

# The Basque media system: The role of Euskal Telebista in its completeness in a globalized audiovisual landscape

(El sistema mediático vasco: El rol de Euskal Telebista en su integridad dentro del panorama audiovisual globalizado)

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*Euskal Telebista began broadcasting 40 years ago with the intention of being an instrument for the normalization of the Basque language. So far, it has met its objective, since ETB has been a fundamental element for the Basque-speaking community to have access in their own language to such an important domain of daily life as public communication. Now, in a new context where audiovisual platforms of international scope are cornering the traditional media, ETB has been able to adapt and continues to support the completeness of our media system*

*Keywords: Media system. Minority language media. Completeness. Basque language.*

*Euskal Telebista empezó a emitir hace 40 años con la intención de servir de instrumento para la normalización del euskera. Hasta el momento ha cumplido su objetivo, dado que ETB ha sido un elemento fundamental para que la comunidad vascoparlante tenga acceso, en su propia lengua, a un ámbito tan importante de la vida cotidiana como es la comunicación pública. Ahora, en un nuevo contexto donde las plataformas audiovisuales de alcance internacional están acaparando a los medios tradicionales, ETB ha sabido adaptarse y sigue apoyando la integridad de nuestro sistema mediático.*

*Palabras clave: Sistema mediático. Medios de comunicación en lenguas minoritarias. Integridad. Euskera.*

*Euskal Telebista duela 40 urte hasi zen emititzen, euskararen normalizaziorako tresna izateko asmoarekin. Orain arte bete du bere helburua; izan ere, ETB funtsezko elementua izan da euskal hiztunen komunitateak, bere hizkuntzan, sarbidea izan dezan komunikazio publikoa bezalako eguneroko bizitzako esparru garrantzitsu batera. Orain, nazioarteko irismena duten ikus-entzunezko plataformak hedabide tradizionalak bereganatzen ari diren testuinguru berri batean, ETBk egokitzen jakin du eta gure sistema mediatikoaren osotasuna babesten jarraitzen du.*

*Gako hitzak: Sistema mediatikoa. Hedabideak hizkuntza gutxituetan. Osotasuna. Euskara*

*La chaîne de télévision basque Euskal Telebista (ETB) a commencé à émettre il y a 40 ans avec l'objectif de servir d'outil à la normalisation de la langue basque. À ce jour, ETB a rempli sa mission puisqu'elle a représenté un élément fondamental dans l'accès de la communauté bascophone, dans sa propre langue, à un domaine si important de la vie quotidienne qui n'est autre que la communication publique. Aujourd'hui, dans un nouveau contexte où les plateformes audiovisuelles d'envergure internationale accaparent les médias traditionnels, ETB a su s'adapter et continue d'appuyer l'intégrité de notre système médiatique.*

*Mots clés: Système médiatique. Médias en langues minoritaires. Médias en langues régionales. Intégrité. Langue basque. Euskara.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In Europe, in the middle of the second half of the 20th century, several minority communities launched their own television stations, some of which already have an interesting journey, such as TV3 in Catalonia, S4C in Wales and Euskal Telebista (ETB) in the Basque Country. Their promoters assumed that television would be a tool to help revive their endangered language, but subsequent studies obliged researchers to nuance this idea. Specifically, Moring (2007) concludes that the communication domain must meet the condition of completeness in order to be useful in language promotion.

Since it began broadcasting in 1983, ETB has been a fundamental element for the completeness of the Basque communication system, while playing an important role in the three aspects of language normalization: status, corpus and acquisition (Larrinaga, 2019, pp. 280-281). ETB is not an independent company; it is part of Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB), the Basque public broadcasting corporation, and talking about one implies talking about the other. At the end of 2020, EITB has been immersed in a transformation process that has culminated in the integration into a single company of its television (ETB itself), radio and Internet subsidiaries, and, consequently, of all the corporation's audiovisual production. This is a corporate reorganization that aims to respond to the challenges posed by the digital era.

In the last three decades, digital technologies have enabled the development of new types of media, and have favoured the establishment of increasingly large communication groups that cross borders and are capable of serving most market niches simply by operating in hegemonic languages. Competition from these global giants has caused a serious crisis for the traditional media. On the one hand, they are losing their audience, and, on the other hand, they are seeing a reduction in their advertising revenues, two problems that affect local media and minority language media (MLM) most acutely. More than a few of them have disappeared. More recently, video-on-demand (VOD) services and new audiovisual consumption habits have made the continuance of MLM even more difficult. It is, therefore, time to ask ourselves where those expectations that four decades ago led to the creation of ETB are.

