Understanding City to City Cooperation: North South Partnerships of Local Authorities as Development Schemes

Marike C. Bontenbal and Dawood Mamoon

Utrecht University

14 November 2017

Online at https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/82698/
MPRA Paper No. 82698, posted 19 November 2017 09:06 UTC
Understanding City to City Cooperation: North South Partnerships of Local Authorities as Development Schemes

By

Marike C. Bontenbal

University of Utrecht, Geoscience Department

And

Dawood Mamoon

University of Islamabad, School of Economics and Management

Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the scant academic literature available on the role of city twinning in development cooperation. It provides insight into the history, rationale, support programmes and activities of twinning in the development context. City twinning, also known as city-to-city cooperation (C2C), is a world-wide phenomenon that came into being in Europe and the US after the Second World War. Originally intended to build friendships and facilitate cultural and language exchanges, during the last two decades a shift has occurred in the objectives of C2C. It is increasingly seen as an innovative modality of development cooperation in which the Northern partner assists the Southern partner in its process of urban development. With the process of decentralisation in both North and South, the changing role of local government and an emerging new trend in development with increased focus on the micro-level, local authorities are believed to play a vital role as aid donors. This view is underlined by national governments, local authority associations and UN agencies that have set up a wide range of support programmes. The change in aid practice has not only led to a more local sphere of activity, the new focus is on strengthening good governance. Advocates of city twinning believe city partnerships are an appropriate vehicle to share experiences and enhance urban governance. Southern partners draw on the knowledge and expertise of their Northern counterparts to address needs in urban management and administration. Capacity building - through peer-to-peer exchange, study visits, workshops and trainings - targets a range of local authority personnel such as mayors, councillors and administrators. Based on a number of case studies from the literature, an attempt is made to define general success factors and challenges to city twinning. It appears that capacity building through C2C is likely to be more successful in strengthening urban governance at the operational level than at the institutional level of local authorities.

Keywords: international municipal cooperation, twinning, urban governance, capacity building, partnerships
Introduction
City-to-city cooperation (C2C), more commonly known as town twinning, is a world-wide phenomenon that came into being in Europe and the US after the Second World War. Originally intended to build friendships and facilitate cultural exchanges, during the last two decades a shift has occurred in the objectives of C2C. It is increasingly seen as an innovative development modality in which the Northern partner assists the Southern partner in its process of urban development.

Although the number of C2C arrangements and local authorities involved in international cooperation efforts is substantial, C2C is a fairly recent theme in the academic debate on development cooperation. The body of knowledge on municipal international relations is largely limited to general international activity of local authorities. The study of Hobbs (1994), for example, reflects on the more general international outreach strategies of US cities. A study by Shuman (1994) considers international municipal cooperation only as part of the larger, grassroots-level "community development initiative". Practitioners have published several studies on C2C, either by municipalities involved in C2C or by supporting agencies e.g. IULA (Schep et al., 1995), UNDP (2000) and UN-Habitat (2003). Truly focusing on C2C as development modality, few academic publications have explained or discussed the concept of C2C in detail (e.g. Haftack, 2003) and only a very thin body of empirical case studies has been published (e.g. Hewitt, 1999 and 2000).

Too little is still known about the present and potential role of cities as agencies for local development. How do local authorities exchange knowledge and expertise that is beneficial to urban development and good governance? What constitutes “good” C2C practice? The aim of this paper is to contribute to enhancing our understanding of the dynamics and impact of the international municipal cooperation process.

Providing a historical overview, the paper begins by describing the growth in international relations pursued by local authorities. Despite the absence of an academic discourse on C2C, an attempt is then made to provide an overarching definition of C2C and to identify characteristics that can be ascribed to C2C practice. Next, C2C is then presented against the background of decentralisation processes in both North and South, the changing role of local government and the shift in focus in development from the macro to the micro-level, that are believed to create a context allowing C2C to become an innovative development modality. Subsequently, an overview of the wide range of C2C support programmes reflects the diversity and ambiguity of the concept but also shows the increasing level of professionalism and institutionalisation of C2C practice. Finally, based on a number of case studies drawn from the literature, it is attempted to define general success factors and challenges to city twinning.

The evolution of international municipal relations in the 20th century
In order to better understand the contemporary phenomenon of C2C, it is useful to look into the history of international municipal relations. Although the municipal movement has reached a global dimension, its European practice was undoubtedly the most highly developed until the second part of the 20th century, from which the international municipal movement expanded further (Gaspari, 2002).

