

Territorial Development Series



Roots and Wings of Action Research for Territorial Development

Connecting local transformation and international collaborative learning

Edited by Miren Larrea

Roots and Wings of Action Research
for Territorial Development

Connecting local transformation and international
collaborative learning

Roots and Wings of Action Research for Territorial Development

Connecting local transformation and international
collaborative learning

Edited by
Miren Larrea

2020
Orkestra - Basque Institute of Competitiveness
Deusto Foundation

Territorial Development Series

Note for the reader

The contributions in this book have been written in English, Spanish and Portuguese and their contents synthesized also in Basque, Norwegian, German and French. By choosing to have an inclusive approach to all these languages we want to generate awareness on the fact that action research is conducted throughout the world in diverse cultural contexts and in multiple languages, although many of these languages disappear when action research enters the academic realm.

To go beyond the symbolism of this decision and make our work understandable for as many readers as possible, we will publish in 2021 a book that will mirror this one by sharing its contributions in English translated into Spanish and its contributions in Spanish translated into English.

Notas para los lectores

Las contribuciones compartidas en este libro han sido escritas en inglés, español y portugués y sus contenidos resumidos también en euskara, noruego, alemán y francés. Nuestra decisión de tener una aproximación inclusiva al uso de todos estos idiomas responde a nuestro deseo de generar conciencia de que la investigación acción a lo largo del mundo se hace en diversidad de contextos culturales y en múltiples idiomas y que muchos de estos idiomas desaparecen cuando la investigación acción llega al ámbito académico.

Más allá de la dimensión simbólica de esta decisión, queremos compartir nuestro trabajo con el mayor número de lectores posible y en 2021 publicaremos un libro que será un espejo de este y que presentará las contribuciones publicadas en inglés en este libro traducidas al español, y las contribuciones en español traducidas al inglés.

Cualquier forma de reproducción, distribución, comunicación pública o transformación de esta obra sólo puede ser realizada con la autorización de sus titulares, salvo excepción prevista por la ley. Diríjase a CEDRO (Centro Español de Derechos Reprográficos, www.cedro.org) si necesita fotocopiar o escanear algún fragmento de esta obra.

© Instituto Vasco de Competitividad - Fundación Deusto



Mundaiz 50, E-20012, Donostia-San Sebastián
Tel.: 943 297 327. Fax: 943 279 323
comunicacion@orquestra.deusto.es
www.orquestra.deusto.es

© Publicaciones de la Universidad de Deusto
Apartado 1 - E48080 Bilbao
Correo electrónico: publicaciones@deusto.es

ISBN: 978-84-1325-098-4

Chapter 6

Communication in the context of action research processes: an experiment with the living spiral methodology

*Maite Reizabal*¹

Laburpena

Komunikazioa ikerketa ekintza prozesuen baitan: espiral biziaren metodologiarekin esperimentu bat

Ikerketa ekintzak, eta batik bat komunitatean oinarritutako ikerketa partehartzaileak (KOIP) eta komunitatean oinarritutako ikerketa ekintza partehartzaileak (KOIEP), komunitateek komunikatzaile profesionalen laguntzaz sortutako bideo parte hartzaileak erabili ohi dituzte hauek ahalduz. Hain zuzen ere, aktoreen ahotsa indartzeko komunikazioari lotutako ikerketa ekintzako literatura horri lotuta dago batik bat, komunikazio tresnen erabilerari. Baina literatura horretan gauza gutxi topatu daitezke komunikazioa prozesuaren parte bezala ulertzen duten ikerketa ekintza prozesuei buruz. Lurralde garapenerako ikerketa ekintzak (LGIE) komunikatzailearen rola prozesuan integratzen du, ikertzaileen eta lurraldeko eragileen rolaekin batera.

Kapitulu honek LGIEko talde eta prozesu bateko komunikazioa eta komunikatzailearen rolak aurkeztu nahi ditu, prozesu horren parte integral eta egiturazkoa dela jakinik, rol hori jokatzeko duen pertsona baten esperientziatik abiatuz. Hain zuzen ere, komunikatzaile profesional horrek proiektuaren egunerokotasunean eta bilera eta tailer guztietan hartzen du parte, eta komunikazioko hainbat tresna erabiltzen ditu aktoreen ahotsa jasotzeko.

Horrez gain, Lurralde Garapenerako Laborategia —LGIE metodologiaren garapenerako proiektu nagusia izan dena— modu zabalenean aurkezten duen kapitulu ere bada. Proiektu horren helburua da Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundiaren eta Gipuzkoako garapen agentzien artean (baita gehitu daitezkeen beste zenbait agentzeren artean ere) maila anitzeko eta elkarlanerako gobernantza irekia eraikitzea, batik bat ekonomia eta garapen instituzionalari lotutako politika publikoak hobetzeko.

