

# Collaborative Governance in Portugal? A Critical Perspective Based on an Empirical Survey

## Governança Colaborativa em Portugal? Uma Perspetiva Crítica Baseada Numa Pesquisa Empírica

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### Abstract/ Resumo

Collaborative governance can be defined as a concerted type of decision-making and collective action in which government bodies and private sector stakeholders interact as equal partners with the aim of achieving outcomes of interest for both parties. Academic authors in favour of the adoption of collaborative governance in Portugal tend to present a rather positive view on its merits. They argue that it is potentially the best approach to address the heavily bureaucratic and paternalistic traits of Portuguese planning. This is against the view of authors who – as ourselves – consider collaborative governance potentially problematic for the public interest. One can argue that collaborative governance has become in fact a surreptitious tool for the advancement of neoliberal goals. This debate raises a dilemma: should or should not collaborative governance be adopted by Portuguese local authorities in matters related with spatial planning? Based on an online survey, this research portrays the perceptions held by planners and planning-related professionals (e.g. planning academics, consultants) and some political decision-makers about collaborative governance in Portuguese local authorities. The empirical results suggest that, in general terms, these individuals consider collaborative governance capable of delive-

A governança colaborativa constitui um tipo de processo de tomada de decisão e de ação coletiva em que entidades governamentais e agentes privados interagem como parceiros em pé de igualdade com o intuito de alcançar resultados benéficos para ambas as partes. Investigadores a favor do uso da governança colaborativa em Portugal tendem a apresentar os méritos da mesma de uma forma bastante positiva. Estes investigadores argumentam que essa forma de governança é a potencialmente mais apropriada em Portugal devido às tendências burocráticas e paternalistas do sistema de planeamento português. Esta perspetiva é a oposta à de autores mais críticos – dentro dos quais nos incluímos – que consideram a governança colaborativa potencialmente problemática para o interesse público. A governança colaborativa pode na verdade ser apreciada como um instrumento para a promoção de desígnios neoliberais. Este debate levanta um dilema: deve-se ou não adotar o uso da governança colaborativa nas câmaras municipais portuguesas em assuntos relacionados com o planeamento do território? Com base num inquérito digital, esta investigação apresenta as percepções de profissionais ligados ao planeamento (por exemplo, planeadores, consultores e académicos) e alguns políticos relativamente ao uso da

ring a number of positive outcomes, but is also associated with risks for the public interest. It is therefore important to conduct further research so that an appropriate legal framework can be developed.

*Keywords:* Governance, Collaboration, Conditions for Application, Neoliberalism, Portugal

*JEL Code:* D73, G38, H11, O21, R58

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Portugal has been struggling economically for a reasonably long time. As a result of the 2008-2009 economic crisis it has requested financial bailout in 2011 and the negative consequences have been dramatic (Abreu et al., 2013), namely in terms of job destruction (Carneiro et al., 2014), decreasing quality of public policies concerned with unemployment rates (Valadas, 2012), health care provision (Moreira, 2016), and education (Lopes, 2016) – not to mention loss in national government credibility and political sovereignty. All this has done harm to the country’s competitiveness and sense of well-being. Indeed, the Portuguese Global Competitiveness Index has been steadily declining in the last few years, taking Portugal from the 36<sup>th</sup> global position in 2014-2015 to the 38<sup>th</sup> in 2015-2016, and then abruptly down to the 46<sup>th</sup> in 2016-2017 (Schwab and Sala-i-Martin, 2014; 2016). In the last World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2017), Portugal was placed in the humble 89<sup>th</sup> position of the global ranking, behind comparable European countries such as Greece (ranking 87<sup>th</sup>), Italy (48<sup>th</sup>), Spain (37<sup>th</sup>) and Ireland (15<sup>th</sup>). Additionally to this, Portugal presents ‘extremely low stocks of social capital’ (Teles, 2012: 870). This portrays a worrying situation requiring the use of resourceful methods to rapidly improve the situation so that sustainable development is experienced – that which meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987).

governança colaborativa em câmaras municipais portuguesas. A análise empírica sugere que, em termos gerais, os respondentes consideram que a governança colaborativa tem elevado potencial tanto para gerar resultados positivos como negativos para o interesse público. É por isso importante conduzir mais investigação sobre esta matéria para a poder enquadrar dentro de legislação apropriada.

*Palavras Chave:* Governança, Colaboração, Condições de Implementação, Neoliberalismo, Portugal

*JEL Code:* D73, G38, H11, O21, R58

As we shall see, the problems experienced in Portugal seem to correspond to a situation where excessively strong bonds to closed political connections, heavy bureaucracy, and submissive-patriarchal thinking exist alongside limited willingness to change the state of affairs. The situation in Portugal seems to indicate as well that there is not enough competitiveness, innovation, meritocracy, social equality, and willingness to cooperate among people and organisations. One can argue that the solution to address these problems is to invest in the collaborative governance model so that social capital can be unleashed and social and political innovations can take place. In fact, one of the authors of this article witnessed a meeting with influential Portuguese individuals whose allegiance to collaborative governance was passionately presented as being *unconditional* and *normative*, using their own terms. This can be a perilous way of addressing the matter and one of the major purposes of this article is to challenge it in constructive terms. This article is therefore focused on exploring the capacity that governance, and particularly *collaborative governance*, has to promote sustainable development in Portugal (and in other countries in similar circumstances) according to the views of people working in spatial planning and spatial planning-related jobs. Note that the hypothesis that collaborative governance is effective in promoting sustainable development in the face of environmental, social and economic ‘wicked’ problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973), while taking into account the growing lack of credibility of governments to do it alone, has

been well defended (for example, by Gollagher and Hartz-Kar, 2013; Weymouth and Hartz-Karp, 2015). It is plausible that this hypothesis is valid also in Portugal (as proposed by Teles, 2012). However, in this article, it is recommended caution before accepting such hypothesis as valid. The relevance of this discussion is most likely to transcend the Portuguese context and contribute to inform similar debates in other South-European countries.

