

Shared visioning as an approach to regional strategic foresight:

The experience of Euskadi 2040

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Highlights:

- There is growing interest in experimentation with regional strategic foresight: while many of the trends underscoring foresight processes are global, much of the capacity to respond is local.
- Foresight has become a science dedicated not only to anticipating potential long-term trends or scenarios, but also to agreeing on preferable futures and defining actions to build these futures from the present.
- Euskadi 2040 is a shared visioning process to identify what the competitiveness challenges of the Basque Country are and how they are changing, to build sustainable and inclusive competitiveness for the wellbeing of the next generation.
- The process has been developed in the interface between the regional government, seeking practical relevance from the strategic visioning process, and a research organisation, seeking to advance academic knowledge on regional foresight.
- The shared visioning process has worked across the whole spectrum of government departments and levels and has engaged with the business sector, the third sector, young people and other actors.
- Outcomes: A realistic, aspirational and systemic shared vision, a catalogue of the most relevant challenges faced in meeting the vision, the identification of key transformative initiatives to move forward, and a measurement framework to track progress.
- Lessons learned: Clearly define the scope and perspective of visioning processes, combine core and distributed leadership, highlight potential conflicts, generate a shared narrative, keep the process fresh with new actors and focus on collective capacity building.

Regional foresight

A rising star

Foresight has become a science dedicated not only to anticipating potential long-term trends or scenarios, but also to agreeing on desired or preferable futures and defining actions to build these futures from the present.

Governments are increasingly challenged to adopt a **proactive approach towards the future**, both in terms of having a clear strategy for their socioeconomic development and in terms of developing foresight tools that can shape and guide that strategy. Indeed, the emergence over the last decade of the OECD's [Strategic Foresight Unit](#) and the European Commission's flagship [Strategic Foresight Report](#) are emblematic of the growing importance attached to futures analysis.

actions to build these futures from the present. It is here where regions and cities – closer to citizens – have a key role to play, albeit with significant challenges in implementing effective processes and linking them to national and supranational foresight exercises.

There is **significant experimentation** underway with regional strategic foresight. For example, an initiative led by Flanders under the Belgian



Leaders Meeting of the Fit for Future initiative

Strategic foresight processes are being implemented primarily at national and supranational administrative levels. However, there is growing interest in **regional strategic foresight**. This is because while many of the trends underscoring foresight processes are global, much of the capacity to respond to these trends is inherently local. Responses must be worked at by firms, organisations, and people “on the ground”, where regional administrations play a key role.

What is more, foresight has become a science dedicated not only to anticipating potential long-term trends or scenarios, but also to **agreeing on desired or preferable futures and defining**

Presidency of the EU has brought together foresight thinking from 9 innovative European regions, including the Basque Country. Following a year-long process of workshops and scenario exercises focused on socioeconomic, digital, green and geopolitical resilience, these regions signed a joint declaration in April 2024 highlighting the key levers that regions hold for building futures that address emerging global challenges.

This policy brief draws lessons from a specific experience in the Basque Country that has experimented with a key component of regional strategic foresight, that of **shared visioning**.

Euskadi 2040

Objective and approach

Euskadi 2040 is a shared visioning process to identify what the competitiveness challenges of the Basque Country are and how they are changing, to build sustainable and inclusive wellbeing for the next generation.

In 2021 the Basque Country began experimenting with a strategic foresight exercise focused on developing a shared vision for the territory's competitiveness in 2040. The **objective of Euskadi 2040** is defined as *identifying what the competitiveness challenges of the Basque Country are and how they are changing, in order to build sustainable and inclusive competitiveness for the wellbeing of the next generation.*

As such the process responds to **two discrete needs**:

1. The need to adopt a proactive approach to the future for the next generation.
2. The need to understand progress beyond an exclusively economic perspective, imbuing competitiveness with a directionality towards inclusive and sustainable wellbeing.

