

## Article

# Digitalisation of Creative Industries Fostered by Collaborative Governance: Public Innovation Labs in Gipuzkoa

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the promotion of digitalisation in the creative economy through collaborative governance in the province of Gipuzkoa (Basque Country, Spain). In order to understand this initiative, two public innovation labs located in San Sebastian that influence audiovisual production in Basque and digital gastronomy, respectively, are used as case studies: 2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab and LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab. Based on sectoral contexts of fragmentation, public and private efforts to consolidate synergies and accelerate processes for the coordination of value chains, attraction of talent, experimentation, and innovation. The analysis has relied on qualitative methodologies, consisting of interviews with key actors and desk research. The results show the implications of a sub-regional collaborative governance model as a means to contribute to a regional Smart Specialisation Strategy. Although the initiative faces a consolidation process, public innovation labs in Gipuzkoa foster sectoral articulation and digitalisation in gastronomy and audiovisual production in the Basque language. Additionally, the acceleration of innovation and the involvement of quadruple helix agents in management tasks have been explored.

**Keywords:** creative economy; digitalisation; public innovation lab; digital gastronomy; collaborative governance



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## 1. Introduction

This article delves into publicly headed innovation labs for Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) in Gipuzkoa, Basque Country. As part of a collaborative governance model, the innovation labs seek to help to articulate a regional Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) based on the strengthening of sectoral entrepreneurial activity. The main contribution of this experience is the exemplification of a structured and agreed involvement of multiple actors, who adopt differentiated and complementary roles, thus enabling effective governance.

CCI is a hard-to-define concept. There are different definitions that vary depending on the perspective of the person addressing the topic. The definition by the UNCTAD [1] (p. 8) is widely acknowledged due to its broadness and adaptability, as it understands that CCI are “the cycles of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs; constitute a set of knowledge-based activities, focused on but not limited to arts, potentially generating revenues from trade and intellectual property rights; comprise tangible products and intangible intellectual or artistic services with creative content, economic value and market objectives.” What distinguishes the CCI is the use value given to the symbolic, which is rooted in cultural and creative sources.

However, delimiting the types of economic activity that belong to the CCI requires more precision. The Basque Observatory of Culture identifies 14 creative and cultural sectors active in the Basque Country, among which gastronomy and audiovisual and multi-media creation can be found [2]. These have been perceived by the Gipuzkoa Provincial

Council as economic areas of strategic importance. By means of a collaborative governance model implemented in Gipuzkoa, the provincial government has led the creation of two innovation labs with the aim of strengthening audiovisual creation in the Basque language and digital gastronomy at a sub-regional level.

The Province of Gipuzkoa is located in the Basque Autonomous Community (Basque Country), next to the northern Spanish border with France. The Basque Autonomous Community has 2,219,777 inhabitants and is divided into three Historical Territories or Provinces: Biscay (1,159,046 inhabitants), Alava (333,852 inhabitants), and Gipuzkoa (726,879 inhabitants). The Capital city of this Autonomous Community is Vitoria-Gasteiz, located in Alava. The Province of Gipuzkoa represents 33% of the Basque Country's population. It covers a surface area of 1980 km<sup>2</sup>, the smallest province in Spain. It comprises 11 districts and 89 municipalities, and San Sebastian is the capital city of the province. San Sebastian hosts 26% of the province's population. The main languages are Spanish and Basque.

Cultural and creative industries have grown in relevance over the last two decades as notable contributors to overall socio-economic development and well-being. Such a reputation has been propelled by the emphasis that scholars, policy makers, and entrepreneurial agents have placed on creativity [3,4]. Indeed, the interplay between a wide set of agents and elements [5] can help comprise an entrepreneurial ecosystem [6,7] in which cultural entrepreneurs and creativity play a major role [8] (p. 65) generating innovation outcomes and overall welfare consequences [9]. For the purpose of this article, entrepreneurial ecosystems will be defined following the basic definition provided by Miller and Acs [10] (p. 79), which states that an entrepreneurial ecosystem and its outputs relies on a variety of voluntary relationships among independent agents with some form of agreed-upon and acceptable governance.

Nonetheless, it was political leadership which first centred the attention on CCI as a policy matter. The set of policies that the UK Government's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) introduced in the late 1990s reframed the production of cultural goods and services as "creative industries", thus understanding them as a "legitimate object of policy" [11]. In the previous decade, a generally deteriorating industrial sector led to national development agendas centred around the notion of business-friendliness and local skills [11–13]. Soon the focus of local public investments started to move from industrial settings to urban areas, which had to be adjusted with new concepts in mind. Emerging industries were promoted, tourism most prominently, and it was deemed that cultural venues and events would create "urban attractiveness", thus re-generating income and employment [14,15].

Similar processes took place in other European countries following the steps of Britain [16]. A general framework can be found in the UNCTAD [17] which established a basic perspective that paved the way for other countries to include the CCI in their development plans. Even though actions aimed at enhancing the creative economy have been globally fragmentary, the term CCI has been adopted by multiple international public institutions [18,19].

One of the main sources of this duality in the policy landscape is the strong influence that the spatial perspective of CCI acquired shortly after the DCMS presented its development scheme. According to Chapain and Comunian [20], a report produced in the year 2000 by the DCMS titled "Creative Industries—The Regional Dimension" stressed the importance of locally-oriented policies and greatly contributed to shift the focus from national governments to regional institutions. In this specific case the Regional Development Agencies were in charge of the application of CCI-oriented government policy, since it was conceived as a key sector in order to make cities and regions competitive within the globalised knowledge economy [21,22].

CCI are significantly context-dependent. Different regions around Europe have envisioned different CCI strategies due to specificities in their structural attributes that can unlock or expand paths for economic growth. These variations are clearly noticeable in

regions part of the European Union, where subtle spatial differences have led to distinctive CCI strategies [23–26].

