

OECD Public Governance Reviews



Promoting Deliberative Democracy in the Basque Country in Spain

LESSONS FROM THE TOLOSA CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY



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Foreword

Citizen participation and deliberation is a core element of an open government and considered by the OECD as a powerful catalyst for driving democracy, public trust, and inclusive growth. In recognition of the growing demand by OECD Members to acknowledge and promote this role, the OECD Council adopted the Recommendation on Open Government in 2017. To date, it remains the first and only internationally recognised legal instrument on open government and has guided many countries in the design and implementation of their open government agendas. Citizen participation and deliberation is widely recognised as important avenues to reinforcing democracy and strengthening trust in public institutions, as also highlighted in the OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative (“RDI”) and its pillar 2 on “Enhancing representation, participation and openness in public life”.

The global landscape for citizen and stakeholder participation is evolving constantly, becoming richer with new and innovative ways to involve citizens and stakeholders in public decisions. OECD countries are already implementing a diverse set of participatory mechanisms: from more traditional mechanisms such as public meetings, in-person consultations, roundtables and workshops, to more innovative approaches like digital participatory platforms and hackathons. More recently, public authorities from all levels of government have started experimenting with representative deliberative processes such as citizens’ assemblies, councils, and juries where randomly selected citizens are invited to learn, deliberate, and collectively define informed recommendations to address a concrete public problem.

The Basque Country in Spain has a long-standing tradition of collaboration between public authorities and non-governmental stakeholders and has been implementing diverse participatory practices at all levels of government. The OECD Open Government Review of Bizkaia published in 2019 provided a comprehensive analysis of Bizkaia’s initiatives regarding transparency, accountability, and participation and how they impact the quality of public service delivery. Gipuzkoa, the first province in Spain that hosted a deliberative process in 1993, is now leading the way in developing more engaging and innovative forms of participation.

Arantzazulab, a democracy and governance innovation laboratory that promotes new forms of collaborative governance, and public authorities in the Gipuzkoa Province – including the Tolosa City Council and the Provincial Council - embarked on a journey to experiment with democratic innovations to empower citizens and improve public decision making. Whilst the primary objective was to experiment and showcase the potential of public deliberation, Arantzazulab’s long term vision is to empower citizens, promote collaborative governance in public policy and deepen democracy by institutionalising and systematising the use of civic lottery and deliberation in the Basque Country. This report takes stock of two deliberative pilots in Gipuzkoa (Provincial level) and Tolosa (Municipal level) and suggests medium to long term actions to move from experimentation to permanent public deliberation. The OECD would like to acknowledge Arantzazulab for its commitment and continuous support throughout the project, as well as the public authorities from Tolosa, Gipuzkoa and the Basque Country for their contribution to this report.

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- Government representatives: elected representatives and civil servants from the Tolosa City Council and the Gipuzkoa City Council, in particular Garikoitz Lekuona Izeta.
- Facilitation team: the cooperatives Aztiker, Artaziak and Prometea.
- Evaluation team: Aktiba research group, researchers from the University of the Basque Country (who evaluated the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly) and Parte Hartuz research group (who evaluated the Gipuzkoa Citizens' Assembly)
- Deliberation experts: Arantxa Mendiharat (Deliberativa), Claudia Chwalisz (DemocracyNext), Jonathan Moskovic (Francophone Brussels Parliament), Kyle Redman (NewDemocracy Foundation) and Rafael Besoli Minguela (Barcelona's Youth Forum).

The report was also reviewed by external contributors including Ieva Česnulaitytė (Founding Head of Research and Learning at DemocracyNext), Garikoitz Lekuona Izeta (Community and Governance at Tolosa City Council), and Felipe Rey Salamanca (Professor of Public Law at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and Founder of Ideemos). The drafting team would also like to thank OECD colleagues that provided comments: Bruno Monteiro, David Goessmann, Emma Cantera and Ollin Pérez-Raynaud.

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Readers Guide

This brief section is intended to help readers understand key terms and concepts of public deliberation, and the context of the collaboration between the OECD and Arantzazulab.

Key terms

Representative deliberative process: a process in which a broadly representative body of people weighs evidence, deliberates to find common ground, and develops detailed recommendations on policy issues for public authorities. For shorthand, representative deliberative processes are often referred to as deliberative processes in this document. Common examples of one-off processes are citizens' assemblies, juries, and panels. (OECD, 2021^[1]). Other words such as citizen assembly or public deliberation are used in this publication to make reference to these processes.

Deliberation: weighing evidence and considering a wide range of perspectives in pursuit of finding common ground. It is distinct from:

- Debate, where the aim is to persuade others of one's own position and to 'win',
- Bargaining, where people make concessions in exchange for something else,
- Dialogue, which seeks mutual understanding rather than a decision,
- and "opinion giving", where individuals state their opinions in a context that does not first involve learning, or the need to listen to others.
- Sortition: recruitment processes that involve random sampling from which a representative selection is made to ensure that the group broadly matches the demographic profile of the community (based on census or other similar data) (OECD, 2020^[2]).

The governance structure of Spain, the Basque Country, Gipuzkoa, and Tolosa

Understanding the Basque Country's governance arrangements and institutions, as well as the national context in Spain, is essential to appreciate the precise context in which the deliberative process pilots took place and the different ways they could be institutionalised.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 is the central law of the State, enshrining the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed (Article 2). Title VIII of the Constitution establishes the territorial organisation of the State in Autonomous Communities and Local Entities, with the distribution of powers that this entails, and which is regulated in Articles 148 and 149. Based on these precepts, the Statutes of Autonomy for each of the Autonomous Communities are approved. The Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country, approved by Organic Law 3/1979, 18 December, for instance, sets out the historical territories that make up this Autonomous Community, as well as its competences, the organisation of its legislative, executive and judicial powers, and its main institutions.

The Basque Autonomous Community (*Euskadi - Pais Vasco*) is one of the 17 Autonomous Communities in Spain, and is divided in three provinces: Gipuzkoa, Araba and Bizkaia. The capital of the Basque Autonomous Community is Vitoria-Gasteiz, and the most populated cities are Bilbao and Donostia-San Sebastian, located in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa provinces respectively. The political power in the Basque Autonomous Community is exercised by a parliament composed of an equal number of representatives from each historic territory (75 parliamentarians in total), who are elected by a popular vote for a period of four years. The Executive Branch is composed of a president - also called Lehendakari in Basque - who is designated by the Parliament, who in turn appoints counsellors to form a government.

The province of Gipuzkoa, along with the other provinces, is also called a “historic territory”, a term exclusive to the Basque Autonomous Community that describes the political and administrative system of its three provinces. The political system is led by the provincial bodies, which comprise a parliament (Juntas Generales) and a provincial council. Each parliament is composed of 51 members who are elected by popular vote for a period of four years. The parliaments have the capacity to approve provincial laws and regulations. The executive power in the three Provinces is exercised by the provincial councils, composed of a president (Diputado General) who is designated by the Parliament and a team of deputies, designated by the president, to lead the government. The main competencies of the provincial councils (which are greater in the Basque Country than in any other region in Spain) are tax collection and policy, territorial planning, roads and public works, environment, cultural heritage, and social welfare, as well as the economic and financial tutelage of the municipalities (OECD, 2019^[3])

At the level of municipalities in the Basque Autonomous Community (like Tolosa), the political power is exercised by a local council composed of a mayor and of counsellors (concejales). Counsellors are elected by popular vote for a period of four years and designate the mayor. In Tolosa, the local council is formed by 17 counsellors, and the mayor.

The collaboration between the OECD and Arantzazulab

Arantzazulab is a democracy and governance innovation laboratory that promotes new forms of collaborative governance between public institutions and civil society, with the ultimate aim of empowering citizens, promoting collaborative governance in public policy and deepening democracy. The Lab acts as a meeting point/innovation ecosystem catalyst to bring together different stakeholders: governments, academia, social and democratic innovation practitioners and experts, and citizens. The Lab's practice is based on introducing and proposing innovative and transformative approaches to governance innovation, building collaborations and networks, and internationalisation, while remaining connected to strong local community and cultural values. More information can be found in Arantzazulab's annual report (Arantzazulab, 2023^[4]).

The Lab is also a reference centre for collaborative governance within the Etorikizuna Eraikiz strategy (Etorikizuna Eraikiz, 2024^[5]) of the Provincial Council. The aim of the Lab is to develop and promote collaborative governance through reflection, research, and experimentation on new models of relationships between public institutions and civil society.

Arantzazulab is set up as a non-profit and non-partisan foundation and is supported by key institutions in the Basque Country – which have been instrumental for the Lab's influence in the local governance context.

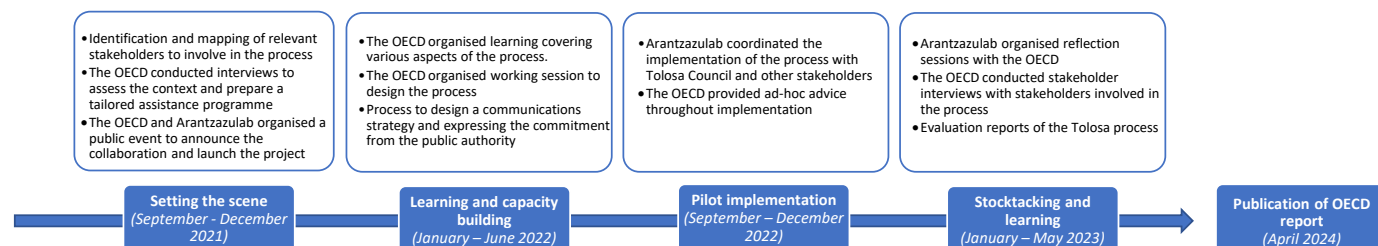
The OECD – Arantzazulab collaboration on public deliberation in the Basque Country

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), through its Innovative, Digital and Open Government Division (INDIGO) supported Arantzazulab in the implementation of the first representative deliberative process in the Municipality of Tolosa, in the Gipuzkoa region of the Basque Country in Spain. This project can be considered as the continuity of a previous Open Government Review

of Bizkaia published in 2019 which provided a complete analysis of Bizkaia's initiatives regarding transparency, accountability, and participation and how they impacted the quality of public service delivery.

The project with Arantzazulab aimed at building capacities across the innovation ecosystem in Gipuzkoa to design and implement a process of public deliberation with randomly selected citizens to help the City Council better address the mental health and wellbeing of its residents. The aim of this cooperation is to experiment on a small scale to learn, generate knowledge, disseminate and be able to establish the conditions for institutionalising representative deliberative processes in the Basque Country more broadly.

Figure 1. Arantzazulab project's timeline



Source: Author's own elaboration

The OECD supported Arantzazulab and Tolosa town Council throughout the design process by organising learning sessions with experts to detail how to organise a representative deliberative process from start to finish. The session covered the main aspects of a deliberative process: civic lottery, communication, learning and deliberation, and evaluation.

- **The civic lottery session** explored the details on how to run a civic lottery, agree on the criteria by which stratification will be done and decide on the most appropriate civic lottery approach in the context of Tolosa based on the guide “How to run a Civic Lottery” (Mass LBP, 2017^[6]). External speakers included Jonathan Moskovic, democratic innovation advisor to the President of the Francophone Brussels Parliament.
- **The communication and commitment session** explored different elements of communication involved in implementing a deliberative process, as well as the commitment from public authorities to take into account recommendations that citizens will produce based on the guide *Democracy Beyond Elections* (NewDemocracy, 2018^[7]). External speakers included Rafael Besoli Minguela, communications expert responsible for communication in Barcelona's Youth Forum.
- The **deliberation session** explored two important elements. First, information, meaning that assembly members should have access to accurate, relevant, and accessible information, as well as the opportunity to hear from speakers chosen by citizens themselves. Secondly, group deliberation which focuses on creating an environment in which citizens can find common ground. External speakers included Kyle Redman, who presented the methodology implemented by the *NewDemocracy Foundation* in Australia to run their representative deliberative processes.
- The **evaluation session** explored different approaches and possibilities to evaluate the deliberative process in Tolosa and Gipuzkoa, as well as different aspects that evaluation could entail based on the OECD Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes (OECD, 2021^[8]). External speakers included Dr Stephen Elstub, Director of Research at the Department of Politics at Newcastle University.

In addition to the learning sessions, Arantzazulab consulted various stakeholders and considered examples from other countries and contexts. In particular, *Deliberativa*, a Spanish non-profit specialised in civic lottery and deliberation, provided further knowledge around the design of these sessions, with more practical information and, crucially, much more focus on the particularities of the Spanish context. Other organisations involved in the design of the process included the cooperatives Aztiker, Artaziak and Prometea.

This project was promoted and financed by Arantzazulab and implemented together with the OECD Open Governance, Civic Space, and Public Communications Unit.

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Executive summary

This report takes stock of the project carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Arantzazulab, and public authorities in Gipuzkoa that included experiments with the use of public deliberation in the Basque Country (Spain). Building on the Tolosa and Gipuzkoa deliberative processes (promoted and designed by Arantzazulab with the support of the OECD and in collaboration with other local and international stakeholders) and interviews with key regional stakeholders, this report finds seven main areas of opportunity for improving deliberative processes in the region. The report also sets out three pathways for promoting and systemising deliberation across all levels of government in the Basque Country: 1) institutionalising deliberative practices, 2) embedding deliberation in public administration, and 3) mainstreaming deliberation within and outside government.

Key findings

The Tolosa and Gipuzkoa Assemblies benefited from a friendly legal and regulatory environment for sortition and deliberation, strong political buy-in and commitment throughout the process, available financial resources, support from an active network of deliberative experts and practitioners, and a long-term vision set by the organisers that valued evaluation and iteration. Moreover, the most important asset was the role of Arantzazulab, whose independence from the government, strong practical expertise on collaborative governance, and legitimacy with public and non-public organisations helped build a reliable operating environment and created safe spaces for experimentation.

While the case of Tolosa can be considered a good practice, **the OECD and the independent evaluation point to seven areas of opportunity for increasing the quality and impact of future deliberative processes:** (1) strengthening the connection with the public beyond those who directly participated, (2) streamlining the selection of the topic for deliberation, (3) improving the dissemination of information, (4) involving civil servants to ensure ownership, (5) setting the right governance structure, (6) systematising evaluation and (7) follow up.

Moving from *ad hoc* deliberative processes towards institutionalising deliberation in the Basque Country requires mapping and addressing current barriers to such institutionalisation. These include legal barriers, such as access to data for sortition, contractor lock-in to run civic lotteries, as well as legal obstacles to providing citizens with a stipend for their participation. The mapping also covers financial and structural barriers, such as the high costs of organising a deliberative process, overall lack of resources dedicated to democratic innovations, and limited knowledge of how to run deliberative processes inside and outside government. Finally, this mapping considers the need to better communicate the outcomes, benefits, and impact of deliberative processes.

Recognising that a successful path to institutionalising deliberative processes varies depending on the legislative, cultural, institutional, and administrative context in which they operate, this roadmap and its recommendations can serve as a valuable reference for policymakers in other regions and municipalities

in Spain, as well as across OECD countries, to advance towards more permanent and systemic public deliberation.

Key recommendations

The OECD's 10 recommendations are clustered into 3 main categories, also considered here as pathways to promoting and systematising deliberation across levels of government in the Basque Country:

Institutionalising deliberative practices by 1) updating existing legislation or adopting new frameworks that enable civic lottery and remuneration, 2) building permanent deliberative institutions that provide citizens with a regular opportunity to participate and reinforce synergies with representative institutions and 3) setting up independent oversight bodies for enhanced evaluation and continuous learning.

Embedding deliberation in public administration by 4) building a compelling narrative for public investment in deliberation to secure resources for future processes and enable economies of scale, 5) creating a dedicated, interdisciplinary public service for deliberation and 6) setting up a digital infrastructure for deliberation.

Mainstreaming deliberation within and outside government by 7) replicating deliberation beyond Tolosa and Gipuzkoa, 8) promoting democratic education and training in schools, 9) nurturing an “ecosystem” of people and networks to support deliberation and 10) reinforcing the conditions for experimentation in the Basque Country.

1 Introduction

As part of its open government agenda, the OECD has been exploring innovative ways to involve citizens in public decision making that go beyond consultations. In particular, the OECD has gathered extensive data and evidence on the benefits of public deliberation as a way to enable citizens to deliberate and provide informed recommendations on complex policy issues.

The OECD's work on innovative citizen participation and deliberative democracy

The OECD's work on innovative citizen participation and deliberative democracy is anchored in the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (2017_[1]), the first and only internationally recognised legal instrument in the area of open government. The Recommendation defines open government as “**a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth**”.

The principles of open government – transparency, integrity, accountability, and participation – are deeply related and intertwined in practice. Conceptually, they can be defined as:

- **Transparency**, understood as the disclosure of relevant government data and information in a manner that is timely, accessible, understandable, and re-usable (OECD, forthcoming_[2]).
- **Public sector integrity** refers to the consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests (OECD, 2020_[3]).
- **Accountability** is a relationship referring to the responsibility and duty of government, public entities, public officials, and decision-makers to provide transparent information on, and be responsible for, their actions, activities and performance. It also includes the right and responsibility of citizens and stakeholders to have access to this information and have the ability to question the government and to reward/sanction performance through electoral, institutional, administrative, and social channels (OECD, forthcoming_[2]).
- **Participation** includes all of the ways in which citizens¹ and stakeholders² can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery through information, consultation and engagement (OECD, 2017_[1]).

Open government is a concept that touches upon every single aspect of governance and aims to lift the barriers between citizens and public institutions – with the goal of strengthening democracy through renewed government–citizen interactions. Citizen and stakeholder participation is thus a core element of an open government.

What is citizen and stakeholder participation?

Citizen and stakeholder participation refers to the efforts by public institutions to hear the views, perspectives, and inputs from citizens and stakeholders. Participation allows citizens and stakeholders to influence the activities and decisions of public authorities at different stages of the policy cycle, and at all levels of government. The OECD (2017_[1]) distinguishes among three levels of citizen and stakeholder participation, which differ according to the level of involvement:

- **Information:** an initial level of participation characterised by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to citizens and stakeholders. It covers both on-demand provision of information and “proactive” measures by the government to disseminate information.
- **Consultation:** a more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa. It is based on the prior definition of the issue for which views are being sought and requires the provision of relevant information, in addition to feedback on the outcomes of the process.
- **Engagement:** when citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g., information, data, and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting

the agenda, proposing project or policy options and shaping the dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation in many cases rests with public authorities.

The OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes (OECD, 2022^[4]) outlines the benefits of citizen participation and suggest a ten-step path for any individual or organisation interested in designing, planning, and implementing a participatory process. The guidelines cover eight different methods that can be used to involve citizens in policy making, from consultations to more advanced deliberative processes.

What is a representative deliberative process?