## **2. OBJECTIVE AND METHOD**

The main objective of this study is to find out whether in the early 2020s ETB, as a medium of communication, continues to contribute to the promotion of the language. Our hypothesis is that, being ETB (EITB) a public corporation, it takes care that our field of communication is always maintained in conditions to be useful in the normalization of the Basque language.

In order to verify our hypothesis, first of all, it is essential to establish the theoretical framework in which to assess how a medium contributes

to the promotion of its language. Specifically, after delimiting the concept of linguistic normalization and outlining which aspects of linguistic normalization can be influenced by media policies and actions, we will focus on the condition of completeness. In the following two sections, we propose to learn about the context in which the media in Basque have been created and sustained; we will first offer an overview of the recent history of the process of normalization of our language, and then we will situate the birth and development of ETB within this process. Once our study has been contextualized, our most important task will focus on describing the situation of the media system in Basque (SMV), which will reveal whether ETB contributes to its completeness, and if so, in what way.

### **3. LANGUAGE NORMALIZATION AND MEDIA**

In the context of southern European minority communities suffering language shift, the term 'normalization' refers to the process of (re)instating their own language for communicative functions in all domains, official, public, or private, in order to guarantee its future stability and normality (Bastardas, 1995). In this very same sense, in the plans and texts on the promotion of Basque, one can also find the term 'language revitalization', which King (2001) and other authors have used in studies on minority communities in other parts of the world. In any case, it is understood that two aspects can be distinguished in the normalization processes: language policy and language planning. Language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behaviour of groups of people or entire communities with respect to the acquisition, structure or functional allocation of their language codes (Cooper, 1989, p. 45), and language policy, to the goals of language planning (Cooper, 1989, p. 29). During the 1990s, research and theoretical developments on language policy and language planning have shown that the two aspects are inextricably related, which is why it is preferred to describe the whole field as 'language policy and planning' (LPP). In this text we assume that LPP, language normalization, language revitalization and even reversing language shift are equivalent terms.

In her Integrative LPP Framework, Hornberger (2007) warns that no approach in itself can set a specific language policy; it is up to society itself to decide what changes its linguistic situation requires. Once the objectives have been decided, the integrative framework distinguishes three types of planning that make it possible to organize the initiatives and actions to be carried out into coherent sections. Thus, social agreement and normative development actions correspond to status planning. All plans and actions related to language transmission are included in acquisition planning, and, finally, efforts to standardize and update the language are included in corpus planning.

Historically, the first initiatives to promote minority languages related to the broadcast media consisted of offering them spaces on state-run radio and television stations, which is why Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2011)

coined the term 'gifting era' to refer to this stage. Appearing in the media, even in a merely testimonial way, contributes to changing linguistic attitudes, because it makes both its speakers and the rest of society see that the language is in today's world. It therefore has a positive impact on its status.

After that first step, the next one was the implementation of MLM by the communities themselves. The aim was to provide a service to speakers in the form of information, formation and entertainment, so Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes speak of a service era. In order to enable the minority language to respond to the new functions, radios and televisions carry out work to adapt and update the vocabulary and linguistic structures, which has a direct impact on the language corpus.

The years leading up to the turn of the millennium saw the emergence of digital technology in a globalized world, with significant implications for MLM. We highlight two: the strong competition from global media companies, and the emergence of bottom-up initiatives in the audiovisual offering. The latter concern sporadic actors, often individuals –called prosumers (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010)– who create and distribute content, mainly in the new media, with the sole interest of having an audiovisual offering to their liking. They feel free from the demands of serving all speakers, and their logic is action: to produce and distribute content. Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes call this new time the performance era.

In the academic sphere, the 1990s and 2000s saw increasing interest in MLMs and their role in LPP. Scholars did not doubt that MLM were useful in status and corpus planning, but it was questioned whether they could have any relevance in language transmission. Fishman (1991), in his Graded Intergenerational Dislocation Scale, distinguishes eight domains in which people's lives take place, and states that a language endures if it is transmitted from one generation to another as a mother tongue, that is, if it is the usual language in the domains of intimacy. For Fishman, the domains above –the school, the administration and the media– do not succeed in converting a language into a mother tongue; at most they can serve to raise awareness of the importance of keeping the language alive in the family and in the neighbourhood. That is, Fishman recognizes a role for MLM in status planning, but dismisses them as an important tool for reversing language shift.

