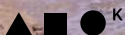


# Final report on the listening process

Busturialdea-  
Urdaibai



AGIRRE LEHENDAKARIA CENTER  
for Social and Political Studies



COLUMBIA CLIMATE SCHOOL  
ADVANCED CONSORTIUM ON COOPERATION,  
CONFLICT, AND COMPLEXITY



# Introduction

This report compiles the findings of the listening process in Busturialdea-Urdaibai on the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum in the region and complements the previous report published in July 2025. During the 10 months that this process lasted, 1,002 individual narratives were collected and verified through seven collective sensemaking sessions. At the same time, we have conducted an exhaustive mapping of the stakeholders and initiatives in the region, allowing us to better understand the complexity of this challenge and the depth of the debate. All this information was verified and enriched at the international seminar on December 1 and 2, 2025.

Once Basque institutions decided not to continue with the project to expand the museum in Urdaibai, this document remains valid for enriching the debate on how Basque society can tackle the necessary socio-ecological transition of the territory.

The report is structured in three sections and a methodological appendix:

- I. Theoretical framework and process.**
- II. Identified Narratives.**
- III. Conclusions.**
- IV. Methodological appendix, glossary, and bibliography.**

The Agirre Lehendakaria Center for Social and Political Studies (ALC) is a collaborative project between the University of the Basque Country (EHU) and Columbia University to better understand the model of Sustainable Human Development promoted by Basque society since the recovery of self-government and project it into the future. ALC specializes in the design, implementation, and evaluation of community listening processes that serve to drive processes of innovation and territorial transformation.

The Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity (AC4) is the Multidisciplinary Research Institute of Columbia University in New York specializing in addressing environmental projects in contexts of complexity and conflict. AC4-Columbia University has extensive experience in international projects

related to environmental conservation and conflict management in regions such as Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Southeast Asia. In this case, AC4-Columbia University is assuming the scientific direction of the project. This involves ensuring transparency and methodological rigor, supervising the analysis of the data collected and validating the results obtained.

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# Part I. Theoretical framework and process framework



## 1.1 Environmental issues as complex social challenges

### Part I. Theoretical framework and process

The 21st century has been characterized by a constellation of social and environmental challenges that are historically unique in terms of their magnitude and level of interconnection. The acceleration of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and habitat necessary for species survival, as well as the demand for water and other natural resources are threatening the systems that sustain life on the planet (Portner et al., 2023; Sachs et al., 2024). Government agendas have improved its response to these challenges, with notable examples such as the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), the “30 by 30” commitment to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem integrity (UNEP, 2022), and the Paris Agreement on climate change (UNFCCC, 2015).



Part I.  
Theoretical  
framework  
and process

recreational or cultural use of spaces are determining factors in shaping the most complex social challenges (Balint et al., 2011).

The implementation of international agreements such as the ones aforementioned has real and profound repercussions on communities and can often be a source of debate and socio-political conflict. Initiatives to protect biodiversity and habitat can hinder social and economic agendas by limiting access to available resources and creating restrictions on what can and cannot be done in a specific area.

Similarly, economic agendas to revitalize the local economy through new productive initiatives or tourism can alter cultural heritage and affect sensitive ecosystems. In this context, public policy-making is extremely delicate and prone to generating new conflicts (Fisher, 2022).



These types of multifaceted and interconnected issues are called “wicked problems.” They are defined by the existence of multiple interest groups, each with different perspectives on the problem, with different objectives or particular solutions based on their own value systems and definitions (Rittel and Webber, 1973). This complexity tends to generate situations in which the goals of stakeholders and public policies are not aligned and in which individual actions conflict with the needs of other groups. In addition, environmental issues such as land use, natural resource management, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation biodiversity and ecosystems, pollution control and management, and the

In most environmental issues, stakeholders assign a unique value to a natural resource or physical space based on their own cultural, economic, social, and political history.

The environmental issue becomes a symbolic representation of much deeper values, beliefs, and experiences for the individuals and groups who identify with it (Pascual et al., 2023). Managing a contentious environmental issue brings these deeper experiences and value systems to the surface and can activate latent tensions or unexpressed narratives around cultural preservation and social change, political influence, and lack of representation in decision-making, among other issues.

Thus, political decisions around a given environmental issue can quickly generate social conflict in which stakeholders raise questions such as: Why is this place, and not another, becoming a priority for policymakers? Why are public funds being used to repair the impact of private companies? Or why don't we prioritize other more urgent issues, such as preserving large ecosystems to mitigate climate change? Behind each of these positions is a set of beliefs and values that define the different priorities of the stakeholders. At the same time, these beliefs are constructed from the historical, cultural, economic, and environmental knowledge of the different stakeholders (Ozkaynak et al., 2023).

Part I.  
Theoretical  
framework  
and process

**THESE BELIEFS AND VALUES  
OFTEN OFTEN EXPRESSING  
THEMSELVES THROUGH  
COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES, WHICH  
NOT ONLY EXPLAIN HOW THE  
CONFLICT IS EXPERIENCED, BUT  
ALSO WHAT IMAGINED FUTURES  
ARE DISPUTED AROUND THE  
TERRITORY**

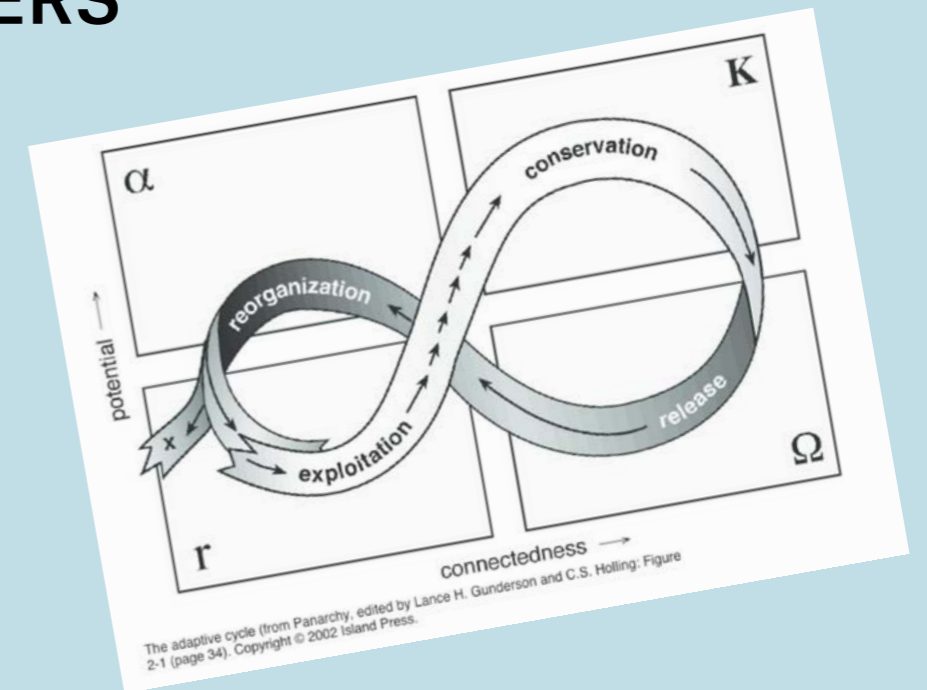




Part I.  
Theoretical  
framework  
and process

# IT IS NECESSARY TO RENEGOTIATE AND RECONFIGURE THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PARTIES INTERESTED IN ADAPTING TO NEW CHANGES AND DYNAMICS, AND THAT PROCESS REQUIRES THE COMMITMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS

(Fisher, 2022)



The adaptive cycle of Gunderson and Holling, 2002



Conceptually, socio-ecological transitions are situations in which social relations with the environment change.

Such transitions have occurred throughout history. However, with increased connectivity between groups, globalization, and the involvement of a wider range of social actors in an issue, as well as rapid environmental changes resulting from technological transitions and the impacts of human activity on natural systems, made these transitions increasingly pronounced and their effects more widely recognized.

Part I.  
Theoretical  
framework  
and process

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT SOCIETIES ARE INCREASINGLY AWARE OF INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND THE WAYS IN WHICH SEEMINGLY DISTANT OR DIFFERENT ISSUES ARE INTERRELATED. THIS HIGH LEVEL OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE ONE PROBLEM FROM OTHER RELATED ISSUES, WHICH INCREASES THE SOCIAL COMPLEXITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS. IN ADDITION, MULTIPLE INTERCONNECTED ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES INCREASE THE SCIENTIFIC COMPLEXITY OF DECISION-MAKING AND THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT. IN THIS TYPE OF PROBLEM, THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL TOP-DOWN POLICIES OR UNILATERAL MEASURES GENERATE CONFLICTS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A SUFFICIENTLY BROAD RANGE OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND ARE OFTEN BASED ON LIMITED INFORMATION. COMBINING SO MANY DIMENSIONS REQUIRES COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS BETWEEN DIVERSE AREAS OF EXPERTISE**

(Fisher, 2014)



## 1.2 Governance approaches to address socio-ecological transitions

### Part I. Theoretical framework and process

Effective governance to address the complexity of the socio-ecological transitions we face requires a different approach to linear planning and hierarchical decision-making. No single institution, expert, company, or stakeholder has all the information and knowledge needed to address a complex issue. It requires the information and knowledge of other actors in its ecosystem. Furthermore, social and environmental landscapes are constantly evolving. Addressing them therefore requires collective intelligence.

## IT IS USEFUL TO THINK ABOUT THE REGULATORY AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT OF THESE PROBLEMS FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE.

In a natural ecosystem, each type of organism performs a unique set of functions that contribute to the overall functioning of the system. In a complex social problem, each stakeholder and institution similarly occupies its unique position in the system and possesses information about the social, economic, and ecological aspects of the system (Ostrom, 2005; Baird et al, 2018). To effectively understand the problem, it is essential to use the information and knowledge of the different parties to generate more efficient policies and management plans (Raymond et al, 2010).



### Part I. Theoretical framework and process

It is essential to understand how the perspectives and needs of stakeholders change and evolve over time, with the aim of incorporating an adaptive governance approach. There is no single strategy that can be applied in all cases. Rather, collaborative governance processes must be designed and adapted to changing dynamics and applied within specific timeframes for each problem.

There is a wide variety of tools and resources to enrich collaborative governance processes for addressing socio-ecological challenges. Although many of them are useful in general terms and are often informative, they may have limited utility in a specific political context or case if they are not adapted.

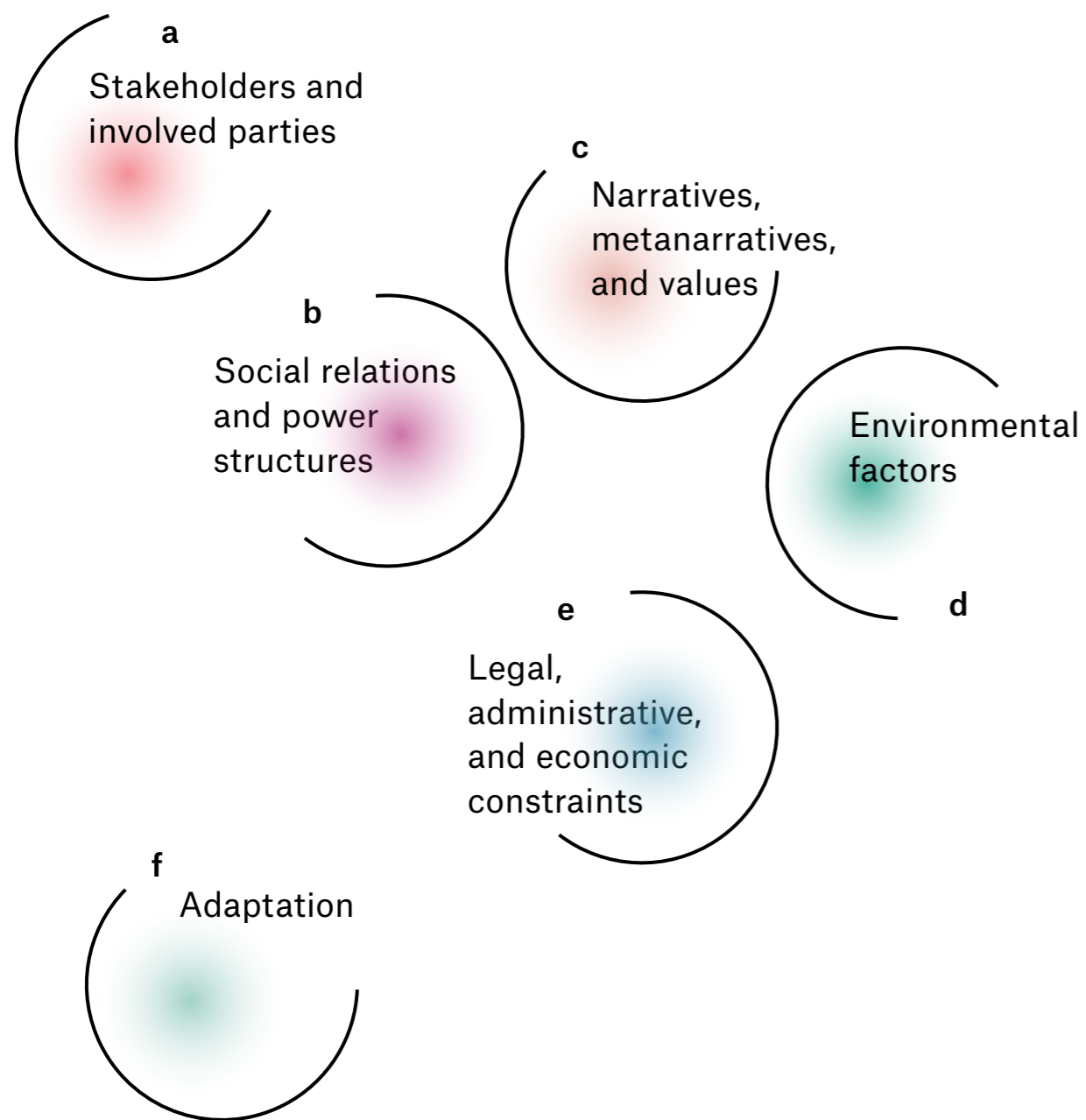
to particular administrative, legal, financial, and political realities. For this reason, it may be useful to consider the types of information needed to inform effective policy-making in socio-ecological transitions.

Although there is no definitive list of these information needs, they have been explored by several authors, including Ostrom (1990), Susskind et al. (1999), and Balint et al. (2012). Much of the existing guidance on managing complex problems includes processes for collecting and analyzing the following types of information:

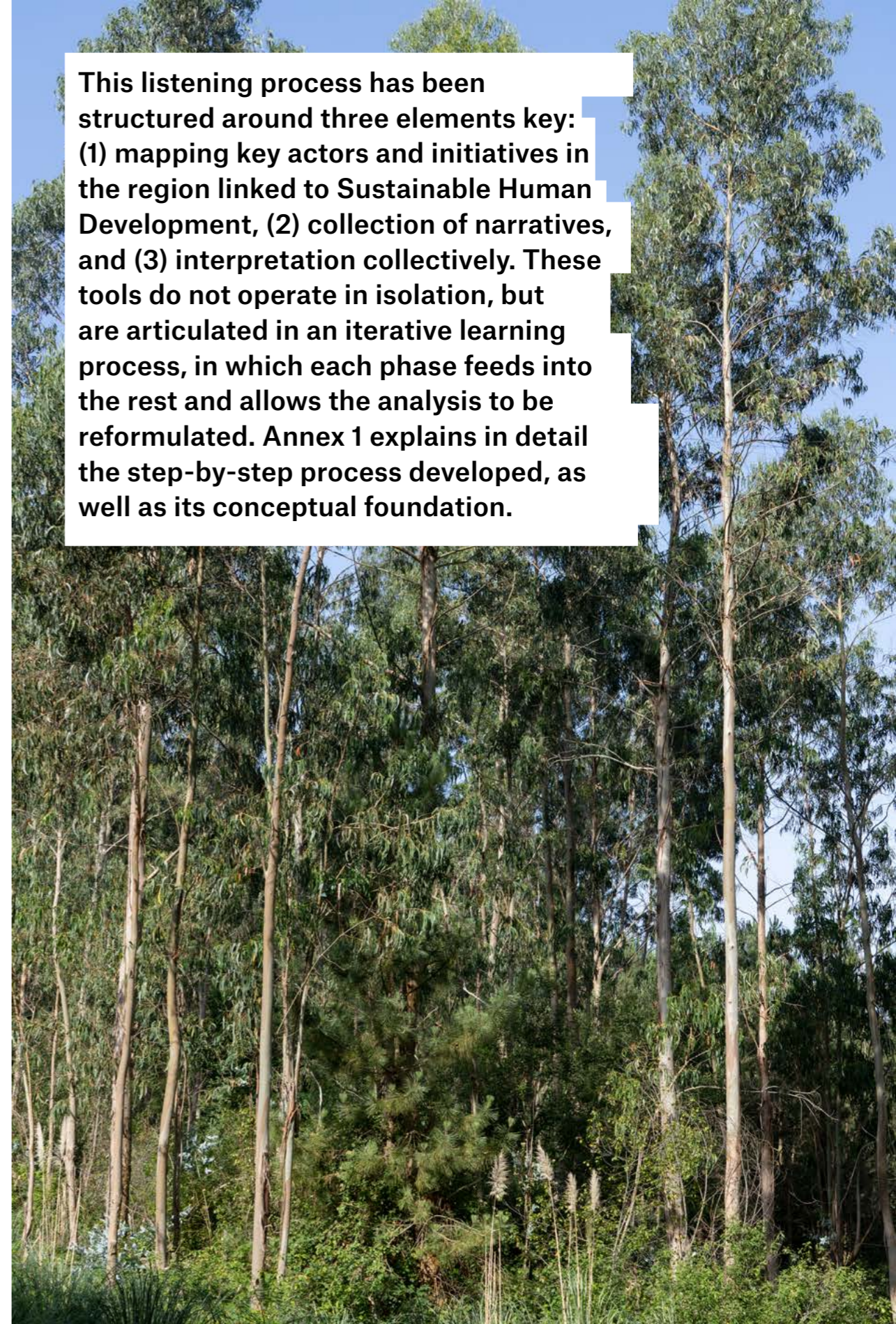
- Stakeholders and involved parties.
- Social relations and power structures.
- Narratives, metanarratives, and value systems.
- Environmental factors.
- Legal, administrative, and economic constraints.
- Logic of movement and evolution.

