



FÖRVALTNINGSHÖGSKOLAN

PARTNERSHIPS AS DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Understanding the relation between policy and
practice

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Abstract

The study explores the relation between policy and practice within a 12 years and counting SIDA funded municipal partnership between Växjö Municipality, Region Kronoberg in Sweden and JB Marks Municipality in South Africa. In investigating challenges and opportunities in the South African municipality – the study gains understanding on the processes of framing, anchoring and muddling through within the local government. The findings suggest that the studied partnership has contributed to learning, reframing of experiences, perspective shifting, as well as concrete changes within the local government within highly participatory processes. The studied processes and lessons learned are thereby facilitating a discussion surrounding the role of partnerships within Agenda 2030 and international development cooperation. Conclusions are that partnerships can be conceived as having both top-down as well as bottom-up characteristics and that the partnerships transformative capacity best is understood in relation to its overall institutional context in which they are embedded.

Preface

“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.”

- Jiddu Krishnamurti

This study is written with the will to learn, to grasp, to gain experience, and seek a well-grounded understanding of the phenomena of partnerships within international development cooperation. Not to judge, not to overly argue for the one or the other but to explore. I have been struggling with the dilemma of eating the cake as well as saving it for later – as the classic expression says. It is demanding to pursue depth and detail as well as width and context. These pixels dancing on your screen is, however, the result of this process. At best, it might spark some ideas and discussions – it really did for me. If it does, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

I want to thank my fiancée Hanne for your patience and never-ending support,
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Sincerely,

Frans af Malmborg

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Introduction

In September 2015 the UN General Assembly adopted the *Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). This adoption set the policy framework for the international development community including the work of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The Agenda 2030 sets the goals higher and more ambitious than the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and consists of 17 goals ranging from peace and human rights, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRHR), sustainable growth and development, education and equality to name a few. The Swedish government puts it as a top priority to fulfill the goals and to be a frontrunner in all aspects both home and in international contexts (Regeringen, 2017a).

To bring about sustainable change within international development cooperation, the partnership method has been emphasized despite that researchers have raised concerns regarding mutuality (Johnson & Wilson, 2009) and conceptual clarity (Devers-Kanoglu, 2008). The partnership method is even granted a Sustainable Development goal in itself, being unique in that it's the only goal talking specifically in methodological terms, addressing the way to approach the other 16 goals. Sustainable Development Goal nr 17 states that:

“A successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society. These inclusive partnerships build upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people and the planet at the center, are needed at the global, regional national, and local level” (United Nations, 2018).

The long tradition of cooperation and collaboration is according to the *Swedish report to the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development* (Regeringskansliet, 2017) considered as the very linchpin of the Swedish societal model both nationally and internationally. The focus of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is therefore *“about developing the partnership driven processes with innovative thinking about strategic and operational steering.”*(p. 4) According to the before mentioned report, *“a number of stakeholder platforms and partnerships with a bearing on Agenda 2030 have been created primarily with and between the private sector, civil society, the research community and*

municipalities. Cross sectoral partnerships, also international ones, are becoming increasingly important given how intertwined the Agenda's goals and targets are" (p. 4).

Later, the report mentions that,

"Sweden will continue to build broad and innovative partnerships that include the whole of society. The partnership between the public sector and the private sector will be vitalized and deepened. The partnership between the public sector and civil society organizations is to be characterized by openness and innovation. [...] The partnership between national, regional and local actors is strengthened" (p. 9).

In the aforementioned report the word "partnership" or "partnerships" is used 41 times. In the actual Agenda 2030 it is suggested as a key factor in the implementation of Agenda 2030. Since the concept seems to promise a lot it is a key concern to see whether partnerships can deliver on this promise. Within the concept of public sector organizations and management, Aaron Wildavsky coined the phrase "*if planning is everything – maybe it's nothing*" – a thought-provoking way to illustrate the watering down of a concept to obscurity through its increasing number of connotations (Wildavsky, 1973). The way that the concept partnership is referred to and discussed within a high-level policy context exemplified above without relevant examples and research, risks to fall into the aforementioned obscurity. A similar argument is brought forward by Sinclair (1995) talking about accountability within public administration; "*nobody argues with the need of accountability, but how accountability is defined, and seen to be provided is far from resolved*" (p. 219). Whereas some accounts suggest New Public Management and Managerialism as ways to solve such a suggested deficit of accountability – something that later has been questioned by a large body of research. As partnerships are considered "innovative", "open" and "increasingly important" – how do they work on the ground? What does the actors involved in partnership consider as important when pursuing partnerships and how is the day to day reality of working within a partnership?

Purpose and object of study

When the concept of partnerships is used extensively without a clear definition within a high-level policy context, almost any policy might be considered having partnership-like characteristics. As partnerships are continued to be referred to as unproblematic - impregnated with positive-sounding connotations - it can leave practitioners, policy-makers, as well as academics clueless about what exactly it is being pursued within partnerships. Therefore, question marks should be raised concerning what is actually happening on the ground - to seek the journey from ideas into policies into organizational recipes into practice (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

The current thesis is conducted as a field study to gather information on the processes in a specific partnership - a municipal partnership between Växjö municipality and Region Kronoberg in Sweden and JB Marks municipality in South Africa administered by International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) - a Swedish non-profit association founded in 2009 working with strengthening local democracy in low- to middle income countries in cooperation with the Swedish local government sector. The purpose is multi-faceted. The first step is investigating what has happened on the ground in relation to overall policy goals as well as considering practitioners' reflections on the studied partnership. The second step is using the findings in relation to the theoretical framework to discuss how partnerships can be conceived and interpreted more generally as developmental practice. Therefore, the study also aims to explore and pursue an understanding of partnerships more generally, seeking to nuance such overly positive-sounding phrasings of the phenomenon as presented in the introduction.

Research questions

- What does a SIDA funded international municipal partnership achieve on the ground?
- What lessons can be learned from the ground level actors working with materializing such an effort?
- How can the agency of international partnerships be understood in relation to overarching policy such as Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals?

Partnerships as development cooperation

The local focus is apparent when looking to the administrative authority in the context -

ICLD. ICLD a Swedish organization funded by SIDA focusing on democracy at the local level. As stated in the opening paragraph of the organizations strategy text:

“[...] to facilitate a sustainable local democracy that ultimately contributes to equal and sustainable global development and create conditions for poor people to enhance their living conditions. The work of ICLD has an important role within the United Nations goals for sustainable development until 2030”
(ICLD, Strategi 2016-2020). (authors' translation).

ICLDs “theory of change” is stated in their strategy document. Because of lack of space I won't go into detail but try to as best as I can recreate the logic in the following:

- a) Increased knowledge and experience of equality/inclusivity, participation, transparency and accountability leads to,
- b) Increased capacity through improved insight of the value of democratic development which leads to,
- c) Local and regional governmental bodies strive for increased equality/inclusivity, participation, transparency and accountability
- d) Which contributes to the overarching goal that local and regional governmental bodies gives equal opportunity to influence over the shaping of public administration and services (ICLD, Strategi 2016-2020).

In the view of ICLD, 1) today's global challenges has local repercussions - ICLD will therefore work with local governments to support them, strengthen their resilience and competence to handle these challenges, 2) that institutions are built with knowledge – therefore ICLD will support local governments in creating and sharing knowledge among one another and 3) that since face-to-face meetings in ICLD's view, is essential in creating knowledge – ICLD will be operating in cooperation with local governments to facilitate these meetings. By doing this, the organization contributes to their overall goal to interlink with the Agenda 2030.