Other researchers put forward new ideas about the continuity of the language and, without underestimating the transmission between generations, stress the importance of the language gaining new domains of use and new speakers (Romaine, 2006, pp. 464-465). From this point of view, the media are fundamental for the future of the language, since communication is one of the main domains in the lives of citizens (Moring, 2013, pp. 39-40). Besides, there is a significant correlation between contact with media and linguistic behaviour (Naro & Pereira Scherre, 1996, p. 228). From what has been said it shouldn't be concluded that involvement with the mass media causes changes in linguistic behaviour; there is a third

factor, the speaker's motivation, that might explain the correlation. The motivated speaker may find in the media what s/he feels s/he needs, be it a linguistic register of higher status (Carvalho, 2004), be it a slang of her/his own (Androutsopoulos, 2001), etc. It is not a matter of imitating words, phonological or grammatical features, or even a standard model of language, as Trudgill (1986, pp. 40-41) argues; it is a matter of the speaker making her/his own something s/he was looking for. It is clear, therefore, that the media can also play an important role in acquisition planning.

Once it is beyond doubt that MLM can be an important resource in all aspects of language normalization, we have to ask about the conditions under which they are so indeed. Moring (2007) responds by adopting a functional perspective. According to him, any language community pursues developing a state of functional completeness. In such a state, speakers can live their lives in and through their language, at least within the confines of everyday matters in their community. A necessary but not sufficient condition for functional completeness is the institutional completeness, which, with regard to the domain of communication, means that there are platforms available in the minority language for each type of media. Another necessary but not sufficient condition is the genre completeness. It is just as important that the offer covers all types of media as that the community finds all types of formats and genres on them.

Minority communities are therefore challenged to arrange a fully developed set of media of all types, where different genres of content are available. In this sense, the era of performance was perceived as an opportunity, as an era with great potential to promote the use of the language through the different media with very little effort or economic cost (Pietikäinen et al., 2019). This has not been the case. Digital technologies have led us to a scenario in which the presence of minority languages in the media is compromised. Now the companies that dominate the market are global operators that offer VOD services, preferably in hegemonic languages. Companies such as Netflix or Prime –the so-called over the top (OTT) platforms– offer instant access to tons of movies and series, allowing users to watch what they want, when they want, for as long as they want. So many facilities along with content production and distribution practices –such as continuous playing at the end of an episode– resulted in the normalization of a new form of audiovisual consumption, the binge-watching (Anghelcev et al., 2021). Regarding new media, now those who succeed are content creators who have become professional, influencers who count their followers in hundreds of thousands around the world, and to achieve this they use English as a vehicular language. The consequence is that the weakest media are disappearing. In Europe, with a high degree of atomization, even the national media find it difficult to develop a competitive offer (EITB, 2022a, pp. 14-15).

All this is reflected in the habits of young people, as confirmed by studies carried out by the research group NOR of the Basque Country University

(UPV/EHU). The university students of Euskadi and Navarre consume information, entertainment and fiction mostly on Youtube, Instagram and OTTs (NOR, 2021b). Regarding language, they mostly choose Spanish (71.5% in new media, 86.2% in conventional television), a significant group chooses English (21.1% in new media, 1.5% in television), and only a minority chooses Basque (3.0% in new media, 9.1% in television) or other languages (4.4% in new media, 3.2% in television) (NOR, 2021a). When they themselves create content they do so only or mainly in Spanish (96.0% in Tik Tok, 74.8% in Youtube, 71.3% in Instagram) (NOR, 2021d, 2021e, 2021c).

#### **4. RENAISSANCE OF THE BASQUE LANGUAGE**

Basque language (Euskara, as we call it) is spoken in an area on the shores of the Bay of Biscay that corresponds to the territory known as the Basque Country, which today consists of the Basque Autonomous Community (Euskadi), the Chartered Community of Navarre (Navarre) and the Communauté d'Agglomération du Pays Basque (Iparralde). In historical times, Basque has not been a great language, neither by number of speakers, nor by extension and its geographical and social spaces have suffered a constant reduction. Awareness and efforts to revitalize it date back to the 18th century, but until the second half of the 20th century there has been no organized planning.

