

# THINK TANK

## RESEARCH DIARY #0

### September-December 2019: Think Tank design

The Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank research diary aims to promote research on this think tank, providing researchers with resources to understand the process. For these purposes, it sets out the chief milestones in the work of the think tank, cross-relating them to other documents that have been created. It also lists content not covered in other documents which may be of interest for research, especially in relation to the work of those involved in designing and managing the think tank, which may be of help in research on the methodological basis of think tanks.

#### Introduction

This first research diary covers the four months prior to the creation of Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank. During this period, between September and December 2019, three officials from the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa (DFG) and a researcher held nine 2-hour meetings to lay the foundations of the think tank and prepare the preliminary design.

The work carried out in this phase, using the methodology of action-research selected by the think tank, involved a process of dialogue between policy actors and researchers and included knowledge based on experience, process knowledge and expert knowledge. The action resulting from this reflection was the launch of the think tank in January 2020.

The content of the nine meetings held throughout the process was systematized in a document. Some of the contents of that document are shown verbatim in the following sections. It is important to bear in mind that the verbatim contents are those agreed at the time of working on the design, and these contents do not necessarily coincide in all cases with the decisions made later after the think tank was set up. These decisions will be recorded in the following research diaries.

#### Basic ideas worked on at the starting point

Before reflection between DFG officials and researchers began, the following principles were laid out, based on the lessons learned prior to the Etorkizuna Eraikizen initiative:

##### BASIC DIRECTION AND PHILOSOPHY

- The think tank should be clear about **where we are going**, and the participants should try to find meaning in this path
- The trajectory of the think tank must be associated with a significant **transformation**
- The think tank should contribute to the development of an advanced **political culture** and **democratic empowerment**

## UNITING REFLECTION AND ACTION

- **The action associated with the think tank must be a constructive process**
- The think tank should link reflection to action, but it should not be an instrumental reflection; it should include **background reflection** and learning
- Rather than agreeing superficial goals, the think tank should help to channel **consensus on issues of substance**
- The action developed out of the think tank should not only take the form of new projects but should be aimed primarily at improving **activity within the Provincial Government** and should stray too far from issues of importance to the Provincial Government.

## PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR COMMITMENT

- The selection of people to participate in the think tank has to be thought through and these groups must "make sense". There are already some in-house groups of this type
- The commitment to participate in the think tank should not be individual but institutional, and this commitment should be long-term
- The think tank will keep its word

## DYNAMIC

- The think tank must define its dynamics beyond mere events, even if events are also organised
- The think tank should be clear about how it will conduct dissemination. Any work carried out must be shared (through documentation, images, etc.)
- The think tank must use the SPACE correctly
- The think tank should have a playful dimension to make it attractive to participants. This includes the way meetings are organized, the general aesthetics and the communication. This is important for keeping up the energy of the participants

## INTERNATIONALISATION

- The think tank must have an international dimension

## Mission statement

The think tank's mission was also defined at that point, and was set out as follows:

Gipuzkoa Think Tank endorses the vision of Etorikizuna Eraikiz. Its mission, complementing the Etorikizuna Eraikiz initiative, has been defined in the following terms:

To cogenerate transferrable and applicable knowledge, through collaborative governance, with a view to implementing a new political agenda and culture that will modernise the ecosystem (actors, contents and processes) of the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa's policies.

## Governance

When working on the governance of the think tank, the following doubts arose:

- Who will participate in the think tank?
- How will the think tank be linked to the people who have the capacity for transformation in the territory?
- Reflection must be concrete

- How will the think tank fit in with in-house transformation of the Provincial Government?
- How will political leadership, bureaucracies and technical expertise be linked in this process?
- How do we ensure that the reflections are not left to gather dust?

The following governance spaces were identified to respond to these concerns:

a) *Etorkizuna Eraikizen Board of Directors.*

This committee stands outside the think tank, but directly influences its activity. The function of the committee is to inform the group promoting the Etorkizuna Eraikiz strategy at all times, so that the think tank can adapt its activity in good time. Currently, the fact that three members of the think tank's promoter group are sitting on the committee helps to guarantee that coordination.

b) *Think tank promoter group.*

This is the group ultimately responsible for the think tank's activity. It is made up of officials from the Provincial Government and researchers and is intended to build bridges between policies and the think tank's knowledge.

c) *Spaces for high-intensity transformation processes.*

These will be spaces for collaboration between those responsible for the think tank promoter group and the experimental processes of transformation of popular policies. The members of the promoter group will have the task of facilitating these spaces.

