at what worked well and to learn from past mistakes. These are critical insights from a southern African case study that confirms the essence of organizational learning theory.

In particular, this self-reflective admission confirms the notions of Nonaka's (1994) *ba* and Aydalot's (1986) innovative milieu which emphasizes the value of sharing in an open, non-threatening environment. This is an important theoretical validation that the case study begins to make, as the researcher is not aware of the testing of this aspect of organizational learning in city-to-city learning contexts in southern Africa. The details of exactly how the learning process was structured and the methodology employed by the facilitators will be covered later on in this

chapter. What is important to reinforce here is the point that the learning process in the case study was structured in a way that facilitated honest and open dialogue, with the space created for open reflection and opportunities created to dissect what mistakes had been made in the strategic planning process. This reporting of a brutal honesty about what worked well and what did not in their approach to strategic planning, it appears, almost disarmed participants and played a role in allowing them to speak their minds, and helped further entrench a sense of trust in each other.

At the same time, in deepening the analysis, it can be posited that this higher order of learning did not happen by accident or coincidence. The eThekweni Municipality's facilitators were actually very skillful learning practitioners who had been schooled in the art of strategic facilitation under the auspices of MILE. As MILE practitioners they had consciously utilized tools and techniques that maximize learning outcomes, such as the adoption of the World Bank Institute's "blended learning approach" which incorporates multiple learning approaches (eThekweni Municipality, 2014c: 18). Again, these insights have not been documented elsewhere before, as MILE is a fairly recent institutional innovation and the lessons learned in this case study is important to inform practice elsewhere on the continent.

Beyond this reference from the MILE Knowledge Management Strategy, the researcher paid particular attention in observing first-hand the facilitators at work in Durban and Namibia. During these observations, important facilitation techniques (ranging from the setting of inclusive ground-rules, to ensuring opportunities for maximum social interaction during lunch and dinner, to creating site visits that encouraged personal interaction on a bus) employed by the facilitators allowed them to create an atmosphere of trust that enabled higher order learning. This is important, as the case study begins to validate Campbell's (2012a: 11) model that suggests clear "orders of learning", placing eThekweni Municipality in the third order of learning with proactive city learners such as Seattle.

What also emerges from the case study is the importance of organizational investment in institutionalizing knowledge management and committing time and resources towards more structured learning. The Founding Document of MILE explains concisely the explicit intention of this knowledge management vehicle:

The intention of MILE is to provide a powerful platform for sharing practical insights into the day-to-day protocols, and systems required for successful implementation of local government functions. MILE can be invaluable to the local government practitioner who asks: “How do I do what I have been doing, more effectively? Who is doing something similar? Does it work elsewhere? Is it grounded theoretically? How can I consolidate such learning via academic institutions?”

eThekwini Municipality (2010b: 3)

This again validates Campbell’s (2012a) model around different styles of learning, with an important qualification. The eThekwini Municipality’s decision to establish a dedicated knowledge management vehicle, MILE, suggests a corporate style of learning which, according to Campbell (2012a: 147), involves “formalized arrangements, including a bureaucracy, written procedures for rule making and less flexible means of decision-making and action”. The three cities that have been identified in this learning typology by Campbell (2012a) are Seattle, Bilbao and Singapore. It is interesting to note, however, that unlike these cities identified in Campbell’s (2012a) research, whilst the eThekwini Municipality’s arrangements were formalized and organized and the learning very structured, one of the critically important findings from this study is that the eThekwini Municipality’s approach enjoyed much more flexibility around decision-making and action. The MILE organizational structure is flat, and does not have a dedicated Deputy Head or Head unlike typical municipal departments, and is managed more as a dynamic program by a senior manager (eThekwini Municipality, 2010b).

As a learning institute that has been in existence for only six years, with increasing support from international agencies such as the UCLG, World Bank, UN and other development agencies, this unique feature of MILE’s flexibility emerging from the case study resists the perfect categorization into the model presented by Campbell (2012a). It shows that in a southern African context, it may be difficult to straight jacket the learning style characterized by MILE into a more generalized model. This is a critically important finding highlighting that need for more nuanced understandings of how learning occurs in an African context, and this will be flagged for further development in later chapters.

To summarize, from this first thematic analysis that explored defining characteristics of good strategic planning practice that cities find useful to emulate, five enduring traits emerged from the case study. These include committing to a longer term planning horizon that goes beyond narrow political terms of office, a robust and bottom-up participatory stakeholder engagement process, an integrated and holistic approach that delivers on outcomes, a planning process that translates easily into implementation and a process that is jointly owned by its administrators and political leadership.

More importantly, the case study showed that whilst cities themselves are actively looking for partnerships with others, they ultimately rely on external brokers that help connect cities with each other. These brokers are often international agents such as the UCLG that are able to access funding for such partnerships from donor agencies. Another critical insight emerging from the case study is the importance of investing in an entrenched knowledge management system that promotes institutionalized learning, which in turn attracts the attention of international agencies and facilitates future partnerships.

Whilst the case study validates the notions of orders of learning and learning styles, as suggested by Campbell (2012a), it showed that the reality of learning in a southern African context required agility, flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by MILE which resists the neat categorization into a corporate learning style. The pragmatic stance of the research, outlined in the conceptual framework again comes to the fore. It is clear that the adoption of grand meta-theories and cookie-cutter reductionist approaches, offer little analytical value in politicized and dynamic southern African contexts that often require more flexible, bottom-up responses to complex urban challenges.

These are all key findings that are helping excavate and reveal the underground knowledge economy that has not surfaced in the southern African context before. In continuing this excavation, the next section probes the concept of city-to-city learning in an attempt to crystallize a common southern African practitioner perspective of this somewhat elusive term.

5.4. Making sense of city-to-city learning

As indicated in earlier chapters, the literature does not offer a single coherent definition of city-to-city learning, especially in the global South, and certainly not in the southern African context. The interviews with respondents directly involved in the mentorship program in the Malawian and Namibian municipalities complemented by the survey findings provided interesting perspectives that helps develop a richer and much more nuanced picture of how southern African practitioners understand this somewhat elusive concept.

This section begins with a quick overview of how the workshop participants who participated in the survey understand city-to-city learning. This is then followed by a synthesis of the conversation between the eThekweni Municipality's practitioner's focus group participants on what city-to-city learning means for them and in particular how they make sense of the UCLG notion of mentorship. The analysis is deepened when these views are compared with how the UCLG colleagues (based in Barcelona, Spain) perceive and promote their understanding of city-to-city learning. These notions are then compared and contrasted with the understanding presented by the ALAN representatives on the one hand and the Namibian planners who were mentored by the eThekweni Municipality planners on the other hand. Similarly, insights from the planning team in Mzuzu, Malawi are also analyzed and compared with those shared by the program funders. In the analysis, attention is paid to who holds these views and how geo-political considerations could influence notions of city-to-city learning, given the theoretical interest of exploring the potential manifestations of power relations. This theme is further developed as the interview respondents are engaged on how their views on the concept of 'mentorship' and their level of comfort and acceptance with this term.

5.4.1. Towards a shared understanding of city-to-city learning

The first question posed in the questionnaire as well as the opening question in each of the in-depth interviews attempted to extract the essence of city-to-city learning. Unsurprisingly, and reflective of the diverse range of conceptualizations in the literature on city-to-city learning, all the respondents in the case study grappled with providing a single, clear and unequivocal definition of this messy concept. Attesting to this, nearly one-fifth of survey respondents answered this introductory question with a very basic response, again reinforcing the difficulty of coming to

terms with what exactly city-to-city learning really means. From all of the questionnaire responses received, however, three broad categories of understanding were able to be distilled.

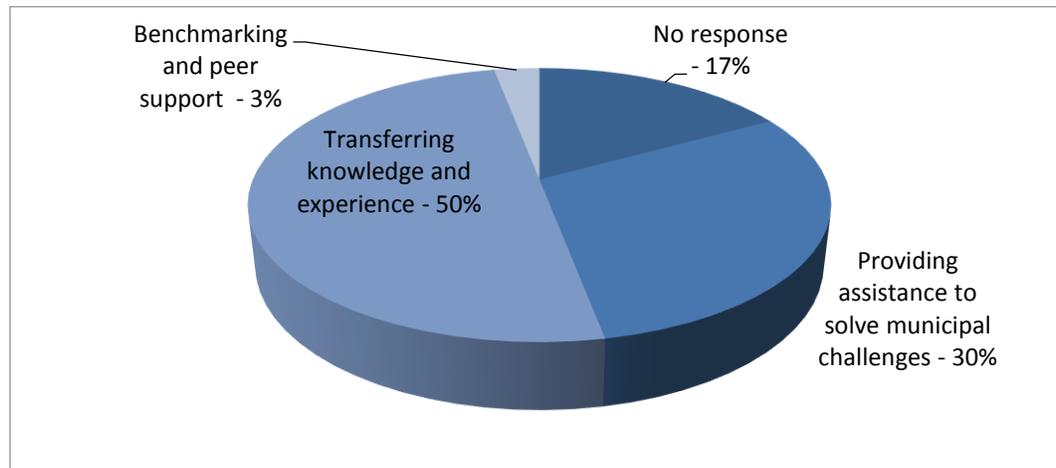


Figure 5.2: Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu City survey respondents' definition of city-to-city learning in percentage (n=34)

As indicated in Figure 5.2 above, the first and most popular understanding of city-to-city learning by far (50% of all survey respondents) were that of “transfer of knowledge and experience” from one municipality to another. This could be explained in terms of them being introduced to the UCLG mentorship program, which possibly framed their understanding in terms of the direct transfer of skills from a better capacitated municipality to an under-capacitated one.

Similarly, the second notion of “providing technical assistance” in order to solve particular challenges within the municipality (as suggested by 30% of all respondents) again seemed to be colored and influenced by the idea of a mentorship program. In the opening of session of the workshops, the lead local facilitator had also explained the background of the mentorship program very much in terms of providing technical support in the specific are of urban strategic planning. Only one response received on this first question put forward the idea of “benchmarking and peer-support” between municipalities.

The predominant notion of transferring technical knowledge from one municipality to another that emerged from the survey resonated best with the common understanding that emerged from the eThekweni Municipality’s focus group of planners and facilitators. For them, and the UCLG interview respondents alike, the idea of two cities and its respective key stakeholders (officials,

politicians, business leadership, etc.) agreeing to enter into a structured program of learning, with one city imparting their “expert” knowledge on an agreed upon topic and the other city receiving it, formed the common basis of understanding of city-to-city learning. The explicit upfront notion of both cities consciously and actively learning from each other did not emerge at the outset. Instead this two-way learning exchange did emerge, when probed, and will be discussed later.

In dissecting this definition, four distinct components emerge: (i) the process involving more than just municipal officials, (ii) there being a strong willingness to participate in a learning process, (iii) the learning being focused and structured, and (iv) the notion of one party predominantly imparting knowledge and the other party receiving it. These are explored in some depth, as the way in which practitioners conceptualize and frame city learning opens up windows of understanding to other aspects of the process.

Turning firstly to the conception of the relationship as being between two cities including *all* the stakeholders that the municipalities typically engage with, it is particularly interesting that none of the focus group members or UCLG respondents limited the definition to interaction exclusively between municipal practitioners only. This appears to indicate a somewhat strongly internalized notion of strategic planning as a fundamentally inclusive process; one that is not limited to municipal practitioners, but necessarily involving civil society partners who will benefit from mutual learning. It is also noteworthy that whilst this notion was accepted, internalized and verbalized, it did not quite translate into full participation of all stakeholders, such as women, youth and the elderly, as observed earlier.

Notwithstanding this, the case study does confirm the observation from the literature on learning made by Bontenbal (2009) that in conceptualizing an understanding of city-to-city cooperation, the focus on facilitating civil society participation in the learning process is indeed important. In particular, the emphasis made by Mamadouh (2002) that this increases public awareness and public support and has symbolic meaning came to the fore in the Namibian example. The researcher as observer watched and listened first-hand during the stakeholder workshop run by the Otjiwarongo team and supported by the eThekwini mentor. From the comments made by the

Otjiwarongo residents during the stakeholder engagement there was no doubt that most residents supported emulating the eThekweni Municipality's experience:

We are very excited about the Durban story and how they managed to turn their city around. We only hope that we can also get investment into our city as well.

Otjiwarongo business leader at Stakeholder Workshop

As an observer seated at the back of the venue in the Otjiwarongo stakeholder engagement session, the researcher made a journal recording that there was a visible difference made with the presence of a planner from another city sharing the lessons learned in that context, and then motivating fellow African citizens to unlock their collective imaginations in a visioning process. In order to test this observation, during the interview with the Otjiwarongo planning manager, this issue was probed further, and the respondent was asked to reflect on what she thought the effect of having the presence of Durban colleagues made on the overall outcome of the stakeholder engagement process. Her response was:

Having the mentor municipality at the community workshops helps to bring greater credibility to the local town's process and stakeholders feel encouraged that they are part of an international community. In particular, having Durban to share their own story is useful as it shows local stakeholders that Durban embarked on a similar process and turned itself around through having an effective vision.

Planning manager, Otjiwarongo Municipality

As this is an important lesson identified in the literature and confirmed in the case study through field observation and interviews, the point about ensuring that city-to-city learning delegations should include all stakeholders will be revisited later and included in the proposed framework for city learning.

The second aspect of willingness to participate in a learning process merits some attention. This is because the literature seems to suggest that a formal bilateral partnership agreement between the two participating municipalities and all their stakeholders is a key characteristic of city-to-city

cooperation (Bontenbal, 2009). What emerges from this case study, however, which challenges the learning literature somewhat, is that neither of the mentees or mentors had signed any partnership agreement or contract binding them to achieve certain outcomes. Whilst there was no agreement in place, what is unique about the case study, is that the eThekweni Municipality had taken the initiative to commit resources to establish a dedicated institutional mechanism in the form of a municipal learning institute whose mandate involved coordinating city-to-city learning. This obviated the need for the signing of once-once bilateral agreements. It was through the MILE office that the learning process was organized, with each visit done under the MILE Technical Support Program.

More importantly, as pointed out in the methodology chapter earlier, it was the fact that the Municipality had taken a conscious decision to position itself as an international center of learning that had attracted the attention of the UCLG in its role as broker to identify it as a potential mentor in southern Africa. Hence the investment in MILE, the capacity and technical expertise of its planning officials (all of whom held postgraduate degrees in planning) and the strong political backing for African technical support are key factors to be noted. The issue of the urgent need for investment in dedicated knowledge management institutional mechanisms by African municipalities will be a key recommendation to be made in later chapters. It must be noted, however, that whilst no contracts were in place between MILE and the mentee cities, contractual obligations were finalized between the funding agency and the authorities receiving the funding.

Again what is interesting is that in thinking about the engagement of both municipalities, none of the respondents consciously raised the critically important role of the UCLG in brokering the learning process and connecting the cities together. This was not seen as a defining characteristic by the participants, and so again reinforces the notion of the underground knowledge economy; where the agency matching supply and demand remain hidden in the African context. This too has important implications about whether the brokering role is best played by an international player located in the global North or whether this is more appropriately located within the continent, as part of a bottom-up African-owned learning process, that is merely supported, rather than driven by the UCLG. Recommendations made in this regard in later chapters will need to take into account key issues such as capacity and resource mobilization.

In turning to the third component of the definition, there was complete agreement by all focus group members and UCLG respondents that the defining characteristic of city-to-city learning was the very focused and directed nature of the interactions that were tailor-made to address the exact needs of the recipient city involved. This, it was observed, was unlike other city engagements that involved numerous city tours and city visits that happen on an ad-hoc basis where cities would visit to explore many different aspects of city governance. In this regard, it is worth noting that the eThekweni Municipality (2014a) has active relationships with sister cities in Oran, Algeria; Alexandria, Egypt; Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; Reunion Island; Maputo, Mozambique; Libreville, Gabon; Mombasa, Kenya; Port Harcourt, Nigeria and Kigali, Rwanda. In March 2015, it concluded a tenth sister city partnership with Douala in Cameroon (eThekweni Municipality, 2015). These engagements cover a range of topics and do not necessarily focus on a particular aspect of governance. The mentorship program, however, did not deviate from having a focused and single pointed agenda on building capacity of planners to run visioning processes that will result in long-term city development plans. As will be unpacked later, this involved a journey of partnership, which was founded on an intensive training run by the eThekweni municipal planning team. The detailed program is attached as Appendix Three.

For the eThekweni Municipality's focus group participants, it was this directed and programmatic learning with peers that made the city-to-city learning unique. They went on to concede that the knowledge from such intimate interactions could not be gleaned even from academic partners or consultants who were often appointed to render technical support. This view was also echoed by the two UCLG interviewees who were responsible for the city-to-city learning. The researcher probed to ascertain whether the narrow focus only on urban strategic planning was limiting given the range of developmental and service delivery challenges facing African municipalities. Both respondents, however, were adamant that the defining characteristic of city-to-city learning was its focused, outcomes-driven nature that allows for deep relationship building. As one respondent put it:

What made the project really successful was having very clear terms of reference and not diluting all our energy on various aspects, but identifying the key area and staying with it.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

Similarly, like their South African counterparts and their UCLG colleagues, the Namibian respondents agreed that the defining characteristic of the learning that made it most effective, was its focused concentration on a specific area – in this case urban strategic planning. For them, this learning experience is a very unique one, best expressed in their summation:

Real, practical things can be learned from each other. It is unlike reading things from books and journals.

Lead facilitator, Otjiwarongo Municipality

These insights from the practitioners do appear to confirm Kane and Alavi's (2007) understanding of organizational learning as involving a dynamic process of not just creating knowledge but transferring the knowledge to where it is both needed and used. Practitioners were very clear that the more focused and directed the learning, and the more that it responded to their needs, then the greater the opportunity for learning and transformative action. This finding from the southern African case study confirms the assertion by Toens and Landwehr's (2009: 4) that "improvement-oriented learning" is achieved when focused on a set of pre-determined criteria.

What is more interesting from a theoretical perspective is that a new dimension of learning was also added by the Otjiwarongo planning team who spoke about learning not just about the very focused technical aspects of strategic planning, but about how to lobby their national governments for change to legislation, based on the experiences shared by their South African counterparts:

Despite contexts differing, we are faced with the same issues and problems. By learning from South Africa, Namibian municipalities are learning how to lobby national government for change and to emulate what other national governments are doing.

Lead planner, Otjiwarongo Municipality

This was an unsolicited acknowledgement of the transformative power of learning through its potential to call for legislative reforms that would enable and promote more sustainable and democratic planning practices. This power of municipalities to facilitate national urban policy reform was not encountered in the literature on city-to-city learning, and the close historical relationship between SALGA and ALAN could account for this positive move. This again is an important contribution that southern African cities are beginning to make towards advancing development in the learning literature.

What also emerged was that whilst the insistence on having a clear program and outcomes came through clearly from the UCLG interviews, what was equally interesting was the explicit acknowledgement that along with this directedness, there has to be a built-in notion of flexibility and openness in the actual results that emanate from the city-to-city learning process. As program managers responsible and accountable for ensuring that the funding for the exchange was well spent and that the outcomes were achieved, this acceptance of allowing the process to generate its own result is noteworthy:

The most important difference to other learning is that it is focused on an outcome; in fact it is very focused, yet with flexibility and openness in the result produced.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

The point was further developed on by one of the UCLG interviewees tasked with playing a hands-on role in the African program. This interviewee admitted that in practice, city-to-city learning was far more complicated than the romantic notions that were previously held. In a frank reflection, it was acknowledged:

As a concept, (city-to-city learning) it is really motivating and exciting, however, in practice it is really very complicated especially because we don't have clear indicators to measure how much of knowledge has been transferred over time.

UCLG project officer

From her perspective, it is clear that part of the challenge was due to there being a total absence of well-defined indicators that measure how much of knowledge gets transferred over time. This issue of monitoring and evaluation of the impact of city-to-city learning also warrants attention and will be revisited in the recommendations chapter.

Of all the four components of the practitioner-based notion of city-to-city learning emerging from the case study, however, it was the fourth issue of transfer of learning from one to another that revealed the most amount of variance in responses. Whereas there was consensus between the eThekweni Municipality's focus group participants and UCLG program managers around the nature of city-to-city learning as involving a transfer of knowledge from one city to another, the views of the Namibian Local Government Association officials qualified this:

For me city-to-city learning is about the coming together of peers to share their best practices, failures and challenges. The power of city-to-city learning is that the knowledge can be applied almost immediately. You can see what your peers are doing and apply the learning immediately in the workplace.

Senior ALAN official

For them, city-to-city learning was viewed more as the joint *sharing* of their best practices, failures and challenges, rather than a one-sided transfer of knowledge. They spoke about the need for a two-way sharing process where both cities felt that they had contributed to each other's learning journey. It is interesting that a similar view was also expressed by both the planner and planning manager from the Otjiwarongo Municipality in Namibia during their in-depth interviews:

City-to-city learning is a process whereby cities are learning from each other, though the sharing and exchange of ideas and experiences of good practices. Different cities have different challenges, and important to learn from each other to see if they can be replicated in another city. The world is becoming one, and the socio-economic problems that we are experiencing are being experienced elsewhere.

Lead facilitator, Otjiwarongo Municipality

It became clear therefore that city-to-city learning for the Namibian planners is best understood as a process where cities/ towns learn from each other through the sharing and exchange of ideas and experiences of good practices. This understanding resonates with the emerging concept of peer-to-peer learning as described by van Ewijk et al. (2015), which appears to be gaining momentum more recently.

So, unlike the views of UCLG respondents and the earlier views of many of the South African focus group participants, the Namibians appeared more circumspect about the conceptualization of city-to-city learning as a one-way transfer of knowledge, and much preferred the notion of two-way learning. The Otjiwarongo planners expanded on the point of learning together and from each other, in order to improve the way they had undertaken strategic planning. For them, they agreed that in this journey of learning together, city-to-city learning necessarily involved helping each other to develop, especially as they had shared a common objective as planners wanting to make a difference. As one respondent put it:

We are not just learning from each other, but helping each other to develop.

Planning manager, Otjiwarongo Municipality

From a theoretical perspective, these insights from the planners in the case study are also particularly significant as they talk directly to Habermas' (1990: 135) assertion that communicative reason is facilitated when there is a "consensus created through shared life-worlds". The planners, whilst working in different cities, shared the same goal on improving the conditions of those communities that they served through a common urban strategic planning instrument. Habermas (1990) argues that this sharing of a common worldview facilitates action that is transformative. Whilst the results of this research do appear to confirm this notion, it is argued that this shared worldview may be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for transformative action arising from the learning process. More than just sharing the worldview, there are other important social ingredients in the relationship between the partners which the research shows is fundamental to transformative action. This will be explored later.

In moving from attempting to consolidate a unified definition of city-to-city learning towards unpacking the concept of ‘mentorship’, intriguing insights into the subtle play of power relations that were beginning to unfold in the discussion began revealing themselves more explicitly. It is this probing of awareness of the nature of power and how it manifests itself in the relationship that the analysis turns to next.

5.4.2. From ‘mentorship’ to ‘learning exchange’

The neutrality of the concept of ‘mentorship’, as adopted by the UCLG, was tested with the various respondents in relation to how they understood and made sense of the notion of city-to-city learning. This discussion stimulated intense but healthy debate amongst the eThekweni Municipality’s focus group participants who appeared not to hold a single, consensual view of the acceptability of, or a sense of ownership of the ‘mentorship’ label. At the one end of the continuum, one of the facilitators involved in the program felt that the term was a very neutral one, and was merely a matter of definition:

Well actually the definition changes each time, based on the context in which we are using it. So, for example, in the UCLG reports we will record the learning as mentorship, when we work in the field we talk about partnerships.

Lead planner, eThekweni Municipality

Another eThekweni Municipality focus group participant, whose role was to lead the facilitated discussions in the respective cities, appeared to be at the other end of the continuum, disagreeing with such a view. She acknowledged that the ‘mentorship’ label made her uncomfortable.

To be honest, every time I open a session with stakeholders in Namibia and Malawi, I explicitly clarify that eThekweni comes with an open mind, and that we want to learn together with the respective city, and that both parties were not to be seen as mentors and mentees.

Lead facilitator, eThekweni Municipality

This is a very important admission made by one of the eThekwini municipal officials, and raised only in response to issue of mentorship. In fact, this almost contradicts the earlier notion presented by the eThekwini Municipality team where city-to-city learning was seen as one city building the capacity of the other city. This acknowledgement of a two-way learning process is interesting and only dawned on participants later during the focus group session. The fact that there was no single consistent understanding again came to the fore, when another opposing view on the concept of mentorship emerged:

eThekwini has been mentored by Sao Paulo around planning and housing and this has been a very useful process. The learning has been valuable as it deals with the issues that the city is grappling with, such as working with civil society, social inclusion and dealing with complex planning procedures in different ways.

Spatial planner, eThekwini Municipality

This view expressed by a spatial planner who reflected on their relationship with their Sao Paulo colleagues, had no difficulty with regarding their Brazilian peers as mentors, as for her, these were “experts” in their field and from whom the Durbanites were most eager to learn. It is interesting to note that there was no hesitation in the use of the term “expert” and no critical thinking about the underlying implications of being regarded as an “expert”. The respondent was of the opinion that in the same vein, the Namibian and Malawian planners would not object to the mentorship label, because of the expertise that the eThekwini municipal planning team held with regard to urban strategic planning.

As the discussion ensued during the focus group, it emerged that ultimately it was the mentor who would decide about the political acceptability of the mentorship label, based on their own ideological positions. From this discussion with the eThekwini municipal planners, it was suggested that for the city that was being “mentored”, perhaps the label did not have much meaning. This is an important conclusion that will be revisited when the results from the interviews with the planners from the Namibia and Malawi are analyzed, as the findings are not at all what the eThekwini municipal planners had assumed they would be.

When the mentorship concept was tested with the UCLG respondents both officials admitted that there was sensitivity about the term and that many people have criticized the ongoing use of the mentorship label. However, the starting point of the UCLG was that whilst there was a hierarchical slant implicit in the concept, this was highly defensible. For the UCLG, what made the program successful was that the mentor was charged with taking full responsibility of the learning process. The analogy of a coach and trainee was used to make the point that one party had the responsibility of supporting the other, given that they have the experience, energy and capacity, and that they were both part of the same team with one single goal that they had jointly shared and were committed to:

The mentor is like a coach, who is the senior one, supporting the other to grow through sharing knowledge in a transparent and generous way.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

So whilst there was unevenness in the way the term was understood between eThekweni municipal officials themselves and between eThekweni municipal officials and the UCLG, it seemed that this was not important enough to jeopardize the program or hinder it any way. It seemed that a pragmatic approach was adopted amongst the ‘mentors’ in Durban, best expressed by one of the planners:

Well... we don't argue with the UCLG anymore, we just use our own terms. For us it is about a long-lasting learning relationship, not about whether we call ourselves mentors or mentees.

Head of Planning, eThekweni Municipality

From the above reflection from the senior planning staff member of the eThekweni Municipality emerges a subtle, but important notion of an underlying power dynamic. It is almost a benign resignation that there was no point in challenging the UCLG on the use of the concept of mentorship. It suggested too that these are just semantics, and what was more important was the actual relationship that mattered. This pragmatic approach, however, was clearly *not* shared by the

officials from ALAN, whose views on the concept of ‘mentorship’ was very frank and illuminating and pointed to the first point of critical contestation in the case study.

For the Namibians, the ‘mentorship’ label was clearly politically loaded, and implied that one city is more knowledgeable than the other, and would therefore involve a process of one side giving and the other side merely receiving. Part of the difficulty with the term which emerged during further probing was the perception that the concept originated in Europe where it was assumed that the knowledge was held and to be merely transferred to Africa.

In our African context, the assumption that the ‘mentee’ has absolutely no skills and experience and expertise at all and has to learn from the other is a bit problematic, actually. For us, a much preferred concept is ‘learning exchange’ as this implies the sharing of aspects of municipal governance that each municipality is good at. It also allows for mutual benefit for both partners

Senior ALAN official

Again, with the Namibian planners from Otjiwarongo great insights into the difficulties with a generalized notion of city mentorship was gained. For the planning manager, whilst the mentorship tag in itself may not be problematic, a loose application of the mentorship notion could prove to be more destructive than beneficial. In reflecting on the concept of mentorship, she posed thought-provoking questions:

A mentor for what and a mentor for whom? What am I mentoring... and the knowledge that I am supposed to give, and the knowledge that I am imparting, is it really relevant for my mentee or not?... There must be similarity in the identities between mentor and mentees, otherwise the mentor starts imposing things that will never work.

Planning manager, Otjiwarongo Municipality

This aspect of knowing the area, understanding the context and appreciating the differences that was raised as important in a city-to-city learning relationship by the planning manager in Otjiwarongo was also elaborated on by the Otjiwarongo planner, who was the lead facilitator in

the strategic planning process and the key point of contact between the eThekweni and Otjiwarongo municipal teams. For him, the label was less problematic than the mindset that comes with the label. Flexibility and openness to listen and learn was seen as critical elements in the relationship. He explained:

In the context of our learning, maybe it can also go wrong if the mentor comes with an attitude that ‘I am the mentor and I know best’. So I think that all of us in life, whether mentor or mentee, life is a learning process and we can all learn from each other. The mentor should also be open to learning and should not feel that I own the expertise. Some mentors you will find are very rigid and are not open to ask themselves about the relevance due to context.

Municipal planner, Otjiwarongo Municipality

In further probing whether this attitude was prevalent during this program it was made clear that this was not at the case, however, that it was being raised as a theoretical or general concern. Interestingly too, the ‘mentorship’ label also proved to be particularly problematic with the facilitation team at the Mzuzu City Council. For the Malawians, this concept again conveyed the notion of an unequal and skewed relationship, where only one side was giving and the other side was a passive recipient who was compelled to apply what was being shared uncritically and without adaptation:

I am not very comfortable with this label. It is because there is like a giant and then a small city. But experience has shown that even from small cities, the giants can learn. So I would say the best is to coin it as a learning exchange. You see there are implications if you say that you are being mentored. You will always think that what has worked in that particular area, will work in this particular area. You must leave room for customization, so for me, mentor is like the giant.

Lead facilitator, Mzuzu City Council

One of the Malawian support facilitators spoke passionately about how the use of a word can inform the way in which behavioral expectations can be structured. For him, using the mentorship

label meant that there would be student-teacher relationship, which ultimately meant that one side implicitly knew more and was expected to control or at least manage the relationship. The need for a more neutral concept such as learning exchange was proposed:

Mentorship is really quite a strong word. If you had to take it seriously from the definition of it, what it means is that if I am being mentored, then I just have to sit down and listen, so it becomes difficult to propose because I am being mentored. There is a teacher there, and a student here to listen to what the teacher says and s/he knows it all. Mentorship is a word that deters other people from contributing... The notion of ‘city-to-city learning’ or partnership offers the opportunity for mutual learning and the exchange of ideas, where people are free to express themselves.

Support facilitator one, Mzuzu City Council

How do the findings in the case study resonate with the literature on mentorship, as discussed in Chapter 3? It is suggested that the Namibian and Malawian interviewees’ responses resonate best with the somewhat more conventional view of mentorship as a predominantly one-sided hierarchical relationship as articulated by many writers such as Devos (2004) and Manathunga (2007) that were identified earlier in the literature review. What is critically important to note, however, is that in the last five years, this traditional notion of mentorship has been critiqued, and more progressive notions of “peer mentorship” between colleagues in a more equal and reciprocal learning relationship have been gaining momentum in the learning literature (Badger, 2010; Huizing, 2012; Linden et al., 2013; Preston et al., 2014). The point to be made, however, is that despite what the latest thinking in the learning literature on more progressive notions of concepts, for the African planners on the ground, these terms were not appropriate as they had internalized and had strongly identified with the traditional notions of mentorship.

In pursuing this issue during the interview with the previous Municipal Manager from the Mzuzu City Council, a less tempered view around the concept of mentorship emerged. For him, what the process was called was far less important compared to the quality of the relationship and the attitudes between the partners:

Looking at the label, I think ‘mentoring’ could be okay, as the one city had more experience in planning processes, and the mentee has a lot more to learn. If there are other terms that could be used, that is fine too, as some people may not be comfortable with the term. For me peer learning may be a better term. We could also talk about city-city learning... I don’t know, stakeholders could come up with better terms. The most important thing is to look at the purpose and the spirit of the relationship. The mentor has need to be developed.

Former Municipal Manager, Mzuzu City Council

This perspective from a seasoned and well respected Municipal Manager, who has since assumed the position of Municipal Manager of Malawi’s largest metropolitan area, is interesting in that it goes beyond the language to focus attention on looking at the intention and spirit of the relationship between the cities. Notwithstanding this observation, he conceded that a new term was needed, given the sensitivities implicit with the concept.

The researcher also canvassed the views of the former City Manager of the eThekweni Municipality on the concept of ‘mentorship’ to determine whether it was indeed just about semantics, and perhaps a red herring that would serve only as a distraction. The response from this city leader and academic who was instrumental in introducing the program in the eThekweni Municipality, and was the Co-chair of the UCLG is important and draws attention to the contestation of the concept. His insights are valuable and are therefore cited here in its entirety:

I took issue with the concept... it was a battle between the UCLG from the global north and myself representing the south. You see, mentorship can be used in a person to person context, as there are people with experience and those without experience. But the more I studied cities the more I learned that there is no city that knows everything, that is better than another, and there cannot be a one-to-one relationship there. Even in the most rural, the dustiest, the most devastating of contexts there is something to learn there, and sometimes there are really good experiences there. If you are thinking city-to-city, then it has to be partnerships, not mentorships.

Former City Manager, eThekweni Municipality

The results from the case study have shown that the whilst the program has been progressing for the last five years without overt objection to the ‘mentorship’ label there are some serious reservations ranging from discomfort through to an explicit dislike of the concept. These were revealed only during this research project, and not otherwise raised at all during the program by any of the protagonists, except for the former eThekweni Municipality City Manager. It is worth reiterating at this point the phronetic research approach adopted in this research, which involves a more active role for researchers, who become “actors in the flow of history rather than bystanders” (Sandercock & Attili, 2012: 164). Given this philosophical stance, the researcher requested that the preliminary findings from his research be presented to all the key stakeholders including the UCLG, UCLGA, funders and the respective cities involved in the program.

The emerging challenge with the concept of mentorship was presented as a key tension point at a reflection workshop organized in Mozambique in March 2015. At this session, there was consensus that in moving forward the notion of learning exchange or peer learning would be used as the official terminology of the UCLG. What is significant is that it was only through the intervention of this research that a key tension point was identified, and presented back to key stakeholders, and then through consensual collaboration an alternative concept found that was acceptable to all players involved in the case study. Working in this phronetic research mode, and becoming an actor rather than a bystander in the UCLG case study, for the researcher, is a powerful way to contribute to transformative planning practice on the continent.

Whilst some respondents have dismissed or discounted the debate as a distraction centered on mere semantics, it is posited that given the emotion around the issue; this could also be a useful indicator or pointer to a more fundamental issue of recognizing subtle power relationships at play – an issue that will be developed later on in the analysis that explores this theme. What is turned to next is the related aspect of whether or not learning between cities involves a one-sided transfer of knowledge from ‘mentor’ to ‘mentee’ that was referred to in the definition of city-to-city learning or about a more equal relationship with mutual benefit.

5.4.3. Who learns and who benefits?

This issue of the extent to which benefits accrue to the eThekwini municipal officials as ‘mentors’ in the program was an important issue probed by the researcher during the focus group discussion, as it helped to clarify whether learning was in fact a one way process. As shown in the previous section, even though participants may have started out conceptualizing learning and mentorship as predominantly a transfer of knowledge on one direction, as the focus group discussions progressed, interesting results emerged.

After listening to their peers share their experiences, it was clear that all participants found that the process of subconscious reflection and introspection on the side that is meant to be sharing the knowledge was a very useful process even though it was an unintended consequence of the interaction. The eThekwini municipal team expressed that they had experienced this in both the Namibian and Malawian settings, as they were forced to think critically about their planning processes when confronted with questions from their colleagues:

Each time there is a question particularly about the nature of the participation process that we followed in eThekwini, caused me to reflect again about how we did it. Fielding critical questions forces us to re-examine our process, which is actually very useful for our purposes.

Lead facilitator, eThekwini Municipality

During the focus group workshop, officials from the Development Planning Unit of the Municipality also again reflected on their own mentorship journey with colleagues from Sao Paulo, Brazil – a mentorship program facilitated by the UCLG - who shared the Brazilian housing model with them in order to improve the quality of the Durban human settlements program.

Come to think of it, our Brazilian colleagues came to the conclusion that the Durban team was ‘like a mirror’ that allowed them to critically reflect and even go back home and rethink certain aspects of their own planning as a result of our interactions.