We will differentiate four stages in the standardization of Basque on the basis of four milestones related to the corpus planning and the status planning of our language. The beginning is marked by the 1968 congress of Euskaltzaindia, the academy of the Basque language, where the elaboration of a unified variety or supradialectal standard was decided. In that first stage, during the 1970s, the standardization of Basque focused on codification. While the academy was establishing the broad outlines of the standard Basque, there was a strong debate in Basque society between those in favour of unification and those who thought that the unified variety would end up destroying the dialects.

The second milestone was the approval in 1978 of the Spanish constitution, which in Navarre and Euskadi gave Basque the status of official language –together with Spanish. The new constitution also recognized a high degree of autonomy for both territories, which, in the case of Euskadi, was articulated in the Statute of Autonomy of 1979, and in that of Navarre, through the Law of Improvement of the Charter Regime of 1982. Making use of its competences, Euskadi passed its law for the normalization of the use of the Basque language in 1982, and Navarre passed its own in 1986. The two recognize the right of citizens to use the Basque language in administration, education and communication, with the difference that the Navarre law limits the right to specific zones of the territory. Both laws were the opportunity for Basque to become fully established in the official

spheres, which brought with it a great work of functional elaboration so that our language could develop in the newly conquered domains.

The next milestone was the 1994 congress, in which Euskaltzaindia undertook a new phase of codification. Basque was consolidating in the new domains of use, which made it necessary to better define the standard, since aspects such as pronunciation or the unified dictionary had not been addressed in the first phase. As the standardization process progressed, in the mid-1990s, the voices of those who considered the unified Basque language to be too artificial gained considerable strength. Some speakers turned to the vernacular varieties in search of a more lively and expressive language. This is the phenomenon known as vernacularization (Coupland, 2014), which in our country was mainly manifested in the local media, starting with the press.

With respect to the social implantation of Basque, a decade had passed since the approval in Euskadi and in Navarre of the normalization laws, and progress could be perceived. In order to have concrete data, in 1991 the Government of Euskadi launched the first sociolinguistic survey, which has been carried out every five years since 1996 in collaboration with the institutions of Navarre and Iparralde. In 1998, the Government of Euskadi, with the collaboration of the social agents, drew up a strategic plan, whose name can be translated as Master Plan for the Revitalisation of the Basque (MPRB). Its main objective was to guarantee the rights of citizens who wanted to live in Basque, and it contemplated 16 areas of action, divided into three axes: the transmission of Basque, the use of Basque, and support for the language. This model, whose main reference was the Fishman scale (Azkarate, 2012, p. 127), proposed various actions in each of the sixteen areas, and one thing that was considered fundamental: the obligation to establish evaluation indicators for the objectives set out in the plan and the actions carried out.

In Iparralde, the opportunity for the promotion of Euskara arose in 1993, when the French State launched a project for the economic and social promotion of the different territories. The French constitution does not recognize linguistic rights and only protects the public use of French, but in the development agreement for Iparralde signed by the institutional agents in 1997, it is admitted that the Basque language is an element of territorial cohesion and that, therefore, it should be promoted. Furthermore, by virtue of the freedom of communication and freedom of expression enshrined in the constitution, it is understood that Basque can have its place in education, the media and the administration. Once the framework was established, in 2000 the first standardization plan for the period 2001-2006 was approved, called Convention Spécifique Pays Basque, which in structure and contents follows the MPRB very closely.

In Navarre, the new steps in the promotion of Euskara came from the local corporations of the Basque-speaking area and from the social agents.

It should be noted that in those years social organizations for the promotion of the language multiplied, and that they launched initiatives throughout the Basque geography, such as media in our tongue, Basque classes for adults, leisure activities, strengthening of Basque in work environments etc.

The fourth milestone in the normalization of Basque cannot be placed in a specific year. It is the expansion of Basque on the Internet, which took place in the second half of the 2000s. By then, Basque already had an interesting presence on the net, but faced with the challenges of a globalized world, the Basque-speaking community decided not to stand aside, and opted for the creation of specific content for the Internet and the development of information and communication technologies in their language. In accordance with the practices that have become common in the performance era, an important part of the new content is contributed by private individuals through social networks and new media.