Municipal Partnerships

The municipal partnership program supports projects for result-oriented and mutually beneficial exchanges of experience between local and regional politically-managed organizations in Sweden and in the ICLD's partner countries. Projects between the

partners are monitored by a monitoring or steering committee represented by 1-2 administrators from each partner as well as politicians from both ruling and opposition party within the both municipalities (ICLD, Strategi 2016-2020). Funding is in advance paid out by the Swedish partner, being reimbursed from ICLD when the partial or final project reports has been submitted. Basically, funding caters for the monitoring committee as well as the exchange programs within each project (flight tickets, hotel nights, venues and so forth. Therefore - ICLD does not finance the implementation of the projects. Reports, documentation as well as budgets are subject to audit. In numbers, ICLD has administered a total of 250 municipal partnership projects, 8 international training programs 22 knowledge center publications (icld.se, 2017a), which makes the partnerships and their projects the most frequently used method. Out of the 250 projects, 63 of them is or has been in South Africa. The focus of a project can be whatever falls within the municipal responsibilities, for example waste-management services, education, culture or private sector and industrial development to name a few (icld.se, 2017c).

The focus of this study is one of ICLDs longest running municipal partnerships consisting of 34 projects. The partnership has been running from 2006¹ and onwards and is between Växjö Municipality, Region Kronoberg and JB Marks Municipality. JB Marks Municipality is the result of a newly formed municipality through a municipal amalgamation between Tlokwe and Ventersdorp municipalities. The Municipality is located in the North West province of South Africa and the largest city with the majority of the administrative functions is Potchefstroom. The main economical activity in Ventersdorp is agricultural activity while Potchefstroom is driven by services and manufacturing. The population of the Municipality was in 2016 measured to 243 527. The African National Congress (ANC) currently rules the council with a majority of 34 seats in the local council followed by the Democratic Alliance (DA) with 22, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) at 5, Freedom Front Plus (FFP) at 4 and the African Independent Congress (IP) at 2. The percentage of formal dwellings in the municipality is 82%. Looking at the audit report the years before the merger between the two municipalities, Tlokwe received an unqualified opinion with findings in the financial

¹ ICLD was founded three years later so the first three years the partnership wasn't a part of ICLD. How the organization adopted the partnership might be an interesting area of study but will not be covered within this essay.

year 2015/16 and a qualified audit opinion in both of the two years before. Ventersdorp Municipality on the other hand received a disclaimer audit opinion during all of the three financial years mentioned above² (Local Government Handbook South Africa, 2018).

However, the focus is not the financial but mainly is the organizational part and the everyday actions within the municipality – the materializing of the overarching policy goals. The actual partnership is supposed to enhance civil influence through increased capacity of local government and should contribute to or enhance one or more of the following areas: (1) Equity/inclusion, (2) Transparency, (3) Possibility to demand accountability, (4) Citizen participation (icld.se, 2018c). Furthermore, according to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) the partnership is revolving around three main issues that all the joint projects should take into account in one way or another; (1) the political system in Sweden and South Africa, (2) good governance and management and (3) capacity building and administrative capacity (MOU, 2015). Summarily, internal statistics from 2017 suggest that there since the start of the project 100 international trips has been conducted for approximately 600 involved delegates. Approximately 3300-3500 hotel nights and a grand total of 25,000,000 SEK has been spent. To see how the partnership is received, translated and implemented, the following interviews will shed more light upon the ins and outs of the partnership. Further results suggest 26 tangible results achieved after the 12 years of partnering which will be shown in the table below (Tangible results, 2017).

² While it presumably qualifies for a very interesting study, the actual study is not particularly concerned with the municipal merger. However, some results suggest that the process of the merger had repercussions for the partnership.

Table 1:1 Tangible results from 12 years of working together (October, 2017)

Tangible results	Adopted by	Year
New internal Communication Strategy	JB Marks Local Mun.	2015
New municipal webpage (design and content)	JB Marks Local Mun.	2010
Initiating of new electronical system for public documentation	JB Marks Local Mun.	2012
New weekly routines to provide outreaching info to prevent fire accidents in townships	JB Marks Local Mun.	2016
Implementation of 'Introduction day' for new employees	JB Marks Local Mun.	2014
Opening of foot-care clinic for diabetics	JB Marks Local Mun.	2014
Opening of the meeting place; 'Ubuntu Xtreme Youth Club'	JB Marks Local Mun.	2012
Opening of two new Youth Clubs	JB Marks Local Mun.	2016
Introduction of 'Time travelling' as method for education about local history	JB Marks Local Mun.	2007
Integrated school library at one school	JB Marks Local Mun.	2010
New system of 'waste pickers' addressing people with few resources to get a first income	JB Marks Local Mun.	2016
New programs to empower young boys and girls run by the Church	JB Marks Local Mun.	2013
Education for nurses through collaboration with Police Service, ambulance and the university	JB Marks Local Mun.	2017
Introduction of monthly fire protection activities for people living in informal settlements	JB Marks Local Mun.	2016
New system where young pupils visit the fire brigade to get knowledge of proactive work to prevent fires	JB Marks Local Mun.	2017
New visual graph in "Tlokwe Newsletter" on how tax-payer money is distributed and spent in the municipality.	JB Marks Local Mun.	2017
Start-up of daily activities for people with disabilities	JB Marks Local Mun.	2017

Unfortunately, due to limitations related to time and resources, as well as staff turnover, a full scale investigation of the practicality of the tangible results mentioned as shown in table 1:1 will not, however be possible to conduct. However, the projects that is investigated in the primary data collection within the field studies is bolded in the above table.

Previous research

In order to gain a broad understanding of the concept at hand, the previous research section will include partnerships in general, cross sectoral partnerships, as well as studies concerning specific municipal partnerships.

When it comes to learning within the municipal partnerships, Devers-Kanoglu (2008) points out that despite high expectations both research as well as conceptual clarity is lacking. While the standard procedure has been to talk about learning and organizational learning, Devers-Kanoglu (ibid) argues that the “real” learning passes largely unnoticed in the relations, why she introduces the concept of informal learning that deviates from the official representations. It is further suggested that municipal partnerships is a valuable area for individual learning more so than organizational learning. However, it is also argued that partnerships are manifold and all partnerships are unique (Devers-Kanoglu, ibid). The conceptual unclarity, is something that we already touched in the introduction when it comes to partnerships both within a high level policy context as well as within the research discourse. These sticking points for Devers-Kanoglu (2008) is however important for our further presentation. If partnerships are unique – how is this study to draw experiences from a specific partnership to more general terms – is this even possible? The argument surrounding the formal and the informal is also something that we will elaborate upon further along in the study – something that can be connected to the discussion between discourse and practice.

There are different versions of partnerships. The concept of cross sectoral partnerships include four different concepts within the partnership discourse; business-nonprofit, government-business, government-nonprofit as well as trisector partnerships (Selsky & Parker, 2005). A common form of the government-business partnerships are Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). PPPs has been a popular method during the end of the 21st and even though it has been popular and widely used, Greve & Hodge (2007) argue that few people would actually agree on what a PPP actually is. The clearest divide between researchers according to Greve & Hodge (2007) is the difference between the scholars that argue that PPPs are tools of government and the scholars that consider it a language game designed to cloud other ideas and purposes (Greve & Hodge, 2007). Even though the before mentioned authors are talking about business-governmental partnerships, the clear divide between researchers concerning PPPs and the fact that researchers can consider it a “language game” (Greve & Hodge, 2007:547) further points to the conceptual obscurity also mentioned by Devers-Kanoglu (2008).

Within the Swedish governance discourse, the government-nonprofit partnerships are abbreviated as IOP (*idéburet offentligt partnerskap*). This form of partnerships can according to SOU 2016:13 capacitate agencies within the civil sector and facilitate collaboration between public and civil organizations. However, as suggested by many of the authors above the same muddiness applies to the IOPs of today since they according to the SOU 2016:13 operate in juridically untested waters. As far as juridical common practice is concerned, all the IOPs has to be assessed individually so that they won't contest the procurement routines and rules for governmental support (SOU 2016:13). Even though IOP is a fairly new form of organization, Forum, a Swedish civil association for nonprofit organization in Sweden, lists 45 active IOPs for 2018 (Forum, 2018).