The OECD has been exploring innovative ways to involve citizens in public decision making that go beyond consultations, for example, through representative deliberative processes. In such processes, a broadly representative body of people weighs evidence, deliberates to find common ground, and develops detailed recommendations on policy issues for public authorities (OECD, 2020^[5]). Common examples of one-off processes are citizens' assemblies, juries, and panels.

There are three elements that make representative deliberative processes markedly different from other methods of citizen participation (OECD, 2022^[4]):

- **Random selection** of participants through a civic lottery. To be able to organise deep and substantial deliberation, the group of citizens participating in it must be relatively small, usually ranging from 15 to 100 participants. Randomly selecting citizens, stratified based on criteria such as age, gender, location, and socio-economic background, has the benefit of capturing the diversity of views, perspectives, and lived experiences of different members of society and ensuring broad representativeness of that community.
- **Deliberation.** Deliberation involves dialogue and debate, but also implies a careful consideration of a range of different arguments and opinions in a respectful way. It requires accurate and relevant information and adequate time, so that those deliberating can go into the core of the issue and find common ground.
- **Impact.** Deliberative processes differentiate themselves from other forms of participation by formally integrating a following-up phase during which the public administration must respond in a timely manner to recommendations presented by assembly members. Monitoring, evaluating and creating a learning loop based on the outcomes and outputs of the processes are key features of the deliberative culture. The impact of deliberative processes has also been shown in the members' engagement in the years following the process. For instance, some members have shown to actively engage in the monitoring and evaluation of the policy recommendations they produced (e.g. "Les 150", an association created by the 150 members of the French Citizens' Convention on Climate to maintain their engagement post assembly).

Overall, because of these properties, representative deliberative processes focus on the depth of deliberation and all parts of society being represented within a smaller group of participants, whereas the majority of other methods of citizen participation place the focus on the breadth of participation – aiming to ideally directly involve everyone affected by a specific issue (OECD, 2020^[5]). This combination of principles is rooted in ancient Athenian democracy and were applied throughout history until two to three centuries ago. It is their modern application to complement representative democratic institutions that make such processes innovative today (OECD, 2020^[5]).

When and why should public authorities convene a deliberative process?

Representative deliberative processes are one way for public authorities to involve citizens in public decision making. These processes can lead to better policy outcomes because deliberation yields public judgements rather than public opinions. When conducted effectively, they can enable policy makers to

make difficult decisions about the most challenging public policy problems and enhance trust between citizens and government (OECD, 2020^[5]). Drawing on the evidence and existing theoretical research in the field of deliberative democracy, the OECD (2020^[5]) highlights seven reasons why deliberation and sortition can help lead to better public decisions:

- **Representative deliberative processes can give decision makers greater legitimacy to make hard choices.** These processes help policy makers to better understand public priorities, and the values and reasons behind them, and to identify where consensus is and is not feasible. Evidence suggests that they are particularly useful in situations where there is a need to overcome political deadlock.
- **Representative deliberative processes can enhance public trust in government** and democratic institutions by giving citizens an effective role in public decision making. People are more likely to trust a decision that has been influenced by ordinary people than one made solely by government or behind closed doors. Trust also works two ways. For governments to engender trust among the public, they must in turn trust the public to be more directly involved in decision-making. It can also demonstrate to citizens the difficulty of taking collective decisions and improve their sense of collective democratic life.
- **Representative deliberative processes signal civic respect and empower citizens.** Engaging citizens in active deliberation can also strengthen their sense of political efficacy (the perception that one can understand and influence political affairs) by not treating them as objects of legislation and administration (Knobloch, 2019^[6]).
- **Representative deliberative processes open the door to a much more diverse group of people,** making governance more inclusive. With their use of random selection and stratified sampling, they bring in typically excluded categories like young people, the disadvantaged, women, or minority groups into public policy and decision-making.
- **Representative deliberative processes can strengthen integrity** and prevent corruption by ensuring that groups and individuals with money and power cannot have undue influence on a public decision. Key principles of deliberative good practice are that the process is transparent, visible, and provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to present to the participants. Participants' identities are often protected until after the process is over to safeguard them from being targeted by interest groups.
- **Representative deliberative processes can help counteract polarisation and disinformation.** Empirical research has shown that “communicative echo chambers that intensify cultural cognition, identity reaffirmation, and polarisation do not operate in deliberative conditions, even in groups of like-minded partisans” (Dryzek, 2019^[7]; Grönlund, 2015^[8]). There is also evidence to suggest that deliberation can be an effective way to overcome ethnic, religious, or ideological divisions between groups that have historically found their identity in rejecting that of the other (Ugarizza, 2014^[9])

As to when to convene a deliberative process, evidence suggests that these processes are well suited to help public authorities solve certain types of public challenges. In particular:

- **Values-driven dilemmas.** Representative deliberative processes are designed in a way that encourages active listening, critical thinking, and respect between participants. They create an environment in which discussing difficult ethical questions that have no evident or ‘right’ solutions can happen in a constructive way and can enable participants to find common ground. For example, in 2023, the French Government convened a Citizen Assembly to deliberate and provide recommendations on assisted dying (OECD, 2023^[10]).

- **Complex problems that require weighing trade-offs.** Representative deliberative processes are designed to provide participants with the time to learn, reflect, and deliberate, enabling access to a wide range of evidence and expertise from officials, academics, think tanks, advocacy groups, businesses, fellow citizens, and other stakeholders. These design characteristics enable citizens to grapple with the complexity of decision-making and to consider problems within their legal, regulatory and/or budgetary constraints. For instance, in 2022, the German Federal Foreign Office organised a citizens' assembly to collect recommendations on the National Security Strategy (Government of Germany, 2022^[11]). Citizens identified threats to national security, defined 121 security policy goals, and deliberated by weighing conflicting understandings and viewpoints on security.
- **Long-term issues that go beyond the short-term incentives of electoral cycles.** Many public policy issues require difficult decisions, as their benefits are often only reaped in the long term, while the costs are incurred in the short term. Deliberative processes can help to justify action and spending on such issues, as they are designed in a way that removes the motivated interests of political parties and elections, incentivising participants to act in the interest of the public good. For example, given the cross-sectoral and long-term nature of the climate crisis, involving citizens can help conciliate various interests and suggest solutions that go beyond short-term political cycles. Among the cases collected by the OECD (2023^[12]), 125 processes dealt with environmental issues in Spain, the United Kingdom, Poland, France, and Denmark, among others.

Representative deliberative processes are not a silver bullet and require careful implementation, and evaluation to ensure they achieve the desired impact on both the decision-making process and the participants.

To reflect the growing interest on the use of representative deliberative processes, the OECD has been gathering evidence to analyse the “deliberative wave” (OECD, 2023^[12]). To support policy makers from all levels of government, the OECD developed the Deliberative Democracy Toolbox³, which includes the [first global report](#) on the use of public deliberation for policy making, the [OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making](#) (2020^[5]), a blueprint to [support evaluation](#) (OECD, 2021^[13]), a guide that outlines [eight models](#) for institutionalising representative public deliberation (OECD, 2021^[14]), and the [Database](#) which contains almost 800 cases from around the world.

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Endnotes

¹ Defined by the OECD (2022^[4]) as individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and political affiliations. The term is meant in the larger sense of 'an inhabitant of a particular place', which can be in reference to a village, town, city, region, state, or country depending on the context. It is not meant in the more restrictive sense of 'a legally recognised national of a state'. In this larger sense, it is equivalent of people.

² The Open Government Recommendation (OECD, 2017^[1]) defines "stakeholders" as "any interested and/or affected party, including: individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious and political affiliations; and institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media or the private sector".

³ The Toolbox is accessible here: <https://www.oecd.org/governance/innovative-citizen-participation/>

2 The enabling environment for citizen participation and deliberation in the Basque Country

This chapter provides an overview of the laws, policies and institutional arrangements that enable citizen and stakeholder participation in the Basque Country as well as some context on the broader Spanish framework. It finds that there is a strong culture of participation built on a long-lasting tradition of collaboration between public authorities and non-governmental actors at all levels of government. The enabling environment is supported by laws at the regional level, local ordinances on participation, and independent innovation labs supported by public administrations and relevant local stakeholders.

The OECD invites its member countries to promote a more structured and institutional approach to participation (OECD, 2022^[1]). This means that governments should build the conditions for meaningful participation, which consists of a set of rules, procedures, and institutions that enable the organisation of participatory processes. A strong enabling environment can give participation and deliberation a higher degree of institutionalisation and embed these practices in the governance architecture of a country (OECD, 2021^[2]). According to the OECD Survey on Open Government (2020^[3]), almost all OECD countries have adopted a legal framework that supports a participatory approach to decision making. In fact, of countries that have adhered to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government¹, the majority have established a legislative basis to handle citizens' complaints (89.5%), promote the use of direct democracy mechanisms (such as referenda) (84.2%), and foster the use of petitions and other forms of citizen initiatives (79%). To date, no data has been collected on the number of governments that have passed legislation on deliberation.

The [OECD Open Government Review of Bizkaia](#) provides a detailed analysis complementary to this section (OECD, 2019^[4]).

A long-lasting tradition of collaboration and participation in the Basque Country

The Basque Country has a strong culture of collaboration between public entities and non-governmental actors. One of the main roots of social participation lies in the long-lasting practice of *Auzolan*, which refers to collaborative work between neighbours on community projects. For instance, communities organised together to raise money to open local schools to preserve the Basque language and culture after the civil war in Spain and during Franco's dictatorship. This practice, among others, paved the way to build strong links within the Basque community (Ayuso and Zallo, 2009^[5]). The same historic collaboration culture is reflected in the significant number of cooperatives present in the territory and the region. 3602 associations operate in the Basque Country, of which 782 are in Gipuzkoa. In the province, the number of active associations was 4500 in 2021, with more than 40 000 people (6% of the total population) involved in volunteering activities (Barandiarán, Canel and Bouckaert, 2023^[6]). Thus, collaboration in the Basque Country takes place in different spheres of society: socially, through community actions and economically in the form of cooperatives. Public institutions show similar inclinations, with their emphasis on collaborative governance and an open government culture, as shown, for instance, in the OECD (2019^[4]) Open Government Review of Bizkaia.

More recently, the Basque Country has been experimenting with innovative citizen participation mechanisms including citizens' juries. The first-ever case recorded by the OECD (2023^[7]) of a representative deliberative process in Spain took place in Gipuzkoa in 1993, where randomly selected citizens deliberated around the construction of a new highway. Since then, more than fifteen deliberative processes have taken place in different parts of Spain, including at the national, regional, and municipal levels (OECD, 2023^[7]).

The Basque Country has solid legal foundations to promote citizen participation and deliberation

Public participation is a constitutionally recognised fundamental right in Spain. There are several articles of the Magna Carta that recognise this right (Government of Spain, 1978^[8]):

- Article 9.2: It is the responsibility of public authorities to promote the conditions for the genuine and effective freedom and equality of the individual and of the groups of which they form part; to remove the obstacles that prevent or hinder their full realisation; and to facilitate the participation of all citizens in political, economic, cultural, and social life.

- Article 23.1: Citizens have the right to take part in public affairs, directly or through representatives, freely chosen in periodic elections by universal suffrage.
- Article 48: Public authorities shall promote the conditions for the free and effective participation of youth in political, social, economic, and cultural development.
- Article 49.2: Public authorities shall promote policies that guarantee the full personal autonomy and social inclusion of persons with disabilities, in universally accessible environments. Likewise, they shall encourage the participation of their organisations, under the terms established by law. Particular attention shall be paid to the specific needs of women and minors with disabilities.
- Article 105: The law shall regulate the hearing of citizens, directly or through organisations and associations recognised by law, in the process of drawing up administrative provisions that affect them.

In addition, National Law 19/2013, of 9 December, on transparency, access to public information and good governance, while not directly regulating citizen participation, promotes a culture of Open Government and Good Governance. A current review of this legislation is underway to align with OECD standards on open government, by considering the inclusion of a provision to underpin citizen participation (Government of Spain, 2021^[9]). At the level of Autonomous Communities in Spain – including Aragón, Andalucía, Balearic Islands, Canarias, Cataluña, Castilla y León, Murcia, Valencia, and the Community of Madrid – several pieces of legislation exist to frame citizen participation and open government (Government of Spain, 2021^[9]).

Citizen participation is understood as part of a broader concept of collaborative governance, a term often used in the Basque Country that refers to “the process of deliberation and shared action that links public institutions, organised society and civil society, with the aim of strengthening the public policy ecosystem in the context of a shared public space, through the generation of social capital and a new political culture” (Barandiarán, Canel and Bouckaert, 2023^[6]).

The Basque Autonomous Community has been building an enabling environment for citizen and stakeholder participation, including by adopting legislations and policies, and establishing institutional offices. At a regional level, Law 2/2016 on Local Institutions of the Basque Autonomous Community mentions citizen participation and exhorts municipalities to guarantee citizens’ rights to participate in public affairs by implementing participatory processes (BOE, 2016^[10]). Nevertheless, there is currently no dedicated law for citizen participation or collaborative governance - a gap in legislature that might be an area of opportunity (see Chapter 4 for good practices in this area). In 2015, the Basque Parliament received a proposed Law on Transparency, Participation, and Good Governance for the Basque Public Sector, but it was not voted on and is not in effect (Basque Government, 2016^[11]). In February 2024, Arantzazulab participated in a hearing in the Basque Parliament to present the lab’s contributions to this law. These contributions have emerged from an analysis of international policy recommendations such as the European Commission’s Recommendation on the participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policymaking (European Commission, 2023^[12]). The previously described legal environment has been a key condition to experiment and insitutionalise deliberation in the Basque Country

Box 2.1. Good Practices: Dedicated legislation on citizen and stakeholder participation

Constitutional protection for the right to participate in Brazil

Brazil's 1988 Constitution enshrined a series of participatory mechanisms, such as National Councils and Conferences, into law to ensure citizen and stakeholder participation in public decision-making. Articles 10, 194, 198, 204 and 216 define the rights of citizens and stakeholders to participate in sectoral policymaking. More recently, through a 2020 amendment, Article 193 states that the State guarantees societal participation in the process of formulating, monitoring, overseeing, and evaluating social policies.

Law 2944/001 of 2022 on deliberative commissions and civic lotteries in Belgium

Belgian law 2944/001 (2022) provides the legal basis for the organisation of representative deliberative processes, in particular the Deliberative Commissions organised by the House of Representatives. These Commissions gather a mixed group of randomly selected citizens and elected representatives to deliberate and come up with common recommendations on topics such as 5G. The legislation sets out the requirements and procedures to organise civic lotteries of randomly selected citizens, including the conditions for access and use of the national registry to facilitate random selection.

Source: OECD (2022), Open Government Review of Brazil: Towards an Integrated Open Government Agenda, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3f9009d4-en>; Belgian Chamber of Representatives (2022); Law establishing the principles for randomly selected citizens in the deliberative commissions and citizen panels, <https://www.lachambre.be/FLWB/PDF/55/2944/55K2944001.pdf>;

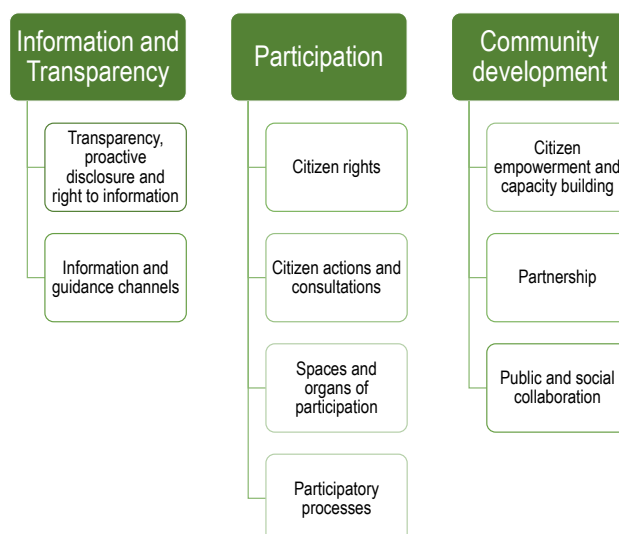
While the Basque Country does not yet have a dedicated law, the Province of Gipuzkoa has adopted a series of legislations and decrees to support citizen participation:

- Provincial Law 5/2018 on Citizen Participation (The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2018^[13]): This law regulates the instruments and procedures through which people can exercise their right to participate in public affairs. It defines citizen participation, describes various participatory mechanisms, and seeks to promote citizen participation in the province. One of the methods described in the law is called “participatory deliberation processes” and is described as giving stakeholders and citizens the chance to deliberate about possible policy solutions for public problems. However, it does not mention sortition as a recruitment method.
- Provincial Decree 1/2017 on the Interinstitutional Centre for Citizen Participation of Gipuzkoa: This decree defines the interinstitutional structure, its main objectives, and activities (The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2017^[14]). It is intended as a forum in which the provincial government, local governments of Gipuzkoa, and other public actors can exchange good practices, experiences, and learnings regarding citizen participation. Its mandate also includes support to all municipalities that have fewer resources to undertake citizen participation processes.
- Provincial Decree 25/2017 on the Social Council for Citizen Participation: This legislation establishes that the role of the Social Council is to provide advice to the provincial government to define both the objectives and activities related to citizen participation in the region, as well as conduct their follow-up and evaluation (The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2017^[15]). The council is made up of representatives from civil society, the private sector, and academia with expertise in citizen participation.
- Provincial Decree R- 3/2011 on the registration in the Provincial Register of Citizen Entities for Participation: Other legislation, such as Provincial Law 5/2018 on Citizen Participation, grants

specific rights to participate in consultations and other processes as “citizen entities”, such as NGOs and CSOs (The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2011_[16]). This decree gives clear instructions regarding the requirements needed to register as a citizen entity in Gipuzkoa.

At the municipal level, the Tolosa Local Council adopted its first law regulating citizen participation in 2022. The [Governance, Participation and Transparency Ordinance](#) regulates the “means, procedures and channels for citizen participation in municipal life and management” (Tolosa City Council, 2022_[17]). The ordinance mentions open government in the introduction as one of the main values considered, recognising it as “a way to strengthen institutional quality and establish a new framework between the Council and citizens” (Tolosa City Council, 2022_[17]). The text also defines the rights of citizens to participate, the bodies, and dedicated spaces the administration has already put in place, along with regulations regarding popular initiatives and public consultations. This ordinance can be considered a good practice as it also includes provisions that enable deliberative processes, in particular, defining and describing the legal requirements to run a civic lottery (see Chapter 4 for more information).

Figure 2.1. Tolosa adopted an ambitious legal framework to support open government and citizen participation



Source: Author’s own elaboration based on Tolosa City Council (2022).

