# Reflections on the Venezuelan Transition from a Capitalist Representative to a Socialist Participatory Democracy
What Are Planners to Do?

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*Venezuela is experiencing a transitional political process in which the government and the majority of Venezuelans want to move from a capitalist representative democracy to a more socialist participatory democracy. This transition is enmeshed in complexities, contradictions, and political opposition. Reflection on the experience of accompanying neighborhood groups in local decision making in Caracas from 2002 to 2006 suggests that planning practitioners and scholars can be allies in the grassroots processes of empowerment and self-determination of local communities and advocates and active agents in the "trickling-up" of greater planning participation to upper levels of government.*

*Keywords:*     *Venezuela, Transition, Socialist participatory democracy, People's power, Councils*

The current government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, led by President Hugo Chávez, has initiated a transitional political process that is attempting to transform the inherited bureaucratic governance structure into a participatory socialist democracy. During the 40 years since 1959, from the revocation of a dictatorship to the beginning of Hugo Chávez's tenure as president in 1999, Venezuela was a representative democracy, albeit a bureaucratic state in the service of capitalist upper-class interests. The governing and economic elites' power came from the maintenance of the status quo, but their legitimacy was undermined as a large majority of Venezuelans entered the ranks of

the poor after 1983.

In the current transition, grassroots people's power exercised by local community organizations is being supported by the new national government as essential. Community organizing is not limited to the political process[1] but an essential element of the current political project, buttressed and institutionalized by two key legal instruments: the National Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela—written by a constituent assembly and voted on by Venezuelan citizens in 1999[2]—and the Local Planning Councils Law of 2002. The latter recognizes the participation of local organizations in public decision making as the "very root" of a "protagonist" participatory democracy. Chávez's regime is attempting to install a "revolutionary government" in which central state policies aim at the improvement of the conditions of the materially poor while acknowledging the importance of working upward from and with local communities.

This transition is, however, enmeshed in complexities and contradictions. This paper seeks to reflect on current planning[3] practices and to contribute to the development of a model of planning that can stimulate people's power in this transition. The need for this shifting of power from centralized governments to grassroots communities has been amply discussed in the planning literature (see, e.g., Friedmann, 1992; Flusty, 2004; DeFilippis, 2004). In this article we focus on two issues that planning scholars and professionals should address if they are concerned with improving the conditions of the materially poor and the politically disenfranchised: (1) the challenges inherent in moving from representative to participatory democracy, including longer and more cumbersome processes of decision making, changing regulations, procedures, and organizational structures, and resistance from bureaucratic and economic agents opposed to the new regime, and (2) the challenge represented by the dominance of the traditional "rational-planning" paradigm,[4] which can work against the consolidation of people's power and the political regime change sought by the government and its supporters.

This article first discusses Venezuela's transition to grassroots democracy, antecedents of public participation in the planning process, and the marriage of direct and representative democracy. Then it describes the current context set by the Venezuelan Constitution and the participatory democracy in which planning restructuring is taking shape. It goes on to present a framework for planning in a participatory

democracy based on action-research involvement in two community-organizing and planning processes in Caracas from 2002 to 2006. Finally, it discusses the shortcomings and risks of the current system of community organizing and proposes a role for planners as allies in the grass-roots processes of empowerment and self-determination of local communities and as advocates and active agents in the "trickling-up" of greater planning participation to upper levels of government. Assertions about the challenges of community organizing are based on primary research on two case studies in Caracas and, although they are not necessarily generalizable to the experience of all community organizations in Venezuela, are supported by substantial anecdotal information from other cases in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

**VENEZUELA'S TRANSITION TO GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY**

Venezuela's transition to a more inclusive and direct democracy is but one example of the rising popular resistance to globalization and neoliberalism (Irazábal, 2008; Irazábal and Foley, 2008) that is developing to different degrees and at different paces in Latin American countries, including Paraguay, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, and Cuba. Greater social and ethnoracial justice within an increasing consciousness of the need for environmental sustainability and a new understanding of democracy are seen as dependent on the abandonment of neoliberalism as a development model (Harris, 2003; Irazábal, 2008; Irazábal and Foley, 2008; Ellner, 2004). In the case of Venezuela, the popular democratic construction of what Chávez has called "twenty-first-century socialism" seeks a new form of socialism that avoids the authoritarianism and rigidity of the earlier autocratic communist regimes.[5] Indeed, one of the main achievements of the Chávez government is to give people hope that a socialist alternative is possible (Ellner, 2001; 2002; Lander, 2005; Parker, 2005; Vanden, 2003), even though the particularities of it have yet to be defined and are the subject of great political contention (Ellner, 2008). This is a particularly important achievement given the widespread pessimism of progressive political groups and intellectuals around the globe about the possibility of finding an alternative to neoliberalism and neoconservative imperialism (Harvey, 2005; Giroux, 2004; Chomsky, 2003; Fuentes, 2004; see also Salinas Figueredo, 2007, and Suárez Salazar, 2007).[6]

A major challenge in this context, however, is the integration of a socialist economy into a predominantly capitalist context. These brands

of socialism aim to adapt to living with and having economic relations with the capitalist world (see Mészáros, 1995). Chávez and other leaders in Latin America argue that if meaningful social change with regard to the enormous social inequalities in the region is to happen, economic growth will need to "be subordinated to a democratic regime based on direct popular representation in territorial and productive units" (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001, quoted in McLaren and Jaramillo, 2008: 15). Implicit in this vision is the notion that popular democracy needs to rise above the domination of top-down models of decision making in public administration. Planning is an important element to consider as an ally in this process.

Thus, a conflictive, dialectical, and nonlinear process rather than a smooth, planned transition to socialism is taking place in Venezuela (Irazábal and Foley, 2008; Ellner, 2008). Experience in other socialist countries, such as Cuba, has indicated how difficult this can be, particularly in the early years of socialist transition, because of the need to confront serious economic crises and repel both internal resistance and external aggression. For some years after the 1959 revolution, Cuba followed a traditional socialist economic planning model in which local planning was dependent on national and regional economic plans with little participation of local communities. During the 1990s, this began to change—local planning was given more autonomy, and decision making was opened up to include the opinions of local communities— although challenges remain (González Núñez, 1995; Roman, 2003: 72). Additionally, the transition to a socialist regime is not necessarily linked with greater equality or more democracy. In the example of Cuba, for instance, Fidel Castro led a regime that combined significant social benefits in the health, education, economic, and agricultural fields with domination over decision making and a ruthless policy toward the capitalist class and others identified with the earlier regime. Although the pitfalls and controversial aspects of the Cuban Revolution have been used (and abused) as propaganda against the Venezuelan process, some critical distinctive features of the process in Venezuela are that the attempts to advance a transition to a socialist economy have not fully broken with existing capitalist interests, have been carried out democratically and nonviolently, and are accompanied by efforts to shift from a representative to a more direct democracy.

