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## A place-based approach in collaborative governance

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### Abstract

Collaborative governance is a broad concept that includes many forms of collaborative arrangements among various actors that differ in their nature, objectives, and types of interactions. This article empirically illustrates how, despite being understudied in the literature on collaborative governance, the “place” dimension (used here to refer to territory as a collective subject) can serve as a backbone that provides a distinctive logic and dynamic, bringing about a specific collaborative governance model – one that is especially relevant in the context of collaborative initiatives by regional governments. We describe a series of necessary features for place-based dynamics to emerge. The article seeks to share a conceptual framework that distinguishes between government-centred and place-based approaches to collaborative governance which can be used as a reflective tool for facilitators of collaborative governance. The framework relies on two empirical cases employed to illustrate its application.

### Key words

Collaborative governance; place-based; collaboration; governance; action research

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## Resumen

La gobernanza colaborativa es un concepto que incluye muchas formas de acuerdos de colaboración entre una amplia gama de actores que difieren en su naturaleza, objetivos y tipos de interacciones. Este artículo ilustra empíricamente cómo, aunque ha sido poco estudiada en la literatura sobre gobernanza colaborativa, la dimensión territorial (que interpretamos definiendo al territorio como sujeto colectivo) puede ser una columna vertebral que proporciona una lógica distintiva y un conjunto de dinámicas que se combinan para articular un modelo de gobernanza colaborativa específico, uno que es especialmente relevante en el marco de los intentos de colaboración de los gobiernos regionales. En este artículo diferenciamos, por lo tanto, entre región y territorio y describimos una serie de características que deben estar presentes para que surjan dinámicas territoriales. El artículo comparte un marco conceptual que diferencia el enfoque de gobernanza centrada en el gobierno, de la gobernanza colaborativa territorial. Proporcionamos así una herramienta reflexiva para los facilitadores de la gobernanza colaborativa. El marco se ha construido sobre la base de dos experiencias facilitadas por los autores.

## Palabras clave

Gobernanza colaborativa; territorio; colaboración; gobernanza; investigación acción

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## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	986
2. Introduction to the case: the policy context.....	987
3. Method.....	988
4. The cases that inspire the conceptual framework.....	990
4.1. The deliberation group on the Future of the Welfare State .....	990
4.2. The deliberation group on the Future of Work .....	992
5. Main contributions from the literature integrated into the deliberation process .....	994
6. A conceptual framework that integrates practice and theory .....	996
6.1. Definitions of place and place-based governance .....	996
6.2. A conceptual framework for government-centred and place-based collaborative governance.....	998
7. Discussion and final reflections.....	1000
7.1. Learnings for facilitators of collaborative governance .....	1000
7.2. Place-based collaborative governance: An understudied concept.....	1001
References.....	1002
Appendix: Relationship between action research for territorial development and territorial leadership as one type of place leadership .....	1006

## 1. Introduction

In light of today's complex, multidimensional and interdependent challenges, collaboration has become an unquestionable governing principle and an obligation for many governments. Collaborative governance has also gained momentum in scholarly and policy debates. Since the so-called shift *from government to governance* (Klijn and Koppenjan 2015), which crystallised the idea that collective problem-solving strategies should replace traditional and hierarchical forms of government, a diverse body of work has advocated for collaborative forms of policymaking and service delivery, proposing a new relationship between governments, stakeholders, and citizens (Ansell and Gash 2008, Blomgren 2011, Emerson *et al.* 2012, Batory and Svensson 2019). The involvement of citizens and societal actors in governance and public policymaking is seen as a means to promote learning and innovation, coordinate the actions and resources of relevant actors, improve decision-making processes, and deepen democracy through increased participation and deliberation (Sørensen and Torfing 2021).

Furthermore, the multivocal character of collaborative governance guides experimentation, fostering learning in different contexts and facilitating the accumulation of lessons and knowledge. Our paper aims to characterise further different models and articulations that collaborative processes can adopt based on experience, complementing those previously documented (Douglas *et al.* 2020).

The research question that guides this effort is: "What are the features of place-based collaborative governance that can help facilitators maximise the potential to develop *place* as a collective subject that owns its problems and mobilises its agency and resources to solve them?"

The answer to this question is an actionable conceptual framework. Our paper is based on an action research process, which means researchers do not do their research *about* stakeholders (in our case, policymakers), nor *for* stakeholders; they do research *with* stakeholders in real time and are involved in transformation processes. Consequently, we do not aim to provide a theoretically generalisable contribution. However, action research can provide actionable knowledge, which is the result of connecting theory and practice, as well as knowledge and action, in pursuing purposeful (Antonacopoulou 2009). Actionable conceptual frameworks are especially relevant for facilitators of collaborative governance processes, who can be action researchers, policymakers, consultants, or others.

The context for our action research on collaborative governance is two cases framed in the same government programme (Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Tank in the provincial council of Gipuzkoa, Basque Country, Spain), which were initially meant to develop the same collaborative governance mode. By analysing why and how these processes have evolved and developed into different collaborative governance modes, we can identify certain features that set them apart from each other. We label these two modes of collaborative governance as government-centred and place-based. As argued previously, these are conceptual distillations of the cases, not theoretical concepts.

Actionable frameworks can, nonetheless, be applied to pose theoretical challenges. Complementing the empirical characterisations, we discuss an important dimension that warrants attention in collaborative governance: the dimension of place. While the

literature on collaborative governance does include this concept, it is underdeveloped. We claim that a place-based approach to collaborative governance provides a distinctive logic and dynamic for facilitators articulating specific collaborative governance forms, and it could be relevant to explore its theoretical implications further.