Senior planner, eThekwini Municipality

The case study therefore appears to validate the usefulness of transformational learning theory highlighted in the literature review earlier, which emphasizes personally relevant experiences emerging through “social interactions, peer dialogues and self-reflection” (Preston et al., 2014: 55). As the notion of self-reflection is a common feature in the learning literature, as noted by writers from the global North such as Devers-Kanoglu (2009) and Higgins (2011), the southern African experience also suggests a confirmation that this internal reflection process helps contribute to practitioner learning.

Interesting too, was the fact that despite the unevenness of understanding of the concept of city-to-city learning, all focus group participants agreed that both sides involved in the relationship did enjoy some mutual benefits. In probing how to ensure there was a best match of the two cities in order to maximize the benefits to both sides involved in the city-to-city learning and whether indeed having a perfect match was a defining characteristic, it was interesting to note that in the eThekweni Municipality there was total group consensus that the perfect match was not critical:

You can never find a city that totally matches another city... there are always differences. One needs to look beyond the differences. You have to recognize when difference makes a difference and when they don't. Actually it's just a feel that you get, and you have to work through it.

Head of Planning, eThekweni Municipality

The focus group participants also accepted that challenges are obviously experienced due to the different legal, political and institutional contexts, but that this was easily overcome through understanding and through making these differences explicit. This point was reiterated by a member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat who argues the case for mutual learning. For her:

City-to-city learning is a very powerful form of learning where there already exists a measure of implicit understanding of the context within which practitioners need to perform and learn from each other.

Member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat

Similarly too, the stage of development in the planning cycle too was not regarded as a constraint, and the observation that learning can occur from a city that is not performing particularly well in certain aspects was also made. This point was also made by the UCLG interviewees too. For them, far more critical was the issue of local technicians wanting to learn; investing their time, their energy, their commitment to make it work. It was clear that if the city felt that this was an imposed program, then it will not yield the results intended. This point was also accepted by the Namibians, who added that despite differing contexts, peers are able to recognize leanings and apply them immediately. This is an aspect that will be revisited when a framework for city-to-city learning will be developed.

In analyzing who benefits from the learning process, the former eThekweni Municipality City Manager was able to offer the most insightful and critical comments around the uneven spread of benefits:

The benefits are not spread widely. There is not really broader participation in the learning. It moves the teams directly involved into new plains of thinking; but frankly not everyone is carried through. Once this imbalance is created, it is 'like moss rolling down a hill which just grows and grows'. To solve this we need to invest in the partnerships and do serious thinking about what is learned. Once this investment is made the returns are easier.

Former City Manager, eThekweni Municipality

One of the biggest challenges with city-to-city learning raised by the former City Manager of the eThekweni Municipality was that the learning curve for the participating officials in international learning projects was sometimes extremely steep. Their experience in the mentorship exposed them to new ideas and ways of doing things that were sometimes not accepted by those who had not been part of the learning exchanges. Whilst not making reference to the UCLG program, it was admitted that by empowering some officials or political leadership only, and not others, can lead to serious challenges later, as not all are on the same level of understanding.

From the former City Manager's experience, this seemingly insignificant point about the extent to which the base needs to be broadened to include all key stakeholders in city-to-city learning had important governance consequences in the eThekweni Municipality case. Flyvberg's (2002: 2) insistence on "grounding our theorizing in the actual politics of city-building" is relevant here for this research project. The case study shows that careful attention needs to be paid to who is learning and highlights the need for the entire collective leadership team to learn together.

For the researcher, what stood out from the afore-going analysis is a simple, yet fundamentally important point. This is that ultimately, it is not so much that cities learn, but that individuals do. City-to-city learning programs might create the platform and help structure meaningful engagement, but it is individuals that ultimately learn from the experience. Whilst this point is taken for granted, it cannot be emphasized enough. From the former eThekweni Municipality City Manager's reflection, the single greatest shortcoming in his own international city-to-city learning experience was that despite his personal or individual learning curve being extremely steep, the conditions were not created for him to share this with his entire political leadership team.

In noting that the delegations from both Malawi and Namibia who visited Durban to participate in the training and learn first-hand from the experiences of eThekweni municipal practitioners comprised of only a selected few municipal practitioners begins to sound alarm bells. Whilst it is accepted that the budgets for travel were limited, perhaps more sustainable long-term learning outcomes may have been cemented if spaces had been created for other key stakeholders from the respective cities to be involved.

From the international literature on learning, where the city of Turin for example is considered a case of good practice, the point is made that what enabled city learning processes was the "network mechanisms of public, private and civic leaders" (Campbell, 2012a: 102). Moreover, in that critical examination of the city learning processes in the cities of Portland, Charlotte and Turin, the broad based nature of learning and engagement with key stakeholders stands out. Providing a good indicator of exactly who was engaged in the process, Campbell (2012a: 122) identifies the key actors as consisting of "an amalgam of elected officials, corporations, and commercial

establishments, developers and home-builders, neighborhood associations, NGOs and large civic institutions like universities and hospitals”.

Noteworthy too is the observation in the case study that individuals with steep learning curves would also more likely challenge prevailing organizational culture which sometimes could work to alienate those who are not ready for such changes. Hence the issue of ensuring that learning delegations are broadened to include at least the most important stakeholders is a key consideration discussed in the next chapter.

5.5. Uncovering the mechanics of city-to-city learning methodologies

As indicated in Chapter 3 little is known about exactly *how* the knowledge and capacity transfer takes place and about the actual learning practices experienced by the practitioners involved (Bontenbal, 2013). Whilst Campbell (2012a) does outline a useful learning typology and unpacks city learning styles, no study has been conducted into the mechanics of how African cities learn from each other, the actual process followed, the learning methodology employed and the duration of the exchange. Attempting to fill in this research gap, the eThekweni Municipality’s focus group participants were asked to explain exactly how the learning process unfolded. As explained in Chapter 1, uncovering the detailed mechanics of the city-to-city learning process, is the second research objective in this project.

The first response from the participants was that as busy practitioners, they had never had the time or inclination to systematically document exactly how the process of learning had unfolded. The lead facilitator in the mentorship program even conceded that she had to consult her diary for dates in preparation for the focus group session. This research project had therefore been a catalyst for the municipal participants to begin a process of actively thinking about their involvement in the project. As they begin to share the beginnings of the story, even the Head of the Department was amazed that the project had such a long history, and spanned twice the number of years that she had initially thought.

For them this was a telling irony, as MILE had been established as a knowledge management vehicle, but had not developed mechanisms to preserve the institutional memory of the mentorship program. This issue of the need to carefully document learning journeys in order to prevent the loss of institutional memory will be included as part of the recommendations around knowledge management in city-to-city learning processes.

Tables 5.8 and 5.9 below reflect the timelines for the Malawian and Namibian mentorship programs, as constructed by the focus group participants:

26-28 July 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eThekwini Municipality facilitated a Strategic Planning Workshop for Eziqoleni Municipality in Margate. NALAO and ALAN officials attended this workshop. The intention was that they would be capacitated to be able to facilitate similar workshops in Namibia with eThekwini as their mentor.
1-3 August 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Officials from ALAN and NALAO attended a 3 day capacity enhancement session in Durban facilitated by MILE on Outcomes Based Planning and Defining Challenges, Developing Visions and Strategic Action Plans and to prepare for the municipal technical support in Namibia.
6-10 November 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Strategic Planning Workshop was facilitated by MILE in Maltohohe. 5 smaller Namibian Municipalities (Pilot) - Usakos, Karibib, Omaruru, Otjiwarongo, Maltohohe and 3 larger Namibian municipalities (Part 1) - Windhoek, Walvis Bay and Swakopmund attended. The following outputs were achieved: Draft Vision Statements for 5 smaller municipalities, a draft Strategic Plan for Maltohohe Municipality, and a Road Map of Action. eThekwini Municipality agreed to return to assist the Pilot municipalities with technical planning.
21-23 June 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MILE visited Swakopmund to share knowledge of eThekwini's Social Inclusion of their Strategic Planning process and also assist NALAO and ALAN develop a Road Map of Action for the 5 smaller Namibian Municipalities (Pilot) - Usakos, Karibib, Omaruru, Otjiwarongo and Maltohohe. The eThekwini Municipality agreed to advise and/ or return to assist NALAO and ALAN with Leadership Training for their Councilors, Public Participation process, Budgeting process and Performance Monitoring process.
16-17 August 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Namibian Delegation visited eThekwini to learn from the Human Settlements Department on Community Engagement Strategies.
18-20 March 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An official from NALAO attended the UCLG Intermediary Cities Learning Exchange that was held in KwaDukuza. A reflection session was held with delegates from Namibia and Malawi to discuss the importance of evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of the MILE mentorship program in Namibia and Mzuzu. All present agreed that this was important and that MILE should take ownership of facilitating this process.
25-26 February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MILE together with officials from Kwadukuza Municipality visit Swakopmund for a Peer Learning Exchange on Intermediary Cities. SMILE (Swakopmund Municipal Institute of Learning) was officially launched in Namibia.
07-13 April 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MILE in partnership with SMILE, ALAN, and NALAO facilitated a six day capacity enhancement program. The aim of the program was to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the capacity of officials from Usakos, Karibib, Maltohohe and Otjiwarongo on TDS development and participatory planning processes. It also had action learning on Day 6 with the facilitation of Otjiwarongo's stakeholder public participation workshop. Review Karibib, Usakos, Otjiwarongo and Maltohohe's TDS process and offer suggestions on how to improve each of the town's plans. Make the case for documentation of processes as part of town's knowledge management imperative.
18-19 May 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MILE attended a workshop in Walvis Bay together with officials from ALAN, NALAO, SMILE, Karibib, Usakos, Otjiwarongo, Maltohohe and the Ministry. The purpose of the workshop was to review: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the effectiveness of the municipal technical support that was offered by MILE to municipalities in Namibia since 2011. their TDS. to officially launch the TDS of Karibib, Usakos, Otjiwarongo and Maltohohe.

Table 5.8: The Namibian mentorship journey

Table 5.9: The Malawian mentorship journey

February 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First engagement with officials from Mzuzu City and MILE in Mzuzu. Officials from Mzuzu presented the areas where support was required. This engagement coincided with the launch of Lilongwe City Assembly City Development Strategy.
2 010 and 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officials from eThekweni Municipality visited Mzuzu City Council to hold pre-planning meetings.
1-3 August 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officials from Mzuzu City Council together with their Public Utility Provider (ESCOM) attended a 3 day capacity enhancement session in Durban facilitated by MILE on Outcomes Based Planning and Defining Challenges, Developing Visions and Strategic Action Plans and to prepare for the Strategic Planning workshop in Mzuzu.
19-22 September 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Strategic Planning Workshop for Mzuzu City Council was facilitated by MILE in Nkatha Bay, Malawi. A draft Strategic Plan was developed and the Nkhukuti Accord was signed by all the workshop participants viz . Senior City Officials, officials from different levels of government including the Minister of Agriculture, Service Providers and Civil Society Leadership.
31 October – 2 November 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MILE attended a review workshop in Lilongwe that was facilitated by UCLG and Cities Alliance. The purpose of this workshop was to review and evaluate the mentorship between eThekweni Municipality and Mzuzu City Council, and Johannesburg City Council and Lilongwe City Council. This workshop focused on what has worked well in the mentorship (important points in the partnership, what has been achieved in the CDS process and what needs to continue) and what did not work well in the mentorship (bottlenecks).
18-20 March 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officials from the Mzuzu and Lilongwe City Councils in Malawi attended the UCLG Intermediary Cities Learning Exchange that was held in KwaDukuza. A reflection session was held with delegates from Malawi and Namibia to discuss the importance of evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of the MILE mentorship program in Mzuzu and Namibia. All present agreed that this was important and that MILE should take ownership of facilitating this process.
30 September – 02 October 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MILE facilitated a Strategic Planning review workshop for Mzuzu City Council. The purpose was to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) allow the newly elected political leadership of Mzuzu City Council the opportunity to provide direction to their strategic planning process. b) review the progress made since the last strategic planning workshop in September 2011. c) identify the strategic challenges and underlying causes of these challenges that face the City Council. d) devise an action plan (with monitoring mechanisms) that addresses these challenges. e) identify key areas of collaboration between Mzuzu City Council, eThekweni Municipality and UCLG.

In explaining how the learning process worked, participants made reference to the first southern African UCLG mentorship program between Johannesburg and Lilongwe, Malawi. This mentorship program which commenced at the same time as that of the eThekwini Municipality proceeded much faster than eThekwini Municipality, given the appointment of a dedicated consultant on behalf of the Johannesburg Council to support the Lilongwe process. The eThekwini team contrasted this approach with theirs which differed fundamentally in that it involved a hands-on training and empowerment phase where the facilitators from the mentee cities were invited to Durban to understand their strategic planning process.

As indicated in the program in Appendix Three, the Namibian and Malawian colleagues were provided an opportunity to begin to internalize the outcomes-based strategic planning methodology. This was done through a sharing of the eThekwini Municipality's transformation story which showed how the municipality was not being responsive to its own stakeholders, how this had led to poor quality of life results and which had prompted a new transformation plan (Dlamini & Moodley, 2002). During the training, in addition to field trips to key projects that were implemented as a result of the strategic planning prioritization process, Namibian and Malawian colleagues were also exposed to hands-on facilitation tools such as case studies. These tools were then actually used by the local planners during the process of identifying local challenges and creating vision statements when conducting their own workshops:

Our process is essentially about empowering them (reference being made to the Namibian and Malawian colleagues) to really take full ownership and control of their own strategic planning process. Unlike the Lilongwe-Johannesburg model, our eThekwini team is seen to be much more in the background, playing a supportive role. Of course this process involves a long timeframe, and commitment from all of us. Sometimes the commitment waxes and wanes over time, but generally it is there.

Lead facilitator, eThekwini Municipality

Whilst they did not have an explicit overall learning methodology, the researcher made an attempt to analyze the timeline and the various steps involved during the learning process and constructed a staged-model that summarizes the five key stages that the municipalities proceeded along during their mentorship journey. It is important to stress that this model, as depicted in Figure 5.3 below, is merely an analytical construct and did not exist prior to this research, as the process was not documented before. It is also perhaps more complex with some stages more iterative in reality, however, the model does capture the essence of the process of building the relationship between the partners, as articulated by the focus group participants.

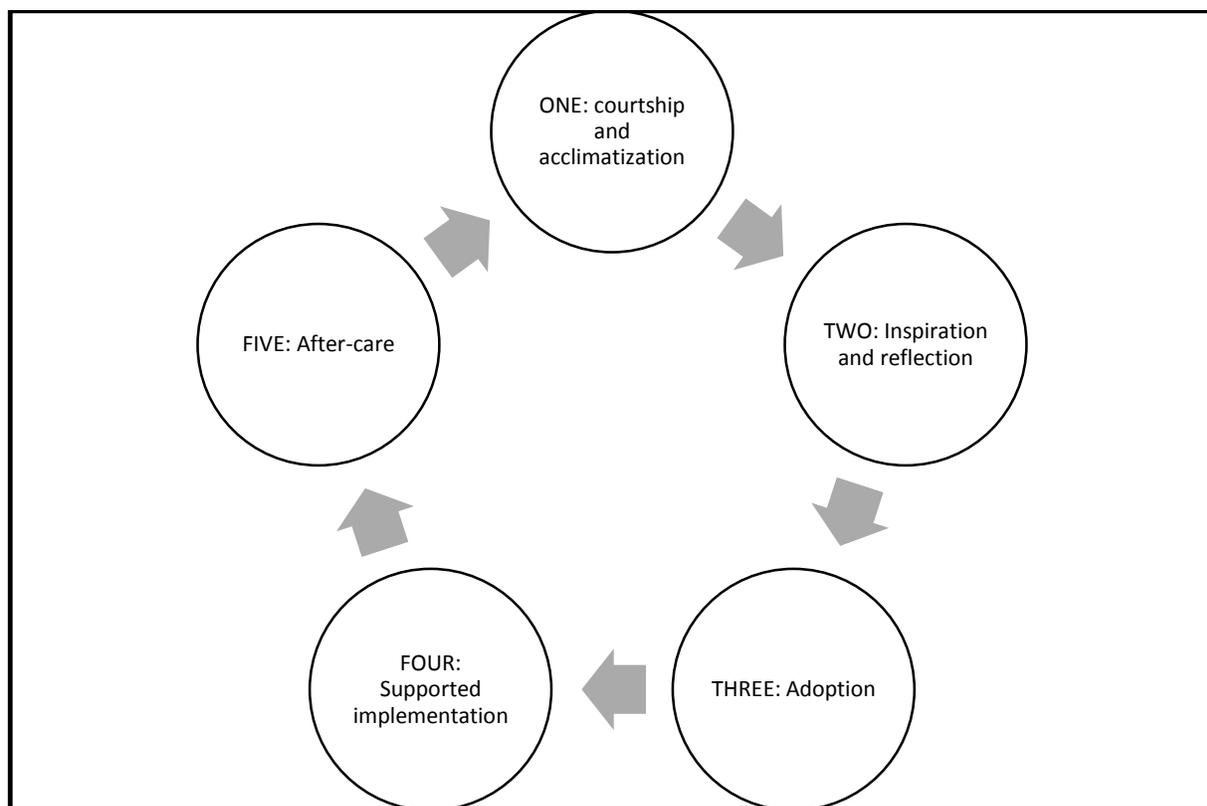


Figure 5.3: Stages in the relationship-building process

One: Courtship and acclimatization stage

This first stage of city courtship and acclimatization involved the cities exploring whether there is a potential for collaboration. Officials from each city also became familiar with each other and their respective municipal contexts. As outlined earlier, there was a heavy reliance on an external broker, or to continue with the matrimonial analogy, a city ‘match-maker’. In this instance the

program manager from the UCLG in Barcelona, a well networked, well-travelled and politically aware individual recognized the potential that Durban could play in southern Africa and played a key role as the ‘go-between’ in this early courtship stage in what was to become a relatively long-term city-to-city relationship. From this analysis, the case study suggests that if city-to-city learning is to yield powerful results based on strong relationships of trust, then a foundation must be laid in the early stage of the engagement. This is an important finding that will be noted for inclusion in the development of the learning framework.

The focus group participants admitted that this was a very time-consuming stage. As the lead facilitator stated, it was important for city officials to “really find each other”. It is interesting to note that three exploratory trips over a two year period were made to Mzuzu by the lead facilitators from Durban even before the actual mentorship process commenced. The first trip was to present the Durban model and test the appetite for a relationship. The second trip was regarded as a ‘reconnaissance’ trip to understand the lay of the land, and plan a program of action with all the role-players including Cities Alliance who was the sponsors. The third trip was to develop the details of the exchange and plan the logistics of the exchange.

The funny thing is that it was only after visiting there the third time that it was decided that the Malawians needed to come to Durban and see for themselves what was happening in Durban and meet the people involved.

Lead planner, eThekweni Municipality

During the focus group discussion, it dawned on the participants that in Namibia the initial exposure period spanned five years before the Namibian team were ready to begin the process. This was a fact that was uncovered, only through reflection and made an impact on the participants. They recalled that during the five year period a series of telephonic and e-mail interactions had ensued, including a visit from the Namibian team who were invited to watch how the Durban team supported another local municipality in KwaZulu-Natal.

Unlike in Malawi where visits were made to understand the context there, this was not the case in Namibia and according to the participants they felt that this was a less robust relationship than Mzuzu because of this shortcoming. Both the lead facilitator and lead planner agreed that more visits should have been made to Namibia to begin to understand the development context there before initiating the program. This is another important revelation that will be noted for inclusion in the development of a framework for city-to-city learning in Chapter 7.

Two: Inspiration and reflection stage

With the cities declaring their learning interest in each other, the first stage of acclimatization was then followed by a critically important process of the mentee cities being inspired by the work and the actual results of their mentors' strategic planning efforts. In this stage the mentees saw what was actually happening in the mentor city and heard moving personal testimonies and stories shared by the Durban colleagues. The Durban story of city transformation from 2001 was narrated together with inside information, shared in an environment of complete trust. After two days of closed discussions, they then conducted a city tour to observe the transformation made in the city in the form of built environment projects that had been catalyzed through the strategic planning process. They also took note of challenges that still needed to be addressed in the city. These honest, open and frank discussions, spurred on by the fact that what brought them together was a set of common challenges, as suggested by the respondents, helped to build what they regarded as a solid foundation of trust and mutual understanding between the officials of both cities.

It is acknowledged that it is difficult to test or measure this empirically as a researcher. However, it appeared that it was the power of the depth of the city-to-city interactions that helped shape the long-term learning and seemed to be the glue that held the program together. Officials engaged with each other over a prolonged period and became familiar with each other as they learned more about each other's challenges and unique contexts, keeping up the contact through ongoing e-mail dialogue and constant telephonic conference calls. A senior planner captured the essence of the uniqueness of the learning in her thoughtful consideration:

It is really surprising how every interaction, every conversation can take you deeper and deeper as we hear more about the other city... but in the same way we learn about our own city too!

Head of Planning, eThekweni Municipality

The issue of trust between planners from each of the cities appeared to be one of the most critical ingredients in allowing planners to speak their minds, challenge each other and reflect on how best to implement the strategic planning process. After much probing to get a better sense of how respondents understood and interpreted this notion of 'trust', useful insights emerged:

Trust is fundamental to make any relationship work. Long-term learning will only be successful if there is trust. Trust is built when both parties deliver on their commitments. Trust is easier to be built between peers, as opposed to a planner and a World Bank consultant. Trust is also built when all parties' behavior is geared towards achieving the common goal of learning.

Member of Cities Alliance Secretariat

Trust means valuing what is being said and then adapting this to suit the local context. There are unspoken things, for example, when funders want information on the project that might be perceived as demanding, both sides get and trust is developed.

Head of Planning, eThekweni Municipality

Trust involves giving the mentee the freedom to express themselves in an open manner.

Lead facilitator, Otjiwarongo Municipality

From these respondents, it appears that trust is important in many respects, not just for making the overall relationship work, but for ensuring that the experiences are filtered and applied to the respective unique local contexts as well as helping to ensure more open expression between the practitioners in the learning partnership. Of all the insights offered around the importance of trust, the most illuminating view was offered by one of the younger support facilitators from the Mzuzu City Council, who again used the powerful analogy of a mirror, to make the point that trust is critical for mindset and behavioral changes:

For most of the city challenges to be appreciated, it must be explained in detail. Now, you can't give details of the challenges to someone you don't trust. You have to provide an environment where everyone feels that they are important, and you appreciate what they have done, and that is where it starts. It is like how you trust your mirror, you know, that is exactly what happens. If we are to change the mindset of people, they need to look at us from that point of view, where they trust us, and whatever we say, there is no partiality in what we are saying and it is the true picture of what is there... just as we do with the mirror – whatever the mirror tells you, you believe it.

Support facilitator, Mzuzu City Council.

The perspectives offered by the interviewees were complemented with a testing of perceptions of survey respondents on the importance of building trust between the mentors and mentees in the program. In addition, the survey questionnaire also asked respondents to provide a rating of the actual level of trust that they felt was built up between the mentors and mentees from the respective cities. As cautioned earlier, these perceptions were based on a limited knowledge of the relationships between the planners and facilitators from the mentor and mentee cities, and would have been shaped predominantly based on observations at the visioning workshop only. Nonetheless, it does offer a good sense of how workshop participants perceived this important issue.

Turning firstly to an examination of respondents' perceptions of the importance of building trust between mentors and mentees, as clearly depicted in Figure 5.4 in general terms, the majority of respondents acknowledged the importance of trust, with 44% of the respondents regarding this aspect as very important and a further 12% perceived this to be important. Only 6% of the respondents viewed investing in the building of trust as not important. Perhaps also significant to note was that nearly 25% of all respondents were uncertain and chose not to respond to this question. As posited earlier, this is not surprising, as there was not much opportunity to be able to comment instructively as their involvement in the entire process had been fairly limited.

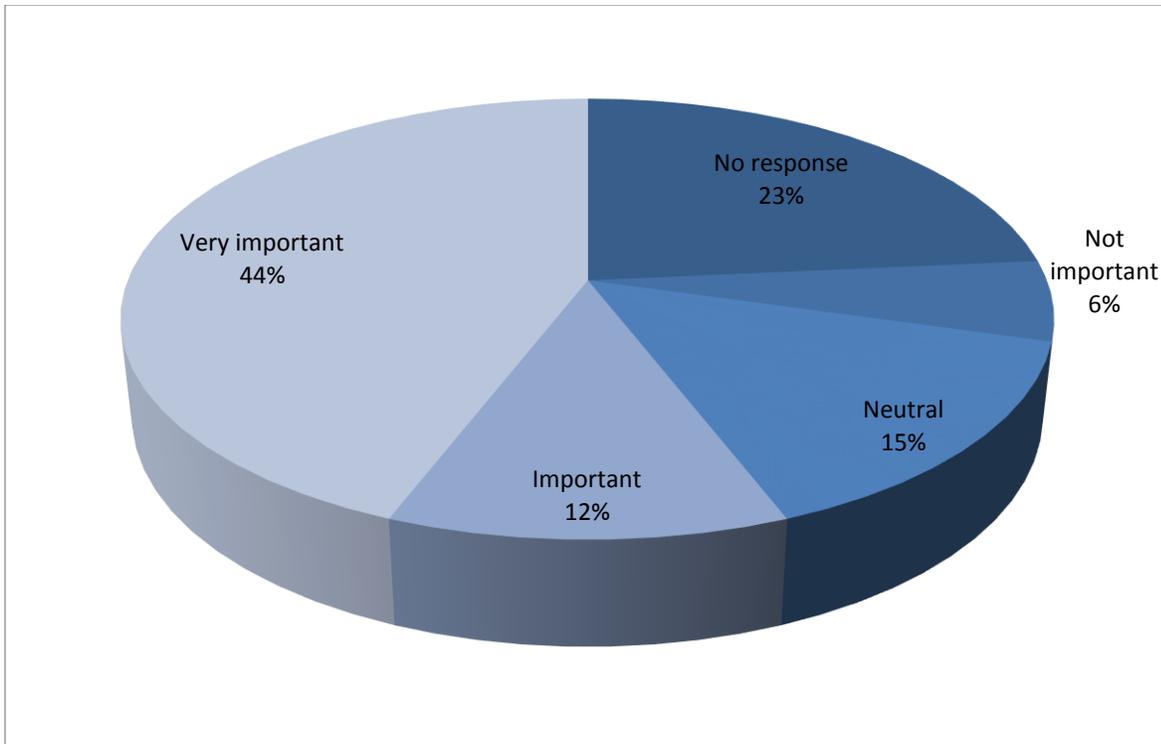


Figure 5.4: Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu respondents' perception on the importance of building trust between mentors and mentees (n=34)

A similar picture is painted when examining the respondents rating of actual trust built, with 83% of all the respondents from both cities rating the level of trust with a score of 3 and higher. In comparing how this rating differs between cities, Figure 5.5 below indicates that the Mzuzu respondents appeared to have rated the level of trust much higher, with 54% allocating a score of 5 and 29% a score of 4, compared to only 10% rating levels of trust with a score of 4 and 5 in Otjiwarongo. Again, in Mzuzu, respondents were privy to a much longer observation period and were able to watch the colleagues from both cities at work during the long day-time session and at an evening reception session as well. This most likely is a key contributor to the higher scores in Mzuzu.

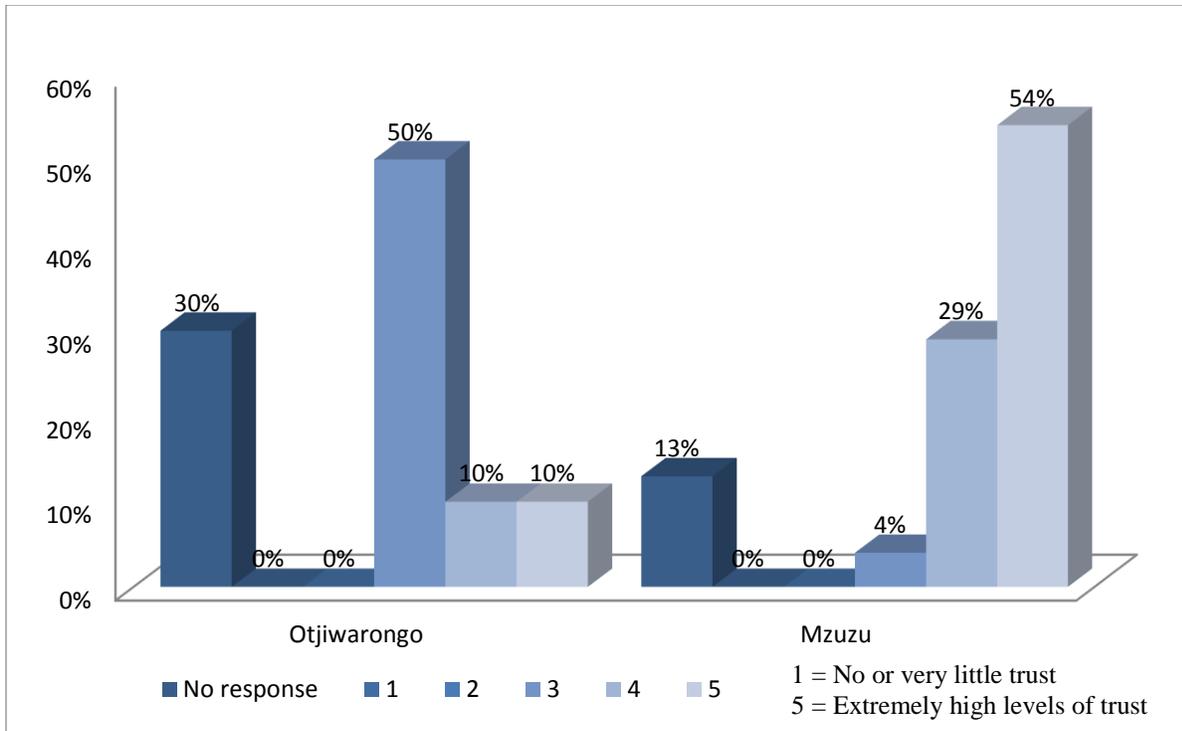


Figure 5.5: Comparative analysis of Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu respondents’ rating of actual trust built between mentors and mentees in percentage ((n=10 for Otjiwarongo and n=24 for Mzuzu))

The powerful in-depth reflections volunteered by the interviewees and supported by the survey respondents represent a critical area of contribution that the case study begins to make in terms of the validation of theory in the southern African context. Three important observations will be focused on here. As alluded to earlier, in the first instance, Habermas’ (1990: 135-136) notion that communicative reason is made easier when there is a “consensus created through shared ‘life-worlds’ — shared contexts, cultures, values and propositions about social life”, does appear to hold true, based on the views expressed by the practitioners. The fact that the practitioners were all planners and facilitators, and not a mix of different built environment professionals such as architects and engineers, and the reality that they all shared the same worldview and were particularly committed to developing powerful municipal vision statements and strategic plans, helped create a shared life-world. They spent most of their work-life grappling with similar challenges and they experience similar frustrations. This facilitated open and honest communication with each other. The case study therefore does validate this aspect of Habermas’ assertions.

Secondly, beyond this shared mindset, it is argued that what is fundamentally more important from this research is that the planners have noted that spending time with each other, relating personal stories, travelling together on the mini-bus during the field visits, having meals together and even sharing drinks after hours in relaxed settings whilst reflecting on how what was being learned can effectively be applied to their own situation, was an important part of the learning process in this second stage. The one eThekweni municipal respondent volunteering an extreme example of sharing an item of personal clothing with a colleague from abroad whose luggage was delayed, was found particularly entertaining by all the focus group participants. In a very concrete way, however, it actually reinforced the point about the extent to which practitioners can bond with each other and build up strong ties in a network of trust that is required for transformative action.

From the case study, it is clear therefore that a necessary condition for effective learning, beyond shared worldviews as identified in the literature by Habermas (1990), is this developing of trusted ties between the practitioners involved in the learning process. To reiterate this point given the gravity of the finding, this research suggests a much more nuanced understanding of learning in southern Africa. The emphasis placed by Habermas (1990) on the importance of shared worldviews is indeed accepted as a necessary; however, it is clearly not a sufficient condition for transformative action arising from the learning process. More than just sharing a planning worldview, this research shows that trust between the planners promotes critical dialogue and reflection which is fundamental for transformative action.

Thirdly, respondents also appeared to confirm the critical importance of the concept of Campbell's (2012a: 111) informal leadership networks referred to as "clouds of trust" that represent important linkages between key actors involved in a particular setting. Whilst this research did not physically map the networks, it is clear that there are key protagonists in each city that serve as the glue that hold the learning process together. These are the lead facilitators that are trusted by all the participants, and which in turn develop further networks. This was evident in Malawi, where the CEO of the Blantyre City Council was invited for the Mzuzu strategic planning workshop, as he had heard about the process from his peers in eThekweni and Mzuzu; peers that he had known and had trusted in these cities. He was excited by the process and was interested in replicating the similar strategic planning process with support from the eThekweni municipal facilitators in his

own municipality. In a similar vein, the case study also appeared to re-confirm Nonaka's (1994: 14) argument that transferring information from one context to another makes very little sense without recognizing the "embedded emotion and nuanced contexts that are associated with shared experiences".

Fourthly, these findings also validate the assertions made by von Krogh and Geleinger (2014) who propose that powerful knowledge creation processes are actually embedded in the spaces of organizations. Having practitioners from the cities engaging in face-to-face interactions is indeed important, but more critical was ensuring that these were intimate spaces and safe spaces, away from outsiders, spaces in which practitioners could bond with each other and could speak their minds without fear.

The case study therefore suggests the carefully constructed program, the way the room was laid out by the MILE facilitators ensuring intimate group discussions, the deliberate organizing of bus trips and joint dinners, all contributed to what Nonaka (1994) and Nonaka et al. (2000) referred to as a "ba", or the creation of an atmosphere of openness without any fear of potential retribution, embarrassment or fear, facilitating transformative action. Von Krogh and Geilinger (2014) made a recent call to pay more attention to these social and informal aspects of knowledge creation across organizational boundaries. This, it was argued, was necessary to begin to understand how knowledge flows informally in what is regarded as an "eco-system of organizations that are in geographically proximate spaces" (Von Krogh & Geilinger, 2014: 156).

What the findings in this case study demonstrate are that during this stage in the mentorship process, practitioners from the respective organizations (eThekweni Municipality, ALAN, NALAO, Mzuzu City Council and Otjiwarongo Municipality) came together for a particular period of time into a learning eco-system with a single unified objective of improving municipal visioning processes. This eco-system, it seemed appeared to be a safe space for most that maximized the learning potential and helped challenge previously held mindsets about city planning and development. The learning impact achieved in this time could in no way compare to time spent through virtual learning platforms or other non-physical contact sessions. Yet again,

Campbell's (2012a) thesis that human interactions and human relationships are critical to understanding successful learning comes to the fore.

In the interview with the senior UCLG respondent who was the most experienced city-to-city learning practitioner, the point about officials being inspired by face-to-face practice as being an important turning point in itself was reiterated. She held the view that when people are exposed to the city realities in a particular safe setting:

All the senses are utilized, and a much deeper identification happens. City visits are therefore fundamental... you must be exposed to the city and feel the reality of the city.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

Similarly, the UCLG program officer who had also been involved in other city-to-city learning between Brazilian and Mozambican municipalities stressed the importance of on-site visits and direct interactions between practitioners. She captured the spirit of the relationship most succinctly in observing:

People must get a chance to see each other's faces. They must know each other; the process is fortified when the exchange happens. They spend quality time together; laughing, joking and sharing problems together, getting to know where each other comes from, in their own contexts. They must have empathy with each other, and be able to put themselves in each other's shoes.

UCLG project officer

In summary then, it seems that Stage Two was an important stage in the learning process in that, according to the respondents, a solid basis for open and honest communication was laid, and trust between the planners was being built. Having been exposed to the Durban story, the practitioners from Namibia and Malawi now began to make the transition from inspiration to adoption.

Three: Adoption stage

Closely related to Stage Two, where the three-day intensive training in Durban (as reflected in Appendix Three) takes place aided with manuals, role play, case studies and site visits; a process of reflection and challenging assumptions begins. A fundamental part of the training involves all role-players quietly but actively reflecting on what it would take to implement a transformation process in their respective mentee cities. The process is designed so that by this time, the planners from the mentee city become convinced of the need for change and are inspired and enthused to take action. The transition to the third stage of adoption is therefore smooth. Having been inspired and having gone through the process of internal reflection, they are ready to adopt the ‘outcomes-based planning’ methodology and are eager to roll out a similar strategic planning process in their own city, mindful of the need to make adaptations along the way to suit the specificity of their own unique local contexts.

What is theoretically relevant in this stage of the learning process is the observation of Nonaka and von Krogh (2009) who recognize the process of organizational knowledge creation as involving the amplification of knowledge in social contexts and selectively connecting it to existing knowledge in the organization. The findings from the case study show that practitioners admitted to reflection about application to their own context, after engaging in these safe spaces. In such spaces, it appeared that practitioners engaged openly and honestly, and then made time to see how the new information which challenged their mindsets could be applied to their own contexts back home.