Although the complexity of socio-ecological transitions and the information requirements for effective governance can be overwhelming, there are fundamental principles that guide their implementation.

These include: thoroughly understanding the social and environmental complexity of the problem; managing and processing large volumes of technical information and information from stakeholders; synthesize and visualize this knowledge in a way that is accessible to decision-makers; and continuously monitor changes in socio-environmental conditions, with the aim of adjusting and adapting policies over time.



**This listening process has been structured around three elements key: (1) mapping key actors and initiatives in the region linked to Sustainable Human Development, (2) collection of narratives, and (3) interpretation collectively. These tools do not operate in isolation, but are articulated in an iterative learning process, in which each phase feeds into the rest and allows the analysis to be reformulated. Annex 1 explains in detail the step-by-step process developed, as well as its conceptual foundation.**





# Part II. Identified narratives

## Part II. Identified narratives

The listening process has focused on collecting and analyzing individual narratives in the region. Throughout 2025, the Agirre Lehendakaria Center team, in collaboration with AC4-

Columbia University and TZBZ, interviewed 949 people. In some cases, a second conversation was held to explore specific topics in greater depth and to assess whether

significant changes in perceptions following the institutions' decision not to continue with the project to expand the Guggenheim Bilbao museum in Urdaibai. Therefore, the total number of narratives collected is 1,002. All conversations have been recorded, anonymized, and published in the digital space set up for this process: [urdaibai.agirrecenter.eus](http://urdaibai.agirrecenter.eus)

The people participating in the process were identified through snowball sampling, one of the most popular techniques in qualitative research. This methodology allows the voices of people outside formal networks, who are often the most difficult to identify, to be included. It begins with a small initial group, which recommends other participants, and continues until opinions are repeated and no new nuances emerge.

Most of the narratives were collected through semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions that allowed people to speak freely about the issues they considered most important. This open structure was designed to create a space for conversation that would encourage the emergence of spontaneous, context-specific narratives, without imposing predefined categories. The conversations revolved around questions such as:

- **What is happening in the region?**
- **What are its main challenges?**
- **What opportunities exist?**
- **In this context, what do you think about the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in Urdaibai?**
- **Who would win or lose from all this?**
- **Last month, you asked about the institutions' decision not to continue with the project.**





The narratives collected through snowball sampling have been analyzed in collective interpretation spaces, presented through ethnographic profiles. These profiles are not constructed on the basis of demographic variables, but rather on shared patterns of meaning that emerge from the cross-analysis of the narratives. In addition, this analysis is complemented by thematic and relational coding in the digital tool, which allows us to observe how different perceptions are connected, what contradictions emerge, and what elements are repeated, changed, or reinforced over time.



Busturialdea-Urdaibai

## 2.1 Main themes identified by the listening process

After analyzing the narratives collected, these are the most significant themes identified based on criteria of repetition, frequency, and intensity.

### • Housing

Housing appears in the narratives as a cross-cutting concern, particularly linked to the difficulty of access for young people and those on low and middle incomes, marked by a shortage of both rental and purchase options. This situation is linked to the increase in housing intended for tourist use—including second homes—and to the limitations on the construction of new housing due to environmental restrictions. For many people, the lack of housing is directly linked to the exodus of young people from the region and the progressive aging of the population, limiting the possibility of building a life project in Busturialdea-Urdaibai.

### • Governance

The narratives express a widespread perception of a lack of information and transparency surrounding the project, which fuels mistrust of institutions and, in some cases, suspicion of hidden interests.

recurring theme is the feeling that decisions are made “from outside” the territory and that citizen participation is limited to informational or consultative phases. At the same time, the narratives show a diversity of positions on how such decisions should be made, ranging from processes of listening and collective deliberation, referendums, or representative political decision-making as has been the case until now, to approaches based on technical, legal, or expert criteria.

### • Tourism

Tourism generates diverse and, in many cases, ambivalent positions in the listening process. While some narratives defend it as a way to boost the local economy and generate employment, others question the quality and stability of the jobs associated with it and point to the need to promote more skilled employment in the region. Concerns are also expressed about the effects of tourism on housing, mobility,

environmental pressure, and the capacity of the

#### • Transport

Transport appears in the narratives as a structural limitation to daily life in Busturialdea-Urdaibai, in a context where a significant part of the population works outside the region. The heavy dependence on private vehicles, combined with the state of the roads, causes daily traffic jams and is exacerbated by what is perceived as insufficient public transport. These shortcomings particularly affect young people without their own vehicles and older people, especially in small towns, and although initiatives such as on-demand taxis are mentioned, they are still considered limited.

#### • Demographics and culture

The narratives express a shared concern about the aging population and the difficulty for young people to stay or return to the region. At the same time, the value of the cultural, associative, and community fabric is emphasized as a central element of local identity.

Culture appears both as a space of resistance and rootedness and as a key resource for imagining alternative futures for the territory.

and community fabric as a central element of local identity. Culture appears both as a space of resistance and rootedness and as a key resource for imagining alternative futures for the territory.

#### • Environment

The environment emerges as an area of broad social consensus, associated with the protection of the natural environment as an essential condition for any development model in Urdaibai. Within this framework, Murueta takes on a unique significance that transcends its ecological dimension, becoming a symbol of identity, politics, and affection that concentrates mistrust, memories, and shared limitations surrounding the project.



## 2.2 Narrative patterns



### Part II. Identified narratives

During the listening process, five distinct narrative patterns emerged, reflecting different ways of positioning oneself in relation to the initiative and, more broadly, to the future of the region.

Far from being homogeneous or closed, these patterns bring together diverse voices—in terms of age, gender, ideology, or profession—that share similar arguments, concerns, or priorities. These five patterns reveal not only positions on the museum, but also different ways of understanding development, governance, participation, and identity in Urdaibai.

In the same interview, a person may take a different position depending on the topic being addressed. At certain times, they may be closer to profile 1 and at others to profile 2, depending on their experience, priorities, or the specific context they are talking about. This shows that the narratives are not fixed or mutually exclusive blocks, but complex and changing frameworks. For this reason, some quotes may appear associated with more than one narrative pattern. This overlap is not an inconsistency, but rather a manifestation of the richness and depth of the listening process.

001



First narrative pattern

## “I am totally against the expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in Urdaibai.”

*“This project seems to be imposing something that is unacceptable. We are using public money to give it to a private company. Projects in the region will not have a negative impact” (0672).*

This first pattern represents the most direct opposition to the possible expansion of the museum in the region. Its main objective is to prevent this project from going ahead, and it considers that the discussion should focus on this issue, regardless of other relevant issues related to the development of the region. Although in the collective interpretations we have assigned this pattern a fictitious age and profession through ethnographic profiles, within this same pattern there are different generations, genders, occupations, and even ideologies and political positions converge within this same pattern. Their arguments are compelling: the possible location of the museum in the Murueta wetland does not comply with current legislation, there is insufficient information about the project, and decisions have been made against the will of the citizens.

001



First narrative pattern

Alongside this main concern, the tourism development model is also being questioned. In Urdaibai, as in other coastal areas of the Basque Country, there is a noticeable influx of tourists during the summer season. This narrative pattern builds its opinions on the experience of managing San Juan de Gaztelugatxe. The quotes that support this narrative tell us about a public heritage site that is no longer available to the residents of the region and has been “commercialized.” This same case is directly associated with the increase in housing prices, the saturation of the transportation network, and the replacement of a productive economy with low-quality services. In their opinion, the experience in San Juan de Gaztelugatxe demonstrates the potential negative impact that the museum would have in Urdaibai:

*“Whatever you put there, people are going to come, and we have the example of Gaztelugatxe, which is unbearable” (0677).*

*“We have the precedent of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe, with the Game of Thrones issue, which has made us a little fearful and tourist-phobic, and that is still present” (0157).*

*“We always make the same mistake as novices, and if you look at places with a lot of tourism, the ecological footprint they leave behind, the benefits for whom, and the impact on the lives of the inhabitants of the place, the quality of life drops dramatically” (0234).*

He also warns of the impact of this type of action on the daily life of small municipalities.

*“Where is Dragonstone? It’s not Rocadragón, it’s San Juan de Gaztelugatxe. And now it’s a Biosphere Reserve” (0508).*

*“We have the precedent of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe, with the Game of Thrones issue, which has made us a little fearful and tourist-phobic, and that is still present” (0157).*

The literal transcription of the opinions collected shows a vehement and angry style, but this should not be confused with a lack of depth or nuance.

**This narrative pattern is shared by many environmental activists and experts who emphasize the collective impact of a possible museum location in the area, but also by residents who are concerned about their quality of life and leisure activities.**

# 001 — Arguments



First narrative pattern

## Tourism

This pattern considers it a big mistake to focus exclusively on the development of tourism in the area as a means of socio-economic development, which generates precarious, temporary jobs with low wages in a region where higher-quality employment linked to fishing and industry has historically predominated.

*"The movement of cars in the morning is significant, everything is going to the countryside (...) and it is difficult, sad, and surprising that there are no other strategies, projects, or anything else to reverse this trend. (...) The focus on tourism seems even more absurd" (0792).*

## Housing

The housing crisis is very present in this narrative pattern:

*"You can see the overcrowding. Lots of people, life becoming increasingly difficult... For me, there is no need for a museum, Urdaibai is a museum, nothing else is needed." (0017).*

*"I think the main problem is the opportunity to live and work in the region. It is not easy to have the right to housing" (0788).*

*"When you're poor, you can't find jobs, and today it's become very expensive to buy a home... There are some homes in Mirakontxa, San Sebastian, that are affordable for anyone who can get in" (0793).*

## Identity

In this environmental and social context, it is difficult to understand an investment that is considered enormous, involving public money, in a tourist attraction that is not linked to the region and its identity:

*"Public funds will be used exclusively to promote a private company, because the Guggenheim Foundation is a 100% private company" (0192).*

*"Are our culture and the needs of our citizens being met? We need a public health system in the region, we need support to boost local commerce, initiatives that promote the Basque language, we need to listen to the needs of young people... We do not want to waste public money on macro-projects" (0803).*

# 001 — Arguments



First narrative pattern

## Ecology

This narrative pattern constructs its argument as a tool for environmental conservation in the region.

The expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in the region would endanger the ecological wealth of the territory.

*"The first task in any cultural project is to study the cultural needs of the area and the cultural ecosystem. And that is not what is being proposed here. We sometimes forget that cultural heritage is also natural heritage, and it is essential to respect that natural heritage and understand the Urdaibai and Urdaibaiko way of life and its inhabitants" (0692).*

*"I walk a lot in Busturia, along the paths. You see the animals, you see that they come here to spend the winter. I don't think any sensible person would think of starting to pour cement here for a museum" (0680).*

*"If you want to promote ecology, what you have to promote is the reduction of activities in an area, not promoting more visitors and creating a museum in an area as fragile as a biosphere reserve" (0798).*

*"I think there is a Vox, and it is Euskal Vox. Euskal Vox does not say, 'I am against climate change,' but rather, nothing is happening." (0057 - Elantxobe contrast).*

## Governance

This narrative pattern feels particularly aggrieved by the steps that he believes have been taken by the institutions to move the project forward, including the cleanup of contaminated land, as it cannot be seen as blackmail and he believes that it should have happened independently of the museum expansion project. In this regard, he denounces the lack of transparency and institutional communication regarding the project.

He believes that sufficient and accurate information has not been provided.

*"Whether we like it or not, we will do what we want, that is clear. Sometimes the law is manipulated, changed, but not for the good of the people, not to give them a way to move forward with their lives" (0786).*

*"Those who make decisions do not live here on a daily basis, and then it is obvious that there are particular interests, mostly political, and other interests, companies, and institutions. That is clear and obvious" (0836).*

# 001 — Arguments



First narrative pattern

Finally, this narrative pattern considers that the designation as a Biosphere Reserve in 1984 embodied the spirit of becoming a space or “laboratory” for experimenting with everything what could be done in an environmentally protected setting, learning to be pioneers in green economy and technologies or becoming international leaders in green R&D. It considers that protection and economic development must be compatible, but “there is an ecological limit, a red line, which development cannot cross.”

*“Art, in its corporate and museumized version, cannot occupy everything. It should not aspire to occupy everything. And even less so a space that has been explaining its limits to us for decades—with birds, tides, and mud” (0622).*

*“Urdaibai offers great opportunities as a laboratory for implementing new economic models with an eco-social dimension” (0584).*

*“We always make the same mistake as novices, and if you look at places where there is a lot of tourism, the ecological footprint they leave behind, the benefits for whom they are, and how they affect the lives of the inhabitants of the site and the quality of life” (0234).*

Looking to the future, he sees untapped opportunities in the primary sector, which represents the historical identity of the region: “gu gara itsasoa eta lurra” (sea, sky, and earth). He believes that Urdaibai must be a pioneer in reviving

this declining primary sector, creating a food hub or food hub with spaces for consumption, warehouses, training, product sales, cooking, services for schools and local residences. This would help alleviate the “exodus” that occurs every morning from the region to Bilbao or Amorebieta to go to work outside the region.

*“Today, you walk through the port of Bermeo and you feel like crying, because fishing has been abandoned, the primary sector has been abandoned, as has agriculture throughout the area” (0665).*

*“On one side, the sea, on the other, the land. I believe that ideas need to be developed in these areas, both in the countryside and by the sea” (0805).*

*“I believe that in the short term, we have many problems in the region, and I believe that public money should be directed towards these issues, rather than private companies and the most extreme” (0550).*

In short, this pattern is not opposed out of inertia. He is convinced that we are experiencing a

A momentous time for the future of the region. He wants an Urdaibai with a future, where the sea and land continue to provide a real livelihood, and where there is a commitment to green innovation instead of repeating outdated tourism models.

# 001 — Variants



First narrative pattern

Within this same “resounding no,” different trajectories can be distinguished that converge in rejection, but do so from different vital, ideological, and emotional frameworks. A first subgroup is made up of the most organized people, with a solid discourse focused on legality, the marshland, birds, and the Reserve’s protection status of the Reserve. They represent the most structured layer of the opposition. Also noteworthy are environmental defenders of all ages, with a high level of education, who identify themselves as expert voices, articulating their narrative around the ecological limits of the territory, climate coherence, and the cumulative impact of tourist pressure.

At the same time, this pattern concentrates a layer of deeper meaning: a territorial fear that combines touristification, overcrowding and the possibility of irreversible transformation of a natural space considered unique and precious. For many people, defending the environment serves as a legitimate framework for expressing a broader fear: losing control over a territory that has already experienced traumatic processes of tourist saturation—especially after

the experience of San Juan of Gaztelugatxe—and whose effects are still present in everyday life: pressure on housing, congestion, landscape degradation, precariousness in the hospitality industry, and the feeling of symbolic expulsion from one’s own place. The confluence of technical arguments—legislation, biodiversity, ecosystem impact—and emotional—protection of the way of life, suspicion of external interference, institutional mistrust—explains the initial strength of this profile, which brings together mobilized sectors, activists, environmental experts, and neighbors with direct experiences of the deterioration associated with mass tourism.

