

# GOLD VI

**Case-Based Contribution  
to Chapter 9: Democratizing**  
*GOLD VI Report on Pathways  
to urban and territorial equality*

**Open governance for a more**

**consensual and inclusive policy**

**making**

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# Open governance for a more consensual and inclusive policy making

## ORGANISATION NAME

UCLG Digital Cities

## CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS

Bilbao (Spain), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Mexico City (Mexico)

## CHAPTER

9: Democratizing

## SUMMARY

Open governance is a trend that is rapidly expanding towards local governments of the entire world. The application of this concept requires the engagement of citizens and, thus, guaranteeing means for their effective participation and their non-exclusion. This case introduces 3 examples of open governance used for inclusive policy making.

In Bilbao, Basque Country, the Auzokide Plan is one of the main open government tools of the Bilbao City Administration. to collect all demands for the improvement of public space in neighbourhoods in areas such as urbanisation, improved accessibility, living areas, lighting, urban furniture... to analyse them later and thus obtain a list of areas to be worked on in the next four years. The civic engagement in Bilbao has a clear digital focus where a special focus is also being put in digital inclusiveness.

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the local government has developed during the last years their Smart City Plan in parallel with a Digital Inclusion Programme. Framed in this plan, Rio de Janeiro Local Administration launched the Knowledge Spaceships programme, which consisted in creating digital inclusion poles for encouraging citizens' inclusion in digital life. With providing the digital means to citizens, it also launched citizen participation programmes.

In the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, another initiative to boost digital inclusion can be found: Aldea Digital Iztapalapa TELMEX TELCEL. This initiative was part of a public-private collaboration in which the telecommunication companies Telmex and Telcel, the Carlos Slim Foundation and the local government created an open space dedicated to digital inclusion. The facility offered courses focussed on digital citizenship and inclusion, providing technical skills to create more engaged and proactive citizens and instructing them on how to participate in local digital forums and on how to interact with the local government.

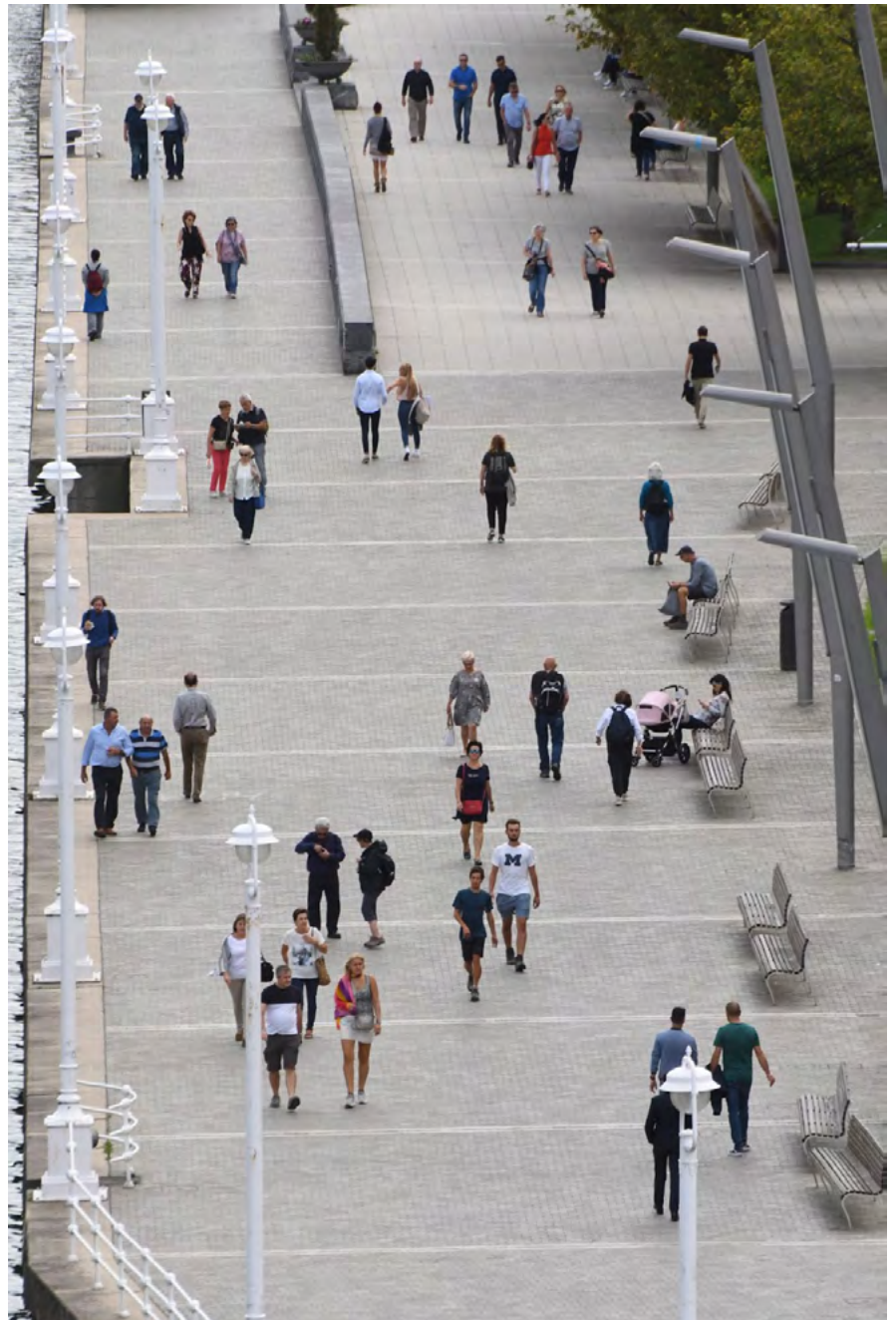
**Open governance is a trend that is rapidly expanding towards local governments of the entire world. The application of this concept requires the engagement of citizens and, thus, guaranteeing means for their effective participation and their non-exclusion.**

