



# The Legacy – Part I

VMB-EGS · Van Merksteijn-Bern Economic Governance System

Layered governance architecture for large-scale scalability – an operational description for anyone who may eventually implement, test, or modify it.

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CONCEPT DOCUMENT – FREELY SHAREABLE

# What This Document Is

This is neither a scholarly treatise, nor a political pamphlet, nor a consulting report. It is a **concept document** intended as an operational description of a governance system – useful for those who may one day implement, test, or change it.

The occasion is personal in nature. A few years ago, Jacobus van Merksteijn wrote *Nova Democratia*, a fully developed proposal for democratic renewal. The further it was developed, the heavier it became – a session structure that reproduced the paralysis it sought to heal. What appears here is what came after: a radically simpler and more operationally robust system, born of an honest self-critique of the earlier work.

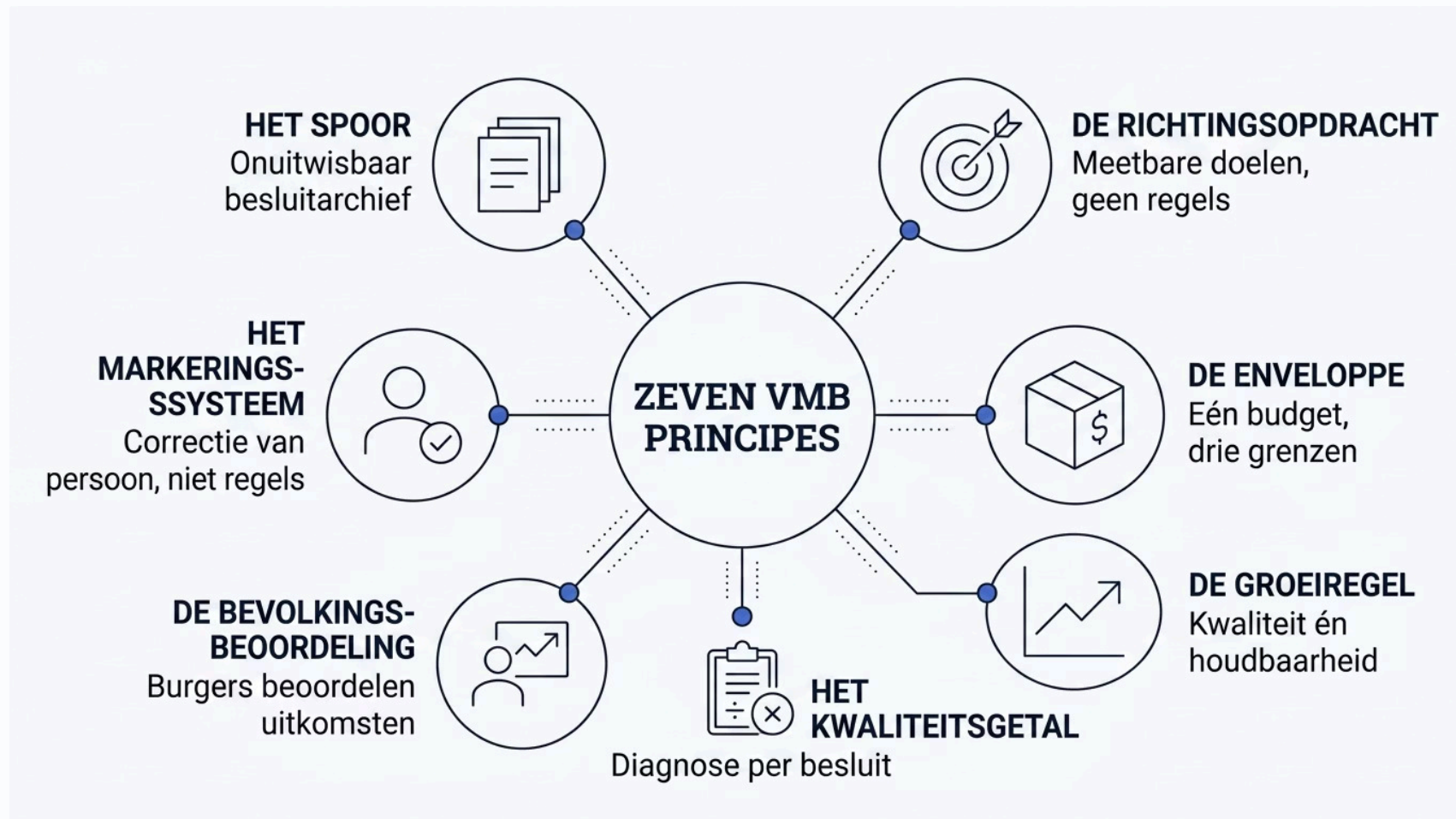
The document is being left behind because the author will not be the one to implement it. His role is that of thinker and documentarian – to ensure the idea is complete, clear, and operationally ready for those who need it, whenever that may be. Crisis forces change. If Europe enters a deeper crisis, people will look for a usable alternative. **This document is meant to be picked up then, without everything needing to be thought through from scratch.**

