

**Building “21<sup>st</sup> Century Sewer Socialism”: Sanitation and Venezuela’s  
Technical Water Committees**

**Rebecca McMillan**

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**Under the Supervision of Dr. Susan J. Spronk**

**School of International Development and Global Studies**

**Faculty of Social Sciences**

**University of Ottawa**

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Table 4.1 Official Poverty Statistics for the Parish of Antímano, 2001 and 2011

### Legend

AD	<i>Acción Democrática</i> (Democratic Action, a Venezuelan political party)
CCA	<i>Consejo comunitario de agua</i> (Community water council)
CMA	Caracas Metropolitan Area
COPEI	<i>Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente</i> (Committee of Independent Political Organization, a Venezuelan political party)
FUNDACOMUNAL	<i>Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad y Promoción del Poder Comunal</i> (Foundation for Community Development and the Promotion of Communal Power)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INE	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística</i> (National Institute of Statistics, Venezuela)
INOS	<i>Instituto Nacional de Obras Sanitarias</i> (National Institute of Sanitary Works, Venezuela)
LCR	<i>La Causa Radical</i> (Radical Cause, a Venezuelan political party)
Minamb	<i>Ministerio del Poder Popular Para el Ambiente</i> (Ministry of Popular Power for the Environment, Venezuela)
MTA	<i>Mesa técnica de agua</i> (Technical water committee)
MVR	<i>Movimiento Quinta República</i> (Fifth Republic Movement, Chávez’s original party)
OPP	Orangi Pilot Project (Pakistan)
PCV	<i>Partido Comunista de Venezuela</i> (Communist Party of Venezuela)
PDVSA	<i>Petróleos de Venezuela</i> (Petroleum of Venezuela)
PPCP	Public-Private-Community Partnership
PSUV	<i>Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela</i> (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, the Chávez government’s current party)
URD	<i>Unión Republicana Democrática</i> (Democratic Republican Union, a Venezuelan political party)

### **Abstract**

This thesis assesses the potential of Venezuela’s technical water committees (*mesas técnicas de agua*, MTAs) to address governance and logistical challenges for improving sanitation in the barrios (low income settlements) of Caracas. The MTAs are a radical experiment in urban planning whereby beneficiary communities map their own water and sanitation needs and help to plan infrastructure development, which is financed by the state. In addition to improving services, the MTAs aim to promote “popular” or “citizen power” as part of a broader political transformation, the Bolivarian Process (1999-present). Based on Hickey and Mohan’s (2005) four criteria for “transformative participation,” the paper argues that the MTAs have opened spaces for citizen empowerment and improved services in the barrios; however, participation at the local scale cannot resolve many of the challenges for improving sanitation such as institutional overlap and the financing gap, especially given that sanitation is the least profitable form of service provision in terms of economic and political payoffs.

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## **Chapter 1: Towards A Political Geographic Understanding of Citizen Participation in Water and Sanitation Service Provision**

Despite global efforts to improve water and sanitation for the poor, service disparities remain stark (Barlow, n.d., p. 19). The World Health Organization (2012) estimates that 780 million people still lack access to safe drinking water and 2.5 billion people have no access to improved<sup>1</sup> sanitation. It is now acknowledged that the world will not meet the MDG for sanitation, which has major implications for human and environmental health. There is therefore an urgent need to learn from best practices in sanitation service delivery in the global South.

In Venezuela, thanks in part to a unique experiment in radical urban planning, the *mesas técnicas de agua* or technical water tables (hereafter MTAs), the Millennium Development Goal for water and sanitation was met in 2005, 10 years ahead of schedule. Under the MTA model communities map their own water and sanitation needs and help to plan infrastructure development, which is financed by the state. Through regular meetings with representatives from the public water utility, residents provide oversight and contribute to decisions about service provision. In addition to improving services, the MTAs aim to promote “popular” or “citizen power” as part of a broader political transformation, the Bolivarian Process. Beginning with the election of President Hugo Chávez in 1998, the process aims to reverse the country’s history of poverty and inequality through redistribution, participatory democracy, and economic self-management.

Despite the MTAs’ apparent success and the opportunity they present for learning from successful cases of participatory development, the MTAs and other participatory initiatives in Venezuela have received little attention in the international development

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<sup>1</sup> The Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) of the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) defines “improved” sanitation facilities as those “which are more likely to prevent human contact with excreta than unimproved facilities”, and lists these as any of “flush or pour-flush to a piped sewer system, septic tank, or pit latrine; ventilated, improved pit latrine with slab or composting toilet” but only if these facilities “are not shared or are not public” (cited in Hall & Lobina, 2008, p. 6).

literature (Buxton, 2011). Drawing on insights from radical development theory and critical political geography, this thesis will examine how participation can improve water-borne sanitation services and empower the poor, arguing that the MTAs have opened up spaces for citizen empowerment and improved local services; however, participation at the local scale cannot resolve many of the challenges of improving sanitation such as institutional overlap and the financing gap, especially given that sanitation is the least profitable form of service provision in terms of economic and political payoffs.

## Research Context

### *Caracas: A Tale of Two Cities*

For the millions of urban poor who inhabit hillside shantytowns (or barrios) in the west of Caracas, Venezuela’s capital, “water apartheid” (Barlow, n.d., p. 18) is a daily reality. These informal and unplanned settlements – home to a majority of mixed-race, black, or indigenous residents – stand in sharp contrast with the wide paved streets, malls, and gated communities of the affluent and majority white East.<sup>2</sup> As Fernandes (2010) explains, these “geographies of marginality” have been “fortified over decades of economic crisis and consequent neoliberal policies of privatization, deregulation, and market-based growth” (p. 2). This uneven development is intimately intertwined with the country’s position in the global economy as an oil exporter. Over the twentieth century, while the country’s national elite shared the spoils of the state oil wealth, a growing informal proletariat developed on the margins of the formal economy and the formal city in urban areas. Due to their illegal status, barrio residents were denied the social rights of citizenship, including adequate water and sanitation services.

Decades of state neglect have created what Joshi and Moore (2004) refer to as *governance* and *logistical* challenges for delivering water and sanitation services. Governance challenges are related to the political and socio-economic exclusion of the barrio

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<sup>2</sup> With the notable exception of Petare, an enormous conglomeration of barrios in the far East of the city, which has been classified as the largest slum in Latin America.

residents and logistical challenges relate to providing services in challenging environments, which are the spatial expression of marginality. This thesis seeks to understand the MTAs’ role in addressing these challenges.

*Mapping “Alternatives to Privatization”*

This project contributes to a growing research agenda on alternative arrangements for public service provision (Balanyá, Brennan, Hoedeman, Kishimoto, & Terhorst, 2005; McDonald & Ruiters, 2012; Terhorst, 2008). This literature recognizes that solutions to the global South’s water challenges cannot rely on the public-private binary. This is because barriers that prevent the poor from accessing services, such as poverty and political powerlessness, tend to persist whether utilities are publicly or privately owned (Bakker et al., 2008; Budds & McGranahan, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2004).

Nonetheless, there is a powerful argument to be made for strong state involvement in the financing and delivery of water and sanitation services. Driven as they are by the need to generate returns for their shareholders, private providers<sup>3</sup> are unlikely to invest in infrastructure in unprofitable poor areas. For this reason, the promises of “water for all” that legitimized the wave of privatizations in the 1990s were largely not met (Bakker, 2010; Lobina & Hall, 2007; Loftus & McDonald, 2001; Spronk, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2004). The track record of private providers was especially poor for sanitation. Companies frequently failed to meet targets for the extension of sewers (Hall & Lobina, 2008, p. 23; Loftus & McDonald, 2001) and connections increased in some cases following renationalization (Borraz, González Pampillón, and Olarreaga, 2013). In other cases, sewerage was not included in contracts at all, what is referred to as *unbundling*, which meant that private

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<sup>3</sup> By “private provider,” I mean all governmental, non-governmental, or community-based organizations operating on a for-profit basis, following the definition of the Municipal Services Project (McDonald & Ruiters, 2012b, p. 22).

companies could cherry-pick lucrative water service contracts, leaving unprofitable sanitation services in the hands of deficient public utilities.<sup>4</sup>

The private sector’s emphasis on cost recovery from users is particularly incompatible with the goal of equitable sanitation provision since the poor are unlikely to spend scarce resources on sanitation. Moreover, because the benefits are largely public goods, downloading the responsibility for sanitation to households individualizes collective issues: the degradation of the environment and safe public water supply (Ali et al., 2009; Budds & McGranahan, 2003, p. 96; Hall & Lobina, 2008, p. 16).

However, while privatization has failed to deliver the promised results, maintaining the status quo of conventional state-run services is not sufficient to ensure just and sustainable service provision either. Like in Caracas in the past, many public utilities in the global South serve only the most affluent populations in urban areas (Budds & McGranahan, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2004). As McDonald and Ruiters (2012c, p. 158) explain, to automatically equate state-run with the “social good” is to misinterpret the nature of the state. In contrast with the Weberian view, which views the state as an independent set of bureaucratic institutions suspended above society, these authors view the state as a “condensation of social relations.” Thus, “calling for state owned/managed services is of little value in and of itself without considering how state and social groups are interrelated and how ‘empowered democracy’ and public ethics might be attained” (McDonald and Ruiters, 2012c, p. 159).

Partly for this reason, the debate on water and sanitation provision has shifted towards questions of *governance*, “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development” (World Bank, 1991, p. 1). Increasing citizen participation in the planning and delivery of water and sanitation services, often referred to as *coproductio*n, has been proposed as one way of

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<sup>4</sup> This may be partly because governments recognized the importance of sanitation for public welfare (Budds & McGranahan, 2003, p. 96), but other observers have noted that it was a strategy for making water contracts more appealing, as was arguably the case in Bolivia’s La Paz-El Alto concession (Spronk, 2010, p. 166).

making governance more democratic and responsive to the poor (Allen et al., 2008; McDonald & Ruiters, 2012b; World Bank, 2004).

To date, the fast growing literature on alternatives has been concerned primarily with water supply, with less attention to sanitation. This is consistent with the general tendency in research and practice to consider water service governance arrangements first and then apply them to sanitation by default (Allen et al., 2008, p. 25). While the two sectors are interdependent, it is important to consider the specific challenges of sanitation provision (Allen et al., 2008, p. 25). The lack of concern for sanitation reflects a broader lacuna in the alternatives literature: a failure to address the environmental aspects of water supply (e.g. water scarcity, threats to water quality, and ecological sustainability) (Bakker, 2010, p.193).

### Research Questions

To date, the small mostly Spanish language literature on the MTAs has also tended to focus more on the social aspects of water supply, pointing to improvements in water service quality and the increased participation of barrio residents (see Appendix A for a bibliography of existing research on the MTAs). It has paid less attention to sanitation and the sustainability of water sources or to the MTAs’ role within the broader Bolivarian Process. Recognizing these gaps, this project sought to ask:

- How can citizen participation in the *mesas técnicas de agua* (technical water committees) and communal councils help overcome the governance and logistical challenges for improving service provision in the barrios of Caracas? What factors have contributed to their success and what are the challenges?
- What can efforts to improve sanitation reveal about broader struggles for political and economic inclusion in Venezuela?

### Methodology and Research Methods

Given the relative paucity of literature on the technical water committees, research was exploratory in nature. The research strategy was qualitative. I collected data in Caracas, Venezuela, from August to December 2012.

My research methodology is informed by Marxist historicist methodologies. This perspective rejects the idea that there are discrete “factors” that can be isolated in the social world, as in econometric approaches (see e.g. Fine, 1999). This project therefore avoids defining causal relationships between the design of participatory fora or the level and scope of participation and outcomes in service coverage and other indicators. This is because water and sanitation governance is complex, and research demonstrates that the design of participatory institutions is often not as important as how they work in practice in particular contexts (Bakker, 2008; Cameron, 2010; Nance & Ortolano, 2007).

Research draws insights from the relative class power approach, and specifically Cameron’s (2010) adaptation of the methodology for understanding municipal democratization in Latin America. This approach interprets democratization, such as the openings taking place in contemporary Venezuela, “as a process of institutional change that results from increased equality in the balance of social, economic, and political power” (Cameron, 2010, p. 13). To understand these phenomena therefore requires attention to long-term changes in social, economic, and political power relations, with particular attention to the contradictions of capitalist development, and not just short-term moments in which new institutions are created. Such a holistic analysis includes attention to

- changes in the distribution of resources and productive assets,
- political organization and the social construction of identities (class, gender, ethnic) by both dominant and subaltern groups,
- the formation of coalitions between different groups,
- political divisions between different social groups, and
- the impact of national and global forces.

This approach stresses the importance of analyzing the material impacts of democratization, for example service improvements, as well as the less tangible effects it has on “the dignity and identity of historically excluded groups as citizens” (Cameron, 2010, p. 16). It also focuses on the implications of democratization for the political strategies and capacities of marginalized groups, including their abilities to “contest the political and economic structures that have marginalized them” (p. 16).

A limitation of this lens is that it is less likely to yield easily transferable policy lessons than other less holistic approaches that favour attention to institutional design or administrative capacity. Its attentiveness to context may also make it difficult to distill generalizable findings. This is a challenge of research on Venezuela more broadly, given its unique political-economic characteristics. Nonetheless, this methodology has a significant potential to enrich our understanding of reform processes since it analyzes factors that typically receive less attention in the political science literature on democratization (Cameron, 2010, p. 20).

I carried out the majority of fieldwork in the parish of Antímáno in the western Caracas municipality of Libertador (see map in Appendix B). I chose Antímáno as the case study because current and former staff of the state water utility for Caracas, Hidrocapital, identified the parish as an example of best practice due to the longevity of the technical water committees and their high and sustained levels of participation. Nonetheless, Antímáno is still plagued by service challenges and sanitation services have been described as “precarious” (Victor Díaz, Interview, August 20, 2012). Antímáno has also been characterized as the poorest parish in Caracas (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 113), although with considerable socio-economic disparity across neighbourhoods. A more complete description of the history, demographics, and status of services can be found in Chapter 4. I chose to focus on a single case study to develop an in-depth understanding of changes in service quality, relationships between the communities and state representatives, and community development over time. However, my research was not limited to Antímáno. I participated in meetings, events, and site visits in other communities, which gave me a perspective on the MTAs at a citywide level.

Research methods included formal interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and informal conversation. I interviewed staff and engineers from Caracas’s water utility (Hidrocapital), government officials, MTA *voceras*<sup>5</sup> or elected “spokespeople,” as well as other community leaders (see Appendix C for a list of interviewees). Interviews were semi-structured, and ranged between half an hour and three hours in duration (with an average length of 1.5 hours). I followed a general interview schedule (see Appendix D), while remaining sufficiently flexible to pursue topics of interest to the interviewees. I amended the interview schedule when significant new themes emerged.

While interviewing was an effective method for gathering information from utility staff and civil servants who were primarily male, it was more difficult to convince community activists, who were primarily female, to grant interviews. Women who are more accustomed to working in the domestic and community spheres are sometimes less comfortable with formal interviewing techniques, as also observed by Fernandes, (2010, pp. 30-31). Female MTA representatives (*voceras*) were often reluctant to commit to one-on-one interviews and tended to be more reserved in the interviews than in informal conversation or when their fellow *voceras* were present. This may be because they were hesitant to speak on behalf of the collective. Indeed, the decision to use the term *vocera* rather than *leader* reflects a preference for more horizontal leadership structures in Venezuela’s participatory organizations. For this reason, I usually tried to arrange group activities, including a daylong group tour of water and sanitation services in Antímáno’s Carapita sector and a focus group with five of Antímáno’s most active MTA spokespeople.

Participant observation included regular attendance at bi-weekly community water council meetings in Antímáno and other parishes (Catia and El Valle). The community water council brings together all of the technical water committees for the neighbourhoods that

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<sup>5</sup> The term *vocero/a* in this context does not translate very well into English. The word literally means spokesperson; however, in this case it refers to people who are elected by their communities to act as liaisons between the community and the water utility. Since most MTA participants are women, they are usually *voceras*.

share the same water system. I also took part in other public events, meetings, and political gatherings (see Appendix C for a list).

Additionally, together with Calais Caswell, another graduate student working on the project, I piloted a household survey in Antímamo with a random sample of 13 houses in the sectors of El Carmen and Santa Ana (see Appendix E for the survey guide). Our primary objective was to assess the survey’s value for use in the wider project. Given the small sample size, it did not generate valuable quantitative data; however, the exercise was useful in that it validated findings from interviews and participant observation. Triangulating data by using more than one method is recognized as a way of increasing the credibility and validity of research, as is incorporating multiple researchers in an investigation (Denzin, 2009, p. 300).

We hired a local research assistant, Luz Darianis, to assist with the survey. Darianis is active in her local communal council (a local community planning body promoted by the Chávez administration); however, she is not formally affiliated with the MTAs, which could have posed a conflict of interest.

Where I quote survey respondents, their names are kept anonymous. I identify all other research subjects by their real names. Although I offered all participants the option of maintaining anonymity, none of my interviewees requested this. Since many of the government officials and utility staff I interviewed would be identifiable anyways by virtue of their public offices, I could not guarantee their anonymity. Moreover, the community organizers frequently drew attention to how their work was not valued or rewarded in the same way as public servants. In the spirit of attributing them their due credit, I use their full names in my thesis.

As Fernandes (2010, pp. 29-35) explains, Venezuela’s polarized political context poses certain challenges for research. Interviewees and MTA participants inevitably asked me to share my opinions of the Chávez government and the Bolivarian Process, particularly

since the field research period coincided with two major election campaigns.<sup>6</sup> It was clear that many interviewees trusted me and spoke more freely once I expressed my own (critical) support for Chávez and the Process. Most interviewees supported the Chávez administration, although to varying degrees. However, they spoke candidly of the limitations of the MTAs and the government; perhaps since they recognized that they did not need to convince me of their government’s successes.

A related challenge is that media and other secondary literature on Venezuela’s political situation are highly polarized. The majority of Venezuelan and international media are run by private enterprises which oppose the Chávez government. It is therefore sometimes difficult to access unbiased, up-to-date information on the progress of government programs.

Field research was complemented by a review of academic and grey literature on the MTAs, coproduction, and Venezuelan politics. Data analysis was qualitative. I applied Hickey and Mohan’s (2005) criteria for “transformative” participation (described below) as a framework for evaluating the successes and limitations of the MTAs.

### Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

My choice of thesis topic was partly motivated by the recognition that mainstream literature on sanitation often lacks sufficient attention to power and politics. This literature is frequently very technical, attributing service inequities to market or institutional failure, rather than to the poor’s exclusion from exercising control over resources. By extension, coproduction is sometimes advocated as a technical strategy for improving service efficiency.

By contrast, literature from critical political geography and radical development studies (including the Foucauldian literature on governmentality) recognizes that participation is necessarily political since it involves changes in the distribution of power

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<sup>6</sup> National elections took place in Venezuela on October 7, 2012, followed by gubernatorial elections on December 16, 2012.

(see e.g. Appadurai, 2001; Cornwall, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2005; Zerah, 2009). Attention should therefore be paid to which forms of coproduction may be empowering for poorer people (Bakker, 2008). Based on a review of this literature, I suggest that coproduction is most likely to promote socially just and sustainable outcomes when it is embedded in a broader political project aimed at both “redistribution” of economic wealth and “recognition” by enhancing people’s capacities to exercise citizenship, radically conceived (following Fraser, 1995; Hickey & Mohan, 2005).

### *Situating Participation in the Planning and Delivery of Sanitation Services*

Although community managed water systems have existed in Latin America for centuries, they have become the subject of renewed interest in recent decades. In many countries in the region, democratization in the 1970s opened new spaces for citizen participation in service delivery. These were welcomed given that a history of dictatorship, political repression, and exclusionary forms of development had bred a strong distrust of the state (Molyneux, 2008, pp. 785-789).

In the 1990s, international financial institutions and development agencies began to promote participatory approaches in both government operations and development programming. As a result of the social devastation wrought by structural adjustment programs, the accepted neoliberal wisdom that the market alone could encourage development lost legitimacy, prompting an increased emphasis on institutional reforms and social development, dubbed the “post-Washington Consensus” (Fine, Lapavitsas, & Pincus, 2003), “revisionist neoliberalism” (Mohan & Stokke, 2000), or “roll-out neoliberalism” (Peck & Tickell, 2002) by its critics. Participation and decentralization have come to accompany more traditional neoliberal reforms such as privatization and deregulation, based on the argument that they will generate “social capital,” a prerequisite for empowerment and good governance (World Bank, 2004). Water justice advocates who oppose privatization also promote participation in water service governance (Bakker, 2008; Spronk, 2010), although from a different perspective and with a distinct vision of participation.

*Defining Coproduction*

Citizen participation in service management is often referred to as *coproduction*. In her much-cited original work on the topic, Nobel-prize winner Elinor Ostrom (1996) defined coproduction as service delivery where “inputs used to provide a good or service are provided by individuals who are not in the same organization” (p. 1073). This broad definition paved the way for a vast and diverse body of literature. The literature on coproduction describes an array of institutional arrangements implemented in widely different contexts. While rich empirically, this diversity makes it difficult to extract general theoretical conclusions, as noted by Evans (1996b, p. 1035). Joshi and Moore (2004) argue that Ostrom’s definition is so broad as to be analytically unhelpful, and assumes that inter-institutional cooperation is “the exception rather than the norm” (p. 39). Bovaird (2007, p. 847) adopts a slightly narrower definition of coproduction as citizen participation in any stage of service planning and delivery in cooperation with a professionalized provider.

However, even this narrower definition includes both public-private-community “partnerships” (PPCPs) and government-citizen coproduction, which have different possibilities for democratic governance given the fundamental differences between state-citizen and company-client relationships. Allen et al. (2008) argue that government-citizen coproduction is a more radical agenda than PPCPs, since it involves democratizing state decision-making structures in ways that empower the poor. However, while government-citizen coproduction has a greater potential to lead to more equitable outcomes, since the government can in theory pursue social ends while private sector is limited by its profit imperative, this is not necessarily the case. As Bovaird (2007) suggests, coproduction may be a way for the state to “dump its difficult problems on users and communities” (p. 855), especially where an increase in resources does not accompany the increased responsibility. This is arguably not the case in Venezuela.

*Comparing Technocratic and Radical Approaches to Coproduction*

It is useful to distinguish between two dominant approaches to coproduction: those that are driven primarily by the instrumental concerns of improving service efficiency or “technocratic” approaches, and those that also promote changes in political power relations towards achieving more socially just outcomes or “radical” approaches. These categories approximate Abers’s (2000) description of forms of participation that emphasize efficiency and those that emphasize democracy. They also correspond roughly with Heller’s (2001) categories of “technocratic” and “anarcho-communitarian”; however, radical is a broader category than anarcho-communitarian since it includes both bottom-up communitarian approaches such as those advocated by the Latin American anti-privatization network Red Vida and top-down cases of state-citizen co-production, such as the Venezuelan case.

I argue that the radical approaches have a greater potential to be empowering for the poor than technocratic approaches, since they directly engage with the root causes of service deprivations and are thus, following Fraser (1995), “transformative” rather than merely “affirmative.”<sup>7</sup> Although technocratic approaches may lead to improvements in the practices of service providers and may improve service quality, they are less likely to lead to scalable improvements and their long-term sustainability is therefore questionable.

### Technocratic paradigm

From an instrumental perspective, it is argued that participation promotes efficiency by reducing transaction costs and improving information exchange by bringing providers and users closer together. For Evans (1996a), coproduction has the potential to increase the efficiency of public administration by promoting synergistic relations between state and society, a process that leads to the creation of social capital, defined as relationships of trust across the public-private divide. Synergy involves both “complementary,” where both public

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<sup>7</sup> Fraser (1995) distinguishes between “affirmative” remedies, “aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them,” and “transformative” remedies, which attempt to restructure the underlying framework (p. 82).

and private actors provide inputs, and “embeddedness,” where state agents become more thoroughly a part of communities.

Voluntary labour is proposed as one way of increasing the economic efficiency of service provision since the opportunity cost for the poor (i.e. the value of their foregone labour) is presumed to be lower than the cost of professional labour (Ostrom, 1996). It is argued that participation will give self-interested service providers an incentive to serve the poor (World Bank, 2004, p. 185), since the lack of performance-related rewards in the public service is cited as a barrier to administrative efficiency (Ostrom, 1996, p. 1081). Participation may also increase participants’ commitment to policies and projects, therefore guaranteeing sustainability, since it is assumed that they have been involved in their design (Molyneux, 2008, p. 782).