### *1.1. Regional CCI Policies as Smart Specialisation Strategy*

Although there is not a consensus on its theoretical and spatial dimensions, the concept of ‘region’ has been widely used as an operative term in the literature [27]. With public innovation strategies in mind, Cooke defines it as “a meso-level political unit set between the national or federal and local levels of government that might have some cultural or historical homogeneity, but which at least has some statutory powers to intervene and support economic development, particularly innovation” [28] (p. 953). Such a view contributes to conceptually tie a region to its policy implementation and competencies. As a realm of social action, a conceptual understanding of ‘region’ entails repercussions for public policies. For instance, the institutional configuration, political agency, and economic activities are influenced within the boundaries of the regional territory. Nowadays, this can be noted through Smart Specialisation Strategies.

In the European context, CCI policy variations across regions have been largely subjected to regional specialisation strategies. Regional Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation are an essential part of the European Union’s (EU) Cohesion Policy and they will likely continue to be at the forefront of the EU’s priorities, as the programming for the 2021–2027 period suggests [29]. S3 is a policy concept to support regional prioritisation in innovative sectors, fields or technologies through the entrepreneurial discovery process and it is based on a bottom-up approach to reveal what a region does best in terms of its endowments [30]. It seeks to promote and coordinate place-based development through non-neutral, vertical policies, which have a common legal and institutional framework [31,32]. Under this model, each region is responsible for the identification of its own strengths and the amplification of positive surrounding conditions. As Foray puts it, “The main goal of a smart specialisation policy is to concentrate resources on the development of those activities that are likely to effectively transform the existing economic structures through R&D and innovation” [33] (p. 4). Thus, smart specialisation strategies are formed by exploratory synergies between four basic kinds of actors, namely businesses and entrepreneurs, civil society, governments, and universities, who form the so-called “quadruple helix”) of smart specialisation [34,35]. However, Foray also notes that “in most cases, a smart specialisation process is embedded in the existing productive structures that are local but whose transformation requires new resources, new technologies and new competences” [36] (p. 25), which implies that S3 strategies are not to be mistaken with undertaking a complete overhaul of local production contexts, but rather strengthening pre-existing qualities.

### *1.2. The Basque Smart Specialisation Strategy*

From 2014 onward, member regions of the EU must have a smart specialisation strategy in place since the European Commission established S3 as a prerequisite for access to the European Regional Development Fund [37]. In line with the new mandate, the regional government of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (Spain) undertook a S3 formulation that was heavily based on its prior efforts to restructure the business and innovation system [38]. Cultural and creative industries have a salient role in it as an “opportunity niche”. Other European regions have granted strategic importance to CCI within a broader S3 programme as well. For instance, Central Finland, Emilia-Romagna, Wallonia, Western Greece, or Slovakia, which are part of the CREADIS3 project. Matching the then-spreading trend in CCI policy perspective that originated in the UK, in the early 2000s the Basque Government initiated a process to intervene more purposefully in the creative industries sector in the region. First, the Basque Council for Culture was created, which represented a preliminary move towards governance; then, the Basque Culture Plan (2002–2009) was introduced and, thirdly, the Basque Observatory of Culture was created back in 2006. These steps were intended as an assertion of the Basque regional

leadership on CCI policy and highlighted its potential in the economic field. This approach was aligned with broader policymaking contexts such as the EU, in which ‘creativity’ was advocated for invigorating the CCI business activity as stressed by the Directorate-General for Culture, Youth and Education of the European Commission during the 2000s [39]. Thus, creativity was understood as an asset and the way was paved for commercially oriented policies at European level [40].

It should be noted that the Basque smart specialisation plan also entails acting on two other dimensions, namely, the reform of the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) governance system, in order to open the polity to market-related agents and universities on the one hand, and the restructuring of the Basque Science, Technology and Innovation Network “to ensure a better alignment between design and delivery” on the other [41] (p. 1549). As noted by the OECD [38], thorough multi-level coordination structures have to be maintained in order to meet such goals. This suggests that the Basque S3 does not only seek to simply comply with EU’s requirements, but it also aims to be robust and sustainable.

### 1.3. Gipuzkoa’s Innovation Labs

In Gipuzkoa, at sub-regional level, cultural and creative industries are inextricably tied to a public collaborative governance programme. Since 2016, the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council has fostered a flagship initiative known as ‘Building the Future’ (*Etorkizuna Eraikiz* in the Basque language). The initiative is described as a comprehensive public collaborative governance model open to all societal agents in the sub-region as a means to enable participation and cooperation for the strategic design of the public agenda [42]. In practice, public–private experimentation is the driving force of the initiative and it is oriented towards answering the challenges of the economic, social, and political future [43]. As a government initiative, Building the Future has three main objectives [44]:

- Generate loci for listening, deliberating, and occasionally, but not necessarily, decision making. These forums are based on horizontal relationships, where the government interacts and cooperates with the network of agents that comprise civil society, namely institutions, businesses, NGOs, universities, associations, etc.
- Collectively identify the upcoming challenges in the Territory of Gipuzkoa. This is mostly achieved by designing methods to tackle future challenges, trying experimental solutions in real-life environments together with different networks of agents. Obtained results are later applied to public policies by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council.
- Create specific structures to strengthen and ensure the sustainability of the open and collaborative governance processes. Such structures’ primary functions are supporting the management, ensuring funding, disseminating the results of deliberation, and looking after the proper implementation of governance processes.

‘Building the Future’ is an initiative that proposes a new way of doing politics [45–47] which is founded on different levels of Governance action, from systemic to individual [48–51]. To this end, it designs new forms of political action emancipated from its institutional logics to influence the public agenda [52,53]. The design relies on the principles of interactive governance [54] and creates strategies and structures that generate the conditions for governance [55]. In particular, it deepens the connection between different actors [56,57] that aim to “realize or implement a public policy, manage a public program or operationalize a set of assets” [58] (p. 543).

The open and collaborative governance model designed and implemented by the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council includes, among other actions [44], what are known as Reference Centres. These are physical centres distributed across the territory of Gipuzkoa [59], thus context-based venues located in environments with adequate resources to meet the strategic priorities defined by the Basque Government, which include knowledge and innovation communities (KICs) [60]. Each of these operate as specialised hubs of open innovation [61,62] oriented towards enhancing subjects with strong potential in Gipuzkoa, which, as mentioned above, are designated as strategic priorities and opportunity niches. The reasoning for the existence of the reference centres is twofold: on the one hand,

they contribute to the local implementation of specialisation strategies (vertical axis of action [63]); on the other hand, they are nexuses for the structuring and articulation of the actors and processes involved in each priority area (horizontal axis of action). Impacting the horizontal axis is achieved by helping the strengthening of a territorial value chain under a holistic view, one that starts with primary suppliers and extends to market results. Normatively, this process is instrumental for supporting the S3 regional policy.

