

# Urban sprawl and environment in the municipal administrations of Vila Velha between 2009 and 2016

Expansão urbana e ambiente nas gestões municipais de Vila Velha-ES entre 2009-2016

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## Abstract

The paper aims to analyze the development of the urban environmental policy in the city of Vila Velha, state of Espírito Santo, during two municipal administrations between 2009 and 2016. It intends to investigate how the city, located in the Metropolitan Region of Grande Vitória, fills its urban environmental policy agenda, in an urban sustainability perspective, with elements of environmental justice and political ecology, based on the debate about ecocentric environmental rationality. The analysis focuses on the two municipal administration plans and on interviews with authorities who occupied relevant positions in Vila Velha, to investigate the concern about the way in which public administration deals with the disorganized occupation of the territory and with social conflicts in the distribution of the impacts of the environmental degradation on its urban environment.

**Keywords:** urban sustainability; environmental policies; environmental justice; political ecology; Vila Velha-Espírito Santo.

## Resumo

*Este texto objetiva analisar o desenvolvimento da política ambiental urbana do município de Vila Velha-ES nos dois mandatos de gestão municipal entre 2009 e 2016. Busca, assim, verificar de que forma o município situado na Região Metropolitana da Grande Vitória-RMGV ocupa sua agenda política ambiental urbana numa ótica de sustentabilidade urbana com elementos de justiça ambiental e ecologia política, baseado no debate de racionalidade ambiental ecocêntrica. Tal análise se perfaz nos dois planos de gestão municipal e em entrevistas com autoridades que ocuparam cargos de relevância em Vila Velha-ES, para verificar a preocupação quanto à maneira como a administração pública trata a ocupação desordenada do território e os conflitos sociais na distribuição dos impactos da degradação ambiental em seu ambiente urbano.*

**Palavras-chave:** sustentabilidade urbana; políticas ambientais; justiça ambiental; ecologia política; Vila Velha-ES.



## Introduction

This article discusses the relationship between the urban sprawl of Vila Velha-ES and the local environmental policy production according to the Management Plans of two municipal administrations between the years 2009 and 2016, which resulted in major urban transformation in the city. From these plans, we see the execution of an urban policy characterized by the accelerated and unplanned occupation of the territory, based on a set of interests of historical political and economic groups that were prevalent in the decision-making process and conduct of this policy.

In this sense, following a late national industrialization process (Dowbor, 2016), Vila Velha-ES also has, in its urban process, a strong influence of the national industrialization as a conductor of intense urbanization and population migration processes (Siqueira, 2010a). The municipality is part of an urban territorial dynamic that follows larger scales, as observed in the Southeastern Region. Thus, Vila Velha-ES is the result of significant transformations generated by the expansion of the last five decades. The city is aligned in a political-economic context of significant industrial structuring of Espírito Santo from the 1970s onwards (Vila Velha, 2010; Sathler, 2017; Siqueira, 2010b). Since then, in addition to being the oldest city in the state – considering the colonial history –, it is also the second most populated municipality, with 486,388 inhabitants, 1,973.59 inhabitants per square kilometer (IBGE, 2021).

In view of this, this article questions how the foundations of the development project, with a modernizing capitalist characteristic, are imposed on the environmental discourse of the municipal Management Plans and environmental policies adopted between the years 2009 and 2016. Thus, it analyzes the correlation between instruments used in the public administration conduction listed in the Sustainable Development Plan of Vila Velha-PDSVV of 2009-2012 and in the Strategic Plan of Vila Velha-PEVV of 2013-2016 and the urban environmental legislation produced in the said years,<sup>1</sup> followed by the discourse analysis of political agents involved during this period regarding the two administrations.

In this regard, the analysis presented seeks to relate space production to the production of policy aimed at the urban and the environment. In addition, it seeks to infer from such questions aspects related to environmental justice in the relationship between territory and rights to space and existing natural resources. In this context, five interviews were conducted, in-depth, with agents who occupied high-ranking positions in the two municipal administrations, through a semi-structured script. Once transcribed, the material collected in these interviews was analyzed based on the methodology of Discourse Analysis (Orlandi, 1999). Thus, in terms of an analysis from the critical political ecology (Leff, 2006, 2016; Bryant, 2015), a debate is presented about the ecogovernmental process (Agrawal, 2005; Malette, 2011) in the municipality politics and its relation to the environmental justice debate (Rammê, 2010; Acselrad, 2010).

## The capixaba<sup>2</sup> urban phenomenon and the spatial occupation of Vila Velha-ES

The city of Vila Velha-ES constitutes the first occupation point of the *capixaba* territory starting in 1535. However, due to its territorial vulnerability, Vila Velha-ES experienced little significant growth until the 20th century. With the transfer of the capital of the then Captaincy of Espírito Santo to Vila Nova of Vitória, in 1551, the city became a natural barrier to the Vitória bay entrance. As a result, its vegetative growth suffered few impacts until the adoption of the state policy of coffee plantations' eradication in the 1960s, which caused an intense rural migration and stimulated the capital and adjacent cities' occupation.

