Title: **Government Urban Management in San Agustin, Caracas: ¿A Never Ending Symbiotic Process?**

Author: **Newton José Rauseo Diaz.**

Institution: School of Architecture, Architecture and Urbanism Faculty, Venezuela Central University.

Introduction.

It is common for ordinary people passing through public space, to make a physical and visual contact, to think about its history, scrutinise it and evaluate its conception, usefulness and maintenance, and who is responsible for all these things.

In this introductory review the starting point is my interest to explore, through a research still in development, the urban management process developed by the public agency Simón Bolívar Center -SBC-. The locus of the study is the San Agustin district located in the central area of Caracas (Image 1), specially the popular zone in the south of the district, under particulars conditions without great difficulties for agency interventions, following a methodology process where spatial elements dominate.

This agency has constructed during the last 56 years many urban developments that have made an enormous contribution to Caracas's city centre history: Bolivar Avenue, Simon Bolivar Centre Towers (offices), and many them located in San Agustin district like Parque Central (high rise offices and residential towers), Teresa Carreño Cultural Complex and Vargas Park. Since 1971 inserted in a process directed by local urban redevelopment plans with a "bulldozer" approach toward urban development, the agency built three housing complexes in San Agustin del Sur. These produced greats social problems for the community and destroyed the original urban spatial structure of low income settlements (called barrios) built spontaneously by poor people who invaded vacant lands in the valleys and hills at the south of city centre. In middle of the 80`s it realized another intervention, the construction of Ruiz Pineda Services Boulevard (Image 2), which despite attending certain social needs, created other urban problems for the city. In this paper I analyse these interventions, which generated questions to be considered by planners and the public agency, with regard to the planning management field, as a social context for professional praxis and community participation.

The interview method was chosen as a way of my understanding (after 20 years of involvement) the individual values of the actors involved within the case study (architects and community leaders). I wanted them to participate directly, with theirs words, values and thinking on what had happened, what is happening and could happen in San Agustin del Sur. The premise was to allow me, as researcher, to participate in these actors expectations, contributing with my opinions and transmitting these interpretations through this paper. This is in the way of incorporating the experiences as part of methodology for new urban planning processes. I wish, also, to incorporate my own experience of working as an active member of the planning team in the Projects and Studies Office of Simón Bolívar Center in the Urban Plan of San Agustin (Image 3) between 1984 and 1986.

<u>Management in the Planning and Urban Development Process.</u>
I deal with planning theories on management process and some referential approaches in as a way of understanding the case study, anticipating that sometimes I will face the paradigm almost impossible to evade of the "should be" of management procedures in the urban planner's work.

My starting point is to conceive urban management as a process incorporated in all stages of planning and intervention, activated by the objectives which aim for improved life conditions of the actors involved (government, community, planners or private entities) in a particular territory. In this case study private entities were not involved.

Urban management is concerned with problems of a structural type, where government and civil society play the most fundamental roles; and time is working as a crucial factor in understanding how social, economical, political and cultural aspects, influence management.

In order to work towards a better approach of management as a topic, it is useful to pay attention to system elements involved inside the complex process for producing urban policy. Three have been identified:
- The context as a system with all its elements, where peoples` needs and demands appear and where urban policy will have some success.
- The dominant political system for taking decisions.
- The actors and organizational system involved in the process of policy making and administration.

The approach is in the way of understanding how, when, where and why these systems work and interact, the influences among them within time, and as a continuous, but not lineal process, with actions and contradictions. It has a richness due to society dynamism and must be assimilated in the process because they belong to it and bring the diversity, natural to human life.

Policy has a strong influence on the planning action, for that reason it is very important for urban management. As BARRETT S. and FUDGE C. (1981. p. 11) wrote: "What do we mean by policy? A political intention as expressed, say, in a political party manifesto? A formal decision expressed as legislation or a local council resolution? Operational policy expressed in government circulars, managerial statement or detailed administrative procedures providing ¨rules¨ for the carrying out of specific task? Clearly, policy is all these things and where policy stops and implementation starts depends on where you are standing and which way you are looking". In my opinion, this works for authorities and civic organizations (like political parties, worker unions, employer organizations) as well as for communities side, including mass events (like demonstrations, open public council meetings) and communities own organizations (like neighborhood, sports, cultural or social associations, etc.), which are clear about their goals and the desired quality of life, but they do not have the political power, skill or instruments to achieve them, as is the San Agustin case.