Reference centres operate under the “entrepreneurial discovery process” approach. The term entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP) refers to the systematic discovery and pursuit of emergent research, development, and innovation investment priorities by agents, typically within a socio-economic system territorially bounded [64], i.e., a region. The EDP requires fostering bottom-up approaches, even if they coexist with corresponding top-down actions [65]. Generally, the role of governments is to create enabling conditions for entrepreneurial discoveries to take place. Moreover, Szerb et al. [66] note that numerous S3 strategies tend to lack private sector and civil society engagement, creating an endeavour void that undermines the outputs of entrepreneurial discovery processes. Hence, governments tend to dominate in the early stages of specialisation strategies.

An accurate way to conceptualise reference centres in Gipuzkoa is to frame them as publicly led ‘innovation labs’ [67,68], provided that they rely on active participation to generate innovation outputs that add to the overarching public benefit. However, Gipuzkoan reference centres are not to be mistaken with living labs in the public sector, their recent surge in the literature notwithstanding [69]; reference centres foster various industries thanks to public involvement and assistance. Cultural and creative industries are among those industries, since they are one of the four opportunity niches identified in the regional S3. Along with entrepreneurship, innovation is an important vector for the competitiveness of regions [70] and the creative industries have been proven to contribute towards this [71]. Additionally, as Miles and Green noted [72], creative industries specifically produce innovation in areas that have traditionally remained ‘hidden’ for researchers and practitioners, namely, user interface, cultural product, cultural concept, and delivery. Together with technological and process innovation, these industries possess above average capabilities for positive spillovers to other economical fields, such as tourism, public services, or healthcare [73,74].

The Gipuzkoan CCI-dedicated reference centres are named ‘2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab’ (2deo) and ‘LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab’ (LABe), presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Core attributes of 2deo and LABe.

	<b>2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab</b>	<b>LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab</b>
CCI field	Audiovisual content in Basque	Digital gastronomy
Objective	To promote audiovisual production in the Basque language	To reflect, co-create, and innovate in digital gastronomy
Challenges	Scarce, unknown, and poorly considered offer Sector with scarce cutting-edge technological capacity	Deficiencies in the sector’s digitalisation Potential to improve cohesion in the value chain
Date of creation	May 2019	July 2019
Main recipients	SMEs in the sector Basque youth and citizens	SMEs in the sector Basque citizens

Source: Author’s elaboration.

Therefore, it should be highlighted that, on the one hand, 2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab is a space dedicated to promoting audiovisual production and that on the other, LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab is dedicated to promoting digital gastronomy. In addition to helping to coordinate the above-mentioned sectors, these innovation labs are way to offer innovation infrastructures to actors that face difficulties in accessing them. Since its

preliminary design, the involvement of quadruple helix agents has been put into practice (see Table 2), in such a way that the point of view of the sector's agents is notably present. Conceptually, the quadruple helix includes social and cultural organizations reflecting the importance of "culture", "values", and "lifestyles", and in general, the dynamics with civil society to signify that the relations between university, industry, and government are contextual and generate innovation systems that are different depending on their institutional, social, and cultural contexts [34].

**Table 2.** Quadruple helix agents involved.

Collaborating Agents	2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab	LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab
Government	Gipuzkoa Provincial Council	Gipuzkoa Provincial Council
Scientific Research	University of the Basque Country University of Mondragón	Basque Culinary Center
Business	SMEs in the audiovisual sector San Sebastian International Film Festival	SMEs in the gastronomy sector
	EiTB (Basque Autonomous Community's public broadcast service)	ACEDE Cluster (Basque cluster of businesses producing home appliances and components.)
Society	Tabakalera, International Centre for Contemporary Culture	Tabakalera, International Centre for Contemporary Culture

Source: Author's elaboration.

Hence, both centres are located in Tabakalera, the international centre for contemporary culture in San Sebastian (capital city of the province of Gipuzkoa), which can be understood as a "cultural brownfield" [75] of institutional leadership. The location of public innovation labs in this centre is an indication of the importance attached to them by the sub-regional policy action system.

#### 1.4. Basque CCI Ecosystem

The Basque milieu of cultural and creative industries has been described as an "archipelago of heterogenous entities" [76] (p. 12). Such wording is a synthesis of a complex reality, in which agents are far from comprising a cluster and have diverse needs, sizes, and scope.

A quick overview of the CCI sector in 2016 shows a total of 15,437 companies based in the Basque Country, which accounted for 10% of the total number of companies across all economic sectors [77]. These companies generated nearly 1784 million euros in 2015, approximately 2.61% of Basque GDP [76,78]. In terms of employment, the CCI sector accounted only for 5.3% of total jobs [77]. Comparatively, on average, creative economy companies are substantially smaller in terms of number of employees than the rest of the business spectrum: roughly 94,3% of these companies had fewer than 10 employees, mainly relying on self-employment, since 83.3% had between 0 and 2 [79]. By contrast, a group of 96 prominent cultural and creative companies, i.e., 0.62% of cultural and creative companies in 2016, generated an estimated 55% of the value created by the industry and employed 15.9% of the overall workforce [76,77].

These observations about the Basque cultural and creative industry ecosystem are consistent with a general depiction of CCI made by Pratt [80], who states that cultural and creative industries differ from other economic fields by virtue of the "missing middle", that is, the lack of sufficient medium-size entities in the sectoral landscape. Moreover, given the high self-employment rate in CCI, companies tend to have a short lifespan, which translates into greater emphasis on skilled workers, rather than on firms, on one hand, and a weak sectoral structure, on the other. This is exacerbated by the project-based work dynamics credited to CCI, since projects represent an often-temporary alliance of professionals and resources. Other overviews of labour in CCI [81] have underlined that

weak sectoral structures have negative consequences for employment quality, which in turn is closely related to social inequalities within the industry.