The emergence of international municipal relations in Europe can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, partly as a working class initiative to lobby for socio-economic improvements, partly as a utopian vision of those who strived for unity of all people in an

---

1 The terms ‘North’ and ‘South’ are used here to distinguish between the industrialised, developed countries on the one hand and the developing nations on the other hand.
universal brotherhood (Dogliani, 2002; Gaspari, 2002). The ideas and ideals of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) founded in 1913, which developed into “the most immediate progenitor of today’s organised transnational companionship among communities” (Zelinsky, 1991), underline the objectives of international municipal relations at that time: the exchange of technical knowledge and, more from an ideological viewpoint, bringing together institutions from all over Europe (Gaspari, 2002). World War II has inevitably caused an intensification of international municipal relations. According to Zelinsky (1991), a major impulse was the work of war relief organisations that channelled assistance from North America to the allies in Europe, occasionally from one specific place to another. After the war, a growing reconciliation movement evolved in Europe, creating active twinning relationships between municipalities, initially in France and Germany but later involving other countries as well. The 1950s can be marked as the effective origin of international twinning relationships between cities (Mamadouh, 2002).

The political crisis in which nation states found themselves in after the Second World War allowed space for municipalities to appear on the scene. A new association of European municipalities was initiated in 1951, the Council of European Municipalities (CEM). It was founded by fifty European municipalities whose primary objective was European integration in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and local democracy through encouraging municipal exchanges and projects. In 1984 the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) evolved from the CEM and merged in 1990 with IULA, whereby the former became the European section of the latter (Hafteck, 2003). Various other national and international organisations were founded fostering town twinning, such as Monde Bilingue in France.

Whereas in Europe town twinning originated from bottom-up initiatives, the American twinning program was established from above. The US movement materialised with President Eisenhower’s "People-to-People" program in 1956 that was intended to involve individuals and organised groups in citizen diplomacy, encouraging exchanges fostered through sister cities (the American equivalent of the European town twinnings) reducing the chance of future world conflicts (Mamadouh, 2002; Vion, 2002). The initiative was reorganised in 1967 as a separate non-profit organisation known as Sister Cities International (SCI). Up to date, it presents itself as a ‘non-profit citizen diplomacy network’ and functions as clearinghouse, catalyst, matchmaker, and advisor. The US concept of ‘sister cities’ is almost identical to that of twinnings in Europe, except that it does not focus on a particular geographical region, taking a global perspective. SCI claims to have the world’s largest number of twinnings today on a national scale (Hafteck, 2003).

The pattern set from the 1950s onwards by both the European and American movement fostering town twinning, has led to a world-wide trend of long-term international municipal relations. Attempts have been made to estimate the total number of town twinning relationships. Zelinsky (1991) calculated that by the end of the 1980s, more than 11,000 pairs of cities in some 159 countries had entered into twinning agreements. Mamadouh (2002) suggested the total number of CEMR twinning arrangements in 1995 was around 14,000. Today, there are close to 30,000 European twinnings registered with CEMR (www.ccre.org). In the United States, SCI claims to represent more than 2,400 communities in 124 countries around the world (www.sister-cities.org) against 1205 communities in 87 countries in 1988. The figures indicate that the number of twinnings has increased substantially during the last twenty years.

---

2 For an elaborate overview of the development of Monde Bilingue, see Vion (2002).
3 However, no definitive central register of twinnings exists and there is still great diversity in defining twinning relationships concerning the frequency, intensity, or results of exchanges. In addition, the variety in levels of scale (be it municipal, regional, sub-national) challenges aggregation of available data, while the level of institutionalisation also varies widely among twinning arrangements.
In summary, reconciliation in Europe after World War II and the American People-to-People program further stimulated the formation of international municipal relations that originated in the first half of the 20th century with IULA as its main protagonist. Associations as the CEMR and SCI have facilitated town twinning on a large scale and their efforts have been shared by many other support organisations, which will be discussed in a later section.

The links that originate from the 1950s onwards are predominantly cultural and involve primarily the countries of the developed world (Zelinsky 1991). From the 1980s on, the scope of twinning became more varied in terms of geographical scope and objectives set. Twinning now also involved communities in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, a means for Western cities to express solidarity and protest against the Cold War. After the collapse of the Iron Curtain, it occurred that the same twinning partners assisted in institutional reform of former Communist cities. Also, some twinings obtained a more economic character, fostering entrepreneurship and trade.4

Perhaps the most obvious change however in nature and goals is the emergence of town twinning as development modality. Cooperation links comprise of municipalities in the industrialised and developing nations. The idea of ‘cooperation twinings’ had been launched in the 1960s after the independence of several African countries and was practised essentially between French and Western African municipalities, in particular Senegal. Subsequently, cooperation twinings developed further in the 1970s and 1980s, becoming more technically oriented and project-based (Hafteck, 2003). Twinning arrangements have thus been implemented as aid delivery mechanisms and increasingly function to allow the exchange of practices of good urban governance between cities.

