

Governance and Territorial Cohesion Through Policies and Good Practices: A Focus on Local Development

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Abstracts

The concept of governance initially emerged in the field of economics and business management with the objective of achieving greater efficiency. It was subsequently extended to the field of government management. In many countries, governance has become a topic of great importance as a result of the implementation of decentralization policies and the extension of popular participation in land use plans in the search for sustainable development. The study, developed in the Decentralized Autonomous Government of Portoviejo canton in the province of Manabí, had as its primary objective the verification of the knowledge of governance among decision-makers and other socially involved actors in the canton's land use plan in the search for sustainable local development. This was achieved through an analysis of the Plan, conceived and applied with the intention of fostering cohesion among the policies implemented. The study employed a combination of theoretical and empirical methods. The theoretical approach involved a review and analysis of the literature on the subject, while the empirical approach involved data collection through questionnaires administered to socially involved actors. This approach enabled the researchers to gain insights into the perceptions and experiences of these actors, and to assess the effectiveness of various governance practices.

Keywords: governance; local development; territorial planning.

Introduction

The endeavors undertaken in the province of Manabí, particularly in the canton of Portoviejo, to attain progress toward sustainable local development are increasing in number and scope on a daily basis. This is due to the evolution of these endeavors as a result of innovation and the management of local authorities and their link with the governance of the canton. The latter has achieved sustained progress within the province of Manabí as a result of numerous projects designed to link and provide development opportunities to the society of Portoviejo.

The Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD) of the canton has undergone a significant transformation from the sectoral development plans that were in place a decade ago. These have now been superseded by a comprehensive and up-to-date document, "Plan Portoviejo 2035,"

which was conceived under the slogan "The best city to live in Ecuador." The ordinance was approved in a session of the Municipal Council in 2021, and it serves as a mandatory reference for all government institutions, the private sector, and all socially involved actors in the territory's development.

For the municipal GAD of Portoviejo, the Development and Territorial Planning Plan (PDOT) serves as a valuable instrument for the perpetual monitoring of the progress of programs, projects, and action plans executed based on local development. Additionally, it provides guidance to socially involved actors in both the public and private sectors, and it promotes the management strategies necessary for the canton to achieve local development.

However, the realization of good governance practices is a prerequisite for such an effort. This entails the integration of the efforts of both the government and civil society in a public-private management system that is developed in harmony with and in accordance with the general guidelines established by the PDOT of the canton. It is for this reason that the author has chosen to address this issue.

This study is an analysis of governance in the territory. It is part of a research project with a non-experimental, longitudinal design. This is a novel approach, as data from documentary sources were reviewed and collected since 2010. This allowed inferences to be made about the changes that have occurred in recent years.

The methodology employed was based on a review and comparative analysis of the articles of various authors on this subject, as well as the official documents prepared by the entities of the Ecuadorian State, in particular the GAD of the Portoviejo canton. Information from various normative and methodological documents was consulted to achieve a content analysis, which involved comparative and systematic readings of the texts. This approach enabled the author to reach pertinent conclusions about their evolution.

Information on the exercise of governance has been obtained from a variety of available sources, including monitoring reports of the plan, institutional information, academic articles, and information published in the press. The data obtained through this process were supplemented with information gathered from in-depth and semi-structured interviews with socially engaged actors, who provided valuable insights into their experiences in governance for the advancement of local development and the establishment of effective practices in this domain.

Theoretical foundation.

1. Governance: angles and edges of its conceptualization

In conclusion, the bibliographic consultations conducted revealed that governance is the set of measures and rules that ensure the proper functioning and control of a state, institution, or organization, whether public or private.

The Dictionary of the Royal Academy of Language also includes a definition of the word: governance is the art or way of governing that aims to achieve lasting economic, social, and institutional development, promoting a healthy balance between the state, civil society, and the market economy.

The term "governance" first emerged in France during the 1990s, initially employed to denote political and state authority. Over time, however, its scope has expanded to encompass economic and business management domains. The objective of governance is to provide strategic direction, to guarantee that objectives are met, to ensure the proper management of risks, and to guarantee the responsible use of resources.

