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Challenging radical democracy to go lower: How commoning practices and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region enact radical democracy on the micro- and meso-level



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Abstract

As liberal democracies are struggling with declining public trust and are failing to create adequate solutions to the climate crisis, one alternative is radical democracy that seeks to radicalise the democratic values of pluralism, equality and liberty throughout existing institutions and domains of nations and economies. Yet, the theory of radical democracy has failed to develop practical implications to radicalise democracy. This research has tested if commoning practices enact radical democracy on the micro-level and if collaborative governance enacts radical democracy on the meso-level. A case study of the Gipuzkoa Region, which has a rich history of community practices and has implemented an innovative collaborative governance initiative is used to test the applicability of the theories as supplements for the theory of radical democracy.

The research has found that commoning practices in Gipuzkoa enact radical democracy on the micro-level through lived alternative democratic relationships that constitute alternatives to market and state-driven systems based on horizontal decision-making and non-economic values based on mutual association and an emphasis of the Basque Language. Further, the collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa enact radical democracy through institutions and democratic practices that allow for more pluralism through participation and horizontal mechanisms, even if still coordinated by a vertical authority of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council. However, the institutionalisation of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa, has so far not been able to activate a larger number of citizens which could then allow commoning practices to supplement broader democratic struggles through the formalisation of these activities across larger political organisations.

This research contributes to the theory of radical democracy by confirming the enactment of it on the micro-level through commoning practices and by connecting the concept of collaborative governance as possibility to enact radical democracy on the meso-level. Further, the research emphasises the possible connection of commoning practices to collaborative governance to include community values in governance.

This research illustrates how alternative democratic approaches to liberal democracies at the micro- and meso-levels are already being used or can be introduced to create solutions with stakeholders to address challenges and increase trust between citizens and public institutions in the process. Even though the provided techniques and institutions should not be viewed as panaceas, they demonstrate that complex difficulties are solved not by simplistic solutions, but by rethinking complexity as a benefit for involving various stakeholders.

Key concepts

Radical democracy, commoning practices, collaborative governance, Basque Country, Gipuzkoa

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1 Introduction



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1.1 Research context

Liberal democracies are facing a decline in trust, public engagement, and connection to citizens and their everyday lives while failing to produce solutions for pressing climate crisis issues (Eckersley, 2020). After thirty years of failure to reform capitalistic political and economic structures, alternatives to the globalised capitalistic system and liberal democracies are not considered in discussions (Mouffe, 1995, 2022). As a result, the rising nationalist populism parties opposing climate science and environmentalism will inhibit liberal democratic institutions' ability to address the causes of capitalism and might derail any measure taken for sustainable development (Eckersley, 2020). This emphasises the need to examine the democratic values, foundations, and institutions of liberal democracy to find new ways for public institutions to include diverse knowledge to create solutions that can address the climate crisis (Eckersley, 2020). Simultaneously, it is equally important to consider how to reestablish trust in democracies again to gain support for ecological concerns in a democratically disengaged public to the extent that a majority supports measures taken for sustainable development (Meyer, 2008). One pathway to achieve this is to extend liberal democracies beyond representation towards more direct forms of democracy (Eckersley, 2020).

1.1.1. State of the debate

Radical democracy is an alternative that suggests that liberal democracies need to include as many people in active participation as possible to fulfil its declared principles of pluralism, equality, and liberty (Mouffe, 1995). First introduced by Laclau and Mouffe in 1985, the concept developed Marxist theory to advance fundamental social change, while retaining its critical and progressive aspects (Mouffe & Holdengräber, 1989). Instead of altogether abandoning democracy through a revolution, liberal democracies should extend and disseminate the core democratic values of pluralism, liberty, and equality throughout existing institutions and domains of nations and economies (Howarth & Roussos, 2022). To achieve this dissemination of the core values, also considered as the deepening of democracy, radical democracy considers conflict as imperative. This is because conflict plays the essential role of a perpetually contingent, never-ending, and democratic agonistic activity to question the dominant character of political systems and demonstrate the continual possibility for changes that question the status quo (Menga, 2017). The idea of a perfect consensus and harmonious collective will need to be discarded to achieve pluralism since pluralism implies the perpetuity of conflict and antagonism (Menga, 2017). Instead, politics should aspire to reach different kinds of ‘meta-consensus’ concerning values, beliefs, preferences or discourses in order to safeguard the correct functioning of participatory processes (Dryzak & Niemeyer, 2010). Such a process of democratic radicalisation interacts with the current political structures in an effort to democratically reform them on a deep level. It is a tactic that does not attempt to establish an entirely new political order and a significant break with pluralist liberal democracy but an approach of radical reformism (Mouffe, 2022).

On the micro-level, such pluralistic democratic values are practised through commoning, which are collective activities performed by ordinary people to produce services and goods through the everyday practices of co-production and democratic decision-making grounded on equity (Euler, 2018; Howarth & Roussos, 2022). Commoning practices show that participatory, democratic processes are achievable and sustainable on the micro-level when managing traditional (rivers, forests) or emerging (solar energy, Internet) commons (Euler, 2019). By sustainably managing the commons, new social relationships emerge between current and future generations and human-nature entities (Euler, 2018). Commoning practices can provide spaces for sustainable development that allow learning of new individual and group capacities based on values, enabling engagement beyond capitalism on the micro-level (Euler, 2019). Yet, commoning practices are limited in their ability to address issues on a larger scale due to their confinement to local contexts caused by their dispersion and fragmentation. Therefore, research on commoning practices needs to question how democratic practices may be institutionalised towards meso- and macro-level structural changes could be achieved (Kiouпкиolis, 2023).

Recently, Kioupkiolis (2023) and Howarth and Roussos (2022) have connected the concepts of commoning practices and radical democracy in identifying the challenges that both conceptual ideas face in becoming an alternative to the current capitalistic system. First, the concept of radical democracy needs to adopt a micro-level perspective to understand how democratic practices on an everyday level are relevant to achieve democratic support in broader society. Second, to address the confinement to local contexts that causes the dispersion and fragmentation commoning practices face, research needs to question how commoning practices can be translated to address issues on the meso- to macro-level (Howarth & Roussos, 2022; Kioupkiolis (2023)). Yet, neither of the scholars addresses how democratic practices can be introduced and practices on the meso-level to connect the micro-and macro-level.

1.1.2. [The Case](#)

In the 2010s, Gipuzkoa, one of the Basque autonomous regions, faced increasing mistrust in the regional government and a decline in its historically rich culture of community practices in private life and worker cooperatives' unique work culture (Barandiarán et al., 2023; Renteria-Uriarte & Heras, 2022). Simultaneously, the regional government realised that the resources and knowledge needed to address issues, such as the climate crisis and a fast-ageing society, were beyond what a regional council could address (Olano, 2023). To address these challenges the regional government set out to bring the community values and practices into its public administration through an extensive collaborative governance project, the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Initiative (EEI), which translates to 'Building the Future'. Initiated by the local policymakers, EEI aimed to create discursive transformative politics through collaborative governance (Barandiarán et al., 2023). The EEI seeks to build an economically competitive, socially just, and environmentally green region through collaborative governance to guarantee democratic quality (Barandiarán et al., 2023). Collaborative governance enables dealing with uncertainty in a variety of contexts, including economic, political, social, and environmental challenges. The concept was developed on an understanding of collaborative governance as a method to extend democracy and its capacities to redefine the public space and power to strengthen social capital, creating the essential circumstances for active experimentation and social innovation (Zucker et al., 2022). Through the extensive community practices of the Gipuzkoa Region and the innovative and ambitious EEI, I argue that this case study presents the opportunity to investigate how commoning practices and collaborative governance can enable democratic practices on the micro- and meso-level.

1.1.3. [Research gap](#)

This empirical exploration is highly relevant since, up to now, far too little attention has been paid to how radical democracy can be institutionalised and practised (Muldoon, 2021). This is echoed in the criticism of the abstract and theoretical exploration of the theory on radical democracy and its

shortcoming to provide practical steps for political movements seeking further new forms of democracy. Further critique focuses on the aversion of radical democracy to institutional forms of politics. Focusing on insurgent and fleeting forms of political practice creates a limited strategy for achieving radical democracy (Muldoon, 2021). Empirical exploration of radical democracy has been focussed on social movements (Candón Mena et al., 2018) and first exploration into the possibility of institutionalisation on municipal level (Muldoon, 2021). Furthermore, the literature connecting radical democracy with commoning practices has failed to consider the meso-level (Howarth & Roussos, 2022; Kioupiolis, 2023). This research addressed this gap by investigating the community practices and the collaborative governance approach in the Gipuzkoa Region as a single case study (Espiau & Moreno, 2022). Additionally, this research adopts a new perspective on the EEI allowing investigation of the mentioned research gap by considering the initiative from a radical democracy standpoint.

1.2. Research objective

This research seeks to determine whether and the extent to which commoning practices and collaborative governance can be considered to enact radical democracy on the micro- and meso-level. The objective of the case study is to test whether the theories may supplement the theory of radical democracy introduced by Mouffe and Laclau in 1985 and address the theoretical gap in how radical democracy can be enacted on the micro-and meso-level. A set of hypotheses (see section 2.4.3.) derived from the theories on commoning practices, collaborative governance, and radical democracy will be tested through the data collected on the single case study of the Gipuzkoa Region in the Basque Country.

1.2 Research question and sub-questions

How is radical democracy enacted by linking the micro and meso-level practices through commoning practices and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region?

1. How are commoning practices enacting radical democracy on the micro-level in the Gipuzkoa Region?
2. How do the institutions and democratic praxis of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz initiative enact radical democracy in the Gipuzkoa Region?

1.3 Social and scientific relevance

Scientifically this research informs the gap in the theory of radical democracy to provide practical implementations (Muldoon, 2021) by considering the concepts of commoning practices and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region. It indicates that these approaches can effectively implement radical democracy at the micro and meso-levels, adding to the theoretical understanding of how alternative democratic models can supplement traditional strategies and promote pluralism. The study emphasises the necessity for additional research into integrating community values and the

significance of minority languages in developing communal activities (Howarth & Roussos, 2022; Kioupkiolis, 2023).

Socially, this research highlights the possibilities of alternative democratic ways to address the erosion in public trust and the limitations of traditional institutions in dealing with modern crises (Eckersley, 2020). By demonstrating how commoning practices and collaborative governance can promote more inclusive, participative, and trust-building solutions, the study provides practical ideas for increasing citizen engagement and generating long-term, democratic remedies to difficult societal concerns.

2 Theory

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the relevant concepts and knowledge in the field of radical democracy, collaborative governance, and commoning practices for this research. In the first section (2.1.), the theory of radical democracy is considered; in section (2.2.), the theory of commoning practices is presented, and in the third section (2.3.), collaborative governance is introduced. The connection of the theories follows the introduction to the relevant theories including the conceptual framework and hypotheses are derived in the fourth section (2.4.). In the fifth section, the operationalisations of the theories are discussed, first, the analytical frameworks used for the data collection on commoning practices (2.5.1.) and collaborative governance (2.5.2.) and second, the evaluative framework based on the literature on radical democracy (2.5.3.).

2.1 Radical democracy

Due to the extent of the theoretical exploration of radical democracy, it is necessary to mention that the theoretical background given on the theory in this thesis does by no means claim to be exhaustive.

It aims to give a holistic introduction of the relevant parts for the conducted research. First, the background and theoretical development of radical democracy are discussed. Followed by literature that illustrates the relevant parts of the radical democracy literature regarding its micro-level practices and the institutionalisation.

2.1.1 Background and theoretical development

The founding researchers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) conceptualised radical democracy as a balance between three features. First, a universal, yet dependent, system of rules and institutions that provide the governance of the political system in an accountable manner, i.e., the rule of law, modes of political representation, and delegation. Second, the establishment of popular political agencies that contain the capacity to object dominance and oppression to ensure democratic values, and third the cultivation of a democratic subjectivity that demonstrates a culture of openness and agnostic respect. Further, the research on radical democracy recognizes ‘the political’ as the instituting power of the social, and ‘politics’ as the institutional power to generate ‘true democracy’. Radical democracy research builds on the deconstruction of democracy, which is considered as the encounter between the political and politics, and for the deepening of the democracy these two domains need to be reconnected (Barnett, 2004).

The research on radical democracy aims at constructing democratic alternatives and emphasizes the importance of inclusive processes and substantive rights in social and economic contexts to defend and deepen democratic systems (Howarth & Roussos, 2022; Mouffe & Holdengräber, 1989). To achieve these, radical democratic projects require “the existence of multiplicity, of plurality, and of conflict, and sees in them the *raison d’être* [reason for existence] of politics” (p.42) to create a authority of democratic values through amplification of democratic practices and institutionalisation of social relations (Mouffe & Holdengräber, 1989). Here the consideration of conflict as a never-ending, never-accomplished and thereby permanently contingent - democratic agonistic play articulated by the disclosure of the hegemonic nature of all political order and constant possibility of counter-hegemonic alterations thereof (Menga, 2017), plays an important role in a chieving pluralism the democratic values.

This research uses the definition of radical democracy adopted by Mena et al. (2018) for the analysis of radical democratic practices within grassroots activism. Radical democracy consists of “proposal(s) and practices looking for social cooperation and horizontality (with) the main goal (...) to construct ways of life that aim to satisfy basic needs collectively, bringing in social, political, cultural, and environmental spheres ‘from below’ in a participatory way” (Translated from Calle 2011, p. 1 in Candón Mena et al., 2018).

It is further important to consider that radical democracy, in its aim to deepen democracy and achieve increasingly horizontal, bottom-up practices, can emerge through initiatives that have been started through an institutionalised, top-down process. Similarly, other forms of democracy that aim to bring in more participation into democracy may be used as a strategy to achieve radical democracy, for example deliberative democracy (Candón Mena et al., 2018).

For radical democracy to develop as an alternative to liberal democracies, the research considers sees the winning of the wider society or ‘the people’ as imperative, since they are the ultimate source of power and their opposition to elites that have captured liberal democracies, and the interests of the majority is central (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

2.1.2 [Radical democratic citizenship](#)

Radical democracy scholars have considered the micro-level or grassroots enactment of radical democracy through the concept of radical democratic citizenship (RDC) (Zaunseder et al., 2022). The concept emerged through the consideration of collective grassroots movements such as the Zapatistas (Harvey, 1998) and the ‘Rojava Revolution’ in the Kurdish-majority regions of North Syria (Dirik, 2022). RDC abandons the consideration of citizenship as a spatial definition to a socially constructed and negotiated subjective position (Harvey, 1998). Harvey (1998) derived from Mouffe (1993) that a conceptualisation of RDC allows the recognition of the diversity of how relations of power are

constructed, and exclusion is prevalent in arguments that claim to have found universal concepts, such as humanism or rationalism. Recently, Zaunseider et al. (2022) conceptualized their empirical work on RDC as citizenship “that is inherently open to others, human and non-human, who are excluded from existing forms of democracy, an openness that extends beyond and challenges forms of enclosure and bordering, whether imposed by the state or by capital” (p. 2). The authors further specified how the concept sets the focus on the actual “doing, acting, performing, practising, enacting, engaging, rather than the dualism of rights and duties within a fictitious political community such as the nationstate” (Zaunseider et al., 2022, p. 6). This ‘doing’ at the grassroots level fosters a revolutionary characteristic and is relevant when connecting radical democracy with the concept of commoning practices. The authors emphasise the importance of collective practices that are built on solidarity, even if unpolitical itself, which have always been the foundation for more direct forms of democracy (Zaunseider et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Institutionalisation of radical democracy

One critique point of radical democracy is its “aversion to institutional forms of politics in the writings of radical democrats and the limitations of purely insurgent and transient forms of political practice as an overall strategy for emancipation” (Muldoon, 2021, p. 190). The challenge of institutionalising radical democracy is the need of institutions and practices to create a framework in which pluralism can be negotiated. However, the most ideal pluralism in its notion to include all ideas, opinions, and differences, could never provide a political framework (Mouffe, 1995). Instead, pluralism needs to be able to differentiate between inequalities that exist but should not and differences that do not exist but should (Mouffe, 1995). To fulfil the goals of deepening democratic values, frameworks of institutions and practices need to allow continuous recreation and renegotiation on issues of equality, liberty, and pluralism. A final reconciliation does not exist nor is it desirable, because the tension and conflict are protecting the radical democratic in its recognition of the multiplicity of social logic and the necessity of their articulations (Mouffe, 1995).

Radical democracy may seem fleeting and intangible, but local governmental institutions and practices show possibilities of institutionalising it, for example, in municipalities (Magnusson, 2022). To move the discourse on radical democracy forward, research must go beyond the movement-based, rupture, and insurgent strategies that have dominated the radical left for the past 20 years. Empirical and theoretical inquiries need to examine how the main institutions of society could be meaningfully engaged with and reformed. Recentring processes of institution construction and the development of power inside political parties, labour unions, and workplaces need to adopt a more sustained way to empower democratic institutions (Muldoon, 2021). To fulfil this, any radical democratic project needs to address two implicit dimensions: “a negative critique of the existing order and a positive articulation of alternative political possibilities” (Muldoon, 2021, p. 196). While the theories of radical democracy

have criticised the democratic failures of liberal democracy, greater attention needs to be placed on “inventing new practices and institutions of self-governance that would shift the balance of power between social classes and provide a permanent institutional mechanism for the empowerment of ordinary citizens” (Muldoon, 2021, p. 196). Institutionalisation will be viewed as both the assimilation of new processes into existing institutions and the establishment of new institutions within current systems (Escobar, 2022).

2.2 Commoning practices

2.2.1 Background and theoretical development: the commons

Scientific research on the commons has been developed by scholars since the 1960s, which can be classified into three schools of thought (Becker et al., 2017). The concept of the commons was first introduced by economists for the classification of goods and services based on excludability and rivalry, to identify generic problems of collectively used goods and to identify suitable modes of provision, use, and regulation (Becker et al., 2017). In the 1990s the second school of thought on the commons arose around the work of Elinor Ostrom which revolutionized the concept from a resource of limited excludability to common-property institutions (Gmeiner & Sievers-Glotzbach, 2023; Ostrom, 1990). Based on a database of global empirical examples of communities managing (natural) common pool resources i.e. water or fisheries, the research community, with an institutional-economic focus, collectively created eight design principles for commons governance, as well as a matching framework for institutional study and development. (Ostrom, 1990). Scholars continuously expanded the concept of the natural resources commons to include increasingly diverse goods, such as knowledge and health (Hess, 2008).

Since the early 2000s, the anthropological commons, a new school of thought on the commons, emerged with increasing contributions in recent years (Gmeiner & Sievers-Glotzbach, 2023). When the definition of commons, as “the collective (production and) governance of a resource by a group of people (commoners) through collectively designed rules, norms and practices” (p. 1018), is considered it becomes clear that commons go beyond the commonly governed goods and service extending to the social and power relations connected to the resources themselves (Gmeiner & Sievers-Glotzbach, 2023). Euler (2018) further extends that commons are “shaped by the social practices, the ways of doing things and relating to each other. The social form is what people perceive when they see, feel, and think about that matter” (p.11). From the standpoint of the anthropological commons, they are not just “a resource or place, but rather a set of more-than-human, contingent relations-in-the-making that result in collective practices of production, exchange and living with the world” (Nightingale, 2019, p. 18). This consideration of the commons as an ever-evolving process, instead of the resource of the institutions

managing it, has caused reciprocated critique between the Ostrom and the anthropological commons. From this discourse, the concept of commoning has developed as a common ground (Gmeiner & Sievers-Glotzbach, 2023). Commoning is understood as social practices that reproduce social relations based on the Thinking, doing, and organising relating to decision-making freedoms, ownership, or obligations over tangible and intangible commons via non-commodified ways (Euler, 2018, 2019; Gmeiner & Sievers-Glotzbach, 2023).

2.2.2 [Commoning practices](#)

Commoning practices are increasingly used to create lived alternatives of the commons in the areas of care (Tummers & MacGregor, 2019), digital resources, energy justice (Kaandorp et al., 2024), material infrastructure (Chronopoulou et al., 2024; Varo et al., 2023), housing (Ferreri, 2024; Vandeventer et al., 2024), living spaces created by refugees (Tsavdaroglou & Kaika, 2024), re-municipalisation (Geagea et al., 2023), education (Pechtelidis et al., 2023), food practices (Slavuj Borčić, 2022), and urban gardening (Bergame, 2023).

In this study, commoning practices are the collective acts of peers who willingly collaborate to provide services and things. These methods are founded on the ideals of inclusive co-production, democratic decision-making, and equitable connections. The focus is not on economic gain but on addressing shared needs through cooperation and mutual aid. Key characteristics of commoning include voluntary participation, self-organisation, and an emphasis on non-hierarchical forms of governance (Euler, 2019, 2019; Howarth & Roussos, 2022). Approaching the concept of commoning is like assembling an incomplete mosaic: while the overall picture may become clearer with time, it remains ever evolving. Commoning involves the ongoing mediation and interaction of peers, whose efforts aim at satisfying communal needs. These practices are both the outcome of collective labour and a means of fostering social (re)production (Euler, 2018; Howarth & Roussos, 2022; Renteria-Uriarte & Heras, 2022).

Commoning practices reshape the political relationships of everyday community interactions, exchange, and organisation, allowing for active experimentation with images of an alternative socio-political paradigm that prioritises horizontality and direct democratic processes over-representation (Howarth and Roussos, 2022). Commoning practices also go beyond human-to-human interactions, since they include the relations that individuals have with “plants, animals, infrastructures, and other aspects of the non-human” (p.22). Through this, commoning practices “are not new ways of interacting in the world, but new ways of being in the world” (Nightingale, 2019, p. 22).

Just as capitalistic development has impacted liberal democracies, the continuous individualisation and commodification of everyday life replaces processes of commoning practices through institutions

(Younes, 2024). This creates a culture of individualized success through capital accumulation and consumption, seeing the entrepreneurial individual self as most desirable. The underlying social vision celebrates these values of success and shames those that adhere to them, but fail to achieve them, as not deserving of success (Younes, 2024). Commoning practices build on shared social visions, values and beliefs, and communities' emergence that develop around commons share vulnerabilities and reciprocity. These means that capitalism might obstruct commoning practices, as the values shift towards individual fulfilment. On the other hand, when shared values and beliefs are existent, they allow for the survival of values alternative to the dominant capitalistic values (Younes, 2024). This emphasises how important cultural norms and values are for micro-level democratic action.

2.3 Collaborative governance

The concept collaborative governance is used in this research to test whether it can be considered as an avenue to further the research on how to deepen democracy in radical democracy. Although it is a rich research field on its own, for this research the conceptual basis used for the EEI is considered to ensure the applicability to the case and stay within the scope of the research.

2.3.1 Background and theoretical development

The development of the collaborative governance initiative Etorikizuna Eraikiz (EEI) in the Gipuzkoa Region has been the focus of the recently published book by Barandiarán et al. (2023). The following concept of collaborative governance is used:

“a public agency [of institutions and processes], directly engaging non-state stakeholders, in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative; which entails new structures of governance as opposed to hierarchical organisational decision-making; and that engages across the boundaries of levels of government, and the public, private and civic spheres, in order to achieve common goals and to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished.” (Barandiarán et al., 2023, p.24)

This is the assumed definition for this research as well. The EEI was further built on the understanding of governance itself as the “means of reconciling official politics and society, an intermediate political space of connecting the two fields to try to channel more and more diverse social interests” (Pomares et al., 2023, p. 45). Collaborative governance processes, which succeed when actions prescribed by the model are adopted and implemented, function as mechanisms of institutionalisation that encourage cooperation in uncertain environments. These activities aim to blur the lines between institutions and their settings, creating new spaces for interaction (Pomares et al., 2023). To implement collaborative governance models, democratic institutions must be extended through social networks made up of interested groups and citizens.

The EEI is based on governance concepts that promote collaboration between state and non-state entities via collective, participatory procedures. Ansell (2000) stresses the significance of public-private partnerships and bottom-up governance, in which public institutions and non-state players share decision-making via formal, consensus-driven processes. This collaborative governance paradigm brings together various stakeholders, increasing involvement and strategic programming in public policy execution (Barandiarán, 2022).

Based on the conceptual models, the collaborative governance defined for the EEI has three implications that need to be considered from this research's theoretical background (Barandiarán, 2022). First, the deliberative space must be redefined to allow new actors to be incorporated and power to be shared. To fulfil the goal of collaborative governance to include diverse stakeholders from social, economic, and political backgrounds, the reach of public engagement must be expanded beyond the traditional state structure (Barandiarán, 2022). The traditional leadership role of public institutions needs to shift away from hierarchical authority to coordinating power to allow non-state players to participate to the public arena. This shift in deliberative spaces introduces new power structures, as well as varied capacities and competing perspectives. These processes run the danger of being hijacked or influenced by certain stakeholder groups. To guarantee that collaborative procedures are carried out properly, conversation and agreements must be enabled, and power sharing must be institutionalised rather than engrained in political culture (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Second, to enable a new political culture and institutional restructuring for collaborative governance generation of social capital needs to be a focus (Barandiarán, 2022). The EEI builds upon the social capital definition by Robert Putnam (e.g. 1993) as the networks, rules of reciprocity, and trust embedded in social interactions that drive community development. Collaborative governance generates social capital through the processes that integrate diverse stakeholders. This integration generates new networks, norms, and values that foster the collaboration and social interactions required for co-creation and successful public policy action. Social capital is vital for collaboration because it supports formal and informal institutionalisation based on trust and shared values, promotes coordination, commitment, and information flow, and so increases governance capacities. In essence, social capital promotes community cohesion and growth through increased civic involvement, trust, and organisational capability (Barandiarán, 2022).

Third, co-creation and active experimentation are required to assist social innovation in meeting the numerous requirements that arise in a complex and uncertain environment. Collaborative governance is considered as a way to break away from traditional state-private relationship to ask new questions and find creative ways to address pressing issues Ansell (2000). This new way of governance thus fosters social innovation for solutions and the processes of collaboration as well. This shift allows for the

inclusion of diverse actors in decision-making processes, fostering new mechanisms of participation and deliberation to overcome crises of legitimacy. Ansell & Gash (2008) emphasize that governance, understood as organising collective action through both formal and informal institutionalisation, is integral to social innovation because it reshapes social relations and helps address unmet basic needs.

2.4 Conceptual connections of concepts

This section connects the concepts of radical democracy, commoning practices, and collaborative governance. First, the literature connecting radical democracy and commoning practices are discussed and second collaborative governance is included to bridge the gap between micro- and meso-level. Third, the conceptual framework and the hypotheses are presented.

2.4.1 Connecting radical democracy and commoning practices

To enable radical democratic practices Magnusson (2022) identifies the need to go past the spectacular of great democratic events to the consideration of ‘boring’ everyday life. The author suggests that a focus on how local governments and people tackle problems can give insights since they tend to act democratically in inventive ways. The consideration of everyday democratic practices is important because radical democracy, due to its nature, will not be achieved through a one-time event but will be continuous “efforts to overcome the divide between rulers and ruled, elites and masses, experts and ordinary people” (Magnusson, 2022, p. 77).

In the research on radical democracy the strategy to achieve the deepening of democracy by disseminating the values of pluralism, equality, and liberty is to unite people by linking diverse democratic struggles together to fight against exploitation, domination, and discrimination (Mouffe, 2022). This strategy has been central in the recent scholarly connections of radical democracy to commoning practices, however the role of commoning practices differs in the two connections either as an extension or as a replacement. The connection between radical democracy and commoning practices was first made by Howarth and Rousses (2022) based on empirical exploration in Greece. The authors extended the concept of radical democracy through commoning practices, arguing that the ideas, values, institutions, and infrastructures that were created at the grassroots level within projects display evidence of an incipient radical democracy. Like the concept of radical democratic citizenship, the authors emphasize the importance of everyday life and its innovative modes of co-production, co-creation, and participatory decision-making for the theory of radical democracy (Howarth & Rousses, 2022). The authors suggest commoning practices as a substitute strategy to unite people by linking diverse democratic struggles together. The radical democracy strategy’s focus on party politics and the strategies’ emphasis on the power of the wider society as a necessary condition for change in order to

strengthen democracy are at odds. The authors further argue that the debate on radical democracy neglects the specific values, practices and organisational conditions that are needed as a foundation for the institution and reiteration of radical democracy. As a solution, the perspective of commoning practices is suggested with the reasoning that it allows shifting the focus of radical democracy from the political institutions and electoral politics to the everyday, to understand how micro-level practices create radical democracy (Howarth & Roussos, 2022).

