



EUSKO JAURLARITZA  
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# Conceptual framework for Collaborative Governance in the Basque Government

To deepen democracy, strengthen  
community, and enhance competitiveness  
for the well-being of territories

AN INITIAL PROPOSAL,  
PRACTICALLY  
ORIENTATED, AND OPEN  
TO DEVELOPMENT

# Table of contents

01. FOREWORD: CHANGE FLOWS FROM THE OLD SPRING	4 pg
02. INITIAL APPROACH: THREE ARGUMENTS	8 pg
2.1. Collaborative Governance as a tool for deepening democracy	
2.2. Collaborative Governance to strengthen the community	
2.3. Collaborative Governance as a competitiveness factor for the well-being of territories	
03. SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND VALUE SYSTEM OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN OUR CONTEXT	18 pg
04. COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BASQUE GOVERNMENT: INITIAL DEFINITION, PRINCIPLES, AND CHARACTERISTICS	24 pg
4.1. Initial definition	
4.2. Principles of Collaborative Governance	
4.3. Characteristics for implementing Collaborative Governance	
05. STRUCTURES, PROCESSES, AND CAPABILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE	34 pg
5.1 Methodologies, structures and work processes	
5.2 Profiles, attitudes, and capabilities	
06. THREE DIMENSIONS OF GOVERNANCE TO DEEPEN AND RENEW COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE	38 pg
6.1. Public Administration Management: Continuous improvement and innovation	
6.2. Inter-institutional relations (multi-level governance): Improving coordination and relations between different levels of government	
6.3. Relations with society: Strengthening and renewing the community and social systems	
07. OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE OF THE BASQUE GOVERNMENT	50 pg
08. NEXT STEPS	56 pg
REFERENCES	61 pg

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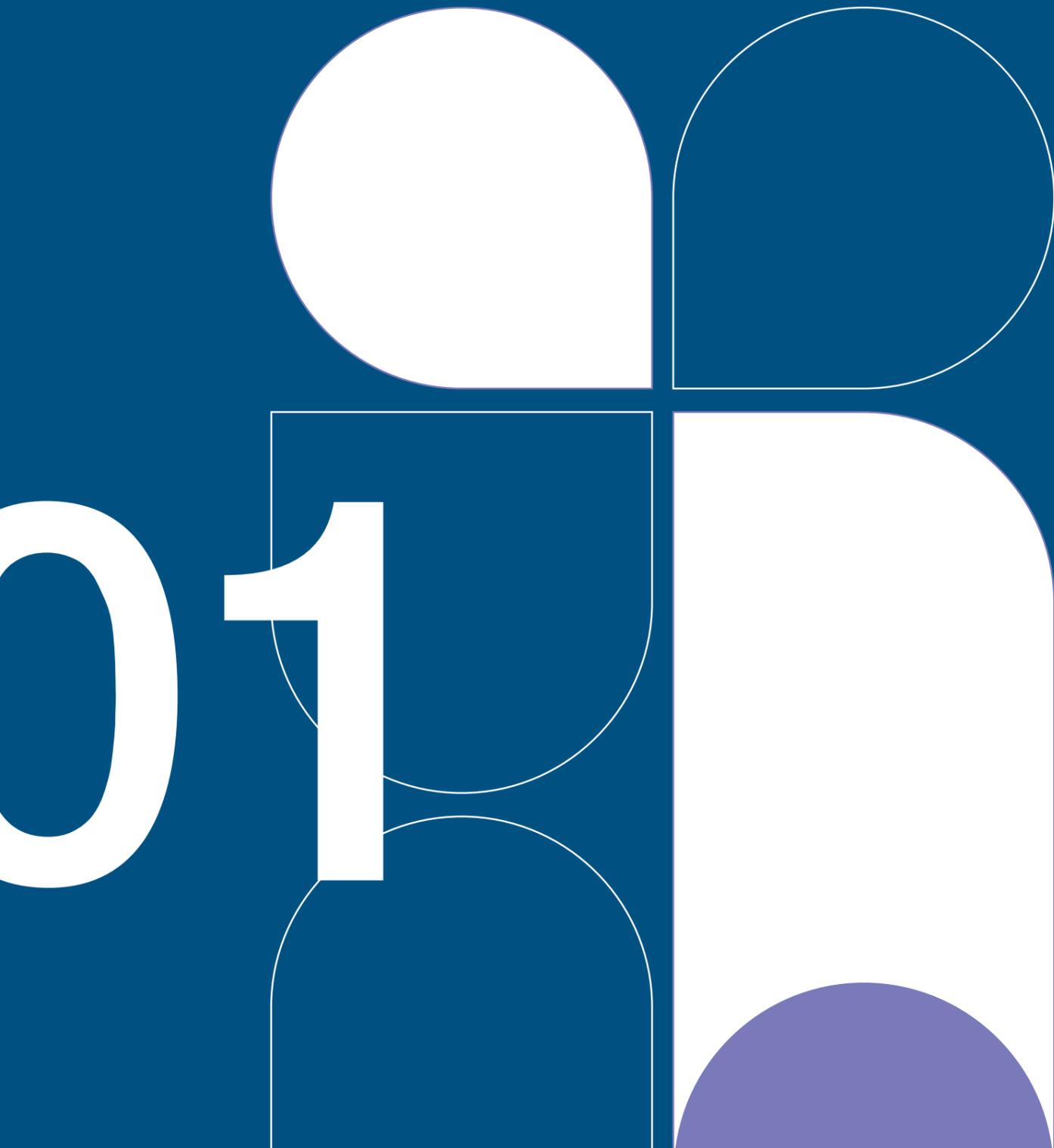
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# FOREWORD

Change flows from the old spring

### Change flows from the old spring

Our welfare and our level of progress are the result of a model of institutional and community cooperation. We owe the solidity of our institutions, our governance structures, and our strengths to go on growing as a people, including social capital, to previous generations and to those who took up the tiller in the Basque Country. Institutional leadership apart, one of the main virtues of this model has been to encourage dynamism and initiative in the community and among people, on the basis of shared responsibility. This is how we see democracy. This is our political culture and tradition. But at the time in history in which we live, it is essential to use these values, drawing on the old spring, to establish updated ways of doing things that give us new sustenance. Without a doubt, one of the key ways is to go further in collective governance.

Let us think for a moment about the challenges we face: employment in the future, competitiveness in industry, housing, security, revitalising the Basque language, transforming the healthcare system, social ageing, migration, emotional welfare, climate change, the new inequality gaps and so on. Let us think about the rise of populist movements that offer shortcuts and magical solutions to these problems, or those trying to sell us an idealised version of old-fashioned authoritarianism. Let us think about the far-reaching changes that have come about in Basque society in recent decades, about the fragmentation currently occurring in the public communication space, about polarisation, disaffection and the strength individualism is gaining.

The interaction of all these factors threatens democracy, creating a scenario with two features we share with all advanced peoples: uncertainty and complexity. The response we must give as a people is obvious: more democracy and better democracy, with community welfare as the compass to guide us. If we wish to be a landmark of democratic quality, and this is precisely our vocation, we need to consolidate and develop in our partnership between public institutions, social stakeholders and the public, to consolidate a more horizontal model for relations, based on mutual recognition and shared commitment. Pursuing deliberation and emphasising pluralism. Together setting the priorities for a renewed political agenda, the ways to carry it out and processes for assessment.

This view of governance is no stranger to us because, as has been pointed out, it fits our own culture of work and community tradition. Cooperation, shared responsibility and commitment to welfare and competitiveness in the community are values deeply rooted in our region. They have made an obvious mark on initiatives run in the economic, social, cultural and leisure spheres, initiatives that have succeeded thanks to the drive of civil society: the cooperative movement, that to revitalise Basque language and culture, the voluntary sector, social welfare organisations and protected employment. All this is of great satisfaction to us, but we must not rest on our laurels. We need to act to reinforce these values and elements that make us a people, in the face of social currents that weaken them, because they are not immune to historical dynamics.

Collaborative governance is an important tool for this. While it is true that the right conditions exist, it is our job to rake risks and experiment in order to unleash their full potential for change, to take a real qualitative leap forward and pull the right levers. It is not enough to be open, efficient and transparent, or to consult stakeholders and the public. We are talking about developing our collective ability to think, work and reinvent ourselves together.

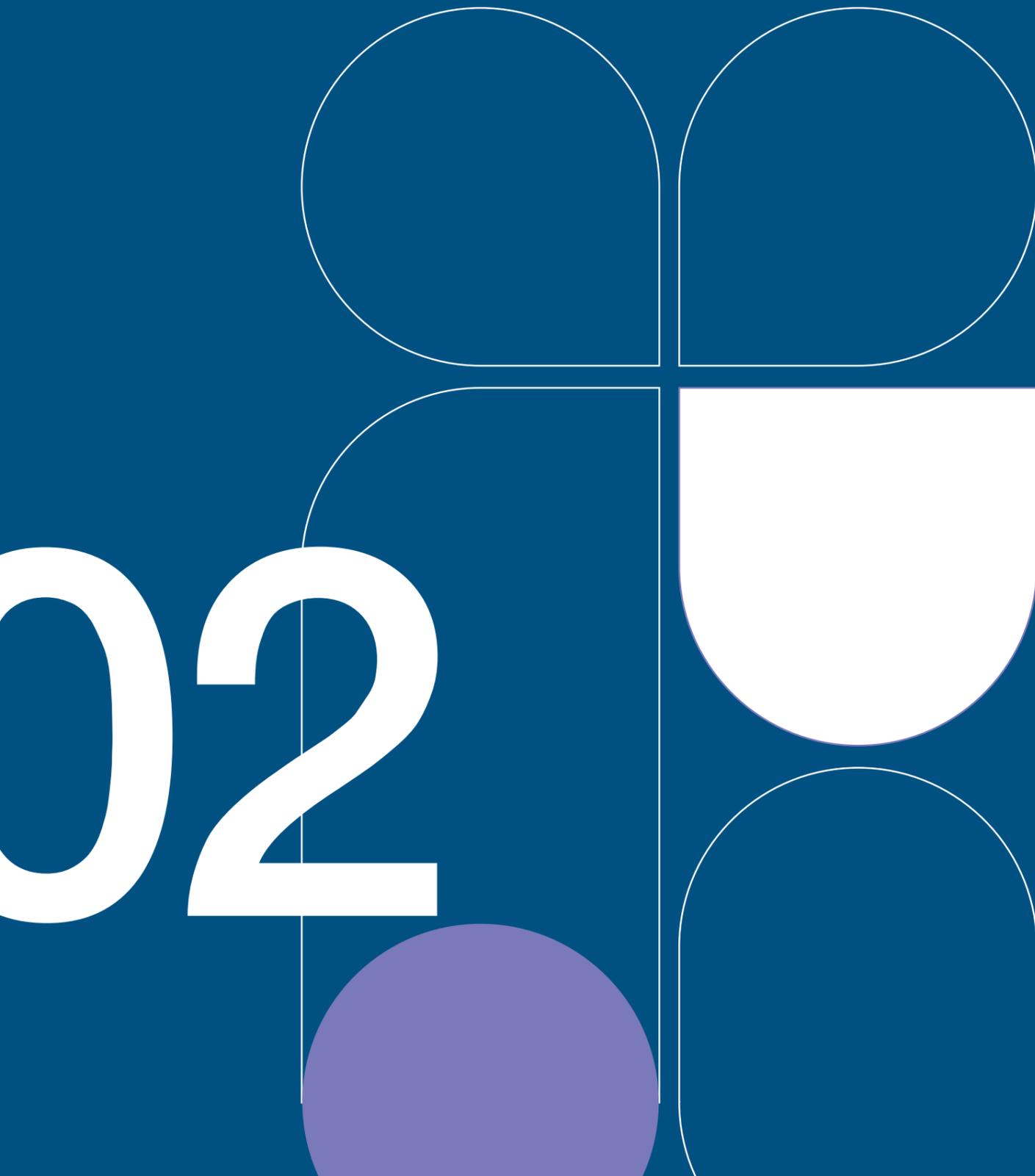
This means rethinking the role of government and the concept of public value, by incorporating new abilities and profiles, as well as new trends in the execution and assessment of our actions: systemic approaches, experimentation and collective learning, for example.