Numerous cities involved in twinning are now functioning similarly as other aid delivery agencies in the international cooperation efforts. Funding is provided by national governments, local government associations or through international donor-funded programmes. Cities set up and support projects and provide knowledge and expertise through the delivery of technical assistance (TA) in their partner cities, often organised in a peer-to-peer setting for local government administrators and technicians. The activities and characteristics of development cooperation twinings, for which C2C is the more recently used term, will be discussed in the next section.

**Understanding C2C**

The trends in international municipal relations described above are important in our aim to understand city-to-city cooperation. With its objective to enhance urban development, C2C is more than an instrument linking populations of different cities through cultural exchange. This section elaborates on the characteristics and definitions of C2C.

There is no blueprint for the set of activities, actors involved, geographical scope or contact frequency in city-to-city cooperation. Various authors review these elements in their work (Hafteck, 2003; Mamadouh, 2002; Vagale, 2003; Zelinsky, 1991). Although highly diverse in content, some general characteristics can be extracted, which distinguish C2C as unique form of development cooperation effort.

First, lead actors and means involved of C2C can be generalised to two broad distinctive pillars. The first is that of the local administration itself, involved in formal political or technical encounters by mayors, municipal councils, and technical personnel. Providing monetary or in-kind contributions (including training sessions and advisory services), such C2C programmes are

---

4 For examples of trade-related C2C, see Cremer *et al.* (2001) and O’Toole (2001).
designed to encourage regular, direct, and on-going contact between municipal administrators and technicians, allowing the transfer of technical information and exchange of expertise and best practice (Hewitt, 1999a). Thus, the exchange of know-how and experience is the central aim, servicing the overall objective of sustainable urban development.

The second pillar is the participation and contributions of civil society, the non-profit and the private sector. Civil society may cooperate with the local authority in its C2C efforts, or it may execute its own programme. These activities include fundraising for projects, facilitating the exchange of people (e.g. schools) and information by means of organising exhibitions and festivals. Raising awareness on global issues and development cooperation is an important goal, as well as creating public support for the international cooperation efforts of the local authority. Mamadouh (2002) points out that these activities in the civic society sphere have a substantial symbolic meaning, reinforcing the link between the cities and further generating public support.5

Second, C2C refers to the international cooperation efforts of local authorities. The definition of local authority, however, varies widely, partially because the institutional context differs among nations. C2C may involve municipalities, city districts, counties, provinces. For reasons of clarity and consistency, the term local authority will be used here to refer to any type of local administrative entity of a country.

Third, the interaction of C2C by definition has an international dimension, involving local authorities in a North-South context. This North-South component is intrinsically connected to the fact that C2C specifically refers to twinning aiming at contributing to urban development and reducing poverty.

Fourth, C2C is characterised by a formal agreement of a long-term, one-on-one partnership between the participating local authorities and/or their respective civic society groups. In general, the relationship does not limit itself to carrying out a single project but opens a way for a variety of shared activities, usually for an indefinite period (Zelinsky, 1991).

Finally, reciprocity of effort and benefit between the partners separates C2C from other types of development cooperation. In practice Southern partners are assisted by means of financial aid, projects and capacity building activities whilst Northern partners benefit from C2C through an increased awareness and knowledge of global issues and the opportunity for the public at large to participate in development efforts. The exchange of knowledge and expertise through peer-to-peer programmes for local administrators implies two-way capacity building efforts, yet empirical evidence on this subject has so far been lacking.

A serious attempt to define and conceptualise C2C is done by Hafteck (2003). In his article, he gives an overview of existing definitions and terminology used by various support programmes and local government associations. Terms used to describe C2C practice include ‘Municipal International Cooperation’ (Schep et al., 1995), ‘International Municipal Cooperation’ (Hewitt, 1999/2000), ‘linking’ (UNDP, 2000) and ‘city-to-city cooperation’ (used by UN-Habitat and the world’s largest local government association called United Cities and Local Governments – UCGL). The term “twinning” is avoided to prevent from confusion with the general term twinning which is common in development practice referring to cooperation efforts between institutions, universities, hospitals and other public services (see Jones & Blunt, 1999 and Avskik, 5 Symbols of twinning arrangements include formal ceremonies in which Mayors sign a twinning oath, road sings at the entrance of municipalities referring to the partner city, the naming of streets and public buildings after the partner city and information stands in the city hall (Mamadouh, 2002).
1999) and to distinguish municipal relations with substantive development objectives from twinnings focusing on cultural/people exchanges.