## Who is this document for?

- **The entrepreneur** who wants something fundamentally different in their own organization from matrix structures and KPI stacks.
- **The city council member or mayor** who is ready to let a neighborhood or an area experiment.
- **The young thinker** who will face the same problems in twenty years as we do today – but then with a Europe that is in even worse shape.
- **The civil servant** who works within the existing system but sees that the existing system does not hold.

# The Shared Core

Both models – VMB-EGS for large-scale implementation and VMB-DGM (The Tabletop Model) for human-scale implementation – share a coherent foundation. It is precisely this foundation that distinguishes them from existing governance systems. The models are simply two expressions of it for different scales.



Each of these seven elements strengthens the others. No single element works on its own – together they form a closed system of steering, evaluation, and correction.

# 1 – The Track

**Everything that is decided lands on the track:** a public, append-only, undeletable decision archive. What, when, by whom, with what motivation. Nothing happens invisibly. Nothing is deleted afterward. Nothing is rolled back to rewrite history.

## What the track is

The track is the shared reality on which the system runs. Without the track, none of the other elements works, because none of the other elements can respond to patterns that are not visible. That sounds simple – and technically it is. Culturally, it is **radical**.

Most organizations have a huge interest in keeping decisions opaque – not to deceive, but because transparency confronts them with mistakes for which they have no safe framework.

## The visibility paradox

The track makes mistakes visible. The rest of the system ensures that **visibility does not become punishment**. That is the core: transparency without psychological safety leads to hiding. Transparency with a system that enables diagnosis instead of blame leads to learning.

- ① The track is the technical backbone of the entire system. All other elements – direction mandate, envelope, growth rule, quality numbers – only become meaningful when they appear visibly on the track.

# Two & Three – Directional Mandate & Envelope

## The Directional Mandate

Each block receives a directional mandate at the start of the period. No budget. No rulebook. No sixty-page vision document.

A directional mandate consists of **two to four measurable goals** for the period: a starting value, a target value, a deadline. Not vague (“we want a pleasant neighborhood”), but concrete (“quality-of-life score from 6.8 to 7.2; two traffic nodes resolved; number of lonely people over 70 reduced by -15%”).

The direction is set by the higher block. The *how* is left to the lower block. Whoever does both slips into micromanagement. Whoever does neither slips into chaos.

## The Envelope

Every directional mandate comes with **an envelope**: an amount for the entire period, allocated once, not broken into a hundred line items. What the block does with it is its own business.

Each envelope comes with exactly **three limits**, no more:

- **Maximum per individual decision.** Above this amount, approval from the table is required.
- **Maximum per category.** Prevents the entire envelope from flowing into a single type of expense.
- **Reserve minimum balance.** A percentage that must remain at the end for the unexpected.