In many cases, participation has been motivated by a recognition that supply-driven approaches such as centralized sewerage fail to meet the needs of the poor given the high costs of connecting to the systems (Hasan, 2006, 2008; Whittington et al., 2000, p. 298). For example, in Karachi, Pakistan, the much-celebrated NGO-led Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) succeeded in convincing state authorities to support their condominial sewerage model, which provides improved services at a lower cost to users (see e.g. Briscoe & Garn, 1995; Hall & Lobina, 2008; Hasan, 2006, 2008; Mitlin, 2008; Watson & Jagannathan, 1995).

Condominial sewerage is a form of simplified sewerage that involves smaller diameter, usually plastic pipes installed at shallower depths than conventional cast-iron sewers. In the OPP model households finance and participate in the construction of *internal* sewer components (sanitary latrines in houses, underground sewers in lanes, and neighborhood collector sewers) and the local government pays for and constructs the *external* components (trunk sewers into which neighborhood sewers feed and treatment plants). Similar participatory condominial sewer projects have been implemented in other countries with varying degrees of success (for Brazil see Nance & Ortolano, 2007; Ostrom, 1996; and Watson & Jagannathan, 1995; for Bolivia see Laurie & Crespo, 2007; and for Indonesia, Kenya, and Paraguay see Watson & Jagannathan, 1995).

Advocates of these approaches argue that community involvement can ensure that solutions are better adapted to the needs and resources of the poor. This also increases the potential for cost recovery since “technology choices and services correspond with what users want and are willing to pay” (Watson & Jagannathan, 1995, p. 5). Since the benefits of sanitation are not necessarily immediately evident to communities, participation can help stimulate demand, particularly when accompanied by awareness-raising efforts. Moreover, because sanitation involves behavioural change, it is argued that hygiene education should accompany improvements (see e.g. Chambers, 2009).

#### Limitations of the technocratic approach

While this literature provides valuable insights into what types of institutional change might help to improve the performance of service providers, its over-attention to the design of programs risks failing “to recognize the ways in which other factors and especially social, economic, and political power relations shape both the creation of institutions and the ways in which they operate on the ground” (Cameron, 2010, p. 8).

Radical literature in development studies and geography is particularly critical of coproduction when it accompanies broader neoliberal reforms. This literature suggests that despite their appeals to empowerment and social capital, neoliberal forms of participation maintain an unjust status quo by legitimizing reductions in public financing and the downloading of service delivery to communities (Allen et al., 2008; Miraftab, 2009; Molyneux, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2005; Zerah, 2009). It thus ensures neoliberal hegemony by increasing citizens’ perceptions of inclusion while avoiding “translating it into redistributive equity” (Miraftab, 2009, p. 41).

Where participation takes the form of public-private-community partnerships (PPCPs), it has been suggested that the poor are subsidizing otherwise unprofitable enterprises through exploitative “voluntary” labour contributions (Bakker, 2008; Spronk, 2009). For example in Laurie and Crespo’s (2007) discussion of condominial sewers as part

of PPCPs in El Alto, Bolivia, they argue that there was little consultation, which led to inappropriate infrastructure and low levels of participation in project execution and maintenance. They explain that communities viewed the technology not as a pro-poor solution but rather as a “way of cutting costs to the company” and “a second-class technology for poorer people” (p. 849).

More broadly, an over-emphasis on institutional design risks depoliticizing service issues by attributing service deprivations to institutional or market failure, rather than identifying its deeper roots in political and economic powerlessness. For example, there is a tendency to attribute inadequate sanitation to a “lack of demand,” measured in terms of “willingness to pay” (Whittington et al., 2000; World Bank, 2004). The notion that the poor should access services according to their willingness to pay as *consumers* reflects a broader shift away from the Keynesian era notion that services were social rights that should be guaranteed to *citizens* according their ability to pay (Bakker 2001, cited in Spronk, 2010, p. 160). For example, the argument that participation will ensure that technologies are more appropriate for the poor rests on the implicit assumption that the costs of these systems would be incurred by the households themselves, rather than through taxation and cross-subsidization (Hall & Lobina, 2008, p. 3).

However, the idea that participation can stimulate economic demand for these technologies fails to recognize that demand is difficult to generate in the context of poverty (Allen et al., 2008, p. 28). It is therefore unclear how it can lead to improvements that can be scaled up without mobilizing the necessary resources for infrastructure. Indeed, in examples of best practice such as the Orangi Pilot Project, widespread improvements were achieved because the NGO successfully lobbied the government for finance on the grounds that sanitation was a social right of citizenship. Similarly, in Brazil, it is argued that sanitation improvements associated with participatory sewerage were due largely to increased public finance achieved through the autonomous organization of citizens in the context of democratization (Briscoe & Garn, 1995).

The limitations of a primarily technocratic approach to participation for confronting these broader questions of state-society relations and public finance lead Allen, Hoffman, and Griffiths (2008) to assert that “the discussion needs to move from how best to use their [the poor’s] inputs to fill service gaps, to how to empower them to assert their full rights and responsibilities as citizens” (p. 28).

### Radical paradigm

These questions of citizenship and empowerment are at the centre of the radical paradigm. The radical paradigm attributes service deprivations to marginality, particularly the poor’s political and economic exclusion from exercising control over resources (see e.g. Swyngedouw, 2004). Participation is seen as a way of empowering the poor by making services more democratic, and increasing the responsiveness of providers through social control and monitoring.

While they are also concerned with improving service outcomes, radical approaches critique the prioritization of economic efficiency over equity concerns. For example, water justice activists advance alternative concepts of “social efficiency,” which focus on all aspects of public welfare, rather than on narrow economic criteria such as the ratio of capital input to number of household connections. As described by Spronk (2010, p. 161), a focus on social efficiency in service provision would include attention to such factors as the number and quality of jobs created, the quality and affordability of services, and whether or not the provider is overexploiting or polluting water resources.

Radical approaches share with the neoliberal paradigm a critique of conventional centralized and bureaucratic approaches to service delivery; however, their critique is based less on the presumed inefficiency of the public sector than a belief that representative democracy is exclusionary and has historically reinforced elite privilege (see e.g. Arvitzter, 2006; Buxton, 2011). In the global South, the distrust of bureaucracy is often due to a perception that previous forms of development were “exclusionary and marred by the classist politics of clientelism” (Spronk, 2010, p. 170). Participation is seen as a way of challenging

these unequal power relations by changing decision-making structures (Allen et al., 2008). Abers (2000) refers to this as “empowering participation,” since it involves discussion of policy goals and agendas rather than merely the implementation of pre-designed programs, as in the neoliberal model. It also critiques the notion that planning should be the exclusive “prerogative of professionals who act in isolation from other spheres of action” (Miraftab, 2009, p. 41).

While the neoliberal model tends to view participants as “clients” or “users,” literature from the radical perspective usually focuses on participation as a way of achieving “citizenship.” It argues that participation can contribute to enhancing government-citizen accountability in the fulfillment of rights, which differs from the accountability to paying clients central to some neoliberal approaches (see e.g. World Bank, 2004, Chapter 4). However, much radical development literature is critical of liberal democratic notions of universal citizenship, arguing that it fails to capture the reality of the poor who live in a condition of “partial citizenship,” excluded from meaningful participation in political life and the social rights of citizenship such as access to public services (Chatterjee, cited in Bakker, 2008, p. 239; see also Castro, 2007; Gaventa, 2001).

Linking participation with struggles for social justice and citizenship, radical approaches focus on the potential of participation to build people’s capacity to exert political agency. Political capacity differs from social capital, since it is explicitly related to the normative goals of social justice rather than a “free floating set of values” (Hickey & Mohan, 2005, p. 238). As Mitlin (2008) observes, “grassroots coproduction appears to have a dynamic that encourages it to move beyond a local orientation and towards more substantive change” (p. 353). For example, for the Orangi Pilot Project, improving sanitation was only one part of a broader goal of empowering the urban poor.

Within the radical literature, there is a distinction between those that advocate for bottom-up, decentralized, and community-managed water systems, and those that also support government-community coproduction models such as Venezuela’s technical water committees. Advocates of bottom-up or autonomous approaches often fear that in state-

sponsored participatory models such as the MTAs, the government will co-opt civil society, i.e. that its participation will legitimize top-down agendas that are not in the interests of the poor (Abers & Keck, 2009; Mitlin, 2008). However, as Abers and Keck (2009) point out, this assumes that the state is strong enough to manipulate participatory processes. Moreover, in reality, the categories of top-down or “invited” spaces and grassroots “invented” spaces are more fluid than they appear,<sup>8</sup> and both spaces are important for achieving the goals of subaltern groups (Cornwall, 2004; Miraftab, 2009, p. 35).

Skeptics of communitarian approaches point to the risk of falling into the “local trap”: the assumption that localizing decision-making will automatically lead to democratization and in turn to social justice; without being attentive to how local places are embedded in and reproduce broader power structures (Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Purcell, 2006).<sup>9</sup> For example, even when participatory programs are motivated by more radical goals, when they are implemented in the context of broader neoliberal reforms, their success may be limited. There is a risk that poorer people have to settle for second-class services, at higher costs to them in terms both of time and money than upper and middle-class citizens who benefit from piped water and sewerage without having to participate (Bakker, 2008; Spronk, 2009; “Water, sanitation, and drainage”, 2003). In the World Bank’s (2004) own analysis, there may also be a tradeoff between immediate service improvements and building long-term capacity for service provision, as well as the sustainability of the services themselves (p. 74).

These concerns have led some radical scholars to argue that civil society actors shouldn’t take part in policy execution at all, i.e. that they shouldn’t participate in actual service delivery activities, but only in policy design and planning, “lest they be co-opted into supporting a neoliberal agenda of state retreat” (as observed by Abers & Keck, 2009, p. 291).

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<sup>8</sup> Cornwall (2004) distinguishes between “invited” spaces for participation in development, sponsored by NGOs, development agencies, and governments, and “invented” spaces, which are “chosen, fashioned, and claimed by those at the margins” (p. 5).

<sup>9</sup> As Marxist geographers argue, scales cannot be examined in isolation, because the local, national, and global are merely scalar configurations of the global market (Albo, 2007).

By contrast, Abers and Keck (2009, p. 291) argue that the concept of “state retreat” is irrelevant in many of the contexts where coproduction is implemented, which have often lacked an institutionalized state presence to begin with. In these contexts, they argue that community groups can actually bolster state capacity to act in the public interest by helping government agencies do their jobs. They go on to critique literature that focuses excessively on democracy as *process* (e.g. the literature on deliberative democracy) rather than measuring the quality of democracy by the equitableness of its outcomes (see also Cameron, 2010). Researchers have identified cases where coproduction has promoted this type of mutual empowerment of state and society, usually in the context of party-social movement alliances under leftist political administrations such as Brazil; Kerala, India; and Venezuela (Abers, 2000; Fernandes, 2010; Heller, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2005).

Related to the local trap is the risk of “romanticizing community,” overlooking local power dynamics. Where well-meaning participatory programs fail to account for these power relations, they may risk reinforcing existing inequalities (class, gender, race). Better-resourced community groups may capture the benefits of participation since they face fewer barriers to participation than the poorest residents, such as time constraints and inadequate access to financial resources, training, and technical expertise (Nakhooda et al. 2007, cited in McDonald & Ruiters, 2012b, p. 30; see also Watson & Jagannathan, 1995, p. 17; Zerah, 2009).

Feminist scholars are particularly concerned about how participatory water management may merely add another burden to women, exacerbating gendered divisions of labour, since women are often primarily responsible for water-related household tasks (Elmhirst & Resurrection, 2008, p. 13). The emphasis on women’s empowerment through participation – as well as the idea that the opportunity cost of poor women’s participation is low – rests on implicit assumptions that women do not work, since their labour is more often in the “private” sphere of social reproduction than the “public” male sphere of production (Spronk, McMillan, & Caswell, 2013, p. 4).

*Assessing Transformative Participation: A Framework*

The above analysis suggests that participation will not always lead to democratization and material improvements for the poor; however some forms of participation can contribute to broader social change and empowerment. Based on their review of participatory development initiatives, Hickey and Mohan (2005) identify four factors that increase the likelihood that participation will promote socially just outcomes or be transformative, which respond to many of the observations and critiques outlined above.

1. Participation should be located within a broader, radical political project aimed at achieving social justice.

First, participation must be part of a broader, radical political project that seeks to challenge existing power relations, “rather than simply work around them for more technically efficient service delivery” (Hickey & Mohan, 2005, p. 250), as in cases of NGO advocacy such as the Orangi Pilot Project, leftist political administrations, or social movement organizing.

2. Participation should engage with *immanent* processes of development.

Second, they argue that participatory approaches have the greatest potential to achieve social transformation where they aim not only to change power relations within the scope of development interventions, e.g. by changing power dynamics between planners and citizens, but also to address broader structures of oppression (e.g. patriarchy, racism, exploitation) and envision more inclusive and sustainable development models. Following Cowen and Shenton (1996), the authors distinguish between *imminent* and *immanent* development. Imminent development refers to “willed development,” as in development interventions by NGOs and aid agencies, while immanent development refers to the underlying processes of (capitalist) development. Transformative participation seeks to transform these underlying immanent processes of development.

3. Participation should aim to achieve citizenship, radically conceived.

The third criterion, the pursuit of citizenship, involves not just bringing people into the political process but also democratizing these processes “in ways that progressively alter the ‘immanent’ processes of inclusion and exclusion that operate within particular political communities, and which govern the opportunities for individuals and groups to claim their rights to participation and resources” (Hickey & Mohan, 2005, p. 251). In some cases, the pursuit of citizenship involves the reversal of exclusionary forms of clientelism, as has been observed of the OPP (Mitlin, 2008, p. 348) and NGO-led community toilet projects among slum dwellers in India (Burra, Patel, & Kerr, 2003, p. 25). It also involves building the capacity and political consciousness of people to envision and push for an alternative model of development.

#### 4. Participatory programs should avoid “elite capture.”

A final and related point is that attention needs to be paid to local power dynamics, particularly how participation may simply conceal the persistence of patronage relations that reinforce elite privilege. Attention therefore needs to be paid to the intersection of political and economic power at different scales and its implications for the outcomes of participatory programs (Hickey & Mohan, 2005, p. 251).

The authors clarify that not all of the conditions must be in place to make participatory initiatives worthwhile. Indeed, they suggest that to see initiatives that fail to meet the criteria as inevitably disempowering denies the poor agency and fails to acknowledge how political learning can take place in any form of participation. They do, however, caution that analysts must be realistic in assessing the successes and limitations of participatory initiatives, especially those which make claims of empowerment, such as the technical water committees in Venezuela.

### Structure of the Thesis

In the remainder of the thesis, I will analyze the experience of the technical water committees through the lens of Hickey and Mohan’s framework. Chapters 2-4 demonstrate how the MTAs have opened spaces for citizen empowerment, with each chapter corresponding with an element of the framework. Chapter 2 establishes the first criterion, situating the MTAs within the broader Bolivarian Process. It argues that Venezuela’s political project has achieved dramatic social and political change in the country towards both “recognition” of and “redistribution” to marginal groups. Chapter 3 introduces the MTA model and argues that it meets Hickey and Mohan’s second criterion of seeking to engage with underlying processes of development in two main ways: an educational methodology aimed at raising consciousness of oppression and by directing state resources to marginal areas. Chapter 4 introduces the case study and argues that Antímano’s MTA activists are advancing a radical, active form citizenship conceived as “popular power” and that the MTAs have largely avoided elite capture, meeting Hickey and Mohan’s third and fourth criteria. However, in Chapter 5, I argue that participation at the local level may fail to confront many of the broader challenges of improving sanitation and building popular power, including the finance gap, institutional overlap, and a rigid bureaucracy that is resistant to change.

## **Chapter 2: Venezuela’s Radical Political Project – The Bolivarian Process and Contemporary State-Society Relations**

Venezuela’s Bolivarian Process is without a doubt one of the most radical political projects in Latin America, and indeed the world. Under President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) and the Bolivarian Process (1999-present), the country has broken decidedly with the neoliberal orthodoxy of “more market, less state.” State oil wealth has been channeled into social programs and cooperatives, and the poor are gaining unprecedented voice through forms of community-level democracy such as the technical water committees. Thus, following Nancy Fraser’s (1995) theorizations, the process aims to achieve social justice as both *redistribution* and *recognition*. Moreover, the approach is not merely *affirmative* as in social democratic social welfare approaches, but is also *transformative* since it aims to fundamentally reorganize both economic and state-society relations.

This chapter will explore the historical context that gave rise to Chávez, the Bolivarian Process, and the MTAs. It will then outline a brief history of the process, paying particular attention to the relationship between the revolutionary government and progressive community groups and social movements, which is key to understanding the successes and limitations of the MTAs.

### Understanding the rise of Hugo Chávez

While many countries in Latin America suffered under brutal dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s, the international community viewed Venezuela as an “exceptional” model of democracy and stability (Ellner & Tinker Salas, 2007). In reality, Venezuela’s democratic model during this period was highly exclusionary. In 1958, the Pact of Punto Fijo was signed between Venezuela’s three main parties: the social democratic Democratic Action party (*Acción Democrática*, AD), the Christian democratic Committee of Independent Political Organization (*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente*, COPEI), and the small leftist Democratic Republican Union (*Unión Republicana Democrática*, URD). Under the pact (1958-1993) the three parties agreed to share power and resources, while excluding

challengers, primarily the Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Venezuela*, PCV) (Wilpert, 2006, p. 12).

This limited form of democracy was broadly supported on the grounds that it guaranteed a minimum level of economic distribution to all social classes (Buxton, 2004). Like in many Latin American countries at the time, the Venezuelan state intervened heavily in the economy, and the strong oil sector fueled economic growth. Under the Punto Fijo system parties directed portions of this state wealth to their followers to secure political loyalty.

However, the political elite’s ability to guarantee social stability through patronage was undermined in 1979 when both high oil prices and favourable international borrowing conditions temporarily came to an end (Wilpert, 2006, p. 13). In response to declining state revenues, a series of governments in the 1980s and early 1990s introduced neoliberal reforms that lifted price and currency controls, cut public services, reduced labour protections, and privatized state industries. The social impacts of neoliberal policies were particularly devastating in Venezuela given the small private sector and high preexisting levels of poverty and informality (Buxton, 2004, p. 118), compounded by the boom and bust nature of the oil economy.

Widespread frustration with the reforms throughout the 1980s culminated in an explosion of popular protest on February 27, 1989, that became known as the *Caracazo*. That morning, as Caraqueños (Caracas residents) left their homes, they discovered that bus fares had doubled as a result of the government’s decision to lift fuel price controls. In response, people throughout Caracas took to the streets, looted businesses, and blockaded major arteries. Protests were met with a violent military crackdown with a death toll anywhere between 300 and 3,000 (Wilpert, 2006, pp. 16-17).

The Caracazo marked a major turning point, as the cracks in the Punto Fijo system became clear. With the government’s legitimacy rapidly deteriorating, a revolutionary movement that had been consolidating within the military seized on the opportunity to

advance their cause, staging two coup attempts in 1992. One of the attempts on February 4, 1992, was led by a young lieutenant, Hugo Chávez (Wilpert, 2006, p. 17). While he was ultimately unsuccessful, Chávez captured the public’s imagination when he addressed the country on national television taking responsibility for the coup.

By the late 1990s, poverty had reached astronomical levels. At the end of 1996, 86% of the Venezuelan population was poor and 65% lived in extreme poverty. In the lead-up to the 1998 elections, these conditions sparked widespread protests, a clear sign that the institutionalized mechanisms for interest representation had broken down (Buxton, 2004, p. 122).

#### The Bolivarian Process (1999-Present)

Following the failed coups, a group within the revolutionary movement decided to adopt a different strategy: electoral politics. They formed a political party, the Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento Quinta República*, MVR), and ran in the 1998 presidential election in alliance with other leftist parties,<sup>10</sup> with Hugo Chávez as their candidate. Running on an anti-poverty and anti-corruption platform, Chávez and the MVR won handily with 56.2% of the vote (Wilpert, 2006, p. 18).

Since then, Chávez’s government has won 13 of the 14 electoral competitions and popular referenda in the last 14 years (see Appendix F). It is not difficult to understand why he has sustained such support. Over the course of his mandate poor and marginal Venezuelans such as women, indigenous peoples, and Afro-Venezuelans have seen concrete improvements in their lives. Since Chávez’s election, social spending has doubled from 11.3% of GDP in 1998 to 22.8% of GDP in 2011 (Johnson and Kosameh, 2013).<sup>11</sup> Poverty has decreased from 50.4% at the end of 1998 to 31.9% at the end of 2011, with extreme

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<sup>10</sup> These included Fatherland for All (*Patria Para Todos*, PPT), Movement Toward Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS), the Communist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Comunista*, PCV), and some other smaller parties.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson and Kosameh’s data are from the Venezuelan government’s *Sistema Integrado de Indicadores Sociales de Venezuela* (SISOV).

poverty decreasing from 20.3% to 8.6% over the same period (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2013). The Gini index declined from 0.465 in 1999 to 0.39 in 2011, which means that Venezuela shifted from being one of the most unequal countries in Latin America in terms of income to being the third most equal (after Costa Rica and Uruguay) (Azzellini forthcoming, “Constituent and constituted,” para. 7). Venezuelans have free access to health care and education at all levels, and Venezuela ranks in the top five countries worldwide in terms of the percentage of students in universities (Azzellini, forthcoming, “Constituent and constituted,” para. 7).

### *Who are the Chavistas? The State-Society Dialectic*

Mainstream accounts of contemporary political change in Venezuela tend to focus on actions in the higher echelons of power, frequently on the figure of Chávez (Valencia Ramírez, 2006, p. 122). Recent interpretations have challenged this view, situating the “Chavistas” more centrally in their analyses (see e.g. Ciccariello-Maher, 2013b; Fernandes, 2010; Martinez, Fox, & Farrell, 2010). They argue that the movements and groups that support Chávez are important agents who have played a key role in keeping Chávez in office and shaping the direction of political change. Following Valencia Ramírez (2006), I suggest that the Chavistas and progressive elements of the government can best be understood as allies in a “counter-hegemonic” project. In contrast with analyses that privilege either “top-down” (state-led) or “bottom-up” (grassroots) dynamics, this view interprets the relationship between social movements and the state as dialectical and interdependent (Raby, 2006; see also Azzellini, forthcoming; Ciccariello-Maher, 2013b; Harris, 2007; Lebowitz, 2010).

Venezuela lacks the more vibrant social movement history of many other Latin American countries because the two-party system effectively contained widespread social mobilization, ensuring that people’s loyalties were primarily to their party rather than their community or workplace (Fernandes, 2010, p. 46). However, it is often wrongly assumed that the “urban poor never successfully organized politically” (McCoy, 2004, cited in Fernandes, 2010, p. 4). In their grassroots histories of the Bolivarian Process, Fernandes (2010) and Ciccariello-Maher (2013b) describe a long tradition of organizing, from militant

guerilla and student movements of the 1960s to movements for the right to the city in the 70s and 80s. Many Chávez supporters and government officials first became politically active in these oppositional movements, sometimes under the threat of reprisal from a repressive state (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013b).

Enrique Gonzáles (cited in Valencia Ramírez, 2006) offers a taxonomy of Chavista organizations, which include both those on the “classic left” such as the Communist Party, the progressive church, and student organizations; and the “alternative left,” which include “new social movements” such as women’s organizations and gay and lesbian groups. A large portion of the military also supports the Chávez government. But, as Smilde (2011) argues, the vast majority of Chávez’s support comes from the “masses of impoverished Venezuelans existing at the margins of formal citizenship” (p. 9). As he explains, their support is not necessarily ideological but rather “based upon a perception, and in most cases a lived experience, that for the first time they have a government that prioritizes their plight and fights for their interests” (p. 9).

A notable feature of the barrio-based organizations is that the majority of participants are women. This can be partly explained by the fact that the oil economy raises demand for non-tradables such as construction, which draws men out of their communities to work (Purcell, in Spronk & Webber, 2011, p. 236).

While pro-Chávez movements express allegiance to the government, their objectives go beyond merely keeping Chávez in office. Many activists will insist that they are first and foremost with the “*Proceso*” (the Bolivarian Process), and that they see Chávez as providing an opening to advance their struggles. Thus control of the state apparatus is seen as a means and not an end in itself. Drawing on the work of Pablo Mamani, Fernandes (2010), characterizes many social movements’ relationship with the state as one of “strategic ambiguity... identifying themselves as part of the state in order to highlight the new forms of access and inclusion that have opened up, but maintaining a sense of their autonomy to be able to put pressure on the state where necessary” (p. 28). These groups maintain different degrees of autonomy: some are state-mandated and receive funding from the government,

such as the technical water committees, while others maintain a more critical stance vis-à-vis the state.