Thereby, the development policy adopted in the second half of the 20th century caused the emergence of a road network that brought a greater and better exchange of the *capixaba* economy with other regions of the country. The infrastructural project of the dictatorial period, which focused on the development of urban areas, the reduction of natural coverage, and stimulating large projects in the basic industrial sector focused on the international market, was the driving force of the state productive structure radical transformation. This project, according to Siqueira, aimed at the economic modernization of the Espírito Santo state, which, until then, kept remnants of its function of green barrier to the Colony and Brazilian Empire mines. This resulted in a level of urbanization growth of Grande Vitória being: "[...] understood in the sense of a process caused, mainly, by the population displacement from the rural to

the urban area, implementing a new urban demographic framework superior to the rural"<sup>3</sup> (Siqueira, 2010a, p. 23).

These policies accentuated the imbalances in the spatial distribution of the state and, especially, of the metropolitan region, which has always housed the main state economic activities in a variety of sectors: industrial, commercial, cultural, and political, among others (Siqueira, 2010b). This period, which encompasses the 1960s-1980s, represents the effective implementation of a modern, albeit belated, project of broad capitalist rationality in Espírito Santo (Lemos, 2015; Leff, 2006).

In this context, the disruption of a colonial logic of agricultural production would, then, inaugurate an extensive urban sprawl process that would culminate in the creation of the Metropolitan Region of Vitória in the 1990s. However, the lack of planning and a consistent urban policy got the land occupation, driven by the removal of hills, creation of urban landfills, and expansion of the road connection between the island, Vitória, and the continent, to promote a disordered region growth, with strong biases of environmental injustice (Rammê, 2010).

With the accelerated growth of the state economy, negative results brought by the spatial expansion resulted in the formation of poverty pockets in flooding areas and hillsides, caused by the: "[...] migration flow composed of people from the north of Rio de Janeiro, west of Minas Gerais, south of Bahia and originated from the declining countryside of Espírito Santo" (Mattos, 2013, p. 101). With this migration flow intensified by the modernizing process, combined with the lack of basic urban services and equipment, it was experienced,

gradually and quickly, the increase in social and spatial problems in Grande Vitória (Sathler, 2017; Siqueira, 2010a, 2010b).

Thus, contradictory to the worsening of social conditions, it was seen, with the local capitalist project expansion, a link to international private capital, related to the large iron and steel industry and the port development, making the economic reality diverse (Caldas, 2015). In this metropolitan context, Siqueira, emphasizing its relationship with the expansion of Vila Velha, highlights:

The social ecology in the Vila Velha municipality is identical, devoid of mountains, a flat region with vast coastlines, which is divided between the privileged region (the core of the municipality and a few neighbors on the waterfront) and the peripheral region, which is divided into popular neighborhoods, with a large agglomeration of the poorest layer, where the social issue is felt with intensity. (2010b, p. 92)

In this perspective, the current urban configuration of Vila Velha-ES arises from the influence of factors that make up the economic dynamism of the Espírito Santo state. In this sense, the urban formation of Vila Velha-ES took place slowly, not undergoing major changes in its urban network until the 1950s, when large economic projects were implemented in the state and it lost its bucolic city look.

According to Sathler (2017), in addition to factors related to difficult access and occupation of other areas of the municipality, a fact mitigated by the gradual emergence of land access works, it should also be

highlighted the existence of an emerging industry regarding job creation, as well as the municipality geography itself. In this sense:

[...] contributing to the limitation of the development, the municipality is cut by five rivers and was filled with flooded areas, which shaped and limited the urban network growth. Believing the geography of the city did not favor its development and seeking to maximize land use, before the 50s, the rivers were straightened by the DNOS – National Department of Sanitation Works, and mangroves and flooded areas were grounded. (Ibid., p. 225)

In the 1970s, a factor of great influence on the population growth of Vila Velha-ES, according to Siqueira (2001b), was the implementation of the housing policy developed for the municipality. Such policy was structured in an extensive popular houses construction program, where houses were designed and implemented by the Housing Company-Cohab/ES and the Self-financed Housing Cooperative-Inocoop/ES in an attempt to reduce the population pressure of Vitória.

Vitória-ES, the state capital, already had housing problems to accommodate the migration promoted by large investments on an insular geography, of small extension and aggravated by the existence of rock formations in the area then occupied, which hindered growth and expansion (ibid.; Siqueira, 2001b; Trigueiro and Amboss, 2011). It is in this sense that Vila Velha-ES, due to: “[...] its privileged geographical position and because it contains the largest number of inhabitants in the state, established itself as a 'commuter town" (Vila Velha, 2010, p. 10).

Until 1980, this expansion process observed the construction of a total of 15 sets of popular housing with approximately 7,127 housing units. However, the housing deficit meant that these projects did not cover the entire population, causing subnormal urban clusters in invaded areas to proliferate in natural territories of sandbanks vegetation, mangroves, wetlands, and hillsides, representing not only a matter of socio-environmental risk (Soares, Meneghetti and Da-Silva-Rosa, 2019) but also of discard of basic urban services and equipment (Siqueira, 2010a).