<u>Government: What is the real intention to be an active agency for building the city?</u>
"Government either seems unable to put its policy into effect as intended, or finds that its interventions and actions have unexpected or counter-productive outcomes which create new problems. Blame for the ineffectiveness of government intervention tends to be directed either at those responsible for policy-making, for constantly producing the ¨wrong¨ policy, or at the implementing agencies for being, apparently, unable or unwilling to act" (BARRETT S. and FUDGE C. 1981. p. 3).

From this paragraph some topic related to the theme are notable. I will approach government intervention under the premise of two ways of working:
- Those given by the convenience of government in power and its leaders from any political party.
- Those given by legal instruments that run the functions of government agencies.

The government political intention on San Agustin problems began during the period of Christian Democratic Party of COPEI led by Rafael Caldera in 1971. Under the criteria for urban renovation based on purchasing and demolitions of properties, mainly in San Agustin del Sur, middle class housing developments were built, putting aside the initial intention of building housing for low income residents. The main interest was mercantile, like most intervention of the government periods dominated by this political tendency. As ALFARO B. (2003) says "I remember during Lopéz Acosta period[1], the young management team who worked with him, believed very much in that[2] because there was business behind any intervention, secure and attractive profits in any SBC activity. The intervention was appropriate to a private urban development agency"; and I can add: located in a zone very attractive for developers because of its privileged location.

A political intention with more social criteria was adopted after Caracas` Governor promised the San Agustin community, at an open public council meetings in 1984, to make an urban plan; and the SBC president agreed, as it indicated in the letter to "Comrade Dr. Arnaldo Morales"[3] describing the community's requests to the political party.

I put emphasis on endogenous and exogenous aspects involved in this agency.
Endogenously related aspects to:
- Its duties, legally defined by the company articles and by the official decrees in San Agustin.
- The consciousness of the executive leaders and urban planners and architects who work at the agency about the urban management process and its social function within the community.
- The methodology used.
Exogenously related aspects to:
- The compromise that SBC assumes for high range governments policies, aligned with political party aims of the ruling government, with personal promises to party leaders,

---

[1] SBC president during the period of COPEY ruled government (1979-1983).
[2] SBC trading nature
[3] Jose Maita`s (a former leader of social democratic party Accion Democratica in San Agustin district) letter.

with community mass party followers, with persons who contributed to the election campaign, with ordinary people to gain electoral votes, etc.

- Detect who has, or where lies, real decisive power.

I could say that any government agency take decisions in basis of policy procedure of its main leaders, and focusing on general policy given by government central power which always is temporary. But, there are also legal frames of making control, which work as a long time instruments. I am talking on the SBC statutes that confer its mercantile and social nature, and the officials' two decrees which established its intervention as an urban renovation agency for San Agustin district in 1971 (South zone) and 1975 (North zone). These should be a worth reference to define an evaluation instrument to encourage the carrying on of agency duties.

It is clear the goals agency given by SBC "Article 2: The company objective is to promote and to carry on…. urban developments like housing, shopping, services, cultural and recreational, to contribute for a better urbanism and architecture of the city, towards a better environment for the population; to make any kind of busyness and trading operations related to the construction and commercialization of its properties….. planning, assistance, coordination, supervising, control and management services required by any of its branches to carry out theirs functions efficiently". However these goals have had an unresponsiveness or inappropriate response in San Agustin del Sur.

All projects made by SBC between 1971 and 1983 have been divorced from the real context, making wrong policies for urban spatial proposals like: "bulldozer" approach for urban renovation, clear out low income families from theirs habit and high investments which have never been refunded. All these interventions were possible only because the oil rental profitable Venezuela.

