Universidad del País Vasco
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

eman ta zabal zazu

CULTURE-BASED INNOVATION GAMES

Impact Statement from the Laboratory of Shared Vision

www.ehu.eus

Culture-Based Innovation Games for Collaborative Governance

An Impact Statement from the Laboratory of Shared Vision, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)

The problem that our research addresses

The United Nations 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Report shows that progress on more than 50% of targets of the SDGs is weak and insufficient; on 30%, it has stalled or gone into reverse. The 2030 Agenda is at severe risk.

In the Basque Country, 2 out of 3 citizens think that politicians care very little or nothing about what citizens think (Arantzazulab 2023: 35,7% "very little"; 31% "nothing at all"). 81% feels more identified with democracy when it is realized by means of agreements and compromise between majority and minority forces. There seems to be a double demand to increase both collaboration between parties and the opportunities for citizens to have their voice heard.

According to the UN Report, local and regional governments have a key role to play in this challenge, since 65% of the SDG targets are linked to their work and mandates, and they are the sphere of government closest to local communities. Local and regional governments "are essential for responding to the erosion of the social contract and for protecting our societies amid intersecting global crises." The problem is, however, that culture-based approaches to the localization of the SDGs "remain undervalued and underutilized in the push for Goals-related progress." (49)

Gipuzkoa irudikatuz 2030 (Gi2030) is a regional action-research program addressing this problem in the Basque province of Gipuzkoa. Anchored on the 2030 Agenda and collaborative governance (the principle of multilevel governance and multistakeholder collaboration), it creates knowledge and resources to facilitate conversations and shared visions about the close future between citizens, researchers, and policy makers.

The action we have taken

In 2023, Gi2030 launched a one-year participatory process aiming to prototype locally culture-based experiences to increase collaboration

between parties and the opportunities for citizens to have their voice heard.

In 20 workshops involving approximately 250 people, we experimented with three kinds of serious games: an adaptation of the Systemic board game (by the UK Policy Lab), an adaptation of the Megatrend cards and Futures Frequency workshop (by the Finnish SITRA Fund), and a general design for "reflective walks" in venues of cultural interest.

Those games took place in the University of the Basque Country campus of San Sebastian, but also in smaller towns and villages in Gipuzkoa. During the summer, they were included in two small cultural festivals with song, dance, poetry readings and improvisation.

For those citizens not able to attend the workshops, a digital platform (https://gi2030.eus/) was set up to follow the process and contribute to it with comments, proposals and votes.

Why games?

Serious games allow to register decisions, visions and actions. They form a "library of agencies" (Nguyen 2020), and when we explore that library, we can learn more ways of occupying our own capacity for collective action.

A systematic review (Edwards et al. 2020) shows that role-playing games

1) nurture the human relationships, trust, capacity and connections required to address the long timescales and uncertainty associated with complex issues;

2) represent an innovative way of advancing more holistic and context-sensitive decision-making practices;

3) assess the consequences of management actions and adapt thinking without real-world consequences, thus allowing both accountability and experimentation;

4) require more evidence about games that bridge community and higher-level decision-making scales.

Why culture-based?

A) Gi2030 is inspired in the rich yet quickly declining tradition of communal practices in the Basque Country, whose traces can be found in the co-operative movement and the *auzolan*—a tradition of community work, still alive with legal standing in some villages.

B) Gi2030 is a "frugal innovation" approach to collaborative governance, since it involves the development of low-cost tools and technologies that enable citizens to participate more effectively in the deliberative and decision-making process. This includes the use of a platform that makes it easier for citizens to share their opinions, ideas and visions of the future. But the point is not simply to do things cheaper, but to do it collectively across the whole territory.

C) Finally, the Gi2030 games are based in already existing cultural resources available all over Europe. They are analogic, iterable and portable, with no need for costly maintenance or implementation teams. They are games that everyone can play and enjoy everywhere.

Explanation of the impact

Gi2030 is a proof of concept for an extended Citizens Assembly. It demonstrates a 5-phase participatory process in a double-diamond year cycle that can be replicated up to 2030 and beyond. Using innovation games and other methods, we have proved that it is possible to transform the 17 SDGs into more than 100 localized questions co-created by citizens, that those questions can be prioritized by experts, and that the refined questions can be answered by actionable proposals in thematic workshops with policy makers.

We have learnt how a Citizen Assembly can be extended, both in time and space, by using state-of-the-art software for free, open-source, participatory democracy (https://decidim.org/). Before launching Gi2030, the research team performed an evaluation of the first Citizen Assembly in Gipuzkoa, which took place in Tolosa in 2022 to discuss how to improve the emotional wellbeing of the population by means of public-community collaboration. During the action-research, Gi2030 helped the Assembly, and the Town of Tolosa at large, by hosting there one of its workshops to continue the conversations initiated during the Assembly, gathering 4 new proposals.

We have convened the first community of Decidim developers in the Basque Country, to collaboratively improve Basque quality in all the instances running the software in that language.

We have reached both urban and rural communities. All Gi2030 content is published in both Basque and Spanish, and participants in the workshops were selected to promote diversity across age, gender, and cultures.

30 UPV/EHU undergraduate students experienced the digital platform and some of the games, exploring ways to contribute to the community by service-learning in a meaningful, engaging way.

The benefits to the research community include the findings published in the reports in Basque and Spanish, plus an article in an open source academic journal in English (Casado 2023). 5 research groups shared a common digital infrastructure able to host several processes such as Gi2030. This has built capacity and literacy in participatory methods to use them in other research projects, or in university management.

Stakeholders

The main stakeholder and funder is the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, which commissioned the research project to the UPV/EHU Vice-rectorate for the Gipuzkoa campus.

Arantzazulab (the reference social innovation center in Gipuzkoa) acted as an informal evaluation agency, providing guidance and suggestions.

The Decidim and Agora associations (set in Barcelona & Bilbao) showcased Gi2030 in their annual meetings, DecidimFest and Pentsatu.

Gi2030 proposed and/or hosted workshops for regional and local government officers to meet with citizens and researchers in Errenteria (popul.: 39,000), Tolosa (19,800), Zumarraga (9,600), Zegama (1,500), and Itziar (800).

The Gi2030 team took Learning Journeys to places where forms of collaborative governance are emerging and spoke with their leaders (the Digital and Democratic Innovation Centre in Barcelona, Wikitoki in Bilbao, Etorkizuna Eraikiz, Hernani Burujabe and Debagoiena 2030 in Gipuzkoa).

References

Arantzazulab. 2023. *Concepciones sobre la democracia en la CAPV* [Report: Views on Democracy in the Basque Autonomous Community]. https://arantzazulab.eus/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Concepciones-sobre-la-democracia-en-la-CAPV.pdf

Casado, A. 2023. The Extended Citizens' Assembly Model for Collaborative Governance: Co-creating a Shared Vision from the Basque Gipuzkoa Province. *Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change* 3(2), 229-249. https://doi.org/10.47061/jasc.v3i2.6127

Edwards, P. et al. 2019. Tools for adaptive governance for complex social-ecological systems: a review of role-playing-games as serious games at the community-policy interface. *Environ. Res. Lett.* 14 113002.

Nguyen, C. T. 2020. *Games: Agency as Art.* Oxford University Press.

United Nations. 2023. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report, Special Edition.* e-ISBN: 978-92-1-002492-1

https://arantzazulab.eus/en/

https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/

https://www.sitra.fi/en/topics/megatrends/#latest