Material conditions make CCI a prominent sector for entrepreneurship, as creators tend to shift enterprises frequently. Nevertheless, theorists like Swedberg [82] have analysed the notion of ‘cultural entrepreneurship’ introduced by Schumpeter, who is often credited as the early manifestation of modern growth entrepreneurs and natural ecological systems conceptualisations [83]. Extending the general understanding, Baumol [84] turned the attention towards institutional arrangements, which highly influence the degree of productivity derived from entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are framed with ‘productive entrepreneurship’ as their core outcome, ultimately producing aggregate welfare benefits [6,7].

In order to enhance productive entrepreneurship, governments, and public institutions that engage in the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach primarily play the role of “feeders” of regional entrepreneurial networks, instead of “leaders” [6] (p. 8). Essentially, under this approach, governments create the necessary preconditions for entrepreneurial discovery processes to take place. In order to specify the different governance functions that public action can serve, Rampersad [85] (p. 1124) delineates four modes of network governance:

- Framing: establishing an identity for the ecosystem and developing a working coordinating mechanism.
- Activating: the process of identifying participants for and structuring the network.
- Mobilising: building commitment among actors.
- Synthesising: creating conditions for productive interaction while preventing, minimising, and removing obstacles to cooperation.

However, the elements that interact within an ecosystem are diverse and constitute complex intersections, as Stam and van de Ven [5] show, and precise policy implications are yet to be explored [86]

## 2. Research Design and Methods

This article is formulated as a case study conducted in the Province of Gipuzkoa, Spain. The methodology employed follows the “empirical triangulation” approach [87], combining empirical qualitative methods, i.e., semi-structured interviews, and desk research. Empirical triangulation enables internal validity assessment during the research process, as analysing exogenously produced documents helps to delimit the extent and significance of semi-structured interviews. This is especially impactful in studies where “elite interviews” are conducted [88,89]. Furthermore, case studies on public administration research make extensive use of diversified sources in order to acquire contextual understanding, and the research here described is aligned with that praxis [90,91]. The methodological design has been made with the goal of maximising the explanatory potential of the agents involved in the activity and governance of 2de0–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab and LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab.

On the one hand, desk research efforts have taken two types of directions. First, three themes in the literature have been examined in depth: Cultural and Creative Industries as policy matters, Smart Specialisation Strategies, and Collaborative Governance. These fields constitute the core of the study and contribute to frame the case. Secondly, an analysis of information from grey literature and secondary sources was undertaken. Such sources can be classified as “management-related” and “knowledge-related”.

Management-related sources are those produced by governments and public administrations responsible for CCI policy design and implementation. In this case, the European Commission, the Basque Government, and the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council. It should be noted that the Spanish Government, concerning the national level, is not part of the analysis, inasmuch as the Basque Government holds full legislative powers in economic planning. Studies in other European regional contexts may have to take account of the national level.

Knowledge-related sources derive from various institutions monitoring the CCI landscape in the Basque Country and Gipuzkoa. The materials have been produced by researchers from Mondragon University and the University of the Basque Country, the Basque Statistical Institute, Creadis3 European Interreg Project, independent research institutes and, finally, LABe's and 2deo's management. Some institutions produce information periodically, such as the Basque Statistical Institute, while others have produced data on a one-off or circumstantial basis, such as the Creadis3 project [77]. The nature of the data obtained is multidisciplinary and mixed, i.e., both quantitative and qualitative.

Lastly, four semi-structured "elite interviews" were conducted in autumn of 2020. After receiving due consent, they were carried out with people responsible for different levels of action within the context of both reference centres. These interviews, described in Table 3, were designed with the aim of collecting information from distinct, but clearly complementary origins. A representative from the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council was deemed relevant, as it is the leading public institution of the Building the Future governance model. Secondly, the General Manager of Tabakalera is in position to provide a comprehensive view of the audiovisual production sector in Gipuzkoa since different organisations are located in their facilities. Thirdly, the BCC Innovation Manager can present a global overview of innovation in gastronomy, while LABe's Innovation and Product Development Lead is in a position to provide insights from their activity.

**Table 3.** Conducted interviews.

Affiliation	Position
Economic Promotion Department, Gipuzkoa Provincial Council	Managing Director of Strategic Projects
Basque Culinary Center, Mondragon University	BCC Innovation Manager
LABe-Digital Gastronomy Lab	Innovation and Product Development Lead
Tabakalera	General Manager

Source: Author's elaboration.

To that end, a standardised set of questions was employed in each interview, with small variances according to each interviewees' domain. Moreover, these interviews allowed to gather information about five main themes regarding the narratives about the reference centres and their environment:

- The status of 2deo's and LABe's operations, respectively.
- 2deo and LABe's main achievements.
- The narrative about the entrepreneurial landscape around both 2deo and LABe.
- The role of digitalisation in both 2deo and LABe.
- The impact of Building the Future on the performance of 2deo and LABe.

After conducting them, the resulting body of oral texts were analysed. In order to guide the thematic analysis, a preliminary exploration of noun-driven cooccurrences was completed using TexMiner, an open-source software for text scrutiny. Then, the cooccurrences were contrasted with the five themes mentioned above. This exercise contributed to identify the themes and frames used by the interviewees. Finally, a qualitative analysis of the corpus was conducted by the researchers, producing results shown in the following section.

### 3. Results

The results obtained, as shown in this section, contribute to the exemplification of practices and knowledge in two general aspects:



- On the governance capabilities of local governments by promoting processes of change and modernisation, in this case, in the creative and digital sphere. Specifically, by promoting more flexible structures, decentralised actions, and developing valuable tools for the management of public policies.
- On the display of concrete examples in which diverse action networks are built, allow a multidimensional approach to problems, and try to articulate multiple disciplines and knowledge in the design and development of different actions.

This contribution is presented in the following sections, which differentiate between 2deo-Basque language Audiovisual Lab and LABe-Digital Gastronomy Lab.

### 3.1. 2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab

2deo can be described as a public innovation lab whose mission is to foster the production and consumption of audiovisual content in the Basque language, promoting experimentation in contents, formats, and production. It was launched in May 2019, but the reflection process that led to its creation goes back earlier.