Box 2.2. Tolosa’s legal basis to promote deliberative processes

The Governance, Participation and Transparency Ordinance

The Tolosa Local Council (Spain) adopted its first law regulating citizen participation in 2022, including the use of deliberative processes. Article 37 on “Roundtable discussions with randomly selected citizens” explicitly details sortition and deliberation as a possible mechanism for citizen participation, stating that when “Tolosa Council considers it appropriate and the subject matter of the debate is of public relevance, roundtables for debate and deliberation may be set up with citizens chosen at random” (Tolosa City Council, 2022_[17]). It also establishes the following features of such mechanisms:

- The base for sortition is the local census and people will be chosen based on criteria like gender, age, and place of residence, among other factors depending on the subject matter.

- They shall not be given decision-making powers, they are merely consultative. Final decisions will always go back to Tolosa Council.
- Experts, civil servants, and stakeholders may be invited to give information to the participants. Facilitators will always be present to ensure equal speaking times for all.
- All participants will be given an equal chance to participate whether in Basque or in Spanish.
- The necessary means will be deployed to allow citizens with special needs to participate.

Source: Tolosa City Council (2022), Governance, Participation and Transparency Ordinance, <https://udala.tolosa.eus/sites/default/files/Ordenanza%20de%20Gobernanza%2C%20participaci%C3%B3n%20y%20transparencia.pdf>

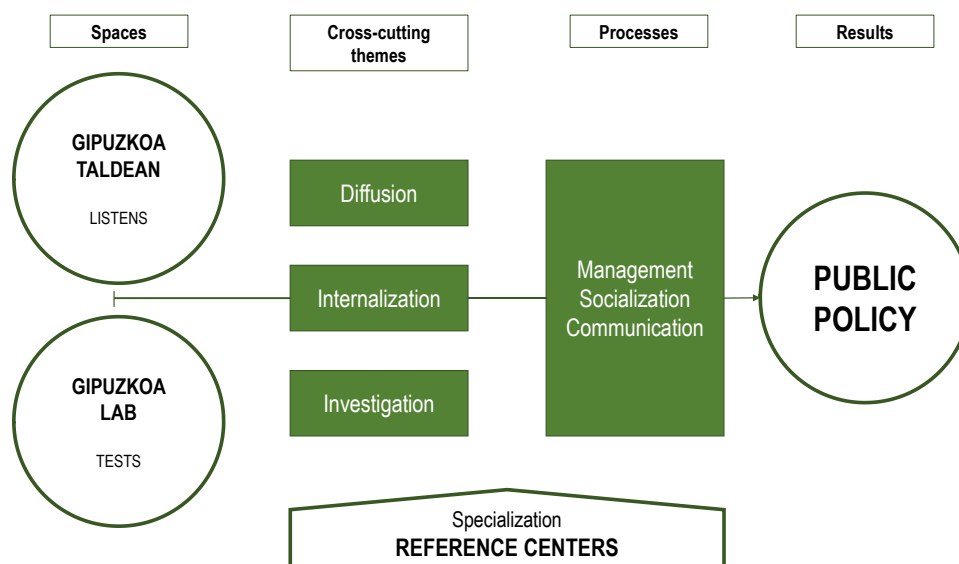
Etorkizuna Eraikiz is the main policy guiding citizen participation in the Gipuzkoa Province

The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council is currently implementing a strategy for collaborative governance called *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* (Building the Future), the main objective of which is to mainstream and institutionalise collaborative governance. As defined by the Provincial Council, *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* is a model, a specific way of understanding, applying, and representing open and collaborative governance, a way of doing politics (Gipuzkoa, n.d.^[18]). First presented in 2016, the objectives of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* are to create spaces for collaboration among all relevant actors in Gipuzkoa and to support experimentation to find solutions for present, and future challenges of the province (Gipuzkoa, n.d.^[18]). The policy encourages public actors to experiment with possible responses in real environments with the collaboration of different actors, and to apply the results to public policies (Gipuzkoa, n.d.^[18]). Concretely, *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* is built on three main pillars: Gipuzkoa Taldean, Gipuzkoa Lab, and the Reference Centres. (Barandiaran, 2022^[19])

- Gipuzkoa Taldean (Gipuzkoa as a Team) is a space for listening and research. It is a network of programmes, such as Open Budgets, Citizenship Projects, Territorial Development Laboratories and most notably, the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* Think Tank. The Think Tank is a research and action centre that seeks to co-generate actionable knowledge that can have an impact in public policies in Gipuzkoa through collaborative governance. It gathers political and technical representatives from the Provincial Council and civil society actors around its areas of work. Gipuzkoa Taldean also manages other projects such as a participatory budgeting, a call for citizen initiatives around social innovation, and a methodological support programme for municipalities (Udal *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*) (Barandiarán, Canel and Bouckaert, 2023^[6]).
- Gipuzkoa Lab is an active experimentation centre that has developed over 40 projects covering a wide range of topics including workers' participation in enterprise, tackling social exclusion, and the use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, among others. Each project is developed in a collaborative manner, involving perspectives from different stakeholders: civil society, academics, public administration, and international actors. For instance, this collaborative approach led to the creation of various chatbots allowing citizens to interact with public administration in a more instantaneous and direct way, in either Basque or Spanish. Other initiatives seek to boost women's presence in company boards, create a centre for provincial sports talents, and promote cities' engagement to address climate change (The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, n.d.^[20]).
- Reference Centres are public-private-community spaces aimed at strengthening strategic sectors for the future of the province. Legally, these are constituted as either foundations or consortiums through agreements with other organisations. Eleven centres have been created so far, each one focusing on a policy topic or issue. Arantzazulab, notably, is one of these reference centres. Its

creation is the evidence of the success of Etorikizuna Eraikiz in creating the conditions for experimentation in deliberative processes.

Figure 2.2. The Etorikizuna Eraikiz (Building the Future) strategy of Gipuzkoa



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on: <https://www.etorikizunaeraikiz.eus/es/escuchar-experimental-actuar>

In addition, and beyond the normative and policy framework, the Basque Autonomous Community also promotes participation through digital tools, like **Irekia**, its **one-stop online portal for citizen participation**. This portal allows citizens to comment on proposed legislation, create petitions, and participate in public consultations (Basque Government, n.d.^[21]).

Institutional arrangements for citizen participation

In addition to the legal and policy framework, establishing an institutional setting for citizen and stakeholder participation can increase coordination, harmonise practices across the public sector, provide technical support, and strengthen relationships between government and civil society (OECD, 2022^[22]). Governments can institutionalise participatory mechanisms and processes by embedding them within their institutional architecture (OECD, 2021^[21]).

In this sense, governments can establish an office with a clear mandate to steer and coordinate the participatory agenda across the entire public sector, which in turn can support harmonisation and standardised technical support. More coordination can also be a way to foster the consistency of initiatives and create a common framework for their evaluation and monitoring. Such centralised units can usefully be supported by focal points across the public administration who are responsible for ensuring the implementation of the relevant legal and policy framework in their institution and providing technical support to public officials. In the case of the Gipuzkoa Province, the General Directorate for Citizen Participation is the main body in charge of citizen participation processes (see Chapter 4).

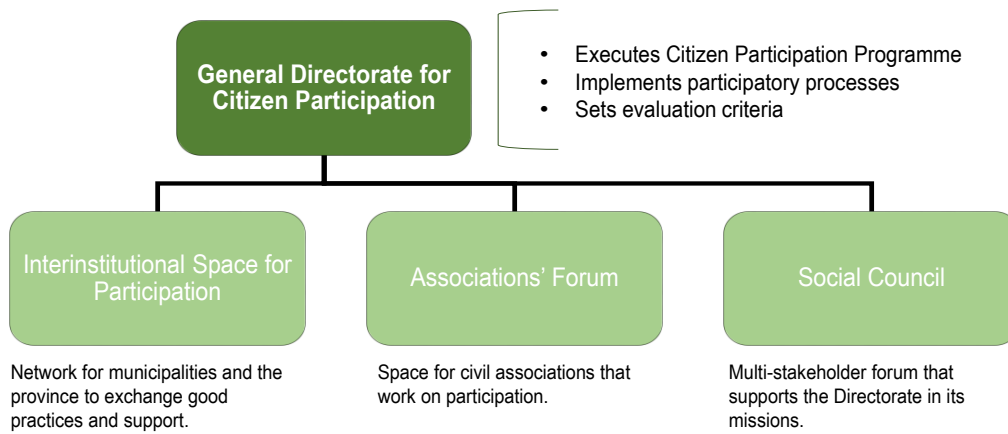
One of its main functions is to draft and execute the Provincial Citizen Participation Programme, which supports citizen participation projects through grants of between 15 000 and 80 000 €. The programme also provides a five-year plan outlining the main objectives, actions, and participatory processes that will take place in the province. It is based on the analysis of previous experiences and is done in consultation

with other territorial actors, as established in Provincial Law 5/2018 on Citizen Participation (The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2018^[13]).

Additional responsibilities of the General Directorate for Citizen Participation include:

- Implementing participatory processes at the provincial level and determining their evaluation criteria.
- Promoting participation throughout the province, i.e., also at the municipal level, mission for which they have three dedicated spaces: Interinstitutional Centre for Participation, Associations' Forum, and the Social Council (Government of Gipuzkoa, n.d.^[23]).

Figure 2.3. Gipuzkoa's institutional setting for citizen participation



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The General Directorate of Participation and Etorikizuna Eraikiz (Building the Future Policy) can be considered as building blocks for a participatory culture in Gipuzkoa. They enable coordination, harmonise practices, provide support, and strengthen the relationship with civil society (in this context expressed primarily as associations). In addition, the emphasis on evaluation of their participatory practices is valuable, as it provides evidence for future improvement. This is broadly regarded as a good practice that can inspire other Provinces in Spain and in other OECD countries (see Chapter 4 for more inspiration).

Box 2.3. Institutional settings for citizen participation at national and local levels in OECD countries

In **Canada**, the city of Montreal established the Office of Public Consultation as an independent body that carries out the public consultations decided by the municipal council or the executive committee of the city. The Office also has the mandate to propose rules to ensure qualitative participation and standards for transparent and effective consultation mechanisms.

In **France**, the national citizen participation agenda is led by a dedicated minister (the Minister of Relations with Parliament and Citizen Participation), coordinated by the Inter-Ministerial Direction for Public Transformation (DITP) and overseen by an independent body (the National Commission for Public Debate, the CNDP). In 2019, the DITP created the Centre for Citizen Participation as a centre of expertise to provide public officials and civil society technical support and guidance to implement participatory processes; a platform dedicated to participation; and a physical space to provide public authorities from across the government to organise meetings, public consultations, workshops, and other types of participatory processes involving citizens and non-governmental stakeholders.

In **Spain**, the city of Barcelona has two dedicated offices working on participation. The Citizen Participation Office deals with implementing citizen participation initiatives and guaranteeing people's right to participate. There is also a Democratic Innovation Office that deals exclusively with researching and developing new methodologies for participation, especially in the digital world. This office is responsible for the upkeep of *Decidim*, the open-source participatory digital platform now used in cities all over the world. These offices are working in cooperation with the participatory office at the regional level (Government of Cataluña).

Source: Author's own elaboration based on OECD (2020^[24]), Survey on Open Government; Interviews with the Inter-Ministerial Directorate for Public Transformation (DITP) ([Centre for Citizen Participation](https://www.ccpm.gouv.fr/)), and Montreal's Office of Public Consultation (<https://ocpm.qc.ca/>); Barcelona City Council (<https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/culturaeducacio/es/>); Democratic Innovation office in Barcelona ([Democratic Innovation Office](https://www.oi.berlin.gov.uk/)); French participatory digital platform ([Accueil - Agora](https://www.accueil-agora.fr/)); Decidim ([Decidim](https://www.decidim.cat/))

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Endnotes

¹ Adherents to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government include all OECD Member countries as well as Argentina, Brazil, Morocco, Romania, and Tunisia.

3

The Tolosa Citizens' Assembly: addressing mental health through deliberation and community involvement

This chapter takes stock of the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly, a deliberative process that gathered 32 randomly selected citizens that convened between October and December 2022. It describes the design choices of the assembly which includes the remit, the stakeholders, the civic lottery criteria, or the sources of information. It also summarises the five sessions that occurred throughout the learning and deliberative phases.

Building on an independent evaluation, this chapter assesses the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly against the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making. Finally, the OECD and Arantzazulab enumerate six learnings that have been identified in the spirit of improving future deliberative processes in the region.

Introduction

Arantzazulab is a democracy and governance innovation laboratory that promotes new forms of collaborative governance between public institutions and civil society, with the ultimate aim of empowering citizens, promoting collaborative governance in public policy and deepening democracy. As part of its mission, Arantzazulab promoted and implemented two deliberative processes to experiment with collaborative governance and innovative citizen participation, one at the municipal level in Tolosa and the other at the Provincial level supported by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council.

Table 3.1. Comparative description of the Tolosa and Gipuzkoa deliberative processes

| Name of the process | The Tolosa Citizens' Assembly | The Gipuzkoa Citizens' Assembly |
|---|--|---|
| Description | <p>Tolosa Local Council initiated this process in September 2022 in collaboration with Arantzazulab and with support of international experts (OECD, DemocracyNext and Deliberativa).</p> <p>Concerning the topic chosen for the process, Tolosa Council wanted to build on public-community collaboration that emerged during COVID-19 to respond to people's needs. Issues like isolation, loneliness, depression, and anxiety came to the forefront and Tolosa Council took this opportunity to learn how to best support citizens and their initiatives in this area.</p> | <p>The Gipuzkoa Citizens' Assembly was launched in November 2022 by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, Telesforo Monzon eLab and Arantzazulab, in collaboration with experts in these deliberative processes (Deliberativa).</p> <p>The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council considered it was necessary to gather citizens' opinions on a challenge in connection with the future of the primary sector. The objective was to involve citizens in discussions of issues directly addressing the future of agricultural activity and the climate emergency.</p> |
| Question | <i>What can Tolosa Council do through public-community collaboration to achieve a Tolosa that improves the health and emotional wellbeing of all?</i> | <i>How can we guarantee agricultural activity in Gipuzkoa to address the climate emergency?</i> |
| Assembly members | 32 residents, as per the criteria established to describe local diversity: age, gender, level of education and where they live. | 32 residents, selected as per the criteria established to represent the territory's diversity: age, gender, level of education, where they live, and one values-based question: their preference of buying local products. |
| Hours of deliberation | 40 hours over five weekends. | 40 hours over four weekends. |
| Implementation teams and stakeholders involved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content committee: five experts and/or sector practitioners. • Promoters: Arantzazulab and Tolosa Council. • Support: OECD and DemocracyNext • Facilitators of meetings: Two organisations (Prometea and Aztiker), and five facilitators. • Contrast Committee: the three political parties represented in Tolosa Council and Arantzazulab • Evaluation team: Aktiba research group, University of the Basque Country, three researchers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content committee: six experts or practitioners in the sectors connected to the question. • Promoters: Arantzazulab, TMelab and the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council. • Collaborator and expert support: Deliberativa. • Facilitators of meetings: two organisations (Aztiker and Artaziak), five facilitators. • Contrast Committee: political parties represented on the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, and organisations working on the topics of the Citizens' Assembly. • Evaluation: Parte Hartuz research group, University of the Basque Country, five researchers. |
| General calendar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2022: sending out invitation letters and civic lottery. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2022: civic lottery, letters sent. • November 2022: Initial meetings. Input of information from experts and professionals working in the sector. |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October-November 2022: Initial meetings. Input of information from experts and professionals operating in the sector. • November-December 2022: Deliberation sessions. • 17 December 2022: Presentation of recommendations to Tolosa Town Hall. • 25 March 2023: Public event to reply to recommendations, by Tolosa Town Hall. • 4 November 2023: First session of monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations to the members of the Citizens' Assembly. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 2022-January 2023: Deliberation sessions. • 14 January 2023: Presentation of recommendations to the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council. • 14 March 2023: Public event to reply to recommendations, by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council |
| Total number of recommendations | 14 | 9 |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on (Arantzazulab, 2023^[1])

In 2022, Arantzazulab and Tolosa's City Council agreed to organise a deliberative process as a pilot to experiment with sortition and deliberation to address public problems in a collaborative manner. The Tolosa Citizen Assembly ran in parallel of the Climate Assembly organised at the province level in Gipuzkoa (see Box 3.1).

This report describes the case of the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly, from inception to implementation, detailing its design features and the lessons learned along the way for all the stakeholders involved. The following pages take stock of the process to design, implement, and evaluate this process – and evaluates it against international standards, like the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making (OECD, 2020^[2]). The Gipuzkoa Citizens' Assembly is described in Box 3.1 and more information can be found on the dedicated website¹.

Box 3.1. The Gipuzkoa Citizens' Assembly: addressing climate change through the first sector activities.

From November to December 2022, the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council gathered 32 randomly selected citizens to deliberate on issues directly addressing the future of the first sector and the climate emergency. The process was opened by Eider Mendoza, Deputy for Governance of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, who highlighted the commitment adopted by the Provincial Council and the relevance that this process has on governance innovation.

The Assembly met during four weekends for a total of 40 hours of deliberation. The Gipuzkoa Citizens' Assembly was tasked to answer the following question: 'How can we guarantee agricultural activity in Gipuzkoa in order to face the climate emergency?' The 32 members of the Assembly were selected via civic lottery, with an initial send-out of 15 000 letters to randomly selected households, and a stratification among the participants that accepted the invitation. The second stage of the civic lottery followed seven criteria: age, gender, education level, language knowledge, place of residence and the importance they give to buying local products.

The Provincial Council accepted all the recommendations

In January 2023, the Citizen Assembly presented the following nine recommendations to the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council:

1. Return economic compensation to rural landowners based on their contribution to ecosystem services and disseminate these values to society.

2. Promote forest management through R&D and by making it a strategic sector.
3. To turn the primary sector into a strategic sector by moving from an economic to an ecosystemic valuation through the participation of the different stakeholders involved.
4. Raise awareness in society from childhood about the world of agriculture and climate change.
5. To study measures for the rejuvenation of the primary sector.
6. Promote KM.0. from the 1st phase of production.
7. Promote strategic organic farming through the creation/expansion of bodies responsible for increasing competitiveness, productivity and commercialisation.
8. Promote local produce by adjusting tax rebates.
9. Encourage professional mixed farmhouses (“baserri” in Basque).

In March 2023, the Provincial Council published a [response to the recommendations](#), explaining their decision to implement a number of recommendations and shared an [update on the implementation](#) status in November 2023.

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on Arantzazulab’s website: <https://arantzazulab.eus/en/the-deliberative-sessions-of-the-gipuzkoa-citizens-assembly-come-to-an-end-with-the-presentation-of-the-recommendations-to-the-general-assembly/>; and the process’ website: https://www.gipuzkoa.eus/es/web/herritarrenbatzarra/que_es

Designing the Tolosa Citizens’ Assembly

The OECD provided technical assistance in particular to build capacities and knowledge through a series of workshops held with Arantzazulab, Tolosa Council, and other stakeholders which are described in the following sections. The OECD Deliberative Democracy Toolbox, in particular the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making, provided a basis for the workshops and the design process (OECD, 2020^[2]).

