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## Reconciling the Places Where We Live with the Spaces We Inhabit: Construction of a Communicative Space for Basque Based on a Local Media Network

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## **Reconciling the Places Where We Live With the Spaces We Inhabit: Construction of a Communicative Space for Basque Based on a Local Media Network**

Eneko Bidegain, Aitor Zuberogoitia & Txema Egana

### ***1. Introduction***

The media ecosystem is becoming more and more complex in the globalized world. As Winseck points out (2008), there is undoubtedly greater numerical diversity and at the same time we are seeing –within countries, regionally and globally– greater concentration at the level of “source diversity.” Toussaint (2011: 15) adds that there is no equitable relationship between cultural proposals in relation to how they are industrialized and inserted in the market. In his opinion, when approaching the media, this diversity is very little accentuated, if at all.

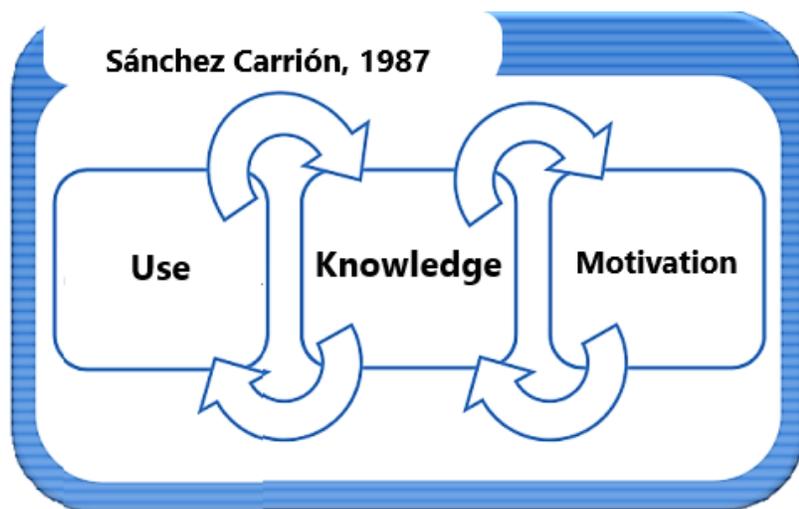
Paranjape (2007) alerts of the “alarming and growing impact” of the global media on the socio-cultural life of different communities in India, describing this as “... rampaging growth of centralized distribution system [which] has not only undermined local expressions but is also loudly proclaiming its sole legitimacy and relevance.” Furthermore, Duncan (2015) claims that community press is facing deep crisis in South Africa. According to Fontaine (2013), four big media companies account for 70 per cent of the media landscape in Canada. All of these

companies, with the exception of Telus, are vertically integrated in that they produce and distribute content across a range of media. Winseck (2016) adds that in Canada high levels of all aspects of media concentration can be observed within most sectors of the telecoms, internet and media industries, and across the network economy. In the UK, a public inquiry chaired by Lord Justice Leveson (2012) praised the local press for its contribution to local life and for not succumbing to the ethically questionable practices of the national press. While the Leveson report did not contain any specific recommendations for its improvement, it called for urgent government action to prevent the demise of the regional press.

As Stanton notes (2007: 9), when we imagine, we locate our thoughts. Every time we talk and spread news we are locating ourselves. Many authors have underlined the importance of news' localization: Valencia-Bermúdez and Campos Freire (2016: 68) say that local information is a "key piece of identity formation," and they maintain that it is also important from a quantitative point of view. Hallin and Mancini (2004) noted that national press is often more politicized while regional press is more commercially oriented and it is not politically biased. The Leveson report (2012) suggests the same idea. Salces-Alcalde & Amezaga (2016) underline that local media are 'breathing spaces' for minority languages. The latter is the case for the media we are studying. More than two decades ago many local magazines through the medium of Basque were created in the Basque Country, especially in the provinces of Gipuzkoa and Biscay. The great majority were created for associations in support of the Basque language and all of them are non profit.

This study is based on the hypothesis that, unlike the model of bilingual media that perpetuates the diglossic situation of the Basque language and does not guarantee its development neither at a quantitative nor at a qualitative level (Zuberogoitia, 2003), the articulation of the local media in Basque would enable the strengthening of a communicative space (Amezaga, 2014) to guarantee the free circulation of the language. The configuration of this communicative space, likewise, would contribute to activating the *Use-Knowledge-Motivation / Motivation-Knowledge-Use* circuit, a two-way circuit that, according to Sánchez Carrión (1987), underlies the processes of learning and transmission of language; it is argued that the strengthening of a communicative circuit in Basque would generate in the case of native speakers, spaces of use through which they would deepen their knowledge of the language which would result in a greater motivation towards their mother tongue. In the case of those who have learned / are learning Basque in adulthood, it provides the necessary motivation to continue with the process and reach a sufficient level of knowledge so that they can begin to use it.

Figure 1. The *Use-Knowledge-Motivation* double-direction circuit



For all this to happen, it is considered essential for the articulation of local media to be in the Basque language.

## **2. Social value of media and importance of networking**

Bidegain et al. (2016) have conducted research to measure the social value of two Basque media companies (*Goiena* and *Berria*). They have underlined the social value these media create. Regarding the term *social value*, Trappel (2014: 132) points out that the term *social value* refers to values for society, not for single stakeholders, highlighting collective benefits.