But this is not just an extension of government, or simply a matter of procedure. We need to blaze a trail all together because it is up to us to drive forward the way of working that has got us this far. To confront the challenges we face, we must pool the resources, drive, intelligence and imagination of all of us, coping with uncertainty and complexity through joint action. This effort must be constant; driving real active listening and constructive debate; based on clear, inclusive and honest principles and rules of the game; and not stopping at occasional discussion processes. It must drive all our main strategic projects as a country. This is the approach proposed within this framework, one that we will carry on enriching and assessing with all stakeholders and will align with Europe, specifically under the “European Democracy Shield” plan.

Day by day, step by step, we aim to construct a milestone on the road to making the Basque Country a nation at the forefront of democracy. This is the key to reinforcing public trust and satisfaction, awakening motivation and enthusiasm to take part in politics and go on preparing the future. This is the path we must take in order to strengthen the walls of our Basque home against those who aim to weaken and divide democracy. This is the Basque model that has been praised by prestigious thinkers like Minouche Shafik and Mariana Mazzucato. From the old spring comes the fresh water of change.

**Imanol Pradales Gil**

**Lehendakari- President of the Basque Government**



# INITIAL APPROACH, TREE ARGUMENTS

## Initial approach: three arguments

Profound changes are taking place in political, economic, and social spheres worldwide. The current model of economic globalisation has directly affected many aspects of social life in every community and has created new dependencies in the field of public policy. Governments are no longer the sole parties determining the success or failure of policies. Many of our current challenges are complex; they cannot be explained through simple linear cause-and-effect relationships but rather involve multiple, interconnected, and evolving factors. These challenges have no single solution, and their outcomes are not entirely predictable (OECD, OPSI & MBR CGI, 2020; Snowden, 2010).

Consequently, many current social and public problems cannot be effectively addressed by public administrations alone, nor solely by market or social stakeholders. Short-term sectorial interventions are insufficient; no single stakeholder possesses the necessary knowledge, resources, and authority to tackle complex challenges on their own (Ansell, 2016). This situation calls for new models of collaboration between diverse actors. Our current technological, social, geopolitical, and environmental paradigms, together with profound social changes, compel us to radically rethink forms of governance, possibilities for participation, and prospects for building territorial strategies.

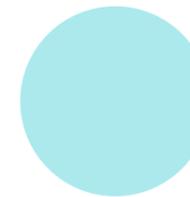
The concept of Collaborative Governance encompasses a wide spectrum of collaborative agreements between stakeholders, varying in nature, objectives, and types of interaction. As a working definition, Collaborative Governance “can be understood as a form of governance constituted by public, private, and social stakeholders to collaborate in a shared space. Public decisions are made through dialogue and deliberation; responsibilities are shared to achieve results that would not be possible individually or within a single sector. Rather than a hierarchical model, Collaborative Governance proposes a more horizontal relationship with public institutions and the stakeholders and citizens that make up society, based on mutual recognition and shared responsibility.” According to Emerson & Nabatchi, (2015), the dynamics of Collaborative Governance can be set in motion not only by institutions but also by social or mediation stakeholders. Regardless of the perspective, Collaborative Governance fundamentally involves sharing responsibilities among stakeholders. This document presents the Basque Government’s vision of Collaborative Governance, which is the focus of this initial approach.

Before defining Collaborative Governance in detail, this section outlines three arguments supporting its relevance in the current context. First, it is presented as a mechanism for strengthening democracy. Second, it contributes to building and facilitating community structures. Finally, and in a way that is complementary to and inseparable from the other two, it serves

as a tool to promote competitiveness that guarantees the well-being of the territories. These three ideas underpin the Basque Government’s understanding of Collaborative Governance.



**deepening  
democracy**



**building stronger  
communities**



**competitiveness for the  
well-being of territories**

## 2.1. Collaborative Governance as a tool for deepening democracy

The current model of economic globalisation, together with the cultural transformations taking place in our systems of coexistence, is directly affecting many democracies around the world. It is contributing to the weakening of political structures, crises in democratic performance, and growing disaffection of citizens with the political system. At the same time, it is creating challenges in political mediation and fostering the spread of populism, technocracy, and authoritarianism.

In recent years, liberal democracies have struggled to manage the demands of citizens, giving rise to what has been coined “a crisis of performance” (Mounk, 2018; Ibarra, 2011). Two main factors can help explain this global trend:

**Political structures of representation and public policy management are often outdated and weak, limiting their capacity to respond to rapid and complex societal changes (Innerarity, 2020).**

**There exists an imbalance between what public administrations or government structures can offer and what societies expect, termed the “democratic deficit” (Norris 2011).**

**This gap accentuates citizen disaffection with public institutions and political systems, creating a serious disconnect between those who govern and those who are governed.**

***“At the same time, globalisation has introduced a new political agenda. The current model of globalisation challenges and weakens both the framework of the nation state and democracy itself. The state is in crisis not only in scope but also in identity: political structures do not control economic and social reality, while the political identity of citizens is undergoing a profound transformation, which in turn shapes the political structures of representative democracies”.***

*(Barandiaran, 2021)*

Findings from a recent study (Arantzazulab, 2023) show that citizens of the Basque Country continue to express strong support for democracy. Trust in the public institutions of the Basque Autonomous Community is high: according to the February 2025 Sociometer, 77% of the population expresses confidence in the Basque Government, a figure well above the average in the most developed countries of the European Union (EU). Nevertheless, many citizens remain critical of democratic performance. The Arantzazulab study highlights growing concern about how democracy functions and its achievements and results. Citizens feel that their needs and aspirations are often neglected and perceive political decisions and political representatives as distant. Key demands include attention to diverse voices, promotion of more equitable citizen participation, consideration of expert contributions, and prioritisation of principled leaders, with local Basque societal values given particular weight.

In line with this diagnosis, the crisis of liberal democracy is, to a large extent, a crisis of mediation, representation, and governance. Strengthening democracy requires bringing citizens and organised civil society closer together and integrating them more fully into the public and political sphere. The starting point is the recognition of plurality: the demands of citizens are varied, heterogeneous, and often contradictory. Public institutions must decide how and to whom to respond. Differences of opinion are inevitable, and although we believe we share the same destiny, specific objectives may differ, and some demands may compete with each other. Plurality is therefore not an obstacle but rather a pillar of democratic governance, obliging institutions to balance diverse interests and needs.

Hence, at a time when threats to democracy are increasing and the legitimacy and trust of governments are being undermined, new tools are needed to deepen democracy. Collaborative Governance can be understood as such a tool. It proposes a shift in the model of relationships between institutions, civil society, and social stakeholders to collectively address the challenges of the public agenda. Collaborative Governance integrates the community into public reflection and decision-making processes, creating new spaces for co-creation, shared deliberation, and shared action between governments and civil society. By uniting the forces of different actors and sharing responsibility, decisions are better informed, drawing on multiple perspectives and data. They also gain greater legitimacy, as broader participation helps ensure transparency. All of this is only possible when the processes are linked to a system of values.

The approach to Collaborative Governance proposed in this framework is grounded in a specific understanding of liberal democracies. We propose it as an opportunity to complement the representative system by promoting other democratic procedures, deepening deliberation (to involve social stakeholders and citizens in public decisions through reasoned, informed, and respectful debate), and valuing plurality (to respond to the social heterogeneity generated by the cultural, ethnic, and identity plurality derived from globalisation).

## 2.2. Collaborative Governance to strengthen the community

The need to protect community and strengthen its organisation has never been greater. Today, the community sphere is conditioned by a postmodern logic that prioritises individual self-reflection. This structural phenomenon is reinforced by deliberate strategies that undermine the sense of the collective, the public, and the community. The exaggerated individualism promoted by neoliberalism erodes the sense of community bonds and networks.

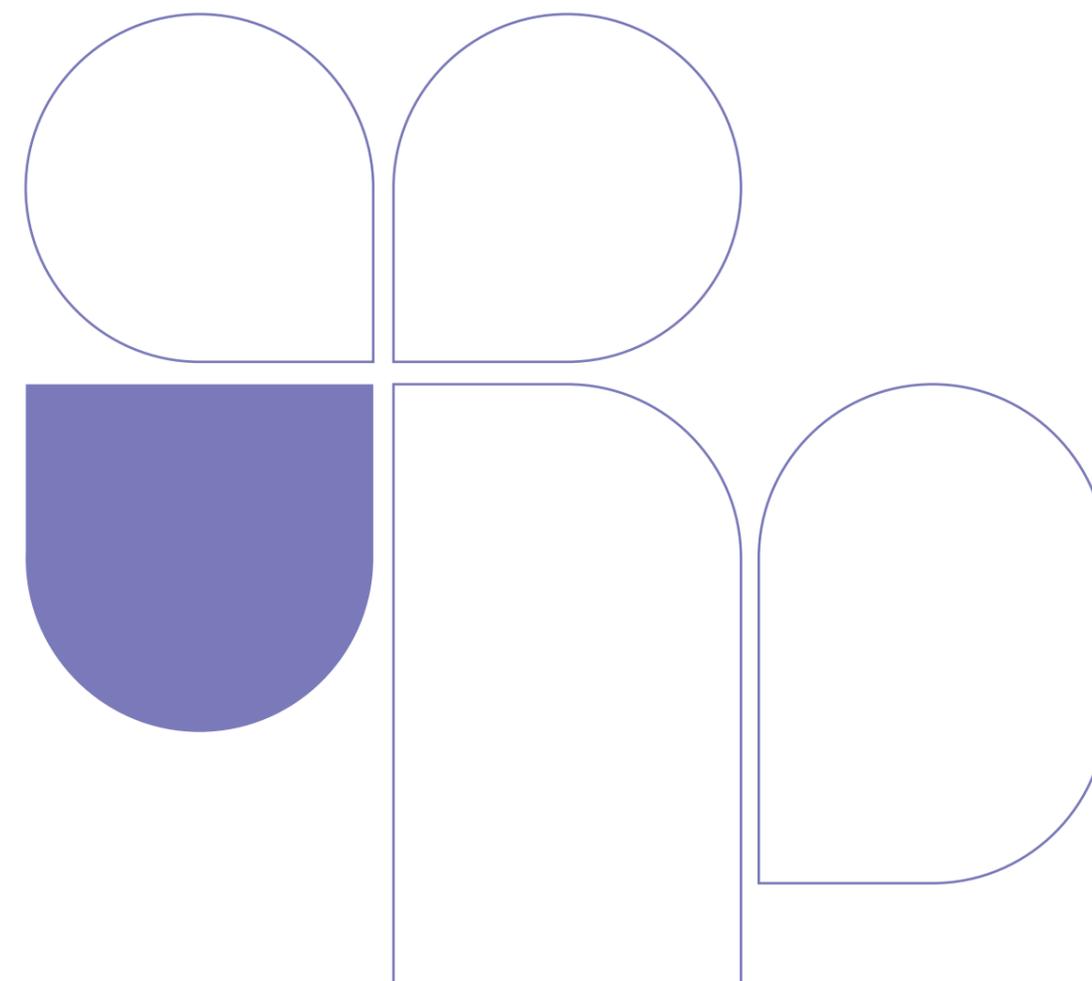
In this context, Collaborative Governance both enhances the effectiveness and legitimacy of policies and strengthens the social fabric of the community. From a philosophical and ethical standpoint, Michael Sandel (2009) highlights the value of cooperation in building a more just, supportive, and cohesive community. Collaborative Governance requires deliberative and horizontal processes: decisions are not imposed hierarchically but are constructed jointly by multiple

stakeholders. As Ansell and Gash (2008) argue, this model depends on mutual trust, open dialogue and a willingness to reach lasting consensus. Such dynamics reinforce a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, which are fundamental for a resilient and cohesive community.

Sandel also contends that a just society is not only defined by the neutrality of the state or by abstract respect for individual rights but by cultivating a life orientated towards the common good. Public decisions, therefore, must include moral judgements and collective debates about the goals a community pursues (Sandel, 2009). Collaborative Governance reflects this approach by creating spaces for public deliberation in which both the means and the ends of policy are discussed. In this way, the community becomes an active participant in the ethical debate on what it considers fair, dignified, and a priority.

Involving individuals in public deliberation strengthens their civic capacities and their sense of commitment to others. The community thus becomes more than merely a collection of individual interests; it becomes a moral entity with identity, purpose, and solidarity. Collaborative Governance strengthens the community both in its operational aspects and also in ethical and civic terms. From this perspective, governance helps to rebuild the sense of the common good, overcome

the social division brought about by individualism, and promote a deliberative and engaged citizenry. In this sense, Collaborative Governance is not merely a model for managing public policy; it is also an expression of justice and democratic life.



