

## **Speech at the Launch of the Second City Official Exchange Programme**

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It is such a pleasure to say a few words at this milestone event – round 2 of the City Officials exchange programme. It is particularly pleasing to know that we have a whole round of this exchange under our belts already – given that the programme more broadly was only started last year with the embedded researchers starting in the City in April, and the Knowledge Transfer Programme itself officially launched in July 2012.

The launch or start of anything new is always simultaneously exciting and daunting (albeit in an exciting way). It's a journey into the unknown – for some amongst you, the unknown will be UCT, working with new people, the MISTRA programme itself, new jargon and acronyms, academic writing, new systems, etc. Between Pippin and I, we are here to help with some of the uncertainties. However, one of the things we've learnt is that we are on a constant learning trajectory, as Cape Town's exchange programme is indeed unique nationally, and arguably even internationally. Being pioneers, we are in some senses making it up as we go along, in response to challenges and opportunities as they arise. Constructive feedback at any point (not just when there are official moments for evaluation) will be valued tremendously.

What I'd like to do today is to position the writing programme in the broader context in which it is nested, and to help demystify some of the imperatives behind the programme which are based in this historical and institutional context. I am going to focus on three realms that provide the architecture for this writing programme: 1) The international MISTRA context and mandate, 2) At the local level, I will briefly outline Cape Town's approach and identity within the international programme and 3) share some insights from round 1 of the city officials exchange.

### **1) MISTRA Urban Futures**

So, firstly, MISTRA Urban Futures. This has got to be one of the most complex and hierarchical institutional structures any of you will ever be part of in your lifetimes! It's my job to deal with that complexity, so, I will spare you (in fact, protect you) from the intricacies (some of these details are contained in the last Annual Report, which you are welcome to take for bedtime reading).

Suffice to say that that MUF is an international centre aimed at fostering positive urban sustainability pathways. Like other similar institutions worldwide, MUF is responding to the emergence of 'wicked' or complex urban problems in a rapidly shifting international context of increasing rates of urbanization, increased insecurity and vulnerability of people and natural systems, and the changing emphasis on local government as the site for simultaneously addressing global and local sustainability challenges. MUF has its headquarters at Chalmers University in Gothenburg, Sweden. Recognising that local expertise and diverse contextual experiences and insights are required to inform approaches to address these challenges, five cities form part of the international centre, each

with their own local interaction platform or LIPs, one of the numerous unfortunate acronyms in this programme! The participating cities include: Gothenburg (GOLIP), Greater Manchester (GMLIP), Kisumu (KLIP), Shanghai (SHLIP) and Cape Town (CTLIP).

What is distinctive about MUF is that it has identified co-production of knowledge as the means by which alternate ways of understanding and addressing urban challenges can be addressed. So, to decode this bit of jargon – what is co-production? Pippin had a wonderful analogy in a talk she gave at the end of the first round of the City Officials exchange programme. She likened co-production with compound words – which are words with different stems that are joined together to add value – by adding two bits together, you get something new and different and more. Words like, interaction, pathway, cornerstone and feedback are all compound words that mean something quite different when the individual words stand alone compared to when they are joined together. In the MUF programme, the focus is on the coming together of universities and local governments at each of the LIPs to bring different knowledge bases together to provide insights, framings, and solutions that are different, and more to find new ways of addressing emerging problems and changing mandates experienced at the urban scale.

In Cape Town, on first hearing this, you might well think, well, how's that different to what we've done for a long time now? The City of Cape Town has had a long relationship with universities in the region, with UCT and the ACC, and has traditionally operated using a model of knowledge inputs from academics, consultants and the private sector. However, these old ways of bringing knowledge to bear in both institutional settings no longer suffice in an era of changing roles of local authorities, from service delivery to addressing tricky transitions. Similarly, internationally, local governments are being challenged to find new ways of identifying problems, formulating policies and implementing policy, and urban scholars are rethinking assumptions and approaches to understanding and theorizing the city. So, co-production then is the first corner stone of the MUF programme.

The second cornerstone is that of Fair, Green and Dense as focus areas for channeling co-produced enquiry. Defining what these ambitions of fair, green and dense in shaping sustainable futures are for each city is of course contestable and context specific. What is fair distribution in Kisumu for example will not translate directly and in an uncontested way in the Gothenburg context. In general, Fair deals with access to urban amenities, functions and structures; Green with resource utilization and how cities respond to resource constraints and global risks, and Dense deals with the planning and management of cities to create equitable urban access and livability. So, generating knowledge about how the concepts of fair, green and dense are constructed and implemented in different contexts through policy and practice is an important imperative of MUF.

