

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

PRACADEMIC
LESSONS FROM
THE BASQUE
GIPUZKOA
PROVINCE

Xabier Barandiarán,
María José Canel &
Geert Bouckaert (eds)

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Chapter 6

Communicating for collaborative governance

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1. Introduction

Given that this chapter focuses on the role played by communication in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*'s development, one might start by saying that since 2016, over 275 actions have been launched, representing over 275 opportunities for communication by the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa. Some of the questions we might analyse are these: How have these opportunities been used? How has each of the communicable objects been managed? How have the different channels been used? What have the main actions been? What audiences have been reached? What have been the main messages? How has the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* brand been addressed? How has the narrative been built? What has the organisation learned? To what extent and in what way has the institution's way of communicating changed? What have been the main obstacles that have needed to be overcome?

There are certainly many questions that can be raised, and many points of view from which they can be answered in any analysis of the case of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* from the perspective of communication. However, above all other concerns there is one central question that I believe should guide our reflection in this chapter: What does communication contribute to collaborative governance at *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*?

To answer this central question, this chapter first describes how communication is conceived in the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* model of collaborative governance. Taking this conceptual framework, I then analyse the specific practical approach taken in three areas of communication: institutional relations, media relations and digital communication. In each of these areas, I describe what was done and how any problems that arose were dealt with. Finally, by way of a conclusion, I offer some final reflections, with a view to drawing lessons from the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* case with regard to the role played by communication in collaborative governance.

2. The main pillars of the vision of communication in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*

This section will attempt to set out the principles on which the conception of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*'s communication is based. The purpose is to provide some context for its practical development, as described in the third section. This conception has been formally analysed for this chapter, and is based on: a review of the basic literature; the background in sociology and communication of several of the people involved in the design and development of the programme; the Provincial Government's interaction with professionals and agencies specialising in communication, public relations and advertising; and conversations and joint reflection between political leaders, civil servants and communication professionals at a number of workshops and reflection processes undertaken over these years.

There is one phrase that clearly reflects how communication is viewed in the collaborative governance model of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* by those working in it: "Collaborative governance is not communicated; collaborative governance is *in itself* communication". This means accepting that communication is an intrinsic element of the model itself and getting away from the idea of communication as a function for telling, staging, relating or 'selling' what the Provincial Government does through *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*. In other words, communication does not come after collaborative governance. Rather, it is an integral part of all the spaces and processes of the collaborative governance model *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* embraces.

I believe that this view of communication eschews an approach that some have described as 'marketinian', focusing instead on the relational and integral dimension of communication. Communication at *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* is viewed as a social interaction with which to build trust. With this goal in mind, we do not consider that it is enough merely to improve intermediation processes and techniques. Rather, the interaction of communication must be placed at the heart of any political action, transforming governance in the ways described in the following subheadings.

2.1. Communication is relationship and social interaction

In categorising the communication of EE, it may be helpful to turn to the distinction made by Martín Algarra (2010), who said that all possible definitions of communication can be grouped into two major perspectives: the relational perspective and the symbolic perspective. It has to be clarified that the 'relational perspective of communication' as this author understands it

differs from that of ‘relational communication’, which refers to the management of organisational communication and has to do with the relationship with different stakeholders. For Martín Algarra, the relational perspective is broader, in that it views communication as existing whenever there is contact or any other form of relationship. That is to say, for example, communication exists whenever two objects or two animals relate to one another. In the symbolic approach, on the other hand, communication is restricted to relationships in which some cognitive content is conveyed. Of the two, political communication belongs more properly to the symbolic perspective, since it views communication as an action whose purpose is to signify something.

Martín Algarra (2010) explores this conceptualisation using Schütz’s theories on the knowledge of reality, and argues that in communicating, “conscious contents are shared: knowledge, feelings, etc.” (p. 39), and what is shared with someone is not lost. In this regard, communication is a ‘social reality’. In order to share with someone there has to be someone. And in turn, to be able to share, one must be able to “transform the world into meaningful knowledge” (p. 39) through the ability to produce symbols. Based on Martín Algarra’s (2010) broad review of the different communication theories, one can conclude that communication is a process of social interaction, involving at least two subjects (one who manifests and the other who interprets) who share knowledge about reality with an intentionality.