Egiturazko komunikazioaz eta Lurralde Garapenerako Laborategiaren garapenaz hitz egiteko espiral biziaren markoarekin esperimendatzen du kapitulu honek. Thomas MacIntyre eta bere taldekideek sortutako markoak artea du oinarri. Zehazki, landare baten metafora erabiltzen da prozesu baten inguruko analisia egiteko eta horren bitartez,

¹ Orkestra- Basque Institute of Competitiveness, University of Deusto.

prozesuak izan duen bilakaera, erronkak edo aspektu ikusiezinak identifikatu eta eraldaketa bultzatzeko. Kapitulu honetan, espiral biziaren markoaren erabilerak zenbait helburu ditu: aktoreen prozesua sakon ulertzea eta haien ahotsa ekartzea, komunikazioak prozesu horretan izan duen rola esplizitatzea eta komunikatzeko edo narratibak eraikitzeke modu desberdin batekin espermentatzea. Erabilitako metafora, kasu honetan, zuhaitz batena da, haginarena: Gipuzkoako armarrarian azaltzen den zuhaitza da, milaka urtekoa eta mantso hazten dena, eta bere burua ernaberritzeko gaitasuna duena. Kapitulu honek Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundiaren eta garapen agentzien arteko gobernantzaren instituzionalizazio prozesuaren sustraiak, enborra, adarrak, hostoak eta ariloak aurkezten ditu. Horretarako, azalpen orokorrez gain, komunikazioko tresna desberdinen bitartez bildutako aktoreen hitzak jasotzen ditu, prozesuan integratutako komunikazioak izan dezakeen rola ere aditzera emateko.

Kapitulua ondoan esperientzia honetan lortutako ikasketa nagusiak aurkezten dira, besteak beste, komunikatzaileen eta lurraldeko eragileen ahotsak uztartzea eta esplizitazio-inplizitazioa edo komunikazioak izan dezakeen rola lurraldeko eragileen ahotsak hartu eta narratibak lotu eta eraikitzeke.

Resumen

La comunicación en el contexto de los procesos de investigación acción: un experimento con la metodología de la espiral viva

La investigación acción y, principalmente, la investigación participativa basada en la comunidad (IPBC) y la investigación acción participativa basada en la comunidad (IAPBC), han solido emplear los vídeos participativos creados por las comunidades con ayuda de profesionales como herramienta de empoderamiento de dichas comunidades. Precisamente, la literatura sobre la comunicación como herramienta de empoderamiento de la voz de los actores está principalmente ligada a esto, al uso de herramientas de comunicación. Pero, en dicha literatura, el contenido relacionado con los procesos de investigación acción que entienden la comunicación como parte del proyecto es limitado. La *investigación acción para el desarrollo territorial* (IATD) integra el rol del comunicador en el proceso junto con el de los investigadores y los agentes territoriales.

Este capítulo presenta los roles de la comunicación y de los comunicadores como parte integral y estructural de un equipo y un proceso de IATD, partiendo de la experiencia de una persona que desempeña dicho papel. Dicha comunicadora profesional participa en el día a día del proyecto, así como en todas sus reuniones y sus talleres, y emplea distintas herramientas de comunicación para recoger la voz de los actores.

Además, se trata del capítulo que más extensamente muestra el Laboratorio de Desarrollo Territorial, el proyecto en el que se ha desarrollado principalmente de la metodología de IADT. El objetivo de ese proyecto es construir una gobernanza multinivel, colaborativa y abierta entre la Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa y las agencias de desarrollo de Gipuzkoa (así como entre agentes que se puedan ir incorporando), principalmente para mejorar las políticas públicas ligadas a la economía y el desarrollo institucional.

Para hablar sobre la comunicación y el Laboratorio de Desarrollo Territorial, el capítulo experimenta con el marco de Espiral Viva. El marco, creado por Thomas MacIntyre y sus compañeras de equipo, se basa en el arte. En dicho marco, se emplea la metáfora de una planta para analizar un proceso y, a partir de la misma, identificar su evolución, sus retos o sus aspectos invisibles e impulsar el cambio. La utilización de Espiral Viva en este capítulo tiene distintos objetivos: entender en profundidad el proceso de los actores y traer su voz, explicitar el rol de la comunicación en dicho proceso y experimentar con una forma diferente de comunicar o de construir narrativas. La metáfora empleada para ello, en este caso, es la de un árbol: el tejo. Se trata del árbol que aparece en el escudo de Gipuzkoa, que es milenario y que

crece despacio, y que tiene la capacidad de regenerarse a sí mismo con un sistema particular. El capítulo presenta las raíces, el tronco, las ramas, las hojas y los arillos del proceso de institucionalización de la gobernanza entre la Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa y las agencias de desarrollo. Por ese motivo, además de las explicaciones generales, reúne palabras de los distintos actores que se han recogido mediante el uso de diferentes herramientas de comunicación entre 2015 y 2019, para mostrar el rol que puede desempeñar la comunicación integrada en procesos.

