THINK TANK

Working Document No. 21. Process of deliberation on new political culture

CENTRAL QUESTIONS OF THE FOCUS GROUP TO ADVANCE THE CONCEPTUAL BASIS OF THE SHARED EXPERIENCES

(22 June 2022)

Introduction

At the beginning of the current phase of the deliberation, in September 2022, it was decided to focus on two projects on which the action linked to the group's deliberations would concentrate. One of these projects was related to the internal transformation of the Provincial Government through an enhancement of the collaboration between a number of departments which, until the start of the process, had worked in parallel on issues on which they were interdependent. The second project is a process involving mapping collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa. It has focused mainly on making up a list of experiences with collaborative governance promoted by municipal authorities and regional development agencies and understanding them. As a third project, it was decided that the deliberation group would be transformed based on the lessons learned about collaborative governance and the new political culture in these projects.

After a phase of reflection closely linked to these projects, the group has now decided to embark on a phase of more conceptual reflection based on these experiences — in other words, to move to a higher level of abstraction in its deliberations. To facilitate this process, on 22 June 2022 the group worked to define 5 questions that are relevant to the group at this time. The aim was to list these questions in this working document so that they can be shared with Quim Brugué, who has expressed his willingness to accompany the group in its reflections over two sessions, starting in September 2022.

The rest of the working document sets out the results of this session, in which one central question (which to some extent joins up the rest) and five other specific questions were posed.

The central question in the deliberation process

The aim of the deliberation group is to co-generate knowledge that will help transform the ecosystem of the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa's policies in the field of collaborative governance and transformation of the political culture. The following question is the one that generated the most consensus as a synthesis of the challenges encountered on the road to this objective:

Through elections, society gives power/responsibility to public institutions. What conditions need to be met to share this power/responsibility without losing political legitimacy?

The following five sections share 5 lessons that the group has learned from its practice, and which can now help in developing a more abstract/conceptual reflection that will help Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Tank explore this question in greater depth. Each of these lessons is, in turn, accompanied by a series of questions.

Concerning the different models of governance that have emerged in the deliberation process

At the June session, one of the lessons learned from the think tank's practise was explained in the form of a metaphor. It reflected the different understandings of collaborative governance that have emerged throughout the deliberation process. In this metaphor, decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership are seen as a pie that can be divided up in different ways. Using this metaphor, it was argued that collaborative governance has been interpreted in at least three ways in Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank.

a) Governance focused on the decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership of the government (in this case, the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa)

These are deliberative processes that the government opens up to participation by other stakeholders in the ecosystem, but based always on the government's decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership. The main role of the people invited to participate in the processes is to contribute knowledge. Through such knowledge, participants can influence government decisions. In the metaphor, the government shares its decision-making capacity, strategic resources and leadership, i.e., its pie, with the people it invites to participate.

b) Governance centred on the decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership of all stakeholders involved

These are processes in which all participants, including the government, contribute not only knowledge, but also decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership on problems that affect everyone. Throughout the process, the various stakeholders can influence each other's decisions. Following the pie metaphor, the territorial actors involved in collaborative governance participate by bringing their own pie with them to share out.

Figure 1. Pies as a metaphor for governance

Reflection based on the last session: three models (at least) for collaborative governance

The Provincial Government's activity is at the centre (its decision-making capacity, resources, strategy, leadership)

The members of the ecosystem (citizens, experts) contribute knowledge to government decision-making spaces. Through deliberation and action, they influence government activity.

The activities of the territorial actors (including the Provincial Council) are placed at the centre (each stakeholder's decision-making capacity, resources, strategy, leadership)

Collaborative governance among territorial stakeholders

The territory (viewed as a collective subject) is placed at the centre (with its collective decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership.

Territorial **collaborative governance**

c) Governance focused on the territory's decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership

This is a framework proposed by one of the participants in the think tank, who took their inspiration from some of the Etorkizuna Eraikiz projects. It requires that the province be seen as a collective subject conceived as something more than a simple sum of territorial actors. In this case, it is not only mutual decisions that are influenced; a collective decision-making space is generated, in which there are resources, strategies and leaderships that belong to the territory (not to the government).

Using the pie metaphor, there are no longer several pies, but one. But it is no longer the government's pie, but the province's, to which each territorial actor has contributed a different ingredient.

In order to pose a question about this framework, the participants proposed reflecting on these three situations as part of a process in which it is possible to move sequentially from one stage to the next. They shared their interpretation that the think tank is currently moving from the first situation to the second.

