THINK TANK

Working Document No. 22. Process of deliberation on new political culture

DIALOGUE WITH EXPERTS AS A METHOD FOR DISTILLING THE GROUP'S THINKING ON COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

(15 September 2022)

Introduction

Between September 2021 and May 2022, the deliberation group reflected on collaborative governance based on the practical problems arising from three projects: (a) the mapping of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa, focusing on the activity of municipal councils and regional development agencies; (b) strengthening collaboration within the Provincial Government, focusing on collaboration between two specific departments and (c) clarifying and strengthening the role of the deliberation group in the ecosystem, experimenting on ways in which the individual and collective dimension interact.

In June 2022, the group began a more conceptual phase of reflection, with the aim of: (a) developing a conceptual framework for what had been learned from practice and (b) discussing those lessons with experts from the field of collaborative governance. At the June session, the group defined five questions it considered relevant for the development of collaborative governance in Etorkizuna Eraikiz. These were summarised in one key question (see Working Document 21). After a session with Quim Brugué on 14 September aimed at answering these questions, this working document sets out some of the input that is being consolidated in the narrative of some of the group's participants.

For a proper understanding of this document, it is important to note that the questions posed in the previous working document were a framework for reflection, but were not answered individually. Instead, throughout the dialogue between Quim Brugué and the participants in the deliberation group, two discourses took shape. On the one hand, we have Quim Brugué's perspective on collaborative governance and on the other, a position that Xabier Barandiaran explicitly raised as being different to Quim Brugué's, which was expanded on by Xabier Barandiaran himself and by other members of the deliberation group. It is this dialogue between two different ways of viewing collaborative governance, and not each specific question, that has been taken as the thread running through the working document.

However, even if the five questions are not individually answered, the debate between the two perspectives could be said to quite clearly linked to the question that the deliberation group posed as a synthesis of all the others:

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

This working document sets out the results of the reflection in two sections:

a) The first section includes two ways of interpreting collaborative governance that have emerged from the dialogue between the guest experts and some of the participants in the deliberation group.

b) A version of the forms of collaborative governance of Etorkizuna Eraikiz proposed by the deliberation group in the previous working document, modified in the light of the lessons learned from the dialogue with the experts.

Lessons learned on collaborative governance in Etorkizuna Eraikiz

The Think Tank's deliberation group's reflections on new political culture have not taken place in isolation. A seminar on the Etorkizuna Eraikiz case was held on 5 and 6 September, in which a significant number of the members of the deliberation group took part. In this space there was a relative consensus about the fact that Etorkizuna Eraikiz and its collaborative governance are being constituted in an *emerging* way, giving rise to a *hybrid* model in which various forms of collaborative governance coexist. This emergent nature is considered to be a strength.

This emerging, hybrid framework allows us to view the two perspectives on collaborative governance that were raised in the 14 September session as being distinct but complementary. Both can form part of Etorkizuna Eraikiz's hybrid model.

Most of the experts invited to the seminar (especially Jacob Torfing —see session report— and Quim Brugué himself) viewed collaborative governance as a process that takes place within the framework of representative democracy, when a government deliberates with the citizens or organisations from the territory, in order subsequently to make decisions that affect public policies. In this case it is understood that the sovereignty that brings legitimacy to the decision-making process derives from the legitimacy conferred on the government by the citizenry through the ballot box. What guarantees the democratic nature of the process is that the government maintains the final decision, ensuring that it prioritises the common good, and not the potential interests of the individuals or organisations participating in the deliberation process.

Etorkizuna Eraikiz has examples of this type. One of these is the collaborative governance of the deliberation group on the Future of Welfare States, where, at the request of the participants themselves, a code of ethics has been developed for the entire think tank. The code establishes that the ultimate responsibility for the decisions made by the government rests with the government itself, even when those decisions are influenced by its deliberations with representatives of the policy ecosystem.

However, the code also includes a paragraph proposed by Xabier Barandiaran, which introduces a different logic into the interpretation of collaborative governance. This paragraph suggests that as collaborative governance is extended, it may in the future lead to processes of co-responsibility. This would involve jointly-made decisions for which all participants would assume responsibility. This perspective was discussed with the international experts in the context of the Etorkizuna Eraikiz case and was also raised openly in the session with Quim Brugué. In both cases it was argued that in this form of collaborative governance the government does not make the final decision. Rather, it negotiates and agrees on decisions with the other stakeholders in the territory. The response of all the experts to this proposal was that if the government does not have the final decision, the process does not enjoy the democratic guarantee associated with representative democracy. There is no guarantee that the process fulfils the common good, so it would not be appropriate to commit public funds to the process.