One implication is that place can be considered an ambivalent space in terms of the theoretical categories or typologies of participatory governance. If we consider, for instance, the concepts of “governance-driven democratisation” and “democracy-driven governance” proposed by Bua and Bussu (2021), place is the context where processes initiated as governance-driven democratisation can develop features of democracy-driven governance; for example, the initial top-down perspective is usually contested in place, creating nuanced, governance-driven democratisation. This is consistent with the affirmation that “invited participants often deviate from what they are invited to do”, and thus these spaces are not static but dynamic (Bua and Bussu 2021, p. 720) and “top-down spaces can generate “new fields of power” imbued with opportunities of democratisation” (Bua and Bussu 2021, p. 721).

This paper is structured into six sections. The next section (Section 2) contextualises the case. Section 3 then discusses the method of action research, which is relevant to understanding how this paper is written and how the conceptual framework we propose derives simultaneously from practice and theory (praxis). Section 4 describes the two specific cases that sustain the conceptual framework, while Section 5 presents the theoretical and conceptual contributions from the literature that inspired the dialogue between action researchers and policymakers on governance. In this regard, the contributions in Section 5 are also part of the case. Section 6 introduces the conceptual framework, which is the paper’s main contribution, followed by a discussion of its implications and final reflections in Section 7.

## **2. Introduction to the case: the policy context**

In this section, we present the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Tank (EE Think Tank), an initiative of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (a provincial government in the Basque Country, Spain) as the policymaking context where the place-based approach to collaborative governance that we conceptualise later has emerged alongside the initially designed government-centred one. The Think Tank is framed within a wider programme called Etorikizuna Eraikiz (EE) (“constructing the future” in the Basque language), designed to develop a new approach to policy based on collaborative governance.

EE is a collaborative governance initiative launched in 2015 by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (Barandiaran 2018). Gipuzkoa is one of the three provinces of the Basque Autonomous Community, which is one of the seventeen regions in Spain. With approximately 710,000 inhabitants, the province has a long-standing industrial background and remarkable cooperative experiences like the Mondragon cooperatives. There is a directly elected provincial parliament and a provincial government called the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (hereafter, the Council), who operate on a scale between the Basque Government (regional) and municipalities (local). These municipalities implement their development policies through joint socioeconomic development agencies (12 agencies).

EE aims to foster a collaborative governance system and culture so that the public institutional agenda is defined and developed in collaboration by the Council and society. To achieve this goal, Etorikizuna Eraikiz has set up several collaborative arenas and programmes.

One of them is the EE Think Tank, a space defined with the mission of cogenerating actionable knowledge through collaborative governance in order to understand the main challenges facing Gipuzkoa and improve the policy ecosystem's capacity to solve them. Policy ecosystems are interpreted as actors (organisations as well as individuals) who are affected by the government's policies, and who often participate in implementing such policies or have relevant knowledge to aid in such implementation. The Think Tank was created in 2018 and was reformulated in 2020 (Larrea and Karlsen 2021). Since then, it has been active in four areas: the future of work, the future of welfare systems, green recovery, and a new political culture. To achieve its mission in these areas, the Think Tank operates through four deliberation groups, where the ministers of the government departments responsible for each of the policy issues and their teams meet representatives of their policy ecosystems in monthly two-hour workshops. Some of these groups also develop tasks between workshops. The Individuals invited to participate are chosen because of their specific experiences and knowledge in the field, which is not the same as inviting lay citizens following randomised procedures, as is often done in participatory processes. However, it also differs from other experiences where organisations are invited, and individuals represent their organisations. We will see how this criterion evolved in one of the cases when organisations of the territory engaged in the process as well.

Each deliberation group acts with a high level of autonomy within the general frameworks defined by a management board for the entire Think Tank.

### 3. Method

The method used in the research process at the core of this paper is action research for territorial development (ARTD), which involves cyclically taking the following steps:

1. *Problem definition.* This is the stage when researchers and the stakeholders of the action research process (in this case, the policymakers and representatives of policy ecosystems) agree on the situation they want to improve through action research.
2. *Praxis.* Cycles of reflection and action follow the problem definition. In the case studied, researchers and policymakers met regularly to reflect in shared dialogue spaces. These meetings brought together three types of knowledge: academic knowledge (theoretical and conceptual knowledge on collaborative governance, see Section 5), experiential knowledge (based on the lived experience of participants, mostly regarding policymaking), and process knowledge, integrated primarily by action researchers through their facilitation of the dialogue process. During or after the meetings and workshops policymakers, and sometimes other members of the ecosystem, made decisions that led to action.

One of the results of long-term praxis is the development of territorial leadership, conceptualised as a specific type of place leadership (Karlsen and

Larrea 2021, p. 325): “ARTD offers three main benefits for territorial leadership. First, it constructs the collective capabilities of the territorial actors, including the researchers. This can be an asset for a territory’s future development. Second, it develops through cogenerative processes between the researchers and practitioners; thus, the research is simultaneously relevant for the researchers and actionable for the practitioners. Third, it changes the cognitive models and behaviours of the non-researchers and researchers during the knowledge construction process. These cognitive models then facilitate the transformation of behaviour, including that of the leadership in the territory”. Place is one of the core concepts of the conceptual framework we present later. The Appendix illustrates how, in this case, action research was not only a research methodology to analyse place leadership but also to construct it.

3. Evaluation and *academic writing*. Stakeholders (policymakers and policy ecosystem representatives) periodically evaluate the results of the process in terms of policy transformation, and researchers share the experience in academic spaces through papers.

In this section, we describe the development of these three stages within the specific case on which the paper is built.

#### a) Problem definition

The initial problem was defined in September 2019 as the absence of institutionalised deliberative spaces where policymakers from the Council could collaborate with representatives of policy ecosystems. This absence was perceived as problematic because it signalled a growing gap between politics and citizens, which weakens democracy.

