

Innovations in Praxis Article

The Extended Citizens' Assembly Model for Collaborative Governance:

Co-creating a Shared Vision from the Basque Gipuzkoa Province

Antonio Casado da Rocha

AKTIBA IT Research Group, University of the Basque Country
antonio.casado@ehu.eus

Abstract

Based on data from two Citizens' Assemblies and a year-long participatory action-research process, this article describes on-going attempts to shift the political culture towards collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa (Basque Country), Spain. Quantitative and qualitative evaluation data from a Citizens' Assembly in 2022 suggest that such representative-deliberative processes might be transformative under some circumstances, increasing action confidence, building capacity and co-creating a shared vision of the future. Could it be that the increase in confidence is a side-result of the co-creation of a shared vision? The growing literature on the impact of standard Citizens' Assembly models is used to explore and refine this hypothesis. Research has uncovered some barriers to such an impact, such as outcome-contingency and difficulties to scale because limited resources. To tackle those problems, and help institutionalize existing Citizens' Assemblies, a prototype for an Extended Citizens' Assembly is presented. This model contributes to collaborative governance by facilitating online-onsite deliberation in a frugal way and further extending those

transformative and visionary capacities that Citizens' Assemblies and other experiments in democratic inquiry help to cultivate in cities and regions.

Keywords

citizens' assembly, capacity building, shared vision, frugal innovation, collaborative governance

Origins

I am writing from Arantzazu, a Franciscan sanctuary located in the highlands of the Basque region of Gipuzkoa, Spain. In the 1960s and 1970s Arantzazu was the center of a highly innovative period in Basque culture; at that time its Seminary was thought of as the “university of the poor” (Casado, 2023). Today, by the 500-plus-year-old basilica lies a new space for research, experimentation and socialization aimed at transformation. Founded in 2020, Arantzazulab is a laboratory of social innovation set in the mountains on top of the Deba valley, where the Mondragon co-operative movement—ow the world's largest co-operative corporation—emerged in the 1950s (Romeo, 2022).

Being a second-generation immigrant in the Basque Country, I have always been attracted to higher education as a leverage point for community and personal development. My role in Arantzazulab has been to coordinate its collaborative research space with the University of the Basque Country, where I hold a senior research position in ethics and political philosophy. I see ethics as “deliberative wisdom” (Senghor & Racine, 2022), a structured process by which human values and meanings of life are understood and tackled. Deliberation is the capability to discuss openly and reflect on questions or problems, on the answers or solutions to these problems, and to explore proposals for meaningful resolution. This is done by a practical inquiry in which we rehearse actionable futures by making, as Dewey put it, “an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible actions are really like” (1922, p. 190).

From 2012 to 2021 I served as mobility and outreach officer in the Gipuzkoa campus, and connecting the university with the outside world became my main line of work. As a researcher my focus has been on the narrative, technological and situated dimensions of collective deliberation, which has led me to study Ethics Committees, Citizen Assemblies, their associated digital platforms, and the pathways to make them more accessible and inclusive.

Perhaps because of my second-generation Basque identity, my passion is community integration and empowerment: to know and sustain what makes people connect and engage in collective action. In the face of present and future disruption, we need more resilient and inclusive communities, and I hope that universities will be a positive driving force in the transition of villages, towns, and cities into sustainability.

My aspiration for Gipuzkoa is a permanent, diverse, and dynamic deliberative space in which citizens, universities and other institutions get

together to achieve the United Nations' Global Goals. I see my place in the "slow lane" (Haselmayer, 2023) of being, thinking, relating, collaborating and acting to drive change—that is, pursuing the Inner Development Goals.

Foundations

In my book *Casa de Cambios* [House of Change] (Casado, 2022), I provided an historical argument for what I call political transcendentalism, understood as a cultivation of capabilities to "transcend the persistent, cultural narrative of separation" between cities and nature, materiality and spirituality, personal change and social change—as Jayne Engle and her co-editors put it in *Sacred Civics* (2022, pp. 3–5).

In April 2023 I met in Arantzazulab with Jayne and twenty other "community connectors,"¹ who arrived from several places in Europe and Canada to shape a global network and design experiments to conduct in collaboration across regions. In this global gathering some participants became increasingly aware of our own role as designers, and the debates surrounding this role (Udoewa, 2022). "The activities and outcomes of designing", according to Carl DiSalvo (2022, p. 71), "help us collectively conceive and instantiate diverse civic imaginaries and practices," and to engage in "rehearsing futures." This image of "rehearsals" resonated with the whole group, and we began to imagine the gathering as a place to rehearse changes we want to see in the world and in ourselves. "Such rehearsals," DiSalvo argues, "are part and parcel of an experimental method of democratic inquiry, through which we participate in and contribute to the ongoing exploration and reinvention of democratic experiences and conditions" (2022, p. 71)²

Arantzazulab is set up as a non-profit, non-partisan foundation and it is supported by key agents in the Basque Country: public institutions from three levels of government (regional—Basque Government; provincial—Gipuzkoa provincial council; and local—Oñati town hall) as well as other key stakeholders from the private sector, such as Mondragon Corporation and Kutxa local bank foundation. This provides support and legitimacy to the lab, whose purpose is the development and promotion of collaborative governance and democracy innovation through reflection, research and experimentation on new models of relationship between public institutions and civil society. In short, to build a learning ecosystem and a community of innovative practices in collaborative governance.