The members of the deliberation group who posited this other way of looking at collaborative governance based their arguments on the existence of community logics in which another type of legitimacy is formed. In the dialogues at the think tank, Etorkizuna Eraikiz's reference centre, Badalab, was raised as a specific case based on this kind of interpretation. In practise, there are also elements of this kind in the dynamics of the deliberation group on the future of work. The government works with other territorial stakeholders on a public agenda in which no one has the capacity to unilaterally make the final decision. In this framework, the Provincial Government still retains the final say on its political agenda and the other stakeholders retain the final decision on their own agenda. Each of these agendas, however, is only one part of the public agenda and the decision on the public agenda as a whole can only be a shared one.

We now return to the central question of the deliberation group: What conditions need to be met to share this power/responsibility without losing political legitimacy? Simplifying, the answer most frequently given by the guest experts was that it is the government's final decision that enables power/responsibility to be shared without sacrificing political legitimacy.

Through its praxis, Etorkizuna Eraikiz is problematising this answer and posing both (a) an alternative and complementary form of collaborative governance in which the government waives its right to make the final decision; and (b) a form in which the government simultaneously retains the final decision in its political agenda, but waives it in the public agenda.

Thus, the question posed by the group remains for cases in which we want to explore approaches that have been described as “more communitarian”. The cases from Etorkizuna Eraikiz cases that follow this logic could constitute empirical sources of learning in this regard.

We could sum this up by saying that the discussions with experts have allowed the group not only to learn from them but also to use them as a mirror of its own discourse, helping to clarify it. It has also been noted that the ideas put forward by the deliberation group are not exclusively theoretical, but are also based on Etorkizuna Eraikiz praxis. This allows for the possibility of proposing a new phase of learning-by-doing that could focus on cases such as Badalab and the deliberation group on the work of the future, which are closely linked to the deliberation group's activity.

Concerning the different forms of collaborative governance in Etorkizuna Eraikiz

In the light of the dialogue between Quim Brugué and some of the participants in the deliberation group, we now return to one of the contributions set out in Working Document No. 21, with regard to the different forms of collaborative governance of Etorkizuna Eraikiz.

In this working document, three ways of viewing and practising collaborative governance were proposed, inspired by the experience at Etorkizuna Eraikiz. We return to this contribution because to a large extent it represents the lessons learned at the session on 14 September. However, some of its elements need to be qualified.

At the June session, when this typology was first presented, a certain evolutionary linearity between them was proposed. In other words, some were considered to be more advanced than others and an evolution from one to the other was proposed.

If we accept that Etorkizuna Eraikiz develops in an emergent and hybrid form, the hypothesis of linearity between these forms loses strength. It seems more logical to interpret them as

different forms of collaborative governance that coexist within the same framework, giving Etorkizuna Eraikiz greater flexibility to adapt to different contexts. This idea was reinforced by Eider Mendoza during the session with Quim Brugué, when she pointed out that collaborative governance has to be adapted to each specific context and that the conditions do not exist in all cases for the government to waive its right to make the final decision.

The following is a summary of the three ways of viewing collaborative governance proposed by the group in June 2022, adapted to the learnings from the previous section.

a) Governance focused on decision-making, resources, strategy and leadership by government

This is a type of governance that is framed within the political agenda. These are deliberative processes that the government opens up to participation by other ecosystem stakeholders, but based on the government's decision-making capabilities, 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. However, the ultimate policy decision always lies with the government. Returning to the examples raised in the previous section, the deliberative group on the futures of welfare states would match this view of collaborative governance.

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

This is governance that is framed within the public agenda, which is broader than the political agenda. 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. However, after joint deliberation, each stakeholder makes the decisions within its own sphere of competence.

Thus, the government continues to make decisions on its policies, just as the other stakeholders make decisions related to their sphere of action, but these decisions are aligned around a common objective. An example of this interpretation is that of the deliberation group on the future of work.

c) Governance focused on the decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership of the territory (community)

This requires that the territory/community be interpreted as a collective subject that is seen as something more than the simple sum of territorial stakeholders. In this case, not only are the decisions made by each territorial stakeholder mutually influenced, but a collective decision-making space is generated, in which there are resources, strategies and leaderships that pertain to the territory or the community (and not exclusively to the government).

In this case, the government links some decisions on its political agenda to the shared public agenda, over which it does not have the final decision-making capacity. According to most of the experts with whom we have spoken, for this it would be necessary to specify other

democratic guarantee mechanisms. One example that can be used to reflect on this interpretation in practice is Badalab.