It should be noted this logic assumes, as pointed out by Martinez-Alier (2010), a displacement of the poorer population to environmentally subordinate areas, while, in relation to wealthier families, we see a highlight to the fact that: "Between 1970 and 1979, 63% of the lots approved by PMVV were on the waterfront. This interest was expected, in addition to beautiful beaches, the narrow strip of coastline does not flood" (Sathler, 2017, p. 229).

In this context, there was an occupation process attached to the regions near Vitória bay and located north of the Jucu river (main water source in the region) combined with the low property value and the transport by tram availability. This had a great impact on the Vila Velha-ES characterization, on the one hand, as a "commuter town" with a working class character in its proximity to the bay and, on the other, of a summer vacation city in the coast region until the 1990s. Thus, it is noticed that:

Flat areas have always been favored for urban occupation, this, perhaps, being the main explanation for the hills preservation. Flat areas, in many regions, present very vulnerable characteristics,

being constituted by sandy soils, below sea level and prone to flooding in rainy season. On the other side, there is a canal network, streams and rivers that make up the natural drainage system of the region. (Vila Velha, 2013, p. 19)

At the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the urbanization process of Vila Velha-ES intensified with the advent of more large-scaled road works, which made the location more accessible for developments, as a source of housing and strong real estate speculation due to its proximity to the coastline. In this regard, we can highlight the Third Bridge – joining the municipalities of Vitória and Vila Velha-ES in their noble areas, by the Vitória bay tip – and the Sol and Darli Santos highways, enabling an easier connection to the municipalities of Cariacica and Guarapari.

Thereby, access and mobility projects developed over thirty years, until the first decade of the 2000s, brought a new feature in territory occupation. Consisting of a 209.965 square kilometers area, the configurations of the municipality regarding territory and environment present the data of: "[...] 85.6% of households with adequate sanitary sewage, 43.3% of urban households on public roads with urban afforestation, and 53.1% of urban households on public roads with adequate urbanization" (IBGE, 2021).

Thereby, it is an urban municipality in which a small portion of the population lives in rural areas – a data verified since 1940 – and is characterized by a territory marked out by the existence of 100 neighborhoods, whose occupation: "[...] had in urban mobility investments the main reasons for 80% of the population to live in only 30% of the municipal

territory” (Vila Velha, 2010). It is also important to mention that, although Vila Velha-ES holds extensive rural areas and natural spaces, agricultural activities are inexpressive for the municipal economy, not even having a department of agriculture.

Thus, we highlight the speech of Interlocutor IV, which points out the dichotomy between urban and rural space of Vila Velha-ES as a problem of the municipality, since, as a result of the highest human concentrations being in the urban environment, the rural population: “[...]feels overlooked in relation to those who are in the urban network who also forget there is a small rural area in Vila Velha”.<sup>4</sup> He emphasizes the struggle to move work force to these small properties, because “[...] Vila Velha-ES is not a municipality, let's put it this way, with agricultural characteristics. So much so it does not even have a department of agriculture” (Interlocutor IV, 2018).

As can be seen, the urban configuration of the municipality of Vila Velha-ES is intrinsically linked to the emergence of all Metropolitan Region of Grande Vitória (RMGV). The late modernizing process is its surroundings development focus and is based on economic bias, especially from the 1970s onwards (Caldas, 2015; Gouvêa, 2005). In this context, notably, the urban sprawl configured itself in a swift and unplanned manner, with disordered occupation (Maricato, 2015; Siqueira, 2010b), becoming a space where a great migratory flow headed towards to works in large industrial projects. Following the reasoning of Leff (2006), this expansion process consolidates a developmental view, inherent to a capitalist rationality process, of broad economic bias and with, practically, no concern for the environment except its

administration, standardization, reversal, and containment in sanitation works, which allowed land occupation, without any ecological planning.

## The sustainable development plan of Vila Velha-ES: 2009-2012

The Sustainable Development Plan of Vila Velha (PDSVV) is an important document for understanding the urban space production in the municipality at the beginning of the twenty-first century. That is so, because it corresponds to the beginning of an understanding transition of its role in the RMGV metropolitan context, after its reconfiguration, in 2001, in the current standards. In this sense, for Sathler (2017), during the 2009-2012 administration of Mayor Neucimar Fraga, due to its legislative problems involving the Vila Velha-ES Municipal Master Plan (PDM), PDSVV is the document responsible for conducting complex relations with the civil construction sector on account of the legislative vacuum caused by discussions around the PDM.

