

Traveling into the *[future]*

Sustainable Tourism Pilot Project developed
in Laciana (León) in 2024

Model for community development of sustainable tourism strategies

Travelling into the *[future]* is an initiative that aims to foster communal development of strategies for sustainable tourism in Spain.

Starting from an initial pilot project developed in **Laciana (León)**, we have generated a transferable model that aims to serve the promotion of a new way of making policies when it comes to tourism.

This document contains a typical **process** and a series of **learnings** that can serve as a basis for the development of strategies that aim to transform the tourism sector from and for the local level, a type of tourism that is governed by the community itself and that seeks the generation and distribution of local wealth.

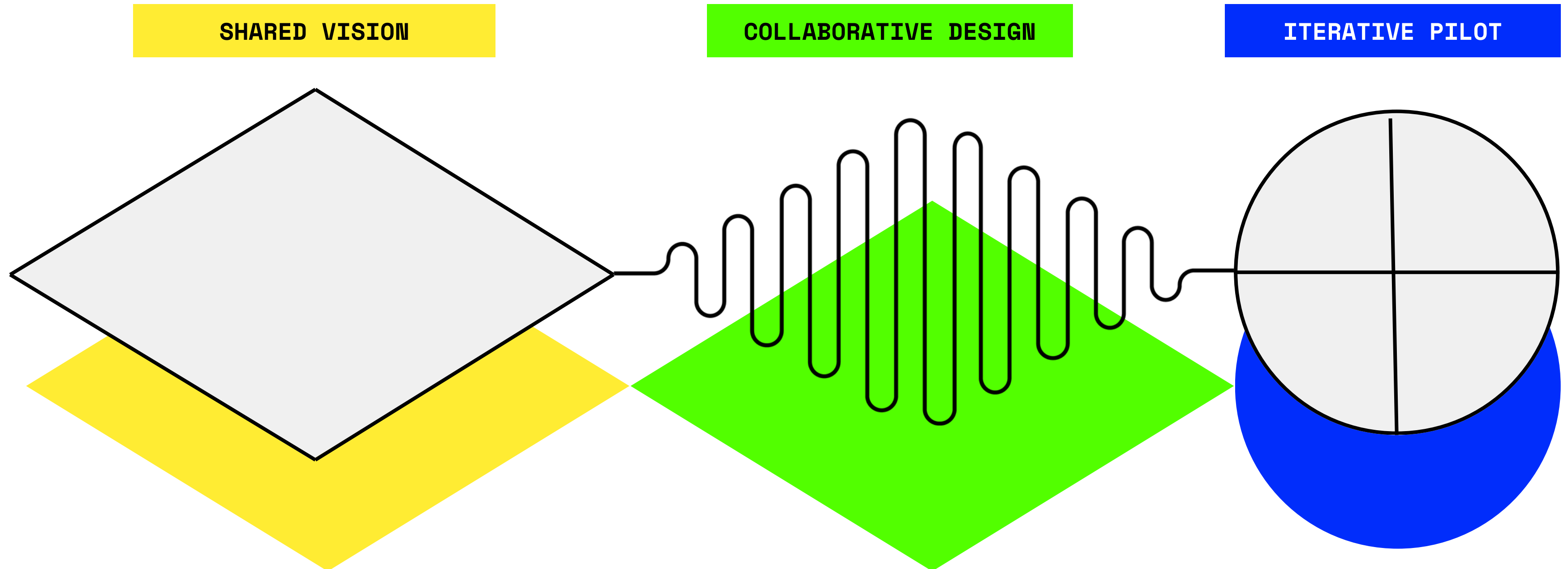
The growth-oriented mentality of the tourism industry, based solely on **macroeconomic indicators**, is what prevents destinations from moving towards sustainable practices. This pilot programme aims to demonstrate that another way of developing tourism is possible. How? By **giving control to the local population** and **avoiding harmful phenomena** such as economic extractivism, overexploitation, loss of local identity, environmental damage, seasonality or job insecurity. Responsible and sustainable tourism can and should begin by **recognising and addressing the needs** of the communities that live in the touristic places, that is, it must be based on a balanced management of the needs of **visitors, residents, the environment** and the **economy**.