It is important to emphasize that the work done by contemporary academics in the field of organizational learning identified in the literature review chapter that make the case that having different contexts is just as important in city learning is relevant here (Johnson & Wilson, 2009; Van Ewijk, 2012). Their suggestion that interactions with practitioners from different contexts may provide an ideal opportunity for critical reflection of one’s own approaches certainly holds true in the case study, as admitted by the respondents. The idea therefore that it is on the basis of experience that people change their perspective following a process of internal reflection that transforms information into knowledge and ultimately learning, as evinced by Higgins (2011),

does appear to be confirmed by the study. This is a very illuminating finding that will be built on in the learning framework to be developed later.

Another key theoretical insight from the case study in this regard is the demonstration that practitioners do not glibly import models from one context to another. The process of reflection and interrogation of the validity of the learning and the ability to apply it to practitioner's own unique local context comes through very clearly. This acknowledgement has been made in the literature by Robinson (2011) who accepts that city strategies are in fact significantly reconfigured when they arrive in particular places. This realization of the need to recognize the specificity of the local context and the unique geographies of space in implementing planning innovations from other cities is yet another consideration that will be flagged for inclusion in the chapter on development of a framework for city-to-city learning.

Four: Supported implementation stage

Equipped with the know-how and tools to run their workshops, facilitators from the mentee cities became activated to play an active leadership role, running the strategic planning sessions themselves in respective municipalities, with the full support of their local political leadership, and the technical support of the Durban team.

In reflecting on this learning process, the UCLG respondent stressed the point of having strong leadership to make sure that the planning process stays on track. For her:

The learning of a city relies on the learning of a team that can fall or stand depending on the leader.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

This aspect of strong leadership whilst regarded by all respondents as necessary during the entire learning process, it was suggested that it was during the period of implementation that this was critical. Making the transition from planning to implementation, they agreed, was the point at which most processes failed.

Importantly, and what appeared to set this process apart from the Johannesburg-Lilongwe mentorship program was the fact that the mentors play only a watching role, providing counsel and advice only during the debriefing sessions. The UCLG and funders were not part of this process, but relied on reports from the team.

The researcher accompanied the lead facilitator to one of the sessions held in Otjiwarongo to observe how this process unfolded in practice. What stood out was the patience from the eThekweni municipal planner, who resisted the temptation to intervene in the workshop to answer questions raised by the civil society stakeholders. Suggestions on how to move forward was not made publicly, but discussions were held over tea and lunch. The researcher recorded these as journal observations and during the debriefing session mentioned these to the eThekweni municipal planner, who confessed that resisting active participation required discipline as there was an urge to help shape the process. She reflected that this was all part of the personal learning and development process.

Five: After-care stage

In this final stage, the mentees have now taken ownership of the workshop with the Durban team merely providing support. Once a road map is developed, the targets identified are self-monitored by the local team. The Durban team did, however, play an oversight role, using opportunities at conferences and workshops to meet to discuss progress, over and beyond the telephone conferences and e-mail dialogues. As in any union, the post-honeymoon stage is perhaps the most challenging one, as the novelty of the learning relationship has worn out, and the hard work of implementation has begun. The need for open and continued communication between learning partners during this time is key to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

In summary, this five stage model is based on a longer term relationship between the cities and is characterized by an explicit attempt to empower the mentee city through early and intensive capacitation. There is also built-in ongoing support throughout the learning process, with the mentee's involvement diminishing with time. As stated earlier, this learning methodology has not been documented in the literature, and the eThekweni Municipality's facilitators are eager to adopt a similar approach in their future engagements with other African cities.

In reflecting on the practitioners' notions of city-to-city learning, as well as the fundamental thrust of the emerging model of learning involving the enhancement of peers' internal capacities to learn new ideas and change mindsets in order to ultimately improve the strategic direction of long-term planning, an important observation is made. There is an alignment between this case study's conceptualization of learning and the notion posited by Campbell (2012a: 9) of learning as involving a dynamic of leadership incorporating elements of "outside knowledge acquisition, development of internal capacities to learn and idea-exchanges on both policy and practice in order to influence the strategic city changes in the longer term".

The case study also resonates with the work of Toens and Landwehr (2009: 4) and their suggestion of what they call "improvement-oriented learning", as it goes beyond just change towards making a marked improvement in the way planning is done. Insofar as proposing a conceptualization of city-to-city learning is concerned then, it does appear that despite the northern bias of the literature, the essential tenets of learning between cities does, as identified by Campbell (2012a), hold true in the southern African context. However, as shown in this chapter, not all of the suggestions in the literature hold true for the case study. It has been shown that a far more nuanced understanding, especially in terms of the institutional model governing learning, is called for.

5.6. Summary and conclusions

Working as a manager in the eThekweni Municipality in the field of city-to-city learning and tasked with a mandate to develop the capacities of African municipalities (as outlined in the methodology chapter), the researcher was clearly perceived as an 'insider' within the local government bureaucracy. It is suggested that it is for this reason; that through critical reflection, perhaps based on familiarity and trust with the researcher, results emerged that represented key 'aha' moments not only for the researcher, but for the respondents themselves. This is an important point to note, as the research provided a unique opportunity for the practitioners to introspect, identify challenges, and most importantly, begin to dialogue about the direction that future learning should take.

Duggleby (2005) and Cameron (2000) have recognized this transformative power of such research, especially when the right conditions are created. This is also consistent with the phronetic research approach and pragmatic philosophical stance outlined in the conceptual framework earlier, and as espoused by the numerous researchers cited earlier working in this tradition. It is indeed exciting that doctoral research can be used a tool for critical reflection with the aim of transforming the quality of practice in southern Africa. This point was acknowledged by the practitioners themselves and augurs well for future academic and local government cooperation.

In this section, a succinct overview of the key findings emerging from a discussion of the three key research themes is presented. Some of the insights that emerged from the focus group sessions and in-depth interviews have not been documented in southern Africa and are significant in the process of exposing the rich, yet underground knowledge economy in city-to city learning.

The first key finding is that practitioners are able to identify clear and measurable characteristics of successful strategic planning processes that are valued and recognized as worthy of being emulated. The case study analysis crystallized a set of five distinct areas that is useful in providing a yardstick to measure good urban strategic planning practice. Whilst not the focus of this research, this has been identified as an important area for future research collaboration.

Secondly, and more importantly, the case study revealed that whilst cities themselves are constantly searching for city partnerships, there is a reliance on brokers that help connect cities with each other. These brokers, it was found are often international agents such as the UCLG that are able not just to match demand and supply in the knowledge economy, but critically they are able to access funding for such partnerships from donor agencies.

The third related significant finding emerging from the analysis is the importance of investing in an entrenched knowledge management system that is able to effectively promote institutionalized learning, as was the case with eThekweni Municipality's MILE. The creation of such a vehicle dedicated to learning allowed time and energy for the development of highly skilled facilitators who deliberately created the conditions for deliberations in a non-threatening environment, reinforcing the notions of Nonaka's (1994) *ba* and Aydalot's (1986) innovative milieu, which they

argued was key for successful learning. Such a vehicle too, it appeared, was a catalyst for enabling “higher order learning” (Campbell, 2012b: 11), placing eThekweni Municipality with proactive learners such as Seattle.

In a detailed analysis of how practitioners themselves make sense of city-to-city learning, four distinct notions emerged. Whilst these will not be repeated here, what stood out in the analysis is the notion of a two-way learning process arising from shared life-worlds, given the practitioners common backgrounds. This finding appeared to confirm Habermas’ (1990) contention that this common worldview facilitated action that was transformative. Most critically, what the case study findings revealed, however, was that whilst this worldview was a necessary condition, it may not be sufficient for transformational action. There appeared to be another critical social ingredient that emerged later in the analysis. The study showed that building up strong ties in a network of trusted relationships, developed through interactions in social settings and by speaking their minds without the fear of retribution was actually a fundamentally important ingredient that spurred on critical reflection and ultimately led to transformative action.

The case study also unearthed discontent from some quarters around the notion of ‘mentorship’ – a seemingly neutral concept that had until the intervention of this research project continued to be used by the UCLG and its international partners. Whilst this concept could be applied to individuals, there was resistance to applying this term to cities. For some practitioners, this spoke to an unequal relationship where one was perceived to be giving and the other merely receiving. In the context of dynamic African cities, it was argued that practitioners can always learn from each other despite differences in relation to size, complexity and context. The preferred notion of ‘learning exchange’ or ‘peer-learning’ was mooted. Based on the analogy of the development of human relationship from early courtship to consolidation, a five-staged learning model was also suggested, each with distinct characteristics that provided opportunities to test the relevance of contemporary learning literature in the southern African context.

As indicated earlier, the Cities Alliance and UCLG have indicated great interest in this research, and an opportunity for feedback was created in Mozambique and more recently in Barcelona in September 2015 to allow the preliminary findings of the research to be shared. This is consistent with the orientation of the practice movement and the phronetic research planning tradition referred to in the conceptual framework. Furthermore, every attempt to share lessons learned in order to improve the quality of strategic planning practice will be made post publication of the full research project. This is important as knowledge sharing has an important transformative role and it can be an important catalyst in re-configuring the geographies of learning and helping to distribute power more evenly. It is this aspect of the politics of city-to-city learning that will be considered next.

In this first of two analytical chapters, the terrain of city-to-city learning has been clearly defined and the process of excavation to explore the underground, unearthed knowledge economy has well begun. This journey of discovery continues in the next chapter through an exploration of the expression of power and how it plays itself. An assessment of the mentorship program is also conducted using the insights gained from the in-depth interviews and from analysis of the data collected from the census surveys in both cities.

CHAPTER SIX

DEEPENING THE ANALYSIS: EXPLORING POWER DYNAMICS AND ASSESSING IMPACT OF THE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

6.1. Introduction

In a critical piece on nation-states and the role played by the global South in challenging the geopolitics of international development cooperation, Milani and Munoz (2013) argue that contrary to what many analysts defend, the world today remains geo-economically and geo-politically divided into North and South or a Centre and Periphery. Myers (2014), who writes not on nation-states but from the perspective of cities, and on urban geography in particular, accepts such a polarization, but cautions against a scholarship that is divided by simple ideological categorizations into 1st/ 3rd world and global North/ South. The danger of such conceptualizations, as posited by Robinson (2011) in her post-colonial critique of urban studies, is that it is often based on a Eurocentric comparative framework. Arguing along similar lines, there has also been a call for “the center of theory-making to move to the global South in urban studies” (Roy, 2009: 820).

Against this theoretical background, a southern African case study examined by a researcher from the global South, on a city-to-city learning phenomenon occurring within the global South, led predominantly by practitioners from the global South, is important in its own right. Having accepted this, however, what makes the research more interesting is the fact that the management of the learning project and the control of its funding did not ultimately rest with the institutions based in the global South. This key difference makes the project particularly significant as it may provide clues into understanding the geographies of learning, and the extent to which power may express itself between the global North and global South. It allows for an opportunity to test whether often held assumptions that by default, institutions based in the global North will assert their dominance and control of such spaces, or whether in reality the analysis is far more complex than mere geo-politics; that perhaps these spaces are contested, claimed and re-claimed.

Beyond the labels of global North/ South, the research also provides the chance to explore perceptions of intra-South dominance and post-colonial control of the mentee by the mentor. These

are the issues that the first part of the chapter grapples with, using the in-depth, frank and open interviewee reflections, the in-situ first-hand observations made by the researcher during the municipal visioning workshops in Malawi and Namibia, and complemented with the data emanating from the two census surveys. Having developed an understanding of the power dynamics in the case study, the second part of the chapter concerns itself with assessing the value placed by all respondents of the mentoring and the extent to which it actually improved the quality of the strategic planning process. As indicated in Chapter 1, gauging the effectiveness of the program is the third research objective identified in this project. Respondents' perceptions of key factors that may impact on the mentoring outcomes are also discussed, and interesting findings emerge here that offer important insights for future planning practice.

6.2. The politics of city-to-city learning: where does the balance of power lie?

The complex issues of who controls the learning agenda, where the locus of power lies and how decisions are made are of critical importance to any researcher. This takes on an even greater significance, however, for a researcher working in the tradition of the practice movement, and committed to actively shaping a new progressive agenda for city planning, against a backdrop of the legacy of colonial and previously discriminatory planning practice, and the imperative to fundamentally redress these imbalances. Such a transformative agenda would involve the shifting of power from the global North to the global South, the structuring of a relationship between participating African cities that are equal, where cities are viewed as partners taking full ownership of the learning process and with Local Government Associations managing the funding of the program.

It is necessary to declare the researcher's position at the outset so that his own views and biases are made explicit. This process of consciously bracketing one's ideological position as suggested by many research leaders in the field over the years including Burns and Grove (1987), Gearing (2004), Tufford and Newman (2012) and Chan et al. (2013) was important in the research project in order not to consciously influence the outcome of the study. As the findings will show, the process of constant bracketing allowed a more rigorous interrogation of the respondents' views and yielded a powerfully richer and more nuanced analysis that at times surprised the researcher.

When the issue of control and domination of the learning process was raised with the eThekwini Municipality's focus group participants, a robust discussion ensued after further probing from the researcher. The first position articulated strongly and very emotively from a senior official was that the control of the mentorship program lay firmly in the global North as the program was controlled by the UCLG in Barcelona, Spain.

The UCLG decides what happens and where it happens... sometimes the UCLG insists on timeframes that are not realistic and that the mentee city is not ready to host these sessions... The agenda on the Committee is not even set by us the city; the topic, the funds is set up by UCLG. The span of control is very limited for the mentee and mentor cities.

Head of Policy Office, eThekwini Municipality

Upon noting this immediate acknowledgement from this senior focus group respondent, the indication was that at first glance, the work of Power (2010) that contextualizes the dominant role of western development agencies seemed to be confirmed. More specifically, the warning by Clegg (2014: 389) about the circuits of knowledge and modern power and how they manifest through "things and devices" stood out, almost demanding immediate validation. The emotive reflection by the respondent could at one level therefore have easily been interpreted as the UCLG deliberately ignoring the suggestion by Campbell (2012b) to play a far less direct role in the learning agenda and due to self-serving interests, consciously wanting to delay its transition towards the proposed more indirect broader coordinating apex role.

Through the process of conscious bracketing, however, ensuring that the discussion was not swayed in either direction, the researcher probed to ensure that this was indeed the consensual viewpoint of the group. In response to the inquisitive line of enquiry, soon another view emerged from the discussion that somewhat discounted or rather qualified this previous view:

Actually, for me it depends on where the funding, timeframes and the capacity are. So it is not necessarily about the global North versus the global South. Also the pendulum of control could be shifting with time as trust gets built. For example in the eThekwini – Sao

Paulo mentorship program there has been shifting power relations over time. eThekwini is now paying for themselves for trips to Brazil and is not relying on outside funding and eThekwini is directing the progress made. The relationship between the two cities has also now really intensified.

Head of Planning, eThekwini Municipality

This was an extremely important qualification that was offered; achieved only through subtle, but persistent engagement by the researcher in an attempt to excavate for a powerful analysis of a complex and contested African reality. With this new perspective and after more debate the focus group participants generally did concede that perhaps it was too simplistic to frame power relations as merely a static global North-global South issue. In the final analysis, the participants suggested that what was critical was who controlled the funds and the strategic direction of the program. They also conceded the possibility of a more fluid and complex power relationship that could easily shift with time as the process matured.

Building on this new insight, another perspective then emerged that went beyond the geography of the global North and South to examine geographies of control within the African continent:

At the end of the day, it is about who has the money and this is where power lies. Between mentor and mentee, eThekwini could even be seen as part of the controllers!

Head of Policy Office, eThekwini Municipality

This contention opened up fresh discussions that reinforced the view that the better financially resourced and capacitated eThekwini Municipality had to remain ever vigilant not to be seen as a neo-colonial power dictating how the mentorship process should unfold to its neighboring African mentees. This process of reflection and debate was useful, as prior to this research no space was created to critically examine eThekwini Municipality's own role in the learning process and the extent to which it may be perceived to be controlling the mentorship program.

It is important to note at this point, that at the time of writing up this chapter (April, 2015), Durban had been a site of unconscionable attacks by local citizens on foreign nationals, many of whom were Malawian. Whilst this is certainly not part of the scope of the research, it is important to at

least acknowledge here that these attacks may result in potentially irreparable reputational damage in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and could serve to further perpetuate the perception of South Africa's arrogant dominance in the region. The issue of African municipal inter-governmental cooperation will certainly begin to dominate the agenda, and it is hoped that the city-to-city learning processes and this research in particular will be able to play a role in building stronger relationships.

Returning to the research findings, whilst the researcher did not directly question the Mzuzu and Namibian planning team on whether they perceived the eThekweni municipal planners and facilitators as controlling or dominating the process, from direct observation during the stakeholder workshops it appeared that the eThekweni municipal team had made a conscious effort to play a more supportive role, if not working directly as partners. This observation appeared to be confirmed by the results from the survey where workshop stakeholders were asked to comment on how they perceived the relationship between the mentors and mentees.

Whilst 61% of Otjiwarongo respondents and 21% of Mzuzu respondents indicated that they were unable to comment on this relationship, perhaps due to their limited involvement with the mentorship process directly, it is significant that only 3% of the total respondents perceived eThekweni Municipality to be playing a dominant role, overshadowing their own planners during the visioning workshops. From Figure 6.1 what stands out most significantly is that 54% of Mzuzu workshop participants had perceived the mentors and mentees as working together in a partnership, with neither of the two cities appearing to dominate the process. Interesting too is that 30% of Otjiwarongo and 17% of Mzuzu respondents felt that their respective cities were empowered and took the lead, with eThekweni Municipality only playing a support role.

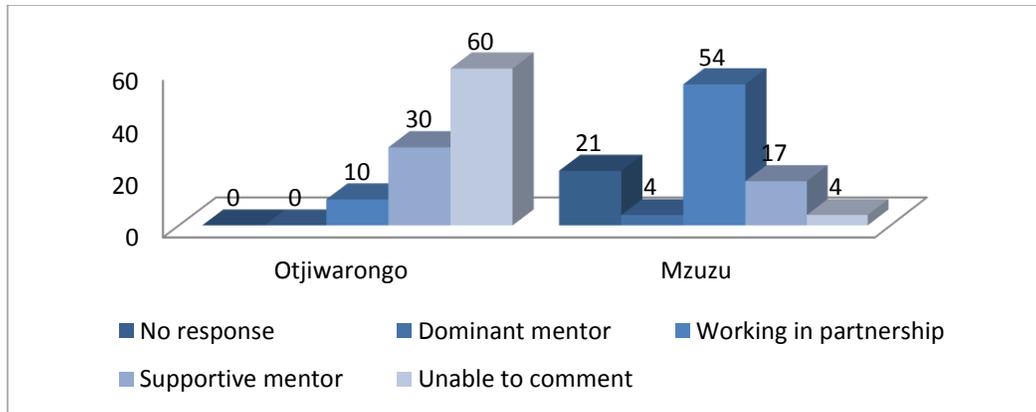


Figure 6.1: Comparative analysis of Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu respondents’ perceptions of role played by mentors and mentees in percentage (n=10 for Otjiwarongo and n=24 for Mzuzu)

Returning to the insights from the in-depth interviews on the issue of the geo-politics of learning, very strong views emerged from the respondents from the Namibian Local Government Association. For the Namibian officials, it was critical to note that whoever was tasked with managing the process needed to understand the local situation and not impose timeframes and deadlines in a context that is very different from their own. Below is a moving and very powerful narrative that pleads for a greater understanding of the local context:

It starts with basic issues such as language and definitions which comes from elsewhere... it sounds like us, but the name does not sound like us... for example CDS, IDP, LED, intermediary cities, etc. and then we need to conform ... which leads to confusion for implementers on the ground! We need to have control over what we want to learn and how we want to learn... and then we must drive the agenda as the projects are packaged with deadlines and timeframes. It is difficult for small towns to manage these timeframes due to political changes and dynamics... sometimes we are not able to see impact of the CDS in the short time. Maybe after ten years of project implementation is when results can be seen..

Senior official, NALAO

There was a sense of frustration from the Namibian Local Government Association officials that there was perhaps not enough of an understanding from the program managers for the local context and almost a lack of appreciation for the slower pace that development unfolded in that country. Project timeframes and deadlines were not therefore always met and created challenges which led ultimately to serious communication breakdowns.

At a superficial analytical level, one could again argue that this limited understanding was a typical manifestation of the exertion of power and control from the global North. However, in drilling deeper and probing for a more nuanced and richer understanding of the dynamics, another perspective emerged this time from the former City Manager of the eThekweni Municipality, who had earlier offered a very critical view of the mentorship label:

This is definitely not ideologically driven; it is dependent on individuals. It is about the person in UCLG that is very passionate about getting projects done. It is not about a global North agenda. It is about a passionate person in the moment just doing things. The networks are not determined by a particular agenda. UCLG is driven by a few individuals and on funding, these individuals play a much bigger role than one expects. Ultimately these programs need to be institutionalized. We must adopt a partnership view, this is the style; this is the nature of the project. Pragmatism is about letting these things go.

Former City Manager, eThekweni Municipality

The perspectives offered from the former City Manager who had been exposed to the inner workings of international networks, coupled with the contested views from the eThekweni Municipality's focus group participants that cautioned against a simplified and reductionist view of control from the global North, certainly enriched the analysis of this research. What was emerging was a more complex picture of international networks that have no funding themselves, but that rely on international funding agencies for projects with clear deliverables and timeframes. Projects in Africa needed highly energetic, motivated and passionate champions in the global North who were connected with funders and able to connect African cities to each other.

The program manager in the UCLG was one such person who was committed and was able to play such a brokering role. The challenge, however, was that the funding came from the Cities Alliance

and had very clear deliverables and progress had to be reported on according to strict timeframes, a legitimate condition given the nature of grant funding. Ensuring that the project was completed timeously and required constant monitoring and reporting could have been perceived as a manifestation of a dominant-subservient, north-south power play.

In an interview with the UCLG project officer from the UCLG, who herself hailed from the global South and was directly involved in a range of city-to-city learning projects on the continent, an insider account of perceptions of geo-politics and how these may manifest helped enrich the tapestry of views. Interestingly, yet again, caution was sounded against a purely reductionist analysis:

There are many factors, and one cannot over-simplify this, as there are many interests and many agendas. When money comes, people are always suspicious. Colonized countries are very sensitive to this because of the past. But then again, the agenda is also driven by people who think they can make a difference. If they make mistakes it is not because they want to, but because they are humans! We just need to open up our ears and listen to what cities can do at a particular moment in time, and respect cities' decisions and not be imposing. This would be very important for turning around a situation. Working with people, I see the good intentions in the end. The energy that is invested, it is good intentions. To highlight, we need mutual respect for understanding how processes work, the different rhythms of work, etc.

UCLG project officer

It would be amiss not to acknowledge that this deep and thoughtful critical reflection that was shared by the respondent with the researcher may not have emerged if the researcher was not perceived as an 'insider'. During the construction of the research proposal, the researcher was cautioned about engaging in 'backyard research' by international advisors, who suggested opting for a case study that the researcher was not aware of, in order to bring fresh new perspectives to the learning agenda. In retrospect, it is now clear that pursuing the current case study actually not only was the appropriate choice, but also allowed for powerful in-depth analyses through testimonies like those made by the UCLG project officer above.

It should also be noted that as the research concerns itself not just with deepening insights into the dynamic nature of city-to-city learning but also about suggesting new frameworks that promote progressive African practices, the researcher continued to probe respondents to begin to suggest alternate institutional models for learning; models that were more bottom-up and promoted regional cooperation. Some of these innovative responses will be presented here and then revisited in Chapter 7 when a new framework for city-to-city learning is crafted.

The first suggestion again shared in an atmosphere of trust, given that the researcher was well known to the respondent, came from the former City Manager from Mzuzu City Council who identified the missing link as having much stronger continental, regional coordination roles, with clearer roles and responsibilities defined:

The way I look at it, we needed to have a clear system of handling the process. I find the UCLGA missing a bit; maybe they have not been too involved? One day we need to have all the players to take the appropriate role. We need to ensure that there is information flowing in all areas.

Former City Manager, Mzuzu City Council

This was reiterated by the Namibian Local Government Association officials who suggested the urgent need for greater ownership of city-to-city learning processes by those that are directly involved. In addition, more than just management and oversight, the need for control over the resources was also mooted:

Our own national and regional governments should be investing in setting aside funds for city-to-city learning and we should be having peer-learning processes driven by ourselves... For example, South West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) and ANC Councilors coming together can reflect on their struggle history and culture to grapple with challenges even at a party level, as African problems are more complex than the west.

Senior ALAN official

Given that the interview with the Moroccan-based UCLG Africa program manager was scheduled for later than the other respondents, there was an opportunity to explore the views of this important regional player on the role of geo-politics and to some extent begin to test some of these suggestions on calls for a more proactive role by the UCLGA. The views from the UCLGA respondent, who was again known to the researcher, were not defensive, nor dismissive, but very refreshing:

I would not hesitate to say that the challenges are real in this regard. From my experience elsewhere, the power dynamics are quite complex; and the expression 'who pays the piper controls the tune', seems to apply in many instances. As much as possible, funding for this mentoring must be decentralized. There must be a balance between those who are mentoring and those who are being mentored. This will create some equality between the two partners.

Program manager, UCLG Africa

The notion of a decentralized model of learning with control over the resources resting and being managed on the continent, with a more equal relationship between the two cities in the partnership represents the essence of an emerging consensual position from respondents. Having accepted this ideal state, respondents did concede that much work has to be done to develop the capacities of the institutions to take greater control. The starting point was to augment capacities in the respective country's Local Government Associations (MALGA and ALAN) as these institutions were meant to play the driving role in coordinating city-to-city learning between countries.

This acknowledgement of capacity challenges confirm the concerns raised in the study conducted by Buis (2009: 194) in which he concluded that most Local Government Associations in the

developing world are currently only able to “aspire to perform” rather than “perform the roles” necessary for facilitating city-to-city learning. This call for the urgent capacitation of these associations before engaging in such programs does resonate with the views of the respondents in the case study. This is an important recommendation that will be flagged for inclusion in the learning framework.

It is opportune at this point to briefly consider the survey respondents’ perceptions of the relevance of the role played by the various agencies involved in the mentorship process. It must be noted that these respondents were workshop participants and as such were not necessarily expected to be aware of the roles played by these agencies. This reality was confirmed by the high non-response rates (between 70 – 76%), as indicated in Figure 6.2 below.

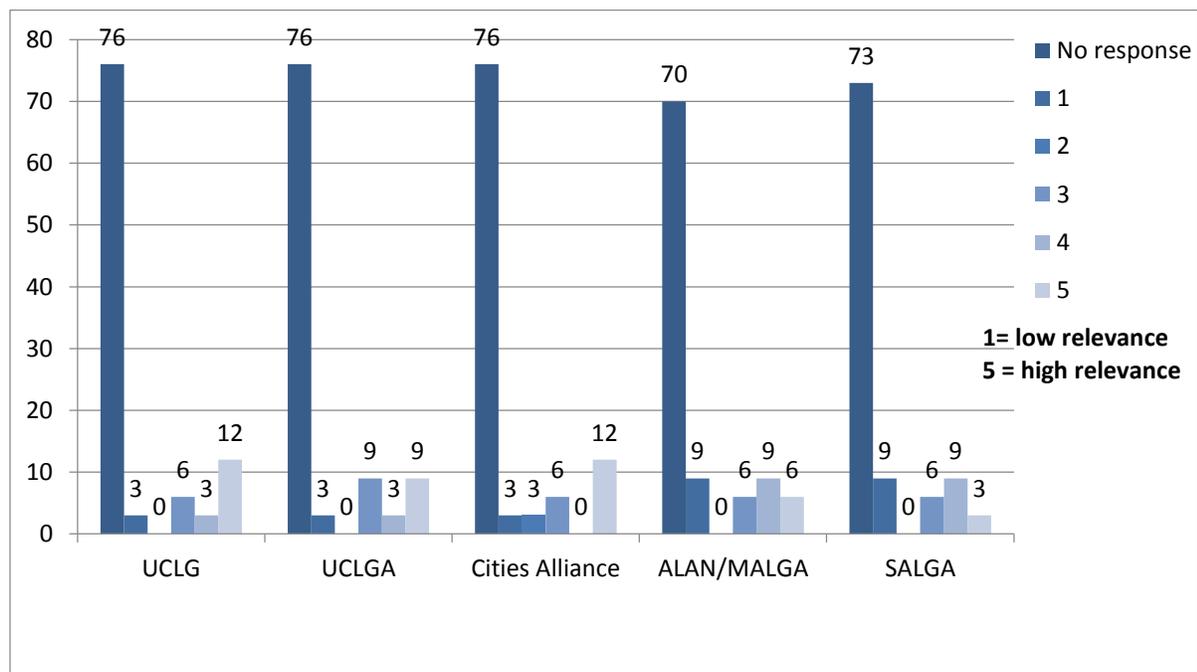


Figure 6.2: Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu census survey respondents’ views on perceptions of the role played by key agencies in percentage (n=34)

Notwithstanding this reality, and accepting the low response rate, what is noteworthy from the results is the perception of the important role played by the UCLG. Twelve percent of all survey respondents rated this international organization with a score of 5, compared to 9% for UCLGA. This is interesting as given the UCLGA's regional nature, it is expected that it should have a larger continental footprint. Twelve percent of the survey respondents also rated the Cities Alliance with a score of 5, perhaps given its important role as the project funder. Also noteworthy is that only 6% of the survey respondents had rated their own country's Local Government Association with a score of 5 for relevance. This once again confirms the need for greater capacitation for African Local Government Associations to maximize reach and impact. It also speaks to the need for a much more bottom-up governance framework with vibrant country associations and a more robust and visible African chapter of the UCLG. This will be revisited in Chapter 7.

In returning to the final viewpoint from a member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat on the issue of geo-politics and the balance of power, a new perspective was offered. The respondent chose to re-frame the issue of power relations in terms of barriers to effective collaboration. If these barriers to collaboration were removed or restricted then, she argued, power would be more easily distributed:

There may be barriers to collaboration that work to control the situation... It is more about the enabling factors, for example, convening spaces for learning and providing funding and other resources for learning. There must be an appreciation of the value of learning events, an equal partnership with commitment from both sides too or else then the power starts playing out. In addition, different organizations' agendas as well can be a potential barrier.

Member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat

The candidness and openness from this member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat reflected genuineness about that organization's involvement. There was also no evidence from any of the other respondents to suggest that the funders had ulterior motives or had pursued another agenda. The researcher had paid careful attention to look for clues in this regard, given the critical pragmatist stance explained earlier in the conceptual framework, the focus on which is more about "meaning and emotion, about respect and relationships, about recognition and power" (Forester,

2012: 10). Whilst the researcher was vigilant to detect particularly for the subtle negative influence of what Rai (2004), Murphy (2008) and Waylen (2004) caution are the vested interests of international capital being inserted into a local site, this was not apparent, or at least certainly not observed by the researcher.

Having conceded this, however, what was unearthed during the interview was an open acknowledgement that large funding organizations needed to understand the local context more. It was also accepted that the fairly rigid funding conditions are a limiting factor, which can be as source of frustration for program managers responsible for monitoring project funding. The respondent made this clear, when noting:

The Cities Alliance approach fails sometimes. There is work we are doing in Africa; outside of South Africa in low capacity environments. If it is done differently, there is a need for much more active factoring of contextual issues more rigorously. I mean, is individual grants the best way or should we build capacity first in a low capacity environments?

Member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat

The case study clearly demonstrates therefore that whilst there may be no agenda or ulterior motive for the insertion of international capital into local sites under the guise of technical support, Hout's (2012) assertion on donor agencies less than optimal functioning in relation to the context in which they work, and in particular their own inability to sometimes appreciate the local political contexts, does appear to hold ground. This study adds a new dimension, however, in that it does show that funding organizations, in this case the Cities Alliance, are not oblivious to this fact, but are taking cognizance of this reality, as demonstrated by the critical self-reflection from the member of the Secretariat. More importantly, it also demonstrates a willingness to change approaches, or certainly begin to challenge their institutional practices:

I've had to adopt a capacity building approach. In most cases we work in low capacity environments where the rules for engagement and support and development cooperation

needed to be re-written. ‘Here’s your Cities Alliance grant, now off you go’ only really has transformative impact in middle income countries.

Member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat

The concerning trend observed by Hout (2012) that it is very unlikely that the current conceptualization of development will move away from merely disbursing funds towards appreciating the complex local political contexts, may not apply in the instance of the Cities Alliance or at least certainly not based on the testimonies from the respondent. This does promote a sense of optimism and hope for the future. By escalating these findings and putting it into the public domain will also assist in engendering a new understanding and help in the lobbying of organizational transformation of international donor agencies.

What the case study does highlight most clearly, therefore, is the polyphony of different practitioner voices cautioning against a simplistic view of understanding city-to-city learning dynamics in terms of a narrow global North versus global South dichotomy. At the same time too, there has been an implicit acknowledgement that the terrain is indeed contested, that the current relationship may not be sustainable in the long-term and that there needs to be a movement towards a new model of learning. Given the fact that the knowledge production process of the mentorship program had been predominantly driven by the UCLG and not respective local authority associations, for a set of institutional and capacity reasons, when considering Foucault’s (1980: 131) contention that “even the production of knowledge by the more powerful about the less privileged and marginalized” is an expression of power relations, there is most certainly a strong case for a re-examination of the current institutional model.

These findings are relevant not only for the positioning of progressive planning practice in southern Africa, but because they talk directly to Johnson et al.’s (2012) observation that the process of knowledge production could either be platforms for managerial dominance and control *or* spaces for change. In the case of the UCLG mentorship program, it is posited that it is disingenuous to frame the dynamics of power relations as being dominated by the global North with the southern partners as mere passive recipients. Rather it is more accurately represented as the creation of new spaces for active deliberation.

This issue of municipal international relations has been explored using Durban as a case study to examine the nature of relationships between funding partners and the eThekweni Municipality in its programs in Africa in a paper by Ruffin (2013). In examining this nature of the power dynamics in such relations, it is interesting to note a similar conclusion drawn in this study:

Funding partners of the North, such as the Common Wealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ) and Sustainable Cities International (SCI) have assisted with international relations and seem not to dominate North-South partnerships with eThekweni, but to work with eThekweni and other municipalities of the South on municipality-driven development terms. This factor is arguably a step towards a more just world order and worthy of further research.

Ruffin (2013: 11)

In a recently published paper on decentralized cooperation, Nganje (2015: 4) highlights a new trend in international municipal cooperation to go beyond South-South and North-South partnerships and experiment with “decentralized triangular cooperation”. Essentially this involves better financially resourced northern municipalities encouraging and supporting cooperation between their southern partners. However, as Nganje (2015) cautions, such collaboration between the southern municipalities themselves, tend to be fragile and often over-reliant on the northern partner. What this speaks to is an urgent need to open up the dialogue and debate about global politics and the roles and responsibilities of actors in municipal cooperation.

From each of the interviews conducted with the city planners, facilitators, Local Government Association officials, UCLG and UCLGA program managers as well as the funders, there is certainly a renewed sense of energy and vigor to engage with these institutional issues that were not previously actively addressed. At the time of finalizing the research there was a firm commitment from the key stakeholders to conduct another follow-up workshop to review the entire learning methodology and institutional arrangements with a view to reflect and draw lessons from the program. The researcher was also afforded the opportunity to present the final findings from the study and the emerging framework for future city-to-city learning and collaboration at a session

on city-to-city learning jointly organized by the UCLG/A and the SACN at the December 2015 Africities Summit in Johannesburg.

In order to develop such a framework, however, it is important to reflect not only on the learning process and its strengths and weaknesses, but to begin to assess the effect the learning has had on the quality of the strategic planning that was implemented. The research stayed clear of a detailed impact assessment which is a science and study in its own right. Instead, it focused on determining the perceptions of each of the stakeholders involved in order to gauge practitioner views of the impact of the mentorship program. It is the presentation of these findings and analysis that is considered next.

6.3. Perceptions of the impact of city-to city-learning

City-to-city learning processes involve high input costs with investment of scarce donor funding in travel and accommodation, significant investment in time from participating cities and supporting agencies as well as substantial effort and energy from all parties to ensure that a relationship is sustained over time. It is an important research objective therefore to gauge practitioner perceptions on the influence of the mentorship program on the planning outcomes and whether the quality of the overall strategic planning processes had improved in the selected Namibian and Malawian cities. This section also alludes to key factors to be considered in order to maximize the impact of future learning processes.

In reflecting on the Mzuzu mentorship experience, the planners from the eThekweni Municipality regarded their interactions as very fruitful. They were generally satisfied that concrete projects and city development initiatives had occurred that had been directly informed by the Mzuzu strategic planning process. For them, this was the litmus test of whether or not their interventions were successful.

