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## POLITICS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Building the future of public policy in the Basque Country: Etorkizuna Eraikiz, a metagovernance approach

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to understand how the changing role of public leadership in the different institutional configurations and political fields of the current context have given rise to the transformation of the structural conditions and the mechanisms of public and political management in the Basque Country, and more precisely inside the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa. The aim of this process is to try to interpret these changes in the context of the description and analysis of a new public policy program Etorkizuna Eraikiz, which translates into “The Future Constructed” in Basque language. Etorkizuna Eraikiz is the result of a strategic reflection and planning process carried out by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa to redirect public policies and promote the innovation of the Gipuzkoan Institutional Governance System. This strategy also responds to the challenge of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa to provide solutions in a collaborative and innovative manner, combining knowledge and experiences that can help to jointly build together a shared future for Gipuzkoa from a meta-governance approach.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Etorkizuna Eraikiz is a public managed government initiative implemented in the Basque Country to improve the future quality of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa. This article describes how government and policy management need to change and adapt to the new global and local contexts. The paper analyses how this program has been jointly designed by different actors/agents inside and outside the provincial government to improve and attend society's basic socioeconomic needs. This program will be created in response to some of the challenges and problems of western representative politics and democracy, the crisis of legitimacy suffered by the current political parties and the social changes that have emerged from the rapid wave of globalization.

**Subjects: Policy Analysis; Public Policy; Governance; Local Government; Political Institutions; Social Policy; Public Services; Welfare; Political Sociology**

**Keywords: Basque Country; metagovernance; territorial competitiveness; Gipuzkoa; public policies; public sector innovation; collaborative innovation; network governance**

## 1. Introduction

Etokizuna Eraikiz—the future constructed in Basque language—is a metagovernance (Christopoulos, Horvath, & Kull, 2012; Jessop, 2003; Kooiman, 2003; Meuleman, 2008; Sorensen & Torfing, 2005, 2007) and regional competitiveness strategy (Camagni, 2002; Martin, Kitson, & Tyler, 2008; Moulaert & Sekia, 2003; Valdaliso & Wilson, 2015) implemented by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa in the Basque Country. This strategy arises from the need to create a new scenario of public policies capable of responding circumstantially, endogenously and in an organised manner to the democratic deficiencies and challenges of our time by expanding the spaces of political discussion, going “beyond” the more traditional systems of Governance (Jessop, 2003; Kooiman, 2003; Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sorensen, 2012).

In this sense, Etorkizuna Eraikiz is also conceived as a complex undertaking that integrates different open governance and collaborative initiatives (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2011; Lathrop & Luma, 2010; Sorensen & Torfing, 2012) that consist of an exercise of active experimentation through projects and strategic policy planning shared with public–private stakeholders in the region of Gipuzkoa.

This proposal seeks to take on the socio-economic challenges of Gipuzkoa to reorient its economic, political, social and cultural future through a reflective exercise that brings about an organised strengthening of Gipuzkoa’s society in the medium and long term. It therefore involves the organized civil society, the private sector, the academy, civil servants, social entrepreneurs and policymakers in a joined effort to reshape the future challenges of the province by institutionalising a new way of designing and implementing public policies.

In this context, the concept of metagovernance (Jessop, 2003; Kooiman, 2003; Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009; Sorensen & Torfing, 2005, 2007; Sorensen, 2006; Meuleman, 2008; Christopoulos et al., 2012) or the “governance of governance” is referred to the analysis of policy actions that go beyond the specific bodies of government in the province. Etorkizuna Eraikiz represents an umbrella public initiative, which integrates diverse collaborative governance actions through different experimental and strategic projects on different economic social, political, cultural arenas, such as climate change, active aging, workplace innovation, employment, cybersecurity, education, gender equality and family reconciliation, among others. Unlike other policy initiatives for the co-design and co-experimentation of public policies led by private organizations and/or foundations such as the 27eRegion in France, Kennisland in the Netherlands, or the Governance Lab in New York, this initiative is publicly led by the Provincial Government. That is, it offers the opportunity to reorganise and re-structure the whole public sphere looking to institutionalise a new public governance culture for the future region.

This article focuses on understanding how the changing role of public leadership in the different institutional configurations and political fields of the current context have given rise to the transformation of the structural conditions and the mechanisms of public and political management of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa. The aim of this thought process is to try to interpret these changes, applying them to the description and analysis of the Etorkizuna Eraikiz programme within the following methodological approach.

