

*Lessons on collaboration  
and co-production*

Knowledge exchange between  
universities and municipalities  
for sustainable and just cities

2012-2020



CITY OF CAPE TOWN  
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA  
STAD KAAPSTAD



AFRICAN CENTRE FOR CITIES



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
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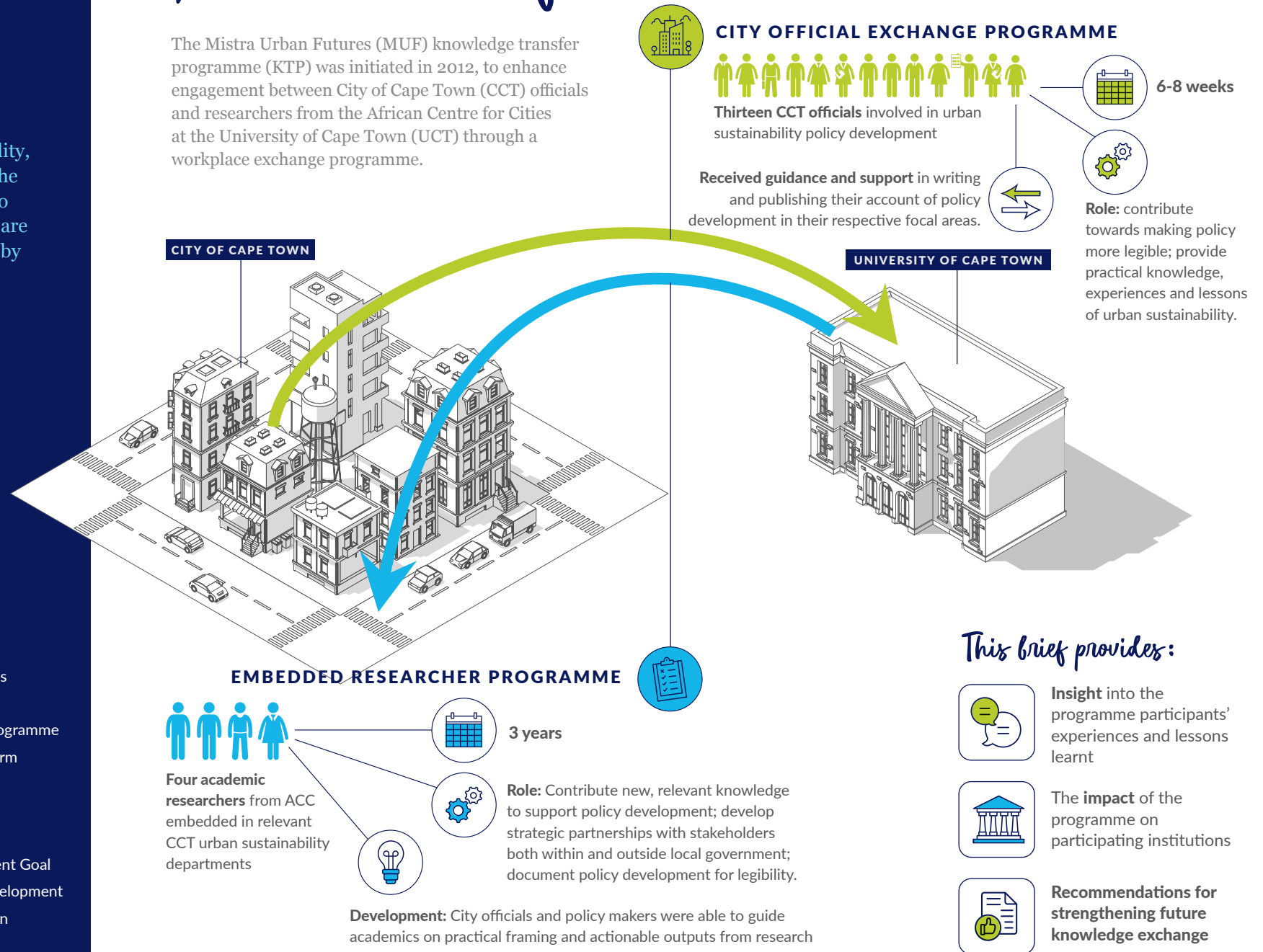


# About this brief

The Mistra Urban Futures (MUF) knowledge transfer programme (KTP) was initiated in 2012, to enhance engagement between City of Cape Town (CCT) officials and researchers from the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town (UCT) through a workplace exchange programme.

“Knowledge is not the only barrier to urban sustainability, but it is one ... and to find the ‘new’ knowledge, we have to seek it together. And so we are in a knowledge field that is by definition new territory.”

-DR ZARINA PATEL (2012)



## CITY OFFICIAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME



Thirteen CCT officials involved in urban sustainability policy development



6-8 weeks



**Role:** contribute towards making policy more legible; provide practical knowledge, experiences and lessons of urban sustainability.

Received guidance and support in writing and publishing their account of policy development in their respective focal areas.



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## EMBEDDED RESEARCHER PROGRAMME



Four academic researchers from ACC embedded in relevant CCT urban sustainability departments



3 years



**Role:** Contribute new, relevant knowledge to support policy development; develop strategic partnerships with stakeholders both within and outside local government; document policy development for legibility.