International municipal partnerships seems to be an area without a large body of research. Two Swedish master theses penetrate the subject from different angles and are both, just as this essay, written in collaboration with ICLD. Olehäll (2017) investigates the reasons to why Swedish municipalities chooses to partake or not in the municipal partnership programs. According to Olehäll (2017), the mutuality is one of the main reasons to why the Swedish municipalities are engaging in these types of partnerships. According to Olehäll (2017), there is an apparent traceability between the engagement in the partnerships and the development of municipal projects and organization. Another reason to why municipalities engage is because the partnership receives external funding and is not taken from the municipal budget. However, Olehäll (*ibid*) also discuss the partnerships from a perspective of municipal marketing – from an active municipal policy to put your municipality on the map and gain attraction. In that view, the partnership has a symbolic value for the municipality. It also has to do with the willingness to put international policy on the agenda for the municipality at hand and Olehäll (*ibid*) also argues that without some local enthusiasts (*sv. eldsjälar*) some of the partnerships would not come into being (Olehäll, 2017).

The other thesis written by Frykberg & Möller (2009) focuses on a specific municipal partnership between Buffalo City in South Africa and Gävle in Sweden. The thesis is focused on knowledge transfer between the municipalities and is focusing around specific municipal partnership projects. Frykberg & Möller (*ibid*) splits the knowledge into tacit and explicit knowledge and explains how the knowledge goes through phases of socialization, externalization, combination and internalization. As in this study, the

authors also set out to study potential challenges for the knowledge transfer. However, the findings suggest that there in all of the investigated projects between Gävle and Buffalo City was knowledge transfer going on – in some projects more hands on knowledge and in others more about sharing understanding, concepts, goals and visions (Frykberg & Möller, 2009).

van Ewijk & Baud (2016) focuses on the role of migrants in municipal partnerships. In the Netherlands, municipalities has engaged in partnerships with Morocco and Turkey – two of the main migrant source countries. van Ewijk & Baud (ibid) focuses specifically on how the involvement of migrants influence the learning, exchange and knowledge transfer leading to change in local government. The conclusions are that there is a large untapped potential in the migrants and their networks that can be of value to the municipalities. The migrants has during the partnerships filled a large number of roles as initiators, key players, facilitators and contributors of specific valuable cultural knowledge relevant in addressing culturally sensitive questions as well as youth participation within the municipalities (van Ewijk & Baud, 2016).

Johnson & Wilson (2009) focuses on the northern partners in municipal partnerships and discusses the idea of mutuality. It is argued however that the assuming of a principle of mutuality poses challenges to both learning and knowledge production. While a lot of research has been directed towards the southern partners, less has been done on the northern learning. The authors conclude that although the partnerships are important arenas for individual learning, this doesn't mean that the organizations learn. Moreover, the power asymmetry in the north-south relationship suggests that even though there is value for both the partners, the "best practice" experiences can be valued more highly from the southern perspective, which in turn affects the incentives for participation for the northern part. Therefore, the authors argue for a more proper understanding and realistic expectations concerning mutuality and learning within north-south partnerships (Johnson & Wilson, 2009).

Summarily one can conclude that partnerships in general suffers from a conceptual unclarity (Devers-Kanoglu, 2008) which can obscure practice and legitimize privatization (Greve & Hodge, 2007). IOPs are new forms of organization between Swedish public sector and civil society navigating in juridically untested waters (SOU 2016:13). While mutuality is the main reason why Swedish municipalities engage in

partnerships, other symbolic values are also considered important but partnerships might not materialize without certain local enthusiasts within local government (Olehäll, 2017). Within some municipal partnerships – migrants has been used as adequate capacitors/consults, contributing with unique knowledge to the municipality (Ewijk, 2016). While knowledge transfer between municipalities can be seen as going through different organizational as well as social phases (Frykberg & Möller, 2009), other accounts suggest that power asymmetries between municipalities affect the learning possibilities, favoring the northern partners' interpretation of events (Johnson & Wilson, 2009). It is obvious that the research does not really present a clear-cut picture of partnerships in general. The previous research however gives us some examples on how partnerships can materialize, be interpreted and conceptualized.

Theory

There are several ways of how to approach the phenomena of partnerships. As discussed in the policy discourse outlined above, partnerships are to be broad, innovative, inclusive, build upon a common understanding and shared vision (Regeringskansliet, 2017). In the previous research section, some of the research surrounding partnerships has been presented as well as some interesting sticking points for further discussion. In pursuing an explorative approach towards the concept of partnerships, the theoretical framework presented below has explorative characteristics – suggesting three possible entry-points for conceptualizing partnerships; the embeddedness of local government in multi-level governance, institutional logics as well as the policy-to-practice translation metaphor. The three theoretical concepts are argued as relevant in exploring the ground-level day-to-day characteristics in relation to overall questions relating to institutionalization, stability and change.

From local to global

In order to conceptualize the Swedish and South African municipalities in a multi-level governance context, some basic assumptions has to be clarified. To lay the groundwork for such an analysis, a basic position is the shift of academic political science discourse from government to governance. Without going into detail, the shift from government to governance is largely characterized by a departure from a single-handed, bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of governing towards a network-based approach where the state takes on a more passive and indirect role, planning, delegating as well purchasing services (Salamon, 2002). Jacobsson, Pierre & Sundström (2015) shows that a lot of research within this discourse has argued that the state is loosening its capacity to govern, which is not at all the case according to them – suggesting the changes in modern governance as changes rather than particularly drawbacks. Any political administration can be seen as having both bottom-up and top-down characteristics. For example, both Lidström (2003) and SKL (2013) points out the contradictory nature and the tensions between the local and central powers (the top-down, bottom-up paradox). Within the Swedish context, this contradiction is even expressed in the Swedish constitution;

*All public power in Sweden is based on the people. The Swedish National regime is based on freedom of opinions and on universal and equal voting rights. **It is***

realized through a representative and parliamentary state and by municipal self-government. (SFS 1974:152, ch 1 §1, authors emphasis)

The division of power between the local and the central government is therefore most adequately defined as an ongoing discussion or power struggle concerning what questions should be addressed on what levels. The constitutional and multi-level governmental perspective – the relation between central and local powers - must although be contrasted with and looked through the organizational and institutional perspectives suggested by Jacobsson et al (2015).

An organizational dimension of governing bears relevance in how bureaucracy and by extension, society is governed through institutional design which makes the traditionally referred to top-down – bottom-up conceptualization as a clear-cut dichotomy somewhat problematic. The embeddedness of local government into the local as well as the global is therefore an important theoretical sticking point going forward in the study. This has implications for the way to understand local government and its agency. In Jacobsson et al (2015) view the discussion of agency, change and power in the studied phenomenon should not be conceptualized as a black box, neither the trends not a decline of state governing but a transformation. In Jacobsson's et al (ibid) view, the role of the state, as well as international embeddedness, institutional design and collaborative and interactive means of governing are new forms and examples of a transformation rather than a decline of governance.

Therefore, in going forward in the study it is relevant to summarize how to conceptualize international partnerships as development cooperation within a multi-level governance perspective. There is both local as well as global aspects that will affect and frame our phenomenon. There is the United Nations and the Agenda 2030 on the global level which interrelates with The South African and Swedish state respectively on the national levels in different ways. There is ICLD and SIDA on the Swedish side, working on a direct mandate from the Swedish state. There is the municipal partners collaborating within this framework. Within the municipalities, actors on the local level that are working both with their day-to-day municipal responsibilities as well as with partnership-related activities.