Kioupkiolis (2023) on the other hand argues the strategy to unite diverse struggles and commoning practices can complement each other to further radicalise democracy. The author argues that commoning practices can coordinate their work towards a path of democratic change and reach wider society by integrating themselves into broad-based popular fronts and political projects. Without a larger goal for commoning practices, projects may be successful but will continue to only have local impacts. In turn, the strategy to achieve radical democracy must be based on grassroots engagement and equitable collective involvement to genuinely empower popular majorities and avoid failure by conventional power, the human-centred and anti-elitist logic of creating popular subjects (Kioupkiolis, 2023). While vertical organisations with central leadership pursuing changes in the democratic status quo, such as political parties, may achieve electoral wins and gain state power, without the support of the broader society, lasting change of the status quo and democratic reforms will fail. Kioupkiolis (2023) thus argues that linking the strategy to unite diverse struggles and commoning practices is needed for a project against capitalistic domination to motivate and empower administrations to confront the global forces of capitalistic liberal democracies.

While Kioupkiolis (2023) and Howarth and Roussos (2022) have connected the concepts of commoning practices and radical democracy in contradictory ways, the authors align in identifying the challenges that both radical democracy and commoning practices face in becoming an alternative to the current neoliberal system. First, the concept of radical democracy needs to adapt a micro-level perspective to understand how identifying the need of a micro-level perspective to identify practices on an everyday level that are relevant to deepen democracy. Second, to address the confinement to local contexts causes the dispersion and fragmentation that commoning practices face, research on commoning practices needs to question how a collective agency to address issues on the meso- to macro-level can be addressed (Howarth & Roussos, 2022; Kioupkiolis, 2023).

[2.4.2 Collaborative governance to connect commoning practices and radical democracy](#)

Collaborative governance has the potential to fill the gap between radical democracy and commoning practices through a framework that can radicalise democracy on the meso-level.

Collaborative governance offers a conceptual basis to investigate the deepening of democracy by fostering equality, plurality, and liberty by institutionalising social interactions and blurring the lines between political and social realms (Pomares et al., 2023). Through this blurring barrier between public institutions and stakeholders, it is possible to realise the goal of radicalising democratic values, frameworks of institutions and practices needed to allow continuous recreation and renegotiation of issues of equality, liberty, and pluralism. A final reconciliation does not exist nor is it desirable, because the tension and conflict are protecting the radical democratic in its recognition of the multiplicity of social logics and the necessity of their articulations (Menga, 2017; Mouffe, 1995). Furthermore, Magnusson (2022) underlines that radical democracy will not be achieved through a one-time intervention but through continuous efforts to diminish the barriers between ruled and rulers. Collaborative governance emphasises collective decision-making at all levels of society, with non-state actors, ideally with ordinary individuals participating. Through this collective decision-making, new democratic engagement by promoting shared power and consensus-building procedures are created (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Barandiaran et al., 2023). This connection to the meso-level would further lend credibility to the claim that radical democracy arises from localised, grassroots activities rather than centralised or elite-driven political institutions; thus, the inclusion of an increasing amount of stakeholders on the meso-level is a crucial step to take. Collaborative governance promotes social innovation via active experimentation and co-creation, allowing communities to adapt imaginatively to difficult situations (Ansell and Gash, 2008). This invention is critical to radical democracy, built on pluralism, equality, and communal action. Commoning techniques lay the framework for local innovation, whereas collaborative governance scales and coordinates these efforts at a broader level.

Through institutionalising stakeholder participation in collaborative governance processes, micro-level activities could be linked to broader democratic frameworks. Thus, collaborative governance could possibly allow commoning practices to supplement broader democratic struggles through the formalisation of these activities across larger political organisations (Kioupkiolis, 2023). Collaborative governance enables these local approaches to be institutionalised and coordinated across regions and levels of government. This promotes social capital and networks that connect local commoning activities with broader society transformation, therefore integrating micro-level behaviours into meso- and macro-level democracy (Barandiarán, 2022).

Thus, the conceptual use of collaborative governance bridges the micro-to-macro-level gap by providing an avenue to institutionalise everyday commoning practices, allowing their connection to larger political and social frameworks and introducing radical democracy through introducing increasing pluralism.

2.4.3 Conceptual framework and hypotheses

Based on the connections made between the concepts in 2.4.3, the following conceptual framework was created:

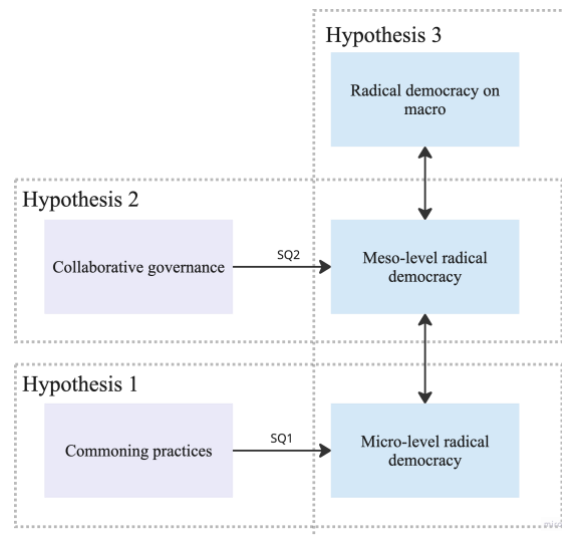


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Hypotheses

The hypotheses were used to test the concepts' relationship and guide the research process. First, an analysis of the existing commoning practices and collaborative governance practices in Gipuzkoa was conducted. The results were evaluated according to the literature on micro- and meso-level radical democracy. To answer the following hypotheses:

H1: If commoning is practised in the Gipuzkoa Region, then radical democracy is enacted on the micro-level of the region.

H2: If collaborative governance is practised and institutionalised in Gipuzkoa, then radical democracy is enacted on the meso-level of the region.

H3: If collaborative governance enacts radical democracy on the meso-level, then collaborative governance can be considered as a theoretical supplement to connect commoning practices and radical democracy.

2.5 Operationalisation of relevant theories

In this section, the concepts of commoning practices (2.5.1) and collaborative governance (2.5.2) are operationalised for an analytical framework, and the concept of radical democracy is operationalised for an evaluative framework (2.5.3).

2.5.1 [Analytical framework for commoning practices](#)

To account for the diversity of commoning practices, the operationalisation was conducted to identify overarching dimensions that commoning practices can entail. In Table 1, dimensions of commoning practices relevant to analysing the community practices in the Gipuzkoa have been compiled Euler (2019) and Howarth and Roussos (2022). The identified dimensions allow the analysis of community practices as commoning practices.

Table 1 Operationalisation of dimensions of commoning practices

Dimensions of Commoning practices	Definition	Operationalisation	Analytical Question
Practices of cooperativism and co-production	Integration of producers and consumers, coproduction for the community while integrating motivations, knowledge, and skills from the community, creating new forms of interacting and coordinating social and economic life, distinct in their different to the capitalistic regime.	Self-organisation of communities for the provision and co-production of goods and local services using collective means of production. Examples include free and open-source knowledge sharing, community-support agricultures, and urban gardening projects.	What are practices that aim at providing and creating services and products within the community?
Practices of needs-satisfaction and voluntariness	Social practices that go beyond the aspect of use of the commons, extending to a contribution to the production for a variety of different reasons, including but not limited to pleasure of creation, sense of purpose, companionship, and social relations.	Unpaid, voluntary activities that are performed by people for the reason of what is considered right and important. For example, volunteering, nursing, education, experimenting, or repairing.	What are practices people do for each other without looking for economic gain?
Practices of collective organisation and decision-making	The practices that centres around the equality of those involved in the practices in defining the rules, setting goals, task allocation ensuring that participants have the freedom of self-determination in their decisions regarding their means of subsistence and well-being.	Horizontal decision-making processes building on equality, reciprocity, and collective responsibility to address joint problems and achieve common interests, through participation processes including those benefitting and impacted from decisions.	How are decisions made within the community?
Practices of (mutual) association and collective solidarity	Practices of self-governance depend on idea of a shared social life and an underlying social vision, based in these values communities may have developed in their own sets of norms and rules to manage their collective resources in a sustainable manner.	In the case of post-2008 crisis Greece this manifested as a collective belief that people need relationships of care and mutual aid (Howarth & Roussos, 2022).	What are underlying shared values and social visions are evident?

Dimensions of Commoning practices	Definition	Operationalisation	Analytical Question
Practices of inclusiveness and mediation	Self-governance encourages direct and inclusive participation in the organisation and decision-making methods of people with different skills and expertise that have time, energy, bring ideas and affection for the project. Additionally, mediation practices take place around important topics such as needs, interests, etc.	Practices that integrate the needs and concerns of those not directly involved. Mediation processes among and between members in the commons projects as well as with what could be considered the non-commons (i.e. capitalist) environment.	Who can participate in the community and the commoning practices?
Practices of protecting community spaces	Protection of spaces that play an important role in human to human and to non-human interactions.	Practices that aim to protect social and natural spaces that are important for communities and are open for everyone.	What are spaces that are important and that communities protect?

2.5.2 [Analytical framework for collaborative governance](#)

The model created for the EEI is based on these conceptions and made to fit the specifics of the Gipuzkoa Region (see 3.2. for the context of the region and EEI). Thus, the collaborative governance model seeks to address Gipuzkoa's issues by offering a framework for target-driven (or purpose-driven) actions that are subject to non-hierarchical decision-making procedures. The framework is based on three priorities: forecasting future issues, collaborating with Gipuzkoa society to address these challenges, and supporting experimentation as a way of problem solving and policy creation. The governance that is aimed for thus encourages a certain type of interaction between collaborating individuals and organisations (regardless of the goal it may seek), between participants who can organise, learn, prototype, propose, and make decisions collectively on a particular topic (a specified purpose) (Pomares et al., 2023).

Since no analytical framework exists for collaborative governance in research so far, an analytical framework was created for this study. The categories and topics for the meso-level have been derived from the existing research on radical democracy and collaborative governance. Furthermore, the framework has found inspiration in the analytical framework by Smessaert and Feola (2024) that has been created to assess the democratic praxis of a collective regarding its institution(s), operation, and symbolic and material productions, and to find out what the political community looks like, how it functions in practice, and what it produces and reproduces. While the authors aim to contribute to the scholarly debate on transitions towards postcapitalist geographies in grassroots collectives, I argue that their analytical framework can also be used for this study for the following three reasons. First, the authors define democratic praxis “as the diversity of political practices that contribute to an infinite, collective, continuous and practical interrogation on how to live together based on the presupposition of equality and the generation of autonomy” (Smessaert & Feola, 2023). This definition aligns with that of radical democracy used in this study, in the negotiation of plurality, liberty and equality through conflict (Mouffe, 1995, 2022). Second, the authors acknowledge the tensions between the aim for horizontalization of democratic praxis and the vertical nature of institutions. The authors scrutinize this in the analysis of collectives' daily politics and organisation to understand the observed practices and mechanisms of power negotiation, more specifically what these negotiations reproduce, and what the political implications of established power configurations are. This further aligns with the intended analysis of commoning practices and how they may be radical democratic practices on the micro level (Smessaert & Feola, 2024).

Therefore, the analytical framework from Smessaert and Feola (2024) will be used to investigate the institutions and democratic praxis created through collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region (see Table 2).

Table 2 Operationalisation of collaborative governance

Collaborative governance	Definition	Operationalisation	Analytical Question
Institutionalisation	To extend democratic practices beyond the governmental sphere and into the wider society, new self-governance practices and institutions must be developed that shift the balance of power between social classes and provide permanent institutional mechanisms for the empowerment of ordinary citizens.	<p>Institutions that are aimed to enable participation to enact the values of equality, plurality, and liberty through conflict and negotiation.</p> <p>Incorporating new processes into existing institutions, as well as creating new institutions within current systems, can lead to the emergence of horizontal governance options.</p>	<p>What institutions have been created to allow more participatory democratic practices?</p> <p>How are decision making structures set up?</p> <p>How are collaborative governance decision-making processes set up?</p> <p>How does collaborative governance create transparency of rules & procedures?</p> <p>How does collaborative governance allow forms of social power to be shared and (re)distributed?</p>
Democratic praxis	“Diverse political practices that contribute to an infinite, collective, continuous and practical interrogation on how to live together based on the presupposition of equality and the generation of autonomy” (Smessaert & Feola, 2023).	Practices that have been established or are already in place to promote the spread of participatory opportunities and the strengthening of democratic basic ideals such as freedom and equality.	<p>How are inclusion and exclusion of participation ensured?</p> <p>How is continued reflexivity about practices and processes ensured?</p> <p>How are decisions corrected or amended?</p> <p>How is belonging to the political community performed and mediated?</p>

2.5.3 [Evaluative framework for radical democracy](#)

The literature on radical democratic citizenship and institutionalisation of radical democracy introduced in section 2.1. has been operationalised to evaluate whether the commoning practices and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa enact radical democracy on the micro and meso-level.

Table 3 Operationalisation of radical democracy on the micro- and meso-level

Level	Concept & sources	Definition	Operationalisation	Evaluation
Micro	Radical Democratic Citizenship (Dirik, 2022; Harvey, 1998; Mouffe, 2010; Zaunseder et al., 2022)	Citizenship that is conceptualized through a common identification with the principles of liberty and equality, instead of national borders.	Citizenship that is based on a constructed 'we', that is intrinsically open to others, human and non-human, who are excluded from present forms of democracy; an openness that stretches beyond and opposes forms of enclosure and boundary whether imposed by the state or by capital and aimed to establish an alliance between interests but to change the existing power relations.	How effective is the current understanding of citizenship in fostering radical democracy? What are the potential risks of exclusion? To what extent are current mechanisms of inclusion effective in achieving true equality within the political community?
Micro	Protection of radical democratic spaces (Dirik, 2022; Harvey, 1998; Mouffe, 2010; Zaunseder et al., 2022)	Protection of the space in which radical democratic citizenship can be practiced, as well as defence against those who would destroy or remove it.	Spaces that are used to practice radical democratic citizenship and actions taken to uphold and defend them.	How do the spaces utilized for radical democratic practices influence the effectiveness of citizenship engagement? Are these spaces accessible and impactful for diverse groups?
Micro	Individual self-liberation as a key aspect of the democratic process (Dirik, 2022)	While the act of fostering in more people the ability to theorise on society does not itself amount to a change, it is important to note that the democratisation of the ability to make statements about society does have meaning for communities who have been alienated from their own history and lacked the ability to speak on their own behalf.	The ability of the community to make statements about their history and political system and ability to participate in discussion about it.	How effectively do current platforms and methods for discussing the political and economic system foster meaningful dialogue and change? What barriers exist to broader participation?

Level	Concept & sources	Definition	Operationalisation	Evaluation
Micro	Culture and art as democratic practices (Dirik, 2022)	Trainings and activities such as cultural associations, art exhibitions, bands, dance and theatre groups with the aim of rendering democratic and political issues more visible in the process of social transformation.	Culture and art practices that allow political practices to be a joyful endeavour.	To what extent does the integration of political aspects in art and culture contribute to social awareness and change?
Micro	Radical worker cooperatives as an alternative to the dominant logics of commodification (Zaunseder, 2022)	Radical worker cooperatives can provide an alternative to the dominant logics of commodification involves reclaiming time and space from the state and capital. Furthermore, the humanness of work, equality at work, and this specific form of workplace democracy are profoundly at odds with the dominant logics of production in capitalism, and thus are constantly under threat as these cooperatives must operate in a marketplace where efficiency and competitiveness take precedence over the values they uphold.	The measures taken by worker cooperatives to democratise the workspace and decisions taken.	To what extent do the practices of worker cooperatives truly enable radical democratic practices in the workplace? What challenges do these cooperatives face in sustaining such practices?
Micro-meso	Promotion of new political culture (Dirik, 2022)	Education, that extends beyond the communication of information, aimed to be a tool to strengthen a society's or community's ability to be a politically literate and acting agent of transformation.	Education measures that are aimed to improve the understanding of political practices in educational system and beyond.	How well does the current approach to teaching political culture prepare individuals for active citizenship? Are there areas where the content could be more relevant or inclusive?

Level	Concept & sources	Definition	Operationalisation	Evaluation
Micro-meso	Confrontation of different ideas, experiences, and interests (Magnusson, 2022)	Democracy in everyday life and local affairs helps establish a culture supportive of democratic institutions. One of the consequences of practising democracy locally should be that it brings people up against the fact that other people have different ideas, experiences, and interests.	The confrontation of different groups of association and opinions in democratic practices on the micro level.	How effectively do current practices foster and encourage the confrontation of different ideas, experiences, and interests? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of these approaches in promoting democratic dialogue?
Micro /Meso	Use of local knowledge (Magnusson, 2022)	Local knowledge is highly relevant, since it is rooted in everyday experience of places, cultures, and histories. Local involvement in decisions when seemed appropriate, could assure rationality, curb corruption and favouritism, protect basic rights.	The structures that are implemented to allow for local knowledge to be included.	How successfully do established political processes incorporate local knowledge into decision-making? Are there instances where this inclusion has significantly impacted policy outcomes?
Meso	New institutions (Escobar, 2022)	‘Institutionalisation’ to cover both the incorporation of new processes into existing institutions as well as the development of new institutions within existing systems.	The newly introduced processes and institutions to improve equality, equity, and liberty.	How effective are the newly introduced institutions and processes in achieving more diverse participation within democratic systems? What areas need improvement to ensure truly representative participation?
Meso	Work culture change of policy makers (Escobar, 2022)	Existing structures for local government are strongly rooted in informal norms and customs. When reformers strive to create new institutional frameworks, they are faced with the equally crucial, but rarely recognised, task of de-institutionalizing old modes of working.	The changes of political culture that have been pursued and the difference r overlap to old practices.	How significant and impactful have the changes in political culture been in shaping contemporary political engagement? What are the key areas where this change has had the most positive or negative effects? How did the difficulties with the old political culture impact political participation and democratic practices? Were these difficulties effectively addressed by the shift to the new political culture, or do some challenges remain?

3 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used to conduct this research. First the research strategy is presented, followed by the research framework as a schematic overview of the conducted research (3.1.). Second, a deeper introduction the case and the context are given (3.2.). Third, the data collection, processing and analysis is presented (3.3.). The fourth section discussion the ethical consideration relevant for the research (3.4.) and the fifth section considers the rigour of this research (3.6.).

3.1 Research strategy: single case study design

This research was conducted using a qualitative single case study design to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). The method was used to link the conceptual research design from the literature on radical democracy, commoning practices, and collaborative governance to community practices and the EEI in the Gipuzkoa Region with the aim of theory testing. The rationale that justifies the single-case study is the unusual case, due to the ambitious and extensive way the EEI is organized. Most collaborative governance projects are only implemented in some part or process in the respective institution, but the Gipuzkoa Region has aimed to transform its whole regional governance (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, n.d.; Yin, 2014). The initiative spans across the region and entails around 900 projects, to consider all the projects is beyond the scope of this research.

The design of a single-case study allowed for the exploration of the connection between the theoretical concepts in practice (Yin, 2014). An interpretivist orientation was adopted for the case study design since the research aimed to present and explain the case from the interviewees’ multiple perspectives and other data sources considered. This included the possibility of challenging the researcher’s original assumptions of the research outcomes (Yin, 2014). This research builds on the qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis and the analysis was conducted following a reflexive thematic analysis (Byrne, 2022). Figure 2 illustrates the research framework in a schematic format.

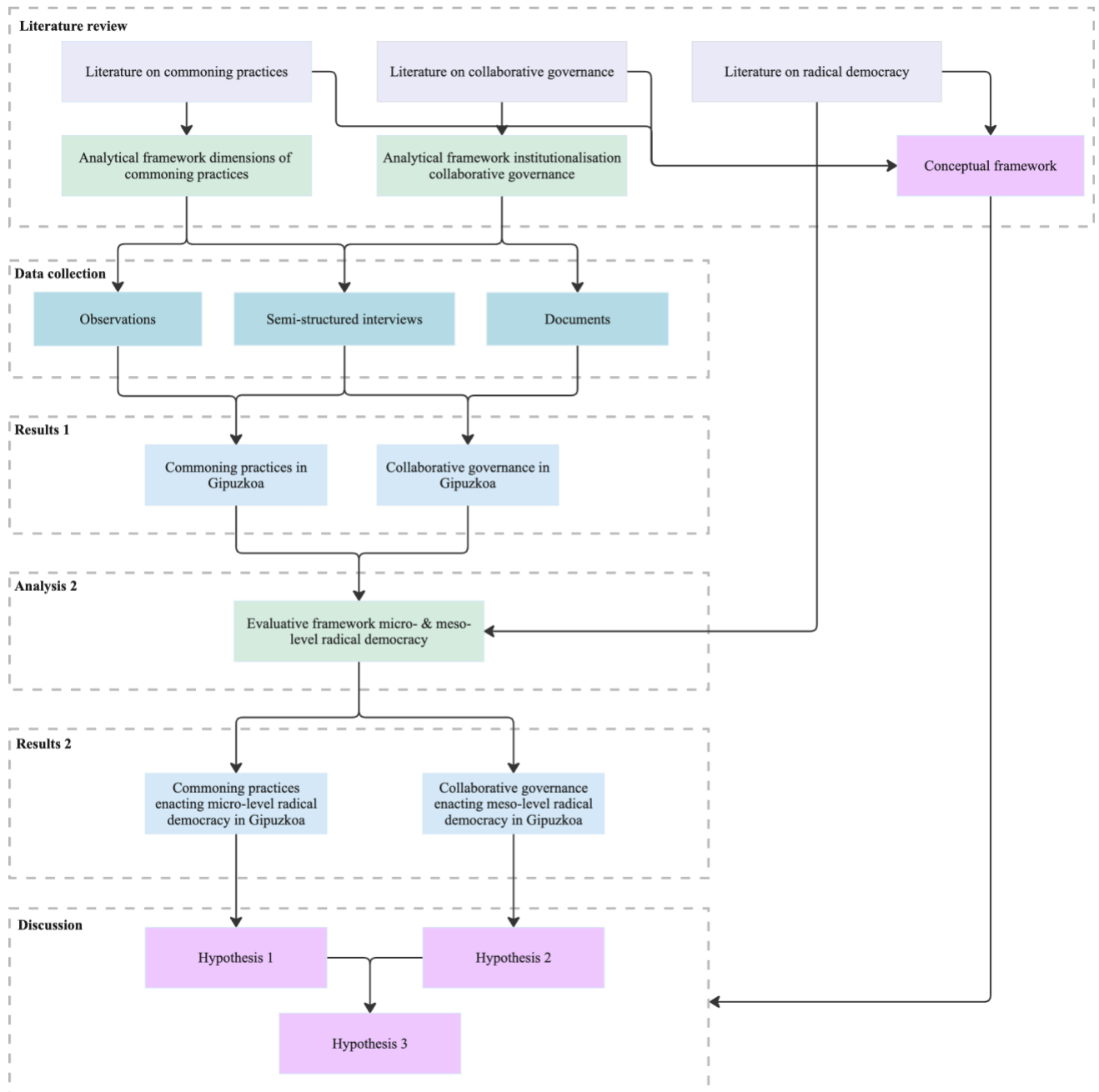


Figure 2 Research Framework

3.2 Case description

To understand the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Initiative started by the Gipuzkoa Regional Council the historic, social, economic, and political context of the region and of the Basque Country as a whole need to be considered, due to its distinct differences in the development to the wider Spanish context (Conversi & Espiau, 2019)

3.2.1 A short history of the development of the Basque Country

Historically, the Basque Country developed as largely independent provinces due to codified statutes. But after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Basque Country was considered as Spanish and Basque cultural and political activities were heavily repressed by the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975). This led to the founding of the domestic terrorist group ETA (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna, translated to 'Homeland and Freedom') in 1959. Until the end of the dictatorship, the ETA and Franco's forces engaged in brutal confrontations with many fatalities (Conversi & Espiau, 2019). Following Francisco Franco's death in 1975, the process of democratisation in Spain moved quickly, with the new constitution passing in 1978 and regional autonomy legislation following shortly after. This resulted in the Basque Autonomous Community government receiving significant powers through its own Statute of Gernika in 1979. The statute endowed the Basque Country "with its own parliament, school system, television channels, social welfare, a police force (...) and (...) a special tax regime and economic agreement" (Conversi & Espiau, 2019, p. 59).

Today, the Basque Country is home to about 3 million people, with approximately 3 million living in Spain and approximately 300,000 in France (Renteria-Urriarte & Heras, 2022). In 2021, 718,000 people were living in Gipuzkoa (Barandiarán et al., 2023). Of these, 8.5% were foreign nationalities and 51.1% were women. Since only about one in five of the population resides in the capital, the distribution of the population is likewise peculiar. The province is home to 88 municipalities, including a sort of middle-tier municipal system made up of medium-sized towns with a population of 10,000 or less that are dispersed over the region and have a distinct local identity. One of the main features of Gipuzkoa is the preservation of territorial balance from all angles (transportation, services, and infrastructure). This, together with its tiny size, suggests that it would be more appropriate to refer to it as a networked city as opposed to a province (Barandiarán et al., 2023).

3.2.2 Political and democratic landscape in Gipuzkoa

The Gipuzkoa Region is run by the Provincial Council (Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa) as its highest executive body. The General Assembly (Juntas Generales) is the territory's legislative body that elects the institution. Both institutions date back to the fourteenth century. The statues of Guernica reinstated the historical institutions in Gipuzkoa and recognised the unique legal position of the Basque provinces. Besides the ordinary competencies granted to provincial councils in Spain, the 1979 Basque Economic Agreement, governs the tax situation between the Spanish State and the Basque provinces: every year an overall quota that is required to pay the state is determined. The amount that is paid is not calculated according to the revenue generated in the Basque Country. Instead, paying for factors outside of its control, like the costs borne by the Spanish state for the armed forces. It should be mentioned that while the state does not deduct any portion of the money received by the Provincial Governments, it also does

not cover the public expenses incurred by the autonomous community, which are its own responsibility. Although this grants the Basque provinces certain freedoms, it also creates a risk since the Basque Country government is responsible for any positive or negative outcomes resulting from the agreement's management (Barandiarán et al., 2023). The competencies of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council include:

- “Public revenue and Finance (full competence)
- Agriculture and forestry (full competence in production matters)
- Road infrastructures (full competence)
- Social policies (semi-full competence)
- Culture (semi-full competence)
- Economic development (shared competence)
- Tourism (shared competence)
- Youth affairs (shared competence)” (Errazquin, 2024)

3.2.3 Social and economic landscape in Gipuzkoa

The phrase ‘Gipuzkoa Model’ has historical significance describing the unique practices of collaboration in institutionalising social, political, and economic life in Gipuzkoa. This idea highlights the region’s strong cultural orientation towards associationism, strong communal relationships, a high level of social capital, and a shared strong sense of identity. The Gipuzkoa Model aspires to promote a balanced area and a cohesive society based on Basque culture and language, Euskara, while also successfully balancing income production with social security (Barandiarán et al., 2023). The culture of solidarity goes beyond the distribution of wealth to an actively involved society with a diverse civil society. About 4,500 associations in Gipuzkoa are performing voluntary work through associations and about 6% of the population (40.000) are involved in some form of volunteer work (Barandiarán et al., 2023).

Economically, the Gipuzkoa Model is built on a strong industrial base, with the industrial sector accounting for 31% of GDP (industry + construction), and 99% of enterprises competing globally as SMEs. Despite its tiny size, Gipuzkoa’s enterprises compete globally, with world-leading companies in industries as diverse as modern mobility and biosciences. The region also has an excellent cooperative model and the world’s largest industrial cooperative organisation (Mondragon Corporation). In 2021, the 782 cooperatives employed almost 10% of the overall workforce (Barandiarán, et al., 2023)

3.2.4 The Etorbizuna Eraikiz initiative (EEI)

The Etorbizuna Eraikiz (EE) initiative is an initiative that emerged from the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa’s commitment to collaborative government as a means of responding to the province’s primary strategic concerns, such as rising extreme nationalism and an ageing society. (Pomares et al., 2023; Zucker et al., 2022). To address these challenges the EEI is

“based on a commitment to a new political culture, founded on collaboration between all types of agents. It invites It invites participation and involvement in politics as a means of avoiding extremism and building bridges with an organised society and a citizenry which, in general, seems to view the political class and public administrations with suspicion.” (Barandiarán et al., 2023, p.30).

The initiative aims to expand new ways of doing politics and managing the public sector through collaborative governance, as well as to ensure the structural and cultural conditions necessary for democratic deliberation and shared action among public, private, and social actors interacting in a specific public policy context (Pomares et al., 2023). The EEI invites residents to participate in the consideration of pertinent public challenges focussing on the three major areas that constitute the basis for continuing to create and improve our current and future well-being: economic, social welfare, and sustainable development (Pomares et al., 2023).

3.3 Data materials, data collection, and data analysis

For this research, nine semi-structured interviews and one structured interview were conducted to study the existent commoning practices and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region. To complement the insights on the commoning practices unstructured observations were conducted during the fieldwork in the Region in April and May 2024. Furthermore, a document analysis was conducted to supplement the interview data on the collaborative governance initiative. This section discusses the data materials, the data collection strategies and the method used to analyse the data.