In addition, while social movements have gained a strategic position in the state in the figure of Chávez and progressive government officials, the state remains contested (2013b). The old elite still wields considerable power. Moreover, although government policy has broken decidedly with neoliberalism, as Fernandes (2010) argues, Venezuela continues to be a “hybrid state,” which “has mounted certain challenges to the neoliberal paradigm but which remains subject to the internal and external constraints of global capital” (p. 23), particularly fluctuating oil prices. Neoliberal “market rationalities” persist in some areas of the public administration (Fernandes, 2010, p. 23-24), as do liberal strategies of verticalist political incorporation, both of which are subjects of social movement contestation (p. 27).

*From Reformism to Radicalization: A Brief History of the Bolivarian Process*

Largely in response to pressure from his support base, Chávez’s discourse and policies shifted markedly to the left over the course of his 14-year mandate. He initially ran on a “third way” social democratic platform and during the first few years of his presidency he did not depart substantially from the economic policies of his predecessors (Buxton, 2004, p. 114). However, as Ciccariello-Maher (2013b, p. 242), explains, both pressure from below and hostility from the opposition encouraged Chávez’s radicalization.

Chávez dedicated the early years of his presidency to launching a participatory process to elaborate a new constitution. He also played a significant role in reviving the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which significantly increased government revenues.

The new 1999 constitution, which marked the beginning of Venezuela’s “Fifth Republic,” is widely viewed as one of the most socially progressive in the world. However, as Buxton (2004) argues, it is essentially social democratic, since it still preserves private

property rights. Its biggest departure from previous governments was in understanding poverty and underdevelopment as a problem of distribution rather than economic growth (Buxton, 2004, p. 128), and by extension recognizing not only political but also social and economic rights (Wilpert, 2006, p. 35). The constitution also envisions a strong role for the state in the economy and rules out the privatization of the state oil company, Petroleum of Venezuela (*Petróleos de Venezuela*, PDVSA), and other strategic resources such as water.

Finally, the constitution laid the foundations for the participatory programs that were to come, defining the Fifth Republic as a “participatory and protagonistic democracy.” Protagonistic means that organized citizens (the “popular power”) are actively involved in the democratic process in a protagonist’s role (Wilpert, 2006, p. 54). To institutionalize this popular power, the constitution establishes “Citizen” or “Moral Power”<sup>12</sup> as a fourth branch of government alongside the traditional legislative, executive, and judiciary branches (Wilpert, 2006, p. 37).

The new paradigm expressed in the constitution gained real legal weight in 2001 with the passing of 49 “enabling” laws. The laws posed a more direct challenge to the power of Venezuela’s economic elite, prompting fierce resistance. Notably, the Hydrocarbons Law established greater public control over PDVSA, which had previously operated as a form of state within a state, with the management harbouring revenues abroad. The opposition responded with three failed attempts to sabotage the government between 2002 and 2004: a military coup in 2002, an oil industry work stoppage led by PDVSA’s managers that same year, and a recall referendum in 2004. Each time, the opposition underestimated Chávez’s support, particularly among the urban poor, who rallied in massive numbers to keep him in office (Wilpert, 2007, pp. 25-27).

Bolstered by the opposition’s failures and with increased public revenues from the oil industry thanks to the new reforms, the revolutionary government consolidated its program,

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<sup>12</sup> The citizen branch ensures that the other branches of government comply with the constitution and act in the public interest. It includes the attorney general, the defender of the people (or human rights defender), and the comptroller general (Wilpert, 2006, p. 37).

dramatically increasing social spending through the creation of the celebrated “Missions” (*Misiones*) or social programs (Fernandes, 2010, p. 83). The first Missions included: literacy training (*Misión Robinson*), high school completion (*Misión Ribas*), university scholarships (*Misión Sucre*), community health care (*Misión Barrio Adentro*), and subsidized food markets (*Misión Mercal*). Subsequently, a variety of other missions were created including for housing (*Misión Vivienda*). Most of the missions are implemented with significant public participation.

The post-2004 era was a period of radicalization. In January 2005, Chávez announced he was seeking to build “socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” To that end, the government ramped up efforts to democratize the economy by supporting the creation of cooperatives and co-managed enterprises. Thus, following Fraser (1995, p. 84), the vision of social justice advanced by the *Proceso* is not merely affirmative as in social welfare approaches but is also transformative since it attempts to restructure the relations of production.

Later, momentum shifted towards efforts to enhance direct democracy with the creation of new forms of community self-management. In 2006, Chávez declared that the “explosion of communal power” was one of five motors of the Bolivarian Process. That year, inspired by earlier forms of grassroots organizing in the barrios, the government began promoting communal councils (*consejos comunales*), which are neighbourhood planning and community development bodies intended to unite all of the community organizations active in a given neighbourhood. The technical water committees were encouraged to integrate with the communal councils as a “working group.” Councils receive funds directly from the central government to carry out community improvement projects. Subsequently in 2009, the government mandated the creation of communes (*comunas*), umbrella decision-making bodies that bring together several communal councils. The communes are envisioned as a way of deepening participatory democracy and advancing the socialist economy by linking community self-government with the cooperatives and social production enterprises (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013, pp. 243-246) (see Appendix H for the structure of the community organizations).

The rhetoric around participation has also become increasingly radical. In the early years of the process, participation was often couched in liberal terms of “co-responsibility.” Today, co-responsibility has been replaced in government and movement discourse with the idea of building a “communal state.” Co-responsibility, like co-production outlined in the previous chapter, implies that certain state functions are carried out in cooperation with citizens, and that that citizens hold the state accountable. By contrast, in a communal state the division between “civil society” and “political society”<sup>13</sup> would be abolished altogether (Azzellini, forthcoming). Santiago Arconada, who was active in establishing the MTAs at the national level, summarizes the distinction:

Co-responsibility is a liberal concept. It doesn't evoke the idea of a political and social space that concerns us all equally. Co-responsibility implies that the government gives a little space of participation to the people. It is still based on the conventional idea that the government should be responsible, that that's what the government is for. But since I, the government, want to be benevolent, I am giving a portion of responsibility to the people and say to them, “now we are co-responsible.” For me, this breaks with the concept of participatory democracy, which is so essential to the Bolivarian Process. In an ideal context, I wouldn't let there be a boundary between the government and the people. I also don't think that there should be areas in which the government participates and not the people (interview, August 24, 2012).

The achievements, challenges, and contradictions inherent to such a radical political transformation are in many ways embodied in the MTAs.

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<sup>13</sup> Gramsci originated the distinction between *political society*, which rules through force, and *civil society*, which rules through ideological consent. As outlined in Fernia (1987, p. 25), political society corresponds with the state and consists of a “dictatorship, or coercive apparatus, for the purpose of assimilating the popular masses to the type of production and economy of a given period”. Meanwhile, civil society enables the “hegemony of a social group over the entire national society exercised through so-called private organizations, such as the church, the trade unions, the school, etc.” In practice, Gramsci recognized that this distinction was more analytical than real given the overlap between the two spheres, as when the state supports the consolidation of civil society for a given end.

## Conclusions

Under the leadership of Hugo Chávez and now successor Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela is undergoing one of the most progressive political transformations in the world, leading to concrete improvements in the lives of Venezuela’s most vulnerable citizens. The MTAs therefore meet Hickey and Mohan’s first criterion, that participation must be embedded in a broader, radical political project aimed at achieving social justice.

The deepening of the country’s transformative process must be understood as resulting from a dialectical relationship between the grassroots and progressive elements within the state. Chávez’s base has put pressure on the government to transform, and bottom-up, grassroots initiatives have been scaled up and institutionalized at the national level. The technical water committees are emblematic of this top-down/bottom-up dynamic. Although they were first piloted in Caracas before the election of Hugo Chávez, the model was scaled up to the national level in 2000, making them one of the first participatory forums promoted by the Chávez government.

### **Chapter 3: “From Technical to Social Logic” – The MTAs’ Engagement with Underlying Processes of Development**

The MTAs are a key part of the explosion of “communal power” in Bolivarian Venezuela. Established at the national level in 2000, there are over 9,000 MTAs nationwide (Victor Díaz, Interview, August 20, 2012; “Nueve mil mesas”, 2013) and as of 2011, they had initiated 1,500 community-managed infrastructure projects (“Mesas técnicas”, 2011) (see Appendix G for their structure).

Hickey and Mohan’s (2005) second criterion for transformative participation argues that participation should seek to “direct participatory approaches towards a close engagement with underlying processes of development, rather than remain constrained within the frame of specific policy processes or interventions” (p. 251). This chapter will argue that the MTAs meet this objective. In Bolivarian Venezuela, citizen participation in all spheres of the state, including the water sector, “is regarded as a key educational practice for transforming fundamentally unequal social relations” (López Maya & Lander, 2011, p. 59). Moreover, the MTAs are part of a broader shift in the water utility’s paradigm from a “technical” to a “social” logic by prioritizing social welfare in service planning and infrastructure investment (González, 2008 cited in Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 16), reversing a history of discriminatory water policy.

#### **Informal Development and Urban Water and Sanitation Services in Caracas**

Prior to 1999, the government’s water service policy was highly discriminatory. It prioritized building networks in the formal neighbourhoods and within the formal city it privileged the high-income areas over the middle-income areas (Cariola & Lacabana, n.d., p. 6). According to Victor Díaz, coordinator of the Hidrocapital’s Community Management Office, the utility had previously never stepped foot in the barrios and “planned everything from air conditioned offices” (personal communication, August 20, 2012).

In the absence of state planning, the city’s diverse barrios share a common history of water struggles. During the early phases of settlement residents typically came together to

create self-help or illegal connections to the city water system and constructed makeshift, on-site sanitation systems such as pit latrines. Then, residents mobilized for improved water and sanitation services from the state, with drinking water as the priority (Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 123). Usually they would attain limited infrastructural improvements through clientelistic ties to the party in power or after staging highly visible protests, which was often their only recourse to obtain services. To demand improvements, residents would deliver petitions, block main thoroughfares, occupy the water utility headquarters, and even temporarily kidnap utility officials until they agreed to improve service delivery<sup>14</sup> (interview with Hidrocapital community promoters, August 28, 2012; interview with Anselmo Rodriguez, September 6, 2012; see also Arconada, 2005a; Francisco, 2005; McCarthy, 2009).

These water mobilizations tended to subside once neighbourhoods received partial access to the system, even though connections were precarious (Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 123). This echoes Swyngedouw’s (2004) observations that clientelist and paternalist political arrangements tend to prevent class issues from being turned into class politics by “particularizing and individualizing solutions that are granted in a piecemeal fashion” (p. 158). Caracas’s history reflects his observations about Guayaquil, Ecuador, where clientelism led to “a very fragmented, divisive, and particularized system of community action,” which was “an important stumbling block preventing the growth of citywide coalitions that could confront the state much more directly” (p. 158).

This piecemeal development of services in the barrios has created what Bakker (2010, p. 22) describes as an “archipelago”: incomplete, fractured water and sanitation networks, and highly uneven service access within neighborhoods. The lack of formal planning, compounded by the high altitude of the barrios, makes delivering services in these areas extremely challenging. The city’s average neighbourhood is situated at 800-1,000m

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<sup>14</sup> In an interview with current Hidrocapital community promoter for the popular parish of La Vega, he recounts how parish residents blocked the Panamerican highway to demand attention from INOS (*Instituto Nacional de Obras Sanitarias*) officials. When the official finally showed up, they kidnapped him and took him to a high point in the barrio until he signed an agreement to improve water services. At the time, the barrio only received water every 20-30 days. Residents demanded that the cycles be reduced to 8 days, which was ultimately achieved (Interview with Hidrocapital community promoters, August 28, 2012).

above sea level, above its principal water reservoirs, and many barrio neighbourhoods are situated at much higher elevations (Victor Díaz, interview, August 20, 2012). Considerable energy and an elaborate infrastructure are needed to pump water to households. For this reason, the Caracas aqueduct is considered one of the most complex in the world (Hidrocapital community promoters, interview, August 28, 2012).

### History of the Technical Water Committees (MTAs)

#### *Early Origins: From Protest to Parish Government (1993-1996)*

Water-related conflict in Caracas reached its peak during the neoliberal period in the early 1990s, prompting the newly elected left-leaning mayor of Caracas, Aristóbulo Istúriz (1993-1996), and his team to seek innovative solutions to the water problem.<sup>15</sup> Under his administration, the MTA model was first piloted in Caracas.

Istúriz inherited a water system in crisis, in part because Venezuela’s water sector had fallen victim to the political spoils sharing of the Punto Fijo period. From 1974 onwards, the National Institute of Sanitary Works (*Instituto Nacional de Obras Sanitarias*, INOS), at the time responsible for service planning, delivery, regulation, and infrastructure, became a hot bed for clientelism and corruption.<sup>16</sup> This severely undermined the institute’s ability to provide services. Cristóbal Francisco (2005), who has held various prominent positions in Hidrocapital and Hidroven (the national water utility) and served briefly as Minister of Popular Power for the Environment (Minamb) in 2012, recalls that there were people on the payroll of the utility who did not actually work there but were rather political allies of the dominant parties, especially Democratic Action (AD). This inefficiency, combined with

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<sup>15</sup> Istúriz was mayor of the Libertador municipality of Caracas. He belonged to the left-leaning party Radical Cause (*La Causa Radical*, LCR).

<sup>16</sup> As Swyngedouw (2004) explains, it has not been uncommon for public water utilities in Latin America to serve as the political booty (*botín político*) of government officials since they allowed for the partial satisfaction of popular demands “and could be used as a system of vote-bonding through providing services and jobs” (p. 158).

decreased social spending during the 1980s and 1990s, led to a marked deterioration of urban services. In 1989, when INOS was dismantled and replaced by Hidroven, there were over 500 recorded water protests in Venezuela, more than one a day.

Santiago Arconada reflects on the situation in his home parish of Antímáno at the time, “When Aristóbulo’s administration began in 1993, the water crisis was dire. We only had water once every two months! And during the times when we didn’t have piped water, we had to wait in line to get water from tanker trucks. It was horrible” (interview, August 24, 2012). Sewerage ran freely in the streets (personal communication with community members in Las Barras, Antímáno, November 18, 2012).

With a view to addressing the water and sanitation problems and other pressing urban issues, Mayor Istúriz assembled a “change team” of progressive reformers within his administration. Many team members had long histories of organizing in the barrios, student movements, unions, and other progressive organizations, and so they shared a strong commitment to people’s participation. With their support, Istúriz piloted a new model of participatory local governance called the “parish government,” which brought together civil society representatives and city councilors at the parish level, a subdivision of the municipality, to find solutions to local issues.

The idea for the MTA model was born at a now famous parish meeting in Antímáno on March 6, 1993. The basic concept was for communities to form committees and cooperate with the state water utility to improve services. Istúriz approached the government of President Caldera and Hidrocapital for support. Together with progressive reformers within the utility, including Jacqueline Faría, then manager of the Caracas metropolitan water system for Hidrocapital, Istúriz was able to overcome central government resistance and gain support for the proposal. With few resources, but a strong commitment to the project, the team implemented pilot MTAs in the marginal Caracas parishes of Antímáno and El Valle (Victor Díaz, interview, August 20, 2012).

Although it was highly successful in improving local services and encouraging community organization, the MTA experiment was short-lived. In the 1995 elections, Istúriz lost to the right-wing candidate Antonio Ledezma. City officials quickly disbanded the MTAs and parish governments, as they viewed them as a threat to their own authority (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 95). However, the early experience with the MTAs provided valuable lessons that would be taken up again after the election of Chávez in 1998. Istúriz and several members of his original change team would also go on to play key roles in the Chávez administration.

*Scaling Up: The MTAs Reborn (1999-Present)*

The water and sanitation challenge was one of the first tests faced by Chávez’s administration when he assumed office in 1999. After decades of state neglect of the water service, the electorate had high expectations that he would resolve the problems. According to Santiago Arconada, Chávez “rose to the occasion in such a forceful, convincing way that in the first few years the water experience was really the face of the Bolivarian Process” (interview, August 24, 2012).

Between March and April of 1999, Chávez appointed a new leadership team for the water sector. Jacqueline Faría was appointed President of Hidrocapital. Faría, “an engineer by education and an activist by vocation,” had first-hand experience with the MTAs from her tenure in Hidrocapital during the Istúriz administration (McCarthy, 2009, p. 11). Fellow progressives Cristóbal Francisco and Alejandro Hatcher were appointed Vice-President of Hidrocapital and President of Hidroven respectively (Arconada 2006, p. 188). All three had sharpened their political teeth in student movements in the 1980s (“Perfil biográfico”, 2010).

May 15-30, 1999, the new leadership convoked a workshop of long-time social activists to discuss what became known as the “communal management” of Hidrocapital. Delegates came from a variety of different backgrounds and included trade unionists, students, environmentalists, cooperative activists, academics, and members of different neighbourhood and cultural groups. The MTA experience under Istúriz figured centrally in

the workshop discussions and many elements of that experience were ultimately adopted. From 1999-2000, Hidrocapital implemented a variation on the MTA model throughout the capital region (Arconada 2005b).

The first step in creating a people’s-centered water service was to establish Hidrocapital’s community management office, which serves as the main point of contact between communities and the utility (McCarthy, 2009, p. 11). Hidrocapital’s frontline staff members in the communities are called “promoters” colloquially known as *comunitarios*. Some are engineers while others come from backgrounds in political or social work. Many are also activists with long histories of community organizing in the barrios.<sup>17</sup> This parallels the “engineer activist” model that Watson and Jagannathan (1995, p. 16) found to be effective in enhancing communities’ voice in service decision-making in Brazil, since engineers also became advocates for the community.

Santiago Arconada was appointed to coordinate the office. Like many social movement activists who assumed positions in the Chávez administration, Arconada faced a significant learning curve: virtually overnight, he went from organizing in opposition to the government to becoming part of the state apparatus (interview with Santiago Arconada, August 24, 2012). Along with Arconada, other members of the Istúriz administration assumed positions in Hidrocapital at the time (McCarthy, 2009, p. 11).

In its first two years, the MTA model proved itself unequivocally in Caracas. By 2001, due to success at the local level, the MTAs became national public policy (Lacabana et al., 2007).

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<sup>17</sup> For example, one community promoter I interviewed was a socialist militant who had previously been involved in organizing illegal land settlements in Valencia, a telling example of the fluid relationship between civil society and the state in Bolivarian Venezuela.

### The MTA Methodology: Census, Sketch, Diagnosis, and Project Execution

Participation in the MTAs serves both a political and instrumental function. Since large parts of the water and sewerage systems in the barrios were constructed through self-help, the communities themselves are often the only ones who know where their pipes are, making participation essential to the utility’s work. However, the MTAs are also viewed as a tool for political consciousness-raising, inspired by the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

To form an MTA, community members follow a three step participatory methodology with support from the water utility: (1) census, (2) plan or sketch, and (3) diagnosis. Through the *census*, community members collect data on who lives in their neighbourhood and the status of their services. Recent literature in the Foucauldian tradition has focused on the empowering potential of such forms of self-censusing. Foucauldian scholars have long illustrated how censuses driven from above are central to modern governmentality since they make the population legible to the state, facilitating its rule. By contrast, self-censusing, according to Appadurai (2001, p. 34), can serve as “revolutionary form of governmentality from below” since it gives communities power when dealing with state organizations and serves as the basis for their claims for social rights.

The *plan* or *sketch* is a map of the community, which demonstrates to the utility where community members have laid their pipes. The map is also highly symbolic. Santiago Arconada recalls that under the administration of Istúriz the entire barrio of Antímano (home to over 150,000 people) did not even appear on Caracas city maps. Thus, by self-mapping, barrio residents are making their neighbourhoods visible to the public and assigning themselves importance in the political priorities. The mapping process also serves as a way of building a collective memory of the community and its history (Santiago Arconada, interview, August 24, 2012).

The third and final step is a *diagnosis* of the service deficiencies. In cooperation with the utility, communities identify service problems and plan solutions, often through community-managed projects. In 2005, Hidrocapital established a community projects fund

as a way of transferring greater responsibility to the communities. MTAs and communal councils<sup>18</sup> can also seek funds from a variety of different sources including the municipalities, the Government of the Capital District – a national executive entity that governs the city’s Libertador municipality<sup>19</sup> – and the Foundation for Community Development and the Promotion of Communal Power (*Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad y Promoción del Poder Comunal*, FUNDACOMUNAL), which falls under the national Ministry of Popular Power for Communes and Social Protection (*Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y Protección Social*). Once they secure resources, the communities have the option to carry out the project work themselves with technical support from utility engineers or contract a construction company, often a local cooperative, to carry out the work.

As former water sector reformer Manuel González<sup>20</sup> explains, the MTA methodology aims to increase communities’ class-consciousness as a springboard for political action. Through the MTA methodology, “communities begin to recognize that differences in service quality correspond with social inequities, and that that the service disparities originate in a process of urbanization that highlights social differences.” They then “realize that by organizing themselves they can struggle for equal treatment as human beings, with respect to

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<sup>18</sup> If the MTA is integrated with a communal council, funds will be received and administered by the council and not the MTA itself.

<sup>19</sup> In 2009, the Federal District was renamed the “Capital District” and additional functions were transferred from the city government to the national government through the creation of the unelected Head of Government for the Capital District. The Capital District corresponds with Caracas’s Libertador municipality. Public works in Libertador often fall under the jurisdiction of the Government of the Capital District. This move was criticized as it was seen as a way of removing power from the opposition mayor of the Caracas Metropolitan Area (*Alcalde mayor/metropolitano*) Antonio Ledezma who was elected in 2008. The mayor of the CMA has functions in all five of Caracas’s municipalities [Libertador (Capital District), Baruta, Chacao, El Hatillo, and Sucre (Miranda State)]. The mayor’s office for the CMA is responsible for the city’s aqueducts.

<sup>20</sup> González is current Secretary of Social Management (*Secretario de Gestión Social*) for the Government of the Capital District. He worked in the Community Management Office of Hidrocapital from 1999-2005, first as a community promoter and then as the community office coordinator. Together with Jacqueline Faría, Santiago Arconada, Anselmo Rodríguez, and Victor Díaz, he was part of the core group of reformers during the initial implementation of the communal management of Hidrocapital.

the essential services of water and sanitation” (Manuel González, interview, October 19, 2012). Anselmo Rodriguez concurs: “When people have knowledge of the water system, they begin to make demands” (interview September 6, 2012). This echoes what Miraftab (2009) calls insurgent planning: “purposeful actions that aim to disrupt domineering relationships of oppressors to the oppressed, and to destabilize such a status quo through consciousness of the past and imagination of an alternative future” (p. 41). In her view, insurgent planning should promote collective memory, particularly around the historic inaction of state authorities (p. 46). As Irazábal and Foley (2010) point out, what is unprecedented under Chávez and unique in the world is that “the government wants to support grassroots planning insurgencies against oppression” (p. 109).

### State Investment in Water and Sanitation

In addition to the MTAs’ radical pedagogy, another way the governance reforms have challenged uneven development is through dramatic increases in investment in water and sanitation, prioritizing the construction of new infrastructure in the barrios. According to Ministry of Environment statistics, the government has invested an average of US\$600 million per year in improving services since Chávez’s election in 1998 (“Estado venezolano”, 2011) meaning that Venezuela has one of the highest per capita investment levels in water and sanitation in Latin America (See Appendix I for a comparison of spending on water and sanitation in select Latin American countries). Between 2001-2011, it is estimated that the government invested a total of US\$7.518 billion in water and sanitation, compared with only US\$2.4 billion between 1989-1998 (Castillo, 2011), representing a three-fold increase. Between 2010 and 2012, special funds invested in the water and sanitation sector totaled close to US\$2.718 billion, of which US\$1.18 billion was related to sanitation (Interamerican Development Bank, 2012, p. 4).

Further infrastructure investment is planned under the government’s 60-year National Plan for Integrated Water Management (*Plan Nacional de Gestión Integral de Aguas*, referred to as *Plan Agua*) (Tarazona, 2012). The plan includes 50 major water supply and distribution projects, as well as new community infrastructure in the barrios. Notably, the

utility will bring online a new water reservoir, Tuy IV, which is expected to meet future water demand in the capital region (La Cruz, 2013).

Specific resources have also been earmarked for sanitation as part of the US\$2.5 billion Río Guaire Sanitation Program. The Guaire River (*Río Guaire*) is the main open-air sewage collector that runs across the entire city of Caracas. Currently, more than 80% of the Caracas Metropolitan Area’s sewage is discharged untreated into its 32 sub-basins (Interamerican Development Bank, 2012, p. 3). Although primary sewer collectors were constructed along the length of waterway between 1940 and 1970 to collect and channel the city’s wastewater, almost none of the sewerage network is connected to these collectors, and only 20% of sewage is collected before reaching the Guaire (Interamerican Development Bank, 2012, p. 3). Moreover, sewerage and drainage water is not separated at the point of discharge (what is called a “mixed system”) (Interamerican Development Bank, 2012, p. 3).