In **Bilbao, Basque Country**, the Auzokide Plan is one of the main open government tools of the Bilbao City Administration. Since its creation in 2004, every 4 years, the local government allocates an annual budget of 1.5 million € to each of the eight districts of the city.

The objective of this Plan is to collect all demands for the improvement of public space in neighbourhoods in areas such as urbanisation, improved accessibility, living areas, lighting, urban furniture, etc. to analyse them later and thus obtain a list of areas to be worked on in the next four years.

The demands and suggestions are collected by several means, which include participatory meetings in the districts, Bilbao Council's website, communications by telephone, emails, and other physical means (such as formularies). In order to leave no citizen behind, Bilbao has Municipal District Offices in each of the districts, which guarantee that citizens have a physically close channel to participate. Furthermore, promotional campaigns (by press, mailings, etc.) are launched to encourage citizens to participate in the Plan.

Each District has a Council made up of political and neighbourhood representation that decides whether the proposed actions should be executed and how they should be prioritised during the following 4 years. Each of the citizens who submitted suggestions receives a response. The Plan also registers



Avenida de las Universidades, Bilbao  
Source: Bilbao City Council

and publishes the age, gender, and proposals per district so that participation is tracked and imbalances can be corrected.

Auzokide Plan's design assures an open perspective and guarantees that each of the neighbourhoods of the city receives at least some investment to respond to the priorities of its citizens. In the last Mandate Plan of Bilbao City Council, a focus has been set on the improvement of accountability in the different phases of the process and, subsequently, monitoring of the execution of the actions.

The civic engagement in Bilbao has a clear digital focus, which is also shared in other parts of the world, where a special focus is also being put in digital inclusiveness. In July 2020 the Auzokide Plan 2020-2023 was approved with 56 fields of improvement for all the Districts of the City.<sup>1</sup>

In **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**, the local government has developed during the last years their Smart City Plan in parallel with a Digital Inclusion Programme, developing an indicator that tracked the population's access to new technologies, particularly in disadvantaged communities and segments.

The local government has made several efforts to integrate citizens taking into consideration that **social inclusion cannot be separated from digital inclusion**. As such, with digital inclusion being one of the priority themes of Rio de Janeiro, the city has made several investments to extend the telecommunication network with fibre optic cables and has renovated technology parks and created data centres.

One of the focuses of the government Smart City Plan has been to strengthen the citizen's relation with the city and the government. Framed in this plan, Rio de Janeiro Local Administration launched the Knowledge Spaceships programme, which consisted in creating digital inclusion poles for encouraging citizens' inclusion in digital life. With providing the digital means to citizens, it also launched citizen participation programmes. For instance, between the years 2014 and 2019, the city launched a political innovation lab.