The idea of ‘social interaction’ is a key feature to bear in mind to understand the wider perspective of the form of political communication that best suits EE. As Martín Algarra explains, different sociological schools and theories, from the constructivists (interactionism or phenomenology) to the structuralists, all view communication as the element that enables social action and interaction. There are differences when it comes to explaining this interaction, but all interpretations recognise the importance of communication (and its social dimension) in any society. It is this idea of social interaction that lies at the heart of EE’s conception of communication, and which goes beyond simply conveying messages or intermediation.

2.2. Institutional communication to build trust

A second feature of EE’s communication is that it was designed to express a model of collaborative governance that builds trust. Trust as one of the goals of communication has been a recurrent object of study. According to Gutiérrez García (2013), “one of the fundamental variables in cultivating trust is the communicative relationship with the public; hence effective communication is essential” (p. 13). Nonetheless, it is important to bear

in mind that many different variables may be involved in the processes of both communication and trust-building. Gutiérrez García (2013) notes that “restoring the crisis of credibility and trust depends on multiple factors, among which communication can play a relevant role, although not an essential one if other problems have not previously been corrected” (p. 52). In other words, trust is multi-causal. In this regard, Gaber (2009) argues that in complex democratic societies, an increase in public communication and the possibility of accessing more information does not always appear to result in greater levels of trust.

Trust facilitates collective action among people and among institutions by promoting cooperation and the construction of common norms and values. Luhmann (1988), Putman (2000) or Giddens (1990), among others, stress the importance of this intangible value in the proper functioning of any social system. Trust is an essential and intrinsic element of communication processes, and indispensable to any democratic society. As Gutiérrez García (2013) puts it, “[t]rust is a highly valuable intangible in a democratic and social system, since it nourishes the social legitimacy of institutions and makes it easier for citizens to make decisions without the laborious work of verifying the reliability of the person who is the depositary of it, especially in complex societies” (p. 51).

Precisely in complex societies with democratic systems, visions and definitions of political communication have evolved from a perspective in which communication is viewed as an addition to politics, to one in which communication is seen as standing at the very centre of politics. The first authors to discuss this subject, such as Fagen (1966), Blake & Haroldsen (1975) and Meadow (1980), viewed political communication as being all those actions that can influence the political system now or in the future. The prevailing notion was of two separate worlds, the communicative and the political, mutually influencing one another.

Subsequent scholars, such as Wolton (1992), Shudson (1997) and Canel (1999), stressed the interrelationships and interactions between all the agents influencing the political system and public decisions, as constituents of the processes of political communication. In this view, political communication is seen as encompassing all communicative actions and actors that in some way intervene in the public space, and thus in the political system. Along similar lines, Canel (1999) identifies at least three main functions of political communication: to provide the information and communication necessary for any decision-making; to legitimise the decision-making and execution processes; and to enable the necessary debate for the collective organisation of societies. In this vision, political communication is a fundamental pillar of political action.

Institutional communication is one of the principal areas within the broad field of political communication. All public institutions in democratic systems, regardless of their powers, their geographical scope or their size, have certain communication needs in their relationship with citizens and other organisations that contain common features. The discipline of institutional communication encompasses all these communication processes, which in addition to covering the practical needs deriving from everyday functions, have the central need of responding to the very existence of the institution. As Canel (2010) puts it, the identity of the institution is not only built through the law; it is also related to other issues such as the way in which the institution defines itself, the way it sets out its objectives or justifies its actions, its ability to involve others in its own actions, etc. From this perspective, institutional communication is linked to the strategic dimension of the organisation itself. Communication must therefore be aligned with the institution's project and identity and cannot be restricted to providing information about what it does, since it is a constituent element of the institution's very existence. Therefore, communication strategies and planning must lie at the core of the institution, in order to make it credible and coherent.

Similarly, Canel & Sanders (2013) draw on the work of Botan & Taylor (2004) to conclude that the way in which institutional communication is viewed has evolved from a "functional perspective to a co-creative perspective. While the former sees the public and communication as a tool or means of achieving organisational goal, the latter sees the public as a co-creator of the organisation's meaning and communication" (p. 35). This co-creative perspective is entirely in consonance with the relational notion of organisational communication in general and institutional communication in particular (Canel & Sanders, 2013; Gutiérrez García, 2013).

