

# Governing the hybrid-dispersed city

Governance evaluation strategy (GES) to recreate sustainability

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## Introduction: Venezuela's Emerging Governance and City Scenarios

Venezuela, the world's fifth largest oil exporter, with reserves in the top ten and a privileged location in northern South America, is facing a critical crossroads that combines radical political changes - the Bolivarian revolution - with the *old rentier petroleum economic model that has proven itself* incapable of solving its citizens' key problems and laying the groundwork for a prosperous, sustainable and governable future for the country and city, free of poverty. This emerging scenario implies, among other aspects, multiple top-down, political-territorial and socio-cultural mutations, the organization and participation of citizens in Community Councils (CCs), functional and financially independent from the municipal government, and re-centralization of the city-building process in the Ministry of Popular Power for the Communes, thereby seeming to move from a federal toward a communal state [1]. The city and its government tend to be diluted into multiple, disarticulated, formal and informal fragments, community councils (CCs), producing a hybrid-dispersed city, self-managed by citizen assemblies that hinder urban governance (Hypothesis) [2]. The paper presents the methodological strategy and research results from a doctoral thesis that evaluates the sustainability of visible management government (VMG) urban praxis with urban governance indicators (UGI).

## Visible Management Government (VMG)

The VMG builds the hybrid city to improve the quality of life for its citizens and, through this process, is legitimized by performance, creates confidence, social capital and empowers citizens, strengthening local governance. The desirable VMG formula is: Government by Policies (G/P) + Good Government [legitimacy by performance, efficient response to citizen needs] = Governance. To “govern by policies” (G/P) implies responding to citizens’ interests and recognizing the plurality and competitive character of citizen demands [3]. VMG is essentially a form of government-driven by policies that entails a particular governance landscape (Figure 1) [4].



Figure 1. VMG Hybrid City Urban Praxis: “Paseo la Chinita,” “La Lago” and Urban Sprawl

*Source: [3]*

## Sustainability Evaluation with Urban Governance Indicators (UGI)

A sustainable city succeeds in balancing economic, environmental and socio-cultural progress through processes of active citizen participation in policy decision and government, i.e. democratic governance [4]. Urban governance is: “...the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken; includes formal institutions, informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens.” [5]

Good urban governance is characterized by principles of sustainability, subsidiarity, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement, citizenship, security, and by the fact that these principles are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. A UN Inter-Agency meeting in June, 2001, reviewed these seven principles and finally recommended the adoption of five UN principles for Good Urban Governance: Effectiveness (includes efficiency, subsidiarity and strategic vision); Equity (includes sustainability, gender equality and intergenerational equity); Accountability (includes transparency, rule of law and responsiveness); Participation (includes citizenship, consensus orientation and civic engagement) and Security (includes conflict resolution, human security and environmental safety). These principles are clearly interdependent and mutually reinforcing [5].

The development of UGI to evaluate the sustainability of Visible Management Government (VMG) urban praxis is important because is an emerging, local

government practice focused on city building and has not been studied in depth. On the other hand, the development of Latin America and Venezuelan cities occurs in a context of increasing urban sprawl, asymmetries in spatial distribution for the quality of life, urbanization of poverty and territorial *laissez faire*, which, like VMG, impact the urban environment and therefore, need specific USI and UGI that consider the local reality in order to overcome its deficits [2].

### **Methodological Strategy: Evaluating VMG Urban Praxis with UGI**

An Innovative Governance Evaluation Strategy (GES+i) was developed centered on trend analysis, building scenarios, governance models and governance indicators to assess the sustainability of VMG urban praxis, framed in the consideration that "good governance is the most important factor for promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty." The GES+i is structured using four phases in line with the research objectives. The first phase, framed in glocal and the Latin American governance landscape, describes the current scenario and trends in the Venezuelan context. The second phase considers the impact of the contextual scenario and new community councils on the city-building process, identifying three future scenarios for the Venezuelan city: archipelago, hybrid and diluted, and consequences for the city and its government, characterized as a hybrid-diluted city and diluted-centralized government [2]. In the third phase, two governance models, the constitutional and visible management government (VMG), are formulated and UGI selected and applied using Delphi and questionnaires. Simultaneously, a field survey supported by a photographic record was made to identify different ways of building the VMG hybrid city during four government periods (1996-2010). In the fourth phase, Delphi and questionnaire results are correlated with the city-building process and governmental periods, to derive conclusions and governance strategies for recreating Maracaibo as a hybrid-sustainable landscape (Figure 2).