Three numbers. The rest is open.

- ☑ **What is new here:** Unspent money does not automatically flow back up. The next envelope is not determined by what you spent last year, but by what you **achieved**. Whoever reaches the direction with less money gets more freedom, not less. The system rewards efficiency instead of consumption – a direct antidote to the December spending syndrome.

# Four – The Growth Rule


This is the overarching test that holds everything together. Every direction mandate is measured at the end of the period against two things **simultaneously**.

## Quality of the Result

What did this block actually deliver, measured against the target? Not *output* (how many meetings, how many reports), but *outcome* – has the district actually become more livable, has the problem truly been solved?

## Economic Viability

Could this be sustained? Are we exhausting people, materials, or funds? Is what we are doing economically consistent – does it consume no more than it produces in the broadest sense?

 **The creeping poison:** High quality without economic viability is not sustainable – you end up destroyed by your own goals. The scenario in which a block achieves its goals by burning out its people looks great on paper. Conventional systems only recognize this when the failures begin. The growth rule makes it visible early as an alarm, before the damage occurs.

## Nine possible outcomes

	<b>Economically sound</b>	<b>Economically tight</b>	<b>Economically unsustainable</b>
<b>Quality achieved</b>	Growth possible – expand, replicate	Hold steady, eliminate the cause	 Alarm – success becomes exhaustion
<b>Quality partly achieved</b>	Continue, improve	Diagnosis: where is the mismatch?	Stop – re-examine the domain
<b>Quality not achieved</b>	Diagnosis: why is it not working?	Deepest alarm	 Immediate dissolution

# Five & Six – Quality Metric & Population Rating

Control is unavoidable in every organization. The question is not *whether*, but *how*. Conventional control is heavy-handed: rules, audits, committees, reports. The VMB approach is light: **two numbers per decision, from two perspectives**.



## The Quality Metric (specialist)

The overarching block gives two numbers for each evaluated decision: a **problem metric** (was this a problem that deserved attention, at the right time?) and a **solution metric** (did the chosen solution address the problem effectively and sustainably?).

Not every decision is evaluated – a sample per period, drawn at random. All quality metrics appear on the trail. Patterns among the evaluators become visible. Finally, a randomly selected citizens' committee evaluates the top evaluators – that is where the regression ends.



## The Population Rating (democratic)

For each decision on the trail, the population gives two numbers: **problem perception** (did I think this was a problem that deserved attention?) and **solution satisfaction** (do I think the decision is a practical solution?).

Questions must be neutrally phrased, limited in scope, accompanied by verified context, and the questioner must be named on the trail. No anonymous surveys.

**i** **Together, three numbers per decision are diagnostic:** high quality metric but low population value? → communication failure or paternalism. Population satisfied, but the specialist is not? → populism or unexpected insight. All three low? → immediate alarm, revision needed.

# Seven – The Marking System

Errors are cheap. Prevention is expensive. An organization that tries to prevent every error in advance through classification, thresholds, and controls pays more in bureaucracy than the errors themselves cost. **The reversal: the system does not correct the rules, but the person.**

## The three parameters

Parameter	Proposal	Effect
N – Threshold	3 markings	One mistake is bad luck. Two are coincidence. Three are a pattern.
T – Counting period	12 months, rolling	Older markings expire on their own. Those who get back on track regain trust.
P – Recovery	6 months clean	Authority automatically restored without a committee.

At N markings within T, one of two outcomes occurs, as determined by the group itself:

- **Domain downgrade.** The person may continue making proposals, but loses sole authority – decisions will henceforth go through the table.
- **Domain removal.** In cases of severe or repeated patterns, the person is removed from the domain.

## Philosophy: diagnosis, not punishment

No punishment. No shame. It is a diagnosis: this person, in this domain, in this period – it does not fit. They may be better suited to another domain. They may be better suited to a supportive rather than a decision-making role.