They set the following questions for Quim Brugué: What are the main indicators that can show that we have collaborative governance? What would be a good starting point for the third phase and how can a process be set underway to build the territory as a collective subject?

Concerning the centrality of government/territory in collaborative governance

As a complement to the previous presentation, a conceptual framework was shared at the session that had been built on the practice of the think tank and presented at a congress on collaborative governance.

Figure 2. Emerging Modes of Collaborative Governance in Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank

		Gobernanza colaborativa basada en	
	Características	La capacidad de acción del gobierno	La capacidad de acción del territorio
Propiedad de los problemas y las soluciones y naturaleza correspondiente de la invitación a participar	¿De quién es el problema?	El foco se pone en problemas de las políticas y se ve al gobierno como el dueño de este problema	El foco se pone en problemas del territorio y se ve a múltiples actores como dueños del problema
	¿De quién debe ser la solución?	Se considera que el gobierno tiene la solución (a través de programas o iniciativas del gobierno)	Cada actor territorial tiene su parte de la solución
	Naturaleza de la invitación por parte del gobierno	Las personas participantes son invitadas por el gobierno como individuos con conocimiento valioso para la mejora de las políticas	El gobierno invita a una serie de organizaciones que son autónomas pero interdependientes como co-responsables de los problemas del territorio
Dinámicas de formación de estrategia y capacidades	Formación de la estrategia	Aprendizaje, combinado con la planificación	Aprendizaje y planificación, complementados por la negociación
	Capacidades	Foco en las capacidades individuales de los decisores del gobierno	Foco en capacidades colectivas del territorio

Source: Arrona, Barandiaran, Larrea (2022).

The reflection of the group discussing this framework was that, in practice, the think tank model is hybrid (it includes processes based on the capacity for action of the government and the territory), and that, in this case, hybridisation of this kind is desirable.

Nonetheless, in order to encourage transformation, they posed the following question: How can we combine dynamics that focus on the institution with those that have a territorial perspective? And in this regard, how can the spaces for deliberation be multiplied? What possibilities are there in this regard in the digital sphere?

Concerning the practical dilemmas that have arisen in the Think Tank's code of good governance

During 2022, following concerns generated in one of the deliberative processes, Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank developed a code of good governance that has been opened up to discussion in each deliberative process (see Appendix I).

The code of good governance was proposed because in the deliberation group on the futures of welfare states, some participants were concerned that government decisions explicitly based on the group's deliberations might in some way be considered to be the responsibility of the group rather than the government. This raised concerns, for example, regarding the use that might be made of this type of message at election time. In response, the code establishes the exclusive responsibility of the participants (including those representing the Provincial Government) in relation to the decisions they make after deliberation. However, it also suggests that if, in the future, the deliberation groups were to evolve in this direction, it would be possible to accommodate processes of co-responsibility.

After the initial drafting of the code by the management team, with representatives from all the deliberation groups, the code was debated by all the groups. The participants in the deliberation groups on the futures of welfare states and new political culture answered a

questionnaire in which they were asked to validate (or not) each section of the code. The results were similar in the two groups. The two items on which there was least consensus were: the exclusive responsibility of the participants (including the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa) for their own actions; and the non-binding nature of the deliberations.

At the session on 22 June, the director of the Think Tank shared some thoughts on these results:

'This debate generates confusion. The central theme is "Who makes the decisions?" That is the key. The group in which concern was raised about this issue has its own specific interpretation of collaborative governance. The participants go to the group, participate, give their opinions and debate. But they clearly know that the decision is not up to them. In this model, the decision is made by the Provincial Government. The decision-making capacity is not shared. In my opinion, that is a long way from collaborative governance. In my opinion, collaborative governance must involve sharing power. Sovereignty must be distributed. It's not just about honest listening. But sharing sovereignty or power carries with it a responsibility. There must be a shared responsibility. We are often said to have rights, but in my opinion, being a citizen comes with responsibilities as well as rights. So collaborative governance implies distributing power, accepting rights and responsibilities. We are a long way from that. But I think that is the direction in which we should be headed.

We need to promote the deconstruction of classical power. This is what collaborative governance should entail. Otherwise, we would be talking about something else. This has great implications and, for power sharing to take place, we need a new political culture. Often, there is no will for this, but we should be clear about what it entails. It is often equated with citizen participation processes, but it's not the same thing. It means configuring a new space of sovereignty'

After discussing these problems, derived from practice and reflected in the code of good governance, it was decided to pose the following questions for Quim Brugué: What forms of shared responsibility are there? What experiences are there in this regard? What can we do about people who are not willing to engage in shared responsibility?