Under the PDSVV guidelines, 27 new laws of territory environmental management were developed in the municipality, involving works, environmental management, and urban planning. In this context, we highlight the creation of an Environmental Code for the municipality – law n. 4.999/2010. However, it is verified the rest of the legislation produced refers to road infrastructure and drainage works, as well as recognition of civil society organizations with works in the environmental area as of public interest. In addition, the

concern with economy and tourism becomes strong, as expressed in the Interlocutor II speech, since in the Development Plan there is an undeniable document character on the part of any management subsequent to that. In this regard, the environment is seen in the development production as an appendix to the economic issue:

*You go to Greece and see hotels on the sea; you go to Italy and see hotels on the sea; you go to Miami you see hotels on the sea; you go to Florianópolis and see hotels on the sea; you go to Morro de São Paulo and see hotels on the sea, when I say on the sea I don't mean inside the sea, but you see a, a, a synchrony between the, the use and occupation of the land in such a way that caters to tourism, that is, caters to sustainability. Because sustainability, also, is not only having the, the bromeliad plant, no, it is keeping it. (Interlocutor II, 2018; our emphasis)*

Another relevant factor regarding the PDSVV conception is in its elaboration alongside the Entrepreneurs Association of Vila Velha (Assevila), a prominent actor in the political discussions of the municipality. According to the first article of its statute, Assevila (2018) is a non-governmental organization, a: “[...] legal entity of private law, non-profit civil association, of public interest, with administrative and financial autonomy, which will be ruled by this statute” and results from the gathering of entrepreneurs of the municipality private sector.

The foundation of the Association results from a “spontaneous initiative, without ideological or party-political connotation,” which took place in 2007, and currently, forty-two entrepreneurs are part of it. The discourse surrounding its emergence had as

scope to serve as a: “regulatory framework and promoter of the sustainable growth of the entire Vila Velha region,” acting to stimulate: “policies and positive actions for the economic and socio-environmental development of the city” (ibid.).

Guided by the principles of stimulating “socio-environmental responsibility”, economic growth of the municipality, and accentuating political and ideological plurality, as well as the morality of public-private relations, its vision is to strengthen the Vila Velha-ES business sector performance and serve as an association capable of centralizing and catalyzing the interests of this sector. Moreover, it seeks to serve as a qualified political representation with the mission of: “mobilizing and articulating ideas and actions that contribute to the formation of a more just, conscious, and qualified society” (ibid.).

According to Sathler (2017), Assevila is, in fact, a pressure group, which sought to insert, in the PDSVV drafting, guidelines for economic capitalist expansion with the approval of the municipal administration. Thus, in the Plan, the proximity between the government and business sector, whose dynamic was shown in the PDM discussion process, reinforces the conduct of the Vila Velha-ES municipality to a developmental character. In this sense, the analysis by Foucault (2005 and 2015) on government allows us to understand the exercise of political power is not carried out in a centralized way but results from a number of forces performed by several sectors of society.

Thereby, demystifying the idea of centralized government, it is observed in the Vila Velha-ES administration the configuration of a governmental process, with the combination of practices and

knowledge that enable power maintenance. In the environmental policies perspective, the governmentality is exploited, which Malette (2011) and Freitas and Mozine (2015) define as environmentality, embodied in the incorporation of a broad environmental discourse, guided by the empty notion of "sustainable development", in order to reinforce modernizing accumulation practices.

In these terms, the conduction of environmental issues, seen in legislation approved in the period, demonstrates the combination of natural resources management allied to the involvement of actors of society linked to the local business community, reinforcing an economic rationality process (Agrawal, 2005; Mansano and Piga, 2016; Oels, 2005). Thereby, it is verified aspects of environmental governmentality in the Vila Velha-ES urban policy and, also, in this research interlocutors' discourses who, as stated, occupied an important role in the development of PDSVV and other municipality actions of urban sprawl and environmental management. In this logic, the concern with environment management is removed from the conception of urban planning, since:

*Entrepreneurs supported the elaboration of this plan and we had meetings with them. Supported in a, I mean, financial sense as well. They sponsored part of the consultancy that drafted the plan. The consultancy company was hired along with the Strategic Planning Department and this was paid by Assevila and, on a quarterly basis right, we had an agenda with him [in] the head office [for] strategic planning monitoring, that is, what were the projects established in our plan. (Interlocutor III, 2018)*

As shown, the feasibility of the development and preparation of the PSDVV, the PDM, and an environmental policy derived from them depended on the financial resources of the business sector. As pointed out by Interlocutor II, the business class "is in a hurry", not being subject to waiting for procedural issues which, in general, involve the public sector (Carlos, 2017; Pintaui, 2005).

The PDSVV, developed in partnership with Assevila, deserves to be highlighted in the Vila Velha-ES spatial organization according to the Interlocutor II because it is an unprecedented document in the conception of an urban public policy to accommodate the real estate market. The Plan also presents a detailed list of data on the municipality and figures as a long-term guideline, of categorical implementation by the following administrations, as the Interlocutor II also demonstrates. In this sense, its development is closely related to what Benach (2017) points out about the profitable use, by the authorities, of policies based on rates and statistics that, although important, should not be adopted as exclusive criteria due to their limiting character in environmental issues' verification.

