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Collective Declaration for Digital Citizen Sovereignty

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Key pillars of Digital Citizen Sovereignty:

- **TRANSPARENCY:** open, accessible, comparable, verifiable, and non-manipulated information
- **DIGITAL LIFE:** it's not about technology, it's about people's lives
- **DATA:** from "having" data to controlling it
- **AGENCY:** beyond "users" toward digital citizenship
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Collective Declaration for Digital Citizen Sovereignty

01

Collective Declaration of **Citizen Digital Sovereignty**



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- 1 Everyone has the right to free digital education in order to use technology in a responsible and critical way.
- 2 Every person should be able to access, use, and control the technology necessary to participate in today's society.
- 3 Technology should be designed with human needs in mind, respecting rights and cultural diversity.
- 4 Establish institutional mechanisms for citizen participation in public technological policy decisions.
- 5 Technology should be developed in an open manner so that it can be adapted, improved, and reused.
- 6 Develop regulations that guarantee access to public information while protecting personal data and privacy.
- 7 Create flexible technological legislation with agile update mechanisms that protect fundamental rights.
- 8 Citizens should be able to actively participate in decisions about the development and use of technology.
- 9 Update the legal framework to ensure the protection of citizens' rights in physical-digital environments.
- 10 Technological development should be oriented toward the common good and the generation of shared social value.



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The Path Toward a Collective Declaration for Digital Citizen Sovereignty

02

Why It Is Necessary to Talk About Digital Citizen Sovereignty Today

For 25 years, Fundación Cibervoluntarios has been working to help thousands of people turn technology into a tool for transforming their lives. This is what technological appropriation means: moving from being passive beneficiaries to becoming active protagonists. Because appropriating the digital world is not just about learning how to use a tool—it is about participating, contributing ideas, communicating, defending your rights, and accessing new opportunities. In short, it is about empowerment.

Over all these years, one key idea has become clear: **being connected is not enough.** Having access to the Internet or knowing how to use a smartphone is not sufficient if, at the same time, citizens **cannot make decisions, do not understand** how technology works, and have no voice in shaping the rules of the digital world. Fundación Cibervoluntarios leads the process of the **Collective Declaration for Digital Citizen Sovereignty, a collaborative effort that has involved the active participation of more than 500 people from different countries, professions, and levels of digital knowledge.** Through this open and plural dialogue, **ten core principles** have been defined, establishing a shared starting point to continue moving forward and strengthening our rights online. These principles are rooted in the experience, knowledge, and commitment of all those who have contributed to building a shared vision of the role of citizens in the digital environment.

There is a clear need to raise our voices collectively and to promote a framework that puts people at the center of the digital ecosystem.

The Declaration highlights the importance of **strengthening our place on the Internet** and **collectively building the foundations of digital citizen sovereignty**—one that guarantees our opportunities, freedoms, and rights. This goal can only be achieved if we continue to build commitment, reflection, and shared knowledge, recognizing that every person can contribute from their own experience to move toward a fairer, more inclusive Internet that truly serves society.

This is where the process begins: the creation of a **Collective Declaration for Digital Citizen Sovereignty (CDDC)**. Its goal is simple to state, yet ambitious to achieve: **to ensure that technology is conceived, designed, and used with people and their rights at its core.**

This process brings together the journey taken so far, the methodologies used, and—above all—**the shared learnings and principles** that have made it possible to reach a Declaration that is not just another theoretical text, but a **lever for collective transformation.**

Beyond digital inclusion: digital sovereignty

For years, the focus was on closing the basic digital divide:

- Who has access to the internet?
- Who knows how to use a computer or a smartphone?
- Who can complete an online administrative procedure?

Today, however, the challenge goes much further. The digital environment is the space where key decisions are made:

- **Which technologies are developed**
- **For what purposes**
- **What data is collected and how it is used**
- **What rules shape the relationship between citizens, governments, and companies**

People are not just “users”: we are rights holders in the digital environment

In this context, **Digital Citizen Sovereignty** emerges as a response to three underlying structural challenges:

- 1. The concentration of technological power** in the hands of a small number of global actors.
- 2. The lack of transparency** around data use and the functioning of algorithms and digital platforms.
- 3. The growing asymmetry** between the knowledge and decision-making power of these actors and that of the broader public.

