

IÑIGO OLAIZOLA | MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE COMPANY DONOSTIA SUSTAPENA – FOMENTO DE SAN SEBASTIÁN

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« The key to the future is being able to develop and attract qualified talent to Donostia. Without people with skills we will not be able to maintain our level of development or address our aspirations as a city of knowledge »

Iñigo Olaizola is Managing Director of the Sociedad Fomento de San Sebastián. Graduate in Business Administration and Management and Master in Strategic Management from the University of Deusto. His career has been linked from the beginning to local and territorial development in consulting companies and entities such as the GARAPEN association made up of Development Agencies of the Basque Country. In 2006 he began his relationship with [Donostia Sustapena - Fomento de San Sebastián](#) of the City Council where he has been responsible for the Innovation Projects area and Competitiveness before assuming the responsibility of running the entity in April 2022.

Egunon eta eskerrik asko gure gonbidapena onartzeagatik. First of all, congratulations on your new responsibility at the head of the Fomento de San Sebastián – Donostia Sustapena company. Your recent appointment is, without a doubt, recognition of an important internal trajectory in the house that provides stability to the entity but is also a boost to the innovative vision you have of the role that the public should play in economic promotion and the creation of the city . What keys to the transition does Iñigo Olaizola want to contribute to the Fomento operating model in this new stage that begins with his appointment?

Eskerrik asko zuei. First, I want to acknowledge the organization's successful track record of the last decade and a half. A time that began with a change in strategy and in the structure and way of operating, betting on incorporating new activities linked to the promotion of innovation. A time marked by “doing”, where there was a wide margin for growth.

This moment of transition, post-pandemic, with a context of global change, especially accelerated (technological, demographic, environmental...) I think it requires us to focus on "what" we do but especially on "how". On the one hand, refocus the strategy, bet on some areas where we can really add value and be relevant, generate an impact in the city and for citizens.

A commitment to innovative entrepreneurship, the science ecosystem, the biosciences sector, new urban transformation projects or a strategic line of work to connect with the needs of young people, for example, are areas where I think we should play a relevant role, as a city. For this we need to boost the capacity for internal innovation, develop a new approach to take advantage of our full potential.

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At an organizational level, I believe that we should look for more systemic approaches, generate training and information processes that allow us to be competitive, taking advantage of the potential of all the people who work at Fomento, and generate new work dynamics, adapted to the times. I believe that we should play more with a role of catalysts, of connectors. We need to be a benchmark for innovation for ecosystem agents, and be at the service of the City Council in this process as well, connecting both worlds. We need to articulate an effective collaboration, with impact, through connections, spaces and new ways to generate projects and initiatives. For this we must surely change our way of relating and communicating. I like to use the concept and term of platform to illustrate that "how" we want to do things.

Just to add one more aspect, I would like the public to get to know our organization better, to know that we are at your disposal. I think it is a deficit that we currently have and we will try to improve it.

Some highly suggestive keys to a century-old company in the city such as Fomento, which has gone through very different stages and has known how to reinvent itself over time to continue adding value to the city. What remains in the Fomento culture of that time when it comes to adding value to the local economy in the 21st century?

Obviously, our portfolio of projects and services has changed significantly, but I think the spirit can be very similar. This year we celebrate 120 years of life, and we have often recalled that our predecessors spoke of "making San Sebastián great". And we, 120 years later, with other more up-to-date words (promote, innovate,...), other types of projects and in other sectors, continue in the same line.

We have a culture of looking for opportunities and projects that generate an impact, as the Hotel María Cristina had, and still does, which is still owned by Fomento and which I believe has played a decisive role in the development of the city. However, we must be aware that achieving that level of impact is complex. We have been living in times, for years now, where complexity has multiplied exponentially, and generating value, being relevant, is something that requires many ingredients, but above all, the ingredient of collaboration.



The Congress "Science and Innovation: the the city of tomorrow" opened the IX edition of Donostia WeekINN

Perhaps before you could do more things from your own abilities, or certain impulses. Now it is almost impossible, and I believe that we have to, not only know and say it, but also modify our own organizational and collaborative culture, and apply it. Allow me to use something that a successful, internationalized company from San Sebastian told us at the Innovation Week (WeekINN) that we organized in October: being competitive today, in most cases, no longer depends on size but on network and collaborators that you have. I think it summarizes the context very well and what it requires of us and where we should go.