One of the research questions is relating to how the partnership bears agency in relation to the overall policy goals of Agenda 2030. Does the partnership have any muscles, agency or power in order to facilitate sustainable change? Is it the overall policy agenda that is pushing the local level (top-down) or does the local level have any agency in relation to global processes? It is easy to ask such a question but hard to answer since it has to be answered in relation both to international development efforts, as well as institutional, organizational and multi-level governmental political factors within the local government. The above conclusions therefore points towards framing a potential discussion of agency of partnerships within such a political- organizational and institutional perspective suggested above.

To further contextualize, the South African local government context is in itself a relevant area to for a brief introduction. Stressed by Siddle & Koelble (2016) as well as Siddle (2011), South Africa is to be considered as having a decentralized governmental framework – that is – by discursive representation. However, when it comes to the practicality of things, a lot of challenges are apparent. Siddle & Koelble (2016) points out that the results of the South African decentralization process is mixed at best. There is an increase in basic services but the service delivery is still poor, financial management inadequate³ and still a lot of corruption (Siddle & Koelble, 2016). In an international comparison, Swedish municipalities has a large degree of autonomy only comparable to the other Nordic countries in a European context (Lidström, 2003). Furthermore, the Swedish municipalities populate a significant part of the public expenditure (Lidström, *ibid*). Both these factors also has an impact on the municipal agency.

In an African context, Hydén (2016) points out that when it comes to decentralization in Africa, there are set of social and political challenges that are unique for the continent. In Hydéns (*ibid*) view though, South Africa, as well as Kenya are still serving as good examples even though local governments still faces a lot of problems with corruption. Furthermore, Hydén (*ibid*) stresses the importance of context-sensitivity, humility and contextual determinants as well as creating partnerships that go beyond the conventional official development assistance. Instead of using the term partnership,

¹Interestingly – after the municipal merger between Tlokwe City Council and Ventersdorp Municipality – there was, according to the Local government handbook of South Africa, a stark difference between the two municipalities financial statements the last three financial years. Even though it might bear some relevance, potential implications related to the financial statements will not be taken into account in the present study due to its scope as well as limited resources.

Hydén uses the concept cooperation which in his view needs to deepen, in order to facilitate strong development (Hydén, 2016).

Institutions, discourses and practice

Researchers such as Linder (1999) and Savas (2000) argue that the relatively vague concept PPP for example, opens up for discussions concerning privatization and private service providers at the expense of public organizations. Savas (2000) argue that the concepts “contracting out” and “privatization” generate opposition more quickly than for example “alternative delivery systems”. In the introduction we touched the Wildavsky (1973) expression talking about obscurity through increasing number of connotations. Within the discourse of partnerships, there are examples of different versions of partnerships, uniqueness as well as conceptual obscurity. As stated in the examples above, the possibility of obscuring activities with nicely sounding phrasings is an obvious risk.

The assumption that there is a discrepancy between theory and practice within organizations was pointed out by organizational theorists Meyer & Rowan in their seminal article *Institutionalized organization: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony* (1977). Their coining of the concept decoupling pinpoints the relevant abstraction between official representation (on the one hand) and practice (on the other) represents an influential train of thought that can be seen as a corner stone within institutional theory, which later has evolved into neo-institutional and further the institutional logics perspective. Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury (2012) describes institutional logics as an “analytical framework for institutional analysis” (p. 2) originally developed by Friedland & Alford (1991) as a development but the same time deviation from the neo institutional perspective. Even though the institutional logics perspective is hard to define, it seems to explain some relevant factors relating to institutional change. In an earlier account, Thornton & Ocasio (2008) defines institutional logics as;

“the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences.”

Values, beliefs and assumptions are here considered just as stable as formal

organizational structures or juridical defined structures. The old versions of institutional analysis such as Meyer & Rowan (1977) as well as DiMaggio & Powell (1983) can be seen as having a stronger emphasis on stability – closely related to how the word “institution” is understood in a general sense and used within everyday speech. As described by Thornton et al (2012), one of the theoretical departures from both the old and the neo (new) institutionalist perspective⁴ from Friedland & Alford (1991) is the relation between stability and change. While the old versions of the perspective largely focused on the stability, empirical research within the field of institutional logics has highlighted organizational as well as institutional agency specifically within the concept of institutional entrepreneurship (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). The institutional logics perspective therefore gives us lenses to understand organizations, institutions and institutional change relating to concepts such as change and agency, which thus seamlessly connects with the embeddedness and multi-level governmental theoretical conceptualizations suggested before.

Translation

Although having different starting points for the discussion, the discrepancies between policy and practice has been discussed at length by a substantial amount of researchers (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Mosse, 2004; Long, 2001). However, as suggested by Kain et al (2016) as well as Bogason & Toonen (1998) – the reason to why this is considered a problem in itself is largely because development discourse has a linear and rational approach to development projects which neglects the role of the informal and the political. As suggested by Lindblom (1959), implementation in practice is a tad or two more messy than in theory. Lindblom (ibid) suggests that the practicality of implementing policy is muddy and suggests us to consider that the word manage has two separate meanings in the English language. To manage can mean to be on top of or in control of something at the same time as it can mean to barely survive in the effort one is involved in. Furthermore, Lipsky (2010) argues that working as a public servant on the “street level” in the public sector can mean to constantly be faced with work-related dilemmas. As argued in the introduction – the vagueness of policy can leave even the most dedicated public servant clueless in certain decision-making situations.

⁴ Even though the difference between the “new” and “old” institutionalism has been questioned (Selznick, 1996).

Therefore, by bringing both the formal as well as the informal to the forth the study will incorporate a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the concept. The concept of translation is involved with describing or tracking the links between theory and practice not drawing a specific line between the formal and the informal (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). In the development context – ideas spread and can even sometimes be implemented in different organizations and different contexts at about the same time. A project that has been described as successful in one country context can somewhat uncritically be translated into another context without taking the contextual challenges within the new context into account (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Kain et al (2016) even shows the process in which a well-grounded development project (Kisumu Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan (KISWAMP)) with good participatory design later failed to implement fully. The project, however was later described and framed as “best practice” thus loosely coupled with the practices that it intended to change (Kain, et al *ibid*).

In order to operationalize the translation metaphor, the three concepts framing, anchoring, and muddling through has been suggested by Kain et al (2016). As stated above, muddling through refers to the muddiness of implementation processes suggested by Lindblom (1959; 1979). Referring originally to Goffman (1974) the process of framing signifies the process in which the view of the world changes and realigns within newly acquired frames of reference. The term thus does not specifically relate to the organization of society as such, rather the way in which actors reframe and organize their experience in accordance to new concepts. In the words of Kain et al (*ibid*), the process of anchoring converges with the process of framing in which actors involved collaborate with potential stakeholders. Czarniawska & Joerges (1996) also points out an important feature talking about the translation between idea/policy/concept and practice – that we cannot be sure about what came first – idea or the action. The same applies to the dichotomy between local and global. Referring to Callon & Latour (1981) the authors argue for example how micro actors associate with other micro actors and together construct larger networks which appear to bear an agency upon itself, when its merely just a totality of the acts of the micro actors. The most obvious example is what we loosely call the global economy (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

Summary of theoretical sticking points

In summary, partnerships are framed within a discourse grounded in multi-level governance, institutional logics and translation. Such a breadth of theories is relevant in order to grasp the partnership multi-faceted partnership-concept. Connecting to the discourses mentioned above, I will hereby declare how I will use the following concepts in this study.

- Translation – the idea that there is a loosely coupled relation between theory and practice. That the relation between the formal and informal as well as theory and practice is muddy and incudes practical and ethical dilemmas and decision-making. The process of translation between policy and practice are conceptualized with framing, anchoring and muddling through as shown in table 1:2
- Multi-level governance – that local governments within any specific context has its own autonomy and its own limitations which stands in relation with constitutional and economical (Lidström, 2003) as well as practical arrangements (Siddle & Koelble, 2016).
- Institutional logics and change – relation between stability and change within organizations and institutions (Thornton, et al, 2012).

