

IMPLEMENTING RIS3: THE CASE OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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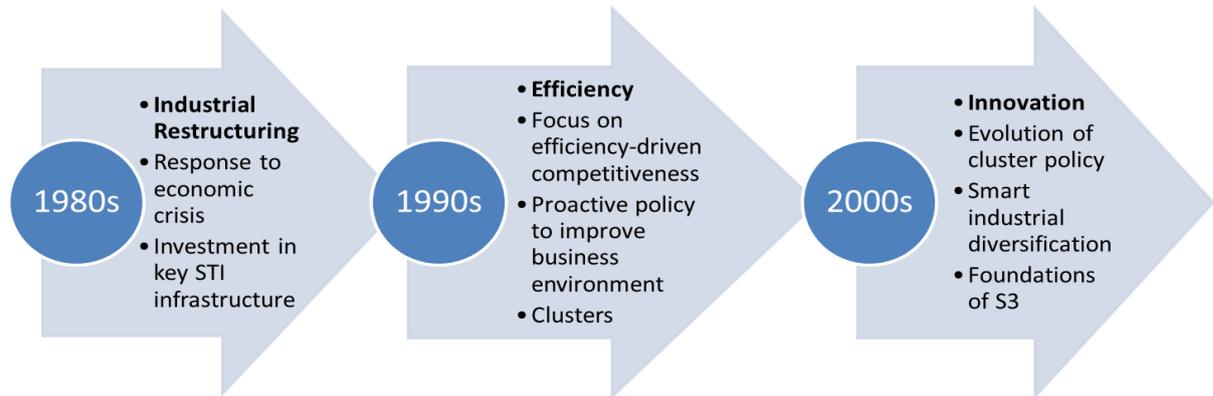
Professor Mari José Aranguren (Orkestra-Deusto University)
Professor Kevin Morgan (Cardiff University)
Dr. James Wilson (Orkestra-Deusto University)



Antecedents and elaboration of the Science, Technology and Innovation Plan (STIP) 2020

The Basque RIS3 is embodied in the current STIP 2020. This emerged from a process that was explicitly triggered at the end of 2012, but that has antecedences well beyond that.

Figure 1: Evolution of Basque Competitiveness Strategy



Source: Own Elaboration

The elaboration of the STIP 2020 can be divided into two phases. The first phase was under the leadership of the Department of Competitiveness and Economic development (DCED) and corresponds broadly with the year 2013. The second phase was under the leadership of the Department of the President (DP) and corresponds broadly with the year 2014. The result was a traditional plan, but one that was seen as a starting point. It was conceived as a living document rather than an end result to be presented in Parliament and then sit on shelves in government. Indeed, the plan that was published at the end of 2014 has been updated at the end of 2015 with an annex that reflects the paths emerging from the initial implementation steps.

Key elements of the RIS3 Document

The STIP 2020 that was published at the end of 2014 set out the RIS3 of the Basque Country, or at least the starting point for the RIS3 of the Basque Country. The centerpiece of the plan is the identification of three strategic priority areas:

- Biosciences-Health
- Energy
- Advanced Manufacturing (Basque Industry 4.0).

Alongside these three strategic priorities the RIS3 also identifies four opportunity niches that are strongly linked to the territory (urban and rural development):

- Food
- Creative and Cultural Industries
- Urban Habitat
- Environmental Ecosystems

In addition to a commitment to focus on these vertical priority areas and opportunity niches, the STIP 2020 also sets out five axes for transversal (or horizontal) actions:

- Guarantee the development of human capital in science, technology and innovation
- Ensure excellence in the science, technology and innovation system
- Promote social, business and public innovation as the key to the process of transforming the Basque Country
- Use public-private collaboration to promote a business ecosystem with high value-added
- Open the science, technology and innovation system to promote the uptake and generation of new knowledge not existing within the Basque region

Finally, the plan also sets out five operative objectives that seek to take advantage of the main opportunities and respond to the main weaknesses that were detected in the science, technology and innovation system:

- Concentrate research, development and innovation resources and investments in the priority areas
- Strengthen basic research and experimental development
- Orientate the Basque Science, Technology and Innovation Network towards results
- Strengthen the capacity to capture international research, development and innovation funds
- Increase the number of firms that innovate

Achievements

The Basque Country has taken full advantage of the opportunities presented by RIS3 to review and reform both its regional innovation *system* and its regional innovation *strategy*. Far from being a paper exercise to access EU regional funds, the design and development of the Basque RIS3 has been as thoroughgoing as anything we have witnessed in the European Union and this is attributable to the political commitment of the Basque Government on the one hand and to the cooperation of its partners in the BSTIN on the other (Morgan, 2016a).

But there are still some challenges to face. One of them is multilevel governance.

The approach to multilevel governance

Multi-level governance is a key challenge for governments everywhere, particularly in the EU, where the multi-level polity is more developed than anywhere else in the world. However, as the OECD review concluded, the Basque Country has major multi-level coordination challenges within its borders, especially as between the central Basque Government and the 3 Provincial Councils (OECD, 2011). In principle the STI Council is one of the mechanisms designed to promote multi-level coordination among the three governance tiers of the Basque Country, but the Council meets just twice a year and therefore it cannot be expected to provide the operational level synergies that are required by the RIS3 process. On the contrary, these local RIS3 plans ought to be integrated into the operational work of the three Priority Sectors and the four Opportunity Niches.

One of the distinctive features of the Basque RIS3 process in recent years – a feature that was not anticipated at the outset – is the emergence of more localised RIS3 plans at the level of the province and the city. The emergence of RIS3 plans in Gipuzkoa and Bilbao cannot be ignored and indeed should be seen as opportunities for more granular forms of local experiments, along the lines suggested by the emergent models of experimentalist governance.

Cities are assuming a much more prominent role in innovation and economic development, as the burgeoning Smart City agenda demonstrates, and the Basque Country is well-positioned to capitalise on this new urban dynamic given the economic calibre and aesthetic quality of its three major cities.

References

Morgan, K. (2016) 'Collective Entrepreneurship: The Basque Model of Innovation', *European Planning Studies*.

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