En las conclusiones del capítulo, se muestran los aprendizajes principales de esta experiencia, entre otros, la combinación de la voz de los actores territoriales y del comunicador, y la explicitación-*implicitación*, o el rol que puede desempeñar la comunicación para tomar las voces de los agentes territoriales y enlazar y construir narrativas.

Communication in the context of action research processes: an experiment with the living spiral methodology

Introduction

The purpose of my chapter in this book is twofold. On the one hand, it is the chapter which presents in greater detail the Territorial Development Laboratory (TDLab) that has been the main project in the development of action research for territorial development (ARTD). This project aims to construct collaborative, open, and multilevel governance between the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa and the county development agencies (as well as other agents that could be added) to improve public policies, particularly related to economic and institutional development.

On the other hand, my purpose is also to share with the reader my insights into one of the features of ARTD that, to date, has been understudied by academics: the integration of communication specialists as active members in action research (AR) teams. This integration has been carried out both at Orkestra (Basque Country, Spain) and Praxis (Rafaela, Argentina). One of my reflections on this feature is that, even though I am part of an ARTD team and I participate in an ARTD process, where communication plays a role, I do not consider myself an action researcher. I am a communicator who integrates communication into AR in a space that lies in the intersection of action researchers and practitioners, and I do not identify myself exclusively with any of them. It is for this reason that I seldom talk about AR in the chapter and that I focus my arguments more on communication.

In order to explore the role of communication in ARTD and share the findings of this exploration, in this chapter I experiment with a new way of understanding and communicating a process: the *living spiral framework* (MacIntyre, Chaves and McGarry, 2018), which is a transformative narrative that uses the metaphor of a plant or a tree to explain a process. This framework was created and developed by Thomas MacIntyre (together with other members of his team), who was my co-inquirer in this chapter. He facilitated the process of building a specific *living spiral* that is described in this chapter and which serves as its backbone. This work was mainly done in the context of the CoLab “Transformation Narratives,” which he organised with the AR+ network.

My aim here is to share a narrative of the TDLab by using this living spiral. Following the twofold perspective of this chapter, I share two types of insights. Some have to do with the usefulness of profiles like mine, communication specialists, in the development of relationships of trust and dialogue processes in AR, while the others are related to the living spiral methodology and my experience when using it.

As a communicator, I consider languages to be an essential tool which transmits much more than what can be captured in a translation. We, as contributors to this book, were challenged to experiment with this idea. Although this chapter is mainly written in English, I have kept the beginning of the original quotes by policymakers in Basque (in italics), but the whole quotes have been translated into English. The main reason for this is that this project was largely developed in Basque, an official but minority language in our territory. Each language gives a particular identity to each project. And therefore, the words of the policymakers in Basque have been kept so as to reflect the identity of the TDLab.

The role of communication in ARTD: strengthening the voice of the actors

In this section, I use the literature on Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) to discuss the main features of ARTD in terms of communication.

CBPR and CBPAR are relevant perspectives when it comes to understanding how the literature on AR has addressed communication to enhance or empower the voice of the actors (stakeholders). Both approaches have inspired me to frame communication in ARTD. However, the actors they work with, the way in which they develop the communication tools, and their overall vision are very different.

For instance, *participatory videos*² are commonplace in CBPR processes. Communities themselves create these videos, and this has a great deal to do with the CBPR approach itself. According to Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, “CBPR is a collaborative and systematic approach to inquiry that involves all partners in the research process, emphasising their complementary strengths” (2014, p. 152). In other words, it focuses on the strengths and the resources of the community, and on what is important to them (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 152). Most of the projects carried out in ARTD have been developed with policymakers. Their time is usually limited and highly focused on day-to-day policies and politics-related issues, where AR is subtly integrated, and there is little time for collecting their insights or participating in co-generated communicative processes. Consequently, in our case, video making is not participatory; empowerment of actors is achieved mainly through the dialogue in workshops. The purpose of filming the workshops is to capture, through the participants’ voice, what is most relevant to them in the workshops, and the process that frames them. This does not mean that by making the video, we do not also aim to give voice to their concerns or strengthen the network. However, we seldom get them involved for more than 5 to 10 minutes in the making of communication materials.

In this chapter, my reinterpretation of the living spiral responds to these features of ARTD. Therefore, to be able to construct the living spiral, I use phrases from policy makers that were systematised during the policy and political discussion of the ARTD process.

The main difference I find between CBPR and ARTD is the way in which they interpret communication. CBPR processes use videos as a tool for stakeholders but do not engage communicators as organisational and integrated members of the research team and thus, of the process (at least not explicitly). In this sense, the video creation process is often facilitated by a specialist in group dynamics, oral, visual, and written narratives, and video software, who is usually an external professional that is not part of the practitioners’ process. On the other hand, although this specific feature has not been discussed in the academic literature to date, the ARTD environment considers that communicators, together with researchers and practitioners, are also part of the process, where they can play an important role in enhancing the voice of the actors using different communication tools. This is related to the reflection on how diverse kinds of useful expertise (survey researchers, photojournalists) can play a role in AR processes in general.