¹ I owe the term to Michelle Baldwin, from Community Foundations of Canada, who also took part in the gathering.

² I thank Ione Ardaiz (Arantzazulab) and Stéphane Vincent (La 27e Région) for conversations about Udoewa's article, and Dewey's influence, respectively.

But what is collaborative governance? There are many definitions. Arantzazulab is inspired and supported by the *Etorkezuna Eraikiz* (“building up the future”, in Basque) initiative, which has been developed by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council since 2016 (Barandiaran, et al., 2023). In this framework, collaborative governance is seen as:

... institutionalized cooperation between public institutions, social agents and citizens in order to empower and influence the ecosystem of public policies; this must be done by strengthening the social capital between institutions, social agents and citizens, by means of deliberation and shared action. (Arantzazulab, 2023, p. 9, translated from Spanish)³

Here “social capital” means a network of relationships, but also the rich yet quickly declining tradition of communal practices in the Basque Country, and whose traces can be found in the co-operative movement and the *auzolan*—a Basque tradition of community work, still alive and with legal standing in some villages. According to some authors (Azparren, 2013), the *batzarra* (the assembly of people whose knowledge and experience illuminate and accompany a community) is the oldest trace of democratic organization in Europe.

However, Western democracies are in trouble, and the Basque Country is no exception. Numerous polls show that people are losing confidence in the system, as liberal democracies face two major, intertwined problems: the decline of their problem-solving capacities in an increasingly complex world, and the gap between political elites and the people. According to Taylor et al. (2020), we must rebuild democracy from the bottom up: “Only if we enhance and reinvigorate democracy at the base will the citizenry find clarity about what to ask for, or what future to envision for their community or region” (pp. 5–6). I am also concerned with the erosion of local communities. The acceleration of contemporary society, along with other forms of “absencing” (Scharmer, 2018), hardly leaves any time or space to build new connections, align the interests and goals of community members, and set free creative powers to solve complex problems and enable collective agency. For that purpose, Taylor et al. (2020) identify two kinds of action: (1) self-organization at the local level in order to find a consensus on the needs and goals of the community, and ways to bring these to

³“Lankidetzazko Gobernantza erakunde publiko, gizarte eragile eta herritarren artean instituzionalizatutako lankidetzeta da, herri politiken ekosistema ahaldundu eta eraginkortzeko; hau erakundeen, gizarte eragileen eta herritarren arteko gizarte kapitala sendotuz egin behar da, deliberazio eta ekintza partekatuen bidez.”

fruition; (2) modes of government-initiated consultation with ordinary citizens, again with the aim of defining common goals.⁴

Thanks to Arantzazulab, I was able to experience and study a successful experience of the second kind, which in turn inspired our Innovation in Praxis. I shortly describe it in the following sub-section.⁵

Learning from the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly

In collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and local agents engaged in deliberative practices, in 2022 Arantzazulab led two initiatives for community participation using what the OECD (2020) calls a *representative deliberative process*, more known as *Citizens' Assembly* (CA). The first initiative was implemented on a town scale (Tolosa), and it focused on the topic of health and emotional well-being; the second covered the whole of Gipuzkoa and focused on agricultural activity and the climate emergency.

In the Tolosa CA, 32 citizens participated in a 40-hour deliberation process to write recommendations in response to this question: "What can the Tolosa Town Council do through public-community collaboration to achieve a Tolosa that improves the health and emotional well-being of all?" The process was carried out over five weekends from October to December 2022, and in the last session the citizens presented a total of 14 recommendations to the political representatives. As of March 2023, 12 out of the 14 recommendations were agreed to implement, and a budget has been assigned to each (Tolosa Town Council, 2023).

Following standard practice in the organization of CAs, the 32 participants were randomly selected from a sample of around 200 citizens who applied to take part after another sample of 2,400 personalized letters of invitation was sent by the town Council. Both samples were done by means of software developed by the

⁴Taylor's strategy is consistent, I dare say, with the kind of Basque innovation that has been done traditionally in Arantzazu. One of its main proponents, the writer and Franciscan monk Bitoriano Gandiaga, wrote that such innovation is not an easy technological fix, but *awareness-based* and difficult: "Without awareness we are nothing. Leaves carried by the wind. But such awareness is bitter. It is painful and demanding." (Gandiaga, 1991, p. 203) Secondly, it is radically *bottom-up*. Gandiaga describes the innovative movement as that of the sap moving from "one thousand roots" (Casado, 2023, p. 17) up a vine's stem. Thirdly, it is *language-dependent*: Gandiaga's social poetry aims to bring people together by means of language and art. Fourthly, it is *regenerative and life-preserving* (1991, p. 198).