The Mzuzu Water Board, which is an independent entity was one of the key sector departments outside of the Municipality was included in the process. Just from my personal interactions with the Water Board representative, I must say that I was very encouraged that improvements had taken place since the development of the strategic plan.

Lead planner, eThekweni Municipality

Another signpost of impact was the fact that the Mzuzu City Council had since taken greater ownership and control of the Structure Plan which was previously driven by the provincial authorities. The fact that two clear outputs – a Vision and an Action Plan was developed and implemented out of the process was also an indicator of impact. The lead facilitator further pointed out that the momentum created on the ground to begin to develop a detailed CDS that was informed by the strategic planning process had convinced them that the investment of the eThekweni municipal team had been yielding high returns. Another interesting observation was made by a respondent of career mobility of a senior official as a real demonstration of recognition of the impact of the planning process:

I think one good indicator is the fact that the national government of Malawi was so impressed with the CEO of the Mzuzu City Council and his vision in implementing a strategic plan, that he has subsequently been promoted to the capital city Lilongwe.

Lead planner, eThekweni Municipality

With regard to the Namibian planning process, there was ambivalence around the impact that the process was having. One of the key challenges raised was not having enough direct contact with the local planners in the municipality, due to reliance on the coordinators of the program from Local Government Association ALAN. Whilst the visioning process had started and Otjiwarongo was leading compared to other municipalities, progress was slow. The CDS was not finalized and at the time of the interviews, projects were not being implemented. However, the more senior planning official in the focus group cautioned about how impact was measured:

We must be really careful. There cannot be a one-to-one return on investment in learning. I mean, there needs to be ten times more investment from the mentor to achieve a result, and if the process is still underway and there is some commitment than that is acceptable.

Head of Policy Office, eThekwini Municipality

A similar sentiment shared by the other senior planner was that it is not always about the end product, but more about the learning process. She also argued that even if a final product is not delivered, over the years there certainly had been rich learning. This point was made with much conviction, and they both added that this understanding is not necessarily appreciated enough by international agencies and funders who are more focused on achieving outcomes.

Of all of the responses elicited on the issue of impact of the learning, one of the most positive findings came from the Namibian Local Government Association officials. In order to convey the power of the insights, an excerpt of the interview is reproduced below:

One of the things I realized is that it is not only when you do the actual strategic planning process facilitation, but through the interactions that something starts to change almost immediately. The planners in Otjiwarongo are now able to facilitate their own processes internally. The mentoring has already begun empowering people. Planners are not waiting for anything; after the first workshop and exposure to eThekwini they themselves want to change their visions. They engage in their own self-reflection and introspection into their own processes and begin to re-examine their thinking and notions of visioning and strategic planning – which would not have occurred without the mentorship process.

Senior NALAO official

These assertions again begin to reinforce the views made by the senior planning staff from the eThekwini Municipality's planning team who had raised concerns around how impact is being measured. It points to the intangible measurable in the form of inspiring confidence, improving energy and motivation, and empowering officials to take action by themselves. Beyond these harder to measure impacts, the ALAN and NALAO officials pointed out that as a result of the mentorship program between Otjiwarongo and eThekwini municipalities, the importance of

engaging with the local private sector as partners has certainly been a positive impact which was yielding positive results:

The relationship with the business community has drastically improved. They now listen to the business community much more and take an interest in committing the city to what the businesses want. The town center upgrade has actually now been funded by the business community although it was driven by the Council. This change in mindset not just from the planners but from the business community itself to commit resources is as a result of the training and mentorship process. So they are really applying the learning on a daily basis. It remains everyday - it shows that there is investment.

Senior NALAO official

When the question of impact was put directly to the planners and facilitators from the Otjiwarongo Municipality, both respondents were of the opinion that the overall strategic planning process had improved. More importantly, they felt a greater sense of ownership due to their direct involvement in the process and were more comfortable implementing a plan that they had designed:

From the quality side, yes it has improved, because in the past strategic plans were done, but we did not believe that we had the capacity to do it, so it was done by consultants, and most of the time also to our disappointment. It was copied and pasted from other towns. Actually, it is difficult to implement things that are done by other people. We can now relate to some of the objectives as these were crafted by ourselves.

Lead planner, Otjiwarongo Municipality

In general terms, it appears that despite observations from the eThekweni municipal team that the process was much slower in Namibia than in Malawi, there was an acknowledgement that the mentorship program had yielded positive results in Namibia. Over and above the development of a draft CDS for Otjiwarongo, planners were empowered to take ownership of their planning process, business investors were showing greater confidence and the quality of the planning process had improved.

In the case of Mzuzu City Council, the former CEO of that Council who had provided the leadership and direction for the plan, and who had himself been trained by the eThekweni Municipality's planning team in Durban, was convinced of the beneficial impact the mentorship program had made on Mzuzu. Again, reference was made to business confidence improvement and the changing of local officials' mindsets which helped engender a more sustainable planning process.

Revenue enhancement has been seen. The city has changed completely in terms of collection of revenue due to using scorecards to gauge performance, which was not emphasized before. Having a change of mentality made this possible. In terms of improvement and change it is there. Changing mentality has a very, very strong impact on the planning process. Having international consultants is not useful, here we have local teams that have done it before in their own city; these are people who are in the system.

Former CEO, Mzuzu City Council

In analyzing the reflections from the former CEO, it is interesting to observe how the South African team is not regarded as international, but seen as part of the local African context. This is an interesting indicator of how the Durban team was perceived, and the extent of acceptance by the Malawians. In addition, the issue of taking local control over their own planning process, through being exposed to the successes of another African city and through intensive capacitation, also resonated with the Mzuzu facilitation team:

Two years ago without this program, we would not have made the hard decisions that we have made as management. There are so many strong decisions that we have made that allowed us to move forward. That kind of thinking 'yes, we can do this', has come in because of the program.

Support facilitator, Mzuzu City Council

Through mentorship we have learned how to fish, not to ask for fish. Previously, from such interactions and sister city relationships we would have expected for a city like

Durban to donate a refuse truck, but now, we have learned how to get a truck. So for sure, we have now learned how to fish through the program. This one is far more sustainable!

Lead facilitator, Mzuzu City Council

Whilst there appears to be a consensus from the planners and facilitators from both cities about the positive impact that the mentoring program had in improving the quality of the municipal visioning processes, it was useful to compare these observations with the views of the local stakeholders participating in the municipal visioning workshops. This was the primary driver behind designing a survey process aimed at complementing the perspectives from officials directly involved in the mentoring program, with those less involved in the program. Three separate but related questions were included in the questionnaire to determine stakeholder perceptions of impact.

The first of these questions rated satisfaction with the general success of the visioning process, whilst the second determined respondent views on whether or not the visioning process improved as a result of the mentoring program. This direct question was a good indicator measuring stakeholder perceptions of the usefulness of the program. The last question was more complex and required each respondent to indicate their level of agreement with a set of statements regarding the potential impact that the mentoring program may have had on different aspects of their strategic planning process. Each of these will be considered in turn. A further set of questions relating to their perceptions of key factors affecting the impact of the mentorship process was also included in the questionnaire and will be examined.

In considering the results from the Malawian survey respondents first, Table 6.1 reflects the extremely high levels of satisfaction with the general success of the visioning process. With only a single respondent neutral on this issue, a third of all respondents were quite satisfied and almost two-thirds were very satisfied. It is clear that the Mzuzu workshop participants valued their own participation in the visioning process and considered it a success in general terms.

Table 6.1: Mzuzu respondents' satisfaction with general success of their visioning process (n=24)

Levels of satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Neutral	1	4
Quite satisfied	8	33
Very satisfied	15	63
Total	24	100

The levels of satisfaction could be attributed to the program being an intensive two and a half day session (as opposed to a one day session in Otjiwarongo), with high levels of engagement and interactions of all stakeholders. Having determined this high level of satisfaction with the visioning process, it was important to determine whether this was perceived to be as a result of the mentorship program, or whether perhaps that even without the intervention and support of the UCLG and its partners, the Mzuzu planning team would have developed a process that was equally robust and one that stakeholders would have been satisfied with. As indicated in Table 6.2, there is an almost unanimous acknowledgement of the positive effect of the mentorship program as perceived by the workshop stakeholders. With only one non-response, all other respondents were clear that the mentorship of their city planners and facilitators by the team from the eThekweni Municipality had borne fruit.

Table 6.2: Mzuzu respondents’ perception of whether strategy improved due to mentorship (n=24)

Perception of whether strategy improved due to mentorship	Frequency	Percentage
No response	1	4
Yes	23	96
Total	24	100

Whilst a general acceptance of the positive effect of the mentorship is important in itself, what is more useful is to understand the Mzuzu’s respondent’s perception of the impact of mentoring on the various aspects of the visioning process. Figure 6.3 below shows that most respondents (71%) strongly agreed with the statement that their process was strategic and targeted, as opposed to detailed and comprehensive. This is probably due to their local facilitators stressing this point and how their strategic approach had been modeled on the eThekweni Municipality process which forced hard decision and choice-making. As the workshop produced a Strategic Action Plan with priorities for intervention, timeframes and allocated responsibilities to each priority, it is not

surprising that nearly 60% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the strategy was able to drive a clear and implementable action plan. Unsurprisingly too, only 42% strongly agreed that the process was participatory, given that this phase was focused on engaging with the newly appointed political leadership and the senior management team. It is critical for this process to be rolled out to include other key stakeholders if it is to be modeled along the eThekweni Municipality’s participatory process.

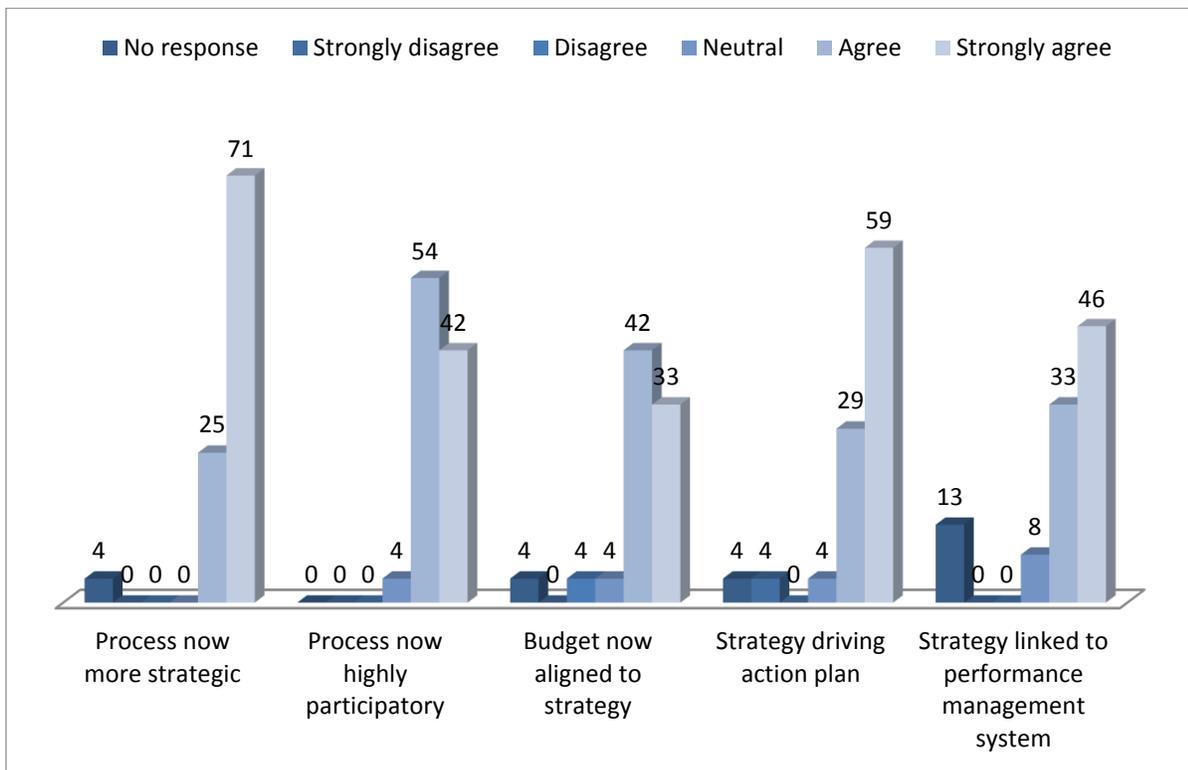


Figure 6.3: Mzuzu respondents’ level of agreement with statements on impact of mentoring on their visioning process in percentage (n=24)

Only just over one-third of all respondents strongly agreed that their visioning process was linked to its budget process. This is an important indication of the need for the Mzuzu Treasury Department to begin to align their budget expenditure more strongly with the strategic priorities emerging from the strategic planning workshop. Should this process not occur, and budget not be allocated to the priority areas, then the potential lack of implementation of deliverables could jeopardize the credibility and legitimacy of the strategic planning interventions.

The area of performance monitoring and evaluation of city strategies is fairly new in African municipalities. It is therefore encouraging to note that nearly 80% of all survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategy was being monitored. This is a good early indicator that the Mzuzu Council is serious about ensuring that performance on the delivery of the plan is continually being monitored.

In turning to consider the level of satisfaction of the Otjiwarongo stakeholders with the general success of the municipal visioning process, it appears that the results are less favorable compared to the Mzuzu experience. Beyond a single dissatisfied response, Table 6.3 below indicates that nearly one-third of the respondents were neutral, with 40% very satisfied with the general process. The picture emerging from the Otjiwarongo respondents therefore appears to be one of a more nervously cautious constituency as compared to the Mzuzu respondents where 96% of respondents were either quite or very satisfied. In positing a possible plausible explanation for this trend, the fact that the Otjiwarongo respondents included representation from local NGOs, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and two active businessmen representing the local Chamber of Commerce may have accounted for the more circumspect responses. It is also worth noting that in making comparisons in percentage terms between the two cities, one must consider that the workshop comprised only of 10 key stakeholder representatives, making the total census survey size in Otjiwarongo significantly smaller than Mzuzu’s 24 participants.

Table 6.3: Otjiwarongo respondents’ satisfaction with general success of their visioning process (n=10)

Levels of satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
No response	2	20
Quite dissatisfied	1	10
Neutral	3	30
Very satisfied	4	40
Total	10	100

Notwithstanding the size of the respondent base, however, it is significant that as much as 90% of all Otjiwarongo respondents felt that their municipal visioning process had improved as a result of the mentorship program. As indicated in Table 6.4 below, there was only a single non-response, indicating an overwhelming satisfaction level with the mentorship program.

Table 6.4: Otjiwarongo respondents’ perceptions of whether strategy improved due to mentorship (n=10)

Perception of whether strategy improved due to mentorship	Frequency	Percentage
No response	1	10
Yes	9	90
Total	10	100

In attempting to interpret this result by drawing on the field notes made by the researcher during the Otjiwarongo Municipality workshop, the researcher noted through the references made by the representatives from civil society that there was an acknowledgement of the value of international support to augment existing capacity for municipal visioning. Of particular relevance to note here was that both representatives from the business sector had been strongly vocal during the workshop that modeling the approach on the eThekweni Municipality’s experience was encouraging and that local officials needed to also encourage investment and stimulate the domestic tourism sector in Otjiwarongo as the eThekweni Municipality had done in South Africa. In general terms therefore the stakeholders were pleased with the mentorship program and the impact it was having.

In unpacking their level of satisfaction through a more detailed analysis of each of the aspects of the strategic planning process, what stands out from the results in the Otjiwarongo census survey, as indicated in Figure 6.4 below, is the general agreement that the municipal visioning process has been more strategic (90% of respondents) and action-orientated (80% of respondents) as a result of the mentoring program. Whilst a similar trend was observed in the Mzuzu survey around being both strategic and action-focused, there was greater support in Mzuzu with 96% and 88%, respectively, agreeing or strongly agreeing that the statements. The similar reasons suggested earlier around cautious optimism early in the process could hold true again here.

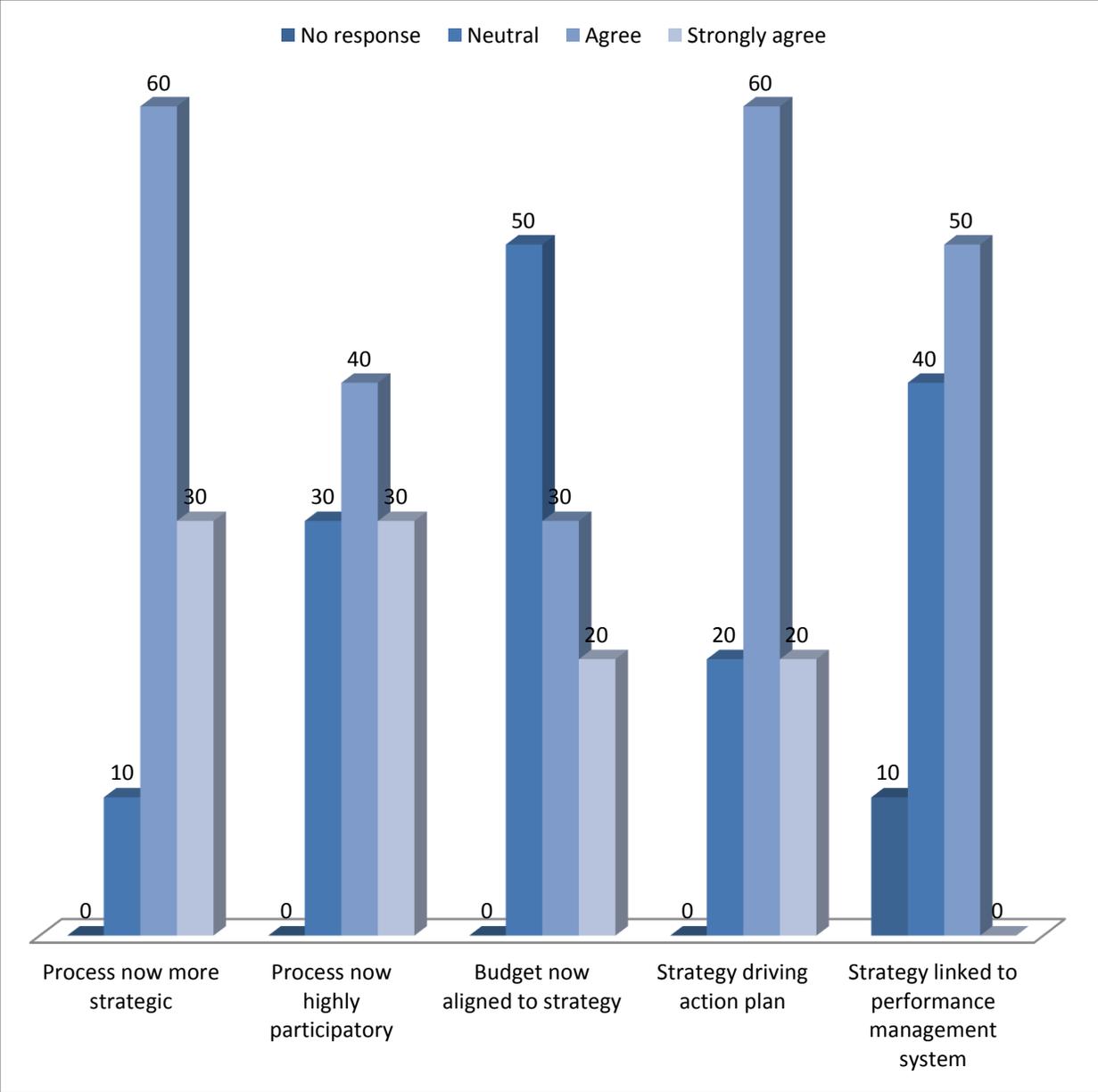


Figure 6.4: Otjiwarongo respondents’ level of agreement with statements on impact of mentoring on their visioning process (n=10)

What stands out from the results on respondents’ perception of the process being highly participatory is that only 30% of respondents strongly agreed that the strategic planning process was highly participatory with 30% remaining neutral. This does indicate that there is much room for more robust engagement with stakeholders in the future rounds of the planning process.

Also conspicuous from Figure 6.4 above is that none of the respondents in Namibia had strongly agreed with the statement that the strategy was linked to a performance management system. This is interesting as civil society representatives appeared to hold the issue of ongoing monitoring of progress as important. This area of monitoring of performance will be revisited in the recommendations chapter as it forms an integral component of a learning organization.

In moving on to consider survey respondents' views on three factors that could have impacted on the mentoring process, some noteworthy findings emerge. The issues of city size and complexity, amount of capacity built and length of the mentorship process that were identified in the questionnaire is explored here. The issue of trust which was also identified in the questionnaire has already been dealt with in Chapter 5.

Beginning with the finding that surprised the researcher the most regarding the influence of city size and complexity and its impact on the mentorship program, it was illuminating to discover that the majority of the workshop stakeholders (nearly 60% of all survey respondents) felt that learning from a bigger and more complex municipality positively impacted on the mentorship. For the researcher and other learning practitioners in the eThekweni Municipality, there is a commonly held notion that municipalities should be appropriately matched in terms of size and complexity in order to derive maximum benefits. From the voices of the beneficiaries of the study themselves, this notion has clearly been dispelled.

Table 6.5: Mzuzu and Otjiwarongo census survey respondents' views on the influence of city size and complexity on mentorship in percentage (n=34)

	Frequency	Percentage
No response	5	15
Negative influence	1	3
No substantial difference	7	20
Positive influence	20	59
Uncertain of influence	1	3
Total	34	100

Similarly, 20% of survey respondents confirmed that city size and complexity did not make a substantial difference with only one of the thirty-four respondents being of the opinion that having

a smaller municipality to partner with a larger, more complex municipality negatively influences the learning outcomes. This is an important finding that was again confirmed during key informant interviews, and is therefore elaborated on as a key consideration in Chapter 7, in the pre-learning phase of the learning framework.

Given the census survey respondents' perception of the positive impact of learning from a larger more complex municipality, their very high rating of the level of capacity built by their municipal planning teams is less surprising. With 65% of the respondents providing an overall rating of a score of 4 and 5, it is clear that the impact of the mentorship program was being felt in tangible ways. As explained in earlier chapters, the researcher as an observer in both the stakeholder workshops in Namibia and Malawi, watched the Durban planning team play a background role, with the local planning team running taking the lead, and commencing each session by acknowledging that the outcomes-based methodology that they were employing was learnt from the eThekweni Municipality's training provided by their Durban counterparts. This result again confirms the views of the interview respondents cited earlier, who provided testimonies of the impact that the mentorship program had made in achieving tangible results. It is also consistent with survey respondents' general perception that the mentorship program had improved the quality of their own strategic planning process, as discussed earlier.

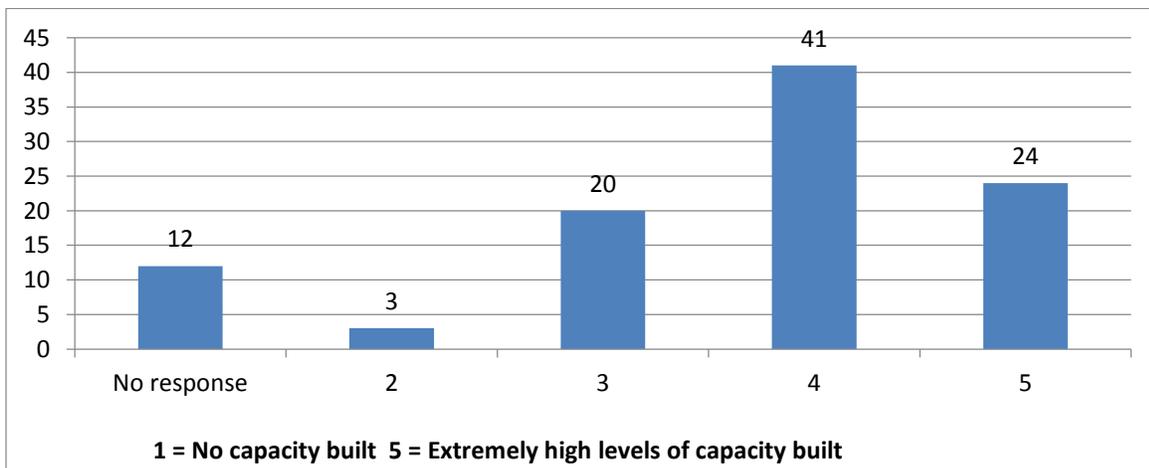


Figure 6.5: Mzuzu and Otjiwarongo census survey respondents' rating of amount of capacity built during mentorship process (n=34)

The third factor identified in the questionnaire probed survey respondents' views on the length of the mentorship program. Given the four to five year mentorship period, the researcher held a pre-conceived notion that the beneficiaries of the strategic planning process, unlike the planning team who were mentored, would have been frustrated with a long timeframe. Again, the researcher was surprised that as much as two-thirds of all respondents felt that the current length of the mentorship program was appropriate. More interesting, as reflected in Table 6.6, only one out of the 34 respondents felt that the length was far too long. Given the point made earlier about the respondents' high level of satisfaction with the process, and the perceived impact that the mentorship had made on their planning outcomes, this result is understandable.

Table 6.6: Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu census survey respondents' views on perception of appropriateness of length of mentorship process in percentage (n=34)

	Frequency	Percent
No response	4	12
Length far too short	3	9
Length appropriate	23	67
Length far too long	1	3
Uncertain of appropriateness of length	3	9
Total	34	100

In moving away from the results of the census survey respondents, some reflections from other interviewees on the impact of the program are considered, commencing with the UCLG respondents. For both of them, monitoring and evaluation and ensuring that outcomes are achieved were clearly important, although they accepted that learning was a long-term process. As program managers for the mentorship program, the two interviewees from the UCLG explained that as an organization, they were placing greater emphasis on monitoring more recently, than they had been before. For the UCLG program manager, whilst the softer aspects of training and empowerment of local planning staff was appreciated, they had begun using publications as a mechanism to express the delivery of results in order to demonstrate more tangible deliverables:

UCLG monitors now more than three years ago and the use of publications to express results is one way of showing the deliverables. As with all planning, strategic plans in

Africa have the risk of not being implemented. However the municipalities in Malawi have reported progress and they are happy about the outcomes. From an outsider perspective, this can be tested, but the fact that they take ownership and report back that there is progress.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

It is interesting to note that in responding to the question of the impact of the mentorship program on enhancing the quality of urban strategic planning, the UCLG program manager used the fact that the Malawians had taken ownership and were reporting back that there is progress, as an indicator of program impact. She did acknowledge that progress in Namibia was much slower, and that more work was needed to be done to improve the outcome in this program. In general terms both the UCLG respondents were confident that the mentorship program had yielded positive results and had made a difference to the overall outcome in both cities.

The comments made by the respondent from the Cities Alliance Secretariat was very illuminating and important as the World Bank had funded the program and it was critical for that institution to ensure that progress was being made. The respondent requested that it be noted that her comments were made not based on any formal evaluation, but purely in a context of anecdotal evidence through their partners' observations. Nevertheless the opinions were very instructive and will again inform the learning framework chapter. The first point made was around the need to institutionalize outcomes of the mentoring process, as she argued that the mentorship could actually be seen as a change process that needs to be supported over a five year period. Without this support, she contended, implementation could not be effectively achieved. The second key observation made was that whilst ALAN and NALAO in Namibia may have experienced challenges in achieving the final deliverables in the pilot project, exposure to the mentorship program did manage to bring a transformation:

Both ALAN and NALAO have successfully used their position of advocacy to promote change throughout their networks... change is happening, but very slowly.

Member of Cities Alliance Secretariat

The respondent stressed on numerous occasions during the interview that in attempting to make an assessment of impact or in conducting any evaluation, the appreciation of context is fundamental. The point was made that transformation is a slow process and that one cannot be over-ambitious about the outcomes that can be achieved in the short-term. This relates again to the point about the need for a change management process that must be implemented in tandem with the mentorship program, as she argued that innovate practice was being introduced into a system that was not necessarily prepared for it.

Her comments were made at a time when the project contract had just been completed and this afforded her a unique opportunity to introspect and reflect very critically on key institutionally issues affecting the quality of city-to-city learning. As her thoughts were extremely insightful in this regard, they are replicated here in its entirety:

Change in practice does not happen overnight; we have to understand the context in which this plays out. Changing behavior is a long-term commitment. Wherever innovation happens, then change at national level is critical. Wherever the implementer is, change agents need to be supported in innovative processes. There are no criteria to look at capacity building, advocacy, nurturing leadership, change management and the local context. These subtle, but important issues are not looked at. We therefore miss the mark and CDSs do not get implemented and are not institutionalized.

Member of Cities Alliance Secretariat

Whilst the issue of understanding of the local context is identified in learning literature as a key consideration by authors such as Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) and Fawcett and Marsh (2012), it is such thoughtful insights from reflective practitioners as those cited above that hold the promise for bold new approaches to city learning. The suggestion is that more than just an understanding or appreciation of the policy, legislative and developmental context of the partner city, there is a case for an entire change management process. This process will go beyond just the municipality being mentored or partnered with, to include the provincial and national ministries involved so that full support can be offered to the fundamental changes that could be made as a result of the strategic

planning processes. Without the inclusion of these far-reaching institutional mechanisms, it is suggested that the fundamentals of a new, progressive southern African framework for city-to-city learning cannot be crafted.

Before concluding this section on the impact of the mentorship program, it is useful to briefly consider some of the suggestions made by the census survey respondents on what they regard as important success factors that may have an impact on city-to-city learning. The range of suggestions that emerged is summarized in Figure 6.6 below.

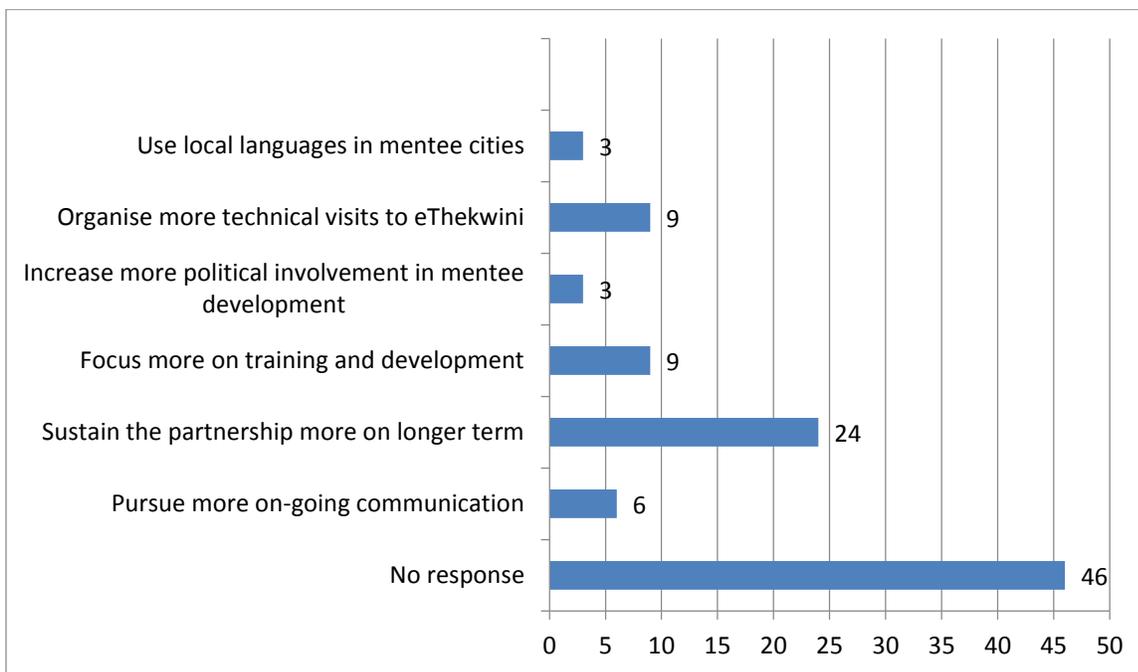


Figure 6.6: Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu census survey respondents' recommendations to improve future learning programs in percentage (n=34)

Whilst nearly half of all respondents (46%) did not respond to this question, perhaps suggesting limited knowledge in this area, most conspicuous from Figure 6.6 is the fact that nearly one-quarter of all survey respondents (24%) recommended the need for a much more longer term sustained partnership in order to maximize the impact of the mentorship program. This is interesting and confirms that such partnerships are accepted even by the stakeholders, who are meant to ultimately benefit from the planning process. This aligns with the result of the specific question dealt with earlier on the length of the mentorship program, and also reinforces the need to ensure more

sustained commitment and funding that goes beyond a three-year horizon. These are important issues that will be revisited in Chapter 7. Organizing more technical visits and focusing more on training and development are also useful recommendations, highlighting the need to build technical capacity and for more on-site learning. Whilst only one respondent mentioned the issue of utilizing local languages, this is something that is nonetheless important to be fed back to the workshop organizing teams.

As a way of concluding this section on assessing the impact of the learning intervention, it is important to reflect back on the literature and in particular on the framework developed by South African researcher De Villiers (2009) that was discussed in Chapter 3. In order to maximize the impact of learning, De Villiers (2009) identified a set of 13 key success factors. Without laboring each of these factors here, it is worth noting the congruence and alignment of those success factors with the findings that emerge from this research. In particular, the observations around maximizing impact through an enabling environment, intensive stakeholder engagement, ensuring strong and continuous leadership, building relations of trust, accessing grant funding and regular monitoring and evaluation resonate with this research project. These and other key elements that emerged during the research will form the basis of a learning framework to guide city-to city learning, detailed in the next chapter.

6.4. Summary and conclusions

Given the phronetic research approach that is sensitive to issues of power and the expression of geographies of learning, the case study paid particular attention to how practitioners responded to the issue of the control of the learning agenda. Whilst the results showed that there was a clear call for rethinking the way the program is managed, and for much greater autonomy and control from African institutions such as the Local Government Associations and the UCLGA, there was an acceptance that major capacity constraints currently is a key obstacle to a truly Southern-managed program, as flagged with great concern by Buis (2009). A key recommendation that would need to be suggested in the next chapter is to invest in the re-capacitation of Local Government Associations.

The case study also showed that it is inaccurate to frame the complex dynamics of power relations as being simply dominated by the global North with the southern partners as mere passive recipients. What came across most strongly is that the international program managers responsible for the success of UCLG's city-to-city learning initiative are often well-intentioned, highly energetic individuals determined to produce results. Whilst it is tempting to cast this as a classic domination of the global South by its more powerful Northern partners, a much more nuanced interpretation is called for.

Working within a pragmatic conceptual framework, and free from the shackles of a grand meta-theory has allowed this appreciation of the complex realities of African practice; with well-intentioned partners driving ambitious programs linked to tight deliverables and timeframes on the one hand and the slower, more thoughtful, respectful traditional African ways of practice coming together in often highly politicized and contested terrains on the other hand. An understanding of this reality does not allow any simplistic dichotomous notions of global North versus global South power relationships. This is yet another critical finding emanating from the case study.

Similarly too, regarding the role of international funding agencies, the warnings of Rai (2004), Murphy (2008) and Waylen (2004) of the vested interests of international capital being inserted into a local site under the guise of technical support did not appear to be relevant in this particular program. Significantly, however, whilst this may have been the case, Hout's (2012) assertion that donor agencies function less than optimally in relation to the context in which they work, and in particular their own inability to sometimes appreciate the local political contexts, did find expression in this research. More importantly what stood out in this regard was the acknowledgement of the operational efficiencies within the ranks of the international agency, and the move to begin to change practices – clearly marking a positive new direction that augurs well for the future of city-to-city learning.

Finally, regarding practitioner perceptions of the impact of the city-to-city learning, it emerged that whilst the Namibian case progressed far slower than its Malawian counterpart, both municipalities were able to produce CDSs. Mzuzu City Council was able to implement actual project emanating from their visioning exercise, which was not the case in Otjiwarongo, due to

delays in the process. Notwithstanding this, tangible benefits accrued in both cities, from changing mindsets, to building capacity to take ownership of planning processes right through to mobilizing Local Government Associations to lobby their national governments for legislative changes.

In the tradition of the phronetic research approach, the researcher (not a bystander, but a player) was able to provide feedback on the emerging findings to the key stakeholders at a regional workshop on African city-to-city learning. The findings created much interest and discussion, and whilst some immediate resolutions were taken, it was agreed that a dedicated future session to consider new directions be organized at a later date, and that the researcher be given an opportunity to present ideas to influence the development of a new learning agenda. In order to proactively contribute towards this exciting movement for change, the next chapter begins to design the essentials of a learning framework, with tangible recommendations emanating from this empirical southern African research, in order to guide transformative municipal planning practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR CITY-TO-CITY LEARNING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

7.1. Introduction

Working within the pragmatist tradition, along with contemporary southern African thinkers such as Harrison (2014), Pieterse and Hyman (2014) and Watson (2014a; 2014b), and others who reject the grand meta-narrative and who place a premium on understanding the uniqueness of everyday practices, has certainly allowed a much greater appreciation of the complexities inherent in learning processes in African cities. Against this background, however, the notion of suggesting a single comprehensive learning framework for future action may seem somewhat contradictory or inconsistent with the overall conceptual framework of this exploratory research. It is important therefore to qualify the intention of this chapter.