As Raats, Donders and Pauwels (2014: 263-264) note, when analyzing “the shift to PSM [Public Service Media],” scholars increasingly study the organizational role “from a network perspective” (see, for example, Aslama-Horowitz & Clark, 2014). They add that broadcasters have increasingly incorporated the pursuit of partnerships in policies and strategies in order to expand their influence, increase the quality of their outputs and services and enhance efficiency by sharing costs. Thus, in their opinion ‘an emphasis on partnership is of central importance to the process of enhancing public value... adding public value depends on a broad ecosystem’ (Raats, Donders & Pawels, 263-266).

On the other hand, and regarding minority language media, Cormack (2007) underlines the importance of having strongly participative media, media strongly linked to communities. He claims, in addition, that new methods of research are needed to study the ecosystem of

minority language media, ways that can penetrate and make sense of the audience's interaction and use of that kind of media. Cormack recommends an ecological approach, focused on interactions amongst people and the contexts in which these take place, rather than just on the media-audience nexus; that is to say, instead of focusing on the audience of local media in Basque, we have focused on analyzing in which context that content is produced, how it is produced and how it interacts with society.

Following Cormack's recommendation, we have described such an ecosystem. In doing so, we also wanted to know the strength of the links of local media in Basque to their communities and the extent to which local media in Basque are rooted in them. We aim to identify the possibilities for the local media in Basque to undertake a transition towards the network configuration mentioned by Raats, Donders & Pawels (2014), taking into account their operational capabilities such as finance and personnel skills, technology and optimal allocation of resource capacity (Moore, 1995), having as a final goal the consolidation of a communicative space for Basque that will guarantee both a sufficient level of use and the free circulation of the language (Zuberogoitia, 2003).

### ***3. Research questions and methodology***

This study was centered around three research questions. Based on this hypothesis the articulation of the local media in Basque would enable the strengthening of a communicative space that a) would guarantee the free circulation of the language b) would generate sufficient levels of use and motivation), we have formulated the following research questions to obtain information about the possible consolidation of this communicative space:

RQ 1: What is the coverage provided through by local Basque-language media from both a geographical perspective and in relation to frequency?

RQ 2: What resources do local Basque-language media have access to, what are their constraints and what opportunities do they have to work together?

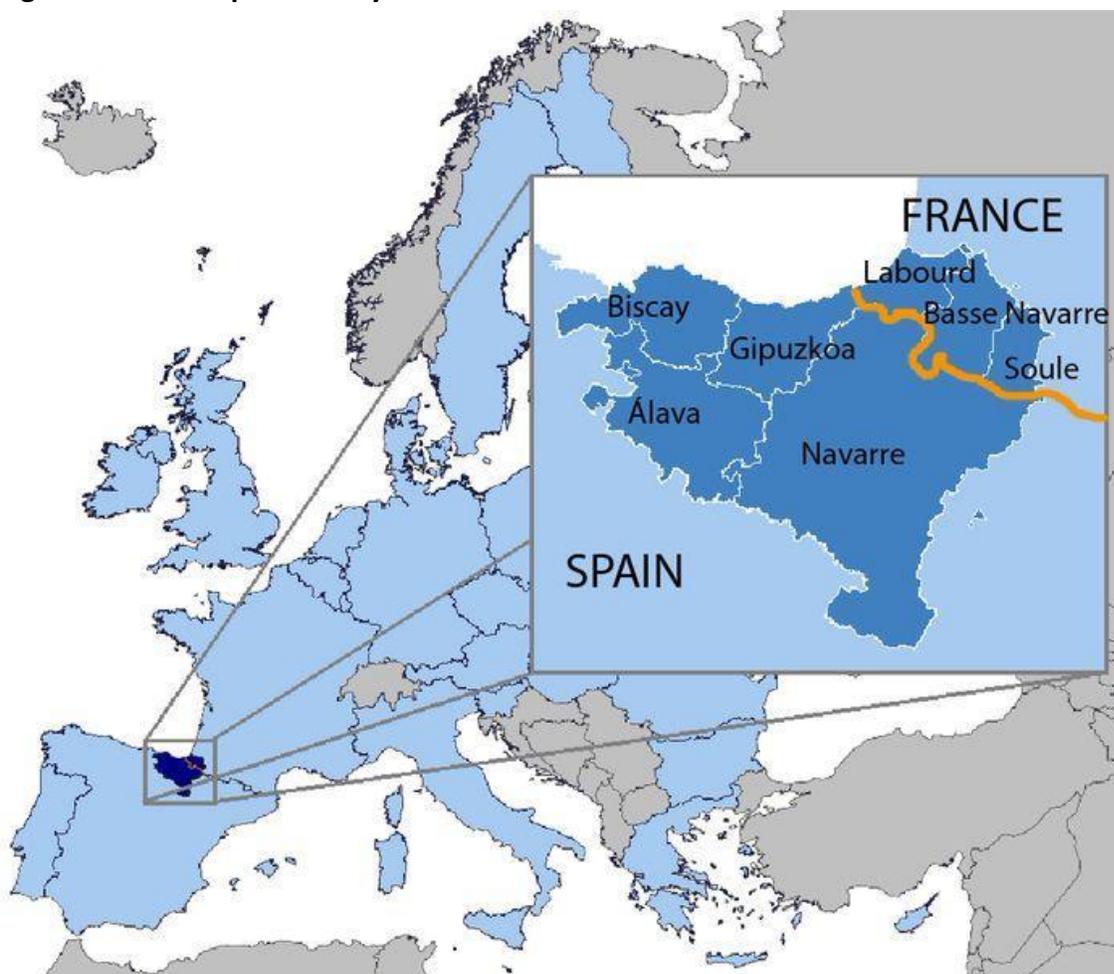
RQ 3: What kind of engagement opportunities do local media in Basque offer citizens?