Farinós (2008, p. 12) asserts that the concept of governance originated in the field of institutional economics and regulation. The objective of this concept was to streamline the regulatory and intervention processes of public authorities while facilitating decision-making by other social agents, particularly those in the economic sector.

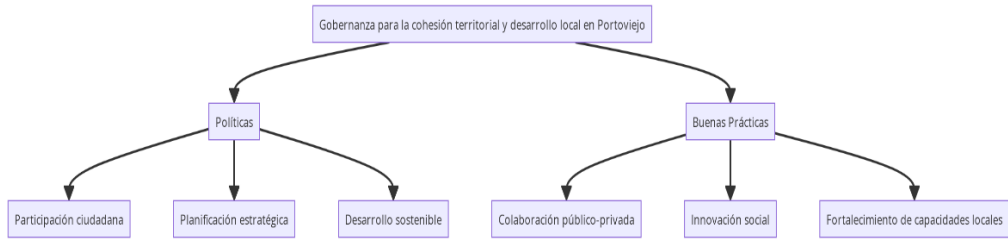
In the literature consulted, other similar concepts of governance are identified. These include the system by which an organization is controlled and operates, as well as the mechanisms by which it and its people must be held accountable. Elements of governance include ethics, risk management, compliance, and stewardship. Governance also refers to a concept that shows how an area of activity is governed. Additionally, it encompasses a system of decision-making entities that directs a certain area of activity, namely a governance system. This system involves, in particular, a governance structure and a dynamism of the system (governance process, management activities).

The four fundamental principles that underpin governance are accountability, transparency, the rule of law, and participation. It is important to note that recent ideas in the field of politics, such as the new public management of the new right, the neo-institutionalism of a new social state, or the community universalism of civil society and non-governmental organizations, have been based on this polysemic and somewhat ambiguous character of the conceptualization of the term governance. This has allowed them to develop and expose their own postulates.

Ortiz (2021) posits a distinction between two forms of governance: public and private. The field of public governance is an interdisciplinary area of study that examines the power dynamics between various actors, including authorities, civil society, and the market. The United Nations Organization's system is analogous to public governance, encompassing several principles, including those of peace and participatory democracy. The World Bank's approach is predicated on the notion of "good governance" as a prerequisite for the implementation of effective development policies. The European Union provides an additional case study of public governance. In this context, European governance can be defined as the set of rules, processes, and behaviors that influence the exercise of powers at the European level, particularly in terms of openness, participation, accountability, efficiency, and coherence.

Private governance represents the epitome of private governing bodies. Corporate governance, on the other hand, pertains to the relationship between shareholders and the company's management, particularly within the board of directors. The objective is to guarantee the integrity and transparency of financial practices and information within the company, particularly with regard to the relationship between the company and its shareholders. Furthermore, private governance encompasses the governance of associations, collective organizations, the family, and even the Internet.

Criado (2016) outlines the key concepts that have shaped contemporary public management and provides a concise overview of the evolution of the intersection between information and communication technologies and public management in recent decades. He also presents a compelling argument for the necessity of rethinking the management of public administrations in light of these developments. In light of the profound transformations that have swept across the domain of new information and communication technologies, it is subject to an unavoidable transformation. It is currently undergoing a phase of change that enables it to adapt to new conditions, as a consequence of the dynamics of adaptation to the new wave of transformations. Consequently, administrative management is obliged to adapt to a new paradigm in public management. The concept of "smart governance" or "smart public governance".



As Cerrillo (2005, p. 11) notes, the advent of globalization, shifts in societal structure and increased complexity, market inefficiencies and the fiscal crisis of the state, novel forms of governance and the legacy of traditional political accountability, the emergence of new public management and the transition from the administration to the market are collectively demanding a novel approach to governance.

Díaz-Orueta, Lourés, and Pradel (2018) state that

As various authors have pointed out, the emergence of local governance models can be interpreted as part of a process of State restructuring in which cities and regions develop their own forms of regulation to ensure competitiveness in a global space increasingly structured on the basis of neo-liberal principles. However, these models also respond to the local institutional context and the capacity of its actors to organize concrete political responses and develop consensus on the city (p. 189).