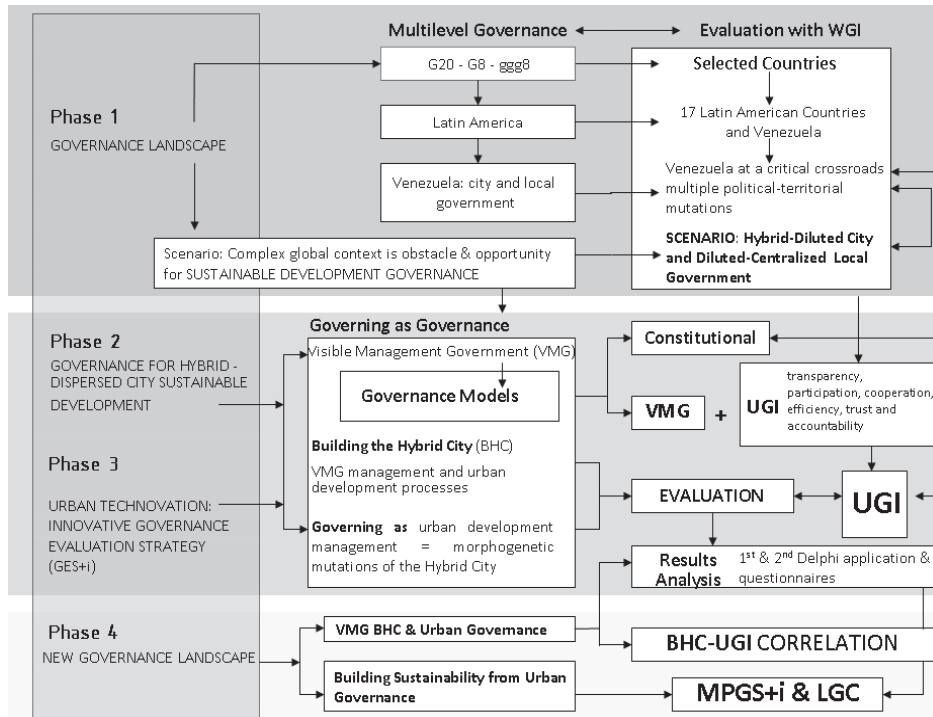


Figure 2. GES + i

Source, [6]

### Analysis of Results, Conclusions: Hybrid City, Governance & Sustainability

The paper concludes noting: 1. Infringement of the constitutional governance model hinders the country's governance and sustainability, fragments and dilutes the city and weakens local government management capacity into multiple citizen assemblies; 2. The relation between governance (expressed in the UGI: transparency, efficiency, participation, cooperation, trust and accountability), urban sustainability and the process of hybrid city building; 3. The perception of governance-sustainability improves when evaluating the city's formal production and decreases, is less sustainable, in the case of informal production; 4. A greater socio-political interaction among the State, society and private enterprise in the city-building process improves VMG governance; 5. VMG urban practice contradicts the formulated governance model, and the resulting hybrid-dispersed and diluted city is unsustainable, validating the hypothesis. To overcome this tendency, an innovative management planning governance strategy [MPGS+i] is proposed to recreate hybrid city sustainability as a collective and shared project, embracing a diffuse governance landscape of multiple sublocal spaces and governments (CCs-citizen assemblies). The MPGS+i interweaves three different, continuously interacting processes in successive and transversal loops, through a interactive socio-spatial and political process [6] (Governance Model) within a post-bureaucratic, multiactoral Local Governance Council (LGC). MPGS+i braids a deliberative-relational management planning process, with the Pressure-State-Response (PSR) model and the process of formulating and collaboratively managing urban policies and projects, supported by

Geographical Information Technologies (GIT), to develop urban models and specific indicators of sustainability and governance.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the GES+i**

Strengths: The transversal, multi-scaled methodological strategy, designed and applied, permitted achieving the research objective and filling the theoretical-practical vacuum existing in Venezuela and Latin America. Weaknesses are of two types: 1. Characterization of the city-building process. The reconstruction and georeferencing of this process during four governmental periods was difficult and the results obtained were incomplete. 2. Transversality was a problem, expressed in the difficulty some experts had (Delphi) in evaluating the praxis of VMG with UGI. This lack of knowledge is justifiable since prior experiences did not exist and it is not a frequently evaluated practice, and because it braids three different disciplinary areas: government, city and sustainability.

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