### **Methodological framework of the think tank**

It was decided to use action research as the methodology driving the think tank. The following two paragraphs are a verbatim transcription of the items agreed on:

*Action research for territorial development*

*Action research* is a broad concept that encompasses processes worked on in different areas and with different methodological bases. The methodology to be used in the Gipuzkoa Think Tank is Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD). This is defined as being a strategy for transformation with the following characteristics:

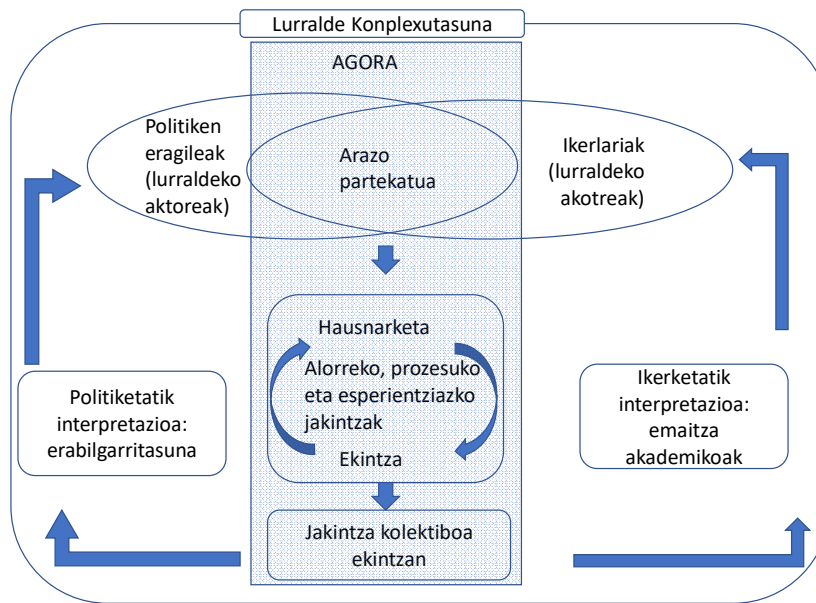
- ARTD draws on the industrial democracy cultivated in Norway, the work of Paulo Freire, action research for transformation developed in the AR+ network and the contributions made from policy analysis to action research. In the coming years, this base will be expanded according to the think tank's needs
- It has been developed within the framework of the experimental processes carried out in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (and especially in Gipuzkoa, under the leadership of the provincial government). For this purpose, the theoretical influences mentioned in the previous section have been adapted to local characteristics
- It is carried out through cogeneration processes, within the framework of dialogue processes between researchers and policy makers
- These processes are based on the work of facilitating actors, including facilitating policy makers and facilitating researchers

- e) The facilitation process includes addressing complexity, clearing up any conflicts, building a shared vision, learning, negotiation and ideological debate. The goal of all of these processes is to transform the action
- f) For more information on how all of the above should be put into practice, please see the documents that show how these concepts have been developed in specific processes (see Appendix 1)

#### *Methodology for think tank processes*

Action Research for Territorial Development is based on cogeneration processes. The nature of these processes is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Cogenerative Model of Action Research for Territorial Development



[Translation:

Territorial complexity

AGORA

Political actors (territorial actors)

Shared problem

Researchers (territorial actors)

Policy interpretation: utility

Reflection

Knowledge of the area, process and experience

Action

Interpretation from research: academic results

Collective knowledge in action]

Source: Karlsen and Larrea, 2014<sup>1</sup>.

Under this model, the process will have several steps:

- *Step 1.* Open a **space for dialogue** between the political actors and researchers who will participate in the process
- *Step 2. Define the shared problem.* This problem may be defined by the time the process is initiated by those who have decided to carry out the process, but it is important that all the actors who are going to participate in the cogeneration process reconsider the problem and ensure that it is significant for all those involved and that there is a willingness to work together in solving it.
- *Step 3. Externalize the territorial complexity* and build a shared narrative about it. In a process, there will be territorial complexity if there are autonomous actors within the scope of the problem to be solved, but they influence each other (they are interdependent). In complex situations, these actors may have different views on the problem and possible solutions, but no one has the hierarchy to decide what the others should do. In these cases, hierarchy cannot solve the problem and collaborative processes are needed to achieve the goals. Most territorial development processes, and therefore processes for policy development, are complex and require the participation of different actors in the ecosystem.
- *Step 4.* Understand the different interpretations of the problem, develop a shared vision and promote reflection to build **minimum consensus around feasible actions** at any given time.
- *Step 5.* Develop **negotiation processes** on the issues discussed in the reflection in order to make decisions and **decide**.
- *Step 6. Putting decisions into action.* Next, it will move on to the process of reflecting on the action, to see to what extent the action developed has solved the problem and to agree on the problem to be addressed in the new scenario.