The Collective Declaration aims to go one step further: not only to reduce digital divides, but to redistribute power, strengthen rights, and open up real spaces for participation in the design of the digital ecosystem.

Toward the Collective Declaration in Four Steps

The study underpinning this Declaration was designed with a clear premise:

If we are talking about Digital Citizen Sovereignty, the process itself must also be sovereign and citizen-driven.

That is why the approach combines **qualitative and quantitative** methodologies, with an **iterative, multi-stakeholder** perspective and a strong emphasis on **co-creation**. It is an open, rigorous, and participatory process structured around four main steps:

4. **Qualitative–quantitative sampling**
5. **Co-creation sessions**
6. **Facilitated synthesis and the construction of shared meaning**
7. **Collective selection of the principles of the Declaration**

All of this took place within the framework of **EmpoderaLIVE 2025**, now established as a benchmark event in civic technology, leading the debate on how to guarantee our rights in the digital age. Throughout the process, there has been ongoing dialogue with experts, citizens, tech volunteers, social organisations, public administrations, companies, and academia.

Step 1 / Listening Before Defining: Qualitative–Quantitative Sampling

Before collectively defining “Digital Citizen Sovereignty,” it was essential to listen to all participants. To do so, a **questionnaire** was designed as the initial research tool, making it possible to gather both:

- **Quantitative data:** perceptions, priorities, and levels of concern
- **Qualitative data:** fears, expectations, proposals, and concrete examples

The work was carried out with **three distinct groups**:

1. **Speakers from several editions of EmpoderaLIVE**

Experts with a global track record in key fields such as digital rights, data governance, artificial intelligence, citizen participation, philosophy, journalism, digital activism, ethical hacking, open-source software, and social innovation, among others.

Objective: to build a shared theoretical framework around Digital Citizen Sovereignty (DCS).

2. **EmpoderaLIVE** participants

Profiles familiar with the work of Fundación Cibervoluntarios and actively engaged with technology as a tool for social change.

Objective: to connect the theoretical framework with practical experience and the real-world use of digital tools.

3. **Spanish citizens**

People with a wide range of everyday experiences related to technology, including the use of digital public services, social media, apps, and online content.

Objective: to incorporate a plural and inclusive voice, beyond expert environments.

Although the emphasis and language varied depending on the group, all research instruments shared the same underlying idea: **this was not only about “defining” Digital Citizen Sovereignty, but about translating it into concrete practices, priorities, and training needs.**

Step 2 / Co-creating the Concept: Participatory Sessions and Structured Debate

Building on the sampling results, the process moved into a second phase: **collectively shaping the meaning** of Digital Citizen Sovereignty and exploring what it means in practice.

Two types of sessions were organised:

- **Digital Citizen Sovereignty as a multidimensional concept**

The **World Café** format was used, a widely recognised methodology for collective intelligence processes. **The session was structured around five thematic axes, which became the pillars of the analysis:**

4. **Transparency**
5. **Digital life**
6. **Data**
7. **Agency**
8. **Equality of opportunity**

Each table brought together a diverse mix of participants:

- One expert speaker
- One facilitator
- Two citizen representatives
- One public administration representative
- One academic

Every 20 minutes, participants moved to a different table, connecting debates and bringing different perspectives together. The outcome was a rich map of **barriers, solutions, and key stakeholders for each axis.**

- **Trustworthy AI: preventing AI from overshadowing the broader debate**

Public debate around technology is currently dominated by **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**. To ensure that AI **did not overshadow the wider** reflection on Digital Citizen Sovereignty, a dedicated space was designed to focus specifically on building **trustworthy AI** from a European perspective, while remaining **distinct** from the broader SDC discussion.