But this situation changed. In 1984, during Acción Democrática party government led by Dr. Jaime Lusinchi, a new SBC intervention was constructed in San Agustin del Sur. The making decision came out, presumably, as a consequence to build Vargas Park on SBC`s lands close to San Agustin zones affected by official's decrees. "The making decision of this new intervention was a product of a president ¨sleeping¨, where a lady[4] asks for a gift to her president. Because he had to build something important to make perceived his government by people. Then a comrade[5] whispered her ¨a civil heroes park in the city centre¨ and named it as Vargas[6] who, by chance, was a doctor like her lover president" (ALFARO B. 2003).

All housing complexes built in San Agustin del Sur by several governments never succeed in the policy of foreseeing houses for low income families because, among others reasons, people had not enough money to access for that type of development, people were not chosen because they did not belong to government ruled party or they were not in the interest of key people within SBC. Instead of foreseeing solutions to housing problem, the

---

[4] President Lusinchi secretary and lover.
[5] The governor of Federal District.
[6] Jose Maria Vargas an ancient president of Venezuela.

agency was producing another one: get stronger the social segregation inside the community, as it is described by CASTILLO E. "Mundo"[7] (2003) "…. that Caldera project picked off very much our idiosyncrasy in San Agustin. The sanagustian were taken out to El Valle, to Coche[8]. They took out people from the barrio and putted them in La Yerbera[9] which set in San Agustin, but with different criteria. People who live in La Yerbera see people form San Agustin del Sur contemptuously". However, new dwellings living in those housing complexes had not enough income to pay the houses and SBC had to subsidies them. The result was an unproductive intervention, economically and socially.

<u>Community in an Intervention Process.</u>
> "There are persons who fight for a day and they are good people,
> There are persons who fight a year and they are better,
> There are persons who fight for many years and they are very good,
> But there are persons who fight their entire life.
> Those are the indispensable"[10].
> Bertolt Brecht

The original population was migrants who came from rural areas (mainly from Barlovento region of former Africans slaves) during the oil boom of first middle last century, but actual population is urban descendant's generations.

FOLEY J. (2001. p. 72) says "During the period of late modernity the formation of new social movements organized around cultural aspects which generated divergent and collective identities assume particular importance. Some groups consolidate as communities and fight for the right of equal opportunities, demanding that their cultures be valued on equal terms with all others"[11]. These concepts can be recognized in the praxis of the San Agustin community which has cultivated their ancestral customs by developing a strong artistic movement, which is today appreciated in Caracas and the whole country.

Why that interest? The answer given by CASTILLO E. "Mundo" (2003) is simple and honest: "When those people were taken away, because the valleys of La Charneca and Hornos de Cal[12] were failed down and they[13] wanted to destroy Marin as well, it was created the anti-clear up committee, where Madera Group[14] was fundamental against them. To pick out our culture, to take out people who though in a cultural and social work, that precisely open a gap between what is the barrio culture and when it is lost; for example, if ¨Mundo¨ leaves there is not one to sing to San Juan, and if the tambour go away then there is nobody to play it because ¨Mundo¨ is not here, nor ¨Totoño¨, nor Farides, none, and so San Juan is not more important. They do that. After they putted out many people we lost

---

[7] Nickname given by neighbors.
[8] Other city's districts.
[9] SBC´s housing development near San Agustin del Sur.
[10] This is a translation from a Spanish language version made by Newton Rauseo.
[11] This and next quotes are a translation from Spanish made by this author.
[12] Sectors of San Agustin del Sur.
[13] He refers to SBC.
[14] A musical group.

Easter, Carnival, many popular things were lost, but we have the film ¨El Afinque de Marin¨, that someone wanted to disappear it to pick out our historic memory".

The tambours, the ¨salsa¨[15], hip-hop, Corpus Christy San Juan, are spiritual and essential expressions for them, but urban popular ways for cultural fight either, similar to street demonstrations or police confrontation. People have dignity as an ethic way of life when these expressions have got meaning to unify people's majority.