Having used the UCLG mentorship program between the cities of eThekweni, Mzuzu and Otjiwarongo as an in-depth case study to explore the detailed mechanics of how cities learn from each other, several powerful insights and valuable lessons have emerged from the research. As a phronetic researcher committed to transformative action especially in the global South, the intention is not to design a comprehensive mini-recipe book or suggest a simplistic, reductionist, ‘one-size fits all’ approach that guarantees successful city learning partnerships. Clearly, such effort is not only of limited value, but works counter to the philosophy of the research project.

Instead, this chapter consolidates the learning from the southern African experience and presents it in a broad but coherent framework that aims to guide future learning activities in order to improve the quality of urban strategic planning practice. It is hoped that this framework will directly benefit future interventions not only by the UCLG which is the only officially recognized global network of cities internationally, but by other agencies and planning and development networks involved in promoting learning in southern Africa or anywhere else in the global South. As indicated earlier, in the tradition of phronetic research, the researcher has already presented the initial findings to the key stakeholders of the program at a city learning event in Mozambique in

March 2015. In addition, the initial findings were also presented to all Namibian stakeholders including the ALAN Presidency and senior political leadership of the five Namibian pilot municipalities at a learning feedback event convened at Walvis Bay in Namibia, in May 2015. In response to these preliminary findings, it is very encouraging to note that the UCLG program manager in Barcelona has seen value in the emerging findings and has even committed to the immediate implementation of key suggestions, including changing the name from a ‘mentorship program’ to a ‘peer learning program’:

I think that the five stages in the learning process that you propose are extremely useful and the UCLG will now adopt this methodology right away, and try to apply it for monitoring the progress of the partnerships that are evolving here. We are about to go to scale now with 14 Brazilian and Mozambican cities, and we will already be able to use your emerging findings for alerting everyone that peer learning should not just depend on funding. It should also depend on the trust to work together. If we look for the relationships, we will accept that mentorship is not a good term for Africa; we will call it peer learning from here on. Also as UCLG we would like to build on your study; to take this as a piece and to reflect our own learning agenda, so we could look for new vocabulary.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

Before a broad framework with key policy recommendations for learning is presented, however, the first part of this chapter engages not with the learning process, but on the findings emerging from the actual urban strategic planning processes in Namibia and Malawi. In order to facilitate this reflection, it is necessary to revisit the good practices identified in the eThekweni Municipality long-term planning process that was valued by the two southern African municipalities. By using the eThekweni Municipality’s planning practice as a yardstick, a set of five key urban strategic planning considerations are suggested with the intention of improving the quality of future planning practice.

At this juncture, two important points need to be noted. Firstly, it has never been part of the scope of this research project to conduct a critical evaluation of the urban strategic planning processes in the selected cities. Instead, critical reflections with a view to frame a few key recommendations

are considered here. Secondly, it should be noted that the planning process is not yet fully completed in both cities, and the considerations are based on the research observations to date. It is anticipated that many of the criticisms are already being addressed, as part of the ongoing implementation of the CDS process in these cities.

The second part of the chapter then resumes with the development of a broad learning framework, segmented into five key areas. As a structuring mechanism, the framework begins by setting out a new understanding or conceptualization of city-to-city learning, which moves away from the notion of mentorship that is perceived to be problematic by many of the southern African practitioners. After recommending a strategic action here, the framework proceeds to highlight other key policy actions to be considered (i) prior to embarking on a learning process, (ii) during the city-to-city learning process, and (iii) post-implementation phase of city learning. It concludes with suggesting a new approach to governance, with three important institutional, financial and capacity-building recommendations to guide a more bottom-up African-led learning process.

7.2. Improving urban strategic planning processes in the case study: some key policy considerations

7.2.1. Strategic considerations emerging from the eThekweni Municipality's experiences

In reflecting on findings from the focus group discussions, key respondent interviews and census survey on the eThekweni Municipality's urban strategic planning process as offering tangible examples of good practice to be emulated, five key points emerged from the case study. Rather than repeating the key points that were raised in Chapter 5, these are synthesized into a set of short strategic considerations for future cities wishing to embark on similar planning processes in southern Africa and beyond. It also serves as a useful yardstick for cities wishing to identify potential cities to partner with that may have already incorporated these areas of good practice.

7.2.1.1. Consider embedding a longer term planning horizon into the strategic planning process

The case study showed clearly that the eThekweni Municipality exceeded the legislative mandate to plan for a period of five years. Through the Imagine Durban process, it was shown that an 80 year planning horizon increased possibilities for greater creation and innovation, and allowed planners to embark on projects not constrained to the typical five year political term of office. It also allowed capital projects that required multi-year budgeting to be implemented in the medium-term.

The intention here is not to suggest that a similar 80 year horizon be adopted in other African cities as a rule, but more to make the case for embedding a longer term planning horizon as part of the city's visioning process. This notion which was introduced to the planning teams in both cities has begun to have appeal, but will require greater ownership of the political leadership to embrace long-term planning. This will require significant lobbying of Councilors, dedicated workshops to demonstrate the long-term value, and exposure to international learning events where political leadership will be exposed to other successful cities' experiences with longer term planning.

7.2.1.2. Invest in systems and capacity that place citizens at the center of planning

One of the central features of the eThekweni Municipality's experience emanating from the testimonies both from focus group respondents as well as selected key respondents, and confirmed by the literature (Ballard et al., 2007; Robinson, 2007) is the energy and effort invested in securing the effective participation of various stakeholders in the planning process. Particularly noteworthy is the activation of ordinary residents and invited sectors of civil society groupings to participate in the development of planning themes and detailed strategies for the long-term plan (eThekweni Municipality, 2011).

Whilst the legislative mandate in South Africa requires consultation with citizens, the case study shows that moving beyond mere consultation to actively engaging with citizens at each stage of the city strategy development process will ensure a greater ownership of the plan by key stakeholders. This is an important lesson that has been learnt and municipalities embarking on long-term planning processes will need to invest in systems and capacity to engage effectively with citizenry.

7.2.1.3. Build internal municipal support for an outcomes-based model of holistic and integrated development early on in the planning process

From the case study it became clear that most Namibian and Malawian respondents appreciated the honesty of their eThekweni municipal planning counterparts who had confessed that their municipality's initial early obsession with service delivery rather than on a focus on improving quality of life was a costly lesson learnt. This was rectified through an internal transformation process that required the changing of mindsets of municipal staff to become more outcomes-focused in their business (Dlamini & Moodley, 2002).

Cities embarking on urban strategic planning processes will therefore do well to learn from the experiences of the eThekweni Municipality that re-configured its municipal systems, commencing with an internal transformation process that was able to support the new demands of a people-centered strategy. Again, this requires investment in staff development and capacity building that will need to be budgeted and resourced.

7.2.1.4. Ensure that the strategy is implemented, monitored and evaluated continually

As pointed out in Chapter 5, what stood out from the data analysis in terms of respondents' perceptions of the eThekweni Municipality's strategy process is that the highest rating emerged in the areas of plan implementation and performance management, with 85% of the participants of all respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that eThekweni Municipality's process was worthy of emulation. This is also one of the key reasons why the UCLG had identified the eThekweni Municipality as a lead city in the learning process, as it had demonstrated how a citizen-focused urban strategic plan could drive the municipal budget prioritization process in order for the strategies, programs and projects to be implemented within the five year cycle. This translation from vision into action on the ground built greater legitimacy and credibility into the process, and further entrenched more active citizen engagement. This confirms the views in the literature where visioning goes beyond imagination to being transformative, achieved through a tangible and clear "blue print or framework" (van Marle, 2014: 173).

The municipality ensured that its targets were being achieved through the publication of an annual review of its plan that allowed for citizens to engage with the content of the plan and the budget allocation (eThekweni Municipality, 2014a). The researcher observed the positive response from invited stakeholders in Namibia and Malawi when this eThekweni municipal approach was shared. Many stakeholders had been disillusioned with previous processes that involved only planning with little delivery. A new integrated approach that translated vision to project implementation was considered a good practice by citizen groupings.

7.2.1.5. Secure joint administrative and political support for the strategic plan

In addition to placing citizens at the center of the CDS, a concerted effort was also made to ensure that political leadership was fully appraised and had supported the planning process in its entirety (eThekweni Municipality, 2011). This is an important lesson learnt as planning processes are usually understood and driven by technical staff of municipalities.

In order to ensure that political leadership support the planning process, managers will firstly need to be convinced of the importance of having political leadership for the process. They will need to make time for their respective Mayor and other political leaders to be continually kept abreast of key milestones and developments in the city strategy. Ward councilors also need to understand the strategy and what it means for their respective communities. Ensuring that local ward Councilors take full control of ward workshops at which the city strategy is presented is one mechanism of ensuring local political ownership of the plan (eThekweni Municipality, 2011).

Having set out the five key strategic considerations relating to good practice from the eThekweni Municipality's CDS process, the next section continues framing key policy considerations, this time arising from the CDS process in the respective Malawian and Namibian cities. Again, to avoid the danger of repetition, high level actions only are focused on.

7.2.2. Reflections from current strategic planning process underway in selected cities: Key actions on inclusivity to augment CDS process

Given that the eThekweni Municipality's strategic planning process has been held out by the planning teams in both Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu as an example to be emulated, and that the issue of ensuring civil society mobilization and active engagement with all key stakeholders has been well established, in a critical reflection on the engagement process in the two municipalities, it is evident that there is room for greater improvement. In this regard, four strategic actions around representivity and inclusion are made here.

7.2.2.1. Actively secure the participation of women in the current urban strategic planning process

The glaring gender disparity in terms of stakeholder participation came to the fore in Chapter 5, where it was noted that nearly 80% of all workshop participants in both Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu were male. Whilst it is accepted that the workshop was the first engagement session, and that this was to be built on during time, it is nonetheless a concern to be addressed. As noted earlier, the marginalization of women has been identified as a common trend in the participation literature. In the planning literature too, women's participation in strategic planning "remains uneven and partial" (Todes et al., 2010: 81).

This is a concern not only in terms of parity and equity, but also for a more practical consideration raised by Escalante and Valdivia (2015: 116) that women are "experts about the places where they live". Hence the exclusion of the unique experiences that women bring to the process, it is posited, will diminish the overall quality of the visioning process in both the cities. Against this background, one of the most critical suggestions to both the Namibian and Malawian planning teams to guide action is to ensure that future engagements include the active participation of women.

7.2.2.2. Conscientize and lobby leadership on the need for greater gender representivity in city strategic planning leadership

This consideration also pertains to gender representivity, although this time within the municipal professional planning and leadership team involved in the program. As raised in Chapter 5, nearly 70% of all interviewees directly involved in the program were male, reflecting the patriarchal

nature of broader societal relations. It is understood that unlike the first recommendation which is much easier to implement as it is within the control of those managing the community engagement process, implementing change to the status quo is more complex.

It is acknowledged that this will require a multi-faceted approach including the interventions from African planning schools to those devising municipal human resources and recruitment policies that focus on the training, promotion and empowerment of female planning professionals. It is also accepted that these may not be a priority in many municipalities in southern Africa currently, given the range of developmental challenges. Notwithstanding this, given the concern raised by Ciocoletto (2014 cited in Escalante & Valdivia, 2015:116) that ultimately the built environment may begin to respond predominantly to the needs and interests of those managing it, it is important to begin to raise awareness about this trend in the longer term.

7.2.2.3. Consider increasing participation of youth and elderly in ongoing city strategic planning leadership

Once again, nearly 80% of the total invited stakeholders that participated in the Otjiwarongo and Mzuzu visioning exercises were between the ages of 30 and 60. As indicated earlier, the failure to recognize young people as a group with specific aspirations is a concern identified in the planning literature (Brkovic & Brkovic, 2014). This is especially important in the context that city visioning processes are about imagining a future that young people are meant to be actively shaping and championing.

The Imagine Durban process in the eThekweni Municipality that was emulated by both cities, for example, actively unlocked the imagination of school children through a range of ambitious programs run in partnership with the Provincial Education Department (eThekweni Municipality, 2011). Given the exposure of both planning teams to this good practice example, greater care should have been taken to ensure participation of younger people. In moving forward, it is important therefore for the respective planning teams to augment their current planning processes with increased participation of the youth in order to ensure that these interests are better represented.

Similarly too, the interests of the elderly were not well represented in both municipal visioning processes. This again confirms the ongoing international trend of not ensuring access for the meaningful participation in the elderly in planning processes as raised by Raymond et al. (2014). It may be interesting for the planning team in both municipalities to consider engaging both the youth and the elderly in a single process, which in the eThekweni Municipality's Imagine Durban program helped build greater understanding and tolerance of each other's views and aspirations. This is a key consideration that can be implemented relatively easily in the near future, ensuring richer, deeper and more meaningful participation.

7.2.2.4. Implement a more structured civil society participation engagement process to broaden sectoral interests

In the Otjiwarongo Municipality the voices of civil society whilst certainly present, were limited. The planners explained that this was deliberate, as the engagement was considered only part of an initial first phase, which was to be rolled out later. Whilst this is accepted, the researcher as an observer in the stakeholder workshop planning process noted that a longer notice period for the workshop could have been given, and that this could have maximized participation. In Mzuzu, the engagement was focused on canvassing the administrative and political leadership, given the political leadership vacuum since 2005 (Tambalusi, 2011).

Given the current low base of civil society engagement, it is strongly recommended that a more structured approach to engaging with civil society be considered in both municipalities. This is especially significant given the increasing importance being placed on more participatory planning approaches in the literature, and the renewed call for active citizen engagement made at WUF 7 held in Columbia in 2014 (UN-Habitat, 2014a). More importantly, as noted in the CDS literature, the very defining characteristic of a visioning process is the fact that it unlocks the imagination of all of its stakeholders (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Clark, 2013; van Marle, 2014).

The detailed participation methodologies followed by the eThekweni municipal team comprising of separate workshops with each sector of civil society, which culminates in a larger stakeholder workshop colloquially known as the "Big Mama" engagements have been well documented (eThekweni Municipality, 2004; 2011). These experiences have also been shared as part of the Durban narrative during the formal training sessions, as indicated in Appendix Three. As the

respective planning teams are now equipped with the tools for engagement, and a platform for more inclusive participation laid, the municipalities will need to be encouraged to foster greater civil society engagement.

To summarize, it is through a process of reflection on the good practices of the eThekweni Municipality's urban strategic planning process as seen through the eyes of the interviewees and focus group respondents, that the first five policy considerations have been crafted. This was supported by another four strategic actions arising from a more critical reflection of the planning processes underway in each of the municipalities. Acknowledging the importance of understanding the uniqueness of local context, and the need to tailor-make responses to suit local conditions as noted by Robinson (2011), it is suggested that these key policy considerations and strategic actions will be useful in helping create a more robust and meaningful urban strategic planning process in both Malawi and Namibia. Having addressed the substantive participatory planning issues, the area of city-to city learning is considered next.

7.3. Towards a framework to guide southern African city-to-city learning

It has to be acknowledged that in straddling the seemingly separate worlds of rigorous academia on the one hand, and more messy planning practice on the other, the researcher as an active practitioner working in the SADC region has been often discouraged by the general failure to translate international development rhetoric into clear and tangible guidelines for action. In the latest State of the African Cities report cited in the literature review as a case in point, a rather impassioned plea was made to “re-imagine the African city” through new paradigms for more modern African urbanism (UN-Habitat, 2014b: 39). Whilst certainly academically relevant, it does fall short of stating exactly how this can be done, what steps need to be followed, what enabling environments need to be in place, who should be doing this and when this should be done – all pragmatic and critically important for the practitioner that is interested in transformative action.

In processing this frustration, this research project addresses this painful disjuncture between theory and practice by responding to the African call in some small way. This is done through the design of a bottom-up learning framework intended to guide more progressive planning practice, on both the continent and global South. It may also be worth noting here that Bontenbal (2009),

one of the more prolific writers in the field of city-to-city cooperation and learning, has accepted that up until that time, there was no discernible blueprint in the learning literature for the activities, actors, scope or frequency to guide city-to-city learning. As pointed out in the disclaimer earlier, whilst the intention here is not to provide a blue print, but merely a framework to guide learning, it is accepted that this is a pioneering area of research with much scope for more future detailed work.

In order to facilitate a well-structured framework, the learning process is segmented into five key components. The first involves obtaining agreement from all the relevant stakeholders on the essentials of a new conceptualization and definition of city-to-city learning. The second, third and fourth components of the framework are what have been termed the ‘pre-learning phase’, ‘learning phase’ and ‘post-learning phase’. The framework also outlines key methodological considerations to guide learning in each of the phases. The fifth and final component of the framework explores the essentials of a new, bottom-up, and enabling governance and institutional model that underpins the entire learning framework, as depicted in summarized form in Figure 7.1 below.

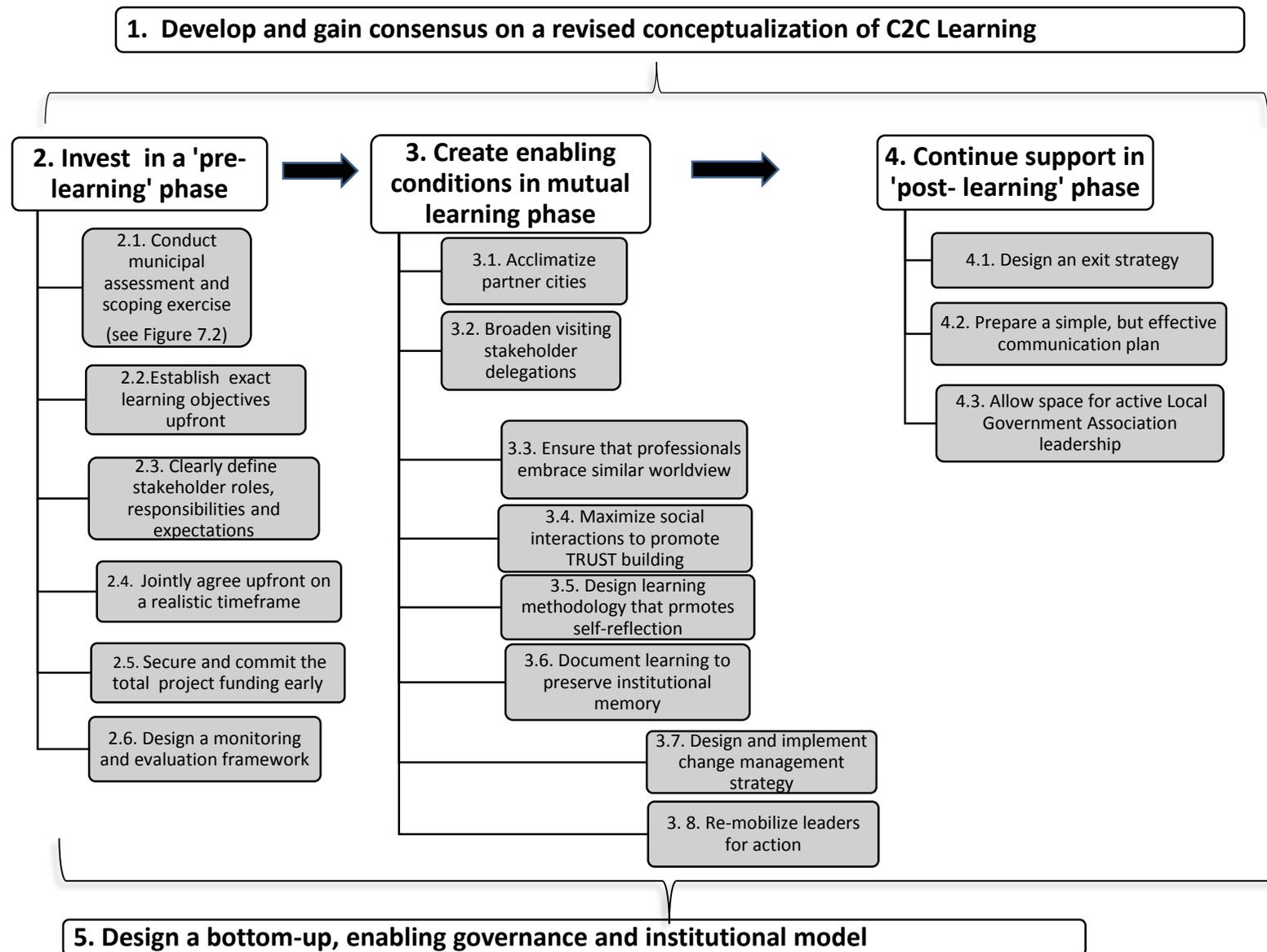


Figure 7.1: Summarized overall framework to guide city-to-city learning in southern Africa

7.3.1. Re-conceptualizing city-to-city learning: building a new understanding and awareness

It is argued that the way one conceptualizes or problematizes an issue will have a determining factor on the outcome achieved. Accepting this logic, the starting point in the framework (refer to component 1 in Figure 7.1) involves a critical re-examination of the prevailing understanding and definition of city-to-city learning. Based on the findings of the research some suggestions to guide this new understanding are offered.

Whilst the learning literature did not offer a definitive view of city-to-city learning as noted by Bontenbal (2009), it is argued that over time there has come to be a common and perhaps unconscious, almost hegemonic understanding of this elusive concept. As a point of departure, as acknowledged earlier in the review of literature, the working definition of learning, suggested by Campbell (2012a: 9) as the “acquisition of new knowledge” that occurs specifically during “technical visits of professional practitioners who actively seek new knowledge and good practice” was accepted at the commencement of the research project. Pausing, however, to consider the breadth and depth of the thoughtful and critical reflections from the range of respondents during the research process, there is a good case for a re-definition of this notion of learning, based on the experiences of the southern African case study.

It is proposed that meaningful city-to-city learning is better understood as “a structured, yet flexible process of mutually acquiring new knowledge, willingly shared by practitioners and their collaborative partners between two or more cities or towns, in order to improve municipal service delivery and good governance”. It is posited that the key elements in this revised definition more adequately captures the nuanced understanding of the complexities of learning in the southern African context, as informed by the insights obtained from this research project.

In unpacking this definition, learning here is seen not as an end product, but is viewed as a dynamic process. Learning is well-structured as it does not occur randomly and on an ad-hoc basis, but is organized with clear objectives, whilst at the same time building in and valuing flexibility and adaptability. It is certainly geared towards acquiring new knowledge and practice, but rather than being restricted to a one-way flow of expertise; it is about learning and sharing together and from

each other as equal peers, in an empowering manner. The new definition also emphasizes the collaborative process not just with professionals, but with a range of civil society partners who learn together and build trusted networks during the exchange; a much needed commodity, in order to achieve complex long-term goals that require alignment and working together. Furthermore, this new understanding also recognizes that learning is not only dyadic, but can work as in the case study when three cities participated together in joint interventions. Finally, and critically too, the outcome of such learning is always improvement-oriented; in the case of municipal learning processes, it is therefore focused on developmental local government objectives.

It is important to note that this new understanding has emerged from a research journey over the last three years. Whilst emanating from an engagement with the key stakeholders, in order for it to be a common, shared understanding that is owned by all the key role-players, a consensus building process will need to be initiated. Given the unevenness of understanding of the fundamentals of the learning process, as visibly demonstrated by a somewhat contested definition of the very concept of ‘mentorship’, it is suggested that a first key step towards engendering a more sustainable learning process is the building of a common and unified understanding of city-to-city learning.

In practical terms, this consensus-building process can take the form of a learning symposium or conference, involving all the critical learning role-players within the region in order to develop a shared understanding of the basic principles of a city-to-city learning approach, its intentions and its assumptions. Open and honest deliberations on why the ‘mentorship’ label is no longer appropriate, a formal adoption of new terminology, and more importantly the development of new learning outcomes will be an integral component of this learning symposium agenda. Such a focused southern African learning symposium, if managed well can lay a foundation for future learning programs, and establish a platform from which individual countries can build on, as they identify learning partners for their respective learning interventions within the region and beyond.

It is further suggested that the UCLGA is best positioned to take a lead in hosting such a learning symposium aimed to build this new understanding of city-to-city learning. Key to the success of

such an event is its timing. In this regard, it is noted with interest that the next Africities Summit¹ is to be held in Johannesburg in December 2015, making this a potentially opportune moment to catalyze action on an African-led learning agenda. Again, in the tradition of the phronetic planning approach, the researcher will volunteer to provide feedback on this research and offer assistance in helping develop a new learning agenda, should such an opportunity be created.

Having built a common understanding and conceptualization of city-to-city learning, the next step as proposed in Figure 7.1 is recognizing that the learning is a long-term process evolving over time. Conceptually, the process has been divided into three phases, with recommended interventions in each of the phases as detailed below.

7.3.2. Pre-learning phase: focusing more energy on gearing up for city-to-city learning

In reflecting on the UCLG mentorship program, it becomes clear that city-to-city learning does not happen overnight. It requires significant effort, time and commitment by a range of stakeholders, whilst also translating into substantial investment of financial resources. In order to maximize the benefits of this investment, it is strongly recommended that far greater emphasis is placed on the gearing up phase; ensuring that all the various conditions are in place, even before an application for funding is made. In the light of the troublesome statistic of more than half of all municipal learning partnerships in South Africa being abandoned within two years (De Villiers, 2009: 150), it makes sense that more attention is spent in securing the critical elements that will promote meaningful city-to-city learning.

A set of six strategic steps (refer to component 2 in Figure 7.1.) are provided in this first phase of what is termed “pre-learning” that begins with the task of conducting a municipal learning assessment, in which a further sub-set of 6 recommendations are outlined and detailed below.

7.3.2.1. Conduct a detailed pre-learning assessment and scoping exercise

¹ The Africities Summit is held every three years and looks at issues affecting urban and economic development in African cities. The theme for 2015 is ‘2063 Vision for Africa’ and explores the local government vision for the next 50 years and creative ways of solving the problems facing cities on the continent, <http://sacitiesnetwork.co.za/africities-2015-dynamics-sustainable-development/>

This first multi-faceted step in the pre-learning phase of conducting a thorough municipal assessment and scoping exercise may appear onerous. Given the timeframes that are stipulated in funding agreements, and the pressure to deliver on learning outcomes, there may be a tendency to fast track this step. It is, however, in the best interest of engendering a more sustainable learning process in the longer term that it is recommended that due consideration of each of these six interventions is given, even prior to the signing of funding agreements with potential donor agencies.

As summarized in Figure 7.2 below, three key factors are central to an effective scoping exercise, all of which are part of a dynamic system that will only be optimized if they are all given attention and prominence. These are (i) an understanding of the municipal planning and development contexts, (ii) an assessment of the municipal readiness to share and impart knowledge willingly, and (iii) an assessment of the municipal readiness to receive and act on knowledge received. Given the explicit intention to guide better practice, each of these broad factors are unpacked through the identification of a set of six key actions which if implemented holistically will assist in ensuring that a thorough and detailed assessment of the learning environment is in place.

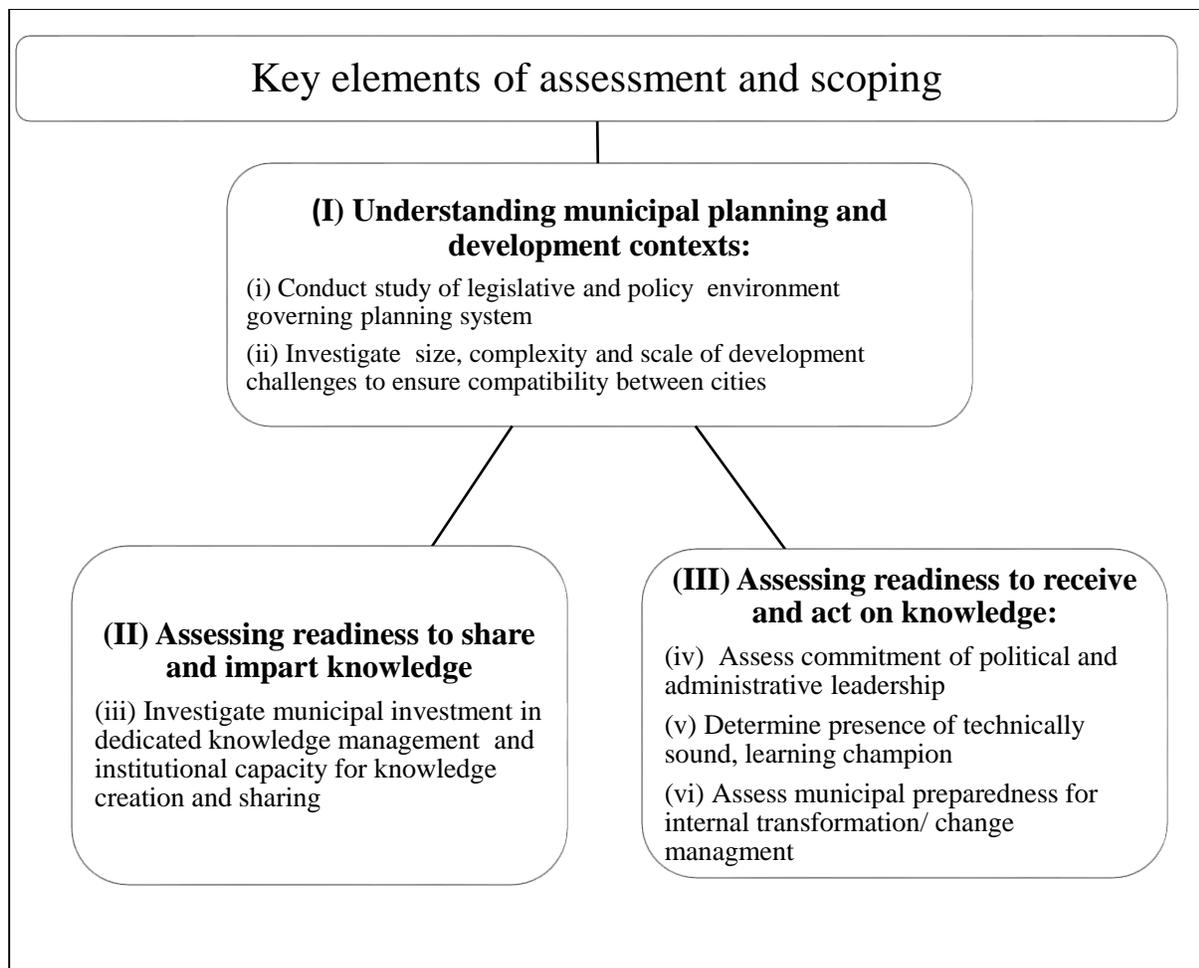


Figure 7.2: Unpacking the key elements of the assessment and scoping exercise

7.3.2.1.1. Conduct study of legislative and policy environment governing respective municipal planning systems

As explored in Chapter 4, where the planning contexts in each of the respective cities and countries were briefly described, each city operated within a unique legal and policy environment. In the South African case, for example, the Municipal Systems Act (2000) legislates for community consultation, and generally provides an enabling environment for urban strategic planning to be conducted by local authorities. This, however, has not been the case in Malawi and Namibia, where national government plays a much stronger role and where such participatory municipal urban strategic planning processes are not legislated. In the interview with the member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat this issue was emphasized as an important consideration to be noted:

Understanding the context well is very important. South Africa's (strategic planning) is great, however, the contexts are different elsewhere.

Member of Cities Alliance Secretariat

Planners who are not familiar with each other's legislative and policy environment will find future cooperation challenging, and at times frustrating as the mechanisms and instruments used to deliver strategic planning outcomes vary considerably. The planners who are leading the sharing process need to be conscious of these differences early in the process, as it will affect the design and methodology of the visioning process that will be developed. Similarly, the planners who are learning about their peers innovative processes need to be cognizant that their implementation processes will need to be adapted to suit their own policy environments.

7.3.2.1.2. Investigate complexity and scale of development challenges, recognizing that compatibility is not dependent on size of municipal area

Whilst the literature is silent on the role that the size of a municipality (measured in population size, density or extent of the municipal area) plays in determining learning compatibility in urban strategic planning processes, anecdotally there is an assumption that learning partnerships work best between similar-sized municipalities. For the researcher, this too was a pre-conceived notion that was held prior to the research process. It is interesting to note, however, that respondents generally did not place too much emphasis on municipal size:

Small cities can learn lots from larger cities. I would not necessarily restrict small cities learning from bigger cities. On the other hand, perceptions may dictate to the smaller city that we are learning something that may not be applicable to us and that may create a blockage to these cities that will prevent innovations from being applied. What is more important is for the facilitators to be aware of these perceptions and deal with them prior to the learning event through proper preparation, so that these stereotypes are eliminated.

Program manager, UCLGA

What is interesting about the above UCLGA response is the implicit acceptance that despite the obvious difference in size of the partner cities, learning can still occur. As explained earlier, what is most important is that the cities face similar developmental challenges, and that the practitioners that are grappling with them share a similar worldview, a point that will be emphasized again later.

7.3.2.1.3. Assess the amount of municipal investment in dedicated knowledge management and institutional capacity to knowledge creation and sharing

For the UCLG, a salient observation is that middle managers in eThekweni are interested, globalized and appreciate cooperation...In this way, there is not a reliance on a single person. This makes for more effective mentorship, as the managers can be more responsive. The most important thing is that having an institution like MILE is key as there is a vehicle to coordinate learning much better. Learning does require lots of time and resources and having a vehicle like MILE assists.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

De Villiers (2009: 149), in identifying critical success factors in city-to-city learning, emphasized the importance of the “embedding of knowledge which leads to alliance capability and continued alliance success”. The observation from the UCLG program manager above, confirms the need to embed knowledge institutionally. It also re-emphasizes one of the most significant findings from this case study around the importance of investing in knowledge management systems and capacity. As pointed out in earlier chapters, the eThekweni Municipality took a strategic decision to position their city as a learning city internationally. More than just a vision statement, however,

they were able to successfully subsequently translate this intent into a tangible program, realized through the establishment of a dedicated learning vehicle with dedicated capacity and resources (eThekweni Municipality, 2010b).

Beyond merely establishing an institutional vehicle to actively promote learning, however, the case study showed that the MILE facilitators were skilled and adept at creating conducive learning environments, therefore ensuring what Campbell (2012a: 11) referred to as “higher orders of learning” occurred. Moreover, the flexible management style of the MILE program mentioned earlier in the research, which challenged Campbell’s (2012b) model of corporate learning that typically has inflexible decision-making processes, is worthy to note here. The lesson and recommendation emerging from the case study is that cities that are interested in learning will do well to invest in a dedicated institutional vehicle, that has high levels of expertise and capacity, and is duly empowered to act autonomously and flexibly given the dynamic African city environments that they operate in.

7.3.2.1.4. Determine the extent of support and commitment of political and administrative leadership

If having the will and capacity to share knowledge emerges as an essential recommendation in this research, then equally too does the reciprocal issue of commitment and support to receive this knowledge, particularly from municipal leadership.

Commitment to learning is key and will ensure that resources are allocated to improve the practice and translate into action. This includes political leadership commitment.

Planning manager, Otjiwarongo Municipality

Like many other respondents in the case study, the planning manager from the Otjiwarongo Municipality stressed the importance of having the full support not only of the highest levels of municipal management, but of political leadership. This is important not only for credibility and legitimacy of the program, but also as suggested by the respondent above, to ensure that there is commitment to resources for the process. More fundamentally, however, it is important as these leaders need to be actively participating and learning in the process, and without their commitment,

the quality of decision-making during implementation of the urban strategic planning process may be jeopardized.

7.3.2.1.5. Determine presence of technically sound learning champion/s

Having noted the importance of support and commitment from leadership, equally important is having one official, with sound technical competence in urban strategic planning who will serve as the learning champion, actively thinking about reflecting on learning processes, and ensuring that they avail themselves generously for the duration of the program. Having this champion to be supported by a team of other interested officials is ideal. In fact, many of the respondents were suggesting more than a single person:

You need to have a core of committed activists that want to learn, think and do, then it will work. In smaller cities this can actually work better. You will also need professionals who are reading!

Former City Manager, eThekweni Municipality

Conditions for implementation should look at capacity of the mentees: minimum requirements will be required including the number and quality of planners before the program moves forward. The role of MALGA is critical here.

Former City Manager, Mzuzu City Council

To highlight again, we really need to have motivated people in the process.

ULCG Project Officer

It should be noted, there that this recommendation is not the same as the one suggesting the importance on learning capacity and investment in knowledge management champions. Beyond this, the focus here is on having officials who are directly involved in the daily urban strategic planning process to champion and lead the learning agenda. From the case study, it was clear that beyond the facilitator from MILE in the eThekweni Municipality, there was a champion from the municipal strategic planning unit that was fully committed to the process. Similarly, in Mzuzu and

Otjiwarongo the respective planning heads had delegated this function to suitably qualified officials.