3.3.1 Data sources and collection

The data collection methods were desk research for the review of documents and fieldwork for data collection through interviews and observations (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

Documents

As a first step to investigate how the collaborative governance has been introduced the desk research an analysis of documents published by the EEI and Gipuzkoa Regional Council was conducted (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). Both primary and secondary sources that address the EEI and the context of the Gipuzkoa region were also considered. For example, a book on the EEI and collaborative governance has recently been published by Leuven University (*Building Collaborative Governance in Times of Uncertainty*, 2023). During the desk research, documents were collected to analyse how the institutions developed, what their activities entail, and who is included in the institutions.

The following selection criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of documents was used. The document...

- ...is available in English
- ...provides insights into the institutions and processes of the EEI
- ...aimed to communicate the EEI towards a broader public

Although parts of the websites of the EEI and institutions were available in English, some documents were only available in Basque or Spanish, they were not included. Furthermore, documents that were offered by interviewees were also considered. Appendix A includes an overview of the analysed documents and their sources.

Interviews

During the fieldwork, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insights both into commoning practices and collaborative governance. Initially, a purposive sampling of relevant individuals involved in either community practices or collaborative governance was planned (Knott et al., 2022). However, during the fieldwork, it became clear that reaching individuals that are involved in community practices was more difficult than expected. Still, through snowball sampling some interviewees that were involved in both collaborative governance and community practices were reached. The following criteria were used for the inclusion or exclusion of respondents. The respondent...

- ...has been involved in the EEI
- ...has been involved in other cooperative governance processes
- ...can give insights in the cultural background of Gipuzkoa
- ...is involved or has knowledge of in community practices or civil society

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to be conducted guided by the interview scheme derived from the analytical framework for commoning practices and collaborative governance (See Appendix C). The choice for semi-structured interview was taken due to its combination of core questions and ability for other relevant themes to come up (Knott et al., 2022). The core questions allowed consistency between different interviews, while ensuring a natural flow of the interviews.

In total nine semi-structured interviews were completed in person or online and one interview was answered in written form. Based on the mentioned criteria I reached out to researchers involved in the EEI before my fieldwork and planned to gain further interviews during my fieldwork through snowballing (Knott et al., 2022). Most interviewees were able to answer questions both about commoning practices and the EEI. In the Table 4 the interviewees, their occupations and the duration of the interviews are listed.

To gain insights into the EEI I first contacted researchers and policymakers who were involved in the published book in 2022 'Building Collaborative Governance in Times of Uncertainty: Pracademic Lessons from the Basque Gipuzkoa Province'. Through this I gained contact to Ainhoa Arrona a researcher at Deusto University, who has been involved in the collaborative governance approaches in Gipuzkoa since 2009. I further interviewed key individuals who have been behind the EEI Xabier Barandiarán and Sebastián Zurutuza, who both were involved in the beginning of EEI as policymakers.

I further interviewed Olatz Errazquin, who is the head of the EEI service for the past two years. To gain further understanding about the collaborative governance I interviewed the managing director and project director of ArantzazuLab Naira Goia and Ione Ardaiz. Through snowballing I further reached the Researcher who has been involved as an internal researcher of the EEI and is now writing his PHD thesis about the EEI. Through these interviews I gained comprehensive insights into the EEI and the collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa. Since, the EEI is further based on the existing community practices that are characteristic for the region, in most interviews they would come naturally and would be discussed as well. Through an interview with an employee of a cultural public institution I further gained comprehensive understanding on the background of the Basque language and culture. Through an interview with Anik Zubizarreta, who is the counsellor for participation and community development work in projects and participative projects in Oñati and a visit to Eltzia I further learned about the extensive community practices. Finally, the written interview of a Civil Society Employee supplemented my information on the community practices in Gipuzkoa. Although, I conducted less interviews than planned the information gained were still sufficient to gain an understanding of the collaborative governance and community practices in Gipuzkoa.

Table 4 Interviewee overview

Interviewee	Main projects/ activities	Interview duration [hh:mm:ss]	Abbreviation for quotations
Xabier Barandiarán	Advisor to the head of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa & one of the main promoters of the EEI	00:41:07	XB
Ainhoa Arrona	Researcher at Orkestra – Basque Institute of Competitiveness, Deusto Foundation Involved in action research processes of EEI since 2009	00:43:40	AA
Ione Ardaiz	Project director of ArantzazuLab	00:56:01	IA
Imanol Galdos Irazabal	Assistant Manager, Donostia Kultura	02:11:12	IGI
Sebastián Zurutuza & Olatz Errazquin	Strategy Director of the Cabinet of the Deputy General of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa & Head of service of Etorkizuna Eraikiz	00:57:49	SZ EQ
Researcher	Researcher at Etorkizuna Eraikiz, in the General Directorate of Strategy of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa	00:39:05	R
Naiara Goia	Managing director of ArantzazuLab	01:03:03	NG
Elena Herrarte	Coordinator of Debagoiena 2030	01:09:42	EL

Anik Zubizarreta	Counsellor for participation and community development work in the area of projects and participative projects	00:26:52	AZ
Civil Society Employee	Operative director of a civil society organisation that works on housing projects	Written answers	CSE

Observations

Unstructured observation of commoning practices was conducted during the fieldwork to understand and interpret cultural behaviour and commoning practices (Mulhall, 2003). On one hand, unstructured observation allowed me to enter the field with ideas of what I am looking for but without a list of practices that must be checked. On the other hand, it allowed me to be both a participant and a complete observer. Unstructured observation further provided the opportunity to collect insights of interactions between groups, while illustrating the whole picture and capturing the context of practices and the influence of the physical environment (Fetters & Rubinstein, 2019; Mulhall, 2003). For documentation identified places of commoning practices will be recorded in a table with the observation times. To identify patterns and elements of the observation, the following information will be observed and documented:

- Use of language (Basque or Spanish)
- Physical arrangements such as the look of actual spaces and environment and use (rituals)
- Structural and organisational features
- People – how they behave, interact, dress, move
- Activities
- Special events (If occurring)

Notes were taken during the observations or as soon as possible after, depending on the observation in a diary of events as they occur chronologically in the field. Fotos were also taken when appropriate. Additionally, a personal reflective diary including both my thoughts about going into the field and being there, and reflections on my own experiences that might influence how I filter what I observe was kept (Mulhall, 2003). During the fieldwork, an iterative process of continuous literature review with observations was conducted to account for all commoning practices that were observed (Fetters & Rubinstein, 2019; Mulhall, 2003).

3.3.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the reflexive thematic analysis will follow the six phases introduced by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To answer the research questions the analysis took part in two rounds using the specialist software NVivo.

First, the data was transcribed using the intelligent verbatim form and consequently I familiarized myself by rereading the transcripts and other collected data to get a thorough overview before starting to analyse individual items (Knott et al., 2022).

The first round of analysis focussed on the interviews and observations to analyse if the community practices can be considered commoning practices, using the analytical framework on commoning practices. I followed an abductive approach to create initial codes, the abductive approach allows the recursive by going back and forth between data and existing theoretical frameworks. This allowed me to connect a deductive inclination from the analytical framework (see analytical frameworks in Table 1) while allowing new categories to emerge and consider if any literature on the commons might be helpful to analyse the data further (Knott et al., 2022; Zapata Campos et al., 2020). After multiple iterative rounds until no new themes emerge, the codes were examined for potential themes of commoning practices, after which all relevant data was collected for the potential themes. The potential themes were reviewed by first checking the relationship among the data items and codes that inform the themes and if they form a coherent pattern. Through this it was made sure that the themes contribute to the answering of the research questions. Second, it was assessed how well the themes represent the data in relation to the research questions. After the themes were reviewed the themes were defined and the presentation of the themes was planned through selection of representing quotes of the themes (Bazeley, 2009). During the production of the research report, it became clear that the presentation of commoning practices did not fit well with simply following the analytical framework and thus a presentation of the practices and consequent relating them to the analytical dimensions became obvious. Visualisation of the results was chosen through a table that shows how the different commoning practices fulfil the dimensions identified in Table 1 (Byrne, 2022). The second round of analysis focussed on the interviews and documents to analyse how collaborative governance is institutionalised and practised in Gipuzkoa. The analysis followed the same steps as outlined above for the first analyse.

The second round of analysis was conducted to evaluate whether commoning practices and collaborative governance constitute radical democracy in the Gipuzkoa Region. To evaluate a situation or event, the assessment needs the availability of a set of criteria on which the evaluation can be based, this was created based on the literature review of radical democracy and provided in section 2.2.3. The steps of the evaluation followed the same steps as explained above, except the data that was considered for the analysis were the codes identified in the first analysis (Chamberlin, 1965; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical standards for the conduction of interviews and observations are of high importance. Researchers must aim to minimize the harm that could come to the research objects and give informed consent, using

real names only if necessary and otherwise maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Interviewees were given the informed consent form before the interviews and sufficient time to read the document (see Appendix E). The document and the processing of data were further explained before each interview. Due to the nature of the research and since most of the interviewees are already publicly communicating about their work interviewees were asked if the use of their full name would be possible, with the intention if it is used, they will be contacted to ensure continuing consent in the manner it will be used. Interviews were recorded using my private devices, after the interview the recordings were saved to my UU-Sharepoint, secured through two-factor authentication. The audio files were transcribed using Microsoft Word, after ensuring that the transcription reflected the interview, the audio files were deleted, and the transcripts were stored in my UU-Sharepoint. If the participants declared that they wanted them deleted, they would be after the successful conclusion of this research.

By making hidden observations, I took on the role of a non-participant, observing the larger picture without taking part in the event (Fetters & Rubinstein, 2019). This brought up certain ethical issues since I was closely observing people's interactions and behaviours in public without their knowledge. It is challenging to obtain informed consent in this study's configuration, which is the conventional technique used in qualitative research. When it comes to ethical issues, the methodology of non-participatory observations of public life has frequently been viewed as less controversial (Petticrew et al., 2007). Observation including observing people and taking pictures without their consent has been determined to be the most effective method for studying objective commoning practices and providing an answer to the research questions. It is ensured that the collected data does not contain any harmful or critical information (Petticrew et al., 2007).

Throughout the research, I continuously developed my ethical sensitivity by reading methodological and field-specific texts on interviews and ethics and discussing any ethical issues I might have with my supervisor (Knott et al., 2022).

3.5 Rigour of research

To ensure the rigour of this research, the criteria for judging the quality of research designs suggested by Yin (2014) is used. First, to ensure the external validity of the research design I built the single-case study design upon the theory of radical democracy, commoning practices and collaborative governance. Second, during the data collection phase, it is important to construct validity using correct operational measures for the studied concepts. The analytical and evaluative frameworks created for operationalising the concepts have been built upon peer-reviewed literature to ensure validity. I used multiple sources of evidence and established a chain of evidence. For reliability, I documented my case study data collection, to demonstrate that the study can be repeated with the same results. Third, for

internal validity during the data analysis phase, I established a causal relationship, in which certain conditions are assumed to lead to other conditions. The limitations of this research are further discussed in Chapter 5.

4 Results

This chapter presents the empirical findings of this research. The chapter is divided into three parts: first, the commoning practices in the Gipuzkoa Region are illustrated (4.1). Second, the collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region is presented (4.2), and third, the evaluation of commoning practices and collaborative governance according to the evaluative framework for radical democracy is given (4.3). The results are subsequently used to conclude each research sub-question, which will be presented in the Discussion Chapter (5), offering a more in-depth analysis of the results presented here.

4.1 Commoning practices in the Gipuzkoa Region

The historical Basque community practices and engagement have been introduced in the Case Description in Section 3.2. The following section will describe the observed and mentioned community practices and determine whether they could be considered as commoning practices. While community practices within the Gipuzkoa Region are not understood as commoning practices by those involved in them, their actions may still be considered as such (Howarth & Roussos, 2022). The structure of this section is organized according to the identified commoning practices. These are first described and are then related to the dimensions within commoning practices that were used for the data collection and analytical framework (see 2.5.1).

4.1.1 Participation in social cooperatives and associations

The extensive participation within social cooperatives and associations in Gipuzkoa is characteristic of the region and many commoning practices take place through it. The following overview provided by the interviewed Civil Society Employee emphasizes their heterogeneity:

“Associations and social movements work in the different areas:

- Promotion of the Basque language (language of Euskal Herria). Associations such as AEK, initiatives such as KORRIKA, ...
- Culture (Musical collectives, Bertsozale elkarte, Basque dances, ...)
- Feminist groups
- Leisure (leisure groups for boys and girls, camps or camping trips...)
- Sports (sports clubs, herri kirolak - translation: Sports of the people, mountain clubs...)
- Festivities commissions
- Gastronomic associations
- Gaztetxes (squads...)
- Parents’ associations
- Environmental associations
- Pensioners’ associations
- Etc.”
- Participate as volunteers in different initiatives or projects (development cooperation, help to refugees, help to homeless people...)” (CSE).

Both Elena Herrarte and Ione Ardaiz illustrate how normal it is to be part not just of one but of multiple associations:

“I guess that translates into if you go to small towns, there’s a lot of associations. For instance, I’m from a very small town, 800 people, and we have a women’s association and a young people’s association. We have, like, cyclists, football. We have a swimming pool association. We have, we have plenty and. All of us are involved in one or the other, so people are so like in the advisory board of one or in the organising of another one. So, people are very active in that sense.” (IA).

Furthermore, Ione Ardaiz did not consider these levels of involvement as something special, which became evident when I pointed out the difference in engagement in associations and cooperatives compared to the German village I am from, which is a similar size to the town Ione Ardaiz is from. Elena Herrarte extended that “any of us we are collaborating in different social dynamics. It’s something cultural that is something local organisational too” (EH). This normalisation especially in the past was also mentioned by Imanol Galdos Irazabal, who would iterate how much his parents would be involved not just in the setting up of an Ikastola (Basque Language School) when he was young in the 1960s and 70s, but “in my time, my parents both were very involved in everything. In this school, in politics, in culture” (IGI). This normalisation of involvement in associations and cooperations that are aimed at providing something to the community, without wanting financial compensation, can thus be considered as commoning practices.

While some commoning practices within associations fulfil the dimension of cooperative provision of each other services for free, it becomes clear how most commoning practices done in associations and cooperatives are aimed towards needs satisfaction beyond the commons. These activities that people engage in just because they are considered as right and important show in different ways. For example, “there are feminist organisations (Bilgune Feminista, Emagin...) that raise awareness and fight for a fairer and more equitable organisation of car” (Civil Society Employee). Anik Zubizarreta mentions how many associations in Eltzia pursue very different activities and provide services for each other without looking for financial gain:

“We have also bodyeltzia, they do activities related with the body. It can be dancing the local dance group has here its place. So, every day, you know, 200 children come here to learn dancing. So, they have quite a like a bigger space so. Body Eltzia dancer, then belly dance or gymnastics or yoga or things related with body then they are swarming elsewhere. Creative Eltzia where they do, maybe, come to read a book or a painting group, or here in the Basque Country there is a there is a traditional singing called Bertola Lisa. That’s how it is says the poetry that you say in the moment and (...) improvise. So, they do in the creative.” (AZ)

From the interview with Anik Zubizarreta, the insights that many associations and cooperatives use bars as their meeting place was gained, which gave context to the observations of large groups of people

meeting on the weekend in bars. Especially in the smaller towns the people in the public squares would engage openly with each other and all seemed to know each other. Unfortunately, my fieldwork did not yield insights into the internal organisation of associations and cooperatives and their openness, due to a lack of insights. However, Elena Herrarte gives insights about the collaborative aspects within friend groups in everyday life:

“Here *kuadrilla* is a friend group and it’s like not very close. But the *kuadrilla* idea is we are the people that we go together on holiday, and we work, go out together on Saturday night. It’s like a very strong relation or network. So here we the type of life is. We are very close to each other. And that that number of I think that illustrates. How close our continuous lives (are), you know. How do I look after my children? Very close to all of my parents, my friends, you can ask any of my friends. Can you take my son after school? Because it’s very like that, you know. Yeah. In smaller *kuadrilla* things, we also collaborate a lot, because it’s the way we live here.” (EH).

The deep establishment of collaborative values in everyday life is evident and stresses the aspects of commoning practices that build on providing services for each other voluntarily. The identified mutual association and collective solidarity further has a historical background: *Auzolan*.

Auzolan

The historical reason for developing the culture of associations and cooperatives, is the concept of *Auzolan*. Ione Ardaiz mentioned *Auzolan* when asked about the unique democratic and participatory Basque culture often talked about in research: “It’s a Basque Word: *Auzolan*. So, this is a word that we use for community work, and it has been a way in traditional times in the towns when they had it too when they had to do some work preparation work or like heavy work in a house or it was a way for them to organize local efforts” (IA). This emphasises the historical need for collaboration due to the remoteness of the region, Ione Ardaiz sees *Auzolan* as the foundation for the culture of associations and cooperatives today. *Auzolan* also continues to exist as a practice to invest community hours to gain tax reductions. As described by Ione Ardaiz: “If you contribute without with this type of community hours to the to the town you can reduce your taxes.” (IA). Although *Auzolan* does not continue to exist in its original form, the underlying culture of collaboration continues to do so. The comment by the Researcher highlights that people in the Gipuzkoa Region still rely upon each other:

“And there is a community-based meaning more conservative or traditionalist or tradition-related approach to democracy, which has a lot to do with this principle of: I do what I can do. If I cannot do it, maybe my family can help me with it. If I cannot do it with my family, then maybe the neighbourhood can help me. So, this bottom-up perspective is conservative but culturally here makes a lot of sense” (R)

Auzolan in its historical iteration fulfils its cooperative and co-productive manner fulfilment of needs without the expectation of financial compensation. This has changed with the financial compensation of *Auzolan* today, through tax reductions. The notion that from a necessity for collaboration, a culture

was created that continues to exist today as the foundation for the existing commoning practices is very important.

4.1.2 [Commoning practices related to the Basque Language](#)

Throughout the fieldwork the significance of the Basque Language and the associated commoning practices in its reestablishment and for its continuation were evident.

[Shared social life and an underlying social vision of the Basque language](#)

One interview that gave a detailed perspective on the Basque Language and its re-establishment since the Franco dictatorship, when Basque culture was repressed, was with Imanol Galdos Irazabal. Being in his early sixties he first learned Basque when his parents and other parents started an illegal school for Basque during the dictatorship: an Ikastola. He describes the beginnings of the Basque language reestablishment:

“So, in the 60s, it was the renaissance of the Basque, you know, cultural movement. So, I was part of this movement. That’s why my parents founded with few parents in my hometown. I not talking only about my hometown. It was a movement all over. But I’m talking personally about my personal experience. We were only 9 students in my Ikastola, the Basque school. It means not everyone in my hometown was part of this I am extremely, I am extremely proud of being part of this movement. It were really hard times. Not for us, for my parents. Because at that time they were really. No, we were only able to, you know, to do our school career that time, 1966. I mean the hard times of Franco; we didn’t really have books in Basque. We didn’t really have anything.” (IGI)

Even after the end of the Franco Dictatorship and the regaining of the semi-autonomy of the Basque regions, Imanol Galdos Irazabal emphasizes how important normal people were in the re-establishment and not how a top-down initiative was the main driver:

“We didn’t have Basque institutions; they were normal people like my parents. They were the work of normal people, people who were not involved in institutions because we didn’t have any institution. So, then the more how we recuperate, for example, Basque language is the best example of the strongest of the Basque Society. Without this commitment of Basque people. The Basque people wouldn’t be the same country, but as we had I said before and narrative a very strong narrative” (IGI)

Imanol Galdos Irazabal further emphasized how far the development of the Basque language has come, with Gipuzkoa being the Basque Region with the highest percentage of Basque-speaking people in the Basque Country:

“You can study the whole degree in medicine, engineering, and business in Basque. In not many countries, (...) like the Basque country, has been able to recuperate on language that 60 years ago was completely dead. For that you need a very strong society, you have to be very well. It’s not

about institutions. It's not only about government, it's about citizens. It's about social, community.”
(IGI)

Elena Herrarte iterates the extent of the re-establishment of the Basque Language by mentioning that except for schools in larger cities both public and cooperatively run schools are in Basque:

“Here in the in the Debagoiena there is not, there is no school that works in Spanish. All the schools are working in Basque. If you go to Bilbao or San Sebastian, there are some schools there. We don't have, we have some hours to learn Spanish and English, but the schools are just in Basque.” (EH)

Throughout the interview with Imanol Galdos Irazabal, it was evident, that for him the Basque language acted as a social vision that united the Basque people to rebuild their culture and country after the dictatorship.

This consideration of the Basque language as something that was used to make sense of relationships between people and the extensive cooperative practices pursued for its re-establishment make clear its value for the Region of Gipuzkoa. Another way in which Basque Language is influencing relationships was mentioned by Ione Ardaiz when talking about the decision to work as much in Basque for the EEI as possible:

“In Basque and it has been another decision as well because something that people were like when we talked to different people, they were requesting is that there's plenty of spaces to refresh and talk in Spanish. There' few or none spaces to go deeper into some of these topics in Basque. So, people like you connect differently when you are talking in the language. Like if you want to talk language you connect differently. Like I've noticed it like I've been working in English for many years and now that I'm back in the Basque region working in Basque, some of the concepts that I was working on abroad so like have a different meaning. You go deeper.” (Ione Ardaiz).

This suggestion that the use of Basque Language allows Basque speakers to go deeper into topics and concepts that are talked about is important when considering how commoning practices are changed by Basque Language. This speaks to the aspects of mutual association when considering commoning practices in the Basque Country.

[Risk of Basque Language loss](#)

Although the importance of the Basque language as a social vision and narrative was highlighted in the interviews and now that the Basque language is established again and spoken by a large portion of the people. Imanol Galdos Irazabal kept repeating how the Basque Country and Gipuzkoa has lost its vision and needs a new narrative. He believes the meaning of the Basque language and Basque nationalism has changed from his generation to the generation of his children, for which the speaking of Basque and considering themselves as Basque is normality and not something they had to take risks and put in effort for it to be part of their lives again:

“Now, In 21st century, also in the Basque Century, definitely my children. That’s a group of some of my children. Both speak Basque differently. But they have a different perspective of life. You know different perspective approach to the Basque Country for them to be Basque is something natural is something when you. Born in a wealthy family. And you have everything you know, you have everything, and you don’t have to fight to get to you know when everything is easy in terms of my children, many new young generations, that was that they have learned Basque normally” (IGI)

In our interview, Imanol Galdos Irazabal referred to immigrants who have moved to his hometown Oñati and have learned Basque to highlight the importance of foreign people learning Basque, because the demographic development in the Basque Country is only at 1.1 children born per woman and he sees the danger of Basque speaking people dying out:

“If we want to survive, as a country we need people, right? This is very obvious. (...) Like, how do you see the future of Basque speakers or Basque language? I always say the same we need speakers because if everyone is gone. It’s very kind of stupid, but it’s true. So it’s the same. How do you see the future of the Basque? It’s very obvious. We need people and the Basque countries birth rate is 1.1. There’s no future, so then. The second question is: we need new Basque people. My personal opinion is very clear. I have no doubt. Latin America, we need new imnts differently than people were: “Yeah, that was the future of Basque culture of Basque language.” It has to be. I know in my hometown. Yeah, a lot of Latin Americans. A lot. And they speak Basque they have learned Basque.” (IGI)

He further sees the risk of losing Basque to pragmatism since Spanish seems to be more effective or more people speak it. IGI underlines that even though the Basque Language is not the most efficient when pragmatism has the highest order, values get lost, which also speaks to the importance of Basque for shared values.

The continuous existence of the Basque Language is also the goal of language cooperatives such as in Debagoiena where they organize a participatory space that has weekly meetings, manage events, and create and disseminate news and magazines in Basque (Elena Herrarte). Eltzia in Oñati has a “Welcome to our neighbourhood”- association that is an open space for everyone who wants to learn the Basque language. Especially for immigrants who move to the town to work at the large worker cooperatives Ulma and Faro (see picture 2). This emphasises how the Basque Language can also be seen as a practice of openness and inclusiveness of new people and does not exclude those who are not from the region.



Picture 1 'Welcome to our neighbourhood' Association in Eltzia (4th of May 2024)

Korrika

One way in which commoning practices combine the Basque Language, practices of mutual association, collective solidarity and voluntaryism is the Korrika ('Running' in Basque). The Korrika is a crowd-funded running event, that aims to support the Basque Language to ensure the language does not disappear. Sometimes called the biggest language festival in the world (Arbelaitz, n.d.) IGI further sees this as an example of Auzolan today:

“With this, torch and torch started is running on the Basque, country and the French Basque country. Thousands of people for two weeks and it's thousands of people in from Korrika in Google. (...) You can criticize great example, or I will see so. So, in some ways. This is, yeah, so this is Auzolan. Friends of mine from all over the World this, will they say you are as a country. Very unique. There's no race like this. And the goal is: To keep going with the Basque Language, right in areas where people don't think that Basque is important. But this race? Includes the whole Basque Country, so it's probably one of our strongest instruments for Basque identity and language. Main strongest instrument as identity element so to not to be different ideas.” (Imanol Galdos Irazabal)

During the Korrika the organizers insert a secret message into a baton passed through thousands of hands during 11 days and 10 nights over 2300 kilometres through the Basque Regions in France and Spain and read at the end (Arbelaitz, n.d.). The Korrika is supported by many organisations and local events are organized when it passes through towns and cities.

Ikastolas - Cooperative schools for the Basque Language:

Ikastolas are schools that themselves are cooperatively run by teachers and parents and can be considered as cooperative and coproduced commoning practices of education. Cooperative schools have great potential in supporting the learning and actual use of minority languages such as Basque, outside of the educational setting (Ciriza, 2019). This is because the Gipuzkoa Region already has a high percentage of Basque speakers and observations in smaller towns and villages showed that Basque was the primary language in every life. Cooperative schools in Gipuzkoa might have started as such but are likely not continued primarily for language purposes. Elena Herrarte describes her engagement in the school as the following:

“I think that people still connect easily or quite easily with collaboration spaces, because here, for example, the schools in the region, one of the large public schools, they become public schools, but cooperative schools also are very strong. That means that, for example, I am a mother of three children. So, I am part of the cooperative, so I participate in the management of the cooperative. There are like governance bodies that and here is like very natural and those kinds of things are very natural. Yes. If you ask here in the street. For example, I am part of the school.” (EH)

Anik Zubizarreta further explains that the involvement of parents goes beyond mere participation to their involvement as necessary for the school to function properly in her hometown of Oñati “With our parents we have an Ikastola, that’s a cooperative school. So, every family is part of the school, and they have to work together to run the school” (AZ). Reintroducing the Basque Language as the primary language for schools and increasing availability for higher level education is seen as one way to ensure that the Basque Language does not die out due to efficiency reasons.

The extensive commoning practices connected to the Basque Language fulfil the different dimensions from the analytical framework and emphasise the language’s importance for the Gipuzkoa region and its citizens.

4.1.3 Joint commoning practices of civil society and local institutions

Another way commoning is practised is through the close cooperation between municipalities and civil society on local levels to provide services together was visible. The four examples presented in this paragraph are the co-creation and maintenance of a space for associations in Oñati, the cooperation in creating new housing opportunities, local care systems, and Donostia Kultura.

Eltzia

The first example of shared practices of cooperativism and cooperation between municipalities and civil society is ELTZIA (see picture 2). Located in Oñati, a town of 11.000 people in the mountainous area

of Gipuzkoa, ELTZIA is a place for social associations and cooperatives developed from a discarded university building through a municipal initiative (Rojas et al., 2020). This example illustrates a co-creation process between the municipality and its citizens to decide what the building would be used for and how it would be organised.

