



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Transformative Participation in Venezuela:  
Communal Councils and the Construction of a New Society?**

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## List of Acronyms

CBRV	Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
CLPP	Consejos Locales para la Planificación Pública
CNPPP	National Presidential Commission for the Popular Power
ESC	Eastern Side of Caracas
FECS	Fundacion-Escuela de Gerencia Social
FUNDACOMUNAL	Fundacion para la promocion del poder comunal
MINPADES	Ministry of Participation and Development
PCP	Partipatory Community Plan
PSUV	United Socialist Party of Venezuela
SAFONACC	Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales
WSC	Western Side of Caracas

## **Abstract**

Communal Councils in Venezuela are the last experiment of participatory democracy that the government has created in order to achieve the promised transformation of the revolutionary process started in 1998. Throughout the country thousands of these self-governing units at community level have been formed with the goal of addressing the people's most urgent needs. The creation of a new political elite under President Hugo Chavez Frias, who has been ruling the country since 1998, has created serious social cleavages which have been conducive of high levels of political confrontation. The success of the model of communal councils in the communities depends in part on the maturity of the government to isolate this experiment of popular participation from the political antagonisms lived in the country. This research has explored in the field the reality of this situation and how promising these councils are in the task of achieving a true transformative participation.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

The more participatory a process of development is, the more successful it should be. In Venezuela this thesis is under stress by elements which are affecting the implementation of a model of participatory democracy via communal councils. Social transformation through participation is supposed to be the way to go for many nations, however different contexts prove that this is not an easy task.

## **Keywords**

Venezuela, Communal Councils, Hugo Chavez, Transformative Participation, Popular Power, Invited Spaces.

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It has been a very long way since I told my supervisor Kees Biekart about my research topic and he answered to me: “I guess you are planning to go to Venezuela to do fieldwork about the communal councils.” I was muted, I never thought of going to my neighboring country to do research, especially from the Netherlands; nevertheless, the idea was fascinating and became one of my greatest life experiences. A wonderful country, with wonderful people, I enjoyed every single moment of my fieldwork in the chaotic and crazy Caracas. I would like to thanks to Kees, my supervisor, for encouraging me to cross the boundaries of my knowledge and dare to ask for more. To Joop for putting things in perspective, to the FECS in Caracas, without their support it would have been impossible to find my way through that amazing city. To my team of friends there: Alexandra, Cristobal, Enrique, Celime, Guillo, La flaca, Lesly, Marcos, and every person who helped me out in this task. To my friend Dora for being my older sister during my fieldwork. To my friends at ISS: Diana, Ana, Lacey, Dianita, Caro, Elona, Amrita, and the whole G&D gang, for being so supportive during all this process. Last but not less, to my parents...I am here because of them, and to my tingle bell sister for making me laugh all the time.

## **Chapter 1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Definition of the Problem**

It is believed that the closer democracy is to its people, the better they will be equipped to contribute in the policy-making process and the design of solutions to cover their basic needs. It is believed that by opening new spaces of participation and giving visibility to those who have never been visible, a country can reach a more egalitarian and fair society.

Venezuela, the 5<sup>th</sup> world's largest oil producer, has made of the institutionalization of new forms of participation a path to reach a new form of socialism denominated the 'Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.' Under the leadership of Hugo Chavez Frias, the country started in 1998 a process of societal transformation known as the 'Bolivarian Revolution.' This revolution aims to give a 'protagonist role' to the people in the decision-making process, and contribute to finish centuries of economic and social injustice created by a system of exclusion and exploitation that goes back to the colonial times.

One of these new forms of participation created under this government has been the so-called 'Communal Councils.' Through this concept whole neighborhoods can voluntarily organize themselves in small self-governing units that address the most important needs of the community and create awareness of the meaning of citizenship as a right but also as a practice. The Law of the Communal Councils created in April 2006, gave a legal status to these units and regulated the formation, functioning and financing of the projects presented and implemented by them. The national government is, through its institutions, financially supporting these projects. The potential of these councils has turned them into a national priority in the Plan of the Nation 2007-2013 (Malave, 2007) and a mechanism to give direct participation to the people in the political society of the nation.

In spite of this, there are critical voices that see the model of communal councils as a mechanism which has a high risk to fail. The central government, through its institutions, is allocating most of the resources for these councils giving more power to the President of the Republic; it also runs the risk of being used by local politicians as a way to exchange favors for community support; and finally, it can be used by the President as an electoral machinery working for his party with State funds. On the other hand, it has also received criticisms for the lack of preparation of the communities and the amount of power vested on them. But the most important criticism is how autonomous and independent these spaces, where people voluntarily gather, are from the different political actors of the country.

Communal councils are expected to be incubators of self-managing, critical citizens who can be leaders in their communities and who can create a



society formed by associations and self-sustainable economic units where community and participatory values are above everything. The challenge is for the State institutions to respect the autonomy of these spaces allowing these values to blossom, and for the community to transform old habits into ones which can work for the benefit of everyone.

## **1.2. Relevance and Justification**

In a world immersed in capitalism, market economy, individualism and competitiveness, it is always interesting to study any attempt to transform society by calling to values such as community, solidarity and inclusion. Participatory Democracy is a fascinating idea; it is to put into people's hands the course of their lives as citizens making part of a community. Because of the Latin American and Venezuela political culture, where political vices are so deeply rooted, the autonomy of the newly formed councils is a must. This autonomy will allow creating a transformative participatory model which can contribute to better governance without being co-opted by any state actor. To study the way that communal councils can become the creator of new and stronger forms of civil society which can completely change the perception about community, state, and citizenship make this experiment even more fascinating. The success or failure of participatory democracy via Communal Councils in Venezuela will set a precedent for a region whose citizens have traditionally felt neglected from any political decision concerning their lives.

## **1.3. Research Objectives and Questions**

This research aims to study the role of the communal councils in the process of building the so-called 'Popular Power' in Venezuela. To achieve this it is necessary to analyse the strengths and weaknesses in the State-communal councils relationship, but also inside the communal councils themselves. Special attention has to be paid to the power relations embedded in these spaces and also the level of autonomy that they have from different political actors.

This research aims to answer the following questions: what are the strengths and weaknesses of communal councils as 'invited spaces'? Could this model be considered one of transformative participation? In answering these questions the researcher would like to determine if the communal councils are strengthening the ideal of 'Popular Power' that the Venezuelan government aims to institutionalize. The fully application of 'Popular Power' is supposed to bring deep changes and the creation of new social structures inside the Venezuelan society. In order to see the broader picture, the political and ideological contexts where the concept of communal councils come from are also important to be mentioned.

## **1.4. Methodology**

The analysis and conclusions of this research are based on participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews; secondary data, which comes in the form of articles, brochures, CDs and web pages from different Venezuelan institutions, and books and newspapers related with the history and the ideology supporting the current regime.

This study involved fieldwork that took place during the month of July in the city of Caracas, Venezuela. The researcher received support from Fundacion Escuela de Gerencia Social - FECS (School-Foundation for Social Management) ascribed to the Venezuelan Ministry for Planning and Development for several of the contacts made with the purpose of collecting data for this research.

The researcher conducted several semi-structured and informal interviews with spokespersons of different communal councils, sociologists and scholars from the Venezuelan academic community, active members and student leaders from the movement opposing the current Venezuelan government from the civil society side, among others. Also participant observation through visits to different activities carried out by different communal councils in the Caracas area and the FECS itself provided important information for the conclusions of this research.

### **1.5. Limitations**

The concentration of the fieldwork in just one geographical area (Caracas) limited the diversity of conclusions to a specific context and a specific idiosyncrasy which might be different from the rural or distant areas of the country. Another limitation was the impossibility for the researcher to visit every single stage of formation of a communal council in different communities in the city of Caracas due to time constraints. Finally, this research couldn't deepen in concepts such as the Bolivarian Revolution and the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; especially in the criticisms it has received from several sectors of the academia due to space constraints.

## **Chapter 2**

### **TRANSFORMATIVE PARTICIPATION:**

#### **A tool for radical transformation via popular power**

Democracy from a liberal perspective has been seen as a mechanism which offers the tools to give through representation a voice to society. In representative democracies, it has been taken for granted that citizens elect

their representatives through electoral politics; and these representatives, in turn, will make policies and hold the state accountable (Gaventa, 2004:26). However, Leftwich (2002:13) argues that democracy, in its representative form, is a conservative system of power which does not promote radical changes since it favors social and economic conservatism.

Representation has been considered an ideal but imperfect system of democracy for many societies. Nevertheless, the exclusionary nature of this system has created gaps between the elected representatives and the citizens that they are supposed to represent. This situation has produced different ways out to bridge these democratic deficits: sometimes violently, sometimes peacefully, new alternatives have made its appearance trying to find the way to bring a true and inclusionary societal transformation.

## **2.1. Transformative Participation**

The crisis of the model of representative democracy and the search for new mechanisms of citizen involvement through civil society has made the State to “construct new kinds of relationships between ordinary people and the institutions which affect their lives” (Gaventa, 2004:25). This new type of relationship has been based on broader forms of participation which could be directed towards the efficiency in the solution of problems affecting the communities at local level.

The discredit that the neoliberal doctrine has in the developing world has made the electorate of these countries look for radical projects of transformation which favor the opening of channels of direct participation. There is the belief that by including politics of participation, societal transformation will come as a natural outcome of it (Hickey and Mohan, 2005:250). Under these projects, transformation comes in the form of participation as a tool which can challenge power structures and change development practices, social relations, institutional practices and capacity gaps which cause social exclusion (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:13).

But what kind of transformation are we talking about? It is the transformation of dominant social practices in the political and economic arenas which have reinforced the power of some elites at the cost of the invisibility and exclusion of a great bulk of the population (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:13). It is the transformation that is framed in a political project of radical change which does not only take into the account the local, but also the national, the global and the transnational relations that create social inequality and injustice.

The supporters of participatory approaches to democracy defend how popular participation can democratise the State’s administrative apparatuses and completely transform positively marginalized groups (Hindess, 2000:40):

“Participation appears to provide individuals with the opportunity to control their government, but it does so by subjecting their behaviour to control in other ways”(2000:41). Transformative participation is to change the processes of exclusion and inclusion so that individuals and groups acknowledge their rights to participate and resources (Hickey and Mohan, 2005:251.) Under this view, participation is seen as the tool for empowerment and the inclusion of marginalized sectors of the population in the process of decision-making.

The ideal society which the transformative model of participation framed in a political project of radical democracy aims to achieve is defined as a political project made of a “set of beliefs, interests, conceptions of the world and representation of what life in society should be that guide the political action of different subjects and play a central role in the struggle to build hegemony” (Dagnino, 2008:58).

### **2.1.1. The meaning of citizenship under transformative participation**

Citizenship, under a radical democratic idea, is a larger concept than the liberal one; it includes popular agency, politics, culture and place. It has a rights-based approach since it institutionalizes participation as a right that every citizen is entitled to. Oxborn's analysis focuses on the construction of citizenship as a process which is strongly linked with the political practice and which entails conflict, negotiation and compromise (Waisman et al, 2005:5).

The way that people perceive themselves affects the way how they contribute, decide or acquire knowledge in processes of participation (Cornwall, 2004:84). Citizenship within participation might increase people's control and power over socio-economic resources challenging and reforming dysfunctional forms of rule (Hickey and Mohan, 2005:253)

Citizenship under rights-based approaches contributes in the construction of participation as a right that can be exerted by those who have been marginalized , thus focusing on stronger political, legal and moral claims which are centred on people's agency (Hickey and Mohan, 2005:257). These citizens must have a sense of belonging which gives ‘social glue,’ some autonomy of thought and action and some equality in a realm of rights.

### **2.1.2. The issue of spaces for participation**

Analysing spaces of participation under a radical democratic approach is vital in the construction of a truly pluralistic and inclusive society. Andrea Cornwall says that: ‘thinking spatially can help towards building strategies for more genuinely transformative social action’ (2004:74). She studies these spaces of participation and she categorizes them into 2 types: popular and invited.

Popular spaces refer to all those which come in the form of collective action, self-help initiatives or just as part of everyday life; these are spontaneous (no external intervention), voluntary spaces, where people, most of the time with similar characteristics, get together (Cornwall, 2004:5). Invited spaces are those which are created in a top-down direction, where people are offered the opportunity to use participatory channels as a potential tool for societal transformation. These spaces might come in variety of ways: from ‘constructed opportunities’ for the people to interact with representatives of public authorities to more complex multi-stakeholder institutions involving representatives from all sectors of society including the government (Cornwall, 2004:76).

It is said that the State, by creating invited spaces, might diminish its social burden of carrying the responsibility to answer all the claims of its citizens. However, Cornwall and Coelho argue that an active role of the people in invited spaces means the construction of participation as an extension of the meaning of citizenship and the deepening of democracy (2007:5).

Although other spaces of participation which come from a bottom/up perspective and can entail confrontation with the traditional structures cannot be left outside the spectrum of transformative participation, it is the institutionalization that the State gives to processes of transformation or its rejection what nurtures this process. The State as guarantor of rights and object of mobilization can stimulate through these processes of transformation the creation of new political collectivities (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007:7).

### **2.1.3. Achieving transformative participation through the institutionalization of participatory democracy**

Participatory democracy has found in transformative participation the way to “directly address the problems of Elitist (Liberal) democracy” (Nylen, 2004:27) creating an active citizen who brings change. Representative democracy has in its nature its biggest limitation: because of its delegative form of power, it runs the risk of being disconnected from the social realities of different micro-contexts. Participatory democracy aspires through its institutionalization the full and direct participation of the communities in the policies that affect their lives. This participation is expected to bring social stability which would be the consequence of efficient state institutions (Acuña, et al, 2003:74).

This form of democracy is seen as the most genuine form of participation because it is expressed through its direct exercise by all people who are part of a community without intermediaries (Acuña, et al, 2003:72). Participatory democracy empowers the excluded ones, where empowerment is: “the construction of active subjects, defining for themselves what they consider to

be their rights and fighting for recognition of those rights” (Dagnino cited by Nysten, 2003:27).

Participatory democracy seen from a socialist ideology aims to reach a societal change by raising a proletarian culture. Cooperativism and socio-economic egalitarianism are the goals that participation as inclusiveness should achieve: a culture of classes has to be developed in order to reach this level (Acuña, et al, 2003:73). The idea of a citizen who is connected with the idea of collective solidarity as the way to develop their community achieves a broader dimension under a socialist view of participatory democracy (Dagnino, 2008:67).

#### **2.1.4. Turning Popular Participation into Popular Power as the way to reach transformation**

A project of transformative participation should engender a redistributive democratic approach which reinforces a culture of participatory democracy (De Sousa Santos, 2006:275). In order to achieve the societal transformation that a socialist project of radical change wants to reach, it is necessary not only for the State but for the private agents to apply a mentality of democratization through a broader participation of everyone in the structure of society (De Sousa Santos, 2006:275). This democratization has to be popular; this is, receiving its institutionalization from the power that emanates from the people.

The idea of popular participation is better defined by the current president of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez: “It is not just about an administrative and budgetary deconcentration... it is to give to the neighbor the possibility to rule: the power of initiative, the power of decision-making, the power to control the public administration from their space of participation” (Cited by Harnecker, 2003). De Sousa Santos argues that the State “has to be a determinant element of articulation and coordination” (2006:277).

Two elements define socialism: the social property of the means of production and the popular power (Colussi, 2007). The Popular Power is the supreme authority, God’s voice, the sovereign, as described in the previous section; it is ‘the power that emanates from the people... it is the effective exercise through the organization and the participation of the majority in the decisions that concern their lives’ (Colussi, 2007). The popular power resides in the people, it defines and controls the implementation of policies at the national and international level (Colussi, 2007); it is sustained by the spaces of individual and collective organizations of the State and the society (Peña, 2008).

There is a major difference between a populist government and governments of popular participation. The former govern for the people, while the latter govern with the people. A populist leader uses the people as a means

to achieve his personal objectives, turning the people into beggars who are used to wait for that leader to solve their problems (Harnecker, 2003). A popular leader, instead, looks for the people's growth, organization and autonomy from his leadership; this way people start a transformation that make them become protagonists of the history (Harnecker, 2003). Under a popular leadership, the popular organization embedded in this framework has to be careful of not losing their autonomy or falling in the vices which has largely been criticized to the political parties (Malime, 2002).

Social movements tend to rescue the power as primary constituents of civil society without forming any political party, just generating instances of exchange and coordination from the bases. Membership is voluntary, intellectuals exert their critical role, and the structures created are self-managed and flexible. These elements revitalize the popular culture whose elements become weapons of mobilization. (Fals Borda, 1986:12)

## **2.2. The Dangers of transformative participation**

Popular participation might be seen as necessary but potentially dangerous because it might affect a stable political system in its efficiency to make decisions (Hindess 2000, Cohen and Arato 1992). The realist supporters of a more depurated democratic system based on representation see broader forms of democratic participation as counter-productive: the poor, uneducated and ignorant might be seen as a threat if given much power (Hindess, 2000:40).

One of the dangers implied in this democratic model is that the institutionalization of spaces of participation might be bureaucratized destroying the transformative power that they could have brought (Hedmont, 2008). They might be vulnerable "to adulteration which comes in the form of power imbalances, co-optation, misrepresentation, or by being connected with institutional frameworks which do not allow its democratic potential and its potential for transforming power relations to be fully developed." (Sousa Santos, 2007:lii). There is the fear that by giving a legal status and by including spaces of participation into the institutionality of governance, they can lose their adaptability and flexibility to achieve the goals proposed by the community. Also the whole political project of radical change can be discredited by the inability of the State to cope with the excessive demands of the people creating 'democratic overloads' (Sousa Santos, 2007:iii).

Another danger of spaces of transformative participation is that they run the risk of creating new forms of exclusion against those who do not share the same ideological hegemonic views. In this situation, it is necessary to reach a sphere of 'agonistic pluralism' (Mouffe, 2000:16). This is to reach a point where two opposite views pass from being antagonists to agonists; this is, from enemies to adversaries. This is achieved by recognizing the legitimate right of the other to disagree with my views. The legitimation of the adversary enriches

the democratic debate and constructs stronger foundations to reach the desired goals of social development (Mouffe, 2000:17).

### **2.3. Indicators for Transformative Participation (ITP)**

In order to qualitative assess the transformative power of invited spaces of participation it is necessary to define what in a normative sense can give better tools for achieving the goal of giving voice and power to those who have never had them. These assessment comes in the form of a set of indicators which can give a better picture of what elements define better the success or not of these spaces of participation.

#### **1- Inclusion and Representation**

Transformation through spaces of participation is derived from the mutual recognition of two subjects of their citizenship as their right to participate and enjoy the benefits of their participation (Gaventa, 2004:29). This situation will reinforce, at community level, the self-esteem and feeling of belonging due to the positive outcomes accomplished. The replication of this effect through society will generate larger changes under a political project of transformation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:20). Also by defining who is inside and outside these spaces of participation, we can determine who the representatives inside these spaces are in terms of income, gender, religion, ideologies, among others, and how and by whom these representatives are elected.

#### **2-Autonomy**

The autonomy of the communities in their own process of transformation is vital for achieving a true and radical change. Autonomy could be defined as the independence that marginalized groups enjoy to increase their bargaining power to a point that interveners cannot impose their conditions and regulations. Both parties (marginalized groups and interveners) set the floor for an environment of cooperation and learning respecting each other's priorities and specific interests (Verhagen cited by Carmen, 1996:52). The respect for the spaces of participation's autonomy will prevent the practice of clientelism, patronage or elite capture common features of an unhealthy political culture (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999:6).