Collaborative governance seems to be an ideal type of governance as it is counter-intuitive to protest against values such as societal engagement and social capital. This might lead one to believe that in order to solve the problems affecting countries like Portugal, where the state has relatively limited powers and credibility and where there is great need to build social capital, collaborative governance might be a particularly suitable model to follow. This possibility raises some crucial questions though: whether Portuguese local authorities are prepared to conduct collaborative governance processes in ways that are aligned with the public interest; whether the benefits of these processes are substantial when considering their risks and costs; and whether the legal framework and knowledge-base of Portuguese planning is aligned with it. An online survey was conducted to obtain a partial answer to these – and some other – important questions.

An influential branch of the literature on collaborative governance presents it as intrinsically desirable in a ‘normative idealised manner’ (as criticised by Swyngedouw, 2005), and focuses on barriers that block its implementation – including, for example, institutional, legal, disciplinary and conceptual barriers. Suggestions are then presented regarding how to remove these barriers and make collaborative governance happen well – then all sorts of problems should be solved (Lasker et al., 2001; Innes, 2004; Bingham, 2009; Amsler, 2010; Fish et al., 2010; Page, 2010). The present article proposes a different perspective from that, as the implementation barriers removal approach is risky – and actually *tyrannical* (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) – because it fails to ask the fundamental questions of whether collaborative processes are intrinsically legitimate (Cooke, 2001) or whether people want it in the first place, but still aims at making them happen (see as well Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). The present article proposes that, before actually implementing a collaborative governance process, two

basic preconditions need to be met. The first is concerned with acceptability and preparedness. The second is concerned with public interest safety, that is, whether collaborative governance might not be used to inflict damage on the public interest for the benefit of the privileged few.

This article is structured as follows. In the next section we will analyse the extent to which collaborative governance is a problematic concept. Then, in section 3, we explore the two necessary preconditions to implement a collaborative governance process and whether these preconditions are likely to be met in the Portuguese context. Section 4 addresses some methodological issues concerning the empirical work critically presented in section 5. Section 6 invites a more open and curious perspective on the topic and section 7 proposes a future research agenda. The article concludes with section 8 where some final remarks are made.

## 2. COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE: A PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT

Governance is defined here as ‘the totality of interactions in which government, other public bodies, private sector and civil society participate, aiming at solving societal problems or creating societal opportunities’ (Meuleman, 2008: 11). Along such lines, collaborative governance can be defined as a type of governance in which public bodies and private stakeholders interact in ways where open communication and communicative rationality, cooperative interaction and equality are seen as guiding principles. In this logic we can trace back the legacy of influential authors such as Patsy Healey, who proposed that communication and collaborative participation are the best tools to deal with societal challenges (Healey, 1990; 2006; 2007). Some authors add here a slight twist, arguing that stakeholders might enter governance processes having in mind just their own interest (Innes, 2004; Purcell, 2009). However, the setup of the governance process continues to be collaborative, as the idea is that the stakeholders will co-create a win-win solution through creative articulation of their selfish interests (which is seen with great scepticism by Purcell, 2009).

Several problems can emerge as a result of this governance model (Stoker, 1998), namely a lack of coherence between the logic of collaborative governance processes and the institutional structures of governments. These

structures were typically designed with an eye on more straightforward, centralised and unilateral forms of decision-making and action. Additionally to this, high process complexity can aggravate the tendency for people involved in policy making to play blame games (Hood, 2011). Blame games are personal dynamics (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002) aimed at deflecting from the individual (or his or her organisation) responsibility for undesirable outcomes resulting from unfortunate choices. Collaborative governance processes can therefore result in situations where accountability is very difficult to achieve, and where little results are accomplished. Collaboratively involving stakeholders in highly complex processes might solve some problems related with lack of state power and credibility. However, it potentially generates other problems related with high process complexity and all the imponderables associated with how multiple individuals might or might not behave when interacting in the ambiguous circumstances created by the institutional voids of heterarchy (Jessop, 1998; Hajer, 2003).

Collaborative governance can lead to disappointing decision-making processes where participation of citizens is legally required but is in practice not taken seriously (for an example see van den Brandeler et al., 2014). It can lead to paradoxical negative outcomes, namely damaging those that were supposed to be empowered, as Cooke and Kothari argue (2001). They propose that the major problems associated with collaborative governance approaches (and particularly those where direct public participation occurs) are the ‘naivety of assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes; how the language of empowerment masks a real concern for managerialistic effectiveness; the quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice; and how an emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice’ (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 14). But there is more. These approaches can lead to ‘dialogues of the deaf’ where stakeholders develop over repeated communicative rounds immunity to each other’s arguments while they become increasingly entrenched in their own views (van Eeten, 1999).

Collaborative governance can undermine the representative democracy principles and structures without necessarily leading to better results (Hertting and Kugelberg, 2017). One can

therefore present collaborative governance as a manifestation of neoliberalism at work (Swyngedouw, 2005; Purcell, 2009; Roy, 2015): under an appearance of equality and openness can operate hidden forces that in fact promote inequality and concentration of power and wealth on privileged minorities. The neoliberal ideology promotes the undermining of state powers and credibility so that corporations can assume greater control of the economic, political and academic establishments with massive impacts on which planning policies are conducted against the public interest (Mirowski, 2013; Sager, 2011). See also Irvin and Stansbury for a critical view on the benefits and drawbacks of citizen participation in decision-making (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004). These authors show a praiseworthy capacity to see both the bright and the less bright sides of participation, a trait that some scholars working on collaborative governance topics would benefit from displaying more – as we will see. Indeed, we can only benefit from considering the adoption of collaborative governance with a critical mind, particularly in countries such as Portugal where neoliberal forces are already strongly in place (Abreu et al., 2013; Carneiro et al., 2014; Moreira, 2016). Moreover, when a country is in need of a rapid transition towards sustainable development, it is potentially problematic to adopt such governance processes because they can be very slow to produce results due to the need to achieve consensus and building trust – a lengthy (and costly) process (Innes, 2004; Hordijk et al., 2015).