*“I don’t think I’ll change anything, I’ll stay here, with the mountains, the sea, good communication... I think I’ll stay here forever and I think we’ll live in a museum. In the end, when you get to the main thing, that’s what matters most. I can stay on the shore, climb a mountain, or have a few drinks with friends. How long do you have tomorrow?” (0691).*

## 001 — Profile evolution



First narrative pattern

Within a longitudinal analysis of the listening process, it can be said that this pattern was initially the most represented in the early stages of the work, as is usually the case in qualitative snowball sampling, where the most mobilized and involved voices tend to appear first. However, over the months and as the listening process has expanded and diversified, a significant part of these initial narratives has shifted towards pattern number 2, which at the end of this listening process constitutes the most prevalent narrative space.

The collective interpretation spaces have shown how, by representing these patterns in a simplified way and talking about NIMBY (“not in my back yard”) attitudes, people representative of this pattern, seeing themselves represented in it in the collective interpretations of the information, have nuanced their discourse towards positions more typical of pattern number 2.

*“We don’t know if the museum will undergo an expansion, but we do know that Urdaibaien will not be able to attend.” (0150 - Bermeo contrast) (06/25/2025)*

## 001 — Profile evolution



First narrative pattern

*“The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao has found a solution that complies with the law, is accepted by society, and can move forward. It meets its needs, but not those of the people. It is not acceptable to sacrifice the future of an entire region.” (0150 - second iteration) (10/29/2025)*

From a methodological perspective, and following the interpretive framework validated by AC4–Columbia University, this type of shifts in second iterations of listening and after collective interpretations should not be understood as a linear substitution, but rather as a natural evolution of the narrative ecosystem: as listening progresses, less polarized voices emerge that seek to integrate criticism of the museum’s expansion with the need to open a broader conversation about the development of the region.

002



Second narrative pattern

**“I am against the expansion, but I want to talk about the development of the region.”**

*“There is no commitment to lines of development for the region. Urdaibai has become stagnant and is in a process of total economic decline” (0138)*

*“I believe that the region has missed an opportunity, and now I see the Guggenheim-Urdaibai project as a chance to make up for it. I am not sure, but I believe that*

*is the only way to move forward and develop this region.” (0797)*

**This second pattern also opposes the expansion of the museum, but considers that the discussion should focus on the development of the region. It is a question of priority or urgency. This pattern is also shared by different ideologies, genders, and generations. The narratives collected in this pattern consider that Urdaibai is stagnant and in decline. Despite being aware of the proposals being promoted by the institutions within the framework of the new Strategic Plan for the region and the declaration of priority action zone (ZAP), they consider that economic investment is misdirected and insufficient. They also consider that the discussion has been superficial and limited to the least critical agents.**

002



Second narrative pattern

This narrative pattern fears that the result of this process could be an exclusive commitment to tourism:

*“All in red” (0072).*

*“You can’t put all your eggs in one basket” (0036).*

Like the first pattern, it considers that public investment in the region should be channeled into other areas that have been waiting for decades.

*“Renewal or new impetus, in my opinion, should come from public investment, but there are other options” (0195).*

*“The economy is currently focused on tourism; industry is being pushed aside. There are no new businesses opening up, it is very difficult for the administration, and it is not easy from a communications point of view: there are not enough buses and trucks available. We are completely forgotten” (0801).*

*“Well, it’s just that teachers and civil servants are getting involved, and society is changing, isn’t it? There will be four entrepreneurs, as far as I know, but they are not representative of the initiatives that receive public funding for regional development” (0791).*

*“There isn’t a single industry that can operate. People here have to leave because the area is very stagnant” (0686).*

*“The area needs a strategic plan for the region’s economy, and it cannot be just the Guggenheim, because the strategy for the area is more about industry than tourism, which is already under a lot of pressure” (0040).*

Although he is against the Guggenheim expansion project in Urdaibai, he calls for more investment and new infrastructure. In this skipper’s opinion, initiatives for the economic development of the region are disconnected and do not emphasize the need to promote a new industrial model, training, research, and new technologies linked to decarbonization:

*“The Guggenheim Museum alone will not be enough, it must be part of a broader development project” (0032).*

*“With that alone, we will not be able to tackle a comprehensive program for the region, recovering the true potential of the Biosphere Reserve concept” (0893).*

This respondent is not against tourism projects per se, but believes that the priority should be to protect the biosphere and build sustainable economic development linked to the territory. Above all, he believes that the discussion should focus on how to manage the economic investment of the regional strategic plan.

Finally, he is concerned that the only conversation is about the museum, while the structural problems of employment, industry, and housing are not being addressed.

He feels that young people and migrants are not being heard.

## 002 — Arguments



Second narrative pattern

### Social commitment

The problem is not only economic; this narrative pattern is greatly concerned with social development. It draws attention to the precariousness of the of care in the area and calls for a different perspective on the way in which migrants who perform precarious jobs are treated. It is emphasized that the social sustainability of the region depends as much on employment as it does on care, housing, and community networks, and that the museum does not address any of these layers. In this area, discourses emerge, mainly articulated by women, that link housing, care, and local life, and that interpret that the museum would exacerbate existing inequalities in the region.

*"We always comment that the public community dimension should be much greater, and that is a real problem" (0584).*

*"An appropriate care policy, greater attention to female caregivers. I know what they are going through. I don't know if that would take the form of a labor dispute or if I don't know what they will go through, but it is a concern" (0624).*

*"Listening to the people and caring for citizens are priorities in a of advanced capitalism that destroys everything in order to boost the economy" (0779).*

*"It's not about the community losing its homes, it's about the community being destroyed." (0144 - second iteration)*

*"We, for example, have that mentality; we come here to work. People often say that we come here to steal jobs, but we take jobs from people who don't want to work those hours" (0737).*

### Location

This narrative pattern opposes the location of the museum in Murueta, but considers that other larger municipalities could host cultural infrastructures that would enhance value to Basque heritage. The location is interpreted as a symbol of misplaced priorities. Instead of investing in improving transport or promoting new housing initiatives, the decision has been made to intervene in a protected wetland.

*"In Gernika, I don't mind, because at the end of the day, I'll tell you, it's a big town, so maybe it's good for Gernika. But in Murueta, that's impossible" (0581).*

*"In Gernika, it's not altering nature, so I don't see anything wrong with it either. But in Murueta, it does bother me.*

*I think it's pretty savage to do that" (0591).*

*"I have my doubts about the museum's location in Murueta because of its overall impact on the reserve, but not in Gernika, which may be acceptable because of its lesser impact" (0854).*

*"I'd like to say no, but I think there's a difference between the Guggenheim being located in Gernika or in Murueta. In the end, a Guggenheim in Gernika... Well, it's a town that has symbolic significance. I can understand why someone would want to do something of that magnitude here" (0556).*

## 002 — Arguments



Second narrative pattern

### Museum project

In relation to the proposal presented on the Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa website for Urdaibai, this stakeholder wants to know more about the museum project, not just the physical infrastructure. In his opinion, they only talk about the container, but not the content.

*"Perhaps the most important thing is not the building, when we talk about art and culture; the most important thing is to see how much art that territory knows. When you are catering to an audience that is going to arrive and not an audience that is already in that territory" (0637).*

*"If a cultural and artistic debate is not introduced at the heart of the matter, it will not be possible to bring out the contents of that project. And if the more specific content or ideas of what it would be, it is obviously much more difficult to convince the public, whether from Urdaibai or outside Urdaibai" (0687).*

*"If you look at the Guggenheim Bilbao website, there is a section that is somewhat of a justification for the project. Guggenheim-Urdaibai and it is nothing" (0812).*

### Governance

This narrative pattern criticizes a hierarchical and outdated model of governance, where decisions come from the top down, without real participation:

*"What we want is for the inhabitants of the region to be asked what can be done here, but before threatening to install a museum no matter what" (0169).*

*"I don't know if it would be necessary to hold a referendum right now, but at least a participatory debate" (0789).*

*"People have been mobilized, and I think it's important to take into account how society as a whole sees it, especially in projects like this. It's true that it's not easy to get people involved, but participation is not a necessary prerequisite for such processes to get underway. Decisions must be brought closer to the people, that much is clear" (0603).*

They believe that time and opportunities have been lost due to a lack of forward planning and political will.

### Primary sector

They emphasize that the recovery of the primary sector is not nostalgia, but a real opportunity if it is connected to local value chains, food innovation, and stable employment, such as creating an agri-food hub, attracting green R&D, and creating quality jobs:

*"In a biosphere reserve, we can draw on the local economy and technology, we can create an R&D hub, we can be a benchmark" (0103).*

*"If you look at the surroundings of Gernika, you will see that it is a primary sector. We must promote fishing and the land, and institutions should play a key role in this. Sustainable agriculture can be achieved, as can training geared towards this goal" (0692)*

## 002 — Arguments



### Second narrative pattern

This pattern expresses fatigue due to the lack of sustained and coherent planning: there are calls for a serious, ongoing process that does not depend on iconic projects but rather on solid development structures that inspire the inhabitants of Urdaibai.

This shift towards “development first” explains why this pattern has become more prevalent throughout the process, especially after the collective interpretation sessions, where many people initially assigned to “it depends” (pattern 4) ended up identifying with this position more specifically.

In this sense, pattern 2 now acts as the articulating axis of the territorial debate: not only is the museum rejected, but the focus is redefined towards the socioeconomic model, the lack of industry, the housing crisis, institutional lack of coordination, and the absence of a clear horizon for the region.

## 002 — Variants



### Second narrative pattern

Within this “no to expansion, but let’s talk about development” stance, different trajectories can be distinguished that converge on a common diagnosis.

A first subgroup is made up of people who interpret the situation in terms of the loss of the productive base: the closure of companies, the reduction in industrial employment, and growing dependence on the service sector, especially tourism, a sector that, on the one hand, mainly provides precarious and seasonal jobs and, on the other, tends to multiply, impacting the landscape and daily life in the region. For them, the museum project, while undesirable, is not the main problem, but rather an example of priorities that are disconnected from real needs.

They believe that without industry, without quality employment, and without a defined roadmap, any large-scale project is out of place. Within this subgroup, there is also a particularly nostalgic sector that compares the present with times of stable employment in factories and shipyards, and sees the expansion as another step towards an economy of precarious services.

A second subgroup brings together people who focus on the community and coexistence, mainly composed of women. For them, the high cost of housing, an inadequate care system, limited mobility within the region, and tourist pressure affect this coexistence, and they perceive that the expansion project does not address (or could even intensify) these dynamics.

There is a third subgroup within this pattern linked to cultural projects, nature and leisure, which considers that initiatives in this area are deeply necessary but that the current museum proposal does not respond at all to the needs of the region or to the development model they consider necessary for Busturialdea.

They envision small-scale initiatives, connected to the territory, capable of generating training, creativity, and local value.

## 002 — Evolution of the profile



Second narrative pattern

As mentioned in the previous narrative pattern, in listening processes with qualitative snowball sampling, the most mobilized voices tend to appear first. As the spectrum of voices diversifies, narratives that integrate elements of other perceptions are reinforced. From a methodological perspective, the consolidation of this pattern is consistent with longitudinal listening processes, as this pattern offers a broader framework for people who do not identify exclusively with environmental issues. The emphasis on territorial priorities (sustainable industry, housing, transportation, care, and stable employment) has served as a meeting point for diverse experiences. The expansion of the museum as the main focus of the debate is evolving into a broader reflection on the development model that the region needs. After analyzing 1,002 narratives, we confirmed the prevalence of this pattern.

## 003 — “I’m in favor, we have to do something.”



Third narrative pattern

*“Animaliek bai, baina gu be bai, the two-legged animals that we are. Otherwise, in the end, we will destroy the reserve.”*

*Let’s get started, let’s get going, let’s start right away in Basque! (0144).*

*“The challenge is to understand that enjoying such an extraordinarily privileged environment as we enjoy in the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve... should not turn us into snails: we don’t have to hide, we shouldn’t be afraid of the tourist attraction we have” (0882).*

*“We can’t continue to be an Indian reservation” (0112 - second iteration).*

This pattern represents those who support the possible expansion of the museum. Their main argument is that we must take the initiative in the face of decline. In their opinion, institutions have the responsibility and democratic legitimacy to propose disruptive initiatives that drive change, and although they are aware that criticism may arise, they argue that anything new is always questioned... until it works. They believe that we normally criticize institutions for not doing enough, and when they do, they are questioned. They compare it to what happened with the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao: initial rejection, and widespread support after seeing its positive impact.



This pattern brings together the narratives of people of different generations, genders, and ideologies (it is not a narrative pattern associated exclusively with a political party) who are in favor of the expansion project of the museum, but also to many people who are currently unemployed (or have in precarious conditions) and groups working in hospitality, services, and tourism. It is especially present in the smaller towns in the interior of the region and on the right bank of the estuary.

*"I like the idea initially, because in the end it is similar to what was done in Bilbao in its day. Of course, as long as it is environmentally friendly and regulated" (0101).*

*"The Guggenheim is fine. It's a good place for tourism. Quite a lot of people pass through here. For example, the economy will improve" (0727).*

*"The Guggenheim—as we have already seen in Bilbao—will be an attraction for international tourism, which will surely bring us a flow of high-quality tourists for the economic development of the region, commerce, and hospitality, with its direct and indirect jobs, which will undoubtedly improve the prospects for our children to consider staying here and not having to look for work elsewhere, as is currently the case for most families" (0882).*

*"Well, anything that benefits the town and is for its good is great in my opinion, honestly."*

(0742).

Their motivations are not uniform either. In some cases, it is a clear and direct yes to the project. In others, support is more linked to the idea that "something big has to be done" because the situation in the region is unsustainable, and in that context, the museum is welcome. There is a shared sense of urgency: we cannot go on like this.



### Emergency

He believes that the situation in Urdaibai is unsustainable; either something is done, or the region will die:

*"I am the only one who says that this project will not go ahead, something must be done" (0106).*

*"If they don't do something, they have to do something. I don't think the solution will be the Guggenheim. It's a good option, but I think that apart from that, even if the Guggenheim is chosen, something else will have to be done" (0821).*

This narrative pattern speaks of lifeless towns, with closed bars and no commerce, and feels that young people cannot stay due to the lack of housing and employment. In his opinion, there is a lack of health services, transportation, and water problems... In some cases, the narrative is tinged with nostalgia,

*"what we have been and are no longer,"—"fishing has always been here, but now it has disappeared, it is a thing of the past, it is no longer an industry, commerce is becoming increasingly scarce..." (0749)*

and lists the companies that have closed in recent years. He also feels that local identity is being lost, that Urdaibai is becoming a beautiful but empty backdrop. The idea that sums up his argument is that it is not worth standing still. He lists closed businesses, declining health services, mobility problems, and water shortages, reinforcing the feeling of paralysis.

### Positive experiences

This farmer repeatedly mentions the Bird Center as a success story. In his opinion, this project has involved physical action in the marshland and no one has complained. This project attracts thousands of people annually and is not considered to have had a negative impact on the environment.

*"So, naturally, the research, the birds, the Bird Center is not public, it is a private initiative."*

(0543)

*"And we don't know what the project is either. No one knows that an Iberdrola tower is going to be built there. Maybe it's like the one for the birds in Laida, the Bird Center, which may be something made of wood, low, so it blends in quite well with the environment. It doesn't have to be a monstrous Iberdrola tower there." (0577)*

### Differences in the region

This narrative pattern draws attention to the different realities experienced by larger and smaller municipalities, especially those inland on the right bank of the estuary. He believes that many of the voices opposed to the expansion of the project do so from a position of privilege and without knowing the reality of depopulation and lack of services in smaller municipalities. The primary sector is mentioned as a possibility for the future, but no one wants their sons and daughters to go into fishing or agriculture.

*"There is a general feeling that most of the policies and proposals put forward are biased to medium-sized cities. And that leads to the destruction of small towns" (0512).*

*"I come from a farming background, and it is clear to see what has been happening over the last few years and the last few decades. Small towns are disappearing. In fact, the first tavern in the smallest town no longer exists today" (0602).*

*"Small villages live off tourism, and in recent years they have been disappearing" (0760).*

*"The more the better. More things, more people, more life, more work. That's how it is in small towns, otherwise... it's very dead. Here, for example, every week buses come to visit all the small towns. We need more things like that. So, as far as we're concerned, let them do it, but you have to ask the people here" (0842).*

## 003 — Arguments



Third narrative pattern

### Deseasonalization

In other cases, perhaps more closely linked to tourism as a business and the hospitality industry, the lack of tourism in winter is cited, and it is believed that the project could drive the deseasonalization of tourism in the area:

*"Tourism is a reality in our region today, but that reality must be balanced an opportunity for development" (0030).*

He would like it to be not just a museum, but a multi-layered project: culture, employment, nature, and other elements. Although he is in favor of the project, he acknowledges that he does not have all the information and would like to know more before making a clear decision. He believes it is a matter of seeing it as an opportunity to avoid stagnation.

