



Interview (Skype)

SEBASTIAN HAMEL

● FCM

1 **How do you view the “southern learning process” and ii) associated international platforms and actors?**

Sebastien Hamel: For the past 10-15 years, the municipal sector’s engagement in international work has been growing. It is incredible now the level of activities that municipalities have internationally. FCM has been doing international work for the past 30 years and we are trying to get outside of the dichotomy of the South and North, of the southern learning process or South-South, etc. There has been a sort of evolution over the years. All of this started – development cooperation between cities – many, many years ago. I would say in the beginning that there was a lot of that sort

of dichotomy – North-South –the receiver, the donor. I think for the past ten years we are getting outside of this a bit. I don’t see this so much as being a southern learning process versus a North-South process, we see this more as an international municipal movement that is growing. There are a lot of exchanges happening. If we think about geography, yes, it might be between cities from the North and cities from the South, or East-West. It might be tripartite or even collective exchanges. But I don’t think the importance now is so much on the dichotomy in terms of the geography; rather the issues that we address are becoming global. They are common issues in the sense of how the cities are facing and dealing with these issues, for instance urbanization, the growing role that cities are playing in economic development, how they adapt to climate change. There are also migration issues in Europe right now. All of these issues are becoming global issues in which the cities are more and more involved. So I don’t think the learning process is so much a certain part of the world learning a different way, I think we are all learning as cities on how to deal with these issues. So the way we have been looking at it at FCM is not so much to think about who is the provider and who is the

receiver, from which geographic region, it is more issue-driven cooperation and dialogue that we are promoting with our various partners and that could be through the work FCM does with partners in Europe, Africa, Asia, etc. It doesn’t matter so much as to where – it is more about the issues. That’s the central focus of our work.

I don’t think there is a value in trying to create a dichotomy, North-South, South-South, etc. I think it is more important to really acknowledge the fact that these issues are really becoming global issues for municipalities and the municipal movement is more involved in having a clear role in how we tackle these global issues. Obviously, when you think about these issues, they are not necessarily felt the same way or with the same level of acuteness from one side to the other, but they are certainly shared in terms of the issues that are becoming more important and they are very central to the role of local government. So all of this to say I don’t necessarily think there is a southern learning process and by position a northern one. I think the municipal movement is becoming more integrated in trying to see the various facets of these issues and how they are felt differently from one city

to another. At FCM, we are not taking this with a geographical point of view but more as an issues-based one.

I have really seen a trend over the past 10-15 years of the municipal movement gathering around a number of important issues. What will happen in Paris with COP21 is a very good illustration of this. The Compact of Mayors is gathering to say “We local governments are impacted by climate change and so we also have something to do with the negotiations because we will be – and already are – at the forefront of reacting to this and we are part of the solution as well.” I don’t think there is sort of a geographical split in the realization of local governments’ point of view, but that this is really something important in which cities need to be involved to craft solutions and be seen as being actors. So if you derive from this a potential development cooperation or cooperation between the city of Montreal and a city in Africa, they all share the same interest and see the same importance of climate change and adaptation measures. If there are some dichotomies emerging over the past 10-15 years, it is not a dichotomy based on the geographic focus, it is more a dichotomy between central and national governments; it is more a dichotomy between local governments and the NGO sector and the private sector. It is how various sectors of society are getting together to look together at how they are impacted by an issue and can react to that issue as opposed to the North versus the South or the East versus the West. There are still some boundaries between the South and the North but in the municipal sector I really see that this has evolved towards the consent that we all work together and

we need local governments to be involved in these local issues and we need to convince the national governments first of all of our involvement and secondly of the acuteness of these issues because we at the local level are usually the first ones to feel that you have to react.” Climate change is a perfect example. Another example is the refugee migration. What is happening in Europe and how the cities in France, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, England are getting together to say we are – or will face – the same situation with the influx of refugees. Cities are positively lobbying their governments to say they can welcome the migrants, and secondly they are lobbying their national governments to say that as they are at the forefront of all of this, they need to have more resources and more responsibilities to be able to cope with this. The dialogue around this is interesting. We are involved in dialogues with cities in Jordan because they were the first to receive these refugees, we have dialogues to see how we can tackle the issue together.

I don’t think it is so much North-South as opposed to being issue driven. The very essence of this has to be looked at carefully. I’m not sure there is a real dichotomy in the way cities are collaborating together – being cities in the North collaborating with cities in the South, or the South collaborating with the South. I think we are really talking more about common approaches to tackle issues that we similarly face.

2

Do we need to formalize a specific platform of south-south cooperation? If so, how would this be best organized

at city, regional and international levels? ii) How can UCLG best help in this?

Sebastien Hamel: There is certainly a need for some kind of platform to better engage the cities that are doing international work from the North and the South together. I think the CIB is probably the beginning of that platform in a way. The CIB is the place where the municipal associations and the cities that are doing international cooperation are meeting together to discuss common issues and how we go about doing it. The history of CIB has really been following what I’ve just explained. Twenty years ago the CIB was the club of northern associations of cities that were doing international work. They were meeting once a year to look at how they engaged with their southern partners and the issues they were facing in a specific country. This has evolved. At the meeting in October, 2015, there were associations from Europe and North America, but now more partners are also coming from Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, Cambodia, the Philippines, etc. Now it is more a platform for all of the cities and municipal associations that are doing international work are meeting regardless of whether they are providing or receiving assistance. It is more like we are all partners and we need to discuss how we do our work collectively, what are the issues we are facing and trying to get solutions for.