**ANTECEDENTS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING IN VENEZUELA**
In the 1980s, Venezuela participated in the wave of government decentralization that swept across Latin America. The Chávez

government that came to power in 1999 did not invent the concept of public participation in urban planning; that concept had already been formally incorporated into planning legislation beginning with Ley Orgánica de Ordenación Urbanística in 1987. That legislation required that the public be informed of decisions that had been made in order to give legitimacy to the process—equivalent to the degrees of "nonparticipation" or "tokenism" in Sherry Arnstein's (1969) classical ladder of citizen participation. Other legal reforms were designed to give greater participation to local communities, but the process of decentralization and municipalization that followed stressed participation in representative rather than direct democracy. Some critics have considered these reforms part of the neoliberal agenda for Latin America, especially when they are introduced from outside or institutionalized and managed by national elites (Kohl, 2002; Vilas, 1996). Their controversial effects have been seen in the division of the capital metropolis, Caracas, into five municipalities instead of the previous two. This spatial and jurisdictional fragmentation has divided the city into distinct class and racial enclaves. While the rationale for this was facilitating management, the largely unanticipated consequence was to consolidate some of these enclaves and to widen the socioeconomic gaps among them. Some of these enclaves group political forces that have shown a willingness to use undemocratic tactics to oppose the current national regime. In effect, the coup d'état of April 11, 2002, the illegal oil-industry stoppage later that year, and the public disturbances called *guarimbas*[7] that occurred in 2003–2004 had politically destabilizing purposes and links to the newly created Chacao and Baruta municipalities (Irazábal and Foley, 2008; Lander and López-Maya, 2005; López-Maya and Lander, 2004).

At the same time, the democratization of the municipalities allowed the consolidation of popular participatory movements and governments. In the wider Latin American context, for example, it can be associated with the rise of Frente Amplio in Uruguay, the Partido dos Trabalhadores in Brazil, and Causa R in Venezuela, all popular sociopolitical movements that achieved power at different levels. Thus, although the main force for generating massive popular participation in Venezuela was the Bolivarian Revolution begun in 1998 with Chávez's first election to the presidency, some significant experiences of a more inclusive process of community participation had been initiated years earlier. The most notable were those in Caracas's Federal District during the mayoral term of Aristóbulo Istúriz (1992–1995) and in Ciudad Guayana during the first two mayoral terms of Clemente Scotto (1989–1995),[8] both mayors

being members of the Causa R party at the time.[9] There, attempts were made to overcome the elite's control of local government by encouraging popular participation (Harnecker, 2005 [1995]: 7) and creating the development of community-based decision-making (Angotti, 2001; Irazábal, 2004). But that transition is usually not easy. Representative democracy, characterized as government for the people, tends to engender passivity. Therefore, a transitional period of government with the people is usually required before reaching any substantive level of government by the people.

Furthermore, the left-leaning local governments face two main problems within national governments in the wake of the application of neoliberal formulas: the withdrawal of the central state from its redistributional functions through social spending and the bureaucratic apparatus inherited by the progressive local governments, which in Uruguay and other Latin American nations has been described as an ungoverned monster ("un monstruo que camina solo"). In Venezuela after Chávez assumed the presidency, the central government was very active in social spending throughout the nation (SISOV, 2006; Monahan, 2005),[10] but with the recent drop in oil prices sustaining the same level of social spending remains a challenge. Some critics argue that the central government's role in social spending has been exaggerated or that the results are not commensurate with the level of spending (Rodríguez, 2008; for a rebuttal, see Weisbrot, 2008). As for the second challenge, the bureaucratic "monster" rears its head and slows progress at all levels of government through corruption, mismanagement, and lack of professional capacity. Yet, the greatest effects of this monster have derived not so much from the inefficiency and large size of the bureaucratic apparatus as from sabotage by individuals within the system who are opposed to Chávez's regime (Fuentes, 2005). An editorial in an alternative newspaper speaks of functionaries "who live off the government" but "oppose any change that involves the people" and "abort, delay, manipulate [any change desired by the regime], finally hiding it in the obscurity with their accomplices" (*La Hojilla*, November 1, 2006).

Marx, in *The Civil War in France* (2000 [1871]), warned of the danger of using institutions inherited from a state that acted as a political instrument for the maintenance of working-class exploitation. Inefficient and downright counteracting bureaucracy, however, is not restricted to the capitalist state; it tends to reproduce and spread in many types of political systems without adequate democratic controls. In the context of

modernity, Anthony Giddens (1990: 12) points out that not only capitalist relations of production but also processes of "organization of human activities in the shape of bureaucracy" prevail. Therefore a democratic socialist transition requires attention to power not only over the means of production but also over the management of bureaucracy. Specifically, in Venezuela, one of the problems of promoting direct democracy is the existence of a corps of functionaries who are accustomed to acting without popular participation and accountability and therefore resist and resent the proposed changes.

## THE *MANDAT IMPÉRATIF:* THE MARRIAGE OF DIRECT AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

The transition from a representative to a direct democratic system has to face the challenging coexistence of representative and direct operational modes as it tries to move toward a balance of the two. Getting rid of all traces of representative democracy is not desirable (Fung, 2004; Fung, Gastil, and Levine, 2005). Critics of representative government point to the poverty of direct political involvement when participation is limited to electoral voting (Roman, 2003: 13). Compounding this danger, elected representatives often receive personal privileges or economic benefits that tend to distinguish their life conditions from those of the people (15). Their principal aim can then become the maintenance of their personal privileges or those of the political party with which they are affiliated. Rather than being representatives of the public, they may favor their personal or party interests (17). Opposed to these practices, Rousseau and Marx defined truly representative government as a *mandat impératif* in which delegates are directly selected by the people, instructed about their wishes, and subject to recall if their mandate is not pursued. In this view, delegates are not expected to be professional politicians; rather, they are expected to maintain their normal functions in the community they represent, thus maintaining close ties to their constituents (as described in the case of Cuba by Roman [2003: 18]). In the new Constitution of Venezuela, there is a clear intention to promote direct participation associated with people's power while maintaining representative government (República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2000: Art. 62), and elected officials are subject to periodic recall (Art. 72). This hybrid form is given expression in the laws relating to local planning and communal councils. Nevertheless, critical tensions remain between representative and direct systems.

## THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The country's model of participatory democracy is established in the

1999 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2000). A constituent assembly ensured the elaboration of a constitution that would serve as the base for the transition from a predominantly representative to a more participatory democracy while maintaining aspects of both. Participatory democracy is conceived in the context of social cooperation, solidarity, and co-responsibility (Art. 4); and the people's sovereignty is to be exercised directly (Art. 5). This direct democracy is defined more precisely in Article 62, which establishes a protagonist role for the community in the planning, implementation, and control of state intervention. It also makes the state, particularly at the local level, responsible for the creation of structures to facilitate participation. The constitution calls for the incorporation of the communities into organizations whose decisions, made in "citizen assemblies," must be respected by the elected local authorities (Art. 70).

Direct participation is particularly relevant at the municipal level, where the institution of the local planning council (Art. 182) places the balance of power in the hands of local organizations formed at the parish level (a subdivision of the municipality). Political organization at the parish level is considered vital, particularly in large municipalities where the local councils are still very distant from their communities. The organization, functions, and responsibilities of the local planning councils were determined by the Ley de Consejos de Planificación Local (República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2002), a key part of the establishment of a participatory democracy that would give the organized community a protagonist role in public decision making (FIDES, 2002: 2). Traditionally, the municipal authorities have been responsible for planning in their jurisdictions. Now local planning councils have the responsibility for developing and managing municipal plans. These councils have a majority representation of neighborhood groups and community service organizations in health, land ownership, education, etc. Authority is divided between elected representatives (the mayor, council members, and presidents of the parish councils) and those from local and neighborhood organizations. The mayor presides over the council, but local organizations have a voting majority of at least one. Local organization representatives are elected in community assemblies. In 2006, the Libertador Municipality in Caracas, for example, had 73 members, 36 elected in the normal local electoral processes and 37 who represented local organizations. From the beginning, the functioning of these councils has faced difficulties because of their large size and the fact that local representatives are not paid while the formally elected representatives are. The situation is further complicated by the wide

range of functions for which delegates are responsable, from collecting basic information and developing plans and proposals to implementing projects.

As can be appreciated, in theory this legislation transfers considerable power over decision making to the local communities, which become responsible for maintaining contact with local networks so that their interests will be taken into account and they will be informed about what is going on. In reality, however, they have not been given the necessary resources to achieve these tasks and are dependent on a "technical office" associated with the municipality. As a result, the control and oversight of decision making are still skewed in favor of professional public servants and state representatives.

Because of the frustration caused by the slow pace of the process of democratization at the municipal level and, in some cases, the delay between the financing of municipal public works and their execution, President Chávez, in one of his weekly television broadcasts, declared that communal councils should be more independent of the municipal authorities and receive direct central government financing (Ellner, 2009). He proposed the direct financing of communal councils—subdivisions of parish and local planning councils[11] — from the national budget, bypassing municipal government.[12] Although most municipal authorities talk about participatory democracy, they are often unwilling to relinquish their power over financial and managerial resources. Later, this process was formalized in the Ley de los Consejos Comunales (República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2006), which creates a virtually parallel system of local organization directly linked to the central government through the local Presidential Commission of Popular Power (Art. 20) and not, as traditionally, through the municipal authorities. It is an explicit step in the establishment of a people's power structure as a counterweight to the representative national-regional-municipal system.[13] The intention is to foster people's power over public policy making and implementation and generate projects that seek to satisfy communities' needs and aspirations (Art. 2). A promotional committee, named in a citizens' assembly, is responsible for the geographical delimitation of the communal councils. Councils should contain between 200 and 400 families in urban areas and upward of 20 families in rural areas. All persons over 15 years old are considered potential voters (in the election of representatives) or representatives. Once legally formed, these councils can obtain up to 30,000 bolivares (almost US$14,000) to finance small productive or service projects in

the community (Rodríguez and Lerner, 2007). Less than a year after the law was passed (Lerner, 2007: 3), over 16,000 councils had already formed throughout the country. 12,000 of them had received funding for community projects—$1 billion total, out of a national budget of $53 billion. The councils had established nearly 300 communal banks, which have received $70 million for micro-loans. The government plans to transfer another $4 billion in 2007. Thanks to these funds, the councils have implemented thousands of community projects, such as street pavings, sports fields, medical centers, and sewage and water systems.

**THE PLANNING CONTEXT**
The institutional initiatives just described are a reflection of the Venezuelan Constitution, in which there is an explicit reference to "participatory, democratic, and strategic planning with open consultation" (Art. 299) as the preferred approach. These normative intents, however, do not happen in a planning vacuum. In effect, two types of planning can be identified as influential in Venezuela in recent decades. The first is closely related to national/ regional economic planning and is influenced by the Comisión Económica para América Latina (Economic Commision for Latin America—CEPAL), founded in 1948 (see Matus, 1978; 1984). In turn, CEPAL influenced scholars of the Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo (Center for Development Studies— CENDES), affiliated with the Central University of Venezuela. Planning theories of this type have been influential in the current government, especially under Jorge Giordani, appointed planning and development minister for 1999–2002 and several times thereafter. This approach is clearly linked to economic development planning with spatial strategies that aim, in the long term, for a more balanced distribution of activities and population in the national territory. An effort has been made to involve local (mainly institutional or political) actors, but planning is still dominated by a top-down approach from the central government. Its economic orientation and technical nature and its theoretical grounding create difficulties of communication with people engaged in local urban planning. The majority of these people are not formally trained as planners, and they regularly have well-defined spatial concerns with concrete problems in their local contexts and the participation of local actors.

The second type of planning is associated with Etzioni's (1967: 385) "mixed- scanning" approach, which combines
   (a) high-order, fundamental policy-making processes which set basic directions and (b) incremental ones which prepare for fundamental decisions and work them out after they have been

> reached. . . . The flexibility of the different scanning levels makes mixed-scanning a useful strategy for decision-making in environments of varying stability and by actors with varying control and consensus-building capacities.

This approach, which is considered an important influence on the "structural plans" introduced in the UK in 1968 (Cross and Bristow, 1983: 237; Healey, 1983: 56), influenced the planning system introduced in Venezuela in 1987. Two levels of planning were established—one more general and supposedly strategic and the other more local and detailed. There were difficulties in separating the responsibilities for the two levels, and both tended to produce general land-use plans with little flexibility.