Peters and Pierre (2005) elucidate the manner in which governance manifests in disparate contexts and elucidate the reasons behind the recent surge in attention devoted to governance. The authors posit that three factors have influenced this phenomenon. Primarily, by engaging private actors and organized interests in the provision of public services, governments have endeavored to maintain service levels despite significant budgetary constraints, which implies an improvement in their governance practices. Secondly, the contemporary prevalence of governance can be attributed to the fact that, in periods of financial constraints and governmental crises, the participatory nature of the phenomenon is encouraged, particularly the incorporation of private sector actors and a managerial approach within the public sector. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the production and provision of public services has been linked to governance, which has been called into question during periods of economic crisis. In an era in which the

term "government" has been increasingly associated with perceived inefficiencies and a focus on collective decision-making, strategies that integrate private sector management approaches and diversify public service delivery have emerged as a promising avenue for reform (p. 41).

The author of this work concurs with Miedes (2010) that territorial governance is confronted with the challenge of "territorial engineering," which entails leveraging and effectively stimulating the "organizational capacity of the social organization as a whole" (p. 174) to provide responses that align with the democratically expressed needs of citizens.

In a study conducted by Kooiman (2025), it is asserted that the concept of governance has been extended to the social sciences and that the term is currently employed in a number of ways.

"Governance theory emphasizes interactions and, particularly, government as interaction, it is essential not to lose sight of the actors. In fact, they cannot be separated from the interactions between them. The actors and interactions are determined among themselves. We tend to view individuals and organizations as independent of the interactions in which they participate. They interact and, apparently, they can stop whenever they want. But basically, actors are continuously integrated by (and in) the interactions in which they relate to others. They constitute intersections in interaction processes. To be a little more specific, it can be said that actors are made up of interactions and the limits from which they obtain their identities are relative and often confusing. This applies to social systems, but also to organizations, groups, and individuals" (Kooiman, 2005, p. 63).

In the view of Rhodes (2005), the term 'governance' is used to describe self-organised, inter-organizational networks that serve to complement the functions of markets and hierarchies as governance structures. This author posits that the defining characteristics of "governance" can be distilled into the following tenets (p. 108):

- 1) The interdependence between organizations. The concept of governance is more expansive than that of government, encompassing non-state actors. The evolving boundaries of the state have resulted in the delineation between the public, private, and voluntary sectors becoming increasingly fluid and opaque.
- 2) Continuous interactions between network members are a consequence of the necessity to exchange resources and negotiate shared goals.
- 3) The interactions within the network are structured in a manner that is analogous to a game. These interactions are founded upon trust and are governed by the rules of the game, which are negotiated and agreed upon by the network participants.
- 4) A notable degree of autonomy is afforded to the state. The networks are not answerable to the state; they are self-organizing entities. While the state does not occupy a privileged and sovereign position, it is nevertheless able to exert indirect and limited influence over networks.

2. Governance for Local Development: Development and Planning Plan

Territorial. The Portoviejo canton as a case study.

The term governance has acquired significant relevance in the field of territorial policy, particularly in the conception of territorial planning and development plans. This is evidenced by the studies of Koresawa and Konvitz (2001), Harris (2001), and Faludi (2002).

In his 2023 study, Díaz focuses on the municipality as the fundamental unit of governance. He highlights the potential for transformation at this level, from a consumer to a producer of development, in terms of the subjects involved.

Nevertheless, those who are critical of governance view it as an ideology of disengagement or even the recomposition of the state. This perspective has been present since the neoliberal turn of the 1980s, when the concept of the minimal state emerged.

The primary objective of municipal management is to enhance the quality of life for the population, encompassing economic, social, environmental, and political aspects, through the application of scientific and innovative approaches (Díaz, 2023, p. 279).