#### **3-Organization and Mobilization**

There are some assumptions created around the idea of invited spaces, one of them is that by creating them people are going to participate because they were there just waiting for the opportunity to get involved (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007:9). The way that spaces of participation are organized in the communities nurture values such as belonging, solidarity and cooperation. The organization also mobilizes people in such a way that they become active members of these spaces stamping them with their own aspirations and motivations. Discovering leaderships based on education, personal prestige,



socio-economic backgrounds among others, shape these spaces in such a way that they reinforce or not the sense of community. Also discovering the motivations of the participants and the creators of these spaces contribute in the achievement of the goals proposed. The empowerment<sup>1</sup> of the community should be the result of an organized and mobilized space of participation, where the hierarchies disappear to give place to more functional tasks' distribution (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007:9).

#### 4-Transparency and accountability

Invited spaces run the risk of being captured by non-democratic elements which can affect the goal of transformation through civil society. We have to remember that spaces of participation are as democratizing as its practitioners (Chandoke cited by Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). If its practitioners take advantage of spaces of participation for their own benefit then the outcome would be just frustration and discredit.

### 2.4. Assessing participation by ladders

Another way of evaluating participatory mechanisms in a broader sense comes through the ladders of participation which assesses the decision-making power of the participants of spaces of participation and how inclusive these spaces are. Farrington and Bebbington (1993) analysis of spaces of participation aims to find how wide and deep a participatory process is. A deep participatory process implies the engagement of the participants in all the stages of the process, while a wide participatory approach identifies how large is the range of people participating. The idea with this analysis is to discover if the studied participatory process has reached what the authors call '*optimum participation.*' This means that although it is impossible to reach full inclusion and full depth in the decision-making process there must be an ideal level between these two features... *an optimum level.*

For a better understanding about the depth that the *optimum level* of participation entails, Pretty (1995:1252) created a participatory typology that measures the level of power of decision-making in a space of participation. This typology is divided in 7 rungs which include:

1-Manipulative Participation: when participants are used as rubber-stamp mechanism to validate policies made by outsiders

2-Passive Participation: when participants are just informed of the policies and projects that have been done by external agents.

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<sup>1</sup> See Friedman J. (1992)

3-Participation by consultation: external agents consult with the participants about a determined policy or issue without considering the community's opinion as binding.

4-Participation for Material Incentives: the external agents offer material incentives to implement a project in exchange of participants' labor. No further training or incentive to continue is offered.

5-Functional Participation: the participants are involved in an interactive way (shared decision/-making) with the project as a way to achieve the external agent's goals and reduce costs; there is the danger of co-optation.

6-Interactive Participation: participants participating in the creation of policies for their own development, participation is perceived here as a right.

7-Self-Mobilization: is achieved when participants take full initiative of what they should do to improve their context without the influence of any external actor. Depending on the size of mobilization this might challenge or not existing power structure.

## **2.5. In conclusion...**

The new forms of participation that radical democratic approaches are seeking to offer are building a new type of society which is transformative because it aims to change the reference to the market that societal action may have. Also because it is giving new elements of inclusion to marginalised groups taking into account the unequal power relations of different actors in the decision-making process. But more important, these radical approaches make marginalised groups aware of the importance to be citizen not only from an acknowledgement of their rights but also through the practice and use of them. Citizenship as such is a very strong concept that when is framed in this kind of theoretical background gets the strength of receiving inputs from the cultural and social contexts that surround it creating new forms of citizenships. All this at the end create the type of society that a radical project of change through transformative participation is aiming to: a democratic, pluralist, autonomous and empowered body which can take advantage of the spaces given by the State- in a direct or indirect way- for its own growth, development and transformation.

### Chapter 3

## **PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY AND POPULAR POWER IN VENEZUELA**

The fall of oil prices in the early 1980's, the Debt Crisis of 1989, along with widespread corruption provoked a fall in the standard of living of most Venezuelans. Wide discontent with the government and growing distrust towards the traditional parties found their way out in the episode known as 'El Caracazo.' In 1989, violent riots in the city of Caracas repressed by the military forces left hundreds of dead people marking the start of the decay of the Punto Fijo Pact (Lalander, 2007:25). In 1992 an unsuccessful coup d'etat led by Army Colonel Hugo Chavez Frias stressed the legitimacy crisis that the government and the model it represented were suffering (McCaughnan, 2004:34).

The elections of 1998 were the checkmate to the Punto Fijo Pact. The anti-establishment Colonel Chavez Frias, the same one who orchestrated a failed coup in 1992, won the presidency of the Republic. He promised to reconstruct the country from its foundations and start the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic (Gott, 2005, p135). To do so his programmatic agenda included to draft a new Constitution which was approved in 1999 by an overwhelming majority. Through this constitution he established a new model of democracy based on a participatory approach which would coexist with the representative democratic model. He also set the guidelines for a full State owned oil industry and an agrarian reform. He extended the presidential term from 5 to 6 years with the right of 1 reelection. And he created 2 new powers in addition to the 3 traditional ones: the Electoral Power and the Citizen Power.

His measures created a strong polarization that was translated into a failed coup against him on April 2002. The opposition<sup>2</sup> accused President Chavez of centralizing and abusing from power, widespread corruption within his circle of aides, and co-opting the most important institutions of all the 3 traditional branches of power. After this situation and partly thanks to high oil revenues, wide popular support and high impact state-funded social programs his government became more leftist oriented and acquired a much more ideological turn.

### **3.1. Participatory Democracy and Popular Power in Venezuela<sup>3</sup>**

When Hugo Chavez got elected president of Venezuela he promised to rebuild the nation over a new and alternative model that would defeat all the things that had kept Venezuela and Latin America in the abyss throughout history (Chavez, 2007:10). To do so he framed the whole process that he started as the ‘Bolivarian Revolution.’ It was named Bolivarian after Simon Bolivar, Latin America’s independence hero who freed 5 nations from the Spanish rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Bolivarian Revolution is a “permanent search for the revolutionary from the autochthonous, fresh and original” (Guedez, 2006).

The Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century aspires to the transformation of all social, economic and political relations by giving the highest degree of participation to the people in the decision-making process of the institutions that rule their lives (Dieterich cited by Marcano, 2007). The Bolivarian Revolution and its participatory democratic component are seen as the vehicles that will lead to this new type of socialism. Based on a more pluralistic and less state-centered socialism (Wilpert, 2006).

In 2007, the United Venezuelan Socialist Party (PSUV) was formed as a party which represents the ideals defended by the Bolivarian Revolution, the socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the government. It is composed by several social organizations and political parties which have supported the project represented by President Chavez who acts as the leader of this party (Fuente, 2008).

Despite of its ideological substance, the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has received several criticisms; among them, that its motivating force revolves around the figure of President Chavez, and that it is a mix of everything but

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<sup>2</sup> The Venezuelan opposition is mainly but not exclusively formed by middle and upper socio-economic status of the society. There are also the ‘ni-ni’ (neither-neither) who are the neutral ones who do not support either political side (Alvarez, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Full explanation of the Bolivarian Revolution and the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century see Annex R.

nothing at the same time; it is seen as a vague compilation of new and old concepts with no cohesion (Romero, 2007).

### **Participatory Democracy: the new democratic paradigm**

The way the State is currently constituted in the world is an obstacle to reach a fully participatory democracy where the people can directly advance their will (Malime, 2002). There is the need to rethink the democratic model for one which can give real power to the people under the most pure and direct way of participation. This is the premise that the Bolivarian Revolution defends in Venezuela: the need to make people powerful as the best way to reach the egalitarian society of the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (CBRV) institutionalized participatory democracy by defining it as:

*“The system of government where citizens are active part and protagonists of their own destiny guaranteeing that the action of the Public Power is at their service. It is a new kind of relationship between the State and its citizens where party democracy is replaced by the protagonist participation of the citizenry”*

*(CBRV official webpage, 2008).*

Under this concept the need for representatives disappears and people are given a mandate to rule over certain areas of the policy-making process of the nation. This kind of democracy entails the direct, unmediated and continuous participation of citizens in the tasks of government (Heywood, 2002:70).

This is confirmed by Article 5 of the CBRV which gives a new whole dimension to the concept of sovereignty by saying that: “**Sovereignty resides untransferable in the people...**” Article 70 describes the new mechanisms which can be used by the citizens in order to practice fully their right to participate in the political and social arenas ranging from people’s initiated national referenda to citizens’ assemblies with binding power of decision-making (Wilpert 2003; Article 70 CBRV 1999).

### **The Popular Power and the Constituent Engines of the Revolution**

Popular Power is defined by Monedero (2004:8) as the government of the people, this is, the government that is legitimized through the exercise of power of the citizens through the collectivity. This is a wide concept that is supported by the power that the Bolivarian Revolution gives to Participatory democracy: the goal of the popular power is that the expectation of the political process will lead to a new hegemony of popular base organizations

where power is an embedded right not born through elections (Fals Borda, 1986:14).

In 2007 President Chavez proposed a reform in the National Constitution of 1999 by institutionalizing this concept and by also naming the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a socialist one. This reform was defeated in a national referendum in December of that year, however, article 136 of this paper summarizes what is the popular power for the government. The spirit of this article is to name the people as the depositary of all the sovereignty which is expressed through the popular power and its constituent power formed by self-governing communities, communes and cities (Reforma Constitucional, 2007). Popular organizations are the autonomous form of collective organization, where all the ideas and the desires of the popular mass come and meet to propose, reform, and transform the old structures. It is part of the state without the bureaucratic, partisan, and hierarchical structures embedded within it and with full autonomy from the formal power of the state.

In order to reach this socialism the Venezuelan government released the 5 Constituent Engines for the consolidation of this goal (Los Cinco Motores, 2008). These engines or steps are:

**1. The Enabling Law**

Special powers conferred to the President to shape the law according to the new socialist model.

**2. Socialist Reform of the constitution**

**3. Moral and Lights**

Education of the people in socialist values

**4. The new Geometry of Power**

A new form of socialist political distribution based in the communities

**5. The revolutionary explosion of the Communal Power:**

Communal councils as the mechanism for political and economic redistribution

The 5<sup>th</sup> Engine is what gives to the communal councils the necessary strength to be included inside the political project of radical transformation aimed by the Bolivarian Revolution.

## Chapter 4

### THE COMMUNAL COUNCILS AND ITS DEFINITION

Communal Councils are defined as instances of participation, articulation and integration of all the citizenry which allow the organized people to exert directly the management of public policies in their geographical spaces; this contributes in the construction of an egalitarian and fair society (Article 2 Law of the Communal Councils, 2006). Communal councils' immediate objective is to look after the most urgent needs of the communities by directly allocating State resources based on the people's decisions (Maingon and Sosa, 2007:2). By March 2008 the NGO Gumilla Foundation had counted 36.812 communal councils spread throughout the country (Machado, 2008:5) which received EUR 3 Billion<sup>4</sup> from the central Government in 2007 (Armas, 2007).

The current chapter will contextualize the environment were the communal councils were created, they predecessors, what the law says about them, how they are formed and how they are divided. Finally, this chapter will address a series of practical issues found in the application of the law.

#### **4.1. Decentralization in Venezuela: the old and the new model**

Venezuela is considered a Federal republic on paper, divided in States, municipalities and parishes. The process of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization started in the early 1980's with the creation of the Presidential Commission for the Restructuration of the State (COPRE) (Maingon and Sosa, 2007). The responsibility on many social services provided by the Central Government was transferred to the municipalities and states, entitling them to levy taxes for their own functioning and their own bureaucracies. Also, in 1989 Venezuela had for the first time in its history the election of governors, majors

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<sup>4</sup> Bs. 9 Trillion

and councilmen of the parish boards. However, with the election of Hugo Chavez as president in 1998 and the new constitution of 1999, a new type of decentralization based on direct participation inside the public planning scheme was created.

The 1999 Constitution allowed the State to create open and flexible mechanisms that allowed the decentralization and transfer of functions from the municipalities to the communities and organized neighbors (CBRV, 1999). The communal councils were created under this logic of popular decentralization and participatory democracy where the communities could work with the State in the solution of their needs.

#### **4.2. Which were the precedents to the Communal Councils**

Since the fall of Perez Jimenez's dictatorship in 1958 and before the arrival to power of President Chavez, the Venezuelan government tried to create community organizations with the goal of transferring resources in a more direct way; however, the hidden interests of the political class blurred the potential benefits of these spaces (Garcia-Guadilla, 2008:5). The arrival to power of President Chavez and the need to involve the population in the new model of participatory democracy originated new mechanisms of popular participation from the top consecrated by the 1999 Constitution (Garcia-Guadilla, 2008:5). These spaces came in the form of Bolivarian Circles, Electoral Battle Units, Local Public Planning Councils and the Communal Councils; nevertheless, the first two ones were very criticized for their use as mechanisms for the promotion of the revolution by using public funds. In many cases the strong links with the executive of these spaces bypassed the power of the decentralized entities created before 1999.

The Constitution of 1999 envisaged the creation of the Local Public Planning Councils (CLPP in Spanish) which were spaces for the promotion and coordination of participatory planning in the municipalities of the country (González Marregot, 2007). The CLPP were supposed to integrate the organized communities through their representatives with the local institutions. A very important task of the CLPP was to promote the creation of citizens' assemblies in different communities in order for them to include their representatives in the policies designed by the CLPP. In 2005 the Law of Municipal Public Policy included the figure of communal council as the most important instance under the CLPP. Nevertheless, the creation of the Law of the Communal Councils in April 2006 derogated the previous relation with the CLPP, leaving the Communal Councils as the maximum expression of the implementation of public policies at the community level and the basic unit of the new geography of power that the government wishes to implement in the country.

#### **4.3. What are the Communal Councils?**



The communal councils are part of the new geometry of power where the Venezuelan Nation should be divided in Central Government, States, Communal Cities, Communes and Communal Councils. Although the failed constitutional reform of 2007 would have shaped this concept better, its rejection left the councils in an administrative limbo<sup>5</sup>.

The creation of the Law of the Communal Councils created these autonomous, flexible and self-ruling spaces for the proposition and execution of community projects with the purpose of reinforcing the idea of popular power proclaimed by the government. The law established that the councils would be linked to 2 State institutions: the National Fund of the Communal Councils (SAFONACC ) ascribed to the Ministry of Finances and the Presidential National Commission of the Popular Power (CNPPP) (Villasmil, 2007:115). The former would finance the social and productive community projects by transferring money to the communal banks; while the former would orientate, coordinate and assess the development of the councils at all levels (Consejos Comunales, 2008). For legal purposes the communal councils must be registered before FUNDACOMUNAL<sup>6</sup> (Foundation for the promotion and development of the communal power); and they can be formed in a geographical area of 200 to 400 families for urban settings and 20 families or more for rural ones (FEGS, 2008:20).

Aside from giving the legal linkages with the state, the law also assigned a series of functions that the communal councils through its citizens' assembly could perform in their communities (FEGS, 2008:26). Among the most important ones:

1. Creation of their own internal regulations,
2. Creation of rules of community cohabitation,
3. Approval of development plans containing the communities' projects
4. Election of the spokespeople and the different members of the 3 communal organs of power.
5. Recall of spokespeople
6. Exertion of Social control through mechanis of accountability

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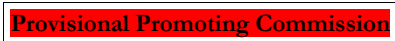
<sup>5</sup> The communal councils are not well integrated into the administrative decentralization. Its inclusion in the National System of Public Planning (SNPP) creates a parallel structure of governance to the municipalities and governorships (Garcia-Guadilla, 2008:6).

<sup>6</sup> FUNDACOMUNAL is ascribed to the Ministry of Participation (MINPADES). Its mission is to give technical and logistics support to the communal councils by channeling the projects submitted by the councils; they also register them in a national database (Radio Nacional, 2008).

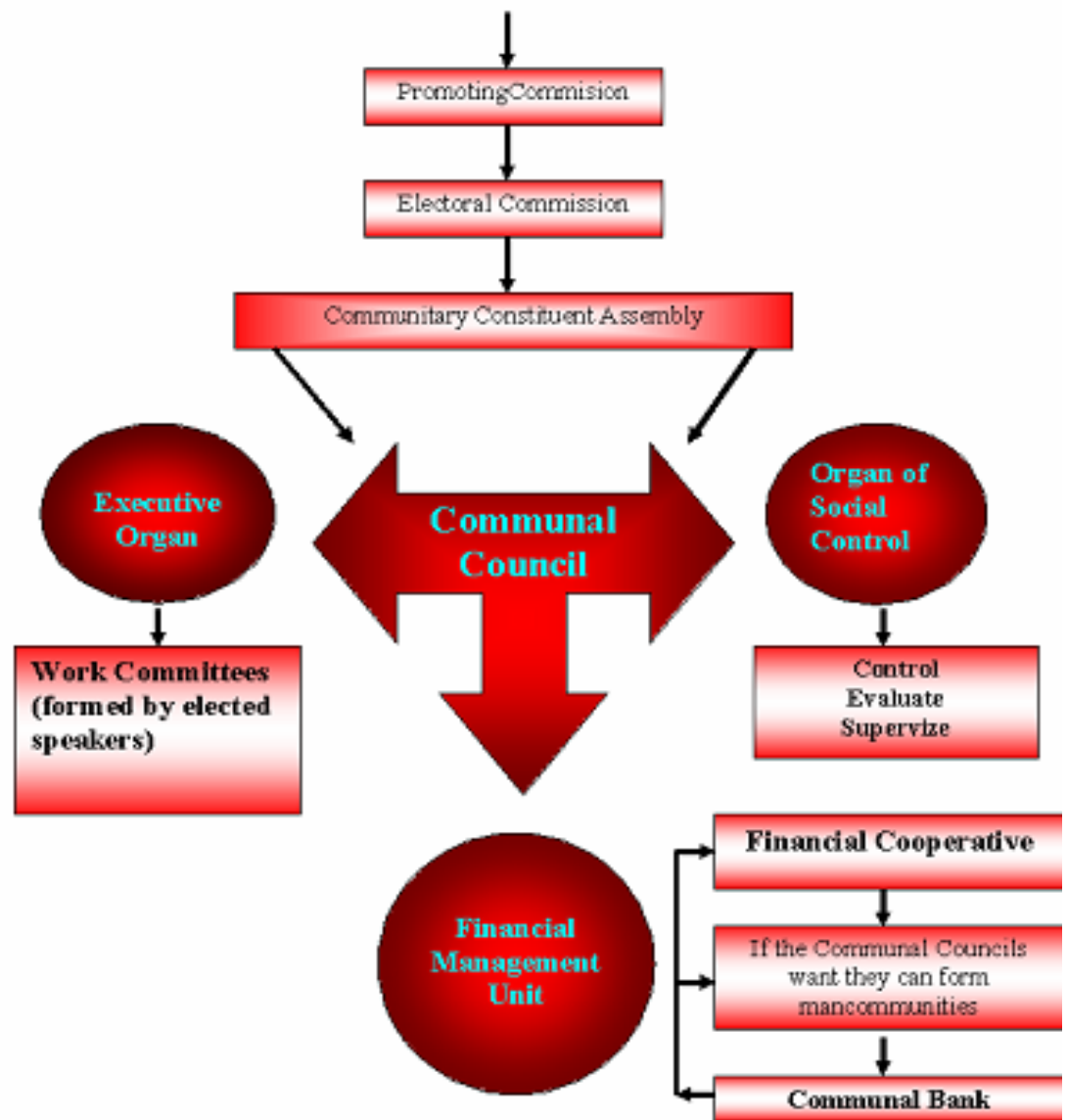
4.3.1. How are the Communal Councils formed?