### 1.1. Methodological approach

Etokizuna Eraikiz’s meta-governance model is methodologically articulated inside a PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) (Matsuo and Nakhara, 2013; Moen and Norman, 2006; Johnson, 2002). The

PDCA cycle is based on a multiyear framework of action (2015–2019) that is annually revised involving a series of steps:

- Development of a Strategic Governance Plan by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa for the period (2015–2019), where the design of Etorkizuna Eraikiz is programmed and conceived. First through the creation of a *Think Tank* (GipuzkoaTaldean) where multi-stakeholders involving the private sector, the civil society, academia, civil servants and policymakers co-create and co-decide on which strategic areas/projects are relevant for the future of the province in 2026; second, the creation of a public experimentation policy lab where these areas/projects will be developed (PLAN).
- Implementation of first actions within the plan look to deliver a series of projects and public services, (DO) inside the following public policy fields: employment, active aging, workplace innovation, education, sustainable development, climate change, cultural development, social inclusion, gender equality, education, cybersecurity, poverty reduction and employment.
- Revision of first results and steps, which are organized into different programs and public actions where the projects in Etorkizuna Eraikiz are re-framed (CHECK).
- Application and scaling of results through the creation of a sustained and participatory culture in the long-term, by fomenting collective learning within the province, that is, what has been learned and how we can apply and sustain future actions to improve public policies (ACT).

Between January 2015 and December 2018, a total of 75 different projects within the Etorkizuna Eraikiz programme will be developed. Eight of these projects are strategically focused on the following topics: active aging, climate change, sustainable mobility, cybersecurity (blockchain technology), social inclusion, poverty reduction and cultural development. Sixteen projects are purely experimental and look to find new paths to improve and scale new solutions to the actual public policies. These are mainly focused on gender equality, workplace innovation, family reconciliation, education, young unemployment, and new economic sectors (cultural and creative industries, biotechnology, nanotechnology, etc.). The remaining 51 projects answer to a public call sustained during the four years of implementation (2015–2019) where any private company, civil society organization, or start-up can present their own proposals.

This article is divided into four sections: first of all, we focus on describing and analysing the contextual and historical features of the Basque institutional framework in which this strategy is implemented; secondly, we will tackle the concepts of Governance and Meta-governance by looking at the socio-political changes suffered as a result of the crisis of legitimacy and the loss of trust in the Public Administrations; thirdly, we will look at the importance given to the mechanisms of regional and territorial competitiveness present in this process; and finally, we will look in more depth at the design, the methodological approach and the contents of Etorkizuna Eraikiz.

## 2. Contextualising the province of Gipuzkoa and the Basque institutional context

The Province of Gipuzkoa is located in the Basque Autonomous Community (Basque Country), next to the northern Spanish border with France. The Basque Autonomous Community has 2,175,819 inhabitants and is divided into three Historical Territories or Provinces: Biscay (1,139,426 inhabitants), Alava (323,592 inhabitants), and Gipuzkoa (717,832 inhabitants). The Capital city of this Community is Vitoria-Gasteiz, located in Alava. The Province of Gipuzkoa represents 33% of the Basque Country's population. It covers a surface area of 1980 km<sup>2</sup>, and is the smallest province in Spain. It is composed of 11 districts and 89 municipalities, being San Sebastian the capital city of the province. San Sebastian concentrates 26% of the province's population. The main languages are Spanish and Basque (Euskera).

According to data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), as of 2014, Gipuzkoa contributes with 21,083.1 million € to the Spanish State, representing 2.03% of its total GDP, and 32.99% of the Basque Autonomous Community. The Basque Country's GDP represents 6.19% of the Spanish total. The industrial and service sectors are the most thriving in Gipuzkoa, representing 28%

and 65% of its' total GDP respectively, leaving the primary and construction sectors with 0.7% and 6.4%. The social economy and cooperative movement in Gipuzkoa have had a huge impact on its economy and on the role local communities have played within the collaborative social economy. According to the Basque Statistics Institute (EUSTAT), 880 companies work for or in the cooperative movement, employing 33.500 workers inside the social economy sector, being home to the internationally acclaimed Mondragon Cooperative founded in 1956. The Province of Gipuzkoa also registers the lowest unemployment rate in the Basque Country and in Spain, with 7.9% as of 2018.

Moreover, the complexity intrinsic to the Basque institutional system means we must reflect on the selection and discrimination of the combinations that structure it, as well as the socio-political trajectory of its system of government, making it more understandable for the reader regarding its operation and institutional characteristics which are highly decentralized with respect to the Spanish State and the other Spanish Communities (Luhmann, 1982, 1998, pp. 26–29). These peculiarities of the Basque institutional model make it a significant case in the analysis of New Public Governance for two main reasons. (Osborne, 2008, 2010; Rhodes, 1996).