These needs were identified in dialogue between policymakers in the economic development and presidency departments of the regional government and researchers at Orkestra, a research centre specialised in the analysis of regional

competitiveness. Building on this policy-research interaction from the outset, the Euskadi 2040 initiative adopts **action research for territorial development (ARTD) as a methodological approach for generating regional visioning.**

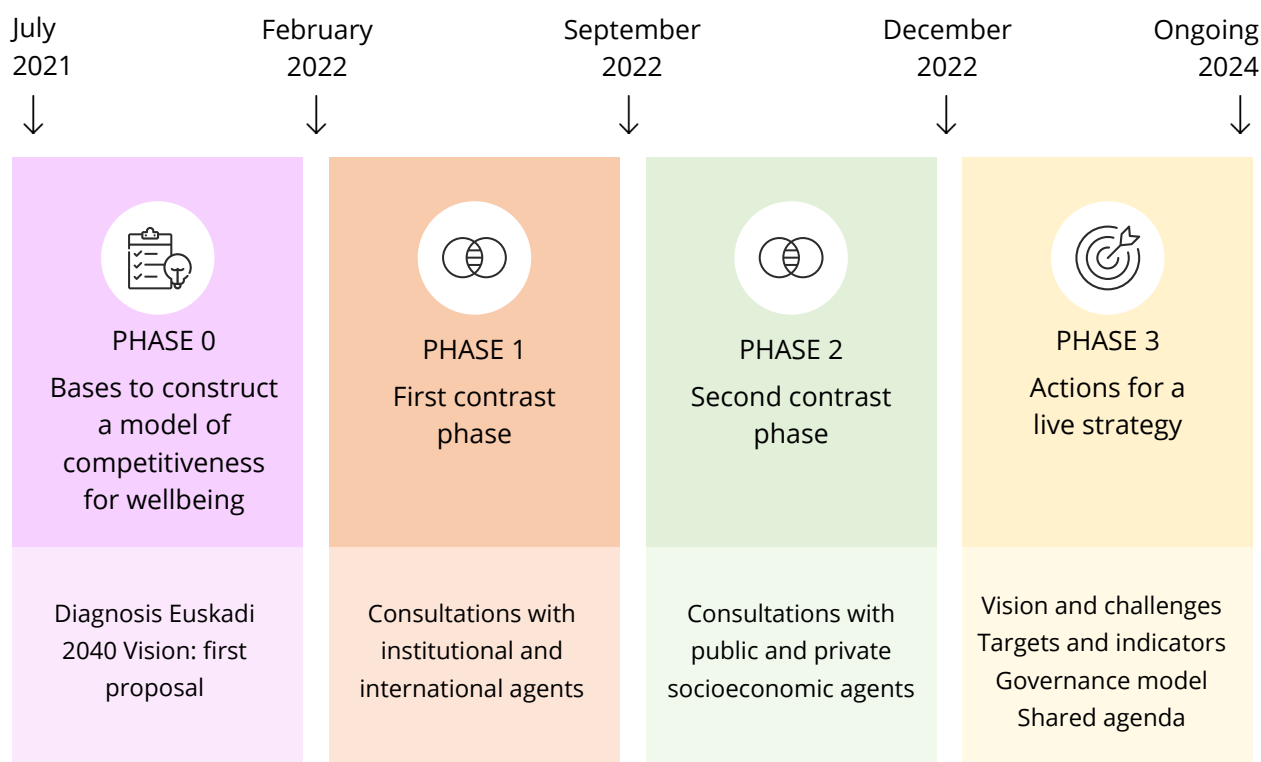
As illustrated below, the project is being developed in the interface between the regional government, seeking practical relevance from the strategic visioning process, and the research organisation, seeking to advance academic knowledge on regional foresight. The ARTD approach is built around cycles of reflection, decision and action, where policymakers and researchers jointly develop action-oriented knowledge. In the Euskadi 2040 initiative that has been centred on a small, mixed team of policymakers and researchers – a core group – who have progressively engaged in reflection and action with a wide range of actors throughout the territory. Overall, it has generated an approach to regional shared visioning that is distinctively **realist, evolutionary, systemic and collaborative.**



Euskadi 2040

The process

The process leading to the development of a shared vision for Basque competitiveness in 2040 has been developed in four phases over a period of two years.