The creation of 2deo was preceded by a collaborative diagnosis process articulated in Gipuzkoa Lab, Building the Future’s space for joint experimentation. It involved the participation of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, the University of Mondragon, the University of the Basque Country, societal agents as part of a contrast group, agents from the regional audiovisual production sector and specific international collaborations. The focus on the production of audiovisual content in Basque arose from the identification of structural weaknesses and threats in audiovisual consumption by young people in Gipuzkoa. The ad hoc study, ‘Basque-speaking teenagers in Gipuzkoa: Consumption and creation of audiovisual content’ [92] shows that the offerings of content in the Basque language are scarce, unknown to younger audiences, and perceived as unattractive.

As the diagnosis is shared by the agents involved, 2deo’s principal goals are:

- To promote the Basque language, particularly among young people.
- To foster the creation of content and formats adapted to new consumption habits.
- To create a referential space for new talent, trends, and products.
- To promote the internationalisation of the sector.

This innovation lab’s activity is supported by a series of agents that belong to the quadruple helix. In addition to the stakeholders that have participated in the prior reflection process, also cooperating with 2deo’s current activity are EiTb, the University of the Basque Country, the Basque Observatory of Culture, the San Sebastian International Film Festival, and Basque-speaking teenagers, among others. These actors form alliances and joint projects through 2deo’s “professionalisation programming”, which is comprised by three lines of work:

- ‘Applika +’, a research project on audiovisual consumption among young university students aged 18 to 22 and product testing among young people aged 14 to 18, in collaboration with the University of the Basque Country, the Basque Observatory of Culture, and EiTb [93].
- ‘2deo. Zinemaldi & Technology’, meetings that address digital transformation in the audiovisual field, including an international start-up competition aimed at promoting innovative business projects based on audiovisuals and digitalisation, in collaboration with the San Sebastian International Film Festival, Tecnalia Research & Innovation Foundation, the Basque Government and Petronor.
- Participation in the working group on innovation in audiovisual content aimed at young people created by EiTb.

Meanwhile, one of the interviewees notes that companies in the Basque audiovisual sector suffer from “precariousness and difficulties in obtaining funding, very few risks are taken with new formats [ . . . ] and they have a poor presence in international markets.” For another interviewee, 2deo represents a partial response to these problems: “I think the centre’s target audience reflects the sector that the centre works in, [ . . . ] an atomised

ecosystem where we have very small producers: individuals, creatives, people linked to culture and creation." As an alternative, one of the respondents suggests that "if this were accompanied by a competitive taxing policy strategy, Gipuzkoa and especially its capital, San Sebastian, could become a reference point for international productions, which would entail an obvious opportunity for improvement of the audiovisual sector."

The 2deo laboratory has 550 square metres of facilities, divided into collaboration and production areas, spaces for editing and post-production and finally, a work area for the centre's coordinators. The profile of the creatives who use 2deo's resources tends to be, according to one interviewee, "mainly film school students. [ . . . ] Many students from the Elías Querejeta Film School (public film school of Gipuzkoa) go to the facilities to edit work they are creating at the school". The function that Tabakalera fulfils of acting as a physical link is central in Gipuzkoa's audiovisual context, as in addition to 2deo, it also houses the headquarters of the Elías Querejeta Film School and the San Sebastian International Film Festival.

However, the prototypes that are created in 2deo's ecosystem have a notably more professionalised focus. As one of the interviewees explains, "a small company, a cooperative company, two associations and four participants who present the project in their name" carried out audiovisual experiments in 2020. Since the centre opened, 31 audiovisual prototypes have been promoted and 12 of them have been presented at festivals.

In its role as an experimentation and digitalisation hub, 2deo promotes a digital focus of the audiovisual prototypes that are presented. One of its managers observes that "in 2deo's DNA itself, as regards digitalisation, as regards new production methods, new products are very closely linked to digitalisation already." On the one hand, this aspect is directly related to providing cutting-edge technology to users of the centre to test creative ideas, and on the other, to conceptualising productions as attractive products on online distribution platforms of both television and films.

The impact of Covid-19 has caused a significant slowdown of activity. In the words of one of its managers: "I think that in this respect, 2020 has caused us quite a lot of hurt in the sense that, as it is such a strange year, many initiatives that were already planned and approved for 2020 have either had to cancel or be rescheduled over time."

According to the interviewees, the Building the Future collaborative governance model that 2deo is embedded in is key to understand its operation. "Building the Future has led to the creation of these centres and the Department, the Directorate of Strategic Projects that interacts with these reference centres [ . . . ] has strongly internalised that way of working in co-governance, in collaboration. They have experienced it as something that is innate." 2deo's activity is eminently experimental, as it adopts the 'Design Thinking' methodology [94] in prototyping processes. Moreover, the main criteria for the selection of projects are their "experimental and innovative potential." This working methodology is supported by an annual management plan that is re-evaluated by all the agents participating in the centre's management. On the other hand, the innovation lab itself understands that its outputs help to promote the audiovisual sector and that to this end, it must disseminate the results of its work in the social sphere.

### 3.2. LAbE–Digital Gastronomy Lab

The Digital Gastronomy Lab LAbE is a public innovation centre for the development of experimental technologies and methodologies in the field of digital gastronomy. It opened officially in July 2019 and is thus the second public innovation lab created in Gipuzkoa after 2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab. Just like the latter, its creation is fostered by the sub-regional public administration which, during an initial phase of reflection on the territory's qualities, points out that the gastronomy sector is strong and that it contributes significantly to the regional S3.

The emergence of LAbE is also closely linked to the strategy of the Basque Culinary Center to consolidate the Basque Country's cuisine and gastronomy sector at the forefront globally. Guipuzkoa is a territory with a consolidated value chain in the field of gastronomy.

Within it, there are internationally strong companies in the gastronomy and restaurant sector, but in addition, it has a cluster dedicated to industrial cuisine products, innovation technology centres, and living labs. LABe, as a space for accelerating digitalisation and innovation, exists within a larger framework of sectoral cooperation. Likewise, the regional smart specialisation strategy supports the creation of LABe thanks to the consideration of Creative Industries as an opportunity niche, where gastronomy can be found [95]. The 'Basque Industry 4.0' and 'Gastronomy and Nutrition 2020' regional plans provide strategic foundations for the creation of the centre [96].