**Citizens' Assembly**



**Provisional Promoting Commission**



First Step: the formation of a provisional promoting commission. This is a group of citizens from a determined community which organize themselves with the idea of starting a communal council in their geographical area (Villasmil, 2007:121). This initiative might come from the neighbors themselves or from State representatives who invite people to form the councils. The formation of the provisional promoting commission counts with the help of a local designated representative from the CNPPP; this person along with the provisional commission will organize and coordinate a demographic census of the geographical area of this community.

Second step: The provisional promoting commission will call for an assembly with all the citizens older than 15 years old and who belong to this

specific community, at least 10% of the population has to be represented in this assembly (Villasmil, 2007:121). This assembly will elect a promoting and electoral commission which will help in the formation of a constituent assembly of the community. Then a new assembly must be formed by at least 20% of all members of the community who are older than 15 years old; they will be responsible for electing the spokespeople (community leaders) who will be part of each of the 3 branches that the communal council has. These spokespeople are *ad-honorem* and will serve for a 2 years period. The function of the spokespeople is to execute all the projects proposed in the citizen's assembly.

Third step: The communal cycle is the practice of the right of the communal council to make policies for the good of their communities (Villasmil, 2007:121). When the citizens' assembly has finally elected the spokespeople of all the working committees then they proceed to make what is called the 'communal diagnosis.' This communal diagnosis is intended to identify the basic needs that the community has, it is done through surveys conducted by spokespeople and volunteers from the community or by a citizens' assembly. After identifying the priorities expressed in the communal diagnosis, the citizens' assembly proceeds to make the 'Participatory Communal Plan' (PCP). This is an action plan to address those issues that the community feels are the most urgent to treat. When the PCP is ready the citizens' assembly agreed on a participatory budgeting of the projects that the PCP considers as the most needed ones. The communal cycle is closed by the execution and control of the projects approved by the community through the communal diagnosis and the PCP, the execution is assisted by the corresponding working committee and the control of the investment of the resources is made by the social control unit.

#### **4.3.2. How do the communal councils work?**

Communal Councils are spaces which work based on a labor division. Although it has a horizontal organization, the spokespeople elected by the citizens' assembly run for posts in one of the 3 branches which compose the communal councils. These 3 branches are divided in an Executive Organ, a Financial Management Unit and a Social Control Unit.

The Executive Organ promotes and articulates the organized participation of the members of the community in different working committees (Law of the Communal Councils, Article 8). They also have as function to plan and execute what has been decided in the citizens' assembly. The working committees might cover areas which range from health to sports and recreation, it would have an undetermined number of elected spokespeople.

The Financial Management Unit is integrated by 5 elected members of the community (Law of Communal Council, Article 10). Their responsibility is to

administer the resources allocated for the projects approved by the citizens' assembly. According to the law this unit will be called the Communal Bank which will function as a cooperative. The money administered by the bank for a specific project has to be returned by the community for re-investment.

The Social Control Unit is integrated by 5 elected members of the community and it has the responsibility of holding accountable the whole communal council for all the procedures done (Law of Communal Councils, Article 11). They will have to supervise all the projects implemented by the communal council in the community.

#### **4.4. What is the impact of the Law on the Communal Councils in a day-to-day basis?**

The design of spaces of participation from a top-down perspective involves a series of issues which cover the regulation, norms and functions that they have to fulfil in order to achieve the desired goal. In the case of the communal councils, the researcher wanted to identify the impact that the legal and institutional design has in the relations of the communal council in the day-to-day.

Although the law of 2006 institutionalized the communal councils as a valid space of participation and power, there are several legal vacuums which affect its implementation in the communities. Many of these problems are derived from the lack of clarity about the place where the communal councils fit in the decentralization scheme of the nation. This situation makes harder for State institutions and other decentralized instances of power to understand the role of these spaces (Villasmil 2008<sup>7</sup>, Velasquez 2008<sup>8</sup>). There are cases where the functions of State institutions overlap with the ones of the communal councils because of the non-specificity of the functions of these spaces (Beltran, 2008).

Some institutions still treat the communal councils as beneficiary and they do not see them as part of the power equation that the revolution wants to institutionalize. This lack of understanding from the institutions have had as consequence a common complaint that the researcher heard from the speakers of communal councils: The answers that the institutions give to the councils are not fast enough or in some cases non-existing<sup>9</sup>. This is the case, for example, of an event organized by the communal council Cacique Catia: they requested some state institutions to make a services fair (ID registration, medical visit, among others) along with this activity but no institution showed

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<sup>7</sup> See Annex B

<sup>8</sup> See Annex C

<sup>9</sup> 22% of the communal councils consider their relation with State institutions as bad; the main reason is the lack of answers from the institutions (Machado, 19:2008).

up, demotivating the organizers of the event. The sociologist Magaly Villasmil<sup>10</sup> sums up this situation: “Some institutions have not understood that it is not about sharing the resources with the communal councils, it is actually giving to them the resources, the power...” (2008).

An obstacle that the councils finds is that the law does not have a regulatory framework which give basic rules that can help to the development of the councils (Villasmil 2008, Velasquez 2008). For example, the number of spokespeople, or how many working tables a council should have, also how the citizens' assemblies have to be conducted, among others. The internal regulation of the councils are not made because the law does not force to do so.

The researcher was participant of the meeting of the Communal Council of El Conde, in the Sucre parish of Caracas. In this meeting there was a lot of confusion about things like under which circumstances a citizens' assembly had to be called, or if a decision from the council was binding enough in order to go above a municipal regulation. He also noticed, how the lack of a moderator was a severe obstacle for the communication among the participants of this council which could not be finished due to arguments between two sides of the council. This is summarized by a spokesperson's words: “There is a lot of confusion (with the law) and the communities have to improvise on these issues of participation.”<sup>1112</sup>

In spite of this, the law has also brought advantages like the importance that this space of participation has acquired in the organizational chart of the State. This has made most State institutions to direct their programs of investment on the communal councils. In an interview with Anabel Diaz, from the *National Institute for the rights of Children and Youth* she said that all State institutions, including hers, were now focusing on programs integrated with the communal councils.

Communities are given the technical responsibility of designing their projects without having the technical capabilities to do so (Gonzalez Marregot, 2007). This is a problem which is recognized by institutions, speakers and academics. Some accuse how quick the law was approved and how its implementation came into force soon after. At the communal councils' registrar's office at FUNDACOMUNAL<sup>13</sup>, they complained that many communal councils did not know how to recall a spokesperson or the citizens'

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> See Annex E

<sup>12</sup> Villasmil mentions in her work the difficulties in the functioning of the communal councils studied by her product of the vacuums in the law and the regulations (2007).

<sup>13</sup> See Annex D

assembly approved a project and then they wanted to change the destination of the resources to another project.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

Communal Councils are spaces which did not come out from the air, there is a history behind their creation and implementation. The interest of the national Government in their creation are proved by the amount of money allocated and the number of councils working throughout Venezuela. These spaces of participation are based on a law which institutionalized their functioning and gave them the flexibility and freedom to create their own regulations. This has had positive and negative effects which are product of the legal and institutional design of the communal councils and affects the functioning of these spaces as shown by this chapter.

## **Chapter 5**

### **HOW IS THE COMMUNAL POWER DOING?**

**The study and analysis of communal councils in the city of Caracas, the opposition and the voices from the Venezuelan academia.**

The model of participatory democracy in Venezuela aims to be the vehicle to reach the ‘Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ that the Bolivarian Revolution proposes. According with the CBRV this model institutionalizes a series of mechanisms for the active participation of the citizenry. The communal councils are one of these mechanisms which aspire to be inclusive, autonomous and effective spaces of participation in the construction of a new society. By applying criteria which allows the researcher to asses the

transformative power of the communal councils, many of the questions about its viability as part of the new conceptualization of the Venezuelan State can be answered.

In order to qualitatively analyse and answer the questions proposed in the introduction of this study, the researcher will use the 4 indicators and the ladder of participation presented in Chapter 2. After this he will debate about the concept of popular power in Venezuela to finally make a set of conclusions that address the main objectives of this research.

### **5.1. Locating the fieldwork**

The fieldwork for this research was developed in the city of Caracas<sup>14</sup> during the month of July, 2008. In order to understand the social logic of Caracas we need to draw a line between the eastern and western sides of the city. The eastern side (E.S.C.) is identified as the area where the most affluent and best neighbourhoods of the capital are, also where the professional middle-income population mainly live. This area is also considered the stronghold of the opposition to President Chavez and his revolution. On the other hand, the western side of the city (W.S.C.) is home to the working class and the new rural migrants; it is mainly formed by neighbourhoods where most of the low-income population of the city are located. This area is considered the stronghold President Chavez and his revolution. Although there is a clear distinct between the two sides of the city, it does not mean that each side is entirely formed by people identified with one political ideology or the other.

### **5.2. Analysing the Councils by using the Indicators for Transformative Participation (ITP)**

#### **1- Organization and Mobilization**

It is believed that opening spaces of participation empowers people in such a way that they can become self-ruling subjects who are in control of their own destiny. What motivates people to organize under the concept of communal councils and how to identify if the outcome of this organization increases the feelings of solidarity, cooperation and community are questions that the researcher wanted to answer through his fieldwork. The empowerment that these spaces of participation are supposed to bring to the community is formed by identifying the answers to the aforementioned questions.

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<sup>14</sup> Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, is a city with more than 4.7 million people (Britannica online, 2008). It is located on a valley that belongs to the Coastal Range close to the Caribbean Sea. As many Latin American cities it received a large influx of immigrants from the rural areas of the country during the last 50 years, making it a social laboratory of cultures, races and beliefs that represent the Venezuelan society.



## Organization and community

In a country where direct spaces of participation have been scarce and exclusive it is revolutionary that people can organize themselves, do their claims and be listened (Villamil, interview, 2008). The first impression that any visitor to a communal council in a low-income area of Caracas gets is the feeling of ownership, pride, belonging and dignity expressed by their spokespeople. This is derived from the impact of their participation in the proposition and solutions of their communities' needs. It was found that there was a great deal of awareness about the socio-political process that the country was going through and the struggle to keep it that way.

The communal councils were seen as the heart of the communities according to several interviewees; as the place where people could meet, plan together and implement solutions to their priorities. They were perceived, in many cases, as the only and legitimate channel between the State and the communities where their participants felt that there was a way out to make their claims and be listened. This in many cases has strengthened the feeling of community and cohesion that a space of this nature can bring.

***“The communal councils are a very important part of the community. We are the ones who run the community, we know their problematic, their happiness, their ailments, everything, everything.”***

*Mireya, Spokesperson CC Esperanza Revolucionaria, WSC*

## Leaderships

Although it is a horizontal organization according to the law, it was found that some communal councils had created hierarchies depending on the amount of votes that the elected spokesperson received from the community, or the kind of profession that this person exerted putting them in a more 'knowledgeable' position. If the spokesperson used to belong to an official security force, if they had a profession while the rest did not, or if they were community leaders in the past affected the way they were seen by the community. The sociologist Magaly Villasmil (2007:138) found during her research in three communities of Caracas, that the leaderships of the communal councils studied came from spokespeople who had belonged to other community organizations. These leaderships helped to create cohesion inside the councils.

## Motivations

What are the main incentives that make people mobilize to form communal councils? What makes people decide to attend citizens' assemblies

for hours, communal council meetings or working voluntarily in communal projects? The aspiration to solve the most immediate needs of the community was pointed out as the main motivation and incentive that mobilized communities<sup>15</sup> to form around the communal councils. The availability of financial resources from the central government for the projects of the communal councils and its eagerness on promoting these spaces as the mechanism to receive them encouraged their formation; Rodriguez and Lerner found that communal councils follow this material logic for their formation (2008:123). In all the communal councils visited FUNDACOMUNAL and the local municipalities had allocated resources for projects in these communities which range from new sports centres to house refurbishment. The spokespeople interviewed felt that this was the way the government took them into account effectively.

The second motivation for the formation of these communal councils was the trust in President Chavez's political project and the ideals of the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>16</sup>. This ideological incentive moved many spokespeople to run for these positions and contribute to what they believed was the construction of a new society.

Different material strategies which could attract more people to the citizens' assemblies, the elections, and the activities held by the community were used (Rodriguez and Lerner, 2007:124). Among the most used ones were services fair<sup>17</sup>, communal parties, cultural activities, and the ideological component of creating a collectivity which united could achieve more.

### **A sustainable sense of community?**

It seems that the communal councils have empowered the communities by giving them the tools to fight for their own development and claim their rights. The dignity that the recognition of people's citizenship brings has contributed to the certainty that no matter which government comes next these kinds of spaces will be demanded to the State. The feeling of solidarity that the communal councils have awakened inside the communities is a plus that make them aware of their own potential to build together a better future. But is all this product of a historic juncture or a true transformation?

There is a major concern related with the reasons that people have for participating in the communal councils. The desire of any community to solve their basic needs is a commendable and logical aspiration; however, if the formation of a space of participation which is supposed to bring societal transformation is based on expecting the State to allocate resources, then, there

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<sup>15</sup> See Annex C and K

<sup>16</sup> Finding supported by Rodriguez and Lerner (2007:124), See Annex

<sup>17</sup> Free medical check-ups, ID registration, among others are offered to stimulate people to come to the events.

is a problem. We have to be aware that Venezuela is currently living an oil boom which is flooding with extra revenues the government's coffers (CNN, 2008). The cohesion and the creation of a sense of community cannot be linked to the material resources offered by a State which depends on an oil boom to offer them.

This situation raises a series of questions which will be described next: first, what would happen if the State cannot allocate more money for the communal councils? Are the communal councils mature enough to be self-sufficient and self-sustainable as the law wants them to be? Second, if the main motivation of the people to participate is material, then the formation of the communal councils is also. If the promotion of community values is linked to the formation of these councils, then without financial resources can the values and empowerment claimed by the communities be sustainable? And finally, it is said that in Venezuela cooperative life is not very characteristic of its culture (Villasmil, 2008), then, were actually the bases asking for spaces of this nature to be opened in Venezuela? Because if they were not, and they were more a product of an imposition in a top/down approach then people's ideational motivation to participate was non-existent or secondary, and it was traded-off by a material motivation which is not sustainable in the long term.

The strengthening of the sense of community in Venezuela might be working now, however the Bolivarian Revolution in its ideological struggle to reach hegemony have been constantly trying to open spaces of citizen involvement which at the end have been abandoned for newer and more revolutionary alternatives. These were the cases of the CLPPs or the Bolivarian Circles which died out as soon as the government changed its focus to new forms of community associations (Maingon and Sosa, 2007). With this precedent are the Communal Councils and the community sense created through them strong enough to have a lasting and transformative effect? This is something that only time will tell.

## **2- Inclusion and Representation**

The political polarization in Venezuela has reflected itself in all spheres of society creating clashes between groups for and against President Chavez and what his revolution represents. By studying the inclusion in the communal councils, this research wanted to discover how the members of the communal councils, the opposition and the academia identified these spaces: as given by the revolution and exclusive of the revolution, as given by President Chavez, or as a space for community development. Also, what were the perceptions that inside the communal councils their members had about '*the other*,<sup>18</sup>' and what impact it had on the membership in these councils and the cohesion in the

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<sup>18</sup> In this section the mention of 'the other' refers those antagonists who are represented by the groups identified with or against President Chavez and his political project.

communities. Finally, this research wanted to identify the homogeneity and diversity that the councils had in terms of education, gender, ideological views, and also how and by whom they were elected.

### **Communal Councils as spaces of...**

Through the fieldwork it was found that communal councils were identified with 3 visions: as spaces that construct community, as spaces which construct the foundations of the social change led by the Revolution, and as spaces which President Chavez promotes because as leader he knows what is best for the country. Curious enough, the three aforementioned visions were the ones held by the spokespeople of communal councils and state institutions which felt highly identified with the political process that Venezuela was going through.

***“We need to follow the leader (President Chavez), because he is the one who knows better”***

*Domilsa, C.C. Cacique Katia, W.S.C.*

In the meantime, there were sectors of the opposition which saw the communal councils as a mechanism of political proselytism where the President wanted to use public funds in the broadening of his and his movement's popular base.

The general impression was that the supporters of the revolution associated these spaces of participation as a stronghold of the process which the commander in chief, in this case President Chavez, in his knowledge had implemented to benefit the poor and excluded ones<sup>19</sup>. The communal councils were associated then with a space offered by the revolution but ideated by President Chavez thinking on the country's underdogs. Although the opposition associated these spaces not with the political project of the revolution but with President Chavez to strengthen his popular base, they were also perceived as an opportunity to put forward the opposition's ideological battle against the regime as it will be explained later.

### **Community and political views<sup>20</sup>**

The political differentiation between the supporters and non-supporters of the Revolution had clear geographical boundaries in the city of Caracas. However, there were neighborhoods and entire communities which had their sympathies divided concerning the current political regime. The speakers from communal councils in the Western side of the city claimed the plurality of

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<sup>19</sup> See Annex C

<sup>20</sup> Findings supported by Garcia-Guadilla (2008) and Maingon and Sosa (2007)

these spaces of participation, where everyone no matter their political views could be part of them<sup>21</sup>. According to them the sense of community was higher than any kind of antagonism brought by ideological differences. The needs of the community were more relevant than the political colors of its members; in these communities, speakers (mainly Pro-Chavez) agreed that it was against the revolutionary spirit to exclude from the benefits of the communal councils just based on political beliefs<sup>22</sup>.

Despite the altruistic feelings expressed by the speakers of these communal councils, the high levels of political polarization in the country have been conducive of a larger distrust among the ideological sides. The political polarization has penetrated the mentality, loyalties and identification inside the participants and non-participants of the councils. ‘The other’ was perceived by the speakers of these councils as people who, even though were part of the community, should be treated with distrust and special attention<sup>23</sup>.

It was found that during the early stages of the formation of the communal councils the communities were invited and allowed to participate in the citizens’ assemblies and the elections for spokespeople no matter their political views. Although some communal councils had elected spokespeople from different political views, there was a generalized perception that by having them inside the communal councils the survival of these spaces were at risk. ‘The other’ was perceived as a potential obstacle and a threat to communal councils’ goals because they would try to sabotage the decisions taken by the community<sup>24</sup>.

***“In our communal council there is no opposition, Thanks God”***

*Mireya, C.C. Esperanza Revolucionaria, W.S.C*

The aforementioned situation had as consequence a working environment polluted by these perceptions from both sides. The perception of communal councils as spaces of the Revolution has affected the participation of those who were not pro-Revolution. This group of people simply chose not to participate due to the political burden that the councils were perceived to have.

It was also found that among the middle-upper and upper income sectors of the eastern side of Caracas a similar logic of distrust towards ‘the other’ was also working. There were two types of communal councils in these areas: one which worked according to the model of community development wanted by the government, and a second one which was active only on the paper. This second case was apparently the predominant one in this context. In this case,

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21 See Annex B

22 See Annex E

23 See Annex K

24 See Annex F

the communal councils were registered before FUNDACOMUNAL fulfilling all the requirements, but with the hidden interest of claiming those communities as part of the opposition<sup>25</sup>. By doing this, those specific geographical areas had legally constituted councils which would not allow other councils to be created.

***“This Communal Council had to be done because we did not want them (Pro-Chavez) to occupy the space left by us...”***

*Teresa, C.C. in the E.S.C.*

### **Language about ‘the other’**

The language of exclusion has gone deep into the participatory instances of communal councils, where some of their members refer to ‘the other’ with pejorative adjectives. The perception that each political side has about ‘the other’ does not allow them to reconcile postures necessary for the construction of community via these spaces of participation.