In addition to that, in the PDSVV there is the proposal of turning Vila Velha-ES into a great industrial center, through the occupation and promotion of business areas in a territory already quite weakened by irregular occupation caused by the urban sprawl of the late twentieth century (Vila Velha, 2010; Sathler, 2017; Vainer, 2000). In this context, the document highlights the need to render the municipality more competitive for both local and international economies, due to its privileged geography and its potential,



aiming at catering to the external and internal markets, showing a strong metropolitan vocation for Vila Velha (Vila Velha, 2010).

Indicating the decline of the economic growth of the municipality and the need to insert Vila Velha-ES into the new global economic dynamics, the PDSVV clearly pleads that certain areas not yet explored by urban work are to be structured and promoted, as Carlos (2017) and Pintaudi (2005) point out. To this end, it lists projects which would be placed in regions of less economic relevance in the municipality, not mentioning anything about natural revers, ecosystem maintenance, or how to deal with the impacts of recurrent floods, a consequence of the disordered occupation and eviction of the population to areas of environmental risk and low urban qualification (Acserald, 2010; Rammê, 2010).

This new dynamic characterizes a difficulty in breaking with an anthropocentric and hierarchical view of the environment, as well as with a purely economic rationality of urban space as supported by Acserald (2010), Guattari (2001), and Leff (2006 and 2016). It should be noted the expansion and conduction of modifications in these areas' structure and territory take place to meet industrial projects, not keeping an initial relationship with a concern to meet, in terms of socio-environmental justice, the needs of these regions' inhabitants (Rammê, 2010 and 2012), diverging from an ecological concern in political terms, as pointed out by Leff (2006 and 2016), Bryant (2015), and Agrawal (2005).

In this perspective, in the PDSVV it is not seen any highlights for the recovery of local economies and territories maintenance, as instruments for the consolidation of

sustainability, which prioritize nature acknowledgment beyond the available resource, but also as a subject and parameter for reducing social inequalities. In that regard, the projects included in the Plan, among them the creation of a "superport", rethink the municipality under a developmental bias of natural resources management and economic handling of the environment (Leff, 2006). The emphasis on services related to the port activity is seen as a progress factor, meeting associated business logistics and corporatists' needs. However, there is little concern with the jilted population in the dockside areas, who serve as a cheap workforce but have little access to the urban network.

Thus, we see frustrated the premise that issues related to sustainability and environmental justice must rethink current values of standardized order to focus on a set of socio-environmental issues in public policies' conduction. According to Jatobá, Cidade, and Vargas (2009), confronting the ecological crisis and a consistent sustainability notion that can solve the problem is not possible with the persistence of meeting economic interests and maintaining existing classes' inequalities, which is verified in arguments developed by Acserald (2010), Leff (2006 and 2016), and Rammê (2012).

Thereby, the projects focus on 10 regions of Vila Velha-ES, bringing development and promoting its economy, on the path to sustainability, indicating that: "[...] regions, which were stratified on account of their vocation and economic potential, will benefit from large development projects implementation, all based on sustainability" (Vila Velha, 2010, p. 4). In these terms, the

municipal land occupation is pointed out as a problem in view of urban occupation. Also, it is not included in the legislation produced in the period any incisive change regarding transport and improvement of urban mobility, and the latter was restricted to aspects of drainage and paving order. In this sense:

The result of such constraints was a rather heterogeneous and complex territorial occupation, especially when analyzed from the urban mobility perspective. Currently, urban mobility and macro drainage are the two biggest obstacles to the development of the municipality, both resulting from lack of urban planning.

In this context, the PDSVV points to urban mobility as a factor preventing the city from further growth and becoming sustainable, but there is no effective concern with the improvement of urban mobility during the period legislation. About that, Interlocutor I, when answering positively to the question regarding the existence of interrelation between environmental policies, urban development policies, and works carried out in his administration period, pointed out the fact that, at the beginning of his management work, he noted the BRT – Bus Rapid Transit – mobility project was almost finished, with great viability on the part of the state government. The project, which did not come to fruition, envisaged the closure of canals and ditches, intended for sewage and rainwater systems, for the transport network construction, which would be in direct conflict with the drainage and sanitation policy.

Given the outlined perspective, it can be said the 2009-2012 administration presented a concern and focus on encouraging the economic development expansion, as means of opposing the previous administration, noting the challenge: "[...] *has always been to instigate discussion and to follow actions so that this development took place sustainably, respecting the environment and its protection and preservation*" (Interlocutor V, 2018). This had the aim to change the then current logic that Vila Velha-ES could not follow the economic development because it is a commuter town. The highlight pointed out by Interlocutor V that "*it was already known it could cause a great environmental impact*", demonstrates the preponderance of an economic rationality in the conduct of natural resources, which is sought to be validated or even justified with the display of an entire technical and bureaucratic apparatus (Freitas and Mozine, 2015; Malette, 2011; Lima, 2003).