Therefore, the objectives of LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab are the following:

- To promote talent and the acceleration of start-ups.
- To identify the main technologies, business models and international-level solutions (scouting tasks) and attract them to Guipuzkoa.
- To generate innovation and learning spaces with the multiple agents of the quadruple helix involved.
- To generate spaces of cooperation within the gastronomy value chain.

The vision underlying the creation of LABe was explained by one of our interviewees: “at both the Guipuzkoa Provincial Council and the Basque Culinary Center we understood that we had to consolidate that position of leadership we already have. We enjoy widespread recognition at international level. What happens is that it is true that maybe innovation in the sector, in this case, and I am going to the last part of the value chain, restaurants, was very focused on culinary innovation. On the plate, the guest’s experience. (. . . ) And we thought that in order to continue being referential, we also had to lead that aspect of incorporating technology”. As a result, public–private collaboration has led to a physical space of 1400 m<sup>2</sup> in which open experimentation and the implementation of digital work processes is possible. Nevertheless, one of the interviewees notes that the consolidation of LABe “has to stem from working together and interacting with other agents beyond the digital gastronomic space itself.”

The sectoral agents that interact at LABe have a variety of features, as companies that are established in the sector, emerging companies, and graduate students from the BCC converge in the centre. Communication with gastronomy businesses is acknowledged as an important vector to identify needs. However, the experimentation process to cover these needs is open and mainly bottom-up: “BCC Innovation intervenes, but a start-up or a company that wants to lead on that issue can intervene; other technology centres that may be slightly more technological than us and which complement us. Somehow this ecosystem is formed based on the identification of an opportunity that can be done by us or it may be because a company or a start-up brings it. The trigger, so to speak, can be several agents, but the philosophy is one of co-creating, yes.” Additionally, as a complement to entrepreneurial efforts, LABe’s prospective team scouts for emerging technologies at an international level.

From a technological perspective, LABe fulfils a testing function. On one side, it operates as a testing environment for some of the Basque Culinary Centre’s research outputs, namely, those oriented towards the digital economy. However, one of the respondents highlights that LABe, understood as a “technological centre”, has to compete “at an international level in gastronomy, but with other technology centres, because we understand that the league of centres, from our perspective, which may not be shared, is a different league from that of the universities, and we wanted to be there.” On the other hand, start-ups can use LABe to try new devices and techniques that require rare tools or expertise.

In order to support experimental actions, there is a multidisciplinary team of professionals, as one of the interviewees stresses: “I think that the profiles of the people who work there, the fact that they are multidisciplinary, is extremely important. Jose, for example, is a chef, but he is a bit of an odd chef because he is much closer to entrepreneurship, to the promotion of new businesses, to technology than a traditional chef. [. . . ] But we also have those chefs who are working on culinary innovation, we also have people who know about sensory issues.”

The work areas that are focused on the most by the gastronomy innovation lab are the so-called front-office, i.e., activities comprehensible to customers, and the back-office, activities focused on the general management of businesses. The intensification of the digitalisation of both areas is related to the holistic vision of the project. Since its creation, at LABe, 26 test and validation experiments have been performed, 77 start-ups, 43 companies or innovation centres have joined the ecosystem, 5 technological products have been developed, and finally, close to 17,000 customers have passed through its restaurant [97].

One of the main challenges that LABe faces is the coordination of all the strata of the sub-regional gastronomy sector, as pointed out by one of the interviewees. “What LABe seeks is to provide stimulus knowing that the levels are different because, of course, within the field of restaurants or gastronomy we have the cutting-edge chefs and then we have the catering venue itself, the local, neighbourhood venue, so in the knowledge that there are very different levels each of us are going to, so to speak, contribute to digitalisation, of course each at their own rate and at their own pace.” As with 2deo, Covid-19 has slowed down efforts to expand the centre’s action, as much of its activity went online during 2020. In this context, the knowledge transfer to the public has been carried out through practical demonstrations, direct communication with other restaurants, and social media.

The collaborative governance that makes possible and supports LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab is, again, perceived by the interviewees as essential for the centre’s activity: “I think that this spirit is embedded [ . . . ], because by definition, by default, its starting point is an open concept as we say. So very likely, as we said, without the institution’s backing it wouldn’t have been possible, to start with.” Work is structured through an annual management plan which is contrasted with the activity carried out at the end of said period: “We set ourselves indicators on a scorecard like any other initiative or any other business project might do, and we contrast it with the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council department itself.”

#### 4. Discussion

2deo–Basque Language Audiovisual Lab and LABe–Digital Gastronomy Lab are two public innovation labs that are part of a sub-regional collaborative governance programme. The similarities between both reference centres lie in their open nature, as their activity is based on the collaboration of multiple institutional, university, business, and social agents, and promote innovation as a tool to streamline and structure two creative sectors that are markedly fragmented. In fact, it should not be forgotten that audiovisual production in the Basque language and gastronomy are niches of opportunity for the Basque Country’s smart specialisation strategy and that, as a result, they are economic spheres with contrasted potential.

Both experiences are part of a regional Smart Specialisation Strategy, which understands that collective knowledge and learning [98] are localised and regional in nature [99]. Smart Specialisation Strategies are closely related to the notion of ‘proximity’, which asserts the situated character of knowledge through the role played by physical, cognitive, and cultural proximity [100,101]. What is relevant about the regional dimension is that it allows the development of endogenous competences that depend, to a large extent, on the three factors that we are going to discuss below:

- The roles of the different actors in the system.
- The characteristics of entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- The identification and control of the risks involved in the process.