These procedural models, inherited from the previous regime of representative democracy, continue to be applied in Venezuela. While some planning processes under these models may prove adaptable to the new requirements of participatory democracy, others may simply help reproduce the expert-driven processes and inequitable outcomes that the new democratic socialist regime seeks to avoid. In effect, a fundamental goal of the current government is to treat people's participation as an integral part of governance. From the outset, planning in the current Venezuelan context is conceived as enmeshed in the processes of grassroots political organization and mobilization that are the very basis of participatory democracy. However, this is not easy to implement and may sometimes be counterproductive. Many observers (e.g., Fung, 2004) argue that grassroots organizations ought to be outside the state so as to provide a mechanism of checks and balances.

Currently, there is some confusion in Venezuela regarding the system of urban planning despite the introduction in 2005 of a new national planning law, which tends to reproduce the previous vertical system and does not fully incorporate community initiatives derived from the local planning, parish, and communal councils. Within this ambiguous planning climate, the "strategic choice" approach of Friend and Hickling (2002 [1997]), which proposes practical ways of approaching daunting problems, has become popular at various levels of decision making. The approach was endorsed in a 2004 television talk to the entire country by President Chávez, who said that "all public servants are expected to work with it."[14]

**THE ROLE OF PLANNERS IN A SOCIALIST PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

At the current political crossroads in Venezuela, the clear intention of the revolutionary government is to foster grassroots democracy. This is a great opportunity for progressive planners, but there are constant difficulties— inequitable conditions of communication, inequitable rewards for participants, professionals' clings to expertise, ambiguities of the planning system, instability of planning networks, and deficiencies in capacity and management, to name a few.[15] Despite these challenges, planners who sympathize with the progressive aims of the Chávez government may be able to seize the unprecedented opportunities made available to confront the obstacles and promote grassroots participation.

In national/regional strategic planning, the planner's role is still seen by bureaucrats and professionals as technical, often with the argument that major decisions are vital to national interests and cannot be left open to discussion. Obviously, critical areas such as national defense could be seen in this light, but there are others, for example related to the use of natural resources or community development strategies, that would benefit from more participatory democracy. Nevertheless, there is a tendency on the part of many public administrators and practitioners to underestimate the capacity of community groups to contribute to complex issues and to consider participation a risk to progress (Irazábal, 2005; Irazábal and Eggebraten, 2006). Although the urgency to respond to critical needs is real, the rationales offered for circumventing participation demonstrate the difficulty of overcoming the notion that only the educated elite is prepared to run the affairs of the state and only planners are capable of planning.

Matters become even more complicated when we realize that many professionals involved in planning in Venezuela do not support the political transition to an inclusive grassroots and socialist democracy advocated by Chávez's regime. In fact, because the majority of Venezuelans are politically divided along the lines of class (Irazábal and Foley, 2008; Ellner, 2008) and a large number of planners come from the socioeconomic elite or identify with its values and fears (Foglesong, 1986; Harvey, 1985), many of them oppose the current regime. However, under the justification of technical value-neutrality, professionals who oppose the government—some in nondemocratic ways, as demonstrated in their supporting of the 2002 coup d'état—still perform professional services for the current government. This condition presents ethical dilemmas much like those discussed by Ananya Roy (2005: 152) when she argues that "the provision and distribution of infrastructure is not a technical issue but rather a political process." Roy

advocates a new epistemology for planning, one that "disrupts models of expertise, making it possible to generate knowledge about upgrading and infrastructure from a different set of experts: the residents." Although some planners in Venezuela have indeed embraced the spirit of this new planning epistemology, not all of them have made the leap from knowledge to action (Friedmann, 1987). In addition, many practitioners still cling—consciously or unconsciously—to the idea that expertise is their exclusive possession and therefore do not value the knowledge of residents, their right to self-determination, or even the larger socialist political project currently in play. This stance has often led to resistance and active opposition to processes of planning by and with the people.

Planning positions that problematize the notion of technical value-neutrality suggest different orientations depending on the contextual circumstances and personal political and ethical beliefs of planners. There are approaches, such as the already mentioned strategic-choice, that make participation of local actors intrinsic to planning and stimulate learning by everyone involved (Forester, 1999; Innes, 2004; Booher and Innes, 2002; Friedmann, 1987; 1992). Although these approaches are compatible with participatory democracy, they do not seem to recognize the importance of the lasting organization of local groups that seek to stimulate more substantial change. There is a risk that only those who are contingently involved in the specific decision-making processes will benefit, and these processes may be short-lived if there is a high turnover of participants (Masters, 1995: 6). There is no doubt that such approaches could open up spaces in which alternative visions could be discussed, but certain critics consider that, far from being emancipatory, they may promote more effective top-down forms of organizational control (Cassell and Johnson, 2006: 785). Furthermore, these approaches tend to privelege the protagonist role of the planner as facilitator. The progressive planner, as described by Forester (1989), is a model that may open the possibility of a more appropriate role for planners in the Venezuelan context and others in which the objective is to expand participatory democracy. According to Forester, a progressive planner is one who works on the basis of Habermas's "universal pragmatic standards of speech"— clarity, legitimacy, truth, and sincerity—and seeks to democratize planning processes by expanding the sphere in which undistorted and inclusive communication takes place. However, this model also maintains the planner at its center. It would seem especially effective for functionaries who work for government institutions and are confronted with practices that do not promote democratic participation or tend to rely on the planning types previously questioned.

Finally, the model of the radical planner described by Friedmann (1987; 1992) proposes that planners be protagonists in the process of societal transformation (Friedmann, 1987: 325; see also Beard, 2003; 2002; Friedmann, 1992; Holston, 1998; Sandercock, 1998a; 1998b; Sandercock and Forsyth, 1992). The radical role, however, is not possible within the state bureaucracy because, as Friedmann (1987: 389) says, planning has been integrated into the processes of political pacification that have been exercised by the bourgeois state. Therefore it is not enough to be aware of possible distortions or structures of elitist power (Irazábal, 2009); it is also necessary to unmask the ideological prejudices of existing practice (Roy, 2001; 2005; Harvey, 1985; Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). This is possible only if planners heed Friedmann and Weaver's (1979: 4) warning that they "cannot engage in planning without themselves becoming corrupted by power." Here, we invoke again the new planning epistemology proposed by Roy, who argues that planners must learn to work with the increasingly frequent exceptions to the order of "formal" urbanization. She further suggests that this epistemology is useful not only in the context of developing nations, but in any context in which planners are concerned with redistributive justice (Roy, 2005: 147).