#### b) Praxis

During the initial cycle of reflection and action, the discussion between policymakers and researchers led to three main agreements. First, collaborative governance would be the core concept used to explore how to bring government and regional actors closer together. Second, the Think Tank would be redefined based on deliberative spaces inspired by the concept of collaborative governance. Specifically, the decision was made to create four deliberation groups around four of the region’s challenges: the future of work, the future of the welfare state, green recovery, and the development of a new political culture. Third, the working methodology for the Think Tank would be Action Research for Territorial Development (Karlsen and Larrea 2014), an action research approach that has been defined as a strategy for fostering regional development and collaborative governance. As a result of these decisions, the Think Tank was reformulated and initiated a new stage in June 2020.

In a second cycle of reflection and action, each of the four deliberation groups chose a specific problem/challenge to address through collaborative governance. They discussed the various dimensions of the chosen problem, leading to subsequent actions in terms of new or renewed policies to tackle the problem. This paper does not focus on the substantial discussions held by the deliberation groups but rather on how they developed different modes of collaborative governance through these processes.

#### c) Evaluation and academic writing

The time frame of the case in this paper goes from June 2020, when the four groups initiated their activity, to mid-2022, when their collaborative governance modes were evaluated in each group and then shared and discussed in a joint workshop with participants of the four groups (in October 2022).

The data supporting the cases are (a) minutes from all meetings, (b) literal transcriptions of the workshops, and (c) working documents, which researchers write to synthesise and conceptualise the group discussions. While meeting minutes are confidential, literal transcriptions of workshops and working documents are available at <https://www.etorkizunaeraikiz.eus/en/think-tank-en>.

To analyse the data, we have used primarily (though not exclusively) working documents that, step by step (one working document per month in each deliberation group), illustrate a distillation process of the main learnings. Therefore, the framework we propose is our own elaboration, departing from in-depth discussions on the emergence of collaborative governance within the Think Tank, particularly within the deliberation group focused on creating a new political culture. Their specific working documents are available at <https://www.etorkizunaeraikiz.eus/en/think-tank-new-political-culture>.

Finally, action research requires being explicit about the positionality of authors, as we were also involved in the case presented here. One of the authors is a researcher whose primary task was to provide researchers and policymakers in the process with concepts and frameworks from the literature on collaborative governance. These contributions inspired reflection and decisions in various meetings and workshops. Another author is a researcher whose role was to facilitate action research as the core working method in the Think Tank. The third author is a researcher who, during the period analysed, combined his academic career with being a politician in the Council with the highest responsibility in the Think Tank.

#### **4. The cases that inspire the conceptual framework**

This section introduces the cases that serve as inspiration for defining government-centred and place-based collaborative governance in the following section. We present the cases before the conceptualisation, following the rationale of action research, where we learn from practice to develop concepts and frameworks.

Each case is one deliberation process of the Think Tank. Although there were four deliberation groups in the Think Tank, these can be synthesised in two, as the deliberation groups on the future of welfare, green recovery, and the new political culture have developed governance modes that can also be catalogued as government-centred.

##### *4.1. The deliberation group on the Future of the Welfare State*

Led by the Department of Social Policies, the purpose of this deliberation group is to discuss and define actions to address the challenges facing the future of the welfare state. Specifically, the group's work for the 2020–2022 period was organised around three more specific challenges: (1) to reflect on the long-term impact of COVID-19 on social services, (2) to help the government anticipate the transformations required by socio-



health policies and proactively respond to them, and (3) as one dimension of the previous, to specifically deliberate on transition strategies that promote a new care model focused on personalised social services. This third goal called for redefining concepts, intervention instruments, and policy evaluation models from a transitional perspective.

The deliberation group on the Future of the Welfare State (hereafter, the welfare group) is formed by individuals from the ecosystem of social policies, such as third-sector organisations, companies, technology centres, and research groups, along with Council politicians and civil servants from the Social Policy Department of the Council. The group is composed of 26 participants and facilitated by a consultant in collaboration with the Council team under the general framework and principles of the Think Tank, which are established by the board of directors with the facilitation of action researchers.

In the initial stage, the government invited certain individuals to the deliberation process based on their knowledge of the policy ecosystems and the challenges at hand. They were invited exclusively as individuals and not as representatives of a specific organisation; nevertheless, it was clear they had been chosen for their knowledge of the different organisations within the ecosystem.

After various sessions dedicated to addressing the impact of COVID-19 and some general trends in socio-health policies, the group focused on transforming the policies related to the care system. The government members leading the process and the ecosystem representatives considered the Council to be responsible for the problem. As a first step, a white book was written after the group discussed and agreed upon the principles of this transformation. The second step involved developing tools to monitor and evaluate the policy transformation proposed in the white book, which meant monitoring and evaluating government social policy at its core. All ecosystem representatives came from organisations that played a role in some stage of the policy process, such as providing the services funded by these policies. However, throughout the deliberation process, the government and the other participants considered that the goal of the deliberation was to inform the government so as to improve their decisions and actions regarding the care system. Consequently, the white book outlined the principles the government should follow when transforming its social policies, and the monitoring and evaluation system monitored and evaluated the work of the government.

The role of the group was thus to co-define a model —a policy that the Council could implement through several policy instruments— and co-assess the implementation of this model. However, although the group co-defined these measures, the final decision to integrate them and the responsibility and accountability for their implementation belonged to the government. The foundation of what we will later call government-centred collaborative governance lies here. In the next paragraphs, we focus on a specific part of the process that illustrates how internalised these principles were among the participants.