##### 4.1. Roles

###### 4.1.1. Policy Makers and the Institutional Role

The institutional role regulates the relationship between different social actors. Such actors structure their practices differently from one region to another, which creates different types of environments [23,102]. Hence, in order to enhance the role of these reference centres, it is understood that it is necessary for institutions to promote their activity and

learn from the processes they generate [103]. The Gipuzkoa Provincial Council has made efforts towards creating adequate conditions for effective governance [55] to take place. Previous specific governance experiences in Gipuzkoa have not been capable of navigating political and multi-level complexities and, as a result, CCI-promoting policies have suffered delays or drawbacks [104]. Thus, following Kooiman [105], Building the Future provides instruments and actions that have translated into reference centres, that is, LABe, 2deo, and others. Furthermore, Building the Future adheres to a notion of governance based on multiple interactions and joint collaboration, as proposed by Torfing et al. [54].

The saliency of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council in the articulation of audiovisual production and digital gastronomy sectors can be viewed as the assumption of a feeding role, while entrepreneurs act as innovation and transmission agents [6,9]. Despite its relative importance within the collaborative efforts, government action on both sectors fulfils two distinctive roles. On the one hand, considering the status of audiovisual production at sub-regional level, 2deo seeks to activate creators' digital capabilities and potential. On the other hand, LABe aims to mobilise the gastronomic sector in order to embed digitalisation into emergent and established businesses [85,97,106].

In terms of ongoing and expected learning, the political materialisation of these public initiatives has contributed to enrich 'regional learning' and 'policy learning', having an impact on the understanding of organisational change, social learning, and politics as potential and effective vehicles for territorial development [107].

Perhaps the key learning lies in the choice of mechanisms that are conducive to the increasing participation of diverse actors, which in turn places high demands on the level of governance. In short, it refers to learning to choose appropriate governance mechanisms and systems in relation to the policy formulations and objectives pursued [108,109].

#### 4.1.2. The Role of Researchers

Researchers have the fundamental mission of promoting collective learning networks, which enable the creation, preservation, and expansion of the knowledge base necessary to carry out innovation activities [110,111]. The aim is to set the orientation of the contribution of universities towards local communities, overcoming the restricted conception of academic performance and research production [112].

This means building bridges between specialised knowledge and social agents as a whole, promoting interaction with the environment and providing solutions to social demands and problems [113]. Every innovation lab in Gipuzkoa is supported by at least one university within the Province, who contribute to explore selected areas of work and produce knowledge. The University of Mondragon and the Public University of the Basque Country have been identified in this study.

The practical experience of these interactions should produce lessons in terms of the positioning of universities and researchers in relation to the knowledge economy of the 21st century. Thus, universities are increasingly linked to the practical challenges of society identified by governments and public institutions [114].

#### 4.1.3. The Role of Practitioners

The role of practitioners is fundamentally concerned with promoting the development of communities that share ideas, information, and knowledge through collaborative working mechanisms [115], in which the communicative processes that foster partnerships between agents become vital [116]. In this case, sharing means that agents develop a practice in common and jointly create a particular learning path, which is why the production, communication, and transfer of knowledge is always "situated", i.e., it is strongly influenced by the social context in which the practice takes place [117,118].

Alternatively, collaborations with various kinds of agents need to be intensified and consolidated, as some respondents have noted above. Both reference centres are in the early stages of their operations and the prevalence of the sub-regional government has been greater than an ideal scheme would indicate. This development, however, has been

examined in the Smart Specialisation literature. S3, as a vertical policy implementation, requires a strong presence of government action initially [31,32]. In order to increase the involvement of other actors, enhancements to the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem have been suggested [66]. In this vein, 2deo and LABe follow a congruent line of work.

From a learning perspective, the creation of an expansive learning context [119] must promote the transmission and distribution of knowledge in order to produce an increase in value for individuals, organisations, and the territory as a whole. Collective learning processes depend to a large extent on the absorptive capacity of a territory or region. The absorptive capacity is a relational concept that defines the capacity of organizations to interpret, assimilate, transform, and exploit external knowledge on the basis of accumulated internal knowledge [120]. Reference centres in Gipuzkoa dedicated to open innovation contribute to bridge the gap between the learning potential within the Basque Country and the actual absorptive capacity of its social capital.

#### 4.2. Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Sussan and Acs [121] (p. 58) propose that entrepreneurial ecosystems have as a main result the sustainability itself of the entrepreneurial process. This is because entrepreneurial ecosystems are complex and fragile systems, where “many elements interact to produce systems performance, thus, the system method needs to allow the constituent elements to interact.” Thus, the basic function of 2deo and LABe is to promote interaction between the “constituent elements” of their respective sectors, while providing a safety net for innovative and emerging initiatives. Moreover, this is supported by the policy recommendations of the European Creative Industries Alliance, who suggests fostering cross-sectional collaboration as a means to stimulate innovation and growth [122].

The Province of Gipuzkoa, as part of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, has been rated above the European average in entrepreneurial ecosystems indexes [123]. However, the results obtained in this study suggest that the entrepreneurial capacities of audiovisual production and digital gastronomy need to be distinctively examined within a broader economy. Accordingly, LABe emerges in an already active entrepreneurial environment, although lacking in connectivity. Audiovisual production in Basque language, on the other side, requires support from different angles in order to be active and autonomous.

The use of open innovation and design thinking methods at 2deo and LABe, which are applied non-linearly, encourages the promoted projects to adopt adaptability as a latent feature, [94]. At the same time, the technological environment in which creatives, small start-ups or digitally innovative companies act is ever-changing. This becomes more pressing when considering the challenge of the scalability of their projects. In fact, the Basque Country’s CCI state that they find huge difficulties in obtaining funding, but at the same time, few difficulties in making use of the technology they have available [124]. According to Nambisan [125] (p. 1034), this behaviour is more adequate for changing contexts, as “[overall] entrepreneurial success may no longer be reflected by the enactment of a predefined opportunity or the execution of a predefined value proposition. Instead, entrepreneurial actions would need to be oriented toward facilitating a continuously evolving value proposition.”

Therefore, from a general perspective, it seems apparent that the institutional framework has a considerable influence on entrepreneurial activity; in particular, on the conditions of possibility so that this entrepreneurship can take place and be sustainable over time. Taking other public programmes for the development of innovation as inspiration, it can be said that the most important task of institutions is coalition building, while the search for new alternatives is an exploratory task and corresponds to the economic and knowledge production sectors [126]. In this sense, Building the Future aims to enable the collective formulation of initiatives in order to build a joint public agenda for Gipuzkoa, which requires robust governance strategies and networks [127]. 2deo and LABe innovation labs are key components of this endeavour.