The co-creation process started with the intention of the municipality to go beyond just being asked for money and giving money to the initiative:

“In 2013, because we (the municipality) had, this huge building that was empty because before, before it was faculty of Mondragon Universitara and then they moved. So, we had this place empty and we want it as a Council do something with this, but something with another, totally different view and a totally different way of doing things, our usual things. (...) This (building) is huge. So, we didn't want to work in a usual form of: 'I ask you and you give me'. This, the usual form working in institutions and in councils there we see that there is a need, and we make something to cover this need but without counting on the citizenship or without being with them because we have the resources and we put the resources to cover anything. And here we wanted to do something different.” (AZ)

The participatory process to determine what would happen with the building was the first time within the municipality to break out of the classical relationship with civil society:

“So, in 2013 they started with a participative process that lasted more than a year. The most important thing was that ELTZIA was designed through a participatory process it was an aim to want to build together. Everyone that came here came with the same (intention): 'We want to work on and to give our time to see about what Eltzia will be and how it will work'. This was an initial agreement. And the aim of the process was to develop, to share and to involve local associations and groups, or in the individuals in something that was more than an individual thing. So, the aim of the process was not only to think about what Eltzia would be, but also to build a way or to be together. So that was a very important starting point that has developed to what the Eltzia is today, so. I think this is important to say because it's the main basis of the Eltzia.” (AZ)

The co-creation process then led to ELTZIA and the establishment of the volunteer position of counsellor for participation and community development work in the area of projects and participative projects, currently held by Anik Zubizarreta. Initially, all the people from the associations that took part in the participatory process went on to be part of ELTZIA:

“Eltzia is a living project so, it has different faces. And it’s true that all the people that took part in this participative process in the at the beginning started in Eltzia. With a big, we built this sentiment and idea.” (AZ)



Picture 2 ELTZIA, Oñati (4th May 2024)

ELTZIA is financed through the municipality which gives the committee seed funding to use according to their decision and the municipality ensures that maintenance works are done at Eltzia. The principles that guide Eltzia, are that it has to be open to everyone and all associations that those participating in the upkeep of the place, i.e. through the cleaning schedule, and that all associations are non-profit. Rojas et al. (2020) have researched Eltzia and consider it as an example of “democratisation of cultural policy, through the involvement of different local cultural actors” (p. 126), emphasising how much this project lives from the co-creation and is thus an example of commoning practices. In addition, Anik Zubizarreta also highlights that Eltzia is inherently open for everyone to enter and participate, which also is an important aspect for commoning practices:

“Eltzia is supposed to be a place, that is for people from Eltzia that are part of Eltzia. Another thing is that Associations can enter the Eltzia whatever. And Eltzia has a committee that that meets, I think once a month and if there is a, if there is one association that wants to enter, they answer it. If they see it’s OK. They enter and they leave so, and council doesn’t take part in this in this.” (Anik Zubizarreta)

Although Eltzia is open for everybody to join and use the common space, it has positively affected the district community, especially elderly people with a space to meet. Anik Zubizarreta addresses that people are not taking the step to use it if they are not part of a cooperative or association:

“Eltzia is to be an open project, an open to their citizenship. But it’s true that if you are not part of Eltzia people, we don’t know why, but people hardly pass from the bar next door to here. You know this this it’s true that there is a bar for everyone, of course. And there is a sliding door.” (AZ)

She mentioned that the COVID years have been derogatory for the public participation in Eltzia, and it is taking time to rebuild relationships. The committee running Eltzia has now chosen to hire a person to foster a connection between associations in Eltzia and the broader society in Oñati to help the community rebuild its culture. Eltzia also is an example of decision processes in which the relationship between the municipality and civil society goes beyond simply money provision:

“I think they change the group. Once a year, or once in two years or something like that. So, we have a constant Relation with them and two times a year. We have meetings with them and if it is needed like one year ago that we started with this new dynamic we met much more than once a week or with so we can we are in touch constantly. So yeah, if there is an especial need, they write. Because one of the different things of the Eltzia that it is based on confidence and trust on a very close relation. So, they feel that we are. That we are very, very close to them, so they. Our relation is like very a very civil relationship. Officially we have two or three meetings apart from the informal meetings or informal WhatsApp messages that are more constant.” (AZ)

This decision-making process highlights how the cooperation between the municipality and civil society can create horizontal decision-making processes together to follow collective responsibility for a project.

Housing

The second example of cooperative and co-creation practices between municipalities and civil society are the housing projects that the Civil Society Employee is involved in as the development director of a civil society organisation that “currently promotes and manages two publicly owned community housing units.” (CSE). Due to touristification and gentrification, Gipuzkoa’s housing prices have increased significantly, which affects the ability of young people to emancipate from their parents by moving out. Even in towns this becomes increasingly difficult. The Civil Society Employee gives two examples that show how the municipality, with the involvement of the organisation, is providing new housing models through participatory processes:

“In the case of the Errenteria project, a participatory process was carried out with the young people of the town (it was called Marea Gora and was promoted by the Hiritik at! cooperative). In the process, many young people communicated the difficulties they had in emancipating themselves due to the state of the housing market in Errenteria and Gipuzkoa. Taking advantage of the fact that

the town council had a block of underused housing, the community housing project for the emancipation of young people was set up. Once the city council decided to promote the project, a second participatory process was developed to define how the community housing should function and be organised (starting from the organisation of the spaces, maximum length of stay, general rules, how to guarantee and promote community life...).” (CSE)

This participatory process led to the establishment of housing opportunities for young people that go beyond the tenant–landlord relationship, by ensuring that the young people are involved in the upkeep of the property and invest time in community practices themselves, as described by:

“This is a community project that aims to facilitate the emancipation of young people. It offers a room for rent in a shared dwelling with other young people who are committed to developing actions aimed at the community, encouraging coexistence and cooperation. This housing, in which the involvement of each of the 26 people who live in it is essential, is characterised by its functioning based on self-management and assembly-based decision-making. In the same way, all the people who live there are committed to participate in the tasks that may arise from living together (cleaning the stairs, use of the kitchen, coordination with the Town Hall, etc...). A monthly rent is established based on income and it is necessary for each participant to carry out community work of at least 9 hours per month in a non-profit association, as well as the commitment, as a community, to carry out 4 actions per year aimed at the community of Errenteria”. (Civil Society Employee)

A similar process was conducted in the town of Usurbil, that created: “an intergenerational community housing that has been launched in 2024. In this case, the people who live in the housing are young people in need of emancipation and elderly people in a situation of loneliness or social fragility. The aim is to respond to both needs together.” (CSE)

These projects are examples of how commoning practices that provide new housing models through co-creation processes can be established through municipalities and civil society working together. Through the co-creation process it is also ensured that the housing models are used by those involved in the process.

Local care ecosystems

For a third example, the Civil Society Employee talked about local care ecosystems as another example of the cooperation between the local public and community members to address the increasing care responsibilities of an aging society. They describe the extensive collaboration in the local care ecosystems:

“In local care ecosystems, the community plays an active role. Although leadership is public, community awareness and activation are promoted through: Participation in the co-design of new care policies, participation in diagnosis (community perspective, participation in the identification

of new care needs) and activation of citizens to promote community care relationships (e.g. support/accompany in the care of an elderly neighbour who lives alone).” (Civil Society Employee)

The public-private cooperation and co-creation go further by not only providing basic care needs, but creating community work teams to ensure the provision of people with care needs that they are integrated in society and the care is continuously improved:

“In some municipalities, community work teams are created to guarantee the community’s vision in local care ecosystems, and on some occasions (with the help of professionals from third social sector organisations) they promote community dynamics (bingo, community walks, meeting points for socialising, etc.) that help to care for the people who have the greatest care needs.” (CSE)

This aim for inclusion was observable during the field work, in the availability of barrier free cafés and toilets in old buildings and groups that take people with mental and physical disabilities to the beach in Donostia-San Sebastián. When asked about it in the interview Anik Zubizarreta emphasised how much still needs to be done and gave the example that Eltzia is getting a second lift to ensure people with limited mobility can reach every floor of the building.

Donostia Kultura

The previous examples emphasize how the collaboration between municipalities and civil society can be positive: Imanol Galdos Irazabal gave a contradictory example where strong public institutions might hinder bottom-up community practices. As an employee of Donostia Kultura, the culture department of the City of Donostia-San Sebastián, he sees the risk that if institutions are too strong, civil society has no incentive to organize themselves. The example that he used was that a new law was being discussed which would allow for small bars to play music late at night. Imanol Galdos Irazabal describes the discussion with his colleagues about the possibility as follows:

“In this table with my colleagues, some people who. Are very: ‘why?’. Some people don’t understand that well. They say: ‘oh, it’s good. We don’t need this kind of music in the bars and why?’ Because somebody’s college, they work in one, for example, as the director of the music program in the city. He says that these small spaces are for small live music. They’re like the competitors (of the music department).” (IGI)

This notion that music organized by people outside of the music department of the city would be considered as competition shows a different side of the institution civil society relationship. Imanol Galdos Irazabal goes on:

“So, this is a wrong idea. That’s why (...) The music department can’t organize all the concerts in the city. It can’t. It’s not good. We need people, young people with small bars, you know, and you’re talking about 3:00 in the morning. Four. Like these kind of initiatives are good. So, a new narrative.

How can (Donostia Kultura) listen? I think we have to be more open to accept different opinions.
This is essential. (IGI)

This difference in how the cooperation with the civil society is seen highlights an aspect that even within a small region with a culture of collaboration, not all public institutions are willing to seek co-creational relationships and share responsibilities. Yet, the cooperative and co-productive relationship between local institutions, community members and civil society in Eltzia, the housing, and local care ecosystems, asserts a side of joint commoning practices to provide services without financial gain and cocreation.

4.1.4 [Commoning of public spaces](#)

Gipuzkoa processes both urban and rural spaces this includes such as beaches, mountains, public squares and parks. These are frequently used by the inhabitants for recreational activities, such as surfing, swimming, parties, sports and many more as my observations have shown. When considering the use of public spaces as commoning practices the use of these spaces as organisational space for associations and cooperatives, the use for protests and the use for political messages need to be considered.

[Public spaces as organisational spaces for associations and cooperatives](#)

On the weekends a clear difference between the use of main squares in Donostia-San Sebastián compared to the smaller towns was unmistakable. On the weekend, the old town and the Centro district, the main shopping area of Donostia-San Sebastián, are always very full of people, a lot of Spanish and French was spoken and it was clear that many people from outside the city were visiting. Yet, locals would use the Boulevard de Donostia between the Old Town and Centro District, music was playing and many people joined in for some dances, later a small group of people continued dancing” (Observation, 21st of April 2024, Video is viewable in folder linked in appendix). Contradictory to observations made in the towns of Gipuzkoa which main squares would be filled with locals when:

“In the main square a lot of people were in the bars, especially more towards midday and early afternoon. It seemed like everybody knew each other and not just small groups. People enjoyed drinks and food and chatted. Their ages ranged from young adults with children to older people. A few people of colour were also on the square and were included in interactions just as much as anybody else. With the rest of the town kind of empty the difference in the noise from the squares through the speaking people was possible to be heard well ahead before entering the squares.”
(Observations 28th of April 2024)

The interview with Anik Zubizarreta gave the observation context that many associations and cooperative meet in bars and on squares on the weekend. This shows how public spaces become part of the commoning practices of the associations and cooperatives. A similar observation was made after the

interview with Anik Zubizarreta during a city walk again became clear how much meeting up in places like that is part of the community. Everyone seemed to know each other and would engage on a Saturday afternoon. Anik Zubizarreta emphasized also how much it is part of her live to spend time with friends in bars to meet up (Observation 4th of May 2024).

During the observations it also became visible how people of colour are more integrated in smaller towns and are just part of the community. This was also mentioned by the Researcher:

“Just to say this in small towns, I think it’s happening faster than in in cities, the integration. You know? When I go to smaller towns, I see better integrated immigrants and you see a diversity which is integrated and speaking in Basque, which is it also happens in the cities. But it’s interesting. I don’t have many data about this, but it happens.” (R)

This difference between the urban and rural aspects stretches further, as generally the community seem to be stronger in small towns and less so in Donostia-San Sebastián.

Protest

This touristification is visible in Donostia-San Sebastián in decisions made for example to build new hotels and a new metro. However, to build this new hotels, public spaces such as parks would need to be destroyed. During my fieldwork I observed a protest that took place under the title: “Donostia Defendatuz Herritarron Plaza” (translated to Defending Donostia Citizen’s Square). The protest was announced through flyers all over Donostia-San Sebastián (see picture 3) and took place on the 27th of April 2024.



Picture 3 “Donostia Defendatuz Herritarron Plaza” Flyer (25th of April 2024)

The protest used the pavilion for discussion which followed the schedule communicated on the flyer and available in Spanish and Basque on the two pavilions built up as information stands (see picture 4).



Picture 4 Protest in Donostia - San Sebastián (27th of April 2024)

The issues that were discussed were the plan of destroying urban parks, the touristification, mobility, heritage, housing, and solidarity. The program further included musical intermissions and self-made food. I observed that the communication in the roundtables was predominantly Spanish. The participants in the roundtables would differ, depending on the topic different people would participate. In between roundtables fewer people would remain and traditional music was played with a Basque announcement. Even though a heavy thunderstorm also took place in that afternoon, people stayed and kept discussing with people. The plastic pavilions were filled with information about the different issues, both in Basque and Spanish. The information provided were an overview of the geographical position of the many issues that were addressed that day (see picture 5):



Picture 5 Geographical overview of protested projects (27th of April 2024)

Further information with the location and what changes are planned were also given, for example see picture 6:



Picture 6 Example of posters illustrating exact areas that are about to be destroyed (27th of April 2024)

And the connection to issues as biodiversity protection would be made to underline how the measure where against the plans on European level by hurting to local ecosystems and it would show the actional ready taken by the activists (see picture 7 and 8, further pictures are available in the observation document in the folder linked in appendix x).



Picture 7 Protested projects going against biodiversity protection (27th of April 2024)



Picture 8 Protested projects going against biodiversity protection (27th of April 2024)

After the last discussion round, the participants and organizers marched along the beach front and the oldtown with a sign and a drum playing. This protest fulfils multiple dimensions of commoning practices. Foremost, the observed commoning practices are protecting the community spaces and commons in Donostia-San Sebastián. Furthermore, the extensive network of organisations that took part in the protest, which can be seen on the bottom of the flyer (see picture x) indicates that this protest followed a cocreation process by all of these organisations at least to some extent. This also shows that collective organisation is evident and that the collective solidarity in Sans Sebastian is strong when needed to defend their commons. I further consider this to be an example of inclusive practices due to the openness of the discussions and the availability for information for anyone who was interested.

Political messages in public spaces

Throughout the fieldwork the use of street art, posters, and flags to bring political messages into public spaces was overwhelming. The following pictures give an idea of how diverse the political messages were as well.

First street art was used to criticise issues also addressed through the protest, such as housing and consumption (see picture 9 and 10):



Picture 9 Poster Donostia - San Sebastián focussing on housing issues



Picture 10 Street art Donostia - San Sebastián criticising capitalism

Second street art and flags were used to symbolize that the ETA prisoners should be freed. All over Gipuzkoa flag that said “extera” could be seen, which means “bring them home” (see picture 11).



Picture 11 Example of 'extera' (bring them home) Flag



Picture 12 Street art in Tolosa (19th of April 2024)

Another issue that would be evident in many places are feminist causes (See pictures 13 and 14):



Picture 13 Street art Tolosa (19th of April 2024)



Picture 14 Street art Zumaya (28th of April 2024)

Many posters and street art were also showing empathy and solidarity with the people in Gaza suffering under the Israeli attack. These propose a similarity between the painting by Picasso that shows the attack from Franco with the support of Italy and Germany in the Spanish Civil war on the Basque Guernica (see Pictures 14 and 15).



Picture 15 Poster Deba (28th of April 2024)

These political messages in the public space produce new political images in the public spaces between the messages and those engaging with them. This shows how commoning practices include the political relationships of the everyday community interactions between humans and with non-human entities. Thus, the presented street art can be considered as commoning practices of infrastructures and their politicisation.

The presented uses of public spaces to conduct commoning practices and shape the relationship of the community and highlight how connected the commoning practices are with public spaces.

Worker cooperatives

The wide establishment of worker cooperatives in Gipuzkoa is in line with the worker collectives that Howarth and Roussos (2022) identified in Greece as micro-level commoning. The importance of the cooperative model in Gipuzkoa and its underlying social values of collaboration is reiterated by Elena Herrarte:

“I think other specific element that Gipuzkoa is that and especially in this region, is that I think because of the cooperatives model and the principle of the cooperatives. The quantity of money that people is earning now. (...) The Wellness is like very (high) we further our big medium society. We don't have a lot of rich people now, some rich people and the differences between the richest and the poorest are not that big in comparing with other regions. That is a very important principle in cooperatives, the difference between the earning of the one who earns the most and the least one nowadays is like 1:30 more or less. But 50 years ago, was 1:3, so that generates like a very.... We are all like very close one with we don't have very big difference. So, we live and that means that the ones who earn less, don't earn too less. (...) It's very how would you say in that sense, well equal more equal? I think that that is an idea that EEI mentions a lot that is important in Gipuzkoa and is especially important in Debagoiena. And I think that that enables also the collaboration”
(Elena Herrarte)

To some extent the social cohesion in Gipuzkoa is an effect from the worker cooperative and similarly the success of worker cooperatives is based in the collaborative culture. Ione Ardaiz additionally highlights that this is part of the culture:

“Another aspect that also so like connect with this is the cooperative movement. So also like this type of like. Collaborative work. It's embedded into economic realities or economic institutions. So here we have the biggest cooperative industrial cooperative in the world. That is Mondragon. But it's one we have all the like, small cooperatives, I guess. New private organisations, that are created a lot of them are cooperatives as well, so that also speaks to that culture of like civic engagement and community development.” (Ione Ardaiz)

The worker cooperatives are built on practices of co-creation and co-production and live out an alternative form of work.

4.1.5 [A summary of the commoning practices in Gipuzkoa](#)

The presented practices all fulfil some of the dimensions identified for practices to be considered commoning. Table 5 gives an overview how the practices fulfil the different the different dimensions of commoning practices.

The analysis has shown that the commoning practices in Gipuzkoa are deeply rooted in the region's history of cooperativism and co-production, particularly through the participation of social cooperatives and associations in service provision. The Basque language has played an important role in promoting shared identity and mutual interaction, particularly during the Franco dictatorship. Efforts to resuscitate the language through cooperative schools, social organisations, and the Korrika festival demonstrate its importance in the region's social fabric. Shared decision-making within care ecosystems and housing initiatives demonstrates co-creation between civil society and local institutions, fostering new partnerships around care and housing. Public spaces, particularly in rural regions, serve as important locations for community organising and engagement, however gentrification and tourism pose issues in urban areas such as Donostia-San Sebastián. Despite these constraints, grassroots rallies to protect public areas as commons represent a long history of civic involvement and cultural preservation. These findings are consistent with the wider research on commoning, emphasising shared responsibility and collective action in the region.

After presenting the data from the fieldwork, it is necessary to mention that also in Gipuzkoa capitalistic globalisation has also impacts. The interviewees pointed out that active involvement has been decreasing and people are following more individualistic practices in their free time especially younger people. The irritates both the challenge and the opportunity of new governance and democratic approaches on the micro level to foster such practices.

Table 5 Analysis of community practices in Gipuzkoa according to the dimensions of commoning practices (Euler, 2019; Howarth & Roussos, 2022)

Commoning practices	Practices of cooperativism and co-production	Practices of needs-satisfaction and voluntariness	Practices of collective organisation and decision-making	Practices of mutual association and collective solidarity	Practices of inclusiveness and mediation	Practices of protecting and usage community spaces
Participation in associations and cooperatives	Auzolan as an historical practices and bases for today's culture of associations, associations providing services for the community for free	Creative associations, feminist associations	x	Kuadrillas, people come together and do something for or with each.	Depends, some are very much for itself. Eltzia associations need a coordinator to connect	Using public places and bars for collective organisation bars, Eltzia
Basque language	Cooperative organisation of Ikastolas today and historically	Korrika as an example how Basque Language can be furthered through	Cooperatives that organize to provide News and other information in Basque	Underlying social vision for reestablishment, change of importance, allowing to go deeper into issues	Inclusive spaces for learning for non-Basque speakers	x
Joint commoning practices	Eltzia, the housing initiative and the local care system show how they depend on cocreation and cooperativism	Inclusion of people with disabilities other activities than the necessities.	The creation process of Eltzia was a collective endeavour and so were the processes leading to the housing projects.	The housing projects show how they can become collective places for connection beyond generations and within the community.	Eltzia is open, however it is not taken up on. The local care ecosystems in themselves are practices of inclusion.	Eltzia is an example of how a space can become more than simple infrastructure to be used. Similar to the housing projects.

Commoning practices	Practices of cooperativism and co-production	Practices of needs-satisfaction and voluntariness	Practices of collective organisation and decision-making	Practices of mutual association and collective solidarity	Practices of inclusiveness and mediation	Practices of protecting and usage community spaces
Commoning of public spaces	Political messages in public spaces coproduce new relationships with the spaces and those entering them	Dancing and protesting in the public square	The protest is an example of hoe collective organisation takes place.	The political messages directed towards the imprisonment of the ETA members shows again the mutual association as Basque	Communicating both in Spanish and Basque during the protest.	Protection of the public spaces through protest.
Worker cooperatives	Coproduction of new economic realities that go traditional economic relations.	x	x	Worker cooperative and associated distribution of wealth create a strong social cohesion in Gipuzkoa.	x	x

4.2 Results to RQ 2: Analysis of collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region

This section analysis how the Gipuzkoa Region’s collaborative governance has been institutionalised and practices. A focus is set on the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Initiative introduced in 2016, however a short background on the beginning of collaborative governance in the region is given starting in 2007. Table 6 provides an overview of the institutions that have been introduced in Gipuzkoa.

Table 6 Overview of institutionalisation of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa

Time	Institutions
2007 – 2016 Start of collaborative governance	Gipuzkoa Aurrera: public-private platform to promote collaboration to address major strategic challenges Gipuzkoa Sarean: Laboratory encouraging study and reflection on new governance models Territorial Development Laboratory
2016 – 2023 Etorikizuna Eraikiz	Gipuzkoa Lab Gipuzkoa Taldean ArantzazuLab: reference centre for governance innovation Debagoina 2030 Governance laboratory Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Thank: New political Culture Deliberation Group Udal Etorikizuna Eraikiz

4.2.1 2007 – 2016 First activities for collaborative governance

After the 2007 election, some of the promoters of the EEI were in the regional government and realised that the traditional way of conducting politics and public institutions was not suitable anymore to address increasingly complex problems such as an ageing society and climate change. Xabier Barandiarán, who was the in the regional government at the time reflects on the beginning:

“And to understand building a future I think is important that the general deputy was a philosopher. And I am sociologist, and we have we had a very strong relation with academy. And I remember we reflected a lot about: how we could communicate better with the citizenship, and this is very important for us. But the best question (...) is: We were in the power, and we had a capability to be able to decide a lot of things. And this project is not building, really, in the bottom-up system. It’s strange, but it was built as a politic decision.” (XB)

The Deputy General and his chief of staff, though lacking public management experience, brought an academic and theoretical perspective to governance, advocating for collaborative governance and shared leadership, ideas that appeared far removed from traditional politic (Barandiarán,

Zurutuza, et al., 2023). Inspired by the unique collaborative culture in Gipuzkoa and a certain organisational freedom of the public institutions the policymakers fostered a programme to promote three principles that would later form the basis for the EEI: shared leadership, public-private partnership and citizen participation (Barandiarán et al., 2023). The first projects were a public-private platform created to promote strategies for challenges in Gipuzkoa and a laboratory encouraging study and reflection on new governance models to improve competitiveness and wellbeing (Barandiarán, Zurutuza, et al., 2023). In the 2011 election, another party was elected to the government, but the project continued. Under the new government with the focus on developing a new governance approach for territorial development. The project was called Territorial Development Laboratory and was made up of a group of local development agencies, the provincial government and researchers. Ainhoa Arrona was a part of the space and emphasized during our interview how important the experience was for the continued support of collaborative government:

“I was in something called Territorial Development Lab. Which is this a collaborative governance process between the provincial government and county economic development agencies. And it was the first really good experience of collaborative governance in the provincial council.” (AA)

When I asked why this was the first positive experience for collaborative governance she answered:

“Xabier [Barandiarán] said that they made some (...) survey about how the level of trust of different territorial actors towards the provincial government, and they realize that county development agencies have high levels of trust on provincial government. And they realized that it was probably because they have started really collaborative experiences. (...) So, they have developed trust relationships between these actors and the provincial council. And because methodologically, I think (...) we all learned a lot.” (AA)

Mirren Larrea and colleagues from the Orkestra Institute for Basque Competitiveness at Deusto University developed the methodological framework for action research for territorial development, which served as the foundation for the Territorial Development Laboratory. This methodology enabled conceptual designs on collaboration to be given shape in a concrete architecture of governance, and was later of critical relevance in the practical structuring of the EEI (Barandiarán et al., 2023). When Xabier Barandiarán and his party won the election in 2015, they had better conditions due to the high electoral support to launch the EEI. The political team built on the understanding that power as means for action to drive societal change, fostering public-private partnerships and citizen participation. This led to the initiation of Etorkizuna Eraikiz by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council in their Strategic Management Plan for 2015-2019.

4.2.2 [2016 – 2023 Etorkizuna Eraikiz](#)

The strategic plan transformed politics in Gipuzkoa by fostering regular collaboration and shared decision-making between the government and regional actors to address the current public agenda and anticipate future challenges. And to drive the transformation of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council by fostering a collaborative and cross-disciplinary management approach, replacing the unconnected structure. This shift requires internal cooperation between political and technical staff, as well as external collaboration with the public, to ensure coherent, integrated governance that aligns with the open and collaborative model (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020).

The Etorkizuna Eraikiz Initiative focussed on creating collaborative governance through promoting public participation in shaping the public agenda, rooted in four key principles. First, institutional leadership ensures long-term stability through government commitment. Second, the model adapts to Gipuzkoa's unique social reality, emphasising community culture, social capital, and cooperation. Third, it promotes open spaces for exchange and experimentation, facilitating collaboration, and project development. Finally, it strengthens democracy, trust, and public value by enhancing participatory governance, fostering citizen involvement, and building a more cohesive society (Barandiarán, Zurutuza, et al., 2023; Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020).

The EEI has developed between 2016 and 2023, with its structure and processes having been amended and improved, this analysis focusses on the institutions and democratic praxis visible through the analysis of documents and interviews. The presentation of the results will follow the analytical framework for collaborative governance introduced in Section 2.5.2.

[Institutionalisation](#)

The EEI recognises that institutionalising collaborative governance entails developing a new logic that will modify the present one and take on a life of its own. And institutionalisation success is measured by the extent to which the model is collectively understood and implemented (Pomares et al., 2023).

[Architecture of the EEI Institutions](#)

The openness of the Etorkizuna Eraikiz initiative (EEI) is visible through the continuous improvement and extension of the model of the initiative, Figure 3 shows how the initially introduced model was constructed in 2019 (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council & New Political Culture Deliberation Group, 2022) and Figure 4 shows the most recent model (Goia et al., 2023, p. 4). The central three spaces are Gipuzkoa Taldean (listening), GipuzkoaLab (experimenting), and reference centres and strategies (specialisation). These three spaces for are at the heart of the EEI Model because this is where actual collaborative governance takes place: institutional and social actors work together to identify problems, deliberate, prototype alternatives, find answers, and create public policies, they are the real embodiment of

collaborative governance. These are non-hierarchical environments in which these discussions and experiments are conducted (Pomares et al., 2023).

The recent overview provided (see Figure 4) shows how these spaces are embedded into support processes, a meta-governance, the Gipuzkoa society and how the municipalities are considered as an extension. In the following the spaces and the subordinate projects, institutions are presented and analysed how they initiate collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region. Second, the meta governance and the support processes are discussed. Third, another collaborative governance project in Gipuzkoa is presented: Debagoiena 2030.