In the case of institutional communication, bearing in mind the tendency to view and implement institutional communication integrally and strategically in the multi-level relationship with the institution's environment, dialogue is essential. In order for a true communicative relationship to exist, the public – i.e. the citizen – must be viewed as an interlocutor and not as the passive target of the communication.

In developing the concept of communication used to advance the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* initiative, we took into account the prevailing trends in institutional communication, and more specifically the development of its strategic dimension, the vocation to respond to the current needs of complex societies, and the objective of generating trust.

However, how and in what form has this view of communication been manifested in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*? How has the theoretical approach to social

interaction actually been applied? Does communication of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* actually fulfil the guidelines on trust-building? I will examine this question in the following sections.

3. Communication management at *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*: from conceptual approach to everyday reality

The features that characterise the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* approach are comprehensive, relational and trust-building communication. However, putting this concept into practice entails challenges, since it requires changing work processes, overcoming existing inertia and achieving consensus on the goals. This became clear with the different actors participating in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*: policy-makers, technical staff (civil servants) from the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa, political leaders, communication managers, stakeholders and the media.

Generally speaking, experience has shown that changes cannot be implemented overnight or in their entirety. In the case of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* there has been an evolutionary process over the last five years (2017–2022). This was to some extent conditioned by the timing of the initiative itself (it was launched during the run-up to an election); by the political, economic and social context of Gipuzkoa; and by the cultural change experienced by the different agents involved. In general terms, for example, the approach to communication was not the same at the launch of EE, when the programme had to be presented and given visibility, as it has been in recent years, when the real material evidence of the initiative's spaces, processes and projects are already in place. This process of evolution has highlighted the existence of dynamic levers, and also of tensions, contradictions and gaps between conceptualisation and practical development.

I will now analyse what has been done so far, focusing on three areas of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*'s communication: institutional relations, media relations and digital communication. I address these areas in particular, because they have shown to be especially significant in the development of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*. Indeed, these were the areas identified in the organisation chart when the communication area was reorganised at the beginning of the 2019 term of government. In the previous term (2014–2019) the Provincial Government's communication was concentrated in a single department, answering directly to the communication bureau of the Office of the Deputy General. In the current term (2019–2023), it has been reorganised: there is a communication department with three sub-areas (institutional relations,

digital communication and media communication), each with its own officer in charge. Communication from *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* has been based on this distribution of areas and tasks.

There follows a brief short description of what has been done in each of these areas, with particular emphasis on the gap between concept and practice and the challenges I believe lie ahead.

3.1. Institutional relations

Because collaboration with civil society is, by definition, the cornerstone of the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* model, relations with other institutions and organisations in society form the central plank of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*'s collaborative governance model and thus of its communication.

Here it is important to note that the Provincial Government basically has two types of relationship with the organisations within the framework of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*:

1. Formal institutional relations: i.e. actions aimed at establishing, maintaining and strengthening the Provincial Government's relations with other agents in the province. These include official visits, collaboration agreements, public events, presentations, etc. They are 'formal' in the sense that they have a certain structure and formalisation.
2. Informal institutional relationships deriving from the different initiatives that make up *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* (spaces, projects, processes). Such relations give rise to continuous interaction, since there are many different spaces for meeting, debate, shared reflection and dialogue, as described in the first chapter of this book.

One might say that the actions and staging of formal relations follow a more classical line, since they are based on a logic of institutional representation that has been developed over several decades. However, *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* has made it possible to introduce new contents into some existing relations by incorporating new projects and forms of collaboration and establishing new relations with other agents. An example can be seen in the case of relations with the business world. By launching new collaborative projects for the future, EE modifies the existing institutional relation, creating more shared ways of viewing the reality of the province, and enables new economic agents to be included who begin to relate exclusively through content. In keeping with the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* philosophy, even in the most formal relationships, we have sought to reinforce trust and provide collaborations and public events with content that is in line with the model.