² “The process of participatory video”. *Transformative storytelling for social change*. Obtained at: <https://www.transformativestory.org/what-are-the-methods-for-transformative-storytelling/collective-storytelling-through-participatory-video/the-process-of-participatory-video/>

“Participatory video”. *Collective Social Innovation*. Obtained at: <http://innovacion-soci.webs.upv.es/index.php/participatory-videos>

Consequently, in some ARTD projects like TDLab, communication has been integrated into the AR process, where the communicator has an overall vision of the process, participates in its day-to-day activities and attends most of the meetings and workshops. Thanks to this integration, the communicator is able to identify and communicate any key aspects that might emerge in the process and suggest creating communication materials (videos, interviews, etc.). And that way, communicators, stakeholders and researchers all narrate the story together about the project in real time, and not just at the end of the process.

The objective of these communication materials is twofold. While the aim of some contents is often to share news about the project with those not participating in it, most of the time, the aim is to enhance the voice of participants and the dialogue between them, which nearly always involves listening, reflecting, synthesizing, and sharing in order to strengthen the voice of the participants.

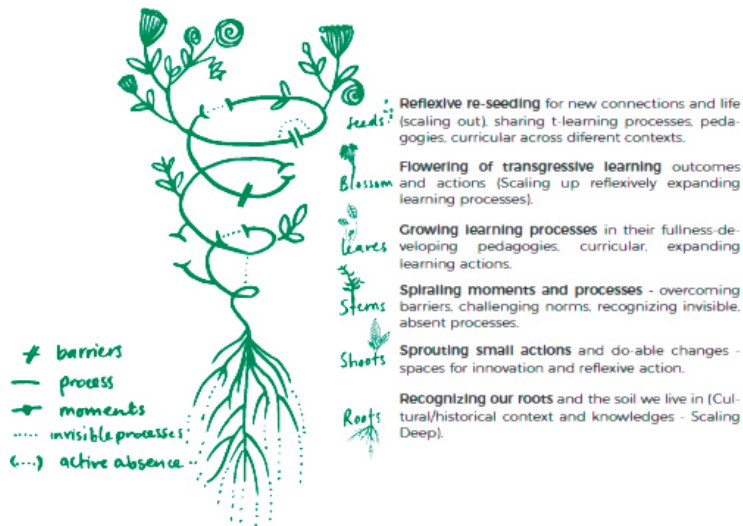
Furthermore, even though the initial idea and design of the communicative process might come from the communicator, there is always a discussion with the actors to see whether it suits them or not. Therefore, we can say that the communicator *facilitates* the creation process of the communication product, which is *co-generated*. But he or she is also in charge of the most time-consuming task: writing and editing. And because of this, although it is only the voice of practitioners that appears in an explicit way, implicitly (by designing and developing the communication material), the voice of the communicator also appears alongside that of the practitioners.

Methodology: the living spiral framework

The *living spiral framework* can be considered an arts-based method. It aims to help discover “how and to what extent, personal and collective learning journeys result in transformations towards sustainability, including the challenges and the tensions experienced along the way” (Macintyre *et al.*, 2018, p. 8). This “tree metaphor” or “plant metaphor” mentioned earlier is often used in the context of socio-ecological processes. Hence, the term sustainability is usually understood from an environmental point of view. However, in the process analysed, the concept of sustainability is more related to establishing sustainable relationships between actors which will impact positively on politics, policies and, consequently, on society. That is to say, in the ARTD case, the living spiral framework aims to achieve open governance based on collaboration.

To be able to do this, it uses a narrative “to generate and analyse” (Macintyre *et al.*, 2018, p. 14) the process, which is called the *living spiral* and is “very useful as it appreciates the uncertain, organic and at times rapidly evolving nature of transformations” (Macintyre *et al.*, 2018, p. 14).

As the following image shows, the living spiral metaphor is like a plant, with its roots, stems, leaves....



Source: The Living Spiral Framework: a guide for researching stories of transformation, p. 15.

Thus, we use the living spiral metaphor to better understand the process carried out by practitioners in order to tell their story and bring their voice to the forefront. But, at the same time, as a communicator, it is a way to experiment with other forms of communication or narratives more connected to the role that communication itself plays in the ARTD process.

Moreover, the living spiral has a transformative aim. Here, transformation comes from the integration of the study, presented in this chapter, into more extensive processes (TD-Lab), something that creative and arts-based methods in AR processes like this one can offer (Etmanski and Bishop, 2017).

The case: the institutionalisation of governance between the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa and county development agencies

Contextualising the case

In order to later present the lessons I learnt with the living spiral, it is important first to contextualise my work as a communicator in ARTD.