Recalling Leff (2006 and 2016), the PDSVV analysis shows a strong economic component in which the Espírito Santo economy, as well as that of Vila Velha-ES, are aimed to be inserted, in a context of competitiveness with guidelines of a globalized economy and on an international scale. The perspective of an economic rationality is observed in the ten objectives presented by the PDSVV and pointed out by Interlocutors II and V. Such urban environmental project, according to Milanez and Souza (2015), distances itself from a more comprehensive view of nature and from a bias with the natural resources of Vila Velha in the molds

of an environmental rationality. Thus, the environmental management, in a municipality rich in natural coverage and natural reserves, does not observe the production of a policy beyond the interests included in the issues presented by Assevila (Sathler, 2017).

Thereby, it is verified the Neucimar Fraga administration was based on an economic perspective, aiming at removing Vila Velha-ES from the economic inertia indicated in the PDSVV, and where it is observed an extensive statistical elaboration on the situation in which the municipality was. Guided by a series of indices considered positive to promote the local development, urban environmental issues are focused on this economic bias, and natural resources represent a secondary concern, as seen in the Interlocutor V discourse (transcribed in this section) on the environmental impacts that could be generated.

## The strategic plan of Vila Velha-ES: 2013-2016

The administration of Mayor Rodney Miranda had as a guideline of its management the Strategic Plan of Vila Velha-PEVV of 2013-2016, a result of planning whose discussions were started from the end of the 2012 elections onwards. Similar to the PDSVV, this plan, although more concise, sought in Assevila the support of ideas legitimization with civil society and business groups. In its initial lines, the concern to provide the administration with a technical profile is stated, aiming at not only: "[...] facing the serious city government management problems, but also urban, developmental and social problems of the city" (Vila Velha, 2013, p. 5).

In this context, in addition to Assevila, Interlocutor III highlighted in his speech the influence of the New Life Vila Velha Movement (Movive) in the plan elaboration. This significantly contributed to the consolidation of the business sector influence as an important actor in the municipality development and, especially, in the Strategic Plan 2013-2016 guidelines' elaboration. Thus, as stated in the plan and the interview given by Interlocutor III, the municipal administration guidelines are grounded in twenty projects – inserted in four areas of activity– characterized as "Structuring Projects". These projects are categorized in view of their nature and sectors that should be focused on by the Rodney Miranda administration (Assevila, 2013; Interlocutor III, 2018). They represent the main challenges in the Strategic Orientation Map, as seen in Figure 1.

That way, each of the major areas of action of the management began to correspond to a set of associated municipal departments, whose function were to plan and act in the collective, in the form of committees, so that the challenges listed could be overcome through structuring projects execution and their 190 deliveries to society (Assevila, 2013). Figure 1 highlights in green the conduct of the Vila Velha-ES policy within the sustainable development premises formulated in seven structuring projects, listed as strategic challenges for the prevention and reduction of historical flooding, as well as to order and regulate land use and occupation. This way, promoting new businesses, in order to strengthen the existing ones, strengthen the local identity and, lastly: "Promote the protection, recovery, restoration, and rational use of natural resources" (Vila Velha, 2013, p. 63).

Figure 1 – Structuring projects of the Strategic Management Plan of Vila Velha 2013-2016



Source: Vila Velha (2013).

In addition, it is important to mention that, in the duration period of the Plan, the municipality issued 15 new laws of environmental character, mostly focused on the management of public and private works, other than ecological initiatives, such as the creation of an artificial reef program for marine reserves biodiversity conservation and recovery of depleted coastal areas of the Vila Velha municipality, which was not carried out after its implementation. In this context, being a territory composed of many natural reserves, having a large number of inhabitants, and resulting from an accelerated urban sprawl that led to poor services distribution and precarious historic spatial occupation, the Rodney Miranda administration sought a strategic view, which, according to Interlocutor III:

*We understood, at the time, what we did not really have, a culture of working in a planned way, right. What usually happens, not only in Vila Velha but in the majority of medium and small-sized municipalities, is that things are done pretty much on a short notice. A problem happens and you try to solve it. Our vision was that we could plan four years of administration, right, and think a little further ahead, leave a few actions designed for future administrations as well, regardless of continuity or not, this was done. So, we developed the strategic plan, in which were defined twenty, twenty structuring projects, and within these twenty projects we had several actions.*

Thus, the PEVV demonstrates the repeated concern to promote the municipality economy due to the growth of a population whose income levels do not keep up with this economic business growth.

In addition, it emphasizes the importance of preventive action works contained in the PEVV that: "[...] identify the priorities to be followed by the government team over the next few years, sharing with society the municipal administration strategy" (Vila Velha, 2013, p. 9). By this angle:

The economic growth of the municipality is carried out at the pace of metropolitan growth, but municipal public revenues do not show a performance capable of generating sufficient resources to sustain the high demands for investments. (Ibid., p. 49)

In this context, it is important to highlight in the PEVV a change of policy regarding the treatment of the poorer population of the municipality. This occurred, to a large extent, due to heavy rains at the end of 2013, which kept the city flooded for weeks and were decisive to centralize the macro and micro drainage works in less favored regions of the city, as a factor of environmental management (Soares, Meneghetti and Da-Silva-Rosa, 2019). There is also emphasis on the need for pumping stations' construction to solve the problematic relationship of the municipality with rainwater.