### 4.3. Risks

Given that innovation labs in Gipuzkoa are framed within the Building the Future collaborative governance model, their operations face various risks that must be taken into account. Such risks can be divided into two main categories: organisational risks and dynamic risks.

Firstly, organisational risks derive from an excessive dependence on the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council. Since their creation, both innovation labs have been led by the sub-regional government with the aim of stimulating entrepreneurial contexts within the territory. This configuration is still far from achieving better forms of distributed leadership. It is understood that leadership must be shared so that the operations of the innovation labs produce innovative outcomes based on the EDP. Moreover, shared and collaborative leadership would help to consolidate innovation labs and make their operations more independent. Sustained dependence on the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council could potentially hinder the consolidation of the innovation labs and the emergence of an active entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Secondly, dynamic risks are those relative to the specific activities carried out in 2deo and LABe. As reflected in the results section, 2deo and LABe's innovation and project acceleration processes are clearly defined and applied accordingly: public calls for proposals, active listening, technology scouting, connection between agents, etc. However, the participation of multiple actors does not necessarily translate into collective comprehension of the innovation labs. In other words, if entrepreneurial agents and society do not gradually take ownership of the reference centres, the collaborative nature of the initiative could be at risk. In this regard, the main contribution of the innovation labs is not their existence, but the outcomes of their work. Their success relies on their production. Therefore, there must be a sensible transfer of knowledge and results in order to make them feasible for sectoral agents.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, both reference centres have reduced their production, but they have also adopted different actions directing them towards digital media and thus have avoided completely halting their work. As a whole, the Basque Creative and Cultural sector has adopted similar tactics as a result of Covid-19, as shown by the Basque Observatory of Culture [128]: faced with a 71% reduction in activity compared to 2019, 26% of companies have adapted their work digitally, and 10% of companies have adopted innovation strategies to transform their activity in the new context. These alterations are consistent with the broader European CCI landscape, where there has been an increase of digital cultural and creative activities, even though not strong enough to compensate for the lack of physical exhibition and distribution options [129].

## 5. Conclusions

This article has analysed the activity of two public innovation labs created under 'Building the Future', the governance model of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council (Basque Country, Spain) [44], which influence two key sectors of the sub-regional creative economy, i.e., audiovisual production in the Basque language and digital gastronomy. In general terms, these public innovation labs have four fundamental goals: to promote digitalisation in their sectors, to foster innovation, to enable and accelerate the growth of start-ups, and in a cross-cutting manner, to contribute towards sectoral coordination through collaborative governance.

Cultural and creative industries are opportunity niches of the smart specialisation strategy of the Basque Autonomous Community and, as part of it, the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council has promoted the creation of two innovation labs: '2deo-Basque Language Audiovisual Lab' and 'LABe-Digital Gastronomy Lab'. Both labs are located in San Sebastian, the province's capital. The International Centre for Contemporary Culture, Tabakalera, houses the headquarters of both centres, as the regional members of the quadruple helix understood that it is a public space that is highly adequate for the convergence and articulation of sectoral agents.

The contributions of this study consist of two main lines of work: firstly, a display of a governance model enabling mechanisms for collaboration and, secondly, the operations of two public innovation labs fostering digitalisation.

These innovation labs represent an intermediate outcome of a set of transformation processes fostered by a public governance model: Building the Future. As such, this paper presents a working example of versatile, decentralised, and co-dependency structures that have the potential to activate and connect dynamic economic sectors [54,105]. Although the role of the sub-regional government is currently dominant, a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem could be able to garner space and significance. Hence, the *raison d'être* of both centres cannot be understood exclusively in dichotomous terms, i.e., as corrective interventions or positive stimuli. On the one hand, 2deo was created after the University of the Basque Country carried out a diagnostic study, but it is also understood as an opportunity for innovation by institutions and sectoral agents. On the other, LABe emerged in a sector with strong roots in Gipuzkoa, where it is difficult to access innovative technologies and which would benefit from increased interactions in the value chain. This translates into the combination of bottom-up processes (entrepreneurial action) with top-down strategies (public action) which are implemented through deliberation and collaboration.

The practice and analysis of this governance model concerns policy makers, practitioners, and researchers alike, as they interact in multiple collaborative contexts. For policy makers, the operation of innovation labs under Building the Future exemplifies the plausibility of adopting public collaborative strategies in order to adapt to socio-economic changes. Practitioners find a representation of their work as connectors and communicators of openly generated knowledge, which requires solid absorptive capacity in the CCI sector. As contributing agents, researchers and universities are involved by bringing specialised knowledge closer to the needs of the social environment around innovation labs.

In terms of impact, 2deo and LABe have facilitated the creation of multiple projects and have coordinated the work of a large number of professionals, emerging talents, and researchers, but management stresses that both innovation labs are undergoing consolidation processes. As young centres, it remains to be analysed how they can offer support beyond early business prototypes and help in scale-up cases. 2deo specifically operates within a sector that faces important difficulties in terms of business sustainability. LABe's environment, while diverse, is better established and capable of actively bringing forward digitalisation initiatives for testing and development.

Nevertheless, innovation labs face several risks that compromise their consolidation and growth in the medium term. These risks are based, on the one hand, on the lack of shared leadership and excessive dependence on public actors and, on the other hand, on the stagnation of knowledge transfer to entrepreneurial and innovative actors.

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic reduced the amount of work achievable during 2020, meaning that successive measurements of the actual impact of both centres should be carried out starting in 2021. This could shed a brighter light on the evolution of CCI in Gipuzkoa, which are part of the greater European productive context [129]. Focusing on governance structures and managerial views, this study did not intend to provide detailed accounts of the innovation methodologies or specific work dynamics that are employed in the innovation labs of Gipuzkoa. Moreover, the findings of this case study should be cautiously interpreted in relation to other spatial and institutional arrangements. As previously discussed, CCI and entrepreneurial ecosystems are notably context-dependent, especially in regions where CCI are part of the S3 in place.

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