Within the project, I use communication as a facilitator to be able to increase the voice of the different policymakers (the main stakeholders in the ARTD process) and action researchers who are part of the project. This helps participants in ARTD understand what the process consists in and integrate it better, as well as strengthening the network. We work with several traditional communicative tools which we classify here in two groups:

- The ones I prepare and edit myself, like the systematisation of the workshops and meetings, written interviews, video interviews, etc.
- And the ones that policymakers or researchers write or create directly, although sometimes I might be the one who proposes the topic and format, such as short articles, blog posts, etc.

Compared to other communicators in research organisations who are not involved in AR, my role here is different because I am part of the process. Unlike external journalists from the media who write about a research project, I participate in all the meetings and workshops, which allows me to have an overall vision of the process and to be in a continuous dialogue with the actors. In this manner, my communication approach is built from the process itself, and I also contribute to the process, as I am able to discern what might be the key point in each moment of the project and communicate it.

During my four years at Orkestra, I have experimented with traditional communication tools to collect the views of policymakers and bring them to the forefront. In this section, I bring together the description of my particular living spiral of the TDLab with some insights and lessons learnt while adapting this methodology to our own particular circumstances at the TDLab. The specific case used will be the institutionalisation of governance between the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (Council) and County Development Agencies (CDAs or agencies) at the TDLab.

Choosing a plant: the yew

The living spiral metaphor can take the form of any plant, depending on what we think is more appropriate to explain the process (Macintyre *et al.*, 2018, p. 23). Choosing a plant required thinking about the TDLab in ways I had not done up until then, and I saw this reflection as being part of the methodology and my learning process. I chose the yew (also known as *taxus baccata*), which is in fact not a plant but a tree. There are several reasons why I chose this particular tree to explain this process:

- The main reason why I started to consider the yew for my living spiral metaphor is that it is the tree that appears on the coat of arms of Gipuzkoa, the province in which the process is taking place. Despite not being the most common tree here and also a very poisonous one, some of its characteristics helped me to think about the process, which made it a great metaphor.
- The yew is a millenary tree. It takes its time to grow, and it does not blossom but produces arils (like red berries) that contain the seed. The yew needs around 40 years to start growing arils. This is something I can relate to regarding the whole TDLab process. Building relationships with trust, as well as institutionalising them, also takes time. But it is thanks to this that we have been able to establish a strong process, which has survived for ten years, with three different governments and two opposite political parties.
- The yew tree has the capacity to regenerate itself through a special system. The trunk is empty inside, and this allows not only roots to grow from the top of the tree to the bottom but that the trunk, the leaves and all other parts of the plant are regenerated. Thanks to this system, I was able to see that our specific process, which I wanted to explain using this living spiral metaphor, helped “regenerate” the existing governance already operating in the territory (i.e., we did not create new governance from scratch). This regeneration comes from the process itself and the people that are part of it.

In the next sections, I make further use of this metaphor, with the twofold objective of sharing with the reader my perspective on the TDLab based on the views of policymakers, and also my experience in adapting the living spiral methodology. The narrative has the following parts: roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and arils.

Roots

Yews have several new roots that grow into the ground and are the starting point of its regeneration. They give us the context and background. Yet this does not mean that all the roots are “positive”.

In the case of the TDLab, I have identified two new roots that are key elements in the process, which are trust and political willingness. The TDLab has built on these two elements to regenerate itself.

These roots were generated at the beginning of the council terms, starting in 2011 and 2015, of different governments of different political parties and with diverse historical, social, economic, and political backgrounds, since these governments decided to give continuity to a project that had either been initiated or reformulated by another party in a previous term.

The construction of the TDLab started in 2009 under the rule of the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party). When EH Bildu’s party arrived in government in 2011, they decided to continue with the project but adapted it to their principles and terms. When the PNV came back into power after four years, the continuity of the project was not totally guaranteed. But eventually, the decision was made to maintain the project.

To represent these roots, I have chosen the words of one of the policymakers that participated in the decisions in 2009 and 2015:

“Liskar politikoak proiektu asko trabatu ditu [...]”

“Political conflicts have limited many projects in Gipuzkoa and it was about time that new decision spaces were opened where agreement is possible.” (Presentation of the book *Gipuzkoa Sarean Bidean*, 19th November 2019).

Besides, I consider that this “roots metaphor” is a good one to illustrate the new paths initiated by the Council and the agencies in the context of the TDLab. Agencies were included for the first time in 2013 after EH Bildu carried out a study inside the Council to see what the aim of the process should be and decided that agencies could play a relevant role in the continuity of the process. To integrate the agencies, they created two spaces: the Intercounty Board (for the people in charge of the Agencies and Council) and the Facilitators’ AR process space (to improve the facilitation skills of the agencies’ technical staff). This helped to build relationships of trust between the Council and agencies and gave them a basis and a direction to follow.

