

City to City learning to cater city needs to climate adaptation

Results of a preliminary study

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Cities nowadays are facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Responding to these challenges, and seizing the opportunities, is placing new and complex demands on decision makers. To keep pace and cope with the rapid changes occurring in cities nowadays, requires accelerated learning through ‘learning from each other’ (peer learning). The emphasis on accelerated learning stems from the insight that combined processes of peer learning and learning from experiments and full scale pilots will be crucial. That's why the capacity to learn and to engage in city to city networks will play an imminent role in this process of life-long learning.

The objective of C2C learning is to build greater institutional and human capacity required to accelerate progress towards disaster resilience. A distinction from other capacity building services, such as technical training, is that cities will learn together. The promise for cities is to become learning organizations by engaging in city learning networks. There are three levels of learning. The first level entails the discovery of existing knowledge, picked up by searching for lessons learned by other cities (reactive learning). The second level involves learning based on inspiration and joint creation of new knowledge. This will take place during exchange activities and the execution of joint projects (pro-active learning). But also through sharing of information and good practices and ideas amongst peers. The third level is about learning from the learning process itself to secure the capacity to learn through continuous monitoring and evaluation (meta-learning). Frontrunner cities in City-to-City Learning have in common that they all possess these three capacities.

With climate change mitigation and adaptation increasingly present on the urban agenda, many cities aim to increase resilience of residents and businesses, but have multiple challenges in operationalizing this generic concept: finding appropriate solutions, data, the right partners, technical expertise and enough funding. International city networks such as C40 (<http://www.c40.org/>), 100RCs (<http://www.100resilientcities.org/>), ICLEI (<http://www.iclei.org/>), and many others offer an avenue for cities that are building resilience, by supporting and connecting to potential sources of funds and knowledge. However, since there is no single definition of urban resilience, nor a normative way of building it, it seems key to understand:

- How exactly are these networks serving the needs of cities, in their search for resilience?
- What are the differences and complementarities among them?
- And how effective are they in driving learning and sharing?

This paper aims to address these questions and presents and discusses the results of a preliminary study. In total 30 member cities have been interviewed and 13 networks analysed.

The results reveal that city peer learning remains young with a limited base of practice, case studies, and guidance. To make deliberate and strategic change and to accelerate uptake of good practices, it is generally recognized that cities need to engage in city to city learning networks and have to learn from lessons of other cities. C2C learning networks, such as UNISDR's Making Cities Resilient Campaign, Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities, EU Mayors Adapt, C40, ICLEI, are currently providing the platforms to build and share evidence around adaptation in practice. They put in place rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems to share planning frameworks, decision making tools, resilient development measures, analytical case studies and private sector engagement models.

The degree of activity within a city learning network will critically depend on the available institutional capacity and financial resources of a city. Often, cities with limited capacity and resources will adopt a reactive style of learning, which aims at the discovery of existing knowledge that is (freely) shared by other cities. It entails pursuing questions like: With what issue do I start? Which solution will work in my context? Who can help me? Searching for such information is an activity that most cities can do without much outside help.

After acquiring the critical knowledge, the specific city would often shift to the phase of connecting with a service provider—and eventually to the implementation of a solution or service. The results of this study clearly substantiated that small and medium sized cities are lagging behind and are hampered to actively engage in these networks.

City to City learning requires cities to develop internal leadership and to have a common vision that encourage the learning and exchange with other cities. The starting point of a city to consider engaging in a city learning network is knowing what needs to be discovered. This could be informed by a self-assessment, using e.g. the Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient. The completion of a self-assessment helps a city to understand its existing gaps and challenges in disaster risk reduction. The key premise is that C2C learning must be useful for the involved cities in addressing these gaps and challenges. A city learning network should, therefore, consider those peer cities and activities that match with specific city's needs. This means that the network has to be organised in advance and systematic in its matching.

City networks work through local public officials because they have the mandate to enact and implement policies, influence budgets, etc. However, there is wide recognition among both cities and networks that more stakeholders have to be actively, and not indirectly, included in network learning activities. In particular, involving the local private sector was repeatedly mentioned as a missing element in network learning. The obstacles may be that local businesses lack a policy mandate to do so, or that they have not yet realized the business need to think about their own adaptation. Some cities have started to see local businesses come forth and seek to be included (for example large industrial companies), but otherwise, they remain disengaged from local resilience efforts, and as a result, from international networks. How to better involve them remains a critical question. This points to the need to expand city-to-city learning activities to include the many other stakeholders on which urban adaptation depends, including businesses and civil society.