There is a need to have a platform. I think the beginning of the platform exists. It is about how we consolidate it in a way that will really reflect the partnership approach that we have been developing over the years where all the stakeholders involved

in international work are included.

Language is always an issue in terms of international work. What is very interesting is that a 'municipal culture' exists and it is transcendent of boundaries such as language. I've always been extremely fascinated by seeing a Canadian expert on waste management working with an African expert. They don't have the same mother tongue, but as they come from a municipality and have the municipal culture, and because they share technical expertise, it doesn't take them much time before they can really relate to one another and talk about problems and solutions. The reason for that is the local level work that cities do is more or less sophisticated in terms of the services they provide. When you have to give frontline services, and when you live in an environment where you render services, you really develop a sort of culture that is very specific to that level of government because you work for the people, but at the same time you are also part of the people receiving the services. This changes a lot about attitude. Language can be an issue but it can be overcome.

Coming back to the platform, UCLG could help most in bringing to that platform those partners that are not there but that could benefit from being involved. I think there is way more value in having a general platform with all of the interested parties in all of this together as opposed to a differentiate between the North and the South.

3 How do you think the learning and cooperation process can be tuned or calibrated to best

benefit developing countries?

Sebastien Hamel: One of the key issues coming out of the UCLG Position Paper on Aid Effectiveness and Local Government at the time was the learning and cooperation process works when you really look at it from a partner's point of view, meaning we are partners in all of this tackling issues together. We really need to break the dichotomy of the 'donor' versus the 'recipient'. There are experiences that will come from one side as well as from the other. It might be different and that is fine because some cities might be more advanced in tackling certain issues. The advancement doesn't have to be a northern thing, it could also be a southern thing. But I think it is by shifting the dialogue to really look at the issue from each side's context, how the issues are being dealt with, and how both sides can learn together from it. That is really how making aid more effective – really bringing the partnership approach into it – is the key to the learning process.

4 What can your city or association teach other cities? Where does your city or association need to learn most from other cities? How do you effectively transfer technical knowledge?

Sebastien Hamel: One thing of interest about Canada is the type of country that we have, a country that is fairly decentralized working across levels of government. Canada has learned a lot in terms of how you deal with intergovernmental relations, which in many countries where we work, whether being from Europe, or Africa or Asia, there are some

issues. At the same time, there is a lot of learning that we have gained from exchanging with other countries. For example, how some municipalities in the UK have had some issues in dealing with their central government. South Africa has a lot to share in terms of reorganizing a state. They have lessons that will be useful for many countries of the North and the South. Canada has lessons and experiences that would be interesting to share, and other countries have experience we can benefit from, especially around social inclusion and cohesion. It's not the geography that is important. It is to tackle the issues and to share the learning.

5 What are your big successes and why were these initiatives so successful? What are the lessons for the south-south and triangle learning and development agenda? How can your best practices for innovation be turned into learning opportunities?

Sebastien Hamel: For the past ten years or so, when you talk about triangular learning, we have really taken the approach in the programmes we have implemented to build synergies between various partners. So it is not bilateral relationships, it's really more multilateral relationships. For instance we had a project with Viet Nam and Thailand, all three of us working together on a series of issues because we felt that we needed to create a partnership approach between us where they as countries also needed to strengthen their relationships. We did the same thing with Mali and Burkina Faso. We are currently creating the same

kind of approach between Poland, Ukraine and FCM. What is very interesting there is that these tripartite approaches are really putting the issues at the center of the relationship and there is a lot happening bi-laterally between the three countries involved, between Ukraine and Poland for instance, or between us and Poland. What is good is that this approach creates much richer relationships and it is much richer in learning. The big success in all of this would be the relationship that remains after the project has been completed. Because of the way the project was implemented, through a partnership approach, it stays and there are more benefits derived from that initial partnership. When you focus on an issue, you really bring the practitioners together and you create the opportunities for them to exchange. That is how it becomes rich in terms of learning experiences. It is also about attitude – respect, the eagerness to learn from whichever side. When we recruited the Canadian cities that are involved in this programme, a lot is based on whether or not they are interested in the issues, if there is technical expertise they can share, but a lot of it is based on their attitude and how they see their involvement. What we try to avoid is having cities who feel they are more advanced and have a sense of superiority in wanting to teach others how to do it. This is really not the way to look at this. It's more about sharing the same concerns over these issues, trying to tackle them together and sharing the learning. There is a lot about the attitude to keep in mind when you develop these projects. Everyone is an equal player and the relationship is built on respect. Canada has never been a colonial power but more a country who has received a lot of people from various places, so it is not that difficult

to find that kind of attitude in Canadian cities. But this is certainly one of the most important criteria when we select Canadian cities.



Do you have case studies or methodologies that demonstrate: i) processes that are effective; and ii) the effective building of capacity?

→ Refer to [UCLG Position Paper on Aid Effectiveness and Local Government](#) and [the UCLG Policy Paper on Development Cooperation and Local Government](#). The case studies presents different tools and methods.