In 2005, by presidential decree, Chávez declared the cleanup of the Río Guaire to be in the general public interest. The goal of the project is to collect all sewage from the sub-basins of the Guaire and construct infrastructure to collect, pipe, separate, and discharge it into the collectors along the river. Once the infrastructure is complete, a new sewage treatment plant will be constructed with the capacity to process all municipal sewage. Project completion is scheduled for 2014 or 2015 (Interamerican Development Bank, 2012, p. 6).

In 2012, the government secured a US\$300 million loan from the Interamerican Development Bank for work on sanitation in 12 sub-basins of the Río Guaire, focusing first on the headwaters in the west, home to the majority of the city’s barrios where the sanitation problem is the most urgent (Interamerican Development Banks, 2012, p. 5). The objective of this stage is to construct water and sanitation infrastructure in the beneficiary sub-basins, for sewage intake, piping, separation, and disposal through collector pipes along the watercourse, and to take steps to prevent and reduce vulnerability to floods and landslides in the surrounding areas (Interamerican Development Bank, 2012, p. 6).

## Conclusions

Thanks to both the increased investment and the participatory reforms, there have been major improvements in water and sanitation coverage since the beginning of the Chávez administration. Between 1998 and 2013, the percentage of households with piped water service increased from 80% to 96%. Over the same period, sewerage coverage increased from 62% to 85%, representing an increase of over 8 million people with access to the service (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2012; “Nueve mil mesas”, 2013).

The MTAs represent a radical departure from the previous practices of Hidrocapital, when utility officials would not step foot in the barrios. Equity concerns now play a far greater role in service planning and investment, and infrastructure investment in the barrios is identified as a priority. Manuel González refers to the shift in the water utility’s development paradigm as transition from a “technical” logic to a “social” logic (2008, cited in Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 16). This approximates the notion of “social efficiency” discussed in Chapter 1, since social welfare is prioritized above technical or economic efficiency. Indeed, this new logic often means finding solutions that do not always conform to conventional Western engineering practices. Victor Díaz explains:

Before the technical staff was very conservative. They would say, “it’s not possible, it’s not possible”. But now, the vision has changed, even in engineering. There was previously a prejudice against the popular sectors. They weren’t solving problems before not because it wasn’t possible, but because they didn’t want to (Interview, December 4, 2012).

Through their participatory methodology, the MTAs seek not only to improve services, but also to change the relationship and division of responsibility and power between state agencies and organized communities. In the next chapter, I will explore how the MTAs are promoting citizen empowerment in practice in Antímano, Caracas.

#### **Chapter 4: “We are Building *Urbanismos*”: Water and Sanitation, Popular Power, and Citizenship in Antímano, Caracas**

Florencia Gutiérrez, a long-time MTA *vocera* and United Socialist Party of Venezuela<sup>21</sup> militant and 67 year old grandmother from Antímano’s largest barrio, Santa Ana, swells with pride as she points out improvements in the parish of Antímano. From sewage pipes and storm drains to subsidized food distributors and community health centres, community members themselves had led all of the work, through the communal councils and communes. “We are building an *urbanismo*,” she explains (personal communication, October 28, 2012). By *urbanismo*, she meant a dignified urban space, in contrast with a *barrio*. While *barrio* is often used as a derogatory term, an *urbanismo* is a source of pride. It also implies self-sufficiency: that goods and services are produced and distributed locally.

Through the technical water committees (MTAs), communal councils, and communes, community activists are actively shaping the urban development process and redefining what it means to be a barrio resident. In doing so, they are advancing a radical vision of citizenship based on the notion of “popular power.” Drawing on field research in the parish of Antímano, this chapter will argue that the MTAs meet Hickey and Mohan’s (2005) third and fourth criteria defining transformative participation: advancing citizenship by seeking to democratize the political process to address immanent processes of development and avoiding elite capture. The MTAs are challenging uneven development in three main ways: (1) improving services in the barrios, providing what Bakker (2008, p. 239) refers to as the “material emblems of citizenship”; (2) increasing the public recognition of the barrios and improving barrio-state relations; and (3) enhancing the political and organizational capacity of MTA participants to push for citizenship rights.

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<sup>21</sup> *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela), Chávez’s party. The party was created in 2006 in response to criticisms that his original party, the MVR was too top down. It was also envisioned as a way of uniting all of the country’s leftist parties, however not all of them have integrated with it (Maloney-Risner, 2009).

### Participation as Citizenship

Participation as *citizenship* implies a more political understanding of participation than technocratic interventions, which view water users as “consumers,” “clients,” or development project “beneficiaries,” since it emphasizes people’s role as agents, rather than passive recipients of pre-designed programs, and implies changes in state-society relations (Allen et al., 2008; Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999). The state-society relations implied by citizenship are often contrasted with political clientelism, which is typically seen as anti-democratic and de-mobilizing (see e.g. Fox, 1994), as was the case during Venezuela’s pact democracy (Punto Fijo).

However, the near universal embrace of citizenship and participation for effective water governance masks divergent understandings of these concepts (Castro, 2007) and of the underlying causes of exclusion from services.

#### *Radical Citizenship and Immanent Development*

Recognizing the failure of legally enshrined citizenship rights such as the “right to water” to lead to substantive equality and democracy, Latin American social movements are advancing radical forms of citizenship that reject “mere inclusion in the social and political order” and aim to “create active political subjects” capable of transforming *immanent* processes of uneven development (Dagnino, 2003, p. 13).

The mainstream, liberal democratic notion of citizenship envisions that citizens – viewed as autonomous and self-interested individuals – enter into a “social contract” with the state, under which they agree to be ruled in exchange for certain privileges or “rights” and protections (Rousseau, 1987, cited in Purcell, 2003, p. 565). Citizens’ input into state decisions is usually institutionalized through an electoral system, which establishes delegation as the organizing principle of democracy (Motta, 2011, p. 35).

However, the conditions of “partial citizenship” that are a reality for much of the world’s population, belie the universality of such citizenship rights. Marx for example, referred to the formal political equality promised by citizenship as a “political lion’s skin,” arguing that it serves to mask underlying inequalities in the economic realm (Marx, 1977, cited in Rasmussen & Brown, 2002, “Beginnings”, para. 2). The liberal view of citizenship as inclusion is often related to a *residual* understanding of poverty, which sees poverty as resulting from individuals’ exclusion from the market or decision-making. Marxist and feminist analysts, by contrast, understand poverty as *relational*, recognizing that groups of people are adversely incorporated into existing social formations, and that these unequal power relations (along the lines of gender, class, etc.) are integral to these formations (Hickey & du Toit, 2007). Therefore striving for citizenship as inclusion into the existing order will not achieve substantive equality.

Marxist and feminist analysts are also critical of the liberal view’s emphasis on the state as the space where politics occurs. Marx argued that, “the category of citizen drove a wedge between the public, political citizen and the private self within civil society, hiding the real sources of power within the sphere of the private” (Rasmussen & Brown, 2002, “Beginnings”, para. 2). The result is that liberal democratic citizenship “serves to constrain and limit politics in a way that makes it difficult to effectively resist the increasing control of capital” (Purcell, 2003, p. 566). As feminist critics have pointed out, it has also effectively excluded women from citizenship discourse by separating the “public” male sphere, from the private, domestic sphere, which is seen as the sphere of women’s activity (Pateman, 1988; Vogel, 1991).

### *Citizenship and Poder Popular: Towards a New Geography of Power in Venezuela*

The discourse of *poder popular* (“popular” or “public power”) expressed in the Venezuelan constitution and advanced through the MTAs represents a radical re-interpretation of citizenship that goes beyond “inclusion” towards addressing processes of uneven development. The vision of popular power differs from traditional liberal citizenship since it entails an expanded public sphere and seeks to create political subjects committed to

the pursuit of a common good, social justice, rather than individual rights and preferences, which is characteristic of the liberal approach (see Mouffe, 1991, p. 71).

The vision of popular power recognizes social exclusion as a structural rather than individual problem. The Venezuelan government has therefore granted greater weight to marginal areas in its promotion of social programs and participatory organizations. According to Smilde (2011), this reorientation has resulted in a “change in citizenship as formerly marginalized sectors of society become the central focus of the government and are receiving full benefits of modern citizenship” (p. 22).

Notably, whereas citizenship in Venezuela has historically been identified with political party membership (Lander, 1996), the new politics of popular power is strongly grounded in the local (Fernandes, 2010, p. 60), and neighbourhoods have become the primary spaces of citizen formation and learning (Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 130; Lacabana, 2010, p. 12). Popular power also emphasizes economic self-management and local self-sufficiency. Venezuelan activist Juan Contreras defines popular power as “a space capable of producing values and goods locally, which imply processes of negotiation between actors who generate relations of power in function of the production and distribution of wealth and power”<sup>22</sup> (cited in Fernandes, 2010, p. 59).

The MTAs and other forms of participation are linked with a broader project of political transformation that attempts to break down the distinction between the citizenry and bureaucratic elite, which is central to liberal democracy (Motta, 2011, p. 35). As López Maya and Lander (2011) explain, whereas previous views of state-citizen relations in Venezuela saw the state as a benefactor which would create the conditions for modernization and the achievement of citizenship, under the new view the state is a “facilitator of empowerment for those who ought to make decisions and control public administration” (p. 64). Moreover, since participation has been accompanied by efforts to decommodify some public goods and services (e.g. housing, land), and to increase the redistribution of the economic surplus,

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<sup>22</sup> Barrio activists began referring to “popular power” before the concept was adopted by the Chávez government, another example of the bottom-up and top-down dialectic between civil society and the state.

citizenship and democracy have the potential to become *substantive* rather than merely formal categories (see Fernandes, 2010, p. 235; Ciccariello-Maher, 2013b, p. 9).

The resignification of citizenship also has a significant cultural dimension, as it promotes a collective rather than individualist notion of citizenship. For example, the guidelines accompanying the 1999 constitution describe as the achievement of citizenship as “members of society possessing attributes such as solidarity, responsibility, and participatory and democratic attitudes” (López Maya & Lander, 2011, p. 65). Local, participatory fora are seen as key sites for learning this form of citizenship, inspired by the Gramscian notion that through participation in struggle, subordinate groups not only achieve institutional change but also gain an identity as “political subjects” (Smilde, 2011, p. 13). Indeed, recognizing how cultural and material practices are intertwined, the Bolivarian Process has emphasized the importance of transforming culture and ideology (Smilde, 2011, p. 21) or building “consciousness.”

In the sections that follow, I will explore particular ways in which citizenship, conceived as popular power, is being built in the MTAs in Antímano, Caracas.

#### Introduction to the Case study: The MTAs in Antímano, Caracas

##### *Geography and Socioeconomic Status*

The parish of Antímano is located in Libertador municipality in the west of Caracas. As of the 2011 census, the population was 153,353, and there were 125 communal councils.<sup>23</sup> The parish’s surface area is 29.5km<sup>2</sup>. Located on the southern slope of the *Serranía del Litoral* (the coastal mountain range), the parish is mountainous with elevations as high as 1,325 meters above sea level. Topography is uneven, with slopes greater than 46% and in some cases as high as 80% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2007, p. 26). Most of

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<sup>23</sup> All census data have been retrieved from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística website [www.ine.org.ve](http://www.ine.org.ve).

Antímáno’s neighbourhoods are hillside barrios (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 113). Anecdotal evidence suggests that most people own their homes but lack formal title to their land.<sup>24</sup>

Although considered one of Caracas’s most marginal parishes, Antímáno is socioeconomically diverse. According to the 2011 census, of its 35,832 households, 20.0% live in poverty (7,172 households), of which 2.9% (1,035) live in extreme poverty. An estimated 3.65% of households lack access to basic services (1,307 households), and 5.19% of households live in inadequate housing (1,858 families) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística website, 2012). It should be noted that statistics on service coverage might not capture people’s lived reality, as they do not define the *quality* of services. In fact, separate data from 2010 (cited in Goldfrank, 2011, p. 113) suggests that 52% of Antímáno’s population lacks basic needs, making it Caracas’s poorest parish.

Table 4.1

*Official Poverty Statistics for the Parish of Antímáno, 2001 and 2011*

	Total households (#)	Households living in poverty (#)	%	Caracas average (%)	Households living in extreme poverty (#)	%	Housholds without access to basic services	%
2001	28,783	8,247	28.65%	16.35%	1,855	6.44%	1,268	4.40%
2011	35,832	7,172	20.00%	12.00%	1,035	2.90%	1,307	3.65%

Note: Table is based on data from the 2001 and 2011 censuses, retrieved from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística website, [www.ine.org](http://www.ine.org)

*Profile of Water and Sanitation Services*

In the 1990s, Hidrocapital President José De Viana classified Antímáno as the parish with the worst quality water service in the Caracas Metropolitan Area (Arconada, 1996, cited in Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 105). Given the parish’s high elevation, there is insufficient

<sup>24</sup> This was raised in a personal discussion with Carmen Rojas, Urban Land Committee *vocera*, November 22, 2012, and in an interview with Rojas on December 11, 2013. Rojas indicated that since most land in Antímáno is privately owned rather than government land the process of securing tenure has been more complicated. It was also reflected in the results of the pilot survey carried out on November 18, 2012.

pressure to pump water to all sectors simultaneously so the utility distributes water to neighbourhoods according to a predetermined cycle. Engineers direct the flow of water to the designated sectors by manually opening and closing valves. Neighbourhoods at lower elevations, which were settled first, receive continuous water service, while newer barrios that are higher in elevation receive water at given intervals and must store water for household use. The longest cycle is in the sector of Santa Ana, where water arrives only every 21 days or more, for a three-day period. Many households have rooftop water tanks that supply household water needs when the piped water is not arriving. Tanks are blue PVC barrels with an average capacity of 2,000L. Where water is on a cycle residents do not pay a water tariff. Lower income neighbourhoods with more regular water service are asked to pay a social tariff, equivalent to less than one US dollar per month, which many still do not pay (Lacabana & Cariola, 2005; “El agua y las estrategias”, para. 5).

Water service is intimately related to sanitation since Antímano relies on piped, water-borne sewerage. Households flush their toilets with pails of water. Hidrocapital’s policy is to favour conventional sewerage over other systems such as septic tanks and dry toilets (Victor Díaz, interview, August 20, 2012; Interview with Hidrocapital community promoters, August 28, 2012). It has tried to implement septic tanks in some sectors; however, they were found to be ineffective in steeply sloped areas and exacerbate the risk of landslides.

### *History of Water and Sanitation Struggles in Antímano*

Water has figured centrally in the history of Antímano. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the crystalline waters of the Guaire River,” which Antímano overlooks, attracted wealthy Caraqueño vacationers to the parish. The river was so clean that locals referred to it as the “river of white water” (Fernández, 2009, p. 14). Today, the reality is quite different: the Guaire is brown from wastewater dumped untreated from the barrios and most middle and upper class Caraqueños would not consider entering Antímano, out of fear for their security. As Goldfrank (2011, p. 113) explains, the problem of violence is paralleled only by concerns over water and sanitation in the minds of most residents.

The parish of Antímáno was a primarily agricultural, rural area until the mid-1900s, when it began its industrial development. At that time, migrants arrived to the city from across the country and many of them settled land illegally (Fernández, 2009). Water was scarce at the time of settlement. Although the communities did succeed in petitioning the national water utility, INOS, to install pumps early on, the pumps only partly resolved the water problems (Fernández, 2009, p. 23). By the mid-1970s, many barrios in Antímáno went without water for two months in a row. Arconada (1996) explains how people were denied the social rights of citizenship, since they did not legally own their property:

The water service in Antímáno was so deficient, ailing, and run-down simply because the policy of the Venezuelan state with respect to the settlers of the marginal barrios of Caracas’s parishes was to not recognize them, not accept them as citizens, ignore them and their condition as candidates for the social rights that are guaranteed in the national constitution. The Venezuelan state’s policy was to not give public services to areas that they considered invaded (cited in Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 105, author’s translation).

Residents became so frustrated by government inattention at the time that they blockaded the main freeway heading west out of Caracas in protest (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 114).

On March 10, 1993, four days after the famous parish government meeting where mayor Istúriz first proposed the MTAs, Antímáno’s first water committee meeting was held with over 100 participants. Throughout Istúriz’s administration, the weekly meetings attracted between 35 and 120 participants, and became known as the “government of Wednesdays” (Arconada, 1996, p. 157, cited in Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 106). The committee worked with Hidrocapital engineers on plans for two new aqueducts to serve Antímáno, which were completed in 1995. They also formed dozens of neighbourhood water groups to coordinate the distribution of water from tanker trucks. These efforts reduced the water distribution rate from once every two months to once every two weeks (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 114).

While water scarcity was the main driver of community organization, sanitation was also a major concern. One of the biggest early achievements of the assembly was in convincing the municipality to replace a sewer main that had been broken for five years, despite the fact that it fell outside of the government’s jurisdiction at the time (Goldfrank, 2011, p. 114).

As Goldfrank (2011, p. 115) explains, Antímáno was the most successful parish government in Caracas. He argues that Antímáno’s model most closely matched the original vision of Istúriz and his Radical Cause party (LCR), in that it challenged traditional party domination and provided participants with some measure of real decision-making power. Antímáno’s robust and sustained participation was likely due to its relatively significant history of community organizing independent of the two dominant parties, AD and COPEI, especially its three decades of struggles for water and sanitation.

Today, Antímáno’s MTAs are widely viewed as a case of best practice due to their high levels of participation. The parish’s community water council has been meeting on a continuous basis since 1999. Meetings are held every 15 days in the centrally located Modulo de Carapita, a community centre in the Carapita sector. While the bi-weekly meetings attract as many as fifty people, a core group of 10-15 committed community activists, primarily women over 60 years of age, has been the central driver of the MTAs’ successes in the parish. Many of these participants – most of whom are *voceras* for their neighbourhood’s MTA – have been involved in the committees since 1999.

#### I. The “Material Emblems of Citizenship”: Service Improvements in Antímáno

Through the MTAs, barrio residents are realizing their right to the “material emblems of citizenship”: public water and sanitation services. Field research points to significant improvements in water and sanitation service quality in Antímáno since the MTAs were introduced. Since data on service quality and coverage disaggregated by parish for Caracas

do not exist,<sup>25</sup> I have relied heavily on the reflections of MTA participants and community leaders. As the committees routinely carry out censuses on service quality and community concerns, spokespeople are well positioned to analyze service quality and the perceptions of their neighbours. I also draw on issues raised at the Antímano community water council meetings from August to December 2012.

### *Water Service Improvements*

According to Hidrocapital, piped water service coverage in Caracas approaches 100% (Victor Díaz, interview, August 20, 2012),<sup>26</sup> so the main challenge is improving the *quality* of urban water services, rather than increasing the number of connections. The most frequently cited achievement of the MTAs in Antímano has been in reducing the length and increasing the consistency of the water cycles<sup>27</sup> (see also Lacabana & Cariola, 2005; McCarthy, 2010). Through infrastructural improvements, including the new aqueducts built under the administration of Aristóbulo Istúriz, water cycles have been reduced from an average of 2-3 months without water in the early 1990s to a maximum interval of 21-25 days without water in the most remote sectors.<sup>28</sup> Increased utility-community cooperation has made water cycles more consistent, so community members now know when their water will arrive.

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<sup>25</sup> Data on sanitation service quality are particularly scarce, a point also raised by Marcano (1993). Her observations seem to still apply 20 years later. She notes that “the data [on sewerage quality in Caracas] don’t exist, but does it make sense to do sophisticated measurements and calculations when with a simple tour it is evident that the system doesn’t work as it should?” (p. 93, author’s translation).

<sup>26</sup> According to Díaz, the communities lacking water in Caracas are on the Carretera Vía de los Teques between Matadero and La Lomita. These people rely on mountain water or water deliveries from tanker trucks.

<sup>27</sup> This point was raised during a focus group with Antímano MTA *voceras*, November 22, 2012; as well as interviews with Victor Díaz, August 20 and December 4, 2012; Florencia Gutiérrez, December 6, 2012; and Romer Malavé, November 28, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> As Victor Díaz explained, diagnostic studies in Antímano during the mayorship of Aristóbulo Istúriz revealed that people in these sectors received water a maximum of 8 times per year, interview (interview, August 20, 2012).

This has decreased the burden of household water management, particularly for women who are often responsible for water-related household tasks. Before the MTAs, daily life was organized around water. The *voceras* indicated that water would sometimes arrive at 3a.m. and community members would have to sacrifice sleep to fill up their tubs (focus group with Antímamo’s MTA *voceras*, November 22, 2012; see also Lacabana & Cariola, 2005). In addition, if they were unaware of when water would arrive, they could risk missing an opportunity to fill up their water tubs or tanks (McCarthy, 2010). Florencia Gutiérrez recounts how in her sector in Santa Ana, they went 2-3 months without water, and had to walk down to the lower part of Antímamo to collect water for household use from a standpipe (interview, December 6, 2012).

Quality improvements have been enabled by greater information sharing between the utility and community members. At bi-weekly community water council meetings community members come together with water utility community promoters and engineers to discuss water and sanitation issues and plan solutions. According to Santiago Arconada, this form of “social control” led to immediate changes in the way the water utility worked, since for the first time it was required to document its work in a way that was presentable to the public (Arconada 2005a, p. 195).

Engineers also do regular site visits and sometimes even go door-to-door to make sure water is arriving. Victor Díaz explains, “It is not just switching a valve.” The increased communication is necessary because otherwise the utility does not have the capacity to know when the water service passes through different neighbourhood blocks, given the high complexity of the system and the tendency for new homes to self-connect without notifying state authorities (McCarthy, 2010). The government eventually envisions transferring the entire management of the local water cycle to the communities themselves, including the operation of the valves (Hidrocapital community promoters, interview, August 28, 2012).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> According to the promoters, in some cases the community members already change the valves; however, in Antímamo and most other parishes the operations engineers manage the pumps and valves. These engineers work for a private company, *La Empresa Carilla*, under contract with Hidrocapital. According to Hidrocapital promoter, Dircia García, having the communities manage the valves would be a source of local employment

The national Ministry of Popular Power for the Environment (Minamb) has also made efforts to distribute water tanks free of charge to barrio residents. MTAs collaborate with the water utility to assess household need and distribute the tanks during state-sponsored *Fiestas del Agua* (water festivals). Antímáno’s most recent Fiesta del Agua on August 17, 2012, distributed 1,346 tanks in the Carapita sector (López, 2012). Despite these efforts, some households still lack tanks, including in the Santa Ana sector, where water only arrives an average of every 21 days (field observations, November 18, 2012). Households without tanks must resort to filling whatever buckets and containers they have, which is extremely labour-intensive.

Community-managed projects have also improved infrastructure in Antímáno (Romer Malavé, interview, November 28, 2012). For example in Carapita, local MTAs collaborated with the utility on two projects<sup>30</sup> that successfully reduced water cycles from 18 to 8 days: 8 days with water and 8 days without. Initiated in 2007, the projects installed 1409m of new 6” piping in the San José sector and 336m of new piping along Carapita’s main street. The two projects improved services for approximately 40,000 people in 20 sectors in Antímáno (Sulay Morales, communication during a tour of Carapita with Antímáno’s MTA *voceras*, October 2, 2012). According to Florencia Gutiérrez, since many MTAs have successfully realized projects, they don’t need to attend meetings anymore. “Within their community they have an MTA but it is to find small solutions to problems that arise” (Interview, December 6, 2012).

MTA participants identified many benefits of community-managed projects, especially where community members carry out the construction work themselves (called *auto-gestión*). Both Hidrocapital staff and MTA participants note that when communities provide the labour, they can stretch the project budgets and achieve more than they had originally

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(since the utility would pay them), and is also safer. Security is a perennial concern in the barrios and outsiders are often at greatest risk.

<sup>30</sup> The projects were entitled *Colocación de nueva tubería de aducción en San José* and *Colocación de nueva tubería de succión de la estación de bombeo de Carapita*.

proposed (interview with Hidrocapital community promoters, August 28, 2012; see also Lacabana, 2010, p. 8). Since self-managed projects are a source of local employment, “the benefits stay in the community” (Florencia Gutiérrez, interview, December 6, 2012). *Voceras* note that the community work is a source of pride and self-esteem for the committee members, and unites them in a collective endeavour (e.g. Elizabeth López, interview, December 13, 2012).

There is also a sense that using community labour allows for greater accountability and control than contracting a private business. According to Gumberto Mendez, community promoter for Hidrocapital, “When you give the money to a company, sometimes they run away with the money. When you give it to the community they save it” (interview, August 28, 2012). Allegations of contractor corruption were frequent, especially in the early stages of the MTAs. As Carlos Dávila, a Hidrocapital-contracted engineer from Empresa Carillo, explained, some communities initially did not know how to properly prepare a contract or check a contractor’s credentials, which increased their risk of being cheated (personal communication, October 23, 2012). This also highlights how building communities’ capacity to exercise popular power is a long process.