⁵Quantitative and qualitative data come from the evaluation report submitted to the commissioning entity (the Tolosa Town Council), which is available online (Casado, et al., 2023).

Sortition Foundation; they were randomly generated and then stratified by gender, age, neighborhood and education level, so that the final group was a representative cross-section of the Tolosa population.

In the “information kit” (Tolosa Town Council, 2022) provided to the 32 citizens, a U-shaped journey was proposed with five stops, corresponding to the five sessions of the CA. Session #1 was about framing the process, introducing the question, and providing some basic information by experts. Data was enriched in session #2, by hearing more expert testimonies about other experiences. In #3 information gave way to deliberation about specific proposals, after hearing the testimony of local agents from Tolosa. This deliberation phase continued in #4, in which recommendations began to be drafted. In session #5 the recommendations were finished and the results were presented to the Council representatives.⁶

Leading the evaluation team, I took part in several CA sessions and preparatory meetings, and right from the start I sensed a connection with Theory U practices. I asked Iciar Montejo, the person who was doing the graphic recording at the sessions, and indeed she was familiar with Otto Scharmer's and Kelly Bird's work. This influence is visible in the images her facilitation company, Prometea, produced for the information kit. The booklet used for the devolution event included pictures and images from the framing session by Prometea. In one of them, the text inside the U reads in Basque “open mind / open heart / open will / presence and active listening” (Tolosa Town Council, 2023).⁷

The CA held in Tolosa in 2022 is arguably a significant milestone. It was the first representative deliberative process carried out in Gipuzkoa, and a fully bilingual one, since simultaneous translation was provided to all Spanish speakers (being the subaltern language, all Basque speakers could understand Spanish). It mobilized citizens, institutions and local agents who collaborated to make this CA a success, fulfilling all the formal criteria of the OECD for a representative deliberative process, with a considerable effort in terms of resources and personal dedication.

Our evaluation showed that the overall satisfaction with the deliberative process was very high among the participants, who reported that they valued meeting with diverse people and different realities, the quality of the facilitation, the help received, and the feeling that their contributions were valued within the

⁶ All expert testimony, along with the minutes of every session, the final recommendations and the evaluation report, are available in the Tolosa Town Council website both in Spanish and Basque: <https://partaidetza.tolosa.eus/es/detalle/-/visualizarProcesos/detail/viewResults/123>

⁷ Both images can be seen here: <http://aktibait.eus/2023/04/28/tolosako-herritarren-batzarra-ebaluazioa-txostena/> (in Basque).

group. They also valued the information received and the acquisition of skills in relation to the topic addressed and to the public-community relationship.

From the analysis of the interviews, participants emphasized the importance of the fact that the group was diverse, which made it possible to connect with different people. This connection was generally experienced as positive and valuable: in their own words, “it is also very enriching because we got together people of different ages, different cultures, different thoughts” (Tolosa CA participant, 18 to 30 years old); “it has been valuable for me to see all the realities that there can be” (Tolosa CA participant, 31 to 40 years old).

The analysis of the interviews also highlighted the perception of the need to strengthen the link between citizens and public administration, stressing the importance of continuing to explore the pathways to collaborative governance, and perceiving the relationship as enriching for all parties: “This collaboration is really quite fruitful for everyone” (Tolosa CA participant, 51 to 60 years old).

When analyzing the changes experienced in the process, a high level of trust towards the CA was perceived during the process, which then increased to very high once the process was over. The level of trust expressed towards political representatives also increased. The importance of further deepening those channels for citizen participation was emphasized. This perception was also expressed by people in charge of the organization: “It has a value in bringing citizens closer to the institutions” (Tolosa CA organizer).

In general, the evaluation identified an increase in the participants' own capacities and argumentation skills, which they assessed following the process to be at a high level, and the feeling that they were up to the demands of the process, reporting that they enjoyed the experience. An increase in action learning and confidence around the topics covered was also identified. As one participant put it: “[now] I learn and can teach others. [I am] Taking what I have learned to others” (Tolosa CA participant, 51 to 60 years old).

While hearing those testimonies I could not stop thinking about the emerging field of research on “action confidence” (Pomeroy & Oliver, 2020). However, much still depends on the outcomes, on how the respective institutions will implement the recommendations. As a participant in the Tolosa CA reported, “I understand that citizens are expected to come here to give, but at the same time, then we will be able to demand” (Tolosa CA participant, over 61 years old). This is consistent with research suggesting that CAs have the potential of reconciling the politically disengaged, even though support for them is outcome-contingent, partly driven by citizens' expectations of a favorable result, not by a commitment to deliberative democracy per se (Pilet et al., 2023).

Now I sense a lot of interest and expectations about what happens *after the Assembly*, how to channel and institutionalize this kind of deliberative experience, so that it is not just a “participatory moment,” but part of a wider, deeper process of political regeneration. Arantzazulab is studying how to embed these practices so that they become permanent, systemic and sustainable. CAs are a promising tool for collaborative governance, but also resource- and time-

intensive. They are expensive and complex to organize: in a small CA such as the Tolosa one, a support team of approximately a dozen people was deployed in every session to facilitate, evaluate, translate, scribe, communicate, and oversee the session.