The system recalibrates who may do what, without expanding the rules. It is the opposite of the conventional reflex response: after one mistake, write new rules for *everyone* because *one person* failed.

- The marking system prevents rule inflation – the most insidious problem in any adult organization. Rules are for everyone; markings are for those who need them.

# VMB-EGS – Architecture in Ten Layers

VMB-EGS is neither an IT product nor a legal text, but a **design skeleton for decision systems at scale** – usable for governments, large institutions, supply chains, and any situation in which people do not know each other personally and do not trust each other personally. The architecture separates structure from content: the same ten layers work for any kind of decision.

Layer	Name	Function	Data Object
L0	Presentation	Portals, API gateway. The only contact point with the outside world.	Incoming request
L1	Input	Adapter + identity binding. What is it, and who is sending it?	InputEvent
L2	Validation	Syntax, semantics, duplicates. Hard contract: no processing without a pass.	ValidatedInput
L3	Actors & Authorization	Is this actor allowed to make this decision? <b>Lottery selection for controllers.</b>	AuthorizedContext
L4	Decision & Orchestration	<b>Three-vote gate.</b> This is where the decision is actually made.	DecisionOutcome
L5	Implementation	Actuator gateway, notification. The decision is executed.	ActuationCommand
L6	Execution Control	Quality, compliance, audit. Afterwards: was it executable?	ComplianceFinding
L7	Data Layer (the trace)	<b>Append-only audit log, publicly readable.</b> The trace of everything.	AuditRecord
L8	Misuse Detection	Anomaly, fraud. Can override L3 and L4 immediately.	RiskAssessment
L9	Governance & Standardization	Policy, standards registry. Distributes rules to L2, L4, L6, and L8.	PolicyDocument

No decision can skip a layer without this being visible in the trace. Not all layers have to be active for every decision – but the absence of a layer is always explicit and recorded.

# The three revolutionary additions

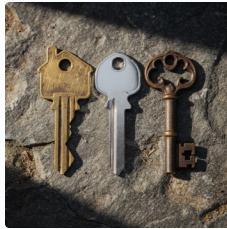
The architecture described above is, in a sense, conventional – similar setups exist in modern governance frameworks. **Three precise additions make the system fundamentally different from anything that came before it.**



## Addition 1 – Sortition Engine in L3

For every decision, the system randomly selects **three controllers** from a fixed pool. Anonymous to one another, not reappointed for the same case, and with no possibility of building relationships with the controlled entity.

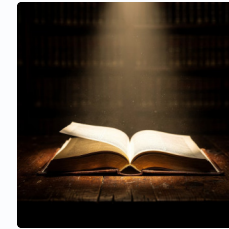
This replaces fixed audit committees, fixed supervisory authorities, and all forms of trust relationships between controller and controlled. Corruption becomes structurally impossible because there is no one to conspire with. The controlled entity does not know who is watching; the controller does not know for whom it is acting.



## Addition 2 – Three-voice gate in L4

No execution takes place until three independent entities – the **rule engine**, a **responsible human**, and the **lot-selected panel** from Addition 1 – have simultaneously approved within a time window T.

Not sequentially (first sign, then review), but simultaneously. One missing voice = the decision expires, no repeat. This replaces hierarchical sign-off rights, escalation paths, fiat decisions, and all forms of after-the-fact backing.