**Development:** City officials and policy makers were able to guide academics on practical framing and actionable outputs from research

## This brief provides:



**Insight** into the programme participants' experiences and lessons learnt



The **impact** of the programme on participating institutions



**Recommendations** for strengthening future knowledge exchange

## ACRONYMS

- ACC** African Centre for Cities
- CCT** City of Cape Town
- KTP** Knowledge Transfer Programme
- LIP** Local Interaction Platform
- MUF** Mistra Urban Futures
- NUA** New Urban Agenda
- P&S** Policy and Strategy
- SDG** Sustainable Development Goal
- TOD** Transit-Orientated Development
- UCT** University of Cape Town



# Background

When addressing urban sustainable development challenges, every attempt to support transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge highlights the disparity between academic, research-based knowledge versus practical, experience-based knowledge. This creates a paradox: innovation cannot occur without the meeting of different perspectives and knowledge, and yet those same differences can hinder innovation.

Such boundary crossing is dependent on developing shared meanings and on individuals who can function as brokers.

## MISTRA URBAN FUTURES (MUF)

is an international programme for research and practice on sustainable urban development. MUF was established in 2010 when universities, local governments and private sector stakeholders identified the need for a collective approach to tackling complex urban challenges. MUF takes an **interdisciplinary, co-production approach to generating new knowledge** and draws on theory and practice to inform research.

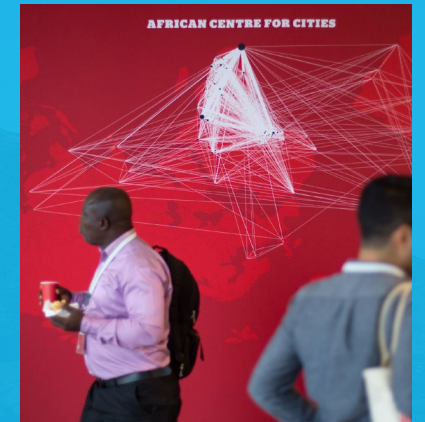


**MUF selected Cape Town as a local interaction platform (LIP)** to provide practical and academic insights and to facilitate critical urban research and policy discourses concerning the dynamics of unsustainable urbanisation processes, both locally and regionally.

**Cape Town is South Africa's second-largest economic centre**, producing about 10% of South Africa's GDP and accounting for almost two thirds of provincial economic activity. However, Cape Town faces challenges in socio-economic and spatial inequality, a fast-growing urban population and high levels of unemployment.

## AFRICAN CENTRE FOR CITIES

The MUF Cape Town LIP was hosted by UCT's African Centre for Cities (ACC). Established in 2008, ACC is a leading knowledge centre that conducts meaningful research on how to understand, recast and address pressing urban crises. ACC aims to develop imaginative policy as well as public discourses and practices to promote vibrant, just and sustainable cities.



## UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

## CAPE TOWN WAS ONE OF FIVE CITIES SELECTED BY MUF

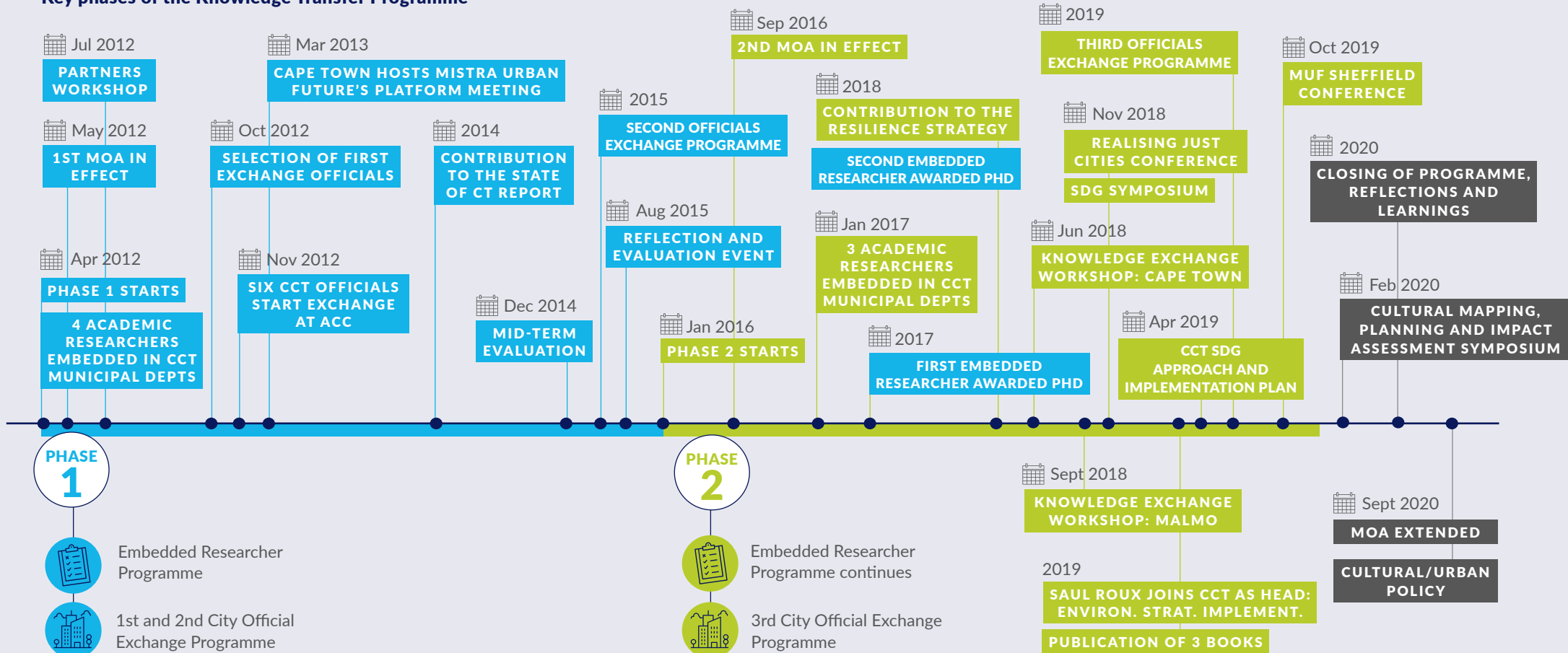
MUF implemented additional projects in Skåne and Gothenburg (Sweden), Greater Manchester and Sheffield (United Kingdom) and Kisumu (Kenya), as well as with partners in Stockholm (Sweden), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Dehradun/Shimla (India) and Shanghai (China). **The MUF projects investigated the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the urban Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the interest of fair, green and just cities.**