Without the participation of residents and local communities, it is difficult to achieve a paradigm shift.

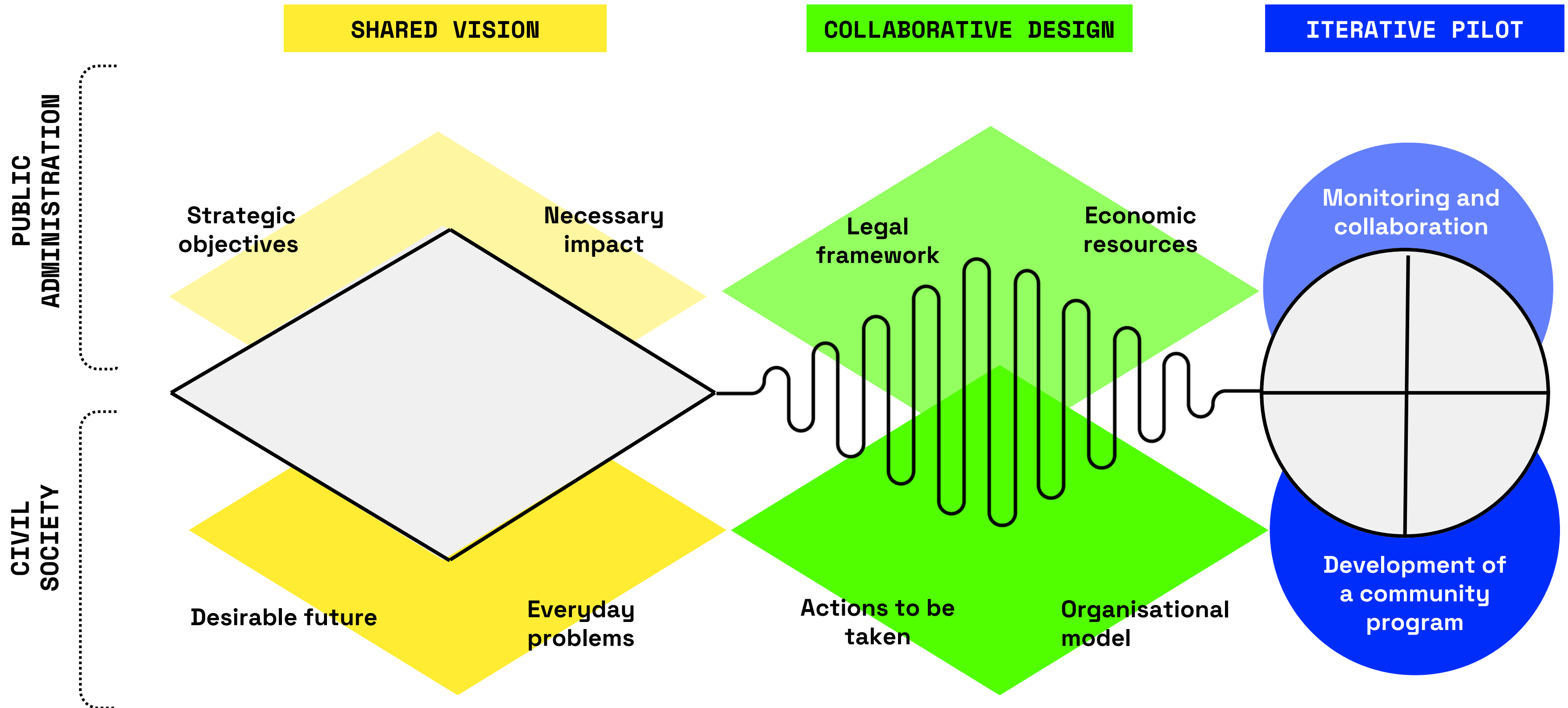
**The future of
tourism will be
sustainable and
local or it will
not be at all.**

The process

Three consecutive steps that serve to implement national-scale environmental policies locally.
A public-communal collaboration process to design and implement sustainable tourism strategies.
A model for creating public policies that puts the local community at the centre.