When the government started to make decisions based on the learning obtained in the Think Tank, some members of the ecosystem voiced their concern that by participating in the deliberation process, they would be held responsible for decisions made by the Council following the deliberation. Some participants even expressed that this was a

very sensitive issue due to the upcoming elections and that their participation in the Think Tank could be used partisanly. To avoid any negative feelings that these subjective interpretations of the process could generate, the group agreed to co-elaborate a “governance code” to explicitly define the government’s exclusive responsibility for its decisions, among other principles.

The code integrates the participants’ concerns by stating:

... in the cases where individuals or teams from the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa integrate the cogenerated knowledge into their decision-making processes and actions, the remaining participants shall not be held directly responsible for those decisions or those actions. (Extract of the EE Think Tank governance code)

Thus, all participants in this deliberation group assumed that the government owned the problem they were addressing. Despite the rest of the participants being relevant actors in the provision of care in the territory, their role was to help the government transform without focusing on transforming themselves or their organisations. In terms of leadership, there was a clear hierarchy in the process, in that although the Council listened to the rest of the participants, it bore all responsibility for the decisions it made and the actions it took.

This process has a characteristic that, from an objective point of view, supports the idea that the government is the problem owner. In some of the other deliberation groups, politicians opted for more radical approaches to collaboration, but they experimented with small programmes outside of their core competences. In this case, what the Deputy of Social Policies opened for deliberation, and later for monitoring and evaluation, was the core of her department’s policies, with a significant impact on the corresponding budgets. This influenced the government’s decision to collaborate exclusively in deliberation (not sharing decisions and actions) and the unease felt by the ecosystem members regarding their potential implications in decisions and actions.

#### *4.2. The deliberation group on the Future of Work*

Led by the Department of Economic Promotion, Tourism and Rural Affairs, this deliberation group aims to tackle the transformation of work caused by trends like digitalisation and the green economy. In 2020, it first developed a phase of deliberation with around 20 representatives of firms, firm associations, consultants, and university researchers, where diverse trends were analysed to understand and address how work could evolve in the future. The fact that relevant members of the ecosystem, such as unions, were absent was discussed by participants, but the conditions were not considered favourable by the politicians leading the process. As a result of this phase, the government decided to initiate specific programmes to address “the meaningfulness of work”. The government wanted to raise awareness among firm managers about the importance of making work meaningful in their organisations, combining the wellbeing of individuals with the competitiveness of firms. There were no specific policies to deal with this dimension directly, despite it having a relevant impact on issues such as the motivation of young people to remain in the region (specifically in industrial firms that lack qualified personnel) or absenteeism.

Based on the learnings from the first phase, an experimental project was initiated in 2021 where the government, a university, and six firms collaborated to experimentally

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construct a methodology so as to diagnose and later improve the meaningfulness of work in firms.

Simultaneously, the politicians in charge of the process and the action researchers facilitating it made some decisions which drove this process in a different direction than the previous. The Council politicians acknowledged that making work meaningful was not exclusively their problem. They considered that firms, firm associations, the chamber of commerce, vocational training centres, along with other administrations like municipalities and their development agencies, were also responsible for the problem. Following this principle, the Council changed the deliberation group participants, inviting representatives of county development agencies, firm associations, chamber of commerce, and vocational training centres to deliberate. Also invited were the firms that had participated in the first stage, provided they were willing to take part in the experimental project to develop a methodology to diagnose and improve the meaningfulness of work. None of them continued in the process, but six new firms integrated it as problem owners and with the responsibility to participate in the experimental project to define diagnostic and improvement tools.

This new group, facilitated by action researchers, worked with two main goals. The first was to define a methodology that could be later offered to firms in the territory to diagnose and improve the meaningfulness of work in their organisations. The second was to design a collaborative governance mode among all participants to ensure the new methodology would be easily accessible to firms.

The Future of Work group, therefore, started in 2020 with a very clear understanding that participants were there as individuals and not as representatives of an organisation. However, the participation strategy transformed during a second phase (from 2021 onwards), when firm associations, development agencies, the chamber of commerce, and vocational training centres accepted the goal of integrating the new tools into their toolkit, and from 2023, started helping firms, primarily SMEs, to diagnose the meaningfulness of work to initiate improvement processes.

Unlike in the previous case, this process involves not only the decisions and roles of the government but also the decisions and roles of other ecosystem actors, who are transforming their agendas according to what the Think Tank has learnt and agreed upon. In 2023, as a spin-off of the Think Tank, a new project was initiated where the technical staff of business associations, the chamber of commerce, county development agencies, and vocational training centres worked together as a team using action research to collaboratively use the new methodology to accompany 39 new firms of the territory. All organisations that participated in the deliberation process except one have decided to transform how they work because of the shared deliberation process. We thus say that both the government and all the other actors are fulfilling their role as owners of the problem and that deliberation is transforming both the government's policy and the agendas of the rest of the regional actors through mutual influence in this process. It has not been easy, but a collective subject now owns the process. The following quotes taken from the evaluations of participants in the last action research session of 2023 illustrate this point:

[the session] helped us focus the process together and, though this isn't easy, we've seen that this path is unavoidable because this is the path of the future.

It seemed to me that the group ‘exists’, that there’s a level of mutual knowledge, and, in general, participants feel comfortable. (Evaluation of the session on 12<sup>th</sup> of December, 2023)

Another difference between this case and the previous one is how leadership is approached. All participants in the deliberation shared a goal: helping firms improve the meaningfulness of work. These participants represent organisations that not only deliberate to make recommendations to the Council, but that also decide together on actions to be developed collaboratively, each of them working in their area of competence and mobilising their own resources. When they present the project to a specific firm, they present it as a shared endeavour. There is thus a shared leadership of the process, which is simultaneously a policy of the provincial Council, a policy of the county development agencies, and part of the activity of firms, firm associations, and vocational training centres. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this cannot be attributed exclusively to this specific action research process, as participants’ attachment to the community involved in this process had been partly built through previous action research processes where the development agencies and the Council had collaborated.