## Addition 3 – Public trail in L7

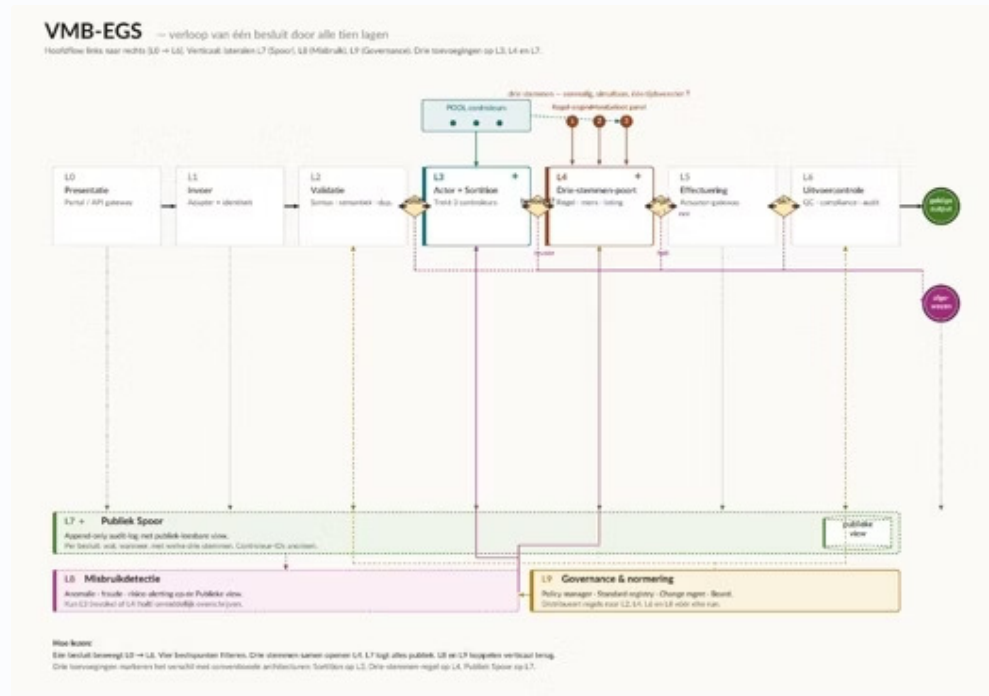
The append-only audit log of L7 receives a **publicly readable view**: who did what, with which three voices, and with what justification. Controller IDs are anonymous, but the decisions are fully traceable.

This replaces external auditors, parliamentary inquiries, whistleblower laws, and internal oversight departments – all of which are forms of after-the-fact control that emerge from a transparent system.

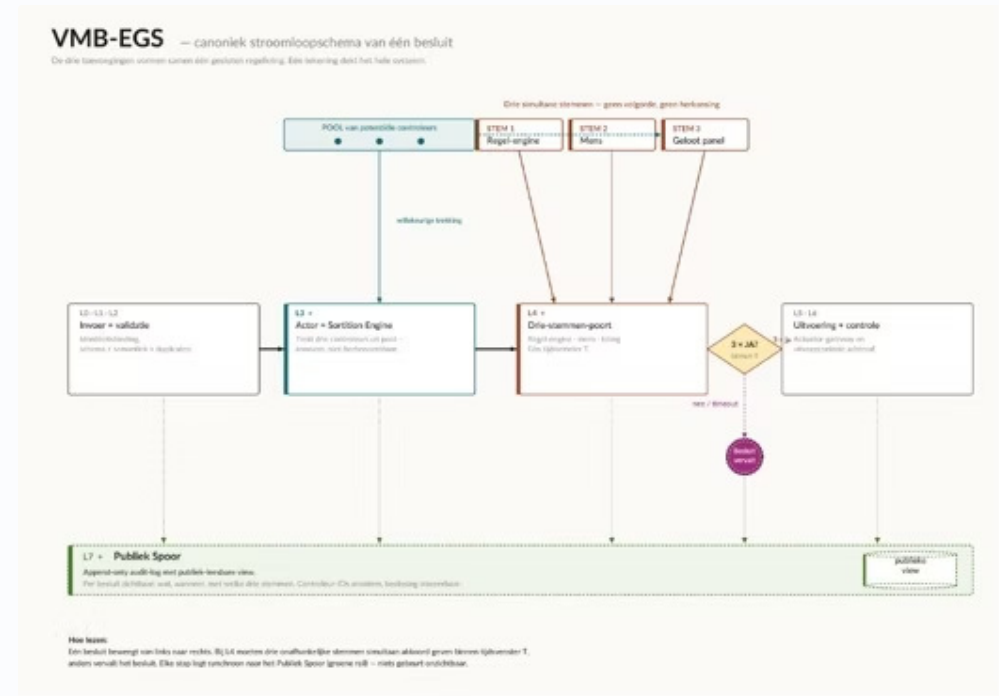
*Control is structurally anonymous and simultaneous. Two properties that have never before been implemented together at this scale.*

# The architecture visually

The following two diagrams show the path of a single decision through all ten levels, with the three revolutionary additions at L3, L4, and L7 marked.