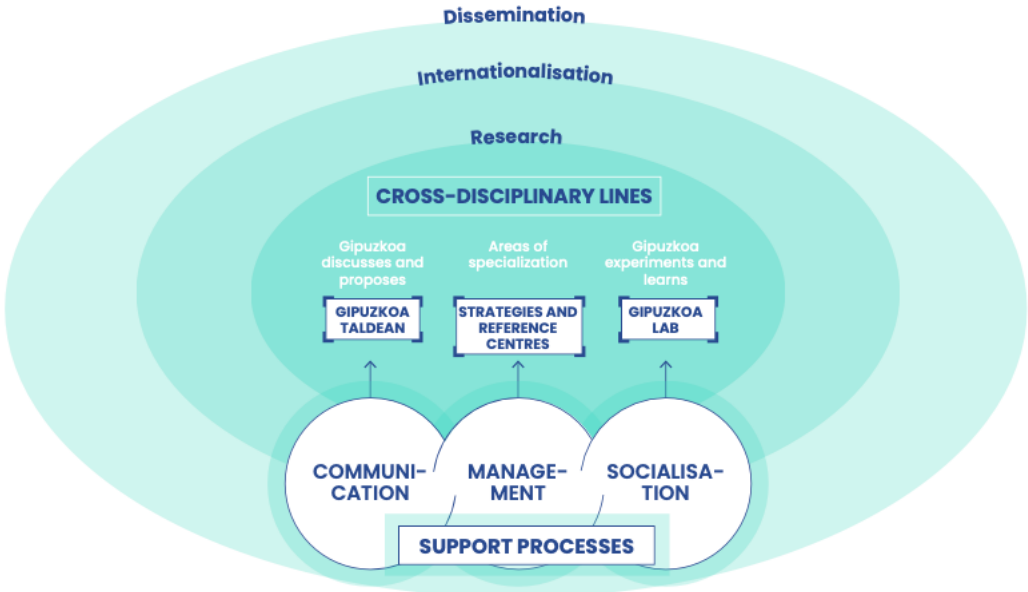


Figure 3 Initial EEI Model 2019

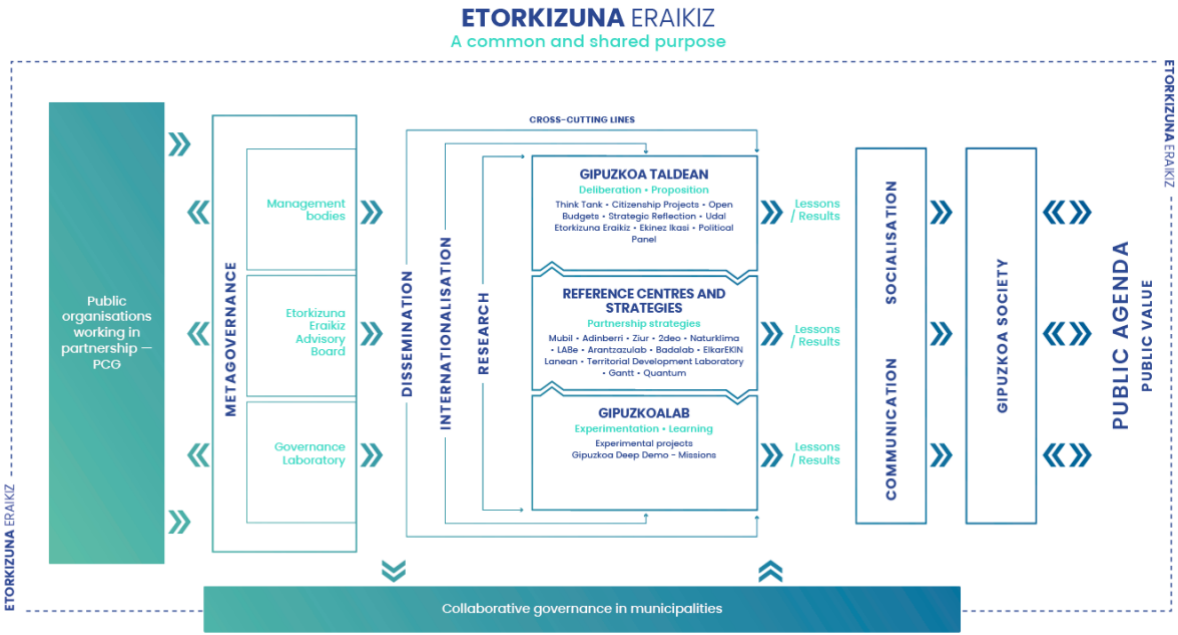


Figure 4 EEI Model as including in Goia et al. (2023)

The three core spaces were communicated towards the public in the first Orain eta Etorkizuna Magazine (Barandiaran, 2022a) through the following overview:

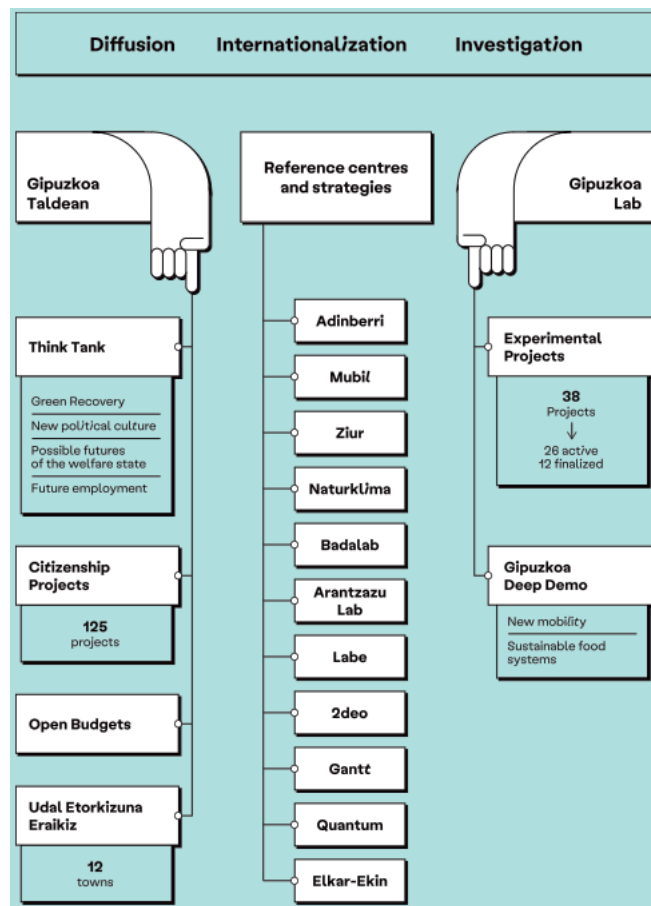


Figure 5 Overview of institutionalised spaces in the three core areas of the EEI (Barandiarán, 2022)

Gipuzkoa Taldean (‘Gipuzkoa as a Team’)

Designed to be a deliberation and listening space Gipuzkoa Taldean hosts different places and activities to enable the participation of society in the deliberation and co-creation of public policies through experimental methods (Barandiarán et al., 2023). In the original model of the EEI introduced in 2020 it was defined as:

“The area for making proposals and deliberating, where citizens and the different institutions and social organisations have to take part in order to achieve the best and broadest representation of Gipuzkoan society. It is not only or fundamentally a physical place, but rather a combination of places from which ideas and projects that are considered key for the future of the region are identified and proposed.” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020).

Xabier Barandiarán further emphasizes how listening in the space goes beyond just listening: “But listening to the society is not only: you can listen, you can watch, or you can look for some things. You know, it is building a conversation, building an interaction, building together the point of view, the common point of view about reality” (XB). Gipuzkoa Taldean started with three major mechanisms for

deliberating and creating ideas: think tanks, citizenship projects and open budgets. Now it also entails the Ekinez Ikasi programme, participatory budgeting, citizen projects and Udal EE.

Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank

With four deliberation groups, the Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank was established in 2019 with the participation of civil society stakeholders and Gipuzkoa Council employees in order to jointly develop knowledge for the change of the policy ecosystem (Goia et al., 2023). The deliberation groups consider the pressing topics of: The Work of the Future, The Futures of Welfare State, Green Recovery and New Political Culture (Pomares et al., 2023). These were introduced to be “lighthouses or reference points to provide a more systemic comprehensive view of the portfolio” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021a). The deliberation groups are part of EEI’s approach achieve the goal to “cogenerate transferrable and applicable knowledge, through collaborative governance, with a view to implementing a new political agenda and culture that will modernise the ecosystem (actors, contents and processes) of the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa’s policies” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2019). In itself and its processes, the deliberation groups also operate using a philosophy of collaborative governance, including stakeholders from organized civil society, universities, and staff from the provincial council through an action research strategy (Barandiarán, Zurutuza, et al., 2023).

Deliberation group on new political culture

One of the four deliberation groups of the EEI Think Tank is further important to consider when analysing how collaborative governance has been developed in the Gipuzkoa Region: the New Political Culture Deliberation Group. It follows the mission to further the conceptual development of how the institutionalisation of collaborative governance can bring together public institutions with stakeholders. It is a public governance tool meant to alleviate political disenchantment and fulfil the demands of the different ecosystems that contribute to the creation and execution of public policy from a systemic perspective (Goia et al., 2023). Political culture is considered as the shared set of perceptions, values, and behaviours that individuals express in response to political events and systems. It plays a key role in shaping political attitudes and actions, going beyond mere economic considerations to include societal rules, values, and norms that influence political engagement. Political culture is dynamic, shaped by life experiences, and characterized by the transmission of values across generations (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council & New Political Culture Deliberation Group, 2022).

The Think Tank was started by the Gipuzkoa Regional Council based on prior experiences, the Think Tank is based on the following:

“Basic Direction and Philosophy

- The think tank should be clear about where we are going, and the participants should try to find meaning in this path
- The trajectory of the think tank must be associated with a significant transformation

- The think tank should contribute to the development of an advanced political culture and democratic empowerment” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2019, p.1)

The Think Tank in its pursuit to create a new political culture for collaborative governance acknowledges the necessity for transformation and democratic empowerment. The Think Tank Deliberation groups used the methodology of Territorial Development Action Research to ensure that reflection and action are utilised in an ever-improving process (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council & New Political Culture Deliberation Group, 2022). Through the set-up of the Think Tank, the Regional Council of Gipuzkoa “accepted a collaborative or cooperative conception of power entailing a recognition that the plurality and complexity of our societies require the cooperation of “political” stakeholders (policy makers *stricto sensu*, experts from various fields, researchers from the academic field, etc.), at different levels, using various instruments of collaboration.” (Tapia Alberdi, 2022, p.88).

The deliberation group for a new political culture was both a collaborative process itself and it fostered the development of collaborative processes through experiences for the transformation of the policy ecosystem of the Provincial Government. In the book ‘Building a New Political Culture in Gipuzkoa Concepts, Methodology and Experiences’ (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council & New Political Culture Deliberation Group, 2022) three practical experiences, and the lessons learned are shared. The first experience regarded the Aurrerabide programme, which is the management approach that the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa has opted to implement its goal is to contribute collaborative governance internally through the introduction of planning, evaluation and accountability tools. A multi-cycle approach not only developed actionable and experiential knowledge and promoted a collaborative culture that transcended formal project boundaries, it also demonstrated how collective knowing in action can enhance governance and organisational transformation (Sánchez-Cambra et al., 2022).

During the second experience, the focus was on inferring practical implications from the institutionalised collaboration between public institutions, social agents, and citizens in two areas: the process of deliberative democracy for public decision-making between public institutions and citizens, and the space for shared deliberation between public institutions and the network of stakeholders, which is the Think Tank itself (experimentation project led by ArantzazuLab and brought to the deliberation group) (Goia, 2022; Goia et al., 2023). The third experience engaged in the creation of the governance model of the Reference Centre for minority languages. In its design Badalab has been hybrid throughout all phases of its development the initiative has been created jointly by public institutions and social agents and so is its continuous governance. This highlights an actual sharing of power by the administrative institutions. Through this authority and responsibility have been shared and legitimacy is gained through the social partners to the new organisation. Two requirements were met for this to be successful. First, to strengthen the basis of this new political culture, the trust that civil society and institutions have acquired during the process needs to be assimilated into daily life. In order to do this, strategy must be centred on a knowledge of the governance model, which emphasises collaboration,

sharing of decision-making authority, candid communication of conflicts, and confrontation identification (Irizar, 2022). Second, in order to guarantee that the goal of collaborative governance succeeds, funding and techniques of discussion must be invested in, making citizen and/or organised social engagement more potent in this governance (Irizar, 2022).

In line with this notion of collaborative governance, the Think Tank and its deliberation groups in its goals to co-generation knowledge through the group's own reflective activity follows a collaborative approach (Tapia Alberdi, 2022). Although the Think Tank ended in 2023. Its model illustrates an approach connecting theory and praxis as a type of social participation in a collaborative process, which is important, because collaborative governance should not only be the goal but also the way (Irizar, 2022).

Ekinez Ikasi programme

To foster new ways of political relations, the Ekinez Ikasi programme used an action learning methodology to implement several projects involving active listening to society and internal groups from the Provincial Government. The programme stresses the application of action learning as a tool for collaborative governance, that started with a pilot project involving top public officials and elected officials to learn to listen and improve their relationship with citizens. In order to address internal dysfunctions and strengthen connections inside Gipuzkoa's public institutions, this approach promotes active listening and communication. Through involving both technical and political personnel, Ekinez Ikasi fosters collaboration and trust between various departments and roles, promoting a culture of continuous learning and group problem-solving. By bridging barriers between technical and political actors, the mixed working groups promote a more integrated approach to governance. Because it encourages shared ownership of policy formulation and strengthens public trust via cooperation and transparency, this process is essential to collaborative governance (Murphy et al., 2023).

Participatory Budget Projects

The goal of Gipuzkoa's Participatory or Open Budget Projects is to encourage and facilitate public participation. They can choose to achieve this by tabling open proposals, which become into projects, and selecting five or six of them through voting. A million or more euros are set aside for funding each year (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021). The procedure is a useful example of active listening since it not only helps to directly ascertain residents' wants and interests, but also lets them prioritise how the institution's budget is shaped. Through this project, the public will be able to directly voice their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions during each of the Council's yearly budget periods. Since 2017, Open Budgets have been conducted yearly, with modifications made to the procedure based on feedback and experiences to reinterpret the participation process in an effort to involve more people. (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021a). Similarly, Citizenship Projects invite citizen participation through an annual

call for funding proposed social innovation processes lead by citizens or local entities (associations, universities, companies, NGOs) (Barandiarán et al., 2023).

Udal Etorkizuna Eraikiz and Territorial Development Laboratory

Two programmes exist that aim to extend collaborative governance to other public institutions programmes. First, Udal Etorkizuna Eraikiz is a program wherein twelve town councils in the Gipuzkoa region are adopting the EEI as a model to build collaborative governance projects in their own municipalities. The EEI actions' sphere of influence grows thanks to Udal EE, creating a learning community in Gipuzkoa. This enhances the area's capacity to foresee and address upcoming difficulties (Goia et al., 2023). Udal Etorkizuna Eraikiz aims to achieve that "the Etorkizuna Eraikiz experience is not only shared among the city councils, but also, most importantly, a collaboration network is built between the city councils and the provincial institution, which allows them to continue listening, learning, and deciding collectively on a common project" (Barandiaran, 2022, p. 15). ArantzazuLab and the Governance Department of the Provincial Government are first mapping the institutions and projects that have evidence of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa to understand the existing collaborative processes. This ensures a comprehensive understanding of the existing practices and activity to establish the basis of a collaborative networking between the regional governance and municipalities (Goia et al., 2023).

Second, the EEI still uses the Territorial Development Laboratory as a learning resource. This was one of the first instances of collaborative governance. The Laboratory is a place to encourage involvement from all the agents that are active in specific areas, to develop innovative methods of operation, and to increase group education. Departments of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council and agents working in the area use the area for discussions. A number of initiatives are being carried out in conjunction with this collaborative governance to engage small and medium-sized businesses and increase the employability of those impacted by social exclusion or at risk of it (ElkarEkin Lanean, etc.). A series of cooperative governance techniques are discussed, and numerous initiatives are jointly developed to implement them, building trusting relationships in the process. The ultimate goal is to increase the effectiveness of policies and public policies' democratic legitimacy (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021a).

These institutions emphasize the extensive structures to enable deliberation and participation between the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa and the institutional, political, and social stakeholders of the territory. It further emphasizes how listening, and deliberation take different forms in different contexts and for different needs.

Gipuzkoa Lab (Space for Experimentation)

Gipuzkoa Lab is a platform for creating experimental initiatives and projects through multidisciplinary collaborations, which always focuses on involving a variety of stakeholders: universities, international bodies and networks, public administration, and organisations of all kinds depending on the subject. Gipuzkoa Lab fosters collaboration, education, and knowledge creation in experimental projects. Its main duties include problem-solving and creating and recommending governmental policy (Pomares et al., 2023; Errazquin, 2024). The Gipuzkoa Lap aims to incorporate a new political agenda into the provincial council through experimental projects and the Deep Demonstration (Barandiaran, 2022a).

Experimental projects are based on active experimentation to find potential solutions to the challenges of the future of Gipuzkoa. The experimental projects' structure needs to match one or more the EEI's strategic areas, address one or more challenges, grow from an interdisciplinary collaboration, and be focused on practical experimentation as a means of research, internationalisation, and dissemination to bring about transformation. (Barandiarán et al., 2023). The experimental projects would then become the basis to realise innovative ways of doing politics. The collaborative governance features of the EEI are ingrained by ensuring that the experimental projects originate from cross-disciplinary groups. This is thereafter encompassed through collaboration, investigation, education, globalisation, advertising, interdisciplinary effort, and input into public policies (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021a).

The Deep Demonstration is a collaborative experimentation process with the Basque Government, the Climate-KIC, the main initiative of the European Union to combat climate change and the Organisation for Economy, Cooperation, and Development (OECD), to develop a progressive ecological transition project that will help the area move to a more environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable model (Barandiaran, 2022, p. 15). The starting point of the Gipuzkoa Deep Demonstration is the Gipuzkoa Model explained in Section 3.2., based on economic competitiveness and social cohesion:

“With this foundation and building on these pillars, the region wants to complete the transition towards an economy with low carbon emission levels, focusing on two main missions: the mission of new mobility and the mission of sustainable food. Hand in hand with the Gipuzkoa Deep Demonstration process, Etorikizuna Eraikiz incorporates a systemic perspective, taking on an agenda linked to ecological transition and sustainability. The objective is to turn the region into a space for advanced experimentation, a test bed for other regions that want to move towards more sustainable models and act on a larger scale in the field of ecological transition.” (Barandiaran, 2022, p. 15).

The Deep Demonstration is adding value to the EEI by “establishing connections among the portfolio projects (project mapping) and identifying areas of opportunity (reconnaissance), which will help define new prototypes and project. It also served as a lever to undertake work in two ‘missions’. In other words, ecosystem functioning is being enhanced” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021a). This is important for

a systems perspective on the different challenges faced by Gipuzkoa. The two focus areas were chosen for the potential positive impact these areas could have on the sustainability if addressed properly (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021a).

The experimental space Gipuzkoa Lab allows for experimental projects to develop within Gipuzkoa to develop new ways of tackling solutions that then can be included into the public policies and collaboration processes outside of Gipuzkoa through the Deep Demonstration to allow new inputs.

Reference Centres and Strategies

The third core institutions of the EEI are the reference centres, which are specialised public-private or social centres to strengthen sectors that are strategic for the province of Gipuzkoa for example climate change, mobility, ageing, food, and the Basque language (Barandiarán et al., 2023). These centres are run independently; however, they get funding and oversight from the Gipuzkoa Provincial Government to ensure the strategic alignment. They generate specialised knowledge that Gipuzkoa's organisations and residents can access. They thereby serve the purpose of 'strategic specialisation' (Pomares et al., 2023).

The eleven reference centres follow collaborative strategies to create collaborative spaces to address social and economic projects that are important for the strategy of the EEI. Each one is characterised by

1. a specialisation of the strategic areas for the future of Gipuzkoa
2. the aim to position Gipuzkoa in their respective fields
3. the aim to lead and implement strategies in that area
4. pursuing to increase the capacity to respond to complex challenges, based on plurality
5. the aim to their own ecosystems, creating networks and dynamising agents from the sector (Barandiarán et al., 2023).

Each centre defines its organisational design and decision-making structures according to its objectives and sectors. For example, ArantzazuLab the reference centre for social innovation and governance is "part of a foundation in which the Provincial Government, a town council, a local bank, a business corporation and the religious order to which the venue in which it is located belong all participate, and its financing and decision-making processes are shared" (Barandiarán et al., 2023, p.67).

The reference centres foster collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa in two ways: first, each reference centre needs to have a collaborative rationale within its organisation, for example through shared decisions of management. Second, there is a collaborative logic in the development of the activities carried out within the framework of the centres (Barandiarán et al., 2023). The reference centres further

contribute to the collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa by playing a critical role in unifying and coordinating visions and capabilities, bringing together key stakeholders in their respective fields. They help mobilise resources, knowledge, and capabilities to develop solutions collaboratively. These centres foster relationships between different government departments and tiers, and lead knowledge and experimentation in strategic areas. Ultimately, the reference centres enable joint action, achieving results that would not be possible independently. While steered by the Provincial Government, their work is co-developed with key system stakeholders and society for the respective challenges shaping and implementing effective public policies (Barandiarán et al., 2023). During our interview, Xabier Barandiarán reiterates the importance of reference centres:

“The third space are reference centres, and this is the biggest, the biggest part of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz, because what is the strategy is now, society has stronger strategies in gastronomy, in mobility, in green recovery, in health and public institutions. Can help these strategies, these civil society strategies and we build together the foundations to work together in order to work together. This is the structure of EE.” (XB)

In short, the reference centres create strategies and initiate them in areas of particular importance of Gipuzkoa’s future through collaborative processes internally and externally.

ArantzazuLab

One reference centre that is especially relevant for collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa is the ArantzazuLab. The reference centre started as a social innovation laboratory from a reflection process but has developed into a laboratory dedicated to innovating democracy and a reference centre for collaborative governance (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023). The centre’s mission is:

“Our mission is to transform governance, promote Collaborative Governance to empower citizens, incorporate diverse knowledge into public policies, and strengthen democracy. We aim to foster a collaborative culture, provide a platform for active citizen learning, and offer innovative tools and approaches to enhance public engagement and participation.” (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023).

The reference centre uses innovation, experimentation and research to investigate with new forms of relationships between governmental actor and civil society to further the public-private-social relationships needed for deepening collaborative governance. To do this ArantzazuLab creates new knowledge for collaborative governance through practical and theoretical experimentation, to further the pursuit of new governance and democracy model in Gipuzkoa and beyond (Barandiaran, 2022a). It further aims to broaden the support networks of collaborative governance internationally, “because the significant responses that Gipuzkoa needs in the face of today’s great social challenges will only come from joining forces” (Barandiaran, 2022, p. 29).

The creation of ArantzazuLab itself is also a reflection of the progress of collaborative governance. Ione Ardaiz said during our interview:

“We reflected (...) about a lot of like social challenges happening in the region. So, we wanted to understand what where other social innovation labs and reference centres covering in the work and what would maybe be an opportunity for us to focus on that will complement the others. But we didn’t want to come here to replace anyone we wanted to complement what was happening in the region. So, in that reflection we understood that there was a space that it was democracy innovation, that was not being addressed by like a lab like this one. And it was very connected with the history of Arantzazu and with that idea of like community development, social cohesion and we did research with the three universities in the Basque region, and we have all the data on our website. We take and share, but in in that research, we understood the perceptions of democracy in the Basque region (...) that there was an opportunity to innovate in this space.” (IA)

From this reflection process ArantzazuLab was created backed by 13 key institutions and actors spanning the public, private, and social sectors. With these institutions and actors also participating in the structure, ArantzazuLab gained the legitimacy to promote cutting-edge experiments that can transform local institutions and public policies. The decision-making and management bodies also operate with a collaborative logic (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023).

Social innovation plays an important part in collaborative democracy, for it to be able to respond to the crisis of liberal democracy ArantzazuLab is creating new deliberation processes through spaces for reflection and action (Goia et al., 2023). The reference centre operates based on their guiding principles of rethinking power to encourage collaboration and empowering citizens to transform the relationship between institutions and society, valuing diverse knowledge, facilitating dialogue, iterative systems thinking approach, creating tangible solutions through creativity and curiosity and a local perspective of the Basque culture and values (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023). The main activities lie in

“researching and experimenting with new forms of government-civil society collaboration, advocating for innovative tools and mechanisms, promoting a culture of collaboration in Basque society, establishing innovation ecosystems comprising diverse stakeholders, and proposing

structures, networks, capacities, leadership models, and funding mechanisms to ensure their efficacy” (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023, p. 9).

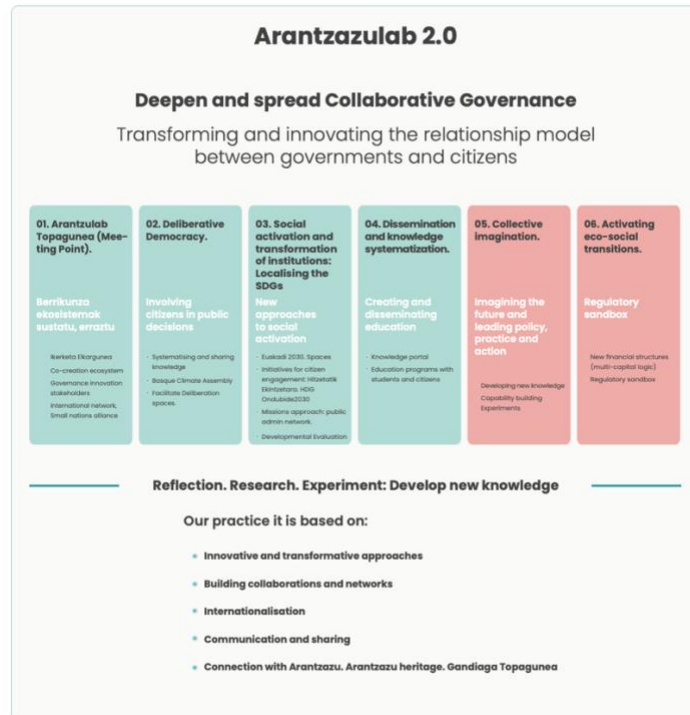


Figure 6 Work areas of ArantzazuLab (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023)

The work of ArantzazuLab takes place in six different areas (see Figure 6). The development of deliberative democracy area is an important area for the collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa, because of its significance in involving citizens in public decision making and consideration as a strategy for collaborative governance.

Deliberative democracy is used to create inclusive spaces that promote societal participation deliberative processes and encourage experimentation with diverse tools (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023). ArantzazuLab used two citizen assemblies to experiment with deliberative democracy to deepen deliberation and put collaborative governance into practice. One citizen assembly was set up at a provincial level in Gipuzkoa, focussing on the question How agricultural activity in the region can be guaranteed in face of the climate emergency. The other was set up at a local level in the town of Tolosa to deliberate the question how the town Council of Tolosa can achieve public-community collaboration to improves the health and emotional well-being of all. The citizen assemblies are significance because they allow participation of citizens who are not involved in institutions or civil society at all beforehand. This also comes with a certain risk as Ione Ardaiz highlights in this comment:

“So deliberative democracy processes these require public administrations to take very brave decisions and approaches and to trust citizens that the work that they will be doing will be relevant for public policy making, and they were different moments in that process in which both political leaders and civil servants, they so like. They were afraid, you know, like they had that they were

so like they were concerned that they the results of this process, they might not be linked to what they were to the work they were doing, or they might not be connected to their strategy in the parent institution, which I think it's normal.” (IA)

This shows how deliberation and collaborative governance needs continuous experimenting with the new. With ArantzazuLab taking on a leading role, this was understood not as a one-time thing, but as a deeper approach. The following shows how the collaboration needs to be accepted by policymakers to work:

“As promised at the inception of these processes, representatives from the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa and the Tolosa City Council publicly responded to the recommendations put forth by assembly members. These processes have proved to be highly successful, demonstrating an effective avenue for citizen engagement in public decision-making. Notably, all recommendations, albeit with some slight adjustments, were accepted, and the relevant institutions committed to implementing them by allocating the necessary budgets.” (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023, p.54).

Another meeting to update the assemblies participants was held for policymakers to reaffirm the endorsements of the process and gave updates on the implementation (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023). Naiara Goia also highlights how important a real dilemma is for a citizen's assembly because ‘simpler’ problems could be solved through standard participation processes (NG). Another point was the importance of adapting deliberation processes like citizens assemblies to the local context to make the process fit.

Lastly, the evaluation conducted by University of the Basque Country found the following:

“Participants reported improved confidence in politics, politicians, democracy, and participatory processes following their involvement in the assemblies.

Members stressed the importance and binding nature of the deliberative processes.

Financial compensation facilitated participation from individuals who typically do not engage in such processes.

Participants gained a better understanding of the work of public institutions and the subject matter.” (Goia & Ardaiz, 2023, p.56).

These insights emphasize how citizens assemblies are able to improve the local democratic practices advance knowledge of deliberative democracy and foster local capacities creating a foundation for institutionalising of deliberative processes for collaborative governance within Gipuzkoan institutions. ArantzazuLab follows three strategies in the pursuit to integrate deliberative mechanisms in a consistent and continuing manner across public institutions to actively involve citizens in public decision-making: ‘scaling up’ the impact on laws and policy-making on different levels to understand what are the changes needed to include in public policies in the region in order to enable this type of work, scaling out we are

seeking to create new processes with different institutional levels to understand how we can create permanent bodies of citizen assembly to include more people and scaling deep, to systematising all the knowledge that we are creating in this these assemblies because we understand that (IA). Scaling deep further focusses on the Basque roots, to make collaborative governance and the deliberation groups “a way of thinking and doing but it’s ingrained in public institutions and society” (IA).

ArantzazuLab plays an important role in furthering collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa, by creating spaces and new relationship for stakeholders to experiment and learn.