In order to strengthen these roots, feelings of mistrust and misunderstandings had to be overcome, which was one of the main tasks of ARTD. On the one hand, the Council had (historically) questioned the role of agencies while, on the other hand, the agencies only saw the Council as a source of money.

Below is an extract from a video recorded at the beginning of the council term (March 2016) where the director of Oarsoaldea’s CDA explained how council and agency policies had converged, for which it is important to emphasise that none of the agencies was self-sufficient:

“Garapen agentzien ardura nagusia da gure eskualdetako garapen sozioekonomikoa sustatzea eta horretan eraginkorrak izatea da [...]”

“The main responsibility of agencies is to support the socio-economic development of our counties. But, although we are efficient in doing so, we do not have formal competences. [...] I think the main challenge is to link the Council’s policies with our own work.”

The base of all of this was the ARTD methodology, which gave the process a mechanism with which to continue.

Trunk

Roots are connected to the trunk, and the trunk is the part of the tree that collects the nutrients from the roots and drives them through the branches for it to be able to produce leaves and arils, and at the same time, it is the “spine” of the tree. Without the trunk, the whole process would not be possible. Because of that, it somehow gives stability to the process, and when it regenerates, it catalyses transformation. The living spiral methodology helped me see the internal interdepartmental coordination of the Council as an essential part (trunk) of the TDLab and made me realise that some of the choices made at the beginning of the 2015-2019 term were key decisions in that they allowed the process to continue.

After deciding to continue with the TDLab for the new term, the General Deputy’s Cabinet chose to share the leadership of the process with the Economic Promotion Department for the first time. Until that moment, the process had been led solely by the General Deputy’s Department. As the process was very related to economic and institutional development, they saw an advantage in working with small and medium enterprises within the project. The ARTD methodology once again contributed to building trust in relationships, which made this collaborative approach possible. Communication helped reinforce these relationships through the newsletter, among other informative tools. The innovation director of the Economic Promotion Department said the following in an interview that was published in newsletter number 12 (January-February 2016):

“Enpresei dagokienez, Gipuzkoa Sareaneko filosofiak enpresa txikien arteko elkar-lana bultzatuko du [...]”

“Regarding firms, the philosophy of Gipuzkoa Sarean [former name for TDLab] is to support collaboration between small firms, with the goal of improving their competitiveness. [...] We think that it is necessary to work with development agencies, municipalities, and other economic agents in an aligned and efficient way and, in that sense, the Gipuzkoa Sarean initiative will be useful.”

By communicating this through a newsletter, relevant information was shared with all participants, and commitment from the stakeholders was gained, which is an example of how communication, integrated into a wider AR process, helps develop a broad range of dialogical approaches where policymakers not only talk but create the conditions for collaborative action.

Branches

Thanks to the previously described roots and trunk, the tree is able to grow branches. Branches are the result of the conditions generated by the roots and the trunk. And, like every tree, yews have small branches and strong ones. In 2017, the Council and agencies signed an agreement for a new form of collaborative governance for economic development policies, which I see as a strong branch that supports many other projects (different policy programmes).

Reaching this agreement was not easy, and it took approximately one year to be signed. The Council team in charge of the project (made up of two members of the General Deputy's Department, a politician, and a technical staff member) agreed with the researchers that Orkestra would facilitate the learning and trust-building process, and that they would facilitate the negotiations because it was foreseen that their role as facilitators would be increasingly important.

For the first part of the process, the trust-building, different diagnoses were used that helped them reflect on the relationship and understand each other's positions. Issues such as financing, roles, trust relationships, etc., were discussed.

In the second part, they started working on a document that would end up being an agreement signed by the two parties. The Council wrote the first version which it gave to the agencies, and this is how the negotiation started. This process, as said before, was facilitated by the person in charge of the project, who was a member of the Council.

Here, I would again like to highlight the role of communication during that time. As the communicator, I edited the introduction in the TDLab newsletters which is usually written by the policymaker in charge of TDLab. At that time, we both agreed that it would be the right moment to write about the negotiation process while it was still underway (the agreement was signed in June, and he wrote this piece of information in the newsletter issued January-February 2017). By writing and sharing the text below, the way I see it is that he was communicating to the rest of the participants that the future agreement was more than merely a piece of paper and was a matter that required responsibility from everyone, especially from those taking over researchers in the facilitation of the process:

“Gobernantza berri bat eraikitzea erraz esan eta nekez egiten da [...]”