## **5. Main contributions from the literature integrated into the deliberation process**

As already described, action researchers use disciplinary knowledge to develop their own theoretical frameworks and then share those concepts and frameworks with stakeholders in the process (in this case, policymakers and, more sporadically, representatives of policy ecosystems). This section presents the concepts and frameworks discussed by researchers and policymakers to develop collaborative governance in Etorikizuna Eraikiz, and that later influenced decisions by policymakers on how collaborative governance has developed in the Think Tank. The section is also one part of the theoretical framework for this paper. The other part, comprising the concepts we use in the paper but did not discuss in the process, is included in Section 6.1.

When sharing this literature with policymakers, the main argument was that there is no univocal understanding of collaborative governance and its main features. The multiple perspectives presented and discussed served as a mirror that potentiated reflection on what policymakers actually wanted to achieve regarding collaborative governance. This situation was labelled “conceptual pluralism” (Ansell 2019).

One of the contributions that inspired the process was by Batory and Svensson (2019), who identify five main dimensions in which approaches to collaborative governance differ. (1) The participants. Whereas some studies consider intra-governmental or inter-agency collaboration to fall under collaborative governance, for others, it is simply about collaboration between governments and other external actors. (2) The leaders of the processes. Some approaches include solely processes initiated and/or managed by public agents, while others include processes led by different actors, where public organisations may not even participate. (3) Inclusion, or whether the external collaboration includes citizens and not merely the organisations that represent them. (4) Scope or durability, i.e., if the collaboration is meant for a single specific purpose or refers to more permanent collaborations over time. (5) Normative assumptions, or whether collaborative

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governance is considered a neutral or a positive and desired form of government (although the latter is the most common case).

Discussions often focus on the type of agents involved, the mode of interaction, and the objective of such interactions, which are three of the most relevant differing elements when contemplating and conceptualising collaborative governance. This is especially true if we take a broader view and consider other similar, sometimes overlapping concepts like governance networks (Klijn and Koppenjan 2015), intergovernmental collaboration, collaborative public management, and cross-sector collaboration (Agranoff and McGuire 2003, Bryson *et al.* 2006), collaborative public innovation (Hartley *et al.* 2013), or co-creation (Ansell and Torfing 2021). All these concepts refer to some type of interdependence and collaborative interaction between a set of actors; however, the interaction is justified by and aimed at different purposes, such as the exchange and mobilisation of resources, social coordination, transformational learning, negotiation and consensus-seeking, or the promotion of innovative solutions to social problems. Each concept refers to a collaboration between agents with distinctive forms of logic in which the interaction is justified, practised, and directed towards different purposes. Policymakers in Etorikizuna Eraikiz discussed this diversity of concepts, but collaborative governance remained the flagship concept in their processes.

The work by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) also inspired researchers to discuss the diversity of typologies used to categorise collaborative governance cases. As the authors summarise, there are functional typologies categorised according to the functions that collaborative processes play, like planning, education, outreach, and implementation (Agranoff and McGuire 2003), or deliberation, dispute resolution, and problem-solving (Henton *et al.* 2005). Meanwhile, other studies create typologies for collaborative governance based on scale (e.g., community level vs larger scales) and the locus and nature of decision-making, i.e., the type of decisions that participants make, such as action, organisation, or policy-level decisions (Margerum 2011).

The composition of actors and their roles were also used to continue discussing the diverse typologies. For example, Moore and Koontz (2008) distinguish between citizen-based, agency-based, and mixed partnership depending on the role played by each type of actor. Similarly, Provan, Kenis, and Human (2008) differentiate between participant-governed networks, lead organisation-governed networks and network administration organisations, according to how the governance of the collaborative process is organised and who governs it. As part of their integrative typology, Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) focus on the importance of how collaborative governance is formed and initiated. Specifically, they distinguish between self-initiated, independently convened, and externally directed collaborative governance *regimes* – a term they use to refer to governing arrangements–. Clarke (2017) makes a distinction between state-centric models and society-centred models, that is, those led by governments or public agencies and those led by non-state actors, where governments can participate and even provide financial support but do not have a leader and convenor role.

A key concept that has influenced the project is Sørensen and Torfing's (2017) distinction on the metagovernance of networks. Metagovernance refers to the new role of primarily state actors in governing networks through deliberate facilitation of collaboration and the establishment of norms and rules that will facilitate such collaboration (Sørensen and

Torfining 2009, Sørensen *et al.* 2015, Torfining, 2022). According to Sørensen and Torfining (2017), the purposes of a network determine how it should be meta-governed; more specifically, which actors should be included in collaborative spaces, what they should be encouraged to do, and the impact their work should have on the broader system. Thus, in spaces where the purpose is to increase democratic legitimacy through continuous improvement, actors representing different constituencies, interests, or points of view must be included so that the joint decisions made integrate the different visions and mobilise the resources of this diverse group of agents. In spaces where the objective is to improve effectiveness and efficiency through continuous improvement, a group of actors with knowledge and skills must be involved in processes that seek to coordinate their actions and resources. Lastly, if the network aims to encourage innovation as a way of promoting democratic legitimacy, effectiveness, and efficiency, collaborative arenas should include diverse actors who possess the resources and capacities for innovation (e.g., creativity and the capacity to develop innovation in practice) in processes of creative destruction, and in the development, testing, and communication of innovative ideas. Co-creation, a specific type of collaborative governance (Ansell and Torfining 2021), illustrates this last innovation-focused view since proponents present it as a proactive and distributive strategy to mobilise resources, experiences, and knowledge for social innovation and the generation of public value, with participation from a wide variety of public, private, and citizen actors (Ansell and Torfining 2021).