The idea of holding a deliberative process in Tolosa benefitted from political support among the three political parties represented in the City Council. All the political parties² agreed to support the organisation of a deliberative process and committed to the implementation of its result. Political commitment to the process and its outcome remains throughout the process, even after the municipal elections in May 2023 and the change of Mayor.

Framing the topic and remit for the process

As for any other participatory process, the first task is to define the problem citizens will help solve, to then frame it as a question that the members of the Assembly will answer. To increase the impact of the process, it is important that the question relates to a policy area in which the public authority can act, and when possible, that both the process and the question are accepted and supported by representatives from across the political spectrum as this increases the commitment to act upon the recommendations.

The post COVID-19 context played an important role in defining the Assembly’s topic. The City Council saw appropriate to select a topic that reflected both the challenges experienced during the pandemic, as well as the positive impact which translated in high levels of cooperation, and solidarity among citizens. After numerous meetings among the OECD, Arantzazulab, and civil servants from Tolosa, and asynchronous exchanges with councillors, mental health emerged as the most suitable topic. During the pandemic, the issue of mental and emotional wellbeing came to the forefront, with citizens experiencing

acute levels of loneliness and isolation and responding with ingenious collaborative approaches to provide solutions to the situation. In Tolosa, mental health is perceived as a community issue.

The final question was phrased as: **What can Tolosa Council do through public-community collaboration to achieve a Tolosa that improves the health and emotional wellbeing of everyone?**

The question was deemed relevant for a deliberative process, as it pertained to issues of mental health and emotional wellbeing, opening various policy avenues on which Tolosa Council could act, such as city planning, digital policy, green urban spaces, and associationism, among others. In addition, its emphasis on public-community collaboration also reflected the Municipality's interest in building on the long-lasting tradition of collaboration, and a renewed energy of organised civil society and spontaneous citizen initiatives that sprung up during the pandemic. Among the 733 representative deliberative processes included in the [OECD Deliberative Democracy Database](#), 58 of them focus on health-related topics (8%), positioning it as the fifth most frequently addressed subject (OECD, 2023^[3]).

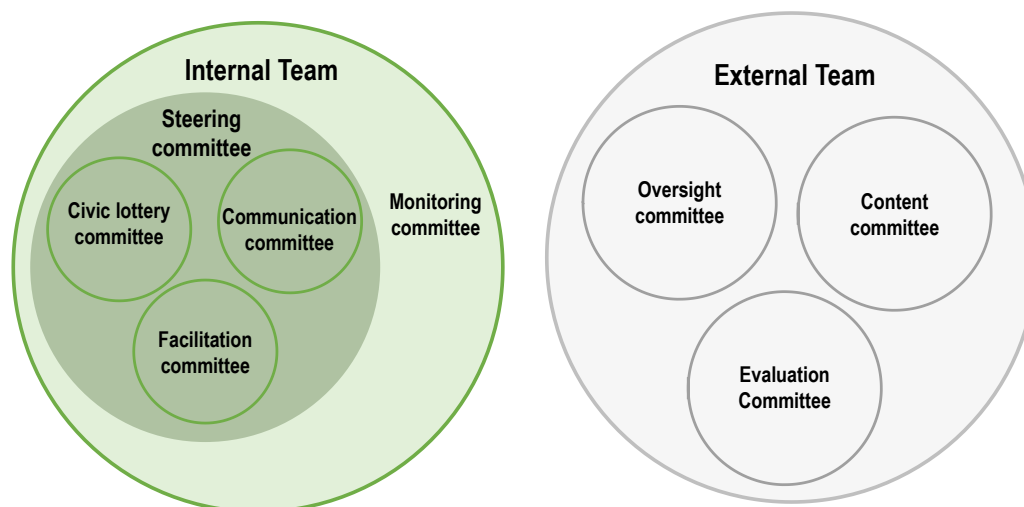
Selecting the stakeholders to involve

The process was implemented by a diverse coordination team, with members from various stakeholders. As shown in Figure 3.1, Arantzazulab and Tolosa's Council coordinated the different implementation teams, which included both internal (those involved in organising and running the process) and external (charged with providing the necessary information, evaluation, and oversight). External observation and the inclusion of non-governmental stakeholders in the design and implementation of the process ensured the integrity of the process, in accordance with the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making (OECD, 2020^[2]).

The internal teams were composed of a Monitoring Committee, and a Steering Committee – comprised of three sub teams: Civic Lottery, Communications, and Facilitation. The Monitoring Committee included Tolosa's political representatives and Arantzazulab staff, who conducted the high-level follow-up of the implementation of the Citizens' Assembly. The Steering Committee (and its three subgroups) were tasked with the design and implementation of all stages of the process. These were made up of representatives from Tolosa Council, Arantzazulab, contractors (Aztiker and Prometea) and experts.

The external teams were in charge of Oversight, Content, and Evaluation. The Oversight Committee ensured the rigour and transparency of the process, ensuring that citizens could be confident in the process integrity. The Content Committee was made up of mental health experts and practitioners, ensuring the accuracy and neutrality of the information provided to participants. Lastly, the Evaluation Committee was made up of researchers from the University of the Basque Country tasked with conducting an external evaluation of the process, using the OECD Guidelines for Evaluating Representative Deliberative Processes (OECD, 2021^[4]).

Figure 3.1. Implementation teams in the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly



Source: Author's own elaboration based on (Arantazulab, 2023^[1])

Defining the criteria for the civic lottery

Considering the size of Tolosa³, the topic selected, and the type of recommendations that would be sought by the Council, **it was decided that the Assembly should be composed of 32 members, to be selected via a civic lottery.** For comparison, according to OECD data, the average total number of participants in citizen juries taking place at the municipal level is 42 (OECD, 2023^[3]). Thus, 32 members is consistent with international standards for a smaller town like Tolosa.

To this end, Tolosa's Council, with the help of *Aztiker* (external contractor), sent out 2.450 letters to randomly selected households, inviting them to register for the deliberative process. Anyone aged 16 and over living in Tolosa was eligible to receive a letter and register for the process. Participants could register from 22 September 2022 to 10 October 2022 via a dedicated website, email, or telephone. This gave participants three weeks to register for the process, slightly below the average of 5.2 weeks according to OECD data (OECD, 2023^[3]), but appropriate for a process of its size and scope.

In total, 255 individuals responded positively to the invitation and expressed an interest in participating in the civic lottery. 170 people reached out by telephone, while 85 did so by email. This speaks to the importance of setting up multiple (both offline and online) communications channels for potential participants, especially in those pioneering experiences where not much is known about Citizens' Assemblies. Ultimately, 103 citizens agreed to take part in the process, marking an acceptance rate of 4.2%, compared with an average of 6.1% for other similar cases (OECD, 2023^[3]). The 162 individuals that declined the invitation mentioned work/studies commitments (37), unprepared or unwilling to participate (22), care or conciliation (21), feeling unqualified (17), excessive dedication demanded by process (8) as main reasons.

32 assembly members (and 32 reserves) were randomly selected and stratified⁴ among these four criteria: gender (2-3 groups), age (6 groups), place of residence (4 groups), and education level (5 groups).

Deciding the information and learning sources

The responsibility of the Content Committee (see Figure 3.1) was to ensure participants received accurate, relevant, neutral, and accessible information. The Committee was formed by Goretti Soroa Martinez, a professor and researcher at the Psychology faculty at the University of the Basque Country; Felix Arrieta

Frutos, social services and politics area at Deusto University; Iker Arriabalaga coordinator of family services at the AGIFES association; Maitane Egurza, practitioner at Izan Foundation; Eider Murgiondo Mugica, nurse in the public health system in Tolosa. The Content Committee had four main tasks:

1. **Mapping the political dilemmas** of the chosen topic and question suggested by Tolosa Council as those dilemmas and possible solutions have different costs and benefits associated to them and different ideological sectors analyse them in different ways.
2. **Creating the curriculum for deliberation** including the information kit given to all assembly members at the beginning of the process, as well as selecting the initial speakers present in the assembly. The curriculum was made up of facts and data, i.e., elements on which experts agreed, and information on the dilemmas, i.e., the values that inform different policy choices, as well as their costs and benefits. The information kit was made up first of an explanation of the citizens' assembly process, followed by the key information selected by the Content Committee itself regarding the topic at hand.
3. **Selecting speakers for the learning sessions** including a first batch of experts who presented on the first session, as well as a smaller list for the second session, to allow for Assembly members themselves to choose other speakers if they so desired. The main criterion for the speakers was to be their ability to communicate clearly. Speakers should be able to deliver general presentations of a secondary school level.
4. **Validating the speakers' presentations** prior to the learning sessions to ensure they were appropriate for the purposes of the Assembly. The Content Committee provided guidance and feedback to ensure the presentations were clear, accurate, relevant, and considered various viewpoints.

Several speakers presented during the information phase of the deliberative process: Fernando Fantova, a social policy expert and consultant; Martín Zuñiga, a social worker and researcher at the University of the Basque Country; Amaia Uriarte, a specialist in family therapy and treatment of psychopathology in children and adolescents; Pepa Bojo; a psychologist specialised in gender violence and community empowerment; Jone Miner an architect in charge of the Urban Development Department of Tolosa Council; and Adriana Martínez, director of APTES (Association for the promotion of social technology) and specialising in community support networks.

Clear commitment to an inclusive process

Inclusion was an important dimension for both Arantzazulab and Tolosa City Council. This translated into design choices to promote an inclusive process. Firstly, it was decided to show respect for the participants' time, and to incentivise participation from often-excluded populations, **the Tolosa Council remunerated participants the amount of 444€ for the whole process (five days and 40 hours)**. This presented a substantial administrative challenge, since it was the first time the local administration paid citizens involved in a participatory process.

Secondly, to increase learning, the design of the work sessions included visual elements, interactive presentations, and both plenary and small group discussions. The aim was to cover the different kinds of learning styles (visual, listening, kinetic, etc.) and to ensure a smooth experience for the participants.

Lastly, in view of the local context, **interpretation was provided to guarantee both Basque and Spanish speakers an equal chance to participate in the deliberations**. This increased the cost of the process but, crucially, helped enhance inclusion. Stakeholder interviews conducted by the OECD highlighted the importance of interpretation for the success of the process, even at an increased cost.

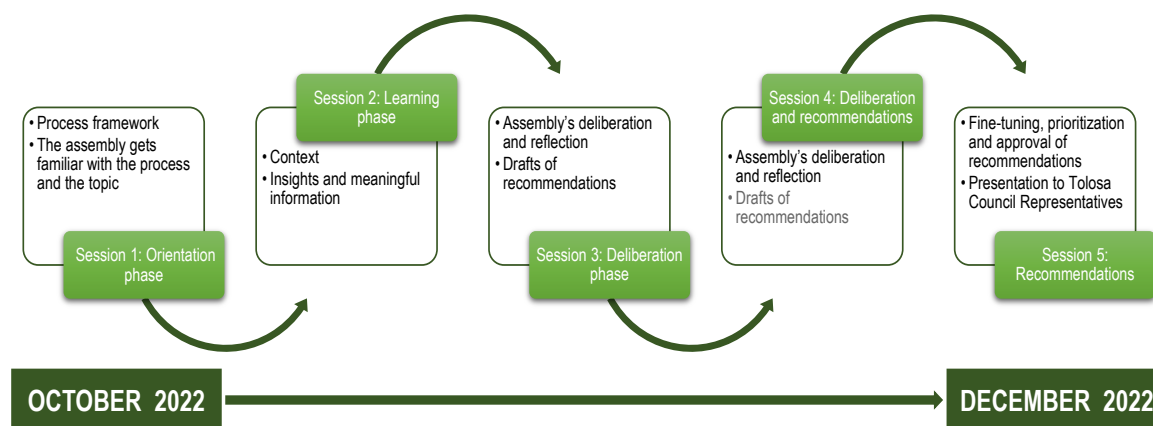
Implementing the Citizens' Assembly

The Tolosa Citizen Assembly consisted of five full-day sessions on Saturdays spanning 40 hours over six weeks, from October to December 2022. After internal reflections regarding the best scheduling options in the context of Tolosa, the organisers had two options: to split the sessions between Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, or a full day on Saturday. The Steering Committee decided to hold sessions over full Saturdays. Interviews conducted by the OECD suggest that citizens preferred this arrangement over the split session option. The full-day format allowed for longer lunch breaks and different kinds of facilitated group activities during deliberation. It encouraged assembly members to dive deep into the deliberation, focusing on the topic for a full day, rather than asking them to reconnect with content they had covered the previous day.

The Tolosa Citizens' Assembly took place over five sessions, lasting eight hours each, for a total of 40 hours of learning, deliberation, and recommendations drafting time. The first three sessions focused on learning, with ten presentations regarding emotional and mental wellbeing from experts, practitioners and interest groups.

For reference, according to OECD data, similar citizens' juries and assemblies at the local level had an average duration of 40,18 hours and average span of just over 10 weeks (OECD, 2023^[3]). The design choices made in Tolosa are in line with international good practice and translated the organisers' commitment to provide participants with time and space necessary for the process to take place according to the highest standards, in particular the OECD Good Practice Principle which suggest participants to meet for at least four full days (OECD, 2020^[2]).

Figure 3.2. Calendar of Tolosa Citizens' Assembly



Source: Author's own elaboration based on the schemes and visuals developed by Arantzazulab, Aztiker, Prometea and Tolosa Council.

Brief overview of the learning and orientation phases

The learning and orientation phases allow to set the tone for the rest of the process and are crucial not only to introduce citizens to the topic, but also to create an environment conducive to good collective decision making. The objective of this phase is to provide information and skills needed for participants to deliberate on the Assembly's topic (OECD, 2020^[2]).

According to international standards, at this stage participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise. They should also have the chance to question speakers directly and be given the opportunity to choose some experts and advocates themselves (OECD, 2020^[2]). In the case of Tolosa, the organisers decided to follow the model proposed by the NewDemocracy Foundation in Australia structured around five sessions.

Session 1 held on 22 October 2022 focused on the general context of Tolosa, the topic, and the functioning of a representative deliberative process. This session included an activity in which the Assembly members themselves agreed on how they wanted to work together and defined a set of common rules: show commitment, to be mindful of the time allocated for each activity, to focus on the question, to show creativity, to respect others' opinions, to listen actively, to have constructive conversations, to keep an open mind and to always look out for the collective good.

Tolosa Council's citizen participation technician Garikoitz Lekuona provided an introduction to the functioning and objectives of the process. Two experts presented a general vision of mental and emotional wellbeing, while two others gave a general overview of public-community collaboration:

- [Ainara Aranberri](#), a lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology at the UPV/EHU and specialist in emotional regulation in children and adolescents spoke from the point of view of neuropsychology. She discussed individual well-being and emotional health, focusing on the impact that various contexts (family, friends, school/work, society) can have on the health of people of various ages.
- [Iñaki Izquierdo](#), the director of the Sustraiak therapeutic community at the Izan Foundation and a specialist in group and systemic therapy, addressed the influence of the groups or systems in one's environment and on individual wellbeing, especially explaining their importance in therapeutic processes.
- [Eva Salaberria](#), technician of the Donostia City Council responsible for the Donostia Lagunkoia City Plan and a member of the working team for the conceptualisation of Community Development in the Territory, presented the general framework of public-community cooperation.
- [Sorkunde Jaka](#), a nurse, technician in the Health Promotion Service of the Donostia City Council presented cases of collaboration with communities in the health field and introduced the main opportunities and challenges of such approaches.

The Evaluation Committee also conducted its first survey with the participants and explained its role throughout the process.

Session 2, held on 5 November 2022, discussed in more depth specific aspects of the Assembly's topic, in particular loneliness, old age, childhood and youth, gender perspective and equality in health, urban planning and health, community technology, among others.

- The assembly members heard from [Fernando Fantova](#) on loneliness, communities and local politics, [Martín Zúñiga](#) who introduced a general framework around ageing, [Amaia Uriarte](#) described the reality of working with children and young people, [Pepa Bojo](#) addressed the importance of gender and equality in health. [Jone Miner](#), head of the Urban Planning Department of Tolosa City Council, explained the interconnectedness and challenges between urban planning and health and [Adriana Martínez](#) (APTES) spoke about the work carried out in the Auzotu project and the possibilities offered by community technologies.

At the end of the second session, the organisers asked the Assembly: "What information are you missing to deliberate and write recommendations?". The Assembly members requested to have contextual information about Tolosa to better understand what was already in place and what were the challenges currently faced by local practitioners.

Session 3 held on 19 November 2022 allowed participants to hear from civil servants and local associations and organisations.

- Maider Serra, psychologist and member of the Spanish Association against cancer and the Prevention Group of Tolosa shared her experience in the food bank and as a volunteer with people in vulnerable situations.
- Ixa Imaz from Tolosa's Immaculate Vocational Training School explained the projects that they are conducting with a focus on students' current mental health, and shared concerns regarding the increasing cases of suicide or suicidal thoughts.
- Garikoitz Murua, artistic director of GKo Gallery presented creative approaches that could respond to Tolosa's mental health and wellbeing challenges.
- Mireia Roca, representative of Zu ta Ni, an association with the objective of fighting against poverty and social exclusion of the Tolosa population, was also present.

Summary of the deliberation sessions

The second stage of a representative deliberative process, and one of the main features of this democratic innovation is the deliberation itself. Having heard from experts, stakeholders, and witnesses, Assembly members can deliberate by carefully weighing the evidence, grappling with the complexity of the topic and the trade-offs involved to eventually draft their recommendations as the answer to the initial question. Through group deliberation, participants should be able to find common ground to underpin their collective recommendations to the public authority. For this, skilled facilitation is essential to ensure that every participant has a chance to speak, ideally through a mix of formats that alternate between small group and plenary discussions and activities (OECD, 2020^[2]).

Session 3 held on 19 November 2022 marked the start of the deliberation phase. Assembly members were first asked to think not about fully formed recommendations, but more about the key principles and core ideas that they would like to see present in the final text. These ideas, referred to internally as “seeds” would be developed into fully-fledged ideas throughout this stage. This process yielded an initial set of five “seeds” that were then developed by exchanging in a World Café⁵ discussion.

Session 4 held on 3 December 2022 continued the deliberative phase of the process. At first, participants went through two exercises focused on divergence and convergence. The first was aimed at enriching the ideas they had previously discussed and the second asked participants to prioritise the newly enriched ideas for recommendations.

Collective recommendations and presenting the results to Tolosa's elected representatives

The third stage of any representative deliberative process is the drafting of collective recommendations by assembly members. After deliberation, the Assembly must reach a consensus regarding its judgement and the recommendations they will submit to the convening public authority. Typically, this involves carefully drafting and rewording recommendations until at least 80% of the members support the proposed measures.

After two sessions dedicated to deliberation, assembly members were divided into five groups to reflect on their learnings about mental, emotional wellbeing and public-community collaboration to come up with recommendations. Grouped in plenary sessions, participants were invited to share their drafts with the rest of the assembly to enrich and further refine their ideas. This took place twice to accelerate the development of the recommendations.