If we look at the social presence of Basque, the evolution in recent decades has been positive. According to data from sociolinguistic surveys (Gobierno Vasco et al., 2023), knowledge of Euskara in the Basque Country as a whole has risen from 22.7% in 1974 to 46.3% in 2021. Knowledge among young people stands out, which in Euskadi, in the 16-24 age group, reaches 90.6%. Use has also experienced a significant increase. According to the measurement of the street usage of languages carried out every five years by the Basque Sociolinguistic Cluster (Altuna Zumeta et al., 2022), in 2021, 12.6% of all conversations in the street were in Basque, compared to the 4.9% that would be expected according to the sociolinguistic conditions of the Basque Country (Altuna et al., 2012, p. 35). In the data provided by the street measurement, it is observed that in 2006 a high point was reached and that, after a slight decline, there has been a stagnation in the evolution of the use of the language, especially outside formal settings. For this reason, the efforts of both public authorities and social agents have been aimed at motivation.

Among the bottom-up initiatives, it is worth highlighting Euskaraldia, which was launched in 2018, with the aim of getting Basque speakers to break with inertias and change their language habits in their everyday lives (Chiramberro, 2018). The public authorities, meanwhile, repeat the MPRB model in their normalization plans. In Euskadi, the Government has drawn up a new plan for the period 2013-2023, which emphasizes motivational actions and language projection. In Navarre, in 2015 the Government agreed on a policy of language promotion and protection of the linguistic rights of citizens, even without modifying the division of the territory into linguistic zones. That policy was embodied in the first plan for the promotion of the language, with the three axes of transmission, use and support following the model of the MPRB. The second plan came into effect in 2021. In Iparralde, there has also been a succession of plans since 2006.

## 5. ETB AND COMMUNICATION IN BASQUE

ETB was established in 1982. By then, there were already written media in Basque, but, with the exception of a very short-lived daily newspaper, there were only general information weeklies. One of them, the magazine *Argia*, dates back to 1919 and is the oldest media in Basque. Before 1982, there were also Basque-language radio and television programs. In our language, the gifting era dates back to the second half of the 1950s, when several parish radio stations decided to offer small programs in Basque on cultural and religious topics aimed at peasants (Gutiérrez, 2002). Regarding television, during the second half of the 1970s, TVE (Spanish public channel) and FR3 (French public channel) broadcast several programs in Euskara. They were produced with very few resources, only offered second-rate content (children's entertainment, reports on customs and ways of life), and were not aimed at the entire Basque-speaking community, neither because of the territorial scope of each transmission nor because of the language model chosen (Torrealdai, 1985). Those first experiences had hardly any positive impact on the status of the Basque language.

In 1982, the Parliament of Euskadi, making use of the powers set forth in the Statute of Autonomy, passed the law creating the public corporation Euskal Irrati Telebista. According to the law, EITB was to perform three tasks: 1) to offer citizens a means to be informed and to participate in the public debate, 2) to complement the educational system, and 3) to promote and spread the Basque language and culture. Once EITB was created, in a few months the corporation put its media to work, thus beginning the service era in our language. Euskadi Irratia, the Basque-language radio station, started broadcasting on November 23, 1982, and Euskal Telebista went on the air at the very beginning of 1983. The two Spanish-language stations, Radio Vitoria, since 1982, and Radio Euskadi, since 1983, were also part of the corporation. In 1986, ETB, which was launched as a bilingual channel, was split into ETB1 (in Basque) and ETB2 (in Spanish).

It is no exaggeration to say that EITB was born from zero. Its legal situation was precarious. The language it wanted to promote had not even been for fifteen years on the road to standardization and, in any case, that unified Basque that EITB adopted as its linguistic model had been planned for literary uses. ETB and its sister medium Euskadi Irratia have had two important tasks related to the corpus of our language: to adapt standard Basque to oral use, and to develop a register for information and current affairs.

Another type of problem that EITB faced in its beginnings was the creation of absolutely all the infrastructures it needed. Together with the production and broadcasting centre and the network of repeaters, the most remarkable infrastructure was the School of Radio and Television, created in 1980, which trained the first generation of EITB professionals and laid the foundations of dubbing in Basque. The first dubbing studio emerged in 1982 from the school itself and in the following years two more were created, one of them

as part of a production centre for television. This was the birth of the Basque audiovisual industry. In the early days it depended entirely on EITB, but since the late 1990s it has been expanding its scope. The dubbing studios, television production companies and film production companies have not only provided EITB with content in Euskara, but have also been the breeding ground for presenters, directors, scriptwriters and actors and actresses who have achieved fame throughout Spain and even around the world.