The construction of the Boulevard had also a social impact on people, as BLANCO J. "Totoño" (2003) says: "First impact was the demolitions of the old. I remember very much that place and it was so nice. There were stores, a Chinese supermarket, a chicha[16] factory, a fish store, the Elias Rodriguez School….. More than to divide the community, a problem could be solved, I feel things were harder, like when one loose a part of our body, it's mutilated, you are amputated; then it's a great process to habit because you have not any more that little piece of your body. It's the same in this community. If you compare, it still has community sense, although old people died, but children and grandchildren stay, there is a family presence. Independently that the Boulevard should have got as an architectonic aim, I feel architecture by itself does not work. You should have the best or the worst, but if you are there you put life; because city is people, city isn't houses or hills or threes or cars, city is people, and then they fuck people…"

The social work consciousness of communities' fighters is expressed in their verb, their contradictions, and their dialectic. About the illegal occupation of Boulevard spaces CARDOZO D. (2003) says "We occupied them because we couldn't have an opportune answer from SBC managers about our request for a space in the Boulevard. Our neighborhood association wasn't interested to stay there, we occupied to satisfy our social needs and to preserving it, because our idea was to generate a communitarian space, like what is today the Public Planning Local Council. During that time we had the wealth, legal security, civil protection and human rights committees. It was the ideal space because it should receive all those committees as a common district space, easy accessibility for everyone, for people communication and integration. We assumed it responsibly and finally we got a legal agreement". However BLANCO A. (2003) says "…people have 20 years staying there and paying nothing, but for any problem of building pipe net they come asking us to solve it". I could say that in some way the invader community certainly knows that the agency will solve its problems, and the agency has the interest to do it.

Citizen Participation.
"The citizen participation deals very much with problems of difficult solution if one try to guarantee or evaluate how representatives are the citizen collectives or associations which have got relationship with government and city council administration….   The intermediaries' people, in these cases, are selected because their direct interest or leadership…. The representatives of entities which participate in government agencies are

---

[15] A caribbean and newyorker Latin music.
[16] A popular drink.

established either or more because their expressed initiatives rather than an associated number"[17] (BORJA J. 1995. p. 266).

I consider citizen participation in term of community participation in three levels: community as a whole, all residents and users citizen of any urban settlement; community organizations which make active life within a settlement like those that arise from citizen who live, work and fight for their settlement (like neighborhood associations or communities committees); and community organizations which work at the settlement but belong from external organizations (like national political parties, churches or any social organizations) with its own goals. This last case took place in San Agustin del Sur with an open public council meetings promoted by the governor in 1984 that influenced very much the making decisions by planners in the San Agustin Urban Plan made in the Projects and Studies Office of SBC. Mr. BLANCO J. "Totoño" says about this kind of participation: "There were many approaches.... many speeches but little results. We lived in a representative democracy; it was quite simple: our represents took decision for us, those who were elected, a politic representative. Even our closer organizations like neighborhood associations were not consulted. Everything was imposed… everything was manipulated".

Another dramatic description is made by CARDOZO D. (2003): "How was the method and attitude of persuading us? In San Agustin del Sur was mainly done by Jose Maita. Sometime ago the ¨adecos¨ invited me to a sport court opening and I went to see how a caudillo drive, in a metaphoric way, public opinion. I was horrified to see him distributing barbecue meat, alcohol drinks and money to people. Maita was a leader who gets school places for children, occupation of SBC houses for ¨adecas¨ families, employments at SBC, along 20 years that he was incrusted in this community".

Sometimes this situation varies little when actions come from own San Agustin communities organizations, as it's the Madera Foundation Project case. When I asked about active community participation in the present project, CARDOZO (2003) answered "Not absolutely. The project rose from a Chavez idea in Hello President[18]. We were asked by FUNDABARRIOS[19] to participate in an urban integral project already made by planners and architects. I said several times that it wasn't question of little houses to more needed people, because the ¨more needed¨ term was an intelligentsia, it's very elastic and should accept anything. I asked for making a document that we called Prospective Stage Project, as starting point of an integral development plan in several stages. They passed trough the prospective because they thought to have the absolute truth, and wanted to carry on the President order. We said, wrote and still think that it isn't and it can't be the way to face the project. I should discuss this with Chavez either".

