

Recovering Trust in Institutions through Networked Governance: An Analytical Approach via the Study of the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa

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Abstract : The economic and financial crisis that hit European countries in 2008 revealed the inability of governments to respond unilaterally to the so-called “wicked” problems that affect our societies. Closely linked to this, the increasing disaffection of citizens towards politics has resulted in growing distrust of the citizenry not only in the institutions in general but also in the political system, in particular. Precisely, these two factors provoked the action of the local government of Gipuzkoa (Basque Country) to move from old ways of “doing politics” to a new way of “thinking politics” based on a collaborative approach, in which innovative modes of public decision making are prominent. In this context, in 2015, the initiative Etorkizuna Eraikiz (Building the Future), a contemporary form of networked governance, was launched by the Provincial Government. The paper focuses on the Etorkizuna Eraikiz initiative, a sound commitment from a local government to build jointly with the citizens the future of the territory. This paper will present preliminary results obtained from three different experiences of co-creation developed within Etorkizuna Eraikiz in which the formulation of networked governance is a mandatory pre-requisite. These experiences show how the network building approach among the different agents of the territory as well as the co-creation of public policies is the cornerstone of this challenging mission. Through the analysis of the information and documentation gathered during the four years of Etorkizuna-Eraikiz, and, specifically by delving into the strategy promoted by the initiative, some emerging analytical conclusions resulting from the promotion of this collaborative culture will be presented. For example, some preliminary results have shown a significant positive relationship between shared leadership and the formulation of the public good. In the period 2016-2018, a total of 73 projects were launched and funding by the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa within the Etorkizuna Eraikiz initiative, that indicates greater engagement of the citizenry in the process of policy-making and therefore improving, somehow, the quality of the public policies. These statements have been supported by the last survey about the perspectives of the citizens toward politics and policies. Some of the more prominent results show us that there is still a high level of distrust in Politics (78,9% of respondents) but a greater trust in institutions such the Political Government of Gipuzkoa (40,8% of respondents declared as “good” the performance of this provincial institution). Regarding the Etorkizuna Eraikiz Initiative, it is being more readily recognized by citizens over this period of time (25,4% of the respondents in June 2018 agreed to know about the initiative giving it a mark of 5,89) and thus build trust and a sense of ownership. Although, there is a clear requirement for further research on the linkages between collaborative governance and level of trust, the paper, based on these findings, will provide some managerial and theoretical implications for collaborative governance in the territory.

Keywords : network governance, collaborative governance, public sector innovation, citizen participation, trust

Conference Title : ICIPMG 2019 : International Conference on Innovations in Public Management and Governance

Conference Location : Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Dates : May 14-15, 2019