## 2.3. Collaborative Governance as a competitiveness factor for the well-being of territories

Globalisation has transformed the economic space, which in turn has affected the functioning of democracies. Globalisation and opening up the economy have transformed and deregulated national economic and market systems, reducing the capacity of the governments and creating challenges for institutional performance. The Basque Institute of Competitiveness, Orkestra, proposes that the Basque economy can be regulated and structured differently to ensure well-being, as outlined in this section.

Competitiveness can be understood as a systemic and dynamic economic process with the intended result of sustainable common well-being (Aranguren Querejeta and Canto Farachala, 2021). It seeks to ensure that the human needs of all members of society are fully met and that each individual can develop their full potential. At the same time, it encourages collaboration with other community stakeholders to shape a common future that is sustainable, grounded in intergenerational responsibility, and mindful of global solidarity.

Hence, Collaborative Governance lies at the heart of competitiveness for well-being. It influences both competitiveness and well-being in a territory through two key processes: the orientation of territorial strategies and the development of strategies and policies. To understand its impact, we can draw on the framework for competitiveness for well-being developed by Orkestra. As this framework explains, the ultimate goal is to promote the well-being of the agents and citizens in a territory, which guides the direction in which competitiveness should be pursued.

When Collaborative Governance addresses the various dimensions of well-being in a shared manner, the strategies of stakeholders are better aligned with these objectives. These strategies, in turn, influence the levers of competitiveness for wellbeing, such as skills, social capital, knowledge, and natural capital (Orkestra, 2019). By stimulating synergies between strategies and policies, avoiding overlaps, and promoting the appropriate use of resources, Collaborative Governance effectively contributes to competitiveness for well-being, particularly when the challenges are complex.

As Ansell (2016) notes, Collaborative Governance allows for the construction of agreements and shared visions between the positions and interests present in the community. This improves strategic direction, ensuring that resources, efforts, and collective intelligence are geared towards the needs most closely linked to the well-being of the agents and citizens in a territory. This is critical in the current climate, given the scarcity of public resources (Ansell & Torfing, 2021) and the increasing complexity of policies, which can create incompatibilities between objectives (Fratesi, 2025). Identifying welfare priorities and enhancing territorial competitiveness to promote them is therefore essential.

Collaborative Governance—both between public institutions and their departments and between other territorial stakeholders—also enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of policies. Just as directionality involves activating the appropriate levers, Collaborative Governance ensures that the levers

necessary for policy implementation are engaged, combining the capabilities, resources, and authority needed to adopt effective measures. It promotes the necessary dialogue between stakeholders to develop territorial development strategies. This includes aligning public competitiveness and innovation policies with private actors in their territories. The result is better-designed policies that take account of the needs of the territory and its stakeholders and that capture new opportunities for competitiveness and innovation more effectively (Borrás, 2009; Valdaliso and Wilson, 2015).

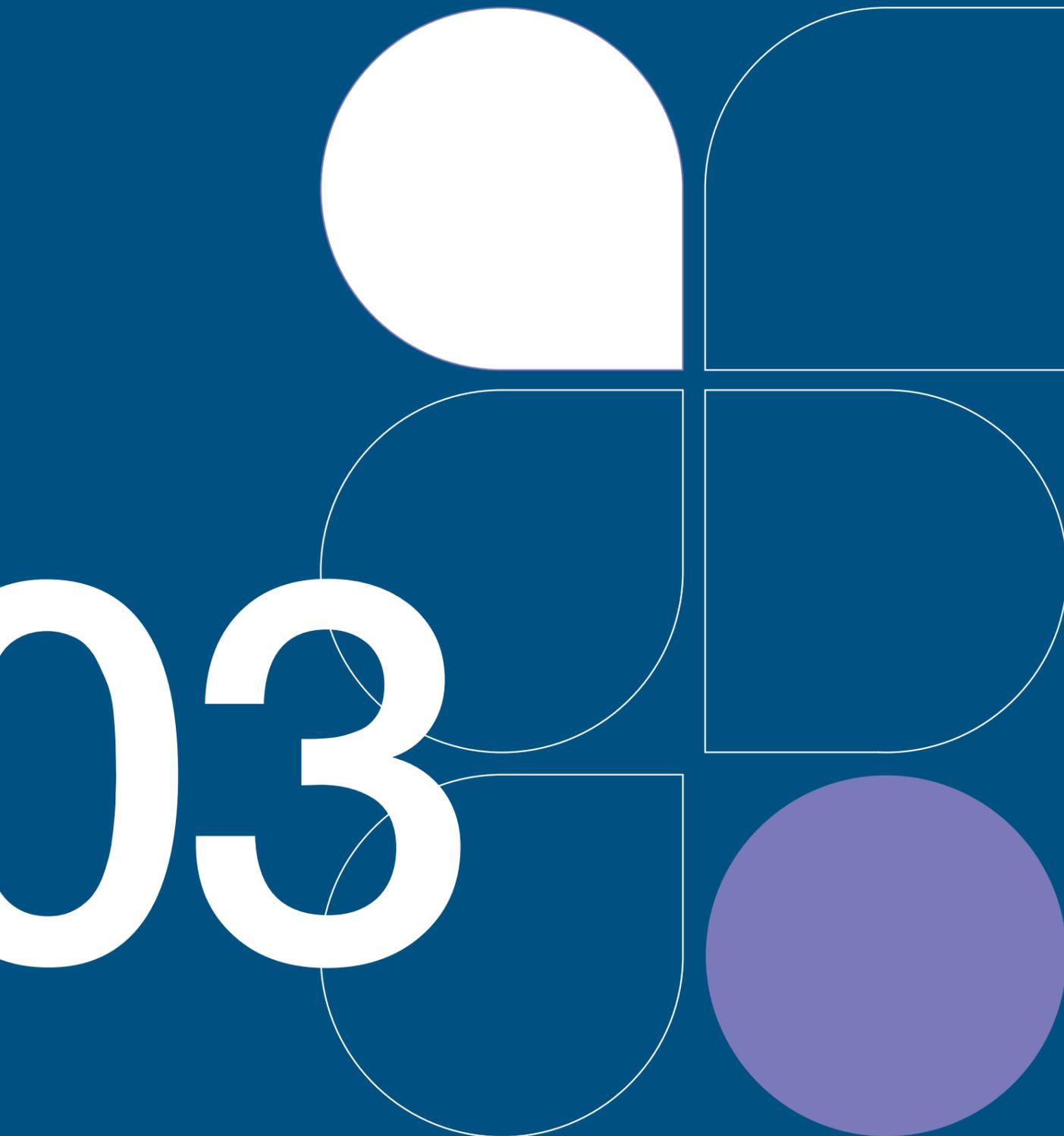
By increasing collective knowledge, cooperation practices strengthen local entities and consolidate an institutional system that is key to territorial competitiveness (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). In addition to reinforcing the capacity of organisations to respond to territorial challenges, Collaborative Governance improves efficiency, as it leads to better organisational performance or lower costs compared to alternative approaches (Agranoff, 2007).

Collaborative Governance is also a strategy for generating added public value. It can mobilise synergies between resources, knowledge, perspectives, and capabilities (Arrona & Larrea, 2022; Ansell, 2016), as well as promote shared leadership. It allows relationships between companies and communities to be based on mutual respect, transparency, and active social commitment, generating lasting value for all parties (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Finally, in the context of territorial competitiveness, companies and public institutions build strategic and ethical relationships. Companies, as active members of the community, must prioritise social responsibility, sustainability,

and collective participation, in addition to economic performance (Porter & Kramer, 2011). They should not view the community solely as a customer or a resource but as a strategic partner. This involves identifying and pursuing shared objectives to promote the well-being of the community and the balanced development of territories (Freeman, 1984). Collaborative Governance provides mechanisms for these key stakeholders of competitiveness to participate in the construction of territorial strategies and assume shared responsibility.

In short, Collaborative Governance is central to competitiveness for the well-being of territories. It is a collaborative process that engages multiple stakeholders in the collective construction and sustainable development of their territory.



# SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND VALUE SYSTEM OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN OUR CONTEXT

In this section, we focus on our context and culture. In fact, a variant of Collaborative Governance has long been associated with our territory. Over the centuries, norms, customs, and institutions have developed with a practical and associative focus, all in the pursuit of the common good. In the regional tradition, the individual and their dignity and freedom have been the starting point, from which interpersonal relationships and social organisations have been built. In this context, individuals assume responsibilities, meet needs, and contribute to the emergence of subsidiary organisations.

The idea of individual freedom is complex; it entails both autonomy and responsibility. Each person has the capacity to make decisions and is accountable for their words and actions, as well as their consequences. The home is the first social organisation, and it is up to the individual to ensure it functions effectively. At the same time, the individual is also responsible for their community and for promoting the common good. Evidence of this can be seen in the longstanding communal associations, neighbourhood services, property-related practices, associations, rules of solidarity and social welfare, institutions, and associative processes periodically rebuilt in modern times, and the ongoing experiences of “*auzolan*” or communal work.

This culture has also created practical institutions across various aspects of social life, designed to respond to the needs of the moment. These institutions go beyond concepts of reciprocity, exchange or cooperation, extending to the sense of responsibility and co-responsibility of individuals.

**In other words, a rich, strong, and pluralistic civil society in which the principle of subsidiarity is manifested. These practical ideas historically shaped the local understanding of democracy.**

Some examples persist in the regional public law of small towns (Eizagirre and Muñoa, 2024), and more recent initiatives demonstrate continuity in associative practices in many areas of society (Eizagirre and Muñoa, 2021). One notable instance of the latter is the *Etorikizuna Eraikiz* strategy developed and consolidated by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa over the past decade. Unveiled in 2016, the “Strategy of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa for innovation in policy management and public policies, creating public value and strengthening democracy” shapes the Council’s commitment to Collaborative Governance. Its objective is to foster community capacity as a means of responding to the main strategic challenges of the territory (Barandiaran, Canel, Bouckaert, 2023). At the core of this strategy lies the so-called “Gipuzkoa model”, which argues the importance of “collaboration” in shaping the institutionalisation of the economic, social and political life of the territory. The model reflects a marked cultural orientation towards associationism, community ties, and a high level of social capital. Other regional initiatives developed along these lines of collaboration include Bilbao Metropoli-30 and Gasteiz Green Capital.

Social movements have also contributed to improving the quality of life of the community. Feminism, in particular, has made our territory a benchmark for policies promoting gender equity. Through the actions of *Emakunde* and the Law on Equality between Women and Men, equality has become firmly established as a cross-cutting public policy.

If we look closely at the essence of these practices, attitudes, and behaviours, we can discern the conception of Collaborative Governance and redefine the new framework in light of its echoes. There is a sense of the individual, a practical and responsibility-based approach to association, and a distinctive distribution of the organisation and responsibilities of the governance system. In other words, Collaborative Governance, in the Basque context, is not merely a way of organising administrative techniques or public policies; it is a social philosophy deeply embedded in our culture and tradition.

In a changing political and social climate, new challenges require increasingly innovative approaches to governance while remaining grounded in a specific context. The Basque Country has a solid foundation for this: a value system shaped by history and practice, which places cooperation, shared responsibility and commitment to the well-being of the community at its core. The Collaborative Governance proposed today builds on this broad base of Basque cooperation.

As noted in the introduction, the current crisis of liberal democracy, lack of representation, and low participation show that political structures alone cannot reflect the plurality and community aspirations of society. In the Basque context, however, a political culture based on community values and associative processes provides the right conditions for promoting Collaborative Governance. Integrating these values—mutual trust, commitment, shared

responsibility, and community ethics—into the design and development of public policies holds significant potential for democratic transformation.