Action research did not seek to “implement” any of these frameworks. Instead, they were used as heuristics that helped interpret what was emerging in the different processes of Etorikizuna Eraikiz. We have distilled the collaborative governance modes that emerged in the Think Tank and incorporated them into the conceptual framework presented in the next section, which complements the typologies previously discussed.

## **6. A conceptual framework that integrates practice and theory**

In Section 6.1, we complement the previous concepts with others that we did not discuss with policymakers but have used in the paper. Section 6.2 then outlines the framework.

### *6.1. Definitions of place and place-based governance*

As a first relevant contribution, we introduce the concept of “place” to suggest an exploratory definition of place-based collaborative governance based on the case.

Place-based policies are a form of public intervention relying on local knowledge and are “superior to alternative strategies”, especially in their capacity to address both economic inefficiencies and persistent social exclusion (Barca 2009). Recently, Beer *et al.* (2022) have advocated for this concept, arguing that concepts of place and region overlap semantically in many ways. For these authors, “region” is a scalable concept that typically refers to a subnational scale. By contrast, the concept of place is a more subjective idea and one that embraces both a sense of attachment and an emotional link; it involves a sense of belonging, a sense of presence and of being in an environment. Place emphasises human experience and subjective views on development and change. The combination of these objective (region) and subjective (place) attachments is what explains agency by citizens and organisations regarding the future of this region/place.

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In Beer *et al.* (2022), this concept of place is operationalised through public efforts to boost the development of municipalities, counties, provinces, and regions by taking into account not only peoples' knowledge but also their values, local assets, and locally derived visions and intentions.

The action research approach used here to facilitate the development of collaborative governance in the two cases is in the tradition of territorial development, which, following Albuquerque (2012), defines *territory* as the actors who live in a place with their social, economic, and political organisation, their culture and institutions as well as the physical environment of which they are part. This definition gives a central position to actors while not necessarily referring to any single territorial level, i.e., it does not exclusively refer to the municipal, local, or regional level but could refer to any of them or even a multilevel combination of them. According to this author, territorial development is the process of mobilisation and participation of different actors (public and private), where they discuss and agree on the strategies that can guide individual as well as collective behaviour. This concept of territory has been used to define objective attachments of individuals and organisations to a specific municipality, county, province, or region, but it lacks the subjective dimension that Beer *et al.* (2022) attribute to place. We use the concept of place in the framework because the cases show the relevance of the subjective dimension. By reinterpreting a specific territory (in our case, a province) as place, we explore conceptually what we have already learnt in practice: the interaction between the subjective and objective attachments of individuals and organisations to territory.

The group deliberating on social policies displayed detachment from the decisions and actions derived from shared deliberation. This response reflected the subjective experience of participants (including Council members), who believed it was the Council's responsibility to act based on the results of the group's deliberation, even though care was part of all participants' daily work and the problems addressed affected them all. Meanwhile, the group deliberating on the future of work developed an attachment not only to the deliberation stage but also to the shared decisions and actions. This response reflected their subjective perception of owning the problems associated with the meaningfulness of work in the territory.

One of the core features of place when considering collaborative governance is place leadership. Stough *et al.* (2001, p. 177) argue that place-based leadership is "the tendency of the community to collaborate across sectors in a sustained, purposeful manner to enhance the economic performance or economic environment of its region". The cases have shown that place leadership emerged differently in each group.

We now address a second relevant idea that inspires the framework: the consideration of government-centred approaches to collaborative governance as mainstream. In accordance with Beer *et al.* (2022), we acknowledge that in the 21st century, the policy-formation process typically involves the engagement and contribution of various stakeholders, including community groups, higher education institutions, and private sector actors. However, public policies remain primarily the domain of governments because they are made in the public's name, thus bringing the role and authority of government into sharp relief. Policies are generally formulated or initiated by a government, even in cases with extensive participation of various societal groups. By

using the term place-based collaborative governance, we want to share an example of how, in a context where the most widespread understanding of collaborative governance was one that responds to the description of Beer *et al.* (2022) as primarily the domain of governments, and in a process initiated by a government, a collaborative governance mode emerged that was substantially different and created more space for the agency of other actors.

Inspired by this literature as a tool to make sense of the previous cases, we provide definitions of place and place-based collaborative governance. We define place as a set of multiple communities of actors whose internal cohesion stems from both their objective and subjective sense of attachment to a territory and who are mobilised to shape the future. We define place-based collaborative governance as the spaces and procedures through which place collaboratively articulates its agency (reflection, decision, and action). This articulation can be within one community or between communities.

### 6.2. A conceptual framework for government-centred and place-based collaborative governance

In this section, we discuss government-centred and place-based collaborative governance modes. Based on Table 1, we present the seven noteworthy features identified in the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Tank experience and describe them.

TABLE 1

Feature	Government-centred collaborative governance	Place-based collaborative governance
<b>Agency</b>	Based on government agency	Based on place agency
<b>Problem owner and focus of the collaboration</b>	Government as the problem owner It is a policy problem	Different communities acknowledge it as their problem It is a regional problem/challenge
<b>Led by</b>	Government	Government and/or regional actor(s)
<b>Nature of the participants</b>	The government invites individuals who possess valuable knowledge to improve policy	The government (or other convener) invites autonomous and interdependent organisations as co-owners of regional problems
<b>Decisions</b>	Government Final decision lies with the government	Government and regional actors, each within their own scope May include individual decisions on their own respective actions and joint decisions on common issues
<b>Implementation of solutions</b>	Government The government is responsible for policy implementation, although other actors may participate in implementing some of the actions, and fulfilment of the policy will most likely have the support of the actors involved since it was with their input	Government and/or participating regional actors There is usually no distinction between stages since collaboration includes defining the problem, and designing and implementing shared solutions and/or aligned individual actions
<b>Resources</b>	Government Other participants contribute with their knowledge	Government and regional actors Regional resources and regional leadership are mobilised and activated

Table 1. Key features of place-based collaborative governance as compared to government-centred collaborative governance.



