



Draft Learning Notes

Date: Wednesday, 17 May 2017

Venue: Botanical Gardens Conference Centre

Theme: City-to-City Learning in Southern Africa: Lessons for Urban Strategies in the Built Environment

BACKGROUND

MILE's 16th Built Environment Seminar in partnership with DUT's Urban Futures Centre provided a safe space for academics, officials and City-to-City (C2C) partners to critically engage in making positive changes to the City. The seminar provided a unique opportunity for thought leader and MILE's Senior Manager, Dr Sogen Moodley to present his recent doctoral study focusing on a United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) case study. Appropriately entitled "City to City Learning in Urban Strategic Planning in Southern Africa: Unearthing an Underground Knowledge Economy", the aim of the study, was to conduct a critical analysis of contemporary city – to city learning on municipal visioning processes. It drew on the insights and experience of three African cities, Durban in South Africa; Otjiwarongo in Namibia; and Mzuzu in Malawi, to shed light on the phenomenon of C2C learning. This research explored the eThekweni Municipality's mentorship program with these selected Namibian and Malawian municipalities that begin to inform contemporary learning theory in southern Africa.

The key objectives of the seminar were to:

- Provide a shared platform for constructive deliberations between city practitioners, academia and key stakeholders.
- Allow for the sharing on a range of options that could contribute, influence or address the key challenges identified in the purpose of the event.

SEMINAR FORMAT

07:30- 08:30 – Registration, Light Breakfast and Networking

08:30- 08:45 – Welcome and Purpose of Session

08:45- 09:45 – Sharing of Research Findings

09:45- 10:15 – Panel Responses

10:15- 11:00 – Discussion and Way Forward

SHARING OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

As point of departure, Dr Moodley explained the context in which the research was undertaken, and in doing so highlighted the importance of empowerment through the sharing of lessons in mentorship programmes. The insightful presentation revealed there is very little formal documentation on essential ingredients for urban strategic planning. The research identified five key reasons as to the reason Ethekewini Municipality is considered exemplary in offering good insight with regard to strategic urban planning. It emerged that adopting a long term approach, whereby 80 year plans adopted by the Imagine Durban process with extensive civil society interactions was deemed inspirational to other cities.

Also, what was appealing the most was the participatory nature of planning rather than consultative. Furthermore, it was found that Ethekewini's integrated and holistic approach towards development, adopting a strategy that translates into action, and having a joint ownership of the plan were all significant appealing attributes of the City's visioning process.

Dr Moodley then discussed the findings of the other broad areas identified such as the perceptions of city-to-city learning and around the concept of mentorship. In this regard, he argued that despite contemporary progressive notions of mentorship, it is clear that all stakeholders need to review the use of this concept in plenary. What was also revealed was the preference of the terms "city-to-city partnerships" or "learning exchanges" over the limiting term of "mentorship". Moreover, the research explored perceptions of who the beneficiaries are, and those that learning. In this regard, what was most interesting was that a five-phase model of learning was proposed as methodology. Steps of this model included Acclimatisation; Inspiration and Reflection; Adoption; Supported Implementation; and After-Care.

PANEL RESPONSES

At the end of the presentation, there was a short response from a panellist, Dr Fayth Ruffin, who specialises in the Public governance discipline at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her passion on the topic radiated from the feedback she provided, expressing the importance of how this study was focusing on the local as it challenged existing literature. She highlighted that Africa still has a long way to go in terms of addressing issues of trust, and inflexibility. On

the issue of funding, she conceded it not always being readily available, but challenged the practitioners to turn to alternative ways such as turning to the private sector. As they operate in the very same communities that were referred to, responsibility lies with them to play a positive role. In fact, she highlighted that there are business people who are willing to stand in the gap but often do not have the necessary information on how to make this a possibility. On the bottom-up approach, her commentary made reference to the accommodative nature of indigenous systems and solutions. Thus, she was of the view that this research challenged the existing methods in order to ultimately improve quality of life. Special emphasis was also placed on the need to integrate NGOs in the local and not the global context. Moreover, in carrying out city-to-city learning exchanges, she highlighted the importance of considering the unique needs of the City and encouraged creative and unconventional approaches to them.

DISCUSSION AND PROPOSALS

The floor was thereafter opened for valuable contributions and discussions from academia, professionals and partners on the theme of city-to-city learning in urban strategic planning. The following are some of the key themes that emerged:

Role of the local context

It is critical for political leadership to drive urban strategic planning, considering they are responsible for driving vision in their respective cities. Thus, this should be done in partnership with Planners and City Managers in moving with one agenda.

Co –production of knowledge

One needs to also assess the role of academia in the co-production of knowledge as there are often structural obstacles which prevent effective city – academic relations. How does local government facilitate the process of learning and allow for local solutions to local problems.

Western education of Urban Planners

In order to truly shape the visioning process, there is a gap of authentic theories emerging from Africa. Over the years it is common practice to refer to western academia in educating aspiring planners. True change will emerge from this level and the development of African theories must be advocated, as indigenous knowledge is unaccounted for.

The brokering of partner cities

Participants were fascinated and excited about Dr Moodley's five-phase learning model, more specifically Acclimatization being likened to courtship. Participants noted the importance of compatible cities being paired by an external party. In the same breath, it was recommended

that ideally, this role should be undertaken by the regional bodies as they have specialised knowledge.

Implications of the study to the 4th industrialization in Africa

It was highlighted that the new-age era gave rise to an array of disadvantages, one of them being the lack of genuine human interaction. Technology has a role to play, but it is a disservice for building trust between parties.

The bottom-up approach

This was challenged by some participants, holding the view that a top-down approach has embedded itself so much that it would be difficult for a bottom-up approach to have a meaningful impact. However, it was conceded that it would be advantageous for leaders to have a world view or a common understanding of what is to be achieved. In the regard, there was already a good understanding of this in the eThekweni – UCLG working relationship.

WAY FORWARD

During the session, participants were not only presented with key research findings, but a way forward was proposed. In his concluding remarks, Dr Moodley presented critical success factors for city-to-city learning, more specifically for practitioners. They were as follows:

1. Conduct a detailed **pre-learning assessment and scoping exercise**:
 - 1.1. Understand the context;
 - 1.2. Ensure commitment of leadership; and
 - 1.3. Assess stability and willingness of municipality to manage a change process
 - 1.4 Ensure inclusivity and active participation of all key stakeholders.
2. Establish very **clear objectives** up-front.
3. Set up **realistic time-frames** that all parties agree to.
4. Design and agree on an empowering bottom-up **M&E process**.
5. Secure **funding early** in the process.
6. Ensure **capacity** for continuous engagement at all levels.
7. Design a methodology that is **tailor-made** to local needs; “do not cut and paste”.
8. Invest in building RELATIONSHIPS and BUILDING **TRUST**.

9. Design into the process a **CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN** that will aid implementation of USP.

10. Actively seek support from **local government associations** and ensure that they have **CAPACITY** and **WILL** to engage meaningfully! Especially important for greater **AFRICAN OWNERSHIP**.