**Collaboration is understood as the basis of democracy. It is expressed through participatory mechanisms and in the construction of a political culture in which the cohesion and decisions of a community are shared. This model of governance is embedded in the territory, and grounded in interpersonal relationships, trust, and care.**

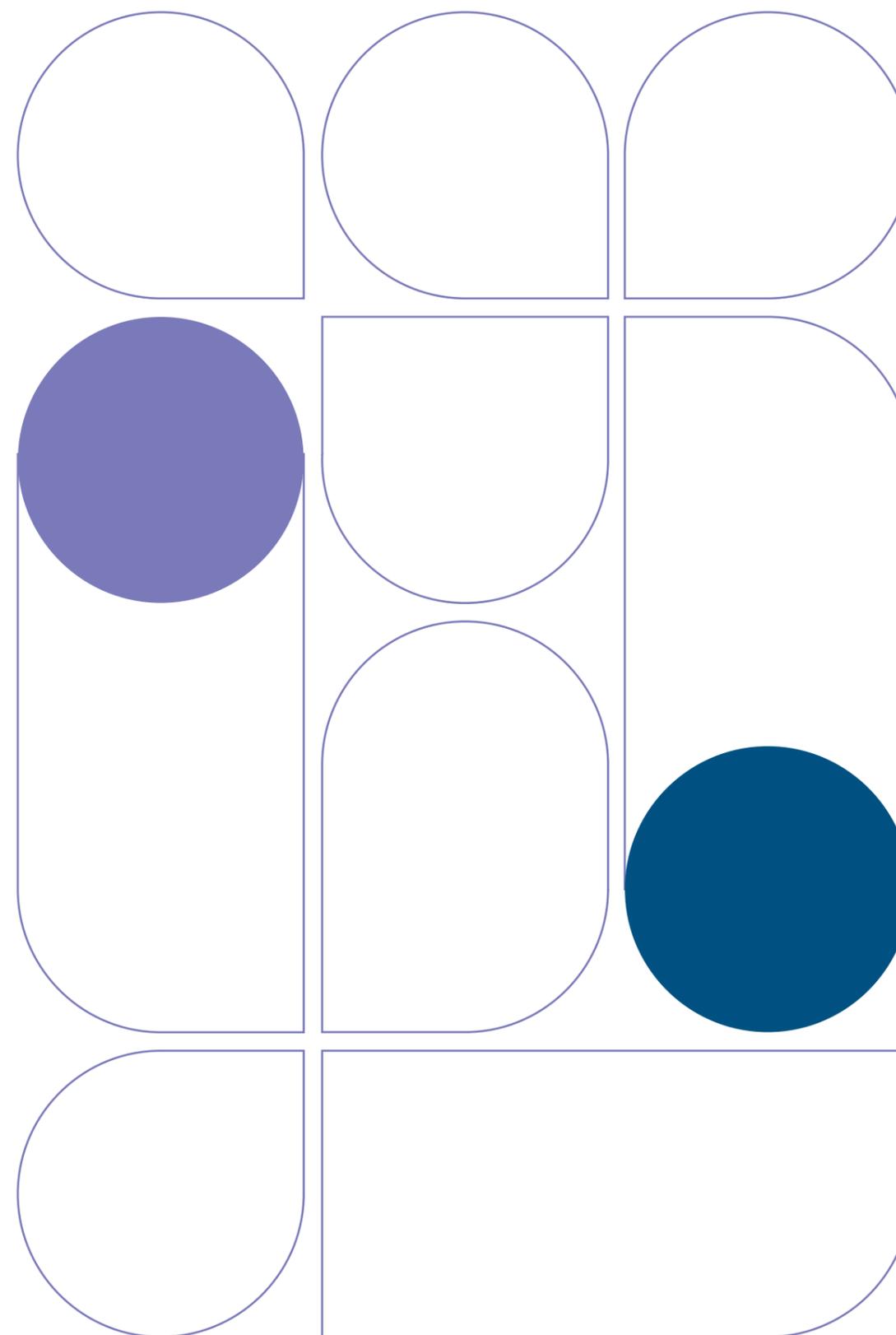
Thus, our social history and values provide a solid foundation for promoting Collaborative Governance in the Basque Country. As a social philosophy, it can serve as a tool for promoting a more inclusive and solid democracy, centred in the democratic culture and community values of our territory. In an increasingly complex and polarised society, cooperation offers a path for taking responsibility, rediscovering shared purpose, and building a common future.

There is no doubt that advancing Collaborative Governance in our context can have a distinctive and unique impact compared to other settings, provided it is based on local values. In Basque culture and tradition, civic responsibility, contributing to the common good, consolidating social institutions, and concern for collective issues have long been the norms of thought, feeling, and behaviour.

**Current social transformations, such as the growth of individualism, digitalisation and social fragmentation, have weakened or reconfigured some enduring values while introducing new ones**

**In this context, advancing Collaborative Governance requires collectively updating and transmitting democratic and community values. In other words, we must promote Collaborative Governance based on our value systems. This in itself requires deep reflection and coherent collective action if we are to effectively maintain or reinforce these values in society.**

**By building on patterns of behaviour from our tradition and the culture of “auzolan”, we will find unique opportunities to respond to the profound, complex, and global transformations currently underway. This conceptual framework is built upon all these considerations.**



04

**COLLABORATIVE  
GOVERNANCE  
FROM THE  
PERSPECTIVE  
OF THE BASQUE  
GOVERNMENT:  
INITIAL DEFINITION,  
PRINCIPLES, AND  
CHARACTERISTICS.**

In the previous sections, we outlined the Basque Government’s understanding of Collaborative Governance. We now set out the principles and characteristics that define the concept. The aim is not to propose a strict or closed definition but to describe the Basque Government’s approach to Collaborative Governance within this conceptual and operational framework.

## 4.1. Initial definition

The Basque Government defines Collaborative Governance as an institutionalised form of collaboration between public institutions, social stakeholders, and citizens. Its purpose is to deepen democracy, strengthen the community, and promote competitiveness directed towards well-being. Rather than a hierarchical form of governance, it is a more horizontal model of relationship with citizens and the social stakeholders that make up society. Based on mutual recognition and shared responsibility, it reinforces social capital (trust, cooperation, and information) between institutions, citizens, and civil society stakeholders through deliberation and shared action.

Based on this definition, Collaborative Governance allows local stakeholders to share a common vision and a set of interconnected actions. It is thus an instrument for promoting collective processes, identifying priorities, and developing lines of action in a territory through decisions formally aimed at

consensus (Xabier Barandiaran, 2021, 2022). This means that Collaborative Governance seeks to deepen democracy through the meaningful involvement of a greater number of actors in the public sphere. This is how the Basque Government understands the model of Collaborative Governance.

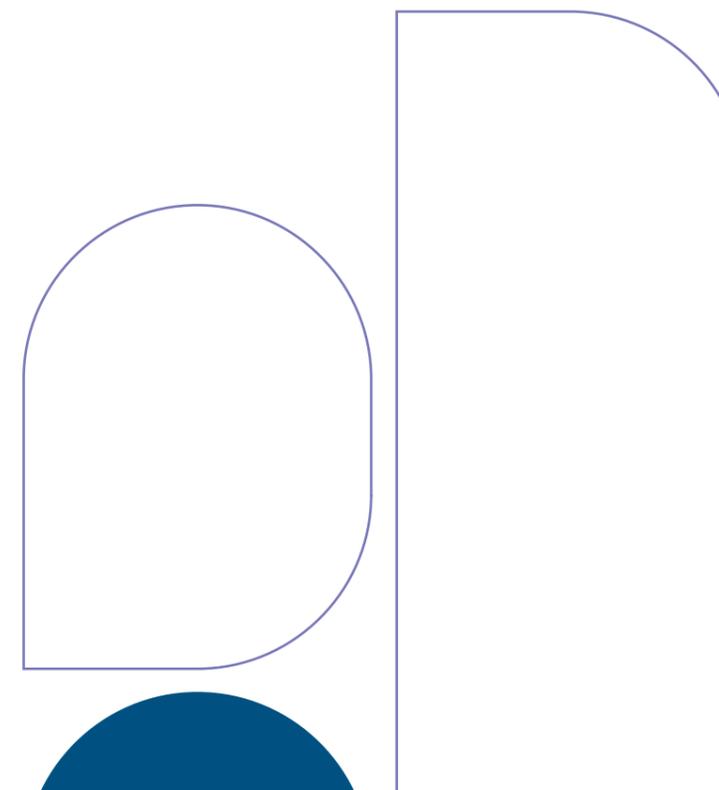
The proposed governance model rests on the government’s decision-making capacity, resources, strategy and leadership. At the same time, it recognises that other institutions, stakeholders, and grassroots initiatives in the territory hold similar capacities within their own areas of action. They too have decision-making power, resources, legitimacy, responsibility and leadership on issues that form part of the public agenda, and these capacities can be brought together to pursue common goals. In such cases, strategies may be agreed through formal or informal spaces, allowing joint policies to be developed on issues that affect the community.

Collaborative Governance, and its continuous renewal, is thus conceived as a strategic tool to help citizens and stakeholders take a leading role in shaping the future of their territories. This approach can increase citizen satisfaction, restore motivation for political participation, encourage the involvement of the community and social stakeholders in shared projects, and strengthen the effectiveness and legitimacy of institutions.

When we describe Collaborative Governance as a means of deepening democracy, building community, or increasing competitiveness, we do not confine it to the political sphere alone. This approach can also be promoted in other areas of society: within companies, in the daily lives and actions of individuals, and in engagement with associations or social initiatives. From this perspective, Collaborative Governance connects with the Basque concept of “auzolan”. It is not merely an extension of public administration, nor just a mechanism of participation that citizens use to defend their own interests. The Collaborative

Governance approach proposed by the Basque Government combines cooperation, shared decision-making, loyalty to the community, and personal responsibility. It takes shape in a specific context, within a value system in which public action and community life are structured and is closely linked to a particular political culture.

Table 1 summarises the fundamental principles and characteristics of the Basque Government Collaborative Governance Model. These points are then explained in detail in Sections 4.2 and 4.3:



## Basque Government Collaborative Governance Model

Fundamental principles and characteristics

Principles	Characteristics
Political culture	Willingness of actors
Trust	Diversity of actors
Shared responsibility	Spaces
Effectiveness	Collective action and shared evaluation
Equality	Continuous learning and transformation

Table 1: Principles and characteristics that define Collaborative Governance in the Basque Government

## 4.2. Principles of Collaborative Governance

The principles of Collaborative Governance are the set of values and attitudes that underpin its development: political culture, trust, shared responsibility, effectiveness, and equality.

- Political culture:** Almond and Verba's (1963) concept of political culture is a fundamental category. Political culture refers to the set of psychological orientations that citizens direct toward the political system, institutions, actors, and political processes. These orientations—shaped by values, beliefs, and attitudes—manifest in knowledge about politics, attitudes toward political objects, and political participation. Civic culture can be understood through three dimensions: political socialisation (both subjective and objective), attitudes and values toward political objects, and political behaviour and participation.
- Trust:** Trust is the foundation of any collaborative process. It is both a condition and a result: without trust, exchanging information, sharing decisions or making long-term commitments is difficult. At the same time, collaborative processes foster and reinforce trust. In Collaborative Governance, trust operates in two directions: horizontally, between the stakeholders involved in the process (both between institutions and between individuals), and vertically, between citizens and institutions. The study “What makes people trust Collaborative Governance? Analysis of a government programme of the Basque Autonomous Community” has shown that the dynamics of trust are complex: both formal aspects (legal norms, agreements)

and informal aspects (personal relationships, mutual understanding) are important for building and sustaining trust (Barandiaran, Canel, Bouckaert, 2022).

- Shared responsibility (co-responsibility):** Participating in Collaborative Governance involves assuming and sharing responsibilities. This goes beyond formal legal obligations to include shared ethical and political responsibilities so that all stakeholders feel partly accountable for the process. In an analysis of network governance, Aguilar (2020) highlights that the interdependence of stakeholders requires new forms of collaboration, including co-responsibility and a commitment to sharing resources and risks to achieve objectives.

In the Basque Country, shared responsibility is linked to the idea of sovereignty and community ethics. In the political system, it is expressed through self-government at various levels, and it extends into wider aspects of social life. Being self-governing means taking on responsibilities in service of the community.

The term “auzolan” refers to collaboration among members of a community. Each member assumes responsibility and initiative while operating within the norms of the community and satisfying individual needs through collective effort. This perspective has historically materialised in the economic, social, cultural and leisure spheres. Well-known examples include the “auzolan” of the Basque farmers, industrial cooperatives, and

third-sector initiatives developed through collaboration between families. In whichever form, it is not merely top-down planning, nor is it the result of a dialectical process that citizens propose to public institutions. “Auzolan” is legitimised and developed through citizens and organisations and institutions of different kinds, and for this, co-responsibility is essential. In a democratic and pluralistic context, co-responsibility means active participation in public life—not only by voting, but also by informing, organising, and collaborating in the processes of nation building. The idea of political community is sustained by the responsible action of its members.

The Collaborative Governance proposed here aligns with the Basque concept of “auzolan”. It is not merely an extension of public administration or a participation mechanism for defending individual interests. Rather, it combines cooperation, the right of participants to decide, loyalty to the community, and shared responsibility. Collaborative Governance requires co-responsibility, combining rights and duties to respond to collective challenges. Today, Collaborative Governance is synonymous with democratic self-government, responsibility, and ethics that underpin community life.