It is relevant to note that the literature on this topic does not necessarily agree on a number of issues, for example whether social capital is the result of collaborative governance or a precondition for enabling it, but it is clear that social capital is one of the pillars of collaborative governance theory (as in Lowndes and Wilson, 2001; Bowles and Gintis, 2002). It is therefore no surprise that the influential work of Putnam (1993b; 1993a; 2000) is frequently cited. It is here relevant to note the paradox of collaborative governance narratives in their use of the concept of social capital. While these narratives claim that social capital is needed to foster successful collaborative governance processes, they also claim that societies need *less government and more governance* as the state is weak and is becoming weaker (and or is loaded with problems at its core). For examples of this type of narratives applied to Portugal see Teles

(2012) or Pereira (2013). These narratives tend to omit or be unclear about the point that societies with a stronger and healthier welfare state have more social capital instead of the opposite, as tested for example by van Oorschot and Arts (2005). These authors empirically show that the so called ‘crowding out hypothesis’ (which proposes that a strong welfare state contributes to alienate social capital from civil society) is invalid. The collaborative governance agenda is with this placed in an ironic predicament by their own proponents: it works best where it is less needed (that is, where there is a strong state with abundant social capital) while it does not work where it is supposedly most needed (that is, in societies with weak states and lack of social capital). This paradox should alert the reader to the dangers of pro-collaborative narratives (see Purcell, 2009), particularly when applied to societies in already vulnerable circumstances to neoliberalism and austerity such as the Portuguese.

But there is more to this. Indeed, advocates of collaborative governance tend to argue that even when processes that follow its tenets fail to deliver their primary objectives, at least social capital will be built thanks to the collaborative nature of the process adopted. This argument raises some concerns. First, because it proposes that just because a collaborative setting was deployed, social capital is to be expected as a result. This argument typically pays little to no attention to the minimum levels of social capital needed to make the process successful. Instead, it assumes that social capital will be built anyway. The risk of social capital being lost through collaborative settings is not contemplated. Second, this argument raises some concerns because the possibility that the state loses further credibility and agency is not considered in many cases, at least not explicitly. One must be aware of the possibility that an unsuccessful collaborative governance process can lead to less social capital, to a weaker state, to more powers being granted to corporate enterprises that are not concerned with the public interest, and to further alienation of citizens from future governance processes.

Note that we are not arguing that the academic proponents of such approach are ill-intended. However, we do believe that their work can be easily used by neoliberal powers in ways that are not constructive for the public interest. For a classic discussion on the meaning of the

term *public interest* and its importance for these matters, see Campbell and Marshall (2002).

### 3. COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN PORTUGAL? A MATTER REQUIRING FURTHER ANALYSIS

The abovementioned debates raise the following question: are planning-related Portuguese stakeholders approaching collaborative governance processes with a negative and stubborn attitude as typically depicted in informal popular accounts or are collaborative governance processes the wrong model to engage these stakeholders? In our view, collaborative governance processes can be desirable and constructive (and this applies also to Portugal), but only when some preconditions have been gathered. We will focus now on two of these preconditions:

- *First*, stakeholders are motivated and prepared to cooperate and existing conditions make collaborative governance efficient and effective (that is, there is sufficient acceptability and preparedness), and

- *Second*, the adoption of collaborative governance is safe for the public interest.

These preconditions will be explored in relation to the Portuguese case in the following subsections.

#### 3.1 First precondition: Are Portuguese stakeholders motivated and prepared to cooperate, and existing conditions in this country are likely to make collaborative governance efficient and effective?

Portugal is a country with a complex recent past that includes a troubled transition from dictatorship to democracy after the coup of state of 1974. This transition has led to significant public administration purges and to various large scale nationalisations aimed at giving to the state vast control over key sectors of the economy. This has created deep and long lasting negative consequences experienced both by the state (which became *persona non grata* for many stakeholders while losing valuable professionals) and by the entrepreneurial sector (which was seriously mutilated) (Pinto, 2008). The difficulties with competitiveness experienced at the moment (Schwab and Sala-i-Martin, 2014; 2016) can be partly explained by

this past, which contrasts starkly with the recent wave of privatisations required by Troika following the 2011 financial bailout (Abreu et al., 2013). Today, Portugal is a country where:

- A strong logic of party patronage in the recruitment of civil servants exists and where there is mistrust among political leaders and the civil servants they inherit from previous political cycles (Silva and Jalali, 2016b; 2016a);
- There is evidence of political business cycles at the local authority level associated with mayor re-election campaigns (Coelho et al., 2006);
- There is little social capital available but there are worryingly high levels of political paternalism: in many cases mayors use their powers rather autocratically and without the public interest in mind (Teles, 2012);
- One can find an institutional environment characterised by heavy administrative structures deeply affected by partisanship in a country where a strong anti-party sentiment exists among the electorate (Silva, 2017); and
- Institutions are hierarchical and resilient to change towards collaborative forms of organisation (Oliveira and Breda-Vázquez, 2011).

As suggested by Lowndes and Wilson (2001), the institutional design of the state is very important in nurturing social capital, and the conditions experienced in Portugal are obviously not ideal for that goal, particularly after the structural changes imposed by Troika (described by Abreu et al., 2013). Therefore, it is unsurprising that cooperation of stakeholders with the Portuguese government is characterised by difficulty, as reported by Silva and associates after participating as academic stakeholders on a process of this kind (2016). In summary, it is important to determine the extent to which Portuguese local authorities are prepared to conduct this type of governance without taking for granted its benefits. This article aims at partially filling this knowledge gap.

### **3.2 Second precondition: Is the adoption of collaborative governance in Portugal safe for the public interest?**

Neoliberal forces are likely to find collaborative processes very attractive to reinforce their hegemonic project while increasing their political legitimacy, as argued for example by Purcell (2009). This happens under the pretence of working for the promotion of democracy and

citizen empowerment. It is therefore critical to check whether those proposing collaborative governance are not aiming at using it as a stealth weapon against the state and the public interest. In relation to this, it is important to note that the collaborative governance model has a circularity and a self-fulfilling prophecy quality to it that is worrying. It presupposes and creates the same conditions: while it is argued that it should be used to address the problem of the weak welfare state, it is likely to weaken further the welfare state. In other words, once started, their proponents can cyclically reinforce their necessity despite results: if it works, more of it should be done because it is so constructive, they can argue. If it does not work, they can claim that it was because of too much state crowding out social capital. Then they can ask for either even more pure forms of collaborative governance, or for collaborative governance to be continued as before with the argument that if it is done for long enough, or if it will become sufficiently strong, it will eventually work (for an example of this being done in Portugal see Pereira, 2013: 59).