As far as the Basque Country is concerned, Aiestaran (2007) provides an exhaustive insight, mainly centered on the genres and topics covered by local media in Basque of the Upper Deba Valley, Arana and Zuberogoitia (2012) describe the Goiena local multimedia group, and González (2006) examines news quality on local media. The importance and presence of media

in Basque has also been studied (Gutiérrez, Mendizabal and Urrutia, 2005), and it has also been framed within the context of European minority language media (Zabaleta, Xamardo, Urrutia et al., 2004, and Zabaleta, Xamardo, Gutiérrez et al., 2007), as well as networking opportunities in local media (Mendizabal, 2005). In addition to these, Aztiker (in Topagunea, 2011) has also published a number of studies on certain local media, including information about local magazine readers and their opinions. Salces (2016) has also described consumer attitudes and impressions towards media in Basque.

The present study has been carried out in the areas where Basque is spoken and consequently media in Basque is made available to the speakers, both in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and the Autonomous Community of Navarre in Spain, and in the Northern Basque Country (the provinces of Labourd, Lower Navarre and Soule) in France (see Figure 1).

**Figure 2. The Basque Country**



When conducting the study, in order to explore the possibilities to strengthen a communicative space in Basque, we took into account all local magazines and newspapers written in Basque, and all local radio and television stations broadcasting in Basque and comprising members of TOKIKOM (the Local Federation of Media in Basque), *Hitza* (local newspapers published through *Berrria*, which is the only daily Basque language newspaper distributed across the seven provinces), members of Topagunea (federation of associations for the promotion of Basque language), local council publications and those which are not members of any network.

A mixed-method approach was used. Firstly, in-depth interviews were carried out with the directors of the principal magazines in the TOKIKOM network, following the methodology used by Aiestaran (2007). Secondly, a detailed questionnaire was sent out to the directors of all the local media featured on Table 1. It was distributed among 65 local media with a response rate of 84%; the questionnaire was first checked by both the research team and the TOKIKOM directors. In-depth interviews were conducted with the directors of some regional magazines: *...eta Kitto*, *Begitu*, *Goiena*, *Guaixe*, *Ttipi-Ttapa*, *Uztarría*, *Aiurri*, *Txintxarri*, *Hernaniko Kronika* and *Anboto*, in May 2013.<sup>1</sup> All interviews were held in the headquarters of the local media in question.

Each interview consisted of 76 questions and lasted for between one and three hours. Questions were divided into sections. Firstly, 11 questions focused on employees, in an attempt to compile a profile of the kind of people working in local Basque-speaking media. The second set of questions focused on the media's network of collaborators, in order to determine whether or not anyone other than the workers on its payroll participated in its activities. The third section of the interview aimed to measure coverage, both in terms of reader base and in relation to the number of hits received by the website. The fourth section contained 13 questions about the media's budget, while the fifth section focused on the situation of the head offices and their computer infrastructure. This section also contained a number of questions on how archives are organized. The sixth set of questions asked about the newspaper or magazine's relationships with other media, while the seventh section contained 14 questions about working method and general organization. Finally, the last section focused on future projects, opportunities and risks.

In order to gather information about those media with whom we did not conduct in-depth interviews, a questionnaire was sent out to the directors asking about number of employees, number of readers or listeners and operating budget. Responses were received from all, with

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, a 'region' is taken to mean one of the sub-areas into which the provinces of Biscay, Gipuzkoa and Álava are divided. Each region contains a group of municipalities, which sometimes organize themselves into associations.

the exception of one radio station and two magazines. A focus group was also organized with those responsible for Basque-language media websites, in order to analyze and debate how Basque-language media have adapted to the Internet and the challenges they now face.

