

“Synopsis of the Process of Modernization and Technological of the Ayunamiento del
Distrito Nacional: For a “Cuidad Posible (Possible City)”
by Victor F. Gomez, MSc.

May 14, 2004
Santo Domingo, D.N.

Summary

In this review of the process of the implantation and technological innovation of the National District City Council (ADN), an abbreviated synthesis is presented of the technological transformation that the government of the city of Santo Domingo has undergone during the administration headed by the Honorable Mayor, Roberto Salcedo (2002-2006). Firstly, the technological innovation of the government of the city is understood as a process that transcends the introduction of technological infrastructure (hardware and software) to become an institutional renovation that encompasses the redefinition of the values and organizational practices as well as the transformation of the image of the institution, so that technology ceases to be an end in and of itself and converts itself into a means of assuring the efficiency and fulfillment of its objectives and institutional goals.

Secondly, this paper is divided into seven large sections that touch on each one of the aspects of technological implantation and innovation: the historical background of the process, beginning from the chaos that was inherited from the past; the change of paradigm or the break with past practices and the implantation of the paradigm of the possible city as an expression of the real and ideal and of the change toward the people; the role of the “*marca urbana*” in the technological change, not only of the “*marca urbana*” itself but also of the “*marca institucional*”, both of which assume the implantation of new institutional values precursors of change; the administrative transformation through the project “Integrated System of Financial Administration” which is the expression of a continuation of existing processes, deepened and redefined in the present form; innovation in the relationship with the community expressed in various ways such as: the communicative force of the “*marca urbana*”, the revitalization of the city through the program “Domingo Libre”, the web page and the city newspaper; innovation and the public space, as part of the politics of recovering the territory’s management capabilities and the return of the city to the citizens and finally, a vision of the future expressed in the creation of a local information society that contributes to the reduction of the technology gap and to the improvement of local governability.

1. History

The 16th of August 2002 marked the beginning of a process of institutional transformation never before seen in the government of the City of Santo Domingo.

Traditionally, local governments in the Dominican Republic have been considered public entities of low profile in terms of not only the economic efficiency of its institutional processes but also in their capacity to offer the public services they are required by law to provide. *Clientelismo*, the dependency on the central government and the systematic weakening of its legal capabilities and attributes have been factors that in the long run have weakened the authority of local governments and restricted their institutional scope from the provision of sanitation services to the urban constituency, leaving to the side the other obligations and attributes that as governments of the territory the ruling laws confer upon them.

The National District City Council (ADN) was not an exception, for more than a decade even the ability to finance public services in the nation's capital was systematically diminished.

2.A Change of Paradigm

Within this context, the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (Party of Dominican Liberation) came to power in city government with Roberto Salcedo as mayor, who immediately started a process of reform and institutional modernization characterized by the completeness of its approach, the modernization of institutional platforms, making municipal public services more efficient, but above all the articulation of a city project with a vision of strategic planning in the territory that has as its basis the recovery of authority and the ability to manage the city's territory through the substantial improvement of municipal public services within the framework creating conditions for public participation, transparency in the governmental process and local governability.

This paradigm shift, is expressed in the slogan "*Ciudad Posible*" (Possible City), a synthesis of the joint efforts and aspirations of city authorities and the citizens, based in the construction of a local institution that contributes to improving the quality of urban life through a balance of the ideal and the real to achieve the possible.

3.The Role of the *Marca Urbana* (City Image/Logo) in Technological Innovation

This initiative represents one of the most interesting emphases on modernization and technological innovation.

Fundamentally it consists of the development of a platform of inter-institutional communication that allows the public repositioning of the city government through the design of an iconography and a new image for the City Council that simultaneously shows a greater closeness with the citizens as well as the spirit of institutional renovation and technological modernization.

Its architecture reflects the founding "bricks" that built the first city of the New World (Santo Domingo), as well as pixels of modernity over which the city will be rebuilt and reconstructed in the context of the proposal of renovation that the "*Ciudad Posible*" contains.

The *Marca Urbana* possesses three key components: the *marca urbana* itself, an expression of the renovation of the local institutions and the greater closeness with its citizens; the *Marca institutional*, an expression of the heraldic European inheritance that defines five centuries of urban tradition in the New World; the *Marca turistica*, an expression of the possibility of projection and economic development of the city whose individuality is based in the crystallized articulation of its geographic, cultural and historic attributes, that makes the feel of Santo Domingo a particular and singular experience. This is still developing because we will attempt to build it through a strategic alliance between the public and private sectors of the city.

The *Marca Urbana*, is without a doubt, one of the key aspects that highlights and gives significance to technological modernization as a process beyond software and hardware and converts it into a process of transformation.