In response to incidences of corruption,<sup>31</sup> as well as cases of shoddy community construction work, Hidrocapital has increased the support it gives to communities managing

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<sup>31</sup> One notorious case of local corruption in Antímano took place during a sewerage project administered by the Las Clavellinas communal council in 2007-2008. The project received funding to build sewage pipes for Las Clavellinas and for the neighbouring sector of Libertador-San Ofre, which at the time had an independent MTA not affiliated with a communal council. Because Las Clavellinas was one of the country’s first communal councils, it received considerable government resources. The government transferred all of the funds for the sewer project for both sectors to the communal council. In the end, the council oversaw the construction of sewage pipes in its own sector but not in Libertador-San Ofre. The communal council alleges that the contractor stole the remaining funds. Nonetheless, according to the *voceras*, Hidrocapital is blaming the problem on the mismanagement of the communal council and the Libertador-San Ofre MTA, despite the latter’s lack of involvement in the administration of the resources (personal communication with MTA *voceras* during a tour of Carapita, October 2, 2012; Sulay Morales, interview, November 11, 2012). Another example of corruption was raised by Cesar González, Hidrocapital Community Promoter, during the October 23, 2012, Community Water Council meeting in Brisas de la Propatria, Catia. There, a contractor in Nuevo Horizonte

their own projects. It now provides workshops on financial management and has intensified project monitoring (personal communication with engineer Carlos Dávila and Hidrocapital community promoter Cesar González, October 23, 2012; personal communication with Florencia Gutiérrez, October 25, 2012). According to *vocera* Florencia Gutiérrez, this increased oversight has been successful in reducing corruption (personal communication, October 25, 2012).

Overall, community members expressed satisfaction with the quality of water services, with the exception of residents in the most remote sectors. Residents generally do not seem to mind the cyclical arrangement (see also Lacabana and Cariola, 2005; McCarthy, 2010). For example, some people feel that continuous water service would encourage waste (Santiago Arconada, personal conversation; see also McCarthy, 2010). As Sulay Morales, an MTA *vocera* in Carapita, explains:

Eight days is good because we have tanks and with the water in the tanks we supply ourselves for the eight days. Also that way people don't waste so much water. Because if you give them water all day... people just let it pour out into the street. People don't have *conciencia* (personal communication, October 2, 2012).

However, it is possible that “the very scarcity lowers the expectations of many residents” (Swyngedouw, 1995, p. 401).<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the government views the cyclical arrangement as an interim measure, until they can increase the capacity of the city water system. According to Victor Díaz, the new Tuy IV reservoir will enable continuous water

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was hired for a water and sewerage project but instead took the money (Bs.1,200 million) and moved to another community.

<sup>32</sup> For example, in the pilot survey in Antímamo's El Carmen sector many respondents indicated that they received continuous water service. Only after further probing did we learn that water often did not come one day a week. This suggests a level of satisfaction with the quality of the service based on the understanding that intermittent water access is normal.

service to Antimano-Junquito within two years (interview, December 4, 2012); however, it remains to be seen whether this will be feasible.<sup>33</sup>

### *Sanitation Service Improvements*

As the quality of water services has improved, sanitation has become an increasingly important issue for MTAs and communal councils. Santiago Arconada argues that between the first and second national MTA meetings (2003 and 2004), there was a marked tendency for communities to begin prioritizing wastewater management. By the time of the second national conference, more MTAs had sought funding for wastewater projects (Arconada, 2006). The tendency for communities to push for sanitation once they have secured improved water services has been observed elsewhere (for example in the *favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*, Water and Sanitation Program Sanitation Global Practice Team, 2011, p. 29; see also Briscoe and Garn, 1995, for a discussion of this tendency in Karachi, Pakistan and São Paulo, Brazil).

Through community projects, MTAs in Antimano have made major strides in replacing old sewer pipes that were corroded after 40-50 years of neglect, and in building new connections in neighbourhoods that did not previously have service access. According to Victor Díaz, most neighbourhoods in the parish now have sewer connections; however, quality and sustainability concerns remain (interview, December 4, 2012).

Florencia Gutiérrez, MTA *vocera* for the Gregorio Acosta La Cruz communal council in Santa Ana, recounts that when she first became involved in the technical water committees, “wastewater would flow freely in the streets.” Through the MTA, her community self organized to install the wastewater pipes. “Before, when I arrived in 1974, there was nothing. People only had latrines. Now, *gracias a dios*, we have our toilets.” Under the leadership of the MTA, the community has collaborated with the water utility to build sewer pipes in all but one neighbourhood. The MTA is now struggling to connect the last

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<sup>33</sup> Romer Malavé expressed doubts that this would be feasible. He expressed particular concern about the pressure impacts of constant water flow in areas that are unstable (interview, November 28, 2012).

neighbourhood. There, residents built their homes along a natural channel, and discharge their wastewater directly into it. The precarious sanitation system is causing wastewater to flood people’s homes during rainy periods (interview, December 6, 2012).

Elizabeth López, the lead *vocera* for the Juana Ramírez La Avanzadora commune<sup>34</sup> (to which Gregorio Acosta La Cruz also belongs), emphasized that sanitation was the focus of much of their commune’s work and had improved in its entire area of influence. In her communal council, Las Barras and Parate Bueno, sanitation had always been identified as a priority in censuses carried out to assess community needs, and López herself identifies as a strong sanitation advocate. She explains, “before, it wasn’t like how you see it now. Now it’s dry. Before, it was all wet.” With support from Hidrocapital, the community formed seven working groups to undertake the “Integral Project for Changing Wastewater Pipes.” The project replaced 181m of superficial pipes with underground sewer pipes. Now, because of the improvements wastewater is no longer identified as a priority in community censuses. López explains the success:

It improved because we changed a large quantity of sewage pipes, like you wouldn’t believe. So this is really evident in some ways. For example, you can’t hide a filtration [where wastewater seeps into people’s homes]. Here we have eliminated filtrations like you wouldn’t believe. *Muchísimas* filtrations (interview, December 13, 2012).

Community members in Las Barras echoed these sentiments. They explained that fifteen years ago, “wastewater flowed in the street.” Now, they have underground sewer pipes and no longer have this problem. They attribute the neighbourhood improvements to

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<sup>34</sup> The Comuna Juana Ramírez incorporates 14 communal councils in Antimano: 1. El Fraile Parte Baja, 2. Unidos por Parate Bueno, 3. Conapun, 4. Rio Crespo, 5. Unidos por Nuestra Comunidad, 6. El Depano, 7. Rincon de Mexico, 8. Simón Rodriguez, 9. Toromayma, 10. Vencedores Unidos las Morochas, 11. Aquiles Nazoa, 12. Gregorio Acosta la Cruz, 13. Las Barras y Parate Bueno, 14. La Batea. Elizabeth is a member of the Las Barras and Parate Bueno Communal Council.

the “consciousness that the state had taken under Chávez” (pilot survey responses, November 18, 2012).

Sulay Morales also recalls sanitation problems in her sector. The aged sewer pipes were causing wastewater to flood the church in Terraza Copacabana. At that time, primary school was being taught in the church and the flooding forced them to suspend classes. Through a project executed in 2009, they replaced the sewage pipes in the neighbourhood (personal communication, October 2, 2012).

Together, these projects have reduced local contamination and greatly improved the living environments of many residents. However, according Victor Díaz, parish-wide sanitation problems remain “critical.” Although most communities have achieved connection to the sewer system, connections are precarious because the empty directly into natural channels that discharge into the Guaire River (Victor Díaz, interview, December 4, 2012). Currently, both storm water and wastewater empty into these channels and many residents also dispose of their solid wastes in the channels. During periods of heavy rain these streams overflow, causing wastewater to flood the streets and seep into people’s homes in affected areas. For example, in October-November, 2012, during the field research period, heavy rains devastated parts of Antímano and other popular parishes (see Bastidas, 2010; “Desperdicios de la quebrada”, 2012; “Instan a comunidades”, 2012; Prensa Gobierno del Distrito Capital, 2013). Exposed channels also put nearby residents at risk of illness.<sup>35</sup> As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, while the MTAs have been successful at improving sanitation services at the local level, local solutions need to be supported by infrastructure on a larger scale.

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<sup>35</sup> For example, at a commune meeting on November 22, 2012, one woman spoke about the illness of her mother. Her mother had serious lung problems, owing to water filtration and mould in her bedroom from a nearby channel.

## II. Redefining Spaces of Citizenship: Improved Barrio-State Relations

Despite these challenges, Antímano’s MTAs have led to major improvements in state-citizen relations. Through their efforts, MTA activists and state officials are making the barrios public (Smilde, 2011; Lacabana et al., 2007) by overcoming decades of neglect and reversing the effective privatization of services. As Lacabana et al. (2007) argue, the achievements of the MTAs represent a major improvement over the previous era, where social welfare was privatized since it was “concentrated in the home” (p. 11). The barrios were socially isolated from the rest of the city and especially from the “institutional sphere” of the state. For these authors, the MTAs are moving beyond the privatization of social life and re-building the public sphere in three ways: (1) building community by beginning to treat problems as collective rather than individual; (2) reclaiming public spaces and gaining opportunities to participate in public life; and (3) accessing and participating in the functioning of state institutions, such as the water utility (Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 11).

Previously, to make their plight visible to the state, community members would have to occupy central urban spaces such as the water utility headquarters or major freeways. Now, people can express their concerns to water utility officials directly from their neighbourhoods, redefining where citizenship is exercised. MTA participants have personal relationships with utility officials, with whom they interact on a first-name basis. The *voceras* in Antímano call Victor Díaz and the Hidrocapital engineers at all hours of the day, despite the fact that Hidrocapital manages a hotline for that purpose. In meetings, Díaz tells community members who are experiencing water problems to call him when their water arrives, regardless of the hour. Díaz and other community promoters typically work a full day on-site or at the utility and then attend community water council meetings, which can go as late as 9p.m.

Community members appreciate the work of Hidrocapital. López explained: “we call them, and they come quickly. They don’t delay that much” (interview, December 13, 2012). Although some community members expressed frustration when Díaz missed community water council meetings, they generally recognize that the utility staff work hard and are committed to finding solutions to their service problems. This reflects a major qualitative change given that the Punto Fijo and neoliberal periods had bred a strong distrust of the state.

### III. Beyond Citizenship as Inclusion: Self-management and the Creation of New Political Subjects

Through the MTAs, participants, and particularly women, are gaining political and self-organization capacities. This has translated into their improved ability to make demands of the state for water and sanitation and other goods and services, such as housing. However, as Mitlin (2008) argues, coproduction has the potential to go beyond demand making towards redefining the roles of citizens and the state. MTA participants identify participation as part of a project of “inverting the period,” towards making public administration subject to popular power. Indeed, adding the word “technical” to the technical water committees was a deliberate attempt to increase the confidence in community members’ ability to make decisions about water service, rather than deferring to specialists (McCarthy, 2009, p. 12). Thus, the questioning of the experts that takes place in the MTAs can be seen as a way transforming state-citizen relations towards the ideal of the communal state.

Many MTA *voceras* first became involved in community organizing and political activism through the MTAs. Now, many are involved in other community organizations and political activities.<sup>36</sup> This reflects Mitlin’s (2008) observations that coproduction can “bring a new kind of citizen into these political activities, one who was not previously active,” (p. 353) particularly women. For many *voceras*, the new opportunities for participation under the Chávez government have been life changing. Elizabeth López explains her political formation: “before Chávez was elected, I was always a person who would go from home to work” (interview, December 13, 2012). Active *voceras* Florencia Gutiérrez and Sulay Morales, who are both in their sixties, completed their high school education through the government-sponsored Misión Ribas education program introduced by Chávez. They now play important leadership roles in their own communities as spokespeople for their communities’ communal councils. Both have been responsible for coordinating major water and sanitation infrastructure projects in their neighbourhoods.

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<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth López is the lead vocera for the Comuna Juana Ramírez; Carmen Rojas is active in her local Urban Land Committee (UCT) and in women’s organizing; Nancy la Rosa is active in community health; Luz Darianis was running for the position of *vocera* for Sports and Recreation for the Gregoria Acosta la Cruz Communal Council; Maria la Barra is active in food security, etc.

For Gutiérrez, work in the community has given her life a sense of hope and meaning after working in exploitative conditions as a domestic worker and suffering through an abusive marriage. She has also shared her newfound appreciation for education and community work with her daughters. While they faced class-based discrimination in school, they eventually became professionals: one a young lawyer, and another the principal of a local school. They are also active in their communal councils.

Through their participation, MTA activists have gained skills in community organizing and project management. Initially when the committees were first introduced under mayor Istúriz, people’s heightened expectations of the committees were not met because communities were ill prepared to take advantage of the new opportunities. As Lacabana et al. (2007, p. 107) describe, community members were asked to present social projects, but did not know how to prepare a project proposal. Pedrera sector resident Luisa Pabón recalls her participation in the first water meetings under Istúriz:

We didn’t have the remotest idea what a project was [...], the only thing that we knew how to do was a letter signed by the neighbours where we asked for water, for them to send it more regularly (cited in Lacabana et al. 2007, p. 107, author’s translation).

Recognizing the barriers to people’s participation, Hidrocapital has designed workshops, trainings, and conferences to increase the capacities of MTA participants. The government covers the costs of transportation and accommodation during the events. Capacity building is recognized as a key prerequisite for meaningful participation in service management (McDonald & Ruiters, 2012b, p. 30). Moreover, opportunities to meet with MTA participants from other areas can promote horizontal learning. In Appadurai’s (2001) discussions of slum-dwellers’ conferences in India, he argues that such exchanges promote both the acceleration and scaling up of community efforts.

Through their participation, barrio residents have become highly organized, and effectively navigate Venezuela’s complex institutional landscape. Gutiérrez reflects on the increased level of community organization today, compared with the Punto Fijo period:

Before, the community wasn’t organized, and it wasn’t participative either. The community resigned itself with waiting for elections to come, when they would give you what you needed to fix your house: cement and other materials. We were very conformist. And we had little freedom. If you went around with your heart on your sleeve, the police would come after you. They didn’t give us any orientation about anything, all we did was go and vote for the president, and nothing more. We didn’t have knowledge of how to improve the system of government; that was hidden. Now we are critical. We have freedom of expression. We are protagonists of all that we do (interview, December 6, 2012).

Elizabeth López, for example, proudly explained the high degree of planning and coordination their community achieved to support Chávez’s 2012 election march. Community members prepared food, developed a communications strategy, and coordinated transportation for the thousands of attendees (interview, December 13, 2012). This contrasts with popular depictions of Chavistas and Chavista gatherings as disorganized masses (as criticized by Valencia Ramírez, 2006). The social networks built in the communities have also been significant, and the *voceras* appreciate the support that they receive from each other. According to Victor Díaz, this makes it very easy to mobilize people since “you only need to call one *vocera* and then all of a sudden everyone knows” (interview, December 4, 2012).

Community members are also gaining self-confidence in their ability to plan and make decisions. In community water council meetings it is not uncommon to see participants disagreeing with engineers’ proposals at the meetings and their opinions are taken seriously. Engineer Romer Malavé calls the meetings an “exchange” because the community members themselves often have good ideas about how to improve the service in

their sector (interview, November 28, 2012). López comments on the qualitative changes in community members’ critical capacities since she first became involved fourteen years ago:

Every time that I am in a meeting, I observe that the communities have advanced. People are a little bit more critical. They analyze things better. Critical doesn’t mean always seeing the negative, but rather being able to give an opinion to transform something. Because if I say, “We are going to do it this way,” but then someone else says “no, we aren’t going to do it like that, we are going to do it this way.” It’s not about me being right and you being wrong, it’s that we evaluate the situation. In other words, it’s about sharing knowledge and doing something that works (interview, December 13, 2012).

Both Hidrocapital staff and MTA participants emphasized that participants were not only learning knowledge and skills but also becoming politicized, what they refer to as creating “political subjects.” As one Hidrocapital promoter commented, “the process of organization raises the political and ideological awareness of the people” (interview, August 28, 2012). For MTA activists, this politicization is often referred to as gaining “consciousness,” which they associate with values of solidarity and respect for people and the environment. According to Carmen Rojas, “the women have gained consciousness” (interview, December 11, 2012). As Sulay Morales explains, “One needs to learn to be really tolerant, to start to learn to understand people and make people understand why things are the way they are” (personal communication, October 2, 2012). López concurs: “We have changed mentalities. We are not the same anymore” (interview, December 13, 2012).

Florencia Gutiérrez describes how she began to identify with the ideals of socialism, specifying the importance of an interpretation of socialism “in accordance with their needs and vision, and particularly *la convivencia* (living together)”. As she explains, she learned about socialism from *el Presidente* (Chávez), but these ideas resonated with her own analysis of unequal relations while working as a domestic worker for wealthy families (interview, December 6, 2012).

However, elected *voceras* also insisted that many other people in their communities lacked this form of “consciousness” which they saw as a major challenge in their work, and especially for improving sanitation. Like many of the participants in the multitude of community-based organizations in Venezuela, they view cultivating revolutionary consciousness as one of their major responsibilities:

The problem is that people aren’t participating because they don’t have consciousness. They are just watching soap operas (*novelas*), gossiping, drinking their *cervezita*, and going out on a Saturday night (Florencia Gutiérrez, personal correspondence, October 25, 2012).

They are people without *conciencia*. That explains all of the things that are happening here. It’s not the government that is useless, but rather it’s the people themselves (Sulay Morales, personal correspondence, October 2, 2012).

Socialism means that I can’t be happy just because I have water, if other people don’t have it. Here people don’t really have *conciencia*, only about 20% of people care if you live or die (Carmen Rojas, Interview, December 11, 2012).

Most activists also emphasized that participation was part of a broader transformation of Venezuela’s geography of power. Elizabeth López describes this process as “inverting the period”, where public administration becomes entirely subject to popular power (statement at a meeting of the Juana Ramírez commune, November 22, 2012). As López explained, “We all know if we achieve the transformation that we want in the communes, well, simply, the commune will exercise the function of the municipal government and many other institutions” (interview, December 13, 2012). Gutiérrez concurred, “it’s not easy, because what we’re doing in the communes is local government” (personal communication, October 25, 2012).

Thus, since they emphasize the importance of participation to their own political formation and for advancing a broader political project, *voceras* view the MTAs as having a value beyond the instrumental function of improving services. In addition, it seems that

community activists are gradually making larger demands on the state. For example, the Juana Ramírez commune was self-organizing to petition the state for a major housing project for Antímáno residents with inadequate housing.

Barrio residents also make frequent reference to articles of legislation and the constitution to reinforce their claims. For example, Carmen Rojas recalls using the revolutionary government’s progressive laws on violence against women when dealing with contractors who were threatening her and her organization (Interview, December 11, 2013). It is not uncommon to see MTA participants carrying pocket-sized copies of the laws on popular power, the constitution, or the government’s platform with them. These are sold at virtually every street corner in Caracas and are distributed for free at public events.

#### Communities as Sites of Conflict: The Question of Elite Capture

Finally, it is important to recognize that communities are not always harmonious spaces, and community organizing is inevitably fraught with interpersonal conflict and struggles for power (see also Bakker, 2008). Nonetheless, since the MTAs are explicitly targeted to poor communities, and their work tends to benefit the community at large, it is unlikely that there is “elite capture” at the scale described in some other cases of participatory reforms (see e.g. Zerah, 2009, for a discussion of middle class capture in Mumbai, India). I would suggest that they therefore meet Hickey and Mohan’s fourth criterion of avoiding elite capture.

MTA *voceras* lamented that in some sectors, a small group of people take over the communal council for their own gain. For example, they cited cases where lead *voceras* were hoarding funds and distributing resources such as housing and scholarships to their own families and friends, without consulting the rest of the community through neighbourhood assemblies. These abuses were allegedly facilitated because members of the same family controlled the communal councils’ Community Administration and Finance and Social Accountability Units, in contravention of the Organic Law on Communal Councils. In some cases, one *vocera* would take control of official documents or the communal council seal,

which is necessary for all correspondence with state institutions, and withhold them from rest of the community members (personal communication with *voceras* during a tour of Carapita, October 2, 2012; informal interview with Sulay Morales, November 11, 2012).<sup>37</sup> However, these individuals are not necessarily wealthier or more privileged than their neighbours, so this may not qualify as elite capture. Moreover, it is more difficult to capture the benefits of MTA projects than housing or scholarships since they are designed for the entire neighbourhood. In reality, given the prevalence of internal community conflict and jealousies, it is possible that many of the claims of corruption exaggerated,<sup>38</sup> especially since communal councils and MTAs are held to strict reporting requirements by government agencies (a point also raised by Lacabana et al., 2007). Nonetheless, perceived corruption may deter participation. Future research should shed more light on social differentiation within communities and how this affects people’s ability to access benefits from the MTAs and other social programs.

There is concern that some barrio residents may be better equipped than others to assume leadership positions in the communal organizations. Acting as a *vocera* is a major time commitment, which may be out of reach for people who have full-time employment or young children. Moreover, it requires levels of literacy and skills in financial planning, which not all residents have.<sup>39</sup> However, the capacity building and literacy efforts

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<sup>37</sup> Sulay Morales alleged that the lead *vocera* for one communal council distributed 10 scholarships and 10 housing units to her friends and relatives without convoking a community assembly. Both Morales and Nancy de la Rosa from the Luchador del Futuro communal council complained that people in their communal councils would not allow them to use the stamp when they needed it.

<sup>38</sup> Complaints of community rivalries were common. For example, Sulay Morales was having protracted conflicts with a fellow MTA *vocera* who was allegedly spreading rumours about her to the water utility. At a meeting in Brisas de la Propatria in Catia on October 23, 2012 community members also mentioned conflicts within their communal council, which caused the council to split in two. Hidrocapital community promoter Cesar González responded, “I don’t want to do more projects, because after the money arrives there is always fighting.”

<sup>39</sup> For example, MTA and communal council participants seemed to have low confidence in their ability to take minutes. On two occasions I was nominated as the secretary because no one wanted to take on that responsibility.

implemented in parallel with the participatory organizations should partly mitigate the risks of exclusion and elite capture in the long term.

Finally, there are also important questions about whether the politicization of community organizations may make it difficult for members of the political opposition to participate, a point I will return to in Chapter 5.

### Conclusions

Through the MTAs, Antímáno residents are accessing the “material emblems” of citizenship: water and sanitation services, and are pursuing a more active form of citizenship that challenges the division of labour between bureaucracy and citizenry, and is viewed as a key part of a transformation towards twenty-first century socialism. The MTAs therefore meet Hickey and Mohan’s third criterion of promoting citizenship by democratizing political processes in a way that addresses immanent processes of development. They have also largely avoided “elite capture” in accordance with Hickey and Mohan’s fourth criterion.

However, scaling up the local projects, particularly in the case of sanitation, remains a fundamental challenge and most people argue that there is still a long way to go in achieving popular power. Indeed, while the MTA activists are striving towards an alternative model of development, the envisioned transformations are still a long way off.

### **Chapter 5: “The Water that Buys Votes is the Water that I drink”: Challenges for Improving Sanitation and Building Popular Power in a ‘Hybrid’ State**

At the bi-weekly community water council meeting in Antímano, active *vocera* Nancy de la Rosa inquires once again about a water and sanitation project her MTA had proposed in 2003. Ten years later, the MTA still hadn’t received resources for the project, with little explanation from the government. Hidrocapital community coordinator Victor Díaz indicates that there is little he can do, because ultimate authority over budgetary allocations lies with the Ministry of Environment.

This anecdote points to one of the central limitations of the MTAs: while local participation has promoted community empowerment and enabled neighbourhood service improvements, participation at the local scale cannot confront many of the broader political challenges for improving sanitation, including the finance gap and institutional overlap. Moreover, the neighbourhood scale of the MTAs may be incompatible with sustainable service planning. As activists push for greater public control over decision-making and the administration of resources to make the discourse of popular power a reality, they confront the entrenched power of state bureaucrats, which highlights the contradictions of promoting popular power or “insurgent planning” (Miraftab, 2009) from above.

#### The Finance Gap and the Limitations of the Local Scale

One of the central limitations of the local orientation of the MTAs is that decisions about broader strategic orientations and resources are made at higher levels of government. Arguably, sanitation has not been a major government priority, which can be frustrating for both community activists and Hidrocapital community promoters and engineers.

In particular, the government’s progress on the Río Guaire sanitation project (see Chapter 3) is increasingly questioned. It is becoming clear that the government will not meet its projected 2014 completion date for the entire project. This goal was probably overly ambitious from the beginning given the complexity of the project and that construction is

highly dependent on climatic conditions (Sánchez, 2013; “Saneamiento del Guaire”, 2011). As of February 2013, government statements indicate that 40% of the estimated 101,000km of required secondary collectors had been constructed (Sánchez, 2013), an increase from the 24.7% by the end of 2010 (Martínez, 2010).