First, the Basque Country has the capacity to establish its own self-governing bodies, which are uniquely granted through the Statute of Basque Autonomy, passed the 18th of December of 1979, right after the Franco regime, and recognised in the Spanish Constitution. This means the Basque Country and Navarra are the only communities in Spain that have right over self-tax regulation, healthcare, public safety and education, as well as complete control over their internal territorial organization. Therefore, the Basque Country has its own Parliament Body and Government, with an autonomous President, referred in Basque as *Lenhendakari*.

Second, within the Basque institutional framework are the Provincial Councils or *Diputaciones Forales*, which are divided into Álava, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. Each one of these Provincial Councils represents and executive body of government which report to the their General Assemblies or Legislative bodies. Each Council has its own public budget and taxing regulation, giving them enough power to regulate and manage their own public policies, while it renders more complex the relationships of Government and Power, not only in its regional dimension, but also in interactions with the Spanish State and the European Union.

As a result, according to the latest *Report on the Analysis and Institutional Operation in the Basque Country*, published on 8 January 2014, the model for the attribution of powers in the Institutional System of the Basque Autonomous Community<sup>1</sup> must be approached as a framework of territorial organisation and distribution of political power that is broad and complex. This broadness and complexity of powers is inserted in different institutional levels—multilevel—(State, Regional, Provincial and Municipal) of the Spanish State and the Basque Autonomous Community, but also within the political, economic, territorial and legislative planning of Europe. That is, in a “collaborative” model implicit in the model of territorial organisation of the Spanish State, guaranteed by its Constitutional Tribunal and also reflected in the Basque legislation, from its basic institutional principles: the Statute of Autonomy, Law 27/1983 on the Historical Territories and Law 7/1981 of the Basque Government.

This regulatory structure guides and establishes the rules for institutional relationships and public intervention of the Basque Administrations, from the principles of “objectivity”, “publicity”, “efficacy”, “decentralisation”, “de-concentration”, “collaboration” and “coordination”; but which, by the same token, also involves greater “fragmentation” and “complementarity” of its inter-institutional relationships: “legislative and executive concurrences” specific to the “integrated” or “cooperative federalism” which it is part of (Gobierno Vasco, 2014, pp. 12–19).

This is why this Government structure also inevitably leads to highly complex and conflictive “crossovers” and “overlapping” of powers; superpositions that take place, in particular, when this distribution of powers is applied to the Historical Territories of Alava, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa,

particularly in matters related to their legislative autonomy and the powers transferred through the law of Historical Territories.

### 3. Some considerations about Governance and Metagovernance

The strategic planning processes of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa and the design of the Etorkezuna Eraikiz programme are part of both, what we could consider the perspectives on Territorial Governance (Bukowski, Piattoni, & Smyrl, 2003; Faludi, 2012; Lidström, 2007), and the institutional logic that seeks more transcendental planning processes. For this reason, it is convenient to make a brief description to understand and distinguish the difference in the use of the concepts of Governance and Metagovernance (Beuir, 2002; Bovaird & Löffler, 2009; Jessop, 1998, 2002; Kjaer, 2004; Rhodes, 1997, 2007).

For some decades now, Governance has emerged as a key concept in both the European political agenda and in its social contract (European Commission, 2001). Criteria of efficacy, efficiency, transparency and responsibility that are so yearned for today by good governing practices, have been in conflict with the increasing systemic and relational complexity and the loss of legitimacy of public management, resulting in conflict and in a deterioration of the relationships between citizens and governments; a paradox which, in the face of the rhetoric of the tools promoted by the concept of Governance and its good intentions, involve many difficulties when it comes to putting them into practice (Atkinson & Coleman, 1992; Fukuyama, 2013; Rhodes, 1997) in different government levels—European, regional, local—, thus transcending the traditional spaces and scenarios of political representation.

In addition, the concept of Governance is inspired by the need for a progressive change of attitudes which, freed from the rigid dichotomies of traditional governments, involves the governmental sharing of the different demarcations, in such a way that they dilute their old limitations among the administrative responsibilities required by the new spaces of social, economic and political life of our present time (Rhodes, 1997; Stoker, 1995). Castells was right when he wrote that “*political systems are immersed in a structural crisis of legitimacy, regularly engulfed by scandals, essentially dependent on the backing of the media and on personal leadership, and increasingly removed from citizens*” (Castells, 1997, p. 33).

The changes in the political, economic and institutional landscapes (energy crisis, economic crisis, production crisis, political crisis) that took place in Europe and the United States during the 1970s and 1980s with the neoliberal governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, accelerated the increase of political-institutional complexity causing, in the process, a crisis of traditional political tools, making more difficult and diversifying on a large scale decision-making processes, the design of public policies and, therefore, weakening the mechanisms that made it possible to establish the Keynesian Welfare State after World War II (Harvey, 2007).