As warned by Noam Chomsky on his reflections about anarchism (2005), the move towards a societal order with less state would lead American society to a situation of extreme vulnerability to totalitarian corporate powers. For that reason, and even though Chomsky is a sympathiser of anarchism and considers the state as an illegitimate institution, he strongly recommends that this move towards a weaker state and anarchism *must not* be performed until conditions are prone to it. In the meantime, the state needs to be protected, otherwise corporate powers will take over increasing aspects of society, the author claims. This point is applicable to many other societies besides the American.

For similar reasons, the notion that collaborative governance is risky is widely applicable as well when neoliberal forces are in place, and therefore using it today in Portugal is necessarily problematic, at least to some extent. In fact, today, a move towards a governance type like that in Portugal, that is, in a setting that might not be particularly ready for it and might be vulnerable to neoliberalism, can have perverse results even though it can be well intentioned. This means that the adoption of collaborative governance processes in contemporary Portugal *cannot be safe* due to the very nature of these processes, the present conditions of the country, and the global economic and political

orders. One can therefore argue that this second precondition is methodologically problematic because it is redundant. Indeed, one can claim that collaborative governance is *always risky* and so there is no need to consider the specific case of Portugal to determine that. Following this quite radical logic, collaborative governance should *never* be used. This radical argument comes across to us as unwarranted, at least to some extent. It follows an extremist logic that is unlikely to be constructive: it is too similar to that which argues that collaborative governance should always be performed because it is inevitably beneficial to do it. Therefore, a shift in the nature of the reasoning is needed. For the sake of engaging more deeply and more constructively with the topic, one should loosen this second precondition and reframe it according to the following words: *whether the benefits and opportunities of implementing collaborative governance outweigh its costs and potential threats for a given circumstance*. Considering specifically the case of Portugal, the following facts should be considered when making such analysis on a case-by-case basis:

- Portugal has recently experienced a financial bailout and, even though the latest trends have been positive, the country is still in debt and the state is not in a strong position. The country is therefore vulnerable to be exposed in the future to further neoliberal austerity policies (or other neoliberal inventions we did not see yet) which have proved to be destructive both for the welfare state and for the citizens' well-being (Abreu et al., 2013). This makes the further weakening of the state a risky possibility.
- The country has experienced a dramatic wave of job destruction associated with the implementation of various measures aimed at increasing 'job flexibility' that has weakened the ability of citizens who stayed in the country to stand against neoliberal powers (Valadas, 2012; Carneiro et al., 2014);
- There was a significant wave of emigration, especially of highly qualified professionals, making Portugal one of the countries most affected by *brain drain* (Amaral and Marques, 2013). The state has done little to prevent this (paradoxically, at some stages it has even promoted it). This has led some of the most capable to articulate narratives and devise measures against the destruction of their citizenship and work-related rights to move away from the country. The consequences of such emigration

in terms of deterioration of social and intellectual capital should not be underestimated.

Considering the abovementioned, it is important – when considering its relative benefits and risks – to determine the extent to which collaborative governance is likely to be safe for the public interest when applied in Portuguese local authorities. This takes us to the empirical part of this article.

#### 4. SOME BRIEF METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

An online survey was purposefully built with the aim of gathering the perceptions of planners, consultants, academics, policy-makers and some other agents (e.g. urban developers) working on matters directly related to spatial planning at the local authority level. This survey was structured by the points articulated in the previous sections. It was divided in the following major parts: *first*, it introduced questions concerning demographics, which included work category, years of professional experience in planning, education level, gender and number of local authorities the respondents will be considering when giving their answers.

*Second*, the survey asked the extent to which the respondents see the use of collaborative governance in Portugal as common or unusual; their perceptions about acceptability levels among distinct professional categories; and the extent to which local authorities in Portugal are prepared to conduct this type of governance in the name of the public interest. This part of the survey aimed at addressing the first precondition for collaborative governance as presented in sub-section 3.1.

*Third*, the survey focused on the extent to which the respondents perceive collaborative governance to be a source of problems and, conversely, a source of benefits. In its turn, this part of the survey aimed at addressing the second precondition for collaborative governance as presented in sub-section 3.2.

*Fourth*, the survey asked the respondents whether they believe that further research is needed on this topic and whether a legal framework is needed to frame the use of this form of governance. *Fifth*, and finally, the survey invited the respondents to offer some open qualitative inputs as they saw fit. Collaborative governance was defined in the survey as in the beginning of section 2 of this article.

The methodology adopted to recruit respondents used two distinct strategies. The first was to ask the largest planning-related Portuguese organisations to disseminate the survey among their members through their mailing lists. These organisations included the Portuguese Association of Regional Development (APDR), the Portuguese Association of Urbanists (APU), and the National Association of Portuguese Local Authorities (ANMP). Key policy-makers working on issues concerning spatial planning for the local authorities that are capitals of district (a regional entity in the Portuguese planning system) were directly contacted by means of searching for their online contacts in their institutional webpages. The same procedure was applied to contact professionals working at the Regional Coordination Commissions (CCR) and to invite private consultants to participate. Finally, some individuals with recognised knowledge about Portuguese planning were personally invited to participate using a snow-ball technique. All individuals contacted (either personally or through mailing lists) were assured that their input was totally anonymous and their participation should be done on a strictly voluntary basis. The 68 responses obtained were collected from the 21<sup>st</sup> of February to the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2019. Statistical calculations were performed using SPSS and the online platform used to gather responses was Smart-Survey.

## 5. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This section is divided in sub-sections that mirror those that have structured the online survey. We will start with demographics. In some sub-sections, qualitative data is used to support the quantitative data. Note, however, that these qualitative insights are offered only to pinpoint some possible explanations for the patterns observed in the quantitative data and should therefore not be seen as the objective reasons why these patterns are present. The full validation of these qualitative insights is beyond the scope of the present research.