Public-communal cooperation: different roles and contributions



SHARED VISION

Before designing specific strategies and actions, it is necessary to generate a shared vision of the problem to be solved and the desired impact expected.

This is usually a space reserved for administrations (especially supra-municipal ones) but local citizens also can and should contribute in this phase of work. It is about combining the strategic objectives and the desired results of the administrations (which look after the general interest) with the future aspirations and daily problems of local citizens.

NECESSARY IMPACT

Work with the administrations involved to assign some tangible results to the project, and thus ensure their involvement and participation in the development of the following phases.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

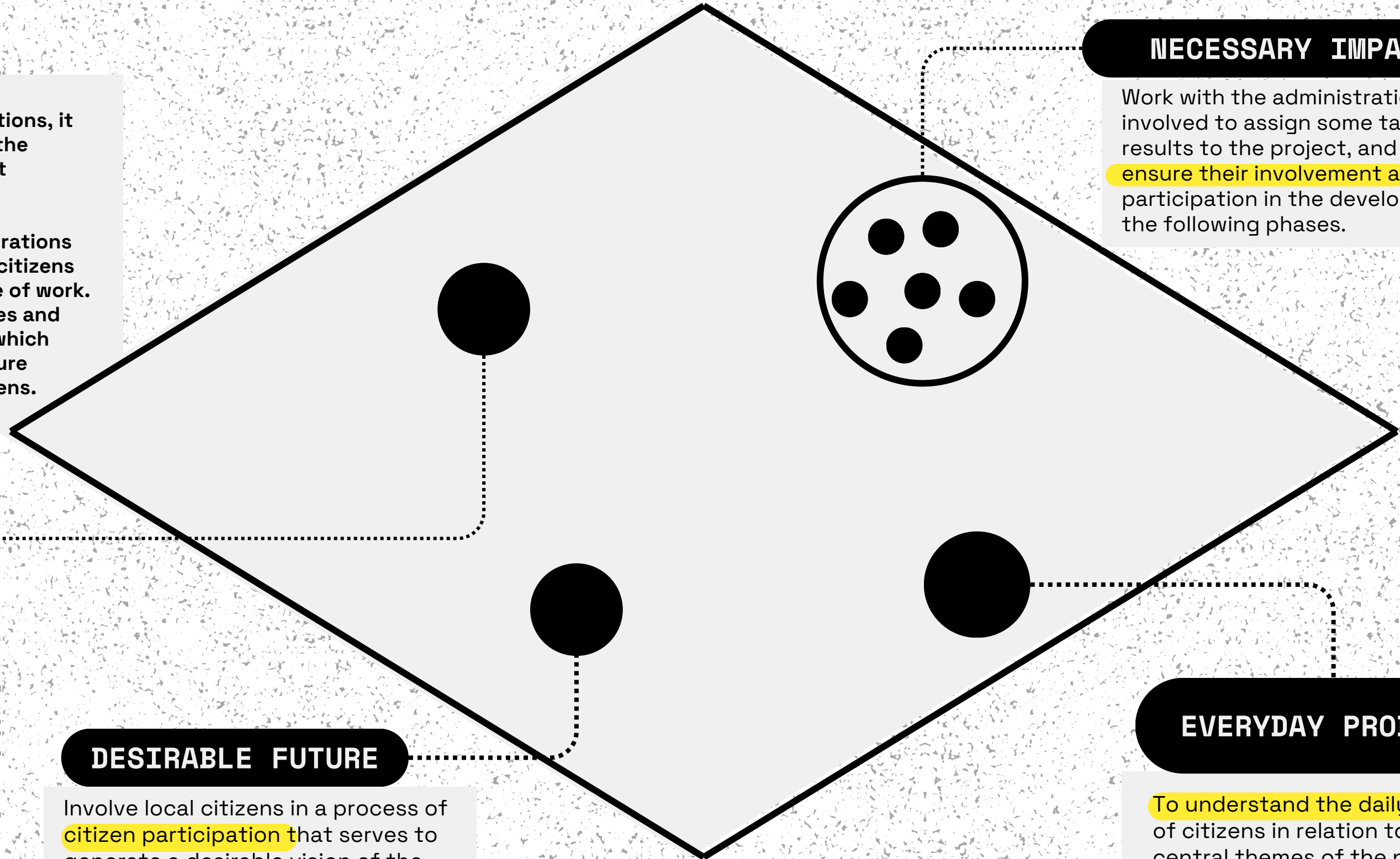
Examine the different guidelines, policies and plans of various scales –community, state, territorial- and extract their sustainability criteria and the objectives to which the project must respond