It is the second type of relations, the informal ones, which might be said to be the most innovative. Here, new opportunities have emerged for relations and interaction between the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa and very diverse agents, including other public institutions, social organisations, companies, universities, development agencies, etc. These relations have been instituted and developed at very different levels: in private and in public, in informal relationships linked to projects or spaces such as the Think Tank, face-to-face and online, at the level of institutional representation and at the level of personal representation, etc.

These institutional relations have been communicated through a variety of actions: initial presentations (throughout 2017) of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* to universities, the principal economic and social agents in the province, the local (*comarca*) agencies, and Provincial Government employees; discussions with economic, social and cultural agents, etc. from the province to extend alignment on the strategic themes in the EE agenda; meetings with international experts; meetings with drivers of the pilot projects; presentations of experimental projects; signing of cooperation agreements with universities, development agencies, etc.; *Etorkizuna Eraikids* (initiative developed in conjunction with schools to discuss the future with schoolchildren); conferences and summer courses; events to mark the setting-up of each of the reference centres; webinars and themed seminars on the new political agenda of EE; meetings of the 'political panel' attended by the different political parties; the plenary meeting of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, which (as discussed in previous chapters) combines public- and private-sector entities; the forum, a space for reflection led by the Public University of the Basque Country, where citizens have an opportunity to debate different topics through intergenerational dialogue, etc. In short, the different spaces and processes within *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* offer a host of opportunities for relations between agents. In the ecosystem of institutional and organisational relationships thus created, the Provincial Government has been the central organisation, but not the only one (nor indeed has it always been essential). In this way, the interaction arising out of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* has not only qualitatively and quantitatively strengthened the Provincial Government's institutional relations; it has also fostered relations between the different agents taking part in different initiatives.

However, although relations have certainly been enriched, we have yet to reach the point in the model we would have liked when it comes to institutional relations. A number of challenges have been identified:

- Many institutional events are still viewed by different economic, social and cultural actors as mere box-ticking, elements of protocol, which they have to attend simply for the sake of institutional representation.

Given the culture of institutional relations that has been developed over the years (and decades), some of the participants and agents involved (especially those who have been around for some time) have difficulty accepting the philosophy that lies behind the events organised in the context of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*. Some groups and citizens have tended to view such events as acts of political marketing. In other words, there is evidence of some scepticism among the target audiences of such events as to their authenticity. We therefore need to continue working to create the right conditions at the events, acts and meetings organised to strengthen collaborative relationships and gain credibility and trust.

- The current formats do not yet enable people to contribute and participate as much as the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* communication model requires. We therefore need to make an effort to find the formats that will best facilitate this participation.
- Not all those participating in the different initiatives, and thus in the relationship system, feel themselves to be part of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* as a whole. One of the clear challenges is to foster a sense of belonging to the project.
- It is difficult to attract ordinary citizens (i.e. those who do not belong to the organisations with which EE works) to the various events that are staged. The challenge, therefore, is to create attractive spaces for ordinary citizens, with particular emphasis on listening to them (to learn about their interests and concerns) and opting for innovative formats and ways of approaching the public.

3.2. Media relations

Communication from the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa has tended to prioritise relationships with the media, to the detriment of other communication tasks. The media are at the epicentre of the communication strategy. Simplifying greatly, one might say that the most common way of viewing political communication among people who have worked on it has been based on the idea that: “anything that works well in the media has been a communication success”. This has led to the development of certain initiatives, forms of inertias and ways of doing things which, according to our internal reflections, are not entirely in line with *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*’s concept of communication.

It is also important to bear in mind that Gipuzkoa has a relatively small media ecosystem, in which everyone knows each other. This further affects the Provincial Government’s relations with the media.

Etorkizuna Eraikiz does need media coverage, for two reasons (among others): first, to legitimise the initiative among its stakeholders, among whom there are a certain number for whom EE's media visibility is important; and second, to promote knowledge among citizens. The media has therefore been at the centre of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*'s communication strategy from the outset and staff have been aware of the need for coverage.