The issues that you mention regarding public-private cooperation and collaboration in general are also those that, precisely, are highlighted by the magazine Nature by including Donostia among the 200 main scientific cities in the world. A consideration as a city of knowledge that is far removed from the idea of a spa and tourist city with which the city is projected and recognized in many settings. Reasons are not lacking, but does Donostia claim enough as a city of innovation, talent and technological entrepreneurship? Are the citizens themselves aware of the strategic importance of hosting knowledge-intensive activities and advanced services that provide qualified, quality employment to thousands of people?

I sincerely believe that the city already has some recognition as a city of science and innovation. But it is also true that this recognition is more of a professional or sectoral nature. This is conveyed to us by the researchers that we host in our Talent House. That San Sebastián is well recognized in the circuits and among institutions and centers at an international level, and considered excellent in certain fields in terms of science and research. This reflects Nature itself, which is already seen from outside the city with that position. But we continue to suffer, as in other areas, and especially if we compare ourselves with other cities, not so far away, from perhaps more aggressive marketing.

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There is also a difference in strategy. Some time ago, an international expert who attended a congress in San Sebastián told us that we must differentiate marketing from branding, because marketing is what we tell about ourselves and branding is what others tell about us, how they see us, and that the difference from one to another in terms of invested resources and inertia and brand strength is very large.

Here, we often comment that the paradigmatic example is that of gastronomy. How San Sebastián, and Euskadi by extension, has positioned itself as a world gastronomic benchmark, is clearly a branding process rather than a marketing one. And that is probably where we should go, working more on what was pointed out in the question, on socializing and that everyone from San Sebastian knows better what is done in the city, that they tell it, that they prescribe it,...< /p>

There I recognize that we have homework, we make efforts with a few actions and projects but we must insist on communicating better. Citizens should know that in terms of employment and number of companies, advanced services and innovation and research activity in Donostia already surpasses commerce and hospitality, for example, and that we have, proportionally, better R&D indicators, than many cities, regions and countries that are in the top ten worldwide. It is also key that we can work among all the agents joining efforts, in the end it is the sum of many small actions rather than large communication campaigns.

Donostia is home to a top-level campus of the Euskadi science-technological park network, it is the headquarters of important Technology Centers, several Cooperative Research Centers as well as technology-based companies with international projection (VIRALGEN, CounterCraft, BiotechFoods, CAF Power etc). The university campuses of the UPV-EHU, Tecnun and Deusto are home to a university community that welcomes thousands of professors, scientists and students. What is missing from the city to strengthen its strategic position in the international knowledge ecosystem?

In fact, in practically two decades a diverse, dense ecosystem has been configured, with 29 centers associated with the Basque Science and Technology Network, something that gives the city a greater weight in this area than it could correspond to in terms of population . 4 university campuses have been developed, with a development of faculties where engineering stands out and with a wide catalog of master's degrees and doctorates as well.

I would also like to highlight the weight of Vocational Training in the city, with 17 centers and a great diversity of families represented that offer a direct exit to the labor market, consolidating a successful model such as Dual Vocational Training, also in Donostia. It is clearly a strength of the city, however I believe that there are opportunities and examples that we must follow.

I remember an expert from Harvard who spent many years doing research in our city who always spoke of the fact that the big bet we had to make was education; convert San Sebastián into an international benchmark where to study. Strengthen our attractiveness for international students, and also train our young people in an excellent way. That is what some of the most recognized innovation hubs in the world have done, growing from their universities.

I believe that training is an area where we can and should promote our development as a city of talent and innovation. In this area, we must be attentive to new training models that have already been deployed in recent times, sometimes in cities that a priori did not count for much but are now well positioned. Being able to offer flexible training, adapted to the context and new habits and digital culture, of a global nature, I think is something important, and not only for fields that are sometimes considered elite or related to innovation. We have a talent problem in all sectors, the key is to be able to develop and attract talent to our city, without people with skills we will not be able to maintain our level of development.