Session 5 took place on 17 December 2022 and was dedicated to finalising the collective recommendations and building the narrative for the presentation of the Assembly's work. After working in small groups and in plenary to finalise the proposals, the Assembly members voted on all the proposed recommendations. In these processes, the voting stage aims at building consensus among participants to

ensure collective support to the final recommendations. In the case of Tolosa, the organisers decided to follow international standards and choose 80% as the minimum threshold for adopting recommendations.

Concretely, after individual presentations of all the recommendations, all participants expressed their level of satisfaction with every recommendation ranking them from 1 to 5 (Tolosa Council, 2023^[5]). In the case of Tolosa, all the recommendations were adopted, and the voting mechanism served mainly to prioritise the order in which they were presented to Tolosa Council. Along with the recommendations, other ideas that emerged during the process have been gathered in a section titled "Seed Corner" and have been included in the report that was presented to Tolosa Council.

Table 3.2. Recommendations of the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly

32 randomly selected residents of Tolosa spent 40 hours learning, deliberating and jointly drafting recommendations to answer the question: What can Tolosa Council do through public-community collaboration to achieve a Tolosa that improves the health and emotional wellbeing of everyone?

| Recommendations | Accepted by Tolosa Council | Timeline of implementation |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Inclusive architecture: Removing architectural barriers for people with reduced mobility and redesigning public spaces to be accessible to all, namely minority groups, thus improving the physical and emotional health of all citizens. | YES | 2023 |
| Getting to know the context of emotional wellbeing of the people in Tolosa: Conducting a participatory study on the emotional wellbeing of the population of the city, identifying the needs of a broad and diverse public, mapping out the existing services, activities, spaces, and initiatives, and creating new synergies and projects to cover all the expressed needs. | YES | 2025-26 |
| We all have a volunteer inside: Encouraging citizens to become volunteers in existing local NGOs, particularly to reinforce the actions towards a stronger intergenerational connection and a smoother social integration process. | YES | 2024-27 |
| Emotional wellbeing laboratory: Collective oven or vegetable garden: Creating a space for all citizens where to engage in conversations and discussions, to connect in a constructive and meaningful way, to spread open-mindedness and interest for the collective dimension of living the town. | NO | |
| Information point to meet the needs of citizens with the services of the municipality: Creating a physical space to concentrate all the information on the activities and services of the city, where people are listened to and treated kindly and where representatives of the municipalities can meet the population and other relevant stakeholders. The information point is completed by an accessible and intuitive website and a hotline. | YES, with modifications | 2024-25 |
| Etzegazte: housing for young people: Helping landlords of empty houses to perform renovation work to rent their properties to young people at moderated rents. Creating opportunities of social renting by building new social housing primarily addressed to young people. | YES | 2024 |
| Overcoming the digital divide: Putting interactive and intuitive screens in public spaces to inform about services and activities in Tolosa, nominating referees to ease the digital interaction of the elderly with the city. All these services are co-designed with the elderly and people facing difficulties in using digital tools. | YES | 2024-26 |
| Young people, LGTBQ+, suicide: care, education, and intervention: Educating to suicide prevention since the infancy in educational centres by implying parents, mental health professionals, and by taking action to raise awareness about the LGTBQ+ community. | YES | 2024-26 |
| Contemporary volunteering in existing associations: tutoring, mediation, accompaniment service: Supporting the migrant community with an accompaniment path performed by paid students and graduates in social sciences. Collaborating with existing associations focused on migrants and working with people in vulnerable situations. | YES, with modifications | 2025 |
| Connecting vases – Initiatives that generate relationships and networks (without age): Creating new forms of bonding across generations, neighbourhoods through multiple initiatives such as collaborative gardening, pet therapy, cultural events, and talent fairs. | YES, with modifications | 2023-2024 |
| Space and leisure, young people (13-18): Creating an autonomous and self-managed space for teenagers to practice artistic and cultural activities and learn more about social issues such as environment, feminism, sport, and Basque culture. | YES, with modifications | 2023 |

| | | |
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| Young people and gastronomic societies (18-25): Favouring the integration of young people in existing gastronomic societies to ensure the continuity of these activities. | NO | |
| Green areas: Creating new green areas and reinforcing the existing ones to expand the spaces of sharing, intergenerational dialogue, contact with nature and animals, awareness and educational activities on environmental challenges and biodiversity. | YES | 2023 |
| Institutional trust – permanent participatory dynamics: Institutionalizing participatory mechanisms to ensure continuity and cohesion between public decisions and the community. | YES | 2025-26 |

Source: Based on Tolosa's response to the recommendations,

<https://udala.tolosa.eus/sites/default/files/RESPUESTA%20A%20LAS%20RECOMENDACIONES.pdf>

Presentation to the Council

Session 5 concluded with a public event in which the Assembly members presented the recommendations to the mayor of Tolosa (Olatz Peon), other members of Tolosa Council and civil servants from the Municipality. All three political parties represented in Tolosa's Council were present, showing the political consensus throughout the process.

When presenting the final report, participants explained the rationale for each recommendation and illustrated them through various examples. They also explained the main target populations and specific local actors they had in mind for their implementation.

Communication about the process

Transparency and communication efforts are crucial to make any representative deliberative process as open. It allows the general public (i.e., beyond the assembly members) to know and be informed about the activities of the assembly. As such, the assembly should be publicly announced before it begins, and all the materials, experts' presentations and final reports should be shared with the public in a transparent and timely manner. Public communications ensure the connection between the mini-public (i.e. the Citizen Assembly) and the maxi-public (i.e. the broad public) and in turn can increase the legitimacy of the process 'outcomes and decisions (OECD, 2020^[2]).

In the case of Tolosa, a dedicated [digital platform](#) was set up as part of the official website of the municipality where citizens could find the schedules of the different sessions, the experts' recorded presentations, and, once finished, the final report with the recommendations and the official response from the authority. Concerted efforts were put in making all the documentation appealing and easy to read through visual designs and plain language. Arantzazulab and Tolosa Council shared all the steps of the process on social media with both pictures and [videos](#). Lastly, a short documentary was published online detailing the process and journey of participants with testimonies both from political representatives and assembly members. Local television and newspapers also published news about the process.

Box 3.2. Involving children in the deliberative process: an innovation from Tolosa

Tolosa Council and Arantzazulab convened a Children's Assembly to mirror the deliberations held in Tolosa's Citizen Assembly. 40 children were randomly selected to address the issue of mental health and wellbeing.

A student representative was randomly chosen from each classroom in the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th grades among three schools to gather a total of 40 children between the ages of 8 and 12. They represented the "Children's Assembly" of Tolosa. The civic lottery set out to give all children an opportunity and to reflect the diversity of pupils in classrooms (e.g., gender, place of residence, origins), like for the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly.

The Children Assembly spent four Fridays learning about emotional and mental wellbeing, and to suggest ideas and recommendations for decision-makers. The first session was about emotions, and the representatives heard from Ana Ablanedo, an expert in the fields of education and pedagogy. The second was about mourning and the children representatives heard from Txaro Etxeberria and Pello Agirrezabal, officers at Herrikide School. Third session was about bullying and harassment, and the children got to hear from Baketik Foundation experts who conducted a theatre-forum dynamic to educate about the topic of school bullying. The fourth session was about loneliness, with the speakers being the Emoki Association that promotes healthy emotional management through courses, advisory, public campaigns, and didactic resources. On 25 May 2022, the Children's Assembly held a meeting with the mayor of Tolosa and other local representatives to present the result of their work.

The objective of combining both Assemblies was to build a democratic culture beyond elections and empower young people and children to address complex social challenges, by training future citizens who are critical, free, participative, and interested in social challenges. This also addresses the right of children to express their opinions freely and be part of decisions made in relation to their classrooms and schools, and in other walks of life.

Source : <https://sites.google.com/view/2022-2023-saludemocional/hola?authuser=1>

Implementation of recommendations and follow up

All deliberative processes should be followed by the implementation of all or some of the recommendations by the convening public authority (OECD, 2020^[2]). This is an important aspect that ensures citizens trust the process and feel empowered and respected by the public authority. In addition to [responding publicly to the recommendations in a face-to-face event](#) with participants and in a written document, the Tolosa Council organised a [public meeting in November 2023](#) to account on the implementation status. In this meeting, Tolosa political representatives and civil servants explained the process of implementation and provided more information about the next steps. Despite a change in Tolosa's ruling party following the 2023 local elections, the political support remained unchanged, a proof of the high-level commitment. The now Mayor of Tolosa, Andu Martinez de Rituerto, opened the session with an explanation on the importance of this initiative for the Local Council and reaffirmed the municipal commitment to implement the recommendations. Members of the Tolosa Citizen Assembly were able to discuss and question the presentation directly with elected representatives. A summary of the recommendations' follow-up is also [available online](#). A second follow up meeting was organised in May 2024, where the Mayor and councillors updated the public on the implementation of six recommendations: 1) Inclusive architecture, 2) Etxegazte, 3) Young people, LGTBQIQ+, 4) Space and leisure, young people (13/18), 5) Green areas, 6) Institutional trust: permanent spaces for participation (see Table 3.2). Assembly members shared their reflections and ask follow-up questions to the Council. the next follow-up meeting will be held in June 2025.

Learnings from the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly

The Tolosa Citizen Assembly can be considered as a good practice

In the design of the Tolosa Citizen Assembly, the OECD and Arantzazulab followed closely the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for public decision making and other international standards. Table 3.3 shows the alignment with the OECD Principles (OECD, 2020^[2]), supporting the evidence that this process can be considered as a good practice.

Table 3.3. Evaluation of the Tolosa Citizen Assembly against the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for public decision making

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Purpose: The objective should be outlined as a clear task, linked to a defined public problem. It is phrased neutrally as a question in plain language.</p> | <p>Yes. The Assembly was tasked to come up with recommendations to address a concrete problem that the community was facing. The task was phrased as: <i>What can Tolosa Council do through public-community collaboration to achieve a Tolosa that improves the health and emotional wellbeing of everyone?</i></p> |
| <p>Accountability: There should be influence on public decisions. The commissioning public authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on participants' recommendations in a timely manner. It should monitor the implementation of all accepted recommendations with regular public progress reports.</p> | <p>Yes. The Tolosa Local Council was involved and committed since the early stages of the process. The process was supported by all political forces which remained even after a change of administration following elections in 2023.</p> <p>The Tolosa Local Council presented their responses in two sessions: the first one took place in March 2023, and the political representatives shared their response for each recommendation; the second session was in November 2023, and the council representatives presented the implementation status. In 2024 two additional reporting sessions will be held in June and October.</p> |
| <p>Transparency: The deliberative process should be announced publicly before it begins. The process design and all materials – including agendas, briefing documents, evidence submissions, audio and video recordings of those presenting evidence, the participants' report, their recommendations (the wording of which participants should have a final say over), and the random selection methodology – should be available to the public in a timely manner. The funding source should be disclosed. The commissioning public authority's response to the recommendations and the evaluation after the process should be publicised and have a public communication strategy.</p> | <p>Yes. The process was communicated widely through different channels, and all the materials were available online.</p> <p>In the Tolosa Council website⁶ there is a section dedicated to the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly. In there all the materials, videos and information have been shared throughout the process.</p> |
| <p>Representativeness: The participants should be a microcosm of the general public. This is achieved through random sampling from which a representative selection is made, based on stratification by demographics (to ensure the group broadly matches the demographic profile of the community against census or other similar data), and sometimes by attitudinal criteria (depending on the context). Everyone should have an equal opportunity to be selected as participants. In some instances, it may be desirable to over-sample certain demographics</p> | <p>Yes. Participants were selected via a two-stage random selection process. The 32 assembly members (and 32 reserves) were randomly selected and stratified among these four criteria: gender (2-3 groups), age (6 groups), place of residence (4 groups), and education level (5 groups).</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>during the random sampling stage of recruitment to help achieve representativeness.</p> | |
| <p>Inclusiveness: Inclusion should be achieved by considering how to involve under-represented groups. Participation should also be encouraged and supported through remuneration, expenses, and/or providing or paying for childcare and eldercare.</p> | <p>Yes. Participants were remunerated (444€ for their five days and 40 hours of work). In addition, in view of the local context, Basque-Spanish interpretation was provided to guarantee both Basque and Spanish speakers an equal chance to participate in the deliberations. Taxi services were organised for participants with mobility requirements and care services were offered but none of the assembly members requested them.</p> |
| <p>Information: Participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise. They should have the opportunity to hear from and question speakers that present to them, including experts and advocates chosen by the citizens themselves.</p> | <p>Yes. The first three sessions focused on learning, as the 32 citizens witnessed ten presentations regarding emotional and mental wellbeing from experts, practitioners and interest groups. Participants were able to request more information before the deliberation stage. The Content Committee was responsible for ensuring information was delivered in an accessible and objective manner.</p> |
| <p>Group deliberation: Participants should be able to find common ground to underpin their collective recommendations to the public authority. This entails careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every participant having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats that alternate between small group and plenary discussions and activities, and skilled facilitation</p> | <p>Yes. The process was designed following a participation diamond pattern, meaning having three clear moments throughout the process: divergence, emergence, and convergence. Deliberation was facilitated by experts and following international standards.</p> |
| <p>Time: Deliberation requires adequate time for participants to learn, weigh the evidence, and develop informed recommendations, due to the complexity of most policy problems. To achieve informed citizen recommendations, participants should meet for at least four full days in person, unless a shorter time frame can be justified. It is recommended to allow time for individual learning and reflection in between meetings.</p> | <p>Yes. The Assembly in Tolosa took place over five days and assembly members worked 40 hours, going beyond the average of 2.7 days in similar contexts (according to OECD data).</p> |
| <p>Integrity: The process should be run by an arm's length co-ordinating team different from the commissioning public authority. The final call regarding process decisions should be with the arm's length co-ordinators rather than the commissioning authorities. Depending on the context, there should be oversight by an advisory or monitoring board with representatives of different viewpoints.</p> | <p>Yes. Arantzazulab and Tolosa Council coordinated the different teams required for the implementation of the process, which included both internal (those involved in organising and running the process) and external (charged with providing the necessary information, evaluation, and oversight). The external teams were made up of the Oversight Group, the Contents Committee, and the Evaluating Committee. The Oversight Group ensured the rigor and transparency of the process.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Privacy: There should be respect for participants' privacy to protect them from undue media attention and harassment, as well as to preserve participants' independence, ensuring they are not bribed or lobbied by interest groups or activists. Small group discussions should be private. The identity of participants may be publicised when the process has ended, at the participants' consent. All personal data of participants should be treated in compliance with international good practices, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).</p> | <p>Yes. The process ensured the protection of participants' privacy following international standards.</p> |
| <p>Evaluation: There should be an anonymous evaluation done by participants to assess the process based on objective criteria (e.g., on quantity and diversity of information provided, amount of time devoted to learning, independence of facilitation). An internal evaluation by the co-ordination team should be conducted against the good practice principles in this report to assess what has been achieved and how to improve future practice. An independent evaluation is recommended for some deliberative processes, particularly those that take place over a significant time period. The deliberative process should also be evaluated on final outcomes and impact of implemented recommendations.</p> | <p>Yes. The independent evaluation of the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly was conducted by Antonio Casado da Rocha, Lucia Pérez Prat, Luken Carbayeda Urruzola, and Alba Garmendia Castaños from the Aktiba research group in the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU). In addition, participants answered questionnaires to determine attitudinal changes about various matters throughout the process and exit interviews were conducted with participants to evaluate their deliberative experience and determine what worked well and what did not.</p> <p>In addition, all the organisations involved in the design and implementation of the process participated in a working session to reflect on lessons learned and possible improvements for future deliberative processes.</p> |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the evidence gathered by the OECD and the evaluation report of the Tolosa Citizen Assembly.

Independent evaluation of the Tolosa Citizen Assembly

Evaluating a deliberative process is important not only as a way to improve future iterations, but also to build capacities and knowledge in the region, and to contribute to building a roadmap towards institutionalisation. In Tolosa, the evaluation of the Citizens' Assembly was conducted by Antonio Casado da Rocha, Lucia Pérez Prat, Luken Carbayeda Urruzola, and Alba Garmendia Castaños from the University of the Basque Country (Casado da Rocha et al, 2023^[6]). Organisations involved in the design and implementation of the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly, including contractors and external experts, gave input to the evaluation alongside the promoter organisations. Their main basis for the evaluation was the OECD Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes (OECD, 2021^[4]). These guidelines set out a three-step evaluation cycle focusing on:

- **Process design integrity:** Organisers frame the policy question and design a deliberative process before people gather in the room to deliberate. Evaluators will ask how these decisions were reached, whether the process has clear and legitimate objectives, whether the design choices are in line with those objectives, and whether the process design allows members enough time to learn and deliberate.
- **Deliberative experience:** Once the deliberative process begins, everything that happens “in the room” and “outside the room” is important. These include the breadth, diversity, and clarity of the

evidence and stakeholders presented, the quality of facilitation, opportunities to speak, removal of participation barriers, as well as mitigation of undesired attention and/or attempts at interference.

- **Pathways to impact:** Once a deliberative process is completed and recommendations have been produced, the spotlight turns to the uptake of those recommendations by the commissioning body. Responses and justifications are expected for all recommendations. Depending on the type of deliberative process, it may be necessary to measure its uptake by the broader public (for example, when it is followed by a referendum).

The evaluation process with participants was twofold: on the one hand, participants answered questionnaires to determine attitudinal changes about various matters throughout the process. Secondly, exit interviews were conducted with participants to evaluate their deliberative experience and determine what worked well and what did not.

More specifically, the purpose of the questionnaires was to assess the impact of the process to determine any change in the reported knowledge about general aspects of the City Council and public-community collaboration, as well as in the confidence expressed towards political representatives, citizen participation, and deliberative processes. In addition, the researchers sought to explore the degree of importance towards deliberative processes expressed by participants, as well as reported changes in the acquisition of new learning. As part of the evaluation, two criteria were also considered: the gender of participants and the language usage (between Basque, a minority language, and Spanish).

The interviews allowed to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions of the process itself. Specifically, the aim was to obtain feedback about the process to understand what worked well and what did not, and what changes could be made to improve future processes. Lastly, to complement the questionnaires and interviews, the researchers were present throughout the sessions to conduct observations and they conducted six interviews with facilitators and organisers to get more insights and enrich their discussions and conclusions.

A summary of the evaluation main findings can be found in Box 3.3, and the full evaluation report can be accessed [here](#).

Box 3.3. Independent evaluation of Tolosa's Citizen Assembly

Evaluators found that the process design integrity was respected and conducted well, in alignment with all the necessary criteria and standards. Participants shared positive experiences "inside the room". The researchers found some challenges regarding communication efforts and the connection between the internal deliberative experience and its larger societal impact, as not many people seemed to be aware of the process and its results. Regarding pathways to impact, the involvement of Tolosa Council in the public response to the recommendations in a timely manner shows positive signs, although further evidence in this sense will have to be gathered later as the implementation of the recommendations takes its course.