The following table exemplifies how the translation metaphor will be utilized as starting points for codifying and analysis of the primary data within the discussion section.

Table 1:2

Projects	Framing	Anchoring	Muddling through
Example project #1			
Example project #2			

Method

In this section I present the methodology I have used to study the phenomena at hand. The methods used is guided by the research questions, the previous research and the theoretical starting points already addressed. Since the word partnership is used extensively within a high-level policy context the purpose of the study has been to study how the partnership is translated into practice. In doing so, using an explorative method has been essential for this study which helps to gain a nuanced understanding of the actual partnership and further discuss what can be learned from the phenomena of partnerships in general. The explorative approach to the study therefore creates a form of open discussion about to the phenomena at hand. A part of the explorative method is the broad range of theories proposed in the chapter before. The breadth of theory suggested in the chapter before is important in the search of a comprehensive understanding of something as complex as partnerships as well as facilitating a nuanced academic discussion regarding the phenomena.

Choosing a single case study design

The focus of this study came from discussions with the ICLD in June 2017. In meetings and emails with ICLD professionals, the discussions originally concerned organizational learning between Swedish municipalities and their counterparts but a broader approach – investigating the overall materialization of ideas (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Instead of focusing on several partnerships – an in depth study focusing on the ins and outs of one specific partnership was chosen. It is thus hereby assumed that since the study object has been going on for a long time and that it has a large amount of projects, it is a more relevant area of study. Therefore, it is assumed that a partnership that has been going on for a longer time has more “meat on the bone” than a shorter partnership. The fact that the partnership also comprises of a long range of projects – both finished and active within the partnership (icld.se, 2017) and that it has been going on for 12 years further opens questions concerning sustainability and institutionalization - has projects that has taken root and affected the day-to-day work of the local government in South Africa.

Data collection

To gain first-hand experience a Minor Field Study (MFS) was conducted. I as a student applied and was granted 27 000 SEK to arrange and facilitate data collection in the

municipality that was involved in the partnership. The field study was conducted in Potchefstroom during the 13th of February to the 26th of February 2018. The main purpose of the field study was to gather first-hand accounts of people that was actively or had been involved in the partnership. The purpose with gaining the first-hand accounts is related to the original purpose – to gain knowledge from the public servants that work in the municipality, which favours the informants accounts before the researchers, considering them as “knowledgable agents” (Gioya, Corley & Hamilton, 2012) – a stance also highlighted by Czarniawska & Joerges (1996). In total, 15 interviews were conducted, 4 of them were with more than one person involved – thereby considered “focus groups”.

However, the data collection started already before both online and in contact with different key professionals within the context. Therefore, the first wave of data was the different types of discursive representations of the phenomenon such as documentation and internal policy documents. Upon conducting the field study in JB Marks municipality, a substantial amount of documentation laying the ground for the field study had already been collected. Although, in incorporating a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the field study research was open to the first-hand accounts and experience of professionals working within the partnership while documentation was used in understanding the institutional framework for the partnership.

The interviews were conducted in the city of Potchefstroom, North West Province, South Africa, which is the administrative center of JB Marks Municipality. Interviews that was conducted were semi-structured. Since the aim is multi purposed, the interviews was designed to incorporate a street level bureaucratic, muddling through perspective (Lipsky, 2010; Lindblom, 1969; 1979) to specify and contrast overall and more general policy discourse. To grasp the context of the interviewees day-to-day work as well as the effect that the partnership collaboration have had on their work, questions related to the interviewees role, and description of their day-to-day work where also of high relevance. To further emphasize and highlight the importance the knowledge from the informants on the ground, informants were further asked to critically reflect what they have considered being strengths and weaknesses within the partnership. In addition to this, some recurring statements from earlier interviews were also incorporated into

later interviews to corroborate or contrast statements from other informants. The assumption towards informants as “knowledgeable agents” (Goia, et al 2012:17) was hereby crucial in the sense that it prioritizes the informants’ interpretations and foregrounds the role of the researcher as a glorified reporter, giving extraordinary space and voice to informants in the stage of the data collection. This assumption affected the interviews to become more open and less closed and to give space to the informants in voicing what they considered to be important in the context.

As Robson (2002:178) states, the case study “involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”. The reason to include the multi-level governance contextual approach is also to highlight particular hardship of drawing an exact line between the particular phenomenon being studied from the context. Furthermore, as Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2008) suggests, triangulation were used to substantiate research findings which was utilized via studying project plans and documentation as well as first-hand accounts.

Limitations

Since partnerships are said to be unique (Devers-Kanoglu, 2008; Greve & Hodge, 2007) one cannot easily suppose that a field study qualifies for uncritically extrapolation into further contexts. Therefore, there should be a thorough and critical reasoning surrounding any potential conclusions and recommendations which might appeal to expand the relevance of the study. However, this study rather sees that the scientific value of the essay can be assessed through the sparking of ideas, discussion and dialogue within a potential academic discourse, rather than pursuing “objective knowledge”. In that sense – the study stands for one possible interpretation of the partnership and municipal partnership discourse. The academic relevance is therefore in parity with the study’s potential inclusion in further discussions and does not seek any claim of “objectivity”. A grounded theory approach of combining and triangulating data has been suggested as a model for specifically gaining new insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) why such a model were utilized here.

Another limitation is the focus on the South African municipality instead of collecting data from both municipalities in the partnership. The reason to focus on the South African municipality instead of both the municipalities are that SIDA, as well as ICLD is

working on a mandate and a focus on developing democracy internationally at the local level in low to middle-income countries. The primary focus should therefore not be to develop local government within the country even though the partnerships are said to have a degree of mutuality.

Coding of primary data

The primary data including interviews as well as field observations in Potchestroom was later coded, using a technique suggested by Gioia et al (2012). Transcripts from field notes and interviews were first coded into 237 first level “comments”, describing the content of a particular interview-section, adhering to the informants’ own terms of the phenomena described. At this stage of the process – just as suggested as important by Gioia (et al, ibid) - I was lost. The second stage was analyzing the comments, creating themes – identifying similarities and differences, coming up with labels for themes. At this stage, the original 237 info-comments were grouped into 22 themes. The 22 themes were later analyzed in the same way as before. Some were merged together and slightly modified into relevant analytical chunks that will be presented in the results section.

Ethical and methodical considerations

In all research, choices has to be made going forward. The process of methodologically choosing the one or the other will, regardless of study, affect the results. The role as a researcher is also an area for further analysis. Is it relevant that I’m am a white male going to South Africa, a country suffering from a long history of oppression from predominantly white males? Can this affect my research? If it will impact on my research, is it possible to minimize impact, and if so – how should one do to minimize the impact? Is it even relevant to try to minimize the impact? The conclusion of the reflections upon these questions resulted in a conscious strategy of, in relation to the interviewees always to maintain focus on the area at hand and my research questions.

As far as further ethical considerations, all the ethical principles of the Swedish science council were adhered as far as information, confidentiality and use (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). However, when it comes to the voluntariness there was a part of the design that was not under my full control. When contacting the South African project coordinator of the partnership in the running up before my study, I was emphasizing my independence and that they shouldn’t take too much of their time out of their schedule on my part but

when I arrived in the municipality, I was presented with two and a half long weeks long interview schedule. The South African project coordinator had contacted all the people that was still within the municipality that at the time had been or was part of a partnership project.

There are two main reflections concerning this. The one is related to the voluntariness of participation in the study – I don't know how the people responded on being scheduled for my interviews – if it was expected and furthermore if this might have affected the answers in the interviews. In a way – the South African project coordinator was my gatekeeper. When it comes to gatekeepers there are a lot of aspects to consider since gatekeeping influences the research in many ways (Broadhead & Rist, 1976). The authors (ibid) for example suggest that it can limit both the conditions of entry into as well as the scope of the study. In a critical sense, the schedule that I was provided could definitely have limited my scope of research. However, considering the opposite – to come into a municipality as a researcher without a gatekeeper seems to present even more difficulties. With help from my gatekeeper I got 15 interviews. It would have been impossible for me to interview as many professionals without the help from my gatekeeper.