An innovative and creative city is also one that favors the process and culture of entrepreneurship. Promotion has one of its main axes of action in this matter. What are the priority activity sectors on which you focus your activity? What factors influence a city to be entrepreneurial?

I think that as a city we cannot afford not to make a special effort and not have a plan that promotes entrepreneurship in a more strategic way and if you hurry me, in a more connected way, taking advantage of all the energy that we have in the city. We are witnessing in recent times a technological change unprecedented in history. Change that is exponential in nature and that generates opportunities in areas and ways of working, and that we must take advantage of to adequately carry out this process of digital transformation in our economy. From commerce to the

more traditional industry, or sectors such as biotechnology offer us opportunities and the possibility of addressing the great challenges that we face locally and globally.

Our obligation is to make it possible for our city to take advantage of these opportunities and for anyone, from here or from any country, with a viable and impactful project, to find all the necessary support to do so. And in this matter, the vision we have is to be able to connect with the agents and resources that already exist in the city. In San Sebastián there are more than 40 agents that promote entrepreneurship in one way or another.

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With more than 100 programs in total, between all. Fomento de San Sebastián is currently the agent with the most programs, located in the entire value chain, and which serves more people per year, more than 700. However, this is not enough. We want us to be able to really propose a city bet where we all add more.

To this end, the new Talent House project, whose naming we are working on right now, wants to offer a city strategy that provides new promoters with access to a better connected ecosystem, where we can offer training spaces, acceleration, financing, internationalization, etc., not only for Development, but for all the relevant actors. We want it not to be a Development project, alone, but a city project that takes entrepreneurship to another level. This is where this new “how” makes sense and when it comes to deploying projects, we need to connect and collaborate to improve the impact and strategic value of our actions. Finally, I would like to point out something that seems very important to me and is connected to the previous question. In this area, of course, education is once again key. We have been working with the Donostia Innovation Campus project for years, where more than 2,000 students work on personal and technical skills related to innovation, through challenges and awareness-raising and training sessions with the collaboration of agents from the ecosystem, both innovation and education. . And I think it is essential to connect it with this entrepreneurship strategy. The culture of entrepreneurship is nothing but a culture of innovation, as pointed out by a management reference such as Peter Drucker. Here we have a clear opportunity for improvement and momentum.

In addition to the commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship, the Economic Impulse Plan is committed to advancing in social cohesion and the active participation of the San Sebastian community in its own future. Is there any instrument that Fomento is particularly satisfied with in this line of building an inclusive city also from an economic point of view?

In relation to this, I like to use the reference and approach of COTEC, a Foundation of which the Sociedad de Fomento is already a member. It clearly links the need to bet on innovation to promote cohesion, being attentive to the possible gaps and gaps that occur when the economy is driven forward by new technological advances, business projects and innovative projects.

In our case, we are clear that we must bet on innovation in the city as a motor for the socioeconomic future, as we have been talking about in this interview. Betting on new sectors and profiles on the one hand but also working on the reconversion of others. And that is where we have developed a whole line of work that we call Reaktiva-T, which tries to identify profiles, offer them

orientation, personal and technical training, through professional certificates, qualifications, to work in sectors and niches of opportunity, such as the socio-sanitary , for example.

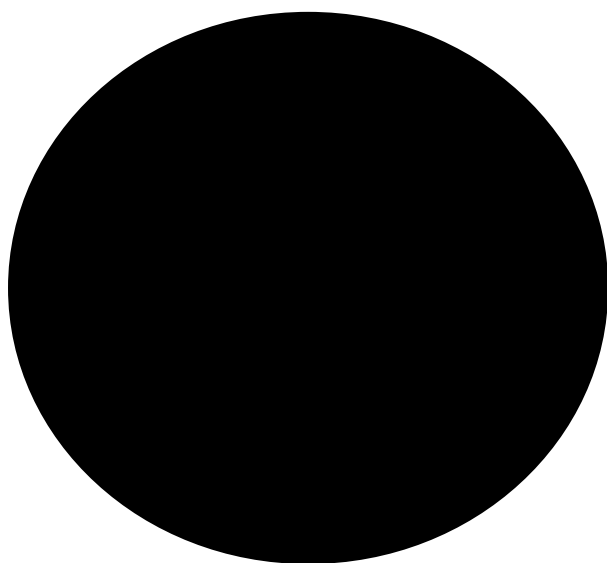
This process connects with the labor market and companies by prospecting for opportunities and supporting hiring. And this is done through a consultation and collaboration process where we work with local training centers, other institutions such as Lanbide and the Basque Government itself or the Guipúzcoa Provincial Council, and associations and sector representation together with third sector entities.< /p>

