

THE TIGHTROPE INVESTIGATION

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Spanish research dances today on the tightrope and although she was already used to circus pirouettes, the last wobbles can definitely take her to the ground. It all started with the economic crisis and the announcement of a [reduction of the budget for science of around 15%](#). The Public Research Organizations (OPIs) were the hardest hit with reductions that reached up to 26% in the case of the CIEMAT. The IPOs managed, somehow, to get around this cut by pulling on old reserves and adjusting the projects a bit. However, the adjustment did not seem to be sustainable and [this week's rumor of further cuts](#) only exacerbates their problems.

How can IPOs cope with such a scenario? The IPOs have historically been the organizations that, dependent on the State and together with the Universities, have carried out the greatest work of scientific research and technological development in Spain. These organizations (CSIC, CIEMAT, IAC, ISCII...) are the ones that execute a large part of the National R+D+i Plan. Obviously, non-competitive public financing must be a fundamental pillar for IPOs. This is funding that the government has slashed.

As well pointed out [Carlos M. Duarte, in El País](#), there is a real risk of losing an entire generation of young researchers. Spain, instead of betting on an economic model based on knowledge and innovation, is struggling to find a new pattern of growth without direction or decision. Models do not serve as a reference [like Sweden](#) which, with 3.6% of R&D over GDP, will grow this year by 4.5%, or [the Finn](#) which, in the 90s and immersed in a deep economic crisis, increased its investment in R&D and emerged as one of the most developed countries in the world.

Faced with this scenario of deep budgetary contraction, do IPOs have any possible alternative? We have to be quite pessimistic. The nature of these bodies, strongly oriented towards "capital R" research, makes them highly dependent on non-competitive government funding. Perhaps they could lukewarmly relax their problems if they achieved more income from technology transfer and business patronage. However, it will not be an easy task.

First, because the nature of the research carried out in the IPOs makes its direct transfer to the productive fabric very difficult. In addition, there is a historical distance between these organizations and private companies, with very different times and languages. The Spanish company, generally with a not very technological profile, does not seem very interested in directly financing the research either. As if this were not enough, the strenuous attempts by the IPOs to find formulas to tackle this distancing have so far been shown to be in vain. This same year we were scared by the message from [Javier López Facal \(CSIC research professor\)](#): "We gave up." The researcher was referring to the inability to give the green light to the CSIC-K2B project, an instrumental public company, under a limited liability company regime, with CSIC capital exclusively, whose objective is the commercialization of research. At the same time, the OPIs would need more support staff for management and transfer tasks that they currently do not have.

Research in Spain is therefore at stake and no political force seems to want to defend it, obstinate in other debates, R+D+i seems not to attract enough attention. However, in the long term, Spain is at risk of going back many years and falling off the bandwagon of the more developed countries for a long time. The investigation, and with it the economic model of Spain, is teetering on a tightrope and we still do not know if there is a network underneath.

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