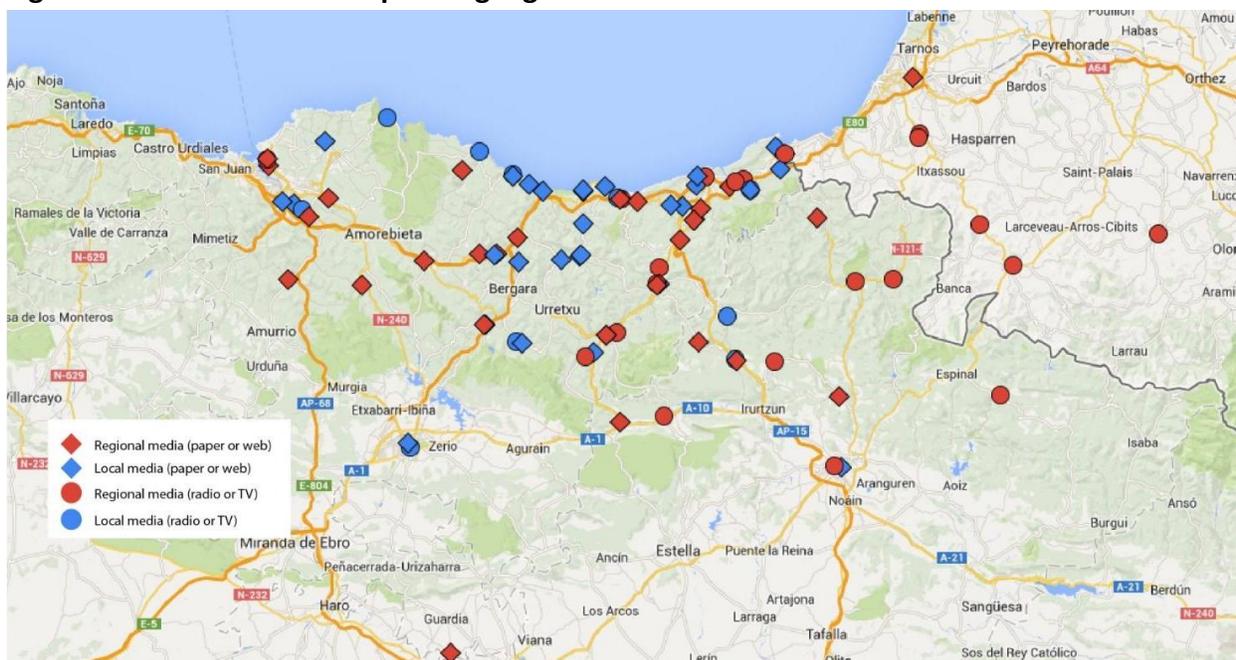
## 4. Results

### 4.1. A general overview of local media

We calculated a total of 92 different local media that write or broadcast in the Basque language. However, it should be stressed that about a dozen of these have a very low frequency level, publishing an issue/broadcasting a program only once every quarter. In the spring of 2013, 80 local media published issues/broadcast program at least once every two months. Of these, 48 were paper publications, 18 were radio stations, 6 were television stations and 8 were websites. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that most media have their own website, and in some cases these websites are very dynamic and indeed are becoming much more of a reference than the paper publication itself.

Half of all local media are regional, while the other half operate at a municipal level. 41 of them are affiliated to the Topagunea association and of these 31 are also members of the TOKIKOM network. 6 are publications from the *Hitza* group and 12 are local council initiatives. The rest are not affiliated to any association or network.

**Figure 3: Local Media in Basque Language**



From the perspective of geographical coverage (as shown in Figure 2), it is clear that every town and village in the province of Gipuzkoa has at least one local Basque-language media. The majority operate at a regional level, although there are several magazines that are published in a single town. In the province of Biscay most places also have local Basque-speaking media. In the north-western area of Navarre there are Basque-language media, and there is a radio station in the capital, Pamplona. The least presence was found in the province of Álava and the Northern Basque Country. In the latter area there are no municipal or regional media. However, provincial radio stations, a regional television station and the weekly publication *Herria* have sections dedicated to local news and information. In Álava, since 2015 a provincial weekly magazine has been available first on paper and then online, whilst only the Aiaraldea region and the city of Vitoria-Gasteiz have had their own local media in Basque.

#### 4.2. Variable frequency, high production level

The first variable we measured was the frequency of local Basque-language media. In addition to the websites, radio and television stations mentioned above, in relation to the written press there are 5 daily newspapers, 2 papers that publish twice a week, 10 weekly magazines, 8 fortnightly publications and 22 monthly ones. The rest all publish issues with a frequency level of less than once a month.

**Table 1. Frequency of local Basque-language media in the different provinces**

Province	Website	Radio	TV	Daily newspaper	Twice weekly publication	Weekly publication	Fortnightly publication	Monthly publication	Total
Álava	2								2
Biscay	1	3	1	1		1	2	6	15
Gipuzkoa	7*	6	4	4	2	7	5	13	48
Labourd		2				1*			3*
Navarre		5	1			1	1	3	11
Lower Navarre		1	1			1*			3*
Soule		1				1*			2*
Total	8*	18	7	5	2	10*	8	22	80

As shown in Table 1, more than half of all local media are located in the province of Gipuzkoa. Much fewer are located in Biscay and Navarre, and fewer still in Álava, Labourd, Lower Navarre and Soule. Nevertheless, it is important to note the prominent role played by radio stations in Navarre, as the most common form of local Basque-language media.

In relation to the written press, we measured the number of pages published by each (production rate). Some are published in A4 format, while others are in A3. We calculated the total number of pages published by each over the course of a month, and then calculated the equivalent in A3 format (for example, a monthly publication containing 20 pages in A4 format would have an equivalent production rate of 10 pages a month in A3).

If we consider the production rate of all local Basque-language magazines and newspapers in the whole of the Basque Country, we see that they publish a total of 2,126 pages per month. In other words, together and in the space of a month, they publish the same number of pages as a 70-page daily newspaper, even though due to uneven distribution, the information contained in these pages pertains much more to some regions than others.