In the current conjuncture in Venezuela, it is also necessary to call attention to the persistent warnings against putting too much confidence in the power of consensus (Irazábal, 2009; Foley and Lauria, 2000; Watson, 2006; Angotti, 2008). This confidence, influenced by a Habermasian universalism, tends to undervalue the fundamental differences in worldviews that are implicit in comfortable European-centered or First World planning perspectives (Mészáros, 1989). As a result, it may obscure or even derail the development of social movements challenging hegemonic values (Roy, 2001; 2005; Watson, 2006; Young, 1990; 1997; 2000; Sandercock, 1998a; 1998b). Planners cannot assume that they are protected from contributing to this pitfall by their progressive values; as Healey (1997: 93) warns, they have to be constantly aware of the "deep structures of [elitist] power embedded in [their] ways of thinking and reasoning."

The alternative, then, is to associate with the social movements, which seek to seize political spaces in which they can develop a certain autonomy that improves their communities' lives and economic well-being. Friedmann (1987) sees the seed of state transformation in small-scale initiatives, frequently around family groups. In his view, this transformation does not require either the "capture" of the state or the

"breaking down" of capitalism.

These discourses are, he says, the empty diatribes of another century (1987: 342). Without denying the role of the state (Friedmann, 1992: 7), he sees the local community as the dynamo of alternative development (DeFilippis, 2004; Flusty, 2004)—a means for the liberation of the family from market dependency through cooperative development, agriculture, increase in self-sufficiency, and effective control of decision-making processes. We can draw parallels here with the aims of the present Venezuelan government. Additionally, Chávez in his speeches has increasingly stressed that the capitalist market cannot resolve the country's problems. Instead, he is actively working on building alternative market relations (in Venezuela, within Latin America, and with other parts of the world) consisting of exchanges of goods, services, and technologies among developing communities and countries based on a sense of solidarity (an arrangement that even includes some sectors of the developed world, such as poor enclaves in the United States).[16]

Friedmann (1987: 355) sees a specific role for planners as "part of the alternative, not as 'consultants for hire' but as committed partisans." This is akin to the model of "advocacy planning" popularized by Paul Davidoff (1965; Harwood, 2003). This role is not easy to perform, however. Friedmann suggests that the planner should maintain a critical distance—not so distant as to create alienation from the community and not so involved as to lose the capacity for independent reasoning. This is the same dilemma as the problem of "going native" in qualitative research and one that has caused significant controversy in critical emancipatory action research (Masters, 1995) and feminist participatory action research (Fine and Torre, 2006). Supporting the community without being part of it presents distinct challenges and risks. In extreme situations, when the community is confronting violent state repression, for instance, where will the committed partisans be, and to what avail?[17] Gramsci's (1967: 24) criticism of intellectuals who consider themselves independent of the dominant class is pertinent here. He doubted that intellectuals formed as a function of the needs of capitalist production could align themselves with social forces that directly or indirectly questioned that system and argued that "organic intellectuals" emerging from their own communities were needed. Even though planners may subscribe to the idea of exchanging types of knowledge with community members, they should be mindful of risk of ultimately reproducing the same procedural and outcome-driven schemes of traditional professional

planning, which may not be those best suited to the conditions and needs of a given community.

Despite all the challenges, however, radical planning—more recently theorized as "insurgent planning" as it confronts the tests produced by global neoliberal capitalism (Miraftab, 2006; 2009; Sandercock, 1998a; 1998b; Friedmann, 2002; Miraftab and Wills, 2005)—seems particularly suitable for the current situation in Venezuela. Since its precepts are supported by the national constitution and government policies, it could conceivably be accommodated within governance dynamics that facilitate people's direct participation. This is not to say that the other approaches discussed here do not have their benefits. Strategic choice, with its specific, pragmatic methods, and progressive planning, with its institutional planners working within the system, should be combined with insurgent planning as needed in the creative development of models that can respond to particular problems and processes. Whoever the actors, Miraftab (2009: 44) says, "what they do is identifiable as insurgent planning if it is purposeful actions that aim to disrupt domineering relationships of oppressors to the oppressed, and to destabilize such a status quo through consciousness of the past and imagination of an alternative future." What is unprecedented in Venezuela and rare in the world is that the national government wants to support grassroots planning insurgencies against oppression. The practices that unfold, however, are replete with procedural and ideological challenges. Below we discuss how these considerations play out in two concrete planning cases.

**REFLECTIONS FROM THE TRENCHES: ACADEMIC INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY ACTIVISM**
This section discusses two experiences of direct involvement by one of the authors and other academics in community activism in Caracas. The first refers to involvement in strengthening popular movements in their efforts to improve their local living conditions in the context of support for/from the current Venezuelan Constitution and political regime. The second involves participation in a local community organizational effort in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to communities by the constitution and subsequent legislation regulating community involvement in local planning activities.

**POPULAR EDUCATION AT THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF VENEZUELA**
In the first case, a group of professors from different disciplines (architects, planners, historians, biologists, and chemists) from the

Central University of Venezuela sustained a dialogue with a number of community representatives during three semesters in 2002–2004 about these leaders' experiences in community organizing in relation to government decision makers. The academics engaged in this dialogue in the spirit of Donald Schön's *Reflective Practitioner* (1983; 1987; 1991), Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998), bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) and *Teaching Community* (2003), and action research (González et al., 2007). We were open-minded to the idea of learning in partnership with the community and contributing to community development and empowerment.

At the initiative of the university's School of Modern Languages, we got together to structure a course that would have practical use for community activists. The course was offered free of charge and was open to all, irrespective of formal educational level. Although there were a number of university graduates and schoolteachers among the participants, most of those involved lived in low-income, self-built barrios or public housing projects. The initiative was an attempt to validate, reflect on, and learn from the experience of local activists from various communities and facilitate networking opportunities. It took place before the consolidation of the local planning councils in the country, but was guided by the desire to build upon the political project defined in the new national constitution. It was a difficult period in the country, following the April 2002 coup d'état and the 2002–2003 oil industry stoppage, and marked by the feverish communal activities that accompanied the start of the social missions led by the government, particularly Robinson (the literacy campaign), Barrio Adentro (primary health care in informalsettlements), and Mercal (popular markets of basic food products at subsidized prices). The ability of the participants to attend class sessions was affected by these events in that many were quickly absorbed into these programs and those that followed. As a result, the number of participants fell by more than half to a final group of 16.