### 5.1 Demographics

The 68 respondents of this survey included 19 planners (27.9% of total respondents), 11 academics/researchers (16.2%), 12 consultants (17.6%), and 6 political decision-makers (8.8%). The remaining 19 individuals (27.9%)

either gave mixed answers (e.g. planner *and* academic, consultant *and* policy-maker) or included themselves in the category of “other”. One respondent chose not to answer this question. The sample of respondents includes a substantial number of people with considerable professional experience: 13.3% had between 11 and 15 years of experience, 22.1% 16 to 20 years, and 17.6% 21 to 25 years. We had 35.3% with more than 25 years of experience while only 11.3% had less than 10 years of experience. 48 respondents had a higher education degree (70.6%) and 19 had a doctorate (27.9%). The vast majority were men (75%), which unfortunately mirrors the reality found in Portuguese planning jobs concerning gender inequality. Regarding the number of local authorities that the respondents used as their references to answer the following questions of the survey, 23 considered only one local authority (33.8%), 12 considered two (17.6%), 12 three (17.6%), and 21 considered four or more local authorities (30.9%).

### 5.2 Frequency of use, acceptability, and preparedness

In this part of the survey we first asked the extent to which the local authorities being considered by the respondents actually use collaborative governance. The vast majority of them (that is, 50 respondents, totalising 73.5% of the 61 answers given to this question) responded that it is “only used in highly particular cases”. Nine consider that collaborative governance is “used with some regularity” (13.2%) while only 2 consider that it is “used in the majority of cases where strategic decisions are to be made” (2.9%). Seven individuals did not know or chose not to answer this question (10.3%). This confirms the understanding that collaborative governance has not yet really entered mainstream Portuguese planning practice. As strongly expressed by one respondent (local decision-maker and academic researcher, 21 to 25 years of professional experience, our translation):

*Collaborative governance is practically nonexistent in Portugal.*

The respondents were then asked about the extent to which – and according to their own understanding – collaborative governance enjoys acceptability among political decision-makers, planners, citizens and the private sector. This was done through a multiple-choice table where



they could rate acceptability levels using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 meaning “Total rejection” to 5 meaning “Total acceptance”. The mid-value 3 meant “Case-by-case acceptance”. The results are presented below in Table 1. This table shows that the respondents believe that political decision-makers are the category less willing to accept this form of governance

(lowest mean). According to the respondents’ views, planners are the category with the highest levels of inner discordance regarding this matter (highest standard deviation). Not surprisingly, the overall perception among the respondents is that the private sector is the most willing to adopt collaborative governance (highest mean).

**Table 1: Perceived acceptability levels**

Perceived acceptability levels	Mean value	Standard deviation	N Number of valid responses
	1: Total rejection 3: Case-by-case acceptance 5: Total acceptance		
Political decision-makers	2.85	0.87	68
Planners	3.20	1.00	65
Citizens	3.27	0.93	62
Private sector	3.40	1.02	62

The last questions included in this part of the survey concerned the existing levels of preparedness of local authorities to adopt collaborative governance processes. These questions used a Likert-type scale where 1 corresponded to “Not prepared” (lowest value of the scale), 3 corresponded to “Reasonably prepared” (middle value), and 5 corresponded to “Very well prepared” (highest value). The first question of this set asked the extent to which local authorities are prepared to “set up collaborative governance processes with high likelihood of promoting the public interest”. The mean value of the responses was 2.31 as 10 respondents (14.7%) declared local authorities “Not prepared”, 33 respondents (48.5%) declared them “poorly prepared” and only 5 (7.3%) respondents considered them either “Well prepared” or “Very well prepared”.

A similar pattern emerged regarding the question of whether Portuguese local authorities are “able to distinguish collaborative governance processes that are constructive for the public interest from those that are not”. Again, 10 respondents (14.7%) considered them “Not prepared” while 37 considered them “Poorly

prepared” (54.4%). The mean value of the total responses was 2.28.

Finally, and regarding the question of whether “local authorities are prepared to interrupt a collaborative governance process if it is concluded that this is not beneficial for the public interest”, the results were even less optimistic: 15 respondents (22.1%) considered them “Not prepared” and 34 (precisely 50.0%) declared them “Poorly prepared”. The mean value of the responses was 2.12. In summary, it is clear that – in general terms – the respondents believe Portuguese local authorities to be poorly prepared to conduct these processes, or at least poorly prepared to conduct them in the name of the public interest. These overall conclusions were supported by the statements offered by some respondents as shown below (our translation).

*I think that a large part of the population is neither prepared for, nor sufficiently informed about, collaborative governance. There is a lack of civic education for that. In the case of policy-makers and managers, there is a lack of will and a generalized lack of preparation for it, as it changes established practices and vested*

interests. [...] we need to prepare people so that they can consciously participate in decision-making processes. Planner, 11 to 15 years of experience

*Even though I recognize that – academically speaking – this is unquestionably an interesting topic, collaborative governance is very risky [...] particularly in small to medium local authorities where both policy-makers and planners present very low skills to follow up such processes. I can admit that in areas with high demographic density this could be considered (even though with reservations). But I have the impression – which is becoming stronger – that [...] there are excessively strong inequalities across the [Portuguese] territory in terms of skills for me to welcome this trendy shenanigan [“modernice”] of collaborative governance.* Planner, 26 to 30 years of experience

This part of the survey was aimed at testing whether the respondents perceive that, in general terms, Portuguese local authorities satisfy the first precondition (as presented in sub-section 3.1). This precondition was focused on the extent to which Portuguese stakeholders are motivated and prepared to cooperate, and existing conditions in this country are likely to make collaborative governance efficient and effective. The conclusion to be drawn is that there seems to be reasons for approaching colla-

borative governance with considerable prudence.