As proposed by Davoudi (2007), territorial cohesion represents a significant challenge for decision-makers, who must consider the possibility of adapting public policies to the specific characteristics of the territory in question. It is crucial to recognize that the territory itself cannot be expected to adapt to the policies outlined by decision-makers. Therefore, decision-makers must utilize government intelligence, employing new techniques of information and communication, and knowledge management, in order to exercise effective governance of their respective territories.

It is thus evident that the management of the territory must enter into a symbiotic relationship with public management, whereby their interaction contributes to the achievement of the objectives and goals proposed by government decision-makers in a context of increasing democracy.

The principles that should govern the relationship between governance and democracy are outlined by Prats (2005, p. 170). The White Paper on European Governance has identified five fundamental principles of good governance: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence. Each of these principles is indispensable for the establishment of more democratic governance.

In any case, the governance work carried out by government authorities and civil society in the development of the Portoviejo PDOT is aimed at achieving greater sustainability. In his 2021 analysis, Arteaga identifies four key dimensions that define sustainability-based development: economic, social, environmental, and governance. The latter is understood as the formulation of local policies and norms of action that align with territorial planning. This perspective is endorsed by the author of this work.

It is therefore essential to study the involvement of the various actors involved in governance, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The PDOT of the canton contains a monitoring and evaluation system that enables the impacts of public-private management to be identified and generates timely alerts for decision-making.

The system is based on a comparative approach, whereby the programmed actions are contrasted with the actual outcomes, using established planning criteria and realistic indicators and targets.

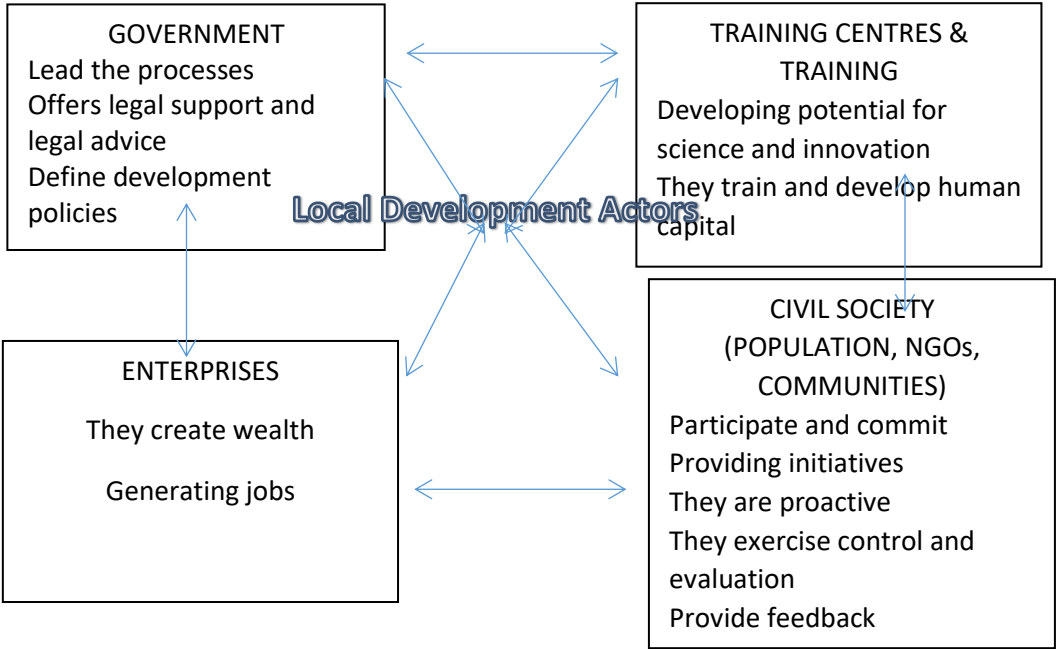


Figure 1. Actors involved in the execution of the PDOT of the Portoviejo canton.

For this reason, reliable and truthful information must be the starting point for any program, project or action contemplated in the Plan aimed at local development, since the dynamic and changing nature of the conditions of the territorial environment requires constant vigilance that will allow the correct delimitation of opportunities for intervention.