I have in my well used Mistra notebook a quote from Peter Marcuse (1998:104) who states: '...it will take more than simply better knowledge and a clear

understanding to produce change...' Indeed we are constantly reminded by our City Colleagues that knowledge is only part of the story when trying to understand the gap between policy and practice. As such, the Governing Sustainability strand of the programme provides a further cornerstone that tries to shed light on the exercise of tactical knowledge, politics and power in the very murky spaces between policy formulation and implementation. How do decisions actually get made? Under what influences? And where? Are the sorts of questions that underpin this cornerstone.

Each of these cornerstones are being explored differently in each of the LIP contexts – and one or a combination of these should serve to inform the approach and questions shaping your publications, to ensure that your work at UCT feeds into the broader ambitions and aims of MUF.

## **2) CTLIP**

Each of the LIPs in the MUF Programme are conducting quite different university/local government experiments, which again you can read about in the Annual Report. In Cape Town, our focus has been on making the policy and decision making process more defensible and legible. We are achieving these two objectives with a bi-directional approach through the Knowledge Transfer Programme. Four PhD researchers from UCT have been partnered with city counterparts working on policy and implementation challenges straddling the MUF F,G & D focus areas. These researchers are embedded in City structures for 7 months at a time over a 3 year period. These compound (and complex) working relationships combines the evidence based knowledge that the city practitioner has expertise in, paired with the rigour of academia in terms of theory and methods to provide defensible policy positions and implementation frameworks. Simultaneously, the PhD process and the Governing Sustainability cornerstone of the MUF Programme afford an opportunity to document the murky spaces between policy and implementation thereby making policy and decision making more legible.

This parallel programme, The City Officials Exchange - has provided the opportunity for selected City officials to spend time at UCT to write up an aspect of your work, together with a writing partner at UCT, with the aim of producing publishable academic papers. Again, this process addresses the ambition of making policy more legible, by telling the story of policy and practice in Cape Town. By engaging with theory and international case studies and best practices, the ambition of the programme is that there will be a positive feedback loop back into the City after the exchange period to improving the defensibility of policy and decisions (this however, might take time, and is evidence that might not be straightforward to capture – we'll try anyway...).

## **3) Insights from Round 1**

Unpacking the City Officials Exchange Programme/Writing Partnership programme is probably best done by sharing with you some of the feedback we received from the first round participants (both the City Officials and the writing partners).

One of the questions posed to City Officials following the first round was what gave you energy in the writing partnership. The answers varied from jelly beans to omega 3 rich diets! Other responses included access to the UCT library, literature, new ideas, new networks, the invigoration of being in a different environment, ability to attend seminars across UCT, working with experts in the field, etc were all seen as energizing and positive aspects of the programme.

A huge challenge for most City Officials was juggling City work time and UCT time. Some described their experience as 'managing two roles' which left them 'time stressed'. In general, having longer, consecutive chunks of time at UCT was regarded as more productive. Time and timing were critical issues. 8 weeks was not considered long enough from the perspective of the UCT writing partners for real co-production to occur.

For some all City Officials, the opportunity to 'come out of the doing and to get into the thinking' was a wonderful opportunity. Reading about other cities made many officials feel affirmed that what they were doing and the challenges they experience are global. The change in perspective was noted as a huge benefit for participants. The 'academic credibility' of a publication was highly valued by some as an added affirmation beyond successful implementation. The papers produced in the past round also demonstrated that knowledge generation is happening in local government, and is not the sole preserve of academia. Writing partners highlighted that working with experts in their fields gave them new insights and have lead them to asking different questions in their research.

I want to end with some of my own reflections of having been a writing partner in the last round. I have taught a postgraduate course for the past 10 years called Environmental Policy and Practice. This course has been through numerous iterations – however, the last session has always been one called 'challenging the cultural embeddedness of policy'. You might well be feeling relieved that you never had to take this course! Just what does this mean? Well, for the past 8 years, I was fairly confident that I knew what this meant – to get to sustainability, you need to change the culture or way of doing things in different institutions. Simple right? Well, my experience of working on the MUF programme and working with my writing partner from the City has really begun to open up a window into what this might mean. We can think about co-production as a compound word – and might extend this in our experiment to thinking about the words as the two institutions of the City (which is of course not homogenous) and the University (again, not homogenous). The cultures of these two institutions are so extremely different. On the surface, you just have to walk down corridors and look at the wall hangings or posters or visit one another's offices and look at desks and bookshelves to see just how different the two enterprises are. So, coming together to get something new, different and more is a monumental task. But we are joined by our common vision and determination to make cities work for all who live in them. Even with this common vision, changing or challenging the fabric of institutions is an extremely ambitious task – and I am learning that perhaps change is not the desired ambition, as the different expertise do indeed provide perspectives that are new, different and more. Even though this programme will not touch the entire City or University –

the opportunity for individuals to get new, different and more perspectives on what they do on a daily basis must inspire us sufficiently to stay on the long and winding pathway to a more sustainable future.