It has been argued that participatory democracy in Venezuela has not received the support from all sectors of the population and that is one of the reasons why it has not reached a full inclusion of everyone (Villamil, 2007:143); however, the language used by the government and the opposition has not helped with this goal. The Venezuelan government has used one where those who are considered as socio-economically marginalized have to be taken into account, but those who are seen as political opponents or indifferent to the government’s policies are seen as suspicious and harmful to the revolutionary objectives<sup>26</sup>. While the opposition related pro-revolution communities with delinquents and criminality.

### **Who are inside the communal councils?**

From the fieldwork done, it was found that although some communal councils were formed by speakers who had never been involved in community activities before, most of the interviewees had been community leaders or had experience dealing with some position of leadership. The spokespeople interviewed were elected by the citizens’ assembly and their election was product of campaigning, community recognition and honesty; in some cases the revolutionary spirit was also counted as an asset for their election. In meetings attended by the researcher the amount of men and women was slightly different favoring the latter group. Most of the speakers interviewed were middle-aged adults with conformed families and who had a low income derived from non-professional activities. The ideological views inside the communal councils were mainly pro-revolution. However, this was informed

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<sup>25</sup> See Annex D

<sup>26</sup> See Annex E

by the socio-economic dynamics in the communities where the higher the income the further away the homogeneity of views pro-revolution were encountered.

### **The community above everything**

In spite of the risk of exclusion which the communal councils can generate, in many cases community acquires a larger dimension than political beliefs. The way that some communal councils (mainly Pro-Chavez) have been able to answer many of the needs of the community have made them earn the respect from the rest, including people who do not share the same political views. There is an interesting phenomenon in these councils, and it is their rush to proof to 'the other' that they are capable of leading the transformation. These situations can be read as either the fact that some communal councils have been able to reach a level of maturity where they are perceived as true interpreters of the communities' aspirations, or the natural leadership of some members and their credibility have given cohesion to the community for overcoming any political disagreement and working on the solution of practical issues.

### **The paradox of inclusion and citizenship in the communal councils<sup>27</sup>**

The Venezuelan Constitution of 1999 opened new mechanisms of popular participation as the way to reach the social transformation expected from the Bolivarian Revolution. This constitution linked citizenship and the exertion of the right to participate as the road to transformation. The communal councils as spaces opened by the State for the exercise of people's citizenship were supposed to be vehicles of this change. However, these spaces have been affected by the political polarization that the country has lived throughout the revolution.

The concept of political inclusion is highly linked with the one of citizenship in Venezuela. There is a sector of the population who has been able to identify their right to participate as the exertion of their citizenship; nevertheless, there is another sector of the population which due to the

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<sup>27</sup> Rodriguez and Lerner (2007:121) argue in their work that there are not many conflicts inside the communal councils because they cover small communities with homogeneous socio-economic characteristics, also the NGO Gumilla Center seems to confirm this result by showing that 71% of the councils consulted had positive relations with the community and 84% of the people in the communities got involve in them (Machado, 2008:23). However, I argue that if a communal council does not exclude other members of their communities, it is not because there are not practices of political exclusion, it is because the communities share similar political views that are not an obstacle for participation. The work of Garcia-Guadilla (2008:12) and my findings in Caracas support this line of argumentation.

political polarization of the country has not been able to find a place where to exert this citizenship. The communal councils reflect this situation which has produced first and second class citizens in terms of loyalty to the revolution.

The first class citizens- the loyalists- are seen as ones who should reap the fruits of their participation and the natural heirs of the benefits that the State has offered through the councils. The second class citizens- the opposition and *ni-ni*- are seen as those who are not accompanying the process of change in Venezuela and who are perhaps defending the conservatism institutionalized by the old elites. Although the citizens who belong to the second category are allowed to participate, they will always be seen with suspicious eyes and with a perception of being opportunistic by taking advantage of a space which is seen mainly as revolutionary and for the revolutionaries. Their citizenship, as expressed by the constitution, might be even contradictory because on one hand they were taught about the inclusion that this Magna Carta should bring, but on the other they encounter in the practice a hostile environment which prevents them from participating in the spaces of participation. This situation is similar also in those spaces which are controlled by the opposition.

The first and second class citizen categorization is creating new forms of exclusion which can lead to the formation of communities inside the communities based on political loyalties institutionalizing, in turn, the right to exclude. In this scenario, more important that the institutionalization of the communal councils as spaces of participation, it is necessary to look for the legitimatization of the communal councils as true mediators between the needs of the entire community and the State institutions. The fact that a particular government institutionalized these spaces of participation does not give more right of decision to one part of the council identified with their political project over the other which doesn't. This can lead to the creation of 'apartheid of revolutionaries.' The understanding of citizenship as the right to participate in an invited space like the communal councils is a challenge for the goal of transformation through participation. This is the reason why the inclusion of the whole community in these spaces of participation is vital to reach a positive impact on the socio-economic development of the community.

### **3-Autonomy**

Autonomy, understood as the right to self-rule, is a very important component that any space of participation must have. In Venezuela, communal councils are supposed to be spaces of participation and articulation of public policies where the community decides what their needs are and how to work them out. The non-intervention of any kind of political or financial actor which can make the decisions of these communal councils dependant on them is a must for the success of this model. The level of freedom in setting the communal councils' agenda, in the use of the financial resources received and from major political actors were some of the issues explored during the fieldwork for this research.



One of the first questions addressed by the researcher was how local was the idea to start the communal councils in the communities visited. According to several spokespeople interviewed this initiative came from the communities themselves without receiving any kind of pressure from State or political figures and inspired by the model of new institutionalism promoted from the government<sup>28</sup>. For the spokespeople's election the interviewees agreed that this was a clean process which did not receive the interference of external actors<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, there were cases of local politicians trying 'to court' some communal councils and put them to work in their favor. In these situations the feeling of community and cohesion expressed by the spokespeople and described in the first criteria of this assessment made these situations unacceptable, the councils demanded respect from the politicians<sup>30</sup>. Also the fact that communities can submit their projects directly to the State institutions discourages this can of intervention

According to FUNDACOMUNAL the institution gave technical advice and training to the communities which wanted to start a communal council. This institution assured to give total freedom in the selection of projects that the councils wanted to implement. This was confirmed by the different spokespeople interviewed; even more, the agendas approved by the communities were in all the cases decided and discussed by the concerning community<sup>31</sup>. The way that the priorities of the community were set did not allow putting forward preset agendas because these priorities were derived from the communal diagnosis and the discussions during the citizens' assemblies.

It was also found that communal councils were free to decide where to invest the monies received for the implementation of their projects. The spokespeople said that the financial resources received were spent in the projects approved by the community and there was no imposition from the institutions to spend it in certain ways. The funds for financing the projects came mainly from allocations given by institutions of the central government like FUNDACOMUNAL, or from decentralized territorial entities like municipalities and parish boards. However, if a municipality or a state or an institution had a specific program that they wanted to implement and the communal councils wanted to participate in them, then, the aforementioned institutions had the authority to decide how and where to allocate the resources<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> See Annex E

<sup>29</sup> For more on this see Villasmil (2007) and Machado (2008)

<sup>30</sup> See Annex E

<sup>31</sup> In 8 out of 10 communal councils, the community approves the projects (Machado, 2008:36)

<sup>32</sup> See Annex M

## **Are the PSUV and politicians supporting the communal councils?**

Although the spokespeople interviewed claimed their communal councils to be very independent from different political actors in general, the researcher found during his visits to some communal councils that this was not always the case. There are three specific situations that are relevant to mention: one is the use of intermediaries inside the State institutions to speed up the approval of financing for community projects, second how some local politicians use the projects supported by their administrations in the communal councils to make electoral propaganda, and thirdly the rising involvement of the government's party (PSUV) in some aspects related with the functioning of the communal councils.

For the first situation some members of the communal councils had political connections with politicians or civil servants inside the State institutions who could 'move' faster the allocation of resources for a project presented by certain council<sup>33</sup>. This happened with projects presented to the municipalities, or the parish boards, in national institutions the researcher could not get a very clear image of this situation.

For the second situation, it was found in the neighborhood of La Silsa, that a communal sports center which had been requested by the communal council to the municipality was advertised with the picture of the mayor of this locality and the name of the communal council next to it<sup>34</sup>. This also happened in other areas of the city where there were informative banners which associated the image of President Chavez with projects requested by the communal councils<sup>35</sup>.

For the third case, the rising role of the PSUV in its relations with the communal councils was another interesting finding for the researcher. According to some of the interviewees the PSUV was receiving projects from the communal councils, later on they would submit this project to the concerning State institution that should allocate the resources<sup>36</sup>. Some spokespeople assured that with the PSUV the answer from the institutions in the approval and allocation of resources was faster.

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<sup>33</sup> See annex K

<sup>34</sup> See Annex S

<sup>35</sup> The way that resources are delivered involve publicized mobile cabinets where President Chavez delivers the checks with the money for the communities (Rodriguez and Lerner, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Garcia-Guadilla on her research mentions the attempts made by parties close to the government to penetrate different instances of participation with the aim of obtaining electoral gains (2008:13).

***“The PSUV is carrying out a mission, because what our president wants is the PSUV to integrate in the community problems. They help us a lot; they make a big effort to help us achieve our objectives.”***

*Juan Pablo, C.C. Esperanza Revolucionaria, W.S.C.*

### **Are the communal councils really autonomous?**

When the communal councils were institutionalized by law in 2006, it was said that they were going to be mechanisms of popular participation and articulation of public policies in the communities. At first sight communal councils seem to be quite independent and autonomous from all the State actors; besides, they have produced high levels of pride, dignity and empowerment on the communities impacted. These mechanisms seem to be revolutionary channels of power transfer to the communities under a framework of political and popular decentralization.

The power of decision-making in the communal councils in the selection of projects and allocation of resources seems to confirm that the self-rule of the communities and a true popular decentralization are in the process of being achieved. Nevertheless, through the fieldwork there were identified two major problems that the communal councils suffer and which have been mentioned throughout this research: on one hand, the way that they are being financed, and on the other the way that they are inserted into the decentralization scheme and the whole idea of popular power.

Communal councils are spaces of participation which are highly dependent on State resources. This is quite problematic since the allocation of resources from the state institutions could make communal councils expect resources from above not forcing them to generate them as it has happened in the past<sup>37</sup>. Even though, the goal with the law of the communal councils is to make them self-sufficient, the dependence from public funds can create parasitic attitudes in the councils which can bureaucratize the whole process of resource allocation.

There is another serious threat to the autonomy of the councils which is summarized by Daniel Levine: “previous processes of interest mediation or representation were bypassed (in Venezuela) for a direct relation between the leader and the people” (Levine, 2005:182). The misuse of the power of the executive to create mechanisms which can reach in a faster and less bureaucratic way the supporters for the regime can undermine the plurality of the democratic Venezuelan system. Communal councils’ space of influence is

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<sup>37</sup> During the 1970's Venezuela lived an oil boom which financed very generous social programs targeting lower-income citizens, nevertheless with a non-lasting impact.

quite limited and by being dependant on state resources it could establish a vertical clientelist relationship (Luziani, 2007).

The law of communal councils gives a lot of power to the executive in the implementation, formation and supervision of the communal councils. The involvement of the executive in the presidential commissions and the creation of SAFONACC or FUNDACOMUNAL both institutions directly linked to the executive are not healthy for a space of participation which is assumed to be self-regulated and independent from any political actor. It is not that the researcher argues against the funding of spaces of participation from the State, it is that under a system of check and balances these kinds of mechanisms have to be included in a scheme of decentralization to safeguard the fair competition of different political actors. In a country with such a level of polarization instigated by the old and new political elites the direct material relation under the Executive power can be used as a mechanism to gain political *clientèle*.

The interpretation that the Venezuelan Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has made about the role that the parties should have in the society justifies, from their perspective, the role of the PSUV in the communal councils. However, Venezuela is not a socialist country *per se*, it does not follow a one-party model and it has regular representative elections where there are competitors from other political strands. The role of the PSUV by intermediating in the councils' projects' submission puts this party in a 'pole position' in the creation of loyalties to specific leaderships, in this case President Chavez. It also denies the opportunity to other political parties to compete under fair circumstances because it has the advantage of working with the communities in spaces created by the State. This presence discourages other people from participating in these mechanisms of self-government because they could be perceived not as spaces for the construction of a new society but as an ideological arm of the ruling party penetrating in the communities.

To conclude this part, the way that the allocation of resources is designed and the publicized mobile cabinets done by President Chavez give the impression of the creation of a new form of relationship between the leader and the masses where the communities feel that the benefits obtained come directly from the Executive. The potential creation of communal cities formed by communal councils, just as the failed reform of 2007 proposed, can be interpreted as a mechanism to take away power from decentralized political actors creating a much larger imbalance of power. Although communal councils have been used as a way to deconcentrate power, it seems that it is actually reconcentrating it even further around the figure of the President of the Republic.

#### **4- Transparency and accountability**

This area of the fieldwork wanted to identify the level of transparency in the process of formation of the communal councils, this is, the spokespeople's elections, the use of financial resources to finance any of the candidates to spokespeople, among other things. Another point of interest was to explore how the management of the resources destined for the communal councils was being done taking the institutional and the communal councils' angles. It was also an objective in this part of the fieldwork to identify to whom communal councils are accountable for; this is, to explore the processes of accountability from the communal councils' perspective.

The spokespeople from different communal councils interviewed and members of the opposition agreed that the process of formation and election of the spokespeople were done without any major problem. The only problems that they might have encountered were more related with the practicalities of the electoral process and the registration of the council before FUNDACOMUNAL.

When it come to the transparency from the administrative perspective, it is important to divide it in the perceptions of the communal councils and the perceptions of the institutions. From the fieldwork it was perceived that the idea of mismanagement simply terrified the spokespeople for two reasons: there was the fear of being expelled of the community if they found out and in second place there was an ideological component linked to a sense of community that prevented them from taking any inappropriate step<sup>38</sup>

However, some spokespeople complained about cases of corruption that occurred inside other communal councils. These cases, which these spokespeople did not want to go in depth, were related with the financial units of the councils: one of them was related with how the speakers of a communal council did not inform to the community about the receipt of some resources and how the overspending of these spokespeople in luxury items gave themselves away to the community. There are documented cases of mismanagement in communal councils where they have received the money or the materials to build the project and sometimes they sell these materials to the best bidder and with overprice (Matheus, 2008), nevertheless, they are a minority.

On the other hand, some members of the opposition perceived the financial resources allocated to the councils as a den of thieves. According to them, in certain institutions the resources were not given to the councils but taken by some civil servants. A similar comment was made by a Pro-Chavez activist, who blamed on the institutions and the non-revolutionary civil servants who were the culprits of this mismanagement.

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<sup>38</sup> More than 70% of the communal councils have procedures to assess the activities implemented (Machado, 2008:42).

For FUNDACOMUNAL the problems related with accountability came in the form of citizens' assemblies accusing some speakers of trying to push for projects that would benefit them in a monetary or material way. The communal councils are accountable to the community and to FUNDACOMUNAL or the institution which gave the resources for a project<sup>39</sup>. However, in FUNDACOMUNAL they complained that there were many communal councils which did not send the reports of how they had spent the monies of the projects implemented in their communities<sup>40</sup>.

### **What is more transparent: the council, the community or the institutions?**

The management of the immense amount of money destined to the communal councils for the implementation of their projects is a valid concern in a country recognized for having no sense for the meaning of public goods, where administrative corruption<sup>41</sup> is rampant and where there is a hale of suspicion over any public initiative. I argue that even though there are cases of corruption inside the communal councils, there is a very high sense of community among their members which isolate these spaces from malpractices. If there are mismanagement related problems, they have more to do with the *modus operandi* of many State institutions which can divert the money allocated for a project to individual interests. Even more, if there are problems of corruption inside the councils, it is derived more from the lack of regulations concerning the functioning of the financial units and the role of the social control units. The State in Venezuela has not traditionally been accountable to their citizens, so there is a culture of non-accountability legitimized from the top. This is the reason why the law must prevent the lack of accountability by creating legal mechanisms formed by a national body focused only on regulating the financial units of the communal councils.

### **5.3. Communal Councils, Popular Power and the umbrella of transformative participation**

The greatest strength that communal councils have in Venezuela is that they are framed under one of the most socially progressive constitutions in Latin America. The institutionalization of the right to participate as part of every single person's citizenship makes of communal councils an important tool to bring transformation. Nevertheless, there are several theoretical and practical shortcomings which are a serious impediment for achieving transformation through the communal councils. The analysis of the fieldwork under the ITP was the first step to find that communal councils were not

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<sup>39</sup> See Annex N

<sup>40</sup> 22% of the communal councils do not have any form of accountability about the executed projects (Machado, 2008:44)

<sup>41</sup> See Transparency International Corruption Index 2007

conducive mechanisms for societal transformation and they were far from strengthening the ideal of popular power. The main reason to say this is that communal councils are embedded in a political context which is not beneficial for their development. This is partly derived from the conceptualization of the Venezuelan constitution, the popular power, the political culture and the institutional design of the communal councils themselves. The main reasons that contribute to the aforementioned situation are explained next.

### **Popular power in Venezuela and its disempowering effect**

The experiment of participatory democracy in Venezuela has its base on popular power; this is, the power that emanates from the people. The conceptualization of this concept becomes problematic for the Venezuelan case because it is based on the promotion of one type of model represented by one leader, as it is the case of President Chavez and his revolution. In theory, to transfer all power of decision to the citizens would breach almost all types of democratic deficits associated with a political system. Nevertheless, how much power should be given to the people, under which circumstances and through which mechanisms are relevant questions that need to be answered.

The reason why asking the above questions are so necessary it is because popular power in Venezuela is a concept which is based on a potpourri of laws, constitutional articles and ideologies which give a sense of fragmentation and lack of theoretical cohesion. On top of this, President Chavez's constitution of 1999 and the laws created under it has exacerbated the presidentialism by giving more power to the executive branch and specifically to the president of the republic<sup>42</sup>. With large sectors of the population supporting President Chavez, but also with large sectors opposing him the idea of popular power linked to a revolution whose image is one person is counter-productive for the democratic health of the nation.

The main problem with the concept of popular power is that it is based on giving power to large sectors of the population which in many cases more than believing in a political project believe in the leader of this project. This can create more a revolution based on fondness than knowledge. This affects the check and balances of the nation since the president, based on his high acceptance among the population and the ideological substance of the revolution, can legitimize any decision by appealing to the defence of the 'popular power.' President Chavez can use his power of rhetoric and popularity to demonize certain groups, as it has already happened, simply because they do not share his political views.

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<sup>42</sup> The Venezuelan Constitution created a unicameral parliament, reformed the judiciary by adding more members to the Supreme Court, gave the power to the President to pass legislation by decree with previous parliament's approval, and took away some functions from the decentralized entities, among others (Delgado cited by Maingon and Sosa, 2007:18).

## **The communal councils under the concept of Popular Power**

To locate communal councils into an ideal such as the one of popular power leaves much more questions than answers in the air. The form that the Venezuelan government has set out the popular power delegitimizes the autonomy and inclusion of the communal councils. As it was said in the previous section, the biggest obstacle that the ideal of popular power has in Venezuela is that it is linked to the figure of President Chavez. The institutional design of the communal councils and the form they have been promoted associate them with a leader who is looking after his constituency and not the country's citizens. This derives in other situations where the way the councils fit in the decentralization scheme, and the way they are financed and promoted as part of the revolution constitute barriers to reach their full potential for transformation.