This redesign introduced a series of obstacles, worsening the political dysfunctions of traditional systems of government. According to Crozier, Huntington, and Watamuki (1975) this process has been the result, precisely, of the success of the democratic system, deriving in a series of trends that prevents its correct operation: (Crozier et al., 1975, p. 161):

- (1) “*the pursuit of the democratic virtues of equality and individualism has led to the delegitimisation of general authority and to a loss of trust in general leadership*”.
- (2) “*The democratic expansion of political participation has generated an overload of government and an unbalanced expansion of government activities, exacerbating inflationary trends in the economy*”.
- (3) “*Political competitiveness, essential for democracy, has been intensified, inducing a disaggregation of interests and the decline and fragmentation of political parties*”.

- (4) *“The capacity to respond of the democratic government to the electorate and social pressures encourage parochial nationalism in the ways in which democratic societies approach their foreign relations (parochialism in foreign relations)”.*

It is based on these trends how the concept of Governance has been able to transform these trends into new democratic deficiencies and needs, attributing to this term a series of thematic dimensions with which we can identify its main perspectives and tools. These thematic dimensions have derived in specific fields of action demanded by:

- Its capacity to involve diverse figures and agents, whether it is from crosscutting perspectives (public, private, or from civil society) and/or different dynamic levels of international, national, regional, provincial or municipal groups.
- The need to organise the complexity of this interinstitutional and multidisciplinary variety through connected and networked groups.
- Or the will to include civil society in the decision-making processes and in the assumption and assimilation of responsibilities related to the efficacy and flexibility that these processes entail.
- Likewise, by the promotion of a “public ethos”, based on values and behaviours such as transparency and rigour, among all the figures, agents and institutions involved.
- And finally, by the autonomy required for both the capacity for decision-making and for the use of alternative tools to the more classic bureaucratic and administrative habits.

The new successful combination of these fields has led to an increase in relationships of organisational interdependence, to the multiplication of networks for exchanges of resources and ideas, and to the intensification of negotiation processes. Likewise, it has increased the level of autonomy of the intermediate structures of government with respect to the State, also blurring the power of the latter from both the macro point of view, due to the new power granted to the markets and to supranational structures, and from the point of view of the microstructures of regional and municipal government, increasingly fragmenting and diversifying the relational system.

In this sense, according to Rhodes *“governance refers to governing with and through networks”* (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1246) which attributes to the concept of Governance a collaborative, interactive, connected, and open nature (Atkinson & Coleman, 1992; Jones, Hesterly, & Bourgatti, 1997; Rhodes, 1997; Sorensen & Torfing, 2007; Provan & Kervis, 2008). The complexity of this list of factors forces us to think about processes and perspectives that are capable of going beyond the democratic consequences and trends described above.

Thus, the conception and application of Governance in an isolated manner to explain and face the processes of change mentioned above have failed, just like the markets, the State, many government policies and the coordination of the different figures and agents fail, particularly when we think about the longevity of these programmes in the long term. Public policies depend on the government that is in power and on its capacity to maintain the networks created by other governments or to build new networks (Jessop, 1998, 2002). This dynamic has led us to think about the importance of innovation processes in the public sector (Barlett & Dibben, 2010; Bason, 2010; Windrum & Koch, 2008) and about the design of these policies. According to Jessop (2002), given the exchange of structural complexity and the opacity of the social world, failure is the most feasible result of the different levels of government in an attempt to achieve multiple goals during an extended horizon of time and space, without regard for the mechanism or form of coordination used (Jessop, 2002, p. 5).

The incapacity and difficulties of being successful through the complete application of these coordinated programs of political action, end up by focusing discourses on the rhetoric of coordination, governance and partnerships, instead of recognising that the application of these programmes and policies is, in fact, helping to build a new institutional structure or a new way of

doing politics in the long term that is above the success or failure of specific actions (Jessop, 2002, p. 5). In this context, we can see a twofold failure of both the mechanisms of governance and the ways in which it is applied.

This fact leads us to the need to create organisational meta-structures of coordination (Alexander, 1995; Jessop, 1998, 2002, 2004); that is, meta-governance strategies capable of “organising the conditions for governance” (Jessop, 2002, p. 5). According to Eva Sorensen (2006), “*meta-governance is a way of enhancing coordinated governance in a fragmented political system based on a high-degree of autonomy or plurality of self-governing networks and institutions*” (Sorensen, 2006, p. 100). Jan Kooiman and Svein Jentoft (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009), see meta-governance as a guiding element to regular governance bodies. It guides the institutional and problem solving choices both, in their future orientation and the monitoring and continuous evaluation of past actions. It serves as a general guide of values, norms and principles (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009, p. 823).