Initially, we worked with an advertising agency on the communication strategy. We held press conferences, gave interviews and planned communication campaigns. However, this approach proved difficult. Most of the journalists saw *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* as part of a new political marketing strategy, because these communication activities did not provide them with the amount and type of information they wanted. It was almost impossible to discuss collaborative governance with journalists who were covering six press conferences a day and hold their attention. They wanted details, tangible facts, dates, millions of euros, etc. It was very difficult to come up with a newsworthy hook. And so, between 2018 and 2019 (during the second half of the term of government), we decided to implement a more generic form of communication, evoking the future and trying to link the Provincial Government to themes that might be of general interest, such as population ageing and care, the future of work, climate change and ecological transition, digitisation, etc.

According to a reflection by people involved in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, these initial difficulties were overcome when the reference centres began to gestate, from 2019 on. They offered the possibility of moving from idea to reality, of giving some material substance to the project. Judging from conversations with journalists and the coverage received in the media, it was from that moment that the project began to gain credibility: the foundations underpinning the reference centres began to operate; the people in charge of these centres occupied media space and the media were more receptive. They asked for more information about *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, began to attend more press calls, and gave more coverage to the topics and the leaders of this governmental project.

At the same time, most of the Provincial Government's communication capacity was focused on *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, i.e. EE was prioritised as its central strategy of communication and public and social positioning. A number of advertising campaigns were launched, with considerable investment in the media. All this increased the visibility of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, although it tended to be associated above all with a general idea of the future and less with collaborative governance.

The May 2019 elections were an important milestone. Given the electoral contest, there was pressure to provide sufficient visibility. At the same time,

however, there were some who believed that excessive visibility might further a suspicion among the public that *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* had electoral interests.

With the start of the new term of government (July 2019), and with the tension of the elections out of the way, those in charge of directing the provincial government's strategy decided that the time had come to consolidate and advance the initiative, a process they referred to as 'qualifying' *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*. They felt that with the advertising campaigns and institutional events, the goal of extending the brand, i.e. giving visibility to the project, had been achieved (this was reflected in the *Sociometer* (regular surveys of the population), which showed a ten-point increase in suggested recognition between October 2018 and October 2019). They therefore felt that the time had come to gain credibility. The idea was to cease any communicative actions that the public might negatively associate with 'marketing' and focus on disseminating what was really being done in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* in the media and among the public. Significant tangible and material achievements had already been made: think tanks, reference centres, calls for pilot projects, grants for citizen-based social innovation projects, a network of municipal councils to extend the model, etc. A change of course could then be made that would make it possible to gain in seriousness and credibility not only with the stakeholders, but also with people in the media. Those of us working on this issue felt that there were signs of change in the media. They were beginning to see that they were receiving weekly accounts of the progress of the different projects; they were provided with the new policies and achievements; and they were being given access to see the actual real gains made, for example through visits to reference centres. In short, they could see that we were talking about real, tangible elements.

As discussed here, there has been an evolution in the relationship with the media that we consider positive, insofar as *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* has been growing and making tangible advances in areas that had initially been only promises that sounded more like self-promoting political marketing. Nonetheless, some concerns still remain with regard to our communication with the media.

- Our investment in content production has been disproportionate to the media coverage actually achieved. This poses a double challenge: on the one hand, we need to be more selective about the content to be disseminated and on the other hand, we need to focus on topics that have a greater news appeal.
- The collaborative governance model *per se*, and most of the content, processes and complex realities being promoted by *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, are not entirely media-attractive. It remains to be seen whether, with

- time and a change in culture, as these approaches mature and develop, they will gradually be given greater coverage in the media.
- The media require tangible realities and, more often than not, the public and political innovation that is associated with collaborative governance is based on intangibles rather than tangibles. This challenge raises at least two issues: How can we make the intangible visible and easy to understand? And how can we make media managers aware of the social, political, economic and cultural importance of providing space for this type of content?
 - The main subject of communication of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* when it comes to the media is the public institution, as embodied in its principal policy-makers. This qualifies and limits both the scope and impact of what is reported. The challenge is to give greater prominence to the stakeholders without distorting the identity of EE and maintaining the narrative relationship with the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa.