*"It's an opportunity to bring people together, and not just that, but the more people come, the more things will happen. Besides, it's not very well established yet. We don't know what it will be like... I haven't seen anything like it before. We need a specific project to find out what and where..." (0485).*

*"It could be an opportunity for improvement for those of us who live here and an opportunity to improve implement a sustainable tourism model that objectively controls the flow of visitors, without it being so uncontrolled. I believe we have all the resources and capacity to promote it" (0892).*

### Ecology

He considers himself an environmentalist, but does not believe that protecting the territory means not doing nothing. He believes that the region needs movement, activity, and projects that provide real jobs. "It shouldn't just be a museum."

*"I think it's a good idea, as long as it's done with the utmost respect for the environment, is geared towards promoting nature and, above all, doesn't stop there" (0893).*

*"There are activities that need to be created to generate the economy, and spaces are very important for that. And I think that, if possible, things should be done in a sustainable way" (0110 - second iteration)*

## 003 — Variants



Third narrative pattern

Within this support for the project, different trajectories can be distinguished that coincide in the need to revitalize the region, although they arrive at this position for very different reasons.

The first subgroup is made up of people who work in hospitality and tourism, including many migrants who are clearly in favor because the project can generate immediate employment. They are not looking for broad debates on territorial models or governance: they speak from a position of need and the expectation of more stable incomes.

*"One thing that is very basic and important in life is to have a job, to be able to live, not to ask anyone for help, to live off your work, you know? But not all migrants have access to a job" (0404).*

*"No, sir. There are no jobs here, you have to go elsewhere. My son works in Bilbao, I also went abroad to work. There are not many opportunities here, you have to go elsewhere... but it could be an opportunity" (0845).*

A second subgroup is made up of small businesses and local entrepreneurs who see the museum as an opportunity to attract customers and expand

markets. They do not want to repeat the model of tourist saturation in nearby areas, but they warn of the risk of "killing the goose that lays the golden eggs." They believe that, with adequate regulation, expansion can be compatible with quality of life and environmental balance.

*"We see hundreds of groups pass by every week, and we control many of them, and we do we see that we are in a moment of growth and opportunity because the Guggenheim can be a significant draw." (0891).*

A third subgroup brings together those who understand the project not so much for its museum content, but for what it represents: movement, project, initiative. For this group, the Guggenheim is a symbol of action in a territory they perceive as paralyzed. They could support other projects as long as they were of sufficient magnitude to break the inertia.

*"I want this work, and I think the Guggenheim will take it. Then, Guggenheim, yes." (0569).*

## 003 — Profile evolution



Third narrative pattern

Unlike patterns 1 and 2, this pattern has remained relatively stable throughout the listening process.

Its intensity has not grown significantly, but neither has it decreased, partly because it expresses a type of perception that does not depend so much on the information available about enlargement as on a general reading of the stagnation of the region. Those who fall into this category have not waited to learn all the details of the project before taking a position: their support stems from a structural need for change and the feeling that the territory has been without a transformative initiative for too long.

The collective interpretation sessions have revealed an important nuance: it is not a question of “yes at any price,” but rather a “yes because change is needed,” accompanied by demands for environmental regulation and institutional clarity. In these discourses, the museum’s expansion acts as a possible turning point rather than an identity-building project in itself.

Methodologically, this pattern tends to appear in contexts with a recent past of employment and economic prosperity that has been undergoing transformation, where narratives that prioritize action over caution tend to emerge. Its stability over time indicates that, even if the expansion is not entirely convincing, the expectation of a project of this magnitude has the capacity to bring together

## 003 — Profile evolution



Third narrative pattern

very different groups, all of whom are driven by the urgent need for the region to regain activity, movement, and a future.

In recent months, due to institutional statements highlighting the technical difficulties in developing the project, this pattern expresses frustration at what is perceived as a new missed opportunity for the region, reinforcing the dynamics of lack of initiative and progressive decline. Narratives associated with this pattern warn of the risk of a “domino effect” if the project is not implemented.

They point out that the planned investment could be lost and that the supposed driving force of the Guggenheim Museum for the region could be reversed, producing an impact contrary to that initially anticipated.

*“If it doesn’t happen, first and foremost, politicians will kick and scream, they will kick and scream, and they will say: look, there are some obstacles. (...) This is a good project, technically well developed, well documented, and it must move forward. That’s clear” (0080 - second iteration).*

004



“It depends on how it’s done, I don’t have enough information.”

Fourth narrative pattern

*“One of the mistakes has been the lack of information with clear evidence. As they say, ‘data kills the story.’ If the data justifies the project, much of the resistance deflates. But without data, doubts persist” (0133).*

*“I must point out that I do not know the details of the project except for the four ideas that have been published at different times in the press. It is difficult to take a firm position on a project that is not yet defined and that I have not been able to consult” (0893).*

**This fourth pattern does not have a fully defined position and represents people who, depending on the development of the initiative, would be for or against the expansion of the museum. They share with the previous patterns the criticism of the lack of information and for that reason consider that they cannot take a clear position. This pattern moves in an intermediate terrain in which the lack of structural information conditions any position.**

**It does not reject the project on principle, but neither does it support it: it needs guarantees, comparisons, scenarios, and verifiable data. What it expresses is not resistance, but prudence and caution.**

004



Fourth narrative pattern

The narratives included in this pattern do not rule out the idea of a Guggenheim in Urdaibai, but believes that clear data and a “serious” plan for the region are lacking. He believes that if there were evidence that it will actually generate quality employment and will not damage the environment, much of the resistance would be mitigated:

*“Like any other project. Its processing must guarantee environmental protection criteria. The Biosphere Reserve involves combining social development with environmental protection” (0312).*

*“The challenge for the region is to be able to live and work while respecting a natural environment that is unique in the Basque Country” (0828).*

*“The Reserve does impose limitations, but I think they have to be limited. Otherwise, we will have nothing left that is related to nature” (0764).*

He wants to believe that this will be the case, but without clear data or guarantees, mistrust persists. He believes that life in the region is very good, criticizes

certain behaviors of “micro-localism,” in which many people in the region consider working in Bilbao as a sign of low quality of life and minimizes the Narrative of the exodus to Bilbao to work:

*“The world doesn’t fall apart because you work outside the region” (0392).*

In general terms, he sees no problem with building a museum if it is done well, and he is confident that the Guggenheim Foundation will not associate its brand with a project that has a negative impact on the environment. In this sense, he believes that location is very important:

*“There are areas in Gernika without having to take the Urdaibai estuary. The problem is that they want to put it there, in that place, with all the wonders we have there. we have there. I’m not against it being built, but not there” (0264).*

*“If the Guggenheim must be built in Urdaibai, let it be in Gernika, but not in Murueta” (0826).*

## 004 — Arguments



### Fourth narrative pattern

#### Information

For this farmer, the main problem in this process is the lack of information and strategic vision. He believes that when it comes to positioning oneself, data is needed on how many people will come, how it will be managed, among other things. At the same time, he feels that there is no development model for Urdaibai beyond tourism and that the economic, industrial, and service potential of the area is not being exploited. Without clear environmental assessments, comparative analyses or rigorous economic estimates, they feel that the inhabitants of the region are being asked to take a “leap of faith” rather than make an informed judgment.

*“There’s a big lack of transparency, and they should be made with more transparency” (0587).*

*“There is a big lack of transparency, and they should be made with more transparency” (0587).*

*“We need transparency. That’s another issue. Transparency of information and greater openness.” (0537).*

*“I think the lack of transparency is very significant, because in fact it is not only on the part of the institutions, but also on the part of the Guggenheim” (0812).*

*“Those who are against it are so out of selfishness or unfounded fears, since no one knows what is going to be done” (0848).*

#### Employment

He also believes that the region is ready to rethink its future based on the needs shared by the vast majority of its inhabitants:

*“There is a region that is ready to change its mind, yes. And those who are undecided, both those in favor and those against, I believe have the desire to obtain quality jobs with an eye toward the future. Those are the ones who are clear and decisive, but everyone wants that in one way or another” (0344).*

Those who hold this position believe that the debate is legitimate only if it can be shown that enlargement can contribute to stable jobs and not just seasonal or low-quality work.

*“For most of the region, this would be a serious problem, as it would lead to the precariousness of workers and the deterioration of their living conditions, among many other things... These jobs: waiters in bars, hotel workers... Precarious jobs, often without contracts, will be the only ones available” (0881).*

#### Location

This subgroup is not opposed to a cultural project, but it does question the choice of Murueta, arguing that there are alternatives in Gernika or its urban surroundings that would avoid environmental conflict. They would like to explore other options, both in terms of location and the format of the buildings. Within this pattern, we have found suggestions for that are smaller, modular, rotatable between different locations, with ephemeral architecture, and that, in addition to not polluting, could have a regenerative effect on the environment. As with the first pattern described, he is concerned that the clean-up of contaminated land will be interpreted as blackmail to build the museum, rather than an obligation of the institutions regardless of any other consideration:

*“Oin Dalia konpontzeko, erosi terrenue eta deskontaminatuko dugu danon artien kontaminaute dauena” (0200).*

*“As for the center located in Gernika, the idea of building a cultural space in an industrial ruin cannot seem bad to anyone. As for the location in the shipyard, without further knowledge, it sounds strange to anyone that in a reserve biosphere, a popular activity should be established, even if that activity is cultural in nature” (0804).*

## 004 — Arguments



### Fourth narrative pattern

#### Basque culture

This narrative pattern also considers local roots. If a museum is built, it believes that it would not make sense to replicate the Guggenheim in Bilbao, but rather that it should be built in connection with the avant-garde Basque culture. A cultural project in Urdaibai would only have legitimacy if it is articulated from and for the local community, and they consider that the Guggenheim “logo” does not necessarily respond to these characteristics.

*“It would be a small copy of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, and I don’t see it as being connected to the Gernika or Urdaibai brands.” (0826).*

*“What will happen there? In the name of art, but is it art? If artists from our region cannot make a living from art, why should we support them?, wouldn’t it make more sense to talk to those who are revitalizing Basque art and give them a leading role?” (0867).*

*“It is a foreign company with interests in American art American art... It does not buy local art or promote the development of local artists... These kinds of movements should be discussed mainly with local artists and not with companies...” (0779).*

#### Participation

Although he criticizes the lack of transparency in the process, he does not feel particularly called to participate, mainly because he distrusts institutions and their decision-making processes. In addition to this institutional disaffection, during the process there have also been voices that, although have not wanted to participate directly in interviews or collective interpretation spaces, express a clear opinion when approached informally or indirectly. This pattern reflects some of those diffuse, cautious voices, reluctant to take a position without more certainty.

*“You don’t have to be against it, and you don’t have to be for it either. It seems like they want to move forward. Then, why?” (0775).*

*“I understand that these ‘listening’ processes are presented as open spaces, but they require time, attention, and a certain responsibility” (0622).*

## 004 — Variants



### Fourth narrative pattern

Within this “it depends on how it is done” category, we find an attitude of informed caution. A first subgroup is made up of people who approach debates from a comparative perspective, considering scenarios and technical questions that require clear assessments (environmental, economic, and/or logistical) before taking a position; superficial information about the project is not enough for them. They do not rule out expansion, but they will not be in favor of the project without verifiable guarantees.

This group mainly includes people who are more technical or related to the business sector in the region.

*“It has its good points and its bad points. For example, since people started hearing about the Guggenheim, housing prices have skyrocketed, apartment prices have gone up, and all the empty market stalls are being turned into tiny tourist apartments. (...) In terms of people coming, seeing and getting to know this place much better, it’s good because it’s a really beautiful area and until now it hasn’t been visited at all and is very unknown” (0741).*

*“No, I’m a global tourism expert, and considering that we don’t have many opportunities for economic development, I don’t see projects like the*

*Guggenheim as a threat. It’s a matter of where and when” (0126).*

A second subgroup shares a clear rejection of Murueta due to its ecological and symbolic value, as well as other narrative patterns, but shows openness to alternatives in Gernika or in already transformed urban areas. that have already been transformed. They do not see a cultural project as incompatible with the Reserve, provided that the choice of location and the scale of the building are appropriate the context of Urdaibai. For these people, the key is not the museum, but the location and the way it is integrated into the territory.

*“There are many elements, and it is not necessary for it to be a cultural project or cultural architecture, but rather a passive museum” (0083).*

*“In Murueta it’s unthinkable, in the place where it is. It’s impossible to build anything, they won’t let you build a house of whatever characteristics you want to put a dead person in there like they want to put in the estuaries. It’s just not possible. And in Gernika? Well, whether we like it or not, there is space there” (0445).*

*“I understand that if they go to Gernika, they will need a bulge, (...) but I don’t see anything in*

## 004 — Variants



### Fourth narrative pattern

*Murueta, (...) the place needs to be restored, but for nature” (0918).*

There is also a subgroup of younger people who initially say “no,” but who acknowledge that they do not have enough information. They admit that if the project addressed issues such as housing, mobility, or youth employment that would benefit them, they might reconsider their position. Their stance is not one of ideological or environmental rejection, but rather a reflection of a broader dissatisfaction with the material conditions in the region,

and their position on the project depends on the response it gives to those conditions.

*“We don’t have time to read up on it... We just know that they were they wanted to open it... Some say that, for example, it will take away a lot of natural resources and others say that it will be very good for tourism” (0738).*

*“That project causes me a lot of uncertainty. I am categorically against it or in favor of it, but at this point, there are many questions to be answered” (0434).*

## 004 — Profile evolution



Fourth narrative pattern

In the collective interpretation sessions, people close to this narrative pattern have remained in intermediate positions, demanding verifiable information and making it clear that their position depends on how the project takes shape. They do not feel represented either by the direct rejection of the project by pattern 1 or by the momentum of pattern 3.

As the process has progressed, the lack of sufficiently detailed information and the different interpretations that have circulated around the project, together with the communication cycle and the information that has appeared in the media, have gradually shifted some of these voices towards more defined positions. A significant number have shifted their position towards pattern 2, prioritizing the need for a structured territorial project and a broader conversation about the development model. Some voices have shifted towards pattern 3, attracted by the perception of opportunity and movement, while others have shifted towards pattern 1, interpreting that environmental issues and the protection of the estuary were not clearly resolved.

## 004 — Profile evolution



Fourth narrative pattern

From a methodological perspective, this pattern reflects a constant in complex narrative ecosystems: when information frameworks are incomplete or fluctuating, conditional positions increase, but tend to be redefined as more solid narratives emerge around them. Pattern 4 has thus functioned as a transitional space rather than a fixed position, and its evolution will be closely linked to the ability to provide verifiable data and guarantees for citizens.

005



## “My opinion is not going to change things.”

Fifth narrative pattern

*“In the end, we’ve been in crisis for a long time, this has been done many times, nothing has ever come of it, and we’re a little fed up, tired. You say... another one, what’s the point?” (0132).*

*“They have also made efforts in the second sector; they have carried out studies, drawn up plans for sustainability and plans to renew and adapt certain activities, but they have not yet implemented any concrete measures. This too has remained on paper” (0889).*

*“The museum will be built no matter what,” said by some political leaders, calls into question the democratic nature democratic nature and willingness to listen of these same politicians” (0916).*

**This fifth pattern mainly represents those who express helplessness, disaffection, and skepticism regarding participatory and institutional processes.**

**They believe that their voice does not count enough to change the course of decisions. They often assume that institutions have already made the decision, and therefore, participating is pointless. Some people who follow this pattern are participating in the listening process, but they do so with skepticism.**

005



Fifth narrative pattern

Like the previous pattern, it is contradictory in that it can represent people who could potentially be in favor and who prefer not to take a public stance, but also people who are against the expansion of the museum and who, at the end of the day, do not trust that the listening process will be taken into account.

Likewise, the collective interpretation sessions have suggested that it includes people who could take a position, but do not do so for fear of the social or personal consequences of expressing an opinion that they perceive as minority or uncomfortable.

This pattern is characterized by its complexity and ambivalence. As in all social debates that generate conflicting opinions, the Narratives that share this profile consider that there may be a certain difficulty and even a phenomenon of “spiral of silence” when it comes to expressing public opinions on this issue and that the listening process must make a special effort to identify these possible narratives and hidden voices.