This would involve reflecting on governance and its mechanisms in a broader sense, considering the guided re-organisation of its different manifestations through the creation of structures and policies that go beyond the usual forms, focusing on the supervision and coordination of it all as a whole.

In short, the structures of metagovernance involve the capacity to create government structures that take into consideration the three systems; that is, the coordinated, efficient and effective worldview of the “market”, the “hierarchies” and the “networks”(Jones et al., 1997; Provan & Kervis, 2008), focusing on their interconnection, very often conflictive (Jessop, 1998; Meuleman, 2008).

In order to adopt a definition of the concept of metagovernance that is capable of integrating all of the dimensions mentioned, we would choose the contribution by Louis Meuleman (2008), which understands metagovernance as “*a means by which to produce some degree of coordinated governance, by designing and managing sound combinations of hierarchical, market and network governance, to achieve the best possible outcomes from the viewpoint of those responsible for the performance of public-sector organizations: public managers as ‘metagovernors’*” (Meuleman, 2008: 68).

According to the reflection adopted by Christopoulos et al. (2012), in the definition by Meuleman, metagovernance acquires greater potential in the management of contextual and specific circumstances, choosing the practices that best adapt to the institutional, social, political and cultural factors of the different countries, regions and communities (Christopoulos et al., 2012, p. 32). A viewpoint that is also acknowledged by Engberg and Larsen (2010) but through a recognition of the contributions of civil society (bottom-up), capable of redirecting the inconsistencies of certain governmental practices implemented vertically (Christopoulos et al., 2012; Engberg & Larsen, 2010).

Finally, it is important to also acknowledge, within these meta-governmental processes, the quasi-mercantile mechanisms of governance dictated by the *New Public Management* (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald, & Pettigrew, 1996; McLaughlin, Osborne, & Ferlie, 2002), which defends saving and the efficient and effective management of costs through the privatisation of some public services; public-private collaboration agreements established particularly through strategic planning processes; and the structuring of new inter- and intra-organisational networks among different stakeholders. According to Torfing et al. (2012), they would all be examples of Interactive Governance.

All of the typologies mentioned can be recognised in the Etorkizuna Eraikiz programme, the highest aspiration of which is, precisely, the *institutionalisation of a collaborative governance model* that not only defines a shared public agenda of spheres of action related to the competitiveness, cohesion and sustainability of Gipuzkoa, but also to the strengthening of the contextual capacities

of the territory itself to decide and face its own challenges based on a new set of guiding values, norms and principles that can transform the culture.

#### 4. The importance of regional and territorial competitiveness

In this context, we also discern in any governance process the dispersion, polarisation and fragmentation of the governmental powers, which translates into a new capacity of the territories and the regional governments to compete and adapt to global challenges through local strategies and policies (Robertson, 1995). This component, at the same time meta-governmental and competitive, is also oriented towards the conception of the territory as a fundamental agent of action in the process of development itself, by fostering territorial competitiveness and innovation (Camagni, 2002; Crevoiser, 2004; Martin et al., 2008; Moulaert & Sekia, 2003; Valdaliso & Wilson, 2015). Regional innovation systems (Moulaert, 2000; Moulaert & Sekia, 2003), for example, have become an essential component in most of the territorial governance processes and models described. Likewise, they have led to political and administrative decentralisation within the framework of the old Nation States.

In the case of the Basque Country, its institutional framework has made it possible to establish a new culture of local governance in which associative and collaborative networks have installed a new “logic of public intervention” capable of structuring a new model for the integration of civil society and public–private cooperation (Estensoro & Zurbano, 2010, p. 133).

Both the regional model and the regionalist schools of thought draw from the new governance models to encourage both the autonomy and the competitiveness of their regional demarcations. The term “regional” defines an area with specific characteristics which refer to its size, its culture, its political and economic organisation and its social structure, while the concept of regionalism, however, is identified—if not in toto—in a very tendentious way, with political movements or ideologies linked to the defence of the reorganisation and the autonomy of the local or regional government through a more or less persistent attributive claim of rights, acquisitive or devolutionary, over certain powers to benefit their respective processes of growth and economic, political, social and cultural development (Dickinson, 1984; Keating, 1998, 2002).

The region, like the territory, cannot be separated from its political load, because as a system of action (Luhmann, 1995) it has certain implications in the distribution of power and in the content of the public policies it implements. Aspects such as its territorial limitations, the institutional system that characterises it, whether it is as a regional government or as an institutional ensemble, and its role as an economic, political or social agency, at a national or international level, are factors that must be taken into account when studying the socio-historical make up that defines it and builds it (Keating, 1997, p. 383). The region, understood as a territorial entity, shows different versions depending on the space in which it is located (Keating, 1997, pp. 390–392):

- It can manifest itself as an intermediary of a series of relations between the State and local Governments.
- It can exist through its demarcation in a variety of territorial, autonomic, provincial or metropolitan levels, where the region is also a political space in which they make and debate decisions among different stakeholders and institutions.