Systemic governance

Several periods of reflection and listening with various stakeholders involved in the Etorkizuna Eraikiz spaces and initiatives made it evident that the EEI needed a systemic governance. A comprehensive approach to develop shared leadership and management is required in order to assure the impact of the communal construction of the Gipuzkoa public agenda and to expand its impact on policies. The systemic governance promotes synergies between the different spaces for listening, experimenting and specialisation, as well as ongoing projects to improve the scalability of successful activities (Goia et al., 2023). The systematic governance is articulated through the management boards of the Council, an Advisory Board and a Governance Laboratory introduced in 2022, updating the EEI Model (see Figure 4). Ainhoa Arrona reflected on the situation before the systemic governance was implemented:

“After a process of reflection, we created what is called the Governance Laboratory. And the aim of the governments laboratory was that they have realized that: we have created a lot of experiments and experiences. We have created a lot of listening spaces and projects. But EEI all somehow a little bit disconnected, so we need to create a systemic vision and a whole vision to find the connections between one thing, some others. (...) it was like something it was lacking. Like a vision of the whole thing. So, we created the Governance Laboratory to start developing that systemic vision.” (AA)

To reach its goal of promoting collaborative governance throughout Gipuzkoa and strengthening the dynamics of collaboration on different levels in the region between institutional and civil society, ensuring collaboration between different programmes and institutions working for the goals is imperative. For the EEI to be a collaborative system as a whole, a network comprised of networks needs to be facilized through a systemic vision. When considering leadership for such a collaborative network, it is important that it is understood as a horizontally accountable through sharing of responsibilities and decision making through recognition of authority at the lowest levels and acceptance decentralisation. To achieve such a shared leadership multiple structures were incorporated, these include the already presented Deliberation Group on New Political Culture in the Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank, the ArantzazuLab reference centre, the Gipuzkoa Deep Demonstration, and Etorkizuna Eraikiz Udal (Goia et al., 2023). Another space for the systematic view is the Governance Laboratory launched in 2022

intended to facilitate connections, working synergies, and mutual learning by integrating reflection and action. It is an institution responsible for ensuring that the EEI processes and projects are developed following the philosophy of collaborative governance to and promote connectivity and relationships between different initiatives (Goia et al., 2023). Thus, the Governance Laboratory “has been in the core of EEI since this governance laboratory started because this was like we would say that it was. It was like the brain, not the brain, but yes. A place where we could see the whole thing” (AA). It was comprised of individuals who have been involved in key areas of the EE, such as Naira Goia, who is the head of ArantzazuLab, Mirren Larea who is was responsible for the ‘action research’ methodology, the Director General for Strategy; Advisor for External Action; Head of Service of the General Directorate of Strategy (Goia et al., 2023).

The Governance laboratory can be considered as an example how the governance of collaborative governance itself can also be conducted collaboratively and it shows the “positive evolution of the model and demonstrates the achievement of the strategy itself. The laboratory provides an effective space to implement collaborative governance in the public policy ecosystem of Gipuzkoa and guarantees the systemic vision and objectives of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz activities” (Goia et al., 2023, p.88).

Support system and cross-cutting processes

An effective support system that directs, organises, and channels the activity created by the EEI model’s deployment and manages the model with a complete overall vision has been essential for the success of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa. The EEI seeks to alter the practices that have been ingrained in political arenas and public institutions through autonomic and hierarchical organisation, as this impede the discussion, creation, and execution of public policies. The EEI expands on the following governance structures in order to promote institutional designs and leadership that support experimentation and cooperation, connectivity between processes, and management, socialisation, and communication activities (Pomares et al., 2023). The three cross-cutting processes (dissemination, internationalisation and research) that must be integrated in all areas of the initiative to enrich the production of information, knowledge and learning in the construction of shared solutions (see Figure 4), aimed to give the EEI structure. First, the dissemination process uses a variety of technologies (websites, blogs, seminars, events, etc.) to facilitate systematic socialisation and communication efforts. Second, the internationalisation process connects EEI to other comparable experiences worldwide encouraging comparison and lesson-learning. Third, the research process organises and systematises the information and discoveries of from the EEI work into a knowledge base (Pomares et al., 2023).

While these processes do not create collaborative governance themselves, they are important for the continued development and management of the collaborative governance network.

Debagoiena 2030

Another initiative that utilises a collaborative approach but was not started in relation to the EEI, is Debagoiena 2030. This a territory sustainable development network with the vision “to achieve a smart, inclusive and climate-neutral Debagoiena by 2050 by deepening the community development of the region” (Herrarte, 2024). The network includes stakeholders in the Debagoiena Territory, which is comprised of eight municipalities in Gipuzkoa and one in Araba. The participating stakeholders come from public institutions, cooperatives, civil society, educational stakeholders, the private sector, economic agents from the territory and strategic international partners like Climate-KIC. Debagoiena 2030 has the mission to “promote a transformation movement with a community response to the global challenges of the 21st century, establishing connections between agents and citizens, influencing the worldview and the values of people, and promoting innovative initiatives and projects that have a relevant impact on our region” (Herrarte, 2024).

Before Debagoiena 2030 was started in 2019, an in-depth community listening process was conducted (EH). This included 138 unstructured qualitative interviews conducted in two rounds to identify narratives, diverse perceptions or points of view, and gain an in-depth understanding of their origin. Ten group interviews to identify narratives and five group interpretations were conducted for “interpretation groups to share, compare and explore in depth the conclusions obtained from the interviews and debates.” (Debagoiena 2030 - Listening Process 2019, p.7). From this process the vision and mission of Debagoiena 2030 were defined and the areas the challenges of the territory would be addressed in (EH). The eight areas that are addressed are: future of work, energy, mobility, food, education, circular economy, inclusion and community empowerment and participation (Herrarte, 2024).

Yet, the first projects were directed towards culture and forests, which Elena Herrarte explains as the following:

“The first action space we opened as Debagoiena 2030 (...) for years where one related to culture and other was with forests, another was with energy. It was like a very random they were like very random projects. But we thought that it was important also because transformation is deep. Transformation is about action. So that we felt at that time that we needed projects. And we needed to start working with different actors in collaboration within a common strategy and towards a common vision and to generate like the body of the actual body of the of the initiatives.” (EH)

This vision of the territory is the core of Debagoiena 2030 because Elena Herrarte sees this as the opportunity to engage actors. Since Debagoiena 2030 only has a small technical team, the collaboration of different stakeholders is imperative in their projects. The following illustrates the dynamic of Debagoiena 2030:

“It’s like a regional agreement. We have a governance body that is more linked to define and take care about the vision with our small technical team. That is more about how we can become stronger,

with that vision: how can we mobilize other actors. So, for us that kind of projects are very important, yes to generate a community subject within each challenge. So, we consider that a proactiveness of the community is very important to respond.” (EA)

Elena Herrarte further reiterates that Debagoiena builds on the existent community values: “We don’t generate like the idea of collaboration that was previously than Debagoiena 2013.” (EH). Based on these values Debagoiena has created as a process to address the different challenges areas:

“We work like in two levels. In each of these areas, we have got a community process where we explore the complex challenge. We generate a collective space to make collective diagnosis, to define where the priority is, to define what kind of project should be the in pools and so on and then from this process we define project or actions. And we further a big portfolio of projects (...). Some of them are very experimental and are oriented to some learnings or something like that are more like pilots. And we work in that way because our aim is. Not only to generate projects we want to create projects but important objective that we are looking for is to generate strong network (...) to generate the capability more than to input project to develop projects.” (EH)

The following graph illustrates the community process used to identify problems, co-create solutions and implement solutions together (EH).



Figure 7 Collaborative community process of Debagoiena 2030 (Herrarte, 2024, p. 14).

Although the Figure 7 suggests a linear process, in the second Orain eta Etorkezuna Magazine Debagoiena 2030 is introduced, and it is reiterated how important it is to create spaces for dialogue and discussions that allow diverse stakeholders to bring in their ideas and perspectives:

“It is extremely important to foster dialogue and contact beyond a mere linear perspective. Among other successes, different agents and individuals in the district have been involved to share their projects, experiences and visions in relation to the challenges posed. Moreover, a collaborative governance model for the territory has been mapped out to bring about an in-depth transformation of Debagoiena towards a development and sustainability model, building a vision framework and work dynamics shared by agents operating in different areas.” (Barandiaran, 2022b)

In the creation of such a collaborative governance model of the territory, Debagoiena 2030 also collaborates with the EEI and takes part in some of their programmes, further showing how collaborative the network in Gipuzkoa is.

Decision-making structures

The decision-making structures set up by the EEI for collaborative governance combine decentralized mechanisms that aim to boost innovation towards collaboration with a vertical institutional leadership (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020; OE).

Building on one of the EEI's guiding principles of vertical leadership, the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council takes on a steering role of the EEI to its funding and has been the initiative behind proposals, designs and implementation, as well as active participants in its development (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020). The provincial council decides the strategic orientation of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz portfolio and allocates resources and generally monitors developments (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021a). Furthermore, the decision-making structures of the EEI located in the provincial council aim to provide connectivity to the collaborative activities and facilitate their activities and not take a steering position as it is. Internally, the provincial council has committed to progressively translate the results into public policy, through this a sustainable, stable model of open and collaborative governance of the EEI by the government itself in the medium and long term is most guaranteed (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020). Olatz Errazquin emphasised how the activities of the EEI have influenced the consideration of internal processes: “(we) started thinking about how our structures and our processes should be more aligned with the purpose of EEI. So, the initiative also has been a kind of question to the organisation of how we work, how we organize, which kind of culture values we have” (O&S). Xabier Barandiarán further emphasizes that such processes take time:

“The EE, not all the public policy system. No, you need (to) achieve new territory step by step, little by little. And it's a very strong process. But when in the laboratory the project has are successful really. This (makes it) easier to incorporate at this at the public policy system and when you are little by little changing the public administration system and with time and with many years you could change the public administration system in general.” (XB)

The horizontal mechanisms in the EEI take on a variety of forms, since experimental projects are very free in who they involve and how and the reference centres have the freedom to organize their decision-structures according to the specific specialisation. The Thank Tank also allowed a certain co-ownership of the process, through which it was operation, although it was started top-down. Elena Herrarte emphasised the importance of decision-making processes that involving the stakeholders from the start of identifying the problem to the implementation, a co-ownership:

“Yes, the engagement, the sensation or the idea of co-ownership of the of the Debagoiena 2030 is also part of the of the success in the process. Sometimes it’s like not that fast because this kind of work needs to connect the spaces to speak to gather. It is easier if you and I define a project and manage it. But if you want to generate like common sense of the project to negotiate the objectives to co-finance the project, that is like another reason of doing things but then or thesis is that that the impact is deeper.” (EH)

The unique decision-making structure evident in Gipuzkoa highlight that the collaboration of the EEI needs a certain commitment to openness of structures and experimenting with within public institutions to ensure connectivity. Simultaneously, the openness for new political culture is needed for implementation.

Transparency of rules and procedures

Through increasing inclusion of stakeholders in processes and institutions for collaborative governance it simultaneously increases the transparency of rules and procedures. Throughout the communication of EEI on its extensive website and the information on the different spaces for listening, experimentation, and specialisation it puts an emphasis on transparency. In the document introducing the EEI Model, it gives insights how each area works, and which tools are used to make decisions. Also providing the documents for stakeholders to suggest new projects (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020). Similarly, the provided information on the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Tank is extensive, including working documents, meeting reports of every meeting and reflection meetings and compiling research diaries summarising the extensive information (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2019).

Through the nature of collaboration in processes and decision-making their rules and procedures also become transparent and understandable. However, Naiara Goia emphasizes how important it is to further ensure transparency towards the public by using the example of the citizens assemblies:

“I mean, it’s one of the requirements and it’s one of the key elements to make the process transparent and accessible not only for the citizens participating in the process, but for a wider community. We follow different mechanisms: there is a web page where you have the all the information. What’s happening in every moment? What are the documents that have been shared? What are the recommendations and then the public institutions made that report answering to these recommendations. So, this report is public, so everything and we’re like informing and then I’m telling everything that has happened.” (NG)

Transparency of rules and procedures are important for citizens to trust in the decisions made by public institutions of the EEI, yet only relying on communication can be challenging when considering how complex institutions have become. Collaborative governance offers a way to create transparency through collaboration and increase trust.

Decision correction or amendment

Collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region builds on processes of reflection and learning as a whole, which allows decisions and projects to be experimental and actions to be constantly adjusted (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council & New Political Culture Deliberation Group, 2022). Ione Ardaiz highlights how important the reflection and learning processes are:

“(We do) different reflection sessions. So, we understand that this type of approach is new. We are all learning. We are also like learning as we do it, as we so like sometimes things work, sometimes we make big mistakes, and we learn from those and that’s why we are opening different reflection spaces. With both people (that) have been involved in different roles in in the design and implementation of the of the citizen assemblies, so we can learn what are the elements that we need to do differently next time.” (IA)

Xabier Barandiarán sees this approach to learning and reflection as a strong point of the EEI allowing to learn and pivot from unsuccessful projects while incorporating successful projects to the public policy system (XB). This reiterates how collaborative governance enables decision amending and corrections a natural part of the learning process.

Sharing and redistribution of social power

The very origin of the EEI lay in the realisation that public institutions do not have the resources, legitimacy and knowledge to address increasingly complex challenges. Thus, the policymakers in Gipuzkoa realised that it lay within their power to share responsibility and decision-making thus sharing their power through collaborative governance (XB).

Elena Herrarte also highlights how spaces of collaboration ask for a new cultural relational way of interacting: “it’s a very deep cultural change. I think that another thing that is like not that material, but (...) we don’t speak about that, but the power dynamics also are like interrelated in this. Each one in their sector has like their scope of power: ‘No, I can decide this and this and this’. And they are in Debagoiena 2030 which is a space where we need to share that power scopes” (EH). She further connects the sharing of power to the improvement of actions both in their use of resources and in their impact:

“To work different in the 21st century because we are not in front of the same challenges and the same situation than in the past. And to successfully respond to these challenges needs radical collaboration. We need to organize regions in a different way. We need to rethink in how public administration works, how different actors work, how can we catalyse like a very big power to transform the community? Because if not, we are not going to be able to do it. In the time that we are asked to show” (EH)

This understanding that public institutions do not lose power by sharing it with citizens through collaborative governance but are able to create more impactful solutions for the challenges that many democracies are facing now, is imbedded in the EEI.

Negotiation of conflicts

Through bringing diverse stakeholders together through collaborative governance conflicting interests and conceptions will be a part of the collaboration process. Ainhoa Arrona explains how normal conflicts have been in collaborative processes:

“We approach conflict in processes (...), for example, we need to foster collaborative governance within a set of actors, and there are always conflicts among them because they have different interests, different views and of course, sometimes conflicts are very low and but some other times there can be big conflicts that you need to work. But for us conflict is something to work on in the processes where we work.” (AA)

Xabier Barandiarán further emphasizes the difficulties of creating collaboration between the four groups that were the focus of the first collaboration projects. Each project had to include at least a people from the university, public institutions, private companies and international experts. Even without including the wider public yet, he emphasised how difficult the understanding between these groups was is and how they had to learn to collaborate (XB).

Having conflicting interests might be also necessary for processes to create actual deliberation, Naiara Goia reflected on the citizen assemblies:

“The first lesson learned is that the Citizens Assembly should have a mandate more focused on a dilemma, a real dilemma. You know, a real trade off. A real question that is based on values. I mean, a real question that is not. It doesn't have a technical answer. You know real dilemma that will make sense to involve citizens, you know like diverse citizens in the in the in the process.” (NG)

When the issue is not a real dilemma and the solution can be found through a technical solution, the deliberation will not yield any impactful results (NG). Elena Herrarte further sees the opportunity of collaborative processes to bring people of conflicting interests into dialogue with each other:

“Regionally the deliberative process; that is what we are now generating spaces with very different actors. We have put together in a in a room, industrial people, radical ecologists, town hall. We have, like we are trying to design like what is the aim of this process. What are the sources? The process what we have co-designed, how can we develop a deliberation, a deep deliberation process with citizen to respond to that challenge.” (EH)

But including the diverse stakeholders with conflicting views in co-creating process of problem identification and solution finding, Elena Herrarte highlights how the radical positions yield to the co-ownership of the solution and stakeholders work together. These examples show how collaborative governance accept conflict as part their processes and allows for meaningful discussions in Gipuzkoa.

Democratic praxis

Shared concern actors mobilise around collectively

The shared concern of the crisis of liberal democracy and the inability of public institutions to address social, economic and environmental challenges has been the key reason why the EEI with the methodology of collaborative governance emerged in Gipuzkoa (e.g. Barandiaran, 2022a). Along with the concern of the continuous existent of the values in Gipuzkoa and the Gipuzkoa model the EEI was in fact “created in order to keep or maintain those values and that’s why when we are offering to the society and to the citizen to collaborate with the public administration to define our future, not just the headlines. Also through specific projects and programs to build a with the society and community” (SZ). This concern and the need for action has been consistently communicated with the EEI to ensure that the reason behind the ambitious project is clear. Simultaneously, the structure of the EEI allows to address other shared concerns brought into processes through experimental projects or specialisation of reference centres. Generally, the EEI can be considered as a collaborative governance project driven by shared concerns. Similarly, a shared concern for the territorial development caused the start of Debagoiena 2030 to address the changes form sustainability and economical causes (EH).

Inclusion in participation and negotiation of belonging to the political community

The strategy that collaborative governance follows to address the challenges Gipuzkoa is facing is the inclusion of increasing number of stakeholders to and create solution that address these challenges. This is achieved for example through experimental projects in Gipuzkoa Lab which allows any stakeholders to initiate new problems addressing challenges that are relevant. Olatz Errazquin illustrates the intention as “the formula that Gipuzkoa is proposing to respond to the crisis of democracy is to create our agenda based on collaboration and experimentation, along with the civil society and citizens and the major items of the territory” (OE). Through this it is also possible that challenges are identified and addressed that public institutions were not aware of beforehand. One important aspect is that collaboration does not only begin with the solution implementation, both the EEI and Debagoiena 2030 illustrate how participatory collaboration processes provide the opportunity to create meaningful solutions through inclusions, also bringing together different stakeholders.

Xabier Barandiarán explained that inclusion in collaborative processes takes time and that in the EEI it is important that in “each project four actors work together: University, Public institutions, private companies and international experts” (XB). When asked if he thinks if the EEI has improved the trust in society into the government, he replied with not a lot, but he emphasized the following:

“Etorkizuna Eraikiz changed the values and the behaviour of people that take part in the Etorkizuna Eraikiz, this is the more important thing. For example, sometimes I remember institutions of civil society. They came to the provincial council to ask for money, but when you say? The money is important but is most important work together. If they agree with that and you start working together,

this process changes their point of view. They understand better the problems they identify with the reality, and they could understand what your problems, why you are deciding one issue and no other issue. And this is a very this is the most important achievement of a Etorkezuna Eraikiz. It's not we couldn't change public opinion so far. But we could change the mentality of the person that took part in the Etorkezuna Eraikiz, and this is. I'm very proud with that." (XB)

This illustrates how collaboration is something that needs to be practised and learned. Something similar is emphasized in the second Orain eta Etorkezuna Magazine by Ion Muñoa:

"When we talk about democracy, we're talking about a system. And most of us understand this: there is a separation of powers, the right to vote and all that. But we talk less about democratic culture. And if we are going to talk about democratic culture, we have to say that democratic culture, like everything, has certain values, which require certain ways of being a citizen. And of course, this is the basis of the conception of being a citizen that has developed since the 18th century as well as its idealisation. So, there is a citizen who is responsible, civic, showing solidarity towards others as well as to the environment. (...) There probably are collective responsibilities, but I think that the most important thing in contemporary society is the need to reinforce the sense of collective responsibility of the individual. And this doesn't mean that everyone has to be involved all the time in everything" (Barandiarán, 2022b, p. 29)

Even if collaborative processes are open if citizens participate still is a question of individual choice, and something that stakeholders in Gipuzkoa had to learn and practise. Regarding the inclusion of citizens, the Civil Society Employee highlighted the following:

"I feel included and represented in the governance of Gipuzkoa, but I think I am privileged, as I have the opportunity to participate in spaces such as the think tank or the deliberation group because of the role I play at a professional level. Although Etorkezuna Eraikiz has various devices, spaces and processes to promote the participation of the community and the social and economic fabric, it is still a challenge to get citizens to participate and commit to the collaborative governance that is being promoted. I believe that Etorkezuna Eraikiz has managed to overcome many barriers in terms of governance, but for the moment, I would say that it has managed to connect with those people who were already active beforehand. The vast majority of society (passive in terms of social participation) still needs to be activated and connected. For various reasons (timing, terminology used, priorities, political detachment...) it is often very difficult to reconcile the natural functioning of the community and the governance of public administrations. Even so, governance is something that has to be worked on a daily basis, so I believe that we are working in the right direction." (CSE)

Although the EEI is open for participation in different ways, this does not instantly translate to the wider society in Gipuzkoa participating.

Internally of the Regional Gipuzkoa Council the inclusion in the participation of the EEI, the establishment of the EEI, also created the risk at some point of having two different council as Ainhoa Arrona explains:

“They felt like there were two different ways of working, the normal one (...) And then the collaborative governance one. So, they wanted to change the approach because they felt the risk of people from the regional government (...) [that] they would say that the EEI was only an initiative on an (...), but a small group was working in that way. Not the whole government. So, they felt the risk that most of the people in the regional government will see it as an outside thing, not as a philosophy that they should incorporate as their way of working” (AA)

That such an innovative approach creates tensions in those that are used to work another way is also mentioned by Ione Ardaiz:

“When you’re looking to transform way of thinking or doing it’s normal that those tensions come up and I think in our processes more than public institutions refusing the work, it’s more we have different tensions. Of course, sometimes it’s because they are very advanced innovations that we are trying to put in place and that creates some like tensions within the institution or sometimes maybe it’s because we go too fast, too far for them, and we need to slow down and we need to understand what are the capabilities, what the capacities we need to be put in place? What are the conditions that we need to create to work alongside you? And so, there’s different questions that come up, but it’s more I think a matter of having a constant dialogue with them to understand how we adapt our practice and to them to be able to work together, because if we work like we work too fast, then we lose them. But if we also, if we walk alongside them, only then we will fall into status quo easily.” (IA)

All these insights show that participation and inclusion are not a given and come with learning and reflective processes to be considered in the establishment and continuation of them. To ensure that the processes are perceived as open it is important that the communication of the processes is accessible and open to everyone. The EEI puts significant effort into creating a variety of communication output that can be used by citizens and civil society to inform themselves (Muñoa, 2023).

[Action research for Territorial development for continued reflexivity about practices and processes](#)

Continued reflexivity has been included in the EEI from the beginning, due to a conception that how things are done is just as important as what is done and that active experimentation took on a central part in the initiative (Eizagirre et al., 2023). On the one hand the EEI went through several reflections between 2016 and 2023, to give three examples:

“November 2021 Etorikizuna Eraikiz Loiola Plenary (the main stakeholders of the Provincial Government ecosystem). This Plenary has become a systematised space dedicated to the evaluation of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz model, and a gathering place for co-creation and collective learning among participants.

December 2021 Etorikizuna Eraikiz Conference (bringing together international experts).

January - December 2021: Qualitative evaluation by Agirre Lehendakaria Center (the main stakeholders of the Provincial Government's public policy ecosystem)." (Goia et al., 2023, p. 84)

The continuous processes reflected in the work of ArantzazuLab and is part of the long-term vision as Naira Goia puts it:

"I mean our work is hard (...) I mean it's a long term because in long term work like in many cases we are talking about changing mindsets, changing culture, changing the way we do things and changing the way we've been doing life for many years and somebody coming to say that, yeah, I mean, it works, but it could be improved. So, I mean it's like, I mean we are aware that our work is like a long-time work." (NG)

To ensure that reflection, learning and action are utilised in a continuous process, researchers from the Deusto University have developed the approach of action research to action research for territorial development (ARTD) which are the "real-time processes of co-generation occurring at the intersection between research and territorial development and with participants who are immersed in processes (involving a relatively small number of people), usually representing specific organisations but the overall aim is to have a long-term structural impact on the territory" (Eizagirre et al., 2023, p. 127). ARTD was used in the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think tank and its deliberation groups, from which three main lessons have been derived. First, ARTD allows to build a non-linear relationship between theory and practice that allow the two to evolve together instead of following a linear path. This also allows Participants to learn to combine different types of knowledge, in the Think Tank case experiential, theoretical, and processual knowledge to collaboratively transform governance systems. Second, ARTD can help to manage the doubts and reservations generated by the participation of collaborative governance by openly addressing the emotional and political concerns that arise when participants engage in co-generated knowledge and decision-making. Third, ARTD gives the possibility to address the emotional facet of building collaborative governance through fostering reflexive co-agency, ARTD encourages participants to recognize both their rational and emotional selves, improving the quality of political relationships and decision-making (Eizagirre et al., 2023, p. 127). ARTD further reflects a new relationship of universities in collaborative governance, by creating and moderating such processes.

4.2.3 Summary of collaborative governance institutionalised and practised in Gipuzkoa

The extensive measures taken by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council to introduced institutions and democratic praxis of collaborative governance constitutes an ambitious project to set up the regional governance to address futures challenges. The process since 2007 has been characterised by reflection and openness to adjust direction. Through spaces for listening, deliberation, experimenting and specialisation the EEI has transformed the governance in Gipuzkoa both internally of the provincial

council and externally by including stakeholders in collaborative governance. While the EEI has to continue to actively include the wider society, the collaboration with universities, civil society and other stakeholders already has introduced increased transparency, shared decision-making and power distribution in the governance emphasising the innovative characteristic. The continued reflexivity of the EEI has further been the reason that the 2024 to 2027 strategic plan of the Gipuzkoa Council will shift its focus to determine how the strategic objectives identified through the EEI can be used to put collaborative governance at the centre of the political agenda to articulate different collaborative mechanisms to fulfil the strategic objectives. Since the reflection process was still taking place until the middle of 2024, the redirection is not considered in this research.

4.3 Evaluation of commoning practices and collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa as micro and meso-level radical democracy

In the following section presents the results of the evaluation conducted in a second round of analysis to evaluate whether the commoning practices and collaborative governance enact radical democracy on the micro- and meso-level in Gipuzkoa. To test this connection, the results of commoning practises and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region have been evaluated according to the evaluative framework in Section 2.5.3.

4.3.1 Commoning practices enacting micro-level radical democracy

The evaluative framework also provides the structure for this section. First, the existence of radical democratic citizenship in the commoning practices is evaluated. Second, it is assessed how the commoning practices protect radical democratic spaces. Third, it is considered how commoning practices promote a new political culture. Fourth, it is assessed how the act of individual self-liberation as a key aspect of the revolutionary process. Fifth, it is evaluated how culture and art in the commoning practices have been used as democratic practices. Sixth, the confrontation of different ideas, experiences and interests in commoning practices is assessed. Last, it is presented how worker cooperatives play a role in constituting radical democratic practices on the micro level.

Radical democratic citizenship

Radical democratic citizenship is an important factor when considering how micro-level radical democratic practices can be pursued. Instead of considering citizenship based on a nation-state, it is a constructed 'we' inherently open to others, human and non-human.

The commoning practices in associations and the ones centring around the Basque Language form such a radical democratic citizenship. The background of Auzolan and the historical reciprocal collaboration was not based on the notion that that is what Basque people do but that is what is considered right to do. While the nationality' or conviction as Basque is very strong in the population, the identified commoning practices assert the ingrained collaborative aspect in culture to do things together and help

each other to live. This micro-level democratic practices further take part without any incentive, based on values. This shows how these practices can be considered as radical democratic as they go beyond exchange for services and products for monetary gain, thus asserting an alternative to capitalised individualised need fulfilment (Euler, 2019; Younes, 2024). The risk of exclusion exists when new people arrive in the communities especially with Basque Language, yet the integration evident during the field work shows how the Basque community is open for people to join. The Researcher reports that integration is happening faster: “In small towns, I think it’s happening faster than in in cities, the integration. When I go to smaller towns, I see better integrated immigrants and you see a diversity which is integrated and speaking in Basque, which is it also happens in the cities.” (R)

Imanol Galdos Irazabal even sees the future of the Basque Language and associated culture in immigrants, highlighting the difference of this citizenship as open and inclusive in contrast to national citizenships associated with the place of birth. Additionally, the protest in Donostia-San Sebastián shows that the protection of important spaces is an important aspect of the micro-democratic practices. Picture 16 shows how much the protection of the nature of Gipuzkoa is part of the commoning practices, showing how the citizenship extends to the non-human.



Picture 16 Poster during the protest (27th of April 2024)

Through this the commoning practices identified in Gipuzkoa enact a radical democratic citizenship, through the social values that the commoning practices centre around and their inherent openness and inclusion of both humans and non-human.

Protection of radical democratic spaces

The role that public spaces play in the commoning practices in Gipuzkoa was evident in the commoning practices in the role of public squares, bars, and Eltzia as a space to come together for collective organisation. Thus, these spaces are important for radical democratic practices and influence the effectiveness of citizenship engagement. Imanol Galdos Irazabal pointed out that the use of bars as spaces to meet and organize in Donostia-San Sebastián is drastically changed since the COVID years and how new places need to be found. Eltzia can be considered as such a space, yet even though it is

technically open for everyone people and free who are not a part of associations within Eltzia do not often make the step from the bar at the front through a sliding door into Eltzia.