However, it should be noted these projects, although included in the PEVV 2013-2016, due to the events that took place in December 2013, had their priority intensified (Interlocutor III, 2018). Slope containment works and projects in the municipality were also objects of attention, along with the replacement of the Marine Canal gates. There were also actions regarding visual pollution, with the removal of signs and legally authorized notices, as well as the removal of abandoned

vehicles on the streets of Vila Velha-ES, which, according to the report, were more than eighty. In this context, there is no articulation between the policies that could represent an effective relation to the promotion of environmental justice (Herculano, 2002), since the drainage process, carried out in an emergency situation, sought only a technical renewal of the regions through civil works and not a proper treatment for the population – such as relocation – or ecological treatment – such as recovery and conservation.

In the items in red, in turn, are the structuring projects related to services to the city – a total of four. Its highlighted strategic challenges are to "Revitalize the road system and improve urban mobility" and "Improve public cleanliness, lighting, and safety" (Vila Velha, 2013, p. 67). The items in orange are the ones focused on the social development intended by the municipality, with seven being identified strategic challenges and seven being intended structuring projects.

Finally, in Figure 1, indicated by the color blue are represented the structuring projects related to the management improvement, pointed out as the basis "[...] to achieve all other challenges identified; it consists on the creation of a favorable environment within the municipal government team, aiming at gaining efficiency and effectiveness in the regulation and provision of public services" (Vila Velha, 2018, p. 50). The strategic challenges pointed out are the search for improvement of people management, promotion of improvements in the physical and organizational structure and processes, along with citizen service. We also highlight the balance of public accounts, new

financial resources, and the improvement in technologies' use to provide better public service (Vila Velha, 2013).

Thus, noted as challenges, are the promotion of policies aimed at overcoming poverty with the creation of opportunities, attention to childhood interests, improvement in access to education and its quality, health, and social assistance services, further composing the list: "[...] mechanisms of drug use prevention and treatment" and the creation of "spaces and integrated activities that contribute to an active and healthy life" (ibid., p. 71).

In this sense, it is possible to affirm the urban space of the municipality continued suffering from the same problems arising from environmental degradation of urban centers in general, in which the poor land distribution and occupation and the large pollutant dispatch resulting from the entire industrial process and modern life, reveal the geography noted by Harvey (2014), which characterizes contemporary cities. The emphasis of a discourse on sustainability, but structured in the molds of an ecological modernization (Sachs, 2009), of a purely developmental nature, reinforces the demonstration of understanding nature in a preservationist mentality with the purpose of available resources' reservation, therefore anthropocentric, as criticized by Leff (2006) and Lima (2003).

In this perspective, the report produced by the Vila Velha City Government, carried out in 2016, at the end of the Rodney Miranda administration, presents the importance of drainage and basic sanitation for the

municipality, from which the municipality neighborhoods had their galleries replaced, along with the drainage of the Costa Canal and Congo Canal. These drainages amounted to twenty kilometers of macro drainage, in which a series of works aimed at sanitation improvements was elaborated, such as, the cleaning of several canals and the Costa Canal works, which increased its width and depth with the removal of more than two tons of rocks (Interlocutor III, 2018; Interlocutor IV, 2018; Vila Velha, 2016).

Therefore, it can be inferred, based on the supposed sustainable development criteria set out in the PEVV, that the structuring projects do not demonstrate an ecocentric perspective (Leff, 2016) related to the characteristics of environmental justice (Rammê, 2010; Herculano, 2002), where it is verified renewal projects of precarious urban structures of the municipality – canals drainage and widening and regulation of urban land use and occupation – as well as the creation of a structure that would stimulate the municipality touristic "vocation". The highlight in the PEVV of this prioritization of urban issues historically critical for the municipality draws attention since a large part of the municipality area is composed of flatlands and wetlands and is below the sea level (Soares, Meneghetti and Da-Silva-Rosa, 2019).

## Final considerations

This article sought to articulate connections between the Management Plans conceived by the Vila Velha-ES municipal administrations between the years 2009 and 2016 and the city urban sprawl process and environmental

management initiatives. Throughout the narrative and argumentation presented, we sought to infer aspects of the development of an environmentality in the policy production process, from the demonstration that the official discourse contained in the documents went through a "greening" of traditional economic issues, with no major impacts on an ecological practice (Marzoca, 2014). In addition, the initiatives of technical management of the environment are highlighted, in disagreement with the social and ecocentric aspects, which represents a distancing factor from the use of an ecological rationality and concern with the urban political environmental justice.