# Knowledge Transfer Programme

The Knowledge Transfer Programme (KTP) was one of the pioneering projects of the Cape Town MUF platform. The KTP aimed to create knowledge platforms that straddled the researcher-practitioner divide, to be better positioned to develop nuanced policy responses to complex urban sustainability challenges faced by the city. Through these knowledge platforms, new knowledge and evidence could be brought to bear on policy-making processes, to increase their legibility.

The objective of the KTP was to explore new sustainable urban transitions, to make decision-making processes more legible and hence defensible within CCT, in order to render policy outcomes of these more sustainable. Ultimately, the purpose of the KTP was to explore institutional collaboration between university and municipal authorities in the interest of sustainable and just cities.

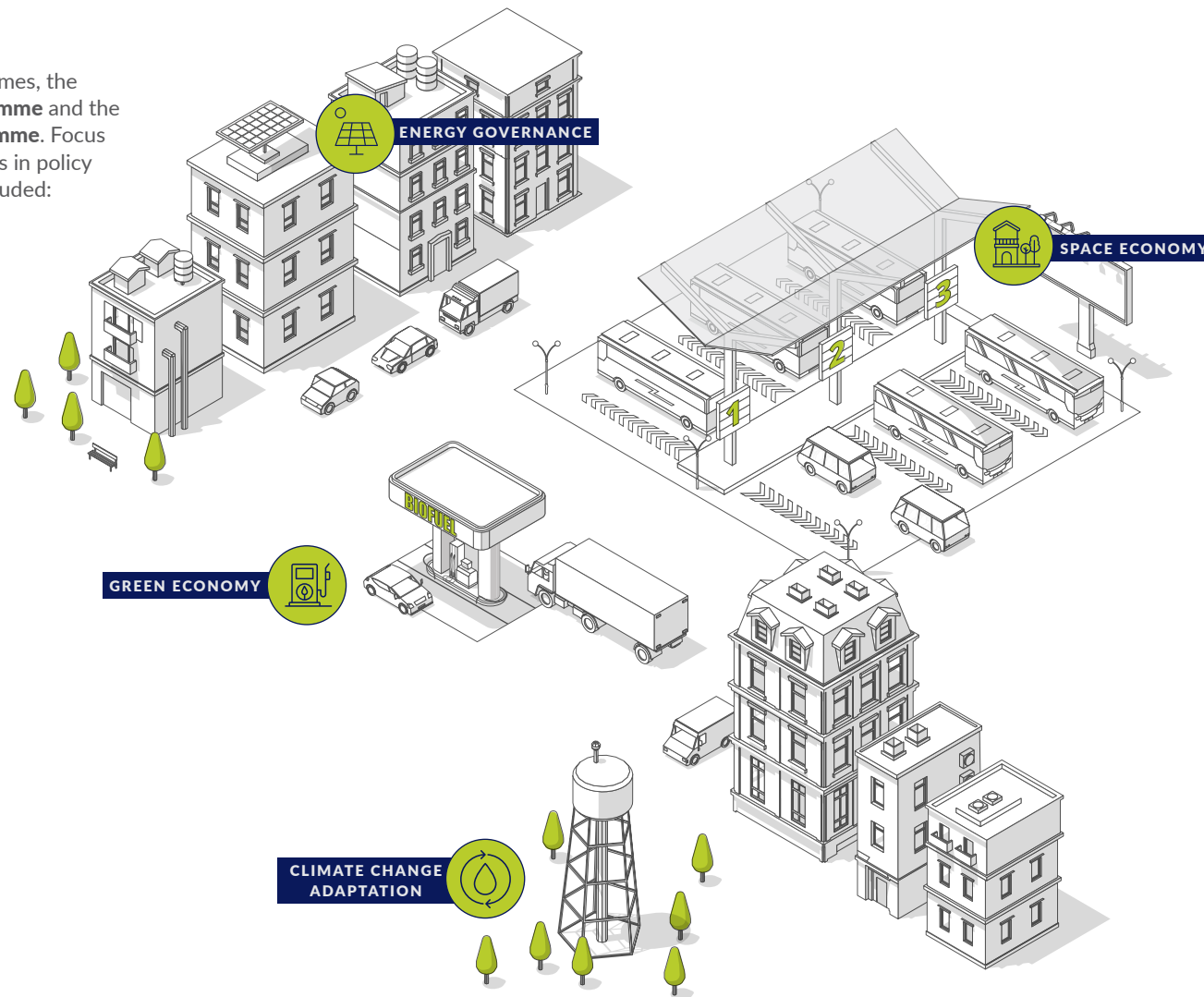
## Key phases of the Knowledge Transfer Programme





# Phase 1

Phase 1 involved two programmes, the **Embedded Researcher Programme** and the **City Official Exchange Programme**. Focus areas of these two programmes in policy development and research included:



Knowledge exchange involves growing a new generation of scholars and practitioners that can traverse both physical and conceptual spaces; and that should have an ability to produce knowledge in different registers (policy briefs, academic articles etc.).