### 5.3 The potential drawbacks and benefits of collaborative governance in Portugal

The literature review presented in sections 2 and 3 facilitated the identification of a number of problems and setbacks that might result from the adoption of collaborative governance processes in Portugal. These were used to prepare a multiple-choice table concerning problems. A Likert-type scale was used to express levels of agreement with ten short statements. Each one of these statements introduced a potential problem that collaborative governance might lead to. The scale ranged from 1, which was the choice corresponding to “Totally disagree” (that this problem is likely to emerge), to 5 for those respondents wanting to express that they “Totally agree” with the statement. The middle of the scale corresponded to 3, associated with “I am uncertain”. Respondents could choose as well not to answer or to state that they “Do not know”. The results of this part of the survey are shown in Table 2 below. The table lists the statements from those where highest levels of agreement were expressed to those with lower levels of agreement.

**Table 2: Participants’ perceptions about potential drawbacks of collaborative governance**

Statement	Mean value (agreement) 1: Totally disagree 3: Uncertain 5: Totally agree	Standard deviation	N Number of responses
Potential <b>problems</b> resulting from collaborative governance			
Participants are chosen based on privileged relationships with political parties	3.83	1.05	65
Favoring political parties against the public interest	3.60	1.07	63
Deterioration of citizens’ political will	3.59	1.12	64
Emergence of conflicts among participants	3.55	0.85	65
Dismissal of inputs offered by professional planners	3.52	1.05	64
Favoring elites against the public interest	3.48	1.10	64
Arbitrary decisions	3.33	1.19	63
Weakening of democratic powers held by those elected to govern	3.25	1.12	65
Corruption	3.15	1.09	60
Reduced abilities of local authorities to promote the public interest	3.13	1.11	63

The analysis of the table suggests that the participants see the influence of political parties with substantial concern: these seem to be the source of problematic forms of patronage. In any case, it is relevant to note that all problems listed were rated above 3 (middle value of the scale). Therefore, in aggregate terms, the respondents expressed agreement that these problems are all likely to be experienced if collabora-

tive governance processes are to be implemented in Portuguese local authorities.

The next multiple-choice table was focused on the potential benefits of collaborative governance in Portugal. It was constructed following exactly the same logic as that applied to the drawbacks, explained above. The results are shown in Table 3, where statements were also listed according to their level of agreement (higher to lower).

**Table 3: Participants’ perceptions about potential benefits of collaborative governance**

Statement Potential <b>benefits</b> resulting from collaborative governance	Mean value (agreement) 1: Totally disagree 3: Uncertain 5: Totally agree	Standard deviation	N Number of responses
Promotion of social capital among participants	3.94	1.00	63
Less abuse of power by political forces	3.78	1.08	63
Capture of private capital for the public interest	3.77	0.73	64
Greater flexibility in decision-making processes	3.70	0.75	64
Greater transparency in decision-making processes	3.68	0.97	62
Greater speed in decision-making processes	3.41	1.04	64

Once again – and similarly to what was shown in Table 2 – the results concerning benefits are all within the same range (between 3 and 4). This seems to indicate that respondents believe that collaborative governance is likely to promote a number of important benefits, but that this form of governance is also likely to be associated with relevant drawbacks. This, however, does not allow one to establish with confidence that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, or vice-versa. That would require further inquiries and would constitute a relevant avenue for future research (more on this overall topic in the next sub-section and in section 7).

In any case, the second precondition (as expressed in sub-section 3.2) establishing that the adoption of collaborative governance should only be done when it is safe for the public interest, remains inconclusive in general grounds. Therefore, only a case-by-case assessment can

lead to meaningful conclusions. Prudence is, nevertheless, always justified.

#### 5.4 Need for further research and a more developed legal framework

Regarding the need for further research on collaborative governance in Portugal, the respondents were presented with a Likert-type scale (from 1 meaning “Totally disagree” to 5 meaning “Totally agree”) to express their levels of agreement with possible future research directions. The summary of the results gathered is shown in Table 4. From the analysis of this table it becomes clear that the respondents would like to see further research on this topic. This is particularly the case on research dedicated to set up a legal framework aimed at making sure that collaborative governance processes serve the public interest.

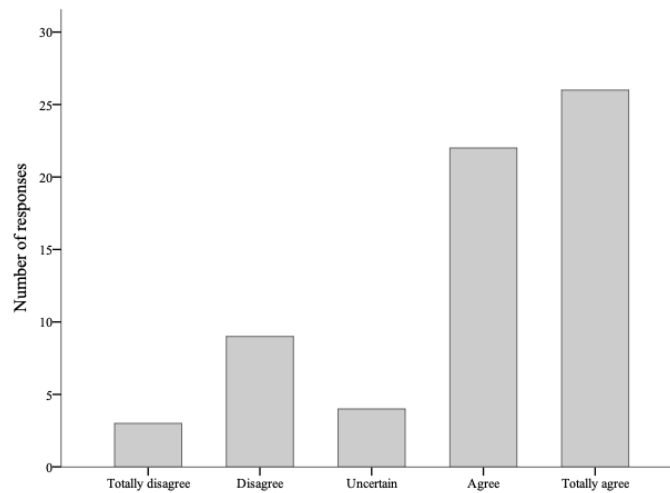
**Table 4: Participants’ perceptions about future research priorities**

Statement	Mean value (agreement) 1: Totally disagree 3: Uncertain 5: Totally agree	Standard deviation	N Number of responses
Research needs on collaborative governance in Portugal			
Research need: Definition of the legal framework needed so that collaborative governance is aligned with the public interest	4.25	0.68	60
Research need: Comparative analysis of the alternatives to collaborative governance	3.94	0.83	64
Research need: Identification of benefits and drawbacks of collaborative governance for the public interest	3.89	1.04	64

The participants generally agreed that the establishment of a more developed legal framework for collaborative governance in Portugal is needed. As shown in Figure 1, the vast majority of the 64 respondents who answered this particular question either “Agreed” (22 responden-

ts, 32.4% of the total) or “Totally agreed” (26 respondents, 38.2%) that this framework is needed. Note, however, that 12 respondents (17.6%) expressed their disagreement (that is, they either answered “Disagree” or “Totally disagree”) regarding this need.