Main learnings:

Participants in the deliberative process expressed high satisfaction with the process.

Participants appreciated meeting with diverse people, quality facilitation, and feeling that their contributions were valued. As stated by two interviewees: "So, it is also very enriching because we get together people of different ages, different cultures, different thoughts" (Woman, 18 to 30 years old) and "It has been valuable for me to see all the realities that can exist" (Woman, 31 to 40 years old).

Participants also appreciated the information and skills they acquired in relation to the topic and public-community relations. "I learn and can teach others, take what I have learned to others" (Female, 51-60).

The analysis showed a high level of trust towards citizen participation and deliberative processes.

Trust increased to very high levels in both cases after the process was completed.

There was also an increase in trust towards political representatives.

There is a need for improvement in sharing information on mental health and emotional well-being resources to the public.

The information received by participating citizens should be more adequate, which could be achieved by incorporating more testimonies of local experiences and allowing more time for deliberation.

Source: Casado da Rocha, A., Pérez Prat, L., Carbayeda Urruzola, L., & Garmendia Castaños, A (2023), Informe de evaluación de la Asamblea Ciudadana de Tolosa. [Tolosa ES 1.2](#)

Positive spillover effects

In addition to the impact described in the previous sections, the Tolosa and Gipuzkoa deliberative processes impacted more than 200 individuals that were directly or indirectly involved in the design, implementation, communication and/or evaluation of the processes, as portrayed in the following table.

Table 3.4. Mapping of involvement in deliberative processes across Tolosa and Gipuzkoa

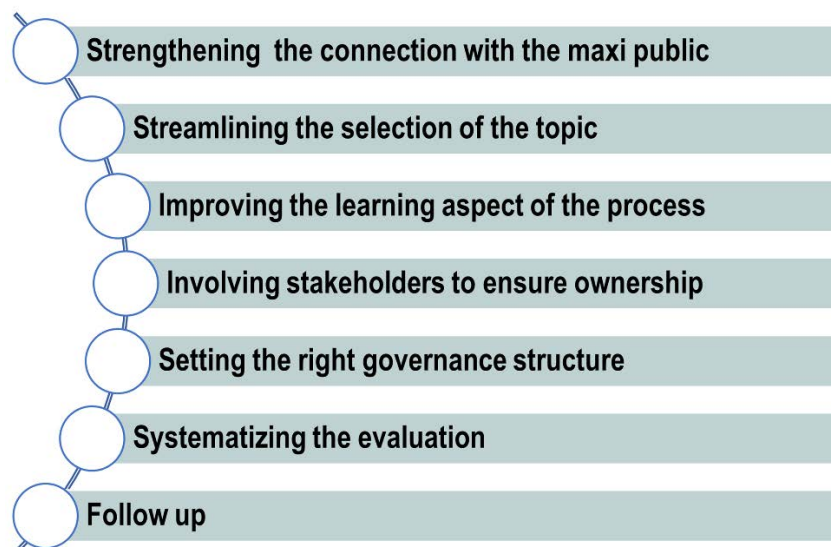
| Type of involvement | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| Tolosa Local Council | 3 people + political representatives |
| Gipuzkoa Provincial Council | 4 people + political representatives |
| Assembly members | 64 individuals |
| Arantzazulab | 3 people |
| Civic lottery | 4 people |
| Facilitation | 10 people |
| Evaluation and research | 14 people (including masters' students doing their research on the process) |
| Communication | 6 people |
| International event organised in Donostia in 2022 | 100 people |
| Total | 209 |

Source: Author's own. This impact can support building a culture of deliberation in and out of government, increase awareness of these processes and create ambassadors and promoters for future processes.

Improving future deliberative processes by learning from Tolosa and Gipuzkoa

Building on the evaluation report as well as interviews and workshops with key stakeholders from the Basque Country involved in the process, the OECD and Arantzazulab have identified six areas of opportunity to improve future deliberative processes.

Figure 3.3. Seven learnings from Tolosa and Gipuzkoa



Source: Author's own elaboration

1. Strengthening the connection with the maxi-public:

A recurrent challenge for deliberative processes is its isolation from the wider public, which decreases the impact of the process. The connection with the maxi-public⁷ enables increased awareness about the process and its outcomes and supports greater legitimacy for the whole process. It is vital to involve the wider community in the conversation to increase uptake of the results, especially when those will impact the community beyond the Assembly members. In the case of Tolosa, efforts were undertaken to communicate and involve the maxi-public as detailed under “Communication about the process” in this report. Nevertheless, both the evaluation report and stakeholders interviewed by the OECD pointed that the connection with the broader community could be improved. Public communications can be a powerful tool to amplify the Assembly and close the gap with the broader public. When communicating, public authorities should make use of diverse communication channels (podcasts, streaming channels, or social media platforms) to reach beyond the usual suspects, in particular younger demographics.

For future processes, the OECD, based on insights provided by Basque Country stakeholders, suggests the following options to improve the connection with the maxi-public:

- **Transparency and communication**, by using mainstream channels such as TV or radio and less traditional channels, including social media. For example, during the French Citizens' Convention on Climate, public figures from government and academia regularly discussed the process on national radio and TV which significantly increased social awareness and French artist JR collaborated with the organisers to create an art installation with the portraits of the 150 randomly selected citizens. In addition, more efforts could be put into the communication of the results, creating different materials for diverse supports (social media, TV, print, billboards, etc.) about each

step of the process and generate conversations. Some partnerships with media outlets and journalists could also be made to broaden the communication. Finally, a thorough and strategic social media campaign could make the information reach wider and younger audiences.

Decentralise the communication by encouraging self-organised events on the topic of the Assembly and sessions to present the recommendations. These additional activities should be organised in different – and less conventional – spaces, to reach different audiences. Another possible way to achieve this is by building coalitions with non-governmental actors. For instance, collaborative efforts with media, and civil society could contribute to crafting a narrative that resonates effectively to different audiences. Other interdisciplinary projects like documentaries⁸ or exhibitions could also be explored as an awareness tool.

2. Streamlining the selection of the topic:

Selecting the topic to be addressed by the deliberative process is an essential step. The task given to the Assembly must be clearly linked to a public problem and be relevant for both the community and the convening authority. This is not always an easy task as communities face very diverse challenges, and not all are suitable to be addressed by a deliberative process. As suggested by the OECD, deliberative processes are better suited to solve three types of issues: 1) values-based dilemmas, 2) complex problems that require trade-offs, and 3) long-term questions. In addition to finding the right problem, the organising authority must ensure that there is room to implement the recommendations of the Assembly, meaning that the problem is in their scope of action and that a solution has not yet been agreed upon.

For future processes, the OECD suggests the following options to improve the selection of the topic:

- **Elaborating guidelines for public authorities** on how to select an appropriate topic for a deliberative process can support future conveners' in navigating the topic selection. These guidelines could be inspired by [DemocracyNext's Checklist for choosing and wording the Assembly question](#) (2023^[7]) or KNOCA's Guiding principles for setting the remit of a climate assembly (KNOCA, 2022^[8]).
- **Involving the public** in the selection of the topic can help public authorities find a pressing issue in the community, support the legitimacy of the process, and increase the awareness of the process among a wider public. Basque Country's authorities could get inspiration from the Mostar Citizen Assembly that designed a collaborative process to define the topic (see Box 3.4).
- **Creating permanent or institutionalised citizen-led bodies** with an agenda-setting role where all or a percentage of members could rotate every few months. Creating a permanent body means providing a clear mandate and in some cases, it can decide the topic or suggest a list of topics to deliberate upon. For example, in Ostbelgien (Belgium) the citizens' council, comprised of 24 rotating members, selects issues that are then deliberated by ad-hoc citizens' panels (Ostbelgien, 2024^[9]).

Embedding the use of deliberation in the decision-making cycle as a recurrent and mainstream mechanism to co-create policies or to inform long term decisions. As public consultations are a normal way for public authorities to reach out to the public, deliberation could be integrated as part of the policy cycle, or in specific policy areas to streamline the selection of the topic. For example, the French Law on Bioethics makes deliberation or consultation mandatory for any amendment to the Law (Legifrance, 2021^[10]).

Box 3.4. Co-deciding the Assembly's topic: the Mostar Citizen Assembly

The Mostar Citizen's Assembly — the first deliberative process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Southeast Europe — resulted from an initiative by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

As the city administration faced many unaddressed issues, a participatory approach was adopted to select the topic. This included citizens, and representatives from civil society and the local authority. As a first step in Spring 2021, through an online poll, all Mostar residents were invited to propose a topic that fell under the competences of the city. Similar responses were grouped into 69 different topics by the contracted polling agency and then ranked by recurrence (number of times suggested). The top twenty were presented to a group of civil society who prioritise six topics then presented to the Local Council members and local authorities who in their turn selected three. The final choice was given to randomly selected citizens who when registering for the assembly could also vote for one of the three topics.

The Mostar Citizen Assembly prioritisation process



Source: Based on Kapidžić (2023), The Mostar Citizens' Assembly: Bridging diversity and division in Bosnia and Herzegovina, OECD Participo, <https://medium.com/participo/the-mostar-citizens-assembly-bridging-diversity-and-division-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-48adc46cd00f>

3. Improving the learning journey:

The learning aspect of a Citizen Assembly spans throughout the process. The information shared to participants before, during, and after the Assembly should be evidence-based and accessible to *all* citizens. This means that it should come from diverse sources of information instead of only a governmental, or top-down communication channels, and that the formats and languages used should be easy to read and understand.

For future processes, both the content and the format could be improved to support different learning profiles and improve accessibility. The OECD suggests the following options to improve the learning and information phase:

- Creating and curating information can be a full-time activity and requires certain expertise. **Future processes could consider creating a dedicated role in the governance team**, such as: content manager, scientific journalist, visual designer, information architect, etc. These new profiles would ensure that all the materials generated are accessible and appealing by using simple language, visual, and using different types of channels to communicate, among others.

- **A greater emphasis could be placed on inclusive training and learning by exploring diverse sources, formats and learning techniques.** For example, the learning aspect could combine traditional classroom settings, with more interactive formats including active learning and online asynchronous training. Additionally, alternative sources such as testimonies and lived experiences from local citizens could complement traditional sources like experts or professionals.

4. Involving stakeholders to ensure ownership:

The implementation of the recommendations produced by a deliberative process usually requires cross-departmental and in some cases, whole-of-society efforts. Citizens' recommendations tend to be "transdisciplinary", meaning that they do not pertain to one specific service within a public administration, but instead require the involvement of civil servants working in multiple services. External actors like civil society and research can be instrumental in providing expertise and support throughout the implementation phase. If these stakeholders are invited from the beginning, the follow-up on the implementation of the suggested recommendations can be better assured. From early stages, the organisers should involve two key groups of stakeholders:

- (1) civil servants that can be experts on the topic or that will have to implement the recommendations, and the political representatives that will sponsor and commit to the process.
- (2) stakeholders (e.g., from civil society, academia, private sector or international organisations) that have interests or expertise in the topic.

Involving public servants beyond the convening authority can help integrate the deliberative process with broader government reforms or wider public administration transformation to build synergies and catalyse a systemic change.

For future processes, involving public officials beyond the commissioning authority from the beginning could facilitate and support the follow-up and implementation of the recommendations. The OECD suggests the following options to improve the involvement of key stakeholders:

- Involving all the public institutions that have a role in the policy or issue addressed by the Assembly to be part of the governance structure, to share their expertise as part of the learning stage or by organising a dedicated session to present the recommendations before those are finalised and public. Basque Country's authorities could get inspiration from the Milan Citizen Assembly on Climate that involved several public institutions affected by the issue of the Assembly at different moments and in particular when drafting the recommendations.
- Involving civil servants across departments in the public institution commissioning the deliberation process. They could be involved in the different phases of the design and implementation, so that they know where the recommendations are coming from, and this way will be able to respond and follow up in a more precise way. Early involvement can also increase synergies between the results of the Assembly and existing initiatives and strategies.

5. Setting the right governance structure:

The OECD recommends having one coordinating team and when necessary, an independent team to oversee the design and implementation of the process. The Tolosa process involved at least six different teams working on the coordination, design, implementation, and evaluation. A main learning for Arantzazulab is the importance of having clearly defined roles, in particular when involving different teams and groups of people and to make sure there is a fluid connection and coordination between the different groups.

For future processes, the OECD suggests dedicating more time in early stages for all the team members and groups involved in the design and implementation to get to know each other and collectively define the roles as well as expectations for their involvement. Building trust is important to facilitate the co-creation process and to ensure fluid and constructive communication. This can be supported by having regular meetings, informal gatherings, and instant messaging groups.

6. Systematizing the evaluation

Evaluation gives legitimacy to the process and helps capture lessons learned and understand the impact generated by the Assembly. It is important to involve the evaluators in all phases of the design and implementation as they are an impartial source that can help understand what works and come up with ways to improve. Evaluators should have access to all the stakeholders both from government and non-public organisations that participate in the process. In the aftermath of the process, Arantzazulab found valuable to communicate about the evaluation report both on the channels used for the process (i.e., official website), but also by organising a dedicated event to share the results, reflect on them and understand what can be changed in future processes.

7. Ensuring a thorough follow-up

The implementation of recommendations and follow up by public authorities is paramount to the success of the process. Future processes could plan the follow-up in the initial phases of design in order to provide a clear calendar early in the process. Arantzazulab found that it could be valuable to take more in consideration the administrative procedures that could impact the implementation of the recommendations such as elections, budget cycle, European regulations, etc.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council: https://www.gipuzkoa.eus/es/web/herritarrenbatzarra/que_es
- ² At the moment of the design phase, the Tolosa City Council was formed by 17 local councillors: 8 from the Basque Nationalist Party, 8 from EH Bildu, 1 from the Socialist Party of the Basque Country.
- ³ According to the Spanish Statistical Institute, in 2023, Tolosa had an estimated population of 20 065 inhabitants: <https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=2873>
- ⁴ The stratification was carried out using the Sortition Foundation's algorithm.
- ⁵ A world café is a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss a topic at several small tables like those in a café. The idea is that participants get to sit at different tables, discuss the topic at hand and constantly rotate to get a sense of what the group thinks.
- ⁶ See Tolosa Council website.
- Content is available in Basque and Spanish
- ⁷ Deliberative processes (e.g. Citizen Assemblies) are sometimes referred to as “mini-publics” and the wider public beyond the Assembly is refer to as “maxi-public”.
- ⁸ The documentary of the Tolosa Citizen Assembly is a good example:

4

Roadmap to institutionalise public deliberation in the Basque Country in Spain

After analysing the conditions that supported a successful process in Tolosa, this chapter provides a set of recommendations to move from ad-hoc deliberative processes, like the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly, to permanent and systemic deliberation in the Basque Country. These recommendations cover different factors including legal, institutional, and cultural aspects that would enable the institutionalisation of deliberation in Tolosa, Gipuzkoa, and broadly the Basque Country. Learnings from this chapter may be of inspiration to other Autonomous Communities and Municipalities in Spain, as well as to public authorities in other OECD countries.

Moving from experimentation to the institutionalisation of public deliberation requires certain actions in the short, medium, and long term.

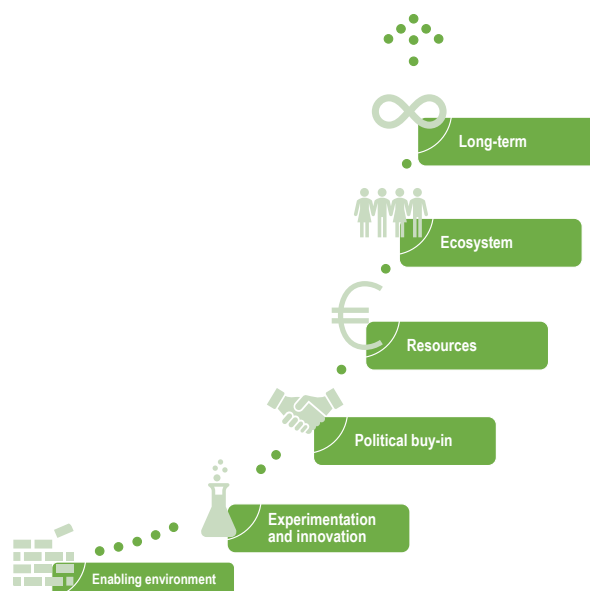
- In the **short term**, consideration could be given to reflecting and integrating the learnings from the Tolosa and Gipuzkoa processes into future deliberative processes, both at a regional and national level. The suggested areas of improvement provided by this report (see Recommendations) could be disseminated among public and non-governmental stakeholders interested in implementing a deliberative process. In addition, peer learning sessions could be beneficial for Arantzazulab and Tolosa representatives to share their journey and learnings.
- In the **medium and long term**, public authorities in the Basque Country and Spain could build an enabling environment that promotes deliberation, which can include legal and institutional changes as well as resource allocation that eases the organisation of deliberative processes. In addition, a reflection could be undertaken at the level of the Basque Country on how to better embed deliberation in the democratic decision-making system.

This section reflects on the learnings of the Tolosa and Gipuzkoa processes, as well as on evidence collected by the OECD across its membership and suggests areas of action to make public deliberation more systemic and integrated in the existing legal, institutional, and cultural structures of the Basque Country. Although an in-depth analysis of other regional and municipal contexts in Spain is beyond the scope of this report, this chapter could serve as inspiration for public authorities across Spain, and more widely for OECD countries, with an interest in building an enabling environment for public deliberation.

Conditions for success: the case of Tolosa

The OECD identified seven elements that made the citizens' assembly in Tolosa a successful deliberative process. This recipe for success in complement with the OECD Good Practice Principles could be used as a blueprint for future deliberative processes in Tolosa, in Gipuzkoa or largely in the Basque Country, as well as more broadly in other regions of Spain, and in other OECD countries.

Figure 4.1. Tolosa's conditions for a successful deliberative process



Source: Author's own elaboration

1. Enabling environment for sortition and deliberation

The Tolosa Citizen Assembly benefited from a friendly national and regional level enabling environment based on both a long-lasting tradition of collaboration and dialogue and favourable legal and institutional frameworks. As described Chapter 2, the Basque Country, in alignment with the broader national context, has a strong culture of collaboration between public entities and non-governmental actors. This friendly environment made it easier to convince a broad range of stakeholders from public and non-public organisations of the value of experimenting with a representative deliberative process.

This process also benefited from a strong legal and regulatory basis. The Tolosa City Council adopted in 2022 the Ordinance on *Governance, Participation and Transparency* which enabled the organisation of deliberative processes (see Figure 4.1 and Chapter 2 for more information). This legal text defines the basis for sortition (local census) and stratification (people will be chosen based on criteria like gender, age, and place of residence, among other factors depending on the subject matter). It also describes the roles of experts during the information phase, as well as the mandatory presence of facilitators to ensure good and inclusive deliberation. The Ordinance establishes the synergies – and the relation - between ad-hoc deliberative processes such as the Tolosa Citizen Assembly, and the Tolosa City Council: “[deliberative processes] shall not be given decision-making powers, they are merely consultative. Final decisions will always go back to Tolosa Council” (Tolosa City Council, 2022^[11]).