## Outcomes of the KTP



The **co-production of knowledge** relevant to policy



Additional **theoretical perspectives** stemming from local experiences and evidence

# Phase 2

Phase 2 also involved the embedding of researchers in municipal departments, as follows:

1.

## TRANSPORT DIRECTORATE



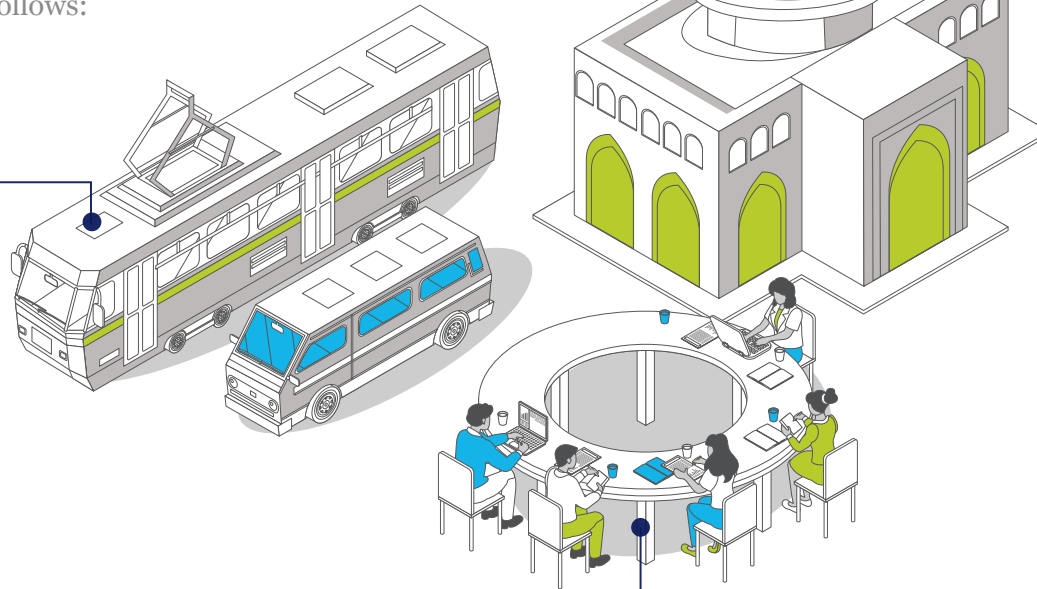
One PhD researcher, 2017-2019



**Research** Transit-Orientated Development (TOD) as a case study on how cities are localising global transport planning innovations within the broader transition toward transport justice

### OUTCOMES

- Accelerated **transport planning theory and practice** within the Transport Directorate;
- Research conducted on access resilience **informed the COVID-19 Transport Response Plan**; and
- Research conducted on the transition to access-based planning and transport planning under deep uncertainty was to be used to **formulate both the Transport Sector Plan and the Integrated Public Transport Network Plan**.



2.

## POLICY & STRATEGY RESEARCH BRANCH



One postdoctoral researcher, 2017-2019



**Investigated** SDG and NUA engagement at global, national and city levels through participation in, and organisation of, relevant conferences, seminars and knowledge exchanges involving other (South African) cities, city networks and urban stakeholders.

3.

## ARTS & CULTURE BRANCH



One PhD researcher, 2017-2019



**Assisted** with a variety of processes, including the promotion of cultural mapping and planning as central to CCT's Integrated Development Plan.

### OUTCOMES

- **Support provided in the cultural mapping and planning process** of conducting CMP in 41 wards
- **Contribution to refining** the Cultural Planning Toolkit Framework
- **Blockages and opportunities identified** for promoting cultural mapping and planning
- A report entitled '**Cultural mapping, planning and impact assessment for just and sustainable urban development**' was published in collaboration with the SA-EU Dialogue Exchange and practitioners and scholars in 6 South African and European cities

### OUTCOMES

- Research conducted was used to inform and facilitate the **transversal approach and framework for SDG implementation in CCT**, the alignment of the City's Resilience Strategy with the SDGs as well as preparations for CCT's first Voluntary Local Review on the SDGs. The approach was approved by the City Manager in April 2019.