Instead of presenting these features one by one, we group them around three main ideas: the framing of the problem and the problem owner, which influences who leads; the nature of participation; and who is responsible for decisions, implementation, and provision of resources.

- a) The framing of the problem and problem owner: What is the issue that leads to collaboration, and whose issue is it?

The first strategic difference we see in the two approaches is what constitutes the “problem” or issue that motivates a collaborative arena, and who is considered to be the problem owner. In government-centred approaches, the problem is framed in terms of a policy and its improvement. Thus, collaboration focuses on improving policy (e.g., designing and evaluating measures to improve those policies). In place-based approaches, the problem is framed as a collective problem (e.g., how to improve the meaningfulness of work in firms) where multiple regional actors are seen as the problem owners. Hence, the group’s work aims not only to co-define or improve government policies to respond to the challenge but also to identify and develop the actions that each actor can take to achieve this goal.

- b) The nature of participation

The second difference we identify when comparing the cases we later present to define this framework is who participates in the groups and who is represented by these participants. In government-centred collaborative governance, individuals are invited because of their valuable knowledge. The rationale is that if the problem is framed as a government problem, what the government needs from participants is their perspective and knowledge on how to solve it. In place-based approaches, the challenge to be addressed changes from a government problem to a regional challenge (e.g., how to improve the meaningfulness of work in the firms in a region). This shift also changes the criteria for participation in the group as members no longer represent themselves but rather regional organisations representing different constituencies and stakeholders, who are also problem owners and solution holders.

- c) Responsibility for decisions, implementation, and provision of resources

The third strategic element concerns who is ultimately responsible for the decisions derived from the group’s work, the implementation of solutions, and the resources for those responses.

As part of government-centred deliberation processes, participants are not held accountable for the final decisions derived from their work, clearly positioning the group’s role as providing input to co-design and co-assess government policies. In the case, we saw that one of the deliberation groups requested the government to develop a code of rules with a clear statement acknowledging that final decisions based on the group’s deliberation were made by the government, which was also accountable for those decisions. In place-based collaborative governance, the final decision-making power concerning the actions to be implemented also lies with the government, but these decisions are intertwined with those made by the rest of the participants. The problem cannot be solved exclusively through government decisions and policies; only through negotiated and simultaneous decisions by all participants can it be solved. In this case, while each participant is accountable for decisions within their own organisational

scope, the close interconnection of these decisions is such that it can be interpreted as collaborative decision-making for regional problems.

The body responsible for implementing the policies, programmes, or actions established through collaboration also varies in the two models. In government-centred collaborative governance, participants in deliberation are invited to co-define policies and programmes and subsequently co-assess their implementation. However, the government decides which of these contributions are finally integrated into their policies and is responsible for implementing the actions defined with the group's input. By contrast, in place-based collaborative governance, participants define actions not only to be developed by the government through their programmes but also actions to be implemented by some participants (e.g., business associations, chamber of commerce, and county development agencies).

As for resources, in government-centred collaborative governance, full implementation lies with the government, with participants providing their knowledge and time. In place-based collaborative governance, other participants also develop actions with their own resources (e.g., individuals in business associations, etc., dedicate their time to addressing the problem following shared deliberation). This mobilises financial and personal resources other than those of the government.

## **7. Discussion and final reflections**

This article explores how collaborative governance from a place-based perspective can establish a specific rationale that articulates a governance model with its own characteristics. The research question that inspired this paper, "What are the features of place-based collaborative governance that can help facilitators maximise the potential to develop place as a collective subject that owns its problems and mobilises its agency and resources to solve them?" has already been answered in the previous section. In this section, we build on that to discuss two specific issues. First, we argue that the framework can be a tool for facilitators of collaborative governance (facilitative action researchers, facilitative policymakers or others). We then discuss the contribution of the place-based governance concept to the literature, as we consider that it has not been developed to its full potential.

### *7.1. Learnings for facilitators of collaborative governance*

The framework we have shared is not a theoretical contribution, but it is actionable and can help facilitators make sense of collaborative governance in regional contexts. One example is that representatives of universities, county development agencies, and reference centres are using a previous version of the conceptual framework as a heuristic to understand their experiences with collaborative governance within Etorikizuna Eraikiz.

The case shows that different configurations of territorial actors will develop different collaborative governance modes in the context of their specific knowledge, values, subjective interpretations, and emotions. We also consider that place-based collaborative governance can mobilise a wider range of actors and their agency than more traditional forms of government-centred collaborative governance, where the government acts in the public's name. In practice, this approach generates spaces where governance-driven

democratisation processes can dynamically evolve to generate bottom-up features, as discussed in the introduction of this paper referring to the categories proposed by Bua and Bussu (2021). We do acknowledge, however, that it never includes all territorial actors, and thus, questions emerge like whose place becomes the backbone of the process and how this is determined and sustained. Considering this variety, dynamic nature, and limitations, we provide the framework as a sense-making tool for facilitators of collaborative governance, who, in every specific case, will reflect on the best approach for the process they facilitate.