According to Sorensen and Torfing (2012), these processes, linked to the increasing emphasis on *innovation processes of the public sector* (Barlett & Dibben, 2010; Bason, 2010; Windrum & Koch, 2008) have been influenced by three important historical factors: first of all, by the growing pressure, demand and expectations of citizens aimed at the public sector in the shape of solutions and new services and limited access to resources, worsened by the global economic crisis in 2008.

Secondly, by the worsening of a series of global problems such as climate change, the reduction of poverty, security, urban planning processes and the necessary development of rural areas. All of them significant problems that have intensified the complexity of the processes and tools necessary to solve them and which require a reduction of the levels of risk and the conflicts between all of the stakeholders involved.

And thirdly and lastly, the process of globalisation itself has led to the new construction of discourses based on territorial competitiveness (Camagni, 2002; Martin et al., 2008; Moulaert & Sekia, 2003; Valdaliso & Wilson, 2015) which is participated in by governments, regions and towns from around the world to improve their innovation capacities, as the only vehicle capable of coping with the rapid processes of change and the fast and necessary adaptation to them (Sorensen & Torfing, 2012, p. 3).

These factors have been decisive in the new perspectives that have arisen around the concept of collaborative innovation and New Public Governance (Osborne, 2008, 2010) resulting in the dynamic creation of white papers on innovation, public and social innovation laboratories, and greater protagonism and responsibility granted to the managers and employees of the public sector, causing in addition the creation of new training programmes centred around Life-long learning (Field, 2000; Sorensen & Torfing, 2012; p. 3).

One of the greatest exponents of this crossbreeding between new meta-governmental structures and competitiveness processes has been the creation of the Mindlab<sup>2</sup> in Denmark or the concept of Big Society promoted by David Cameron's government in Great Britain (Foxwell, 2015; Penin, Staszowski, & Brown, 2015), focusing on the vision of citizens and civil society as a resource and a key partner in the process of public sector innovation. We can find all of these elements in the Etorkizuna Eraikiz programme, which we will discuss in the following sections.

### **5. The design of Etorkizuna Eraikiz**

Etorkizuna Eraikiz is the result of a strategic reflection and planning process carried out by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa between 2015 and 2019 to redirect public policies and promote the innovation of the Gipuzkoan Institutional Governance System, strengthening it, making it more dynamic and adapting it to the demographic, economic, social, productive and environmental challenges, while defending the welfare and sustainability of the territory.

This strategy also responds to the challenge of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa to provide solutions in a collaborative way, combining knowledge and experiences that can help to jointly build together a shared future for Gipuzkoa. This discussion process involves different actors/agents, from civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, civil servants and policymakers.

This programme has been materialised in the co-design of a participative strategy (Bason, 2010) by means of a thought process among different agents and experts, assessing the processes of territorial learning and by joining more competitive and advanced regional networks and innovation hubs. In this respect, we can conceive this programme as the first step for the organised establishment of the conditions for a new governance or meta-governance model; that is, as a meta-governmental programme capable of visualising and guaranteeing the mechanisms necessary for a new institutional governance system that is consolidated in the long term (Kooiman, 2003; Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009; Jessop, 2003; Rhodes, 1997, 1998; Torfing et al., 2012).

This planning dynamic emerged within the framework of the Strategic Management Plan 2015–2019 by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, in which it establishes the foundations for the development of a series of projects, among which we could highlight for our analysis, a Good

Governance Strategy and a Programme for Political Culture and Deepening Democracy, made specific in the following objectives (DFG, 2016, p. 20):

- The transformation of the ways of governing and making Good Governance a hallmark of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa.
- To explore in more depth the attitudes, values and democratic behaviour of citizens, institutional representatives and organised society.

These projects are reflected in the most important general objectives of the Plan, among which we should highlight the Reinvention of the Government of Gipuzkoa *“as the driving force that promotes the development and transformation of the territory, establishing a corporate and crosscutting commitment to the cultural and organisational change by each person and department of the provincial government of Gipuzkoa; opening active channels for citizen participation, multiagent collaboration and transparency”* (...) *“...extending and homogenising new advanced practices of planning, management and evaluation applicable to each one of its public policies...”* (DFG, 2016, p. 15).