What is the next level in citizen participation? There are several ways forward, and most involve some form of institutionalization of CAs.⁸ In the following section I will describe an on-going process to co-create a shared vision of the emerging future within the Gipuzkoa region and how it might incorporate and extend some features of CAs. This “Innovation in Praxis” was inspired by existing literature, of course, but most crucially by two face-to-face experiences: (1) attending and evaluating the Tolosa CA, (2) the u-lab 2x project I had taken part in since 2019, which in its last iteration crystallized around the idea of “retreat” as a space to reclaim time for research and transformation.⁹

The Innovations

While our research team as evaluating the Tolosa CA, I had the feeling that the positive effects of the Tolosa CA (higher levels of confidence, both in the relationship with politicians and in the participants' perceived capacities) happened because *during the Assembly a shared vision was co-created by the participants, experts, and facilitators*.¹⁰ For the CA to take place, politicians had to trust citizens, letting go, and *at the end of the Assembly the citizens mirrored back that trust to the politicians*, letting come the proposals embodying that very vision—in the Tolosa CA, all fourteen recommendations were approved by more than 80% of the participants. The co-creation of a safe deliberative space opened, as it were, an organ of perception for the CA to see itself and the emerging future (the vision) it wanted to create.

With slight variations in terminology, the literature about collaborative governance includes references to common goals and shared vision. As Ainhoa Arrona explains, the complexity of the territory and its problems makes it

⁸ One of the most interesting ones to me is the proposal by Abels et al. (2022). This model for “European Citizens' Assemblies” requires 5 to 8 on-site and digital meetings, and a new CA announced and convened every year.

⁹ In our last iteration (2022) the team was made up by Verena Hammes, Rita Aldabaldetrek, Orla Hasson and myself. I am grateful to all of them for their inspiration and commitment to the project. See <https://www.u-school.org/offerings/ulab2x-2024> for an explanation of the u-lab 2x program.

¹⁰ Aktiba Ikerketa Taldea (<http://aktibait.eus>) is an interdisciplinary research group focused on practices, learning and values, based in Donostia – San Sebastián.

necessary to base development in participation, and that in turn is a strong reason to seek the co-creation of “shared vision and trust relationships” and “strategies based on learning, negotiation and collaboration” (Arrona, 2018, p. 170).

Shared Vision as Common Caring For a Just Cause

The connection between organizational learning and shared vision was one of the key insights in Peter Senge’s influential book, *The Fifth Discipline*. I think Senge made an important point when he emphasized the intrinsically relational nature of a shared vision and its connection to a common quest or “just cause” (Sinek, 2019):

“A vision is truly shared when you and I have a similar picture and are committed to one another having it, not just to each of us, individually, having it. When people truly share a vision they are connected, bound together by a common aspiration. Personal visions derive their power from an individual’s deep caring for the vision. Shared visions derive their power from a common caring. In fact, we have to come to believe that one of the reasons people seek to build shared visions is their desire to be connected in an important undertaking.” (Senge, 1990, p. 191)

The quote by Senge is consistent with research on CAs, suggesting that the “important undertaking” connection has an impact on numerous factors, such as who decides to participate, the response rate, and the dropout rate. Removing the link to power makes participation less meaningful and makes it more likely that only those with a strong interest in the topic will choose to participate (OECD, 2020).

The Extended Lab as a Sensing Organ for the Whole

If connection and “common caring” are so important, how we can foster them *before* and *after* the actual CA taking place? To answer that question, at the University of the Basque Country we are currently experimenting with a prototype of an “extended lab” which moves beyond CAs in several ways. We call it “extended” because it uses digital technology to extend deliberation, both in space and time, so that the gap between decision making in complex systems and the lived experiences of people affected by those decisions might be somehow reduced. As Scharmer (2018, p. 102) explains, this requires new infrastructures that complement traditional forms of governance to catalyze collective action from a shared vision or “awareness of the whole”.

The lab itself can be thought of as a sensing organ for a shared vision of the whole; this was suggested by the participant reported in the Tolosa CA evaluation interviews who stated, “it has been valuable for me *to see* [emphasis added] all the realities that there can be.” As Scharmer (2009) recalls in *Theory U*:

In his classes [Ed] Schein always emphasized that the most important principle of managing change is to 'always deal with reality'; that is, start by seeing what is actually going on. Our challenge is to find a way to cultivate and enhance the collective capacity of seeing." (p. 134–135)

Here "extended" means *extended perception* but also geographically *extended in space*, so that the lab reaches to a wider audience, and *extended in time*, too: both backward extended, so that the question and answers addressed by the lab are crowdsourced in a digital participation platform, and forward extended so that deliberative experiences on different topics can build on one another—all of them supported and hosted by the extended lab.