The collaboration promoted by this model is guided by agreed principles: recognition of others, acceptance of their capabilities and legitimacy, freedom and autonomy, clear and transparent rules, and honesty.

- **Effectiveness:** Collaborative Governance processes must be goal-orientated. This can mean identifying or meeting societal needs or working on specific challenges

in a shared manner. Coherence is an intrinsic characteristic of effectiveness: public policies should be consistent with the defined goals or strategies.

- **Equality:** in Collaborative Governance processes, participants must be treated equally to ensure the conditions for a more balanced distribution of power. An example of this is the effort to incorporate the gender perspective into Collaborative Governance; various authors agree that structural gender inequalities must be addressed to create truly inclusive and egalitarian processes and spaces (Larrea, 2024).

Indirect but related values support these five principles: individual and collective commitment, mutual respect, solidarity, and empathy (the ability to understand others and recognise their perspectives).

Hence, to a large extent Collaborative Governance is the construction of a new democratic and political culture underpinned by these values.

## 4.3. Characteristics for implementing Collaborative Governance

It is essential to understand the context in which a system of Collaborative Governance is implemented. As previously noted, Collaborative Governance cannot be reduced to a simple tool for building community or managing public affairs. It is embedded in a context, within a culture, a system of values, and a framework in which this governance is structured and developed—especially within a political culture.

Why is Collaborative Governance so well accepted in the Basque Country? Cooperation has historically been part of our social fabric, and social and grassroots initiatives have shown a strong capacity to institutionalise cooperation. The territory possesses significant economic and social resources to build community and generate social capital. Many public policies in the Basque Autonomous Community have originated from popular initiatives, to later be supported or adopted by public institutions. When we propose Collaborative Governance here, we are not starting from scratch; we already possess an ecosystem accustomed to collaboration. Context is therefore vital when shaping a Collaborative Governance system.

In a given context, certain fundamental characteristics define Collaborative Governance and the elements required to implement this model. Some are structural and facilitative, while others are linked to the conditions and capacities that must be fostered (Adapted reference: GC map, Arantzazulab; Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, Etorikizuna Eraikiz, New Political Culture Think Tank, 2022).

### 1. Willingness of actors

In designing and developing the policies, structures, processes, capacities, and resources that comprise the public agenda, governments show their willingness to collaborate and interact with society, rather than act unilaterally. Interaction and collaboration between the government and society are organised around the public agenda, ensuring that it is not only the government’s agenda. Through exchange and collaboration between the government, citizens, and the wider network of social stakeholders, priorities and actions for the public agenda—and consequently public policies—are established. Successful implementation requires the active commitment of both the government and social stakeholders.

### 2. Diversity of actors

Collaborative Governance processes involve a broad and diverse set of stakeholders, with inclusivity as a core principle. The aim is to involve as many actors as possible in the process, especially those usually excluded, and to incorporate a variety of insights. Therefore, the participation of multiple stakeholders must be guaranteed, and effective methods need to be developed to incorporate their knowledge and perspectives.

It is also important to consider intersectionality and the diverse positions of stakeholders (Zugaza, 2024). Additionally, attention should be paid to mobilising the ‘absentees’—those who feel unaffected by public affairs but whose involvement is crucial to the strategies (Ahedo et al., 2023).

### 3. Spaces for reflection, dialogue, deliberation, co-creation, experimentation, action, and shared decision-making

Spaces are created for citizens and stakeholders to listen, reflect, deliberate and, where agreed, make decisions. These spaces are not hierarchical, but rather they promote horizontal relationships where governments interact and collaborate with the broader civil society network (institutions, companies, non-governmental organisations, universities, associations, etc.). In-depth dialogue and deliberation lie at the heart of Collaborative Governance.

Interactions between stakeholders must be characterised by active listening, constructive debate, and the exchange of opinions. These spaces can be formal or informal, with agreed “rules of the game” that foster participation and trust. Informal collaboration is also possible, supported by social capital and relational networks, as is evident in the case of companies and associations. Effective collaboration also requires the use of facilitation techniques and methodologies that enable new ways of working and thinking in these spaces.

### 4. Collective action and shared evaluation

Collaborative Governance is realised through collective action or by coordinating connected actions among actors while creating and facilitating spaces for joint learning. Co-creation is one approach to putting this into practice (e.g., the Arantzazulab Co-creation Ecosystem).

Mechanisms are also created to incorporate mutual evaluation into monitoring public policies. New evaluation tools are used to complement traditional methods, allowing for more effective measurement of project impact and collective learning from successes or failures. (e.g., developmental evaluation, which is focused on learning and adaptation in complex and uncertain environments and contexts; Arantzazulab EE).

### 5. Continuous learning and transformation

Collaborative Governance recognises the emergent nature of collaborative processes in complex contexts. Learning is not a secondary outcome but rather is the core of the process. Not merely an accumulation of technical knowledge, it is related to the transformation of the relationships, values, and stakeholders involved. Thus, Collaborative Governance is more than a means to achieve a fixed goal, it is a journey to develop the collective capacity for thinking, working, and reinventing ourselves together.

**Having outlined these key characteristics, we now turn to the structures, processes and capacities required to implement Collaborative Governance effectively.**



# STRUCTURES, PROCESSES, AND CAPABILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Collaborative Governance represents more than a new way of governing. It promotes a culture of shared relationships and responsibility among public, private, and social stakeholders. Rather than a simple administrative reorganisation, it signals a deeper shift in how we understand democracy and social and political relations. This change affects not only public administration but also all members of the collaboration process.

This implies that the structures, processes, and capacities necessary to effectively implement Collaborative Governance must be developed by a diverse range of local stakeholders. In the following sub-sections, we describe some of the key concepts.

## 5.1. Methodologies, structures, and work processes

To put Collaborative Governance into practice, new ways of thinking and doing must be developed, while ensuring that the necessary structures and processes are in place within institutions and among social stakeholders. Collaborative processes involving multiple actors must be grounded in working methodologies that make trust and collaboration effective. These include active listening, collective sense-making, co-creation, experimentation and prototyping, scaling, and co-evaluation.

Most working methodologies incorporate the following key elements, all of which are pertinent to Collaborative Governance processes:

**Systemic vision:** developing spaces and resources to analyse the actions of governments and civil society in their entirety (projects, stakeholders, and the links between them) to build a common vision and share responsibilities.

**Design:** a competence for engaging with complex problems, a way of thinking and working that reflects a broader form of strategic, adaptive and cooperative intelligence (Cross, 2023).

**Anticipatory approach:** dedicating effort and resources to anticipate future challenges.

**Sustainability:** ensuring social, economic, and environmental sustainability through practices promoted in collaboration with citizens and social stakeholders.

**Communication:** going beyond one-way, transparent, clear, and honest information to include mutual accountability and information sharing across all actors.

Innovative approaches to these methodologies are being developed and promoted by professionals both locally and abroad. Arantzazulab Democracy Innovation Laboratory has gathered a wide range of resources on this work (Design for Democracy Innovation, Arantzazulab, 2024).

Local institutions and stakeholders must provide the structures, procedures, and resources necessary to ensure the stability of Collaborative Governance processes. New funding models should also be explored to make collaborations sustainable over time, ensure their impact, and strengthen the commitment of participants.

## 5.2. Profiles, attitudes, and capabilities

To establish effective Collaborative Governance, it is critical to develop the right profiles, attitudes, and skills to foster collaboration, innovation, and active learning within public administration, private companies, and organised civil society, and among citizens. According to the OECD, the success of public innovation lies not only in the use of new technologies but also in transforming cultures, processes, and capabilities within diverse organisations. For this reason, several official bodies and social innovation laboratories have developed conceptual frameworks and tools<sup>1</sup>.

Flexibility, resilience, courage, self-knowledge and self-awareness, action orientation, critical reflection, curiosity, empathy, and strong local roots are among the attitudes and ways of thinking that should be encouraged and reinforced.

In terms of practical capabilities, the action skills (process development skills) required for Collaborative Governance processes can be grouped into three categories:

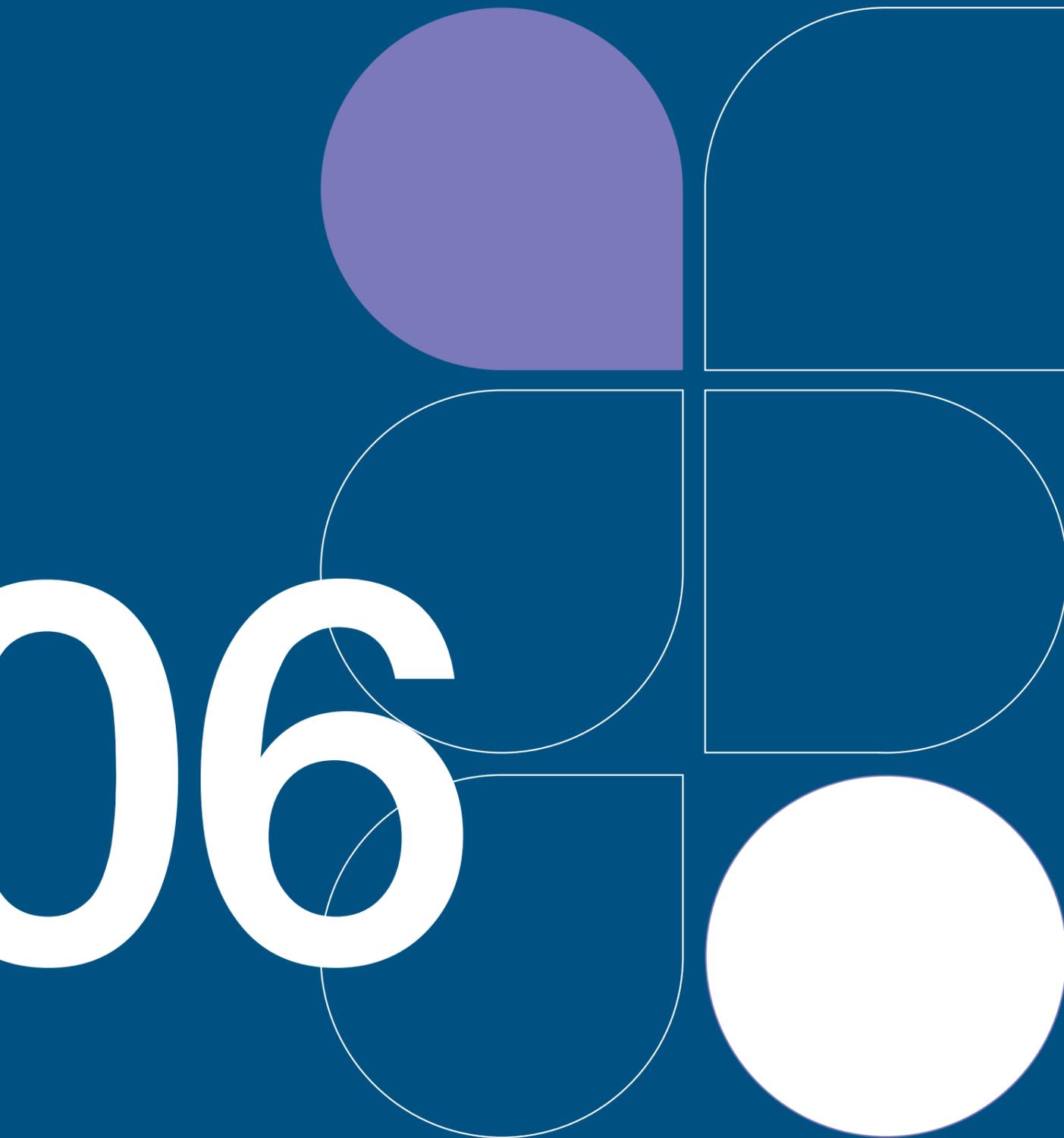
- (1) Facilitating relationships and collaborations: the ability to cooperate and foster collaborations;
- (2) Designing and promoting innovative experimentation: analysing, demonstrating, and iterating new ideas, while making the learning process explicit;
- (3) Leading change: mobilising resources and legitimacy drive transformation (ref. Arantzazulab GC capabilities for developing processes).

These skills and attitudes must be developed at multiple levels in Collaborative Governance processes: individual, institutional, community, and system. It is not enough to develop skills at the public administration level alone; all actors engaged in Collaborative Governance processes must nurture the attitudes and capacities that make collaboration effective.