Within this framework of action and reflection, the Etorikizuna Eraikiz programme emerged, based on two basic ideas: on the one hand, the modernisation of Gipuzkoa through new economic, social and cultural projects; and on the other hand, the design of the strategic public spheres of action that the province must approach in collaboration with the civil society and other stakeholders of the provincial territory. From the methodological point of view described at the beginning of this paper, Etorikizuna Eraikiz responds to three important objectives:

- (1) The definition of specific strategic projects necessary to tackle over the next 10 years in Gipuzkoa.
- (2) To experiment with and apply, with the collaboration of the businesses and entities in Gipuzkoa, a series of economic projects that can help to guide the needs and problems of its business conglomerates.
- (3) To build a new model of public management that is more open, transparent and collaborative.

These basic ideas have led to the co-design and c-creation (Bason, 2010) and a series of innovative initiatives based on two important pillars and a series of crosscutting measures:

- (1) *GipuzkoaLab*: focused on the design of a Laboratory for the implementation and evaluation of a series of pilot experiences for their subsequent inclusion in public policies.
- (2) *Gipuzkoa Taldean*: A *Think Tank* oriented towards the preparation of a Strategic Plan for Gipuzkoa 2026.
- (3) A series of crosscutting initiatives specified in three subprojects: *Nazioarteratze Sarea*, *Ikerkune* and *Gizarteatze Prozesua*.

### 5.1. *GipuzkoaLab*

*GipuzkoaLab* is the core of Etorikizuna Eraikiz. It is based on the co-creation of a laboratory for policy design and experimentation (Bason, 2010; Torfing, 2016; Torfing et al., 2012) to promote high-priority projects in different strategic fields. This laboratory divides its activities between the identification of the above-mentioned projects to be contrasted with the economic and social agents of the territory; the integration of these projects in the activity programmes of the Provincial Government; and finally, the design of the intervention strategy; that is, the pilot experience and its application.

This Laboratory is fundamentally practical in its nature and aims to transform the businesses in Gipuzkoa into Laboratories where it is possible to experiment, test and apply new economic, social

and cultural policies through *collaborative innovation and governance* (O'Flynn & Wanna, 2008; Torfing, 2016). The thematic fields approached by *GipuzkoaLab* are focused on workplace innovation, active aging, gender equality, social inclusion, and cultural development.

### 5.2. *Gipuzkoa Taldean*

*GipuzkoaTaldean* is a *Think Tank* focused on the formulation and development of a Strategic Plan for Gipuzkoa 2026, based on a reflexive process dealing with four important questions to set up a series of projects. These questions focus on the preparation of a strategic document that maps the socioeconomic needs and conditions of the territory: What is the route for change? How do we approach this change? What steps need to be taken? In order to answer these questions, *Gipuzkoa Taldean* has been joined by a new generation of people involved in the decision-making processes of companies, organisations and associations in Gipuzkoa that are in daily contact, but which, up until now, have found themselves distanced from the institutional reality of the territory itself.

This structure established four departments and working groups in the 2016 which include, among others:

- The economic and tourist promotion of the territory to improve its competitiveness and attractiveness.
- The promotion of education, culture and language equality based on knowledge and territorial identity.
- The promotion of welfare through the design of new social policies.
- And finally, support for sustainable mobility and sustainable infrastructures.

### 5.3. *Crosscutting lines of action*

The crosscutting lines of action of the strategy described include three important subprojects or initiatives:

- (1) *Nazioarteratze Sarea* an *internationalization network* oriented to the learning of other successful cases and experiences. This strategy looks to create and access new international networks and projects which can later be adapted or scaled to the Gipuzkoan regional context by following two important premises:
  - To integrate *Etokizuna Eraikiz* in international forums and networks.
  - To share and export the experiences of *Etokizuna Eraikiz* itself.
- (2) *Ikerguna—research in basque—*is an initiative that seeks to involve the University System of Gipuzkoa through its four universities—the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), the University of Deusto, the University of Mondragón and Tecnun-University of Navarra—, in the reflection, debate and information process of the various activities included in the *Etokizuna Eraikiz* programme. This line of work seeks to establish a series of research programmes focused on four important objectives:
  - To answer questions that are useful and relevant for Gipuzkoa's society.
  - To carry out a systematic and continuous process to evaluate and contrast the political practices as well as the organisational and institutional processes of other regions that are leaders in these fields.
  - To disseminate the obtained results.
  - To participate in foreign debates to contrast and co-create new activities and research programmes.
- (3) The *Gizarteratze prozesua* or *social integration process* is focused on the promotion, dissemination and socialisation processes of the main actions and challenges conducted in the region, as well as of the experiences and obtained results. This integration process seeks to:

- Share the values and the work process with citizens through collaborative activities and the co-design of new projects.
- To involve citizens in new dynamics of political participation.
- To share with the companies and organisations of Gipuzkoa the experiences, development and the results obtained.