“Building new governance is easy to say, but difficult to do. However, after the interactions and meetings held lately, I would say we are taking firm steps. And in this regard, there is a reflection concerning the changes in roles and attitudes of all of us I would like to share. When we started on this path in Arrasate, on 26th May last year, and began the process to sign the agreement at the Intercountry Board, researchers proposed a procedure. As a matter of fact, we asked them to facilitate that part of the process. However, as the process goes on, we have seen [...] that the facilitation of researchers is not enough, and that the Council team has adopted this role as its own, at first gradually but lately in a much more direct manner. In the last few months, I have personally taken on the role of facilitator, and I would like to share two thoughts I found significant along that path. On the one hand, adopting the role as facilitators meant ‘that we went from being a witness to actually carrying out the process,’ and I would say something similar is also happening with the county agencies. Consequently, the new governance has been ‘taken out of the research laboratory’ and we are bringing it to life in our daily activities. Thus, we are starting a new phase, and our path will go as far as our strength will let us.”

Without a communication tool like the newsletter, reflections like this one would only be recorded in research diaries during the process or possibly shared as insights in academic contexts. However, non-academic communication formats like newsletters contribute to building the process narrative in ways that are more accessible to newcomers.

Leaves

After developing the whole process, some leaves emerged that gave energy to it so that it could continue over time, and also for the tree to grow new roots with which to construct new

processes. As said above, in June 2017, both parties signed an agreement that included the philosophy of the TDLab's work and the relationship between the agencies and the Council, as well as formally recognising the two main dialogue spaces of the process, which were the Intercounty Board (including the Executive Committee) and the Facilitators AR process space. Action researchers participated in both, although with a more relevant role in the second one. In other words, action researchers remained in the institutionalised "new" governance.

At an Intercounty Board meeting where the almost final version of the agreement was drafted (23rd February 2017), I recorded a video for the director of Uggasa (CDA of Urola Garaia). This happened almost at the same time as the writing by the council policymaker described before, and by sharing it here, I want to show how communication tools can keep the dialogue going among the participants in AR processes, as well as enhance the voice of the different actors involved in these processes. In my view, the following words represent her interpretation of how conditions were created for leaves to grow on the branches:

"Prozesuaren gauzarik esanguratsuenen artean, nire iritziz, gobernantza eredu berri baterantz pauso eraginkor bat ematearen alde egon den borondatea izan da [...]"

"In my opinion, among the most significant features of the process is the willingness of the Council and the agencies to take effective steps towards new governance. Reaching this framework agreement, only a few months after initiating the process, is the result of hard work on the part of all of us.

The work and role of development agencies have been recognised, and we have built a new and stronger relationship between the Council and the agencies. I would also like to underline that we have worked with a long-term perspective during the whole process. That is to say, our objective has been that the agreement is not something for just one term, but the first step on a long path."

Despite this positive statement, we were all aware that we still faced challenges ahead. The agreement was there, but both parties now needed to demonstrate that the deal was not just "theory", but also practice. This was especially emphasised by the president of the Tolosaldea Garatzen CDA in a video released after the agreement was signed (2nd June 2017):

"Konbenioa sinatzerakoan komentatu den gauza garrantzitsu bat da, nahiz eta orain arte egindakoa garrantzitsua izan, lana orain hasten da [...]"

"When signing the agreement, an important message emerged: even if what we have achieved so far is important, the real work has begun today. Now we have to establish a high level of trust among the different parts of public administration (the Council and agencies) to optimise results. That is what we have to do from now on."

On this occasion again we used communication tools to give voice to the actors and to keep the dialogue going in the public sphere. This was done not only by recognising each other and celebrating what had been accomplished but also by sharing views and concerns about potential conflicts of interest and about what was yet to come. Thus, communication contributed to strengthening the roots, i.e., the relationships of trust between the Council and the agencies.

Arils (and new branches and leaves)

The signing of the agreement helped other branches to grow. Here, I will mention one: the facilitators' Industry 4.0 AR process that is still underway and aims to make a diagnosis

of industrial small and medium enterprises in Gipuzkoa to see how they are doing regarding Industry 4.0. The first stage of the process was facilitated by Orkestra and the Council (Innovation department) and started in April 2017 and ended in June 2018.

The result of the facilitators' Industry 4.0 AR process was a diagnostic report based on the dialogue between agency staff and 420 representatives of small and medium enterprises (out of 507 industrial SMEs in the province), which is quite a large number. It also showed how governance worked in practice, and how working collaboratively could help make processes improve.

As we said earlier, yews do not blossom, but instead, they produce arils which contain the seeds for new processes. This is what is happening with the Industry 4.0 process. According to the results of the diagnosis, once the processes responding to the diagnosis started, new actors have been joining the process and have established new processes related to Industry 4.0.

Communication in these contexts is relevant for the dialogue process between participants but can also play a role in integrating outsiders into the process. This was what happened when Julian Müller, an expert in Industry 4.0 visited the TDLab. Once again, I made a video so that we could include his perspective on our process in our collective narrative of the TDLab. I share some of his words that describe this process and which in my view, are like the arils of our yew.

"It is good and well decided that you have direct contact with companies in the field [...] and that different actors work together. [...] different actors from the political level, from the government, from various agencies, and people that work in the same sector, all of whom need to collaborate and find a way of working together."