# 005 — Arguments



Fifth narrative pattern

## Disconnection

According to the narratives collected, people who feel that their voice does not count for institutions use a wide variety of arguments. In some cases, these arguments criticize the disconnect between institutions and society, but in other cases they attribute it to a lack of information or knowledge on the subject:

*"Citizens need to know things, but sometimes we don't have the ability or knowledge to make decisions" (0187).*

It is particularly important to take into account the narratives of migrants who identify with this pattern.

*"That's a Basque thing, don't ask us, we're migrants. If your name is Iñaki or Nico and you play for Athletic, they'll integrate you, but if not... Basques are very closed-minded. As far as I'm concerned, they can expand it, I don't care. As long as I have a job..." (0820).*

*"We're not from here. That's for the locals to decide. I have an opinion, but no one is interested in hearing it. That's your issue" (0819).*

*"I don't know exactly what they want to do, and we're not from here. You have to ask the people from here; they'll have a different opinion. We would say that as far as we are concerned, go ahead and do it (0842).*

## Distrust

This pattern is very critical of the management of the initiative and believes that there may be hidden interests that society is unaware of. They specifically mention possible interests linked to real estate speculation in the Murueta area and cite recent legislative changes in coastal regulations as clear evidence that rules can be broken if necessary. Mistrust is one of the main themes of this pattern.

*"What we are talking about may already have been decided and I am participating, but if it is something that has already been imposed..." (0041).*

*"The project does not meet the needs of the region... A project that wants to impose itself without consulting the people. A process without participants. An authoritarian and decisive approach. A process that wants to be heard" (0085).*

*"It may be that another Guggenheim is needed to fill the political vacuum and to have something to exploit" (0743).*

*"Why are the protection measures for the Sea Zone being changed? These protection measures make sense in a Biosphere Reserve, but are private interests?" (0023).*

*"The region is neglected, and priorities are focused on the greater Bilbao area. Even if it is not obvious, the Guggenheim Museum project is just as clear: to boost tourism in Bilbao and the surrounding area, turning the region into a daily playground." (0890).*

# 005 — Arguments



Fifth narrative pattern

## Other emergencies

This pattern also shows that there are other urgent issues that should be addressed before the museum. Among them are housing, transportation, and health services. He sees housing as the most urgent and real problem: rents are impossible, and buying a home is beyond his reach and that of any young person:

*"Housing is the most serious problem at the moment. It is impossible to find a home, there are too few. We have a budget of 700 euros, depending on the size and location, it is incredible that young people have managed to get housing with financial assistance. Living in the old neighborhoods is a luxury..." (0037).*

This pattern suggests that everything becomes a luxury, even renting a modest apartment, and he also links this to the model of tourism that has been gaining ground in recent years. His arguments reinforce the idea that institutional priorities are out of step with the real needs of the population.

*"The housing problem is a matter of urgency and importance, and we have a real problem here. We want our children to be born here and stay here, without having to move to another region or country. And I don't see any serious and coherent public policy that would address these real problems" (0361).*

*"It is impossible for a normal citizen to find housing. [...] It is impossible for a person to buy a house here, and there is no year-round rental market. Only short-term rentals. It is a desperate situation to live there" (0510).*

*"First of all, there are no apartments here. That is a big problem. There is also a lack of hotels for people coming from outside... The government has to see things as they really are, that we work here, that we don't have apartments" (0727).*

*"Many people in the town have tourist apartments, and they come in all shapes and sizes" (0144 - second iteration).*

## 005 — Variants



### Fifth narrative pattern

Within this “my opinion won’t change things” category, several sub-profiles can be distinguished that share the same sense of distance and mistrust, but arrive at it by different paths.

The first subgroup consists of young people who are disconnected from decision-making spaces and have other urgent concerns that point to an uncertain future: housing, employment, or mobility. They feel removed from the debate and, when asked to take a position, may sometimes align themselves with the dominant “no” in their environment, but they recognize that the museum is not central to their concerns.

*“Today, young people have two main problems: first, housing, and second, work” (0881).*

*“From what I see around me, young people don’t have many options for living. To work, they go to Bilbao, Amorebieta, or places like that. And then, when it comes to finding a home or a job, it’s clear that they want to live here, but there are no opportunities or support, and the prices for renting are too high...” (0536).*

A second subgroup is made up of young people who are more politicized and critical of the current economic model. They consider the project

to be yet another symptom of a territorial and capitalist and extractive territorial and economic model that they reject outright. This group is skeptical of institutional participatory processes, which they perceive as cosmetic and having little influence on real decisions.

*“And once the Guggenheim is built, mass tourism will come... I think it will bring another type of tourism, which will be massified and will destroy the tranquility and environment that we have here” (0740).*

*“I think it’s only worth it to build a few restaurants, or maybe a shopping mall, and make a profit from that. Ultimately, the towns don’t lose out” (0739).*

*“The Guggenheim Museum’s location at the edge of the biosphere will cause serious problems for the local landscape, animals, and residents.” (0868).*

A third subgroup includes migrants who, despite living in the region and additionally supporting a large part of the region’s employment in the region (hospitality, care, cleaning), say they “do not feel like they belong here” in terms of political recognition.

Some of the people interviewed were not aware of the project or have only heard about it “in passing,” but do not consider themselves protagonists in the

## 005 — Variants



### Fifth narrative pattern

debate; they believe it belongs to “the Basques.”

Their perception is reinforced when some participants question the participation of migrants in the listening process. Their priority is to survive, keep their jobs and housing, not to get involved in public discussions.

*“I don’t really know what they want to do, and we’re not from here. You have to ask the people from here; they’ll have a different opinion. We would say that it’s fine with us, go ahead and do it” (0842).*

*“I’m Argentinean, I’m not from here. But I live here. Progress... What can I say?” (0841).*

*“I think it’s great, honestly. Although I have to say, I’ve never been to the Gernika Museum. I’ve been busy working and not much else” (0742).*

*“We’re not from here. That’s for the locals to decide. I have an opinion, but nobody’s interested in hearing it. That’s your business.” (0819).*

A fourth subgroup, which includes many migrants, but not exclusively, is made up of precarious workers who express a certain detachment. The museum only enters their horizon if it translates into a better contract or more working hours.

*“For us migrants, it’s very difficult to find work. Once we do find work, we have to put up with a lot of things. The hours, the temporary contracts. But we put up with it.” (0737).*

*“I don’t really know what they want to do, and we’re not from here. You have to ask the people here; they’ll have a different opinion. We would say that it’s fine with us, go ahead and do it” (0842).*

Finally, there is a subgroup of resigned people who have participated in previous consultation processes or spaces without seeing tangible results.

They say that what was decided beforehand usually ends up being done and that their participation will not change anything. They do not deny the value of the debate, but they doubt its effectiveness.

*“The museum will be built no matter what,” said by some politicians, calls into question their democratic nature and willingness to listen (0916).*

*“In the field of language... We made a big effort with the previous two laws, now it’s just a formality. What shame!” (0889).*



As the process has progressed, this pattern, which is more than a position on the museum project, expresses that material conditions (housing, job insecurity, transportation, care) that overshadow any cultural debate have acquired great qualitative relevance, regardless of its prevalence. The composition of this pattern gives it a very high symbolic weight. It condenses structural problems in the territory and highlights gaps in representation that transcend the debate about the museum.

This pattern does not function so much as opposition or support for the project, but rather as a space of distance and has become more visible as a structural symptom, without significant evolution.

From a methodological perspective, this pattern reminds us that when people do not feel they have any real influence, or when public discourse is perceived as distant from institutions and communities, they tend to withdraw. The challenge is not to steer these voices towards a “yes” or a “no,” but to create conditions that make them want to participate without feeling that their efforts will be futile.



## 2.3 Prevalence



### Part II. Identified narratives

From the outset of the process, a narrative architecture has been observed, comprising five main positions regarding the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in Urdaibai. As this is a qualitative study, it is not possible to speak of majorities or minorities, but rather of prevalences. Prevalence here does not refer to statistical representativeness, but to relative narrative weight within a qualitative process. Within this context, prevalence is understood as trends with greater presence, density, argumentative maturity, or repetition over time. The interpretation of prevalences has been possible thanks to the volume, frequency, and intensity of narratives and the five contrast sessions carried out during 2025, as reflected in the preliminary report on narrative patterns.

In the first phase of the process (February–June), the prevailing position corresponded to pattern 1, that is, outright opposition to the museum expansion. This predominance can be explained both by the logic of snowball sampling (which tends to collect the most active and mobilized voices first) and by the initial concentration of opinions associated with rejection of the project. These narratives, with strong environmental, legal, and symbolic content, bring together profiles of high-level experts in ecology, environmental activists, professionals in the cultural sector, and concerned neighbors. due to mass tourism or the impact on their daily lives. This pattern also has another, deeper layer of meaning: the fear of touristification, overcrowding, and the irreversible transformation of a natural space considered unique and precious.

For many of these people, defending the environment serves as a legitimate framework for expressing a broader fear of losing control over a territory that has already experienced processes of tourist saturation (as in the case of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe) and whose effects they perceive on a daily basis: pressure on housing, congestion, degradation of the landscape, and a feeling of symbolic expulsion from their own place. This convergence of technical arguments and territorial emotions explains the initial strength of this profile, which brought together mobilized sectors, environmental experts, activists, and residents with direct experience of the deterioration associated with mass tourism.

However, as the process progressed, and after the collective interpretation sessions, the prevalence shifted towards pattern 2, which has established itself as the most significant. This pattern shares the “no” to the museum project, but shifts the center of gravity of the debate towards the development model of the region. It is a more cross-cutting profile, bringing together people concerned about the economic deterioration of the area, the lack of industry, the housing shortage, and the need for a coherent strategic framework for Busturialdea. They oppose the museum, yes, but from a broader perspective: the project does not respond to the real priorities of the territory. This profile has been enriched with nuances from pattern 4 and emerging discourses: some of those who initially said “it depends” have ended up taking the position of “no, but the priority is the socioeconomic future.” It can be summarized as “no to expansion, but yes to development.”

At the same time, pattern 3 (in favor of the project) remains stable. It brings together profiles with very different positions: people with a certain level of economic and professional stability who see the museum as a driving force; companies in the tourism sector; people in more vulnerable situations who work in hospitality and care; and residents of small inland towns who feel a serious decline and see the museum as a sign of movement and proactivity after years of fruitless debate. Once the decision not to continue with the project was known, we collected more narratives expressing concern that this decision would not mean the absence of new driving projects.

Pattern 4 (“it depends on how it is done”), which was more prevalent in the initial stages, has gradually faded and shifted towards more defined positions: partly towards pattern 2 and partly towards pattern 3. The distinctive feature of this profile is the persistent demand for clear information, verifiable data, and environmental guarantees.

The lack of information has caused many of these people to ultimately take opposing positions.

## Part II. Identified narratives

Finally, pattern 5 (“my opinion doesn’t count”) has acquired increasing qualitative and quantitative relevance. This pattern includes voices that feel that their material conditions (especially housing, job insecurity, transportation, or care) overshadow any cultural debate. Here we find several subgroups that converge: young people with a sense of rootlessness with respect to the territory; a significant part of migrants often linked to labor opportunities, combined with a perception of limited political agency and recognition within local decision-making processes.

# Part III. Conclusions





## 1. Participation

Participation has been widely diverse and heterogeneous. The process has collected 1,002 narratives, demonstrating the interest and willingness to make a meaningful contribution to the future of the region. This volume of interviews, conversations, and ethnographies allows us to observe not only explicit positions, but also other types of perceptions, tensions, and narrative patterns that do not usually emerge in conventional consultative devices. Plurality does not imply symmetry between arguments, but rather a narrative map that is representative of the territory. ALC and AC4 would like to once again thank the people who have dedicated their time to this listening process for their participation. We also respect those who did not wish to participate in the process.

Youth participation was lower at the beginning, but through a greater effort to

To obtain this type of perspective, especially from those who are not organized, we reached 13.49% of participants between the ages of 18 and 29. Meanwhile, the presence of the population between the ages of 45 and 65 is high compared to other age groups (42.89%).

These data largely reflect the demographics of an aging region.

*The listening process has brought to light different ways of viewing this project. There is no single way of seeing it, and there are many nuances. Instead of a black-and-white photograph, we now have many color photos and images that give us a richer and more complex perspective.*

## 2. Credibility

In mobilized sectors, there was initially concern that the process would serve to legitimize decisions that had already been made, a common dynamic in contexts with a history of participation perceived as merely procedural. However, the publication of the first results in July, which included environmental, symbolic, and legal criticisms in their entirety, generated a significant change in the perception of the methodological integrity of the process. Since then, the listening process listening process has gathered more narratives that consider that it is operating with sufficient independence criteria to form part of the legitimate space for public debate. Mistrust has not completely disappeared, but significant nuances have been introduced.

*At the process level, we have seen how this type of sustained listening over time is costly (in material and human terms) and creates difficulties for institutions due to the level of transparency and uncertainty surrounding the final results. However, we have also seen how this type of intervention generates greater levels of trust in society at times when the disconnect between public policy and public perception calls into question the foundations of the social contract.*

## 3. Consensus

There are differences but also broad consensus on the development of the region.

Based on the narratives collected, no one questions the need to combine environmental protection with the socio-economic development of Busturialdea-Urdaibai, or the framework of the biosphere reserve.

*As was evident at the international seminar, there are not many similar conflicts in which such broad consensus is reached.*

*This consensus provides a unique foundation for building a shared future in the region based on diversity.*

## 4. Inclusion

In the section on the narratives of migrants, we identified a challenge of tacit exclusion in decision-making spaces, not necessarily specific to the region but to Basque society as a whole. On the one hand, based on the preliminary conclusions published in July, many narratives expressed surprise

surprise at the arguments in favor of expansion among migrants. A significant portion of this group supports the project for employment reasons (increased tourism and hospitality), coupled with a perception that the debate “is not theirs” because they have little influence.

*Looking ahead, it would be appropriate to explore specific mechanisms for recognizing and involving these communities in the debate on the development of the region and on the transitions that must be addressed in the Basque Country as a whole.*

## 5. Contradictions

Analysis of the narratives collected reveals multiple contradictions, not as individual reproaches, but as indicators of open debates in society as a whole. The impact of tourist apartments is harshly criticized, but a large proportion of these properties belong to local owners. The defense of identity and the desire to be served and live in Basque coexists with a strong dependence on labor that is not always recognized or integrated. The Biosphere Reserve is invoked as a shared value and common good, but at the same time, an almost “private” use of some public spaces for leisure and daily walks is defended. At the same time, the need to care for the environment is claimed, but a strong dependence on individual vehicle use is maintained. Finally, there are constant calls for support and vindication of the primary sector, but this operates more as a symbol of identity than as a realistic life horizon for the younger generations. Many people call for support for fishing and agriculture, but almost no one is willing to work in these sectors or wants their children to do so.

*These contradictions, inherent in all societies and human beings, do not invalidate the narratives, but rather nuance them and reflect their complexity. The listening process allows us to name them without moralizing, in order to open up a space for shared self-criticism. If all positions have a grain of truth, they also have a grain of inconsistency that we must accept naturally if we want to build a more honest and sustainable model of development.*

## 6. Development model as a focus

The narratives identified make it possible to see the cross-effects between conservation, tourism, housing, employment, and mobility. Multiple actors with legitimate interests, but in tension. Therefore, the narratives have reflected that the debate is not only about the expansion of the museum, but on how to approach the socio-ecological transition of the region and what role each agent in the region can play.

In this context, the disagreement over the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Museum in Urdaibai becomes a “proxy” or substitute for the deeper debate on the socioeconomic model and the transformation of the region. The narratives converge on two broad consensuses: the protection of the biosphere is unquestionable, but it must be accompanied by viable socioeconomic proposals; and tourism is no longer perceived as a positive value in absolute terms. What was once interpreted as an engine of prosperity is now seen as a risk to housing, mobility, and social cohesion. Most employers are calling for to reorient the model towards more balanced forms of development, with stable employment, local returns, and limits on tourist pressure.

*The listening process has allowed us to highlight concerns and contradictions that affect Basque society as a whole, not just Urdaibai. Building a new model of sustainable tourism, supporting the socio-ecological transition of all the regions, and understanding the different ways of perceiving the same reality are challenges that call on all of us.*

## 7. New nuances

Both those who reject the project and those who support it or have doubts agree that the region needs to act, move forward, and make strategic decisions as a pioneer of green development in a biosphere reserve. The initial Not In My Back Yard attitude (in which many people who rejected the project viewed it favorably when applied to other regions) has evolved into a more nuanced position focused on the future of Urdaibai. This evolution is key: it indicates that much of the resistance is not static, but open to alternative scenarios if they meet criteria of environmental protection, territorial coherence, and social return.