Finally, we propose that the profiles, attitudes and capabilities outlined here be embedded in the development of this framework and in the institutionalisation processes it may involve. Examples include integrating them into public procurement, the teams driving these processes, training programmes, and systems for managing professional profiles and competencies. Adapting civil service legislation will also be necessary, as this new model of governance requires a reorganisation of the public service.

Having set out the key characteristics of Collaborative Governance, the following section examines how its implementation influences different dimensions.

<sup>1</sup> Frameworks and tools for skills development: OECD—Innovative Capacity Framework (OCDE); UNDP— Practical Guide to Public Innovation; NESTA—Competency Framework for Public Innovation; European Commission—New Architecture for Public Innovation; UCL IIPP—Public Innovation Index; TIAL (The Institutional Architecture Lab); etc.



**THREE  
DIMENSIONS OF  
GOVERNANCE  
TO DEEPEN  
AND RENEW  
COLLABORATIVE  
GOVERNANCE**

Deepening and innovating Collaborative Governance has a particular impact on the three dimensions of governance. First, it promotes (or in some cases demands) internal improvement and innovation in public administration. Second, it seeks to strengthen community and social systems by enhancing collaboration between institutions, associations, companies and social networks to increase social capital and territorial cohesion. Finally, it introduces a profound renewal of relational models, making society and its actors (both organisations and individuals) active participants in the design and development of public management and policies. These dimensions reinforce one another and share a common objective: to build a more democratic, more effective form of governance that is closer to citizens.

The following sub-sections present the implications of Collaborative Governance for each of these dimensions. We also examine the opportunities it presents for transformation in administrative structures, in civil society, and in the relationships between them.

## 6.1. Public Administration Management: Continuous improvement and innovation

Collaborative Governance requires a transformation of public administration that must be understood through the lens of public innovation. This transformation is not merely about the pursuit of robustness and efficiency; it is also about making public institutions more open, flexible, connected, and participatory. The continuous improvement of the administration is directly related to public and democratic innovation; governance that places collaboration at its centre creates institutions which are robust, innovative, and meaningful to society. The OECD (2017, 2021) has shown that synergies between open governance and public innovation are fundamental to strengthening democracy.

### Good Governance and Open Government

To better understand Collaborative Governance, it is useful to compare it with other public governance models. Although the term “governance” is used broadly, it encompasses a range of approaches and elements.

**Open Government**, for instance, is a culture of governance that promotes transparency, integrity, accountability, and stakeholder participation, with the aim of sustaining democracy and fostering inclusive growth. Its pillars—transparency, accountability, integrity, efficiency and participation—encourage good government practices and align closely with the principles of Collaborative Governance.

**Good Governance**, or “governing well” has also been used to describe public governance. Many governments have limited this practice to formal reforms, such as improving transparency through legislation or establishing citizen participation mechanisms, including advisory councils and surveys.

These two concepts are interrelated: Open Government represents a culture of public governance, and Good Governance encompasses the overarching objectives and principles of public governance. Collaborative Governance, goes further by calling for a cultural shift. It emphasises collaborative creation of information rather than merely increasing transparency. It moves beyond consultation with citizens, actively involving people in decision-making and strengthening their engagement with public institutions. For it to succeed, Collaborative Governance must extend beyond formal institutionalisation and become embedded in political and institutional culture (Gurrutxaga, Zugaza, Lekue, 2024). Thus, compared to the Open Government model, Collaborative Governance can include deeper participation and other organisational levels. While both approaches share the goal of achieving better and more democratic administration, Collaborative Governance represents a greater qualitative leap.

In any case, the Collaborative Governance framework must embrace the pillars of Open Government—efficiency, transparency, integrity, accountability, and the rule of law—and complement them. The Basque Government’s Collaborative Governance framework will specifically address the dimension of participation, charting a path towards collective co-responsibility and power sharing.

Finally, from a Collaborative Governance perspective, the creation of “public value” takes on a more collective dimension of “public meaning”. That is, public value is not only a criterion for measuring the quality of public services or the effectiveness of government action; it is a common goal that transcends individual interests and promotes social cohesion, social justice, and decent living conditions. This framework of Collaborative Governance seeks to build this public value collectively through active participation and public dialogue for the common good.

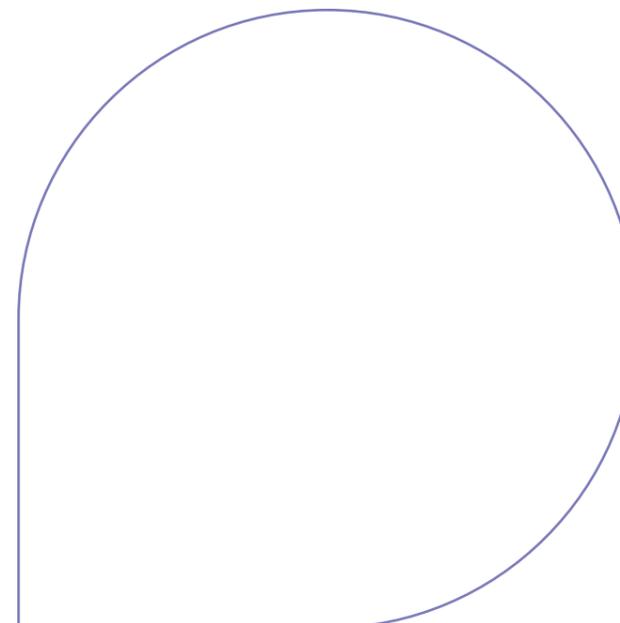
## Frameworks for public innovation

Many public institutions have recognised that their capacity to respond to current challenges is weakening, often due to obsolete tools and structures. Collaborative Governance is inherently linked to the institutional transformation and new approaches to public innovation, as this way of understanding governance requires a rethinking of the role of public administration. Thus, Collaborative Governance generates new cultures, structures, laws, and procedures within public administration. It also promotes the development of new capacities, the incorporation of new profiles and the establishment of new approaches and trends for the development and evaluation of organisational performance. This includes prioritising systemic approaches, openness, experimentation, and collective learning, all fully integrated with contemporary public innovation frameworks.

In fact, collaboration underpins a range of advanced approaches and frameworks for public innovation. Advanced governments are increasingly combining territorial development with innovation policies and strategies, including mission-oriented innovation (Mariana Mazzucato), challenge-led innovation (Ingrid Burkett), design-based methodologies, and innovation ecosystems. Regardless of their nature, scale or focus, these models converge on a common direction and framework: to build a renewed form of Collaborative Governance. This approach promotes more open and participatory decision-making areas orientated towards collective solutions and fosters coherence between ecosystems, sectors and stakeholders, allowing collective intelligence to be harnessed to address complex challenges.

Consequently, experimentation with collaborative public innovation approaches to transform organisations is considered desirable in Collaborative Governance. Such experimentation strengthens networks between actors and enhances the effectiveness of collaboration, supporting the achievement of shared objectives.

Lastly, Collaborative Governance requires coordination across administrative levels to optimise relationships between institutions. This is known as multilevel governance, which is described in the following sub-section.



## 6.2. Inter-institutional relations (multi-level governance): Improving coordination and relations between different levels of government

Multilevel governance is key to addressing the complex challenges of contemporary societies, in which public policies cannot be confined to a single institutional or governmental level. In any given territory, the strategies and policies of local, regional, national, and international institutions interact and influence each other. For political effectiveness, governance must therefore be understood in a coordinated and collaborative manner. This includes both inter-institutional collaboration (horizontal and vertical) and inter-departmental interaction within the same institution (intra-government), to ensure coherence and connection between bodies with specific competences.

In other words, it is not always enough for each level of government to design and implement its own policies. These actions and strategies must be formulated in synergy with other administrative levels. Hence, the Collaborative Governance framework must encompass relationships between different levels of government to effectively develop strategies and policies based on mutual trust and shared action.

At the same time, the Basque Government's Collaborative Governance framework must take a step further and work to strengthen and renew community and social systems. The next section explores this dimension in greater depth.

## 6.3. Relations with society: Strengthening and renewing the community and social systems

Collaborative Governance is a fundamental tool for consolidating and innovating community life and social systems, bringing together the institutions, associations, businesses, and social networks of a territory. To understand this fully, it is important to distinguish between three dimensions: the private sector (companies and economic initiatives), organised civil society (associations, foundations, and social networks), and citizens (individuals or informal groups). Actors that generate and exchange knowledge, such as universities, research centres, and other academic bodies, play a critical role in facilitating and enriching collaboration across these dimensions. When we refer to 'civil society' in this text, we mean the three dimensions.

From the perspective of Territorial Governance or Community Development, promoting public-private participation and the role of civil society is key to driving sustainable territorial development (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Collaborative Governance cannot be understood as a purely public sector initiative; it relies on the initiative of organised civil society, the commitment of businesses, and the active involvement of citizens. Collaborative Governance serves not only as a bridge between government and citizens but also as a catalyst for dynamic and pluralistic action across a territory. The legitimacy of public, private, and social institutions is derived not solely from hierarchy but from community recognition, ethical coherence, and common objectives.

## Organised civil society and citizens

Critical, responsible citizens with a sense of community are essential drivers of social transformation. In the Collaborative Governance approach proposed here, individual responsibility matters. The goal is to foster a society composed of people who are autonomous, aware, and responsible at an individual level, while also being socially committed.

Guaranteeing the autonomy of civil society is equally important. Social stakeholders must be able to maintain their own initiatives independently of the administration and articulate the voice of the community on their own terms.

Examples of associationism and social networks are particularly significant in our tradition. Collaborative Governance should encourage citizens to organise themselves collaboratively to respond to social needs. Strategies to monitor and support associations are crucial, and social infrastructure—such as public spaces and physical facilities—are essential tools for fostering social relations, generating social capital, and enhancing well-being (Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, Acción Comunitaria, 2022).

## Businesses and economic initiatives

Businesses can consolidate their social responsibility and contribute to the quality of life in the region by engaging in Collaborative Governance beyond purely economic objectives (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Increasingly, initiatives demonstrating democratic innovation and deep social commitment originate not from administrations but from organised civil society or the social economy.

Collaborative Governance introduces new ways of working within companies, influencing both external relations and internal structures, as well as management models. Leadership based on participation, alliances around shared objectives, and open innovation is becoming increasingly important to competitiveness. This demonstrates that collaborative approaches also drive

significant changes in the internal functioning of companies. Companies, therefore, are not only economic actors; through Collaborative Governance, they can expand and reinvent their role as social and institutional actors, promoting sustainable and inclusive development in their regions (Orkestra, 2022; Sotarauta & Beer, 2017).

Research by Orkestra highlights Collaborative Governance not just as a tool for social cohesion but also as a key factor in competitiveness for the well-being of territories. In today's complex environment, companies increasingly recognise that their performance and capacity for innovation depend as much on the quality of their relationships with their social and institutional environment as on internal factors. Public-private collaboration, and particularly communities and local administrations, is essential for generating shared value and driving systemic transformation (Orkestra, 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

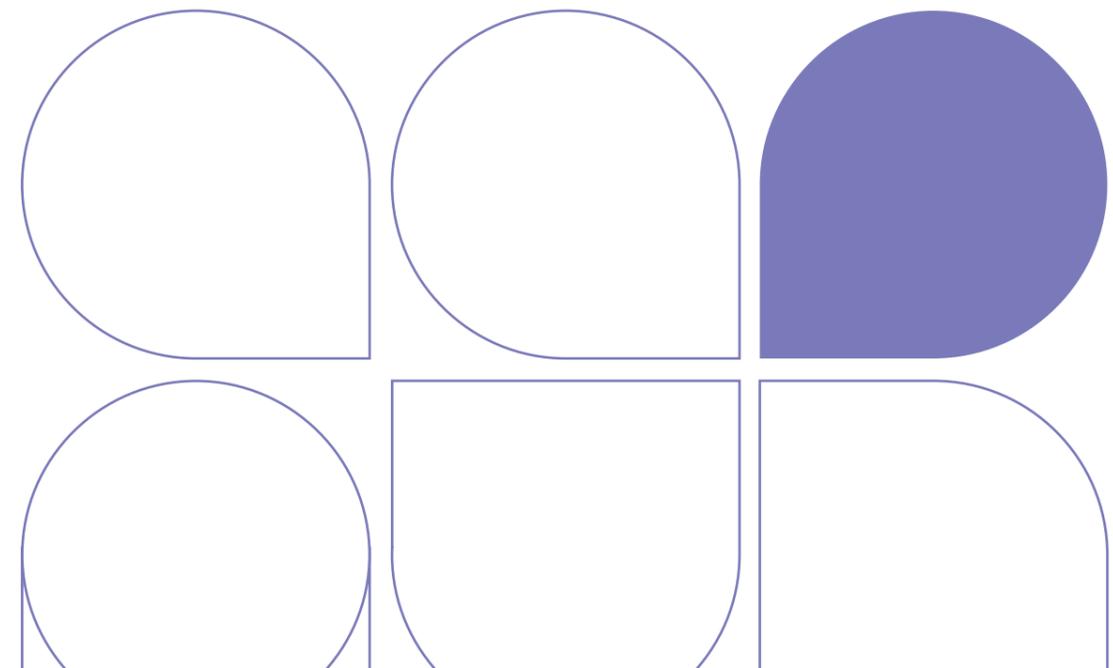
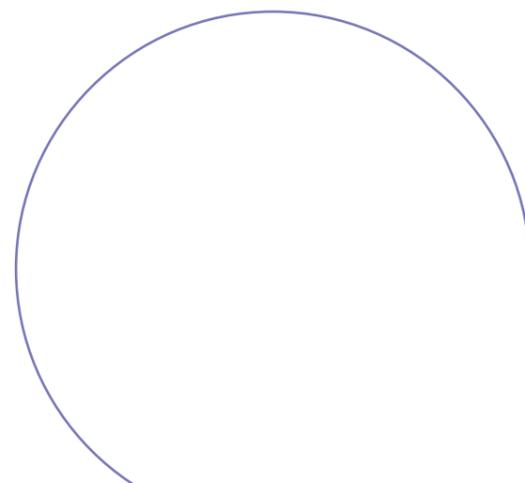
## Innovation in the relationship model: involving society in public management and public policy design