2. Experimentation and innovation: the role of Arantzazulab, and the innovation ecosystem

Stakeholders interviewed by the OECD described Arantzazulab as a “conveyor of multidisciplinary actors and a catalyser of democratic innovation”, both ingredients being beneficial to testing new participatory approaches. Indeed, Arantzazulab played a crucial role throughout the process, in particular to secure political commitment and allocate resources for the design and implementation of the process. Its role as an innovation lab independent from the government, with practical expertise on collaborative governance, and with support from key stakeholders in the Basque Country, including the Basque Government, the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, as well as private actors like Mondragon and the Kutxa Bank Foundation, strengthened the credibility of the deliberative process.

This case shows the potential role of innovation labs in creating safe spaces for experimentation, key element to promote new approaches to collaborative governance, including deliberative processes. This element could be further explored, not only in the context of the Basque Country but the OECD community at large. The OECD's Observatory of Public Sector Innovation reached a similar conclusion in its analysis of 137 innovation labs across 37 countries: innovation labs play a key role in creating the spaces to experiment with innovative democratic methods (OECD, 2023^[21]).

3. Political buy-in and commitment: support from across the political spectrum

Commitment from the public authority that is commissioning the process is part of the OECD Good Practice Principles (see Chapter 1). In the cases of Tolosa and Gipuzkoa, both processes benefited from buy-in and commitment across the political parties represented in the elected Councils, and public support from Tolosa's Mayor. Proof of the high-level commitment, political support remained unchanged after a change of Tolosa's ruling political party following the 2023 local elections. This was key to secure the necessary resources for the process, and to adopt the legal changes that enabled the civic lottery and the remuneration of participants. Political commitment also helped embark the administration and convince other non-governmental stakeholders to support the process.

4. Financial and human resources

As for any participatory process, deliberative processes require the necessary resources to be properly implemented. Such resources can be human, financial, and technical. In the case of Tolosa's Citizen Assembly, financial resources were secured through Arantzazulab and Tolosa's Council for a total amount of 217 330 EUR. This total is for an assembly of 32 members and 5 days of deliberation, including capacity building costs but does not include project team staff costs. This is slightly above the OECD average cost for a small-medium size deliberative process (OECD, 2023^[3]).

Nevertheless, the high costs associated with deliberative processes and the limited availability of resources remains a barrier for the multiplication of these type of processes. Public authorities across Spain facing such barriers can decrease the costs by internalising certain functions (economies of scale), for example, by training civil servants on facilitation methodologies. Moreover, there is a need to build a narrative that supports the importance and value of deliberative processes to convince public and non-public organisations to invest in innovative forms of democracy. This can start by acknowledging and demonstrating the economic and collective benefits of deliberation. For example, by showcasing cases where public services are improved or where costly infrastructure investments gain public support through deliberation. Investing in deliberation can also include other positive spill overs such as securing public support for difficult decisions (e.g., abortion), or increasing trust in the government and reducing polarisation in society. Such investments could be embedded in broader public spending on democracy, including elections (national and sub-national), civic education, and other forms of citizen voice.

5. Deliberative ecosystem: A committed group of local and international actors

Besides Arantzazulab and the Tolosa Council, the process benefitted from a committed ecosystem of public and non-public actors that played an active role in designing, delivering, and evaluating the process. This ecosystem consisted of civil servants, researchers, facilitators, and experts that believed in the potential of a deliberative process and that remained committed until the end of the process. Among them, the following organisations participated in the design and implementation of the process: Aktiba research group, Aztiker, Deliberativa and Prometea. In addition, a network of international experts, including members of the OECD Innovative Citizen Participation Network such as DemocracyNext, Ideemos, Democracy R&D, and Delibera provided valuable guidance.

6. Thinking about long term: building knowledge for future processes

While the main objective of the pilot was to experiment, both Arantzazulab and public authorities from Tolosa and Gipuzkoa had the intention to learn from it, iterate, and use deliberative processes more regularly in the years to come. This long-term thinking gave another dimension to the pilot, creating the space to organise a deliberative process following high-quality standards and putting the learning aspect front and centre.

Evaluation was included in the design of the process from the outset, and the results of the independent evaluation have been communicated broadly to both public authorities and the public. Arantzazulab has invested time and resources in building knowledge for the future by organising peer learning sessions with international and local ecosystem, participating at conferences, and publishing content sharing the Tolosa case in academic publications, local newspapers, online blogs, and social media. Finally, the publication of this report and the request to include recommendations for the future show Arantzazulab willingness to think and plan for the long term.

Moving from ad-hoc to permanent and systemic public deliberation

Beyond implementing a deliberative process to try and demonstrate its potential to improve public decision making, the objective of both Arantzazulab and public authorities in Tolosa and Gipuzkoa was to build the case to institutionalise deliberation as to become a regular and mainstream tool in the collaborative governance toolkit of the Basque Country. The following analysis could be relevant to other regions aiming to transform public deliberation from an ad-hoc to a permanent and systemic process, as well as to ongoing national-level reforms on Open Government in Spain.

Institutionalising a deliberative process refers to establishing a legal or cultural form of recurrence to go beyond one-off processes and embed such mechanisms into existing decision-making structures such as local councils, governments, or Parliaments (OECD, 2021^[4]). This helps ensure their continuity regardless of political change, builds a culture of deliberation in and out of government, and increases the opportunities for citizens to participate in public decision and policymaking. There are different ways to embed representative deliberation into public decision-making, as shown by the OECD's eight models and examples (OECD, 2021^[5]). For example, it can take the form of connecting deliberative mechanisms to parliamentary committees, like in Belgium, or by giving people the right to demand a deliberative process, as is the case in Austria.

Making representative public deliberation a regular part of democratic governance can yield important benefits, such as:

- **Allowing public decision makers to take harder decisions better**, as well as more decisions with long-term impacts (such as on climate change, biodiversity, emerging technology, urban planning, infrastructure investment, and other issues of this nature).
- **Enhancing public trust**. Public trust has been declining for decades. A one-off deliberative process can make a difference, but it is the regular practice of public deliberation that gives people and decision makers the opportunity to build mutual trust.
- **Making representative deliberative processes easier and less expensive**. Costs and resources are saved by not starting from scratch every time.
- **Strengthening society's democratic fitness**. Adding public deliberation and civic lotteries to democracy extends the privilege of representation to a much larger group of people. It also exponentially increases the positive democratic dividend of participation. These processes strengthen people's agency (Knobloch et al., 2019^[6]) harness collective capacity (Landmore, 2012^[7]), and awaken a collective consciousness that connects people to one another and to something bigger than themselves (Mercier and Sperber, 2019^[8]). There is ample evidence on how participation in a deliberative process has a transformative effect on those involved. It often leads to increased levels of political efficacy not only amongst members of deliberative bodies, but also the broader public. People strengthen their "democratic muscles" through participation. Seeing 'people like me' participating in complex public decision making can have a similar effect on those not directly involved but aware of the process. Institutionalisation creates more opportunities for more people to be able to have such a transformative experience.

Table 4.1. Characteristics of eight institutionalised deliberative democracy models

| INSTITUTIONALISATION MODEL | LINKED TO | MANDATE | WHO INITIATES | LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT | COUNTRIES |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|---------------------|-----------|
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|---------------------|-----------|

| | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Combining a permanent citizens' assembly with one-off citizens' panels | A legislative body | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda setting • Initiating citizens' panels • Monitoring implementation of recommendations • Asking written questions | Embedded into law/ongoing | Local, regional/state | Belgium, France |
| 2. Connecting representative public deliberation to parliamentary committees | A legislative body on a working level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing recommendations • Voting on recommendations | Citizens MPs | Regional/state | Australia, Belgium |
| 3. Combining deliberative and direct democracy | A referendum/ballot measure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafting a collective statement of key facts for the voters' pamphlet | Public authority | State | United States |
| 4. Standing citizens' advisory panels | An executive body on a working level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing ongoing citizen input on a specific issue | Public authority | Local, regional/state | Canada |
| 5. Sequenced representative deliberative processes throughout the policy cycle | A legislative body | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different and evolving mandate for each assembly in the sequence (proposing objectives, developing recommendations, evaluation) | Public authority | Local | Colombia |
| 6. Giving people the right to demand a representative deliberative process | A legislative body | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing recommendations | Citizens Public authority | Regional/state | Austria |
| 7. Requiring representative public deliberation before certain types of public decisions | Type of decision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing recommendations | Legal requirement | National | France |
| 8. Embedding representative deliberative processes in local strategic planning | Planning stage of the policy cycle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing recommendations | Legal requirement | Regional/state | Australia |

Source: Based on OECD (2023), Eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/eight-ways-to-institutionalise-deliberative-democracy.htm>

Most of the deliberative processes organised nowadays are ad-hoc processes, meant to respond to specific contexts and policy issues. Nevertheless, the institutionalised or permanent cases collected by the OECD multiplied from 2020 to 2023, going from 22 to 41 — the majority of which are implemented by subnational governments at the local or regional levels. For example:

- The Paris Citizen Assembly (100 members) is currently deliberating on how to support individuals experiencing homelessness as well as on the barriers currently faced by the city to increase green spaces.

- The Lisbon's Citizen Council (50 members) [deliberated in 2022 on how to enable the city to face the climate crisis](#) and, in 2023, on how to make Lisbon [a 15-minute city](#).

Moving to a more systemic approach beyond one-off processes requires overcoming some of the immediate challenges to organise deliberative processes that were observed by the OECD and which are summarised in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2. Mapping the current barriers to mainstream deliberation in the Basque Country

| Element of a deliberative process | Current barrier or challenge | Possible lever |
|---|---|--|
| Civic lottery (random selection of citizens) | Legal barriers to access data for sortition and dependency on contractors to run the civic lottery. | <p>Establish a new or amend existing legal frameworks produced at the Basque, Spanish or European level to facilitate bureaucratic processes and access to the data necessary for the civic lottery. This framework could be in alignment with, or be integrated as part of, national legislation (e.g., Law 39/2015, of 1 October, on the Common Administrative Procedure of Public Administrations; Organic Law 3/2018, of December 5, on the Protection of Personal Data and Guarantee of Digital Rights) or local ordinances (e.g., Tolosa Ordinance or the law 2944/01 of 2022) that are relevant to the establishment of deliberative commissions.</p> <p>Develop internal capacities for civil servants and develop the required structures to be able to run the civic lottery without external support.</p> |
| Remuneration of participants | Legal barriers to provide citizens with a stipend for their participation. | <p>Establish or amend legal framework(s) that could be inspired by existing examples of laws passed that would either support a citizen's remuneration leave or electoral mandatory participation. At a national level, for instance, such provisions could be integrated into the (review of the) Law 19/2013, of December 9, on Transparency, Access to Public Information, and Good Governance.</p> <p>Establish regional or national guidelines or a pay scale for citizen participation.</p> |
| Financial resources to implement a deliberative process | High costs to organise a deliberative process and lack of resources dedicated to democratic innovations. | <p>Internalise certain functions or create shared structures across public institutions to enable economies of scale. Information sharing across autonomous communities could also be one way of reducing learning and development-related costs. This could be done, for instance, through the Sectoral Conferences established under Law 40/2015, of October 1, on the Legal Regime of the Public Sector to enable central government and autonomous communities to discuss and coordinate on policy planning and implementation.</p> <p>Build a compelling narrative for public investment in deliberation and democratic innovations.</p> |
| Skills and knowledge about deliberation | Low levels of knowledge and skills to run deliberative processes inside and outside of the government, for example on facilitation. | <p>Train public servants and disseminate tools, guides, and manuals on deliberation inside and outside of the government. Such tools could also be discussed and consolidated through Sectoral Conferences, particularly the Sectoral Conference on Open Government.</p> |
| Outcomes of deliberative process | Opacity surrounding outcomes and benefits | <p>Systematise the recommendations' follow up by both the implementing authority and civil society. Reinforce oversight mechanisms at a national and regional level to ensure the transparency and monitoring of the deliberative process' outcomes.</p> <p>Communicate about the benefits of deliberation both for the wider public and for public administrations.</p> |

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Recommendations to embed public deliberation into decision making process in the Basque Country

This section builds on the challenges described before to suggest concrete actions public authorities in the Basque Country could pursue to make public deliberation permanent and systematic. Based on the

observation of the Tolosa process, the learnings from the evaluation reports, as well as interviews conducted with key stakeholders in the region, the OECD identified three main clusters of action for the Basque Country:

- **Institutionalising deliberative practices**
- **Embedding deliberation in public administration**
- **Mainstreaming deliberation within and outside government**

These clusters should be implemented in synergy as they are complementary to each other. The recommendations listed below suggest concrete actions that contribute to promoting and systematising deliberation across levels of government in the Basque Country (regional, provincial, and municipal).

Figure 4.2. Clusters of action to institutionalise public deliberation in the Basque Country.



Source: Author's own elaboration

Institutionalising deliberative practices

Institutionalising deliberation means establishing formal structures and mechanisms to incorporate deliberative practices in decision or policymaking (OECD, 2021^[5]). It is about building permanent structures for deliberation and/or adopting legal obligations for public authorities to organise deliberative processes or empower citizens to request them. As is the case for most deliberative processes observed by the OECD, the Tolosa Citizen Assembly, selected citizens randomly to join a specific process, the assembly had a one-off mandate and the design and outcomes of the assembly had little to no formal connection with existing representative institution (although a governmental body usually sponsors the assembly). In a permanent, and therefore institutionalised process, citizens are randomly selected on a regular and rotation basis (e.g., every year), the body has a clear and defined mandate, and is aimed at being synergic with existing representative institutions. The OECD mapped eight different models to institutionalise public deliberation (OECD, 2021^[4]), which can include:

- **Creating permanent structures or institutions:** the Paris Citizen's Assembly was created by a regulation voted in the Local Council that created it as a permanent body. The regulation established it as a formal connection to the local elected council and required the latter to provide a written response to citizens' recommendations at the time of submission.
- **Creating legal obligations for public authorities to organise a deliberative process:** in July 2011, an article of the French Law on Bioethics was introduced to institutionalise the obligation to organise public debates and deliberations for any change in the law.
- **Empowering citizens to initiate a deliberative process:** in the Austrian state of Vorarlberg, citizens' councils can be initiated if 1,000 or more citizens sign a petition asking for one. This petition system was introduced after the state amended its 2013 Land Constitution to include direct democracy practices as well as citizens' councils. This right was used for the first time in 2017 to deliberate on land use rights.

Recommendations

Promoting the use of deliberative processes by updating existing legislations or adopting new frameworks that enable civic lottery and remuneration.

The Basque Autonomous Community has been building an enabling environment for citizen and stakeholder participation, including by adopting legislations, policies, and by establishing institutional offices to support the inclusion of citizens in public decision making. For example, Law 2/2016 on Local Institutions of the Basque Autonomous Community mentions citizen participation and exhorts municipalities to guarantee citizens' rights to participate in public affairs by implementing participatory processes (BOE, 2016^[9]). This Law could be updated to include representative deliberative processes, and lifting the barriers to civic lottery and remuneration, as part of the mechanisms to involve citizens.

At the Provincial level, the Gipuzkoa Provincial Law 5/2018 on Citizen Participation regulates the instruments and procedures via which people can exercise their right to participate in public affairs (The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2018^[10]). It defines citizen participation, describes various participatory mechanisms, and seeks to promote citizen participation in the province. One of the methods described in the law is called "participatory deliberation processes" and is described as giving stakeholders and citizens the chance to deliberate about possible policy solutions for public problems. The Law could be reviewed to mention sortition as a recruitment method.

At the municipal level, Tolosa's *Governance, Participation and Transparency Ordinance* of 2022 is an important step towards institutionalising deliberation and could incentivise other municipalities to implement a similar law, regulating the "means, procedures and channels for citizen participation in municipal life and management" (Tolosa City Council, 2022^[11]). The Ordinance states that deliberative bodies do not have any decision-making power, making them merely consultative. An updated version could detail, for instance, the procedure by which recommendations coming out of public deliberation practices could effectively be integrated in decision and policy-making cycles; or even in which cases assembly members recommendations can be binding and implement them as they are suggested by citizens participating in specific deliberation processes.

This could also be the opportunity to discuss the role of national and supranational frameworks as catalysers and enablers of public deliberation. For instance, laws, regulations, and guiding principles at the Spanish or European levels providing access to data for civic lottery or establishing the legal framework for public authorities to provide remuneration to Assemblies' participants could lower barriers to representative deliberative processes. At a national level, for instance Law 19/2013, of December 9, on Transparency, Access to Public Information, and Good Governance, for instance, lays the foundations for fostering transparency and access to information. Ongoing reforms to align this law with OECD standards and establishing a legislative basis for public consultations could go further by including deliberative

processes and providing guidance for Autonomous Communities to mainstream deliberation across public administration. At the European level, the recently adopted Recommendation on the participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policymaking invites Member States to “have in place a clearly defined policy or regulatory framework for both citizens and civil society organisations participation, including the objectives, the procedures and the relevant actors involved” (European Commission, 2023^[11]). Mapping and assessing these legal frameworks for deliberation is a necessary step to envision and facilitate the process of institutionalising deliberative processes.

Building permanent deliberative institutions that provide citizens with a regular opportunity to participate and reinforce synergies with representative institutions.

The Basque Autonomous Community could consider setting up permanent deliberative institutions at different levels of government to address different policy problems. Representative deliberative institutions have a clear mandate that usually is described in a regulation or a legislation, where citizens are randomly selected on a regular and rotative basis, for example, once a year (OECD, 2021^[5]). Regarding the Basque Country, the Law 3/2022 on the Basque Public Sector, particularly Article 19, calls for the establishment of permanent spaces for citizen and associative participation that allow for a deliberation of quality, socio-economic diversity and ideological plurality (Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, 2022^[12]).

At the regional level, the Basque Autonomous Community could get inspiration from the Ostbelgien Model and design a permanent body synergic to the Basque Parliament. The Ostbelgien Model is composed of three democratic institutions: a permanent citizens’ council, a citizens’ panel, and a secretariat of public officials. The citizens’ council, comprised of 24 rotating members, selects issues that are then deliberated in the citizens’ panels. The panels’ recommendations are then presented to the Regional Parliament, which is required to dedicate at least 2 parliamentary debates to the recommendations. The citizens’ council is then tasked with monitoring the Parliament’s response and the implementation of the recommendations. The Basque Autonomous Community has already started a reflection to design a permanent body to involve randomly selected citizens in addressing the climate crisis, being inspired by the [Ostbelgien](#) and the [Brussels](#) models.