Open Infrastructures for Inquiry and Iteration

Another innovation lies in the way in which our extended lab goes beyond and complements standard CAs. For instance, the lab gives a lot of time and attention to how questions are formulated and chosen. In many CAs the question is a given, it is taken for granted. But much is at stake in the definition and framing of the question or problem that the mini-public is tasked to address. María José Sanz, the Director of the Basque Center for Climate Change, played a leading role in the first CA on Climate Change in Spain, which took place between 2021 and 2022. I asked her if there was something that she would like to change now in the CA design. "The question could be more or less concrete," she answered.

But the important thing is that it can be repeated, that there are more assemblies and they democratize knowledge without undermining the capacities of the citizenry. The *Decidim* platform worked to create forums and the facilitation provided a safe space, but the best thing is that a high percentage of participants have become proactive in their own places as agents of change. (Personal communication, November 8, 2022)

Therefore, praxis showed us the power of iteration. Collaborative governance is above all a process, not a one-off event, and that is where the "new infrastructures" mentioned by Scharmer (2018, p. 102) need to be iterative and portable, so that they are able to scale in depth and across the territory. In the next section I will describe the Decidim platform we are using for that purpose.

The Implementation

Before starting this project, I knew what the literature on social innovation says: collaborative governance aims to bring together multiple stakeholders in common forums with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision making (Ansell & Gash, 2007). But since we began "walking the talk" I have become convinced that collaborative governance needs to be enacted by democratic participation, not simply represented in a fixed model which then all

stakeholders are expected to comply with. I dare say that we need an “enactive turn” in governance theory and praxis (more about this in the last section). We should not waste too much time just defining collaborative governance and finding the right concept for it. The energy should be in *playing with it* and *being aware of it* as an ongoing, interactive “medium with which community members could potentially realize their own priorities and ways of living” (Mitchell, 2021).

Following Peter Senge’s work, such a medium could be compared to that soil in which, emerging from the personal visions, the collective grows something that might be called a shared vision. As he wrote, “shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision” (Senge, 1990, p. 191).

For those priorities or personal visions to be reflected and shared up and across the territory, in our extended lab we gather them in a digital platform designed to empower citizen participation. Decidim, this digital platform, is the open software that has run, for instance, the University of Bordeaux participatory platform, the city of Barcelona municipal action plan, and the Conference on the Future of Europe deliberations (2020–2022). Created in 2016 for the Barcelona City Council, it is a free digital platform with strong democratic guarantees, and is now being used in cities, associations, and universities all over the world.

The enabling conditions to our implementation are two: (1) *mutual trust* between the university and citizens, on the one hand, and the university and the regional council, on the other; (2) *civic tech*, because to make deliberative mini-publics more visible we use the digital tools to share their visions across time and space, thus helping to catalyze collective action from those shared visions. The challenge is *to extend agency through technology without losing trust*.

We have experienced barriers, too. Not because of lack of resources—I think that the tools to bring collaborative governance to the next level are all in place. The pathway for institutionalization of an extended lab does not require expensive and time-consuming reforms of the existing institutional system, be it in terms of redistribution of authority, decision-making roles, or competences. The extended lab for collaborative governance might be just an “institutional add-on” (Abels et al. 2022) to the existing institutional architecture. The problem is that resources are nothing if the people are not able to mobilize them, and for that one needs not only a highly motivated team, but also a degree of autonomy from the demands that “business as usual” makes on university researchers, especially those in the early stages of their careers.

However, CAs are happening all over the world. By extending them we can make them more visible and easier to organize. A simple way to do it is to use a year-long cycle that can be replicated. Let’s see how.

The Realizing

In Barcelona, Decidim was used to crowdsource its strategic plan, with a big budget. It received more than 10,000 citizen proposals, facilitating online and offline participation. It has also hosted CAs on Climate Change at the state (Spain) and city (Barcelona) scales. Our initiative (<https://gi2030.eus/>) is more modest, since as of November 2023 we are only 11 months into the project, but it is up and running.

The first phase was to co-initiate the platform, which is promoted and funded by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, but designed and run by the Gi2030-ZEHAR consortium together with citizens and social agents of the region. The consortium applied in 2022 to an open call at the University of the Basque Country, and the funding was used to set up the technological infrastructure and to hire three full-time researchers, which make up the core team along with two Principal Investigators. It is designed as a collaborative research initiative with an extended team of 25 academics from the humanities, health care, and social sciences.

Having set up the core and extended teams, we have also designed a 5-phase participatory process in a double-diamond¹¹ year cycle that can be replicated up to 2030 (and beyond). This process begins long before the planned co-initiation in January, by “preparing the ground”, applying for and receiving funding, hiring expert help, and learning from previous experiences. The team took Learning Journeys to places where forms of collaborative governance are emerging and spoke with their leaders (the Digital and Democratic Innovation Centre in Barcelona, Wikitoki in Bilbao, Etorikizuna Eraikiz, Hernani Burujabe and Debagoiena 2030 in Gipuzkoa). Then the process itself is structured in the following five phases:

1. Co-initiating (January)

In this phase, agreements are reached with local agents to contribute to the Gi2030 process, either as stakeholders or event hosts. Accordingly, the core team publishes a provisional calendar of activities and events. Prospective scenarios are commissioned for the workshops. We begin to use and test the platform as a hub, blog and container for the whole process.