City-to-city cooperation has become an umbrella term to cover all possible forms of relationships between local authorities at any level in two or more countries which are collaborating together over matters of mutual interest leading to sustainable urban development. Being used by UN-Habitat and UCGL in policymaking and widely acknowledged by their partner organisations, the term best fits the current thinking on municipal development cooperation and its practice. \(^6\)

Much as there is discussion about the terminology used to describe the C2C movement, there is discussion about an overarching, inclusive definition that reflects all C2C activities and characteristics. As Hafteck (2003) notes, a single definition for C2C does not exist. He provides an overview of the definitions used by various organisations involved in development cooperation. Although there is variety in approach, lead actors, purpose and means involved, he finds some points of convergence: the overall goal of sustainable development, the concept of some form of partnership between local authorities being at the core of the partnership, the notion of territory (i.e. the area of jurisdiction of a local authority), and the participation of civil society. Hafteck then proposes a new definition: C2C…

“…consists in substantial collaborative relationships between sub-national governments from different countries, aiming at sustainable local development, implying some form of exchange or support carried out by these institutions or other locally based actors” (Hafteck, 2003).

In the following sections the focus will be on the changing context of government and governance and development cooperation that explain the growing role of C2C as aid modality. First, national policies of developing countries have been changing with an increased focus on decentralisation. The process of decentralisation attributes new responsibilities to local authorities. Second, this new role for local governments requires institutional strengthening and improvements in the sphere of urban governance. Third, new trends in development cooperation are emerging that are characterised by a micro-approach and a wide range of development actors and agencies that are active in development assistance. Finally, it is explained how local authorities may respond to these trends through C2C practice.

**Decentralisation**

Since the mid-1980s decentralisation reforms have been introduced in developing nations. Governments reform and strengthen their systems of local government and devolve responsibilities and resources to sub-national levels at an unprecedented rate (Devas & Grant, 2003). Decentralisation has also become a central issue in the development debate. Governments and international aid donors agree that devolving powers to the local level and strengthen the capacity of local authorities will foster local development. In respect to these processes, C2C is believed to be an effective mechanism for good governance capacity building.

There are many different reasons why governments pursue decentralisation. The factors vary from country to country but are mainly political. \(^7\) The State is no longer seen as the sole

---

\(^6\) Hafteck (2003) prefers to use the term Decentralised Cooperation (DC) and notes that using the term C2C may lead to misunderstandings. He further observes that the term ‘city’ is not ideal as it does not reflect the entire range of sub-national governments that are involved in such partnerships. DC itself is however a controversial term, assuming that all project-implementing entities other than central administrative structures can engage in C2C and therefore is not limited to local authority bodies.

\(^7\) In Latin America, democratisation was an important objective of decentralisation policies in the 1980s, when most military regimes were replaced by democratically elected governments (van Lindert & Nijenhuis, 2004). In
framework for organising space, people and economic activities (de Jong & Broekhuis, 2004). Decentralisation is generally considered a response to the failure of the state and the need for reform to counter economic inefficiencies, macroeconomic instability, and ineffective governance (Work, 2002).

While countries may have different arguments for decentralisation, the underlying rationale is that bringing government closer to the people will make it more responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens - the majority of whom are 'the poor'. Advocates of decentralisation argue that decentralising responsibilities for service delivery to local governments will result in better use of resources and offer greater effectiveness in promoting sustainable urban development (Crook & Sverrisson, 2001).

Decentralisation can be defined as the transfer of responsibility for public functions and services from the central government to lower levels of government. Decentralisation is closely connected to the subsidiarity principle, meaning that functions should be devolved to the lowest level of social order that is capable of completing them. As Work states:

"Decentralizing governance is the restructuring of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capabilities of sub-national levels" (Work 2002).

Three fundamental dimensions of decentralisation can be distinguished (Smoke, 2003; Work, 2002). Fiscal decentralisation refers to the resource reallocation to sub-national levels of government, such as the assignment of responsibilities of own-source revenues. Institutional or administrative decentralisation aims at transferring decision-making authority, resources and responsibilities for the delivery of public services from the central government to sublevels of government. It includes administrative bodies, systems and mechanisms which help to manage and support decentralisation. It also includes mechanisms that link formal government bodies to other key local actors such as NGOs and the private sector. Finally, through political decentralisation, political power and authority is transferred to sub-national levels of government. It allows for the creation of an inclusive local political process, which is needed for local authorities to understand and act on the needs and preferences of local people. Political decentralisation requires the restructuring of institutions and the legal framework and stronger linkages with civil society and the private sector.