It's seems to me that people are clear in mind about interventions when I asked: Do you see an effective and active SBC intervention in this moment? and he said "Yes, in fact very much protagonist, not only the SBC but other government institutions. Their interventions, unquestionably, will always be necessary, but the turner point of intervention is toward a

---

[17] This is a translation from Spanish original made by Newton Rauseo.
[18] Hugo Chavez radio and TV program.
[19] Government urban planning office for barrios.

shared project, and perhaps that is an obstructed stonewalls: how they deal with people reasons and proposals" (CARDOZO D. 2003).

The Planners Rules.

> Logic is, without doubt, unshakable,
> But it can't stand a man who wants to live"[20]
> Franz Kafka, "The Trial".

The position of planner's team (conformed just by architects) was `setting´, under a technical manner, to a political situation in response of both Jose Maita letter and some requirements from community represents, which were not incompatible what the team detected during the work field in San Agustin. Although this should be an allowed position, it had a politic framework, but if I consider that any professional makes a politic activity in the good word sense; in this case politic had strong personal and party interests.

Different things were matching up: the intention of government agency for intervention in the district, some government open mind for citizen participation, and a planner's new approach for urban development. But, as the situation has been described, we have pay attention what FOLEY J. (2001. p. 73, 75) says: "The result is that neighbours do not trust the interventions of local politicians, a distrust that extends to local planners who are perceived either as identified with, or dominated by, local political groups….. Healey (1996a: 285) also admits the existence of different visions of reality, which imply that consensus is not always achieved in a planning process…. In situations that generate visions that do not conform to dominant ones, there is a tendency to exclude them because they are not intelligible to those who defend the dominant discourse. So, we can not trust planners' good intentions, because there is the tendency to ignore the deep structure of power incrusted to some kinds of thinking and organizing".

How planners can take distance from politic party interests? Some ideas HERREA R. (2003) set up: "…. How there is not a frame inside public administration that should let to separate what is public social benefits for the country from what is party or group interests?, that is crucial…. to have a strong structure so politic can not sully this actor…. Maybe through open competitive examinations, stability of public administrative career, fair evaluations of tasks and salaries of employed people. This is part of public management, of what it should be".

In San Agustin took place a "logic" spatial process of planning and architecture design, but it is necessary to think about because if the Boulevard spaces (like kindergarten, district council, library, church) (Image 4) worked in their social use character, those of mercantile character (like commercial stores) (Image 5) did not work and for instance, they produced greats social problems to the city and the community like illegal occupations, disarray, neglecting, sanitary net collapsed, anarchic buildings, general deterioration, illegal sells, prostitution, indigence, pollution; and in terms of management brought up a focus of problems of parasite tendency among the agency and the community.

---

[20] This is a translation made by Newton Rauseo from a Spanish version.

This "logic" of Boulevard planning and architecture has been contradictory among the neighbour who says "…. there is more open spaces. Before we had not the mount of spaces we have now, everything wasn't bad at all" (BLANCO J. "Totoño". 2003); and the architect who says: "I am radical about that, I believe it must be demolished to make another thing together the community, I believe that building is totally obsolete now…" (DELGADO M. 2003).

On Some Reflections.
In 30 years, the approaches have been under a "housing problem or urban problem" point of view. However a new approach should consider the premise of urban as phenomena because it's material and spiritual order which content aspects of diverse nature.

My deal toward a reflection about urban management as process in San Agustin, is more dialectic in time than symbiotic, and implies to work together a politic, social, economical as well cultural context of actors where it takes place. It is a process which begins with the initial ideas that lead to planning, followed by the development of projects and their construction as products, and it seems to me that management never ends because it still work through the administration of planning products.

San Agustin community's is now claiming to participate in all these stages, under its right given by the Public Local Planning Council Law. Therefore I put into consideration the management of a planning process which the active participation of all actors involved, opposite to traditional way of management just by planners in offices like laboratories.

I try to detect main theme dimensions, sometime slaps or interconnect and not clearly distinguished one from other. But it is necessary an approaching for identification them to know the essence of the deal phenomena's about: politic contents, making decisions policy and the way they were made, methodology structure and the techniques of getting better making decisions, the social, economical and cultural indicators, costs and benefits, the environment policies, the administrative organizations, the relationship among structures, management functions and systems, the individual and collective behaviours inside organizational structure.