This emerging nuance is particularly relevant for future public policy scenarios, as it allows for more negotiated and less polarized solutions.

*The process itself has allowed for a comparison of different ways of viewing the project and the development of the region. Thanks to this comparison, nuances that did not previously exist in the discourse have been introduced.*

## 8. Binding or non-binding?

The Busturialdea-Urdaibai listening process was conceived from the outset as a non-binding mechanism. Its explicit objective was not to make decisions or replace formal institutional decision-making mechanisms, but rather to generate a solid qualitative basis for an in-depth understanding of the narratives, perceptions, and frameworks of meaning that exist in the territory. In this sense, the process was clearly situated in the soft sphere: listening, interpretation, comparison, and collective learning.

*However, one of the key lessons learned from the process is that, without being formally binding, it has had real material and political effects, reshaping the framework of the debate, enriching the discussion, and contributing to the decision-making process.*

## 9. The listening process as a collaborative governance tool

Beyond gathering perceptions, the process has functioned as an instrument of collaborative governance. Especially in the sectors most opposed to the museum's expansion, it has become a space where concerns and proposals can be heard, compared, and collected.

Public institutions, for their part, have been able to experience the difficulties and added value of incorporating tools for listening and collective interpretation of information at the community level.

This is one of the key lessons to be learned from the international seminar. Rather than listening on an ad hoc basis at the beginning and end of projects, the most fruitful collaborative governance processes are those that develop a capacity for ongoing listening and interaction with the territory, allowing changes and adaptations to be made to complex initiatives in real time. Listening and dialogue not only take place within organized networks, but channels for direct interaction with citizens can also be built.

*Once the decision was made not to continue with the museum expansion project, the organizations that opposed it have seen their concerns and suggestions acknowledged.*

*At the same time, the institutions that have facilitated this process, assuming political and electoral risks that are normally considered excessive, have been able to experience how their commitment to the development of the region has been enriched with very concrete contributions.*

*excessive, have been able to experience how their commitment to the development of the region was enriched with very specific contributions. All the efforts of these social and institutional agents should be recognized. Instead of experiencing a zero-sum confrontation, the listening process has made it possible to visualize a future scenario in which the entire region wins.*

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 BILBAO, IZARBA EN GAZTETEA, AJUNTAN

# 3.1 What now?



The challenge from now on is not to close the debate, but to restart the discussion and give it new content, preventing the void that has been created from leading to paralysis or disaffection. Instead of proposing new specific solutions, the narratives collected call for the current strategic plan to be reinforced with new initiatives that complement the necessary investments in infrastructure that have already been committed to.

As suggested by the OECD for this type of process, these initiatives should address the different issues raised rather than focusing all efforts on a specific area. It is the way to control investment risk and allow the various stakeholders to see that their suggestions are being taken into account. The process of dialogue between the region's stakeholders for the implementation of the strategic plan will determine which ones should be promoted in the future and which ones should be discarded.

In light of the above, the listening process could be kept active (integrating other existing participation processes) as a stable space for contrast and public feedback, reinforcing its educational and experimental. This would involve continuing to incorporate new voices—especially young people, migrants, and residents of small municipalities—fostering intergenerational and territorial dialogue, and exploring tools capable of simulating new development scenarios (connecting narratives with empirical data and anticipating the territorial impacts of different decisions). Far from being exhausted in a specific discussion, the listening process could be transformed into a strategic tool for managing tensions between protection and development, articulating a collective project that combines identity, sustainability, and well-being.

The main strength of the process lies in its ability to make visible and analyzable

social dynamics that normally remain intangible. Converting collective meaning, latent tensions, and narratives into intelligence relevant to public policy is one of its central contributions. The possibility of identifying the plurality of narratives and relationships that shape the territory not only enriches the diagnosis, but also allows us to understand how legitimacy—or mistrust—towards certain decisions is socially constructed.

Through deep listening, mapping, and collective interpretation, the process has significantly expanded the information base on which fairer, more legitimate, and contextualized governance options can be built. By bringing to light plural narratives and power relations, the process transforms usually invisible dimensions of the socio-ecological system. These include values, perceptions, frames of meaning, and networks of trust, which become shared and socially intelligible information capable of informing adaptive governance processes. In doing so, it allows different stakeholders to better understand the complexity of the current moment and establish a common platform for learning and collaboration, necessary for tackling subsequent phases of decision-making, design, or planning.

Finally, the Urdaibai process highlights a central ethical tension in the practice of social innovation: the politics of translation. Making local perceptions visible can strengthen accountability and mutual understanding, but it can also reproduce mistrust or polarization if not managed with caution and responsibility. Experience confirms that listening is not a neutral exercise in data collection, but a practice with clear political effects.

that continuously reshapes the relationships between institutions, communities, and ecosystems.

Based on this experience, we can affirm that Urdaibai meets all the conditions to become an advanced learning space in which the commitment of its citizens enables the attraction of diverse forms of knowledge, talent, and responsible investment, allowing for the testing of specific initiatives oriented toward social and ecological value that may later be scaled up across the Basque Country.

## 3.2 The future



### Part III. Conclusions

The experience developed in Urdaibai opens the door to an evolution towards more anticipatory models of territorial governance. The qualitative and relational database generated constitutes a first catalog of social data, which integrates both objective information (agents, initiatives, policies, indicators) and subjective information (narratives, perceptions, frameworks of meaning). This platform allows us to explore how local narratives and collective perceptions have evolved over time, as well as to visualize the dynamic map of actors and their interconnections between municipalities, institutions and sectors. In this way, it turns the social fabric underlying governance into something that can be observed, tracked, and understood collectively.

The digital tool thus plays a key integrative role: it connects qualitative data—narratives, ethnographic profiles, and metanarratives—with relational and institutional structures, allowing real-time visualization of how the social substrate on which decisions are made evolves. This capacity is particularly relevant in highly complex contexts, where decisions depend not only on technical variables, but also on cultural frameworks, relationships of trust, and shared perceptions.

In this scenario, it would be possible to explore simulations that are not limited to projecting economic or environmental trends—such as housing prices or climate impacts—but also incorporate the evolution of narratives, levels of trust, and collective meanings in response to different strategic decisions for territorial development. This approach opens up a great opportunity to deepen the commitment of Basque public institutions (regional and provincial authorities) to innovation in collaborative governance.

The information gathered during the listening process is essential for moving forward with the construction of Social Digital Twins, understood as digital representations of the dynamics of social and cultural systems that integrate quantitative and qualitative data in real time. Unlike traditional predictive models, these systems do not seek to replace human decision-making, but rather to amplify institutional capacity to understand and manage complex scenarios, simulate possible impacts, and anticipate social risks before they materialize.

In this approach, technology acts as a mediator between the physical and digital worlds, enabling a two-way flow of information that adapts to non-linear processes and changes in collective narratives. The possibility of simulating scenarios incorporating not only technical variables, but also levels of trust, social acceptance, or polarization, represents an opportunity to improve the democratic quality of public decision-making.

The collective experience has also made it possible to identify significant information gaps: voices that are still underrepresented, relational connections that are difficult to capture, a lack of consolidated quantitative data on environmental impacts, housing, or mobility, as well as limitations in access to regulatory or administrative information. At the same time, these shortcomings point to new possibilities. The digital tool suggests that, in the future, some phases of the process could be expanded or even partially automated, facilitating more systematic collection and analysis. The combination of the existing qualitative base with legal, administrative, quantitative, and environmental layers would allow for the evolution

toward a living model of the territory, capable not only of reflecting but also of anticipating dynamics of change.

However, the development of these models also poses significant challenges: the management of large volumes of qualitative information, the need for expert human curation, the difficulty of automating narrative analysis without losing context and meaning, and the risks associated with algorithmic opacity. Therefore, any progress in this direction must be based on clear principles of inclusion, transparency, auditability, and democratic control, understanding these technologies as public goods at the service of deliberation and not as technocratic instruments of control.



 **APARKALEKUA  
BETETA**  
PARKING  
COMPLETO



# Part IV. Annexes



# Annex I.

## Methodological approach

This research is situated within the framework of complexity, which requires tools that enable a systemic understanding of the problems and an adaptive intervention connected to cultural and territorial dynamics (Rittel and Webber, 1973).

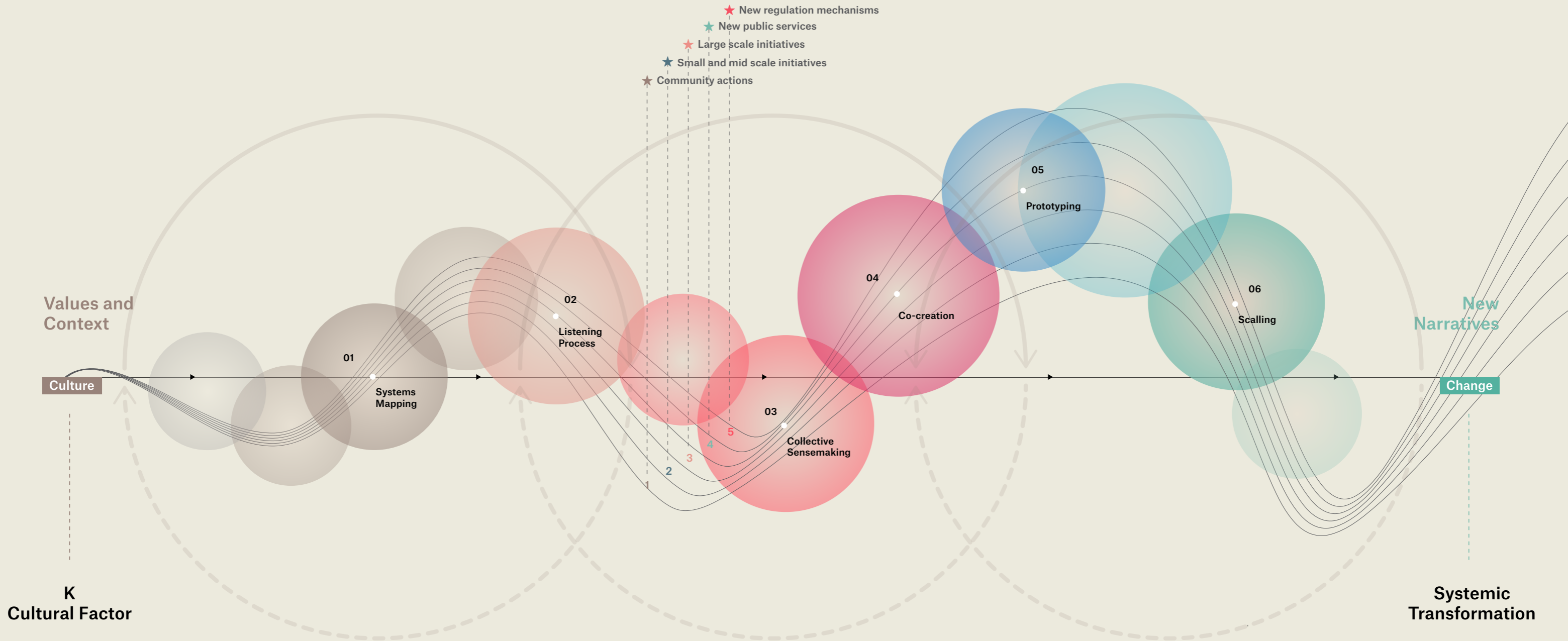
To do so, it is necessary to use techniques that facilitate the collection, analysis, and interpretation of information in constantly changing environments.

The analysis must consider how collective identities and social relationships influence its configuration, appropriation, and impact. Unlike other methodological approaches that structure research in sequential phases, this listening process involves a non-linear analysis process with constant feedback.

This listening process has been structured around three key elements: (1) mapping, (2) narrative collection, and (3) collective interpretation. These tools do not operate in isolation, but are articulated in an iterative learning process, in which each phase feeds into the rest and allows the research to be reformulated as the analysis progresses.

The following sections detail each of these three techniques, beginning with mapping, understood as a fundamental tool for visualizing the ecosystem, identifying interconnections, and analyzing gaps and opportunities within the system.





# (1) Mapping of actors, initiatives, and strategic plans

Real-time visualization of the ecosystem



Mapping is a key tool for visualizing the social, institutional, and economic ecosystem in which the debate takes place. It allows us to identify agents, relationships, discourses, initiatives, and conflicts present in the territory. More than a static diagnosis, mapping is a living tool that is updated as the listening process evolves.

Mapping identifies key actors, coalitions, participation gaps, and different types of power, both soft (social capital, symbolic legitimacy) and hard (economic resources, regulatory capacity). This exercise is essential for understanding how influence is distributed across the territory and which voices tend to be invisible.

Mapping also facilitates the identification of existing initiatives linked to sustainable human development, allowing for analysis of whether or not these respond to the perceptions and needs expressed by citizens during the listening process.

## (2) Listening

### The cultural dimension of transformation processes



The objective of this listening process is to identify the various narratives and perceptions regarding the possible expansion of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum in the Busturialdea region. These opinions may focus on this issue or cover other related topics that citizens consider relevant to the future of the region. The listening process has been designed to be open, allowing each person to decide whether they want to express specific opinions or more general reflections.

A well-structured community listening process must combine various sources of information: interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation, and quantitative data analysis, among other possibilities. The goal is to identify narrative patterns, value nuances, and avoid simplifying existing opinions. This proposal has applied ethnographic tools to nuance and segment public discourse, identify hidden narratives, and open a more constructive dialogue on this issue.

#### What is a listening process?

The listening process is a tool that allows us to capture the narratives of a community in real time and understand how they influence the dynamics of social transformation. It is not just a matter of collecting information, but of identifying the perceptions, meanings, and cultural constructs that structure the way actors understand their reality and their capacity for change.

Listening allows us to visualize contradictions, ambivalences, and tensions, and to accept them naturally, with the aim of facilitating public discussion that recognizes the truth that exists in the opinions of others and promotes a more self-critical view of our own positions.

From this perspective, listening does not seek to validate or invalidate positions, but rather to understand the frameworks of meaning from which they are constructed.

This approach is particularly relevant in contexts of socio-political and environmental conflict, where technical decisions are intertwined with identities, values, and historical experiences.

### The importance of narratives

Narratives are not individual discourses, but collective constructions that reproduce, question, and transform the sociocultural context in which they emerge (Balasch & Montenegro, 2003).

From the LAC approach, narratives are studied on the basis of ethnographic profiles, which are not based on purely demographic criteria, but on shared patterns of perception and behavior. This implies recognizing that narratives may be contradictory to each other, but they all operate within the same system and condition the success or failure of initiatives (Espiau, 2022). There is no single true narrative, but rather multiple perspectives that must be understood in their partiality and location (Haraway, 1988). Rather than reflecting reality in a simplistic way, this approach allows for spaces of interpretation and understanding of how different narratives shape social reality (Haraway, 1988; Balasch & Montenegro, 2003). This contrasts with positivist views that seek a universal truth and relativist positions that invalidate any structured analysis.

Therefore, the LAC listening approach proposes segmenting these narratives into ethnographic profiles that reflect shared patterns of perception. To this end, although this research focused primarily on in-depth interviews, it is recommended to combine different listening channels (interviews, academic articles, participatory observation, visual materials, etc.) and to sustain the process over time, rather than carrying it out as a single, one-off action.

In this listening process, the main aim is to identify meta-narratives. To do this, the iceberg technique is used, which is represented in the ethnographic profiles and allows us to distinguish between different levels of narrative: the narrative, the hidden narrative, and the metanarrative (Espiau et al., 2024). The surface narrative corresponds to opinions expressed openly, but they do not always

Modality	Definition and objectives	Potential	Limitations
Consultation	A tool for gathering opinions, assessments, or proposals from citizens or specific groups on a particular topic. Its purpose is to ascertain the position or preferences of those consulted. (Font et al., 2012; OECD, 2001)	A clear and decisive short-term response.	It does not allow for nuances.  It blocks and limits the possibility of dialogue.
Survey	Instrument for collecting quantifiable data through structured questionnaires, generally with closed questions. Its objective is to measure attitudes, perceptions or behaviors of a specific population (Creswell, 2014)	It allows citizens to be involved in decisions; promotes shared responsibility.	It fails to capture nuances or depth; responses are conditioned by the questions; risk of bias in the formulation or interpretation.
Participatory process	A collective dynamic in which people deliberate, propose and make decisions on a topic or project. Its objective is the direct involvement of citizens in planning and decision-making (Arnstein, 1969).	It allows for the collection of statistical and representative data. quantitatively	
Listening process	A qualitative approach that seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, stories, perceptions and narratives of a community. The objective is to gather perspectives for interpretation and analysis, without formulating proposals or making direct decisions. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Clifford & Marcus, 1986)	Allows the complexity and diversity of experiences; generates in-depth, contextualized knowledge; contributes to the construction of ethnographic profiles and collective narratives. (Geertz, 1973; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011)	Does not seek direct impact or immediate operational results; less political visibility if it does not translate into concrete proposals concrete proposals. (Marcus, 1995); depends largely on who interprets the results.