Due to the on going planning and execution of Etorikizuna Eraikiz, which will end in December 2018, it is still soon to evaluate the results of this public meta-governance program. Its uniqueness resides on the capability and self-governing autonomy to launch a holistic innovative approach that transforms the public sector and institutionalises a new political culture. Although it is true that the implementation of an initiative of this kind is only possible thanks to the institutional autonomy of the province and its small size, it can be an international benchmark for other political experimentation initiatives and laboratories such as Mindlab in Denmark, or the Governance Lab in the United Kingdom.

## 6. Concluding remarks

The design of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz programme is a central pillar in the transition towards a new institutional culture in the way of managing and administering the future of the political governance of the province of Gipuzkoa. Although it is still early to assess the impact that this programme will have on the province, its *raison de être* is that it is part of a more ambitious and complex project which, through more stable meta-governmental structures, should be able to establish in the medium-long term a new process of institutionalisation based on broader models and practices. Despite the difficulties and complexity surrounding the Basque institutional system itself, the rooting and necessary implementation of a new political culture is fundamental for the institutional future of the territory, both from a discursive point of view and from a practical point of view, for three important reasons:

First of all, the conceptual representation of the language which gives meaning to the practices in the construction of expert knowledge on the territorial space; secondly, the practices and plans of action which derive from this language influencing the agents and institutions in charge of implementing them; and finally, the rules and the values that guide the different social actions, deciding which of them are relevant and which of them can be discarded and, therefore, creating dynamics of hegemonic power that govern the regulatory and conceptual factors through which the policies are built, applying each discourse to its specific spatial practice (Richardson & Jensen, 2003, pp. 57–65).

Thus, the analysis of the design of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz programme gives us the opportunity to learn about the meta-governmental discourses and practices that make up the new construction of the future institutional framework in the province of Gipuzkoa. In this context, each social structure raises thoughts about the reasons for its existence, its mechanisms of action and communication, the organisation of its power frameworks, and the effect of all these when building policies and scenarios focused on strengthening organised society and enhancing the process of political legitimisation. All of this through new mechanisms of political collaboration and representation oriented towards solving the problems of Gipuzkoa's society, creating the necessary tools to be able to guide and decide on its future.

Within this context, here I refer to the elemental notions of the theory of structuration, in which action and structure mutually address each other, that is, the “rules and resources recursively implicated in institutions” that structure and are in turn structured through the social actions and systems of the societies they belong to, in a given time and space. Actions reproduced by specific agents and institutions that “apply rules and resources in the diversity of contexts of action”, interacting and influencing each other (Giddens, 2006, pp. 60–61).

In this respect, between the so-called “practical and discursive consciousness there is no separation, only differences between what can be said and what is generally done” (Giddens, 2006, p. 44). Having said this, knowing the reasons that underlie each action of the institutional discourse of Gipuzkoa as a priority goal; this is why the analysis of the design itself of the Etorkezuna Eraikiz programme goes beyond the implementation of a simple political action strategy, as it is part of a broader and more ambitious process for the restructuring of the institutional political culture of this territory.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of the strategy such as the one mentioned would be to install a process by which, according to Loureau, “the instituting social forces” end up “building social forms that are legally coded and instituted” (Lourau, 1979, p. 73). In this respect, both the Strategic Plan for the 2015–2019 Management of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, and the Etorkezuna Eraikiz programme are still far from establishing such a political culture. Their success will lie the possibility of developing continuist actions which either through *GipuzkoaTaldean* or the future development of the Strategic Plan for 2026 that is part of this last measure, are capable of preserving the meta-governmental perspectives proposed in Etorkezuna Eraikiz.

Having said this and as a conclusion, according to Bill and Hardgrave (1992), the progressive institutional structuring of the public sphere has had to gradually solve different problems: identity, legitimacy, participation, penetration and distribution. Thus, “public life” ceases to be a mere public Agora in which to debate and agree on public matters, to also become an object of the political economy, a sphere related to resources and political action. Once these goals are defined by means of strategic planning processes and programmes such as Etorkezuna Eraikiz, all that remains is to institutionalise the resources necessary to create the guarantees that ensure their sustainability in the future (Lechner, 1988).

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#### Notes

1. The Administrative Government of the Basque Autonomous Community is located in the city of Vitoria-Gasteiz which belongs to the province of Alava.
2. Mindlab is a public interministerial innovation unit created by the Danish government to promote collaborative innovation between the different ministerial agents bodies, and businesses, to respond to new social challenges. Other similar examples can be found in the 27e Région in France or Kennisland in Holland.

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