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Editorial: DRS2022 Labs

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Editorial: DRS2022 Labs

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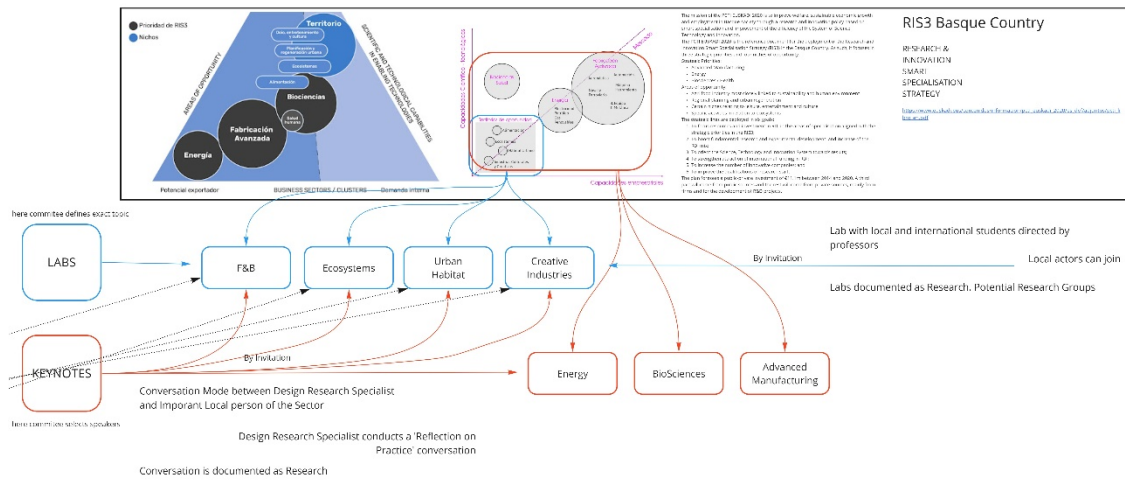
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The DRS2022 congress in Bilbao was an incredible experience, both intellectually and emotionally. One for the books. There is no better way to present this editorial than nodding to Peter Lloyd's introductory words to the editorial of the Proceedings: *'DRS2022 has been a labour of love and an article of faith'*.

Despite all the uncertainty that the COVID situation added to the usual jitters of the process of organisation, we happened to come up with some innovative and fresh ideas. In the case of the 2022 conference, the involvement of the academic institutions, namely Basque Universities led by the public University of the Basque Country, was balanced with the city of Bilbao itself that took part evenly in the whole process, sharing the protagonism and giving a new taste of local engagement to the event. To quote again from the Editorial, 'We talked about how we could discuss and work on local issues that affect the Bilbao region but that also resonated globally; we talked about how to involve local professionals and organisations in design research; and we talked about how to raise awareness about the importance of design research. Both the new DRS Labs and the keynote debates engage directly with these issues'. The idea of creating/hosting the Bilbao Labs, with the intention of seeding an idea that would hopefully replicate and grow over time was as exciting as it was undefined. Nevertheless, there was always someone in the group, with experience in these arenas, to foster an attitude of: 'no worries, it will take shape almost by itself over time'. And so it happened.

The first step was to frame the scope of the Labs. The focus should be Bilbao, or Bilbao region but how? To identify design challenges for Bilbao, we looked at the European Smart Specialisation Platform of the European Commission (RIS3), that sets the potentially-funded areas by regions in the territory of the European Union. With this in mind, we tweaked and adapted the challenges set for the Basque Country to the very city of Bilbao. Working with the municipality-based team who were involved in the conference, the Labs emerged as something attractive and creative; something interesting for designers yet useful for the city. Since we didn't intend to tightly limit and constrain the Lab challenges, we aimed to start from a framework that was positive and operative.





This document that gathers the results and process of the Labs that took place in Bilbao in 2022 should serve as a seed for future improved versions of the idea. It is important to state that this approach is as valid as any other used for future Labs in future DRS conferences. The key idea is, as the call for proposals reads: ‘...the DRS encourages design researchers to engage with local organisations in a defined project that brings direct benefits to the local region, engages conference participants and wider publics, and demonstrates the potential that design research can bring to diverse industries, institutions, and communities’. Following (and adapting) the RIS3 challenges for the region, we identified four challenges or issues that are particularly relevant Bilbao and the surrounding region:

- ❑ Urban Habitat: Urban public space and mobility. How will our interconnected society change the way that we move, the physical configuration of our streets, and even the types/shapes of vehicles and our relations with them?
- ❑ Digital Ecosystems: Digital platforms, IoT and AI for the early detection and prevention of social isolation and loneliness, especially in the context of ageing.
- ❑ Cultural Heritage: Transformation of the architectural industrial heritage of Bilbao to mixed economical, educational and cultural activities sites.
- ❑ Creative industries and public space: How does the desire of cities to support creative expression at all levels coexist with the everyday life of residents?

The idea of the Labs in 2022 was to have a local research team, who was part of an academic institution, working together with an international partner with a similar composition, that is, a research team of an academic-relevant institution. This collaboration should be fruitful for both partners and enrich the academic and research realm of the local host, be it Bilbao or, in future iterations of the Labs, any other city.

The labs are meant to work as a continuous collaboration, starting some months before the celebration of the conference, through the actors working both remotely and with punctual

interaction, and in-person visits if possible. The more cross-disciplinary dynamic and continuous the interaction is, the better. It is desirable that the Labs organisation committee helps facilitate interaction, communication and availability of resources. For the process of selecting Labs we opened a bid for Lab proposals in which, on top of the proposed team, theme and methodology, we asked for a plan for pre, during, and post-operative collaboration and outcomes. Workshops and exhibitions during the conference were not only welcome but also encouraged and supported.

Five international LAB proposals were selected to tackle the challenges. The local institutions involved were the School of Architecture of the Basque Country, Mondragon University, the University of Deusto, the School of Fine Arts of the University of the Basque Country, IED/Kunsthal, and Bilbao Biodesign Centre. International partners included the University of the Arts of London, London College of Communication, the University of Washington, the international DCODE network involving Edinburgh Futures Institute and TU Delft, and Senseable Cities Lab from Boston MIT. These diverse and creative participants ensured the success of the initial collection of Bilbao-based DRS conference Labs.

And there is no better way to wrap up this Editorial than nodding to Rachel Cooper's closing words when interviewed by the University of the Basque Country at the Bilbao 2022 conference: *'Design Researchers have to engage with the outside world, with other disciplines and professionals, as well as with the general public, with policymakers and agents to solve today's complex challenges. I think there are a lot of young people trying to work on that and be more activist. Design became activist'*

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