In reality, however, it is very difficult to verify the government’s actual progress because Venezuelan media is highly polarized on this issue. While the opposition media refers to the project as a “joke” and criticizes the lack of progress (see e.g. Bautista, 2013; “Denuncian que”, 2012; “El retraso en”, 2012), government media assures the population that the project is progressing, albeit slowly (see e.g. Martínez, 2010; “Proyecto de saneamiento”, 2013; Sánchez, 2013). Head of the Government of the Capital District, Jacqueline Faría, has accused opposition media of attempting to discredit the project for political reasons (Martínez, 2010).

Nonetheless, the government admits there have been delays. At the end of 2010, officials attributed slow process to a shortage of resources and the lack of cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and other government agencies (“Saneamiento del Guaire”, 2011). The Ministry is also tempering its promises about the project. While president Chávez had previously indicated that the population would be able to swim in the Guaire River, the new Minister of Environment, Dante Rivas appointed in 2013, has recently indicated that water will be “less contaminated” in some areas within two or three years (“Dante Rivas retoma”, 2013).

MTA representatives and Hidrocapital staff we interviewed observed that the government’s interest in the project seems to have declined in recent years and that the construction of secondary collectors needed to channel sewerage has been slower than expected. According to Victor Díaz:

The government has not given the Río Guaire project the necessary relevance since Jacqueline Faría left the Ministry of Environment. In Antímano, sanitation services are really precarious. They [the municipality and the Ministry] need to go more into

the communities. They’ve done some work along the river, but they need to cooperate more with the MTAs in the communities (interview, December 4, 2012).

Florencia Gutiérrez echoed his concerns, “Many people say that the people who were in the Ministry of Environment before weren’t interested in the project.” In her view, they need to start by addressing the wastewater problems within the barrios and by relocating families who are in high-risk areas, “like they did when Jacqueline was there.” For Díaz and Gutiérrez, “sanitation champions” such as Jacqueline Faría within the Ministry of Environment have been at the forefront of advancing the sanitation agenda. However, the government as a whole has not made it a priority. Other research on sanitation politics identifies the importance of these sector champions to the success of reform processes (see e.g. Water and Sanitation Program, 2011, p. 8).

Although the government cannot possibly address all political demands, there is reason to distinguish water and sanitation from other services. In their discussion of sanitation, Hall and Lobina (2008) argue that, “the health benefits of such systems are too great for them to be treated as an optional extra, especially in cities” (p. 4). Moreover, while per capita spending on water and sanitation in Venezuela is among the highest in the region, when these figures are compared with annual gross domestic product (GDP), it becomes clear that increasing sanitation investment would be relatively affordable. Assuming the 2012 level of GDP (US\$382.4 billion<sup>40</sup>), the government’s investment of US\$600 million per year in improving water and sanitation represents only 0.16% of GDP.

This seems to confirm assertions that governments’ water and sanitation expenditures are determined “largely by political, rather than technical or economic constraints in the context of competing demands for resources” (Water and Sanitation Program Sanitation Global Practice Team, 2011, p. 11). Santiago Arconada, a self-identified sanitation advocate, attributes the inadequate attention to sanitation in the barrios to clientelist populism:

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<sup>40</sup> This data was retrieved from the World Bank Databank (2012), <http://data.worldbank.org/country/venezuela-rb>

I say this because the manual of conventional engineering says that you can't build a drinking water supply system without constructing, in parallel, a system for collecting the wastewater. So it has to do with the fact that the water that buys votes is the water that I drink. The water that I collect is less politically eye-catching. I think that's the reason (Interview, August 24, 2012).

Literature on the political economy of sanitation supports this point. Krause (2009, p. 103), for example, argues that politically oriented investment may undermine the public interest since it involves the allocation of particularistic goods to certain groups instead of public goods that would benefit the majority of citizens, such as sewerage. It may also pose challenges for longer term service planning.

While it is very difficult to determine government motivations for investment, the quotes from Victor Díaz and Florencia Gutiérrez, as well as most media reports, suggest that the government continues to focus mainly on the more visible aspect of sanitation, the river cleanup, rather than prioritizing sanitation service problems in the barrios, suggesting the importance of the *appearance* of progress.

During the 2012 election campaigns, the government leveraged its progress on water supply for electoral support. For example, during the gubernatorial election campaigns, the regular operations of Hidrocapital's community management office were virtually suspended, as staff members were busy distributing over 4,500 water tanks in Petare in the strategic riding of Miranda in Caracas's east. The tank distribution was announced at a Fiesta del Agua, a public gathering with over 1,500 attendees. Overhead, banners read “Thank you Chávez for bringing water to the people” (field notes from event, November 2, 2012, see photographs in Appendix J). In another visible campaign event, Hidrocapital took to the streets to distribute bottles of tap water to counter opposition claims of poor water quality. These types of highly visible displays of progress were also common in the housing and transportation sectors. Progress on sanitation, by contrast, remained slow. Subject to opposition critique, sanitation appeared to be a taboo topic among government supporters. This was demonstrated, for example, by assertions made by Hugo Chávez and Environment

Minister Alejandro Hatcher that the Río Guaire project was in fact advancing but that “characteristics of the works impede their visualization, because they consist of a system of sewers that are being built below the city” (cited in González, 2012, author’s translation).

While investments in water, transportation, and housing are clearly urgently needed, there is concern that the pressure to show progress between elections, made all the more urgent by the constant and vicious opposition smear campaigns, may make the government prioritize relatively easy and highly visible fixes (e.g. water tanks) over long-term and more complex initiatives.

Research suggests that public participation in budgeting may help increase the public interestedness of investment decisions and promote transparency, when accompanied by sufficient resources (see e.g. De Sousa Santos, 1998; Hickey & Mohan, 2005, p. 244). For example, De Sousa Santos, (1998, p. 455) discusses how participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, led to dramatic increases in sewerage coverage. However, a central challenge in Venezuela is that while direct democracy is working well at the local level, it is more difficult for participation to “trickle up” to higher levels of decision-making (Irazábal & Foley, 2010).

As McCarthy (2012) describes, central government ministries do not “sponsor a public deliberative process in which [communal] councils attend open assemblies and make presentations before state officials and neighbors about the viability and importance of their proposals” (pp. 126-127). While some municipalities do sponsor open-air assemblies and participatory budgeting processes, ultimate decision-making authority still resides with government bureaucrats in most cases (McCarthy, 2012, p. 142).

According to the activists, these bureaucrats sometimes attempt to undermine participatory initiatives such as municipal participatory budgeting processes. As Irazábal and Foley (2010, p. 106) point out, government officials often under-estimate the capacity of community members to contribute to complex issues. However, MTA *voceras* also believe that bureaucrats are unsupportive because they are unwilling to cede their own power:

For example, take what happened to us last time. We did our budget and the liaison from the municipality said that it wasn't like that, that it had to be this way, so I stood up and I said that we wanted the budget to be designated like that... so that bothered them, and so I said to them, *bueno*, then when are we really going to be “popular power” if you're always telling me what I should do, because I am so ignorant, because I haven't learned? Things aren't done the way you want them to be done, things are done the way I want or the way the *people* want. So how are we popular power, if you don't respect my decision? (Elizabeth López, interview, December 13, 2012)

There is bureaucracy in the municipality. For example, when it came time for the budget, the municipality didn't want to give resources to the communal councils. They want to continue there with their resources, managing the money and managing *us*. They don't want us to be free. But we *do* have the capacity. If I don't have it, then maybe you have it because you're a lawyer, or you because you're in social management... we have a roundtable (*mesa*) where we can discuss things (Florencia Gutiérrez, Interview, December 6, 2012).

### The Contradictions of Insurgent Planning from Above

This points to one of the central tensions in the Bolivarian Process: to what degree can popular power be decreed from above, given that the vision of the communal state ultimately challenges the power of state bureaucrats?

For liberal analysts of the process, the Chávez government mobilizing and channeling resources to its base represents a mere continuation of the clientelist relations of Punto Fijo. In their view, civil society is effectively dominated by the state. They understand Chávez's electoral victories through the lens of clientelism, arguing that the government buys votes through the social missions (see e.g. Corrales and Penfold-Becerra, 2007). While it is true

that mission and MTA participants are predominantly Chavistas, explaining government support in terms of “buying votes” is far too simplistic.

As we have seen, people’s support for Bolivarian Process and their participation in the popular organizations is motivated not just by material rewards, but rather an increased sense of dignity and self-esteem and a strong identification with Chávez and the broader political project. Indeed, the most committed MTA activists continue to participate even when they have not seen immediate personal benefits.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the concerted efforts to promote participation, community organization, and political consciousness-raising distinguish the MTAs and other social organizations from past examples of political gift-giving meant to guarantee political subordination (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013a, p. 130). The demands on community activists’ time alone belie claims that the Chávez government is giving “handouts” in exchange for votes.<sup>42</sup>

Understanding the power dynamic between the bureaucracy and community organizations in Venezuela requires moving beyond traditional liberal conceptions of the state, which view the state as a unitary entity held in check by an autonomous civil society. By contrast, as described in Chapter 2, the relationship between the state and the Chavistas is interdependent. Rather than maintaining total autonomy, many activists in Venezuela view the state as an ally in a counter-hegemonic struggle.

Thus while clientelism may be a useful category for understanding certain tendencies towards hierarchy and domination, it does not fully capture the Venezuelan experience (McCarthy, 2012). This is because: “openings from above and pressures from below have produced a series of *hybrid political relations* that question if not defy standard categories of analysis” (Gay 2006, cited in Schiller, 2011, p. 128). For historical reasons, a strong civil society has never developed in many barrios, so the state has deliberately attempted to

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Florencia Gutiérrez, one of Antimano’s most active MTA *voceras* lives in a sector that still only receives water every 21-25 days.

<sup>42</sup> In the words of MTA *vocera* Sulay Morales: “I have worked like a donkey, and it has been fighting with the institutions the whole time” (interview, November 11, 2012).

support its development (Azzellini, forthcoming). Civil society in turn shores up the state’s institutional capacities through coproduction. Categorically painting the MTAs or the missions as vehicles for state clientelism and domination therefore fails to “capture the complexity of those emerging state-barrio relationships, the everyday work of state making, and the negotiations of power taking place” (Schiller, 2011, pp. 128-129).

Rather than assuming that “invited spaces” will inevitably lead to state domination, it is perhaps more useful to focus on tensions between the “top down” or state-led and “bottom-up” or grassroots-driven tendencies in the process, what some observers refer to as the struggles between “constituted” and “constituent” power.<sup>43</sup> While until now “top-down” and “bottom-up” dynamics have co-existed and led to a deepening of the Bolivarian Process, many analysts predict that these will become increasingly conflictive. This is because of the interdependent but ultimately antagonistic relationship between constituent and constituted power.

This relationship is antagonistic because while the constituent power seeks to transform the state, institutions tend to reproduce their power (Azzellini, forthcoming). As Irazábal and Foley (2010) describe, “elected representatives often receive personal privileges or economic benefits that distinguish their life conditions from those of the people. Their principal aim can then become the maintenance of the political party with which they are affiliated. Rather than becoming representatives of the public, they may favor [*sic*] their personal or party interests” (p. 102). Clientelist spending is one way of supporting existing party interests (Mitlin, 2008, p. 355). As Spronk and Webber (2013) argue, this leads the bureaucracy to be more reformist than revolutionary.

López Maya and Lander (2011) present two possible paths that could come out of the negotiation of power between the “bottom up” and “top down” elements in the Bolivarian

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<sup>43</sup> As Azzellini (forthcoming) explains, “Constituent power is understood as the legitimate collective creative capacity of human beings expressed in movements and in the organized social base to create something new without having to derive it from something previously existing. The constituted power – the State and its institutions – must guarantee the framework and conditions of this process” (para. 2).

Process: first, a return to clientelism and paternalism, where the movements are controlled by the bureaucracy, which distributes resources and decides on practices and orientations. There is a general lack of transparency, and with little social control, corruption prevails. Second, a participatory and democratic path, where autonomous popular organizations have greater participation in public administration and there is “increased institutionalization of types of public administration that allow for continuity, universalistic criteria for access to rights and resources, and a real capacity for public control” (p. 76). This would require the construction of intermediate levels of articulation between the popular organizations.

Some analysts have suggested that in recent years, the tendency has been increasingly towards the former, less democratic path (Santiago Arconada, interview, August 24, 2012; Motta, 2011). For Santiago Arconada, this tendency is manifested in the MTAs. He identifies two phases in the development of the MTAs: a first period, 1999-2006, which was a time of experimentation and inclusiveness, and a second period, 2007-present, where the MTAs have become increasingly bureaucratized and subject to party domination. Moreover, as they have attempted to assert their autonomy and push for larger objectives, they are often met with resistance from the water utility and both central and municipal governments.

#### Bureaucracy and Politicization: Constraints to Autonomous Action?

Community activists are frequently frustrated when their efforts to transform their communities are constrained by a rigid state bureaucracy. They highlight three major challenges that stem from their continued reliance on the state: (1) the creation of vertical relations of accountability with the institutions rather than horizontal relationships in the community; (2) the long administrative procedures and a lack of transparency; and (3) the risk that dependence on the state undermines their ability to critique the government in ways that would advance their struggles.

MTA representatives stressed how the government’s continued control over resources leads to an asymmetrical balance of power between the communities and the state. For example, activists expressed how they live in fear that their projects will not be approved,

which can make some community leaders feel beholden to state agencies rather than to their communities. As Sulay Morales explains, “we continue to be directed by the institutions. That’s the popular power we have” (interview, November 11, 2012). People therefore prioritize spending time attending government-sponsored rallies and meetings, which can come at the expense of community work. Community members in turn may perceive the MTA *voceras* as representatives of Hidrocapital rather than of the community (Elizabeth López, interview, December 13, 2012; Carmen Rojas, interview, December 11, 2012; Lacabana et al., 2007, p. 125). López explains:

When you’re part of an organization, you think that they’re going to take away all of your resources because you didn’t attend a meeting, but no, this is false. So, what happens? The Government of the Capital District or the municipality or Hidrocapital calls a group of people and those people go because they feel like they’re more part of the institution than the community (interview, December 13, 2012).

In her view, this fragments the community and curtails mobilization: “the group gets divided and never unites, and the objective that we all need is never realized... I’ve met with other communards [commune participants], communards from other communes and other parishes. It’s all the same.” Smilde (2011) similarly observes that community representatives who are responsible for liaising with the state “often subordinate community responsibilities to political mobilization... as their networks, livelihood, and future are integrally tied to the viability of the Chávez government” (p. 10).

The bureaucratic institutions also work at a much slower rate than the communal organizations, which can be a source of frustration for the activists who want to address community needs promptly. According to Irazábal and Foley (2010), the co-existence of both representative and participatory forms of democracy has led to “longer and more cumbersome processes of decision-making, lack of procedural and factual certainties and changing regulations and organizational structures” (p. 14). *Voceras* frequently lamented the lengthy steps and demanding paperwork they must complete to apply for project funding:

We don't have fast responses from Hidrocapital. There's still bureaucracy within Hidrocapital (Florencia Gutiérrez, personal communication, October 25, 2012).

Institutional bureaucracy, that's why things don't arrive (Carmen Rojas, statement at a community water council meeting, Antímamo, October 11, 2012).

Why haven't we transformed? What is really slowing down the process? The President has transferred a large quantity of resources to us. But when the institutions get here, we have to follow a large number of norms and so everything is *pasito a pasito* (baby steps). We as a community have to get beyond this, because if we don't, we won't get anything done (Elizabeth López, interview, December 13, 2012).

Community activists sometimes wait years for project proposals to be approved<sup>44</sup> and there are no clear criteria for the prioritization of projects. This may result from the need to maintain flexibility, which sometimes comes at the expense of checks and balances (for a discussion, see Ellner, 2011). It also reflects the realities of managing a gargantuan budget in the context of a polycentric governance system. However, it is often very frustrating for community activists. While community groups wait for their proposals to be accepted, the government may arrive with funding for a “shovel ready” project that it would like to see executed, but which may not necessarily be a community priority (McCarthy, 2012, p. 134).

Victor Díaz of Hidrocapital worries that the water utility's slow responses to community requests may discourage participation (Interview, December 4, 2012). Moreover, government problem solving from the top (Wilpert 2006, cited in Ciccariello-Maher, 2013b, p. 246) can lead to conflicts with community leaders. For example, the government is continuously changing the structure and names of different initiatives as well as administrative procedures for securing funding. While this reflects the need to be adaptive when initiatives do not work as expected and to rebrand new and improved programs to

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<sup>44</sup> For example, at a community water council meeting in Brisas de la Propatria, Catia on October, 23, 2012, one participant mentioned that his MTA was waiting for the approval of a sanitation project that they had proposed four years before.

maintain mobilization, it can be difficult for community activists to keep up. According to Elizabeth López, “If there were continuity, things would be different. We would have become more aware. But if every year you’re changing the name that’s where things fail” (interview, December 13, 2012).

For example, the steps for forming an MTA, a prerequisite for executing projects with Hidrocapital, have become more onerous in recent years. In 2006, the government began encouraging the MTAs to affiliate with the communal councils as “working groups.” Communal councils are neighbourhood-level planning and development bodies that are envisioned as a form of community self-government (see Chapter 2). At that time, Hidrocapital discontinued the practice of registering the MTAs as independent civil society organizations (McCarthy, 2009). This means that MTAs can no longer receive funds directly, rather the communal councils administer the funds through their administrative and financial units.

While the integration of MTAs and other community organizations into communal councils and communes makes sense from the perspective of planning and for scaling up initiatives, the additional administrative procedures can be burden for some less organized communities. According to McCarthy (2012, p. 133), steps for forming a communal council can easily take a full year. Carmen Rojas, who belongs to an urban land committee that has chosen to remain an autonomous organization rather than fold into a communal council, makes similar observations about the MTAs, “The MTAs are very positive, but it’s very long. I don’t have patience. I told Victor [Díaz] that I would take it on [the creation of the MTA] but that I didn’t want to be there for 1-2 years” (interview, December 11, 2012).

As Arconada explains, the opacity of some decision-making procedures also debilitates the planning capacities of the organizations: “What I know is that we don’t have access to information, information that belongs to us, information about money and our budget, so our planning capacities are very minimal” (interview, August 24, 2012). For Florencia Gutiérrez, “Overcoming bureaucracy also involves giving people knowledge, not

leaving all of the knowledge in a few hands. We all want to learn so that we can manage things” (Interview, December 6, 2012).

When information is not readily available, it tends to feed the perception of clientelist and corrupt practices in the distribution of resources, among both Chávez supporters and the opposition. The opposition has alleged corruption in the case of the Río Guaire project, blaming a lack of progress on “*sucialismo*” (dirty socialism, a play on words referring both to the Río Guaire’s contamination and government corruption); however, it is very difficult to verify these claims. *Voceras* also reported cases where people received resources because of their connections in Chávez’s party, the PSUV (Florencia Gutiérrez, personal communication, October 25, 2012; Sulay Morales, interview, November 11, 2012). While these are legitimate concerns, clientelist corruption is not a new issue in Venezuela and people in the barrios feel strongly that they are being robbed less by politicians. This point is clearly articulated by Florencia Gutiérrez:

They [the opposition] say that the president is corrupt, that we are all corrupt. But, think about it: 40 years ago, the wealth was in PDVSA [*Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.*, the state oil company]. What did the people in PDVSA do? Where did this money go? To the transnationals. They didn’t use it for social projects, nor did they send aid to Cuba. There was no Mercal [a state-run subsidized grocery store]. This all comes from PDVSA, *mi reina*. They [the opposition elites] were the original corrupt people. They have their bank accounts in the United States with their money there (interview, December 6, 2012).

Aside from specific cases of preferential spending or corruption, it is highly unlikely that people’s ability to participate in or benefit from the MTAs depends on their political loyalty. Victor Díaz insisted on this point at a community water council meeting on August 29, 2012, when he scolded community members for what he saw as improprieties in the distribution of the water tanks during Antímano’s Fiesta del Agua in August 2012. He highlighted in particular the need to distribute the tanks based on need and not party affiliation: “Just because someone is an *escualido* [derogatory term for a member of the

opposition, literally a “squalid person”], doesn’t mean they shouldn’t get a tank.” He referred to the act of discriminating against based on political affiliation as “counter-revolutionary.”

McCarthy (2012), who is highly critical of the politicization of the MTAs, concurs with this point. He argues that although there may be isolated instances of favouritism in the distribution of funds to communal councils and other organizations, “membership in the PSUV is not a widely applied prerequisite for participating in or forming a council or for a constituted council to generate effective participation in its relationship with the state” (p. 139). Hawkins, Rosas, and Johnson (2011, p. 211) also confirm this finding in their study of the government’s social missions.

Moreover, while community organizers perceive that they may lose resources if they do not attend government events, they did not cite any cases of this actually happening. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Díaz’s quote above, political discussion is quite common at MTA meetings, raised by both MTAs and Hidrocapital staff. This is logical since many participants view their advocacy for water and sanitation as part of a broader political struggle. In addition, MTAs are most active in low-income communities where the majority of people are Chávez sympathizers. But it is possible that the increasingly overt politicization will lead some low-income opposition members to self-exclude (Hawkins, Rosas, & Johnson, 2011, p. 211). According to Arconada, the MTAs’ partisan tendencies therefore represent “a restriction of public space.” He explains, “Before, openness was the process’s strength. Our philosophy was ‘You need water? Come!’” (Interview, August 24, 2012). Another early water sector reformer, Anselmo Rodriguez, echoes this sentiment: “It wasn’t that you needed to be *rojo rojito* to participate” (interview, September 6, 2012). Arconada worries that the government’s efforts to impose the party line, intended to further consolidate the process, may unintentionally weaken it.

Another significant concern is that dependence and politicization will limit the impetus for communities to pressure on the government to live up to its rhetoric and promises. Since communities know that the revolutionary government is an essential precondition for the continuation of the MTAs and other organizations, they may be reluctant

to criticize the government out of fear that they might be feeding into opposition efforts to discredit it. This echoes Mitlin’s (2008) concerns that in state-led participatory fora participants may “take on the interests of the state” (p. 357). As one MTA *vocera*, Sulay Morales, explains, if you criticize the government, “people might call you an *escualido*” (interview, November 11, 2012).

### Scale, Institutional Overlap, and the Brown and Green Agendas

The ability of the MTAs to push for greater attention to sanitation is also constrained by the fact that Hidrocapital, the MTAs’ primary point of contact, has limited jurisdiction for sewerage infrastructure. As an operations and maintenance company, it is responsible for repairing sewer pipes and occasionally the execution of small-scale sewerage projects with small diameter pipes. As established in the 2001 Organic Law for Drinking water and Sanitation Services (LOPSAPS), the municipality owns the pipeline infrastructure and is responsible for major public works. In 2009, some of these functions were transferred to the Government of the Capital District, a national government entity. This institutional fragmentation can be a source of frustration for MTA participants, who see this as limiting their ability to address the problem. As Victor Díaz explains, “People ask us ‘why don’t you have more control over the wastewater problem?’ If people ask you to build a new sewer pipe, you can’t, with the exception of very dire situations” (interview, December 4, 2012).

Under *Plan Agua*, the government’s strategic plan for improving potable water services, Hidrocapital received funding for infrastructure construction over and above its regular operating budget, but this funding is only earmarked for drinking water projects, not sewerage (interview with Hidrocapital community promoters, August 28, 2012; field notes from community water council meeting, Brisas de la Propatria, Catia, October 23, 2012). For sewerage projects, communities are often required to approach other institutions such as the Government of the Capital District, the municipality, and FUNDACOMUNAL. The result is that water and sanitation are sometimes attended to separately (interview with Hidrocapital community promoters, August 28, 2012). This is impractical, since it means that

communities will be required to tear up their roads and stairwells again in the future when they secure funding to install or upgrade their sewer pipes.

The complex web of funding agencies in part reflects ongoing power struggles between the different levels of government, which use resources to advance their own political agendas. Given that municipal governments in Caracas have historically shown little commitment to improving water and sanitation in the barrios, maintaining centralized control over some functions, for example through the 2009 creation of the Government of the Capital District, is justified on the grounds of public interest, and indeed has been integral to many of the successes to date (Victor Díaz, interview August 20, 2012), even when it leads to the duplication of government functions.