The model of the canton's integrated Territorial Development Plan, based on the exercise of good practices in governance, is shown in Figure 2.

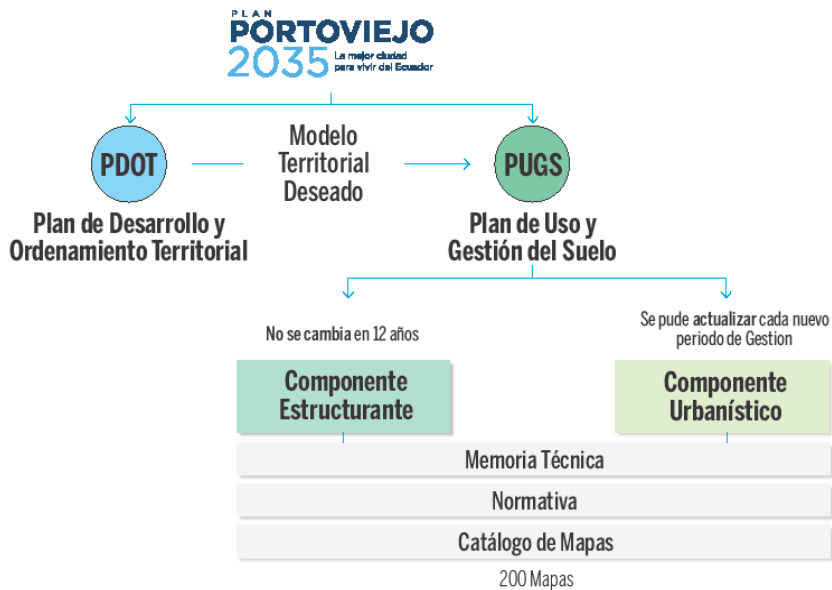


Figure 2. Schematic of the desired territorial model of the Portoviejo canton.

Source: PDOT Portoviejo 2035, GAD Portoviejo, 2021.

Methods

In alignment with the exploratory and descriptive nature of the proposed study, which entailed a comprehensive examination of existing literature, a non-experimental design was employed. This design employed a synthesis of analytical and logical historical methods as the predominant theoretical approach to investigate the evolution of governance at the local level. Additionally, documentary analysis was utilized as an empirical method. The primary sources for this study were the successive PDOTs developed in the Portoviejo canton. Furthermore, descriptive statistics were employed in the processing and analysis of the data obtained.

The documents detailed in Table 1 were analyzed and compared.

Table 1. Documents consulted during the study.

Documents consulted	Origin	Localization
Follow-up reports Goal Fulfillment Index ICM of the PDOT of the GAD Portoviejo	GAD Portoviejo, 2021. Planning Directorate	Secretariat of Planning, GAD Portoviejo.
Procedures related to the PDOT del GAD Portoviejo		http://intranet.portoviejo.gob.ec/fil.es.aspx?menu=todo

GAD Portoviejo PDOT Follow-Up Reports	Strategic Management and Quality	Planning Secretariat, GAD Portoviejo
Organic statute by processes		http://intranet.portoviejo.gob.ec/Default.aspx
Guide for the formulation/updating of the cantonal Development and Territorial Planning Plan (PDOT)	Technical Secretariat Planifica Ecuador, 2019. First Edition.	https://www.planificacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2019/08/GUIA-CANTONAL-FINAL-.pdf

A sample of 30 voluntary subjects with a background in governance and an active role in local development according to the PDOT was interviewed, as illustrated in Table 1. The objective of the interview was to ascertain their opinions on three fundamental aspects: the basic characteristics that should define good governance practices; the extent to which the contents of the PDOT are reflected in local development; and the principal challenges that persist in the territory.

Table 2. Actors linked to governance in the territory who were interviewed.