Phase 0: Analytical foundations

The analytical foundations for the action research process built on three pillars that together support a deep understanding of where the region is currently positioned, how it got there, and the challenges it is likely to face in the future:

- **Current positioning:** Analysis was based on the 'territorial competitiveness for wellbeing' framework used by Orkestra in its annual Basque Country Competitiveness Report. This framework structures analysis of indicators reflecting the current positioning of the Basque Country in terms of results (wellbeing and economic performance), structural context, and dynamic levers.
- **Past keys to competitiveness:** Analysis drew on existing published research exploring

the socioeconomic development strategy pursued by the Basque Country over the last four decades.

- **Future challenges to competitiveness:** Analysis identified the principle global megatrends – significant changes in environmental, social and economic conditions likely to develop in the coming decades – that may affect the future competitiveness and wellbeing of the Basque Country.

These three analytical pillars informed the drafting of a preliminary 'vision and challenges' document by the core group of policymakers and researchers leading the project. This document was framed as a 'reflection for action' and used as a starting point for the subsequent phases.

Phase 1: Multi-level government engagement and external contrast

Engagement around the 2040 vision and challenges developed by the core group was broadened to involve the whole spectrum of departments and layers of government within the region. These included:

- Key figures (ministers, vice-ministers and senior civil servants) in **multiple departments of the regional government**
 - » Presidency department
 - » Department of Economic Development, Sustainability and Environment
 - » Department of Health
 - » Department of Security
 - » Department of Education
 - » Department of Economy and Finance
 - » Department of Work and Employment
 - » Department of Equality, Justice and Social Policies
 - » Department of Culture and Language Policy
- The economic development commission of the **Basque Parliament**
- Leaders of the 3 Basque **provincial governments**: Alava, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa
- Mayors of the 3 Basque **capital cities**: Bilbao, San Sebastian and Vitoria-Gasteiz
- Presidency of EUEDEL (Association of Basque municipalities)

In parallel, this phase also included **external contrast with academics and policymakers** forming part of Orkestra's international advisory board and community of ambassadors, at academic conferences, and through *ad hoc* meetings with key figures in other regions, such as the [Future Generations Commissioner](#) in Wales.



Phase 2: Broad-based societal engagement

With a dynamic process of adjustments to the vision and challenges document underway, a second contrast phase engaged with actors from four key spheres of Basque society, either directly or through representative organisations.

- **Business sector:** Business associations from the region and the three provinces, the association of cooperatives, the association of social enterprises, and a newly-created forum of international niche-market leaders or 'hidden champions'.
- **Third sector:** The association of third sector actors.
- **Young people:** Students at a range of educational centres, covering school students, different types of college and vocational training students, and university students.
- **Other socioeconomic actors:** Trade unions and key territorial infrastructures, such as the network of science parks.



Phase 3: Putting into practice the shared vision

The ideas and inputs from the previous engagement phases were consolidated by the core group in a document setting out the resulting shared vision and identified challenges. This vision is complemented by a framework and indicators for measuring progress towards it, and by a process for developing a shared agenda of actions across different actors with an associated governance model. This third phase is currently ongoing as actions are articulated and progress measured.

Euskadi 2040

The outcomes

The main outcome of the process to date is a shared vision for the type of competitiveness desired for the Basque Country in 2040.

A Basque Country that is...

Prosperous

Leader in competitive and sustainable industrial development. With a prosperous and diversified economy that ensures full employment and quality of life for all people.

Innovative

Pioneering, and continuously transforming.

Connected

Co-responsible with the world and a benchmark on the international level.