4. Technological Innovation in Municipal Finances

Municipal finances constitute a functioning example of technological innovation in the ADN. As a decentralized public institution, ADN manages financial resources that come from the law 17-97 as legislated by the central government in the same way it also manages resources generated by municipal taxes. Traditionally, the city councils have managed their resources with limited mechanisms of financial control that without a doubt has contributed to their historic inefficiencies with respect to the allotment of resources for the different services that are their responsibilities.

In the case of the ADN, the present management has strengthened the financial reform through the formation of a technological platform called: “Integrated System of Financial Administration (SIAF)”, which was the result of the joint cooperation between ADN and the Inter-American Development Bank. The system works in a decentralized manner through eight independent modules:

- Budgetary Planning and Execution
- Attention to the Citizens
- Human resources
- Payroll and Personnel
- Bidding and Buying
- Patrimonial and Fleet Controls
- Control of Materials and Inventory
- Web Page

Each of the aforementioned modules allows for the fulfillment of different methods of control and financial budgeting that, besides improving and making more efficient the allotment of resources, allows the exercise of transparency and accountability before the citizens of the national district.

Technological innovation in the financial environment is a step in a continuing process of consolidation and improvement, the final end of these intermediary reforms is to construct a pioneering platform of local electronic government in the Dominican Republic. There are still key challenges like training and improving the administrative personnel and the *homologacion* and suitability of the information infrastructure of key aspects of systems administration, the web and physical support.

5. Technological Innovation and the Relationship with the Community

In this field, technological innovation began with the implementation of the *marca urbana* through two key tools of disclosure: the city newspaper and the ADN's web page. The *Marca* as a new image and expression for the institutional renovation redefines the way the local government communicates with its citizens; permanent and reciprocal communication is fundamental to guarantee an adequate relationship between the two parts. In its first stage, the newspaper is circulated monthly and is free, allowing coverage for those citizens that lack access to the Internet. The web page will begin by offering information about the activities, products and services for the ADN with the goal of transforming it into a portal that eventually becomes the interactive electronic window of the government of the city.

In this context, the revitalization of the city has been one of the characteristic achievements through the program "*Domingo Libre*", a path of urban revitalization that includes the public use of three large spaces in the city: the *Malecon*, maritime front of the city, through the initiative "*Malecon Libre*"; the Avenue V Centenario through the initiative called "*Villa Libre*", in one of the most populated areas of the city; "*Cristo Libre*", an urban revitalization initiative based in a zone with low availability of public space and recreation for the capital's citizens.

The technological innovation in this field has been based on improving the communicational abilities of the government of the city by incorporating the citizens in the recovery and restitution of the city as a space that generates quality urban life and culture for its citizens.

6. Technological Innovation and Public Space

From the perspective of public space, modernization and technological innovation seeks to organize the National Districts' public space as a result of a new scenario introduced by the law 163-01 that modifies the territorial limits of the national district, confining it in a territory of 104 square kilometers, with no possibility of horizontal growth and therefore compels upward growth and density in the use of land.

With around a million inhabitants and a density of about nine thousand inhabitants per square kilometers, it is urgent to define elements and instruments of public space management that contribute to the improvement of the inhabitants quality of life in the capital, reducing the gap that separates different socioeconomic groups.

The re-conceptualization and classification of functional public spaces is part of the effort that aspires to improve the quality of life of the people in the national district through ordered and integral action over the territory of the capital of the republic. The project consists of four large components: (i) legal, physical, and economic evaluation of public spaces of the national district; (ii) revision and creation of norms for the management and use of urban public spaces; (iii) inter-institutional and intersectorial coordination for the management of public spaces and;(iv) education for the citizens regarding the use of public space.

The program was born as a strategic alliance between the private sector as a result of collaboration between EUMEX with different municipal administrations of important Latin American cities and capitals. The program encourages the adoption of an advanced technological platform that allows the administration of public spaces through a GIS system and the corresponding support infrastructure.

7. Final Considerations

Finally, looking back, modernization and technological innovation is understood not only as an end in and of itself but as a means that facilitates, improves and increases the closeness between the citizens and local government to together create the conditions that improve the quality of urban life of Santo Domingo, making it a "*Ciudad Posible*", as an intermediate expression between the ideal city and the real.

In the medium and the long term, the vision of technological innovation aspires to leave the seat of local government and consolidate, starting with the construction of an information society and local connectivity, in such a manner that it can contribute to the reduction of the technology gap between distinct sectors that form the society of the capital.

This vision expects to take advantage of the infrastructure of the city council distributed throughout the city, especially the trade schools and transform them into centers of technological innovation in the community that at the same time contributes to the integration of the underdeveloped sectors of society, improve the social and human capital of the city and give more strength for local governability.