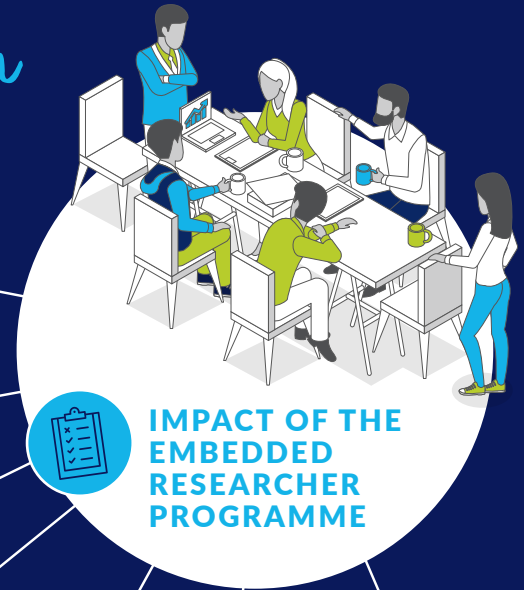


Overall, the KTP, including both embedded researchers and the officials' exchange, contributed significantly to existing efforts in CCT to populate policy and strategy with a sensibility for social, ecological and material sustainability.

There was a high expectation of the model and its potential for a long-term and sustained effect on ability, capacity and morale across CCT. Furthermore, there was a high level of commitment to continuing with it.

# Phase 1 and 2 Reflection

## BY CCT OFFICIALS



Promoted a questioning and theoretically informed work environment. Researchers played an inspiring and educational function.

Researchers' were able to contribute perspectives that staff members felt constrained from contributing. Their intellectual authority also gave their perspectives greater traction.

Theoretically informed and conceptual approaches not sustainable by CCT officials in institutional setting without continued presence of embedded researchers.

Researchers contributed towards the identification of new needs.

Highlighted the need for greater reflection and generation of common perspective via external opportunities.

Researchers' concept of change as motivated by good ideas and knowledge alone deemed idealistic and unrealistic.

Highlighted a need for change in the institutional culture so that 'green' areas of work are able to find greater institutional purchase.



### IMPACT OF THE CITY OFFICIAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME



Increased confidence and ability of officials to contribute to policy processes



Allowed senior officials to engage in professional development appropriate to their experience and circumstances



Provided officials with space for 'reflection on experience'



Enabled a non-hierarchical space for inter-departmental communication, facilitating collaboration and building collegiality

# Phase 1 and 2 Reflection

BY UCT ACADEMICS AND  
EMBEDDED RESEARCHERS



## IMPACT OF CITY OFFICIAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME



**12 papers were co-authored** by the officials and academics, seen as a credit to the ACC programme.



**Impact was uncertain of the KTP on the academics** that contributed as writing partners to the CCT officials.



**Provided an opportunity to research city processes** through close and sustained engagement with officials working at the policy coalface



## IMPACT OF THE EMBEDDED RESEARCHER PROGRAMME



**Provided embedded researchers with an intimate experience of and insight** into CCT and its functioning.



**Generated an understanding of knowledge and knowledge production**, expected to persist as a formative experience for the researchers that will effect future practice, research and teaching for each of the embedded researchers.



**Improved embedded researchers' perspective, sensibility, insight and sensitivity to institutional life**, all of which is expected to persist in the researchers' thinking and in their approach to future work.



Overall, both the embedded researchers and the officials' exchange provided a positive and successful learning experience. However, academic practice was not influenced in any significant way, and no CCT officials were being used in ACC's teaching programme despite there being many able intellects who could contribute great perspective from reflection on experience.

“One of the most interesting benefits of the KTP was that interdisciplinarity was celebrated, and value was added by sharing research interests across different disciplines”.

– SAUL ROUX (RESEARCHER)



