

THINK GREEN AND LET OURSELVES BE CARRIED AWAY BY INNOVATION

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In the Basque Country, eco-innovation sounds like novel and interesting concept, but it does not go directly with us because we already have a consolidated industry and we interpret these things that have to do with the environment as regulatory impositions, cost increases or, in the best of cases, as a possibility of marketing -because it is already known that "green sells". A slightly more open and surely more intelligent look (***now that "smart" is fashionable***) presents us, however, with a whole world of great possibilities.

The conventional scheme of thought regarding industrial innovation and environmental improvement leads to consider the latter as a collateral and indirect result of industrial processes of product and process innovation. Thus, despite the fact that environmental concern has not figured among its main priorities, Basque industry has achieved significant improvements in this field in recent years - Basque industry grew between 1990 and 2008 just before the crisis, more than 95 % in real terms, also accompanied by notable progress in energy efficiency, which has improved by more than 81% in the same period. See [here](#)- If we take, for example, the automotive sector, which is one of the most of Basque industry (more than 300 companies that directly account for between 15% and 25% of industrial employment and no less than 18% of the total sales of Basque companies outside the Basque Country) their competitive position is This is mainly explained by the considerable advances and achievements made in terms of operational efficiency, which makes it possible to offer materials, parts and components throughout the value chain, competitive in price and market conditions. The deep organizational transformations and the efficiency improvements experienced have also derived, in a patent way, in great savings in energy and materials and surprising recycling ratios. The justification is simple: each toe of energy saved or each ton of unused or recycled material is a considerable cost saving that companies cannot let go in order to be competitive.

The change we are witnessing is, however, radical. The improvement of the environment is not only a collateral result, but it is becoming the main engine of the main innovations of the most relevant industrial sectors(*). Continuing with the selected example, road transport is responsible for more than 20% of greenhouse gas emissions in Europe and in parallel with the political commitments (Europe 20, 20, 20), the main manufacturers are marking a clear path for what could be called the "green automotive industry", with more efficient vehicles and lower greenhouse gas emissions and other types of gases that must comply with the increasingly demanding European and national directives and even go further there to satisfy the commercial demands of a population that is increasingly sensitive to the environment.

And within this framework are included, incremental innovations that are already being carried out in the industry with the incorporation of more sustainable vehicles -more efficient traditional combustion vehicles, weight reduction, hybrid vehicles, use of cleaner fuels, biofuels, design and electronics for more efficient driving) to other more groundbreaking ones that have to do with the incorporation of plug-in hybrid and pure electric vehicles for which very relevant scientific-technological advances are still needed - energy storage and others.

Beyond this green automobile industry, society is slowly moving towards new urban mobility models that combine variables far beyond the vehicle and that have to do with the intensive use of shared transport (public or private), design of cities and urban areas that are friendlier for pedestrians, the priority incorporation of traditional bicycles or those with electric motors, new logistics systems for merchandise, the ordering and intelligent management of traffic, and much more. which represent major challenges for the automotive industry as we know it today and immense opportunities for development and job creation (green jobs) for our industry as a whole.

The conclusion is that beyond the temporary difficulties of this crisis that we are suffering, the

industry is an activity with a great future ahead. To take advantage of them, in addition to being very efficient, we have to change the chip: think green and let ourselves be carried away by our innovative capacity.

(*)The 2008 study "[DuPont Automotive/Society of the Automotive Industry Survey](#)" by DuPont and the Society of the Automotive Industry (SAE) shows that environmental factors are the most important challenges facing the automotive industry and outweigh cost savings for the first time in 14 years.

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