Table 2. Comparative summary of four types of citizen participation —consultation, survey, participatory process, and listening process— according to their definition, objectives, potential, and limitations. Source: Own elaboration

reflect the way in which actors react. The hidden narrative includes those implicit beliefs that can be detected in discourse, even if they are not directly verbalized. Metanarratives constitute the deep values that structure the way in which a community perceives the possibility of change and the power relations that define its context. Identifying these metanarratives is essential to understanding the ideological frameworks that condition the formulation and reception of the listening object, allowing not only a deeper analysis of existing narratives, but also the detection of key points for social transformation.

### **Snowball sampling**

Snowball sampling is one of the most popular sampling methods in qualitative research.

According to Atkinson & Flint (2001), its main added value is that it enriches the process with the voices of people who are not part of formal or structured networks. These are usually the opinions that are most difficult to identify or that are hidden. Researchers usually start with a small number of initial contacts (seeds) who meet the research criteria and are invited to participate. Participants are then asked to recommend other contacts who meet the research criteria and who may also be willing to participate, who in turn recommend other potential participants, and so on. Researchers use their social networks to establish the first links, from which the momentum of the sampling develops, capturing an ever-growing chain of participants.

Sampling usually ends once saturation point is reached. This is the point at which opinions, although come from different networks, are repeated and there are no significant nuances between the narratives collected. In this process of Listen, the narratives collected through “snowball sampling” have been analyzed in contrasting spaces to ensure that no voice has been left out of the process and that networks have not influenced the content.

Thus, snowball sampling operates within real social networks, which makes it particularly useful for understanding relational ecosystems, trust dynamics, and marginal narratives, unlike quantitative (random, stratified) sampling, which seeks statistical representativeness but at the cost of losing the complexity and depth that emerges from social interactions and invisible connections, interpreting the population as a homogeneous aggregate.



**Annex I. Methodological approach**

**(2) Listening approach**

Modality	Definition and objectives	Potentialities	Limitations
Sampling random simple	Quantitative technique where all individuals of the population have the same probability of being selected. Its objective is to obtain a representative sample and that can be extrapolated. (Creswell, 2014)	Allows for generalization results to the population total; minimizes selection biases; statistically robust.	May ignore network dynamics and context; difficult access to populations invisible or reluctant; it requires a sample frame difficult to complete to obtain in complex contexts. Samples subject to on representativeness.
Sampling stratified	Quantitative technique that divides the population in subgroups (strata) and selects samples proportional samples from each one. Its objective is ensure simple representation of all subgroups relevant. (Creswell, 2014)	Asegura representación de minorías o subgrupos específicos; aumenta precisión estadística en comparación con muestreo aleatorio simple.	Requires information Detailed prior information the population; can overrepresent artificial categories; does not capture dynamics relational or contextual narratives. Samples subject to to interpretations on representativeness.
Qualitative sampling	Qualitative method where baldesnow initial participants (seeds) recommend new contacts, expanding the network to achieving saturation. Its the objective is to capture diverse narrative voices that are difficult to access or not visible in formal networks. (Atkinson & Flint, 2001)	Allows access to hidden persons or marginal; generates trust, and access from relational closeness; favors collecting diverse narratives and contextual.	Risk of network bias (only circulates through certain social circles); not representative statistically; may exclude voices outside of networks initials; it depends on personal trust.

Table 3. Sampling strategies in social research: definitions, potentialities, and limitations. Based on Creswell (2014) and Atkinson and Flint (2001). Own elaboration

# (3) Collective interpretation

## Deepening democracy



Collective interpretation is a key process within the listening process, as it allows for the comparison and validation of the findings obtained in the mapping and listening phases. Various actors participate in this process, including actors who have participated in the process.

listening and encourage a shared analysis of the information. Through this technique, the aim is not only to validate hypotheses, but also to generate new interpretations and new lines of listening. This interpretative dimension is essential for providing directionality to the listening processes. This process should not be understood as a one-off event, but as a practice that is repeated many times throughout the research.

From a methodological perspective, collective interpretation can be understood as a space for deliberation in which, on the one hand, mapping is presented and, on the other, the narratives identified (through ethnographic profiles) in the listening phase, which are often contradictory or far removed from objective data, are confronted.

The confrontation of narratives allows not only to cross-reference existing actions with the perceptions of the actors, but also to identify gaps and opportunities that could guide new strategies. As Haraway (1988) points out, any evaluation is conditioned by the point of view of the person carrying it out, which makes it essential for the analysis to be contrasted and enriched by multiple voices.

In these collective interpretation sessions, the challenges and opportunities identified in the listening process have been presented, using ethnographic profiles to highlight similarities and discrepancies between different segments of the population. This exercise has several fundamental objectives: to induce learning from collective experience, to draw conclusions, to incorporate new approaches into the analysis, to strengthen the network of participants, and to validate the research process. Therefore, these contrast sessions not only validate the analysis carried out, but also allow for the identification of blind spots and the reformulation of the research in dialogue with the actors themselves, following a participatory logic.

which has been applied in other projects promoted with this same methodological approach. This methodological approach avoids the imposition of rigid analytical frameworks, aligning itself with St. Pierre's post-qualitative approach (cited in Guttorm et al., 2015), which advocates keeping research in a state of constant questioning.

Furthermore, following Bourdieu (1999), it is crucial to consider the possible presence of symbolic violence in the interpretation of data.

This concept refers to subtle forms of domination that operate through language and social structure, causing certain narratives to be internalized as natural without being questioned. Collective interpretation seeks precisely to minimize these biases, promoting a space where actors can express their perceptions without prior conditioning. Following this logic, it is not enough to make explicit the positions of those who analyze the data; it is also necessary to examine their implications and the power relations that shape the process of knowledge production (Biglia and Vergés-Bosch, 2016).

From an intersectional perspective, a homogeneous view of social actors cannot be assumed, since factors such as gender, social class, and origin condition access and participation in innovation processes (Viveros, 2016). For this reason, collective interpretation seeks to integrate diverse voices and experiences, avoiding the reproduction of structural inequalities. Beyond being a validation mechanism, this process becomes a strategy for democratizing knowledge production and questioning power structures.

Collective interpretation sessions are repeated throughout the listening process and are structured around different key elements. The first step is to present the process carried out so far, including the findings from the mapping and listening exercises. Subsequently, a series of guided questions are posed to carry out the comparison.

Do you recognize these patterns? To what extent do the profiles created reflect a broad spectrum of territorial opinion? Do you see yourself reflected in them? What are we missing? How many and which initiatives respond to the needs identified in these profiles? Who else should we talk to?

These questions seek to generate a dialogue in which attendees can contribute their own views on the results obtained.

In addition, it is important that the sessions have a diverse range of participants, balancing aspects such as gender and age. The number of participants has not exceeded 15 people in order to ensure effective participation and encourage debate. The sessions have lasted 90 minutes, allowing for the exchange of ideas without the discussion losing its fluidity.

The sessions were recorded, transcribed, and photographed. The participants in these sessions were individuals and organizations that contributed their narratives to the listening process, as well as other organizations or individuals who had not participated.

Collective interpretation is a methodological process that goes beyond the simple validation of findings. It is a space where different perspectives intersect, dominant narratives are questioned, and new meanings are constructed together.

Ultimately, the most transformative innovation processes do not emerge from the isolated actions of individual agents, but rather from collaborative ecosystems where knowledge and decision-making are built collectively (Mazzucato, 2014). From this perspective, participatory methodologies allow us to move from an approach focused on "what's in it for me" to one based on "what's in it for us," recognizing that innovation is only possible through collaborative processes that are open to diverse experiences and knowledge.

## Potentialities and limitations of deliberative spaces

Modality	Definition and objectives	Potential	Limitations
Focus group	Structured meeting of a small group of people to explore perceptions, beliefs, and experiences based on group interaction around a specific topic. Its objective is to generate discussion and delve deeper into shared or divergent narratives.	It allows for the identification of consensus and dissent; it encourages interaction and the comparison of experiences; it generates rich qualitative data.	Risk of some voices dominating the conversation; possible group pressure; results not statistically generalizable.
Citizen forum	An open space for public deliberation where diverse people express their perspectives and reflect collectively on topics of common interest. Its objective is to broaden the plurality of voices and involve more people in the construction of shared meaning.	It promotes inclusion and diversity of voices; facilitates collective reflection; and reinforces sense of community and belonging.	Difficulty in managing large groups; possible tensions between opposing positions; limited impact if there are no mechanisms for follow-up or translation into action.
Collective interpretation	A collaborative process of analysis and interpretation of previously collected narratives and data, integrating multiple perspectives to construct shared meanings and collective understandings about a reality or territory.	It promotes the collective appropriation of knowledge; Enhances empathy and mutual understanding; provides depth and contextualized interpretive richness.	May be perceived as abstract or not very operational; requires facilitation skills; does not necessarily lead to direct decisions or actions.

Table 4. Qualitative modalities of participation and collective analysis: definition, potentialities, and limitations. References: Krueger & Casey (2015); Font & Blanco (2007); OECD (2001); Denzin & Lincoln (2011); Balasch & Montenegro (2003); Chambers (1994).

# Annex II. Work process

In late February 2025, the Busturialdea-Urdaibai participatory process was launched. To understand the territorial context, the overarching focus of the analysis has been the integration of the cultural dimension, understood as the influence of values, collective identities, and social relationships. One of the characteristics of the methodology is the non-linear structure of the research: the activities carried out from the beginning of the process to the present have not been approached as linear sequences, but have instead been continuously informed through an iterative learning process that has allowed the work to be reformulated as the listening process progressed.

## Mapping

This is an exercise closely linked to the listening process, which is not merely an initial assessment but a tool for continuous monitoring and adjustment that allows for adaptation to changes in the ecosystem. Public policy, together with regional strategic plans, allows us to observe from a systemic perspective how bottlenecks, key actors, and inter-institutional dynamics constrain transformation. Likewise, over the course of these months, 265 actors, 208 initiatives, and 15 strategic plans have been identified.

- **Main agents related to the region:** 265 key actors have been identified, analyzed, and classified according to the following categories: name, description, municipality, contact information,

type (nongovernmental organization, private company, public administration, academia, civil society, religious organization, social movement, funding entity, foundation, city council, institution, association, other), thematic area (employment, environment, identity, tourism, services and care, housing, or Guggenheim), people involved, investment volume, capacity, interrelationships, indicators, and projects they lead or participate in. This has enabled an analysis of the relationships between the different actors and their evolution.

- **Major projects linked to the region:** A total of 208 projects, which have been analyzed and classified according to the following categories: name, municipality, level of impact (community, small- and medium-scale, large-scale, public services, legislation, and financing), description, sector (primary, secondary, or tertiary), partners (public administration, private sector, academia and education, civil society, other), thematic area (same as above), budget, lead agent, agents, interrelationships, and indicators and perceptions they address.

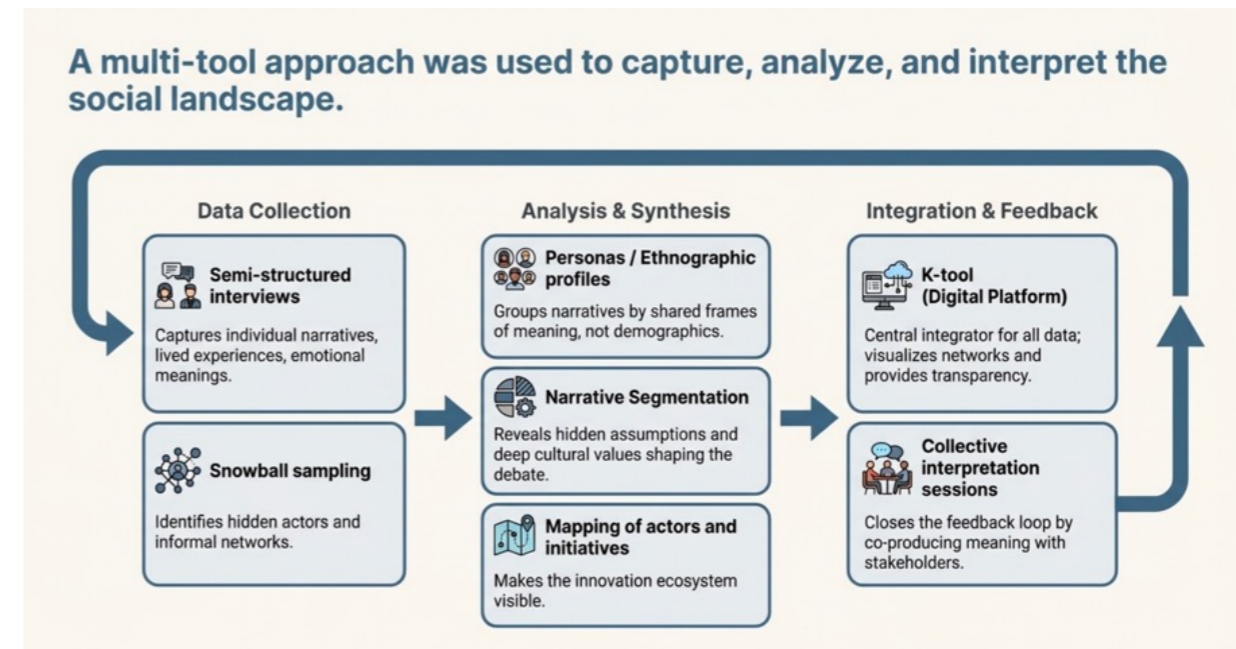
- **Strategic plans related to the region:** 15 strategic plans have been identified, analyzed, and categorized according to the following categories: name, description, municipality or region, level of impact — the same as above —, sector — the same as above —, thematic area — the same as above —, partners — the same as above —, budget, stakeholders, interrelationships, indicators, and perceptions.

First, stakeholders and initiatives were identified, for which a list of key stakeholders and projects was compiled. Subsequently, these stakeholders were classified based on their role within the ecosystem. Through this process, an analysis of interconnections was conducted, which allowed us not only to identify current relationships but also to identify new potential relationships. All this information has been organized in the digital tool K-tool, which will be explained later, enabling continuous consultation and updating.

Visualizing an ecosystem is not a static snapshot: it reflects the interconnections between the actors and initiatives within that ecosystem and its dynamic evolution over time. The mapping highlights the different types of actors in the Urdaibai ecosystem.

## Anexo II. Work process

Additionally, the different types of initiatives related to the support and development of the region are mapped, and the levels of interconnection between them and between actors and initiatives are analyzed.



## Listening Process

1002 narratives were collected in 10 months. A total of 949 people participated, of whom 53 also completed the second round of interviews. Through snowball sampling, ethnographies, mapping, and open calls for participation, we have identified a total of more than 1,700 people.

In the context of this study, snowball sampling was selected as it allows for a more accurate understanding of the depth and complexity of the Busturialdea-Urdaibai region as a qualitative method. This type of sampling, by expanding the network through contacts recommended by the initial participants, makes it possible to capture voices that do not appear in formal networks or are difficult to identify (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). Likewise, it fosters

Type of interview	Percentage of total
Personal interviews (one)	86,51%
Two personal interviews (second iteration/ in-depth interviews)	5,58%
Written interviews	4,53%
Participants in group interpretations who have not conducted personal interviews	2,85%
WhatsApp audio interviews	0,53%

Table 5. Percentage distributions of participants

trust-based relational dynamics, which is particularly helpful in identifying diverse, contextualized narratives grounded in everyday practices—a fundamental aspect of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

We began the process with a series of brief, open-ended conversations. The goal was to give interviewees the opportunity to bring up ideas and concerns they considered important, without imposing any constraints on them. At the end of each session, we analyzed all the information gathered and grouped the ideas that recurred throughout the interviews, identifying the most significant ones. We then segmented these opinions and organized them into narrative patterns. Starting in July, a series of in-depth interviews was conducted to delve deeper into the ideas derived from specific topics, prevailing patterns, and validation sessions. The goal of the second round of interviews was to validate the initial analysis, particularly to observe the evolution of the perceptions that emerged and were captured during the listening process—for example, to assess the impact of actions taken by different institutions. To this end, we re-interviewed some of the individuals who had already been interviewed. Another objective of the second

## Anexo II. Work process

iteration was to reach the narrative profiles that were missing from the first iteration: young people, adults, and migrants.

