



PARTNERING FOR GROWTH

THE REAL BAAKENS VALLEY GROUP: “CROSSING THE RIVER BY FEELING FOR THE STONES”

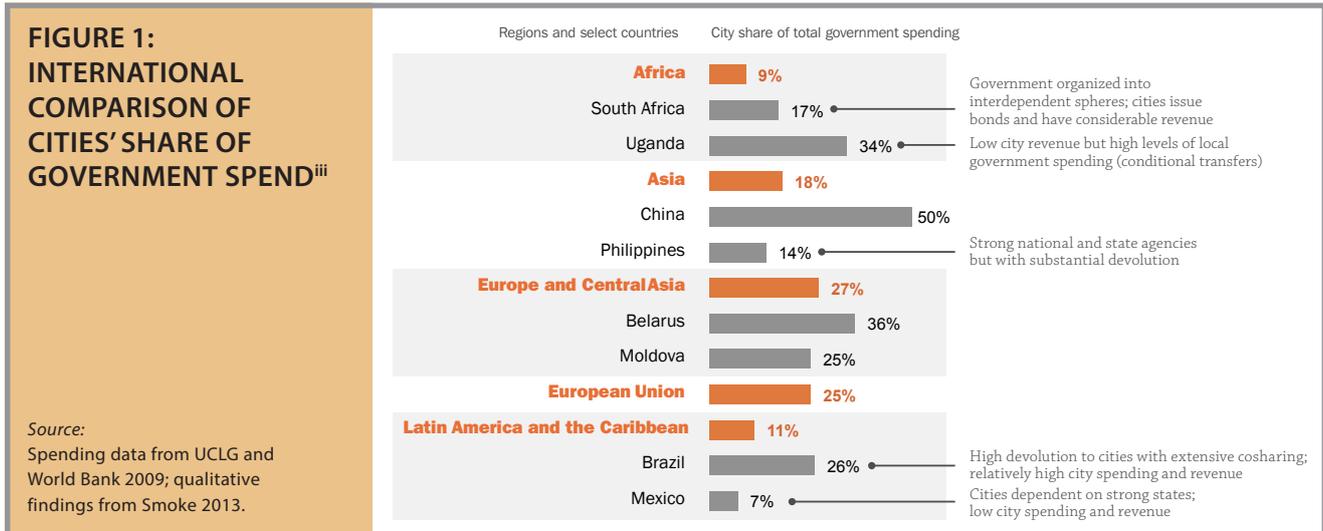
In South Africa, local governments are constitutionally mandated to ensure social and economic development of their localitiesⁱ. It is, however, acknowledged that LED is unique and very different from traditional local government functions in that it is primarily “market facing”ⁱⁱ. Local governments are expected to deliver economic results in an environment where they have limited internal resources for economic development, and little or no control over the behavior of private sector who are the drivers of the economy. Traditional planning and consultative processes have typically not delivered the desired impact; there is often paralysis as large-scale plans are made that require significant budgets, and problems may seem too overwhelming to know where to start. This knowledge note summarises an experience in Nelson Mandela Bay with a different way of collaborating that is building collective responsibility. This is starting to show progress in stuck situations and is rippling through the city.