A large deal of the literature assumes that decentralisation of government has some generic benefits, mainly the increased political participation of ordinary citizens whose voices are better heard. Smoke (2003) notes that the majority of these advantages can be broadly captured as improved efficiency, governance and/or equity. These results, in turn, are associated with poverty alleviation. Advocates of decentralisation say it will lead to greater responsiveness to the needs of the 'poor' through new initiatives and greater citizen participation (Crook & Sverrisson, 2001). Local governments thus are expected to contribute to local development by providing tailor-made services, an enabling legal and institutional environment, and by creating partnerships with key local public, private and community actors.

Eastern Europe, it has been a response to the shift to market economies and democracy. In Africa, it is part of a process of national reform and viewed as a path to national unity (Devas & Grant, 2003; Work, 2002).

8 The latter is also referred to as economic or market decentralisation meaning that certain functions or tasks are transferred from the public to the private sector, and is considered the most complete form of decentralisation (Nijenhuis, 2002).
Some pitfalls however can also be discerned. According to Devas & Grant (2003) there is no evidence of such a connection between decentralisation and the development of more pro-poor policies or poverty-alleviating outcomes. Mechanisms of participation and accountability are in practice often dominated by local elites to the exclusion of the marginalised. Obstacles of power, social exclusion and minimal organisational capacity mean that few gains will be made by the poor. Decentralisation efforts are in some cases a guise for national political elites to expand their control through developing new local institutions or restructuring existing ones. Furthermore, decentralisation may undermine macro-economic control of the countries concerned, worsen interregional income disparities and increase local government budget deficits (Devas & Grant, 2003; Gaventa, 2002; Smoke, 2003).

**Urban governance**

As pointed out above, the diminishing role of the state runs parallel with the trend towards new forms of local governance and democratisation. The belief that decentralisation will result in better use of resources is based on the assumption that local citizens have an influence on the decisions made by local governments. Historically, the 'local' has been considered a key site for democracy building and citizen participation. Citizenship was thought to derive largely from community identification and locally concentrated political participation (Lowndes, 1995 in Gaventa, 2002).

Thus, decentralisation and local governance are intrinsically connected. The governance debate has been dynamic since the introduction of the initial concept of governance as “good government” in 1989 by the World Bank (Helmsing, 2000). In the current debate governance is broadly defined as the system of values, policies and institutions by which a society organises collective decision-making and action related to political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental affairs through the interaction of the state, civil society and private sector. Governance comprises the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations (Work, 2002).

Governance consequently is not government. It recognizes that power exists inside and outside the formal authority and institutions of government. There is no longer any clear distinction between the public and private spheres. As Helmsing (2000) note, it is not necessarily that local governments can do the job better, rather the context has changed and other actors have to be considered, such as communities, organisations, NGOs and the private sector.

Although a normative debate, there is considerable agreement on what constitutes good governance. According to the UN-Habitat Global Campaign on Urban Governance, the fundamental principles of good governance include sustainability, subsidiarity, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement and citizenship, and security (UN-Habitat, 2002). It is generally accepted that good governance entails the creation of effective partnerships to ensure that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard in the decision-making process (Work, 2002).

**Emerging trends in development policy**

Paralleling the institutional and political decentralisation processes in developing nations described in the above sections, a new trend has emerged in development assistance with increased attention to the micro level. From the 1950s until the 1990s the conventional belief on...
development assistance was that the best way to improve living standards was through large scale loans or grants to national governments. The destructive effects of the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes by IMF and World Bank based on the notions of neo-liberalism led to the effect that centralised states became increasingly incapable of meeting the socio-economic needs of their population and sharply reduced employment possibilities in public services. Researchers have begun to pay increased attention to micro-level forces and their role in the broader development process. Thus, one trend in development assistance is the shift from the focus on macro-order structures and processes to the micro-level, through smaller scale interventions targeting populations and problems and taking into account the local context.\textsuperscript{10}

At the same time, a growing range of actors started working actively in development assistance. This includes lower tier political and administrative units, community groups, and NGOs (Hewitt, 1999a). The deliverance of development assistance is no longer limited to large multilateral donors and national governments of the industrialised world.

Along with these shifts regarding level of scale towards the local and new actors on stage, the objectives changed in development assistance. From the 1980s on, more social, labour-intensive projects were implemented, putting a greater emphasis on social development,\textsuperscript{11} poverty reduction, good governance, and the environment. At the same time, there was growing awareness that particular attention should be given to cities as the rapid urbanisation of developing countries\textsuperscript{12} created a range of serious problems.