**AI can only be considered trustworthy if it puts people first—
not innovation at any cost.**

An adapted version of the **Q-sort** methodology was used, applied across four institutional scenarios:

- **Public administration**
- **Civil society**
- **Companies**
- **Academia**

Within each setting, arguments were analysed across three **ELSA** dimensions:

- **Ethical** (responsibility, fairness, human agency)
- **Legal** (*obligations, safeguards*)
- **Social** (inclusion, accessibility, distributive effects)

Participants were asked to prioritise the arguments, identifying which were **essential**, which were **important**, and which were **neutral or even counterproductive**. This made it possible to clearly identify **areas of consensus as well as points of tension.**

Step 3 / Turning Many Voices into a Shared Narrative

Following the co-creation sessions, a key phase began: **facilitated synthesis**. This was not simply about “summarising” what had taken place, but about:

- **Bringing into dialogue** the outcomes of the thematic tables (digital life, transparency, data, agency, equality) with the results of the trustworthy AI exercise.
- **Identifying cross-cutting patterns**, areas of agreement, and points of tension.
- **Transforming dispersed ideas** into a coherent set of principles.

To achieve this, the full facilitation team came together in a “**collective sensemaking**” session. Their role was not only technical, but also interpretative: reading interactions, capturing nuances, and ensuring that complexity was not lost.

The outcome was the identification of nine major shared elements, which were later developed into ten principles—or “recitals”—of the Collective Declaration. This step was essential to ensure that the Declaration:

- **Truly reflects what emerged during the co-creation process.**
- Has a **clear and communicative structure** capable of reaching diverse audiences.
- Preserves the **participatory legitimacy** of its origins.

Step 4 / A Truly Collective Declaration: Public Selection

Once the ten principles of the Declaration had been drafted, a new phase began: **testing them with the community itself**.

Three versions of the same principles were presented, with differences in language and emphasis tailored to:

- **Citizens**
- **Academia**
- **Government**

Participants at **EmpoderaLIVE 2025** were invited to vote and select the formulations they found most appropriate, clear, and motivating. Average participation was **46 people**, which made it possible to:

- Compare how the same principles are interpreted from different perspectives.
- Identify **discursive tensions** between more technical, more political, and more citizen-oriented language.

- Ensure that the final text of the Declaration reflects a **collective preference**, not just the voice of the drafting team.

The Collective Declaration for DCS presented here is the result of this deliberative process: a combination of conceptual rigour, diversity of perspectives, and democratic selection.

Results of a Collective Co-creation Effort

Key Insights from the Five Thematic Pillars of Digital Citizen Sovereignty

1. TRANSPARENCY

Open, accessible, comparable, verifiable, and non-manipulated information

Transparency is perceived as something that **is felt more through its absence than its presence**. It is commonly associated with:

- Clarity
- Traceability
- The transfer of information

However, the debate also highlighted a key tension:

How far can transparency go without putting people's privacy at risk?

Barriers identified

- Political and economic interests that hinder openness.
- Difficulties in verifying information.
- Lack of knowledge to understand legal texts and terms of use.
- Inaccessible language and the use of "dark patterns" in platform design.

Proposed solutions

- Digital literacy and education as a foundation.
- Clear regulatory frameworks that enforce transparency.
- Access to open, verifiable, comparable, and non-manipulated information.
- The creation of ethics committees and mechanisms that allow technical teams to flag risks.

Key stakeholders: governments, technology companies, citizens, the education community, the media, and developers.

2. DIGITAL LIFE

It's not about technology, it's about people's lives

Participants agreed that digital life is not a separate layer, but an inseparable part of everyday life.

There is broad consensus that digital life is “everywhere”—that it is “life lived through devices”—and that almost all aspects of life now pass through the digital realm, even though people do not feel they have full control over that space.

“You don't break it—the phone is my life” This phrase was repeatedly used as a symbol of that fusion. **Defining what “digital life” is feels relatively easy. Defining what a “non-digital life” would be is far more difficult.**

Barriers identified

- The absence of clearly defined rights in online spaces.
- The speed of technological change versus the slow pace of regulation.
- A **generational gap** in knowledge and usage.
- Lack of control over who knows what, who decides what, and how our data is used.
- Growing distrust resulting from this lack of control.