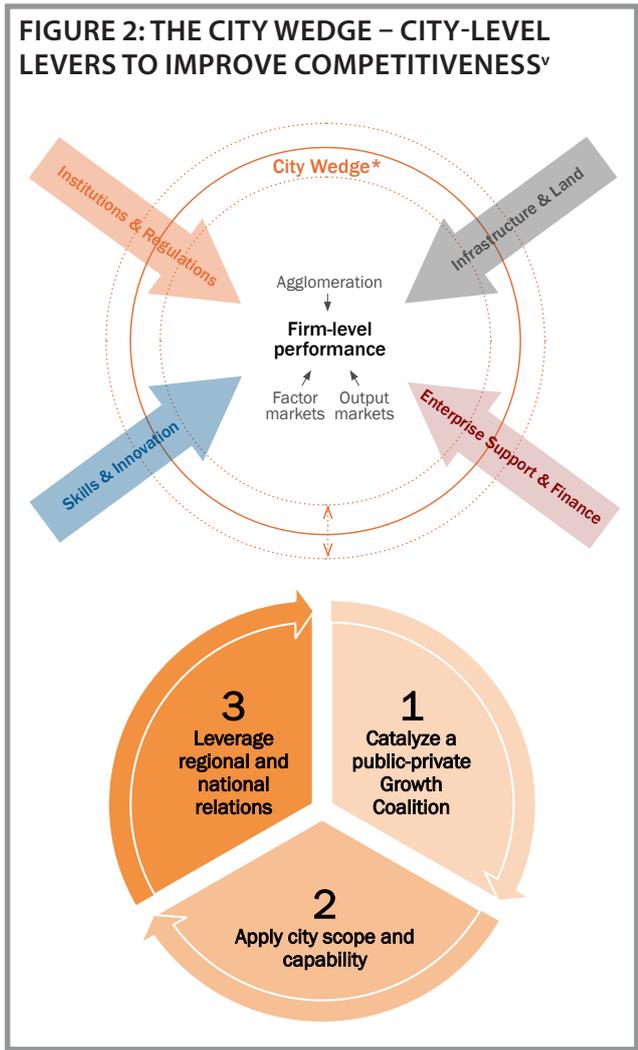
BACKGROUND

Cities are the future. They are where people live and work and are hubs for growth and innovation. But they are also poles of poverty and, much too often, centres of unemployment. One way to address this challenge is to improve a city’s competitiveness, transforming average cities into flourishing urban centres that successfully facilitate firm and industry growth to create jobs, raise productivity and increase incomes. A team at the World Bank Group conducted a series of analyses that looked at two central questions: What makes a city competitive? And how can more cities become competitive?

The resulting report, *Competitive Cities for Jobs and Growth: What, Who, and How*^v shows that improving the competitiveness of cities can help eliminate extreme poverty and promote prosperity for all citizens. The report also explores the various levers available to cities to improve competitiveness, both within the municipality and more widely.

The availability of levers within a municipality is affected by resources, capabilities, and mandates. South African cities have a 17% share of total government spending; and much of available budgets are tied to conditional transfers which limit the flexibility in allocation of resources.





In many cases, the technical capacity of the municipality also has gaps (in terms of human resources and systems), including in economic development, business regulation and land approval processes, and skills- and enterprise support functions.

These resource limitations make it particularly important to build effective alliances to develop and deliver on competitiveness improvement initiatives and overcome the weaknesses in the “city wedge”. How do we leverage private sector into crucial city developments? And how can we build growth coalitions to accelerate and sustain local results?

Collaborating with people you already know and trust can be relatively simple. But some situations can only be resolved working together where: trust is lacking; relationships are fragile, conflicted or non-existent; and it is very unlikely that key players will be able to agree on a shared vision or what has caused the problem. In these contexts, collaboration is both more necessary and more difficult. In Adam Kahane’s *Collaborating with the Enemy*^{vi} this is referred to as stretch collaboration.

Effective stretch collaboration requires:

- Embracing both conflict and connection - even when one’s personal tendency is more towards one or the other
- Experimenting a way forward – starting to do things differently without necessarily knowing the outcome, failing fast and failing forward
- Stepping into the game – recognising our own role as part of both the problem and the solution.

National Treasury’s Cities Support Programme had identified the need for a targeted initiative in the economic development space to introduce and entrench a collaborative approach, within city administration and with external stakeholders.

Using the World Bank’s Competitive Cities Executive Development programme and the “Collaborating with the Enemy” framework as a foundation, a project was designed and launched in 2017 to work with a small and select group of individuals around specific economic themes in three metros (Nelson Mandela Bay, Tshwane and eThekweni). The programme aimed to incorporate technical, team work and trust-building aspects.

The Nelson Mandela Bay *Partnering for Growth* learning event was the first delivered in South Africa, and included a range of exercises to build relationships and mutual understanding, as well as creating shared insight into the nature of competitive cities. On the final day of the event, voluntary teams were formed to test out these new ways of working on issues in the city that they had energy for. This knowledge note follows the progress of one of these groups which has made significant strides in their chosen area.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE REAL BAAKENS TEAM

A PASSIONATE DIVERSE GROUP IS FORMED

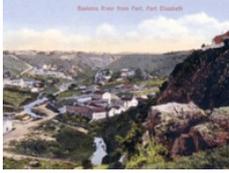
The Real Baakens Group formed at the learning event, with role players gravitating towards each other. The group is a mix of social activists, business people, municipal officials, and spatial development experts. For some people this issue relates to their direct mandate, but for most it is more to do with a personal commitment – as residents of the city, activists, recreational users of the space, and those that hope their children will stay in the city.

Their interest is contributing is primarily as “friends of the city” - a new approach of shared responsibility to make progress rather than just expecting the municipality to do everything. They want to be allies in trying to get tough things done, in particular around issues that have been stuck for many years. They share a passion to realise the development potential of the area.



THE HISTORY AND POTENTIAL OF THE BAAKENS VALLEY

The strategic role of the Baakens has been recognised for a long time. It is a 30km valley intersecting Port Elizabeth, a location of Xhosa *isivivana* (stone cairn journey markers), a source of water for early explorers, and a landing place for the 1820 English settlers. The site is also a confluence of biomes. It has been a place of sustenance, trade, conflicts and reflection, regular floods, as well as the location of forced resettlement of the South End Community.^{vii}



There have been various research efforts – including the 2016 Urban Land Institute (ULI) study - and many plans/ projects with only limited visible changes to date, mostly in the form individual initiatives such as the Tramways building and private commercial developments further up the valley).