In this pre-learning phase, it is important to secure the commitment of a small team who is willing, able, allowed and above all passionate to embrace the learning process. This is an important consideration worth flagging as a matter for discussion with the city leadership considering embarking on a city-to-city learning journey. Given the obvious capacity constraints in smaller municipalities in (southern) Africa and generally in the global South, it is recommended that at least one person be identified. A lack of commitment to secure such a single person in the pre-learning phase will be a clear indicator of a higher likelihood for a less meaningful learning process. The suggestion by the former City Manager of the Mzuzu City Council to utilize the relevant country's Local Government Association to detect this capacity is also useful in this regard.

7.3.2.1.6: Assess municipal preparedness for internal transformation

Whilst De Villiers' (2009) list of critical success factors for city-to-city learning include an enabling environment and institutional support, it falls short of emphasizing the need to assess whether or not a municipality will have the capacity to deal with the changes that arise from the learning interventions. This is certainly a major gap in the learning literature. It is hoped that through the raising of awareness of the importance of change management, this gap will be filled. The former City Manager of the Mzuzu City Council put it succinctly:

It is about having the capacity to have courage to change the way things will be done.

Whilst having this personal courage for municipal officials to embrace transformation is undoubtedly an important factor, there is clearly a need for all other stakeholders to support this change management process. In a critical reflection on the work being done by the Cities Alliance in CDS processes in other parts of Africa, the Cities Alliance Secretariat respondent underscored the value of supporting innovation and change from national governments. This strong view went as far as attributing the failure of the implementation and the institutionalization of city strategies to this lack of support for municipal change management:

Wherever innovation happens, then change at national level is critical, wherever the implementer is, change agents need to be supported in innovative processes. As leaders of change none of the support allows for this; no criteria to look at capacity building, advocacy, nurturing leadership, change management and the local context. The whole aspect of these subtle but important issues are not looked at. We therefore miss the mark and CDS do not get implemented and are not institutionalized.

Member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat

As part of this assessment of municipal preparedness, is the capacity of the municipality to develop a framework for change management and institutional transformation that will be introduced as part of the strategic planning process. By the time the learning partnership has matured and is being phased out, the CDS should have been completed, with at least a broad framework to manage the associated changes arising from implementation of the strategic plan. In eThekweni Municipality's transformation process, for example, this included a series of behavioral change factors such as changing of assumptions and mindsets of municipal staff, re-designing policies and reworking performance management systems (eThekweni Municipality, 2002). The implementation of the change management plan should be initiated as part of the post-learning phase, driven by the city leadership team.

In closing this section on the six key interventions required as part of a scoping exercise in the pre-learning phase, it is worth reiterating that omitting this step and proceeding to commit scarce resources towards a city-to-city learning process will compromise the overall quality of the outcomes, or worse still, result in premature termination of the program. These key actions are of course not exhaustive, but it is hoped that collectively they will go a long way towards helping make more informed decisions about the future learning process.

7.3.2.2 Establish clear learning objectives upfront

The second step in this pre-learning phase responds directly to the analysis in Chapter 5, which showed unequivocally that the defining characteristic of city-to-city learning for most respondents in the case study was its very focused and directed nature of the interactions. This is an important

learning that emphasizes the need for discipline that will allow one to have a focused and single-pointed agenda. To reiterate the point made by the UCLG respondent:

What made the project really successful was having very clear terms of reference and not diluting all our energy on various aspects, but identifying the key area and staying with it.

UCLG Program manager, Barcelona

Having confirmed the assertion of Toens and Landwehr (2009: 4) that “improvement-oriented learning” is achieved when focused on a set of pre-determined criteria, this case study strongly recommends the construction of very clear and concise terms of reference that spells out the exact objectives of the learning process. It is important for leadership to understand what the learning process involves, and what it does not involve. Having the key role-players in the process to internalize the terms of reference over time, assists with self-censorship to ensure that newer mandates are not taken on that can jeopardize achieving the desired outcome.

Notwithstanding this, it must be pointed out that even though all respondents were adamant that having such a focused terms of reference was not limiting, from the researcher’s personal perspective, such rigidity may compromise opportunities to build on synergies that may emerge organically as a result of other initiatives. Notwithstanding this, given that very clear and focused terms of reference emerged as a priority, it is included as a key consideration that other practitioners may want to seriously consider.

7.3.2.3. Define stakeholder roles, responsibilities and expectations

Following on from, and directly relating to the second key step that will ensure a more focused and precise learning program, the third step involves very clearly defining each of the various stakeholders’ roles, responsibilities and expectations in the learning program. In reflecting on the case study, what emerges is that whilst respondents were clear about what the learning outcome was, there was much room for improvement in delineating the roles and responsibilities of the learning actors. During engagement with respondents around issues of power and control of the

process, it was conceded that a clearer definition of responsibilities was needed, as reflected in the thinking of this Mzuzu practitioner:

This power has also to do with the mentee and mentor. UCLG is just the policy formulating body somewhere, telling us how things should happen in the different regions of the world. The main players, however, are the mentee and the mentor. The mentor has the duty to keep the fire burning. That is where the mentor is seen to be more powerful. After all, the policy-making body up there is not the mentor to be asking for progress reports. If the mentee lacks self-confidence to take control of the program and then the mentor also does nothing, automatically progress will not be made. The mentee must also therefore be active and be prepared to do their bit. This must be clearly stipulated, but it is not available right now and this is an issue. These guidelines must be formulated.

Support facilitator, Mzuzu City Council

Given that this research was conducted at a time when the mentorship was very well advanced, it is a matter of concern that this lack of role definition was being identified as a gap. What is interesting to point out here, however, is that the researcher during the document analysis process was able to locate the original UCLG (2010a) Terms of Reference prepared as part of the City Future program, and the roles and responsibilities are in fact quite clearly stipulated. The issue is therefore less about not having guidelines that provide role clarity, and more about not sharing and internalizing them. This stands out in marked contrast to the previous point, where all role-players were clear about the focused learning outcomes. Whilst in general terms it is recommended that roles are clarified, shared and internalized, the roles of each learning partner will not be detailed here. Instead, it will be revisited in the fifth component of the overall learning framework where a new governance and institutional model (labeled 5 in Figure 7.1) is suggested. The next important step on establishing learning timeframes is, however, turned to now.

7.3.2.4. Establish realistic learning timeframes

Throughout this research project, and consistent with the critical pragmatist philosophical stance adopted in this research, there has been an acknowledgement of the complexity and messiness of the often contested planning environments that planning practitioners work in. Recognizing the reality of leadership changes and the fact that securing buy-in from a range of stakeholders takes longer than planned, the fourth key step in this pre-learning learning phase is to ensure that realistic learning timeframes are set. Whilst this research cannot prescribe the exact length of a typical city-to-city learning program as this would be context specific, it suggests a fine balancing act between ensuring that a long enough time to allow for meaningful interaction on the one hand and the need to begin to deliver on tangible products and outcomes without learning and participation fatigue on the other.

In probing the eThekweni Municipality's focus group respondents for reflections on project timeframes, there was a hesitancy to fix an exact timeframe, but in general terms a program over three years appeared reasonable:

We must recognize that it is a process, we must build a relationship and people have to be ready then only learning will happen. It is difficult to say exactly how long it should run. It should not go beyond three years as interest may start to wane; also additional resources may start to shift, and after three years there has to be products to be shown.

Lead planner, eThekweni Municipality

This focus on delivering tangible products also emerged strongly from the UCLG program manager, who suggested that the first two years are important to show results. For her, by this time an assessment needed to have occurred to determine the amount of progress made:

For partnerships, there must be results and an assessment must be made to determine whether this has been achieved. After two years results must be achieved, or else there is less credibility.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

It is interesting that unlike the UCLG program manager, the UCLG project officer suggested a slightly longer timeframe for city-to-city learning, acknowledging the organic nature of the learning cycle. In her view, as the learning process matures, efficiencies also increase. Having accepted that, however, she also recognized that there will be dips and peaks in the process, which has to be managed:

Continuity is very much important. It must be a natural process as the city grows. Medium to longer term is better; 3 to 5 years for starting, then to be efficient later. The valleys of enthusiasm will be there.

UCLG project officer

In a similar vein, the former Mzuzu City Manager also suggested a longer timeframe, stressing the importance of reviewing this, should the timeframe be exceeded:

We must have a clear timeframe, then, have a revised workplan if the timeframe is exceeded. For me, 5 years in principle would work well.

Former City Manager, Mzuzu City Council

As a general trend, it seemed that a five year learning program was the maximum period that practitioners were comfortable with; which also coincided with a typical five year planning cycle and political term of office, in many countries. The need to deliver tangible products earlier in the process, however, and certainly within the first two years was favored. For the researcher, if a five year learning timeframe appears optimal, then the need to manage the lag periods between learning events becomes more important. This view was expressed by the planning manager from Otjiwarongo who suggested proper programming of events in advance to ensure that the program is constantly on the agenda of the practitioners concerned:

Actually, the time between activities is too long. For example, if we have one activity the first year and the next the following year and there is no contact between the mentors and mentees, this is a problem. There must not be a time when you think the project is done with. There was a time when it was very, very quiet and then it popped on us suddenly. We even had forgotten about the CDS process, and wondered, 'Is this still around?' It needs to be programmed, so that we are all aware.

Planning manager, Otjiwarongo

This admission from the planning manager is telling and whilst it was the lead facilitator from that municipality who may have been in touch with the lead facilitators from the eThekweni Municipality, this information may not have been communicated effectively. It is critical, therefore, if long-term relationships are entered into, to have an effective and simple communication plan to ensure that all role-players are fully aware of the learning activities and are constantly kept informed. This issue of communication will be re-visited later. A complicating factor in Namibia, however, and the reason for the long lags was also partly due to the late securing of tranches of funding, an important step that is discussed next.

7.3.2.5. Secure funding early to initiate the process

Money is key - at the end of the day if there is no funding then it (learning) cannot happen.

Former City Manager, Mzuzu City Council

As expressed in this matter of fact reflection from Mzuzu's former City Manager who was instrumental in securing the participation of his Council in the program, adequate program funding remains a key component for program success. Admittedly, there was not much debate from the respondents on the issue of funding, as the adequate financial resourcing of the project is almost taken for granted, and regarded as a pre-requisite anyway. However, in reflecting on the Namibian learning experience, the project had been delayed due to a range of institutional and organizational issues, which delayed funding being received on time from the funders. As a result, there was a

significant lag between learning events, resulting in a loss of momentum that was referred to in the previous recommendation.

Hence, whilst this fifth step in the pre-learning stage might appear relatively simplistic and unhelpful, organizers of learning programs will do well to ensure that there is a guaranteed flow of funding into the local program office account timeously, and more importantly that there is capacity to administer and manage these funds effectively. The optimal situation is for funds to be secured upfront and then allowed to be used as to lever in other resources from various other sources as the project matures. As suggested by the UCLG program manager, in this way, the self-funding of programs can be facilitated:

Funding is key, especially in the beginning - it is an investment to be made. Later cities will bring on their own funding and sustain themselves.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

This aspect of funding and how much is required, where it is sourced from, how it is disbursed, and who disburses it are all fundamental questions to be pondered on. From the researcher's perspective, some creativity is required in re-thinking this funding model. Some important institutional mechanisms are recommended in this regard at the end of this chapter, where some ideas for a new institutional model are proposed.

7.3.2.6. Design a robust monitoring and evaluation framework

Unlike the taken for granted point about securing funding for the project being important and a prerequisite for the project, the issue of monitoring and evaluation is generally not seen as a priority, and certainly not before the learning process begins. From this case study, however, and in the light of reflections of the practitioners who acknowledged the complex nature of African city-to-city learning, the need to design a robust monitoring and evaluation framework upfront emerges as an important recommendation. By revisiting the UCLG project officer's reflection on the entire learning program, the value of this last step is reiterated:

We can't grasp this; it (city-to-city learning) is very hard to measure quantitatively.

UCLG project officer

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of programs is in itself a complex process, and great progress has been made in refining tools to do this more effectively in international projects (Guinea et al., 2015). The intention here is not to begin to suggest a new framework for monitoring and evaluation, as this clearly falls outside the framework of this research. It certainly will be identified as an area of future research, given that a literature search on impact monitoring in city-to-city learning in particular revealed that little or no work has been done in this much needed area. What is emphasized here, however, is the need for the entire program management team to spend some time before the learning intervention commences to develop a suite of key performance indicators related to each of their project outputs, and to use this as a tool to ensure that their learning program is on track.

Having crystallized a set of six key steps to be considered in the pre-learning phase of a typical city-to-city learning initiative, it is worth emphasizing again that these actions emanating from the case study, whilst not intending to be prescriptive, will help engender a more sustainable and meaningful learning program in the longer term. Investing in building a more solid platform in this phase it is argued ensures that the financial and human resources invested in the next phase – that of the actual mutual learning process – is justified. It is this phase (refer to component 3 in Figure 7.1.) that is examined next.

7.3.3. City-to-city mutual learning phase: creating the enabling conditions for meaningful knowledge transfer

Based on the findings from the case study, during the analysis in Chapter 5, a learning model with five clearly delineated stages was developed. In summary, it was suggested that the learning process begins with courtship and acclimatization where stakeholders begin to find each other. This is followed by a process of inspiration and reflection in stage one, before the adoption of the learning occurs as the third stage. A process of supported implementation of learning defines the

fourth stage and the program typically culminates in stage five with an after-care process. Drawing on the key findings emanating from the case study, a set of eight key policy considerations is made that cut across the five stages identified in the learning model. They are not developed in detail, but provide strategic policy direction to guide future practice.

7.3.3.1. Invest substantial energy in the first year in acclimatizing the partner cities as this will lay a foundation for learning

In the learning model emerging from the case study, the first stage of city courtship and acclimatization involved officials from the respective cities becoming familiar with each other. In Chapter 5, it became clear that if city-to-city learning is to yield powerful results based on strong relationships of trust, then the foundation must be laid in the early stage of the engagement. In practical terms, this means maximizing the amount of contact time in the first year of the learning program. The results showed that the eThekweni municipal planners did not feel there was sufficient time spent by themselves in Namibia in the early stages of the project, and they would have benefitted more if they had more direct contact time with the planners there. This was an interesting observation as they had more contact time in Mzuzu which, in their opinion, had achieved greater results. Whilst no claims are being made between a direct correlation between the amount of early contact time and meaningful learning outcomes, this is an important consideration to note.

More specifically, this has implications for applicants preparing funding proposals, as often most of the funding is reserved for travel of delegates either for training sessions or for the actual strategic planning workshops. Consideration of the need for reconnaissance visits and high quality contact time earlier in the process between the planners directly involved is not necessarily factored into budgets and business plans. This is therefore an important practical policy consideration for program managers, funders and learning practitioners themselves emerging in this acclimatization stage of learning.

7.3.3.2. Ensure that the delegations involved in city learning exchanges are broadened to include key stakeholders

Perhaps one of the greatest and most significant findings that emerged from the case study, and as emphasized in Chapter 5, is that ultimately, it is not so much that cities learn, but that in practical terms it is individuals that do. So, whilst city-to-city learning programs create the platform and help structure meaningful engagement, learning is actually a very personalized individual experience. The eThekweni Municipality's former City Manager's deep reflections about learning processes not necessarily being wide enough to take others on board, leading to uneven levels of understanding and ultimately potentially jeopardizing inter-personal relations, are profound.

Given the point made earlier that the delegations from both Malawi and Namibia who participated in the training sessions first-hand in Durban, did not include other stakeholders from their respective cities, a second key policy consideration in the acclimatization stage is to widen the base of visiting delegations. Whilst it is accepted that much ground may have been lost in this regard, given that the program is already in the implementation stage, this can be easily rectified through ensuring that future engagements are not restricted only to the key municipal planners. Again, the international experiences studied by Campbell (2012a) in Turin, Portland and Charlotte support this recommendation.

7.3.3.3. Ensure that professionals involved in the learning embrace a similar worldview

Another related finding emerging this time from the inspiration and reflection stage of the mutual learning process pertained to the fact that those leading the learning process were all planners and facilitators, and not a mix of different built environment professionals. As such, they all shared the same worldview. More importantly, as they were committed to a single cause of developing powerful municipal vision statements and strategic plans, this helped create in that particular instance a shared life-world. This finding it was noted, validates Habermas' (1990: 135) assertion that communicative reason is facilitated when there is a "consensus created through shared life-worlds".

What does this finding mean in practical terms for policy recommendations on city-to-city learning? In thinking through the implications for the structuring of learning engagements between professionals, the third policy consideration emanating from the case study is that careful attention should be paid to which professionals actively participate in the learning process. One must proceed with caution here, however. It is not necessarily being suggested that learning processes on urban strategic planning be led or managed exclusively by urban planners. It may well be the case that engineers or architects or other professionals that share a similar worldview as planners, and have the same understanding of the complexities of the realities that are being dealt with, and will therefore be able to connect with each other, regardless of their academic training. This is an important qualification that needs to be made, especially given recent moves to engender more multi-disciplinary approaches to innovation and problem solving (Paletz et al., 2013).

As stressed in Chapter 5 this shared worldview is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for transformative action arising from the learning process. More than just sharing a common worldview, the case study showed that there are other important social ingredients in the relationship between the partners that are fundamental to transformative action. The next two policy considerations deal with these important social aspects.

7.3.3.4. Engineer a learning process to maximize social interactions in order to facilitate the process of building trust

Another of the more significant findings emerging from the case study is that planners spending time with each other, relating personal stories, travelling together during the organized excursions, having meals together, and as noted earlier, even sharing drinks after the formal sessions and chatting about their challenges in relaxed social settings formed an important part of their learning process in this second phase. Through these and other examples in the case study, it is clear that for transformative action, strong ties need to be developed in a network of trust.

A logical fourth policy consideration emerging from this study therefore is to ensure that learning event organizers consciously create the space and opportunities for social engagement and

interaction. This is particularly important for host cities to take note of, as often project budgets do not allow for these ‘soft’ expenses related to learning programs. The creative use of host city Mayoral receptions, for example, is a concrete mechanism to employ for augmenting limited project budgets to ensure more social interactions. At a more strategic level, it is important for decision-makers to be aware of the importance of social interactions in building trust networks that are essential for meaningful learning and transformative action.

7.3.3.5. Design a learning methodology that promotes quality engagement and self-reflection in a conducive support environment

Another related enabler of critical self-reflection emanating from the case study is the sharing of experiences in environments that are not perceived to be threatening but actively promote open and honest dialogue. The findings discussed in Chapter 5 have most clearly confirmed the notions of Nonaka’s (1994) *ba* and Aydalot’s (1986) innovative milieu and the usefulness of transformational learning theory that emphasizes personally relevant experiences emerging through “social interactions, peer dialogues and self-reflection” (Preston et al., 2014: 55). Similarly too, the assertions made by von Krogh and Geilinger (2014) who propose that powerful knowledge creation processes are actually embedded in the spaces of organizations, have again been confirmed.

Whilst these findings and validation of learning theoretical contributions are important in their own right, as a phronetic researcher concerned with improving planning practice, a clear fifth policy consideration in this regard is to ensure that attention and detail is paid to creating a learning methodology that values face-to-face interactions. This will include a range of interventions from the careful design of the training session content to maximize group participation, right down to the micro-design of the room layout. This suggestion may appear insignificant, as often study tours are hurriedly constructed, however, if thoughtful consideration of the program design is given, more meaningful engagements and better learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved.

7.3.3.6. Document the learning process to preserve institutional memory and to facilitate reflection

One of the ironies revealed in the case study was that despite MILE's commitment to promoting knowledge management, and its dedicated capacity to achieve structured learning (eThekweni Municipality 2010b), the MILE team had neglected to take the time to document the process of learning in the UCLG mentorship program, as it had done to document learning in urban strategic planning processes. In fact, had the researcher not embarked on this research project, the documentation of the program timelines, critical reflections on the project, and indeed institutional memory may have been lost.

Against this background, the sixth key policy consideration for the eThekweni Municipality arising from this case study is to build on this research through the careful documentation of the story of MILE and its own knowledge management journey, with a dedicated chapter detailing the African experiences on city-to-city learning. This narrative will provide invaluable lessons for other practitioners interested in embarking on a similar learning trajectory.

Beyond the eThekweni Municipality, it is recommended that the Mzuzu City Council and Otjiwarongo City Council initiate a process of documenting their learning experiences. Whilst it is acknowledged that these municipalities do not enjoy the same level of resources and capacity as the eThekweni Municipality, creative options such as employing postgraduate students or research interns to document their experiences can be explored. In this way, further loss of institutional memory can be prevented. The respective country's Local Government Associations may also be encouraged to play a more active role in this process. This suggestion will be revisited in the final part of this chapter, where the beginning of a new model of governance is suggested.

7.3.3.7. Re-mobilize leadership to take the lead during implementation stage

Beer and Clower (2014) in a recent paper on the importance of mobilizing leadership in cities posit that effective leadership is now much more important for the success of places than it ever has been in the past, and that given the current dynamics of growth, are most likely to increase in significance even more. This assertion has been confirmed in the case study, where the role of local leadership in leading learning processes in order to inspire confidence, enhance credibility and their own development, and improve decision-making has come very clearly to the fore, as explicated by this reflection from the UCLG Program manager:

The learning of a city relies on the learning of a team that can fall or stand depending on the leader.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

Whilst administrative leadership, supported by city's political leadership usually represented by the Mayor is regarded by all respondents as necessary during the entire learning process, it was suggested that it was during the period of implementation that this was critical. Making the transition from planning to implementation, they agreed, was the point at which most processes failed. Hence the seventh policy consideration from this study is to re-engage and re-mobilize leadership at the commencement of the implementation stage. This can be done using a combination of mechanisms from personalized one-on-one briefings and debriefings, to ensuring the Mayor opens each workshop, to having press conferences where political leadership takes ownership. Whilst the issue of visibility and credibility is important, fundamentally more important is that the political leadership is fully apprised of the process and feels confident to give strategic direction and actively help shape the learning agenda.

7.3.3.8. Finalize and implement a change management strategy identified in pre-learning phase

The eighth and final policy consideration in this mutual learning phase of the overall framework is to ensure that the change management strategy identified in the pre-learning assessment phase earlier is finalized and implemented timeously. As outlined previously, it is important to ensure very early in the process that the municipality has the will, and the capacity to implement major

changes in the way it operates. During the CDS process, major institutional issues around improving the systems and structures and processes would have emerged. It is in the implementation phase that these need to be finalized and implemented in order to ensure credibility of the strategic planning process. There is therefore a need for active leadership, this time from the Municipal Manager and the senior management team that is fully backed by the political leadership of the municipality.

7.3.4. Post-learning phase: providing continuous ongoing support and feedback to consolidate learning

After the mutual learning process has formally concluded, and the program enters into its after-care stage, there may be a somewhat justified temptation to re-prioritize energies, given the competing demands in the lived realities of busy planning practitioners. From the case study, however, it is apparent that the post-learning phase is important in order to consolidate learning and to ensure that the momentum and sustainability of the lessons learned through active application of the good practices that were internalized over the years in the partnership are sustained. As indicated in Figure 7.1 (refer to component 4) a set of three related strategic actions are proposed.

7.3.4.1. Design and implement an exit strategy

The first action in the post-learning phase is one that should actually be initiated well before the learning program winds down. It is imperative that an exit strategy is in place, which will ensure that the energy and momentum created during the learning program is continued. Whilst this was not in place for the Namibian and Malawian cities, in retrospect, this was seen as a vital action by the UCLG program manager:

From the UCLG point of view, there must be an exit strategy, partly because there is not always funding and a dependency should not be created.

UCLG program manager, Barcelona

The focus in the respondent's comment is more about ensuring that there is funding in place to sustain the learning over time. However, the exit strategy should contain more than just a business

plan to secure funding for ongoing learning. Whilst holistic and integrated in nature, it does not need to be complicated, but should rather focus on the key elements that will ensure that the learning is consolidated. Some of the key questions to be dealt with in the strategy include:

- How will the learning from the program be institutionalized and who will be responsible for this?
- How will the monitoring and evaluation framework designed in the pre-learning phase be implemented ensuring a focus on how feedback of the evaluation should be shared and how could future learning processes improve the quality of practice?
- How does the learning process continue in the likelihood that no future donor funding is secured with creative ideas on how to sustain the processes locally?

7.3.4.2. Prepare and implement a simple but effective communication plan

The second action of preparing and implementing a communication plan may well be incorporated into the exit strategy. However, there is a danger of it being subsumed amongst other elements such as the acquisition of funding that may be perceived to be more important. Hence, the issue of prioritizing the need for effective communication has been identified as a stand-alone recommendation. Again the content of the communication plan is not set out here, but must include key information including what the learning milestones will be and exactly how the various stakeholders will be informed of the next steps in the learning program.

7.3.4.3. Allow space for active leadership by Local Government Associations

The findings of Buis (2009: 193) shared earlier during the literature review acknowledging that Local Government Associations have a “strong influence” on the agenda of city-to-city cooperation is most relevant in this post-learning phase. This is because they provide a platform for exchange. Whilst the role of these Local Government Associations is not limited to this phase only, as will be outlined in the next section, it is argued that in this post-learning phase, their role is most crucial in two key areas. The first is around inter-governmental relations and ensuring that the diplomatic ties built up during a period of 3 to 5 years is strengthened, and possibilities expanded on, or new areas of collaboration are explored. More importantly, however, it is argued

that their role should be focused on disseminating the learning accumulated during the entire process with other municipalities in order to inspire them to embark on similar learning journeys.

It is in this context that the third and final strategic action in the post-learning phase is made, calling for Local Government Associations to take the lead in knowledge sharing processes. In the Namibian case, it is worth noting that ALAN played an extremely important role in positioning Otjiwarongo and the municipal planning team as a role model to other smaller municipalities that will be able to benefit from the experiences that was gained from its partnership with the eThekweni Municipality. This is a particularly interesting example, as due to the capacity constraints that it had faced, ALAN worked in partnership with the better resourced and larger Swakopmund Municipality that was willing to play the role that MILE had been playing in South Africa. Swakopmund had taken the responsibility to support ALAN to share the emerging lessons from the Otjiwarongo urban strategic planning process with four other pilot municipalities in Namibia (eThekweni Municipality, 2014d).

The above initiative is a concrete example of how an under-capacitated Local Government Association can find creative mechanisms to share knowledge, if allowed the space to play a leadership role in the post-learning phase in city-to-city learning processes. It is also a powerful and symbolic statement of how a country can take ownership of its own learning and development process, using one of its own larger municipalities to provide support to less capacitated ones. Whilst the eThekweni Municipality did participate in the training process there, it was Swakopmund that played host and coordinated the learning, with ALAN facilitating the knowledge transfer process. Similarly, whilst UCLG was present, it played only an observer role. In this way, the idea of a more decentralized and bottom-up governance model was unknowingly being tested. It is this critical area that is considered next.

7.3.5. Building a bottom-up, enabling governance and institutional model for city-to-city learning

As depicted in component 5 of Figure 7.1, the entire framework to guide city-to-city learning in southern Africa is underpinned by a decentralized and bottom-up governance model. This base creates an institutional platform on which the three phases of pre-learning, mutual learning and post-learning is founded. It is acknowledged that the proposed model that is outlined below is not detailed enough to be immediately operationalized, as the intention is only to suggest a new strategic direction for the longer term. In summary, it focuses on the three areas of (i) building a decentralized institutional model that enhances more localized decision-making and control, (ii) securing dedicated continental funding for learning, and (iii) building capacity at all levels to enable more meaningful city-to-city learning processes. The central ideas in each of these key areas are explained.

7.3.5.1. Develop a decentralized and bottom-up learning model, driven by municipalities

From an analysis of the roles, responsibilities and levels of activity of the various stakeholders in the city-to-city learning process in the case study, it emerges that the program has been predominantly driven by the UCLG. In particular, as the various respondents had indicated, it was the energetic and committed leadership from the UCLG program office in Barcelona that had ensured constant movement in the program. Whilst this role was appreciated by some respondents, it was uncovered that there were some sentiments around a need for greater local control of the learning process, not just as a post-colonial symbolic move, but as part of a concerted effort of strengthening African developmental institutions and empowering them to transform their living environments:

We must also realize that there is a history to these things... a colonial history and a history of apartheid. We cannot weaken the African institutions, this is counter-productive. It is important to strengthen the African institutions so that they can deal with their own problems.

Program manager, UCLG Africa

From the above respondent's reflection, it is clear that there is a need for a stronger role to be played by African role-players, and UCLGA in particular, in the coordination and promotion of what is essentially an African learning program. This was not just a self-reflection from the

UCLGA respondent, but also came through from the previous CEO of the Mzuzu City Council, who is the current CEO of a larger Council within Malawi. His remarks which were shared earlier, is repeated here, as a matter of emphasis:

The way I look at it, we needed to have a clear system of handling the process. I find the UCLGA missing a bit; maybe they have not been too involved? One day we need to have all the players to take the appropriate role. We need to ensure that there is information flowing in all areas.

Former City Manager, Mzuzu City Council

In unpacking the potential role to be played by the UCLGA, the same respondent suggested that UCLGA should be setting up the learning parameters for the continent, deciding on the timing and the phases of the process. Importantly too, the issue of monitoring and review was also identified as being within the scope of UCLGA's mandate, in order for greater ownership of the process:

UCLGA should set these outputs and decide on the timeframes and phasing. Africa will need to own this. Also the monitoring and evaluation process - it is important to evaluate how much has been done and whether the process should be continued or not. There has not been a country evaluation; we need to see how far we have gone. The UCLGA could be the one who is driving this.

Former CEO, Mzuzu City Council

With a greater role being played by the UCLGA, this transition will enable the UCLG as an international network to begin to play the apex role that was suggested by Campbell (2012a). By freeing itself up from playing a direct role in city-to-city learning programs, the UCLG will be able to more easily gear itself up to provide normative guidance to cities and ultimately promote new orders of learning.

In a similar vein, by suggesting that the UCLGA assumes a greater leadership role in continental learning coordination, space must equally be created for both regional networks and for country Local Government Associations to drive their respective regional and country learning agendas. This observation came through again from the previous respondent, this time when the

conspicuous absence of a driving role by their country local government was highlighted. From this municipal leader's perspective, national city-to-city learning should logically be actively championed by that respective country and in particular by the respective country's Local Government Association:

MALGA was not playing a key role; this was missing. Mentoring should be going forward with MALGA coordinating mentoring from Mzuzu to other municipalities.

Former CEO, Mzuzu City Council

In further developing national mechanisms for the coordination of municipal learning, interesting and innovative mechanisms were proposed by the same respondent. The idea of a powerful Steering Committee comprising of a range of key national stakeholders and solely tasked with driving the learning agenda and fully supported by the UCLGA is a concrete proposal that emerged:

A national Steering Committee on mentorship could be established, made up of ministry representatives, MALGA, and the Finance Committee. These institutions can guarantee the performance of the program. As bodies move around, the new people need to be trained and supported. This must be implemented by UCLGA.

Former CEO, Mzuzu City Council

If this new thrust of decentralizing the learning process is accepted, and the respective county's Local Government Associations begin to play a more active role of matching demand for learning from one municipality with a potential supply of expertise by another, then this implies that municipalities themselves must gear up to take knowledge management functions more seriously too. This policy consideration of dedicating capacity for learning has come through very strongly earlier, where the importance of developing dedicated municipal capacity was emphasized. This emerging decentralized model is captured schematically in Figure 7.3 below, depicting a bottom-up approach with greater emphasis being placed at the municipal level.

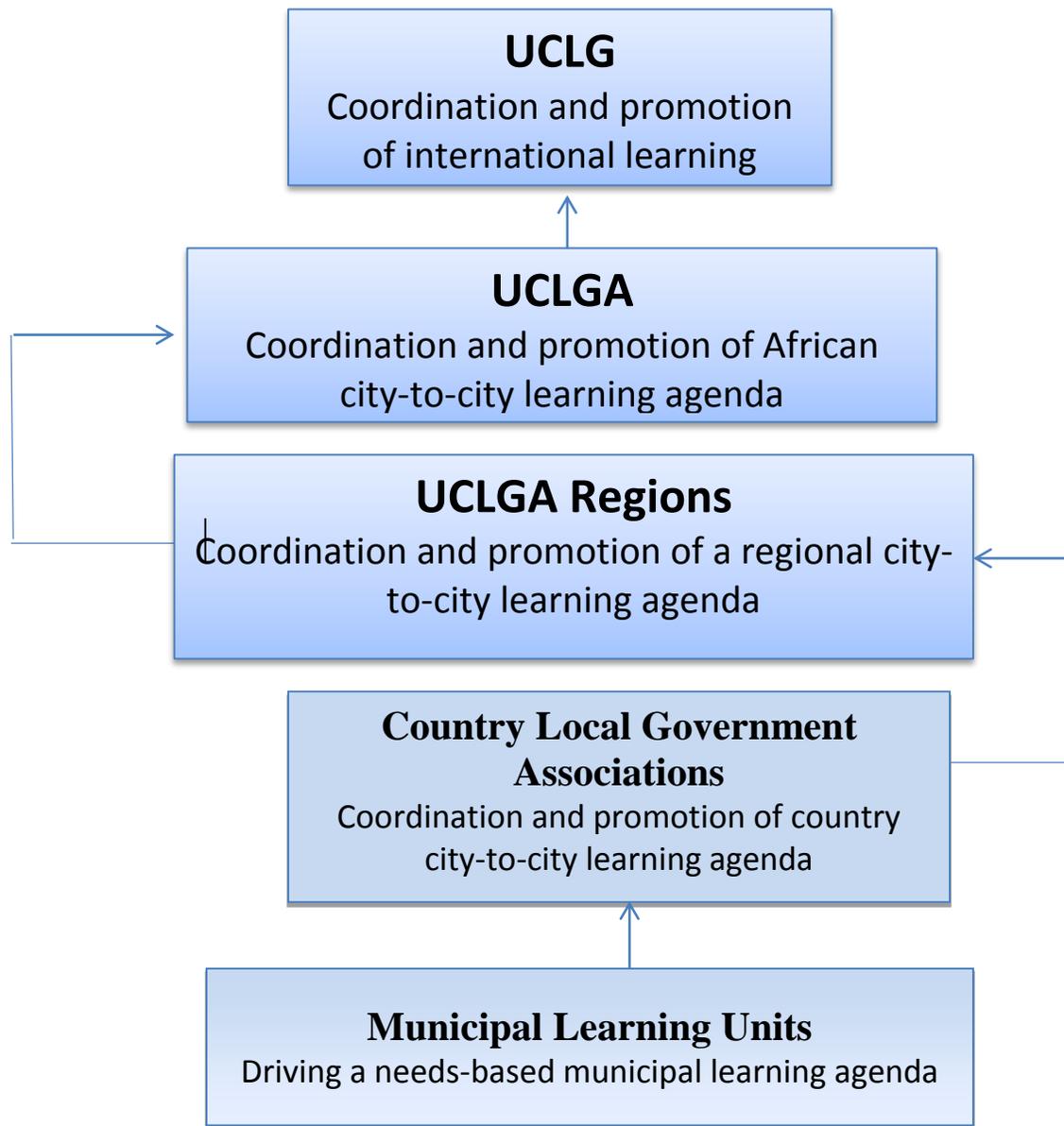


Figure 7.3: Proposal for a bottom-up learning process driven by municipalities

In summary, the new strategic thrust that is suggested in this research is a complete reconfiguration of the locus of control for municipal learning processes. As shown in Figure 7.3, the model begins from the bottom-up with individual municipalities taking full control of their learning processes and investing energy in knowledge management functions. Whilst it is suggested that a small dedicated unit be established to champion this function, given the capacity constraints in African municipalities, a good starting point is the recognition of knowledge management as an important function, and the allocation of this responsibility to a closely-related line department.

The knowledge management function and the city-to-city learning processes in municipalities must be actively supported by the respective country's Local Government Associations. These associations are best placed to design, coordinate and manage a national city-to-city learning agenda, and to match intra-country demand and supply for learning, given their country-wide footprint. As demonstrated in the ALAN-Swakopmund example earlier, this is a concrete way of transferring local knowledge from one part of a country to another.

In working from the national level upwards towards a continental-wide learning agenda, the model captured in Figure 7.3 incorporates the notion of regional-wide learning coordination. Currently this is non-existent and SALGA, ALAN and MALGA do not have a mechanism to coordinate such regional learning. The researcher acknowledges that this may be difficult to implement in the short-term, due to the fact that the regional structures for learning are not yet in place. This is, however, a useful coordination mechanism to be pursued over time and can assist in improving the responsiveness of the UCLGA.

The new model also suggests that greater responsibility for the coordination of African city-to-city learning rests with the UCLGA, with support being offered by its parent organization, whose new apex role in the learning arena has been discussed earlier. It is through this new bottom-up approach, with a stronger municipal focus, and a new regional coordination role that the UCLGA will be able to better manage the enormous responsibility of efficient continental knowledge management. The viability of this recommended institutional arrangement is dependent on two accompanying key factors: the decentralization of funding and the effective capacitation of all key structures delivering on the learning agenda. These are considered as the last strategic areas that

are critical to building a bottom-up, enabling governance and institutional model for city-to-city learning.