**Figure 1: Participants’ perceptions regarding need to develop an enhanced legal framework**



The analysis of the qualitative input provided by the respondents offers some insights on why these results might have emerged. Somewhat emotional comments regarding the dangers of collaborative governance were offered, for example those presented below. The sentiments shown in these statements might contribute to explain why there is such a strong inclination towards creating a legal framework for collaborative governance processes.

*The problem of collaborative governance [in Portugal] is essentially rooted on the lack of political trust on political decision-makers and on public entities. [...] A large number of proposals are rejected just because the political decision-maker and his offspring [“prole”] does not see their egos fed by the projects. [...] The*

*political agenda in local authorities is very complex, petty and biased. It seeks short-term results and the personal promotion of the political decision-maker and votes. Collaborative governance requires a different kind of society... The local planning system in Portugal is feudal. Urban developer, 21 to 25 years of experience*

*Collaborative governance could be good, [...] however decision-makers lack common sense, ethics and responsibility... Political families are in fact family members, these people accumulate positions in all sorts of institutions: they are presidents and aldermen but also are in ONGs and are managers of municipal corporations while also work in or own private corporations... everything at the same time, all*

*mixed, and they end up acting as if they were owners of everything... This is the reality of Portugal. Therefore, I do not believe in collaborative governance here. I would like instead to see severe justice... and a severe attack on corruption.* Planner, 26 to 30 years of experience

In contrast to these views, and as already noted and shown in Figure 1, some respondents disagreed that collaborative governance should be subject to additional legal regulations. As argued by the following respondents, this can contribute to block even further the possibility to act in and develop local authority areas.

*Collaborative governance is a practice that I am aware of in some local authorities I know. [...] It is frequently conditioned by the existing legal framework and by the restrictions to their autonomy that have been put in place [...] Many possibilities of collaborative governance are limited by the mechanisms of centralized control imposed by the central government...* Academic / researcher, 16 to 20 years of experience

*What is needed is to simplify the existing legal framework, we need to reduce it to what is in fact essential. We also need to remove the frequent contradictions and arbitrariness [of the existing legal framework].* Planner, more than 40 years of experience

## 6. TRANSCENDING THE CREATIVITY BLOCK: AN APPEAL TO EXPLORATION

Before moving on to proposing a research agenda for collaborative governance in Portugal (which is considered to be the most relevant future research development by the respondents – see Table 4), it is important to note that perhaps too much attention has been dedicated to collaborative governance already. The importance of considering alternatives is in fact supported by the results of the survey. Indeed, the respondents rated quite high the relevance of exploring alternatives to it (see again Table 4). The purpose of this section is therefore to raise awareness about possible alternatives. There are two major alternatives that deserve much more attention than what they are currently receiving. These will be introduced now.

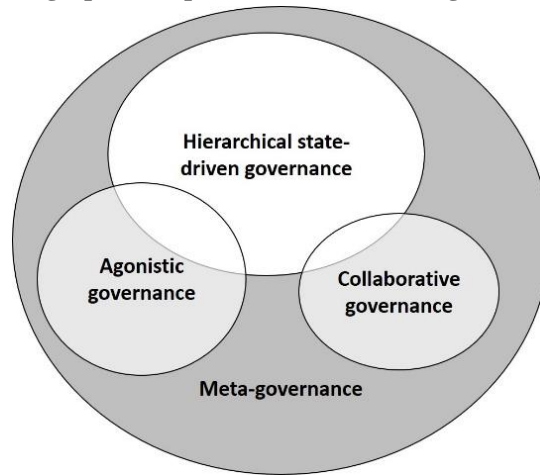
**Agonistic governance.** This is a form of governance where (at least some of) the stakeholders involved are antagonists, and so the governance process facilitates a range of interactions aimed at converting their incompatible

positions into agonistic ones. This means that the objective is not developing consensus or harmony through dialogue and/or cooperation, but instead humanising conflict while recognising the importance of tension and disagreement in society (on the importance of disorder and conflict for the promotion of a healthy society, see for example Sennett, 1970). This is a highly developed (even though not frequently used) line of thinking to a large extent based on the work of Mouffe (1999; 2005b; 2005a; 2013), who has inspired a range of influential authors (e.g. Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006; Hillier, 2003; Purcell, 2009; Allmendinger and Gunder, 2005). Taking into consideration more seriously and more frequently this line of thinking in governance studies could be very constructive, particularly in countries such as Portugal where stakeholders find it difficult to work collaboratively and conflict is common.

**Meta-governance.** This is proposed here for consideration following the ideas of Jessop (2002b; 2002a). It can be defined as a type of governance that articulates other forms of governance at different overlapping or separate levels and places. In Figure 2 this is represented through a diagram where we can see that hierarchical state-driven governance plays the major role, but where – when appropriate – collaborative and agonistic governance are also used. The partial overlaps between hierarchical state-driven governance, agonistic governance and collaborative governance were drawn to propose that these types of governance can happen simultaneously and in an orchestrated form.

Meta-governance is an invitation to creativity and polyrational thinking (Davy, 2008; Ferreira et al., 2009). It aims at accommodating different worldviews under the same umbrella framework (as previously done by authors such as Beck, 2006; Beck and Cowan, 2006; Douglas, 1989; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Ferreira, 2018), therefore recognising that there is some truth and value in all of them. The problem it raises, however, is how to actually orchestrate worldviews that might be incompatible among themselves. This asks for the development of a research agenda capable of tackling questions of that order of complexity, an effort that has already been initiated in issues concerning planning, management, and governance (see, for example, Ferreira, 2018; van Marrewijk, 2010). The outline of such research agenda is presented in the next section.

**Figure 2: A graphical representation of a meta-governance set-up**



### **7. SETTING UP A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR CONSIDERING COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN PORTUGAL**

In this article we have first critically approached the concept of collaborative governance. Then we tentatively explored some of the reasons why applying this type of governance in Portugal might be problematic. Implementing collaborative governance in Portugal is a risky project with the potential to lead to acceptability problems and drawbacks in many, but probably not in all, cases. These reflections were generally supported by the empirical data gathered through an online survey. However, it is important to recognise that there were respondents who saw positively this form of governance in the Portuguese context. Based on this, the key proposal we would like to offer is that one should explore what type of governance fits the best the situational characteristics in place (as discussed in the previous section). This is considered preferable to focus on how to make collaborative governance to work when considering the characteristics of the situation and/or of the stakeholders. This is also considered preferable to normatively proposing that collaborative governance is the best form of governance and so it should be applied in Portugal. It is therefore argued that narratives that see implementation barriers as obstacles to be removed have a tyrannical quality (Tewdwr-

Jones and Allmendinger, 1998) and should be seen as counterproductive.