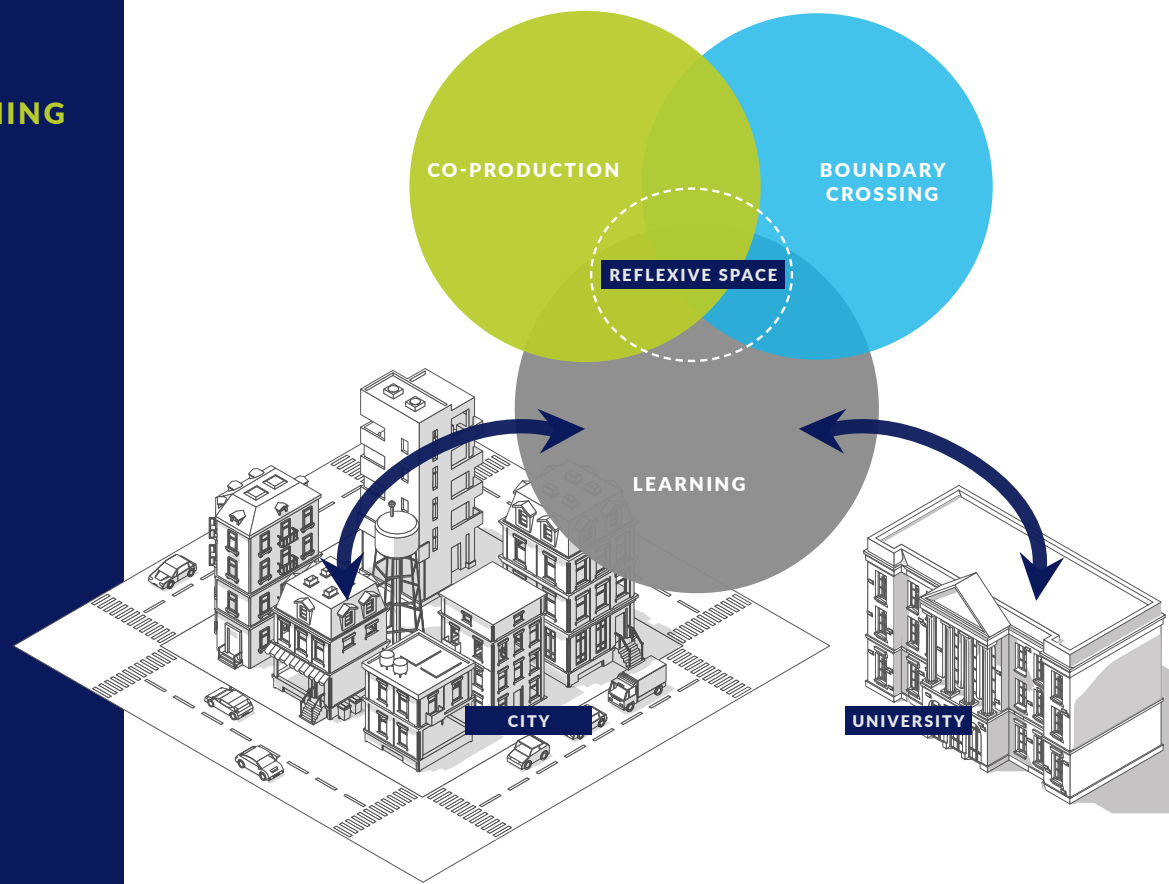


## REFLEXIVE SPACES AS PORTALS FOR LEARNING

**The co-production of knowledge in Phase 1 required learning to take place across institutional boundaries.**

Embedded researchers and CCT officials found that boundary crossing was experienced as more than a spatial shift from one institution to another, it was also a process of “moving between reflection, theory, action and practice” (Reflection workshop, SR, 2015).

The ‘reflexive spaces’ acted as portals for boundary crossing and generating new insights and knowledge, with learning and transformation being dependent on returning to home base i.e. the university or municipal offices.





# Phase 2 Findings

## I. IMPACT OF KTP ON TRANSPORT JUSTICE IN CAPE TOWN



Transport justice had gained support in **Cape Town**, where poverty, inequality and accessibility are strongly linked to race and spatial segregation.



It was determined that improvements to the transport system that largely benefit people with high levels of accessibility (i.e. wealthy car owners) need to be **optional and self-financing**.



Many public, non-motorised transport users (particularly elderly, female or lower income) were found to have **levels of accessibility below the sufficient minimum**. These users should be specifically prioritised and subsidised to raise their accessibility to the minimum level.



The **accessibility improvements created by the Transit-Orientated Development planning strategy** at the public transport network scale were found to be in direct conflict with the accessibility declines for those forced out of the central neighbourhoods by gentrification at the local scale.



pic: Kelvin Trautman

“Immense value has been added through the ability to have real collaboration between our practitioners and the researchers [embedded in the Transport Directorate]. The former group is focused on delivery but has limited time to explore and research emerging ideas. The researcher, on the other hand, has the skills, competencies and focused time to explore new approaches, including those in fields that cross traditional disciplines, and to distil these as relevant, consumable information for the practitioners.”

- **CLAIRE HOLDERNESS,**  
OFFICIAL AT CCT



## 2. IMPACT OF KTP IN LOCALISING THE SDGs IN CAPE TOWN



Awareness and interest in global agendas grew over the course of the programme and several champions interested and invested in SDG localisation in CCT emerged.



### LEARNINGS

The SDG research revealed gaps in CCT's existing work and the need for more engagement with actors outside of the city with the purpose of knowledge exchange. External actors to be engaged with included those from other cities, provincial and national government as well as the private sector and civil society.

Cross-city learning was one of the most useful aspects of the comparative research project and afforded CCT the opportunity to learn about the experiences of other cities, for instance budget alignment (eg. Kisumu) or external communication (eg. Buenos Aires). The examples of good practice from other cities with different contexts were important in shaping policy discussions. The comparative analyses provided a wealth of action-oriented experiences and knowledge that contributed towards the strengthening of CCT policy discourses and practices.



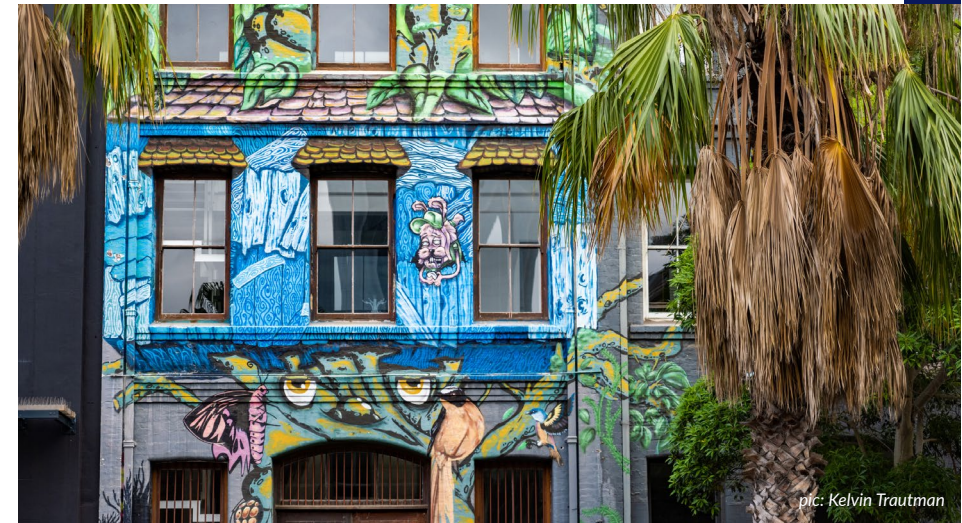
### OUTCOMES

The approach and implementation plan for the city was approved. Alignment with key CCT strategies, such as the Resilience Strategy, was strengthened. Co-authored articles were produced, connecting researchers from different cities and contributing to the framing of SDG implementation nationally.