To date, the municipal focus has been mostly on large and long-term projects as part of a centrally agreed plan – in particular the notion of a waterfront development - which have required complex cooperation with Transnet and attracting significant budgets; the lack of progress on these two items has created frustration and a sense of paralysis.

EXPERIMENTING WITH A DIFFERENT APPROACH

The approach of this group has been different – starting by walking together through the space, observing and trying to understand at a very practical level the underlying issues and the ultimate source of the problems. They explored the perspectives of others in ways which foster collaboration instead of retaining conflict. They then found small ways to take action together, and start to move along with other players using the existing capacities and resources.

One simple example was the apparent vandalism and stoning of cars in car park under the highway. On closer inspection, the stones were actually manganese falling from trucks on their way to the

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead



port. This realisation resulted in a discussion with Transnet about practical approaches to enforcing covering of loads transported through the city. Incidents like this were a chance to change the narrative about the area.

Four immediate steps for progress were identified: stormwater; sewage; security, parking and cleansing; and events.

Progress was made by first inviting the municipal manager for a cycle through the space, and then inviting municipal officials to walk the area with the group, reflect, and understand practical issues.

RESULTS START TO EMERGE

Through this seemingly small step, resources were quickly mobilised: Sewage spills were repaired; environmental approvals for emergency repairs were secured; repair of water leaks completed; alien vegetation that was contributing to storm water issues was cleared; and stormwater litter traps were being cleaned. More importantly, people were starting to communicate to solve problems across the rigid confines of organisational and institutional silos.

In terms of tourism, a story around the Baakens has started to emerge. The impetus developed to launch the Nelson Mandela Bay Steam Train, revitalising the century-old Apple Express steam train. The first step was to get the service running over the December 2017 holiday season through a combined effort of volunteers, the municipality and Transnet. There is flexibility about how this will evolve over time, and this has also opened up stakeholders’ thinking around the wider waterfront development.

Other stepping stones have started falling into place. These are creating a more coherent story to link all the events and recreational options in the valley - food truck Fridays, climbing walls, abseiling to clean cliff faces, hiking trails to connect tourist points.



The group members have also helped trigger wider community efforts, such as cleaning up the historic cemetery^{viii}

Community to rescue at Muslim gravesite ... which confirmed that their forefathers were Indonesian.

The Herald South Africa, 27 Nov 2017. Name: Isha Nkomo

PORT Elizabeth's Muslim community was hard at work yesterday, cleaning up the South End cemetery with the hope that it will one day be recognised as a heritage site for the city.

The author of South End: Then and Now, Yusuf Agherdien, 61, said the cemetery held significance for the Muslim people of Port Elizabeth as it told the story of their ancestors and where they came from.

"Looking at the history of PE, Muslims played a vital role in the development and growth of this municipality," he said.

The cemetery, plagued by vandals and neglect, was established in 1855. Some of the headstones found there were priceless, and the scriptures were in Arabic and "Jawi script",



SAVING HERITAGE: Getting stuck in to clean up the South End cemetery, are from left, Iqbal Azeez and Abbas Agherdien from the Eastern Cape Malay Cultural Society, and right, Ashraf Adnan

As some of the initiatives gained momentum, partners had to be conscious not to slip back into institutional silos and move towards an eco-system awareness of challenges. These shifts required constant reflection as issues emerged.

CONCLUSION

This new approach has demonstrated that new collaborative approaches and initial actions, even at a small scale, can start to shift the system quite quickly.

The initiative has also raised issues around mandates, institutional authority and tested the notion that the responsibility for progress rests with all stakeholders rather than just the municipality - for individuals to see themselves and their organisations as part of a system rather than outside of it has changed perspective on the nature of responses. Traversing the complexities in moving from documents and talk to action has required team members to stretch themselves and test some of the tools they have learned. The initiative provides a useful starting for collaborative approaches to spread across the system in the city and support economic growth.

CONTRIBUTING AND CONSTRAINING FACTORS

The progress by this group has been possible thanks to a highly committed and skilled group of people willing to go beyond their day job, and to open up their thinking. They have also had access into the necessary networks to help the immediate problem, with some "convening power".

Some of the progress may also have been made possible by a wider period of change within the municipality, with some willingness to try new ways of working.

- i. (S152 1 c) (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).
- ii. OECD (2009) *Organising for local development: the role of local development agencies*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/54/41/44682618.pdf?contentId=446>.
- iii. Kilroy, Austin Francis Louis; Mukim, Megha; Negri, Stefano. 2015. *Competitive cities for jobs and growth: what, who, and how* (English). *Competitive cities for jobs and growth*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.
- iv. *Ibid*
- v. *Ibid*.
- vi. Adam Kahane (2017) *Collaborating with the Enemy How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust*, p.47
- vii. Sources: thecasualobserver.co.za; Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism; Yusuf Agherdien "Double Vision" exhibit
- viii. 27 November 2017, via <https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/the-herald-south-africa/20171228/281517931493809>

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