Committed

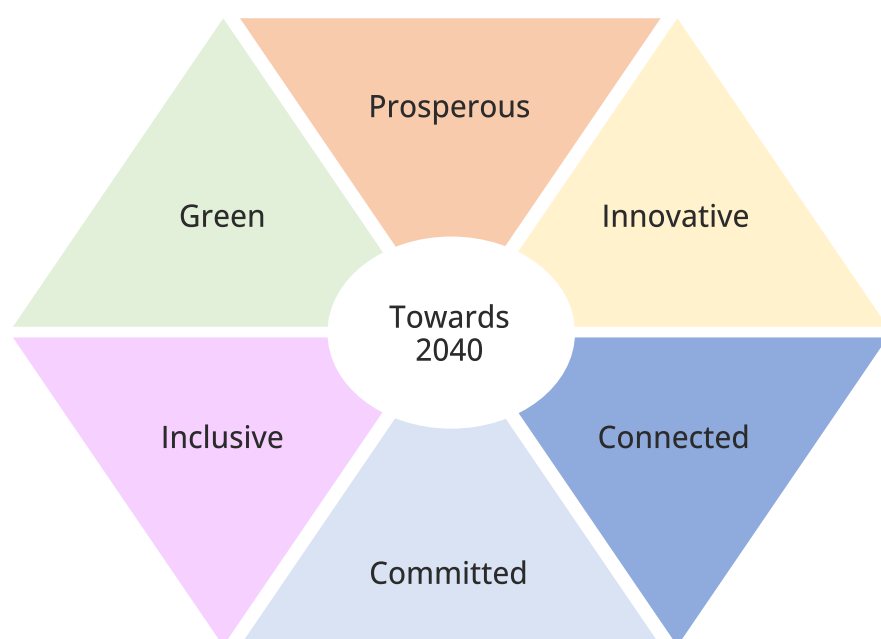
A unique place, which cultivates its singularities, and has a socially, culturally, politically and entrepreneurially committed society.

Inclusive

Empowering, embracing diversity and enabling all people to fully develop in an inclusive and equitable society.

Green

Carbon neutral.



In short, a competitive Euskadi that is committed to the wellbeing of all people, with intergenerational co-responsibility and in solidarity with the rest of the world.

A differentiated, attractive place to live and to contribute to.

The individual dimensions are not seen as isolated components, but rather as part of a **systemic vision**. Like trying to solve a 'Rubik's Cube', changes affecting one of them also have effects on other dimensions.

For example, there may be positive interactions: an inclusive Basque Country may have greater potential for prosperity, which in turn may have a positive impact on inclusion. Yet there may also be negative interactions: green transition may generate job losses in traditional sectors, undermining prosperity in the short term.

The vision is both realistic and aspirational. It is explicitly built on existing competitiveness foundations and is intended to inspire specific actions that will address challenges standing in its way. Indeed, in addition to articulating the meaning of each dimension of the shared vision, the document developed during phase 3 **identifies the**

most relevant challenges faced by the Basque Country over the coming years in each dimension.

In terms of moving to action, a series of driving forces have also been identified, understood as innovative, structural, scalable initiatives developed in collaboration between different agents (institutions, public and private agents, etc.) with a view to generating transformations that will enable the Vision of Euskadi 2040 to become a reality.

Finally, a **measurement framework** has been established to both track and inspire progress towards the shared vision. This includes a set of objectives for inspiring 'headline indicators' corresponding to each of the dimensions (see table), alongside a broader panel of 39 indicators that can be tracked to reflect the diversity of areas included in the vision and challenges of Euskadi 2040.

SCOPE	OBJECTIVES	BENCHMARK INDICATOR
PROSPEROUS	Territory with less than 6% unemployment	Unemployment rate (% active population)
	Among the 10% of European regions with the highest per capita incomes	GDP per capita (PPPs)
INCLUSIVE	Among the 10% of European regions with the lowest poverty rate	Risk of poverty and exclusion rate Arope
INNOVATIVE	Leading European region in innovation	Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS)
GREEN	Carbon neutral territory	Greenhouse Gas Emissions Index (Base year 2005)
COMMITTED	This must be achieved with a growing commitment by all to the future of the Basque Country, respecting and supporting its uniqueness, and in a way that is increasingly open and interconnected with the world.	
CONNECTED		

Key learnings so far

The Euskadi 2040 process has generated a range of learnings that may be relevant both for progress in the action stages of the Euskadi 2040 process and for other territories seeking to carry out similar regional foresight processes.