Interviewed	Institution	Quantity
Councilors	GAD	3
Lawyer	GAD	1
Secretary	GAD	1
Directors	Human Talent Equity Urban planning and PODT	3
Entrepreneurs	Companies and MSMEs	7
Participants in programs and projects	Neighborhood Councils Non-governmental organizations	10 5
Total		30

A Likert-type questionnaire was administered to the sample in order to ascertain the level of awareness regarding the update of the PDOT of the GAD Portoviejo, as well as their involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the objectives set forth in the exercise of governance. The questionnaire comprised ten questions, each of which required the respondents to assign a grade according to the following options: The respondents were asked to assign a grade to each question, using the following scale: Very High (5); High (4); Medium (3); Low (2); and Very Low (1). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Questionnaire questions.

QUESTIONS	Mark with an X the option you consider correct				
	Very high	High	Middle	Low	Very low
1.-How was your participation in the planning process of the Development and Territorial Planning Plan (PDOT) of the canton?					
2.- How do you value your knowledge of the principles of good governance?					
3.- What has been your level of participation in the updates of the GAD PDOT?					
4.- Rate the knowledge you have about the PDOT indicators and goals					

5.- What is the level of knowledge of the programs, projects and plans in your area.					
6.- What do you consider to be the level of responsibility shown by the actors of development and territorial planning?					
7.- What control do you have of the problems that limit the fulfillment of the plan?					
8.- How do you think the coherence that exists between the actions of companies, the government and civil society in terms of the development of the PDOT?					
9.- What level of priority do you think NGOs give to the PDOT of the canton?					
10.- What level of effectiveness have the programs and projects developed as part of the PDOT of the canton had?					

Results and discussion

A review of the documentation, including that of the Population and Housing Census of the National Institute of Statistics of Ecuador (INEC), 2021, reveals data of interest that provide insight into the results achieved by the canton.

The registered population is 277,323, which represents 17.4% of the total population of the province of Manabí. Table 4 presents comparative results regarding the enhancement of fundamental services within the canton, attributable to the initiatives and initiatives implemented by the PODT.

Table 4. Behavior of selected basic services by year in the province of Manabí and the canton of Portoviejo.

Basic services for society in the province of Manabí	Year 2010	Year 2022	Portoviejo 2020
Coverage of electricity received by the network	89,3%	96,2%	98,3%
Availability of drinking water through the public network	50,4%	61,1%	77,1%
Solid Waste Collection Coverage	67,1%	80,7%	94,4%
Area covered by sewer service	32,8%	43,6%	61,6%

Source: Own elaboration based on INEC data, 2021.

The coverage of the principal basic services for the population has increased at a relatively comparable rate between 2010 and 2022 throughout the province of Manabí. However, the canton of Portoviejo has exhibited a considerably higher growth rate.

In the course of the interview with the actors socially linked to governance, the main deficiencies that remain as barriers to the full development of the territory were identified. These deficiencies were enumerated as follows: The migration of rural populations to urban areas is a significant phenomenon in the region. There is also a lack of awareness and understanding of health, education, and nutrition plans and programs among the population. Social organizations have not demonstrated sufficient leadership in addressing these issues. Additionally, there has been a loss of identity values, coupled with the implementation of acculturation campaigns. The community is also unaware of municipal ordinances and regulations. Citizen participation is limited, and there is a lack of organizations committed to community development. Furthermore,

there is a dearth of strong and committed leadership. The misuse of land for activities that are incongruous with their intended purpose, deforestation, and the establishment of human settlements in areas that are environmentally vulnerable have also contributed to the deterioration of the region. The extraction of materials from the subsoil and the proliferation of unregulated extractive activities in the coastal zone have further exacerbated the problem. The degradation of water resources, which is also influenced by irrigated agriculture, has led to the deterioration of aquatic ecosystems, which in turn has a detrimental impact on economic activities such as agriculture and tourism.

Nevertheless, the interviewees acknowledge the tangible outcomes in the region resulting from the collaboration between the government and the business sector and civil society, particularly in the wake of the catastrophic earthquake that devastated the canton and necessitated reconstruction efforts in the city.

Among these achievements are the establishment of parks and recreational areas, such as La Rotonda; the implementation of sanitation and cleaning initiatives along the Portoviejo River; the relocation of vulnerable residential areas to other locations within the territory; the enactment of legislation and regulations pertaining to environmental protection; the reconstruction of buildings intended for social use and housing for victims and those affected by the disaster, as well as the restoration of affected road infrastructure.