The experience started with a formal course in project evaluation and planning aimed at obtaining financing from government agencies and a course in the ideological roots of the Bolivarian Revolution (the philosophies of Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, and Ezequiel Zamora) that attempted to articulate popular knowledge and that obtained through mass-circulation journals with the more formal analysis of academic essays and historical documents. In both courses formal and prestructured knowledge and pedagogic strategies proved not very

useful because they were not sensitive to the experiences of the group and the sophistication of individual participants, who had already learned very valuable lessons though their varied experiences of community work. Less formally organized encounters proved more conducive to learning in allowing exchanges about and reflections on lived experiences.

At the end of each semester, the groups evaluated their performance and decided on the two courses in which they would like to participate in the following semester. Each semester there was one course directly relevant to planning issues and another on contextual elements (e.g., the constitution and the government missions). In the planning course we tried to clarify through participants' experiences the differences between the stages of the planning processes in which they had already been involved. It became clear that linear processes were not appropriate (something that planners usually acknowledge but tend to reproduce) because some communities already had their priorities established or had determined what projects they considered essential. It made no sense to pretend that we were faced with a clean slate. We tried to associate the planning processes with issues related to the organization of the communities, convinced that the most important result was not achieving specific plan objectives but strengthening local community organizations and guaranteeing their permanence—building and sustaining social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995; Booher and Innes, 2002) and contributing to community-driven development (Dasgupta and Beard, 2007; Beard and Dasgupta, 2006).

Participants considered the experience productive. The contact with the university had given them confidence to defend their positions in negotiations with other institutional actors, and meeting other community activists had given them "network power"—"power that grows as it is shared and is not a zero-sum game" (Innes, 2004: 13; Irazábal, 2009). Power grew as players built on their interdependencies (Booher and Innes, 2002). To provide continuity to the experience, we decided to establish discussion forums in the neighborhoods, thus acknowledging their lived place, validating their experience, and incorporating more local people into the dialogue.

The establishment of networks, the empowerment of the participants, and the learning we experienced were the most positive results of the project. We noted, however, that there was a tendency for community leaders to be absorbed by government institutions, including the missions, municipal bureaucratic positions, and political party activity.

Co-opted by the state, some ceased to act as representatives of their communities (Havassy and Yanay, 1990). At the same time, academic demands made it challenging for the professors to reach out and achieve continuity. As a result, two years after the start of this experience our communication with participants had virtually ceased. These challenges reveal the difficulties of becoming "reflective practitioners" (Schön, 1983)—individuals striving to strike a balance between their commitment to knowledge and action.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN SAN PEDRO PARISH
The second experience took place in San Pedro Parish in Caracas, adjacent to the Central University of Venezuela, in the period 2002–2006. This parish has a large population of lower-middle-class people who depend on state-financed services. A community/university network was initiated by a group of professionals in the university's School of Architecture and Urbanism in 2003, and other professors joined in 2004. The organization of local planning councils was a central part of the experience. Parallel to the institutional processes, a constant effort was made to document all the experiences of the community with the aim of developing an ongoing "diagnosis" of the parish that included basic information on the community and on the projects that the members brought to the working group.

The activity proved to be a rich and varied experience. Weekly meetings with a core group of local activists at the School of Architecture and Urbanism were often joined by others depending on the type of project or problem (e.g., homelessness, street vending, security in public spaces) being discussed, including university students working with the community and people from other communities. We also participated with the community in local assemblies, social events, and neighborhood meetings involving state actors. The community was able to identify its principal problems, determine priorities for intervention, and present its ideas to the relevant authorities. The community/university network offered assistance to community actors in the formal expression of these ideas, such as the elaboration of maps and written documents, and multimedia PowerPoint presentations were produced to facilitate sharing of the proposals.

The local activists often displayed a broader understanding of problems and project proposals than the government institutions involved, especially at the municipal level. One example was related to the problem of security. The activists understood that it was very difficult to intervene directly in the organization of the police forces with

responsibilities in the parish. They did, however, feel that street lighting, tree pruning, and maintenance of public spaces could have a positive impact on public safety. The authorities tended to respond to initiatives in this regard with formal and isolated interventions such as the replacement of the lighting fixtures. The activists, however, knew that this approach did little to resolve the problem. They recognized that the challenges of homelessness, poor maintenance of public spaces and vegetation, street vending, inadequate lighting, and lack of formal police patrols required multifaceted intervention. Additionally, they understood the importance of their own role, for instance, in generating cultural activities in open spaces, exercising visual control from the adjacent buildings, and involving local business owners in stimulating activities in the surrounding spaces (e.g., street-side cafes and controlled street vending). In sum, community members offered planners and functionaries valuable information and lessons.

Another example is related to the homeless. In the context of the constitution's call for social solidarity (Art. 2), the traditional repressive measures taken against street people were considered inappropriate by community members. Instead, some local community actors took the initiative of seeking ways to improve life conditions for these people. In collaboration with a group of psychology students and homeless people, they developed a project offering various services to street people. What we want to highlight here is not so much the content of this project as the fact that the initiative (underpinned and inspired by the philosophy of the new constitution and the regime) emerged from the community and the inclusion of homeless people. While the community group was working on this project, however, a new government mission called Negra Hipólita (the name of Simón Bolívar's childhood caregiver) was introduced by the government to confront this same problem at the national and city levels. Although the achievements of this mission have been significant,[18] it robbed local initiatives such as the one in San Pedro Parish of institutional and financial resources.

## SOME RISKS OF THE CURRENT STRUCTURE FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Just as centralized, government-led missions can compete with and ultimately dampen local initiatives, the creation of local community organizations can stymie emergent social movement organizations with novel approaches to organizing or forms of problem-solving at the local level. The formation of local planning councils is illustrative of the problem—along with, perhaps, the benefits—of the top-down imposition of organizational forms. These councils were intended to function as a

counterweight to municipal control of local decision making. Despite the fact that noninstitutional actors have the majority of the votes on these councils, in the case of the Libertador Municipality in Caracas—to which San Pedro Parish belongs— the mayor maintained control over decision making and simply bypassed the council. The San Pedro council representative felt pressured into agreeing to decisions in which he had not had the opportunity to participate. To complicate things further, his work and that of other participants was unpaid while the institutionally elected members, such as the mayor, received salaries.

The issue of compensation for participation extended beyond this inequity. Community participants who helped construct public works were unpaid while contractors were paid for equivalent work. Furthermore, significant time commitments were expected of participants in councils, and no reduction of laborers' time has yet been provided in compensation.[19] On the contrary, some employers opposed to Chávez either kept their employees at work extra time to prevent them from participating in government-sponsored initiatives or explicitly requested them not to do so.