Proposed solutions

- More education in digital skills for all ages.
- Reducing the generational gap in the use of technology.
- Regulatory frameworks that provide real security and protection.
- Safe spaces to store and manage personal information.

Key stakeholders: Among younger people, private companies are seen as the main actors; among older people, governments and public institutions play a central role. This difference in perception is particularly relevant for advocacy and policy strategies.

3. DATA: from “owning” to “controlling”

One of the most powerful discussions focused on data. The shared conclusion can be summed up as follows:

Data ownership matters less than the real control people have over their data.

Two main types of data were identified:

- **Personal data consciously provided by individuals.**
- **Behavioural data** generated through online activity (clicks, usage time, movements, etc.).

The discussion also highlighted the importance of considering:

- Cultural factors and worldviews.
- The distinction between **privacy** and **intimacy**.

Barriers identified

- Data monopolies held by major digital platforms.
- The difficulty of **revoking access** once data has been shared.
- Lack of traceability: people do not know where their data is or how it is being used.
- Inconsistencies between technical standards and legal frameworks.
- The vulnerability of individuals in relation to actors that simultaneously define standards and policies.

Proposed solutions

- **Decentralisation of data systems.**
- **Interoperability** and open, shared protocols.
- Public access to infrastructure and open data spaces.
- Holistic data education: what data is, how it is used, and the risks it entails.
- Traceability as a prerequisite for accountability.

Key stakeholders

- The **European Union and local authorities** as key actors in breaking data monopolies.
- Major platforms (Google, Meta, Amazon, etc.) as actors with structural power.
- **Academia** as a space capable of driving regulatory **coherence and fairer standards**.

4. AGENCY

From “users” to digital citizenship

Agency refers to people’s real ability to make informed decisions and retain room for manoeuvre in the digital environment. It is associated with:

- Extending the same rights that exist in the physical world into the digital space.
- Being able to accept or reject terms of use.
- Choosing between platforms.
- Moving from one service to another without losing everything.

Agency is closely linked to **democracy, privacy, freedom of expression, and collective responsibility**. **If technology makes decisions for us, there can be no full citizenship.**

Barriers identified

- Lack of education in:
 - Critical thinking
 - Basic legal knowledge
- How algorithms work.
- Insufficient public investment in infrastructure and training.
- Lack of diversity among those who design and govern technologies.
- Absence of accessible open data.

Proposed solutions

- **Simplifying and making platform terms of use** more flexible.
- Strengthening education that combines technical skills with ethics and critical thinking.
- Promoting free software, **open source**, and **open data**.
- Creating public AI infrastructures and shared digital spaces.
- Shifting perspectives: from passive “users” to political actors in the digital environment.

Key stakeholders: governments, companies, citizens, and educational institutions working together at local, regional, national, and international levels.

5. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Not a matter of justice, but of equity

When equal opportunities in the digital environment are discussed, the focus often turns to:

- **Access to technology and information.**
- **Equal rights**, including the right to be forgotten.
- Recognition of highly diverse social, historical, and cultural contexts.

Barriers identified

- Educational and knowledge inequalities.
- Gender, racial, and other biases embedded in algorithms and systems.
- The rapid pace of technological change, which leaves many people behind.
- Complex, unintuitive, and exclusionary interfaces.

Proposed solutions

- **Critical digital literacy** for the entire population, without age-based bias.
- Avoiding training approaches that focus only on “target groups” instead of society as a whole.
- Designing **technological alternatives adapted** to diverse needs: disability, rural contexts, educational levels, and more.

Key stakeholders: Schools, third-sector organisations, major technology companies, and public administrations share responsibility for reducing inequalities.

The divide is no longer only about access, but about power and decision-making capacity.

What Citizens Tell Us About Trustworthy AI

The Q-sort exercise on **trustworthy AI** points to three main conclusions:

1. A pragmatic consensus in favour of innovation

- Innovation is seen as essential, particularly in the business sector.
- Ethical and legal safeguards are accepted as long as **they are not perceived as excessive barriers** to technological adoption or as empty bureaucracy.