Thereby, it is observed the plans presented in the attempt of an urban environmental policy configuration for Vila Velha-ES include guidelines for territorial organization of the municipality, seeking mitigation of externalities' inequality related to the environmental degradation process resulting from disordered urban sprawl. As seen from Benach (2017), the character adopted by environmental policies, populated by indicators and statistical data usually postulated by public actors, only represents the verification of an economic and technical quantification limiting the environmental discussion, an understanding endorsed by Agrawal (2005), Freitas and Mazine (2015), and Malette (2011).

In this respect, the plans have different guidelines in their content. In the Fraga (2009-2012) administration, there is no central concern with the existing infrastructures, but, rather, with the perspective of their expansion for the occupation of little-explored areas, with the development of projects contained in its

ten objectives. As for the Miranda (2013-2016) administration, we can see pointed out in it, in the structuring projects configuration, the need for improvement of existing structures, as well as the necessary regulation of the land issue.

In this sense, it is reinforced the Fraga administration presented a broad focus in urban sprawl, made possible by means of ten objectives, of developmental aspect, and with the installation of port works, creation of road structures, and real estate services and compounds in the municipality territory, aiming at eradicating the "commuter town" legacy that characterizes Vila Velha-ES and promoting the municipal economy.

In the Miranda administration, in turn, although initiatives with an expansive developmental aspect are not verified, as in the previous administration, it is possible to see a concern with the modernizing consolidation process of urban sprawl carried out up to then (Vila Velha, 2013).

As seen, on the one hand, the first administration has in the PDSVV a consolidation of data and statistics on the municipality, being the object of repeated mention, by the interlocutors linked to that administration, as something that represents a real milestone for the Vila Velha-ES political planning. Regarding this aspect, one has to agree with the perspective of Sathler (2017) that, due to the legislative vacuum left by the PDM under discussion, the Management Plan of the Neucimar Fraga administration consisted of the main document on the conduct of municipal issues. The Rodney Miranda administration PDEE, on the other hand, although not presented in the form of an extensive document, full of data and statistical information, it presents a structuring aspect,

reinforces, and consolidates the relationship between government and business groups – represented by Assevila and Movive –, treating the municipal administration on a clearly capitalist aspect and rationality, in the sense given by Leff (2006).

The ecogovernmental aspect (Malette, 2011; Freitas and Mozine, 2015) becomes even clearer in the interlocutors' speeches and appears incisively in the interviews' analysis as the dynamic adopted in the administrations is highlighted, in order to optimize public politics formulation, leading the urban environmental aspect to create or technically improve urban structures and equipment. In both cases, the Managements Plans printed the ideas from the private initiative in policy formulation, which is demonstrated by the intense legislative production focused on works and territorial expansion of the real estate occupation, aiming at solving the vacuum caused by the absence of a current PDM.

Thus, it is important to highlight that such plans have their conceptions focused on a discourse of "sustainable development", influenced by the incorporation, into public policies, of the millennium objectives themes placed in the context of the United Nations and its conferences on the environment. This initiative, however, as seen from the documents' analysis and in the urban environmental policy execution, has the sole purpose of bringing an "environmental" guise without in fact representing an ecological concern and rationality to the urban process of Vila Velha-ES.

Finally, in this perspective of analysis of the plans, it can be verified an anthropocentric and hierarchical bias of the environment, the latter being driven by an economic and



structuring rationality of the city, meeting the rational criteria of the city model developed by the productive system. Environmental rationality in the molds advocated by Leff (2006 and 2016) is not present in the emphasis

developed in the administrations, not being verified characters of an intergenerational concern in the molds of environmental justice or even alterity with the natural elements, as advocated by Fraser (2007) and Rammê (2012).

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## Notes

- (1) The research on legislation produced in the period of 2009-2016 in the Vila Velha-ES municipality took place in 2017 and 2018, through the official repository made available digitally by the municipal Legislative Chamber <<https://www.vilavelha.es.gov.br/legislacao/consulta.aspx>>, by using the terms: environmental, environment, construction works, and urban, resulting in the identification of 27 laws produced between 2009 and 2012 and 15 laws produced between 2013 and 2016. Cf. Lemke, Fuchs and Mozine (2017).
- (2) A term for what is relative to the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo or what/who is its natural or inhabitant.

- (3) All direct quotations translated by Laura Reginin, unless otherwise noted.
- (4) The quotes of excerpts transcribed from interviews with the interlocutors were kept as they are in the original, preserving the speeches' colloquialism. This occurs in all direct quotations included in this article identified in their references as "Interlocutor...".

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## Entrevistas

- INTERLOCUTOR I. Entrevista concedida a Marcio Valério Effgen, em Vitória, no dia 25 de janeiro de 2018.
- INTERLOCUTOR II. Entrevista concedida a Marcio Valério Effgen, em Vitória, no dia 6 de fevereiro de 2018.
- INTERLOCUTOR III. Entrevista concedida a Marcio Valério Effgen, em Vitória, no dia 8 de fevereiro de 2018.
- INTERLOCUTOR IV. Entrevista concedida a Marcio Valério Effgen, em Cariacica, no dia 9 de fevereiro de 2018.
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