Decentralisation was ranking high on the development agenda alongside the renewed global emphasis on governance and human-centred approaches to human development. Democratic and decentralised governance is increasingly considered a requisite component of development initiatives (Work, 2002). Development aid both aims to contribute to the decentralisation process itself and to strengthen the capacity of local authorities that are necessary to respond to the newly achieved responsibilities. Thus, some programmes assist central governments in designing and implementing decentralisation plans (reforming legal, political and fiscal systems), while other programmes address local government capacity building (resource management, social services delivery and civic participation) (Work, 2002).

Today, academics and practitioners universally recognise the importance of good governance practices for alleviating poverty. There is an emerging consensus that good governance is the \textit{sine qua non} for sustainable development (UN-Habitat, 2002).\textsuperscript{13} Both national and international donors are active in the field of good governance, including cities and their national and international associations, regional and international NGOs, civil society organisations, the World Bank and various UN institutions.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} This trend does not however solely reflect all recent shifts in development thinking. Another major trend is the shift from project aid to sector-wide approach and budgetary support. This new macro-approach type of partnership between donors and national governments is government-led and aims at sector reforms and institutional capacity building of central governments.

\textsuperscript{11} The introduction of the Human Development Index in 1990 by UNDP is a good example of this new focus.

\textsuperscript{12} In 1950, the number of people living in urban areas was 750 million. In the year 2000, that figure is estimated to be 2.8 billion, 47 percent of humanity. By 2015, some 4 billion people will live in cities, 53 percent of world population (UN, 1998).

\textsuperscript{13} The World Bank and UN institutions have produced key policy documents on the urban governance debate that put forward this line of thinking. See for example UNDP’s 1999 Human Development Report, the World Bank’s 1999/2000 World Development Report and UNEP’s GEO 2000 Report.

\textsuperscript{14} UN-HABITAT’S Global Campaign on Urban Governance addresses the goal of “sustainable human settlements development”. By contributing to the eradication of poverty through improved urban governance. It aims to increase the capacity of local governments and other stakeholders to practice good urban governance.
City-to-city cooperation: the road ahead
Summarising the above sections, several developments can be observed. Decentralisation has brought new powers and responsibilities to local governments in developing countries. The benefits are believed to lie in the sphere of the increased popular participation and in return a more efficient way of governance taking into account the needs and desires of citizens and other stakeholders. Conditions of good governance contribute to the creation of partnerships and decision-making that is inclusive and reflects broad consensus in society, and hence may lead to a reduction of poverty. The evolution in development assistance has partly led to a growing emphasis on the local level and the notions of good governance. The understanding that nation states no longer represent the sole milieu for solving current problems (Gaspari, 2002), has strengthened the role of non-state actors and micro-order players in development aid. The rapid urbanisation in developing nations and the consequent growing urban problems are demanding increased attention towards the urban context. It is in this context that local authorities worldwide have stepped up to become actively involved in development aid and C2C is considered an innovative way of development cooperation.

The overall objective of C2C is indeed contributing to development at the local level (Hafteck, 2003). The exchange of information and technology among municipalities allows for capacity building to strengthen urban governance in developing countries and assist local authorities in taking up their newly ascribed responsibilities. Hafteck (2003) points out the comparative advantages of local governments as aid agents over NGOs and other actors: the possession of in-house TA, the experience in medium to long-term project planning and budgeting and in involving beneficiaries in decision-making. Furthermore, he argues that, as established institutions, “they can engage in development cooperation by choice rather than necessity” - i.e. they are not dependent on it.

To conclude, C2C fits into this new form of development practice because of its focus on governance on the one hand and its actions at the micro/local scale on the other hand. With the process of decentralisation and the need to strengthen local governments in an increasingly urbanising world, the role for local authorities to provide development assistance through C2C is intensifying.

C2C policy and support programmes
The development of C2C as a means to provide international assistance at the local level is reflected in newly developed C2C policies and support programmes. In this section an overview is presented of such programmes of international and national organisations that contribute in some way to C2C practice and its efficiency. By providing a policy framework here, a better understanding of current C2C practice and thinking is made possible.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCGL) was launched in January 2004, when the existing local government organisations - IULA, the United Towns Organisations (UTO)\(^\text{15}\) and Metropolis\(^\text{16}\) – united their respective global networks of cities and national associations of local governments in a single organisation. Being the largest organisation of cities and local governments in the world, with members in over 100 countries, it is the principal local government partner of the United Nations. UCLG is based on three principles: defence and promotion of democracy, local self-government and decentralisation for the service of the citizen. Its work focuses on local action for development, human rights, social inclusion, promotion of peace and innovation in local governance (www.iula.org).

\(^{15}\) UTO evolved from the 1957-born World Federation of Twinned Cities, which itself took over the activities of Monde Bilingue. It has been a protagonist in the C2C for development field.