The committee of Eltzia is considering this, by hiring someone who is responsible to foster such openness and the municipality of Oñati is further fostering physical accessibility by making Eltzia barrier free. Anik Zubizarreta also highlighted that between the two parties that are active on the local level in Oñati, neither of them would consider stopping the support of Eltzia, because the people would be protesting that and protecting Eltzia. Similarly, the protest in Donostia-San Sebastián emphasized how the people are protesting to keep their community commons in the city. The use of the citizen square for the protest and the dancing further demonstrate how public spaces are important for commoning practices.

Promotion of a new political culture

Globalised capitalism has caused individualisation in the everyday life; to promote radical democratic practices on any level it is important a new political and democratic culture is fostered and learned (Dirik, 2022). The commoning practices in Gipuzkoa promote new political relationships on the micro-level through collaboration in Ikastolas, housing projects and local care ecosystems.

The collaborative schools (Ikastolas) are an example how democratic practices through collaboration can be a possibility to use education of these values through leading by example or ‘walking the talk’. Instead of just communicating the importance of the historical collaborative values to young people, by creating the educational setting through them, the parents and teacher show instead how active democratic citizenship takes place. Similarly, by including those who need housing in participatory processes of both problem identification and solution finding, the housing projects foster new political engagements in these processes. Additionally, the housing arrangements that go beyond the simple financial transaction of payment also foster a new kind of citizenship, by showing young people the importance of community engagement. And so does the citizen engagement in local care ecosystems which also reiterates the radical democratic citizenship that is evident in Gipuzkoa.

To ensure that the collaborative values continue to be lived by the younger generations, Elena Herrarte emphasised how Debagoiena 20230 has realised that younger generation needs different kinds of engagement to learn and appreciate collaboration. This shows that the consideration of the values is not stagnate but the necessity that a new generation will have a different understanding thus needs new approaches to micro-level political culture make sure pragmatism does not eradicate values.

Individual self-liberation as a key aspect of the democratic process

In the process of changing society, the liberty to make statements about society and its problems, does not guarantee change, but it is an important aspect of micro-level democratic practices to be able to do so (Dirik, 2022). In the commoning practices in the Gipuzkoa Region such statements about their history

and political system are evident through the open recognition that the collaborative aspects as decreasing and less people are participating in associations as used to.

Secondly, the extensive use of art in public spaces that convey messages about the convicted ETA members and the Basque Autonomy speaks to the use of art to transform public spaces into platforms for political discourse and social commentary, thereby fostering an environment of at least passive conversation about the issue (see Pictures 10 to 15). However, no insights were gained to which extent these messages are also discussed in other places.

Culture and art as democratic practices

The extensive use of street art in public spaces highlights how these commoning practices use art as a tool to bring social awareness into the public spaces. As described in Section 4.1.4., the observed street art predominantly included political messages, which ranged from feminism, the freeing of the ETA prisoners, critique of expensive housing to solidarity with Gaza and Palestine. While the evaluation to what extent the street art contributes to social awareness and change is difficult to do for certain. This use of public space indicates a powerful tool for raising awareness and advocating for various causes, including regional and global issues. This form of art transforms public spaces into platforms for political discourse and social commentary, thereby fostering an environment of active civic engagement. The use of culture as a political aspect for social awareness and change is also evident in the commoning practices around the Basque Language. This is highlighted in the resistance during the Franco dictatorship and its reestablishment afterwards, as described by Imanol Galdos Irazabal. The artistic and cultural aspect are further evident in the Korrika, which aims to ensure through the crowd-funded event that the Basque Language does not disappear. Similarly, the continuous teaching of Basque dances and poetry styles, for example by the association sin Eltzia further support the continuous existence of the Basque culture.

Worker cooperatives as an alternative to the dominant logic of commodification

The significance of the worker cooperative in Gipuzkoa enable radical democratic practices within the cooperatives, by enable worker to take part in decision-making power and redistributing the profits more fairly. However, the importance of the worker cooperatives extends beyond the workplace. Elena Herrarte describes how the worker cooperative model influences other micro-level relationships and social cohesion:

“I think another specific element that Gipuzkoa is like that and especially in this region, is that I think because of the cooperatives model and the principle of the cooperatives. The quantity of money that people are earning now. (...) We further our big medium society. We don't have a lot of rich people know some rich people and the differences between the richest and the poorest are not that big in comparing with other regions. That is like a very important principle. In cooperatives, the difference between the earning of the one who earns most and the least one nowadays is like 1:30 more or less. But 50 years ago it was 1:3, so that generates like a very... We are all like very close one with we don't have very big difference. So, we live and that means that no one earns less.” (EH)

Anik Zubizarreta indicates that worker cooperatives and the social security foster participation in “I would say that this also works in in the building of this kind of communities because people have their essentials covered so they can put their time in things like this. So yeah, that’s a factor that that helps” (AZ).

4.3.2 [Meso-level radical democracy](#)

Following the structure of the evaluative framework for micro- and meso-level radical democracy this section first presents the institution that introduce more plurality in Gipuzkoa. Second, it is illustrated how confrontation of different ideas, experiences, and interests takes place in the collaborative governance. Third, the use of local knowledge is highlighted. Fourth, it is presented how a new political culture is promoted. Finally, the work culture change of policy makers for collaborative governance is demonstrated.

[New institutions for more plurality](#)

Section 4.2.2. illustrates the wide range of introduced institutional, spaces and processes for collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa through the EEI and Debagoiena 2030. To evaluate how these enact radical democracy at the meso-level, it needs to be questioned how effective they are in achieving more diverse participation and deliberation within democratic systems.

The collaborative governance approach of the EEI and Debagoiena 2030 seeks to increasingly include diverse stakeholders in the deliberation of challenges and the solution-finding processes and implementation. The EEI combines collaborative governance with vertical institutional leadership through the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council with horizontal, decentralized mechanisms. This approach allows for top-down strategic orientation to cope with the complexity of collaborative governance, while also giving freedom to experimental projects to develop organically and autonomously at the grassroots level. The top-down leadership allows of power sharing through experimental processes and for example the reference centre can chose their decision-making structures according to their needs, which is important to ensure the continuation of the EEI. The institutional leadership mainly aims to provide a systemic overview and steering for the EEI to navigate its complexity and ensure an overall collaborative approach. Even if processes are started by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa it allows for collaborating stakeholders to define the problem, for example the deliberation group on new political culture, it was suggested the starting point was the crisis of liberal democracy, but the first deliberation was whether this problem fit or not (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2021b).

Similarly, Debagoiena 2030 facilitates a community-driven approach, where stakeholders co-design solutions in areas like education, energy, and inclusion. Working on a smaller scale Debagoiena 2030 adopts a community-led problem identification and the subsequent development of projects reflect a significant shift toward collaboration and decentralisation.

Both initiatives demonstrate a conscious effort to involve various stakeholders such as public institutions, civil society, cooperatives, private sector agents, universities, and international partners to foster a more holistic approach to addressing regional challenges. Debagoiena 2030 includes stakeholders from eight municipalities across sectors, while EEI relies on collaborations that at least include stakeholders from academia, the private sector, international experts, and civil society. This aim to include diverse stakeholders is the main strategy to allow for more participation. By fulfilling it collaborative governance goes beyond simple participation by bridging different perspectives, aligning collective action toward shared goals. The in co-definition of processes and co-creation of solutions is a powerful strategy for ensuring that policies and projects are not merely top-down but rather address the real concerns and ideas of the community. Through these collaborative processes the EEI allows sharing of decision power with those that are collaborating, but also responsibility for the solutions is shared and other stakeholders take on an important role.

An important factor that the EEI especially pursues are efforts to make processes, decisions, and information accessible to stakeholders and the public to ensure transparency. The EEI provides extensive information on its activities, processes and outcomes for the participation stakeholders and public facing through different media types. The EEI also includes regular reflection sessions, working group meetings, and public documentation of processes and outcomes, the initiatives maintain transparency and allow stakeholders to learn from ongoing efforts. This also fosters trust in the governance process, making collaboration more open and accessible. This aids in fostering a sense of co-ownership of projects, allowing diverse voices to shape decisions from the ground up.

One important aspect that also needs to be considered in collaborative governance and its effectiveness to introduce participation is that some stakeholders may still have more influence over decision-making processes than others. Debagoiena 2030 recognizes that stakeholders, such as public institutions, private companies, or established cooperatives come with existing power dynamics, which can lead to unequal influence in collaborative spaces. Elena Herrarte highlights the need to actively share power among different actors in Debagoiena 2030 to ensure true “radical collaboration” that can address power asymmetries.

While extensive measures have been taken to widen the participation of diverse stakeholders, the EEI faces the issue that most citizens do not know what it is yet. To further enable participation the EEI needs to find paths to include more citizens on way could be the use of citizen assemblies to gain further traction in widening citizen participation. However, the EEI still has introduced a far-reaching initiative that has promoted collaborative governance through different institutions that allow more plurality through sharing decision-making power in processes and solutions.

Confrontation of different ideas, experiences, and interests

Generally, collaborative governance aims to be consensus based, yet conflict is considered as a natural part of the collaborative process, as described by Ainhoa Arrona and Xabier Barandiarán. Collaborative governance builds on the inclusion of diverse perspectives and knowledge to create better solutions to challenges. Thus, collaboration can use conflicting perspectives and insights in establishing a more comprehensive understanding of an issue. However, for conflict to be a productive component of the decision-making process it needs to be approached constructively to foster thorough discussions and integrate a wide range of perspectives. This does bear the risk of being resource intensive and could lead to escalation. Xabier Barandiarán highlights the role of a facilitator in collaborative processes:

“We have a person, Ainhoa Arrona, they did a very good work as facilitator. Really, when we had problems and. In general, the problems are not objective problems, and they are problems with the communication problems with people with the different understanding. Different point of view, you know, and I think with good communication with trust with by building social capital you could resolve this problem.” (XB)

This indicates that facilitation of clear communication and building trust are essential for collaboration. Naiara Goia even considers dilemmas that need a discussion based on values is good for including citizens in for deliberative processes:

“The first lesson learned is that the Citizens Assembly should have a mandate more focused on a dilemma, a real dilemma. You know, a real trade off. A real question that is based on values. I mean, a real question that is not. It doesn't have a technical answer. You know real dilemma that will make sense to involve citizens, you know like diverse citizens in the in the in the process.” (NG)

Elena Herrarte highlighted how collaborative governance in Debagoiena 2030 has had the benefit that opposed stakeholders ended up working together through the collaboration and engaging with a variety of expert perspectives and critical evaluations helps refine practices and ensure continuous improvement.

Consensus-based decision making has the drawback that some interests or opinions must be set aside to achieve a decision, however collaborative governance does not exclude conflict and confrontation of different ideas overall. Collaborative governance sees the need however to agree what the problem is, as Xabier Barandiarán puts it: “sometimes it's not easy to be agree with the with the problem with the focus, but with the agreement, we can't look for better solution” (XB).

Use of local knowledge

The role of local knowledge is relevant for radical democratic practices, because it is rooted in everyday practices of particular places, cultures, or histories (Magnusson, 2022).

From its introduction the EEI build on the historical and cultural context of the Gipuzkoa Region, more specifically the ‘Gipuzkoa Model’. This represents the values and capacities of Gipuzkoa, how the region’s economic and social development has been constructed and is the foundation for the shared construction of the region’s future (Errazquin, n.d.). This has led to the introduced collaborative governance approach to be adjusted from research literature upon according to the local collaboration values and fitting to the challenges that are impacting Gipuzkoa. As Xabier Barandiarán puts it:

“If you and me, we have the same values we could work together better. This is important if you have the comprehension about the public sphere or the public space, and your comprehension is the same of mine, and our collaboration system is possible. Sometimes in the democratic context, only the rules establish the democratic system, but it’s not enough. I think you need the social cohesion. You need the interiorized, the democratic culture to. Build the democratic context and I think the more important than the rules are the culture. This is an important idea to understand the collaboration system because sometimes historically we had in other public institutions we have public participation systems. But it doesn’t work because the rule is not enough. I think it’s not enough.” (XB)

Furthermore, the processes of the EEI aim to incorporate various types of knowledge, including theoretical, experiential, and community-based insights. This involves collaborating with the three universities based in the Basque Country, research centres, citizens, and local associations to gather a comprehensive understanding of issues. And the Researcher gave the insights that even consultancy companies from the region were preferred to international ones:

“It’s interesting if we take consultant consultancy firms here, the consultant consultants that are doing, you know this kind of processes and engaging different types of contracts with the public sector are smaller and are more local and understand better what is actually happening in in the territory, whereas in Biscaya what we can see is there, these big transactional consultancies. And this is a clear difference, and I think this has to do a lot with the way the government has approached this. So, it’s not just spontaneous, it’s also that the government has favoured this relationship with the civil society.” (R)

Thus, the local knowledge and values in Gipuzkoa have been considered in the EEI and related decisions by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa.

Promotion of a new political culture

The EEI has considered the relational side of collaborative governance as just as important as the outcome, thus introducing a new political culture and citizenship by involving stakeholders is a key point in collaborative governance and was the focus of one of the deliberation groups of the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Tank.

EEI's approach to foster collaborative governance by involving a broad range of stakeholders in decision-making processes does not imply that collaborative culture is easy or achieved right away. Throughout the EEI the conception that new relationships between the public institutions, and the collaborating stakeholders is necessary. As described by Ione Ardaiz the collaborating stakeholders needed to learn how to work together and understand each other:

“It's not always easy because usually it's like bringing together people that maybe they are not ready, or they are not used to listening to one another. And our role is building those safe spaces for them to feel comfortable and feel that they can contribute towards like meaningful change. So, you have a lot of like meetings, conversations and then we try and build the conditions for those collaborations to shape and grow.” (IA)

To foster a new political culture between the stakeholders that do already participate in the EEI, the strategies of the ARTD and Ekinez Ikasi are used to facilitate learning action together respectively in collaboration outside of the Provincial council and inside.

Although the “EEI was created in order to keep or maintain those values and that's why when we are offering to the society and to the citizen to collaborate with the public administration to define our future, not just the headlines. Also specific through specific projects and programs to build a with the society and community” (SZ). Insights from the civil society employee show that the EEI has not been able to engage citizens on a larger scale indicates that there needs to be more done to incentivise involvement with citizens. In the second Orain eta Etorikizuna magazine Naiara Goia illustrates the issue:

“It requires a commitment from both sides. On the one hand, a government that proposes governance through cooperation needs to take responsibility for this power-sharing exercise, and to involve citizens to open this public space to other actors in society. Therefore, I think that this is a prism with two sides, and now the challenge is: “How can we ensure, in a society that is more and more individualistic, that a citizen feels this responsibility to the community? How can we make them see that we all have something to say, in some way or another, to face up to the current situation?” (Barandiarán, 2022b, p.29)

Olatz Errazquin emphasised that they are aware of this need and aim to foster a new political culture through a variety of capacity building initiatives:

“Right now, we are working a lot in in training to build capacities in the territory. So not just the public administration also the agents, also the citizen, they understand this way of doing things and to generate capacities. In order to tackle complex challenges that we are facing, so next month we are launching an internal process in that sense with some political representatives. But we are defining along with the public University of the Basque country specific capacity or master about collaborative governments, but with a very practical view and to those capacities through.” (OE)

The EEI and its focus on collaboration and innovation has fostered a more inclusive and forward-thinking political culture. The involvement of diverse actors and the creation of new platforms for

dialogue and experimentation have strengthened democratic practices and enhanced the region's capacity to address complex challenges building upon the shared values in Gipuzkoa.

Work culture change of policy makers

The changes in that the EEI entails in the public institutions in Gipuzkoa is extensive, as it is described in the document introducing the EEI Model: “Etorkizuna Eraikiz wanted to change the way the government of Gipuzkoa Provincial Council and society in Gipuzkoa ‘did politics’ (by switching) to ‘do politics’ by promoting ordinary and effective sharing and collaboration between the government of Gipuzkoa Provincial Council and the network of actors and agencies in the region to facilitate sharing and cooperation to jointly build and respond to the current public agenda and pre-empt future challenges” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020).

To enable the new way of doing politics a change is required in the “operating culture of Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, a transformation in the operational and relational culture of political and technical staff. The current fragmented and compartmentalised structure of Gipuzkoa Provincial Council must be progressively replaced by a new one that encourages more collaborative and cross-disciplinary management” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020). The new way was mapped out as: “Listening (+reflecting) > Deliberation > Experimentation > Analysis and Evaluation > Addition to Public Policies” (Errazquin, 2024).

The change to collaborative governance increased democratic involvement and efficiency by incorporating multiple viewpoints into decision-making processes, for this to function “the political and technical staff of Gipuzkoa Provincial Council are key to the satisfactory development of Etorkizuna Eraikiz. This model of Open and Collaborative Governance in Gipuzkoa is a new way of ‘doing politics’ that requires a change in the operating culture” (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2020). Olatz Errazquin highlighted the achievements of the EEI during the interview that an ecosystem of innovation and collaboration has been built by bringing together public institutions, companies, universities and civil society in new spaces for experimentation and deliberation. Furthermore, the ability to reflect in the public institutions has been increased and a systemic approach was incorporated into the activity of the administration (Errazquin, 2024).

While the goal to replace traditional hierarchical structures with more collaborative and cross-disciplinary approaches has led to more dynamic and responsive governance it has also presented challenges in altering entrenched organisational cultures. Olatz Errazquin emphasised that “the challenge of aligning the internal organisation with the values and goals of EEI is significant, requiring a major reflection on our structure and processes” (OE).

Internally, Olatz Errazquin illustrates how parts of the Provincial Council would try to address the same challenges but not know that there would be an overlap:

“For example, the department in relation with taxes and cleaner finance might be thinking about how I’m going to make the young people more attractive this territory from the tax perspective. And the economic development department will be thinking about how I can maintain in in our companies, the young people and the talent that is incorporated newly in in these companies because currently there is a big competition between bigger companies and smaller company. So, I mean there is a complex problem that we were tackling from different perspectives and individual way and as we usually build the project, I mean we try to define a project in a linear way without paying into account.” (OE)

Through the collaborative governance the approach will change towards a more problem centred focus:

“So, this portfolio approach, what we are trying is with specific methodologies to start relating those challenges, taking into account the complexity and the different agents. That are involved or are working already on the matter. And in that has bring us internally, for example, to create a specific group, political and civil servant group. In which we are debating some challenges from and taking into account the different perspectives that we may have here in our organisation about that challenge or topic. But it’s quite complicated challenge itself to think in the complexity it has to be from your perspective in your own. And not too great for we have to change that way of thinking.” (OE)

While progress has been made, full integration of collaborative ideals within the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council’s organisational culture and structures remains a challenge. The transformation needs ongoing work to align behaviours with new ideas and resolve opposition to change. This has also been the focus of an evaluation of the EEI in 2023, which is currently being reworked to realign the strategic objectives:

“Right now, our focus is that we have to find strategy objectives and what is performed under EEI has to be aligned to respond those strategic objectives. So, all the architecture that we have divided in these places right now and we are not using that architecture, it’s more like. All the effort we have to gather, and we have to align toward those strategic objectives that we have defined.” (OE)

The work culture change in the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council has developed with the increasing political participation through collaborative governance. While the improvements have had many good benefits, such as increased creativity and democratic engagement, there are still hurdles to completely adopting and integrating these new techniques. Addressing these difficulties would require ongoing efforts to align organisational cultures and practices with collaborative governance concepts.

4.3.3 [Summary of radical democratic practices in Gipuzkoa](#)

Gipuzkoa’s commoning practices enact radical democratic practices at the micro-level level in the four presented crucial areas. First, as demonstrated by the integration efforts of the Basque community and common values of cooperation that transcend financial exchanges and embrace a non-exclusionary form of citizenship, open, inclusive commoning practices that priorities collaboration and collective action

are conducive to radical democratic citizenship. Second, public spaces like bars and Eltzia are crucial places for group organisation; but, in order to promote inclusivity and cooperation, efforts must be taken to make these areas more accessible. Third, housing initiatives and other educational and interactive programs that promote active citizenship and a sense of community responsibility are changing political culture. Finally, the region's worker cooperatives adopt radical practices in the workspace.

On the meso-level, the initiatives for collaborative governance such as Debagoiena 2030 and Etorikizuna Eraikiz are enacting radical democracy in Gipuzkoa. First, through the participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including representatives from the public and private sectors, civil society, cooperatives, and public institutions, these initiatives emphasise inclusive decision-making procedures. The EEI permits both strategic oversight and local autonomy by combining decentralised innovation with top-down leadership from the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council. This encourages involvement by coordinating group efforts across industries. With a focus on community leadership, Debagoiena 2030 involves stakeholders in the co-creation of solutions for problems in the territory of nine towns. Both programs place a strong emphasis on accessibility and openness, fostering inclusive involvement and fostering trust through frequent reflection sessions and open documentation. To further collaborative governance, more initiatives could focus on citizen engagement such as citizen assemblies, are recommended to close these gaps and improve wider community involvement. These efforts also place a strong emphasis on local knowledge and cultural values, which guarantee that the policies and solutions are grounded in the context of the area. The transition in public organisations' internal cultures towards collaborative governance also calls for a greater emphasis on problem-centred and cross-disciplinary approaches.

5 Discussion

5.1 Conclusions to the research sub-questions

5.1.1 How are commoning practices enacting radical democracy on the micro-level in the Gipuzkoa Region?

To test the first hypothesis, ‘*If commoning is practised in the Gipuzkoa Region, then radical democracy is enacted on the micro-level of the region,*’ this section first interprets the commoning practices evident in the Gipuzkoa Region and then discusses their evaluation in relation to the literature on radical democracy.

The findings from the analysis of the community practices in the Gipuzkoa Region support the literature that commoning practices are increasingly used to create lived alternatives in various sectors, including education, housing, and care (Ferreri, 2024; Pechteldis et al., 2023; Tummers & MacGregor, 2019; Vandeventer et al., 2024). The cooperative schools (Ikastolas) and housing projects reflect the collective, voluntary, and co-productive nature of commoning, as described by authors such as Euler (2018) and Howarth and Roussos (2022). The engagement of parents in educational governance and the collaboration in designing intergenerational housing aligns with the concept of horizontal decision-making and non-economic values. These examples show how commoning practices provide solutions to local challenges, creating alternatives to market-driven or state-dominated systems (Euler, 2018).

In line with Nightingale (2019), the findings illustrate that some of the commoning practices in Gipuzkoa are not just about producing goods or services but are also about renegotiating the political relationships in the community. The participatory processes seen in local care ecosystems and co-creation projects, such as Eltzia, are examples of how social reproduction and alternative governance models emerge from grassroots participation (Nightingale, 2019). The presence of bottom-up organising, as seen in gentrification protests occurring in public spaces, shows that these practices embody direct democracy and challenge capitalistic structures, thereby experimenting with a more inclusive socio-political paradigm based on shared values and mutual association (Euler, 2019).

The case of municipal cooperation in Gipuzkoa, where local institutions collaborate with civil society, aligns with the literature on re-municipalisation (Geagea et al., 2023). These practices in Gipuzkoa, especially in managing care systems and public spaces, demonstrate how commoning can be integrated into public governance structures, suggesting a blurring of boundaries between state and commoning practices. The commoning practices also go beyond human-to-human interaction by using public spaces as commons for social, cultural, and ecological purposes. This illustrates that commoning involves not only human relationships but also a deeper connection to the land, infrastructure, and even local

ecosystems representing ‘new ways of being in the world’, where communities engage with both the human and non-human world in inclusive and sustainable ways (Nightingale, 2019).

The findings highlight the importance of shared social visions and cultural values in driving commoning practices in Gipuzkoa. Whether in the realm of Basque language preservation, housing, or care, the findings show that commoning in Gipuzkoa is rooted in a collective sense of responsibility and reciprocity, mirroring the literature’s emphasis on the importance of cultural norms. This collective ethos is critical for sustaining commoning practices, even when challenged by external forces such as institutional power or neoliberal values (Younes, 2024). The shared values and beliefs that exist from that historical collaboration are probably the reason that neoliberalism has not eradicated the community practices in the Gipuzkoa Region. Since neoliberal development continues to replace commoning practices through individualisation and commodification of everyday life, it is imperative that alternative values to neoliberalism exist to ensure that groups of individuals band around such shared values and beliefs (Younes, 2024).

Under the scrutiny that not all community practices can be considered as commoning practices and the consideration commoning practices are ever evolving and can be considered as a mosaic of practices (Howarth & Roussos, 2022), the analysed practices in Gipuzkoa can be considered as such, and thus the first half of the hypothesis can be considered as fulfilled.

Consideration of everyday micro-level democratic practices is vital because radical democracy, due to its nature, will not be achieved through a one-time event but through continuous “efforts to overcome the divide between rulers and ruled, elites and masses, experts and ordinary people” (Magnusson, 2022, p. 77). Recognising how commoning practices enact radical democracy on the micro-level is needed to understand how horizontal democratic practices with different purposes can be combined to construct modes of existence that aim to satisfy basic needs collectively, bringing in social, political, cultural, and environmental sectors ‘from below’ in a participatory way (Candón Mena et al., 2018). The results in section 4.3.1. are the evaluative results of the identified commoning practices. The overarching intention was to determine whether the commoning practices redistribute power away from central authorities and toward local, grassroots actors through democratic practices. In the context of the Gipuzkoa Region, it is important to explore how the practised commoning negotiate power, and how governance is enacted collectively and inclusively (Dirik, 2022).

First, radical democratic citizenship is enacted through the commoning practices by creating a citizenship that is built around the constructed ‘we’ as Basque or Gipuzkoan people and the related mutual association that plays a significant role in the society today stemming from the historical commoning practices of Auzolan (Zaunseder et al., 2022). The commoning practices performed through

the associations enact collective practices built on solidarity. Even though not all the associations follow a political intention, these still hold the foundation for more direct forms of democracy (Zaunseder et al., 2022). The collective ‘we’ in Gipuzkoa is further enacted through the Basque language and culture that stand in themselves also for certain values that is open to immigrants and includes the non-human (Espiau & Moreno, 2022; Zaunseder et al., 2022). The Basque language as a uniting factor plays an important role for RDC and can itself be considered as an anthropological commons, because of its impacts on the relationships around the language that result in “collective practices of production, exchange and living in the world” (Nightingale, 2019, p. 18). The importance of the language to discuss issues of collaborative governance in a deeper sense was emphasised by Ione Ardaiz and the use of Basque language as a cultural democratic practise. Collective processes such as associations and the Korrika show that culture can be used as joyful democratic practices (Dirik, 2022).

Another way in which art has been used as democratic practice to make political issues visible has been the street art that, for one issue, addresses the imprisoned ETA members. The ETA was the most extreme manifestation of the desire for autonomy in the Basque Country, which has existed since the Franco dictatorship (Conversi & Espiau, 2019). To use public spaces for political messages like this and critique the current position of the Basque Country speaks to an individual self-liberation as a key aspect of the democratic process through making statements about the political situation in the Basque Country as a whole (Dirik, 2022). The political messages in the public space produce new political images in the public spaces between the messages and those engaging with them. This shows how commoning practices include the political relationships of the everyday community interactions between humans and with non-human entities (Nightingale, 2019).

Furthermore, the impact of the worker cooperative in the Gipuzkoa Region enable an alternative to the dominant logics of commodification in the workspace (Zaunseder, 2022). This further improves the social cohesion and ability to engage in democratic practices outside the workplace itself as the findings have shown. This democratisation of governance with municipalities through local care ecosystems, and participatory projects show that the commoning practices in Gipuzkoa extend beyond the mere governance of resources and involve the social and power relations connected to those resources. The key here is the horizontal, non-hierarchical social structures that are practised through commoning and are central to radical democracy (Dirik, 2022).

The research findings show that the analysed practices commoning in Gipuzkoa are inherently democratic and shape interactions within communities and with local institutions. Thus, they enable direct participation in governance, fostering an alternative to traditional top-down democratic processes (Euler, 2019; Kioupkiolis, 2023). By enacting democratic processes and emphasising the importance of inclusive processes and substantive rights in social and economic contexts the commoning practices in

Gipuzkoa enact radical democratic practices (Mouffe & Holdengräber, 1989). The hypothesis can be considered as true that commoning practices enact radical democracy on the micro-level.

However, although commoning practices are characterized by democratic decision-making regarding the commons, the question arises whether commoning practices need to pursue politically centred goals or if democratic practices alone are enough for these micro-level practices to contribute to a wider democratic reform. Additionally, the question remains how the linking of diverse radical democratic practices practised through commoning on the micro-level can be connected to create alternatives against exploitation, domination, and discrimination (Mouffe, 2022).