2. Citizens want tangible protections, not just broad legal frameworks

- Concrete measures are valued, such as **the labelling of AI-generated or AI-modified content**.
- There is particular concern about reducing **digital divides** and ensuring real access and understanding.
- A certain level of distrust towards institutions emerges when they are

not perceived as capable of enforcing the rules.

3. Academia reflects diverse agendas

- Some prioritise **algorithmic justice** (avoiding bias and discrimination).
- Others focus on **user transfer** and practical usefulness.
- Others place greater emphasis on **promoting innovation**.
- The risk-based approach raises mixed views: it is seen as useful, but also as potentially restrictive for research.

From an **ELSA** perspective, **ethical and social** dimensions clearly emerge as priorities, while the legal dimension is accepted when it **enables** action and questioned when it merely adds complexity.

Shared Elements Underpinning the Collective Declaration

From the overall synthesis process, **nine shared elements** emerged, later transformed into the **ten principles** of the Collective Declaration. Presented in communicative terms, these elements are:

1. Education and knowledge

- Not only technical training, but also values, ethics, critical thinking, and an understanding of rights.

2. Access and adaptability for all

- Technologies and content that are accessible, understandable, and adapted to diverse contexts and cultures.

3. Questioning technological determinism

- Technology cannot be framed as inevitable.
- We must recover the question of what makes us human and which decisions should not be delegated to machines.

4. Co-governance and connection between actors

- Governments, companies, academia, and civil society must collaborate.
- There can be no citizen sovereignty **without real spaces for participation**.

5. Open, shared, and transparent information

- The open movement (open data, open source, open access) as a foundation for accountability.

6. Decentralisation and institutional accountability

- Avoiding concentrations of technological power.
- Ensuring that institutions assume their responsibilities at all levels.

7. **Ethics as a cross-cutting principle**

- Not as a final add-on, but as a guiding thread in every decision related to the design, use, and regulation of technology.

8. **Balancing individual and collective interests**

- Recognising individual rights while also safeguarding the common good in the digital environment.

9. **Continuity between physical and digital spaces**

- Understanding online and offline worlds not as separate realities, but as interconnected spaces.

From the combination and expansion of these points, a tenth principle emerges, centred on active participation and shared responsibility:

Digital sovereignty is not a state, but a process that requires ongoing commitment and collective action.

Next Steps: Toward Concrete Roadmaps

Building on the Declaration, Fundación Cibervoluntarios commits to developing **specific roadmaps** for each line of action, including:

- Concrete actions
- Strategic partnerships (“travel companions”)
- Monitoring and evaluation indicators

This process will be supported by three methodological pillars:

1. **People-centred approach (User-Centric Approach, UCA)**

- Understanding users’ needs, goals, and contexts.
- Involving them at every stage: design, implementation, and evaluation.

2. **Quadruple Helix Collaboration (QHC)**

- Structured collaboration between:
 - Public administration and the public sector
 - Industry and companies
 - Academia
 - Civil society and organised citizenship

3. **Action Research**

- Researching while acting.
- Adapting tools and programmes based on insights generated through the process itself.
- Documenting best practices and sharing them openly.

An Invitation to Join This Evolving Process

The Collective Declaration for Digital Citizen Sovereignty is the result of an evolving process that will continue to grow. The research report demonstrates this clearly: **when spaces for co-creation and listening are created, citizens respond with clarity, nuance, and concrete proposals.**

This document is not only a summary of the study. It is also an **invitation**:

- To media outlets seeking to address technology through a lens of rights and social justice.
- To institutions and public decision-makers looking for frameworks to design more democratic digital policies.
- To social organisations, civic movements, and communities already working to defend rights in the digital environment.
- To companies and technology teams aiming to align innovation with social impact and ethics.

Because Digital Citizen Sovereignty is not a luxury, nor a technical issue reserved for specialists. It is a necessary condition for digital transformation to be truly fair, inclusive, and democratic.

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