7.3.5.2. Lobby for the decentralization of funding to support the proposed bottom-up institutional model

Money is key; at the end of the day if there is no funding then it (learning) cannot happen. When a system is being developed, learning is so important, and resources are needed to fund this.

Former CEO, Mzuzu City Council

The issue of CDS is advanced by the Cities Alliance. To access these funds we have to work through a body as strong as UCLG. For initiation of the program, the status quo for now is okay, but eventually local associations like MALGA and the like should be given an opportunity to directly access the funds from Cities Alliance. Local associations themselves must be able to interact, based on their needs and areas of collaboration that they have identified themselves. This will actually promote the kind of networks that UCLG will like to have at the end of the day. UCLGA should be actively promoting these networks between the local countries at a regional level. In this way they are decentralizing and replicating learning. Within each region cities can be identified for partnerships and they can own the process.

Lead Planner, Mzuzu City Council

If city learning is identified as a priority for service delivery improvements then, as articulated in the first quote above, financial resources are obviously required to support learning processes. Without the requisite funding the proposed decentralized, bottom-up institutional learning model will not be realized. Of course, the question to be asked is where should these funds be made available from and who should be controlling them?

Whilst there are many credible funding sources internationally and continentally, including the European Commission, Africa Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), regardless of where the funds are sourced, it is imperative that accountable and democratic African governance structures manage these funds. As suggested in the second quote above from the Malawian respondent, future funding must be accessed and controlled directly by Local Government Associations. Careful consideration must be given to who makes the application for the funds and how this is administered, as it may have implications for how the learning process is controlled. One respondent summed up this point very succinctly:

... the expression ‘who pays the piper controls the tune’, seems to apply in many instances. As much as possible, funding for future mentoring must be decentralized.

Program manager, UCLG Africa

In summary, it is clear that along with the decentralized powers and functions for meaningful city learning, the requisite funding must be set aside to operationalize a vibrant African learning vision. It is also evident that this funding must be managed locally, and perhaps disbursed by the country Local Government Associations. It is strongly suggested, however, that more work be done to determine the exact roles and responsibilities of the various African role-players vis-à-vis resource mobilization, as this is a grey area that requires greater conceptual clarity.

In line with empowering African structures to take control of their own learning processes, the researcher is of the view that no matter what financial mechanism is utilized all African role-players must demonstrate their own commitment towards learning. This, it is argued can only be expressed through a measure of self-funding, regardless of the size of the contribution. It is acknowledged that generally governments are under-resourced. However, there must be a move towards reserving at least some catalytic seed funding that can be used to lever greater resources for municipal learning and knowledge management.

7.3.5.3. Fast-track the move to prioritize the capacity building project in (southern) Africa

One of the recurrent themes that have emerged strongly from the case study is that meaningful learning processes require dedicated capacity. An enabling governance model, together with program funding will still not deliver learning outcomes without the requisite skilled personnel in place driving learning processes. Capacity must be in place at all levels and scales. As the model has been developed from the bottom-up, capacity must be built at the municipal level first, ensuring that knowledge management functions are resourced and at least some capacity exists to either share good practice or be able to receive technical support. The case study showed clearly that city learning processes do not happen without significant investment in systems, structures and competent staff who are passionate about learning and sharing. The eThekweni Municipality was identified as a potential learning partner because of its strategic decision to invest in knowledge management systems and staff.

Beyond the capacitation of municipal staff, the literature has shown that there is need to capacitate Local Government Associations. The case study confirmed the concerns raised in the research conducted by Buis (2009: 194) in which he concluded that most Local Government Associations in the developing world are currently only able to “aspire to perform” rather than “perform the roles” necessary for facilitating city-to-city learning. There is therefore an urgent need to augment the capacities in the respective country’s Local Government Associations (MALGA and ALAN) as these associations were meant to play the driving role in coordinating city-to-city learning between countries. Whilst the case study was limited to only three countries, it may be fair to extrapolate the need to build Local Government Association capacity more generally in the SADC region, and on the continent at large. This is an important recommendation as the new model positions Local Government Associations pivotally on the continent, viewing it as the interface between municipalities from different countries in the broader region.

At this juncture, it must be noted that the recommendation to prioritize the municipal capacity building project in Africa is not new. In fact, in 2009 the UCLGA mooted the idea of developing an African Local Government Academy that will be the “driving force” behind the professionalization of municipal officials and political leadership (UCLGA, 2015: 2), in order to

respond to the crisis of capacity on the continent. To date, whilst the plans and strategies are far advanced, not enough has been done on the ground to operationalize these important visions. On a positive note, the researcher has observed with interest a renewed vigor to pursue this goal. As reflected in Figure 7.4, the UCLGA (2015: 2) has recently proposed a “network of campuses” and as part of their action plan proposes a set of decentralized learning hubs in the east, west and southern Africa to facilitate regional learning. This move not only aligns with the proposed model being suggested in this research, but also acknowledges MILE as the key driver for learning in southern Africa.

Action Plan – Virtual Academy Space : A Network of Campuses

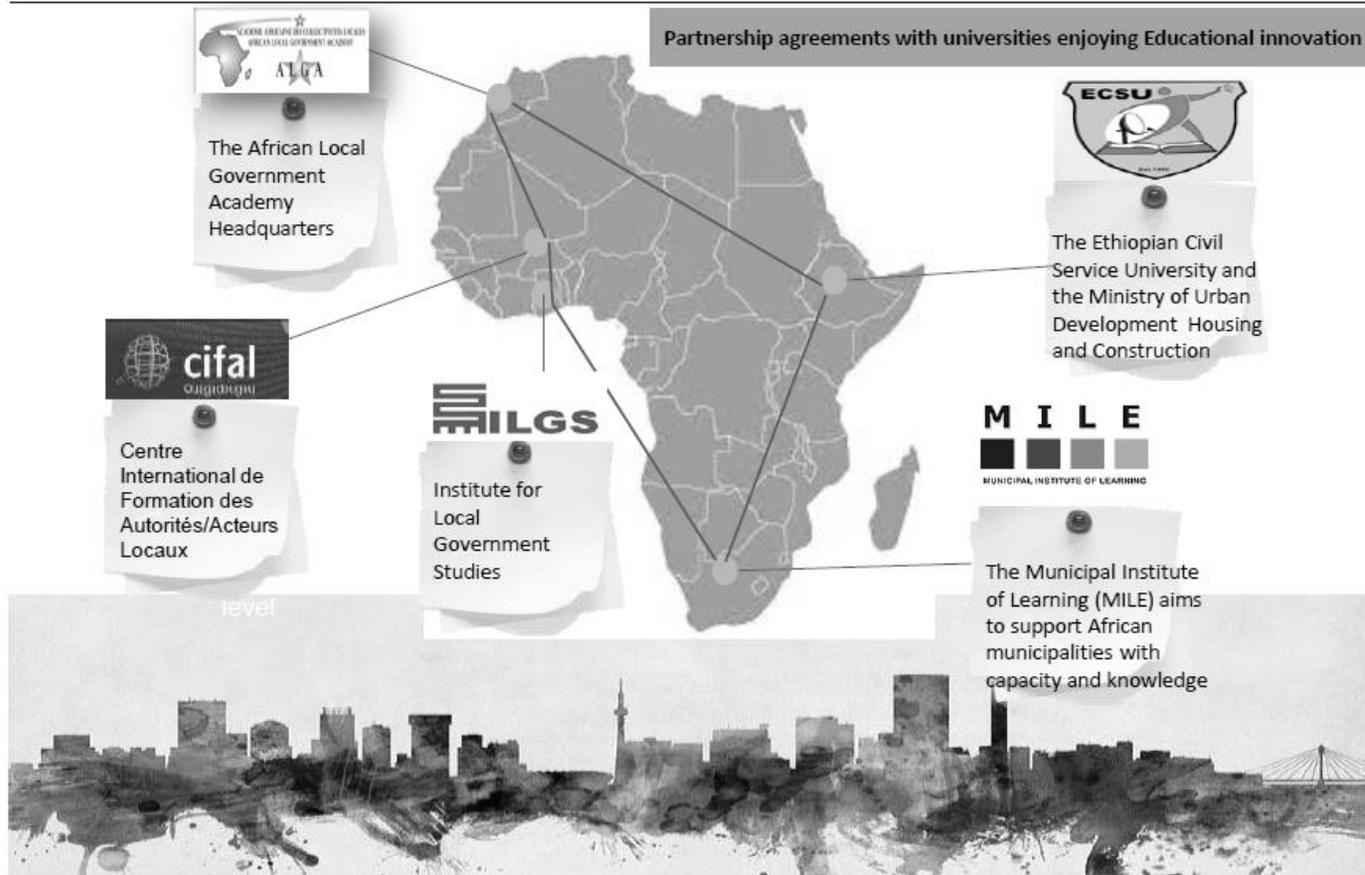


Figure 7.4: UCLGA proposal for African learning hubs (UCLGA, 2015: 2)

7.4. Summary and conclusions

This chapter has used the powerful insights and valuable lessons emerging from the in-depth case study to inform a broad, but coherent framework, with a set of strategic policy recommendations and actions to guide future city-to-city learning processes in order to improve the quality of city strategies in southern Africa and beyond. In the first part of the chapter, the process of urban strategic planning, as opposed to the learning process was put under the spotlight. Commencing with reflections from the eThekweni Municipality's long-term planning process, a suite of five key urban strategic planning considerations were proposed, before a set of four actions to improve inclusivity in the current urban strategic planning process in the Namibian and Malawian municipalities were offered.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the rest of the chapter then focused on the construction of a broad policy framework, which was segmented into five key components. The first step in the development of a framework it was suggested involved the re-conceptualization of city-to-city learning. Gaining consensus on a new and shared understanding, it was argued, was key in order to embed a more meaningful and sustainable learning process in the psyche of practitioners. In reviewing contemporary definitions of learning from the literature, a case was made for the need for a definition that resonates with the experiences from the southern African case study. A new definition was therefore proposed and each element of this conceptualization was briefly unpacked. It was suggested that this new understanding emerging from the study be shared in a platform that can be further developed by all the relevant stakeholders.

Having built a common understanding and conceptualization of city-to-city learning, the second step proposed in the chapter was gaining recognition that learning is a long-term process evolving over time. The learning process was segmented for conceptual purposes into three phases: pre-learning, mutual learning and post-learning, with a set of related policy considerations and strategic interventions suggested across these phases.

The chapter then underscored the critical importance of building a decentralized and bottom–up governance model that incorporates three strategic inter-related and inter-dependent actions. These are building a decentralized institutional model that enhances more localized decision-making and control, securing dedicated continental funding for learning, and building capacity at all levels to enable more meaningful city-to-city learning processes. Each of these last three considerations were outlined, but not detailed, as the intention was only to inform a new strategic direction, rather than inform a business plan.

In closing this chapter, it is worth reiterating the phronetic approach of this research and the call to become “actors in the flow of history rather than bystanders” (Sandercock & Attili, 2012: 164). Committed to the imperative of transforming practice, it must again be emphasized in this chapter that the initial findings of the research has already been shared, valued and has contributed to immediate commitments of change by the UCLG. Moreover, there is a great expectation that the broad framework for city-to-city learning emerging from this research project be presented by the researcher to all key continental and international role-players. This is encouraging and augurs well for academic-practice collaboration.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction

The question that was framed at the commencement of the researcher's long but rewarding academic journey was very clear. In essence, the question explored what insights have been offered by the eThekweni Municipality's mentorship program with selected Namibian and Malawian municipalities that can inform both contemporary learning theory as well as the development of a robust city-to-city learning framework, in order to improve the quality of municipal visioning processes in southern Africa. The need to inform contemporary theory as well as the imperative to improve planning practice has thus been a central consideration in this research project.

As acknowledged earlier, the researcher who has been working as a municipal planning practitioner in southern Africa over the last decade has been actively lobbying for more structured learning engagements, knowledge sharing and peer reviews in order to improve the quality of planning practice in the SADC region. During this time, the emphasis had predominantly been on transformative practice. Municipal collaboration with the academic community was obviously viewed as central to the outcome of achieving a more developmental local government. At the same time, the role of the practitioner as activist on the one hand and the academic as neutral researcher on the other, could not be easily reconciled. When the opportunity to pursue doctoral research arose three years ago, this was embarked on with some trepidation given the uncertainty around this tenuous academic-praxis relationship. During the research process, however, the researcher was pleasantly surprised to discover that the separation between the worlds of theory and practice is a somewhat artificial one, amplified by a limited understanding of how the boundary between these seemingly disparate worlds can be redefined. In this research project, the adoption of a powerful conceptual framework helped bridge this apparent divide.

This final chapter therefore begins with a recap and re-affirmation of the power of such a useful multi-conceptual framework that positions itself within pragmatism as an overall guiding philosophy and draws inspiration from the practice movement within the planning school, as well as from knowledge creation theory in the organizational learning discipline. Having recapped the philosophical stance of the study, the chapter then reflects briefly on some methodological considerations encountered during the research process. As a final summary chapter, it then crystallizes the key findings in the study in response to the five research sub-questions that were identified in the first chapter. It also provides a short overview of the high-level recommendations made in the previous chapter, before identifying some of the key limitations of the research. The chapter then closes with some strategic ideas for future research.

8.2. Reaffirming the power of pragmatism within a multi-conceptual framework

In an exploratory research project such as this one, undertaken by a practitioner committed to the transformation of planning practice, and working in an often contested, highly dynamic and political environment; the adoption of critical pragmatism as a guiding philosophy resonated with the convictions of the researcher. It proved to be a powerful lens with which to interpret complex urban realities in southern Africa. More specifically, the pincer-like appeal of Aristotle's pragmatism with its focus on allowing one's work to make a difference in practice on the one hand, and the emphasis on consciously recognizing the pervasiveness of power and how it may manifest on the other hand, presented critical pragmatism as an ideal lens to interpret the case study. The adoption of such a pragmatic paradigm enabled the researcher to be freed of the shackles of grand meta-theories and immerse himself into an in-depth exploration of what happens in current practice. Drilling deep into the case study and paying attention to the context and meaning that key urban protagonists involved in municipal visioning attach to city learning in an African context has enabled the development of a bottom-up governance and institutional framework to guide a more progressive learning model.

Whilst the research adopted a broader, philosophical approach of critical pragmatism, it also needed to declare its position with regard to conventional planning theory, given the urban strategic planning content of the study. In summary, the research located itself within the planning practice movement, drawing predominantly on empirical knowledge to inform theory (Watson, 2002; 2008; 2014a). The communicative practice perspective of the planning practice movement proved to be useful in helping understand city-to-city learning, in the light of the already declared researcher's bias towards practice, and the overall pragmatist stance.

At the same time, however, Flyvbjerg's (2002; 2004; 2012; 2015) phronetic planning approach proved invaluable in helping interpret and analyze more critically practitioners' actions in the case study. More importantly, the appeal of such an approach lay in its call for researchers to actively confront the messy problems of the day by getting their hands dirty, rather than stepping back and contemplating reality from an objective distance (Simmons, 2012). As explored in earlier chapters, it is within this phronetic research tradition that planners have been actively challenged to "do politics with their research...instead of writing yet another paper or book", thereby explicitly contesting the prevailing measurement of the impact of academic work by citations in other academic work (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012: 3).

This struck a chord with the researcher, who was encouraged by other phronetic researchers who communicated their research results dialogically back to their stakeholders after identifying tension points and then constructively developed better practices with the stakeholders (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012). It was through the adoption of a similar approach, this time in a southern African setting by sharing results from the research in a structured manner to all key city-to-city learning stakeholders in Namibia, Malawi and even others involved in UCLG learning programs in Brazil and Mozambique, as well as to the Cities Alliance and UCLG representatives, that significant catalytic actions have emerged. This includes the reaching of consensus to change the name of the signature program of the UCLG 'mentorship program' to 'learning exchange'.

These transformative actions would not have been possible, however, without a robust conceptual framework that also drew from the body of organizational learning - given the focus of the research on understanding the exact learning methodology and exploring the critical success factors in

southern African city-to-city learning processes. The research showed that employing the conceptual lens of knowledge creation theory and the notion of knowledge being created in the space between organizations, or within organizational eco-systems, has not only been powerful, but has helped fill some of the gaps in this research field. More specifically, the focus on human interactions, the nurturing of close bonds and ties, of personal trust, sharing of values and the creation of safe spaces to nurture these, all emerged as critical ingredients in determining whether those involved in city learning will reach out to others in learning networks in any meaningful or significant way.

In keeping with the thrust of this research of transcending boundaries and pushing the limits of one's comfort zones, some critical methodological reflections and challenges are presented as a way of summary in the next section. This is followed by a high level and succinct summary of the research findings in response to the five research sub-questions posed in the project.

8.3. Some methodological reflections

At the time of research conceptualization during the proposal writing stage, the researcher was cautioned by international academics against the notion of conducting 'backyard research'. This advice was based on the concern that since the researcher is employed by the eThekweni Municipality and is already a practitioner in city-to-city learning, there may be the challenge of being too close to the study which may compromise producing valid and reliable data. In reflecting on the quality of the insights emerging from the study, however, it is clear that such concerns were misplaced. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 4, it is argued that precisely because of enjoying 'insider' access to, and familiarity with the range of research participants allowed frank, open and honest discussions, especially regarding sensitive issues such as the politics of power dynamics in city learning.

At the same time, however, as qualified in the methodology chapter, a fine balancing act was required at times, with the researcher being constantly challenged to impose a strong sense of discipline and to become fully aware of his own notions, ideas and prejudices on 'mentoring' and urban strategic planning. More importantly, a conscious attempt had to be made to limit the

influence of these in relation to the data collection and analysis, through the process of bracketing, which Chan et al. (2013) explain involve the suspension of what is known about the experience being studied, as a mechanism to limit the influence of researcher bias.

In reflecting briefly on the research approach and design, it is important to reiterate that the decision to employ the use of a case study in order to drill deep into the nuances of learning processes was an important one. It allowed for the “careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, historical background, physical setting, and other institutional and political contextual factors” (Hyett et al., 2014: 2). Moreover, given the philosophical stance outlined earlier, the fundamental concern with improving the quality of planning practice, and the paradigmatic location within the theoretical tradition of the growing practice movement, case study research best served the interests of the project and the convictions of the researcher.

Similarly, consistent with the pragmatic paradigmatic view adopted in the study, in reflecting on the utilization of a mixed methods approach with both qualitative and quantitative data integrated into the study, it is argued that this approach worked particularly well. Regarding the research design, it is contended that sound decisions were made about the timing, weighting and mixing of methods. The robust two-phased sequential exploratory design process complemented each other and helped convey a more rich and complete understanding of city-to-city learning. It commenced with the qualitative data collection and analysis in order to explore the nature of city-to-city learning in the mentorship program, and then moved onto the second, quantitative phase. This was done through the use of a social survey instrument that was administered to all participants who were involved in the respective visioning processes in the two municipalities.

Similarly too, each of the five research methods (content analysis, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, field observations and the census survey) were powerful complementary tools to elicit data that collectively helped produce a set of illuminating research findings. The next section presents an overview of some of these findings that helped build a richer and more nuanced understanding of the complex learning landscape in southern Africa.

8.4. A summary of key research findings

As a structuring mechanism, this section presents the key findings in response to the five research sub-questions. In order to minimize repetition, the detailed findings are not re-stated, but the most significant results are presented as a succinct summary.

8.4.1. Research sub-question 1

What is unique about the eThekweni Municipality's city visioning experience that is perceived by other southern African municipalities as worthy of being emulated?

The study has shown through an in-depth analysis of the various responses from across the research participants in South Africa, Namibia and Malawi that there are five unique characteristics of the eThekweni Municipality's urban strategic planning process that defines it as a case of good practice worthy of emulation. According to the knowledge of the researcher, no attempt was made prior to this study to systematically distil these success factors with a view to serve as a useful benchmark for other African cities about to embark on a similar journey. These are itemized below.

8.4.1.1. A long-term planning horizon

The first interesting observation emerging from the study about the eThekweni Municipality's approach to strategic planning was its explicit intention to produce a long-term plan that went beyond the legislative mandate of a five year term. Most cities normally did not exceed this mandate, but focused on ensuring compliance. As noted in Chapter 5, the Imagine Durban planning process with its 80 year planning horizon opened up possibilities for greater creativity and innovation, which typical five year plans did not always enable (eThekweni Municipality, 2011). This allowed municipal planners the space to embark on projects that yielded longer term results and freed them from the constraints of delivering within the typical five year political term of office. As reiterated in Chapter 7, when framing recommendations in this regard, the intention was not to suggest that a similar 80 year horizon be adopted in other African cities as a rule, but to make the case for embedding a longer term planning horizon as part of the city's visioning process.

8.4.1.2. Participatory planning rather than merely consultative

The second central feature of the eThekweni Municipality's planning experience emanating from the testimonies both from focus group respondents as well as selected key respondents, and confirmed by the literature (Ballard, et al., 2007; Robinson, 2007) was the energy and effort invested in securing the effective participation of various stakeholders in the planning process. As indicated in Chapter 5, of particular importance was the activation of ordinary residents and invited sectors of civil society groupings to participate in the development of planning themes and detailed strategies for the long-term plan (eThekweni Municipality, 2011). As with the first characteristic, the case study went beyond the South African legislative mandate in South Africa that requires consultation with citizens, to an active engagement with citizens at each stage of the city strategy development process. This was done in order to ensure a greater ownership of the plan by key stakeholders. The key recommendation made emanating from the research is that municipalities embarking on long-term planning processes will need to invest in systems and capacity to engage effectively with citizenry.

8.4.1.3. An outcomes-based model of holistic and integrated development

The third defining feature of the eThekweni Municipality's planning experience identified by most Namibian and Malawian respondents was internal transformation processes that required the changing of mindsets of municipal staff to become more outcomes-focused in their business (Dlamini & Moodley, 2002). Urban strategic planning processes could not be divorced from organizational reform that values holistic and integrated development. A key recommendation made to cities embarking on similar urban strategic planning processes is to be cognizant of the experiences of the eThekweni Municipality that had re-configured its municipal systems, commencing with an internal transformation process that was able to support the new demands of a people-centered strategy. As with the previous findings, this recommendation required investment in staff development and capacity building that will need to be budgeted and resourced.

8.4.1.4. Strategy that translates into action

What stood out from the data analysis in terms of respondent perceptions of the eThekwini Municipality's strategy process, was the highest rating in the areas of plan implementation and performance management, with 85% of all respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the eThekwini Municipality's process was worthy of emulation. As documented earlier, this was one of the key reasons why the UCLG had identified eThekwini as a lead city in the learning process, as it had demonstrated how a citizen-focused urban strategic plan could drive the municipal budget prioritization process in order for the strategies, programs and projects to be implemented within the five year cycle. It is this noteworthy translation from vision into action on the ground that had built greater legitimacy and credibility into the process. It further entrenched more active citizen engagement that emerged as the fourth defining feature of the eThekwini municipal planning process. The study, therefore, was able to confirm the views in the literature where visioning goes beyond imagination to being transformative, achieved through a tangible and clear "blue print or framework" (van Marle, 2014: 173).

8.4.1.5. Joint ownership of plan

The final defining good practice characteristic emerging from the case study that set apart the eThekwini Municipality's process from other processes was the joint ownership of the plan by political and administrative leadership. Through this joint ownership, the study found that confidence was instilled among public stakeholders for them to engage and be regarded as partners in such a process. In order to ensure that political leadership supports the planning process, the study recommended that in the first instance managers would need to be convinced of the importance of having political leadership as their partners in planning processes and that their respective Mayors and other political leaders are continually kept abreast of key milestones and developments in the city strategy. The research also highlighted the need for ward councilors to intimately understand the CDS and what it means for their respective communities. More importantly, the study emphasized the need for local ward Councilors to take full control of ward workshops during which the city strategy is presented. This was a critical mechanism of ensuring local political ownership of the plan (eThekwini Municipality, 2011).

In summary, the case study has shown that there are clear and measurable characteristics of successful strategic planning processes. Interestingly too, the five areas that emerged as being

worthy of emulation surfaced as consensual, common areas that respondents had identified without prompting, and they were not contested or debated by the participants. As such, these characteristics will be useful in serving as a reference point for good urban strategic planning practice in the SADC region. Other cities may find them useful to learn from. It is this central issue of exactly how the learning process takes place between cities that is the focus of the next sub-question.

8.4.2. Research sub-question 2

If southern African cities are learning from each other about how to embark on city visioning exercises, how exactly does this learning occur?

It is important to reiterate here that the study did not set out to document the various learning methodologies that cities utilize to learn from each other including amongst others, city study tours, ad-hoc exchange visits and structured training interventions. Instead, it put under the microscope the learning process between planners in the eThekweni, Mzuzu and Otjiwarongo Municipalities to better understand exactly how learning takes place in this UCLG mentorship program. Using the insights gained during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the research was able to break new ground in that a learning model was developed with five clearly delineated stages in the city-to-city learning process.

The case study showed that the first stage involved a process of ‘courtship and acclimatization’ where stakeholders learned about each other from an external broker who plays the role of a city ‘match-maker’. Using a matrimonial metaphor, the research showed that in this case study, the UCLG program manager served as the “go-between” in this early courtship stage in what was to become a relatively long-term city-to-city relationship. From this analysis, the research begins to suggest that if city-to-city learning is to yield powerful results based on strong relationships of trust, then a foundation must be laid in the early stage of the engagement, where planners from the respective cities begin to identify with each other.

This first stage of acclimatization is then followed by a critically important process of the ‘mentee’ cities being inspired by the work and the actual results of their “mentors”’ strategic planning

efforts. A key finding emerging here is that the power of the depth of the city-to-city interactions helped shape the long-term learning. This appeared to be the glue that held the program together. Officials engaged with each other over a prolonged period and who became familiar with each other as they learned more about each other's challenges and unique contexts, maintained contact through ongoing e-mail dialogue and constant telephonic conference calls. Again the issue of trust between planners from each of the cities appeared to be one of the most critical ingredients in allowing planners to speak their minds, challenge each other and reflect on how best to implement the strategic planning process.

Having been exposed to the Durban story, the practitioners from Namibia and Malawi began to make the transition from inspiration to adoption of the learning – the third stage in the model. During an intensive tailor-made training session, the planners were ready to adopt the 'outcomes-based planning' methodology and to roll out a similar strategic planning process in their own city. It is important to note that this is done very mindful of the need to make adaptations along the way, to suit the specificity of their own unique local contexts.

Equipped with the know-how and tools to run their workshops, in the fourth stage of learning, planners from the 'mentee cities' became activated to play an active leadership role, running the strategic planning sessions themselves in respective municipalities, with the active and full support of their local political leadership. The findings showed that the Durban team played only a support role, re-emphasizing the empowerment principle of allowing their partners to lead the process, especially in public forums in their local settings.

In this fifth and final after-care stage, the 'mentees' have now taken ownership of the process with the Durban team merely providing on-going support. Importantly, the study showed that once a road map is developed, the targets identified are actually self-monitored by the local team. The Durban team, however, played an oversight role, using opportunities of conferences and workshops to meet to discuss progress, over and beyond the telephone conferences and e-mail dialogues. The need for open and continued communication between learning partners during this time was flagged as a key success factor during this stage, in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

The development of this learning model is an important milestone as it is the first time that a critical engagement with the process of learning between cities has been undertaken in a UCLG program. As indicated in earlier chapters, the key findings of the research including the learning model were presented to all key learning stakeholders in March 2015. The UCLG program manager mandated with the task of rolling out international city-to-city learning has found this model very useful and will be drawing on the recommendations to inform future Brazilian-Mozambican learning interventions.

Similarly, the member of the Cities Alliance World Secretariat who served as a key respondent in this research will be drawing on the lessons learned, particularly in the first stage of learning, to inform a new learning partnership on urban strategic planning process that will commence between the eThekweni Municipality and Ugandan cities in early 2016. This is particularly gratifying for the researcher, as more than the small but important academic offerings being made to the literature on learning, there is the privilege of making real-time contributions to improving the quality of learning on the ground in urban strategic planning practice in southern Africa.

In line with this premium that has been placed on improving the quality of practice through this research project, the third research sub-question was framed to deal precisely with the issue of examining whether or not the UCLG coordinated and Cities Alliance sponsored mentorship program between the three cities resulted in an improvement of the quality of urban strategic planning process. Explored in great depth in Chapter 6, a summary is offered in the next section.

8.4.3. Research sub-question 3

Has the quality of urban strategic planning improved as a result of these learning interventions in the UCLG program being run in the selected municipalities?

The research has shown that city-to-city learning processes involve high input costs with investment of scarce donor funding in travel and accommodation, significant investment in time from participating cities and supporting agencies as well as substantial effort and energy from all parties to ensure that a relationship is sustained over time. For this reason, the entire second half

of Chapter 6 explored whether the quality of the overall strategic planning processes had improved in the selected Namibian and Malawian cities. Without repeating the details of the findings in this concluding chapter, it is useful to briefly summarize the responses from the range of respondents who participated in the study.

In reflecting on the Mzuzu mentorship experience first, the planners from the eThekweni Municipality regarded the mentorship program as a general success with their interactions with the Malawian planners as very fruitful. They were generally satisfied that concrete projects and city development initiatives had occurred that had been directly informed by the Mzuzu strategic planning process. Another signpost of impact cited by the eThekweni Municipality's respondents was the fact that the Mzuzu City Council had since taken greater ownership and control of the structure plan which was previously driven by the provincial authorities. Moreover, two clear outputs (a Vision and Action Plan) was developed and implemented out of the process. This was a tangible indicator of impact, for the eThekweni municipal planners.

Similarly, the former CEO of the Mzuzu City Council who had provided the leadership and direction for the plan, and who had himself been trained by the eThekweni municipal team in Durban, was convinced of the beneficial impact the mentorship program had on Mzuzu. Again, reference was made to business confidence improvement and the changing of local officials' mindsets which helped engender a more sustainable planning process. This issue of taking local control over their own planning process through being exposed to the successes of another African city and through intensive capacitation also resonated with the Mzuzu facilitation team themselves.

With regard to the perceptions of the impact of the learning on the Namibian planning process, there was ambivalence certainly from the eThekweni Municipality's participants. One of the key challenges raised was not having enough direct contact with the local planners in the municipality. This was due to a reliance on the coordinators of the program from the Local Government Association, ALAN. Whilst the visioning process had started and Otjiwarongo was leading compared to other municipalities, progress was generally slow. The CDS was not finalized and at

the time of the interviews, projects were not being fully implemented². However, the more senior planning officials that participated in the eThekweni Municipality's focus group cautioned about how impact was measured and stressed that it was not always about the end product, but more about the learning process. The point was emphasized that even if a final product had not been delivered, over the years there certainly had been rich learning. For the eThekweni municipality's senior officials this longer term view is not necessarily appreciated enough by international agencies and funders, who are often more focused on achieving shorter term deliverables.

As detailed in Chapter 6, of all of the responses elicited on the issue of learning impact, one of the most positive findings came from the Namibian Local Government Association officials. They reaffirmed the views made by the senior planning staff from the eThekweni Municipality's planning team. The case was made for intangible measurables in the form of inspiring confidence, improving energy and empowering officials to take action by themselves. Beyond these harder to measure impacts, the ALAN and NALAO officials pointed out that as a result of the mentorship program between the Otjiwarongo and eThekweni municipalities, the importance of engaging with the local private sector as partners has certainly been a positive impact which was also yielding encouraging results. When the question of impact was put directly to the planners and facilitators from the Otjiwarongo Municipality, both respondents were also of the opinion that the overall strategic planning process had improved. Yet again, they too felt a greater sense of ownership due to their direct involvement in the process and were more comfortable implementing a plan that they had designed.

There appears to have been a general consensus from the planners and facilitators from both cities about the impact that the mentoring program had in improving the quality of the municipal visioning processes. The research then compared these observations with the views of the local stakeholders participating in the municipal visioning workshops. This was the primary driver behind designing a survey process aimed at complementing the perspectives from officials directly involved in the mentoring program, with those less involved in the program. From the results of

² At the time of finalizing this research project in June 2015, however, exponential progress in finalizing the strategic plans in all of the pilots in Namibia has been made, with a launch held in Walvis Bay in May 2015 to celebrate the completion of these projects (eThekweni Municipality, 2015b).

the census survey of all workshop participants in both cities, it is significant to note that there was almost unanimous acknowledgement of the positive impact of the mentorship program.

It is also interesting to observe that in responding to the question of the impact of the mentorship program on enhancing the quality of urban strategic planning, in general terms both the UCLG respondents were confident that the mentorship program had yielded positive results and had made a difference to the overall outcome in both cities. The UCLG program manager had also used the fact that the Malawians had taken ownership and were reporting back that there was progress, as an indicator of program impact. Like the eThekweni municipal planners, she too acknowledged that progress in Namibia was much slower, and that more work was needed to be done to improve the outcome in this program. As indicated in an earlier footnote, these observations on progress in Namibia were made in 2014 at the time when interviews were being conducted. During final thesis write up in June 2015, however, significant progress had been made by Otjiwarongo Municipality and the other pilots in Namibia.

Finally, from the responses from the member of the Cities Alliance Secretariat, a refreshing call was made for a much greater appreciation of local context and politics when attempting to make an assessment of impact. The point that transformation is a slow process and that one cannot be over-ambitious about the outcomes that can be achieved in the short-term was also emphasized. So too was the need for a change management process that must be implemented in tandem with the mentorship program. These were useful observations that were built on, in relation to the construction of the policy framework to guide city-to-city learning detailed in Chapter 7. An overview is provided in the next section, as this was the focus of the fourth research sub-question.

8.4.4. Research sub-question 4

What are the essential elements of a policy framework that can guide more effective city-to-city learning practice in this field?

Given the researcher's commitment to improving the quality of planning practice, an entire chapter was dedicated to this sub-question. The powerful insights and valuable lessons emerging from the in-depth case study was distilled in Chapter 7 in order to inform a broad, but coherent learning framework, with a set of strategic recommendations to guide future city-to-city learning processes. This framework, it is argued, can make an important contribution towards improving the quality of CDSs in southern Africa and beyond. In the first part of the chapter, the process of urban strategic planning, as opposed to the learning process was focused on. Beginning with reflections from the eThekweni Municipality's long-term planning process, a suite of five strategic considerations were made. A set of four inclusivity actions on the current urban strategic planning process in the Namibian and Malawian municipalities was then offered.

The remaining part of this practice-oriented chapter then focused on the construction of a broad policy framework to guide city-to-city learning. It was suggested that the first step in the development of a framework involved the re-conceptualization of city-to-city learning. It was argued that gaining consensus on a new and shared understanding was key, in order to embed a more meaningful and sustainable learning process in the psyche of practitioners. In reviewing contemporary definitions of learning from the literature, a strong case was made for a new definition that resonates with the experiences from the southern African case study. As such, the research again broke new ground, with the conceptualization of a novel definition. A call was made that this understanding emerging from the study be shared in a platform that can be further developed and enhanced by all the relevant stakeholders.

Having built a common understanding and conceptualization of city-to-city learning, the next step proposed in Chapter 7 was to lobby for recognition that learning is in fact a long-term process that evolves over time. The learning process was segmented for conceptual purposes into three phases: pre-learning, mutual learning and post-learning, with a range of strategic recommended interventions suggested across these three phases. The chapter then underscored the critical importance of building a decentralized and bottom-up governance model that incorporates three strategic interrelated and inter-dependent actions. These include (i) building a decentralized institutional model that enhances more localized decision-making and control, (ii) securing dedicated continental funding for learning, and (iii) building capacity at all levels to enable more

meaningful city-to-city learning processes. Each of these last three recommendations were outlined, but not detailed, as the chapter explained that the intention was only to inform a new strategic direction, rather than inform a detailed business plan to operationalize African city-to-city learning.

8.4.5. Research sub-question 5

How does the critical analysis contribute towards the building of new theoretical knowledge in city-to-city learning?

Whilst the researcher has declared his bias towards praxis and the need to make an impact on the quality of planning practice, the contribution of this doctoral research towards the testing and building of new theoretical knowledge in city-to-city learning, particularly from an African and global South perspective cannot be understated. In answering the fifth and final research sub-question, it must be noted that the engagement with theory has not been restricted to the review of literature in Chapter 3. Instead it has been integrated across all chapters and particularly in the analysis of the research findings where theory was tested and validated. In this section, some of the more significant theoretical contributions and implications are teased out from all the chapters and summarized into a coherent whole, for the sake of directly responding to this research sub-question.