To critically reflect on the positives and negatives in the gatekeeper dilemma, I have come to the following conclusion. There can be an interest in showing only the good sides of a project and I didn't have insight in booking all the interviews. As I presented myself, the area and scope of my study I was open with the fact that I was writing in cooperation with ICLD – which is the organization funding the partnership.

As the study will further suggest – the interviews, which mostly were framed as discussions – also shows critical excerpts to a large extent. While, it is both preposterous and cynical to draw the conclusion that the participants have been overly optimistic in interviews for their own gain, it is just as bad to state that the researcher has no possible interference with the research object - if someone else were to conduct the same study – it might show something different. In conclusion, the thesis won't shoulder any objective declamatory results, but is further emphasizing the importance and relevance of considering methodological dilemmas such as these above.

Results

The results are presented in the following section. To answer the two first research questions both primary and secondary data will hereby be presented, according to themes. In the following I will deepen the understanding of the phenomenon presenting in situ knowledge of the participants in different projects. The interviews has been coded to the following analytical themes: *learning, concrete changes, challenges* and *user reflections*. All references and quotes from informants has been coded as IV1, IV2, IV3 etc. to ensure confidentiality. Important to point out is that the third research question will be discussed within the “Discussion” section due to its expansive nature.

Learning

The most recurrent theme in the interviews was around learning. However, learning is a broad theme – incorporating different facets which will be clarified in the following. The original rationale behind the partnership was to learn from each other and surrounding democracy. Since South Africa only had been a democracy since 1994 and Sweden had employed this kind of system for a very long time, the idea was that both municipalities could learn from an exchange (IV15). During the interviews the respondents would relate or pinpoint different aspects of the learning process. One respondent or a focus group could also stress several important aspects relating to learning. To understand the width of the learning concept within the actual context, three umbrella concepts are utilized that pinpoints different aspects of the learning process: 1) perspective shifting, 2) identifying issues, 3) identifying best practices.

Perspective shifting

The concept of *perspective shifting* within the learning experience connects to the fact that being exposed to a different way of doing things, will change one’s mindset. The shift of perspective or mindset has contributed to different things within different contexts or area of work. For example, one respondent reflected on the utility of the change of the mindset – that some changes in the local government does not always have to do with investing resources or implementing certain procedures – some changes are done through a shift in perspective – which doesn’t have to be resource based (IV7). Within the inclusivity project, one administrator reflected on the shift in perspective on how they related to the children with disabilities. According to the respondent, they had

been way too protective of their disabled children in the past. After visiting the daily activities center in Sweden, the respondents described a shift in mindset that instilled agency towards their client group. Thus, the perspective shifting learnt in the exchange made them relate to their client group more as capable agents instead of passive recipients of care (IV11). Within the Fire department, the focus group described themselves as having gained a “broader view”. In the comparison it was obvious that Sweden was a lot more well-funded than South Africa but the comparison also showed that the South African fire department was stronger in certain regards and motivated personnel to be even more efficient and smart about their resources as well as pinpointing certain strengths within the department (IV10). One of the administrators described how study visits within their own government contributed to a raised awareness surrounding certain issues (IV3). Within an exchange visit in one of the municipal extensions (informal settlements) in Potchefstroom, one of the discussions with the Swedish delegation contributed to changing the view from waste to recyclables as potential resources for the people living there (IV5).

Identifying issues

Another aspect of the learning, except the possibility to shift perspective or mindset was the way in which the informants stressed how they through viewing things from another perspective, clearly could *identify issues* within their own local government or day-to-day practice. While working with an inclusivity project, an administrator reflected on how deeply rooted the problem of social exclusion was in South Africa – reflecting on the overall cost of social exclusion. According to the administrator, the problems with exclusion was as deeply rooted in the South African to the extent where the programs and projects had very limited effects. Being able to tackle the issue, according to the administrator, one had to go back to the roots within the early child development programmes – working with including small children in daily activities which lays the foundation for further socialization primary and tertiary education (IV2). In the area of politics, one participant was strongly impressed with the idea of coalition politics in Sweden, reflecting on the hardship of trying to facilitate discussion over party lines in both municipal as well as provincial and national government. This was a big perspective shift in the participants personal as well as professional life – seeing the need of deliberation within government as a way to progress the South African political

system (IV13). Another example relates to a communication project facilitated in the partnership. After having an introductory project surrounding communication and public relations, the municipality which didn't have a communications department, started one. The informant was thus the first one occupying the position as a communications officer within the municipality. The administrator describes that the issue of communication was through the partnership project given attention and targeted as an area for further development (IV8).

Identifying best practices

Except the two learning concept described above, the findings further suggest a more direct approach to learning which will be conceptualized as *identifying best practices*, which more specifically refers to what the participants in the partnership has observed during exchange projects, workshops and study visits. From an overarching perspective, one of the main objectives within the partnership has been to study best practices. The rationale behind this has been to identify prominent standard operation procedures as methods and further investigate applicability and utility for structuring one's work. As with the other two learning concepts, the findings suggest that the process of identifying best practices has been a key effort within the partnership (MOU, 2016-18; IV14; IV15). However, where the findings indicate that the process of identifying best practices is something that all the projects in the partnership has been working with, the findings further suggests that even though best practices are identified and seen as important, the process of implementing the best practices is somewhat more complex which will be investigated further below.

Concrete changes

The overarching partnership consists of 34 finished and active projects within a vast number of fields within the municipal mandate, all of which has their own challenges and opportunities. Within the 15 interviews and focus group discussions that were conducted, one of the main themes was how the projects had contributed to the participants day-to-day work and if they could name concrete changes and how they were implemented as well as potential challenges to that process. In addition to as well as in relation to the different types of learning presented above, the findings suggest that there were also numerous examples of practical change as results of the partnership. In some cases these processes where challenged while others, according to participants,

was more easily implemented and also remained uncontested. In some cases, projects where easily started but harder to motivate in a long term perspective. The partnership has, as described above in Table 1:1 seen 17 direct translations and tangible results into JB Marks Municipality. Translations in this regard is only the instances where the partnership has had a direct impact on the day-to-day work and the daily activities. Here are some of their accounts. One of the interviewees, reflected on the different direct applications that could be made in relation to community development work within JB Marks Municipality. Particularly two interesting translations where mentioned here; the opening of the new meeting place for girls after school as well as a new system for waste pickers.

“When a lady was at the exchange she talked about a project for girls. When I then visited I asked to know more about the project. [...] She explained and I started it when I came back. I am meeting girls after school one day a week. Talking about girls issues, meeting people who will address girls issues and education” (IV5).

The same person also started a project with mothers that previously relied solely on grants. When the Swedish delegation was in one of the extensions outside of Potchefstroom the Swedish person reacted on the masses of plastic laying around. as the interviewee explains below:

“All over here its filthy, plastic bottles. Can they do something with this? The Swedish person explained - start a recycling project. People lack information about the environment – we don’t know that this is money. I picked up some ladies because they were not working and started this project – waste pickers. Now at least they have something to eat every day. Because you came and said this. [...] so I started this [and] got help from LED [Local Economic Development] to register the business” (IV5).