The proposal made here is that the principle of requisite variety (Jessop, 2002b; 2002a) should be considered in Portugal (and in other countries in similar conditions). This would mean adopting collaborative governance in cases and places where its goals and practices can be welcomed, where there are institutional settings in place to make it happen effectively and constructively, and where there are no major vulnerabilities to neoliberal advancements (or to any other issues leading to the deterioration of the public interest). In circumstances where these conditions cannot be met, other forms of governance might enjoy higher acceptability, work best, and be safer. Doing this would mean that some form of meta-governance would be applied. This concept was introduced in previous section where an appeal to creativity was made. This serves to alert the readership that there are many more possibilities than the usually considered state-driven governance versus collaborative governance duality. There is also no need to think that adopting one necessarily means excluding others, as writings on planning inspired by critical realist theory note (Næss, 2015). Orchestrating them might be a more promising approach, and for that meta-governance would be recommended.

Note that meta-governance also raises a number of intriguing questions. These concern, for example, when, where, and why a given governance type should be adopted. It is clear

that a number of topics need to be considered and questions need to be answered to advance this line of thinking. A country like Portugal is therefore demanding for a research agenda considering the following topics listed below. This research agenda seems particularly necessary if a legal framework is to be produced in the near future to regulate the use of collaborative governance. Without this research agenda, such framework could have more detrimental effects than benefits – as alerted by some respondents.

**On *limits of governance capacity*.** What kind of methodologies should be used to determine when the structures and processes of hierarchical state-driven governance have to be improved? How should they be improved is the obvious subsequent question. Conversely, what kind of methodologies should be used to determine when the state should accept that the matters at stake transcend its capacity to deliver on its own and therefore collaborative governance (or any other form of governance) is the best way forward? How can these methodologies be sufficiently objective not to fall as prey of uncritical ideological biases?

**On *testing devices to determine whether a given governance type is suitable*.** What are the best devices to test that a certain governance type enjoys enough acceptability, is likely to be efficient and effective, and safe for the public interest? How to avoid ideological biases in the creation and particularly in the application of these devices?

**On *distinguishing between flexible and constricting legal frameworks applied to governance processes*.** In their comments, some respondents alerted that the tendency in the Portuguese context is to produce legal frameworks that are excessively deterministic. They tend to create conditions where action becomes nearly impossible as soon as the current case is not perfectly matched to the absurdly rigorous (yet typically rather arbitrary) specifications of the Portuguese law. It is therefore needed reflection on how to create legal frameworks that allow methodological and conceptual flexibility, but are still capable of increasing the probability of governance processes to serve the public interest.

**On *distinguishing constructive from non-constructive interpretations of different types of governance*.** How to distinguish in practice governance processes fundamentally aimed at empowering corporate or other powers against the public interest from well-intended

governance processes? Specifically, how can one distinguish hierarchical state-driven governance processes aimed at empowering further patriarchal political leaders from apparently similar processes but aimed at protecting the public interest? Similarly, how can one distinguish collaborative governance processes that are problematic for the public interest from those that are constructive when taking into consideration the possibility of hidden neoliberal agendas as those identified by Mirowski (2013)?

**On *promoting the transparency of governance processes*.** A number of respondents expressed their concerns regarding the possibility of corruption at local authority level being augmented if collaborative governance is promoted. Some added that there is the need to make collaborative governance processes more transparent so that effective public scrutiny can be attained. This raises some important questions: how can transparency and scrutiny be achieved without undermining the private setting sometimes needed for some negotiations to be successful? When and how should the agreements made within collaborative processes be made public?

**On *protecting governance processes from damaging take-overs*.** How can well-intended governance processes be designed and managed to prevent them from being taken-over by neoliberal stakeholders aimed at reinforcing their powers against the state and the public interest? Similarly, how can citizen initiatives be prevented from being dismantled by state interventionism that *crowds out* social capital?

**On *orchestrating different types of governance on meta-governance processes*.** How can meta-governance processes that orchestrate more than one governance type be conducted so that they do not cancel each other out? Which criteria should be used to determine which governance types should be used where, with whom, and for which purposes? Should they be used simultaneously or sequentially?

**On *governance transfer and generalisation*.** To which extent are the answers to these questions dependent on local and institutional context, that is, are they the same for all institutions and places (e.g. Lisbon versus Porto, large urban centres versus medium and small centres, local authorities versus central government) or will they require substantially different answers and methodological approaches?

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We are well aware that this article has produced more questions than answers. That might be its key merit because there are reasons to be concerned with the social, economic and environmental conditions being experienced in Portugal. Indeed, the wave of forest fires that took the lives of more than one hundred people in the Summer of 2017 came across to the public as a major governance failure, casting a dark cloud over Portugal. Witnessing either academics or practitioners uncritically defending collaborative governance principles in such country is a reason for concern. Therefore, *we do want* to raise questions so that new and exciting possibilities can be explored, or so that state structures and processes can be improved instead of becoming crystallised by ideology. Note that we are not willing to dismiss collaborative governance as a matter of principle, as we accept that in some settings that might be the best approach

to adopt. But we would like to use this opportunity to make a strong case against normative views that see collaborative governance as morally, technically, and democratically superior to other forms of governance, particularly state-driven governance.

We do believe that the advocacy of collaborative governance is being done by their supporters with constructive intentions, however we also believe that more scepticism and curiosity about alternatives would be beneficial. We would therefore like to invite those involved in policy studies in Portugal (and elsewhere) to join the effort of asking how can we constructively use the idea of governance as something that should raise curiosity (and not normative fervour). And doing this in ways that *indeed* lead to more social capital, public engagement, sustainable development, economic stability, and without assuming that normative views on such delicate and complex matters are adequate.

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