In recognition of the limitations of the local planning council, especially in the larger cities, communal councils were formed to permit the direct financing by the national government of local actions. Many institutional actors have been involved in this process. This involvement is sometimes confusing to local groups, which must decide on the spatial delimitation of the parish, their own priorities, and ways of designating or electing their representatives. The intervention of institutional actors, particularly from the government, could be considered as an effort to maintain influence over the communal councils, but there is no doubt that at this stage some guidance is essential. Additionally, it can be argued that a certain degree of confusion in the process is inevitable. What is clear is that, despite the confusion, these innovations have encouraged communities to participate in the process of self-organization and planning.

In San Pedro Parish, local activists were often critical of the imposition of representatives of the governing political parties on local organizations and the co-optation of activists by state institutions. We could interpret some of these problems as frictions that occur between the structures created by representative democracy, with its predominantly individualistic ethic (dominant for the 40 years of the previous regime in Venezuela), and the emerging more direct democracy, with its attempt to promote solidarity and consolidation of

communities' power. The frequent changes in legislation and the differing interpretations of it by multiple agents (including within the university) reflect a tension between the idea that legislation ought to lead processes and the idea that it ought to respond to the initiatives of organized groups. A similar conflict is that between a view of the communal councils as the base of a political pyramid, with the municipal, state, and national levels of government on top, and the belief that the councils should completely replace city and state governments.

Because communal councils send their project proposals directly to the Presidential Commission of Popular Power, critics of the government see the bypassing of the intermediate levels of government as a risky return to centralization and "presidentialism." They also argue that while some councils suppress dissent and are therefore assumed to be pro-Chávez, councils led by the opposition usually have a harder time getting funding (Martín, 2007). Lastly, if legislation is complied with and the vote of the majority in councils is respected, some decisions and policies that are not in the public interest (e.g., traditional "not in my back yard" decisions such as preventing the construction of working-class housing in affluent neighborhoods) may be implemented, reproducing the persistent dilemma between democracy and equity in urban planning processes.

Despite these limitations, in the case of San Pedro Parish, local activists maintained their enthusiasm and were optimistic regarding the possibility of formal consolidation of their communal councils in the short term. At the national level, the communal council project has generated a great deal of enthusiasm and participation because it is perceived as opening an alternative channel of communication with and assistance from the government that is less dependent on the municipal authorities or political parties, which are often viewed in a negative light. Many communities also appreciate the fact that communal councils open a direct conduit to President Chávez, who maintains constant contact with grassroot groups throughout the country. Notwithstanding the danger of overestimating the figure of the president-leader in this process of political transition, many supporters of the government feel that their direct access to and support from Chávez can help them bypass bureaucratic stalling and possible sabotage and in the process contribute to community empowerment.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**
Two main themes emerge from this discussion of the ongoing Venezuelan political transition. The first is the difficulty of transferring

power to the people even within a national political regime that discursively identifies with grassroots participation. There are many challenges inherent in a political transition that has adopted the bureaucratic state apparatus of a previous regime and experiences the tensions derived from the parallel functioning of representative and direct institutions—including longer and more cumbersome processes of decision making, lack of procedural and factual certainties, and changing regulations and organizational structures as the system moves from representative to more direct democracy. Additionally, while direct democracy may easily function at the local level, it is much more challenging to implement it at other levels of decision making.

Similar challenges are inevitable in planning. Our experience indicates that, in this period of transition, planning decisions remain mostly hierarchical. Furthermore, national and regional planning tends to be dominated by technical approaches, whereas local participatory planning tends to be more pragmatic and problem-oriented. In this context, there is a need to unravel what happens when the two systems meet and devise ways to achieve greater citizen participation at the national and regional levels. This calls for a delicate balance between preventing local processes from negating constructive input from upper levels of government and protecting them from overbearing control. Unequal power relations among planning stakeholders (see Foucault, 1977 [1972]; Forester, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 1998) require local groups to be wary of the usurpation of their power by the municipal authorities or the national political parties in a situation in which there is still ambiguity regarding how the new planning structure ought to function.

In these circumstances, there is great need for planners willing to help develop and expand alliances with locally organized people's power. Most professional planners in Venezuela have been trained in the rational paradigm, and many operate under the assumptions that planning processes can be controlled and predetermined, that planners should lead and coordinate decision-making processes, and that they should be given time for thorough evaluation of proposals before recommending a course of action. As in other contexts, they are often afraid of taking risks, experimenting, or taking popular reasoning into account (Carp, 2004; Sandercock, 2005; 2006). Facing these challenges, planners have to be constantly aware of their entrenched structures of power that perpetuate hegemonic ways of thinking and reasoning (Healey, 1997: 93; Harvey, 1985; Kaza, 2006) and try to eliminate the obstacles to the consolidation of people's power.

Academic planners sympathetic to this call can ally themselves with communities in their search for empowerment and self-determination. It is possible to become organic intellectuals. While ideally these intellectuals come from and remain with the working class, they can also be scholars with strong roots in their communities, who work to maintain links with local issues and struggles and use their position to help those communities to develop self-inspired, organic consciousness. Beyond this, there are opportunities for planners to work empathetically in communities that are not their own. To do so they will need experience of and openness to various approaches so that, instead of imposing a preferred method, they can seek the one that seems most appropriate for the particular community. They will also need empathy, sensitivity, respect for the opinions of others, affection, enthusiasm, reflexivity, and tolerance (Freire, 1972; hooks, 2003). This proposal is reminiscent of Denzin and Lincoln's (1994: 2) idea of the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur, a person capable of producing "a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provides solutions to a problem in concrete situations . . . and takes new forms as different tools, methods and techniques are added to the puzzle." These radical planners will draw their tools from "what is available in the context" and will be capable of "performing a large range of diverse tasks" and "knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms . . . that can be brought to any particular problem." They will sometimes need to support community decisions even in the face of uncertainty, since an opportunity can easily be lost and and not acting may hinder progress in the transition toward a more equitable and participatory democracy. In a transitional period like that of today, with the process threatened by domestic and international opposition (Clement, 2005; Sharma, Tracy, and Kumar, 2004; Zagorski, 2003), conservatism or dogmatism on the part of planning practitioners and scholars can work against the consolidation of people's power.