3.3. Digital communication

The digital strategy has also sought to improve the quality of communication between citizens and the institution. On the one hand, social media offers a range of interesting possibilities for communication and dialogue of an initiative based on collaborative governance. On the other, the initiative itself, *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, offers new options for content, branding and interaction that can go beyond the limits encountered in the Provincial Government's digital communication, which by its nature tends to spawn very institutional content, with little appeal to the average online user. We have therefore tried to use this opportunity to make some qualitative leaps in the field of digital communication.

Our aim is to ensure that *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*'s digital communication operates in both directions. On the one hand, we want to inform people about the initiative and the projects being developed from it. On the other, digital channels offer more possibilities for getting direct and immediate feedback from society at large. In keeping with the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* philosophy, we want the whole of online Gipuzkoan society to become digital stakeholders in the initiative. However, given the complexity of the project, the distance required for citizens to connect with a government initiative and the difficulty in ensuring truly two-way communications between the institution and society, for the time being, we can only engage in digital communication with certain specific target audiences.

The target audience can be divided into two levels. On the one hand, there is the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* ecosystem – i.e. organisations related to public

policies, a qualified audience that is familiar with the project. This audience shows more knowledge and interest in the initiative, since they have, in one way or another, participated in it. They are also more active and participatory, and thanks to them, a greater reach and impact is being achieved in digital communications, since they then disseminate EE content on their own networks. On the other hand, there is the wider society, which constitutes a less well-informed audience that shows less interest in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*. With this audience, our communication ends up being more one-way; users do not participate much and do not show an interest in being informed.

These are some of the defining features of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*'s digital communication:

- The institutional web page provides information on the general features of the initiative and offers the latest news, while also offering access to the different spaces for user participation and interaction.
- We have a presence on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. All channels are regularly updated and active.
- These channels are treated differently according to the needs of each segment and the opportunities each one offers.

In general, communication has been strengthened on all these channels, but with differentiated strategies. We have stepped up information updating; the content has been adapted to encourage user participation, and the initiative has been 'humanised' (with faces) to make *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* more approachable. We try to use each channel to create a bond and to bring legitimacy to the initiative among the different segments in a more direct and effective way. Each medium is used to receive input from users and to interact with them in an instantaneous, individual and personalised way. For example, questions, data, examples, etc. are posed which, as well as offering information on EE-related topics, serve as an 'excuse' for a more 'natural' interaction between the different users. Along the same lines, we steer away from more institutional-type staging that would spark greater online rejection and instead try to find images that better engage with the tastes of the digital target audiences.

Clearly, digital media offer great potential for bringing *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* closer to citizens and to establish a closer, more human and direct relationship with them, through digital dialogue. This is why collaborative governance can also be built and developed in the digital arena. The digital communication strategy is designed with this in mind, but there are still a number of challenges to be addressed:

- The necessary conditions have not yet been established to develop collaborative governance in the digital space. A stronger and more stable

- digital community needs to be created to allow for more interactions and possibilities for better-quality dialogue.
- We are concerned about how we can expand and improve the interaction between the Provincial Government and the citizens in the digital environment through *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*. We have tested out and experimented with new methods and channels, but there are still limits and the reality is still a long way from what we would like.
 - We have not been entirely successful in generating or adapting the content of the networks to make them appealing to the general public. For example, the Think Tank – which is a central space within EE – generates some very important and profound documents and reflections on the future of public policies in the territory; however, by their very nature it is extremely difficult to turn these contents into the subject of intermediation with digital audiences. The challenge is to ‘translate’ this type of content into readily ‘consumable’ online content.
 - There are still many cultural and political barriers to be overcome before users in Gipuzkoa can interact normally with a public institution like the Provincial Government.

4. Some conclusions about communication and *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*

Having explained the conception of communication in the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* model and analysed real practice from different approaches and areas of communication, I would now like to set out a series of conclusions for consideration.

First of all, it is important to note that in the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* model, communication is designed from and for collaborative governance. Experience has shown that communication is an integral part of the model, and that it can be used to seek and reinforce interactions, which means putting into practice a relational approach to communication. However, this way of approaching communication has to coexist with the intrinsic needs and functions of institutional communication, which can sometimes generate certain tensions, as well as developing practices that run counter to the model. In this regard, experience has shown that it is helpful to consider a progressive development in the relational approach, without disturbing the balance in the forms of communication that enable day-to-day legitimisation of the institution.

