

# THINK TANK

Deliberation process on the new political culture:

Working Document No. 12

## **ELABORATION OF THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION - STUDIES OF THE BADALAB PROJECTS AND CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES**

(19 May 2021)

### **Introduction**

On 17 February 2021, following a debate on the working methodology, it was agreed to conduct a process of reflection on the input from the group members up to May. The third of these sessions was held on 19 May with the group on participation of citizens and civil society, together with the team that has worked on the public agenda.

The session was based on the work carried out by the members of the group in two experimental projects. One of these projects was developed in the Badalab language innovation laboratory focused on the make-up of its governance. The second, Arantzazu Lab, worked on the social innovation laboratory, focusing on citizen participation.

As a complement to the think-tank deliberation, the participants said that "the goal has been to move to action through experimentation, which has generated knowledge". They also stressed that these processes have not arisen as a consequence of the think tank; rather, they are processes that were already underway, but that the think tank has "enriched" and reinforced the processes. As a result, they said that the think tank has "added value" to them". This presentation of the participants shows the praxis (relationship between reflection and action) that has been sought in the first year of work at the Think Tank, since the objective was that the issues debated in the think tank should influence each participant's day-to-day work.

### **Badalab: experimentation in the construction of governance**

In the case of Badalab, the experimentation has focused on building the most horizontal possible model of governance, which would limit hierarchy as much as possible.

Main studies on this subject:

- a) This experimentation has been more important than the part concerned with the methodological learning contents, so it is important to influence means rather than content.
- b) The discussions cannot remain merely in theory; theory and action have to go hand in hand if they want to work on motivation.
- c) It is important to translate the governance analysed into legal decisions

In addition to these projects, Badalab's experience raises the question: How can what has been learned in practice be transferred to other projects? In response, "the input from the latest publication from the Think Tank will be helpful".

### **Arantzazu Lab: experimentation in citizen participation**

The aim of Arantzazu Lab is citizen participation and empowerment *vis-à-vis* the public agenda. Within this framework, a special way of working has been devised: citizens' assemblies. Randomly selected citizens participate in these projects, demonstrating that any citizen is capable of making decisions, as long as the right information and resources are available.

Main studies on this subject:

- a) The involvement of the public administration is essential in these processes
- b) These are processes that make consensus-building difficult
- c) They should be tackled with a long-term perspective
- d) This type of process shows that citizen empowerment is what makes collaborative governance possible.
- e) Good intentions alone are not enough to promote these processes; resources and structures are needed to ensure that they endure over time.

Together with the previous session, the contents of this session allow us to work on what it means to learn from action. The previous studies appear simple and partial from the point of view of a conceptual framework and in some cases not interrelated. However, when these studies arise out of something that has been done in practice, the complexity that this action reveals means that it has been in some way managed. Consequently, reflecting on these studies allows us to take on new lessons covering a wide complexity. This will be the aim of the book to be published by the Think Tank on the new political culture.

In the same session, a space for reflection has opened up to set out the visions of the participants based on previous experiences. The contributions have been grouped into four sections:

### **Interaction between group members**

In terms of how the actions of the team working on citizen participation affect other groups, the answers were as follows:

- a) It legitimises the continuity of innovation.
- b) In terms of conceptualisation, we've gone back to the 1960s.
- c) In the deliberation process, some groups generate theoretical knowledge and others generate practice-oriented knowledge, and that is where our added value lies. We are focusing on different sections that are part of a whole. This can coincide with our group structure and be productive.

### **Capacity of the team to learn from conceptualisation and action**

Some members of the group emphasised the importance and difficulties of learning by doing

- a) It might be dangerous to go no further than simple discourse.
- b) Putting words into practice is very difficult.

Some also stressed the importance of developing the theory.

- a) Theorising is an important issue. There are some concepts that we have to work on in depth, because this is what allows for a shared vision. It is important that everyone speaks the same conceptual language.

Most highlighted the relationship between the two.

- c) The government must be brave enough to open up to new practices and perspectives.
- d) Reflecting on processes and contents. Once a month we meet and think for a few minutes, so there is a lot of distance between what we say and what we do. We need to grow slowly.
- e) It is necessary to combine different types of knowledge: expert, experiential and methodological. All three are very important.
- f) Importance of persistence. There is a conviction that our society and our politics can change with a new idea. But this is not true; transformation will come from great insistence. It is necessary to combine an awareness of transformation with a will to transform. And above all, it must be viewed as a long-term process.

Finally, there were contributions on the working methodology used

- a) This methodology does not guarantee results, although it can build a new culture and create spaces and opportunities for learning.
- b) There is now consensus on complexity, but we do not know how to manage it.
- c) Having four groups leads to dispersed ideas.

### **The ecosystem of the Provincial Government's policies to impact the new political culture**

The Think Tank's mission is to influence the DFG's policy ecosystem. In this session, the participants discussed their views of this ecosystem:

- a) This process has brought together different types of players from the ecosystem (social, public administration, etc.) and a climate of trust has been created. This is important and could form the basis for building something further down the road.
- b) It has often been said that there was a basis of trust, but it subsequently transpired that these were relationships based on an instrumental level. The relationships we are building have a different logic and that is very valuable
- c) I think we are creating the conditions to influence the ecosystem; that is a good start.
- d) During this time in the think tank, have we had an impact on the technical staff at the Provincial Government?

### **Expectations of results and vision for the future**

Finally, addressing the different types of learning to impact the ecosystem, participants were also asked for their expectations with regard to the process:

- a) The think tank has been a learning process and that is the most important thing. Together we have co-created knowledge and we have set out what we want to do. This has helped the group improve its ability to understand what we are doing.
- b) We need to delve deeper into the processes and achieve a greater degree of integration among everyone.
- c) We have to persevere if we want to see results over these two years.

I don't know exactly what we're going to achieve, but I think we're going to raise awareness. It will be difficult to see it in the next few years, but what we have done today will have an impact in the future.