5.1.2 [How do the institutions and democratic praxis of the Etorbizuna Eraikiz initiative enact radical democracy in the Gipuzkoa Region?](#)

To test the second hypothesis, *‘If collaborative governance is practised and institutionalised in Gipuzkoa, then radical democracy is enacted on the meso-level of the region,’* this section first interprets the collaborative governance evident in the Gipuzkoa Region and then discusses its evaluation in relation to the literature on radical democracy.

The findings of the research on collaborative governance demonstrate how extensive the introduced institutions and democratic practices are in the Gipuzkoa region. After initial experiments with more participatory processes, the provincial council institutionalised collaborative governance as the “collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative; which entails new structures of governance as opposed to hierarchical organisational decision-making; and that engages across the boundaries of levels of government, as well as the public, private, and civic spheres, in order to achieve common goals and to carry out a public purpose that could not be accomplished” (Barandiarán et al., 2023, p.24). In section 4.2.2, the comprehensive institutions that have been introduced are illustrated.

To test whether and how the collaborative governance enacts radical democracy on the meso-level it is important to consider how collaborative governance extends institutions and their settings to create new spaces for interaction, participation and collaboration (Pomares et al., 2023). The implementation of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa, extended the democratic institutions through the inclusion of stakeholders in public - private partnerships and bottom-up functioning governance, where decision-making is shared among public institutions and non-state actors through formal, consensus-driven processes (Ansell, 2000). This is achieved through decision-making structures set up for collaborative governance combining decentralized mechanisms that aim to boost innovation towards collaboration with a vertical institutional leadership to ensure a systematic guidance (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council,

2020). The horizontal mechanisms in the EEI take on a variety of forms, since experimental projects are very free in who they involve and how and the reference centres have the freedom to organize their decision-structures according to the specific specialisation. The Thank Tank also allowed a certain co-ownership of the process since the leadership role of the state actors shifts away from a traditional hierarchical power to a coordinating one to allow non-state actors to contribute to the public space. Redefining the deliberative space by including more actors to be incorporated and power to be shared (Goia et al., 2023).

Since collaborative governance entails the incorporation of diverse stakeholders from social, economic, and political backgrounds, the scope of public participation beyond the traditional state structure needs to be broadened (Barandiarán, 2022). This change in deliberative spaces creates new power structures, which further entail differing capacities, and conflicting visions, though these processes face the risks of being captured by singular stakeholder groups or manipulated. Transparency of rules and procedures are important for citizens to trust in the decisions made by public institutions, yet only relying on communication can be challenging when considering how complex institutions have become. Collaborative governance offers a way to create transparency through collaboration and increase trust. The changes are important to build the social capital needed to enable a new political culture and institutional restructuring for collaborative governance. Processes that integrate create new networks, norms and values that promote cooperation and social interactions necessary for co-creation and effective public policy action, fostering social capital that drives community cohesion and development by enhancing civic engagement, trust, and organisational capacity (Barandiarán, 2022; Putnam, 1993). Collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region builds on processes of reflection and learning, which allows decisions and projects to be experimental and actions to be constantly adjusted (Gipuzkoa Provincial Council & New Political Culture Deliberation Group, 2022). These processes of reflection and learning support social innovation to respond to the multiple needs that arise in a context of complexity and uncertainty.

The first part of the hypothesis that collaborative governance is practised in the Gipuzkoa Region is fulfilled, although limited by the difficulty to include citizens, yet the extensive institutions and processes have introduced a collaborative factor that spans across the institutions of the province.

Similar to the importance of micro-level democracy, the consideration of meso-level democratic practices is important because while radical democracy, due to its nature of always striving for more pluralism, is difficult to institutionalise, exploring how institutions can further pluralism should nevertheless be conducted (Muldoon, 2021, p. 190). When considering the result, the EEI and Debagoiena 2030 in regard to the literature on radical democracy highlights how institutional structures and processes can integrate bottom-up participation. These initiatives serve as practical examples of

how collaborative governance can foster radical democratic practices by embedding pluralism, conflict, and participatory processes into the fabric of regional governance.

First, Candón Mena et al. (2018) argue that radical democracy can arise from institutional frameworks that start with top-down procedures and gradually embrace bottom-up behaviours. The EEI and Debagoiena 2030 are good examples of this transformation. Although these projects were initiated by provincial councils and official organisations, they prioritise decentralised decision-making and community-driven problem-solving. This approach is consistent with the concept that radical democracy might emerge through institutional structures that gradually enable more horizontal and inclusive behaviours (Mouffe, 1995).

Second, Muldoon (2021) emphasises the importance of both critiquing the current system and invention in radical democratic movements. EEI and Debagoiena 2030 both criticise existing governing systems, but also actively aim to develop new practices and institutions to empower regular individuals. Through collaborative governance these initiatives help to establish new forms of self-government and collective action, both of which are essential to radical democracy.

Third, Menga (2017) emphasizes the importance of radical democracy of constant, agonistic confrontation to achieve pluralism by exposing and challenging dominant power systems. The EEI and Debagoiena 2030's collaborative governance initiatives, while institutionally launched, both aim to engage a wide range of stakeholders and promote the confrontation of opposing viewpoints. This approach is evident in how EEI and Debagoiena 2030 foster talks and deliberations that bring opposing perspectives to the forefront, allowing for ongoing policy and practice revision thus embracing the radical democratic idea of conflict as a necessary and productive component of democracy (Menga, 2017). The values upon which the collaborative governance builds can be considered as a meta-consensus, that provides the basis of the collaborative governance (Dryzak & Niemeyer, 2010).

Fourth is the importance of including citizens in radical democratic programs to combat the capture of resources by elites and reflect the interests of the majority. EEI and Debagoiena 2030 aim to increase involvement by bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders, including civil society, academia, and the commercial sector. This method aligns with the radical democratic objective of mobilising different social movements to increase democratic participation and fight conventional power disparities. However, in the difficulty to include citizens who have not been involved in governance, collaborative governance needs to explore how to activate increasingly citizens. Initiative such as Etorikizuna Eraikiz Udal aim to connect to municipalities extending the collaborative network in Gipuzkoa (Goia et al., 2023). Mouffe (1995) contends that radical democracy necessitates a framework that allows for continuing pluralist discussion. The EEI and Debagoiena 2030 programs aim to establish venues in which different points of view may be articulated and negotiated. This ongoing conversation contributes

to reducing inequality and creating a more inclusive political climate. By incorporating diverse actors with differing background and perspective collaborative governance fosters pluralistic discussions.

Collaborative governance, as defined by Pomares et al. (2023) and Barandiarán (2022), is critical in developing radical democratic practices by encouraging engagement between the state and society. The EEI and Debagoiena 2030 initiatives challenge the conventional boundaries between public institutions and citizens, resulting in democratic spaces that challenge hierarchical power systems. This link with radical democratic principles is further confirmed by Muldoon who argue that collaborative governance broadens participation and power-sharing beyond traditional electoral politics. Ansell and Gash (2008) emphasize the importance of social innovation in radical democracy, which is founded on experimentation and co-creation. The EEI and Debagoiena 2030 programs exemplify this notion by encouraging creative approaches to regional concerns through collaborative procedures. This dynamic creates an atmosphere conducive to pluralism and collaborative action, supporting radical democracy's essential ideals in an increasingly more pluralistic governance system Magnusson (2022).

By including increasingly more stakeholders in decision-making processes, which entails sharing of power, increasing transparency and a new political culture, collaborative governance within the EEI allows more participation. Through this the introduced collaborative governance departs from the traditional relationship that public institutions have and creates new relationship with its stakeholders and citizens. The increased deliberation and inclusion of diverse knowledge and perspective does not completely align with the conflict considered as central in radical democracy by (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). However, when considering that institutionalisation of radical democracy must be seen as a continuous process, I argue that the collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa region fulfils the hypothesis of enacting radical democracy on the meso-level, due to the increased plurality. The consideration that radical democracy does not have an endpoint, is further reflected in the development that collaborative governance has gone through and its continuous reflexivity.

5.2. Discussion of the results

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how radical democracy is enacted by linking the micro and meso-levels through commoning practices and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region.

The key findings indicate that on the one hand commoning practices in the Gipuzkoa Region enact radical democracy on the micro-level through lived alternative democratic relationships that constitute alternatives to market and state-driven systems based on horizontal decision-making and non-economic values (Kiouпкиolis, 2023). On the other hand, the collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa enact radical democracy through institutions and democratic practices that allow for more pluralism through

participation and horizontal mechanisms, even if still coordinated by a vertical authority of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council (Muldoon, 2021). To test the third hypothesis '*If commoning practices enact radical democracy on the micro-level and collaborative governance enacts radical democracy on the meso-level, then the theories can be linked as theoretical supplements for radical democracy on the micro- and meso-level*' the connection between the micro- and meso-level in Gipuzkoa needs to be considered.

Although, the identified commoning practices in Gipuzkoa enact radical democratic practices on the micro-level, renegotiating political connection through participation in care systems and public space activism exemplifies direct democracy while challenging capitalist mechanisms and are based on a shared social visions and cultural values (Nightingale, 2019). Without a larger vision any commoning practices and its enacted radical democratic practices on the micro-level will likely continue to be just on the local scale possible reducing continuously (Kioupiolis, 2023). The enacted radical democratic practices do not immediately allow a connection to the strategic pursuit of uniting diverse struggles against capitalistic domination to motivate and empower administrations to confront the global forces of capitalistic liberal democracies (Kioupiolis, 2023), since democratic practices do not need to address a political issue on the micro-level, but could also be democratic in their relationship (Zaunseider et al., 2022).

The results of the collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa Region have revealed that its institutions and processes enact radical democracy on the meso-level, building up the context and the very collaborative values that are also underlying the commoning practices in the Gipuzkoa Region. Thus the collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa should be able to include the practices that are evident in Gipuzkoa through commoning by institutionalising social interactions and blurring the lines between political and social realms (Pomares et al., 2023). However, the institutionalisation of stakeholder participation in collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa, has so far not been able to activate a larger amount of citizens which could then allow commoning practices to supplement broader democratic struggles through the formalisation of these activities across larger political organisations (Kioupiolis, 2023). Thus, the hypothesis that if collaborative governance is based on values that commoning practices are also build upon, it provides an opportunity to link the micro-level to the meso-level and allow commoning practices to integrate into the wider democratic struggles is too simple. To address the confinement to local contexts that commoning practices face, collaborative governance needs to consider how to 'reach' the radical democratic practices enacted through commoning practices (Howarth & Roussos, 2022; Kioupiolis, 2023).

Hence the hypothesis that collaborative governance if it is enacting radical democracy on the meso-level can link micro-level radical democracy enacted through commoning practice towards macro-level democratic struggles cannot be considered as true, just yet. The findings from the case study in Gipuzkoa

suggests that to answer this hypothesis might rather be that there is a possibility, which has not been realised yet. To reiterate that radical democracy is not achieved through a one-time event, but through continuous efforts to radicalise democracy towards increasing plurality, equality, and liberty (Magnusson, 2022). Thus, the efforts that are being taken to connect more towards the micro-level, including Etorikizuna Eraikiz Udal that aims to connect with municipalities can be considered as continuous efforts to radicalise democracy in the Gipuzkoa Region (Muldoon, 2021). The joint commoning practices to create new ways of interacting between municipalities and citizens for care, housing and Eltzia, emphasise that radical democratic practices between the local institutions already exist (Muldoon, 2021). Hence, to link the meso-level of radical democratic practices to the micro-level collaborative governance needs to extend to the levels that exist in between. For example, through territorial initiative such as Debagoiena 2030.

Another factor that plays an important role to achieve this, is building social capital as outlined by the collaborative governance literature (Barandiarán, 2022). The learning process that the EEI has been facilitating between the collaborating policy makers and stakeholders, highlights the need to foster the social capital for collaboration and problem-solving, even when not all stakeholders are initially aligned. The past decades of capitalistic influence of societies and democratic citizenship restricted to voting, the relearning of a citizenship that entails more needs time and activation (Younes, 2024). Collaboration is a new way of doing and relating, it will not be established through a rule but through learning.

Thus, the hypothesis for the linking of collaborative governance and commoning practices for micro- and meso-level radical democracy can be answered as: Although collaborative governance has not linked the meso- and micro level yet, if continuing efforts are pursued to radicalise democracy through increasing inclusion of stakeholders and citizens on multiple levels in the Gipuzkoa Region, collaborative governance has the potential to do so.

5.3. Theoretical implications

The theoretical contributions are fourfold. First this research contributes to the theory of radical democracy by testing the connection made by between commoning practices and radical democracy made by Kioupiolis (2023) and Howarth and Roussos (2022). The connection between the two concepts were contradictory if commoning practices should be an extension to the strategy to achieve radical democracy (Kioupiolis, 2023) or if it should replace the strategic component of radical democracy (Howarth & Roussos, 2022). The findings of this research confirm the enactment of radical democracy on the micro-level through commoning practices by illustrating the radical democratic aspect that is embedded in commoning practices in Gipuzkoa. To supplement the theory on radical democracy and to determine whether it should be a replacement of supplement for the strategy to radicalise

democracy the question if all commoning practices can be considered to enact micro level radical democracy needs to be considered. Since commoning practices can be radical democratic and have a revolutionary aspect by enacting (Zaunseider, 2022), this does not entail that the commoning practices speak to a political problem or can be connected to such. This entails that relying only on commoning practices to gain the support for wider support of society as the strategic aspect for radical democracy, could create a disconnect. Simultaneously, commoning practices are not the only way radical democratic practices can be practised on the micro-level since other possibilities exist, for example in municipalities (Muldoon, 2021). Thus, the findings affirm the connection between commoning practices and radical democracy made by Kioupkiolis (2022) as a supplement to the strategy to radicalise democracy. Additionally, the findings have shown, that commoning practices can enable radical practices between municipalities and citizens.

Second, this research contributes to the theory of radical democracy by connecting collaborative governance as a strategic supplement to radicalise democracy on the meso-level. Collaborative governance offers a possibility to gradually increase pluralism in public institutions through extension of horizontal mechanism to include stakeholders in decision-making processes and solution finding (Ansell, 2000; Ansell & Gash, 2008). However, if collaborative governance does not go to the extent that power is shared with the intention to increase the collaboration continuously to involve more stakeholders and citizens, it will not be able to be considered radically democratic (Candón Mena et al., 2018; Mouffe, 2010). Through these theoretical implications, the research findings open up new avenues for future inquiry into collaboratives governance approaches that can provide more plurality.

Third, this research aimed to confirm the theoretical connection that collaborative governance could be a connection between commoning practices as micro-level radical democracy to fill the gap between micro and macro-level identified in the theories of Kioupkiolis (2023) and Howarth and Roussos (2022). While the findings did not confirm the connection made between the theories, the findings show potential and further research should consider how collaborative governance can bring community values into public institutions.

Fourth, a contribution to the theory on the anthropological commons and commoning practices is made, by identifying the importance of the Basque Language, as a native, minority language on the relationships around the language that result in “collective practices of production, exchange and living in the world” (Nightingale, 2019, p. 18). This further opens an avenues to research native, minority languages from a commoning perspective to understand their impact on relationships between the individuals involved and related non-humans.

5.2 Methodological contributions

This research has demonstrated the relevance of studying the micro- and meso-level of radical democracy and has operationalised a new evaluative framework on the literature of institutionalising of radical democracy (Escobar, 2022; Magnusson, 2022; Muldoon, 2021) and on the concept of radical democratic citizenship (Dirik, 2022; Harvey, 1998; Mouffe, 2010; Zaunseider, 2022) to determine whether practices can be considered as radical democratic. This framework was developed due to no existing frameworks to evaluate practices, particularly in relation to the insurgent characteristics of radical democracy. This is further the reason why the framework should be tested on other context and just as radical democracy itself, should be considered as a starting point to be continuously improved (Muldoon, 2021). Furthermore, the definition of an analytical framework for commoning practices was conducted to allow analyses of commoning practice without knowing the exact commoning that are practised, based on dimensions of common denominators between the diverse commoning practices (Euler, 2019; Howarth & Roussos, 2022). Similarly to the evaluative framework for micro-and meso-level this should be considered as a starting point for improvement as commoning practices are very heterogenous.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The limitations that need to be addressed for this research are related to the research, the methodology and the transferability of the findings.

First, the language barrier was one of the researcher's difficulties, which might have had an impact on the depth of comprehension in the interviews and limited the document analysis. Subjectivity may have also been brought into data interpretation due to the absence of inter-coder dependability, especially when creating analytical and evaluative frameworks (Bazeley, 2009; Yin, 2014).

Methodologically speaking, the results generated through a single case study methodology are less generalisable, which is a trade-off for the advantage of studying a case in depth (Yin, 2014). Additionally, there were restrictions on observations and interview selectivity, caused by the language barrier of the researcher. While the interviews gave a comprehensive overview, the sample was smaller than planned to gain insights on the community practices in Gipuzkoa (Knott et al., 2022)

When considering the transferability of the findings, it is important to keep in mind the specific setting, although located in Europe, Gipuzkoa has, as an autonomous region of the Basque Country, liberties in their financial and public institutions organization that is differs from many other locations (see overview in Section 3.2.). Similarly, the social context of the region which also builds on historical collaboration differs from other context, further research should consider the freedom of citizens to not be involved while still finding solution to increase trust in public institutions and creating impacts

without forcing a sense community and citizenship that people are not willing to. Further research is also needed to understand the applicability of the methodological contributions in different settings to test their validity and if the theoretical implications would still apply.

5.4 Implications for practice

This study sheds light on an innovative governance project, its development and the extensive introduced institutions and democratic practices The Etorikizuna Eraikiz Initiative illustrates a different approach that although it is specifically designed for the Gipuzkoa Context how public institutions can answer to rising mistrust in their citizens and how to find solutions with stakeholders that extend the resources and ensure solutions address challenges. Furthermore, the EEI emphasises that it has developed over years of actions and reflections and not just been implemented out of nowhere, showing a learning process and that small steps can lead to increasingly impactful changes (Barandiarán et al., 2023).

6 Conclusion

In light of the decline of citizens trust in public institutions, the inadequacy of conventional democratic and market-based solutions to modern crises have become undeniable (Eckersley, 2020). Alternatives, such as radical democracy are not considered in the mainstream political discourse, but provide possibilities for more pluralistic democratic approaches for sustainable development (Mouffe, 2022). While radical democracy has been extensively theoretically developed, practical implications of how to further it on the micro- and meso-level are lacking (Kioupkolios, 2023; Muldoon, 2021). This research investigated the commoning practices and collaborative governance in the Gipuzkoa region and considered whether they are able to achieve more pluralistic practices on the micro and macro level. The case study was used to test hypotheses formulated to test the concepts' applicability as supplements for the theory of radical democracy on the case study of the Gipuzkoa Region.

The findings have shown that commoning practices in the Gipuzkoa Region enact radical democracy on the micro-level through lived alternative democratic relationships that constitute alternatives to market and state-driven systems based on horizontal decision-making and non-economic values (Kioupkolios, 2023). Collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa enacts radical democracy through institutions and democratic practices that allow for more pluralism through participation and horizontal mechanisms, even if still coordinated by a vertical authority of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council (Muldoon, 2021). The research further investigated whether collaborative governance can bridge the divide between micro-level radical democracy and macro-level democratic struggles. While the study did not find a direct link, it does show that collaborative governance could incorporate community values into public institutions and promote radical democratic behaviours. The findings emphasise that, while collaborative governance can support radical democracy, it has yet to completely activate broader public engagement, allowing commoning techniques to have a greater impact on bigger political

organisations. Through these insights this research contributes to the theory on radical democracy by confirming that commoning practices can supplement rather than replace traditional micro-level strategies, even if they do not address all bigger political challenges. It also shows that collaborative governance can improve pluralism at the meso-level, but it must constantly evolve to more inclusively share power and involve diverse stakeholders, while also opening up avenues for future research into how these practices can better integrate community values and address the role of minority languages in shaping collective practices. Future research is needed to confirm the findings from this single case study and consider how collaborative governance might better integrate community values and bridge the gap between micro and macro-level radical democracy by increasing stakeholder participation and power-sharing mechanisms.

In conclusion, the research emphasises that radical democracy is an ongoing process rather than a singular event. It demands constant efforts to strengthen plurality, equality, and liberty. The initiatives observed in Gipuzkoa exemplify these efforts and indicate that, while significant progress has been made, further expansion is required to fully realise the potential of radical democracy through collaborative governance and commoning practices. These findings, however, stress how alternative democratic approaches to the liberal democracies on the micro-level and meso-level are already practised or can be introduced to create solutions together with stakeholders to address challenges and increase trust between citizens and public institutions in the process. Even though the presented practices and institutions should not be considered as a panacea, they illustrate that complex challenges are not solved through simple answers but by rethinking complexity as an advantage to include diverse stakeholders.

7 References

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8 Appendix

8.1 Appendix A

Overview of items included in the document analysis

Document	Description	Source
Building Collaborative Governance in Times of Uncertainty: Pracademic Lessons from the Basque Gipuzkoa Province	Book published about the EEI by those involved and international researchers	https://muse-jhu-edu.utrechtuniversity.idm.oclc.org/book/109941
PPT Introduction to Etorkizuna Eraikiz	Presentation sent by Olatz Errazquin before the interview.	Olatz Errazquin, included in online folder see Appendix B
Etorkizuna Eraikiz Model (2020)	Document introducing the first iteration Etorkizuna Eraikiz model, its background and principles and its support processes.	https://www.etorkizunaeraikiz.eu/documents/33991264/adff38ef-bb91-7d8e-5b3e-cb7d4f2edc24model
ETORKIZUNA ERAIKIZ - STATUS 2021	Status report of the EEI in 2021	https://www.etorkizunaeraikiz.eu/documents/33991264/40680589/etorkizuna-eraikiz-status-2021.pdf/d6ab11f2-5cb8-1557-286e-652e6f001d95
O & E: Orain eta Etorkizuna Magazine 2022, 2023	Periodical magazine dedicated to the analysis and dissemination of fundamental issues for Gipuzkoa now and in the future.	https://www.etorkizunaeraikiz.eu/en/orain-etorkizuna-magazine
Debagoena 2030 Introduction presentation	Presentation used to introduce the valley Dabagoena and the project 2030	Elena Herrate, included in online folder see Appendix B
Listening Process of Debagoena 2030 in 2019	The report is the result of present the opinions and perceptions of	Elena Herrate, included in online folder see Appendix B

	the citizens of Debagoiena about their valley and everyday life.	
Arantzazulab Annual Report 2023	Arantzazulab is the democratic innovation laboratory.	Naira Goia, included in online folder see Appendix B
Building a New Political Culture in Gipuzkoa Concepts, methodology and experiences	Report that shows the results of the Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank deliberation group for the transformation of the new political culture.	https://www.etorkizunaeraikiz.eu/documents/33991264/2543ab9f-78d3-5551-fd1c-7e0f2306032d
Research Diaries on the Think Tank on ‘new political culture’	Research diaries are considered to gain further insights into the Think Tank	https://www.etorkizunaeraikiz.eu/en/docutecque

8.2 [Appendix B](#)

Link to folder with documents not available online

https://solisservices-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/g_h_weidemann_uu_nl/EnKnDWIj5YIMj5XA39tCIEAB0kL61UbTOUxHcMaUUvoGVQ?e=ZR6o5D

8.3 Appendix C

Interview scheme

Topic	Subtopic	Questions
Introduction	Introduction of research, including what will be done with the data, obtaining informed consent and signing.	Can you tell me about yourself and what your role is in the EEI ?/ how you are involve in commoning practices?/ what your job is? How would you describe the culture in Gipuzkoa?
Commoning	Practices of cooperativism and co-production	Are you part of or know of any initiative that provides products or service through different means than the traditional capitalistic way? What are community practices that aim at providing and creating services and products within the community?
	Practices of needs-satisfaction and voluntariness	Do you have any experience of communities coming together to solve an ongoing issue or protection of spaces? What are practices that people in Gipuzkoa do for each other without looking for economic gain?
	Practices of organisation and decision-making through peers and self-organisation	Are there any community behaviours or social practices that are unique to the Gipuzkoa Region? Who is part of the community? Are there local community meetings? Are there decision-making structures in place? Who is participating in decision-making processes and how have they been set up?
	Practices of (mutual) association and collective solidarity	How are decisions made on community level? How do communities come together to help those in need?
	Practices of inclusiveness and mediation	Who does the community benefit? How can new people participate in the community?

	Practices to protect social and natural spaces	<p>What are spaces that are important and that communities protect?</p> <p>Are there places theatre essential for people and where they come together?</p>
Collaborative Governance / EEI	Institutions	<p>What were the motivations when the EEI was started?</p> <p>Since the EEI was initiated by policymakers, why was it seen as desirable to widen the governance process?</p> <p>What were shared concerns around which actors mobilised to initiate the EI?</p> <p>Who was included in the setting up of the initiative and in decisions after?</p> <p>What institutions have been created to allow more participatory democratic practices?</p> <p>How is belonging to the political community performed and mediated?</p>
	Democratic praxis	<p>How are decision making structures set up?</p> <p>How is transparency with regards to its rules and procedures ensured?</p> <p>How are inclusion and exclusion of participation ensured?</p> <p>How are conflicts negotiated?</p> <p>How are different forms of social power shared and (re)distributed? How is continued reflexivity about practices and processes ensured?</p> <p>How are decisions corrected or amended?</p> <p>How are other-than-human actors considered?</p>
	Future of EEI	<p>What have been learnings from the past years?</p> <p>What are the future plans of the initiative?</p> <p>What is the ideal future development of the initiative?</p> <p>Is the initiative accepted within the wider society?</p>
Connecting commoning practices and		<p>How did the EEI build on existing bottom-up democratic processes in the Gipuzkoa community?</p> <p>How do (more) formal procedures interact with (more) informal practices?</p> <p>What are differences and similarities between collaborative governance and commoning practices?</p>

collaborative governance		
Snowballing		<p>What are places in Gipuzkoa where someone can experience the culture of the region?</p> <p>What are things or places that are unique to Gipuzkoa?</p> <p>Who else do you think I could talk to about this?</p>
Ending		<p>I have asked all the questions I had, but I wanted to check whether there is something else about your experience/understanding we haven't covered? Do you have any questions for me?</p> <p>Is there anyone you think you could introduce me to that would be good to talk to for my research?</p>

8.4 Appendix D

Informed consent document for interviewees

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

In this study, I want to learn about the relationship between the innovative and ambitious governance approach introduced through the Etorikizuna Eraikiz initiative and the cultural and community practices in the Gipuzkoa Region. My research focuses on the relationship between the governance initiative and how the community in Gipuzkoa and their practices relate to this, to find insights how successful transformative governance and democracy approaches can be implemented.

Participation in this interview is voluntary and you can quit the interview at any time without giving a reason and without penalty. Your answers to the questions will be shared with the research team. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Please respond to the questions honestly and feel free to say or write anything you like.

I confirm that:

- I am satisfied with the received information about the research;
- I have no further questions about the research at this moment;
- I had the opportunity to think carefully about participating in the study;
- I will give an honest answer to the questions asked.

I agree that:

- the data to be collected will be obtained and stored for scientific purposes;
- the collected, research data can be shared and re-used by scientists to answer other research questions.

I understand that:

- I have the right to ask for anonymisation of the collected data.
- I have the right to see the research report afterwards.

Do you agree to participate? Yes No

Signature (Place, date)

INFORMATION SHEET (INTERVIEW)

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to take part in this study on the relationship between the innovative governance approach introduced through the Etorikizuna Eraikiz initiative and the cultural and community practices in the Gipuzkoa Region. The purpose of the study is to learn about how bottom-up practices and top-down governance interact to achieve transformation towards sustainable systems. The study is conducted by Gesa H. Weidemann who is a student in the MSc. Sustainable Development at the Department of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University. The study is supervised by Dr. Julia Tschersich.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You can quit at any time without providing any reason and without any penalty. Your contribution to the study is very valuable to us and we greatly appreciate your time taken to complete this interview. We estimate that it will take approximately 60 minutes to complete the interview. The questions will be read out to you by the interviewer. Some of the questions require little time to complete, while other questions might need more careful consideration. Please feel free to skip questions you do not feel comfortable answering. You can also ask the interviewer to clarify or explain questions you find unclear before providing an answer. Your answers will be noted by the interviewer in an answer template. The data you provide will be used for writing a Master thesis report and may be used for other scientific purposes such as a publication in a scientific journal or presentation at academic conferences. Only patterns in the data will be reported through these outlets. Your individual responses will not be presented or published.

DATA PROTECTION

The interview is audio-taped for transcription purposes. The audio recordings will be available to the Master student and academic supervisors. We will process your data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Audio recordings will only be stored on a secured and encrypted server of Utrecht University.

We would like to use your real name in the presentation of the data, but you can ask for anonymisation.