In the first instance, as stated at the beginning of this chapter in reflecting on the conceptual framework, this research reaffirmed the theoretical value of critical pragmatism as a guiding philosophy to interpret complex social reality in a southern African context. Working within the pragmatist tradition, along with contemporary southern African thinkers such as Harrison (2014), Pieterse and Hyman (2014), Watson (2014a; 2014b), and others who not only reject the grand meta-narrative but who place a premium on understanding the uniqueness of everyday practices, has enabled a greater appreciation of the dynamism of learning processes in African cities. More specifically, by locating the research within the planning practice movement, and drawing predominantly on empirical knowledge to inform theory - as promoted by Watson (2002; 2008; 2014a), further made the case for the communicative practice perspective in helping understand city-to-city learning. At the same time, however, as stated earlier, Flyvbjerg's (2002, 2004, 2012; 2015) phronetic planning approach was also most useful in helping interpret and analyze more

critically the practitioner's actions in the case study. More importantly, working in the phronetic planning tradition challenged the researcher to "do politics", by actively feeding the emerging results to all stakeholders, identifying tension points and creating new alternatives (Flyvbjerg, et al., 2012: 3). In summary, the research demonstrated the value of adopting a pragmatic theoretical stance in a southern African context.

Secondly, as indicated earlier, in terms of its contribution to the literature on urban strategic planning, the case study has shown that there are clear and measurable characteristics of successful strategic planning processes that were recapped earlier in this chapter. Not only is the contribution here real in terms of a detailed analysis of what can work in practice, but it also challenges the ideological position that African cities only have examples from the global North to seek inspiration from. In a similar vein, the findings in the case study confirm the assertion made by Robinson (2011) that cities do consciously adapt and adopt practices to suit the local contexts, and showed that this was still applicable even when borrowing from their Southern neighbors.

Thirdly, in relation to engagement with the contemporary literature on learning and knowledge management, many important insights have been offered. For the purposes of a summary, a set of ten key contributions will be focused on below.

(i) The strategic role of the knowledge broker in an underground knowledge economy

The first important contribution made by the study is the confirmation of the existence of a vibrant underground knowledge economy, in city-to-city learning. Undocumented in the literature on learning, and operating completely under the radar, what the case study revealed is that whilst cities themselves are constantly searching for city partnerships, there is a reliance on a third party agency that goes between cities matching a latent demand for knowledge with a potential knowledge supplier. Employing a matrimonial metaphor alluded to earlier, the study showed that cities enter into an arranged marriage of sorts, relying on the expertise of the go-between to ensure success of their courtship.

These brokers, it was demonstrated, are often international players such as the UCLG who are able not only to effectively match demand and supply in the knowledge economy, but more importantly are able to access international funding for such partnerships from donor agencies. The implication of this revelation is profound, suggesting that if more bottom-up learning processes are to be engendered, then a far more proactive role for African institutions such as the UCLGA and its regional sections is required in actively matching local learning demand and supply.

(ii) Institutional investment in appropriate municipal knowledge management vehicles that promote learning

Secondly, the case study demonstrated the importance of investing in entrenched knowledge management systems that are able to effectively promote municipal institutionalized learning, as was the case with eThekweni Municipality's MILE. Of vital importance was the strategic role played by city leadership to actively and consciously position the municipality as a center of learning on the African continent. This was done so that its good practices could be disseminated within the region on the one hand, whilst ensuring that international good practice from elsewhere in the global South could be received as part of the Municipality's own learning agenda.

The case study therefore validated Campbell's (2012a) model around different styles of learning adopted by cities internationally, with one all-important qualification. The eThekweni Municipality's decision to establish MILE suggests a corporate style of learning which, according to Campbell (2012a: 147), involves "formalized arrangements, including a bureaucracy, written procedures for rule making and less flexible means of decision-making and action". As explained in earlier chapters, the three cities that have been identified in this learning typology by Campbell (2012a) are Seattle, Bilbao and Singapore. One of the critically important findings from this study is that unlike these other cities identified in Campbell's (2012a) research, the eThekweni

Municipality's approach enjoyed much more flexibility around decision-making and action, even though the learning was very structured and organized.

This unique feature of MILE's flexibility emerging from the case study clearly resists the perfect categorization into the model presented by Campbell (2012a). It begins to suggest that in a southern African context, it may be difficult to straight jacket the learning style characterized by MILE into a more generalized model. This is a significant finding highlighting the need for more nuanced understandings of how learning occurs in African contexts.

Again, the pragmatic stance of the research, outlined in the conceptual framework earlier comes to the fore. It is clear that the adoption of grand meta-theories and cookie-cutter reductionist approaches offer very little analytical value in politicized and dynamic southern African contexts that often require more flexible, bottom-up responses to complex urban challenges.

(iii) The transformative role of non-threatening learning spaces and highly skilled facilitation

The third related contribution made by the case study is the substantive finding that more than just setting up an institutional learning vehicle, what mattered most was the quality of the sharing and engagement. As detailed in earlier chapters, the learning process in the case study was structured in a way that facilitated honest and open dialogue. Spaces were created for reflection and opportunities were maximized to dissect what mistakes had been made in the strategic planning process. The study showed that this honest sharing about what worked well and what did not in the eThekweni Municipality's approach to strategic planning served to disarm participants. This consequently played a critical role in allowing participants to speak their minds and helped further entrench a sense of trust among each other. From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the notions of Nonaka's (1994) *ba* and Aydalot's (1986) innovative milieu, which they argued was critical for successful learning. This

again is an important theoretical validation that the case study begins to make, as the researcher is not aware of the testing of this aspect of organizational learning in city-to-city learning contexts in southern Africa.

At the same time, in deepening the analysis, the research posited that this higher order of learning did not happen by accident or coincidence. The eThekweni Municipality's facilitators were actually very skillful learning practitioners who had been schooled in the art of strategic facilitation under the auspices of MILE. The value of recruiting and developing highly skilled facilitators who consciously created the conditions for deliberations in non-threatening environments was therefore reinforced.

(iv) The case for inclusive learning spaces: going beyond practitioner-to-practitioner learning

In an exploration of the extent of inclusivity of actors involved in the learning process, the case study indicated a somewhat strongly internalized notion from the respondents of strategic planning as a fundamentally inclusive process; one that is not limited to municipal practitioners, but necessarily involving civil society partners who will benefit from mutual learning. What was most interesting, however, was that whilst this notion was accepted, internalized and verbalized it did not quite translate into full participation of all stakeholders such as women, youth and the elderly, as detailed in earlier chapters.

Notwithstanding this, the case study did confirm the observation from the literature on learning made by Bontenbal (2009) that in conceptualizing an understanding of city-to-city cooperation, the focus on facilitating civil society participation in the learning process is indeed important. In particular, as detailed in Chapter 5, the emphasis made by Mamadouh (2002) that this increases public awareness and public support as well as that it has symbolic meaning was adequately demonstrated in the Namibian example. It was here that the researcher as observer watched and listened

first-hand to stakeholder testimonies during the workshop run by the Otjiwarongo team.

(v) Learning transcending partnership agreements

From a survey of learning literature, the study showed that a formal bilateral partnership agreement between the two participating municipalities and their stakeholders is an important characteristic of city-to-city cooperation (Bontenbal, 2009). What emerged from this case study, however, as an important fifth insight that begins to challenge the learning literature, is that none of the learning partners had signed any partnership agreement or contract binding them to achieve certain outcomes.

This is an interesting and important finding that could be explained in terms of the eThekweni Municipality establishing MILE whose mandate involved coordinating city-to-city learning. This, it could be argued, obviated the need for the signing of once-off bilateral agreements. Again, the southern African experience demonstrated a unique local response that did not necessarily conform to international learning practice, but worked well to suit the needs of its learning partners.

(vi) Highly focused, directed and needs-based learning

As a sixth key point to note, the case study showed most clearly that all respondents valued a highly focused, directed and programmatic learning with peers that they suggested made the city-to-city learning unique. These observations from the practitioners as noted in Chapter 5 confirm Kane and Alavi's (2007) understanding of organizational learning as involving a dynamic process of not just creating knowledge but transferring the knowledge to where it is both needed and used.

In essence, practitioners were very clear that the more focused and directed the learning, and the more that it responded to their needs, then the greater the opportunity

for learning and transformative action. This finding from the southern African case study therefore confirms the assertion by Toens and Landwehr (2009: 4) that “improvement-oriented learning” is achieved when focused on a set of pre-determined criteria.

(vii) The role of shared life-worlds and a common objective in facilitating mutual two-way learning

The strong views expressed by the Namibian respondents on conceptualizing learning as a two-way process where cities/ towns learn from each other through the sharing and exchange of ideas and experiences of good practices was particularly noteworthy. This understanding resonated best with the emerging concept of peer-to-peer learning as described by van Ewijk et al (2015), which it was noted, appears to be gaining momentum more recently. The Otjiwarongo planners expanded on the point of learning together and from each other, in order to improve the way they had undertaken strategic planning.

In unpacking this process of learning from each other, the research showed that city-to-city learning necessarily involved helping each other to develop, particularly and especially as the participants had shared a common objective as planners wanting to improve the quality of lives of the communities they served. From a theoretical perspective, these insights from the planners in the case study are very significant as they talk directly to Habermas’ (1990: 135) assertion that communicative reason is facilitated when there is a “consensus created through shared life-worlds”. The planners, whilst working in different cities, shared the same goal on improving the conditions of those communities that they served through a common urban strategic planning instrument.

The fact that the practitioners were all planners and facilitators, and not a mix of different built environment professionals such as architects and engineers, and the reality that they all shared the same worldview and were particularly committed to

developing powerful municipal vision statements and strategic plans helped create in that instance a shared life-world. They spent most of their work life grappling with similar challenges and experienced similar frustrations. This facilitated open and honest communication with each other. The case study therefore does validate this aspect of Habermas' assertions. Habermas (1990) argues that this sharing of a common worldview facilitates action that is transformative. Whilst the results of this research do appear to confirm this notion, the seventh key contribution made by this research is the argument that this shared worldview may be a necessary, but clearly not a sufficient condition for transformative action arising from the learning process. More than just sharing the worldview, there are other important social ingredients in the relationship between the partners which the research shows is fundamental to transformative action.

(viii) The human factor in learning: trust and social relationships

The study showed that beyond the shared mindset referred to above, planners have clearly indicated that social rituals were a fundamentally important part of the learning process. These included relating personal stories, travelling together on the mini-bus during the field visits, having meals together and even sharing drinks after hours in relaxed settings whilst reflecting on how what was being learned can effectively be applied to their own situation. The extreme example of sharing clothing due to lost luggage, that was volunteered by one respondent, most poignantly reinforced the point about the extent to which practitioners can bond with each other and build strong relationships of trust that are required for transformative action.

The eighth critical contribution made by this research therefore is that a necessary condition for effective learning, beyond shared worldviews as identified in the literature by Habermas (1990), is the building of trusted ties between the practitioners involved in the learning process. This is important not just for the learning process between the practitioners, but because the key protagonists form part of the informal leadership networks referred to by Campbell (2012a: 111) as “clouds of trust”. The study showed that there are key protagonists in each city that serve as the glue that

hold the learning process together. In particular, the lead facilitators that appeared to be trusted by all the participants play an important role in developing further trust networks and diffusing learning in the region.

(ix) Discourse matters: from ‘mentorship’ to ‘learning exchanges’

The study also paid particular attention to the use of learning terminology and more specifically in determining respondents’ views on the concept of ‘mentorship’, which most clearly unearthed discontent from some quarters. The research showed that this seemingly neutral concept that had until the intervention of this study continued to be used by the UCLG and its international partners, was a key tension point amongst stakeholders. In summary, what was found was that whilst this concept could be more readily applied to individuals, there was resistance to extending this term to cities. For some practitioners, this spoke to an unequal relationship where one was perceived to be giving and the other merely receiving.

In the context of dynamic African cities, it was argued that practitioners can always learn from each other despite differences in size, complexity and context. The preferred notion of ‘learning exchange’ or ‘peer-learning’ was mooted, which was further developed in the policy framework chapter. This research offered a more comprehensive definition of city-to-city learning that encompassed all the salient points identified by respondents, making this another important theoretical contribution from southern Africa.

(x) The politics of learning: control, capacity and autonomy

Given the phronetic planning approach adopted in this research that is sensitive to issues of power and the expression of geographies of learning, the case study paid particular attention to the politics of learning and how practitioners responded to the issue of who controlled the learning agenda. In summary, the results showed that there was a clear and unequivocal call for rethinking the way the program is managed in

future and for much greater autonomy and control from African institutions such as the Local Government Associations and the UCLGA. At the same time too, and important from a theoretical perspective, there was an acceptance that current major capacity constraints is an obstacle to achieving a truly Southern-managed program, as flagged with great concern by Buis (2009). The previous chapter explored this in great length in its response to create a more bottom-up, governance model.

Importantly too, the case study showed that it is inaccurate to frame the complex dynamics of power relations as being simply dominated by the global North with the southern partners as passive recipients. Instead, the case study showed that the international program managers responsible for the success of UCLG's city-to-city learning initiative are actually often well-intentioned, highly energetic individuals determined to produce effective results.

Whilst it is tempting to cast this as a classic domination of the global South by its more powerful Northern partners, a much more nuanced interpretation is called for. Working within a pragmatic conceptual framework has allowed this appreciation of the complex realities of African practice. More specifically, it highlighted the tension between well-intentioned partners driving ambitious programs linked to tight deliverables and timeframes on the one hand and the slower, more thoughtful, respectful traditional African ways of practice coming together in often highly politicized and contested terrains. The research has shown that such an understanding of this complex reality does not allow any simplistic dichotomous notions of global North versus global South power relationships – an important contribution being made from an African perspective.

Finally too, regarding the role of international funding agencies, the cautions of Rai (2004), Waylen (2004) and Murphy (2008) against vested interests of international capital being inserted into a local site under the guise of technical support did not appear to be relevant in this particular UCLG program. Significantly, however, whilst this may have been the case, Hout's (2012) assertion that donor agencies often function

less than optimally in relation to the context in which they work, and in particular their own inability to sometimes appreciate the local political contexts, did find a very clear expression in this research. What stood out in this regard was the acknowledgement of the operational inefficiencies within the ranks of a multi-national agency, and the progressive move to begin to change practices – clearly signaling a positive new direction that augurs well for the future of city-to-city learning.

8.5. Research limitations and future strategic collaboration areas

As has been demonstrated in the previous section, there can be no doubt that this research has begun to make on the southern African learning landscape, the researcher remains encouraged by outcomes of this research project. At the same time, three key research limitations have been identified. In the first instance, the focus only on a small case study with just three countries may have limited the ability to make generalizations. As declared in Chapter 4, the UCLG mentorship program extends across continents and a conscious decision was made to study only one of the seven mentorship programs. Given that the researcher did not have a research team or dedicated project funding (beyond travel and accommodation), this limited focus was, however, justifiable.

Secondly, whilst the case for conducting ‘backyard’ research has been made, the power of enjoying an insider perspective lauded, and the assurance of employing techniques such as bracketing to limit researcher bias given; it has to be acknowledged that unintended researcher bias and prejudices may have influenced or colored the interpretation of the results as well as the crafting of key policy considerations and the learning framework. It is important to accept the fact that the researcher is a senior manager in the eThekweni Municipality and that this could have been a limiting factor in the research. It is suggested that potential future research in this arena be conducted collaboratively with partners from research institutions that may help to ensure greater objectivity.

Thirdly, given that the research scope was limited to a single focused research question, a fuller engagement with related issues could not be thoroughly engaged in. In particular, the following four areas have been flagged as important potential future areas of research. Development

agencies, researchers and students in the built environment and allied professions in southern Africa will be encouraged to consider these future research areas emanating from the study:

i. Participatory citizen engagement in urban strategic planning, with a focus on vulnerable groups

Both the Namibian and Malawian experiences demonstrate that much more can be done to deepen participation of civil society stakeholders, including working in partnership with the private sector in urban planning processes. The literature has certainly confirmed that the voices of women, youth and senior citizens are not being heard in decision-making. In a southern African context with a rapidly growing youth population, this is especially significant. Whilst the issue of stakeholder engagement has been researched fairly extensively in South Africa, there is a case to be made for more targeted comparative southern African research including providing concrete guidelines on how to deepen participatory urban planning.

ii. A detailed impact evaluation of urban strategic planning processes and the extent to which they improve quality of life in cities

One of the researcher's concerns with urban strategic planning processes, certainly in South Africa over the last decade, is that monitoring and evaluation of implementation of urban strategic plans are limited to the measurement of outputs (for example, the number of houses built, roads constructed and kilometers of water pipes laid). However, little empirical research has been done to assess the impact that the delivery has made in improving the quality of life in cities and, more specifically, whether the outcomes of the urban strategic plans are achieved. It is acknowledged that outcome indicators are more difficult to craft and measure. This is certainly an important research area to be considered by southern African academics.

iii. A comprehensive study on the impact of long-term planning in metropolitan areas

Related to the research area above, is the issue of an in-depth assessment of the value and impact of long-range planning on the growth and development trajectory of cities. With many southern African cities now into their second and third decade of democracy, it may be an opportune moment to evaluate the effect that twenty-year plans and vision statements are having in shaping the development trajectory of these areas. The year 2030 has been identified as an important goalpost with many South African and Namibian cities having IDPs with vision statements geared towards 2030. Provincial and National governments plans and even the UN's SDGs are targeting this all-important 2030 milestone. It may be useful therefore to commence with research that can help as part of a critical mid-term assessment, and more importantly begin to inform and shape the direction of city long-range plans.

iv. A detailed comparative assessment of learning methodologies and tools to promote meaningful southern African peer learning exchange

One of the important outputs emanating from this doctoral research is the creation of a learning model that captures the various stages of development in the learning lifecycle in a southern African city-to-city learning process. Whilst this contribution is unique and useful in sensitizing practitioners to the learning journey, it is nevertheless limited to just three cities, in a single UCLG mentorship project. With research funding and an establishment of a small research team, the scope of this research could be amplified to include more case studies to cover all of the UCLG learning programs in the global South, particularly between African and South America. An in-depth expose of the different learning methodologies, tools and lessons learned will go a long way for improving the quality of south-south municipal cooperation and learning.

8.6. Concluding remarks

As the process of city-to-city learning revealed itself as a long and rewarding journey for the practitioners involved in it, so too has the researcher's academic journey of discovery been an incredibly rich and illuminating one, over the last three years. In critically reflecting on the

conceptual choices made, there is no hesitation to reaffirm the decision to reject a grand meta-narrative in favor of a more pragmatist, hands-on and bottom-up, context specific interpretation of social reality in southern Africa. This guiding philosophy aligned well with the approach of adopting a multi-conceptual lens by drawing from the outwardly very different urban planning and organizational learning disciplines. The analytical power of such multiple lenses amply demonstrated the value of resisting the temptation to stay within the comfort of a single discipline and validated the power of cross-disciplinary research.

Guided by such an empowering conceptual framework, and equipped with a set of appropriate methodological tools, the findings of the research offered fresh new insights. In particular, a southern African definition of city-to-city learning emerged with a powerful bottom-up institutional framework to transform learning practice. Given the phronetic approach that is biased towards action and praxis, through the deliberate sharing of emerging findings, the learning roadmap is already being redrawn, or at least within the ambit of the UCLG. Given the mandate and reach of the UCLG in the global South and beyond, the potential for transformative action is promising.

Moreover, as academic research is primarily about making contributions to theory, the researcher is encouraged that the research project enabled the critical testing of contemporary learning theory. This is especially relevant given the fact that southern African realities sometimes challenged the application of neat “one-size fits all” conceptualizations. Beyond the critical engagement, the generation of new insights to contribute towards new thinking about urban planning and city-to-city learning as a contribution from the global South, has been most encouraging for the researcher.

In returning to African vision of Seme (1906), and reflecting on progress made more than a century later, the researcher has been observing with great interest the new African developmental agenda that has been unfolding. The sense of optimism and hope for the continent, with ‘Agenda 2063’ serving to galvanize action towards socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years was initiated at the AU Johannesburg Summit in June 2015. In finalizing this doctoral research project in November 2015, African city practitioners and political leadership are once again gearing up for Africities 7, to determine the contribution that local authorities can make

towards 'Agenda 2063'. It is against this backdrop of an African regeneration, that the researcher remains fairly optimistic about the outlook for a bottom-up African municipal learning agenda.

In closing, it is immensely gratifying to note that beyond fulfilling academic requirements for doctoral thesis submission, this research project, with its findings based on critical self-reflection from a range of international stakeholders will be able to play a role in actively shaping the new direction of the UCLG and UCLGA learning trajectory, as part of the process of Africa's regeneration. For a planning practitioner working in the SADC region who is committed to transformative action, this unique opportunity to make a real connection between theory and practice has been a privilege.

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APPENDIX ONE

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

-Strictly Confidential-

Date:	
LG Support Person Name:	
City:	
Questionnaire No.:	

Survey Background and Instructions to Respondents

As you are aware, the eThekweni Municipality has been providing mentoring support to your municipality in the visioning component of the strategic planning process. This questionnaire which is part of doctoral research being undertaken by Mr S Moodley at the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa will be fed back into city strategic planning process coordinated by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in order to improve mentoring programs on the continent. Thank you for taking the time and effort to participate in this survey. As your contribution will help enhance strategic planning practice, do please answer the questions as honestly as you can. Once completed, please mail them to the e-mail address provided at the end of the questionnaire.

Section A: Demographic Profile

A1. Gender

A2. Age (in years) _____

1. Female	2. Male
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A3. What is your highest level of education completed?

1. None	2. Primary school	3. Secondary school	4. Certificate/Diploma	5. Undergraduate degree	6. postgraduate degree	7. Other, please specify
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A4. Affiliation

Please indicate the category that best represents your affiliation during which you participated in the municipal visioning process:

Political Leadership	Official working in Municipality	Official working in Local Government Association	Non-governmental organization	Faith Based Organization
Business Leadership	Other community organizations	Other, please specify		

Section B: Respondent perceptions of success, relevance and effectiveness of city-to-city learning

B1. What in your opinion does *city-to-city learning and mentorship* mean?

B2. Overall, how satisfied are you with the *general success of the municipal visioning process* that was completed in your municipality?

1. Very satisfied	2. Quite satisfied	3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	4. Quite dissatisfied	5. Very dissatisfied
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B3. In your opinion, as a key stakeholder involved in the visioning process, how satisfied are you regarding *relevance and usefulness* of the eThekweni municipality’s strategic planning experience being applied to your municipality?

1. Very satisfied	2. Quite satisfied	3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	4. Quite dissatisfied	5. Very dissatisfied
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B4. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to the key characteristics of the eThekwini Municipality’s (EM) visioning process that could be adopted in your own municipality’s strategic planning process?

1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree

	1- Strongly disagree	2-Disagree	3-Neutral	4-Agree	5-Strongly agree
The strategic nature of the EM’s vision statement in helping that city to guide where they want to be is commendable					
The EM’s participatory engagement process is worth emulating					
The EM’s vision and strategy driving its budget and financial allocation is most useful to learn from					
The ability of the vision to translate into workable action plans for each of their municipal departments are most useful					
The fact that the EM’s vision and strategy is tied into a performance monitoring system is something we found most useful					

Was there any other characteristic that was found to be useful from the eThekwini experience? Please specify

B5. Do you think your municipality’s strategic planning process may have improved as a result of the mentoring process with the eThekwini Municipality?

1. Yes	2. No
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B6. If no, what were / are some of the barriers to successful transfer of learning and implementation of a new strategic planning process? You can tick more than one answer, if necessary.

1. Insufficient funding for implementation	2.Lack of leadership and will to implement process	3.Lack of enabling legislation to allow process to be implemented	4.Other competing priorities within the municipality
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Other factors (please specify)

B7. Please now rate your level of agreement with the following statements with regard to the actual impact that the support that eThekwini Municipality has had on the way your municipality has conducted its own strategic planning process.

1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly agree

	1- Strongly disagree	2-Disagree	3-Neutral	4- Agree	5-Strongly agree
Our municipality's vision is now much more strategic and is able to guide us in terms of where we want to be in the future					
Our participatory engagement process has been socially inclusive					
Our vision and strategy now drives our Council s budget and financial allocation					
Our vision is now translated into workable action plans for each of our municipal departments					
Our vision and strategy is now tied into a performance monitoring system					

Is there any other impact that the eThekwini Municipality process has had on your municipality? Please specify.

Section C: Factors Affecting the Mentoring Process

C1. The eThekwini Municipality is a large and complex metropolitan area, compared with your municipality. From your experience, how do you think that this issue of difference in size and complexity will influence the ability to learn about municipal visioning? Please tick the most appropriate option.

1. Difference in size between the municipalities <i>negatively influences</i> the process as the contexts are very different	2. Difference in size between the municipalities makes no substantial difference	3. Difference in size between the municipalities <i>positively influences</i> the process, as the experience from a larger municipality is richer	4. I am uncertain about how size may influence the learning process
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C2. Part of the mentorship process was to build the capacity of the local planners / facilitators in your own municipality / county in order that they are confident to manage the strategic planning process. From your observations during participating in the visioning workshops, how would you rate the level of capacity that had been built during the mentorship program? Please rate the extent to which capacity has been built on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being very little or no capacity building and 5 being extremely high levels of capacity building.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
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C3. As a participant in the municipal visioning process in your city, which statement best describes the duration and length of the mentorship process. Please tick the statement that is most applicable, based on your knowledge.

1. The length of the process between eThekwini municipality and my municipality was far too short for meaningful learning and support.	2. The length of the process between eThekwini municipality and my municipality was appropriate for meaningful learning and support.	3. The length of the process between eThekwini municipality and my municipality was far too long and drawn out for meaningful learning and support	4. I am unaware of the duration of the support between the municipalities.
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C4. The mentorship process involved changing the way planning and development processes should happen in your municipality, based on the experiences shared with colleagues from eThekweni municipality. From your observations, how important is the issue of creating trust and sharing of common values between eThekweni Planners and your municipal planners/ key stakeholders involved in your visioning process? Please tick the statement that is most applicable, based on your knowledge.

1. The issue of building of trust and sharing common values between the planners from eThekweni and our stakeholders is regarded as extremely important	2. The issue of building of trust and sharing common values between the planners from eThekweni and our stakeholders is important	3. I am neutral on the role that trust and shared values plays in this process	4. The issue of building of trust and sharing common values between the planners from eThekweni and our stakeholders is not regarded as important
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C5. Related to the issue of trust and sharing of common values raised in question C5, from your assessment, how would you rate the level of trust that has been developed between the eThekweni planning team and your municipal planning team during the mentorship program? Please rate the extent to which this sense of trust and sharing of values has occurred on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being very little or no trust and shared values and 5 being extremely high levels of trust and shared values.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
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Section D: Control and Ownership of Strategic Planning process

D1. In the municipal visioning process, the eThekweni Municipality played the role of a “mentor” and your municipality played the role of a “mentee”. From your personal experience and involvement in the strategic planning workshops, which of the following statements best describe the relationship between the two municipalities. Please tick the most appropriate option.

1. The eThekweni Municipality appeared to dominate the process, overshadowing the role played by my municipality.	2. The eThekweni Municipality and my municipality appeared to seemed to work in partnership in managing the process	3. My municipality managed the process, with eThekweni only playing a supportive role	4. I am unable to comment on the relationship between the mentor and mentee.
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D2. In addition to the eThekweni Municipality and your municipality playing a key role in the visioning process, there have been other national and international role-players that have been involved in the process. Please share your honest observations and reflections on the relevance of the role played by these agencies and the value that they may or may not have added.

Name of Agency	Rating of Relevance in project: 1-low relevance 5-highly relevant	Comments / Reflections
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)		
United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLGA)		
Cities Alliance		
Association of Local Authorities in Namibia (ALAN) / Malawian Association of Local Authorities (MALGA)		
South African Local Government Association		
Other agencies (please specify)		

Section E. General

E1. From your perspective as an active stakeholder in the municipal visioning process, what are some recommendations that you would make to improve the way learning between eThekweni Municipality and your municipality could be structured so that better strategic planning can be achieved?

APPENDIX TWO

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

Questions to guide informant interviews and focus group session

Understanding C2C learning (introduction and scene setting)

1. How would you define City-to-City learning? Please can you share some of the city-to-city learning initiatives that are underway between eThekweni and other cities in the global South?
2. How is this different from mentorship? Are you comfortable with this label and if not, why not?
3. Which other cities/countries do you learn from?

Why eThekweni? (research question 1)

4. Share the narrative with us behind why African cities are interested in learning from EM's strategic planning process?
5. Can you please unpack what you think are the unique characteristics of the USP process?
6. Tell us how it came to be that eThekweni was selected to be a mentor to African cities, as part of the UCLG program.

How does learning occur? (research question 2)

7. Reference will now be made to the UCLG managed eThekweni-Namibia and eThekweni-Malawi mentorship program:
 - 7.1. From a document search there does not seem to be any record of the mentoring road map in Namibia and Malawi. Is it possible for us to construct this TIMELIME to depict the mentoring roadmap? When did the process start and when will it end?
 - 7.2. How exactly does the transfer of knowledge happen; what is the model of learning – in other words do planners first come to eThekweni... are they trained... and then do you go there? How important is this?
 - 7.3. What does the learning exactly comprise of e.g. a workshop and if so are case studies shared, stories told, site visits conducted?
 - 7.4. Does the methodology challenge assumptions and mind-sets? Does there need to be a sense of trust created before challenging mind-sets?
 - 7.5. Has this been formally documented somewhere?

Has the quality of practice improved as a result of learning? (research question 3)

8. There are many ways to build the capacity of planners for more effective strategic planning. Some theorists are arguing that city-to-city learning is the most effective because of the direct experience and expertise. From your perspective, how effective do you think learning been for the mentees? How would you know this? As a result of this learning is there a change in plans and ultimately development on the ground?

9. Is there anything that you as the mentors have learned from the process to improve your own strategic planning process?

Towards a framework for C2C learning (research question 4)

10. Was a set of mentoring guidelines developed by the UCLG/other agencies to guide your mentorship process? If not how did you go about it? Do you think it may be useful to generate a set of generic, adaptable guidelines to guide future learning relationship on the continent and beyond?

11. What for you are the critical success factors or key elements that are important for C2C learning practice?

To unpack and drill down:

11.1. Is size and complexity of municipalities important? Do you think that smaller cities can still learn from larger ones? Can you reflect on the experiences on the Sao-Paulo-Durban mentorship and think about whether size played a role? In Namibia, is there a move for smaller municipalities to learn from similar sized municipalities e.g. Swakopmund?

11.2. Is municipal capacity in the mentor city and mentee city a factor to be considered and institutionally where is the program located in eThekweni?

11.3. Does the length of the process play a role? How important is this?

11.4. How important is funding of the process?

11.5. The latest insights from the literature place value on trust and human interactions and valuing interpersonal relations. In thinking about all your city-to-city learning experiences, tell us how important you think these networks of trust are? For example, how do you relate to the funders, program managers, mentees, mentors, etc.? How often do you interact with them, are some relationships stronger than others and why? Will this a difference to the outcomes in the two municipalities?

Probe for real examples to help clarity.

11.6. FOR FOCUS GROUP ONLY: Using a Venn Diagram please show the relationships between the key role-players (yellow cards and kokis to be provided) – who controls the process and is this important?

12. Is there anything else that you want to share/reflect on, regarding the learning process around urban strategic planning?

APPENDIX THREE

DETAILS OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT PROGRAM

eThekwini Municipality Institute of Learning
1st to 3rd August 2011
Intuthuko Junction Conference Centre, Cato Manor, Durban

1. Introduction

eThekwini Municipality, through a strategic partnership with the United Cities of Local Government Association (UCLGA), is currently “mentoring” the city of Mzuzu in Malawi. Both the eThekwini and city of Mzuzu identified that capacity enhancement around strategic planning with a view to develop a Long-Term Vision for the city was critical to the successful development of Mzuzu. This workshop would therefore set the foundation for a visioning workshop in Mzuzu with all stakeholders and service providers. This 3 day program would also assist in enhancing capacity in the current administration of Mzuzu City Council

2. Proposed Outcomes

The proposed outcomes of the program are:

1. To enhance the capacity of the delegates attending the program, including the following:
 - Developing a clear understanding as to why a longer term strategic vision is required for city development
 - Providing detailed insights into how a city’s long-term vision has been actually implemented – using the case of eThekwini Municipality
 - Equipping the delegates with information and tools to manage their own Strategic Planning Workshop in Mzuzu
2. To prepare in-depth for the forthcoming Mzuzu Workshop, including materials development.

More information on the Partners and Facilitating Team

Imagine Durban is an eThekweni Municipality led project on integrated, long-term planning. It is being implemented in conjunction with Sustainable Cities as part of the Sustainable Cities International Network – Africa Programme.

Municipal Institute of Learning: eThekweni Municipality established the Municipal Institute of Learning to support African municipalities with capacity and knowledge in order to be effective in the delivery of local government’s old and new core competencies.

Your facilitation team

██████████ – Senior Technical Planner (Expert Facilitator)

██████████ – Chief Policy Analyst

██████████ – Senior Manager: Programs – Longer Term Planning

██████████ – Senior Manager: Programs – Integrated Development Planning

Day One: Monday, 1st August 2011 Outcome Based Planning and Defining Challenges	
08:30 – 09:00	Arrival at MILE conference venue
09:00 – 10:30	Welcome: Address by Senior Political/Administrative Official from eThekweni Municipality Introduction of participants and facilitators Expectations of the delegates and facilitators Developing the Ground Rules for the program
10:30 – 11:00	Tea
11:00 – 12:30	The Durban Story – Creating the platform for a Long-Term Vision <i>During this session, we share openly and honestly the experience of Durban’s transformation process from the time it was established as a Metropolitan Area in 2000, until today.</i> <i>Participants then are engaged around how useful this experience is, and what pre-conditions may be necessary in their own contexts to begin to embark on a similar planning and transformation journey.</i>

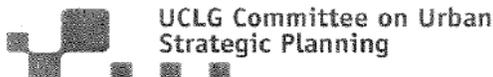
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 14:30	Introduction to Outcomes Based Planning <i>The intention of this session is to convey the power in moving from merely an output-driven organization towards an outcomes-focused local government. Participants will be engaged in group exercises to help facilitate learning around the outcomes-based methodology and language.</i>
14:30 – 15:00	Tea
15:00 – 16:30	How to define Challenges and develop case studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies developed during this session would be used in the Mzuzu Visioning Workshop
16:30 – 17:00	Wrap up Return to Hotel

Day Two: Tuesday, 2nd August 2011 Developing Visions and Strategic Action Plans	
08:30 – 9:00	Arrival at Conference Venue
09:00 – 9:30	Learning Circle: Reflections from Previous Day Questions, Comments and Concerns How does the Mzuzu context differ from the eThekweni context? What needs to be adapted?
9:30 – 10:30	Developing Strategic Visioning Part 1
10:30 – 11:00	Tea
11:00 – 12:30	Developing Strategic Visioning Part 2
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:00	Introduction to Strategic Spatial Planning and Integrated Development Plans
15:00 – 15:30	Tea
15:30 – 16:30	Developing Strategic Action Plans
16:30 – 17:00	Wrap Up and Departure to Hotel

Day Three: Wednesday, 3rd August 2011 Preparation for Mzuzu Workshop and Facilitation	
08:30 – 09:00	Tea
09:00 – 10:00	Learning Circle: Reflections from Previous Day Questions, Comments and Concerns Preparation for Mzuzu Workshop Development of an Action plan for the Mzuzu Workshop Confirmation of roles and responsibilities
10:00 – 10:30	Tea
10:30 – 12:30	Introduction to facilitation and facilitation techniques Evaluation of program
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
14:00 – 16:30	Tour of Durban and INK area – “Strategic Visioning in Action”
16:30	Arrival at Hotel

APPENDIX FOUR

PERMISSION TO USE UCLG AS A CASE STUDY



United Cities and Local Governments / Cités et Gouvernements Locaux Unis / Ciudades y Gobiernos Locales Unidos
Carrer d'Avinyó, 15 - E-08002 Barcelona (Espanya)
Tel: +34 93 4815 823
Fax: +34 93 342 8760

25 August 2013

To whom it may concern,

RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR DOCTORAL STUDIES UNDERTAKEN BY MR SOGEN MOODLEY, DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

It is hereby confirmed that the UCLG Urban Strategic Planning Committee has been notified by Mr Moodley of his intention to utilize the UCLG Mentorship program as a case study in his research entitled: "City-to-city learning in urban strategic planning in Southern Africa: unearthing an underground knowledge economy."

We are particularly encouraged that the findings of his doctoral research will be fed back into the UCLG and can help improve the quality of future city learning engagements on the African continent. As such we will fully cooperate with Mr Moodley to ensure that his fieldwork in the respective municipalities in Namibia and Malawi are supported by the Association of Local Authorities in Namibia (ALAN) and the Malawian Association of Local Government Authorities (MALGA).

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact my offices in Barcelona, Spain or myself via e-mail on s.hoeflich@cities-localgovernments.org

We wish Mr Moodley all the best in his academic pursuits and look forward to engaging with him in the near future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sara Hoeflich de Duque".

Sara Hoeflich de Duque

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