The conceptualisation of the popular power leads to deeper questions related with the theoretical foundations of the communal councils. How can the communal councils be considered? Part of the government? Part of the structure of the state? Part of a different dimension of civil society? Part of the community? If we consider them part of the State then are the spokespeople something like *ad-honorem* officials elected by the citizens' assembly? If the citizens' assembly has power of election, proposition and execution, are they also part of the State? As the sociologist Marco Velasquez from FEGS referred to this point: "Am I father or Am I son, where do I fit?" If the speakers and the citizens' assembly are considered informal, *ad-honorem* State officials, how a public official can elect himself?

Lets say that the communal councils are part of the State apparatus, if such is the case, then what position they occupy in the decentralization scheme of the nation? Are they at the same level of the local parishes, the municipality, the states? Are they for proposing, executing or both? If they are for proposing, then, they have to be seen as bodies which decide what is needed in the community and which decisions are binding by presenting them to the different State institutions. Under this case the municipalities and governors have to recognize, respect and foment the initiatives of these councils. If they have power for executing all areas of development of the community, then the question would be more related with the need of the presence of municipalities and governorships in the communities. Still there is not a clear distinction in the law about the role of the municipalities; ideally they should function as coordinators and integrators of public projects implemented by the communal councils, nevertheless this is not the case so far.

### **5.4. Communal Councils in the search for 'optimum participation'**



By applying Farrington and Bebbington typology of participation it was found that the width of the model presents a series of important obstacles to achieve the level of 'optimum participation.' The way communal councils look on paper allows the community to express and execute a lot of their claims without many direct institutional obstacles impeding it. However, when they are analysed from the width perspective it is found that even though by law everyone's participation is guaranteed, the communal councils present a level of political polarization which is reflection of the current state of politics in the country. The situation of community distrust based on political views and the feeling of 'not participation by choice' of some members of the communities strengthens the perceived narrowness in the inclusion of these spaces. The territorial claims of councils controlled by this side or the other, especially from the observation done to the ones located in the Eastern side of Caracas is a proof of this tacit policy of non-inclusion.

If Pretty's typology of participation is applied, then communal councils could be categorised as *Functional Participation*, where the participation of the people is a means to achieve the external agencies' goals. Although people participate in joint analysis, development actions, and formation which help to make these councils stronger; the way that they are implemented confirms the need of the government to find quicker mechanisms to reach the population of the country in such a way that they identify a material benefit with the President. This situation affects the autonomy of the councils and, as Pretty says, can make them fall under co-optation.

### **5.5. To conclude...**

After assessing the institutionalization of the communal councils as a mechanism for transformative participation, the results leave a lot of doubts in the air about the feasibility of these spaces under the current circumstances. The researcher identified during his fieldwork serious shortcomings in each one of the 4 areas chosen as ITP. These shortcomings were mainly derived from the apparent sense of community which was seriously compromised by the lack of autonomy from the State and the political loyalties based on an ideological hegemony. This hegemony nurtured exclusionary attitudes which affected the level of political inclusion. On the good side, the way that the councils have been designed help them to be transparent in the managing of resources, despite some exceptions.

On the other hand, to frame communal councils under popular power creates a lot of confusion due to the way this concept is developed in the current Venezuelan context. The theoretical and ideological vacuums of the term affects the conceptualization of the communal councils. The lack of clarity on where the communal councils are located in the decentralization scheme and how their members should be considered affect the formal outcomes expected from these spaces.

Finally, the lack of autonomy and inclusion shown by the ITP affects the path of the communal councils to reach an '*optimum participation*.' This is a barrier which due to the lack of autonomy from the executive power and the reflection of the macro-political polarization on these spaces leave them in a level of 'functional participation' as Pretty's typology proves.

## **Chapter 6**

### **WRAPPING UP THE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNAL COUNCILS IN VENEZUELA**

It could be argued that the role of communal councils in Venezuela is leading a true societal transformation. They have given new tools for the communities to develop themselves and rule over their own matters. The conception of the communal councils was derived from the formal idea of giving an opportunity for the empowerment of those who had been invisible to the public policies. The Venezuelan State asked to its citizens: what do you need? What can I do for you? And then told to them: If you want to tell me what you need you have to organize yourself in the community, decide your priorities and you and I will work together to solve them (Villasmil, 2008)<sup>43</sup>. This logic seemed to be revolutionary in a region not very used to be taken into account by its leaders. However, to create this mechanism in a strong ideological framework and in a great political polarization led by a very charismatic leader was a dangerous move which might already be distorting the formal intentions of this space of participation.

Are the communal councils fulfilling their role as vehicles for a transformative participatory process? The answer would be not really. Although there is a positive change of mentality in many communities of the country thanks to the communal councils, these invited spaces are still missing the political inclusion and autonomy from the State which are key elements in the creation of emancipated and self-ruling citizens. To call communal councils transformative tools of participation and the way to reach popular power seem to be a difficult conceptual endeavour for a number of reasons summarized next.

In first place, framing communal councils under the concept of popular power has been counter-productive because of the confusion, the fragmentation and the association with the figure of President Chavez that this concept has. The overlapping role of the councils and the municipalities partly due to the confusion with the conceptualization of popular power go against the logic of political decentralization. By allowing these spaces of participation to jump over the steps of the power pyramid, they undermine the order of the public planning scheme. On the other hand, changing the representative system for one just based on popular power is not feasible in the Venezuelan scenario. This is partly because of the political culture of the country where the traditional partisan scenario based on clientelism and assistentialism is not ready to depart.

In second place, the closer spaces of participation are to the leadership in the power pyramid, the more inflexible and ideologically extreme they might become. This ideological extreme affects the autonomy of these spaces of popular participation because they become judges of social and political behaviours. This is what Thais Maingon calls 'citizenship under tutelage' (Maingon and Sosa, 2007:33). The way that communal councils in Venezuela

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<sup>43</sup> See Annex M

are conceived from a top/down perspective makes them easy prey of this situation. This kind of citizen is not conducive of good community practices which can include everyone.

The role of President Chavez as the indispensable leader of the revolution has affected the way that the communal councils have been implemented. Instead of being a mechanism of empowerment, they seem to be more a mechanism for broadening the popular base of the president by transferring resources without the bureaucracy of the State apparatus. The almost direct link of the councils with the Executive power through the institutions ruling them affects the autonomy of these spaces disempowering the people who are supposed to benefit.

Finally, the inability to include all political views in the communal councils is a serious obstacle to reach a true transformation. The perception of first and second class citizens based on the loyalty to the revolution hinders the potential of these spaces. What the current political process in Venezuela needs to learn is not the practice of the right to equality, but the practice of the right to be different. This one does not need to be institutionalized by law but taught to the children, the future of this country, to really create a transformation in the Venezuelan society. In order to have a successful model of transformative participation, the design of mechanisms of participation should include elements that promote an 'agonistic pluralism' as Chantal Mouffe says. By recognizing the legitimacy of 'the other' to oppose to my political views, the Venezuelan democracy could strengthen the foundations of a true transformation necessary to achieve an inclusive society.

A model of participation which is based on transferring state resources to the communities as a way to mobilize people excluding those who disagree or are apathetic to the new political project; a model which is linked by law and ideology with a leader with personalistic features; and a model whose law bypasses traditional channels of decentralization cannot be called transformative by any means. Well designed mechanisms of participation which attempt to search for ways to include most of the population no matter politics, ideology, religion, race, gender or sexual orientation is a must for a project of transformation based on participation. The ideological process lived in Venezuela has perhaps created stronger social tensions than the pre-existing ones. Any leader with rhetoric, charisma and a good political base can create breaches in a society; however, to achieve the reconciliation and construct bridges to bring the antagonists on board is a different story.

The true transformation of a society which is looking for an alternative model of development starts from the recognition of the people's sovereignty by their leaders. The leaders have to take a step aside allowing and motivating the full development of everyone's participation without any further interest than achieving a real political, economic and social egalitarianism.

## **ANNEXES**

### **Annex A**

**Why Communal Councils cannot be conceptualised as civil society in Venezuela?**

The ethnocentric origin of the concept of civil society does not help in the analytical endeavour of calling the members of communal councils by this

name in Venezuela. Especially, since this mass of emancipated citizens consider themselves as part of a project that wants to build transformation based on indigenous concepts and local knowledge not borrowed from their colonial masters.

On the street people identify two political actors: the government and the opposition. The Venezuelan imaginary about opposition is related with middle-upper classes, upper classes, the Catholic Church, political NGOs (including think tanks), private universities and the old political parties. At the same time the opposition is divided in two sectors: civil society and old political parties which the civil society does not want to be related with because of the past they represent. The liberal perspective of considering communal councils as part of civil society does not apply here for its elitist perception and because the communal councils make part of a larger political project of transformation led by the State. According to Levine civil society organizations in Venezuela are unable to institutionalize their representation because of their weak alliances and narrow focus (ousting President Chavez) (Waisman et al, 2006:10).

The CBRV gives an important role to the organizations of the civil society in the consultation for the election of important figures of the Electoral and Citizen's Power; however, the constitution is not clear about the type of civil society they talk about and its relations with the central government. Even more, the discourse of the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the popular power seems to contradict the intervention of the civil society consecrated in the constitution. This situation sends an ambivalent message to the society who does not know where to stand when it comes to this concept.

## **Annex B**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>Eglis Fuentes</b>
Position:	Communal Economy Spokeswoman
Communal Council:	Urbanization Bello Campo (Chacao)
Date of the Interview:	June 30th, 2008
Interview conducted in:	Spanish
No translation	

Relevant Quotes in English:

*“The revolution did not invest on me a drop of oil, but an entire barrel”*

*“The process of participatory democracy comes to cover a historical debt that the State had with the people”*

*“The communal councils are totally pluralists; they allow the entrance of everyone. For instance, in my communal council there are 9 speakers out of 25 who belong to the opposition and they were elected by the community through the citizen’s assembly. There was this fight in my council among some speakers for political reasons, and there was this lady who was a speaker from the opposition who stood up for the communal council and defended it because she said that the good results obtained were above anything”*

*“The rules and regulations (of the communal council) are set by the community, no one owns anything, we are all responsible for this”*

*15. “The election of the speakers who belong to our communal council was done with a service fair, we called several state institutions to offer free vaccination, registration for obtaining the national ID card, among others, so people were motivated to go and vote”*

JT. Juan Carlos Trivino S.

E: Eglis Fuentes

JT: Podrías describir un poco donde está tu consejo comunal localizado?

E: Chacao es un área localizada en el este de Caracas, y es conocida como la zona más afluente del país debido a que en esta zona viven personas con un perfil socio-económico alto. Sin embargo hay comunidades de bajos recursos en el área. Esta zona recibe el mayor presupuesto municipal de todo el país.

JT: ¿Qué significa para ti este proceso de consejos comunales?

E: El proceso de democracia participativa viene a cubrir una **deuda histórica** que se tenía con el pueblo.

(Según la entrevistada la oposición manipula la oportunidad de los consejos debido a que los ven como herramientas gubernamentales, mientras que ella asegura que estos consejos son totalmente pluralistas al permitir la llegada de todos y todas para sin importar la procedencia política. Ella cita que el consejo está formado por 25 voceros de los cuales 9 son de la oposición. Estos fueron

elegidos por las asambleas de ciudadanos.Cada comunidad determina el número de voceros)

En mí (La revolución) no ha invertido una gota de petróleo, sino todo un barril. Imaginate tu, de 350 artículos la constitución de 1999 dedica 150 a participación. Es que esto es la descentralización por fuera de la institución del estado (No tiene un carácter tecnocrático y a través de la representación tradicional).

JC: Cómo fué el proceso de formación del consejo comunal de ustedes?

E:La elección de los voceros que hacen parte de nuestro consejo comunal fue acompañada de una feria de servicios. Se contactaron varias instituciones del estado para que cedularan, vacunaran, educaran. (Esto fue usado como un tipo de “gancho” para que la gente participara de la elección).Para que un consejo comunal sea considerado bajo esta figura debe primero tener una Banco Comunal que vendría a fungir como una figura cooperativa.

Las reglas de juego (reglamentos) son puestos por la comunidad y nadie es dueño de nada pero todos somos responsables. (El sentido de comunidad fue constantemente repetido a través de la entrevista, el nosotros adquiere un nivel supremo, por encima del yo)

Todo esto ocurre bajo la construcción de un proyecto país. Hay una claridad de que este proceso de grupos que participan se hace bajo el imperio de la ley que le da claridad al consejo como un elemento de desarrollo y construcción positivo.

JC: Como podria catalogarse los consejos comunales? Espacios de la comunidad, del gobierno?

E: Bueno nosotros seguimos ideas, no hombres, este es un espacio de la revolucion. Es una revolución pacífica donde el sentido de nosotros vale mucho más que el yo

Observaciones:

La entrevistada contó anécdotas de su comunidad donde personas de diferentes visiones políticas se enfrentaron y una copartidaria de la visión minoritaria habló a favor de los beneficios de los consejos mostrando como las respuestas oportunas de estos consejos, es decir las acciones, más que las palabras le van dado validez como interlocutores válidos de la comunidad.

## **Annex C**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>Domilsa CastellonEglis Fuentes</b>
Position:	Promoter Adviser of the Social Control Organism at Parish Level
Communal Council:	Cacique Katia (Western Side of Caracas)



Date of the Interview: July 1st, 2008  
Interview conducted in: Spanish  
No translation

**Relevant Quotes in English:**

***“The director of the hospital was elected by the popular request of several communities who were organized through the communal councils, we wanted this director because she is very hard-working woman and always available for the community. She has delegated to some communal councils of the area the capacity to choose some manual laborers... the director of the hospital is with us (the community)”***

*Domilsa, C.C. Cacique Catia, Western side of Caracas*

***“We need to follow the leader (President Chavez), because he is the one who knows better”***

*Domilsa, C.C. Cacique Katia, Western side of Caracas*

***“There is the case of several conflicts of interests with several municipalities of the area, if you require help and they know that you are with this or this person then they don’t want to receive your project.”***

*Domilsa, C.C. Cacique Katia, Western side of Caracas*

***Of course, the projects can be presented to the municipality, the government or the PSUV which is receiving projects too.***

*Domilsa, C.C. Cacique Catia, Western side of Caracas*

La señora Castellón ha pertenecido anteriormente a distintas organizaciones comunitarias de base. Entre ellas los Círculos Bolivarianos, UBE, y un grupo en su comunidad que inició antes de el inicio de la administración del Presidente Hugo Chávez.

Se desempeña en el área de contraloría social, que es un grupo de ciudadan@s cuya función es supervisar el correcto desempeño y desenvolvimiento de los funcionarios públicos en sus comunidades, además son representantes que supervisan la correcta inversión de los recursos públicos, así mismo reciben denuncias de la comunidad sobre hechos que pueden ser considerados como aprovechamiento de la función pública para uso personal.

Hay conflicto de intereses con varias de las alcaldías de las zonas ( Cabe recordar que las contralorías hacen parte de una zona geográfica mayor que el del consejo comunal). Esto se debe a que si dos alcaldes están enemistados y se

solicita ayuda con algún proyecto si la persona (líder comunal) es identificada con apoyar un bando o el otro entonces es castigada al no ser recibida por el alcalde.

La Sra. Castellón repitió constantemente que “Hay que seguir al líder (Pres. Chávez) porque él es el que sabe”

La entrevista mencionó la tristeza que había sentido con la muerte del guerrillero Reyes, ya que según ella es parte de un ejército liberador.

La concientización sobre los ideales de la revolución, fue un punto predominante durante toda la reunión. Así mismo el orgullo de su comunidad y de la Contraloría social al haber logrado elegir la directora del hospital quien ha su vez ha delegado a los consejos de la zona la capacidad de elegir algunos de los trabajadores del hospital mismo. Así ellos lograron sacar al director designado debido a que no era alguien conocido por la comunidad. La directora fue elegida por firmas de la misma comunidad. Así mismo a esta líder le fue mostrada una copia del reporte donde la doctora firmo por el referendo revocatorio, sin embargo ella dice que lo que le importa son los hechos y no la filiación política: “La directora del hospital está con nosotros”

(Cabe recordar que la contraloría social fue creada e institucionalizada por el gobierno nacional en el año 2003)

La gente está cansada del clientelismo, sin embargo a la pregunta de de quién obtienen los recursos para los proyectos ella respondió que del gobierno, pero para presentar un proyecto lo hace ante el instituto estatal que corresponda, la municipalidad o el PSUV.

Así mismo se quejaba como se presentaban proyectos a las alcaldías donde si se identificaba que este consejo pertenecía a tal municipalidad de la cual los alcaldes eran enemigos no se recibía el proyecto.

## **Annex D**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>Teresa Martinez</b> (Last name changed at the interviewee's request)
Position:	Spokeswoman
Communal Council:	El Cafetal (Eastern side of Caracas (Communal Council's name changed at the interviewee's request)
Date of Interview:	July 3rd, 2008
Interview conducted in:	Spanish
No translation	

Relevant quotes in English:

*“I believe that the communal councils will continue even without the current administration... they are creating a culture where they do whatever they want”*

*“Our communal council functions more as an association, we are in total 9 speakers, all from the opposition, we don’t want anyone Chavista (Pro-Chavez)”*

*“This Communal Council had to be done because we did not want them (Pro-Chavez) to occupy the space left by us, because if you leave any space they come and take it”*

*“Haven’t you seen in your visits to the councils how they (Chavistas) look? They don’t look at peace, they are scary, and they are a serious problem. That people want to bring communism into the country and that cannot be tolerated”*

JC: Por qué surge este consejo comunal en este área?

T: Este consejo comunal tuvo que hacerse debido a que no queríamos que ellos (los chavistas) no llenaran el lugar dejado, porque ellos cualquier espacio que se deja los lo agarran.

JC: Usted si no está totalmente de acuerdo con la figura de los consejos comunales por qué los apoya en su barrio?

T: Tu no has visto como se ven, no tiene cara de paz, no, dan miedo, es que son un problema serio, esa gente nos quieren traer el comunismo al país y eso no se puede aceptar. Nuestro consejo comunal funciona más como una junta de vecinos, en realidad los 9 voceros que somos todos de oposición, no queremos a nadie chavista. Es que tu no has visto... nunca antes habíamos tenido ingresos tan altos en petróleo sin embargo dónde está la plata? No se ve.

JC: Pero usted antes pertenecía a la junta de vecinos....

T: Sí claro, yo siempre he sido parte de asociaciones de vecinos.

JC: Usted cree que los consejos comunales seguirán incluso sin Chávez?

T: Sí claro, no ves que ya aquí se ha creado una cultura donde ellos (gobierno) hacen lo que les da la gana.

**Annex E**

Interviewee: Juan Pablo Paiva (Contraloria Social)  
Position: Member of the Social Control Unit  
Communal Council: Esperanza Revolucionaria (W.S.C.)  
Date of the Interview: July 6th, 2008  
Interview conducted in: Spanish  
No translation

### Relevant quotes

*“100% of the people from my council are revolutionaries, so we do not have any conflict at all”*

*“We are building a communal house for the community, we just submitted the project to several institutions and now we started with the construction of it”*

*“We needed sidewalks, so we presented the project and we just concluded the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of it”*

*“There are politicians who have tried to get involved with the communal council (apply clientelism), but we better invite them so they can see our problematic and then when they are in power they know our problems”*

*“The PSUV is carrying out a mission, because what our president wants is the PSUV to integrate in the community problems. They help us a lot; they make a big effort to help us achieve our objectives.”*

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

JP: Juan Pablo Paiva

JC: Cómo ha sido hasta ahora todo el proceso con el consejo comunal?

JP: Hasta ahora hemos trabajado con las uñas, esperando que el estado nos responda. Afortunadamente logramos que nos dieran la cancha.