¹¹ Our approach is adapted from a universally accepted design process, promoted by the UK Design Council from 2004 as the “Double Diamond” model: <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/archive/articles/double-diamond-universally-accepted-depiction-design-process/>.

2. Questioning (February-May)

Through several face-to-face workshops, questions and problems are explored for each of the five central themes of Gi2030 (people, economy, science and technology, climate change, well-being). The objective of these meetings is to explore, through the collective construction of questions, a shared vision between citizens and institutions, based on scenarios worked and presented by the research staff, activating the imagination about future collaborative governance scenarios.

3. Prioritizing (June-July)

This stage is the moment of truth at the bottom of the U: we start from the questions (100+) we have collected in the previous phase. The core team, with the help of the extended team, other experts, social agents and citizens, carries out a process of categorization, selection, refinement and prioritization of the questions collected in the previous phase, using an adaptation of the Delphi method. The bulk of questions goes through “the eye of the needle” to build up the most important or vital ones. Those questions (max. 10) will continue to be the guiding thread of the conversation about the Gipuzkoa we imagine in the year 2030.

4. Making proposals (September-November)

In this phase, new face-to-face workshops serve to transform the prioritized questions into proposals. On the other hand, the involvement of different agents is sought, so that from their situated knowledge, they can make new concrete proposals through the digital platform. In all cases, the proposals must be based on one of the questions prioritized in the previous phase. All proposals are published on the platform and a voting mechanism will allow participants to indicate which proposals they find most interesting.

5. Sharing and preparing the ground again (December)

In this final phase, which blends in with the “preparing the ground” stage for the next iteration, the collaborative drafting of the first Shared Vision document is completed. Everyone taking part in the process is invited to a face-to-face meeting so that we can celebrate together and share experiences from the year. In this event, some of the proposals that have been collected on the platform are also presented. The Shared Vision is published in the form of a script whose elements refer to the proposals made in the platform and ensure traceability with the questions formulated in the previous phases.

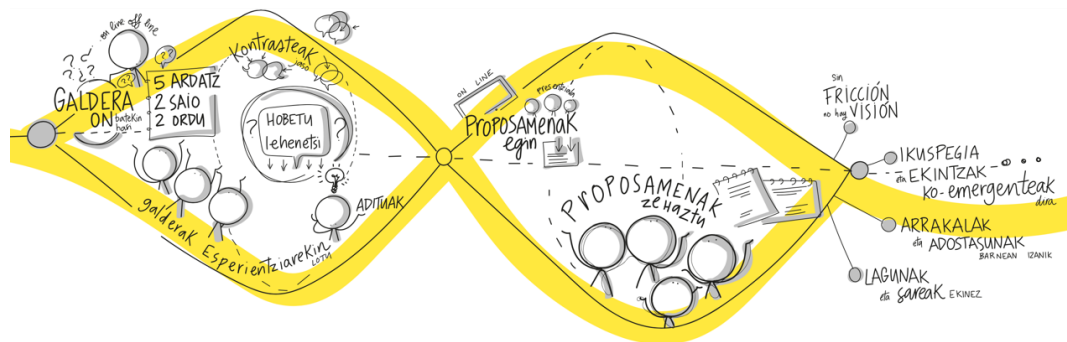


Figure 1. The Gi2030 double-diamond process in 5-phases over a year.
Visual practice by Miryam Artola, @muxotepotolobat.

As of writing (November 2023) the first cycle is not yet over, but we have some provisional data. In the February-July period, Gi2030 has hosted thirteen 2-hour workshops (phase 2) and two 4-hour “summer festivals” in which the prioritization techniques (phase 3) took place along with cultural events such as poetry and dance improvisation, lectures, and music performances. 247 people took part in those synchronous, face-to-face events, while 185 people registered and took part in the digital platform.

Gi2030 has attracted some attention in local media and community engagement officers in five town governments are involved in this year’s cycle: Errenteria (population: 39,000), Tolosa (19,800), Zumarraga (9,600), Zegama (1,500), and Itziar (800), and the plan is to continue with officers from additional town governments next year. All content is published in both Basque and Spanish, and participants are selected to promote diversity across age, gender, and cultures. Therefore, we might say that we are aiming at the edges of the system, bringing into the conversation participants that heretofore were not included in collaborative governance practices.

As Otto Scharmer writes, “real institutional impact usually requires an intentional and sustained intervention and does not result from merely sending individuals on a retreat” (2018, p. 78). Our praxis agrees with that, since from an initial idea of building the shared vision one retreat at a time, we are moving now into a “one meeting at a time” attitude, within a year cycle of learning and deliberation, facilitating a public conversation on questions and proposals that might catalyze institutional and collective answers.