Concerning the criteria for identifying collaborative governance in Etorkizuna Eraikiz

The definition of collaborative governance used by this group for its own work was as follows: Collaborative governance is a specific response, proposed by a specific area of policy (government) and it is fundamentally based on establishing new forms of communication and collaboration between governments and civil society, both within and between organisations, to strengthen collaboration between institutions and society.

The criteria linked to this definition are:

1. Governments must show themselves more willing to cooperate and interact with society than to act on their own
2. Governing is, above all, an open dynamic of collaboration and learning so that decisions are taken in better conditions.

3. Governments create spaces for listening, reflection and sometimes —but not necessarily— decision-making. These spaces are not directed through a hierarchy; instead, horizontal relationships are established.
4. The priorities and applications of the public agenda and, therefore, of public policies, are established through exchange and collaboration between the government and the network of agents.
5. They create specific structures, first to promote the stability of the open and collaborative governance process, and then to guarantee it.
6. Preference is given to diversifying those involved
7. We work in action, learning from it
8. It is aligned with the foundations of the new political culture
9. It includes mutual evaluation in its ways of working
10. The processes are transparent
11. It is defined from a position of complexity and from there it develops the systemic approach
12. There is agreement in advance as to how decision-making will be carried out

These criteria have subsequently been reworked by ArantzazuLab in its process of mapping experiences of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa and the recently created Collaborative Governance Laboratory of Etorkizuna Eraikiz has taken ArantzazuLab's work as a reference point. Through this process, a new definition of collaborative governance has been incorporated, which operates alongside the previous definition: Collaborative governance is institutionalised collaboration between public institutions, social agents and citizens to empower and streamline the public policy ecosystem; This must be done by strengthening the social capital between institutions and citizens through shared deliberation and action.

Participants in the deliberation group on the new political culture recently conducted an exercise in which they were asked to place the main criteria in order of priority. The prioritised criteria were: the will of the government; the creation of spaces for listening, reflection and sometimes —but not necessarily— decision-making; a shared public agenda; the diversity of actors; the evaluation and capabilities of the organisation.

However, applying these criteria to Etorkizuna Eraikiz as a whole is also a source of difficulties and dilemmas and it was proposed to discuss these. The group that reflected on this issued posed the following questions for Quim Brugué:

Should the Provincial Government's criteria for collaborative governance be applied in the same way to all actors and networks (ecosystems)? It is important to bear in mind that, in order to fulfil the criterion of diversity, there will be territorial actors of very different kinds. Who adapts these criteria and how? Does the Provincial Government do it or should it co-create them with actors/citizens? Should we also establish relational conditions in this model? (We are referring to conditions on the distribution of power, the relationships of dependence between agents, the establishment of modes of collaboration and the co-responsibility that this involves).

Concerning the legitimacy of giving an opinion in the deliberation on issues with which we are not familiar

This section reflects the concern expressed by one of the participants in the deliberation process over several sessions:

'In a previous session I asked whether it is legitimate for us to give our opinion on a subject about which we have no knowledge. My question is related to this issue. […] To tell the truth, I don't like the distinction we make between experts [*aditu* in Basque] and those who have practical experience on a subject [*aritu*]. In my opinion there are different types of knowledge and each of us here is coming from a different place. We have different types of knowledge, and each type of knowledge has a different legitimacy. My concern is this: what legitimacy do we have to talk about issues with which we are not familiar? I have no doubt that talking about things we don't know is interesting for this group. As individuals, it can be very interesting and enriching. But is that the goal of this think tank? This issue is accentuated because we are talking about a public think tank. In my opinion the aim of the think tank is not for us to learn or to enrich ourselves, but to offer a service to society. We often talk about topics that are outside the area of expertise of many participants. Do we have the legitimacy to talk about issues we do not know about and give our opinion on them?

In my opinion this devalues the activity of this think tank. I think it weakens the transformation process. At the same time, I believe that in these situations we adapt the reality to our own framework. Just to be clear: if there is a subject in which I am not an expert, I try to place it within my framework. And ultimately, that ends up distorting that reality. We need to watch out for that. It can be an intellectual trap. That is my concern'.

The group that reflected on this contribution considered that collective intelligence (a term on which the group previously reflected) may have elements to build the answers required by this approach.

With this in mind, they posed the following question for Quim Brugué: What are the conditions for building a collective intelligence that will allow us to increase the legitimacy we have to influence processes through our knowledge? (This collective intelligence must include a clear and shared perspective of the object we want to transform)