DESIRABLE FUTURE

Involve local citizens in a process of citizen participation that serves to generate a desirable vision of the future for the territory. What would we like our town to be like in the future? What would be the role of tourism in this future scenario? How did we get there? These ideas are a beacon for the following phases of work.

EVERYDAY PROBLEMS

To understand the daily reality of citizens in relation to the central themes of the project. Through interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, etc., to identify the limitations, constraints and potential for the future project.



About participation

Participation is a polysemic term that has different meanings and its proper implementation depends largely on the political, institutional and historical context. If we understand participation as a relationship between public institutions, citizens and society as a whole, strengthening this relationship produces benefits for all parties, such as: an improvement in the quality of policies, plans and projects; innovation in processes and results; increased mutual trust; and ultimately, the generation of a participatory culture.

Conditions for public-communal cooperation

Constructive relations of dialogue and consensus between the administration and citizens should be developed following the principles of involvement, trust, transparency and independence. This requires a series of conditions and guarantees for all parties involved.



Public administration

- It must recognise the autonomous capacity of citizens to discuss and propose alternatives.
- It must share the preparation of the agenda and commit to considering the proposals developed jointly.
- It must have favorable legislation, clear and precise procedures.
- It must provide long-term support and resources to ensure a sustainable civil society, with spaces for dialogue and cooperation.



Citizenship

- It must assume great responsibility in order to improve its participation in the development of public policies.
- It is necessary to start from a minimum of participatory culture that implies good public activity.

Participation process

- They must be open and accessible.
- They must be based on agreed and known participation parameters.

COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

Designing and agreeing on public policies to promote sustainable tourism between the administration and the local community is possible. To do so, it is essential to assign different roles to each party and to organize the content to be defined in different spaces and moments of work.

Once the challenge to be addressed has been defined, the local community itself is responsible for imagining and specifying the lines of work and actions that should be implemented, while the role of the public administration will be to provide legal security to the project and provide it with financial resources.

DEFINE THE CHALLENGE TO BE ADDRESSED

The shared vision leads to the definition of a specific challenge to be addressed. This challenge must be formulated in a **concrete manner**, considering: the problem to be solved; the expected result; limitations and conditions; the audience/s; and the relationship with the previously defined strategic objectives.

DESIGN THE PROGRAM COLLABORATIVELY

A **citizen driving group**, voluntary and representative of the different sensitivities and diverse links with tourism that exist in the territory, is responsible for designing the strategic lines and actions to be carried out.

Supported by a **facilitating team** and with the commitment of financial support from the Administration, the driving group is the one who, through different work sessions, defines the program that will be implemented in the future.

The collaborative design process led by citizens must be fueled by expert views on the subject matter, which help in the task of shaping actions. It is important that the public administration validates the content that is agreed upon in this space.

A **possible way to work** in three steps could be the following:

- Define the WHATs: during a first session, the actions necessary to achieve the set objectives are defined.
- Defining with HOWs: The second session is dedicated to the design of the governance model that the pilot will adopt, considering: actors, commitment, coordination spaces, decision-making, resource management and transparency system.
- The third session is used to plan and schedule the actions to be carried out in the implementation of the project: structured work schedule; phases; milestones; etc.

GENERATE A TANGIBLE TOOL

The collaborative design process must result in a clear and actionable tool. This is intended to **strengthen and provide** security to the entire process, guaranteeing its implementation. The final program must be validated by all parties involved.