Table 1. Results of the scale applied to the selected sample.

Questions	Number of responses and by hundreds in each category in parentheses				
	Very high	High	Middle	Low	Very low
1	5 (16,6%)	4 (13,3%)	5 (16,6%)	10 (33,3%)	6 (20%)
2	3 (10%)	4 (13,3%)	7 (23,3%)	12 (40%)	4 (13,3%)
3	4 (13,3%)	4 (13,3%)	7 (23,3%)	14 (46%)	1 (3,3%)
4	3 (10%)	4 (13,3%)	8 (26,6%)	10 (33,3%)	3 (10%)
5	4 (13,3%)	5 (16,6%)	8 (26,6%)	12 (40%)	1 (3,3%)
6	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	10 (33,3%)	12 (40%)	2 (6,6%)
7	5 (16,6%)	4 (13,3%)	6 (20%)	13 (43,3%)	2 (6,6%)
8	4 (13,3%)	3 (10%)	8 (26,6%)	14 (46%)	1 (3,3%)
9	5 (16,6%)	3 (10%)	7 (23,3%)	12 (40%)	3 (10%)
10	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	7 (23,3%)	12 (40%)	5 (16,6%)
Averages	3,9 (13%)	3,7 (12,3%)	7,3 (24,3%)	12,1 (40,3)	2,8 (9,3%)

Source: Won elaboration. The figures have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Despite the fact that eight of the interviewees (councilors and directors of the GAD) are responsible for tasks that are closely linked to the design, execution, and control of the PDOT at the cantonal level, it is evident from the responses of the sample that 64.6% of them indicate that they have only medium or little involvement, participation, or knowledge of the issues addressed. This finding demonstrates limitations in the exercise of good governance practices at the local level.

The lowest levels of self-ratings were observed in questions 2 (actors' knowledge of the fundamental principles governing governance), 6 (level of responsibility shown by actors), 8 (level of coherence of all actors around the plan), and 10 (effectiveness of programs and projects

developed as part of the PDOT), with over 70% of respondents indicating medium, low, or very low levels of knowledge or responsibility.

While the interviews and documentation review indicate the presence of a local development strategy, there is a need to enhance the interaction between all stakeholders to ensure greater compliance with the principles of good governance. It is imperative to enhance the transparency and dissemination of the plan at all societal levels. There is a pressing need to elevate the level of participation in its design, implementation, and control, extending beyond the governmental domain. It is crucial to instill a sense of accountability and dedication among all stakeholders, particularly those entrusted with the responsibility of steering development programs and projects. This will ensure the optimal utilization of resources at the cantonal level and facilitate the attainment of the objectives outlined in the Plan. Moreover, it is essential to foster a unified coherence among all stakeholders to propel collective progress towards shared objectives.

Conclusions

Participatory governance represents a novel approach to decision-making processes within a given territory. It entails a transition from an autocratic, centralized model to one that is characterized by a process of consultation and the pursuit of consensus. This shift is exemplified by the canton of Portoviejo, which has employed this approach in the design, elaboration, execution, and control of its PDOT, "Portoviejo 2035." It is essential to enhance the level of involvement of all stakeholders who impact the governance of the territory. To this end, it is vital to expand the role of business and civil society in the conceptualization and implementation of programs and projects, thereby ensuring their efficacy.

In light of the existing knowledge regarding local issues and the social forces at play within the territory, participatory governance calls for the promotion of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, with the objective of implementing effective governance practices. The establishment of stronger ties between local government and training centers and universities could prove instrumental in achieving this objective. It is essential to implement a series of measures at the cantonal level to ensure that the government effectively promotes the necessary changes through the strategies outlined in the PDOT and the involvement of relevant actors, including companies, NGOs, and civil society as a whole. These changes should be developed in a way that is integrated into the very process of investigating the phenomena and processes in question. In other words, the actors should inquire about their problems while simultaneously intervening in the solution of these issues.

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