Växjö was in another project also a part of developing the municipal communications strategy as well as assisting in creating for the whole municipal communications/PR unit. One part of the collaboration was creating a new policy for communications and PR as well as the building of the municipal website:

“we didn’t have a website, we looked at the issue of the website, visited Växjö and saw their website and they also assisted us in building our own website particularly looking at issues like, what needs to be seen by the public, [...] the issue on its appeal – how it would engage public from the outside. Växjö has already advanced, working with their website in years.” (IV8)

Within the social field, one of the participants was visiting a Swedish daily activities centre in Växjö to look at how the Swedish work with including disabled people. The experience from that visit inspired starting a project around including people with disability in JB Marks Municipality. Focusing on disabled people who has finished school (for people with special needs) and that are unable to find employment – the project has mobilized 20 learners and 40 caregivers, providing the 20 participants with daily activities such as sewing, baking and gardening. To facilitate better communication with the participants, the administrators and the learners in the project where used the picture method when communicating with the participants, which they had learned from the Swedish visit (IV11). Reflecting on the importance for the participants involved the administrators state:

“They are happy because they are doing something, they are enjoying it unlike sitting at home. Some of them have been exposed to abuse so when we are there they feel independent and they feel useful and feel involved in the community” (IV11).

Except these, more translations where materialized in the municipality and is being materialized as we speak. For example – the Sports and culture administration is currently developing and organizing their way to work with volunteers (IV4), the fire department is organizing a new storage facility (IV10), the environmental services are creating a policy that aligns the municipality’s environment work with the Agenda 2030 (IV9) and the community development workers are currently working with a new organization structuring vulnerable families (IV5; IV3).

Challenges towards materialization

What most of the interviewees referred to as a major challenge was funding. As already stated – ICLD funds only the exchange programs within the projects and gives no money for further implementation for example project funding. Many interviews came back to

this theme as it was a defining factor within their day-to-day work. The municipal fire service, for example, accentuates this dilemma accordingly:

“Our biggest challenge is the financial part – we have started implementing but to come up to the level where the Swedish are, is going to take us money, budget.”

In the inclusivity project mentioned earlier that now has daily activities for 20 participants, funding is also a dilemma which makes the whole ongoing project voluntary. It is the parents of the children that are the caretakers within the project (IV11). Another example is the Library project. After visiting Swedish school libraries, the library team wanted to create a similar system for the Schools in JB Marks, most of which didn't have a library. The department started working closely with specifically one school but weren't able to mobilize political and financial support for the project (IV12).

However, the challenges mentioned were not only in relation to specific situations or specific project. Because of the frequency of mentioned financial challenges within vastly different areas of the partnership (IV3; IV4; IV5; IV2; IV10; IV11; IV12; IV14; IV15), the evidence strongly indicates that challenges related to financial aspects was a strong factor challenging implementation and further materialization of projects. To illustrate the financial challenge, one participant explained that it was hard trying to argue for mobilizing resources for a new library, when people living within the community doesn't have roof over their head. Having discussed the partnerships mandate within the local government, three of the informants (IV14, IV15, IV13) suggest that the partnership has and is still enjoying a cross party mandate in JB Marks. However, the findings also suggest that some challenges to the partnership were political in nature. As pointed out in one interview, the municipality is suffering from political volatility. During election processes, the informant pointed towards the impact that a high rate of turnover within the city council has effects on the stability of the partnerships political anchoring (IV14). Furthermore, lack of infrastructure and organizational factors (IV7; IV8) was pointed out as further contextual challenges.

User reflections on the partnership framework

One of the aspects utilizing informant interviews was to gain perspective on the partnership in itself from an organizational perspective from the informants. Some of the critique was directly tied to the implementation or the projects, something that already has been brought to the fore in the results. However, from an overall organizational method-like view, some reflections and criticism was directed to the framework within how the partnership was conducted.

As a partnership focused on targeting the knowledge within the organizations concerns has been raised towards the turnover of staff as a risk in the long term (IV14). Reflections concerning the “return on investments” was also made. According to internal documents, over the years, the Swedish government has invested around 25 million SEK within the 12-year partnership. One of the informants reflected on what might happen when people come and ask about the return on investment when the partnership is designed in such a way that it is hard to see the direct results and is based around learning. If the partnership is going to escalate, it needs other measures and to incorporate entrepreneurial and business-like aspects that builds on win-win standards not only for learning and best practice but also within the area of trade (IV15).

Risks towards the mutuality of the partnership is also further articulated with the funding coming from the Swedish side as well the lack of institutionalization on the partnership from the JB Marks side. There is no specific office or person working only with the issues related to the partnership. All the people engaged within the partnership on the JB Marks side are volunteers taking time of their own day-to-day schedule, which both can threaten the existence of the partnership as well as the quality of administrative routine. The lack of a formal structure and volunteerism furthermore is said to influence the quality of communication internally within the municipality (IV14). One occasional finding was for example that the different administrators within the projects did not have a knowledge surrounding the other projects within the municipality. Within three interviews⁵ (IV7; IV10; IV12) the informants was not aware of other parallel or earlier projects’ learning experiences or materialization other than vaguely.

⁵ Since this was an occasional finding mentioned in the interviews but not something that was specifically researched, the extent to which there was knowledge of other projects is unknown.

Furthermore, the method of the partnership is revolved around projects. In a critical reflection concerning this, one informant emphasized this as a challenge explaining that plenty of the things in the municipality wasn't solved through creating a project around it. On the one hand as stated above in the results section, learning experiences has contributed to the process of understanding a certain area – shifting perspective and starting to work actively with it for example; communication and inclusion. However, noted challenges with communication or inclusion won't go away after a 1 to 3 year project and due to the framework of the partnership – a project that has been done before, can't be applied for again. Therefore, to extend the partnership, new and innovative project applications has to be made to preserve activity within the partnership (IV14).

Summary of results

Even if the 12-year partnership has contributed to tangible results and direct materialization within the local government, the findings suggest that learning, reflection and perspective-shifting for the partaking professionals is the most prominent area. When it comes to the partnerships practical influence the accounts differ. While some accounts suggest that the project they were involved in was directly applicable to their day-to-day and materialized as new routines, policies and direct work. Other highlights that challenges such as institutional memory, funding, administrative and organizational challenges as well as absence of local political buy-in has limited the impact of the endeavors. On the other hand, opportunities such as creative new ways of going about things, identifying important key-areas, synergetic effects, long-lasting friendship and respect between the two partners are seen as strong assets of the collective undertaking. In line with earlier research (Heeks & Stanforth, 2014), the findings from this thesis suggest that the relation between policy and practice cannot be seen as linear nor its process completely rational and formal. When it comes to weaknesses concerning the partnership method, issues were raised concerning mutuality, funding, lack of institutionalization, and “projectification”⁶ of municipal services.

⁶ For further explanation in a Swedish context see Fred, M. *Projectification in Swedish Municipalities. A case of porous organizations* 2018; Abrahamsson, A. & Agevall, L. 2010. *Välfärdsstatens projektifiering – kortsiktiga lösningar av långsiktiga problem* in Kommunal ekonomi och politik, Vol 13, nr 4, pp 35-60.

Discussion

The following section will utilize the theory and further discuss the concept of partnerships as suggested in relation to the results. Conceptualization will be put into effect by utilizing the concept-trio framing, anchoring and muddling through for discussing the process of translation. Furthermore, the third research question will be discussed within the frames of institutional logics and governance perspectives – thereby pursuing the explorative aspects of the study. In this discussion the partnership-method will be framed in relation to stability and change in public organizations in the light of its current and/or potential mandate and therefore suggest how partnerships can be understood and conceptualized within international development cooperation.

Framing, anchoring and muddling through

As shown in table 1:3, some of the results of the study will be presented as part of this three-step process. Within the domains of the studied phenomenon, the concept of framing appears an adequate way to conceptualize the learning and perspective shifting experiences that is presented in the results. The findings suggest that the actors partaking in the partnership to a large extent has framed/reframed their professional posture towards the work conducted within their own municipality. The way in which communication was framed – identified as an area, the way in which waste picking was framed as a resource within the informal settlements, how the project group working with disabled clients reframed the clients as actors instead of passive recipients. As Goffman (1974) suggests, the process of framing incorporates the process of reinterpreting reality from newly acquired concepts.