#### *4.3. Audience/reader data*

In addition to having a high production rate, local Basque-language media also reach a large number of people, with all publications having a print run in the hundreds or even thousands. Some are distributed free of charge, while others are subscription only. Together, the publications of the *Hitza* group, TOKIKOM network, local councils and other associations total over 187,000 copies throughout the areas where Basque is spoken.

CIES and Aztiker associations provided data on the number of readers and we see that the TOKIKOM publications are read by over 194,000 people. The members of Topagunea who are not in TOKIKOM have over 29,500 readers. Of the six publications of the *Hitza* group, four have a joint total of 66,000 readers. Together, all the publication groups for which the total was calculated (*Hitza*, TOKIKOM, Topagunea, association and local council magazines) have 268,300 readers and distribute around 100,500 copies.<sup>2</sup> If we then calculate the proportion, taking into account all copies distributed, we can conclude that local Basque-language media publications are read by around 430,000 people. However, it may be that in some regions the same individual may read two local newspapers or magazines.

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<sup>2</sup> Since reader data was unavailable for some publications, these were not taken into account during this calculation.

Local media websites (i.e. magazine, radio and television websites) provide data on the number of daily and monthly hits, which are around 294,000 in total.

#### *4.4. Local media employees*

The vast majority of local media organizations are small-scale and run by teams of people which are on average not greater than 10. Just 5 of them have more than 10 people, with the largest group having 48 employees whilst others have no full-time staff whatsoever. If we add all the results together, we find that 266 people work in local Basque-language media in the areas where Basque is spoken. Two thirds of local Basque-language media employees (156) work for publications belonging to the TOKIKOM network.

Of the 266 people, 178 are employed on a full-time basis. Two thirds of employees are women and a third are men. Finally, almost all those people working in local Basque-language media have been working for the same company/organization for more than two years, with only 29 having started less than 24 months ago. The effects of the economic crisis and recession have been felt in this sector. According to the information obtained in the in-depth interviews, the main local media in the Basque Country have had to implement cutbacks from 2008 onwards. Between them, the ten main local publications have been forced to make over ten people redundant in recent years. The highest losses in this sense have taken place in Navarre.

#### *4.5. Budgets and subsidies*

Data in relation to budgets and subsidies was gathered from most, but not all, magazines and media. Based on this information, it was found that, together, local Basque-language media (not counting local television stations and the radio stations broadcasting in the Autonomous Regions of the Basque Country and Navarre) had a total annual budget of over 11 million euros in 2014. If we estimate the missing data from certain media, the results show that the members of TOKIKOM together account for more than half of this amount, while the media in the *Hitza* group account for less than a quarter.

Together, the members of the TOKIKOM network have a total annual budget of approximately 5.9 million euros. In addition, the Topagunea members who are not affiliated to the TOKIKOM network have a total annual budget of over 561,000 euros. In the case of associations, most of the 1.7 million euros corresponding to this sector is concentrated in the Euskal Irratiak

Federation (Federation of Basque-Language Radio stations) in the Northern Basque Country, which has a total annual budget of 1.2 million euros.

More than half of the budget for local media (more than 6.1 million euros) is spent on covering personnel costs. 1.7 million euros is spent on printing, 1.63 million on overheads, 0.96 million on distribution and 0.91 million on other expenditure. It should be noted that neither radio nor television stations are subject to printing or distribution costs, although they are subject to other costs that the printed media do not have.

According to our calculations, 39% of the local Basque-language media budget corresponds to subsidies provided by public institutions. Most subsidies are provided by the Basque Government, local councils and associations of municipalities. Local councils and associations of municipalities together provide 47% of all subsidies (over 2.1 million euros), while the Basque Government provides 27% (1.2 million euros), although it also contributes to the subsidies granted to the Euskararen Erakunde Publikoa (the Public Basque Language Entity), alongside the Atlantic Pyrenees General Council, the Aquitaine Regional Council and the French Government. It is worth noting that in the period studied, the Navarre Government gave no funding at all to help subsidize local Basque-language media, and that the only funding received by local media in this Autonomous Region came from local councils and associations of municipalities, along with the Basque Government (of the BAC).

For their part, the Biscay and Gipuzkoa Provincial Governments provide 730,000 euros to local Basque-language media, a figure which accounts for 16% of all subsidies. In relation to local council subsidies, it is important to note that the figure given above does not take into account the value of the office space provided free of charge to many magazines by their local authorities. To this we should add the 120,000 euros provided by associations of municipalities. In most cases, these associations do not provide funds directly, but rather through their member local councils. To sum up, local councils and associations of municipalities together provide nearly 19% of the local Basque-language media budget.

#### *4.6. Organization and operation*

With regards to local Basque-language media, as can be seen in Table 2, there is no single organizational model. Editorial departments differ in size and work can vary on one hand from writing weekly articles to having daily or monthly editorial meetings, on the other. Some media have journalists working on particular areas whilst others have multi-role journalists who receive extra support at key points e.g. weekends. In addition, journalists may (or not) be

responsible for tasks such as maintaining the website, video-photo resources, proof-reading, interviewing, writing articles and so on.