**The political innovation laboratory LAB.Rio was created as a tool to bring citizens closer to administration by encouraging engagement through digital and on-site experiments to test, create, and discover new forms and formulas for**

**policy making.** Through this lab, the following initiatives were developed: the city's Youth Council, the Ágora Rio Challenge, the Mapping tool, the "Chega Together" and "Immersion" projects.



Puente Zubizuri, Bilbao  
Source: Bilbao City Council

Out of these initiatives, the Ágora Rio Challenge was an open government practice of special interest because of its usage of technology. This initiative consisted of creating a Rio citizen's social network in which hundreds of ideas were presented in the topics of Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games of 2016 and the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan of the city. As a result of the Ágora Rio Challenge, 764 ideas were presented with the participation of 1,688 people and a total amount of 8,562 votes for different projects were counted.

The process of participation followed 4 sages. Firstly, propositions were gathered and discussed in the platform, and the Municipality of Rio clarified which projects were already being carried out and mentioned other limitations. In a second stage, face-to-face meetings between city hall representatives and the population were organised to promote dialogue. Thirdly, a ranking was made by citizen participation.

1. See: <https://www.bilbao.eus/cs/>

Finally, technicians from the City Hall and citizens elaborated a final document with information from the “finalists” and a conference was organised 10 days later to explain which proposals were to be taken forward and why.

As an example of some of the initiatives selected in regards to mobility, the following were carried out among 20 of the selected initiatives: reorder the city’s bus system, execute water transport projects in the city, improve infrastructures for cyclists or improve the fleet of buses.

Similar to the Brazilian Knowledge Spaceships programme, in the **Iztapalapa district of Mexico City**, another initiative to boost digital inclusion can be found: Aldea Digital Iztapalapa TELMEX TELCEL. This initiative was part of a public-private collaboration in which the telecommunication companies Telmex and Telcel, the Carlos Slim Foundation and the local government created an open space dedicated to digital inclusion.

The project was launched in an inner suburb of Mexico City, named by some as a space of poverty, and served to provide citizens with digital competences and technological facilities. Furthermore, in addition to boosting the digital knowledge of attendants via workshop and courses, the facility offered courses focussed on digital citizenship and inclusion, providing technical skills to create more engaged and proactive citizens and instructing them on how to participate in local digital forums and on how to interact with the local government.

**Achieving a better engagement of citizens in open governance processes requires not only creating the open participation programmes, since inclusion remains essential for making these participation processes**

**inclusive, and this inclusion can be achieved by digital means or by bringing local offices closer to all districts of cities, including those with lesser inclusion level.**

In regards to digital inclusion, different cities around the world have different digitalisation levels, which include different digital infrastructures and capacity, but also digital knowledge. As the cases presented show, open governance can be brought to the citizens together with digital inclusion programmes, which inevitably guarantee more accessibility.



Campo Volantín, Bilbao  
Source: Bilbao City Council

Even when considering the differences in these cases, it becomes clear that several practices presented are highly transferable. On the one side, practices such as Auzokide Plan in Bilbao guarantee the inclusion of neighbourhood in open governance, practices as the inclusive implementation of the Smart City Plan in Rio de Janeiro focused on digital engagement promote that all citizens have technical means and platforms to engage, and practices such as the workshops in Iztapalapa guarantee that the citizens have the proper skills to interact with governmental institutions.

This paper has been produced as a Case-Based Contribution to the sixth Global Report on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD VI): the flagship publication of the organized constituency of local and regional governments represented in United Cities and Local Governments. The GOLD VI report has been produced in partnership with the Development Planning Unit (University College London), through the programme Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW). GOLD VI focuses on how local and regional governments can address the local manifestations of growing inequalities and contribute to create “Pathways to urban and territorial equality”. The GOLD VI report has been produced through a large-scale international co-production process, bringing together over a hundred representatives of local and regional governments, academics and civil society organizations. This paper is an outcome of this process and is part of the *Pathways to Equality Cases Repository*, which collects the over 60 Case-Based Contributions produced as part of the GOLD VI report.

In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 9 on “Democratizing”, which focuses on the challenges and opportunities for local and regional governments in implementing meaningful participatory processes, and democratizing decision-making, unpacking asymmetries of power and the underpinning trends affecting processes of democratization. The chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote more egalitarian, participatory and democratic processes, giving voice to marginalized groups of society, minorities and other groups, and thus contribute to urban and territorial equality.

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