### NEXT STEPS

The preparation of a Voluntary Local Review on the SDGs and inputs into the next Integrated Development Plan for the years 2022-2027.



pic: Kelvin Trautman

## 3. CONTRIBUTION OF THE KTP TOWARDS THE INCLUSION OF CULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING



Cultural mapping and planning have proved to be valuable tools in enabling change by surfacing the spatial and social divisions that impact the lived experiences and practices across multiple wards.



Cultural planning has proved useful for engagement that allows for the sharing of experiences and accepting of differences. This is important for social cohesion where historically there has been tension and suspicion.



Through the cultural mapping and planning research, community engagements revealed that residents and some officials had an appetite for change.



Employing community members through the Expanded Public Works Programme improved understanding of social and spatial practices. The inclusion of residents created ownership and a means to hold CCT accountable.



Cultural planning has the opportunity to draw together different municipal departments in the planning processes. This has proved to be of great value where there has been buy in and support from senior management in departments. However, currently there is limited scope for this approach as it not mandated through policy.

# Key outcomes

Through its conception and execution, the KTP has opened a unique and unprecedented space for interaction and exchange between CCT and UCT around the sustainability agenda, how best to support a city's transitions within it, and how best to co-produce relevant knowledge.

The expected outcomes of the KTP (knowledge co-production and new theoretical perspectives) were greatly exceeded. More tangible external impacts were realised as enhanced CCT policies and plans contributed to the sustainable development agenda of Cape Town.

## KEY PROGRAMME OUTCOMES INCLUDED:

**1. Applied and functional production** e.g. policy briefs, policies, articles, models and methods, and the synthesising of work done at ACC

1.



**2. Improved CCT and ACC outcomes and products** e.g. impactful CCT policies and plans, all contributing towards a sustainable and just future for Cape Town.

2.



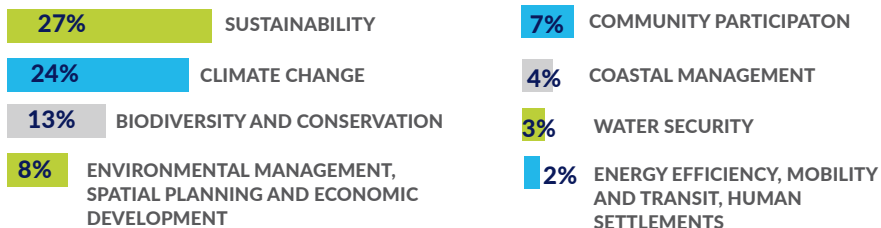
**3. Informal and continuous exchange of knowledge** between researchers and CCT officials as well as that absorbed and learnt throughout the experience

3.

**4. Academic production** e.g. PhDs and peer-reviewed articles

4.

Over both phases, 2012-2020, **116 CONTRIBUTORS** either published or enrolled in studies across a variety of themes relevant to sustainable development in Cape Town



“This is probably more to do with inter-personal and inter-institutional learning than it is to do with knowledge production.”

-SUE SOAL

## MUTUAL BENEFITS

Arguably, for everyone involved, the most distinctive and valuable outcome of the KTP was the fostering of new relationships.

Researchers appreciated the access and familiarity that sustained time embedded in CCT granted to them. This made certain kinds of insight, understanding and even knowledge possible. It created angles to see things that might otherwise have gone unseen.

For CCT officials, sustained access to researchers supported a growing dexterity and familiarity with more conceptual approaches, and a reflective stance in action. For both, these perspectives could only exist through the relationships that were developed over time. This has generated visible and readily accounted for gains in academic production, in intellectual capital and in working relationships between the institutions and within them.

Embedded City officials and PhD researchers both indicated the significant knowledge gains afforded through the programme. Access to knowledge and new approaches and ways of thinking were cited as the most significant benefits of partnering and embedding across traditional institutional divides.





# Key recommendations

The KTP demonstrated that for cities to become more sustainable, a transformation of their policy agendas is required as well as an institutional transformation of the ways in which their policies are pursued.

It was towards the expansion and actualisation of this potential that KTP succeeded, although the fruits of it are yet to be fully revealed. Based on the experiences of actors within the KTP, the following recommendations were made to enhance the programme in support of such future success.





## INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

To protect the programme from risks of political change and instability the following institutional arrangements were suggested:

- **Supervision and contracts on the purpose and objectives of the institutional relationships are important.** This requires the engagement of supervisors from the outset of the process, which should address:
  - The supervision of embedded researchers;
  - How the supervision process can best serve municipalities and the primary process of knowledge creation; and
  - Reflection to achieve deeper insight into the process of knowledge production itself.
- **The role of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) cannot be understated.** Sharing insights on the nature and form of the respective MOUs can strengthen the instruments for future partnerships. Developing guidelines reflecting on experience will support ongoing negotiations between the institutional players in ensuring the continued traction of the MOU.
- **Clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of the steering committee** should be developed with adequate support provided.
- **Ideally, an embedded research coordinator should be appointed** to manage both the administration and the intellectual project of embedded research. A coordinator can play the role of an institutional bridge.



