Orkestra
BASQUE INSTITUTE
OF COMPETITIVENESS
DEUSTO FOUNDATION

CUADERNOS ORKESTRA
ISSN 2340-7638
https://doi.org/10.18543/RTWM2847

EKIN: A METHOD FOR POLICYMAKING THROUGH COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND ACTION RESEARCH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
No. 08/2026
https://doi.org/10.18543/ZTQU5769

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CUADERNOS ORKESTRA, no. 08/2026. Executive summary.

ISSN 2340-7638

Collection: https://doi.org/10.18543/RTWM2847

Notebook in Spanish: https://doi.org/10.18543/ZIHD4310

Executive summary in English: https://doi.org/10.18543/ZTQU5769

Executive summary in Basque: https://doi.org/10.18543/YFO4863

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With 20 years of experience and knowledge, Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (Deusto Foundation) is a leading research centre in Europe in regional competitiveness. Its mission is to promote competitiveness at the service of inclusive and sustainable wellbeing in the Basque Country. To this end, the institute works on a daily basis on transformative research projects with local and international stakeholders and provides rigorous analysis for decision making.

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Acknowledgements

As the author, I would like to thank everyone who took part in the action research process aimed at strengthening the meaning of work in SMEs in Gipuzkoa, as this booklet draws heavily on that process for its inspiration.

Among the organisations that have taken part, I would like to extend my special thanks to the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, which, as well as leading this process, has made an explicit commitment to Action Research for Territorial Development.

Among the participants, I would like to single out Unai Elorza, from Mondragon Unibertsitatea, for his generosity throughout the process. I would also like to thank Usue Lorenz and Cristina Zumeta for their contributions to the first draft of this text.

Executive summary

Many regional and local governments are embracing collaborative governance to transform their policies. This type of governance allows for the integration of diverse perspectives from the very start of the process. Together with the building of trusting relationships and the commitment of a territory's stakeholders, it ensures that the policies developed are more viable and transformative. However, putting collaboration into practice is not always easy, as difficulties and tensions inevitably arise.

Orkestra has a long track record of supporting regional and local governments in developing these dynamics. This report builds on this work and presents EKIN: a method for developing economic development policies through collaborative governance and action research.

The method sets out a series of steps for developing a specific policy and is framed within the context of action research for territorial development (Karlsen and Larrea, 2015). Although EKIN is a method, it is not intended as a formula that can be directly applied in other contexts. It is a tool that will need to be adapted to the needs of each region.

The term EKIN can be translated from Basque as 'let's get to work' and implies that it is not conceived from a theoretical perspective, but rather as the result of praxis (continuous cycles of action–reflection–action). Although the method draws inspiration from various experiences, this booklet takes as its reference a specific policy process designed to help businesses support employees in finding greater meaning in their work. This process was led by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, in collaboration with Orkestra and Mondragon Unibertsitatea, and with the participation of county development agencies and other local stakeholders (ASLE – Association of Worker-Owned Companies of the Basque Country, the Chamber of Commerce and Tknika – VETC in the Basque Country).

The method sets out these eight steps:

1. Definition of the problem

Through dialogue, learning and negotiation, problems are gradually defined and prioritised until a common focus for collaboration is identified.

2. Pilot projects

Pilot projects generate new working methods on an experimental basis, involving a small number of local stakeholders. These projects are then adapted for non-experimental use by a wider range of stakeholders. Pilot projects are not always necessary. Some of the processes that have inspired this booklet have skipped this step and moved straight on to the next.

3. Mapping of local stakeholders

This is an exercise to identify all the stakeholders involved, assess each one's level of commitment to the potential problem-solving process, and initiate an initial round of dialogue.

4. Designing inter-organisational relationships and institutional agreements

Collaborative governance requires stakeholders who, following the initial dialogue, join the process to internalise a new way of relating to one another. Designing these new relationships is a necessary step, but not sufficient in itself. To move to action, the design must be complemented by institutional agreements that establish the ground rules for the relationship. Many collaborative governance processes fail to move beyond this phase.

5. Designing spaces and roles

The people who will be collaborating from this point onwards are not necessarily the same as those who defined the ground rules. Once these rules have been established, it is important that the specific individuals who will be collaborating design the spaces for dialogue they will share and the roles each person will play. There is one role that is often overlooked at this stage, yet it is essential for the development of collaborative governance: the role of the facilitator.

6. Co-creation workshops in action

Once the spaces and roles have been agreed upon, the co-creation process begins. In this process, by combining i) experiential knowledge (based on the participants' own experience of the problem), ii) expert knowledge (knowledge from the various disciplines that can help solve the problem) and iii) process knowledge (knowledge of how to link experiential and expert knowledge to build solutions in action), cycles of reflection, decision-making and action are generated. These cycles enable policies that help resolve the initially agreed problem to be designed and implemented collaboratively.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

The type of monitoring and evaluation that best suits action research for territorial development is that which is geared towards continuous learning throughout the process, so that, through iteration, the process is gradually transformed in the direction agreed by the participants.

8. Systematisation

Following the previous steps, it is important to draw lessons and construct narratives that enable these to be shared. These narratives can take various forms. This booklet is an example of the systematisation of several action research processes.

The description and illustration, through examples, of these eight steps aims to help those responsible for public policy at regional or sub-regional level to develop collaborative governance; to support research teams wishing to work with these governments in adapting their methodologies for generating new knowledge; and to encourage organisations in the consulting sector that support these processes to promote participatory methodologies. However, its main contribution lies not in what it offers to each of these groups individually, but in its promotion of collaboration amongst them, thereby improving outcomes. It is, therefore, a response to the need to develop policies with a territorial impact.



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