**Table 2. Different organization models**

Media	Operation	Newspaper	Magazine	Website	Weekly	Daily	Other
<i>Kronika</i>	1 journalist weekdays (photos & press conferences), 2 weekends (features)	+	-	+	-	+(paper & website)	
<i>Ttipi-Tapa</i>	1 journalist for local news, 1 general interviews, 1 opinion column 1&2 Proofread / upload daily content to the website (Mo-Fr)	-	+	+	+	+(website)	Sent to press Fri morning, for distribution following week
<i>Guaixe</i>	Editorial team sharing weekly interview / articles+1 for sport section	-	+	+	+	+(website)	
<i>Anboto</i>	1 for sport section, 1 culture, 1 website, 1 conducting interviews	-	+	+	+	+(website)	Covers 12 towns

<i>Txintxarri</i>	Journalists responsible for themes/topics for both paper+website Attend press conferences/upload content/write paper copy/compile video-photo libraries. Two video-edit.	-	+	+(features uploaded here in longer version)	+	+(website)	Distributed Monday mornings
<i>Eta Kitto</i>	Editorial team of 2 journalists. Meet to discuss topic distribution-Thursdays. Advertising management, Fridays & Mondays Copy writing Tuesdays & Thursdays	-	+	+ 1 editor uploads content daily (4 to 5 articles)	+	+(website)	Twitter and Facebook focus
<i>Aiurri</i>	Working groups. Impromptu weekend work Weekend schedule established Thursdays & Fridays.	-	+	+Refreshed daily (1-2+ articles) Additional content uploaded here	+	+(website)	

	Information gathered over weekend examined, weekly issue started, Mondays						
<i>Uztarría</i>	Monthly strategic meeting, then weekly team meeting to discuss topics & website content Monthly editorial board meeting for general subjects & problems	-	+	+	+	+(website)	
<i>Begitu</i>	1 journalist performing 70% of all tasks, covering local news and features. Collaborators	-	+	+	Fortnightly	+(website)	
<i>Goiena</i>	Team of journalists, each linked to particular geographical area or theme, working	-	+	+	Twice weekly on paper	+(website)	

	visibly (Internet/TV/p aper/magazin e) Google Drive, and showing time spent on each task Daily morning editorial meetings (content/TV/p aper/website) to ascertain priorities/com plications/imp rovements						
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Press offices are important for many reasons. Large number of emails of all kinds (institutional, sports-related, social, etc.) are sent out to the publications every day. Local issues, on the other hand, are not covered by any information agencies but supplied in situ. Provincial issues, including official communications from the provincial and autonomous governments are published if relevant to the local area or are given a more local slant by adding related interviews or local features.

*4.7. Relations between media and the problem of fragmentation*

When analyzing the relationships which exist between local Basque-speaking media, with a view to the consolidation of a communicative space in Basque, two factors need to be taken into account: the relationship between local media from the same region, and that which exists between all local media operating in Basque in the areas where Basque is spoken.

An example of this successfully implemented is the case of Buruntzaldea, a region to the south of San Sebastian, and which can be seen in more detail in Table 3 below. As can be seen, overall local media in Basque from the same region maintain good relationships with each other and in some cases work collaboratively. They might, for instance, try to set up common websites,

write features together, share timetables relating to regional events or work in collaboration with local council Basque language services. It is also common practice to exchange news, photographs and information regarding subsidies and advertising across organizations. Elsewhere, activities such as the sharing of premises, of training resources and of local government coordination can take place.

With regards to television, the *Goiena* group collaborates with the *Erlo*, *Hamaika* and *Goierrri* television stations. According to *Goiena's* representative, although there is no written agreement between the local TV stations, they have a very close relationship, almost like siblings. These local television stations were members of the Tokiko association, combining their content on the tokiko.tv platform, whilst nowadays some members have formed a new association: *Infosare*. Over and above their relationship with TOKIKOM, they have little contact with other journalists.

Prior to 2012 there was no formal structural relationship or agreement between regional local media on the one hand and those media operating in Basque across the seven provinces where Basque is spoken. In that year, the Hekimen association was founded by the non-public social initiative media working in Basque, thus incorporating the media described in this study.

**Table 3. Relationships between local media in Basque: an overview**

Media	Relations with other local media	Representatives at Tokikom	Region
<i>Kronika</i>	Good relationships with other regional local media. Attempt to set up a common website. Work collaboratively on 6 features annually Share a regional events timetable Collaboration with local council Basque language services	Yes	Buruntzaldea
<i>Txintzarri</i>	Annual meeting and press conference contact Exchange of information and photos.	Yes	Buruntzaldea

	<p>Attempt to set up a common website.          Work collaboratively on 6 features annually          Share a regional events timetable          Collaboration with local council Basque language services</p>		
<i>Aiurri</i>	<p>Good relationships with most local media.          Attempt to set up a common website.          Work collaboratively on 6 features annually          Share a regional events timetable          Collaboration with local council Basque language services</p>	<p>Yes. "Tokikom has helped us to know each other better and establish a more meaningful relationship"</p>	<p>Buruntzaldea &amp; Tolosaldea</p>
<i>Uztarría</i>	<p>Close relationship with <i>Urola Kostako Hitza</i> (they share office, information, photos).          Strong relationships with other local media (there is a regional local media council), for advice regarding subsidies or advertising; little contact with local media beyond</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Urola Kosta</p>
<i>Ttipi-Ttapa</i>	<p>Close relationship with nearby <i>Guaixe</i> for text and photograph exchange          Collaboration further afield as required</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Baztan-Bidasoa</p>
<i>Eta Kitto</i>	<p>Work independently</p>	<p>No. They consider Tokikom as "an opportunity to exchange information about subsidies, but not to exchange copy"</p>	<p>Eibar</p>

