

# **NEW INSTRUMENTS OF METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE: COLLABORATIVE CIRCLES**

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The Bilbao metropolitan area is an urban reality of almost one million inhabitants, made up of more than thirty municipalities that have undergone a process of transformation in the last 40 years that is difficult to compare at European level. This stream of municipalities embraces the estuary of Nervión-Ibaizabal and the bay of El Abra. The centrality and strength of the capital, Bilbao, is undeniable in terms of culture, business, universities and endowments, but the other municipalities have not wanted to be left behind and have all gradually strengthened their own centralities.

Many of these communities have long since ceased to be dormitory towns or mere factory sites. All of them now combine, to a greater or lesser extent, economic, social and cultural activities with the necessary residential function in a balanced way. And many of them are also home to metropolitan institutions that benefit from the metropolitan reality of which they are a part. Starting with the industrial activity, but also the port activity, the trade fair and exhibition activity, a large part of the peri-urban commercial activity, the technology centres and parks, the main campus of the public university and a long list of other facilities and institutions spread over the length and breadth of the metropolitan area. This has allowed us to enjoy a largely decentralised and polycentric agglomeration. And therefore reasonably balanced.

This distribution of functions and facilities means that anyone can live in one of the municipalities and move to another in their daily lives to work, research, study, obtain goods and services, consume culture, enjoy nature or simply socialise. The interurban road network and the metropolitan public transport network remain competitive and support, with some signs of exhaustion, this inexorable process of interurban mobility and metropolitan interaction. The metropolis is a breeding ground for shared experiences.

Paradoxically, at the institutional level, there has been some difficulty in recent years in managing processes of inter-municipal interaction and coordination. It may be that the multi-municipal reality that characterises the Bilbao metropolitan area is not particularly conducive to joint decision-making between municipalities, nor does it ensure that the synergies that shared governance undoubtedly offers are sufficiently exploited. In this sense, there is now scope for joint management of inter-municipal urban development processes, including cooperation in the provision of public services, or joint management of common challenges that go beyond local realities (climate change, environmental transition, demographic challenge or technological development).

This is an opportunity to reinvent inter-institutional governance in our metropolitan environment and to experience new models of multi-level cooperation through the creation of innovative networks and organisational structures in the form of metropolitan or inter-municipal collaborative districts. Circles that take the form of laboratories, councils or collaborative consortia that aim to share knowledge, manage opportunities for cooperation and coordinate efforts to address common challenges. Stable spaces for cooperation on urban, economic, industrial, entrepreneurial, cultural, educational, technological, energy, climate or social issues. Joint working mechanisms that act as catalysts for a bottom-up process of cooperation and interdependence between municipalities in the metropolitan area.

Through these spaces, municipalities work together to develop common projects, optimising

resources and ensuring greater efficiency and perspective. In addition, these collaborative spaces also serve to foster solidarity between municipalities, overcome socio-economic disparities and promote sustainable and inclusive development in a cohesive metropolitan Bilbao.

A new way of making a city, of making a "big city", that empowers local institutions with new decision-making and collaborative management capacities, allowing them to face the challenges that go beyond them, while at the same time taking advantage of the opportunities that come with being part of a big city.