However, for community organizations this can be difficult to navigate and add to their burden of work. For example, they often have to apply to several institutions before their projects are approved and end up repeating procedures with different agencies. Elizabeth López, for example, recounted being approached by the Ministry of Environment to do a tour of the storm water channels in the area of the commune, despite the fact that she had already participated in a study on drainage for the Río Guaire project, which she referred to as a “joke,” presumably because of the slow progress. She reluctantly agreed to repeat the work, but then the engineer didn’t show up, which to her meant that the ministry did not value her time:

The engineer said to me, “oh no, pardon me but unfortunately...” as if my time wasn’t worth anything. So I told her, “look, excuse me, but during that joke of the Río Guaire, they did a whole study on the commune’s storm water channels. It must be there in the papers. You should look at that and give continuity to the work.” When she comes it’s as if my work isn’t worth anything. Community work is not worth anything. You see? Because what you do with A, you need to do with B, C, and D. You can get worn out... At a certain point, you need to rebel, because if not, they keep doing this (interview, December 13, 2012).

In addition, the small scale of the MTAs and communal councils (200-400 households in urban areas) means that they can address local neighbourhood issues, such as internal (tertiary) sewer connections, but they tend not to address the questions of secondary collectors or wastewater treatment. Thus the MTAs may be better designed to address the “brown” agenda than the “green” agenda. The brown agenda addresses issues of environmental health that are more local, immediate, and generally have their greatest impact on low income groups; whereas the green agenda addresses the issues of ecological sustainability, which are more dispersed geographically and whose effects are more delayed in time (Hardoy, Mitlin, & Satterthwaite, 2001).

Indeed, this was a major concern of some existing organizations working on water and sanitation issues when the state began mandating the communal councils. Organizations such as the *Consortio de Catuche* had previously been receiving state resources but then were told that they had to affiliate with a communal council to continue receiving funds. As McCarthy (2012) describes, “these organizations were designed specifically based on the nature and scope of neighbourhood-wide concern, which councils, because of their narrow territorial boundaries, may not be able to address as well” (p. 132).

The creation of the higher-level community water councils (CCAs) was envisioned as a way to extend popular power over water and sanitation governance and help to address these broader planning challenges. It was originally intended to bring together not only the MTAs and the water utility, but also officials from the municipality and other agencies. This would have given it the potential for the increased institutionalization and “real capacity for public control” that observers argue is required in Venezuela (López Maya & Lander, 2011, p. 76; see also Ellner, 2011). It could also in theory promote the scaling-up of sanitation planning, necessary for addressing larger-scale infrastructure needed to support local solutions. As Mitlin (2008) argues, this types of “federating” helps coproduction efforts go beyond a local orientation as “local groups are drawn into processes that both emphasize their solidarity with one another (resisting individualization) and create a political union able to negotiate directly with the state” (p. 356).

However, in reality, the CCA mostly serves as a space for reporting service quality issues. While it has been extremely successful in ensuring the utility’s prompt attention to immediate problems and negotiating between competing water users, it has been less effective as a space for proactive infrastructure and investment planning, a limitation recognized by MTA participants and Hidrocapital staff (personal communication with Dircia García, Hidrocapital community promoter; field notes from discussion at October 11, 2012, community water council meeting, Antímano). In reality, municipal officials rarely, if ever, attend CCA meetings (a point also raised by McCarthy, 2009, p. 13). In a 2007 survey conducted by Lacabana et al. (2007, p. 119), 100% of MTA participants in Antímano felt that other institutions should participate.

The 2009 creation of the communes represents an important step towards building the immediate levels of articulation necessary for communities to assume greater power over planning procedures. To date, it remains to be seen how the communes will articulate with the community water councils and there may be jurisdictional challenges. Victor Díaz of Hidrocapital expresses concern that since the communes do not correspond to the geographical scale of the watershed or water system like the community water councils, their planning capacities may be hindered (Interview, December 4, 2012).

### Participation, Community Labour, and Invited and Invented Spaces

A final challenge with the MTAs is that they rely heavily on voluntary labour, so their long-term sustainability may be questionable given the other demands on barrio residents’ time. Most of the burden of community work falls on poor women, many of whom work a *triple jornada* (triple work-day) of productive, reproductive, and community labour.<sup>45</sup> Given the time requirements of participation, many of the most active *voceras* in Antímano

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<sup>45</sup> This unequal division of labour became especially clear during a gender workshop I attended that was organized by the Government of the Capital District in Antímano. In one activity on October 27, 2012, participants were asked to categorize the productive, reproductive, and community work they do during an average week, and to compare this with the work other members of their family do. Women bore the majority of the burden of both household and community work.

are older women who do not have formal employment and dedicate most of their time to household and community work. Both participants and Hidrocapital staff emphasized that it was natural that women are the most involved since they are more community-oriented than men and are most often responsible for water-related household tasks (focus group with Antímáno’s MTA *voceras*, November 22, 2012; Victor Díaz interview, December 4, 2012). They also draw inspiration from Chávez’s direct appeals for women’s participation, and identify themselves as *luchadoras* (female warriors or fighters).

Nonetheless, some are critical of the appropriation of women’s labour. Sulay Morales lamented that she sometimes felt like she was doing the government’s job, without pay (interview, November 11, 2012). Carmen Rojas concurred:

I do the work for free and you [the civil servant] get paid for my work. We are very conscious of the fact that we have all of this experience and knowledge and training and we work for free. We don’t earn a salary like the civil servant and we never will (interview, December 11, 2012).

Rojas described the government’s use of women’s knowledge and participation to do its job as “the intellectual exploitation of women” (interview, December 11, 2012). There is also a significant class bias since women in wealthier areas of the city do not have to participate in meetings to receive adequate water services. Sulay Morales describes the injustice of the situation: “We have revolution for the poor and capitalism for the rich” (interview, November 11, 2012).

For now, however, *voceras* believe that the benefits of participation outweigh the costs, and they draw motivation both from the improvements that they see in neighbourhoods, and from their identification with the broader Bolivarian Process. In their view, participation is essential for advancing their vision of social and political change.

In the context where the state continues to be “contested” and hybrid, pushing for greater attention to sanitation at higher scales will depend on the strength of alliances

between community organizations and progressive reformers within the state, particularly “sanitation champions.” Similarly, Irazábal and Foley (2010) argue that, “There is a great need for planners willing to help develop and expand alliances with locally organized people’s power” (p. 114).

Given the constraints associated with the institution-driven and politicized nature of the MTAs, there is also a recognition that institutionalized forms of organizing must be coupled with more autonomous forms of activism, such as in the newly created communes. Although the communes are promoted by the state, there is a sense that many of the communes have a more independent dynamic and are capable of putting pressure on the state (field notes from National Network of Commoners conference, December 1, 2012). This reflects the observed need in the literature to maintain both “invited” or institutionalized spaces of participation such as the MTAs that meet the immediate needs of the poor, and more autonomous “invented” spaces that can challenge the status quo and push for more significant structural change (Cornwall, 2004; Mirafteb, 2004, 2009).

Action in autonomous spaces is also important since it is unclear whether the MTAs would outlast a change in political administration, particularly at the national level (as observed by Spronk, Crespo, & Olivera, 2012, p. 443). Victor Díaz raised this point at a Community Water Council meeting in Antímáno just days after Chávez’s electoral victory in the October 7, 2012 presidential elections. While Chávez’s victory would have been considered a landslide in the US or Canada, it was his closest margin yet. Many attribute the close margin to the problems of bureaucracy and inefficiency described above. At the meeting Díaz, himself an Antímáno resident and long-time social activist, acknowledged that the work on water and sanitation had not been fast enough, and admonished participants to continue to put pressure on the government: “I want to pressure the water utility further, but I can’t do it alone.” He also encouraged the committees to be more autonomous. “Making demands of your allies is the easiest thing. I wouldn’t be here if there was a different government, they would send new civil servants.” One MTA activist responded, “None of us would be here,” and all participants expressed agreement.

Carmen Rojas summed up what will undoubtedly be the central tension in the MTAs going forward: “No one is just going to give us popular power. We need to take it ourselves” (field notes from community water council meeting, Antímano, October 11, 2012).

### Conclusions

This chapter has argued that despite progress to date, participation in the MTAs alone will not confront some of the broader challenges for improving sanitation: the finance gap, institutional overlap, and the appropriate scale for sustainably managing water resources. Overcoming these challenges will require continued alliances between community members and progressive state reformers to advance the sanitation agenda, particularly those that are identified sanitation champions, and efforts to federate beyond the neighbourhood level, for example through the communes.

In the face of these daunting challenges and the work ahead, community members remain optimistic that their lives and neighbourhoods will continue to improve, which itself is an enormous achievement of the Bolivarian Process:

Really, sometimes I begin to lose hope. I lose hope because I look above and I see *ranchos* [shanties]. There’s still work to do. But when I go down into the communities, I see the work we’ve done in the communal council. And I say, “yes, we have really done something” (Elizabeth López, interview, December 13, 2012).

Since I entered this process, my life has totally changed. I feel happy. I am going on 68 years old and I feel like working. I feel like helping. Because I have a lot of faith that next year the project will arrive, that we are going to succeed. That if I continue here in the technical water community, giving the community strength that it will give me strength. Sometimes, I lose energy, sometimes I get annoyed, but I know that if I just do something, we will find solutions (Florencia Gutiérrez, interview, December 6, 2012).

## Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the MTAs have opened spaces for community empowerment and have led to service improvements in the barrios. However, participation at the local level cannot confront many of the broader political challenges for improving sanitation, which remains the least profitable service sector in terms of political rewards. Moreover, the MTA activists’ vision of a communal state subject to popular power requires structural change that threatens the entrenched political interests of state bureaucrats.

Chapter 1 argued in favour of strong state participation in sanitation service provision. Providing sanitation, particularly in poorer areas is not profitable. Moreover, since the benefits of sanitation are public goods, expecting the poor to pay steep prices for household connections individualizes collective problems. However, in the global South, bureaucratic state utilities have not fared particularly well at providing water and sanitation services in poor areas. Public participation is proposed as one way to make state-owned utilities more responsive and democratic while also empowering the poor.

Drawing on insights from radical development studies and critical political geography, Chapter 1 called for a radical approach to participation. The radical paradigm recognizes that service deprivations stem not only from technical or administrative inefficiencies but also the poor’s political and economic powerlessness. Participatory programs that live up to the rhetoric of “empowerment,” “transformation,” and “good governance,” must therefore aim to challenge the broader political and economic structures that oppress the poor rather than merely work around them for more technically efficient service delivery.

Literature on best practices in participation in development reveals four criteria that are common to cases of empowering participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2005):

1. Participation should be located within a broader political project aimed at achieving social justice;

2. Participation should engage with “immanent” or underlying processes of development rather than remain constrained within discrete interventions;
3. Participation should aim to achieve “citizenship,” radically conceived; and
4. Participatory programs should avoid “elite capture.”

Chapters 2-4 of the thesis demonstrated that the MTAs meet these four criteria. Chapter 2 described the political and economic context that propelled the MTAs to the national stage in Venezuela, demonstrating that the MTAs meet Hickey and Mohan’s first criterion, that participation should be embedded in a political project aimed at achieving social justice. Under the banner of the “Bolivarian Process,” Venezuela’s Chávez administration (1999-present) has advanced one of the most radical projects for social justice in Latin America and the world. Following Nancy Fraser’s (1995) theorizations, the process aims both for political *recognition* through widespread participatory programs and for *redistribution* by redirecting social spending to previously marginalized areas. However, the process also aims to go beyond “affirmative” forms of justice, by attempting to transform political and economic relations towards a communal state, which challenges the distinction between the bureaucracy and the citizenry (or “political” and “civil” society), and socialist economy.

To understand these political changes requires moving beyond strictly state-centric analyses of Venezuelan politics. Following interpretations that are sensitive to the importance of social movements in advancing the political transformations in Venezuela, I argue that the dynamics in the process need to be understood in terms of a dialectic between “bottom-up” or grass-roots tendencies and “top-down” or state-driven tendencies in the Bolivarian Process. This perspective highlights the importance of the grassroots in radicalizing the government’s political program. It is also attentive to how social innovations from “below” come to be institutionalized at the state level, and are incorporated into bureaucratic structures. For example, the MTAs were first experimented at the local level in Caracas by progressive mayor Aristóbulo Istúriz and subsequently adopted at the national level by the government of Hugo Chávez.

While this institutionalization is important for scaling up successful initiatives and for giving them the necessary support to meet the material needs of the poor it inevitably leads to tensions, which are explored later in the thesis. Finally, Chapter 2 argues that while the Left holds office in Venezuela, its power is necessarily partial, constrained both by Venezuela’s position within the global capitalist economy and by the continued power of the old political elite within the state apparatus. For this reason, Fernandes (2010) argues for the need to see Venezuela as a “hybrid state.”

In Chapter 3, I argue that the technical water tables meet Hickey and Mohan’s second criterion: engaging with underlying processes of development. The MTAs challenge uneven development in two main ways. First, to form an MTA, participants follow a three-step methodology that is aimed not only at improving services but also as a tool for raising consciousness as a springboard for political action. In this way, they approximate Mirafteb’s (2009) notion of “insurgent planning” that challenges the status quo and encourages participants to envision alternative forms of development. Second, the MTAs have been accompanied by increased investment in water and sanitation in the barrios, reversing a history of discriminatory water policy.

Overall, participation has been promoted as part of a broader shift in the water utility from a “technical” logic guided by questions of technical and economic efficiency at the expense of social welfare, to a “social logic” which prioritizes increasing services to the barrios, often at the expense of traditional Western engineering standards. This approximates social movement calls to use “social efficiency” as a metric for assessing services. Reform-minded bureaucrats and engineers have been central to this transformation.

In Chapter 4, I explore how the macro-politics of the process intersect with community efforts on the ground, through one in-depth case study: the MTAs in the parish of Antimano, Caracas. I argue that Antimano residents are advancing new forms of citizenship based on the notion of “popular power,” and that to date they have largely avoided “elite capture.” They therefore meet Hickey and Mohan’s third and fourth criteria. The notion of popular power expressed in Venezuelan law differs from mainstream liberal democratic

citizenship since it increases the scope of the public sphere by challenging the notion that planning should be the exclusive purview of political elites, while also partially decommodifying goods and services. The latter means that citizenship has the potential to be *substantive* and not merely formal.

I argue that Antímamo’s MTA activists and Hidrocapital staff are advancing citizenship as popular power in three main ways: (1) improving water and sanitation services in the barrios, achieving what Bakker (2008) calls the “material emblems of citizenship”; (2) increasing the public recognition of the barrios, which also involves reimagining where citizenship is practiced; and (3) enhancing the political and organizational capacity of citizens to push for citizenship rights, while also raising political consciousness or, in Gramscian terms, “creating new political subjects” through counter-hegemonic struggle.

However, in Chapter 5, I argue that as citizens get closer to achieving popular power and begin to push for larger redistributive objectives, they face many barriers. I outline the three major barriers for improving sanitation: (1) the challenges of mobilizing the necessary resources for sanitation in the context of high political competition, given that sanitation is not as politically rewarding as other investments; (2) cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and slow response rates from institutions; and (3) the local scale of the MTAs, which limits their ability to address sewerage collection and treatment.

Given the importance of socially minded sanitation champions in advancing the sewerage agenda, future success will depend on the strength of alliances between organized communities and progressive elements within the state. However, while many government officials are committed to achieving the goal of the communal state, the reality is that the bureaucracy as a class draws material benefits from its position within the state apparatus. Broader structural change will therefore depend on the autonomous struggles of the people in invented spaces.

### Areas for Future Research

It is my hope that this thesis and the broader research initiative of which it is a part will increase awareness of the MTAs and the achievements of activists working to improve their communities in the barrios of Caracas, Venezuela. However, there are many gaps in the academic research on the technical water committees, which were beyond the scope of this initial exploratory study. First, there is a great need for more quantitative data on the achievements of the technical water committees. These data do not exist in Venezuela. Accessing data on the achievements is complicated by the fact that Venezuela, for political reasons, does not regularly report to international development agencies such as the United Nations. Moreover, MTA projects are funded by a plethora of different agencies, which often do not publish reports, making them difficult to track.

In addition, while this project and other studies have focused mostly on the barrios of Caracas, MTAs in rural areas and indigenous communities undoubtedly have equally rich and diverse experiences from which to learn. In rural areas in particular, community members are playing a more direct role in service provision through the formation of cooperatives. Since cooperatives cross the public-private divide, they raise particularly interesting questions about the potential for participation to promote more democratic services in the face of economic imperatives. Two further research agendas seem particularly promising: comparative work on the MTAs and other public service committees in Venezuela and an exploration of potential “alternatives” to centralized conventional water and sewerage technologies.

#### *Learning Across Sectors: Comparative Work on the MTAs*

The experiences in the water and sanitation sector in Venezuela have subsequently inspired reforms to promote increased participation in other sectors, for example through the creation of technical energy committees and technical telecommunications and information committees. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the outcomes of these reforms vary widely across sectors in terms of their degree of decision-making power, levels of participation, and

how they articulate with other community organizations and the state. The technical energy committees have most often failed to get off the ground (Victor Díaz, interview, December 4, 2012). Meanwhile, the technical information and telecommunications committees have been widely successful and have apparently maintained a more autonomous social movement dynamic than the technical water committees. Moreover, the committees have representation on the board of the national telecommunications company, CANTV, although it remains to be seen whether representation has promoted more democratic outcomes (Cecilia Cariola, interview, October 18, 2012). All of this suggests the need to pay attention to how the particular political economies and geographies of different public service sectors affect the strategies of movements advocating for more just services and how it affects their outcomes (following Spronk & Terhorst, 2012).

*Sustainable “Alternatives”<sup>46</sup> to Conventional Sanitation?*

Secondly, as indicated in Chapter 5, while participation has promoted more direct democracy at the local level, broader goals and orientations are still set by the central state. Venezuelan environmentalists and indigenous rights activists have been particularly critical of how broader questions of the development agenda have largely been insulated from public debate, particularly the country’s neo-extractivist model<sup>47</sup> (Garcilla-Gaudilla, 2009).

In the water and sanitation sector, the reliance on water-intensive and highly polluting conventional water-borne sanitation has been the unquestioned norm. While there are reasons to promote conventional sewerage, particularly in high-density urban areas where some on-site systems may not be appropriate (Hall & Lobina, 2008), activists such as

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<sup>46</sup> Arconada actually critiques the use of the term “alternative” arguing that it normalizes the Western paradigm and closes off space to consider other realities. When I asked what he saw as more sustainable alternatives, he responded, “I first want to point out the problem with how we ask, ‘What is the alternative?’ Asking what the alternative is serves as a justification for what exists. And that’s already a problem. It operates as a limitation on our thinking” (Interview, August 24, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> This was expressed during a public forum on the limitations of the petro-state and the struggle for a different development model, entitled *The Dark Side of Petroleum and the Myth of Development in Venezuela (El Lado Oscuro del Petróleo y el Mito de Desarrollo en Venezuela)*, November 1-2, 2012, Caracas.

Santiago Arconada criticize the Venezuelan government’s failure to promote debate on alternatives to the Euro-centric development model.

Arconada’s concerns echo Miraftab’s (2009) observations about how the ideal of a western city has been “deployed to advance a certain paradigm of development and capital accumulation” (p. 44). She observes that this in turn has demonized informal settlements. This disdain for technologies not deemed “modern” was clear for example in statements made by former Environment Minister and Hidroven President Alejandro Hitcher, “If it doesn’t have piped sewerage collection, it is a *barrio*.” He was referring to El Hatillo, a pristine upper-middle class Caracas suburb, which relies on septic tanks (cited in an interview with Hidrocapital community promoters, August 28, 2012).

A research agenda attentive to the relationships between technology, power, and nature could ask: What types of sanitation services do people want and what are their criteria for a successful sanitation service? What political and economic interests are advanced by current technological arrangements? Are there cases where alternative sanitation technologies have been successful? What kinds of governance arrangements accompany these systems?

For Santiago Arconada, these questions around sanitation strike at the heart of a major limitation of the model of 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism and a key challenge going forward:

Unfortunately, you can’t say that socialism has proposed an alternative to this model of engineering. For socialists, mass production isn’t the problem; the problem is that the poor have to use miserable latrines while the rich have their toilets. But no, the real problem is the need for an alternative vision of water and “21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism” hasn’t arrived at that. Why not? Because socialism is a Western construction, and Western society has been built on the idea of dominating nature.

This is what a new process like the Bolivarian Process should have said. If they had presented these problems, if they had presented goals for humanity other than

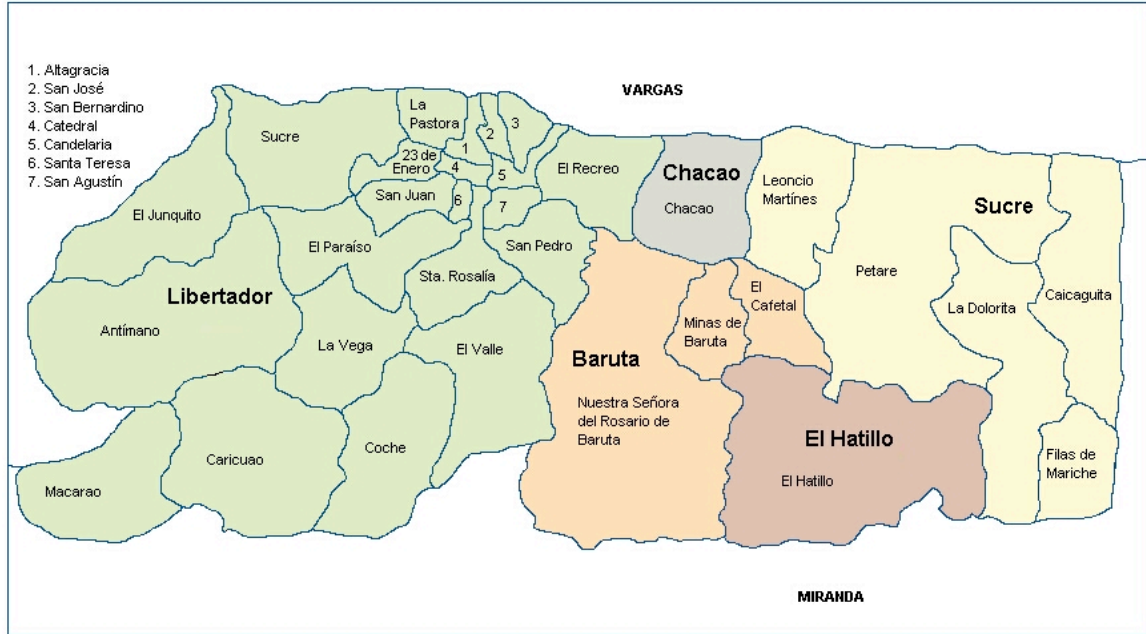
development and progress, if they had understood that the liberation of the productive forces conspires against the life of the planet, because we are a finite planet, which has limits.

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### Appendix B: Map of Caracas



MUNICIPIOS Y PARROQUIAS DE CARACAS

Source: FONISON website, [www.fonisol.com](http://www.fonisol.com)

## **Appendix C: List of Interviews and Events Attended**

### Individual Interviews

#### **Santiago Arconada, first Coordinator of Hidrocapital’s Community Management Office, August 24, 2012**

Arconada currently teaches at the Indigenous University of Venezuela and is an indigenous rights and environmental activist. He served as Hidrocapital’s first community coordinator after the creation of the Community Management Office in 1999. He subsequently held several prominent positions with Hidroven, the national water utility, including working to consolidate the MTA model in Zulia state. Beginning in 2007, Arconada worked as the Vice-President for the Institute for the Control and Conservation of the Maracaibo Lake Watershed (*Instituto Para el Control y la Conservación de la Cuenca del Lago de Maracaibo*). Prior to his involvement in water service management, Arconada was a carpenter and union organizer. Arconada lives in Antímáno.

#### **Cecilia Cariola, Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Central University of Venezuela (*Centros de Estudios de Desarrollo, CENDES, Universidad Central de Venezuela*), October 18, 2012 (Informal interview)**

Together with Miguel Lacabana, Cariola has published widely on the MTAs and community participation in Venezuela. Most recently, she has co-written a book on the technical telecommunications and information committees.

#### **Victor Díaz, Coordinator of Hidrocapital’s Community Management Office, August 20, 2012 and December 4, 2012**

Díaz has worked with Hidrocapital for 13 years. Previously, he was part of the team of reformers in the administration of Caracas mayor Aristóbulo Istúriz (1993-1995) that initially piloted the MTA model. He has also worked in political organizing, primarily in the Caracas parishes of Antímáno and 23 de Enero. Díaz studied Geography at the Universidad Central de Venezuela and currently lives in Antímáno.

**Manuel González, Secretary of Social Management, Government of the Capital District  
(*Secretario de Gestión Social, Gobierno del Distrito Capital*), October 19, 2012**

González worked in Hidrocapital from 1999-2005, first as a community promoter and then as coordinator of the utility’s Community Management Office. Prior to his tenure in Hidrocapital, González worked with the Network of Community Centres (*Red de Centros Comunitarios*), a program that supported community organizing around culture and recreation in the barrios. González is trained as a sociologist.