Secondly, it is evident that there are still important gaps between the concept and actual practice in the three dimensions analysed (institutional

relations, relations with the media and digital media). While there has been significant progress in all three areas, and the reality of communication is now closer to the ideal than when *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* was initially launched, it is still far from achieving its ultimate goal.

Thirdly, taking a closer look at this evolution, we note that the drive of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* has brought about changes in the different levels and processes of communication – in many of the actions, in the way events are designed, in some aspects of the way communication managers work, and in the communication processes. Above all, there has been a transformation (albeit not total) in the way communications from the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa are viewed and exercised. *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* has therefore constituted a great collective learning process on communication for the organisation as a whole.

Fourthly, we can identify a number of achievements of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* in the area of communication.

- New spaces and opportunities have opened up for collaboration, and by extension, for interaction and dialogue. In many cases the conditions have been established to develop a form of communication that generates shared contents and meanings.
- In all communication spaces and channels, there has been a transition from a one-way to a two-way approach. The Provincial Government's digital communication space has been innovated, strengthened and improved from this approach.
- Progress has been made in trust-building communication, gaining in credibility and reliability (at least among stakeholders and the most qualified audiences).
- We have demonstrated that it is possible to implement (at least partially) another way of viewing and practising institutional communication.

Fifthly, we should not ignore the fact that there are still serious difficulties in advancing towards the model of communication proposed by *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*.

- Within the organisation itself, amongst other agents and in the media, there is still a degree of inertia at an operational level, which runs counter to the proposed approach to communication. Specifically, even today we still see many classic 'stagings' that prioritise the 'photo' of the visit, rather than actual spaces for dialogue.
- There is still reticence among the public towards possible elements that are identified with the instrumental and political use of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*.
- Difficulties remain in communicating intangible elements.

- There are still difficulties in establishing new relationships (e.g. with important players in the business world and a major portion of the general public) and continuing to grow with the relational model.
- There are doubts about the extent to which the different actors participating in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* feel themselves to be an integral part of the initiative. Here, one might consider whether there is an *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* community that can continue to grow beyond the central nucleus of the most active people who participate in the different initiatives and projects.

Sixth, at the beginning of this chapter, I posed the following central question: What does communication bring to collaborative governance? Based on the above analysis, I conclude that communication is not just necessary for informing and legitimising any action of collaborative governance; it is essential for the very existence of collaborative governance. In this regard, it would be of interest to explore further the elements and features that optimal communication of collaborative governance requires.

Finally, and to turn the initial question on its head, one could say that in the case of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* collaborative governance has contributed a great deal to communication. It has been the lever which has brought about the transformation that was needed in the Provincial Government's institutional communication. We can therefore conclude that collaborative governance processes are also processes for transforming the communication of public institutions.

5. Lessons for practitioners

- Collaborative governance requires thinking about communication from collaborative governance itself. In the case of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, it is understood that “collaborative governance is not communicated; collaborative governance is in itself communication”. That means that communication does not come after collaborative governance, but it is an integral part of all the spaces and processes of the collaborative governance model *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* embraces.
- The features that characterise the *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* approach are comprehensive, relational and trust-building communication. However, putting this concept into practice entails challenges, since it requires changing work processes, overcoming existing inertia and achieving consensus on the goals. This became clear with the different actors participating in *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*: policy-makers, technical staff (civil servants) from the

Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa, political leaders, communication managers, stakeholders and the media.

- It is essential, but not enough, to have a clear and well-defined communication model for collaborative governance. Taking into account the experience of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, it would also be advisable to foresee the roadmap to implement this model, considering the main changes that it implies.
- The collaborative governance model *per se*, and most of the content, processes and realities promoted by *Etorkizuna Eraikiz* are complex in themselves. This makes it difficult to attract media and citizens (both physically and virtually). In general, tangible realities are required; and more often than not, the public and political innovation that is associated with collaborative governance is based on intangibles rather than on tangibles.
- In the experience of *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, we have learned that managing communication properly can improve collaborative governance; and *vice versa*, a process of political innovation such as *Etorkizuna Eraikiz*, based on collaborative governance, can also improve the communication processes of a public institution.