In this journey our main achievements so far have been two:

1. The creation of the Gi2030 community, comprised by core and extended teams, participants in the online platform, the workshops and the weekly hub meetings.
2. The results of the first three phases of the process (the first diamond), which harvested more than 100 questions made in the workshops, and examined them until a final set of 10 questions was agreed upon. Those questions set the agenda for

the final two phases (the second diamond), and represent an on-going, provisional “overlapping consensus” (Rawls, 1993) between citizens and experts about the most pressing issues for Gipuzkoa in 2030.

The Learnings

In every action-research project there is an amount of learning-as-you-go. This is a work in progress and there is still much to learn. Part of our strategy is to share short and frequent recaps, so here are a few provisional lessons.

Dare to Move From 3.0 To 4.0 Governance

When we started, we thought that what we were being asked to do was “to make a strategic plan for Gipuzkoa” (Gi2030 stakeholder). Soon we realized that to do that we would have to facilitate a shift from, to put it in Scharmer’s terms, 3.0 governance (coalitions between organized interest groups) to 4.0 governance (collective action from shared awareness). That is a huge transition, but we are determined to enact it with trust and confidence, acting as if we were already in that paradigm. Eventually it will come. Meanwhile, let’s work one year at a time, within the wider horizon of this “decade of transformation,” until 2030 and beyond.

Lead the Way by Synchronous Interaction

Contrary to our expectations, more people attended face-to-face meetings than registered in the platform. To discover why, the team interviewed a sample of workshop participants. Most of their answers were very positive, and found the workshops enriching and informative. Sharing the room with people who provided expert or experiential knowledge was appreciated, but also the dynamics of “listening and being listened to.” The key role of facilitators to ensure inclusivity in participation was recognized, as well as the workshops being an intergenerational and intercultural safe space.

Try the “Enactive Turn”

Our emphasis on process over product is similar to that of enactivist cognitive science when it emphasizes interaction over representation.

Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980) developed the idea that perception and action are co-emergent phenomena—perception develops as one moves, and one’s movements are conditioned by perception. Following this idea, consciousness is seen as a process in which the knower is coupled with other knowers, affecting and being affected by systems that include the non-human environment. Enactive knowledge is thus more about systemic transformation than about processing data.

At Gi2030 we are inspired by scholars in the enactivist tradition, who have expanded Maturana and Varela's radical idea to understand cooperation. We feel that sometimes we do not even need *to know* that we are cooperating in order to be able to cooperate. This is important because it might explain emerging forms of cooperative governance and shared vision as a result of smoothing out friction by interaction.¹²

Be Frugal, but Get the Best Help You Can Find

Besides being extended in the sense that the process takes place over a year in several places, both online and onsite, ours is also a “frugal innovation” approach to collaborative governance, since it involves the development of low-cost tools and technologies that enable citizens to participate more effectively in the deliberative and decision-making process. This includes the use of the platform and other digital tools that make it easier for citizens to share their opinions, ideas and visions of the future.

This frugal quality is important in the Basque context for two reasons. First, because one of the lessons of the Etorkizuna Eraikiz initiative in Gipuzkoa is that “collaborative governance is costly” and therefore it cannot be sustained by just one agent: blended financing and private-common-public collaboration may foster joint ownership of the projects (Barandiaran et al., 2023, p. 101). Frugal innovation is about the “means and ends to do more with less for many or more people” (Bhatti et al., 2018, p. 181), but the point is not simply to do things cheaper, but to do it collectively. *Only frugal innovation democratizes governance.*

However, being frugal does not mean that we do not need external resources. We apply for funding, since we need it to keep the civic tech infrastructure in good shape, and use specialized facilitation and communication services when necessary. In my experience, it is crucial to have a highly motivated core team with at least one experienced social innovator.

¹²“Often, cooperation is presupposed as something we set out to do, so that actions are either clearly cooperative or not – a separate and identifiable type of action altogether. [...] But taking this idea as the starting point for understanding cooperation presupposes that we already know what it is, and so we do not need to define the elements out of which it could arise. It precludes, for example, the possibility that cooperation arises without there being a predefined intention or motive to cooperate, while this may be key to understanding how people get to cooperate in the first place. Shared goals may emerge during the course of an interaction, and so participants can ‘roll into’ cooperation without having previous awareness of it. For instance, making space for someone who enters a crowded bus is achieved by the new and old passengers together, each adjusting movements and postures. Here, a common goal emerges out of the interaction and in the context of a small space to be shared as smoothly as possible.” (Fantasia, et al., 2014, p. 3)

Turn Friction into Vision

Nothing can beat a good workshop. Perhaps we have been doing too many (13 workshops in five months is exhausting, and leaves less time to reflect and harvest learnings), but they make possible change by *hearing the unexpected*. Just one example: in one meeting in Itziar, a hamlet close to the town of Deba, one resident was angry with us because she associated the project with the Provincial Council, and she was concerned about the installation of windmills close to her home. Thanks to a “slow and care-full scholar” (Temper et al., 2019, pp. 10–11) her anger was transformed into an open dialogue, in which she mentioned her admiration for Schumacher’s “small is beautiful” idea. Days later, we found that the Schumacher Institute had just released a toolkit that could be very useful for us (see below). Somehow the friction encountered in the meeting became not an obstacle in the way, but the way itself. And we will come back to Itziar and reconnect with its residents.