<i>Begitu</i>	They ask other magazines for advice regarding how to apply for subsidies or advertising. No other relationship aside from this.	No	Arratia
<i>Goiena</i>	Provide training for other magazines Close relationships with other local TVs in Basque	Yes	Debagoiena

#### 4.8. Issues relating to running small local media in Basque

A discussion group was formed with seven experts working in the field of the Basque-language press, who were responsible for media websites at daily, weekly and online publications. Participants mentioned how strength was lost due to the “fragmentation” and to the tendency historically of the local media world to work individually viewing ‘their strength from too small a perspective. They think they need to combine all the efforts made by each local media organization into a cohesive network.

However, the issue of joining forces triggered a debate. Overall, it was considered a positive thing to create unity whilst realizing this would require considerable changes to idiosyncratic styles of working. A concern was voiced that town or village-level local media might lose strength if they abandoned the hyperlocal approach. On a similar note, another participant pointed out that “the current situation of fragmentation only serves to multiply our workload and it seems that we are incapable of establishing a basic set of guidelines for sharing.” He also talked about technological problems, since each media uses “a different unit.” He does not see the world of local media as a unified one, “because each organization has its own platform or preferred code.”

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that while this research study was being carried out, a number of networking projects were set up. Even though a project close to San Sebastian failed to result in a unified platform, a nearby one in Tolosa was set up in the autumn of 2013 as a result of the collaboration between the local newspaper, a local magazine and the local radio station. The local television station did not, however, joined the initiative. It is also worth pointing out that in some cities such as Bilbao and Pamplona-Iruñea or at the provincial level as in Álava similar initiatives are underway nowadays, and the same is true also for other regions such as Sakana, in the north-west of Navarre. Elsewhere, also near San Sebastian, a reflection process was set up in an attempt to establish a local media network and to set up a regional

organization. Thus we see that local Basque-language media are indeed trying to overcome the current situation of fragmentation, alongside developments taking place through the TOKIKOM association.

#### *4.9. The importance of having a network of local collaborators*

This study also focused on the networks of local collaborators established by local Basque-language media. Depending on the size of their editorial team, local media tend to have smaller or larger networks of external reporters and collaborators. There are a number of different types of collaborator. One figure that is present in almost all magazines is that of the columnist. In relation to informants, there are two different types: journalists' regular contacts in the different towns or areas, and reporters. Another important element is the role played by local Basque language associations in half of all of the magazines studied. And finally, two less common forms of collaborator are donors and volunteers who help out with the organization of specific events.

It is difficult to calculate the exact extent of collaborator networks, since the type of collaborator involved in local media varies from organization to organization. In total, though, 1,083 individual collaborators were identified during the course of this research project, although the real figure may be even higher. Also, the data available provides no specific information regarding the continuity of collaboration. 7 out of every 10 collaborators (681 in total) work with magazines which are members of the TOKIKOM network. Almost three quarters of all collaborators work for media that form part of the Topagunea association, regardless of whether or not they are affiliated to TOKIKOM. It is important to highlight the strong presence of associations here, mainly due to the 150 collaborators of Euskal Irratiak, since the radio stations in this federation have a broad network of collaborators to help them with radio sessions and to aid them in organizing fundraising campaigns.

The extent of involvement of local contact reporters varies from one type of local media to another. The majority of media tend not to have neighborhood reporters who search out and write up news articles. Nevertheless, a dense network of informants exists and likewise an editorial team may approach their local contacts for information. The *Goiena* group, for example, asks hundreds of people to write for it over the Internet. It seeks to foster and promote blogs and its informants have their own blog, on which they write their news. On-line collaborators come from all over the Upper Deba Valley, and even include some who live in other parts of the Basque Country but have a connection of some kind with that region. The news articles written on the blog sometimes become the main news items on the website.

Thanks to this network, these bloggers have become one of *Goiena's* sources. "This year, the aim is to ensure that between 5% and 10% of the paper editions is written by these sources. The idea is not just to work *for* the community, but *with* the community too. We want to boost participation and increase the depth and insight of our articles." Some magazines, however, do everything themselves and operate without the help of a network of informants.