\(^{16}\) The World Association of the Major Metropolises.
The United Nations are a key player in the facilitation and promotion of local authority networks and municipal international relations. The establishment of the World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC) in 1996 reflected the call for further development of partnerships between international local authority associations with the UN. The active member associations are UCLG and the Arab Towns Organizations (ATO). WACLAC enables permanent coordination, collaboration and negotiation power to local authorities in the international arena, in particular with the United Nations. WACLAC’s main objectives are promoting local autonomy and strengthening the voice of cities and local authorities on the international stage. Through its member associations, WACLAC also aims to advance the role of cities and local authorities in international cooperation. In these efforts, WACLAC cooperates with UN-Habitat (UN-HABITAT, 2003). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is also active in C2C, considering it an “effective modality not only for local development in the South but also as a vehicle for building bridges across ethnic, religious and other divides” (UNDP, 2000).

Other institutions and programmes that support C2C include the European Union (e.g. the Tacis City Twinning Programme, URB-al and Asia Urbs), the Cities Alliance – a multi-donor coalition of cities and their development partners providing funding and assistance to local authorities in slum upgrading and city development strategies and the CEMR, who since 2002 supports North-South cooperation and the work of European local authorities in international development aimed at capacity building.

Besides international initiatives and associations, national governments play an active role in facilitating C2C. From the 1980s on, mainly in Europe and Canada, the establishment of national cooperation programmes and changes in legislation led to great support to municipal cooperation (Haftack, 2003). Four national programmes are shortly discussed in Box 1, being key innovative players in the international field of C2C.

The emergence of support programmes facilitate C2C and allow for professionalism and institutionalisation of partnerships that have generally evolved out of grassroots initiatives. The programmes provide funding to C2C initiatives and enhance capacity building and the creation of knowledge networks. The existence of these programmes reflect the broad understanding that development cooperation carried out by local authorities is widely acknowledged by bilateral and multilateral development cooperation agencies.
Success factors and challenges – conditions for capacity building

The academic body of knowledge on benefits and challenges of C2C is scarce and highly anecdotal (e.g. Hewitt 1999, 2000). There is no common agreement on what constitutes good C2C that significantly contributes to good governance practice and urban development in developing countries.

In the sphere of policy making, UNDP (2000) and UN-Habitat/WACLAC (2003) reports identify various general characteristics of successful linking, based on respective research of several C2C partnerships. The first factor concerns political will and commitment from civil society that are necessary for successful linking. A professional, remunerated coordinator, support from the mayor and formal city council resolutions for C2C support help build commitment and prevent possible disruption caused by changes in political leadership. Community-wide participation is mentioned as a second success factor: the wider the participation (e.g. of community groups, organisations, universities), the more a link is likely to succeed. A third characteristic is the establishment of clear objectives and work plans between participating cities that is critical to the overall success of C2C programmes. Long-term objectives should be set, with realistic stages being defined for progress towards them. Finally, understanding (building trust and respect) and a clear definition of mutual expectations is paramount.

Findings from the Local Agenda 21 Charters Programme17, executed to support local governments in North and South and their respective partnerships, show similarities with the above mentioned conditions. Good practice in C2C is based on three principles: shared goals, shared planning and ‘something to teach and something to learn’. The latter means that the transfer of knowledge and skills is not a one-way flow from North to South (Knowles & Materu,

---

17 The programme was executed by the local government associations ICLEI, IULA and Towns and Development and ran between 1997 and 2000.
Learning and teaching should thus replace the paternalistic character that is common to many development programmes. It can greatly undermine the spirit of partnership and mutuality. Northern partners need a solid understanding of the needs in the South and aid should be demand driven, rather than donor driven.

While little is known about benefits and challenges of C2C, various authors have elaborated on good practice in capacity building between institutions, notions that can be applied to the practice of C2C. In their empirical analysis of twinning arrangements of public institutions in Sweden with Namibia and Laos, Jones and Blunt (1999) draw conclusions on the effects of twinning as mechanism for institutional capacity building. Results in these twinnings include the contribution of physical resources such as vehicles and computers, the opportunity for individuals to travel, receive further education and work together with fellow professionals. Further, the “backing of an empathetic partner organisation” provided organisational confidence. Avskik (1999) analysed the inter-organisational cooperation projects in Norwegian development assistance and concludes there were significant benefits from the partnerships, mainly through the direct contacts it provided with a professional environment and consequent access to resources and expertise for the recipient organisation. In the framework of the South African/Canadian programme on Governance, Proctor (2000) examined six sub-national government twinning relationships. She notes that the exchanges between Canadian and South African public servants resulted in new insights for both sides, which “promoted greater understanding of the problems”. In his case study on the Toronto (Canada) - São Paulo (Brazil) exchange to improve emergency service delivery in the latter, Hewitt (1999a) describes how managers and technicians of both municipalities met regularly to cover various aspects of emergency service delivery. He concludes that information and technical exchanges lead to improvements in equipment, operations, the implementation of new emergency systems and staff training.