Collaborative Governance represents a substantial shift in the relationship model between governments and societal stakeholders, encompassing citizens, social stakeholders and the private sector. Traditional governance models have largely relied on the transmission of information or consultation. Collaborative Governance, in contrast, emphasises interaction based on reciprocity, trust, and shared responsibility. Escobar and Elstub (2019) stress

that such a model requires a new political culture based on deliberation, constructive dialogue, and strengthening democratic capacities. Participation, therefore, is not an instrumental tool but rather allows for a rethinking of democracy itself through new public relations, strengthening the community and enhancing competitiveness for social well-being.

According to the OECD (2022), citizen and social stakeholder participation—and deliberative processes in particular—contributes to improving the quality and legitimacy of public policies, provided these processes are structured, inclusive, and transparent. Participation allows citizens and stakeholders to become involved in the public policy cycle and in the design of services, thereby influencing the actions and decisions of public administrations at multiple stages of the political cycle.

To guide citizen and stakeholder engagement, the Basque Government's Collaborative Governance Framework draws on two international models: the OECD (2022) approach and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model.



The resulting framework defines five levels of participation and involvement for social actors (citizens/individuals and stakeholders). These levels are not a linear process; rather, collaboration is permanent and continuous.

**Combining all levels to create meaningful involvement :**

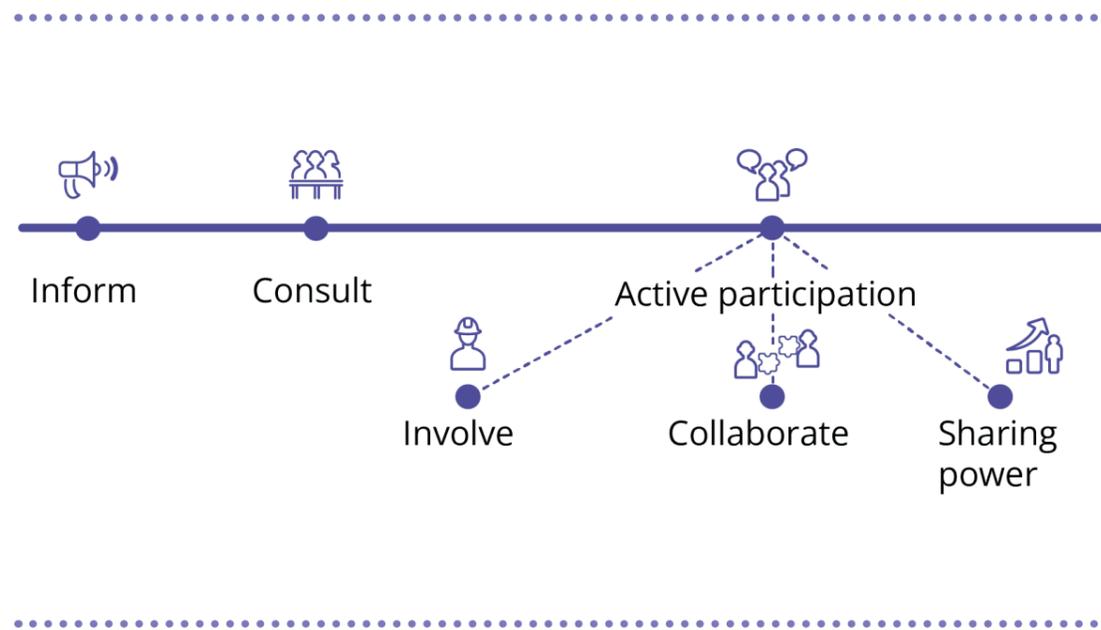


Figure 1: Participation levels of the Collaborative Governance framework (various sources)

**Table 2 describes the five levels and the methodologies or approaches designed to implement them:**

Level	Explanation	Methodologies
1 Inform	Government provides information (one direction) proactively or on request.	Institutional websites (Irekia), Information campaigns, Newsletters.
2 Consult	Opinions of citizens and stakeholders are sought, but institutions retain final decision-making authority. This is the basis of a two-way relationship.	Surveys, Questionnaires, Public hearings.
3 Involve	Citizens and stakeholders are actively engaged in the process to ensure that public concerns and objectives are fully understood and continuously taken into consideration, but the decision rests with the government.	Focus groups, Deliberative sessions, Thematic forums, Institutionalised collaborations.
4 Collaborate	Citizens and stakeholders participate as active partners in decision-making, including developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions.	Co-creation workshops, Citizen panels, Deliberative democracy Assemblies, Permanent institutionalised collaborations (in formal and informal spaces).
5 Empower/ Share power	Decision-making power and responsibility rest with citizens or social stakeholders, with institutions facilitating participation.	Binding referendums, participatory budgeting, Popular initiatives, Institutionalised collaborations.

Table 2: Levels of participation and examples in public management/policy design and development (adapted from IAP2, OECD (2022))

The final three levels (Involve, Collaborate, and Empower) constitute active participation; citizens and stakeholders can participate meaningfully in public management, public policy design, and decision-making and are provided with resources and opportunities (information, data, digital tools, etc.) to work together on public policies or issues related to public management.

At each level, what is promised to citizens or actors in society must be clear and honoured from the outset of the process (Table 3):

Level	Promise to citizens and actors
1  Inform	We will provide information in a clear and understandable way and help you to understand it if needed.
2  Consult	We seek your opinions and explain how they will be taken into account.
3  Involve	We consider your concerns and opinions and use this information to guide the process and make decisions.

Level	Promise to citizens and actors
4  Collaborate	We will incorporate your recommendations and opinions directly into the decision-making wherever possible, clearly explaining the reason for any exceptions.
5  Empower/ Share power	The final decision will rest with you.

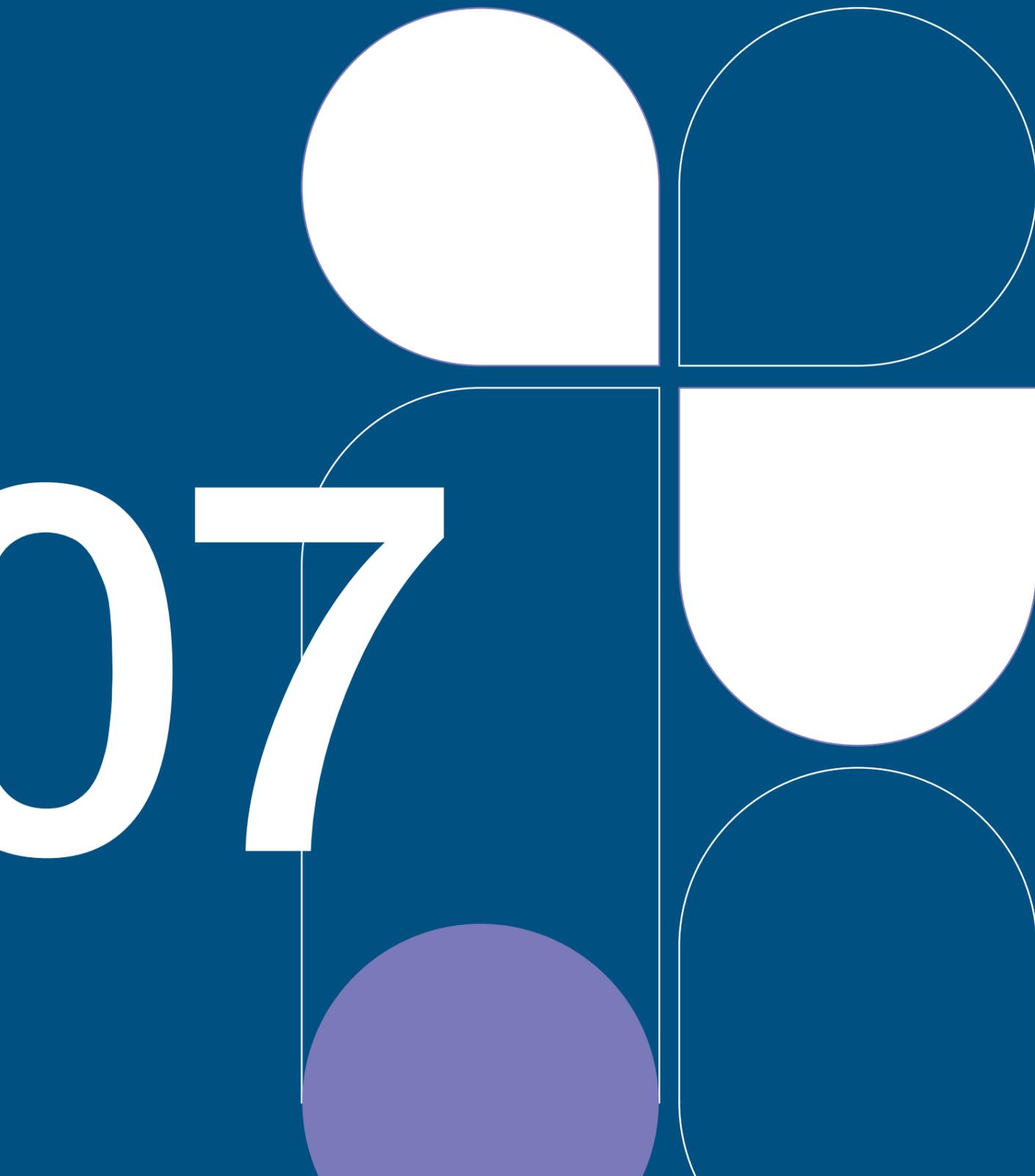
Table 3. Levels of participation and what is promised

Source: Rozelle, M., Sarno, D., & Michaelson, L. (2024). Federation of International Association for Public Participation. Recuperado 23 de febrero de 2026, de [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/iap2\\_spectrum\\_2024.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/iap2_spectrum_2024.pdf)

The government's relationships with citizens and social stakeholders can vary in nature and depth. These include permanent institutionalised collaborations (depending on the nature of the organisations and social stakeholders), issue-specific processes, structured relationships and collaborations for defined time frames, participatory processes, and experimentation and learning processes. All these forms are incorporated into the participation gradient of this Collaborative Governance Framework.

The Basque Government, through different departments, currently implements a range of initiatives to interact or engage with society. Examples include websites and online platforms (Ireki), sociometers, departmental focus groups, social pacts, permanent strategic collaborations with stakeholders and institutions, structural relationships with social agents in formal and informal spaces, citizen hearings, deliberation forums with young people, and collaboration projects in planning for social innovation.

This framework provides a strategic vision and aims to establish a sustainable model of engagement with citizens and stakeholders over time. Existing and future Basque Government initiatives should be incorporated and connected within this framework to align with each level of involvement. Based on the principles and characteristics of Collaborative Governance, the framework also seeks to comprehensively map the institutional governance model, ensuring balance across participation levels. This would demonstrate that governance with varying degrees of depth and involvement is promoted, while collaborations grounded in reciprocity, trust, and shared responsibility are supported. Ultimately, the framework should serve as a reference for both local stakeholders and government departments, providing clarity, coherence, and meaning to various collaborative efforts.



# OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE OF THE BASQUE GOVERNMENT

The framework set out in this document is an instrument proposed by the Basque Government and forms part of its political strategy to enhance the quality of democracy.

**It outlines the Basque Government's understanding of Collaborative Governance and presents an initial framework to support citizen-led initiatives.**

**This framework is operationally focused and open to new contributions. It draws on both the social philosophy and values embedded in the tradition of Collaborative Governance and the knowledge and experience developed locally in recent years.**

This framework can also serve as a reference for the governance model used by the departments and agencies of the Basque Government. The aim is to identify initiatives that engage citizens and social stakeholders, develop them in a connected way, and offer a starting conceptualisation and operational framework to give them meaning.

From the Basque Government's point of view, Collaborative Governance is an institutionalised collaboration between public institutions, social stakeholders, and citizens. Its purpose is to consolidate the public policy ecosystem and strengthen the community. This document proposes Collaborative Governance as an instrument for deepening democracy, strengthening the community, and increasing competitiveness geared towards well-being. It resonates with the concept of "auzolan", reflecting collective effort and shared responsibility.

Collaborative Governance is not merely an extension of public administration, nor is it simply a mechanism of participation for citizens defending their own interests. The Basque Government's approach combines collaboration, shared decision-making through collaboration, loyalty to the community, and personal responsibility.

This Collaborative Governance Framework proposes a new approach to governance and illustrates how the Basque Government engages with institutions, organised civil society, and citizens. It fosters collaboration while promoting a culture of shared responsibility.

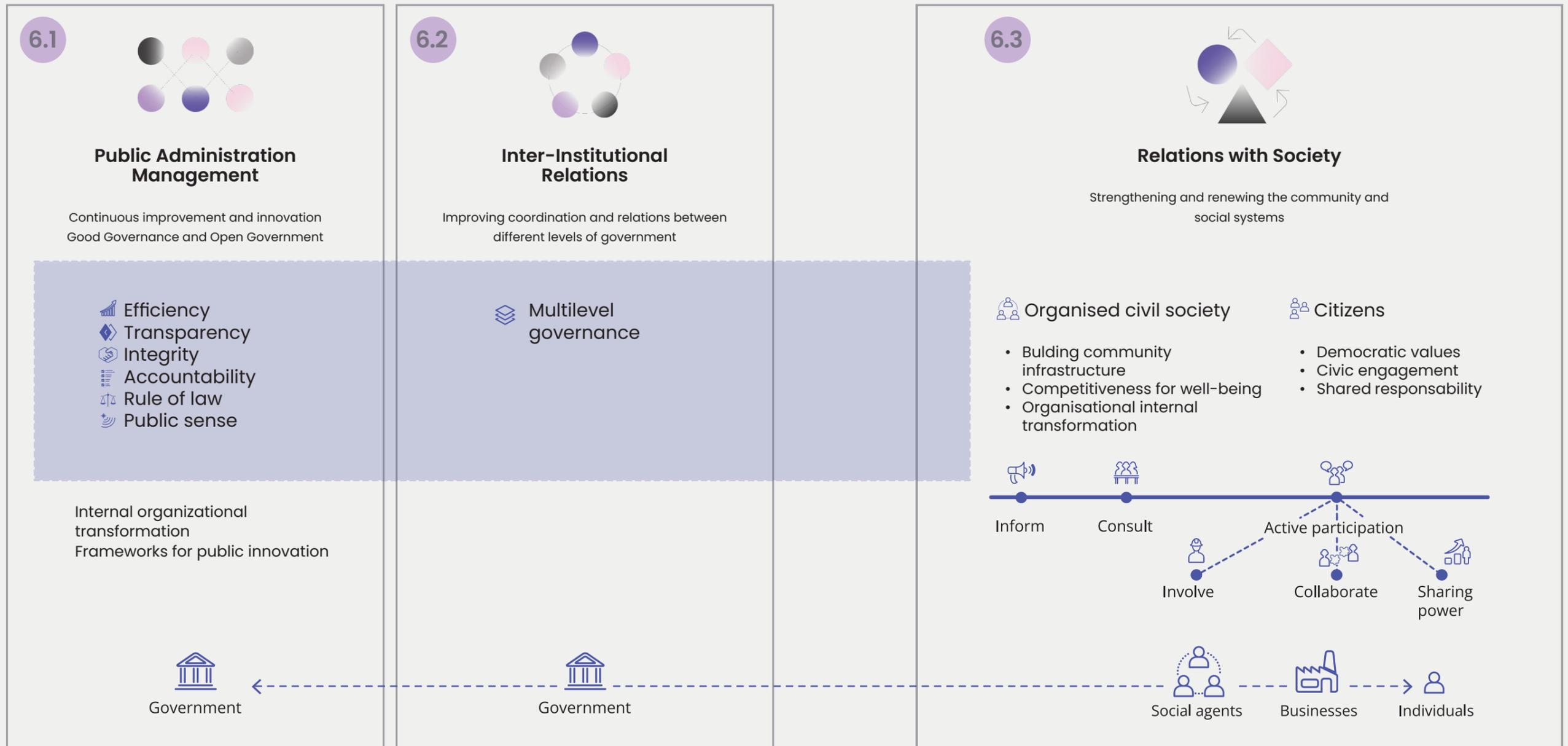
Collaborative Governance is not merely a reorganisation of the administration but a change grounded in the way democracy is understood and in social and political relations. This change affects both the administration and all participants in the collaboration process, requiring new ways of working and relating to one another.

This text also serves as an invitation to local stakeholders to continue enriching this Collaborative Governance Framework and to disseminate the principles, characteristics, and practices outlined across different institutions and social groups.

Figure 2 summarises the Collaborative Governance Framework proposed by the Basque Government and brings together the main concepts developed in the previous sections. (Note: the numbers refer to the sections where each concept is explained and will be removed (if necessary) in the final graphic).

# 1 Collaborative Governance Framework

2 To deepen democracy, strengthen community, and enhance competitiveness for the well-being of territories



5 Implementing Collaborative Governance

Structures • Processes • Capabilities

4 Collaborative Governance

Definition • Principles • Characteristics

3 Social philosophy and value system of Collaborative Governance in our context

08

**NEXT  
STEPS**

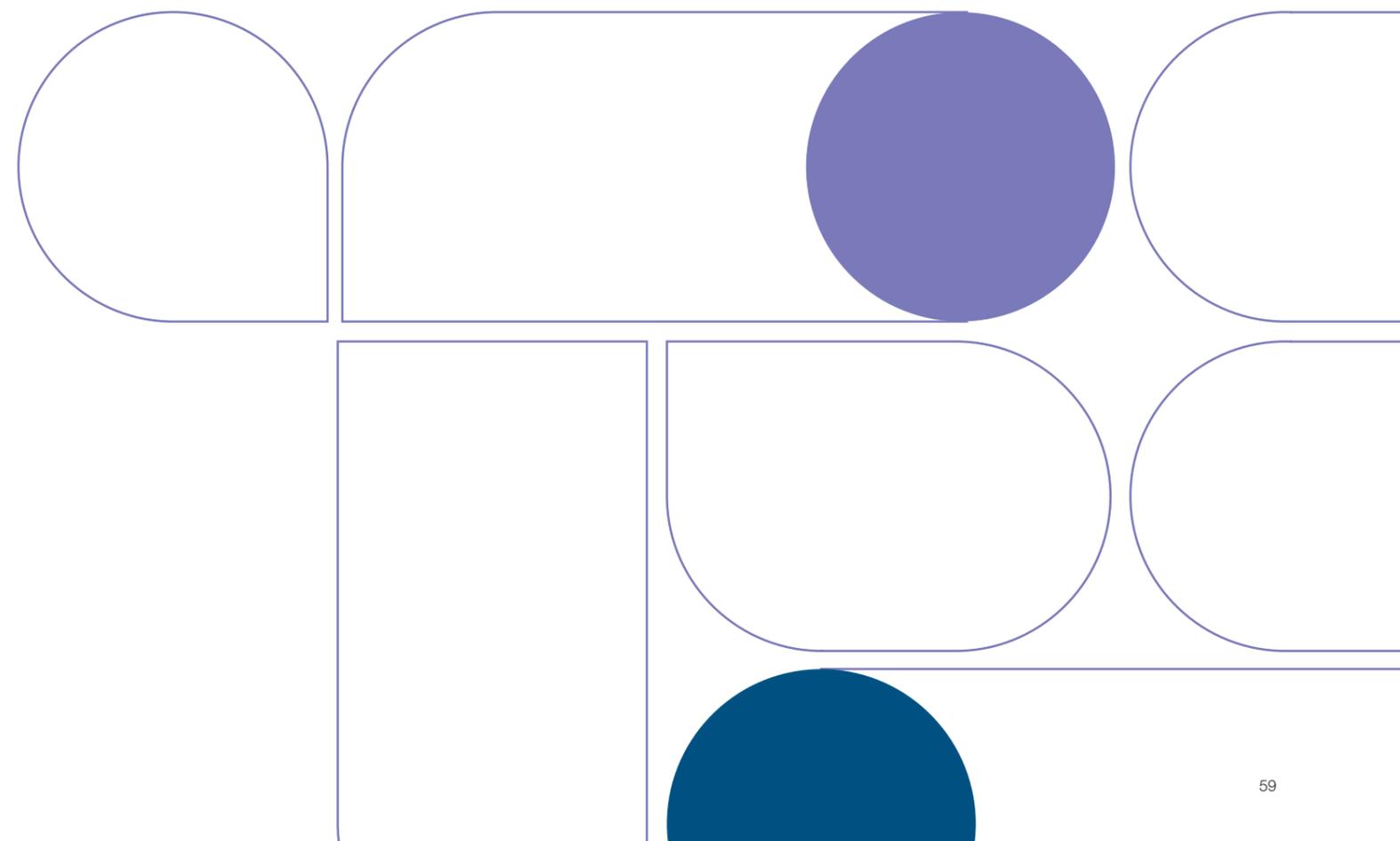
This document presents the Collaborative Governance Framework that the Basque Government intends to use to guide its operations. It is important to emphasise that we are not starting from scratch. This framework builds on a tradition that has long been part of our identity as a people and is a proposal built on the recognition of previous experiences. It is therefore part of a long trajectory that reflects a fertile ecosystem of institutions, social stakeholders, and citizens who are used to collaborating in many endeavours.

This framework also forms part of the Basque Government's broader strategy to improve the quality of democracy and position the Basque Country as a benchmark robust democracy. It will therefore be developed jointly alongside other projects with the same aim, including the report presented to the Basque Parliament to improve the democratic quality of the Basque Country, the Basque Government's Strategic Projects, the 2025-2028 Social Innovation and 2030 Agenda Plan (together with the projects linked to its first strategic pillar, "Consolidation and Deepening of Democratic Culture").

This framework is presented as an initial proposal open to development. It reflects the Basque Government's understanding of Collaborative Governance and is intended to serve as a basis of inspiration for grassroots initiatives. It is also an invitation to institutions and social stakeholders to share and put into practice the principles and approaches proposed. The following are some of the next steps planned in this process, including measures to institutionalise the framework as well as other complementary actions:

- In the coming months the framework will be submitted to the Governing Council of the Basque Government. Once approved, it will be presented to each governmental department. Work will then be carried out with the departments to identify how the framework can support their projects and make them operational. The ultimate goal is to embed this governance model in the Basque Government's working methods. From these practices, a "Manual for the Operationalisation of Collaborative Governance" is expected to be developed.
- A process of socialisation, review, and enrichment of this framework will be initiated in collaboration with Basque institutions and social stakeholders. The aim is to build a co-creation process to promote shared ownership of the framework and broaden the collaboration model it represents. To enrich it further, links will be established with the network of universities and knowledge stakeholders in the Basque Country (for example, with the Collaborative Governance Research Line being developed at Arantzazulab). The framework will be presented in their existing research and learning programmes, both for dissemination and to incorporate new knowledge.
- In parallel, the framework will be aligned with initiatives being developed by the various committees and working groups of the European Commission and the European Union in defence of European democracy. These include the European Democracy Shield strategy of the European Commission, which continues the work of the European Democracy Action Plan adhered to by the Basque Government.

- By the end of the year, the framework will be reviewed by international experts in the field to gather inputs and help position the Basque Autonomous Community's strategies and reflections on the global stage. Linked to this effort, an international seminar will be organised early next year under the framework of improving the quality of democracy.



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