**Figure 1 – Main PFD of VMB-EGS.** Path of a single decision through all ten levels, with the three revolutionary additions at L3 (Sortition Engine), L4 (Three-Vote Gate), and L7 (Public Trace).



**Figure 2 – Canonical flowchart of a single decision.** The three additions together form a closed feedback loop that structurally excludes manipulation and backdoor support.

# VMB-EGS in Practice – Six Scenarios

Architecture on paper is one thing. How the system responds to concrete situations is something else. The six scenarios below show how VMB-EGS behaves differently from conventional governance systems – especially in cases that existing systems cannot handle.

- 1 Official knows the reviewer**  
In conventional audits, this is a conflict of interest handled with disclosure forms and eligibility checks. With VMB-EGS, the problem does not arise: reviewers are anonymous to the person being reviewed and to one another. No recusal required.
- 2 Top manager wants an exception**  
In conventional systems, this can be done with a phone call behind closed doors. With VMB-EGS, there is no channel for that: every action goes through L0/L1. It is possible to request an exception – but it appears on the trace immediately. The request itself is visible.
- 3 Pool becomes too small**  
For a small organization, the system adapts. With fewer than six potential reviewers, the draw is omitted and the decision is automatically treated as a VMB-DGM trace 2 – all voting rights holders together at one table. Scale determines the mechanism.
- 4 Reviewer refuses to decide**  
A missing vote means the decision fails. The applicant can resubmit, and the system draws a new lot. Repeated timeouts from the same reviewer appear on the trace and become visible as a pattern.
- 5 L9 changes the rule mid-process**  
The policy version timestamp is recorded at L2. A decision that is already in motion at the time of the change is handled under the old rules. This prevents retroactive justification and backdoor policy changes.
- 6 L8 suspects collusion in the drawn panel**  
The abuse detection also analyzes voting patterns in the pool. Statistically unlikely clusters – three reviewers repeatedly appearing together in the same category – trigger a temporary exclusion and review. The pattern is investigated, not the person accused.

| *The difference between a good governance system and a bad one is not how it works with ideal people – any system can do that – but how it works with people who have bad intentions.*

# Open Questions for the Implementation

VMB-EGS is a conceptual architecture. Three operational details must be defined for each implementation before the system can run in production. They have been left open deliberately – not out of inability, but because the appropriate values depend on the respective context.

## Specification of the Sortition Engine

Pool size, draw frequency, and the method for preventing manipulation of the draw itself. Verifiable randomness is technically solvable – the political question is: Who manages the seed, and how is that made visible on the trace?

## Time Window T

How long do the controllers have to vote? What happens in the event of a tie (two in favor, one against)? What about a timeout (one or more controllers do not respond within T)? The choice of T determines the balance between speed and care.

## Anonymity vs. Traceability

The controller must remain anonymous, but their vote must be irrefutable. Cryptographic techniques such as commitment schemes or zero-knowledge proofs make this possible – but require decisions about which party manages the cryptographic keys and under what conditions they may be opened.

❏ **Status:** Conceptual architecture. Not tested at scale. Suitable as a reference framework for organizations that want to rethink their governance fundamentally. The document may be freely shared and freely reused – that is exactly the intention.

*What I leave behind is not an army. It is a direction. For all who wish to take up that direction, the system is ready.*

– Jacobus van Merksteijn, Malta, June 2026