**Florencia Gutiérrez, MTA *Vocera*, Gregorio Acosta La Cruz Communal Council, Santa Ana, Antímano, December 6, 2012**

Gutiérrez helped to establish the MTA in her sector in 1999, when community members and Hidrocapital staff launched an initiative to improve water services for 80 households. Since then she has been active in the MTA as well as in her local communal council and commune. She is also an active supporter of the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* and a graduate of the government-sponsored *Misión Ribas* high school certificate program. Gutiérrez moved to Antímano in 1974.

**Elizabeth López, Lead *Vocera* for the Juana Ramirez La Avanzadora Commune, Antímano, December 13, 2012 (Interview conducted by Calais Caswell)**

Prior to assuming responsibility for the Juana Ramirez La Avanzadora commune, Elizabeth López was active in the MTA for the Las Barras-Parate Bueno Communal Council in Antímano, spearheading major improvements in wastewater and drainage.

**Romer Malavé, Operations Engineer for Antímano, Hidrocapital, November 28, 2012**

Malavé began working for Hidrocapital in February 2011 as an Operations Engineer with its subcontractor Empresa Carillo. Malavé received his degree in mechanical engineering from the National Experimental University for the Armed Forces (*Universidad Nacional Experimental de la Fuerza Armada Nacional, UNEFA*).

**Sulay Morales, MTA *Vocera*, La Cauchera Communal Council, Copacabana sector, Carapita, Antímano, November 11, 2012 (Informal interview)**

Morales became active in her MTA in 1999. She has also been involved in her community’s urban land committee, as well as other communal council activities. Morales is a homemaker and a graduate of the *Misión Ribas* high school certificate program. She migrated from Táchira state in the Andean region in 1982.

**Anselmo Rodriguez, Community Liaison, Ministry of Popular Power for the Environment, September 6, 2012**

Rodriguez was a community promoter in the Community Management Office under the leadership of Santiago Arconada in the early 2000s. He later went on to be coordinator of the Community Management Office for the Litoral water system in the south of Caracas.

**Carmen Rojas, Integral Land Committee of Los Jabillos (*Comité de Tierra Integral de los Jabillos*), December 11, 2012 (Interview conducted by Calais Caswell)**

Rojas has been a leader in her local urban land committee since its creation in 2013. She is an active MTA participant and is also involved in women’s organizing.

Group Interviews

**Group Interview with Hidrocapital Community Promoters, August 28, 2012**

In attendance: Dircia García, Gumberto Mendez, and Jesús López.

**Tour of the Carapita Sector with MTA *Voceras* from Antímamo, October 2, 2012**

In attendance:

- Pedra Escalona, MTA *Vocera*, Simon Rodriguez Communal Council
- Sulay Morales, MTA *Vocera*, La Cauchera Communal Council, Copacabana sector, Carapita
- Florencia Gutiérrez, MTA *Vocera*, Gregorio Acosta La Cruz Communal Council, Santa Ana
- Rosalba Ruiz, MTA *Vocera*, Segundo Despertador Communal Council
- Luz Darianis, MTA Participant, Gregorio Acosta La Cruz Communal Council, Santa Ana

- Nancy de La Rosa, Health Committee/MTA *Vocera*, Luchador del Futuro Communal Council, Libertador-San Onofre sector

### **Focus Group with MTA *voceras* from Antímamo, November 22, 2012**

In attendance:

- Nancy de La Rosa, Health Committee/MTA *Vocera*, Luchador del Futuro Communal Council, Libertador-San Onofre sector
- Sulay Morales, MTA *Vocera*, La Cauchera Communal Council, Copacabana sector, Carapita
- Carmen Rojas, MTA Participant and Community Leader in the Integral Land Committee (*Comité de Tierra Integral*), Los Jabillos
- Rosalba Ruiz, MTA *Vocera*, Segundo Despertador Communal Council
- Anastasia Zambrano, MTA Participant, Terrazas Central Communal Council

### Major Meetings and Events Attended

- Community Water Council Meeting, Antímamo, Caracas: August 29, September 13, October 11 and 25, November 8 and 22, 2012
- Community Water Council Meeting, El Valle, Caracas, September 5, 2012
- Community Water Council Meeting, Brisas de la Propatria, Catia, Caracas, October 23, 2012
- Gathering (*Encuentro*) of Caracas MTAs in Hidrocapital’s Headquarters, Caracas, August 21, 2012
- Site visits in Santa Cruz del Este (San Rafael, Trujillo, Barriolita), Caracas, with Hidrocapital staff, August 28, 2012
- March for the Closure of Hugo Chávez’s 2012 Election Campaign, Caracas, September 30, 2012
- Hugo Chávez’s Inaugural Address at Miraflores, Caracas, October 7, 2012
- “Women, History, and Struggle” (*Mujeres, Historia y Lucha*), Gender Workshop sponsored by the Government of the Capital District, Antímamo, Caracas, October 27-28 and November 4, 2012

- Public Forum: The Dark Side of Petroleum and the Myth of Development in Venezuela (*El Lado Oscuro del Petróleo y el Mito de Desarrollo en Venezuela*), Rómulo Gallegos Center for Latin American Studies (*Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos*, CELARG), Caracas, November 1, 2012
- Water Festival (*Fiesta del Agua*) sponsored by Hidrocapital and the Ministry of Popular Power for the Environment, Mariche, Petare, Caracas, November 2, 2012
- Public consultation on the Government’s Strategic Plan (*Plan Socialista*, 2013-2019) sponsored by the Ministry of Popular Power for the Environment, November 17, 2012, Parque Miranda, Caracas
- Meeting of the Juana Ramirez la Avanzadora Commune, Antímano, Caracas, November 22, 2012
- National Conference of the National Network of Communards (*Red Nacional de Comuneros*), Sierra de San Luis, Falcón State, December 1-2, 2012
- Ceremony to Award Certificates to Participants in the *Mujeres, Historia y Lucha Program*, Teatro Principal, Caracas, December 6, 2012
- Christmas Party Antímano’s MTA Participants, Caracas, December 7, 2012

### **Appendix D: Interview Schedule**

1. What is your current position and how did you become involved in the MTAs?
2. What have been the major achievements of the MTAs?
3. What have been the major challenges with the MTAs?
4. For you, what does “co-responsibility” mean?
5. What is the significance of the MTAs to the Bolivarian Process and the goal of achieving “socialism of the twenty-first century”?
6. In your opinion, why have advances in sanitation been slower than advances in water?
7. What is the role and significance of the newly created “communes” (*comunas*)?

## **Appendix E: Survey Guide (Spanish)**

### **Identidad de los entrevistados**

Sector:

Consejo comunal:

### **Nombre entrevistado 1:**

Genero:

Estatus marital:

Edad:

### **Nombre entrevistado 2:**

Genero:

Estatus marital:

Edad:

### **Información demográfica**

1. ¿Cuanto tiempo tiene Ud. viviendo en este hogar?
2. ¿Cuántas personas viven en el hogar?
3. ¿Cuál es su ocupación?

### **Vivienda y tenencia**

4. ¿Tiene título al terreno donde se encuentra su casa?
5. ¿Usted es propietario de la casa, inquilino u otro?

### **Servicio de agua**

6. ¿Cómo consigue el agua potable? ¿Tienes que hervir el agua del chorro antes de tomarlo? ¿Y el agua para el uso en el hogar (para lavar, etc.)?

7. ¿Con que frecuencia llega el agua del chorro a su hogar? ¿Cuántos días dura?
8. ¿Cómo se abastece el hogar cuando el servicio de agua esta interrumpido?
  - b. ¿Su hogar tiene tanque? ¿Cuántos días dura el agua de un tanque?
9. ¿Paga Ud. una tarifa por el servicio de agua? ¿Cuanto?

### **Servicio de aguas servidas y aguas residuales**

10. ¿Cómo se deshace de las aguas grises de la casa, por ejemplo del fregadero?
11. ¿Cómo se deshace de las aguas servidas de la casa, ósea las aguas negras (Ej. tubería, pozo séptico, letrina, etc.)?
12. ¿Paga Ud. una tarifa por el servicio de saneamiento (o servicios relacionados)? ¿Cuánto es mensual?

### **Actividades en el hogar**

13. ¿En su hogar quien suele recolectar el agua (Ej. llenar tanques, comprar botellas, etc.)?

### **Calidad del servicio**

14. ¿Ha tenido Ud. problemas con el servicio de agua en los últimos años? ¿Cuáles?
15. ¿Ha tenido Ud. problemas con el servicio de saneamiento en los últimos años? ¿Cuáles?
16. ¿La calidad del servicio de agua y saneamiento ha cambiado en los últimos años? ¿En su opinión que explica los cambios?
17. ¿Su servicio de agua y saneamiento ha sido afectado por las lluvias o un desastre natural (ej. deslave) en los últimos años? ¿Cómo resolvieron los problemas?

**Participación política**

18. ¿En el último año ha tratado de resolver algún problema de agua o de aguas servidas en su casa o sector? ¿Cómo/quienes intentaron resolver el problema?
  
19. ¿Ha asistido Ud. alguna vez a una reunión o actividad relacionada con el agua?  
¿Cuál(es)? (Por ejemplo Fiesta del Agua, reunión del consejo comunitario de agua, etc.)
  
20. ¿Cree Ud. que asistir a estas reuniones y actividades es fácil, difícil o muy difícil?  
¿Porque?
  
21. ¿Cree Ud. que avisar o denunciar un problema ante Hidrocapital es fácil, difícil o muy difícil? ¿Porque?
  
22. ¿Participa Ud. en algún otra organización o grupo comunitario (Ej. consejo comunal, asociación religiosa o de trabajadores, partido político, etc.)? ¿Cuál?

**Appendix F: Results of Venezuelan Electoral Competitions and Popular Referenda,  
1998-Present**

(Adapted from REUTERS, 2013, retrieved from [www.elimpulso.com](http://www.elimpulso.com))

**1. 1998 Presidential elections**

Chávez won with 56% of votes over Henrique Salas Romer who received 40% of the votes.  
Assumed office on February 2, 1999

**2. 1999 April constitutional referendum**

Approximately 90% of voters decided to convoke a constitutional assembly to prepare a new constitution. Abstention was 62%

**3. 1999 December constitutional referendum**

72% of voters approved the new constitution, which marked the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution.

**4. 2000 Presidential elections**

Chávez won with 60% against Francisco Arias. These elections are known as the ‘mega-elections’ since they were convoked to legitimize elected officials after the adoption of the new constitution, including governors and mayors.

**5. 2004 Regional elections**

The governing party won 22 of the 24 states and over 80% of municipalities. The opposition was weakened, having lost 6 of the 8 states it controlled and the majority of the 220 municipalities it controlled since 2000.

**6. 2004 Presidential recall referendum**

In August, 59% of almost 10 million voters voted for Chávez to stay in power after the opposition called for a recall referendum.

**7. 2006 Presidential elections**

In the beginning of December, Chávez was reelected with 62% of the vote against Manuel Rosales who received 27% of the vote. Chávez promised to lead Venezuela towards “21<sup>st</sup> century socialism”.

#### **8. 2007 Referendum on constitutional reform**

Chávez lost his first electoral contest when his proposal for amending the constitution and deepening the socialist project was rejected by a narrow margin.

#### **9. 2008 Regional elections**

Elections took place at the end of November to elect 603 officials including governors, mayors, and councilors. The opposition won key states and municipalities, the governing party (PSUV) won most of the positions.

#### **10. 2009 Referendum on constitutional amendment**

At the end of 2008, Chávez proposed a referendum to eliminate presidential term limits, which were set out in the 1999 constitution. The vote took place in February 2009 and the proposal was approved with almost 55% of the votes.

#### **11. 2010 Legislative elections**

In September members of the National Assembly were elected for the term until 2016. The governing party won the majority of seats; however, the margin of the popular vote was quite close and Chávez did not win the two-thirds of seats required to pass large reforms.

#### **12. 2012 Presidential elections**

October 7, Chávez was re-elected with 55.07% of the vote (8.1 million votes) against Henrique Capriles Radonski who received 44.31% (6.5 million votes).

#### **13. 2012 regional elections**

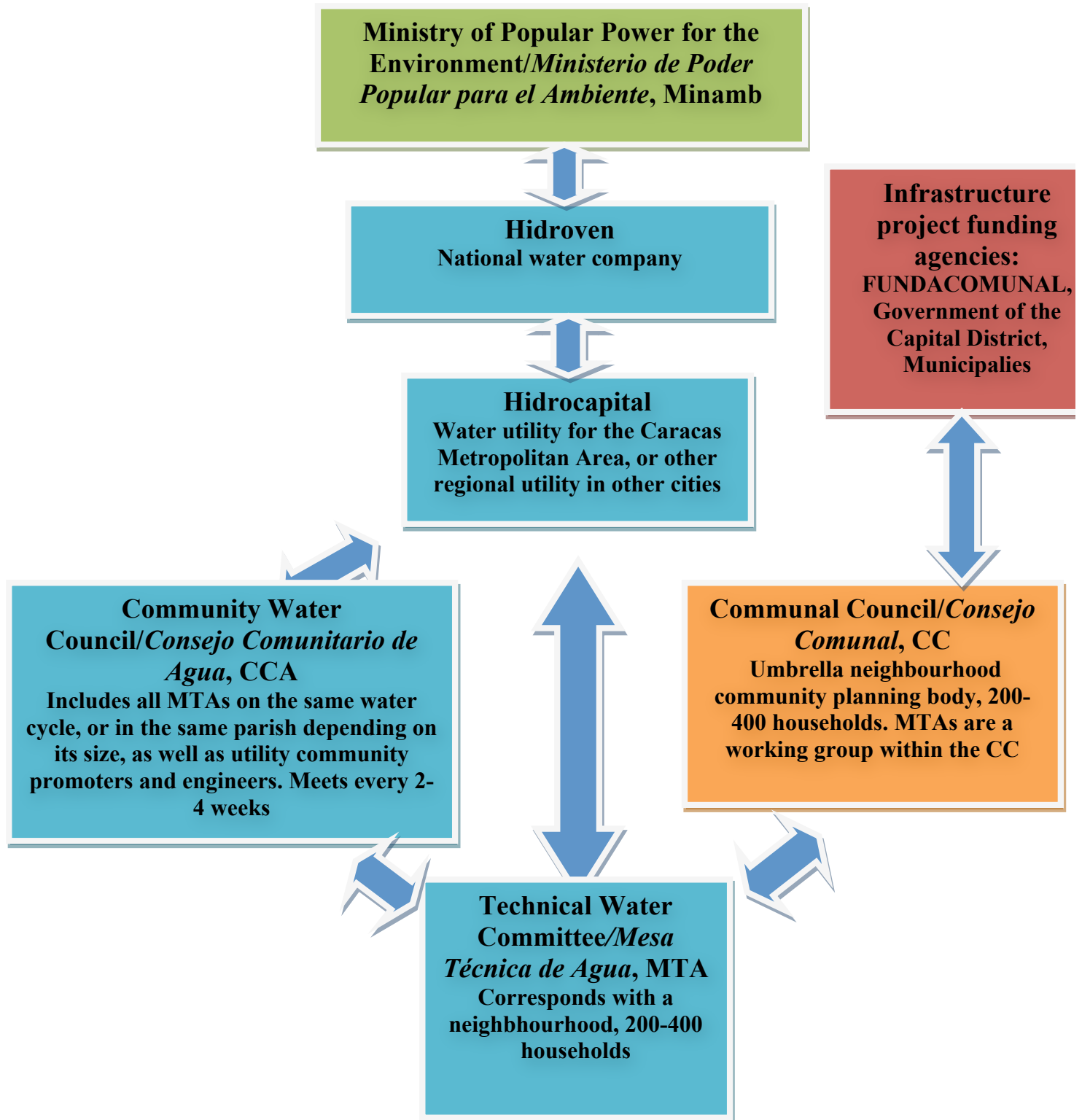
The governing United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) won 20 out of 23 states. Former presidential candidate and incumbent governor of Miranda state, Henrique Capriles, maintained his position over vice president Elias Jaua.

### **Elections after the Death of Hugo Chávez on March 5, 2013**

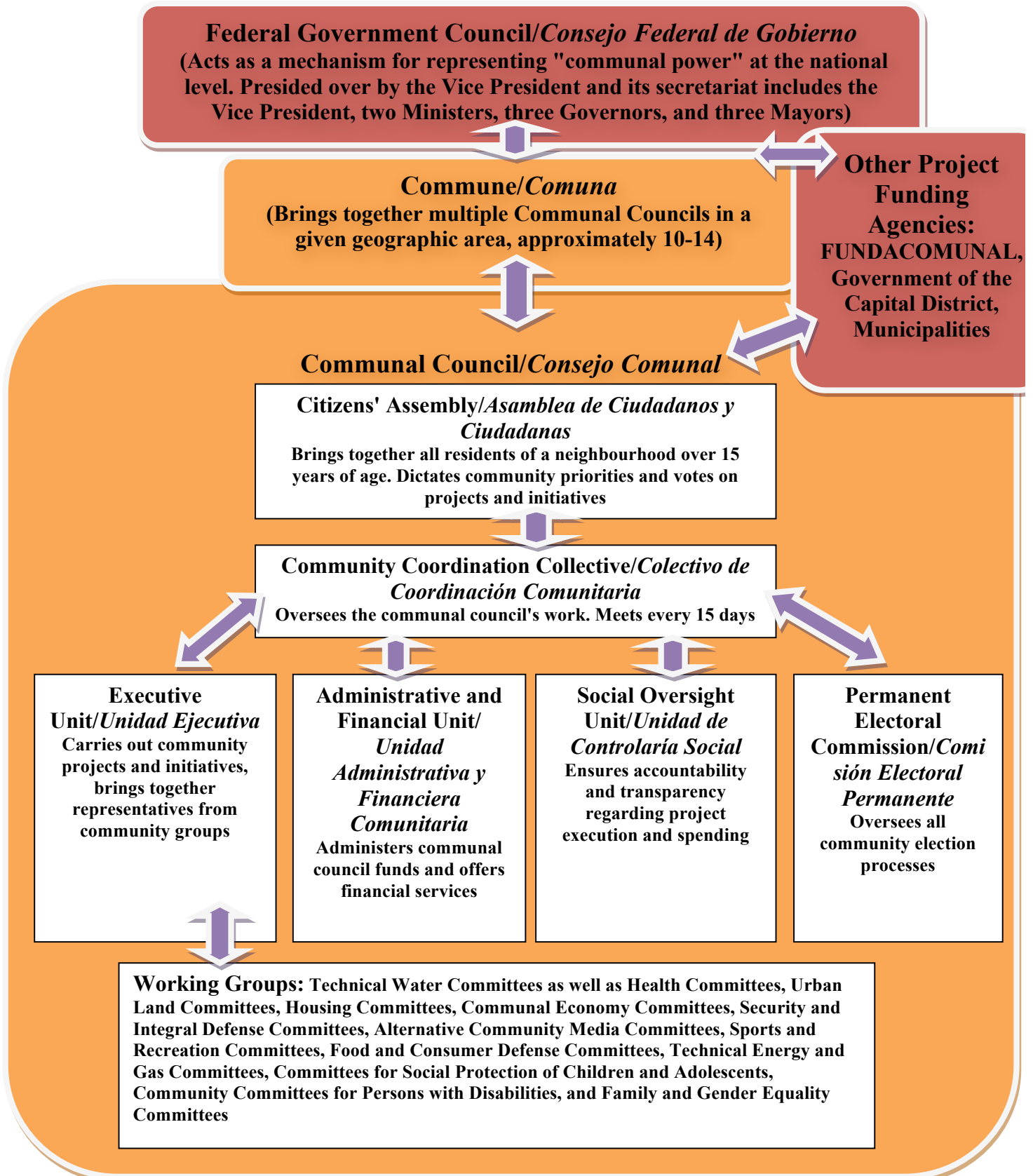
#### **14. April 2013 presidential elections**

Chávez’s successor Nicolas Maduro won with 50.66% of the vote (or 7,505,333 votes) against opposition candidate Henrique Capriles who obtained 49.07% of the vote (or 7,270,403 votes) (Lopez & Watts, 2013).

**Appendix G: Structure of the Technical Water Committees in Urban Areas**  
 (Based on Ley Orgánica de los Consejo Comunales, 2006)



**Appendix H: Structure of the Communal Councils**  
 (Based on Ley Orgánica de los Consejo Comunales, 2006)



**Appendix I: Investment in Water and Sanitation in Select Latin American Countries  
(2010)**

	Annual investment millions of US\$	Population millions	Investment (US\$) per capita
Uruguay	154.40	3.00	51.46
Paraguay	67.40	6.00	11.23
El Salvador	61.60	6.00	10.27
Ecuador	143.00	14.00	10.21
Venezuela	288.60	29.00	9.95
Colombia	435.90	46.00	9.48
Argentina	360.00	40.00	9.00
Chile	151.20	17.00	8.89
Costa Rica	34.40	4.00	8.60
Peru	220.20	29.00	7.59
Panama	29.80	4.00	7.45
Brazil	1300.90	195.00	6.67
Nicaragua	39.90	6.00	6.65
Guatemala	78.10	14.00	5.59
Dominican Republic	49.00	10.00	4.90
Honduras	32.20	8.00	4.03
Bolivia	33.80	10.00	3.38
Mexico	868.60	113.00	1.02

Source: Spronk, Olivera, & Crespo (forthcoming)

**Appendix J: Photographs**



Figure J1: Antímáno.



Figure J2: Some of Antimano’s most active MTA participants: (From Left to Right) Nancy de la Rosa, Rosalba Ruiz, Luz Darianis, Florencia Gutiérrez, Pedra Escalona, Sulay Morales.



Image J3: Hidrocapital Community Coordinator Victor Díaz and operations engineer Romer Malavé at a community water council meeting in Antímamo.



Figure J4: Santiago Arconada, former Hidrocapital Community Coordinator.



Figure J5: A community water council meeting in Antímáno.



Figure J6: A woman raises her water concerns to Hidrocapital staff at a community water council meeting in Antímáno.



Figure J7: Engineer Daniel Pereira goes door-do-door consulting Barriolita residents about their water Service.

Viernes	Jueves	Martes	Miércoles
27-CCH Sta. Rosalia 1er Jueves c/mas 3:30pm	28-CCH San Agustin 2do Jueves c/mas 4:00pm	29-CCH Cota 905 3er Jueves c/mas 3:30pm	30-CCH Cafetal 10:00 am
31-CCH Sto. Cruz del Este 2:00pm CDI de Uru.	32-CCH Ojo de Agua 3:00pm	33-CCH Minas de Baruta. 3:00pm	34-CCH Hoyo de la Puarta. 3:00pm
35-CCH El Hatillo 10:00AM			
28/07/12	26/07/12	24/07/12	25/07/12
24/07/12	18/07/12	15/07/12	15/07/12
12/01/12	24/07/12	24/07/12	25/07/12

GUARDIA	L	M	M	J	V
GERALDINE	Yelitza	SAUL	OMAR	JESUS	

AREA 2	AREA 1
CESAR / OMAR	DIRC
Omar / Saul / Cesar / Victor /	
H. Domingo Liciari X-50	H. Razzati X-50
CDI Av Rio Janeiro	H. Ortopedico Infantil
Materno Petare	H. Santa Ana X-50
Perez Leon X-50	Cruz. Rosa
CDI Comercio Petare	CDI San Jose
SeBUCAN-Charros	H. José G. Hernandez
H. Vargas X-50	CDI Simon Rodriguez
H. Niños X-50	CDI Vam
H. Riquelme X-50	

Figure J8: The Hidrocapital community promoters’ busy schedule of community meetings and visits.



Figures J9 and J10: Cristina Villamizar, a resident of Antímano’s Santa Ana sector, shows the various containers she uses to store water. Her piped water service arrives only every 21 days for 3-4 days.



Figure J11: MTA participants are literally demanding their rights: A petition to Hidrocapital to improve Barriolita’s water services.

**Appendix K: Ethics Certificate**

File Number: 09-11-38B



Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 01/15/2013

**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

**Ethics Approval Notice****Social Science and Humanities REB****Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)**

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Susan	Spronk	Social Sciences / Others	Principal Investigator
Calais	Calwell	Social Sciences / Others	Research Assistant
Rebecca	McMillan	Social Sciences / Others	Research Assistant
Kate	Salimi	Social Sciences / Others	Research Assistant
Madeline	West	Social Sciences / Others	Research Assistant

**File Number:** 09-11-38B**Type of Project:** Professor**Title:** Water, Power and Citizenship: Participatory Governance in Urban Water Supply Management in Bolivia and Venezuela

<b>Renewal Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</b>	<b>Approval Type</b>
01/31/2013	01/30/2014	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

**Special Conditions / Comments:**

N/A

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