After a process of more than a decade, as a communicator, I now want to share the results of long-term AR processes aimed at building trust and coordination mechanisms, reaching agreements, and applying good will in specific programmes. However, we need to continue taking care of the roots, i.e., of the relationships of trust, in the same way as we aim to continue producing arils.

Final discussion

There are different ways in which the living spiral methodology could be used in ARTD processes. One is to build a spiral with the actors in real time. This would show the perspective of stakeholders more directly. However, it would also require stakeholders to be more committed, and that has seldom been feasible in processes with policymakers using ARTD.

Consequently, in order to explore how the living spiral could be applied to ARTD, I have developed my own living spiral, which I have built on the contributions that stakeholders have made through the communication tools I use. I have not asked for any extra effort on their part, which means that my own perspective is strongly implicit in the narrative.

My final discussion focuses on what I learnt when experimenting with the spiral in the context of the AR+ CoLab. Next, I share my reflections on what I learnt about the living spiral methodology. These were part of a blog post made at the AR+ website (Gamester, Teague and Reizabal, 2019):

"CoLab helped me enormously to examine the collective process more deeply and to understand it better through the living spiral, and also to be able to see what the barriers and problems were that we had to face during the process. At the same

time, it was the starting point of a reflection about my own communicator role inside Orkestra's AR Laboratory. For instance, it made me start to think about the way I work, and whether my voice is reflected implicitly or explicitly in the interviews, videos, and so on, I create.

In addition, thanks to sharing the experience with Katie and Jean, and constructing our own collective narrative, I learnt that even though we might be examining different processes, in the end, and with the help of the metaphor, we can find common aspects we all share. This was very important, and helped me to find myself within the diversity of CoLab."

The Living Spiral Framework helps us to understand the process in more depth and how transformation really took place. In this case, it was very constructive for me as a communicator in ARTD to see how relationships between the Council and the agencies were institutionalised. I also learnt how previous communication items could be integrated into a more comprehensive scheme. Literal extracts from different interviews, articles, and videos could all be part of the same narrative.

Notwithstanding all this, I must say that when I produced single communicative materials that were contextualised in the dialogue process of actors (videos, interviews, newsletter articles, etc.), my voice, the communicator's voice, was a weak one. And this was because I put the emphasis on what the actors said and did at that moment. Nevertheless, this shows that integrating a communicator into an AR team, who has a global vision of the project and communicates its news while reflection and action are taking place, can be positive for enhancing the voice of actors and fostering dialogue between them, even if the voice of the communicator is barely present.

The use of the living spiral in this chapter was of a different nature. Here, I did not write while reflection and action were taking place, but later on, in a more elaborate process. Moreover, the living spiral, with its narrative starting in the roots and finishing at the arils, invites us to develop a more comprehensive perspective. As mentioned earlier, the interpretation of the communicator is a strong component in this perspective, and this was new for me.

As to ARTD, I do see potential in this approach. One of its positive aspects is that as a communicator who participates in the process, in some cases, I can communicate, in a constructive way, what actors might find difficult to say. Quite often, when practitioners talk in interviews, videos and the like, the story is sweetened, at least a little bit. As a communicator, I also have access to discussions on the obstacles, invisible aspects and so on of the process which are shared in formal and informal meetings, but not recognised in interviews or posts, with some exceptions. In this respect, I must stress that we never publish these contents without the consent of participants, including this chapter. However, when participants give their consent, the communicator can help make explicit certain features of the process that stakeholders do not openly dare to address but accept that they need to be addressed. These issues are difficult to be discerned by communicators that are not part of the process.

As a final conclusion, I think that from the living spiral method, ARTD can include this new role of communicators, who are not only able to develop on-the-spot communication products, but who are also able to create overarching narratives of the process so as to help build the shared story, and who may also lend a hand by addressing difficult issues in a constructive way.

References

- Bradbury, H. (2012). The Voice: The participative dynamics of finding, raising, sharing what we have to say, *Action Research Journal*, 10(3): 223-224.
- Coghlan, D. and Brydon-Miller, M. (2014). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*. Sage Publications.

- Etmanski, C. and Bishop, K. (2017). Art: Enhancing Creativity in Action Research in Six Lessons in H. Bradbury *et al.* *Cooking with Action Research: Resources for Self and Community Transformation*, Action Research+ (pp 81-88).
- Gamester, J. Teague, K. and Reizabal, M. (2019). Our Interstory in the Learning Futures Co-Lab. *Action Research +*. Obtained at: <https://actionresearchplus.com/our-interstory-in-the-learning-futures-co-lab/>
- Macintyre, T.; Chaves, M. and McGarry, D. (2018). *The Living Spiral Framework: a guide for researching stories of transformation*. T-Learning; Transitional Minds; Environmental Learning Research Centre.
- Tremblay, C., de Oliveira Jayme, B. (2015). Community knowledge co-creation through participatory video, *Action Research Journal*, 13(3): 298-314.