

# The contribution of Action Research to policy learning: The case of Gipuzkoa Sarean

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This article is about a six year policy learning process named Gipuzkoa Sarean in the Basque province of Gipuzkoa. In the article we reflect on how action research contributed to policy learning. The process consists of three stages:

2009-2011: Initiation of the project and development of a work method;

2011-2013: Government learning and organisational change;

2013-2014: Social learning and the shift to a new approach to territorial development.

For each stage we describe the background and main goal of the research project, the participants in policy learning, the work method and agenda, the status and roles of policy makers and researchers and the results.

Our reflections on-action are used to discuss the conditions for social learning. Our argument is that the distinction between *practice* and *praxis* is crucial for understanding the conditions for social learning. Our use of the concept *praxis* is inspired by Paulo Freire and we interpret it as the connection of reflection and action in the same phase of the process. If they are separated into theory and practice they do not create the conditions for social learning in a policy process. They might create outcomes, such as recipes for policy or political discourses, but not social learning.

**Key words:** policy learning, territorial development, territory, policy maker, theory, practice, praxis