It was identified four agents-actors working dialectically (instead of symbiotic manner) as Urban Managers in the entire management stages: government agencies for urban development; community (subject and object of planning process) and its genuine organizations; professional planners and private urban promoters. The functions of each agents-actors must be defined by agreement through the discussion in a horizontal way, with a similar power to avoid parasitic or submissive tendency.

Urban planner lead a Technical Management as an actor closer to bring together interest, values, needs, expectations, goals from other actors. He should act on the basis of ethic and responsible about the process and its products; under a conciliated alliance where planning praxis achieves legitimately.

A Strategic Management of co-participation should substitute official decrees through a plan as a technical-politic instrument appropriate to guide the achieving of community

goals. Within the SBC this strategic should be developed with the creation of San Agustin Urban Office conformed together other public agencies, working co-ordinately with further Local Public Planning Council, and promoting private intervention. The character of strategic management should be Normative (Orderlies), Urbanization (plans and projects), Construction (civil works), Administration (selling and renting properties), Promotion (within community), Control and Maintenance (of built spaces).

Planning and Corporative Management should guide an active protagonist among actors, mainly communities' organizations. Flexibility of action's as a way to incorporate those processes which appear in time.

A Sustainable Management as a new paradigm, where values of existing things, which must be preserved when they have got a meaning for local communities and the rest of citizen (for environmental, social, and cultural reasons), is the basis for planning; and new interventions as supporting these reasons.

BIBLIOGRAFY.
- BARRET, S.; FUDGE, C. (1981) Examining the policy-action relationship, in Policy and Action: Essays on the Implementation of Public Policy. Edited by Susan Barret and Colin Fudge.
- BORJA, J.; FORN M. and other. (1995) *Barcelona: un modelo de transformación urbana. 1980-1995*. Quito. Editor PGU-LAC.
- CASTELL, M. *Local and Global Management of Cities*.
- FOLEY, J. (2001) "Diversidad de Identidades. ¿Problema u oportunidades para la Toma de Decisiones Institucionales?" In *Cuadernos del CENDES*. Separata. Año 18. Segunda Epoca. Caracas.
- FOLEY, J; VILA, E. "La Planificación Urbana: una evaluación a través de planes".
- FORESTER, J. (1989) *Planning on the Face of Power*. University of California Press. Berkeley, Los Angeles.
- HEALEY, P. (1996a) "The Communicative Work of Development of Plans", in Mandelbaum, Seymour, Mazza, Luigi y Berchell, Robert, eds. *Explanation in Planning Theory*, Rutgers, New Bruswick, NJ.
- HEALEY, P. (1997) *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Society*. Mac Millan, London.
- MELO L. (1986), *San Agustín del Norte: Plan Maestro*. Centro Simón Bolívar C. A. Caracas.
- VILA E. (2003), "Gestión Urbana y Cultura Urbana", article in magazine *Questión*, Año 2, Nº 18, Caracas.
- *Statutes of the Centro Simon Bolivar C.A.* (1991).
- Centro Simón Bolívar C. A. (1971) *San Agustín del Sur: Proyecto de Renovación Urbana*. Caracas. Litografía Edigraph.
- Law of Consejos Locales de Planificación Pública, Gaceta Oficial de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Nº 37.463, de fecha 12-06-2000.

INTERVIEWS.
- ALFARO B. (2003), architect, Manager of Projects and Studies Office of Simon Bolivar Center 1984-1986; author interview at 2003/07/11.
- BLANCO A. (2003), engineer, SBC Cadastral Division Head's, author interview at 2003/09/04.
- BLANCO J. "Totoño" (2003), neighbor and music teacher at community primary school in San Agustin; author interview at 2003/11/25.
- CARDOZO D. (2003), neighbor, former president of Los Pasajes Neighborhood Association, member of Integral Support Communitarian Center of San Agustin, author interview at 2003/11/10.
- CASTILLO E. "Mundo" (2003), neighbor, member of musical group La Parranda Loca of San Agustin; author interview at 2003/10/27.
- DELGADO M. (2003), architect, team member of San Agustin Urban Plan; author interview at 2003/07/07.
- HERRERA R. (2003), SBC architect's, team member of San Agustin Urban Plan; author interview at 2003/07/02.