We support Miraftab's (2009: 33) call for an insurgent planning rooted in the particularities of the so-called global South, one that promotes practices that are "counter-hegemonic in that they destabilize the normalized order of things; [that] transgress time and place by locating historical memory and transnational consciousness at the heart of their practices [and] are imaginative in promoting the concept of a different world as . . . both possible and necessary." The development of the practical and theoretical implications of radical planning on the basis of reflections on experiences from the global South will contribute to a "decolonization of planning theory" (Miraftab, 2009: 32) by "questioning the assumption that every plan and policy must insist on

modernization," with the Western city as an object of desire (45; Perera, 1999; Irazábal, 2004). The case of Venezuela is particularly valuable for this exploration because grassroots planning challenges to neoliberal capitalism are supported from above. The Venezuelan experience can therefore provide both hope and inspiration and cautionary lessons to community members, planning scholars and practitioners, and government officials throughout the continent and beyond.

**NOTES**

1. In the 1980s, many neighborhood associations were created in Venezuela, although most Venezuelans did not participate in them. These associations made plans and presented proposals to the government but had neither binding powers nor public funding. Middle- and upper-income neighborhood associations organized themselves in federations such as the Federación de Asociaciones de Comunidades Urbanas and the Escuela de Vecinos in Caracas, but the lower-income associations were excluded. The latter mainly engaged in self-help projects and confrontational politics with the government.

2. It is usual to date the Constitution to 1999, the year it was finished by the National Assembly and passed by the voters, but it was officially published in *Gaceta* in 2000.

3. "Planning" is defined here as the creation of strategies for the betterment of places and communities through social, community, and economic development, land use, housing, urban design and preservation, mobility, and environmental planning. Planning can take place at different scales, from the local to the global. At the core of planning is interest in furthering the public good and creating a more equitable future for all. In the context of Venezuelan communal councils, the specified areas of work include health, education, land use, housing, habitat, social protection and equality, popular economy, culture, integral safety, communication and information, recreation and sports, food security, water, energy and gas, and services.

4. Rational planning follows a technocratic, top-down, and supposedly value-neutral decision-making model in which "expert" planners participate. It aims to operate scientifically, attempting to gather all the relevant information, perform all the relevant analyses, develop all the potential solutions to a problem, and exhaustively evaluate their consequences before making a decision. In a changing world where planning is political and uncertainty and unpredictability abound, this mode of planning is neither economically nor politically feasible (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1996), yet it is traditionally

embraced in many parts of the world. However, the experiences in Venezuela reflected upon in this article further validates the notion that "[r]edressing the shortcomings of the traditional approach does not entail the discarding of the technocratic approach it espouses, but the acknowledgment that this situated knowledge is one of many socially constructed perspectives" (Irazábal, 2009: 130). Therefore planners' knowledge and interests need to be acknowledged and counterbalanced by those of other stakeholders.

5. We distinguish here the authoritarian past communist regimes of countries such as the USSR, China, and Cambodia from current socialist-oriented nations like the Scandinavian countries and from socialist-type practices such as the national health care system in Canada and Spain.

6. A renewed optimism is cautiously arising given the structural crisis made manifest by the world financial crisis in 2008.

7. The insurrectional strategies called guarimbas were employed in Caracas and some other Venezuelan cities. Their aim was to disrupt public order so as to provoke repressive military intervention, delegitimize the government, and encourage international action. The main strategy was to barricade major streets and freeways. In extreme forms, guarimba tactics included burning tires and trash in public streets, using homemade explosives and weapons such as Molotov cocktails, and most important, the para-policing and support of leaders, elected officials, and private media of the political opposition. After a few incidents, calls for massive par-ticipation in guarimbas failed. The approach underestimated both the support for Chávez and the democratic culture of many Venezuelans, including many from the opposition. Significantly, also, the guarimbas were extremely unpopular because they infringed on the free movement of everyone in the city, particularly those in middle- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods (García-Guadilla, 2005).

8. Scotto was elected mayor of Ciudad Guayana for the third time in 2004.

9. Before Chávez assumed the presidency, Causa R had split into two groups, one including the future minister of education and sports, Aristóbulo Istúriz, and the mayor of Ciudad Guayana (Municipio Caroní), Clemente Scotto, supporting Chávez; and the other opposing him and even participating in the coup d'état of 2002.

10. Social spending in Venezuela (including social security) in 1990 amounted to 172,271.3 million bolívares, 29.9 percent of public spending and 7.8 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), whereas in 2005 it was 38,781,871.5 million bolívares, 44.9 percent of public spending and 13.2 percent of GDP (SISOV, 2006). The

government's proposed 2006 budget earmarked 41 percent of total expenditures or US$16.6 billion (£9.4 billion) for social programs. Both Anna Lucia d'Emilio, the director of the United Nations Children's Fund in Venezuela, and Ramón Mayorga, the representative of the Inter-American Development Bank, considered the country's social programs the largest and most comprehensive in Latin America (Monahan, 2005). It is fair to acknowledge here that in the intense political war between representative officials (governors and mayors) supporting and opposing Chávez's regime, the state and municipalities whose governors and mayors have been politically opposed to the regime have had difficulty receiving their fair share of federal revenue.

11. Administratively, the communal councils are represented in the parish councils, which in turn have representation in the local planning councils. In practice, these three organizations have varying levels of consolidation and interaction.

12. According to the law, communal councils were meant to remain dependent on the municipal authorities. This disposition was subsequently revoked by the 2006 law Ley de los Consejos Comunales.

13. For Ellner (2008) this corresponds to a "hard-line" Chavista strategy of creating parallel structures to replace old ones as opposed to the "soft-line" strategy of working with the old structures.

14. The book was translated from English into Spanish by the Venezuelan Planning Institute in 2002 and became popular among planners in Venezuela.

15. Many of these conditions have been more broadly identified as challenges to communicative planning (see Irazábal, 2009).

16. Several national cooperatives and endogenous communities have been created that are practicing socialist models of grassroots economic development. The national government promotes foreign exchanges of preferentially priced Venezuelan oil for Cuban medical services in low-income areas under the mission called Barrio Adentro. Raising significant controversy in the United States, the Venezuelan government has also delivered help in the form of preferentially priced Venezuelan oil derivatives to poor and minority communities on the nation's East Coast and in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. For commentary on a Venezuelan-UK exchange of oil for planning consulting, see Massey (2007).

17. For example, in the reaction to the coup d'état of April 2002, when the low-income supporters of Chávez's government directly confronted the city police force in the streets, the majority of the middle-class supporters of Chávez's government remained at home,

fearful of repression by the coup executors.

18. According to government accounts, the mission has 43 centers. In the first six months of 2008, more than 2,600 people received services, along with 198 people who were reinserted after rehabilitation (Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, 2008).

19. A proposal for a reduction of the workday was included in a constitutional reform that was narrowly rejected (by less than 2 percent of the votes) in December 2007.

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