Success factors contributing to these results vary from political commitment and constant adjustment and reshaping of the programmes executed to genuine partnership and ownership by the aid recipients. Both Proctor and Hewitt mention the fact that the recipient partner determined the area of focus and activity as a crucial success factor. Proctor further discerns the mix of project techniques used in the South African/Canadian programme as relevant, enabling a variety of administrators to participate, even those with tight agendas who had no time for long classroom sessions. In the Toronto - São Paulo case, the focus on specific initiatives and project areas, the hands-on contact, as well as the nature of the personal contact between the parties, contributed to positive outcomes.

Some form of compatibility of the partners in the relationship is mentioned as condition for building good partnerships (Vagale, 2003). Similar problems and prospects for growth, a comparable strategic and management framework in which the partners operate, the hierarchical position of the cities in the national urban system, their economic strength and focus, size and experience are but a number of elements that ideally would be comparable. Zelinsky (1991) notes that “the unwritten rule is that two places should be roughly comparable in size. Compatibility (...) implies some sharing of economic, cultural, ideological, historical, recreational, or other type of concern or perhaps a beneficial complementarity of interests”. No evidence however has been found in the literature that compatible partners indeed perform better than less compatible partnerships when C2C is employed as development modality.

Both Jones & Blunt (1999) and Avskik (1999) draw the conclusion that overall, while there are improvements at the operational level of recipient organisations - i.e. technical upgrading and general competence building - at the organisational level, or the level of institutional capacity building, the evidence is less prominent. Also changes at the strategic level are less notable and
the projects tend to have less influence upon the superordinate goals that the recipient organisations pursue. Avskik argues that changes at the organisational and strategic levels of public agencies have more political implications and frequently meet more resistance than measures to improve technical skills and procedures at the operational level. It may be a controversial practice to give advice on how to (re)organise an administration. In addition, the donor partner may not possess the skills to engage in organisational development.

Weaknesses that may obstruct the effectiveness of partnerships include firstly the lack of focus on clear objectives, which may result in the fact that visits become ends in itself rather than a basis on which to build systematically. Also, political changes due to elections or the replacement of personnel at both ends of the linkage may interrupt relationships (Proctor, 2000). Further, a serious threat is that individuals who have acquired skills and knowledge through a partnership programme may leave the organisation, especially because salary levels in developing countries tend to be relatively low in the public sector. Finally, a number of practical constraints may hamper the effects of a C2C relationship, such as physical distance, the language of communication, state borders (e.g. the required visas to be obtained), and resources in terms of money and time (Mamadouh, 2002).

From the case studies described above, some benefits, success factors, weaknesses and constraints can be distracted that are both tangible and intangible. They are summarised below in Box 2. The thin body of evidence however requires a careful interpretation and one should be cautious in drawing general conclusions and find generic characteristics of good city-to-city cooperation. Technical improvements at the operational level tend to be more frequently and more easily acquired through C2C than institutional change and organisational learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2. Institutional twinning: conditions, benefits and challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conditions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mutual understanding and agreement on objectives, expectations and planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality of personal contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compatibility partner city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exchange of (technical) knowledge, skills and expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provision of physical resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stronger organisational confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greater understanding of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of focus on clear objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A partnership is not an end – it is a means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Paternalism/one-way flow of resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**

In this article an attempt has been made to provide a synthesis of the existing body of academic knowledge on city-to-city cooperation practice. The literature points out, firstly, that from an evolutionary perspective of international municipal relations, C2C partnerships specifically targeting development issues are a relatively new phenomenon. Furthermore, the current trends in development practice towards decentralisation and good urban governance provide a policy context that, together with the increasing recognition that aid can be delivered by a wide range of different agents, allow local authorities to play an active role in development through C2C. Finally, regarding success factors and challenges to C2C practice, it appears that while capacity building through C2C may foster beneficial changes at the operational levels of aid-receiving local authorities, the – often - wider goal of institutional and organisational change is more difficult to achieve. Further research is needed to contribute to the hitherto thin body of academic knowledge on how C2C can be defined and what constitutes good C2C practice. Notions of
capacity building principles, genuine ownership and a demand-driven nature of development projects could be guiding concepts in this process. Only then we will be able to better understand how local authorities using C2C as development modality may contribute successfully to local development in their partner cities.

References