Contributions were received from a total of 949 people. In terms of interview type, face-to-face interviews were the most common (86.51%), followed by follow-up interviews (5.58%), that is, interviews with individuals who were interviewed on two occasions.

By age, although the distribution of participants is balanced, those aged 45 to 64 make up the largest group (42.89%). The presence of young and middle-aged adults is also significant, with 13.49% aged 18 to 29 and 23.08% aged 30 to 44. Meanwhile, those over 65 account for 20.55% of the participants.

In terms of gender, participation was very balanced, with 52.37% women and 47.63% men. 5.58% of the participants were migrants living in the region.

In terms of geographic distribution, the data show that the initiative is particularly well-established in the Busturialdea-Urdaibai region: Gernika-Lumo (234 people) and Bermeo (184 people) are the towns with the highest representation. They are followed by Mundaka (84), Ibarangelu (32), Murueta (31), Gautegiz-Arteaga (31), and Forua (29), among others.

Similarly, participation from outside the region is also significant, with 137 people (14.43%) from Bilbao, Bizkaia, and the rest of the Basque Country.



**Anexo II. Work process**

Location	Municipality or territory	Percentage %
Busturialdea-Urdaibai	Gernika-Lumo	%24,66
	Bermeo	%19,39
	Mundaka	%8,85
	Busturia	%3,48
	Ibarrangelu	%3,37
	Murueta	%3,27
	Gautegiz-Arteaga	%3,27
	Forua	%3,06
	Muxika	%2,00
	Sukarrieta	%1,90
	Arratzu	%1,69
	Ajangiz	%1,47
	Errigoiti	%1,16
	Elantxobe	%1,05
	Kortezubi	%1,05
	Nabarniz	%1,05
	Ereño	%0,32
Mendata	%0,21	
Morga	%0,21	
Busturialdea, but not Urdaibai	Ea	%2,63
Urdaibai, but not Busturialdea	Arrieta	%1,05
	Amorebieta-Etxano	%0,42
	Munitibar-Arbatzegi Gerrickaitz	%0,00
Others	Ret of Bizkaia	%7,48
	Bilbao	%4,32
	Resto de Euskal Herria	%2,63

Table 6. Percentage distribution of participants by region

## Other Channels

In turn, the research has been enriched by secondary sources of listening, providing access to voices and experiences not captured by the main snowball networks. One of the main conclusions emerging from the collective interpretation sessions was the need to delve deeper into the perspectives of migrants, both young and old. To this end, ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, photography, and accompanying “life journeys” have been employed, following their trajectories and daily practices in a situated manner. This approach makes visible voices that are generally rendered invisible in such processes, thereby providing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the social and cultural perceptions surrounding the museum.

## Collective interpretation and narrative analysis

This process forms the basis of the ALC and AC4 analyses and the generation of hypotheses. We then test the hypotheses developed with the public and strive to bring together as diverse a range of groups as possible. To do this, we have represented the narrative patterns grouped from the interviews in different profiles; rather than being the final result, they serve as a tool for the validation sessions, which have allowed us to validate and refine the findings obtained up to that point. Furthermore, these profiles are not static but adaptable, evolving as the listening process progresses. In total, seven validation sessions were held to verify and refine the information gathered; initially, three profiles were presented, but two more were subsequently created. The average duration of the sessions was approximately 90 minutes, and the same set of questions were asked in all of them:

**Do these profiles sound familiar to you?**

**To what extent do the profiles we’ve created reflect a broad spectrum of regional opinion?**

**What should we explore further?**

**Is there anything you would remove?**

## Anexo II. Work process

**What ideas or profiles are we missing?**

**Who should we talk to?**

To further refine the conclusions drawn from the focus group sessions, we have launched a second round of interviews with a new group of participants to ensure diversity was once again represented. We shared with them the conclusions and profiles we presented in July and asked if they felt anything was missing, or if they had noticed any changes in how the process had evolved. In short, we aim to determine whether perceptions have evolved and, if so, in what direction.

### • Ibarangelu

The first comparison session took place on June 11 at the Ibarangelu Cultural Center and was attended by 11 participants. Those in attendance included the mayor of the town council and representatives from the Basque Government, the Guggenheim Urdaibai Stop (GUS) platform, Gernika Gogoratuz, the Elika organization, and the University of the Basque Country (UPV), as well as a student, a doctor, and a member of the media. During this initial comparison session, four profiles were compared: 001, 003, 004, and 005. The participants also highlighted the need to create profile 002.

### • Murueta

The second public forum took place on June 18 in Murueta, at the old school building, and, as in Ibarangelu, was attended by 11 participants. In addition to the mayor, participants included a PNV representative from Burukide, a representative from Behargintza, a representative from the GUS platform, a member of the parents’

association of a public school, a student, and a former mayor, among others. During this second session, five profiles were already reviewed.

#### • Bermeo

The third session took place at the Bermeo Cultural Center on June 25 and was attended by 14 participants. This session was attended by the First Vice President of the Basque Government. Also in attendance were the mayor of the municipality, a representative of the GUS platform, a representative of UNESCO Etxea, a member of the LAB union, two PNV council members and one EH Bildu council member, a student, and a retired doctor, among others. As in Murueta, five profiles were compared.

#### • Gernika

The fourth session was held at the Elkartegi in Gernika on July 2 and was attended by 12 participants. On this occasion, we were joined by the General Deputy of Bizkaia. In addition, participants included a retiree, a student, the mayor of Errigoiti, a representative from Gernika Gogoratuz, two representatives from the GUS platform, an employee from the music school, an employee from a publishing house, and a member of Ernai. Once again, the five profiles were compared.

#### • Elantxobe

The fifth session was the last public forum held at a town hall; it took place in Elantxobe on July 7 at the senior citizens' center, with 13 people in attendance. In addition to the mayor of Elantxobe, participants included a PNV parliamentarian, a representative from the GUS platform, a retiree, an expert in participatory processes, two summer visitors, an environmental technician, a university employee, a social educator, the director of a public center, a factory worker, and a student, among others. The five profiles were compared.

#### Anexo II. Work process

#### • Youth

As highlighted in the preliminary report from July 2025, the voices of young people were not sufficiently represented; in other words, we had difficulty reaching this group and gathering their opinions. For this reason, we met with students from a local school on November 24. Twelve students participated, and during the session, the five profiles were reviewed and validated.

#### • Migrants

Held in Gernika on November 24. Four people participated, and we compared the five profiles.

#### • International experts

On December 1 and 2 at Urdaibai Ekoetxea, ALC and AC4 Columbia organized an international seminar, in collaboration with Hiroshima University and its Network for Education and Research on Peace and Sustainability (NERPS), on governance systems, participatory processes, and the rights of nature. The event featured international experts in urban planning, architecture, art, and tourism (Joshua D. Fisher, director of the AC4-Columbia Climate School; Karin Okada, collaborator at the AC4-Columbia Climate School; Jacqueline M. Klopp, Columbia University; Thaddeus Pawlowski, Columbia GSAPP / Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes; Tamara Muruetagoiena, Fresh Produce; Lidia Cano Pecharroman, University of Texas at Austin; Hu Meng Qu, Hokkaido University; and Kayo Funato, Hiroshima University).

Representatives from the municipalities of Busturia, Ajangiz, Muxika, Sukarrieta, Gautegiz Arteaga, Elantxobe, Ibarrangelu, and Ereño also participated, sharing their perspectives on the conditions necessary for a just transition in Urdaibai, along with local organizations such as Gernika Gogoratuz, BC3, IHOBE, Arantzazu Lab, and others. A total of 51 people participated.

# Annex III.

## Digital Tool: Urdaibai K-tool as an infrastructure for adaptive governance

For this project, the Agirre Lehendakaria Center created urdaibai.agirrecenter.eus, a platform that transparently makes available to the public all the material generated during the process: transcribed interviews, visual materials, cross-checking sessions, and an overview of stakeholders and initiatives. In this way, anyone has been able to follow and verify the work carried out at any time, thereby enhancing the process's traceability and public legitimacy.

The platform, publicly accessible via the domain urdaibai.agirrecenter.eus, has made it possible to view the entire process in real time, making the information generated during the process available to the public openly and free of charge. The system displays the data using maps, relational graphs, tables, and accessible visualizations, and is continuously updated. All information is public but has been anonymized using alphanumeric codes, ensuring the protection of participants and preventing any possibility of individual identification.

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From a methodological perspective, K-Tool should not be viewed merely as a repository of information, but rather as a governance infrastructure that enables the integration of large volumes of qualitative and relational data, explicitly incorporating the cultural dimension of social transformation processes. In contexts characterized by high complexity, conflict, and a plurality of actors, the digitization of listening and analysis processes is no longer optional but becomes a necessary condition for sustaining legitimate, traceable, and adaptive processes over time.

One of K-Tool's key innovations is its ability to combine objective data and social perceptions in real time—a feature rarely found in traditional impact assessment or strategic planning systems. In this way, the tool allows users to simultaneously observe which initiatives, policies, or actors exist in the region and how they are perceived by different segments of the population, revealing tensions, mismatches, gaps, and contradictions between institutional action and everyday experience.

The tool is structured into several interconnected modules:

- **Mapping module**, which allows users to visualize the interrelationships between actors, initiatives, and strategic plans, as well as their evolution over time. This module makes it possible to identify levels of intervention (community, medium- and large-scale), types of actors (public administration, civil society, private sector, academia), and patterns of concentration or fragmentation within the ecosystem. The mapping module includes the 265 identified actors, the 208 active initiatives, and the 15 strategic plans analyzed. Each of these elements has its own profile, allowing them to be classified by type, scope of action, territorial scale, and type of relationship with other actors or initiatives.

This mapping exercise was not approached as a static snapshot, but rather as an ongoing dialogue informed by active listening. The tool enables the cross-referencing of the map of actors and initiatives with the collected narratives, so that we can see not only who is active in the region, but also how these actors, policies, or

projects are perceived from different social perspectives. This cross-referencing has been key to identifying tensions, gaps, overlaps, and disconnections between what exists at the institutional or strategic level and what is experienced and expressed through the everyday reality of the territory.

- **Listening Module**, designed to manage in-depth listening processes across multiple channels. This module organizes and analyzes the interviews conducted during the process, which have been fully transcribed and published in the digital tool. In this way, anyone accessing the platform can directly consult the collected narratives, ensuring the transparency, traceability, and accessibility of the process. The information is analyzed along two fundamental axes: segmentation (diversity of perspectives on the same reality) and narrative depth, distinguishing between explicit discourse, implicit narratives, and metanarratives. This structure allows for the analysis of the social response to specific narratives and the observation of their evolution over time. In addition, the module includes a specific section on visual narratives, featuring a selection of 100 photographs taken throughout the listening process in various ethnographic contexts. Each of these images has been classified by thematic areas and is publicly available on the platform, expanding the narrative records beyond the textual format and allowing for a visual and situated interpretation of the experiences and perceptions of the territory.

- **Collective Interpretation Module**, which documents deliberative sessions and evaluates how spaces for debate are being managed, incorporating criteria of diversity, balance, and the quality of deliberation. This module functions as a governance panel that enables real-time monitoring of the democratic depth of the process. The module comprises a total of seven records, one for each collective interpretation session held. Each record documents the municipality where the session took place, the format (in-person or online, with all sessions in this case being in-person), the number of participants, the materials used for comparison—primarily the ethnographic profiles developed at each stage of the process—the participatory balance (gender distribution), the previously mapped agents who participated, and the profiles that were validated (albeit with some refinements) during the session. Furthermore, all

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sessions were recorded and transcribed in full, and the transcripts are available in the digital tool. The tool also includes an automatic translation feature that allows users to view transcripts in Basque, Spanish, or English, adapting to the user's selected language. Each participant is assigned an alphanumeric code that distinguishes their various contributions throughout the session while maintaining anonymity. In cases where participants had previously taken part in individual interviews, the same code was retained, allowing for the tracking of the evolution of their narratives throughout the process. Additionally, it is explicitly noted when contributions come from members of the ALC team. This structure facilitates tracking the threads of the session, identifying agreements, disagreements, and nuances, and their subsequent relationship to the narrative patterns detected in the individual listening sessions.

One of the key contributions of using K-Tool in the Busturialdea-Urdaibai process has been the ability to systematically cross-reference the mapping of stakeholders and initiatives with the narratives gathered through community engagement, thereby bridging the typical divide between technical analysis and social interpretation. This cross-referencing has made it possible to identify not only which actors and projects operate in the territory, but also how these are experienced, legitimized, or questioned by citizens from diverse perspectives.

The integration of these layers has made it easier to detect significant gaps between institutional priorities and perceived needs, as well as to identify areas of high narrative tension, spaces of latent consensus, and opportunities for public action. In this way, the process does not merely describe the conflict, but generates collective intelligence geared toward governance, bringing to light dynamics that normally remain implicit or fragmented.

The digital systematization of the process has also made it possible to transparently document the evolution of narratives, shifts in patterns, and the emergence of new concerns over time. This traceability is particularly important in contexts of institutional mistrust, as it allows for public verification of how certain voices and arguments have (or have not) been incorporated into the analysis.



# Annex IV.

## Glossary of key concepts

### **Territorial agents**

People, groups, and institutions that intervene in or are affected by processes of change in Urdaibai. Identifying them is key to mapping power relations, alliances, and tensions in the territory.

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### **Affective atmosphere**

Emotional climate shared by those who inhabit the territory. Frustration, enthusiasm, mistrust, or hope are not incidental elements, but forces that condition social dynamics, collective projects, and the willingness to change.

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### **Environmental conflicts**

Disputes over land use, natural resources, or conservation, reflecting tensions between values, identities, and development models. In Urdaibai, these conflicts trigger deep narratives and affect local governance.

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### **Sustainable human development**

A model that prioritizes collective well-being, equity, and ecological sustainability. It is not limited to economic growth, but promotes an integrated vision of progress based on social justice and territorial balance.

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### **Semi-structured interviews**

In-depth conversations, guided by thematic axes, that allow personal and collective stories to be captured. They are the main tool in the listening process.

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### **Progressive evaluation**

A real-time analysis system, adapted to complex contexts. It accompanies transitions by capturing contradictions, lessons learned, and changes in perception, and facilitates flexible decision-making.

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### **Collaborative governance**

A decision-making model in which citizens, institutions, and social agents co-produce knowledge and share responsibilities. Key in contexts where no single party has the complete solution.

## Collective interpretation

A deliberative space where narratives and findings are contrasted among diverse agents. Rather than validating, it seeks to build shared meanings and open new lines of listening.

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## Metanarratives

Deep structures of meaning that sustain what a community considers possible, legitimate, or desirable.

They condition visible and hidden narratives and are fundamental to understanding resistance to or support for change.

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## Ecosystem mapping

Identification of actors, relationships, discourses, initiatives, and conflicts present in the territory. More than a diagnosis, it is a living tool that allows us to understand how the system evolves.

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## Development model

Dominant vision of how the territory should be transformed. It can be explicit or implicit, and comes into tension with other proposals that strive to impose their own narrative of the future.

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## Tourism model

Underlying logic in how visitors are attracted and managed. In Urdaibai, mass, regenerative, cultural, and sustainable models clash, with direct implications for the economic, social, and ecological fabric.

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## Snowball sampling

Qualitative technique that allows access to invisible or peripheral voices through chains of recommendation. Useful for capturing marginal narratives and building trust.

## Narratives

Shared stories that express how a community understands its present and envisions its future. They are collective constructions that emerge from experiences, values, and imaginaries, not simply individual opinions.

Layers of narrative depth

- Visible narrative: what is said openly, even if it is not always practiced.
  - Hidden narrative: latent, non-explicit ideas that underlie the discourse.
  - Metanarrative: deep beliefs about what is possible
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## Listening process

Qualitative methodology focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences, values, and perceptions of the community. It goes beyond asking questions: it interprets, segments, and returns the narratives collected to open up possibilities for transformation.

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## Biosphere Reserve

International recognition that defines Urdaibai as an area of active conservation. It involves a tension between ecological protection and human development, and acts as a constant reference in the narratives of the territory.

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## Complex social challenges

Problems that have no single solution, where social, ecological, cultural, and political factors converge.

They require collaborative, adaptive approaches based on collective intelligence.

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## Socio-ecological transitions

Profound changes in the way we produce, live, and relate to the environment. These are processes of systemic transformation that involve both structures and subjectivities.

# Annex V. Bibliography

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