The project definition must consider aspects such as:

- Legal-administrative framework of the project
- Provision of financial resources
- Definition of objectives, expected results (KPIs), recipients, lines and work actions, governance model, schedule, etc.
- Release date and closure
- Continuous and evolutionary evaluation system: periodic collection and listening, collective interpretation and co-creation of a portfolio of experimentation in real time

Keys to designing participatory processes

When we talk about a “participatory process” we refer to a sum of participatory moments and actions (workshops, group dynamics, meetings, interactive exhibitions, forums or virtual work groups, creative interventions, etc.) related to the participation of different agents or representative people to provide different perspectives or visions in relation to a topic or problem on which a decision is to be made.

3 NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP PROPERLY

Communication and information

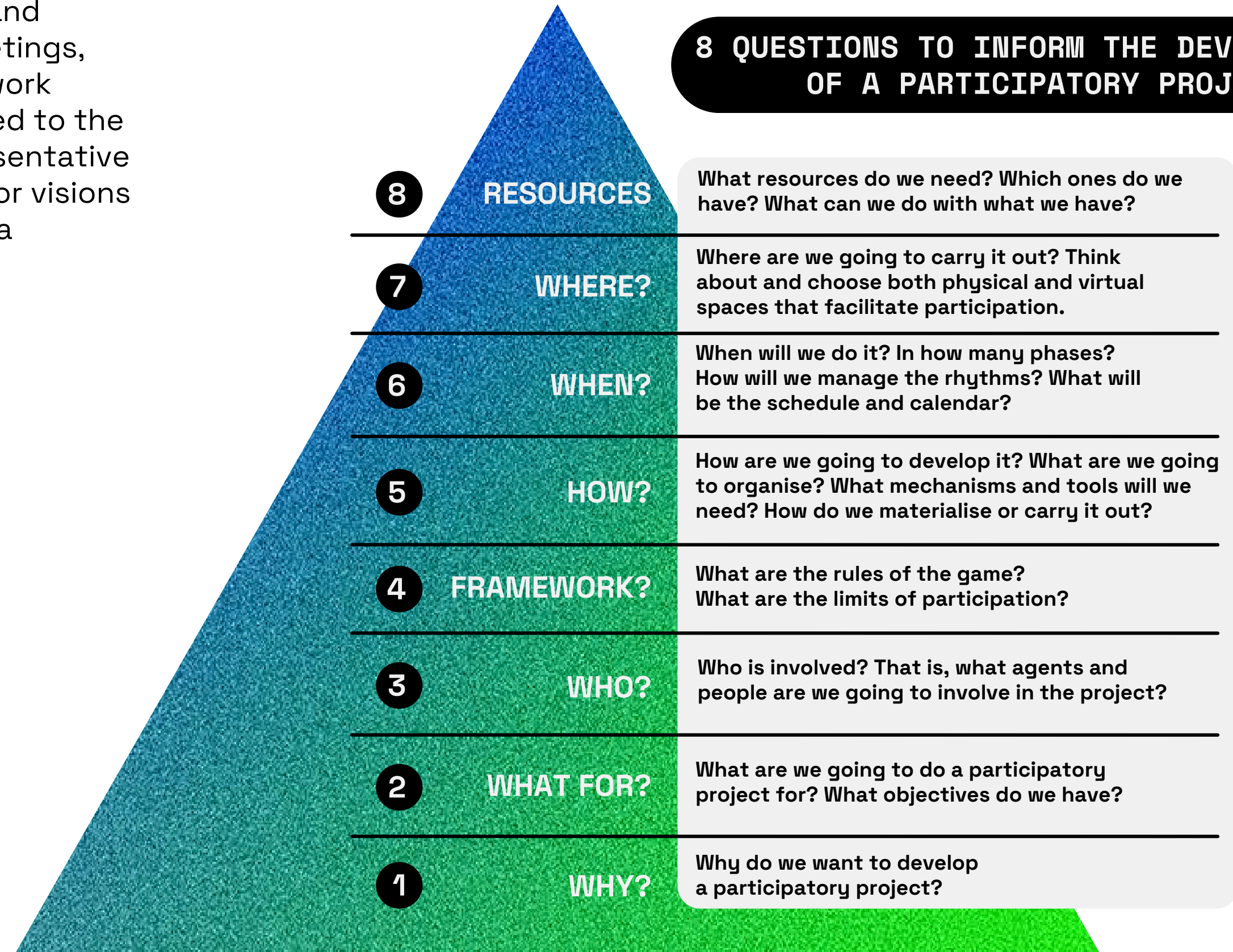
- What do we need to communicate and to whom? What channels and formats are we going to use in communication?