JC: Tienen ustedes algún tipo de problemas o conflictos dentro de su consejo comunal?

JP: El 100% de la gente de mi consejo son revolucionarios, entonces no tenemos ese conflicto. Pero se presentan esos problemas no, de que yo soy el que mando mas, pero yo digo esperate yo soy el coordinador, yo soy ex funcionario del gobierno, yo soy comisario. Pero igual nadie manda más que nadie. Pero eso es por asamblea por voto, yo fui el mas votado saque 190

votos, además por mi experiencia lealtad y honestidad a las instituciones. A mi me seleccionaron, me postularon,

JC: Cuál es la mayor dificultad que ustedes encuentran aquí con el consejo?

JP: El mayor problema es la apatía pero eso es en todos los consejos comunales, pero eso se acaba explicándole a la gente que es un Consejo Comunal, para que sirva. Qué beneficios obtenemos nosotros, me preguntan? Bueno si tiene problemas en su vivienda el consejo comunal le arregla su vivienda, si necesita una operación que valga millones el consejo comunal le tramita. Es que nosotros somos un poder, nosotros estamos enmarcados en el estado pero no percibimos remuneración.

JC: Pero esto es voluntario?

JP: Nosotros no percibimos salario es *ad honorem*. Este es un trabajo fuerte por eso es que todos los voceros no están.

JC: Oye, yo he escuchado que uno puede meter un proyecto en varias instituciones, eso es cierto?

JP: Tenemos una casa comunal, metimos el proyecto en varios entes del estado pero en el que primero salga mejor. El primero que nos da respuesta ese es.

JC: Y en el PSUV también?

JP: El PSUV está cumpliendo una misión, porque nuestro presidente quiere que el PSUV se integre los problemas comunitarios. Ellos colaboran se esfuerzan en los CC para lograr los objetivos de la comunidad. Los martes nos reunimos y hacemos una asamblea, ellos hacen bastantes grupos de personas hacen presencia con el apoyo de ellos llevan esto a la directiva y a los entes del gobierno y nos ayudan. Los martes tenemos una reunión entre el CC y el PSUV pero los de oposición no toman la palabra, a veces tratan de sabotearnos la cuestión. La gente de la oposición miran de lejos pero no dicen nada no participan. La satisfacción mía es que la gente solucione los problemas. Hay políticos han tratado de meterse y eso, pero uno los invita para que vean la problemática del barrio y luego cuando ellos estén en el poder ellos sepan. Las familias le exigen a uno, le exigen a los consejos comunales. A mi me dió orgullo inaugurar la cancha.

JC: Pero la gente se involucra?

JP: La participación es el mayor problema. Pura promesa, puro llenar planilla, pero no hay resultados. Igual es Fundacomunal quien da los lineamientos a uno. Esto es una potencia, hay mucha aspereza entre los consejos, pero eso no pasa en el mío, porque el ejemplo que le vamos a dar al futuro revolucionario es el ejemplo de los mayores. Mal ejemplo los niños se desaniman con la revolución.

JC: Quien los incentivó a iniciar esto aquí?

JP: Nos motivó el gobierno que esta llevando el presidente Chávez, estamos cansados ya de tanto Adeco. Caldera decía zapato para los ricos y alpargata para los pobres, ahora es lo contrario. El Presidente es un hombre humanitario. Yo estoy con el presidente, pero tengo que ser claro y si por claro me crucifiquen que me crucifiquen, el tiene que ponerle mas seriedad a la inseguridad.

JC: Cual es el mayor problema con las instituciones?

El mayor obstáculo es que no nos dan respuesta rápida y oportuna a los proyectos dados por la comunidad.

## **Annex F**

<b>Interviwee:</b>	<b>Hernando Jose Hales</b>
Communal Council:	Los lideres revolucionarios del Siglo 21 (Western side of Caracas)
Position:	Spokesman
Date of the Interview:	July 6th, 2008
Interview conducted in:	Spanish
No Translation	

### **Relevant Quotes:**

*“In my communal council we do not exclude anyone, what matters here is the work, at the end the community is the one which rules”*

*“...there are insiders from the opposition, but the community knows who they are. But there are communal councils where the squalid ones (Opposition) are not accepted at all”*

*“We started legally last august (2007). First we did all the process: elections, regulations. It is not easy to create and register it, they (institutions) put a lot of obstacles. They take a little bit too long.”*

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

HJ: Hernando Jose

JC: Cuéntame un poco como empezaron ustedes?

HJ: Estamos recién conformados. Empezamos legalmente ahorita, empezamos en agosto del año pasado. Primero hicimos todo el proceso de

elecciones, lleva muchos estatutos. No es fácil conformarlo y registrarlo, ponen muchos obstáculos. Además, se demoran un poquito. Igual ya hemos presentado 3 proyectos a Fundacomunal.

JC: Y tienes tiempo y todo para el consejo?

HJ: Sí, yo trabajo también, pero le dedico tiempo también a mi consejo comunal.

JC: Y ustedes tienen gente de oposición en su consejo?

HJ: En este consejo si hay escuálidos, porque en los consejos comunales no se dice en que partido tiene que estar y si se trabajan bien con ellos. Aquí manda la mayoría y la revolución. Aquí en este consejos comunal que yo estoy no se excluye a nadie, aquí lo que importa es el trabajo. Ellos la comunidad nos va a decir que tenemos que hacer. Pero si hay consejos donde los escuálidos no...En los consejos comunales hay gente infiltrada que es pagada por la oposición pero la misma comunidad si sabe quién esta gente. Pero igual si hay gente de la oposición que trabaja.

## ANNEX G

### Interviewee:

**Deysi Carmona**

Communal Council: Terepaima, El Valle, Caracas (Western Side of Caracas)

Position: Spokeswoman, Land Committee

Date of the Interview: July 3rd, 2008

Interview conducted in: Spanish

No translation

### Relevant Quotes:

*“If we need sewage for the street, we are not going to ask to my neighbor if he belongs to the blue, red, yellow, or green party, the bad smell from black sewage goes to everyone, so it has to be solved for the good of the community.”*

*“The communal councils are part of the community, this is the representation of the community, the popular power.”*

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

D: Deysi Carmona

JC: Cuéntame un poquito, ya que me habían explicado como se formaron ustedes, como es la elección de los voceros y cómo manejan todo lo que es la gente de oposición?

D: Los voceros no pueden representar ningún tipo de partido. La comunidad es la representación de los consejos comunales, no tienen ningún tipo partidista. Los que hacen el trabajo no son presidentes o representantes, son voceros. Que la comunidad integrada busque soluciones a los problemas a que le competen en cada uno de los comités que haya en ese ámbito que ocupan. Los criterios partidistas sí serán en otro nivel. Cuando vas a arreglar un tubo de agua tu no le vas a preguntar a la persona que se le mete el tubo tu eres verde, rojo, azul, etc, la cloaca tampoco porque eso es una necesidad de todos. Si al señor se le rompe al tubo del medio de su casa, a quien perjudica, ese tubo de agua servida no le va a preguntar si el mal olor le pegará al adeco, al copeyano, al chavista, la hedentina y el agua va a correr pa todo el mundo. Indiferente del color del tinte que sea, si es mala gente o no, el problema de todos, eso hay que hacercelo entender a todos.

JC: A que pertenecen los consejos comunales, es decir, so parte de que?

Los consejos comunales son parte de la comunidad, esta es la representación de la comunidad, del poder pueblo, pero el pueblo aun no esta preparado para tomarlo, no esta concientizado. Es por eso que los poquitos que estamos en los consejos comunales nos preocupamos cuando las instituciones del Estado no nos dan respuestas. Una pildora hoy, una pildora mañana, poquito a poquito con resultados se demuestra que la revolucion si funciona. Si las instituciones no dan respuesta, los cc no pueden dar respuesta y esto crea malestar social.

## **Annex H**

**Interviewee:**

**Marcos Velasquez**

Position:

Sociologist at FECS-Caracas

Date of the interview:

July 11th, 2008

Interview conducted in:

Spanish

Translated from original language

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

MV: Marcos Velasquez

JC: Which are the biggest limitation that the communal councils have?

MV: The Communal Councils have several limitations in the practice of its functions and the conception of the solution. The problem is in front of the solution. (There is no vision of planning). For example, Communal Plans of development, the obligation to make them by the community is



there but the law does not say how. I think that it would be very positive if the municipalities gather all the development plans from the communal councils and include them in their municipal plans of development; that would definitely help a lot.

JC: Why is it possible to send to several institutions the same project?

MV: There is confusion about to whom a project should be sent, there are councils that submit their projects to 2 or 3 different institutions to see which one works faster. In theory the 2 or 3 of them can give positive answer and allocate the resources for the same project.

JC: I have noticed that some people from State institutions don't even know what a communal council is. Where does it fit in the State?

MV: There are theoretical vacuums to define where is the Communal Council. I, as communal council and based on the popular power, am father or son? There is a contradiction to consider the communal council as part of the State. Why? Because, am I civil servant as communal council? Am I community?, If I am considered public servant do I elect myself? This is the problem with the confusion about the popular power. The communal councils cannot be considered a government because there is not a division of the 3 powers: executive, legislative and judiciary. This is a pasional not a political debate: Are you in love with the project or not? There is also the issue of inclusion, if this is a big house, it is supposed that our dad has to take care of everyone, but now the middle and upper classes have been neglected.

The law leaves a lot of vacuums, like how many speakers each council should have, how many committees are necessary and in which areas, there is no regulation about the way that the assemblies should be developed. The internal regulation of the communal councils is left to the councils themselves, but this regulations are not been done in many of the councils. Also there is no institution which can really say how to make a template of regulations for a communal council.

## **Annex I**

**Interviewee:** Luis Ignacio  
**Position:** Student Leader and representative of the national student movement.  
**Date of the Interview:** July 9th, 2008  
**Interview conducted in:** Spanish  
**Translated**

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

LI: Luis Ignacio

JC: Talk to me a bit more about the opposition movement in Venezuela and how do you feel about all this process of participatory democracy and communal councils.

LI: Participatory Democracy can be seen as starting with the Bolivarian circles which were reactionary and violent groups. The citizens' assemblies formed in the eastern part of Caracas were formed by citizens who belong to the opposition to the Chavez administration

There is a big difference between the opposition groups to Chavez from the Political side and another one from the civil society side. The former has committed many mistakes and it has been power hungry while the latter is spontaneous, apolitical in the sense that it doesn't come from a specific political background.

I see the communal councils as a fashion which people want to belong to....for now.

JC: But do you see the communal councils are something which can last?

LI: The communal councils in themselves are not bad. They are derived from the Bolivarian circles and there is no doubt that president Chavez has had a social role. The communal councils with passions are good because the citizens have the opportunity to talk. But there cannot be a political mechanism to defend the revolution (Bolivarian). They ideologize everything through this. I think that it is a mistake to put inside a CC party politics and the ideology of this party; especially because this government attempts to control. This is why the CC should be as independent as possible. There should be a non-politicized geopolitical reorganization. The ideology hampers the effort. Actually I feel that the essence of this should be participation and decentralization.

JC: But which do you see as the biggest obstacles for the functioning of these councils?

LI: The financial dependence of the communal councils affects the independence of these spaces.

Also that idea that you can do whatever you want, but you have to ask for permission to me as government. This desinstitutionalizes majors, parochial councils because we, as communities, are the ones who take the decisions. Chavismo, as a movement, has meant recognition, a kind of recognition which for 30 years politicians never gave to the people, but it has also meant a violation of fundamental rights.

JC: I feel that the opposition works against everything the government says, what would you say to that?

LI: We consider ourselves as a proposition not as an opposition. We want to build not to be an obstacle. Our goal is to build our fatherland, to capitalize what democracy is, and put these concepts inside the society. We want also to change the country's vision. Chavismo has meant division, and new forms of exclusion, this project as such has not been sustainable. The communal councils might become stones in Chavez's shoes especially because of the incompetence of Mr. Chavez. They were created for political interests which were not sincere and people might get disappointed because of the lack of results. If you follow the line of the government with the implementation of social and participatory mechanisms they follow an electoral line where depending on the occasion they create a new thing. In this case the communal councils were created the year of the presidential elections of 2006, the same result was expected to be obtained with the CC for the referendum of 2007 which Chavez at the end lost.

JC: Would you consider popular power a new definition of civil society?

LI: The concept of the government about civil society and popular power is just semantics, popular power is civil society and civil society are the civilians who belong to the society. With Chavismo we feel like sheep. The message that this government has tried to give through its ideology is ok, but not the way that they have tried to impose it.

There is something wonderful that is happening thanks to Chavez and it is that he, his government, his ideology, the context, everything have awakened a plurality in the thinking of the young people. For example I had the opportunity to meet the Student leader of the Bolivarian Student movement, he told me I know that I cannot change what you believe in and you cannot change what I believe in, we are never going to be on the same political side but we could work together. Even in a marriage you find power differences so how you are not gonna find them here.

When Chavez formed the PSUV he made a mistake, his political base is a group of small movements which cannot be under the same umbrella, that is why some of them are leaving his party.

JC: What is the student movement in Venezuela?

LI: The Student movement is an spontaneous movement born from the consciousness that this situation has generated. He and the environment that he has helped to create is generating a new generation of leaders. Douglas Barrios member of the National Assembly said that: "The revolution is a plantation which will reach the maturity, when that happens the harvest is going to be unstoppable." You know, freedom of expression is not to be able to talk but that this what I am saying does not bring further consequences.

JC: Do you think that the revolution is sustainable?

LI: No, it is not. The unfulfilled promises, the betrayed hope , that is what is going to make Mr. Chavez fall. Chavez phenomenon is a product of affection but not his government which is not as loved and wanted by the people.

## Annex J

<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>Gonzalo Himiob Santomé</b>
Position:	Law Professor, and Lawyer at his own Law firm, Writer for EL UNIVERSAL (National Newspaper)
Date of the interview:	July 9th, 2008
Interview conducted in:	Spanish
No Translation	

### **Relevant quotes**

*“The Communal Councils are not bad. In zones where Chavismo (pro-Chavez movement) is not strong, there are communal councils where far from supporting Chavez, they are opposed to him. These Communal Councils struggle against Chavez impositions.”*

*“In the communal councils managed by the officialism (Pro-Chavez), there has been huge corruption in the resources allocated to the communal councils. This is, the resources are allocated by the institutions but they don't (reach the communal councils) go to where they have to ”*

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

GH: Gonzalo Himiob

JC: Yo estoy haciendo una investigación sobre los consejos comunales y su rol transformador en Venezuela. Desde su perspectiva, cómo ve usted todo el proceso de democracia participativa, consejos comunales, etc, bajo la óptica del la 'nueva institucionalidad del estado'?

GH: Hugo Chavez se monto en una ola de descontento popular. El habla de unos 40 anos de injusticia. Era una democracia bipartidista y se disputaban cada 5 años el poder los mismos 2 partidos tradicionales que llegaban a pactos de gobernabilidad. En ese pacto se excluyó a una buena parte de la sociedad. La constitucion de 1999 propone formalmente en algunos aspectos que a la

gente se le dé más protagonismos en los aspectos políticos y sociales de la mano, pero de la otra mano la constitución de 1999 es quizás de las constituciones de Latinoamérica que mejor desarrollo en los derechos humanos tiene. Del otro lado hay una exacerbación del presidencialismo, la valoración de la figura única del presidente como el gran director como el gran gendarme que tiene que ver con todo. Esto va con la personalidad de Hugo Chávez, va mucho con su visión de que sin el proceso no existe, sin el proceso no se lleva adelante y tiene que ver con la lealtad que le mantiene mucha gente. Es que el problema es que no se entiende que un presidente por definición en el mundo moderno tiene que ser temporal y esto conduce a la tiranía, a la opresión y a la frustración. Los consejos comunales tienen rango constitucional, el trató de alguna manera en la reforma no solo consolidar un socialismo y uno muy radical como la única visión válida en el país. Yo recuerdo escuchar en el canal del estado donde representantes del oficialismo a lo que no podían responder era como quedan los dentro de esa democracia participativa, que respeta supuestamente todas esas corrientes de pensamiento, todos aquellos quienes no militan con esa corriente socialista, como quedan esas personas allí. No había manera de responderlo porque simplemente están excluidos de toda posibilidad de decisión.

Eso es lo que dá al traste con la posibilidad de Chávez de consolidar esta reforma constitucional. (A los Venezolanos) no nos gustan que nos impongan las cosas y eso se veía muy claramente como una imposición, especialmente lo de la reelección indefinida. Eso demuestra un desgaste. Hubo abstención del sector oficialista que todavía le cree a Chávez pero no cree en el proyecto impuesto. Todavía Chávez no ha podido reaccionar apropiadamente, su visión personalista no lo deja ver claramente.

JC: Muy bien pero, como ve usted los consejos comunales?

GH: Los consejos comunales no son malos, han sido armas de doble filo para la revolución porque aunque han sido una herramienta ideológica de penetración en zonas chavistas, también en otras zonas donde el chavismo no es fuerte se han constituido consejos comunales donde lejos de apoyar a Chávez se han opuesto a él. Estos son consejos comunales que luchan contra las imposiciones de Chávez, lo cual es bueno porque ha activado la conciencia política de la gente. El Venezolano de hace 10 años no es el mismo que es ahora. El Venezolano de hace 10 años era una persona apática en la política, el de hoy se ocupa de las cosas, es más consciente, más preparado de las cuestiones políticas, y eso es un mérito de Chávez, y hay que reconocerlo para bien o para mal.

Los muchacho que tienen hoy en día 20 años, son muchachos que han vivido más de la mitad de su vida bajo este gobierno, y que son muchachos que no se dejan pasar bolas bajas políticas como nos las dejábamos pasar nosotros. Y eso sí es mérito político de Chávez que despertó la conciencia política del Venezolano, quizás no de la mejor manera, quizás no de manera positiva, pero

si efectiva. Sí somos muchos mas concientes de lo que un líder político decida hacer una cosa u otra.

JC: Ud cree que los consejos comunales pueden continuar en una era post-Chávez?

GH: Yo creo que los consejos comunales son positivos, el problema es cuando tú tratas de utilizar el consejo comunal como herramienta de manipulación ideológica, cuando no permites que el consejo comunal sea lo que tiene que ser que es una herramienta de participación pluralista y tolerante de los vecinos, de las comunidades, en los asuntos del Estado.

Por supuesto, es que debería continuar, porque si tú lo reenfocas y los conviertes en lo que tiene que ser, es una de las mejores maneras de permitir directamente a la gente todo lo que es la toma de decisiones sobre su destino.

Es que yo soy un hombre de centro izquierda, uno no puede ser de otra forma en un país donde hay tantas desigualdades y problemas sociales por resolver. Uno de los pecados que no se le perdonará a Chávez es que eno resolvió el problema, es más, él incrementó una polarizacion en torno a su persona entre los ciudadanos que ha resultado muy negativa para todos. Del lado del oficialismo todo lo que sea diferente a Chavez es malo, mientras que del lado de la oposición todo lo que medio huelo a chavismo-oposicion radical es malo, y eso tampoco es así. Porque eso construye una pared entre los venezolanos que no permite comprender, metafora que me gusta mucho, Venezuela es al final como un buque que no puedes undir un pedacito, los buques se unden completo o no se unden, de manera tal que tu tienes que trabajar cotodos llo smiembros de la tripulacion, con todas la areas del buque para llevarlo a buen puerto. Y eso no se ha podido porque Chávez construye un discurso de focalización de todo lo que tiene que ver con el ámbito político, social e incluso hasta ciudadano tiene con ver con él. Eso no se puede manejar así, y un estadista verdadero puede manejar eso asi. Eso conduce que los problemas no se resuelvan. Yo sí estoy de acuerdo con las figuras de los consejos comunales como una figura interesantísima para el logro de la paricipación ciudadana en la toma de decisiona politicas, pero lo que no puedo estar de acuerdo es que ni de uno ni de otro bando se utilicen los consejos comunales como herramientas de penetración ideológica, en todo caso como herramientas de discusión ideologica sí.