## CHAMPIONS

Identifying appropriate institutional partners was deemed crucial to successful collaboration.

- **Guidelines for supervision and for being municipal champions** were both seen as important supportive processes and mechanisms. To support the engagement between researchers, supervisors and champions, a suggestion was made around developing a Terms of Reference (ToR) to guide the expectations and shifting nature of research.
- **Develop an orientation course** for the researchers, supervisors and champions. MUF produced theoretical material that could be used as the grounding for the orientation.
- **Ideally municipal champions should be at different levels of government and able to leverage different kinds of support.** Buy in and support from senior officials was found to be vital, but mid-level officials working on specific projects were more flexible and better able to integrate and collaborate with embedded researchers.

“Co-creation is a powerful process and ensures that real, tangible and sustainable City policy and implementation outcomes and impacts are achieved”

– CAROL WRIGHT (CCT)







## RESEARCHERS AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

- **Academic and practical experience is crucial to the programme.** It is recommended that the focus remains on PhD students, with the possibility of including students with master's degrees should they have significant and valued CCT experience. Postdoctoral placements have also proven to provide valuable and more senior input into City processes.
- **It is important to engage with academics that were experts in the process of knowledge production.** For example, contracting researchers who were interested not only in the topics at hand but also the processes by which they were researched, was recommended to achieve the programme objective.
- **It was recommended that guidelines for recruiting researchers were developed and incorporated the following:**
  - Skills and expertise;
  - Academic grounding;
  - Diversity and structural transformation (through support and mentorship if necessary); and
  - Career path.
- **It is suggested that candidates with qualities suited to the researcher embedding process,** such as good ethics, empathy and flexibility, are selected.
- **There is a need to develop clear supporting guidelines or a framework for the research process.** Administration is important for ensuring the research process is smooth.



## WRITING SUPPORT

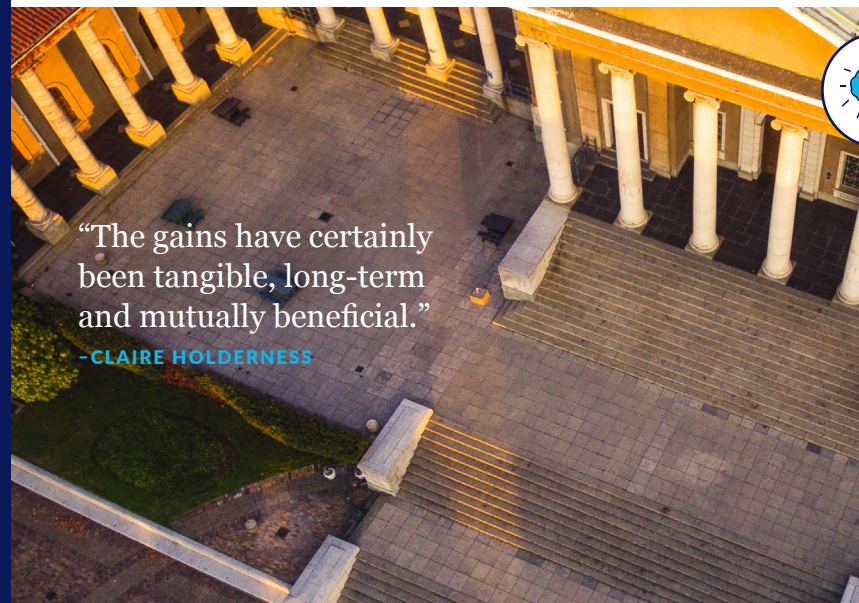
- **The need to continue to invest resources in thinking-writing,** and in engaging officials in these experiences collectively was identified. This input nurtures 'voice' and conceptual faculties, and indirectly generates relationships amongst officials.
- In order to support PhDs in completing their City and study commitments **it is recommended that a writing up period be calculated into the process.** This would need to be supported through the supervision process and could involve writing workshops or retreats.



## COMMUNICATION

In addition to developing the instruments to support the process, **a communication strategy** can be helpful. The purpose of this would be to:

- Develop accessible information to share internally within the municipalities to gain more traction beyond existing partners;
- Share findings in different registers such as through blog posts, op-eds, and other appropriate forms of communication; and
- Produce a short film (that could also be used as part of the orientation process with embedded researchers).



“The gains have certainly been tangible, long-term and mutually beneficial.”

—CLAIRE HOLDERNESS



## REFLECTION

**Reflection should be on an ongoing basis.** An informal set of meetings between embedded researchers to reflect on the process is important for providing collegiate support. In Cape Town this is called the 'coffee club'; it takes place monthly.

Similar reflection meetings for programme mentors and supervisors from both UCT and CCT could prove beneficial.



# Future opportunities

Through the KTP it was recognised that there is a need for co-producing scientific articles, reports and policy papers to address the education of future urban planners, practitioners, policy makers, academics and developers, i.e. those who would be responsible for building tomorrow's sustainable cities. It was suggested that the following is developed to further strengthen and build collaboration:



Theoretical and conceptual frameworks, based on lessons learned from the KTP, that deepen the understanding of conditions for **transdisciplinary and collaborative knowledge production**, with a focus on post-graduate programmes;



**Policy suggestions for both universities and municipalities** that address the importance of supporting administrative structures in facilitating collaborative projects; and



**Policy suggestions on new means of education** for the next generation of professional urban developers.





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