Cultivate a Practice Field (a Permanent Circle or Hub)

Workshops are important, but they take a considerable amount of time and resources from the team. In order to nourish ourselves, and to be open to stakeholders and interested people, we have seen the need to host a hub with regular meetings on campus. That is why every two weeks there is a day in which our lab is open for everyone: it is our practice field, where we host coaching circles and try new methods and techniques for our toolbox.

On September 8, 2023, we co-hosted a one-day summer school and, over lunch, the Provincial Deputy of Governance said something that I remember to this effect: *An elected politician’s day-to-day business is hectic; there is very little time to acquire or reflect on new knowledge. That is why we appreciate so much this kind of collaboration with the university. You have something that we do not have, capabilities for noiseless reflection and research, and that gives us some security amidst all this uncertainty.* It made me think. Policymakers and academics need each other, but not because political decisions should be left to scientists (even action scientists) or think tanks. What policymakers need from researchers is that we do our own work: to go deep into generating new knowledge. For that we might have to create and protect safe and stable hubs within our own universities, because if campus life becomes hectic and noisy too, then we cannot deliver what they need from us, and collaboration will not take place. Policymakers need us to create times and spaces for “intentional stillness,” avoiding hyperactivity and “mindless action” (Scharmer, 2018).

Put Together a Toolbox

When looking at the challenges ahead for Gipuzkoa, Naiara Goia, Managing Director of Arantzazulab, identified the need to “curate a tailored toolbox and develop capacities and skills in these methods that will contribute to the ambitions of collaborative governance” (in Barandiaran et al., 2023, p. 95).

We have created some tools like the workshops for harvesting and refining questions, or the adaptation of the Delphi method for hybrid environments, and we also use those developed by other agencies (such as the Megatrend Cards and the Futures Frequency workshops developed by Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund). But we also feel the need to adapt them. The Schumacher Institute (2023) has just released its community toolkit for climate action to help groups develop a collective sense of shared values and common purpose, which in turn helps projects to emerge. We aim to try, adapt and use many of those practices to put together our own toolbox.

Close the Feedback Loop Fast

This is an area where we still have a lot to learn. A good thing about hosting the workshops using the Decidim platform is that their results can be turned into open data and shared in the platform. If done properly, it could be of great interest to policy-makers.

One example in this direction is The Strategy Room developed by Nesta, the UK's innovation agency. It combines facilitated deliberation, interactive polling and collective intelligence to identify the best climate change policies in local areas. During the 90-minute experience, anonymized data about participants' preferred strategies are collected. It also captures how views shift during group discussions. The data is open and available for anyone to explore and for local councils to download and use for decision-making. According to Nesta, the data can also be interrogated to better understand the role of co-benefits, demographics and lifestyle factors in shaping people's preferences.

Turning the results into open data and visualizing it is technically possible with our Gi2030 platform. If we can do it in practice (still an unanswered question for us) it would be a massive breakthrough, and other members of the international Decidim community are working on it.

Be Open to Other Collaborative Governance Initiatives

At Gipuzkoa we have seen that CAs can build new bridges between the streets and the institutions to support short-term action based on long-term, awareness-based thinking. But in international CA networks sometimes more attention is given to questions of legitimacy (how to make the Assembly "look good" in terms of institutional, representative and deliberative standards) than to questions of capacity (how to create enough awareness and social momentum to put in place the Assembly's recommendations). By putting less weight on the representativeness standards, the extended lab model emphasizes capacity building, and highlights the need for a broader vibrant ecology of democratic practices, including activism, social movements, institutional and grassroot-led

innovation and experimentation, participatory economies and the revival of the commons.¹³

Last but not least, we have learnt that we are not alone in this. Small villages and organizations in Gipuzkoa have shown interest to use the platform, and we are considering alliances and joint projects with the Basque Centre for Climate Change and the itdUPM, an interdisciplinary centre of the Polytechnic University of Madrid.

In this journey over a year, the Gi2030 action research has been open to stakeholders and participants as a way to re-imagine the purpose of their system by creating a unifying, shared vision based on questions, answers and proposals. Our innovation is practical knowledge about how to make Gipuzkoa see itself in a systemic way. In a future line of work, we will begin to explore how we might shift existing systems towards the vision, and for that we will have to shift our focus, from a shared *vision* to several interconnected *missions*, and experiment with changing those systems in a safe, simulated environment, such a game.

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¹³ I am grateful to Oliver Escobar for this last point, which he made in the summer course “Citizen’s Assemblies, a new wave of citizen’s engagement in Europe” (San Sebastian, May 19, 2023). I also thank Cristina Monge for an encouraging talk in that course.

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