### Knowledge in the think tank: types and sources

The following are the issues agreed on in relation to sources of knowledge:

Within the selected methodological framework, the think tank will develop knowledge co-generation processes that will combine three types of knowledge:

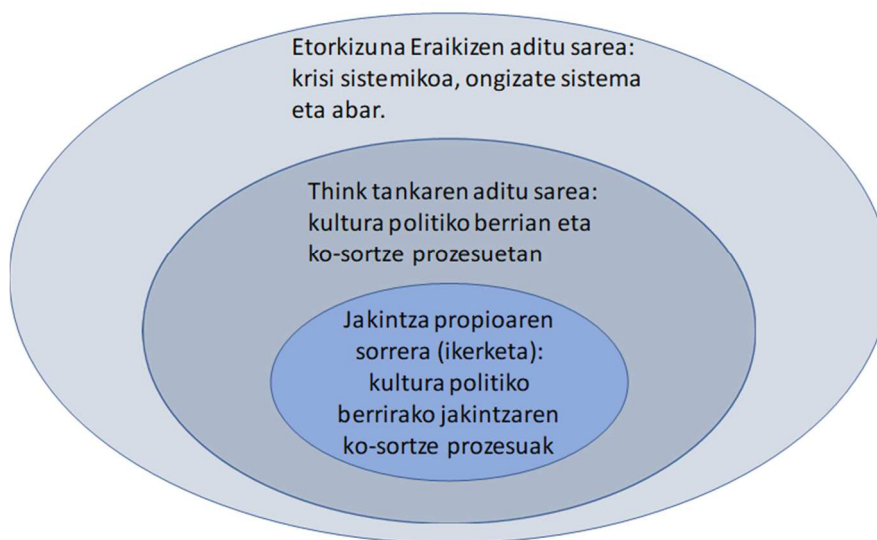
- a) Expert knowledge. This refers to the knowledge that experts possess about the new political culture and the areas in which they want to develop it (crisis management, sustainability of the welfare system). In order to attract this type of knowledge to the project, different sources will be used:
  - a. Invite experts to learn about the project and provide input
  - b. Compile material published on the subject and make it available to the actors in the ecosystem
  - c. Invite DFG researchers to share their data and contributions
- b) Process knowledge. This is methodological knowledge linked to action research. This type of knowledge will be attracted in the following ways:

<sup>1</sup> Karlsen, J. and Larrea, M. (2014). Territorial Development and Action Research. Innovation through dialogue. Farnham: Gower.

- a. By training facilitators with experience in the action research process (researchers or policy makers) and involving them in facilitating the cogeneration process
- b. By inviting experts in action research to learn about the project and provide input
- c. To compile all the material published on the subject and share it with those who have responsibilities for facilitation in the process
- c) Experienced-based knowledge. This is the practical knowledge that ecosystem actors have on the problems they want to solve. This knowledge will be integrated in the following ways:
  - a. Cogeneration workshops with ecosystem stakeholders

The various sources of expert knowledge are shown in the following figure:

Figure 2. Sources of expert knowledge with which Gipuzkoa Think Tank will work



[Translation:

Network of experts in Etorkizuna Eraikiz: systemic crisis, welfare system, etc.  
Network of experts from the think tank: in the new political culture and co-generation processes

Generation of own knowledge (research): knowledge co-generation processes for the new political culture]

As shown in the figure above, the strategies for generating/using expert knowledge will be as follows:

a) Generation of own knowledge

The core of the think tank will work on the knowledge cogenerated in the process of building the new political culture, in order to systematize and publicize this experience through academic publications. This will strengthen the think tank's ability to learn from its experience.

Together with the promoter group, a commitment has been made to make two academic contributions in this field in 2020. Other researchers involved in the think tank activity may also be invited to write their contributions. However, the think tank has no budget of its own to fund this research.

b) Network of experts from the think tank

Networks of two kinds will be created. The first will include experts who can collaborate on the new political culture. This network will be managed by the think tank promoter group and a special effort will be made to have it set up in 2020.

The second type of group will include experts who have the necessary knowledge to collaborate in managing the process. Topics that they might address: transformation, co-generation, democratization, participation, empowerment and process management, among others. The effort required in this area will be small in 2020, because there is already a basis to start working on.

c) Network of experts in Etorbizuna Eraikiz

The think tank will help to find the right experts for activities carried out by DFG policy makers with the representatives of its ecosystems. These experts should work on their links, not only with the think tank, but also with these policy makers.