In utilizing the concept in the specific context, anchoring would more specifically refer to how the partnership projects landed within the context – whether they mobilized political buy-in and resources for further long-term development. As suggested by the findings – some of the projects was well anchored within the community while others wasn't, due to challenges explained above. However, as described by informants, the partnership in itself is, considered well anchored politically within the community (IV14, IV15). It is further created and maintained by local government by both sides and is ongoing for 12 years, which suggests a certain degree of anchoring. As suggested by Lindblom (1969; 1979), muddling through refers to the everyday reality of public servants to implement and materialize practice out of policy – and relates to the

challenges that this process might entail. In the study, it is obvious that we find some results that easily have been materialized into practice, which shows a more or less straight line between project and practice.

However, as presented in the results, there are also challenges towards the materialization characterized mainly by economical factors but also political buy-in. Even though the partnership obviously remains a prioritized area for both of the municipalities, it is apparent how some projects struggle in implementation.

Summarily, it is clear that the concept-trio framing, anchoring and muddling through can be used in describing the links between policy and practice within the studied partnership. The conceptualization is relevant in highlighting the ins and outs of international development practice as framed within the local government that takes actors perspectives into account and nuances overarching unproblematic policy formulations.

Table 1:3 Examples of how projects are translated into practice

PROJECTS	FRAMING	ANCHORING	MUDDLING THROUGH
PUBLIC RELATIONS BEST PRACTICE	Concept of communication (internal/external) framed as an area for further development within the municipality	Anchored as a new internal communications strategy	New municipal homepage, cooperation with private stakeholders, stronger focus on internal communication, communications department
TSHARAWANANG LIBRARY PROJECT	Librarians and officials reframed idea of the role of the library	Trying to mobilize resources for improved library services - limited scope of implementation	Integrated school library in one school, streamlined desk service in public library,
TLOKWE INCLUSIVITY DISABILITY SECTOR II	Through visits and workshops – framed disabled people as potential agents	Awareness raising through campaigns and involving local community and involved parents as helpers	Set up of daily activities center targeting unemployed disabled people that had finished school
NEW COORDINATING STRUCTURE TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE FAMILIES	Through visits and workshops created understanding about vulnerable families	Involving Local Economic Development and Community development workers	New system of waste pickers, home visits to monitor and empower families
INTERNATIONAL TEAM FINANCE	Visits and workshops looking on standard operations procedures for financial administration	Involving of financial administrative team, presentation of Växjö's finance team in city council	Initiating of new electronic system for public documentation
FROM HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP TO PARTNERSHIP – INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION AND EXHIBITIONS	Concept of struggle history as a shared history, highlighting similarities between Swedish and South African history	Anchored within local museum through exhibitions and in contact with schools	Introduction of 'Time travelling' as method for education about local history. Method later spread to other parts of South Africa

Stability, agency and the Agenda 2030

In trying to answer the final research question, the following section discusses how partnerships can be understood within academic frames in relation to agency, stability and change. Policy has been to practice through partnership projects, but how can this process be understood as well as partnerships role within international development cooperation efforts within the Agenda 2030?

Within modern day macro institutions such as the national governments, United Nations and the European Union it might be difficult to conceive the possibility micro actors to voice and pursue local interests. It is therefore of relevance to discuss the way to conceive the agency of local governments as well as transnational partnerships such as the partnership studied above. Building on key ontology from Callon & Latour (1981), the translation metaphor opens for analysis in how micro actors are participating in structuring and restructuring such institutions. In the study, the actors within the partnership was specifically pointing out the importance of exchanging ideas and shifting of perspective. In relation to this, Czarniawska & Jorges (1996) suggests that the travels of ideas not should be conceived as ideal representations of organizational change or “recipes”. Rather regarded as constantly evolving, disembedding and reembedding, reinterpreting and materializing. Considering the relatively vague concept of partnerships used by the United Nations and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, partnerships should thus not be conceived as ideas or implementation strategies rather frameworks within which local actors can voice local priorities and pursue goals relevant for themselves. As shown in this study, local governments and actors within partnerships can act as agents of sustainable change within participatory processes – formulating own goals and strategies to tackle local governmental problems. Materialized partnership processes as those shown in table 1:3 can furthermore be translated back to policy and back into practice in another context. Thereby highlighting micro- and meso-actors constitutive agency in relation to overarching policy discourse – spread as “best practices”. It is although important to bear in mind, as shown by Kain et al (2016), that such translations also can be loosely coupled and spread as best practices, even though they didn’t achieve the goals on the ground. This, however should not dismiss local actors’ potential agency towards global processes.

On the other hand, imposing an institutional logics perspective can bring on another understanding. An increasing focus on partnerships can also be seen as an institutional trend or a “master idea” (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) or as a form of institutional pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Actors (participants) within the partnerships can also be conceived as institutional entrepreneurs, articulating and framing needs through participatory approaches (Thornton, et al, 2012). Partnerships can further be conceptualized as a more modern approach to governance - restructuring downpipe-logics with interactive and innovative policies characterized by openness (Jacobson, et al, 2015).

One definite conclusion that is that partnerships are embedded into larger institutional networks both within the state as well as above the state within international policy. According to institutional logics, public organizations have degrees of stability as well as transformative aspects (Thornton, et al, 2012). Partnerships as development cooperation cannot be disconnected from such processes and should therefore rather be understood in relation to them. Therefore, partnerships should be conceived as having both top-down as well as bottom up characteristics – stable as well as transformative aspects. As seen in this study – some organizational and methodological implications were raised by actors within the partnership relating to the organizing of the partnership itself. One conclusion is therefore that the way that partnerships are organized and framed, defines agency, participation and potential institutional change. As suggested by Jacobson, et al (2015), institutional design can therefore be a relevant factor in creating constructive partnerships within development cooperation – that public organizations create an area for participation and collaborating, thereby articulating local needs towards global processes.

In the studied case, this collaboration area has existed for 12 years and is ongoing. The participants have learned a lot, reframed experience and in specific ways changed local government institutions. The actors still consider the partnership a relevant and important area to further pursue. One potential area for further studies can be the importance of the learning suggested by a majority of the interviewees. Since the learning experience was suggested as a very important part of the partnership it might be interesting to further examine the learning in relation to perspective shifting and

organizational innovation. However, due to many factors such as the uniqueness of partnerships, the relevance of organizational frameworks as well as a relatively recent adoption of Agenda 2030, it is too early to further draw general and too ambitious conclusions concerning partnerships within international development cooperation. As shown above, partnerships could be understood in relation to a variety of theoretical entry-points, where practical, policy-related, organizational, transformative as well as discursive aspects are all potential areas for further research.

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Appendix 1: Interview-guide⁷

- Introduction of myself, area and scope of study
- Position and responsibilities
- Daily duties and routines
- Role within the organization

Role within the partnership

Involved in which project?

When was the project / how long has the project been going on?

What are the challenges in your specific work role – has the partnership contributed to new perspectives or learning relevant for your work?

What are your thoughts on sustainability in relation to the project/partnership?

Anchoring

How is the project anchored within the community – political? / citizens? / how do you work with that?

has finished projects taken root and if so – how?

Mutuality

How would you describe the mutuality within the project?)

What have you learned in the partnership?

Contextual challenges/risks

What are the main contextual challenges?

Political, economical, administrative, practical, network/social?

What is most important to develop project further in your opinion?

Organizational learning – has finished projects taken root and if so – how?

⁷ It is important to point of that the interviews were semi-structured and that the guide was used more as a frame of reference than a step-by-step guide. Due to the different positions and roles of the interviewees, an open approach was highly relevant, focusing more on discussing factors and aspects deemed relevant by the interviewees.