Clear scope and perspective

In the process of constructing a shared vision it is essential to clearly define the scope and perspective: the “competitiveness for wellbeing” perspective to Euskadi 2040 has helped provide focus and coherence throughout the process.



Systemic vision highlighting potential conflicts

A systemic approach implies the simultaneous development of several dimensions of a shared vision, where conflicts may arise. An important part of the Euskadi 2040 process has been to highlight possible conflicts and seek alternative ways to make their simultaneous progress compatible (e.g., a prosperous AND green territory through innovation).



Keeping the process fresh with new actors

As the process advances and new challenges emerge, it is necessary to think about which new actors need to be involved in the process and how. In Euskadi 2040, as a project to build the future, it has been considered essential to incorporate young people, who do not usually participate in these types of processes. Their incorporation has also required innovation in the modes of participation.



Combining core and distributed leadership

The scope and perspective of the process determines its core leadership, making it easier to keep the process alive and to monitor improvements. However, in the medium to long term, it is important to activate other leaderships outside of the core, with different roles depending on stage of the process and the specific focal points that are emerging.



Dialogue through diversity and shared narrative

The process of building a systemic shared vision is challenging because behind in each dimension there are actors with their own legitimate interests. This sometimes generates polarised positions that stifle progress. Purposeful dialogue with actors who have different visions and the construction of a shared narrative on how the different dimensions can work simultaneously are essential tools in the search for the lowest common denominators that allow progress to be made.



A focus on collective capacity building

Alongside the individual capacities of each participating actor, strategic visioning processes can facilitate the generation of collective capacities in the territory. For example, collective capacities for mutual learning, innovation and the building of networks and relationships are critical for the promotion of a long-term territorial strategy.

For more resources and information, scan the QR code or click **here** to visit the website about Euskadi 2040



Where next?

As Phase 3 of the project is ongoing, the shift from visioning to action is being consolidated around two core pillars:

Generating and consolidating a governance model

This will enable dialogue on the future of the Basque Country to be kept alive. This is likely to include both *ad hoc* spaces and building synergies through the integration of the initiative into already established bodies. The model created should enable deepening both inter-agent and multi-agent collaboration, with an academic accompaniment that promotes ongoing critical reflection and enables it to connect with global discussions.

Leveraging the shared vision as a tool for the construction of a shared agenda

This implies using it as a mirror in which each of the actors in the territory can see themselves reflected. Encouraging its use in this way should support the many actors impacting on the future competitiveness and wellbeing of the Basque Country in defining their roles, actions and level of contribution to the vision going forward. Thus the shared vision should become an active tool in articulating and aligning the agendas of the different actors in the territory towards the same common horizon for the future.

Read more

- **A detailed report on the Euskadi 2040 process (in Spanish):** Izulain, A., Aranguren, M-J. and Wilson, J. R. (2023). Competitividad para el bienestar de Euskadi 2040, *Cuadernos Orkestra*, 2023/12, <https://doi.org/10.18543/UGSG4703>
- **An academic paper reflecting on the roles of place-leadership and power in the futures domain from the experience of Euskadi 2040:** Izulain, A., Aranguren, M-J. and Wilson, J. R. (2024). Place-leadership and power in the futures domain: The case of Euskadi 2040, *European Planning Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2024.2339927>
- **A report on the 'Fit for future: global challenges, regional solutions' regional foresight initiative led by Flanders under the Belgian presidency of the EU and the joint declaration resulting from that process:** <https://www.fdfa.be/en/leaders-meeting-highlights-crucial-role-of-european-regions-for-a-resilient-european-union>
- **A book explaining the action research for territorial development (ARTD) methodological approach:** Larrea, M. (2020). (Ed.). *Roots and wings of action research for territorial development: Connecting local transformation and international collaborative learning*, Bilbao: Deusto Publications.
- **Background on the Basque Country case in long-term territorial competitiveness strategy:** See: <https://www.orkestra.deusto.es/en/about-orkestra/the-basque-case>
- **Recent editions of the Basque Country Competitiveness Report:** See: <https://www.orkestra.deusto.es/en/publications-search/basque-country-competitiveness-report>

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