### **5. Conclusion: a sector which needs to form networks**

Three main conclusions can be drawn from this study. In response to the first research question (*What is the coverage enjoyed by local Basque-language media from both a geographical perspective and in relation to frequency?*), we can conclude that local Basque-language media reach a major percentage of the Basque-speaking population. All of Gipuzkoa and a large part of Biscay are covered by these media, as well as Vitoria-Gasteiz, Pamplona and north-western Navarre. In other words, all the Basque-speaking areas have local Basque-language media. On the other hand, large parts of Navarre and Álava have no local media in the Basque language, and in the Northern Basque Country there are no specific local Basque-language media at all, only provincial-level media that dedicate some sections to local news and events. In relation to frequency and production, it is important to highlight the fact that, together, these media publish the equivalent of a 70-page newspaper --the amount published by leading newspapers in the Basque Country. As for the number of copies printed and the number of readers, together local Basque-language media reach a critical mass of nearly 200,000 copies and over 400,000 readers. It is therefore clear that the area where Basque is spoken has a high level of production and a good offer of local Basque-language media. We can conclude that the 'minimum critical mass -in terms of density of speakers-' cited by Salces-Alcalde and Amezaga (2016: 239) regarding the conditions required for minority language local press 'to emerge and develop' are covered in our study. It can also be concluded that there are conditions for the consolidation of a communicative space in the Basque language that would guarantee the sufficient levels of use and motivation mentioned by Sánchez Carrión (1987) with a view to activating the two-way circuit (Use-Knowledge- Motivation / Motivation-Knowledge-Use) that underlies the processes of learning and transmission of languages.

In response to the second research question (*What resources do local Basque-language media have access to, what are their constraints and what opportunities do they have to work together?*), it is worth highlighting that the local Basque-language media industry employs nearly 300 people and has a total operating budget of over 10 million euros. It is therefore both a source of employment and an economic sector to be taken into account. It is true, on the other hand, that, examined one by one, we are mostly talking about small media structures,

but, as Raats, Donders & Pawels maintain (2014: 275) this could be an advantage: “the bottom-up structure of the small organization allows more intense ties with external allies, more informal contacts and lowers the threshold for PSM professionals and partners to explore new partnerships.”

The coverage of these media and the number of new projects cannot, however, hide the weakness of each one at an individual level, particularly in economic terms. The majority of media are currently operating with a reduced budget and have had to implement cutbacks over recent years, a circumstance that has resulted in a loss of jobs and the reduction and limitation of certain projects. The network of local media would not survive if not for subsidies provided by public institutions. Indeed, subsidies account for 39% of their total operating budget. This is a major constraint that serves to highlight the importance of the continued commitment of public institutions to providing funding. Regarding minority language local media and the role of public institutions towards them, we agree with Moring (2007: 30) when he refers to *institutional completeness* and underlines that “there should be a respect for the need to develop institutionally complete -or as institutionally complete as possible- media landscapes in minority languages.”

The second constraint or problem of this research question, as acknowledged by key figures working in this field, is the fragmentation of the sector. Local media directors recognize this fragmentation as a weak point which results in a substantial loss of strength and influence. However, at the same time there is a positive side to this situation, since it reflects the wealth and diversity of local Basque-language media. The situation is also forcing them to form networks as a means of overcoming the disadvantages posed by fragmentation. The result is the emergence of stronger regional media groups and the structuring of a cohesive relationship between local media throughout the areas where Basque is spoken in general. This tendency is aligned with Raats, Donders & Pawels’ (2014: 275) advice (‘An overarching strategic framework is crucial for avoiding fragmentation partnerships and networks’), and strengthens likewise a structure that contributes to the foundations of the previously mentioned communicative space in Basque language. It would be worthwhile to study the effect that this communicative space has on the consolidation of a differentiated Basque identity (on the influence of the media in the construction of national identities, see for example Bidegain, Gostin and Zuberogitia, 2017).

In response to the third research question (*What kind of engagement opportunities do they offer citizens?*), local media in Basque have deep roots in their local communities, and have established a network of over 1,000 collaborators. Many of these collaborators are informants, providing information either directly or through third parties. It is interesting to see how some

local media (mainly *Goiena* and *Uztarrria*) are trying to tap into the strength and potential of their communities by encouraging greater participation and engagement, and in all cases increased engagement helps enrich the way in which the newspaper or magazine operates. The main conclusion, then, is that the two main pillars of local media are community participation and the balance between very local news and articles of more general interest.

Strong community participation is an advantage for local media in Basque, but, as Mayer & Stern (2011) claim for media in general, it needs to be carefully measured: “as news organizations fight for survival, a more connected relationship with their communities should be valued, and therefore measured.” Astigarraga (2017) examines this issue in greater depth.

Regarding the balance between very local news and articles of more general interest, there is a challenge there for local media. Following to Stanton (2007), it should be borne in mind that all news is local in the global world, that is to say that they are not isolated and they should integrate global affairs in their news. But, on the other hand, it is true that their local character makes them appropriate for the niche market:

Media globalization does not mean that the global audiences become a single identity, but rather that audiences fragment. More typical of a global media audience is the special interest audience. Thus minority language audiences become much more typical of the new audience than they were in the days when national audiences were dominant. This takes the minority language audience away from the margins and puts it nearer the mainstream audience. (Cormack, 2000: 12).

Trying to keep this difficult balance between local and global affairs seems to be a challenge for local media in Basque, in order to “reconcile the places where we live with the spaces we inhabit,” examine how they manage to do that, and, in doing so, propose effective policies to strengthen local media as they are “a vital part of the public good” (Ali, 2017). Furthermore, in the case of local media in Basque, as we have seen in this study, there is both evidence of and potential for this type of reconciliation.

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