In February 2024, the Basque Parliament approved the Law on Energy Transition and Climate Change, stating in its Article 12, that the Citizens’ Assembly on Energy Transition and Climate Change is a space for citizens to learn, deliberate and reach consensus on the great transformations that are necessary to reach climate neutrality (Basque Parliament, 2024^[13]). The article also declares that Basque Office of Energy Transition and Climate Change will act as a permanent, independent, supporting body for the Citizens’ Assembly with the objective of establishing and guaranteeing the application of deliberative standards. Arantzazulab, Telesforo Monzon and Deliberativa, in collaboration with the teams of Ihobe and EVE, have carried out a first conceptualisation of the Citizens’ Assembly, taking as inspiration the Ostbelgien and Brussels models, mentioned above.

At the Provincial level, the Provinces of Gipuzkoa, Araba and Bizkaia could follow other sub-national authorities in OECD countries such as Vorarlberg (Austria), Brussels Region (Belgium), or Ontario (Canada) to connect representative institutions such as provincial councils with deliberative bodies. For example, following the example of the Brussels’ Region Parliament, the *juntas generales* (provincial parliaments) could bring together a combination of citizens and elected representatives to work jointly on a policy issue and form a deliberative committee. In the Brussels case, the deliberative committees are comprised of 15 elected representatives and 45 citizens selected via civic lottery.

At the Municipal level, Basque municipalities could also be inspired by the 19 local authorities¹ that have designed permanent deliberative instances, for example the [Lisbon’s Citizen Council](#) (Portugal) or the Bayside Local Council (Australia) where an institutionalised panel of 28 members deliberate on the future of the local community and integrate the recommendations in the City’s strategic planning.

An additional option could be to establish permanent deliberative mechanisms to address specific policy areas. For example, in Toronto (Canada), a Regional Reference Panel met eleven times over two years, and advised Metrolinx, the government's road and transportation agency, on transportation projects and policies including the management of congestion and demand during rush hour, the expansion of access to rapid transit and cycling infrastructure, and the planification of new services such as car sharing and ride sharing. Similarly, France set up deliberative processes to address bioethics issues (OECD, 2021^[5])

Setting up independent oversight bodies for enhanced evaluation and continuous learning

As suggested by the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes, an independent evaluation is recommended for all deliberative processes, particularly those that last a significant time. To provide common guidelines for the evaluation of deliberative processes across Autonomous Communities, the Government of Spain could consider amending Law 39/2015, of October 1, on the Common Administrative Procedure of Public Administrations. In particular, amendments could be made to Article 133 to set guidance to institutionalise the evaluation and learning from deliberative processes.

To institutionalise and systematise public deliberation, the Basque Autonomous Community could envision the creation of an independent oversight body. This body could be based on the external Evaluation Committee already set up for the Tolosa Citizens' Assembly and the independent evaluation report commissioned by Arantzazulab and developed by Aktiba research group in the Basque Country University (UPV-EHU). Alternatively, it could be based in the Evaluation Committee set up for the Gipuzkoa Citizens' Assembly and the independent evaluation commissioned by Arantzazulab and developed by Parte Hartuz research group in the Basque Country University (UPV-EHU). This body could be responsible for ensuring adherence to international standards, impartiality of the information provided to the Assembly, neutrality and integrity of the process as well as become a disseminator of good practices. In addition, this body could be responsible for reporting back to the public. In sum, this body could shield public deliberation from undue influence, collusions, or manipulation in and out of the government and contribute to building trust on deliberative processes and their outcome.

Embedding deliberation in public administration

Embedding deliberation refers to moving from the overarching layer of institutional and legal frameworks to anchor deliberative practices across the public administration. The aim is to create the necessary enabling conditions to implement these processes across the government and better connecting them to the normal workings of the public administration. Rooting deliberation requires raising awareness and building the infrastructures that will support the organisation of deliberative processes. These infrastructures can include resources (e.g. financial and human), skills (e.g. internal facilitators and evaluators or legal, communication and IT departments), tools (e.g. sortition algorithms), digital platforms and spaces.

Recommendations

Building a compelling narrative for public investment in deliberation to secure resources for future processes and enable economies of scale

Deliberative processes tend to be more expensive than other participatory processes, namely due to the remuneration of participants and external experts involved, as well as the costs associated with the civic lottery. Deliberative processes can vary in terms of costs. Out of 133 cases where the budget is disclosed, the average cost of a deliberative process was 210,737 euros according to the 2023 update of the OECD Deliberative Democracy Database (OECD, 2023^[3]). Public administrations are often reluctant to invest in democratic experimentations due to an unfamiliarity with the method or because of limited financial resources available.

Table 4.3. Budget comparison of different deliberative process across the OECD

| Min / Max / Quartiles | Budget (in EUR) | Description | Example | Size of the deliberative process (number of members) |
|-----------------------|-----------------|--|---|--|
| Min. | 5000 EUR | The smallest budget for a deliberative process is 5000 EUR. | Sulzberger Citizens' Council (2010) | 12 participants |
| 25% | 40 000 EUR | 25% of the deliberative processes have a budget of 40 000 EUR or less. | Estonia Youth Climate Assembly (2021) | 33 participants |
| 50% | 70 000 EUR | 50% of deliberative processes have a budget of 70 000 EUR or less. | Tallinn Climate Assembly (2023) | 50 participants |
| 75% | 120 000 EUR | 75% of deliberative processes have a budget of 120 000 EUR or below. | G1000Enschede (2017) | 320 participants |
| Max | 5 431 000 EUR | The largest budget for a deliberative process was 5 431 000 EUR. | French Citizens' Convention on Climate (2020) | 150 participants |

Source: [Budget distribution for deliberative assemblies \(Source: OECD Deliberative Democracy Database\)](#)

The Basque Country could consider building a case for the continued or reinforced allocation of financial resources, by articulating how these investments directly contribute to informed, transparent, and collaborative decision-making. This narrative could be based on impact evidence from good practices including Tolosa and Gipuzkoa. Increased research on the socio-economic benefits of public deliberation such as inter-personal trust, social cohesion, and reduced polarisation could be instrumental for this shift. Institutionalising public deliberation can contribute to reducing costs by doing economies of scale. Institutionalisation requires some initial financial investments to establish sustainable infrastructures but when deliberative processes are institutionalised, they can be less costly than one-off experiences (OECD, 2020^[14]). Lowering the costs could also be made possible by applying a circular dimension to these processes. This could mean reusing materials that have already been produced (e.g., templates of public procurement contracts or letters for civic lotteries) by Basque Country stakeholders or by other countries in the OECD community.

The Basque Country could reflect on the opportunity to set up dedicated funds for democratic innovations which can include deliberative process at the regional or provincial levels, to support smaller municipalities or public authorities with limited budgets. For example, in Gipuzkoa, the General Directorate for Citizen Participation already has a program to provide grants and subsidies for municipalities that organise participatory processes (Government of Gipuzkoa, n.d.^[15]). This programme could be updated to take deliberative processes into account when making such decisions. In addition to the financial support, civil servants from the Provincial level could dedicate their time and proven expertise to helping smaller councils design the deliberative processes. For instance, this could translate into conducting part of the civic lottery, facilitating the deliberative sessions or more broadly, sharing best practices.

Creating a dedicated, interdisciplinary public service for deliberation

Administrative support is important for the success of deliberative processes. Interviews conducted by the OECD suggest that there were various administrative hurdles for the Municipality of Tolosa, most notably, the payments to participants, securing trained facilitation, and accessing data for civic lottery. Having a dedicated office or service to provide support in this area would prove beneficial and would further incentivise institutions to convene deliberative processes. Internalising certain functions could also be a way to reduce costs in the medium to long term and create a culture of deliberation inside the government.

The Basque Country could set up a Centre for Public Deliberation: an interdisciplinary public service comprising of civil servants trained in deliberative and participatory practices. It could be dedicated to designing, organising and implementing deliberative processes or supporting other institutions in doing so. A recent [report by NESTA](#) provides further guidance to create a Citizens' Participation Service in

Government (NESTA, 2023^[16]). In addition, it could provide trainings or develop guidance to reinforce capacities and knowledge across the administration.

In the case of Gipuzkoa Province, an option could be to update the functions of the General Directorate of Participation to include support in the organisation of deliberative processes (see Recommendations for more information).

Figure 4.3. Potential roles for office(s) or institution(s) dedicated to citizen participation and deliberation



Source: OECD (Forthcoming)

Creating and adapting a digital infrastructure for deliberation

Technology offers new routes for public participation, with significant potential to increase their scale and scope. According to the OECD, in 2020 and 2021, amid a pandemic context, online deliberation was the most used medium for conducting a deliberative process, and one third of processes organised in 2022 and 2023 used a hybrid setting (online/offline). Although in-person assemblies have been credited for their ability to build trust and agency amongst assembly members, digital tools can support deliberative processes in different ways:

- **Closing the gap between the Assembly and the broader population** by embedding other forms of participation that target a wider public, like online consultations or surveys. 55% of the cases that used a complementary form of participation, opted for a digital solution.
- **To increase transparency throughout the process and ensure the continuous communication** of its stages and outcomes. For example, 40% of processes that communicated did it through online or digital channels including social media and dedicated websites.
- **To gain more insights and save resources** during the learning, deliberative and decision-making phases of a process with live sensemaking, automating the preparation of learning resources or mapping opinions and conversation dynamics (e.g. MIT and Democracy Next's [tech-enhanced citizens' assembly](#)).

The existing digital platform for citizen participation in the Basque Country is Irekia, an online portal that serves as a central hub for news related to the Basque Government, which includes draft legislations, policies, and initiatives. Citizens can react on these pieces of legislation and governmental actions as well as suggest any issue of interest. The Basque Country could explore using digital tools to support in-person

deliberative processes or enable hybrid settings. Similarly, at a national level, the Participation Platform, established in 2020 in the Government's Transparency Portal could be adapted to support deliberative processes happening on national-level policy. Table 4.4 provides a list of possible functionalities a digital platform can incorporate to support deliberative processes.

Table 4.4. Suggested functionalities of a digital platform to support deliberative processes

| Functionality | Expected objective |
|---|--|
| Guides and manuals available for capacity building and awareness among all stakeholders using this platform. | Knowledge and capacity building |
| Communication mechanisms such as forums or chats to allow members to stay informed or to self-organise (set agendas, suggest topics and deliberative questions, recommend experts to listen from...). | Communication Members' permanent engagement |
| Other forms of participation (consultations, vote, etc.) to allow for interaction between in-person deliberative sessions and gather insights from the broader public and feed back into the assembly. | Hybrid deliberation Connecting maxi and mini public |
| Monitoring and follow up of recommendations' implementation. | Transparency Accountability |
| Learning modules with information, data and videos to enable continuous learning | Learning Information |

Source: Autor's own elaboration

Box 4.1. The European Union's platform for digital democracy

In April 2021, in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the European Commission developed a digital platform to enrich the in-person panels. It helped collect contributions on the topics of the Conference (e.g., "Health", "EU in the World", "European democracy" or "Climate change and the environment") and acted as a centralised information hub for the Citizens' Panels and events that occurred across Europe. In total, 19 000 ideas were submitted, 5 million people visited the platform, and more than 6600 events were organised. Although deliberation did not take place directly on the platform, this digital infrastructure was a one-stop-shop for information and initiatives related to digital democracy. More recently, the European Commission tested automatic translation functionalities to enable multilanguage deliberation. This platform is understood as a digital public infrastructure to support and enable future deliberative processes at the European level. Since the end of the Conference in 2022, a new platform has seen the day. It is branded as "Have your Say" and aims to centralise the European Commission's participatory processes.

Sources: [Conference on the Future of Europe \(archive-it.org\)](#) ; [Have your say - Public Consultations and Feedback \(europa.eu\)](#) ; ["After CoFoE: what's next for digital democracy in Europe?"](#)

Other emergent technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) could be considered for this digital infrastructure for deliberation. It can be used to make sense of citizens' inputs, moderate content, assist stakeholders and citizens, scale communication efforts, translate inputs into other languages and/or create scenario simulations. In the context of these technological advancements, discussed in an OECD interview, Arantzazulab plans to identify advanced practices and opportunities, as well as risks that AI and other technologies can bring for citizens' engagement. The lab is also exploring the role of AI in citizens' engagement in collaboration with other actors connected to the emerging technology sector, including technology providers and academia. The final objective remains to contribute to implementing practical solutions to transform civic participation and strengthen democracy. Arantzazulab may therefore act as a radar to identify impactful technologies for citizen participation and governance reform and bring these innovations to the local context.

Mainstreaming deliberation within and outside government

Mainstreaming deliberation refers to going beyond the government and ensuring all of society knows about representative public deliberation and its potential to transform public decision making. Mainstreaming this participatory practice means incorporating in the culture as to make a habit and common practice. This cluster requires two parallel set of actions: 1) replicating deliberative processes and extending their reach to the wider public, and 2) raising awareness out of government. By replicating, the administration gives room to an iterative learning process – which contributes to building knowledge and improving on a regular basis. By raising awareness and creating a habit, public authorities invest in societal knowledge and capacities to empower citizens and civil society alike to be able to understand, participate, monitor and evaluate public deliberation. Raising awareness could be done through public communication campaigns, based on members sharing success stories and personal testimonies (see Chapter 3)

Recommendations

Replicating deliberation beyond Tolosa and Gipuzkoa

While deliberative processes are gaining recognition, there is room for greater efforts to not only promote these processes but also increase their reach. This report and other OECD resources² provide guidance and learnings for any public authority in the Basque Autonomous Community, in Spain or across the OECD membership interested in experimenting with deliberative practices. Additional resources in Spanish and in Basque include:

- [OECD Citizen Participation Guidelines in Spanish.](#)
- [OECD Deliberative Wave Report in Spanish.](#)
- [DemocracyNext Assembling the Assembly Guide in Basque.](#)

In the cases of Gipuzkoa and Tolosa, Arantzazulab built an ecosystem of experts that collaborated throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of the processes, including: Deliberativa, Aztiker, Artaziak, Prometea and Basque autonomous community (EHU-UPV) Aktiba and Parte Hartuz research groups. These collaborations are important to build capacities out of government and anchor the deliberative culture at the local level. Networks or communities of practice can contribute to building such ecosystems. Coordinating and identifying the roles amongst partners for the medium and long-run can be helpful to ensure a continuous ecosystem engagement. For example, the [Iberian Network of Deliberation](#) gathers more than 100 individuals and organisation working on deliberative processes from government, academia, and civil society.

To further promote deliberative processes across Spain, consideration could be given to leveraging existing communities of practice, such as the Sectoral Conference on Open Government , and other

initiatives and networks including Red Delib, to expand the impact of experimentation learnings. Further, enhancing information sharing between policymakers on deliberative processes across regions could be supported through national-level efforts to promote Open Governance, including the V Plan on Open Government 2024-2028.

Promoting democratic education and training in schools

Fostering a culture of participation requires not only opportunities for citizens to participate, but also citizens who are ready to take on an active role in collaborating, co-creating, and making informed decisions together with public institutions. A citizenry that is democratically fit has the mandate, skills and competences needed to play an active part in a democratic system. Multiplying opportunities for citizens to exercise those “democratic muscles” through practice can help enhance their democratic fitness and strengthen their skills to express disagreement, find compromise with others, self-mobilise, engage in activism, feel and express empathy, practice active listening, effectively express their opinion, and strengthen verbal self-confidence.

As an example of action, the innovation and capacity building centres – the Berritzeguneak -, funded by the Basque Education department and established in the Basque Autonomous Country, could collaborate with innovation labs like Arantzazulab, schools and other academic partners to develop civic education programs.

Reinforcing the conditions for experimentation in the Basque Country

Arantzazulab consolidated as a space for experimentation and learning node for democratic innovation. Arantzazulab represents a new model of “democracy and governance innovation lab”, at the intersection between the government and the civil society, with a degree of autonomy that allows it to undertake societal transformations and be the connector of diverse networks, a convener of various sensibilities and types of knowledge.

Arantzazulab is a valuable player, well placed to activate democratic innovations and support public authorities in implementing the suggested recommendations of this roadmap. For example, by partnering with the suggested Centre for Public Deliberation on delivering trainings, building guidance and resources, supporting experimentation and pilots in other Municipalities building on the experience from Tolosa and Gipuzkoa. Arantzazulab could also, in collaboration with public institutions, design the new infrastructures and capabilities needed to institutionalise deliberative democracy as well as shape with the relevant stakeholders, the policies and laws required to foster deliberation. All in all, Arantzazulab and other similar organisations could be reinforced and sustained to connect and amplify the efforts taking place across the Basque Country.

Conclusion

Arantzazulab achieved its main objectives with these two experimentations: develop knowledge about deliberative democracy, build up local capacities, and create the conditions to institutionalise public deliberation in the Basque Country. The cases of Tolosa and Gipuzkoa showcase the potential of public deliberation, mainly to inform policymaking, promote social cohesion, and include underrepresented voices in decision-making. These processes showed that elected representatives and institutions in the Basque Country, from both municipal and provincial levels can benefit from the use of deliberation as an opportunity to broaden the representation of usually underrepresented groups in policymaking processes, and as a means to enrich policymaking with informed recommendations.

Both the evaluation report and the OECD point to a series of areas that Basque public authorities should improve in future processes, nevertheless, the OECD considers both the Tolosa and Gipuzkoa processes

as a good practice and source of inspiration and learning for other public authorities in Spain and other OECD countries.

Building on a long-lasting culture of collaboration, existing participatory practices at all levels of governance, Arantzasulab and the innovation ecosystem experience, and the learnings of both processes, the OECD suggests a roadmap to move from experimentation to systemic deliberation in the Basque Country. Recognising that a successful path to institutionalising deliberative processes varies depending on the legislative, cultural, institutional, and administrative context in which they operate, this roadmap and its recommendations can serve as a valuable reference for policymakers in other regions and municipalities in Spain, as well as across OECD countries, to advance towards more permanent and systemic public deliberation.

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Endnotes

¹ Based on the existing cases collected by the OECD Deliberative Democracy Database in 2023.

² See: See: OECD (2020), *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>. And Participo, a digest for the OECD Open Government Unit's area of work on innovative citizen participation: [About Participo – Medium](#).

OECD Public Governance Reviews

Promoting Deliberative Democracy in the Basque Country in Spain

LESSONS FROM THE TOLOSA CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

This report takes stock of the project carried out by the OECD, Arantzazulab, and public authorities in the town of Tolosa and the province of Gipuzkoa (Spain) to experiment with the use of public deliberation. It explores ways to improving deliberative processes in the Basque region, including looking at the link between those who participate in deliberative processes and the broader public, the role of civil servants in ensuring ownership of deliberative processes, the governance structure, or making evaluation and follow-up more systematic. The report also sets out three pathways to promoting and systemising deliberation across all levels of government in the Basque Country: 1) institutionalising deliberative practices; 2) embedding deliberation in public administration; and 3) mainstreaming deliberation both within and outside government.



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