En los consejos comunales manejados por el oficialismo, la asignacion de recursos que se le han dado a ellos ha habido muchisima corrupción, es decir los recursos se otorgan pero no llegana a quienes tiene que llegar.

JC: De qué formas no llegan?

GH: Los dirigentes demuchos de estos consejos comunales lo que buscan es hacer negocio con lo que están haciendo, favorecido con una gran impunidad. En este país, y te puedo hablar con absoluta certeza, todo lo que se

haga en favor del oficialismo, incluso cuando constituye en si mismo un delito y una violacion de los derechos humanos, pues es favorecido y promovido por el presidente Chavez lo cual conduce a la impunidad. Caso contrario a lo que pasa con la oposicion, que la oposicion ejerce sus derechos y utiliza la misma constitucion de 1999 para oponerse a Hugo Chávez, entonces constituye un delito.

JC: Cómo es este proceso de polarización y radicalizacion aquí?

GH: Es que pasa por muchas etapas, de la despersonalizacion del opositor deja de ser persona para pasar a ser un escuálido, oligarca, fascista todo lo que dice Hugo Chávez es el desconocimiento absoluto del ser humano hasta el asesinato, no es que Chavez tome una pistola y asesine pero el repite y reitera que cometer ciertos actos en aras de la revolución está bien incluso si son violentos. Es que se está reivindicando la violencia como forma de resolución de conflictos y eso no es una democracia que sea protagónica. Si tú me preguntas si los consejos comunales son malos digo que no en sí mismos, no en su concepcion en su forma de involucrar a los ciudadanos en la toma de decisiones no, pero si son usados como herramientas de penetracion ideologica si son malos y de esto hay muchos ejemplos.

Se han dictado desde el poder ejecutivo una serie de decretos tratan de consolidar lo que no se logro con la reforma consti. Y una de las herramientas que se utilizan para consolidar esas son los consejos comunales, por ejemplo la ley judicial si tu la vez desde lejos ves que esta bien, trata de centralizar los procedimientos judiciales, los ascensos, trata de jerarquizar ocuparse de unas y otras cosas, pero cuando la analizas es una herramienta para fortalecer el centralismo somete a todas las policias locales municipales, estatales al control directo del Ministerio de Justicia que se le atribuyen facultades de intervencion y suspension de las fuerzas de policia.

Quien es en definitiva el que esta decidiendo como opera o como no opera la policia local es el presidente Chavez a traves del Ministerio de Interior de justicia y al lado de esto se crea una toda una estructura del sistema integral de policia que integra la policia nacional, estatal, servicio de inteligencia, policia municipal y un poco mas adelante se crea la policia comunal es un cuerpo de policia de profesionales armados que no son parte de la estructura integral de la policia, la pregunta en este caso seria a quien le rinden cuenta estos senores armados que cumplen funciones policiales profesionales pero que no son parte de la policia entonces ciertamente los consejos comunales a los que estan sometidas las policia comunales esta creando una policia paralela con gente armada. Ocurrio lo mismo con la ley sapo en la que se convertia a todos a todos los funcionario publicos en funcionarios de inteligencia, y contra inteligencia y lo que es mas grave sometia sus posibilidades de ascenso tanto en la vida civil como militar que se convirtiesen en funcionarios de inteligencia y contra inteligencia. Y esto da la posibilidad a los ciudadanos de convertirse en delatores anonicos.

JC: Ud cree que hacia futuro se esta creando autonomia, pq me parece un tanto muy interesantepor la corrupcion qe ud ha mencionado. He hablado con voceros que hablan que si se han presentado casos en otros consejos, pero si se habla de la comunidad como veedor. A mi parecer si da la impresion que se estuviese creando una conciencia de comunidad que cuida sus intereses y que impermeabiliza el proceso counal de este tipo de influencias de corrupcion.

GH: Se pretende de los cc se conviertan en contralores sociales. Pero a su ve si esta contraloria se ejerce en contra del poder central pues ahi se discrimina. Esta reforma de diciembre le daba la posibilidad delpresidente de elegir a dedo unos vicepresidentes regionales, echando para atrás todo el proceso de descentralizacion, y por encima de las autoridades locales. Venezuela era una especie de cuadro que habia que pintar y el unico que podia sostener ese pincel era el, el unico que sabia que color escoger era el.

JC: Que son los iluminados?

GH: Es un termino que yo uso para oponerme a ese liderazgo de traer soluciones magicas a los problemas del pais para conectarse con el pais. Nadie le va a que le tomo la vena a la gente pero no le soluciono sus problemas, no se sirvio del poder de la gente, del poder real. No del poder de estar sentado en la silla presidencial, del poder de la gente para empezar a solucionar los problemas. El se esmero y se esforzo en convertirlos en clientes del Estado, a traves de dadivas y asignacion de recursos pero muy selectivamente. El juega mucho con la ilusion, aquí se han dado casos de la senora que presta sus servicios a una casa, ella no es oficiasta pero a ella cuando le da una camista y una cachucha roja ella va porque el hermano del amigo del tio de la prima le construyeron una casita y le dijeron que si ella nova a estar marchas la posibilidad de recibir lo mismo se alea, asi que hay un chantaje, bueno quedate conmigo y yo te voy a resolver ese problema, eso si no te salgas del proceso, mira que a este sise lo resolvi asi que yo si cumplo

Chavez no ha percibido que los biberones de los bebes no se llenan con ideologia, que la gente padece todos los dias el hambre, los problemas de inseguridad. Se trata de legitimar las faltas del estado cuando son ilegítimas o tratar de vender esperanzas al maquillar cifras sin reconocer los problemas que es el inicio para resolverlos. todo lo que se diga al contrario es un espacio fascista, es la oposicion tratando de echar broma.

El discurso de participacion ciudadano es solo eso un discurso, es solo retorica no va mas alla y todo lo que sea vinculado a eso no es mas que el esfuerzo de chavez de mantenerse en el poder a costa de lo que sea incluso a costa de su propia credibilidad. El siempre tiene cartas bajo la manga

RCTV erosiono su credibilidad es la primera vez que vinculan una desicion negativa con Chavez, yo soy el que esta dando esa orden de cerrar el canal y se hace.



Yo soy un firme creyente en la participacion popular en la toma de decisiones, pero esa participacion popular tiene que partir de la base que si vas a hacer participar a la gente tienes que hacer que esa participacion cuente, que no sea personalista, que enfrente el animo critico, para que alabe lo que tenga que alabar y critica lo que tenga que criticar.

Creo que Venezuela va a hacia mejores rumbos, estos jovenes de hoy han vivido mas de la mitad de sus vidas bajo este regimen y esto ha creado mucha conciencia politica, independiente si son oficialistas o no. El proyecto de participacion es un proyecto absolutamente totalitario. La voluntad popular que es la verdadera efectividad en el control del poder.

### **Annex K**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>Mireya</b>
Position:	Spokeswoman
Communal Council:	Esperanza Revolucionaria, La Cilsa (Western Side of Caracas)
Date of the Interview:	July 3rd, 2008
Interview conducted in:	Spanish
No translation	

### **Relevant Quotes**

*“The more we can avoid a member who is not from the same political vision the better; this might endanger the existence of the communal council itself”*

*“People find motivation to go to the communal council because of the possibility to solve the problems of the community”*

*“One, as a leader, tries that all the speakers become revolutionaries, we don’t want the past anymore, besides, we are all leaders because we all work the same”*

*“In our communal council there is no opposition, Thanks God”*

*“The councilmen (from parish boards) know who is who in the councils and if the communal council belongs to the opposition there might be problems”*

*“This is a beautiful process, if everyone were inside, it would be easier. The problem is that there are a lot of Adecos and Copeyanos (People who belong to the traditional Parties identified with the elites) inside the institutions that block the projects.”*

JC: Cuéntame un poquito por qué y cómo se formaron ustedes...

M: El consejo comunal viene siendo una parte muy importante de la comuna. Nosotros somos los que manejamos la comunidad en pleno, sabemos su problemática, sus alegrías, sus dolencias, todo, todo. Hay necesidades en la comunidades que podemos resolverlos nosotros, no todo puede ser resuelto por papa gobierno. Es importante decir que nosotros somos autonomos, nosotros decidimos, oiste. Es que nuestro Comandante presidente creo un pequeño gobierno dentro de la comunidad. La gente se motiva a ir a los consejos comunales por la posibilidad de solucionar los problemas de la comunidad.

JC: Ok, y cuando se forman qué hacen, es decir cómo fue el proceso de conformación , fácil, difícil?

M: Bueno mira, tenemos que prepararnos para hacer proyectos. La comunidad es la que hace el proyecto. Conformar un consejo es facil, es lo mas facil que hay. Se llama en asamblea a la comunidad, son unas elecciones comunales, allí la misma comunidad elige las personas que quieren que los representen en las diferentes instituciones. La misma comunidad organiza y hace las mismas elecciones.

JC: Pero ustedes como manejan el tema de la oposición y todo eso?

M: Bueno en nuestro consejo comunal no hay opositores gracias a Dios. La comunidad decide que es la vocería que ellos quieren. Depende de las necesidades del sector se hacen las comisiones. La comisión promotora es la que hace el censo es un estudio socioeconómico. Los voceros no pueden representar a ningún partido, ni ninguna figura pública que tenga que ver muy directamente con las instituciones. Uno como líder trata que todos los voceros sean revolucionarios, no queremos más pasados, todos somos líderes porque todos trabajamos igual. Mientras se pueda evitar que entre una persona que no sea de la misma rama política mejor, porque sino el consejo comunal se puede ir al piso. En el consejo comunal no se habla de política especialmente en presencia de opositores. Cuando ellos están no se habla de estrategias nuestras ni nada.

JC: Pero tienen ustedes gente de oposición en las vocerías?

M: En nuestro consejo que se llama esperanza revolucionaria gracias a Dios no.

JC: Oye y a quién le presentan ustedes los proyectos?

M: El proyecto puede ser metido en diferentes instituciones pero lo aprueba solo uno.

JC: Incluso al PSUV?

M: Se le puede presentar al PSUV. Si conoces a alguien en la alcaldía y está conectado con alguien del consejo comunal o el PSUV es más rápido. Los concejales saben quien es quien en los consejos y si el consejo es de oposición

puede haber problemas. Este es un proceso muy lindo, que si estuviésemos todos juntos sería más fácil. Los consejales no se toman la cuestión de ir y peinar el barrio como dice mi Presidente. Este es un proceso bien bonito que lo tenemos que lograr entre todos. Te hablo como comunidad. Este es un proceso que si todos estuviésemos en este proceso, son muy pocos los que no están de acuerdo. Pero hay mucho adecos y copeyamos dentro de las instituciones que nos trancan los proyectos. Todos somos comunidad, todos somos revolucionarios, es solidaridad, si yo no ayudo al vecino como puedo decir que soy revolucionario.

## **Annex L**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>Esteban Rojas</b>
Communal Council:	El Conde
Position:	Metropolitan Councillor for Public Policy planning.
Date of the interview:	July 9th, 2008
Interview conducted in:	Spanish
Translated from original language	

His task is to train communities which are involved with communal councils. Help to jump the obstacles that can make financial resources from the local or central government take long.

He helps with the Participatory Diagnosis which has to be made by each community with a communal council, also he approves projects proposed by the CC

He sees problems in the misuse of public financial resources, especially from the institutions. He also believes that if the community has the space to create a communal council then this must be done. In his experience he believes that community work has to be done no matter political tendency but remembering that at the end the community is the one which rules.

I asked him where he would place the communal councils. He said that they were part of the State and the geographical area where they belong to.

## **Annex M**

<b>Interviewee:</b>	<b>Magaly Villasmil</b>
Position:	Sociologist, Central University of Caracas, Center of National Statistics
Date of the Interview:	July 8th, 2008
Interview conducted in:	Spanish

No Translation

### Relevant Quotes

*“The institutions are not aware of the constructive power of the communal councils... Some institutions have not understood that it is not about sharing the resources with the communal councils, it is actually giving to them the resources, the power...It is going to be very hard for the institutions to understand this new role.”*

*“The internal regulation of the communal councils is left to the councils themselves, but these regulations are not done in many of the councils because the law does not force to do so.”*

*“From the experience that I have and in the communal council where I was doing research no one talked about politics; there was a difference between the PSUV and the communal council.”*

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

MV: Magaly Villasmil

JC: Bueno para empezar, pues he leído tu trabajo sobre los consejos comunales, sin embargo en estos días investigando aquí me he encontrado con dos situaciones frecuentes: uno la relación con las instituciones, hay muchos vacíos en la ley que crean problemas para los consejos y dos la presencia del PSUV en los consejos. A qué se debe esto?

MV: Bueno mira, los consejos comunales autoconstruyen su metodología de trabajo, aunque las instituciones ignoran esto. El problema es que las instituciones no son conscientes del poder constructor que tienen estos consejos. No se puede universalizar las características, hay algunos consejos en los que la gente participa masivamente y otros no.

Acerca de lo que me comentas del PSUV, bueno yo creo que eso afecta el buen desarrollo de los consejos comunales porque la gente que es delegado del PSUV y al mismo tiempo vocero del consejo comunal crea un problema porque no tienen tiempo para ambos. Es decir esto afecta la eficiencia porque si tu estás en una cosa y estás en otra no puedes funcionar bien en las dos.

No hay herramientas para evaluar y sistematizar la experiencia de los consejos comunales. La ley deja muy libre cuantos voceros vana a conformar, cuantos comités y que áreas, se deja libre como van a ser tus asambleas. El reglamento interno es dejado al consejo comunal pero esto no se está haciendo en muchos. A esos no se le ha dado importancia y es fundamental, y ninguna institución sabe dar un ejemplo de como hacer un reglamento interno. Es que como se va a institucionalizar una herramienta así ante la comunidad si no se tiene esto.

La gente tiene que darse cuenta del poder que tienen. Sin embargo, No es fácil porque depende de qué está sucediendo en la comunidad: si hay roces, si la gente deja de participar porque hay discusiones, etc.

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JC: Si claro ya entiendo lo que quieres decir, pero igual cuales son como los problemas mas frecuentes que tu hayas en los consejos, es decir en linea con lo que tú decías anteriormente...

MV: Bueno es básicamente ese tipo de cositas que te comentaba antes, como nuestras asambleas se hacen cada tanto, si es cada vez que hay un proyecto o no, y para que se tome una decision debe haber tantas personas mayores de 15 años. Eso no esta escrito en ningun lado y las comunidades a veces no lo hacen o no lo saben. Al consejo comunal se le ha dado mucho poder sin estar preparado. Para la gente es una oportunidad, eso fue masicvo, estamos hablando de organizacion popular, del pueblo que fue excluido de las politicas publicas, que no era ciudadano el excluido, el invisible, tuviste 40 años que se le tumbaba el rancho, no tenia agua, trabajo luz. Ahora te estoy diciendo, oye yo quiero saber como estas tu pero tu tienes que organizarte para decirmelo y aparte de decirmelo en lo que tu puedas arreglarlo arreglalo y yo te doy los recursos. Pero en la manera de constituirlo de trabajar un consejo comunal es complicado, porque es un gobierno comunitario pero sin ningun tipo de logistica que tiene el estado. Ellos cuentan con los recursos que tienen ahí, unos aliados buscando beneficio para ellos, pero hay otros que no.

JC: Que es un consejo comunal? Es parte del Estado, del gobierno, como lo catalogarias?

MV: Las organizaciones mencionadas antes eran transitorias (Comites de tierras, etc). Si te lees la ley el consejo comunal es autogestion, estamos en proceso de llegar a eso. Pueden funcionar con recursos del estado o no. Pueden pedirle plata a la ONU, y el Estado en la ley les permite tener dinero de donaciones, del estado, pero claro estamos en un gobierno que utiliza metodologia de proyecto para ejecutar su presupuesto y esta planteando que las comunidades participen de ese presupuesto, por lo menos del 20 % de ese presupuesto. Entonces hay varias partidas de las gobernaciones, alcaldias, ministerios, entonces quien haga mas proyectos comunitarios esta mejor con Chavez, porque el presidente esta apoyando que las comunidades se organicen. El consejo comunal tiene que aprovechar que se esta trabajando con esta metodologia.

JC: Claro veo, pero ahora que mencionas lo de los recursos, como es el tema con la instituciones, es decir sueltan ellas la plata facil? Que pasa ahí?

MV: Ahora es difícil que las instituciones entiedan eso porque son instituciones. Porque ni siquiera es compartir los recursos, es darles los recursos, darles el poder, de que tu hagas las politicas que tu consideres en la asamblea que es y que la ejecutes como tu creas que sea, con tu gente, la controles tu y despues me pasas la vaina pa' ver como la hiciste. Eso no es

fácil. Las instituciones les va a costar mucho tiempo desligarse de esa visión porque es una guerra de poder.

JC: uhmm, poder?

MV: Si claro, Dentro de la comunidad también hay muchas peleas por el poder. Un proyecto donde hay dinero de por medio, dependiendo en la manera que trabajan se pueden ocurrir o no conflictos, y se puede dañar un consejo comunal un proyecto porque no se dio y alguien se fue con los reales.

JC: Cuando yo estuve por FUNDACOMUNAL ellos me comentaron que ellos guiaban a los consejos en lo que era cosas técnicas y legales y que tenían que hacer cumplir ese tipo de cosas. Cómo ver té ese rol de FUNDACOMUNAL en los consejos?

MV: Aquí estamos inventando, FUNDACOMUNAL no saben como se hace una revocatoria de mandato, eso no está escrito en la ley. La Asamblea Nacional no hizo un reglamento de la ley. Digamos un consejo comunal puso en sus estatutos como hacer una revocatoria de mandato aprobado por una asamblea de ciudadanos porque la ley dice que las decisiones de esta son vinculantes. Es que hay que entender que todo esto deriva del modelo de democracia del 99. Este modelo democracia da cuerpo al poder popular. Esta constitución obliga a los estados, municipios, parroquias a compartir responsabilidades y recursos con las comunidades y que reconoce a las asambleas de ciudadanos y ciudadanas para controlar el poder.

JC: Cuales son los obstáculos en el proceso de formación tienen los consejos comunales desde la comunidad? Sus limitaciones?

MV: Por la diversidad que hay todos tienen limitaciones.

La autonomía es relativa, económicamente aun dependen del gobierno, porque está en la ley y podrían seguir pidiendo dinero. El estado les da dinero pero no les puede decir en qué se invierte el dinero, al menos que sea la gobernación y la alcaldía que dicen voy a hacer un proyecto quiero tomar tu opinión y entonces se hace un diagnóstico participativo que también está aprobado en asamblea.

JC: Y los que no están organizados?

MV: La comunidad que no está organizada le pueden hacer lo que quieran y de malas.

JC: Y cómo ves tú la inclusión dentro de los consejos?

MV: La inclusión...sí hay inclusión, sí hay gente que no aguanta el escuálido y que no aguantan al chavista. En el Este que las asociaciones de vecinos son muy verticales, es que era un negocio, se tergiversó, e iban a una gobernación y le daban la plata, muchas organizaciones de vecinos quieren amoldarlo a los consejos comunales, en un consejo comunal no hay verticalidad, es horizontal. Nadie puede pasar por encima de lo que dice la

asamblea de ciudadanos. En el consejo comunal son muchos , nadie puede ser protagonista.