Continuity and evaluation

- How are we going to evaluate the process and the actions we carry out?
- What participation indicators are we going to focus on?

Commitment

- What are the commitments of those responsible? And of the people and entities involved? To whom, and how will the results be communicated during the process? How will we monitor the process? With whom?



The learnings



Rural ≠ Rural

Every rural area has its own particularities; don't take anything for granted just because it's a town far from the city.

As a general rule, rural areas are treated as a homogeneous whole with a certain type of common problems. However, reality tells us the opposite. Therefore, to undertake transformation projects, we must analyse the context and adapt to it, without taking anything for granted.



Sustainability = the same old thing

Circularity, resource use and other concepts linked to sustainability are practices that have never disappeared from everyday life in these territories.

The concept of sustainability in rural areas is, on many occasions, what has been done all our lives or what is done out of common sense. Practices such as food sovereignty and energy self-sufficiency, agroecology, the efficient use of resources, the repair and extension of the life cycles of goods, the care and maintenance of local techniques and knowledge, participatory governance of communal goods and other sustainable practices are almost inherent to the rural context. Therefore, there is nothing more sustainable than protecting and respecting the ways of doing, producing and consuming resources that local people have been practising generation after generation, without imposing generalist measures and criteria designed for urban and industrialised environments.



Social innovation is a luxury

It requires knowledge, time and economic resources that are scarce in these territories.

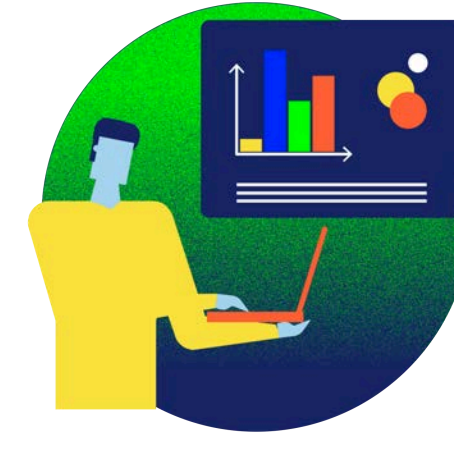
Governments and local communities are short of resources and time, so they appreciate any external help that can be provided. To get their involvement in these projects, it is important to build mutual trust, connect with their lines of work, be flexible with our expectations and work towards tangible objectives.



The local team: essential

The connection with the local community and knowledge of it are essential to carry out a project like this.

Even if the technical or academic knowledge to carry out the project comes from outside, having a local person on the team will make it much easier to achieve success. It helps to generate trust and co-responsibility, provides local wisdom and can be key when it comes to adapting the work to the particularities of that area.



Small innovations = big advances

Implementing data analysis for strategic decision-making in rural areas is already an important paradigm shift.

Changes in the social sphere or in the economic fabric often occur without prior planning, especially if they do not require much infrastructure to be implemented, as is the case with tourism. Introducing logic to establish quantifiable objectives, warn of possible problems and anticipate negative impacts is already an important step forward.



Tourism is a context, not a sector

The lines separating economic sectors in rural areas are very blurred

Therefore, the best way to approach changes or innovations is from an intersectional perspective: not working alone and for the agents of the economic sector, but also involving the cultural, educational, etc. community. Only by listening to all voices and taking into account all points of view will it be possible to create effective strategies to address the challenges posed by tourism in the territory.