"It must be taken into account that policies are increasingly interdependent with each other and therefore require solid governance models to coordinate their implementation"

It is a model that works and that we want to promote, and that includes part of the principles and commitments that I have been mentioning in this thread of questions: training, collaboration, innovation... In a few dates we will launch a new project in this field, in which field of accommodation, something I think innovative, from a comprehensive vision and that also involves a review of our strategy and management of real estate projects at the same time.

"Success lies in involving society in the ecosystem and making it the protagonist"

Donostia was a pioneer at the time due to its vision as a "smart" city thanks to Fomento de San Sebastián, which acted as a catalyst for numerous projects along these lines that channeled funds and opportunities to the city. What is going to be the focus (or is it already being) in terms of Next Generation funds that make it possible to promote the processes of digitization and energy transition in the city?



Iñigo Olaizola

It is true, I think that from 2006 onwards, beginning with small energy efficiency projects, the organization has made a commitment to projects linked to sustainability. The process has gone in parallel to the different periods and calls for European funds, which has allowed us to increase the size of the projects until reaching the REPLICATE project, surely the most important for us and the

city itself in terms of budget (€30M). and number of partners (39), and due to the impact on the Vega del Urumea area mainly with the new development of Txomin. Along this path, it must be said that we have been adapting to the approaches and principles of the European Commission itself, also in terms of the name or terms under which to propose the projects. The last one has been SMART but there are already candidates to succeed it (circular economy, etc). We are entering a new phase with Horizon Europe (HE), which is the current research and innovation program of the European Union (successor to Horizon 2020), which has a budget of €95.5 billion and which sets out three fundamental pillars (science excellent, global challenges and industrial competitiveness, innovative Europe). In these three pillars there are opportunities for us to continue proposing projects for our city. On the other hand, in what is being the management of the NEXT Generation funds, Fomento is playing an important role in the presentation of the projects, accompanying the different municipal departments in the preparation and presentation of projects and contribution to their internal management, where the City Council is making, in my opinion, a very important effort, getting good grades in terms of the deployment of projects and the assimilation of new management processes and principles. We have presented a significant number of projects to date with good results, and we have mainly focused on projects related to sustainable mobility, the digital transition in commerce and tourism, looking for driving projects and generating new dynamics in these sectors; on the other hand, also the sustainability and renaturation of our city, and finally several projects related to the rehabilitation of public buildings.

In our case, it seems very important to us in this programming period to work around urban transformation projects where we also incorporate the transformation of economic and industrial spaces, from a perspective of sustainability and renaturation, or also working on concepts such as the twins digital or energy islands, for example. This last being refers to spaces where we can combine uses and different systems and models of production and energy consumption, hand in hand with the agents and users, the real protagonists.

We want to accompany these agents and the City Council in providing an innovative approach, initiating public-private consultation processes and seeking European funding to carry them out. Our role there must be to propose, connect and be a catalyst, an agent that promotes innovation. It also seems fundamental to me that we can contribute to the development of new urban spaces or to the revision of some that require interventions.

“Success lies in involving society in the ecosystem and making it the protagonist”

Providing proposals for a mix of uses that promote opportunities for local and international companies and talent, with models of sustainability and urban design adapted to the times and needs, with technology as an ally (artificial intelligence, robotics, etc.) and placing special focus on groups such as young people. For us it is essential to develop projects that make it easier for them to live and work in our city. For this reason, I believe that recovering spaces such as the Loyola Barracks is magnificent news for the city and a great opportunity for this type of proposal.

Eskerrik asko for conveying this optimistic and inclusive vision of Donostia to us. We wish you the best of luck in your performance at the helm of Fomento. We know first-hand that you have the best possible team and that is always a guarantee of success and good work.

A pleasure to have shared this time with you.

This conversation is included in the [NAIDER winter issue](#)