JC: Bueno, cómo ves tú la política y los consejos comunales? Cómo ves tú esa mezcla?

MV: En mi experiencia, en el cual donde yo estaba trabajando no se hablaba de política, había diferencia entre el PSUV y el consejo comunal. Es que los problemas son apremiantes, hay un nivel de conciencia que tenemos que ayudarnos entre todos, el que rompa con eso y cree egoísmos eso también crea conciencia sobre qué es la comunidad y de qué está hecha. Esto es como probarse como grupo, si tiene éxito o no eso se evaluará. Ya hay un éxito ganado que la gente se organizó y que puede hacer sus demandas autonomamente y eso ya es revolucionario en sí. Otro recibir dineros del estado, donaciones y hacer sus políticas públicas como debe ser, buscado un mejor vivir, y eso nadie se lo saca de la cabeza a la gente. Estuviste muchos años excluido, y la gente aprende: ah, ya yo sé que yo soy ciudadano y que tengo derecho y que la constitución lo dice y la gente se sabe que está en la constitución y que se saben la constitución de pies a cabeza. En la práctica se ira construyendo porque siempre va a haber algo que surge.

### **Annex N**

**Interviewee:** **FUNDACOMUNAL's employees at the registrar's office.**

Date of the Interview: July 9, 2008

Interview conducted in: Spanish

Translated

This institution gives technical assistance in the formation of communal councils through training and informative courses. It is a decentralized institution which belongs to the Venezuelan Ministry of Participation and Development. It aims to strengthen the communal power by making it self sufficient in the projects proposed and implemented by the communal councils. Each project can receive up to BsF 1.7 million (US\$800.000.00 official exchange rate) if it is for housing and 120.000.00 for ordinary projects (US\$55.000.00 official exchange rate). There is no limit for the amount of projects that a community can present but the institution is trying to allocate resources to those communal councils which have never received any kind of monetary assistance before.

Each regional office belonging to Fundacomunal demands accountability from the resources given to the communal councils. These reports must be accepted and confirmed by the communal council's citizens assembly. This year and periods 3 and 4 which are equivalent to the second semester of 2007 Fundacomunal has registered 8399 projects whose funds have been allocated by the state. 2000 projects are still pending for fund allocation.

The problems identified by Fundacomunal are those related with participation here the elected voceros are sometimes accused of trying to possess projects for their own benefit. Another problem is when a project is approved the community changes its mind about the use of the funds for that specific project. Some councils do not submit the reports to Fundacomuna. There are also problems with recall ( revocatoria de mandato) to members of the vocerías

## **Annex O**

<b>Interviewee :</b>	<b>Cristina Fazzina</b>
Position:	Legal adviser at FUNDACOMUNAL, Caracas
Interview conducted in:	Spanish
Date of the Interview:	July 9th, 2008
Translated	

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.  
CF: Cristina Fazzina

### **JC: What are the main obstacles in the relationships communal council-institution?**

There are legal vacuums in the law of the communal councils that is why the reform was created

There is the idea that the communal councils must be self sustainable. Actually they are given this money for their projects and they must return this money not to the State but to the communal bank which is used again for new projects. This is something that FUNDACOMUNAL requires to the councils and which although it is not written in the law, because of these legal vacuums we have the freedom as institution to demand it to the councils.

JC: What does the State want with the communal councils?

CF: The idea of the State is to create communal councils which get together to form communes and where the State transfers its power to. The people are sovereign in the decision making. There is the belief that communal councils are the only mechanisms through which it is possible to obtain resources for the communities however the State has the duty to help those communities which are not under the communal council. We have to remember that Communal councils are the political flag of the process that Venezuela is living.



This process responds more to government lines to implement benefits for the collectivity. Communal councils are spaces which can create new forms to oppose the government, so the people become judges of the process if it does not work well.

## **Annex P**

**Interviewee:**

**Elvis Blanco**

Position:

Junior Director of Training at  
FUNDACOMUNAL, Caracas

Date of the interview:

July 9th, 2008

Interview conducted in:

Spanish

Translated

EB: Elvis Blanco

JC: Juan Carlos Trivino S.

JC: What are the communal councils?

EB: This is a form of self-government which is not assistentialism. Communities organize themselves and have the communal power based on the 5 engines of the revolution. This is the new geometry of power. Moral and Enlightenment equals revolutionary education for the people. Who than the community itself to know their own problems but it has to be framed under an educative process.

The law of the communal councils is not right because it gives power to the municipalities and governors, but now it is under reform because it needs to give more power to the people. The new law is strictly popular, the communal councils become a space for the articulation of the different movements. The communal councils have to be formed as a cooperative.

JC: Are they part of the State, government of what?

EB: In order to answer the question whether the communal councils are part of the State or not we need to divide the state in a super structure which means the laws that form the state and the structures which are the spaces for discussion and creates the institutionality necessary for the super structure

The greatest strenght of the communal councils is that it is part of the super structure through the structures.

JC: Why the role of the PSUV in the communal councils?

EB: The PSUV is a political party which works not in the representative way of competing in an indirect democracy where representation is the most important part. This party rescues the initial purpose of the political party which is to listen to the people and work with the state by giving feedback in order to truly give solutions. Its mission is to work with the people in this battle of ideas whose aim is to achieve a true transformation.

Communal councils are part of the revolutionary institutionalization. The lack of answer from the institutions to the communal councils come basically from unionized people who had to live under the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic and have become obstacles to the revolution. The Popular Power is not born from the votes but from the organized people. It is the 6<sup>th</sup> power which as Chavez says: If we want to end with poverty we have to give power to the poor. Here it is the people's sovereignty, it is the active subject which makes part of a community not the individual.

The problems with the CC come from the media and the opposition which bomb people in such a way that it makes difficult the ideological unity of the CC. We need to fight against the enlightened, those who feel that because they have education they can give orders. There must be a change in the formation and ideology so we can have a change in the Revolutionary Institutionality.

## **Annex Q**

### **COMMUNAL COUNCIL MEETING**

Communal Council: El Conde  
Place: El Libertador, Caracas  
Date: July 9th, 2008  
Reason: Communal Council's weekly meeting

This is a communal council located in the neighborhood of San Agustin, very close to the Parque Central Metro Station. This neighborhood belongs to the Municipality of "El Libertador," one of Caracas's largest one. This CC is made out of people who are pensioners, professionals, unemployed, housewives, with a middle, middle-low and low class in the socio-economic spectrum.

I had the opportunity to go to the meeting of the Communal Council of this community held on July 9th, 2008. These meetings are held every Wednesday and in this opportunity it had around 50 participants including several spokespeople of different working tables. The participants were mostly women, between 25 and 60 years old.

The meeting started by reading the act from the previous meeting. Then the community was informed about the activities which were going to be held in the community and which were organized by the communal council. After this certain problems which affected the community were mentioned by the spokesperson who seemed to be the secretary. After this she gave the floor to an street vendor who sold phone calls by mobile; he talked about the problem that he and his colleagues were facing because the neighbors and the police didn't allow them to work freely and they wanted to remove them from the streets because of the noise produced by the drinkers who used the mobile service offered. The police commissary for the area told the leader of the vendors to go to the communal council to ask for support from the community. Here we can see that he, as the authority, recognized the power vested in the communal council. The CC establishes rules of cohabitation which were respected by the local authority.

After him, the spokesperson for community safety started to ask for the community's support for these vendors by collecting signatures. In spite of this, there is an edict which forbids street vendors in the area but there seem to be confusion if they can go above the municipal law or not.

When the council finished debating this issues, another member of the community started to talk. He complained about the rubbish left by the construction works in the community and he proposed to sign a petition for the National Assembly where they could make law a regulation to make construction companies aware of these problems.

Next point treated is the one about housing. What is said in the assembly has to be respected because is binding. The spokespeople spoke depending on the relevance of this issue to their functions. The spokeswoman of the working table of Habitat and Housing leads the topic. Some participants to the meeting start accusing the spokeswoman of not being clear about the allocation of apartments given by the government to the community. Later on, an spokeswoman approached the researcher and told him that due to the fact that the Habitat and Housing spokeswoman was from the opposition she was favoring the apartment allocation to those of her side.

Suddenly one participant to the meeting starts claiming President Chavez as the supreme leader. Some member of the CC sigh, annoyed by these phrases of support. Also it is mentioned that the revolution needs to be defended by another participant. After this one of the spokespeople start talking about the importance to remember that the community was not middle class or wealthy, that they did not belong to the opposition and the that they had to be careful with them.

The participants led by one of them start exclaiming cries for the revolution: “Fatherland, Socialism or Death” which loads the atmosphere with a very political feeling.

The situation with the Habitat and Housing spokeswoman becomes tenser, people start arguing without order and the meeting suddenly ends. There is a group of 10 people who go to the street to continue arguing.

## **Annex R**

### **The Bolivarian Revolution**

*“...the revolutionary process is a necessary step to achieve the transformations of the old society” (Chavez, 2007:51)*

Deep transformations always entail a rethinking of all the structures that supported an old model. When Hugo Chavez got elected president of Venezuela he promised to rebuild the nation over a new and alternative model that would defeat all the things that had kept Venezuela and Latin America in the abyss throughout history (Chavez, 2007:10). To do so he framed the whole process that he started in the country as the ‘Bolivarian Revolution.’ It was named Bolivarian after Simon Bolivar, Latin America’s independence hero who freed 5 nations from the Spanish rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the Venezuelan historian Martin Guédez, the Bolivarian Revolution is a “permanent search for the revolutionary from the autochthonous, fresh and original” (2006). Guédez argues that Bolivar is seen as “practice of the norm and the prototype of the new man aspired through the liberation from old models that the revolution aims to defeat” (2006).

The philosophical roots of the Bolivarian Revolution rest on what has been denominated as ‘The tree of the three roots.’ This tree is informed by the life and thoughts of 3 personal heroes of President Chavez: Simon Bolivar, Simon Rodriguez (also know as Samuel Robinson and Bolivar’s mentor), and Ezequiel Zamora (Leader of the federal forces in the Venezuelan civil wars of the 1840s and 1850s) (Guédez, 2006).

Simon Bolivar, Venezuelan aristocrat and a military strategist, concerned with the great inequalities left by the Spanish social structures in the independent Spanish America gave to his struggle a transcontinental dimension. Bolivar’s dream was to unite the Spanish America under the same political project to counter the influence of the world powers over the region (O’Phelan, 2005). He was also concerned with the quality of government and legal equality in order to reach social justice. On the other hand, Simon Rodriguez, Bolivar’s mentor, was a teacher concerned with “the need to integrate the indigenous people’s of Latin America, and the black slaves... into the societies of the future independent states” (Gott, 2005:103). He was also a

defender of the originality of any political project initiated in Latin America so it did not have to rely on the intellectual dependence of the former colonial masters (Gott, 2005:107). Rodriguez believed in education for all the excluded ones (black and indigenous populations) and an economic revolution starting in the rural areas in order for nations to be successful (Gott, 2005:107). Finally, Ezequiel Zamora, a Venezuelan military leader and strong critic of the landed oligarchy, who proposed a very advanced program for land reform, a social role of the military in the society, and supported the Bolivarian dream of uniting the troops of the Hispanic American nations (Gott, 2005:110).

According to the German sociologist Heinz Dieterich, one of President Chavez's most important ideologists, the Bolivarian Revolution is a process of transformation which covers 4 areas: an anti-imperialist revolution, a democratic-bourgeois revolution, a neoliberal counterrevolution and the aspiration to reach a socialist society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2005). The whole revolution has an original and unique character which opposes any form of oppression coming from the world powers or the old economic elites that has dominated the developing world and Venezuela. This revolution is bourgeois-democratic because it creates new forms of production based on cooperativism and community self-management where everyone can be part of this form of economic development. It is also anti-neoliberal because it discards this policy for considering it greedy, focused on economic growth rather than economic justice, and against the dignity of the human being. Finally, it aspires to reach a new form of socialism different from old types because it is more tuned with the globalization times and it does not want to repeat the same mistakes that did not allow the Communist World to survive.

The Bolivarian Revolution is a process that is not a copy or a replication of any other movement, according to its supporters. It is inspired by Simon Rodriguez's maxim: "either we shall invent, or we shall wander around and make mistakes" (Cited by Gott, 2005:106). It is a political and popular movement which aims to economic, political and social inclusion as the best vehicle to find the harmony to reach a better society (Roca, 2008). The prominence of the majority in all the national projects is an obsession that the revolution institutionalized through the Constitution approved in 1999. In this constitution the participatory democracy (Popular power of decision-making at all levels) is given a predominant role and it is the blood which will give life to this new structure. It rescues Bolivar's legacy by including the importance of the union of all Latin American nations based on principles of solidarity, brotherhood and humanity. But more important it recognizes the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as the ideal society that Venezuela, Latin America and the developing world should aim to.

### **The Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*"We have assumed the commitment to direct the Bolivarian Revolution towards socialism and to contribute to the socialist path, with a new socialism, a socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup>*

*century, which is based in solidarity, in fraternity, in love, in justice, in liberty, and in equality”*

*Hugo Chavez ( Cited by Wilpert, 2006)*

The goal that ‘the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ aspires is to transform all social, economic and political relations by giving the highest historically possible degree of participation to the people in the decision-making process of the institutions that rule their lives (Heinz Dieterich interviewed by Marcano, 2007). The Bolivarian Revolution and its participatory democratic component are seen as the vehicles that would lead to this new type of socialism that is essential to understand the political project of radical transformation that is intended to be applied in Venezuela.

Released as a new concept on a speech in January 2005, President Chavez wanted to be clear that his revolution was socialist but aware of the global context surrounding it. It departs from the idea of a more pluralistic and less state-centered socialism (Wilpert, 2006) which needs to create alternatives to the neoliberal policy that the capitalist model has put forward in the world. It defends the need to rethink the paradigm of the capital for a new kind that democratizes the means of production and is not based on the profit but more on the work-value (MINCI, 2007:14).

Heinz Dieterich, who considers himself the creator of the concept of ‘The Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,’ says that this kind of socialism creates a qualitatively distinct civilization from the bourgeois one (Dieterich, 2005). According to him, to be revolutionary means to replace the institutionality of the ‘status quo’ that the capitalist model has brought for a new set of social, political and economic parameters. This can be achieved:

1- By changing the market economy for a value-economy democratically planned (Dieterich, 2007): Under this principle the concept of ‘Economy of equivalencies’ is applied. The economy is not longer based on the market-profit logic but on the work-value logic where the time-inputs necessary for the production of a product are considered as part of its final value (Marcano, 2007). Also the means of production are completely democratized by expanding non-private forms of ownership like cooperatives and endogenous development units (Wilpert, 2006).

2- By applying the principle of social and economic egalitarianism as the measure of prosperity, the market is not longer a reference of wealth. The State is the one which should, with its example, start the chain of change so the grassroots can absorb this spirit and replicate it and spread it throughout the nation. The principles of cooperation, complementarity and solidarity are the ones which rule the internal and international relations of the nations embracing the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

3- By implementing a new governance model which is guided by the interests of the majority (Wilpert, 2006). This is to change the plutocratic nature of representative democracy for the participatory nature of direct democracy (Dieterich, 2007). To reach this level it is necessary for the state to delink itself from forms of private capital that can hamper its freedom to pursue its own projects. The creation of mechanisms that can allow a broader participation of the masses is necessary for the consolidation of the participatory model. Examples of these might be: institutionalized mechanisms of citizen-initiated referenda, involvement of the community in the scheme of social service delivery provided by the State, spaces of self-government and self-development at community level which can also influence the policy-making process from a bottom-up perspective.

4- By not reproducing paternalistic attitudes. Paternalism has led in the past to an atrophy of the creative capacities of the population and might encourage totalitarian regimes which use these practices as mechanisms to remain in power (MINCI, 2007:23).

5- By redefining the role of the military in society where it becomes a civic–military union. Under this new role the military is integrated as much as possible within the civilian population. The military can undertake social missions throughout the country, complementing the role of the state in the delivery of social services (Wilpert, 2006).

6- By recognizing the feminist socialism and also the environmental socialism. The former recognizes the role of the woman in society and makes a call to them to be participant of the inclusive nature of this project. The latter sees in the need of sustainable development the importance to respect the natural resources that a nation possesses (MINCI, 2007:28).

7- By creating a ‘taylor-made’ socialism which goes according to the needs and the context of the nation where it is being developed (Wilpert, 2006). This ‘taylor-made’ socialism draws from the originality, authenticity and needs of each society.

In the case of Venezuela this socialism is based on the “Tree of the three roots,” the National Project Simon Bolivar to reach a more equal society, and the Power Regional Block (*BRP in Spanish*) to integrate politically, militarily and economically the Latin American nations. The Venezuelan socialism also recognises in Jesus Christ the first socialist whose example of love and community has to be followed (MINCI, 2007:30).

*The Venezuelan socialism is one accommodated to the philosophical roots of the Bolivarian Revolution, accommodated to the Venezuelan and Latin American Context, self-aware of the environment which surrounds the region. But it is at the same time a kind of*

*socialism that acts as a mould that can be adapted by any other country using their own history, knowledge and popular heroes. The Venezuelan Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century respects the private property and gives all the guarantees to its development but it does not promote it from the state anymore. This is a kind of socialism that applies the economic and political union based on solidarity not on competition. It has a very strong emphasis on participatory democracy as the mechanism which can create a truly pluralist society which needs are satisfied. This kind of democracy is seen as the highest expression of people's power because is the most direct way of making any citizen feel included in the new popular equation of power. Finally, the Venezuelan socialism is a model that blends the learnings from the indigenous communities, the life of Simon Bolivar, and the power of oil as a geo-political weapon for social justice into what they have called their own Bolivarian Socialism.*

### ***Some criticisms to the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century...***

The Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been proposed as a new kind of socialism which is set on the traditional Marxist, Leninist, Hegelian foundations but adding new ingredients which are more context-based and participatory. However, its detractors say that there is nothing new about this socialism: it is old wine in new bottles. The criticisms come from the economic, political and ideological fronts.

The economic project offered by the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century gives a central role to the State as the motivator of the changes necessary for a social transformation; nevertheless, this role can make it fall into the inefficient and corrupt bureaucratization that destroyed the Soviet Union (Eppel, 2006). Concepts such as cooperativism, endogenous development and Import Substitution Industrialization are essential part of the new proposal; however, they were used in the past with mixed results; especially, due to the proved inefficiency and bureaucratization of the State in managing them. On the other hand, the 'economy of equivalencies' defended by Dieterich is considered simplistic because it takes into account only the time employed in the production of a product, but not the learning and technical difficulty that is involved in its production.

On the political side and if we go specifically to Venezuela, the motivating force of the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century revolves around the figure of President Chavez; this gives a personalistic impulse to the revolutionary project creating the risk of turning it into an autocratic regime (Romero, 2007). But, the strongest criticism that it receives is that the 'Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' (especially in Venezuela) is a mix of everything but nothing at the same time; it is seen as a vague compilation of new ideas with failed ones with a no real plan of action which gives the impression of improvisation (Eppel, 2006).

## **Annex S**





Banner promoting a sport's center requested by a communal council with the picture of a local politician

Same Sport's center



## Annex T



Event organized by the Communal Council of Cacique Catia for the Independence's day



Communal Councils' spokespeople's trainign at FECS, Caracas



Typical neighborhood in the Western side of Caracas



Great communal party at La Silsa, Caracas



**“The work with the people must be the biggest value of every revolutionary”**

Typical banner in neighborhoods of the Western side of Caracas

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