The framework and the case provide some learnings for those promoting collaborative governance. One of the critical features when facilitating collaborative governance is for facilitators to understand whether participants (a) see themselves as owners of the problem, which creates the conditions for them to use their agency and resources in solving it, or (b) perceive the issue as belonging to the government and that they are there to “help” the government solve it. The scenario for facilitators changes from one situation to another. If the government is considered the problem owner by all, the role of facilitators is basically to generate favourable conditions for learning. When all participants (government and others) perceive themselves as owners of the problem, facilitators must create favourable conditions for learning and negotiation.

We have chosen the place-based concept because being a problem owner is not an exclusively objective category. Without subjective attachment, individuals and organisations seldom see themselves as owners of the territory’s problems, making it more difficult for facilitators to mobilise their agency and resources.

### *7.2. Place-based collaborative governance: An understudied concept*

Notwithstanding the focus on actionability, the framework may also invite further theoretical development in the collaborative governance literature. Our discussion and final reflections are oriented toward addressing this issue.

The specific contribution of our framework is to emphasise the relevance of participating actors’ subjective sense of attachment to a territory. This is what differentiates traditional delimitations of territory from place. From an objective standpoint, all government initiatives involving collaborative governance pertain to a territory, usually interpreted as the specific scale where the government has competence. However, our framework illustrates how collaborative governance can evolve differently when, besides a territory, there is place, a subjective attachment of specific communities to a particular territory that drives their acceptance of responsibility for the territory’s problems. This subjective interpretation might seem to be subtle and easy to overlook. In contrast, when the attachment we define here as place-based exists, there is a much greater potential for mobilising a broader range of agency and resources. This is illustrated by the fact that both cases started as government-centred. We argue that the objective territory (in this case, a province) remained the same throughout the process, but the subjective interpretation connected to place transformed, creating the conditions for actors other than the government to provide agency and resources for the process.

Furthermore, place can be a determining factor – or at least, a relevant one – in differentiating between collaborative forms, which is underdeveloped in the field of public governance and administration but provides another lens to look at government-

led collaborative governance processes and structures. While place has a prominent role in some collaborative governance research traditions and fields, such as in collaborative planning (Healy 1997) and collaborative partnerships in the fields of water and resource management (e.g., Ulibarri *et al.* 2020), it is not an emphasised dimension of collaborative governance in the public governance and administration literature. We believe it can play a crucial role, as it can help configure specific articulations of collaborative governance even in government-led, externally directed, or state-centric models that do not particularly emphasise the construction of collective subjects. By comparing the two cases, we think we have illustrated this point.

As shown in the cases, how place enters into the framing of the problem that a particular government addresses through collaborative governance affects the locus and specific features of the collaboration. That is, place – or the way to approach and integrate place in public governance – can be a feature that articulates different types of collaborative governance. It can be a dimension that forms the backbone of a particular approach, even in models initially led by governments and the public sector (state-centric models), where their hegemonic role becomes blurred within a more collective leadership. Considering place as a dimension of collaborative governance allows governments that often have government-centred perspectives of collaborative governance to evolve towards collaborations that mobilise agency and resources beyond their own.

In that sense, similar to the differentiation between place-based and spatially blind economic development approaches, public governance can be more or less *spatially aware* (or *place-based*), which in turn affects how a given government approaches and practices collaborative governance.

Spatial awareness is connected to three main features of collaborative governance: (1) Government is recognised as the representative of the common good (and thus, the primary meta-governor of collaboration). (2) All participants are recognised as territorial actors legitimised to decide and act on issues that are relevant to the territory. (3) Resources are mobilised not only by the government through policy but by all participants through their regional role.

These three features make place-based collaborative governance an overarching governance mode that can operate as a governing principle for a regional government. We believe it can contribute to solving territorial problems by channelling the already existing energy of diverse communities into goals that are shared with the government. Under this overall approach to governance, a government can articulate a hybrid model where different approaches coexist within an overarching place-based framework.

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## Appendix: Relationship between action research for territorial development and territorial leadership as one type of place leadership

Action research for territorial development (ARTD)	Place leadership	Contribution of ARTD to place leadership
<b>Complexity</b>	Territorial development has interinstitutional overlap, distributed power, and mutually supportive or conflicting goals and policies (Sotarauta <i>et al.</i> 2012).	Research offers a safe space to construct mutually supportive policies in contexts that are not appropriate for “command and control”.
<b>Shared problem</b>	Leaders encourage actors to engage to consider economic, social, environmental, and ethical factors, and to innovatively transform external stimuli into internal answers (Bennett and Krebs 1994, Gibney 2011, Sotarauta <i>et al.</i> 2012).	Researchers initiate knowledge cogeneration processes in which they engage other actors but consider themselves “problem owners” who are also engaged in finding solutions.
<b>Agora</b>	Leaders influence the emergence and form of collective interpretations (Bennett and Krebs 1994, Gibney 2011, Sotarauta <i>et al.</i> 2012).	The agora, a space for mutual influence, enables the actors to define and interpret problems, construct shared visions, and cogenerate narratives of the process.
<b>Reflection–action (praxis)</b>	Leadership aims to create the capacity for taking action (Horlings 2010). Leaders encourage actors to engage, to consider economic, social, environmental, and ethical factors, and to innovatively transform external stimuli into internal answers (Bennett and Krebs 1994, Gibney 2011, Sotarauta <i>et al.</i> 2012).	As facilitators, researchers create the conditions for actors to reflect, make decisions, take action, and thus become relational leaders; the academic output fuels academic debate and reflections with the territorial actors. Researchers combine their field, process, and experiential knowledge with the knowledge of other territorial actors to solve territorial development problems.
<b>Collective knowing</b>	Leadership is not an individual but rather a collaborative process (Sotarauta <i>et al.</i> 2012).	Through ARTD, policymakers and other territorial actors integrate research as a structural component of their collective problem-solving capability.

Source: Adapted from Karlsen and Larrea (2021).