The effort to launch EITB immediately had a positive impact on the status of the language, demonstrating that Basque was a language as suitable as any other for radio and television. This idea is confirmed every day by the media offer of the Basque corporation. ETB from the beginning has guaranteed the Basque-speaking community spaces for information, formation and entertainment, and, although it is not a pioneer in formats or arguments, it has never been out of touch with the main trends and tastes of the moment (Larrinaga, 2019, p. 152). The formats produced include magazines, quiz shows, situation comedies, reality shows, talent shows and travel programs, as well as programs aimed specifically at students of Basque as a second language. Even though the latter type of program makes an important contribution, ETB has a greater impact on language acquisition as a company that operates largely in Basque. It is an incentive for people interested in working in the corporation to improve their language skills, while at the same time offering employees an environment in which to use and develop their language daily.

Continuing with history, in 1990 Gaztea, EITB's young radio station, was created, which has been broadcasting exclusively in Basque since 1994. In 1996, together with the television stations of Catalonia and Galicia, ETB launched Galeusca TV, its first international experience, which ended after a year and a half, when each started up its own international channel. 1996 was also the year in which EITB registered eitb.com, its first Internet domain, with versions in Basque and Spanish, where the programming of the different media of the group was announced. In 2000, live broadcasts of EITB's media and information news were incorporated to the web.

As EITB grew, so did public communication in Basque. The 1980s saw the birth of the local press and a large number of local radio stations. In 1990 Euskaldunon Egunkaria was born, the first Basque-language newspaper to reach the entire Basque-speaking community. In 2003 it was closed down by a controversial court decision, and the popular initiative launched Berria to replace it. The local television stations in Basque are from the early 2000s, when the local media also made the leap to the Internet. The panorama of communication in Basque was completed by specialized periodicals, which since the 1970s were multiplying and covered a wide range of topics, from science and technology to humanities and comics for children.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Basque communication field shows itself to be very vital but, faced with the changes heralded by digital

technology, the sector begins a period of reflection. In 2000, EITB approves its first strategic plan to adapt to the new audiovisual landscape, which marks the beginning of the Basque performance era. That first strategic plan was in force until 2007, and since then new plans have been periodically elaborated. In 2022, the plan that will set the course of EITB until 2030 was approved. Among the achievements of these plans related to the promotion of the language, it is worth mentioning that EITB's linguistic model has been revised so that dialectal (vernacular) speeches have their place alongside the unified Basque. EITB broadcasts have been extended to Iparralde and Navarre. In line with the efforts to promote the use of the language, EITB prioritizes the offer in Basque aimed at children and young people, and for example decided to create a children's TV channel (ETB3) in 2008. EITB's Internet offer has also been strengthened; there are several thematic sites within the portal eitb.eus, an on-demand repository that has been operating since 2011 –Nahieran–, a channel on Youtube, and seven information and entertainment apps, among which we have to highlight Hiru3 for children, Go!azen for teens, Gaztea for young people and EITB Albistek on current affairs. Since 2005, through an agreement with the Basque producers' associations, EITB has been involved in the financing of all Basque-language film projects, in addition to a significant number of projects in Spanish, which are subsequently dubbed into Basque <sup>1</sup>. EITB also has accounts in the main social networks. It should be noted that EITB's channels in Spanish have also become instruments for the normalization of the Basque language; they give it visibility in front of an audience that might otherwise be unaware of our language, and demonstrate to that same audience that politicians, artists, sportspeople and many other citizens make use of it in their daily lives.

EITB's entire strategy is dominated by the idea of community service, but, in concord with the spirit of the performance era, new formats have also been explored in which consumption at will, interaction and participation take precedence: webseries, music demo contests, cover contests, interactive comics, etc.

Outside EITB, local media in Basque have faced the challenges of globalized communication with unequal fortune. Some have been disappearing; others have initiated integration processes to become multimedia groups; all have opted for collaboration, and in 2012 they launched Tokikom, the association of local media in Euskera. Following this philosophy of collaboration, that same year Hekimen was formed, the association of media of popular initiative and national diffusion –which means that covers the entire territory where the Basque is spoken. As in EITB, both in Tokikom and Hekimen the idea of service is central. The two associations represent the service they have to provide to Basque-speaking

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1. Projects include documentary, animation and fiction feature films. Their original language has not been an obstacle for some of them to achieve international recognition, such as "Errementari: The Blacksmith and the Devil", "Black is Beltza", "Handia - The Giant" or "Loreak - Flowers".

citizens as a two-storey house. On the first floor, at the base, would be the local media, on the second the national media including EITB and between the two there would be elevators that would facilitate collaboration in such a way as to guarantee a complete service to the community (Tokikom, 2013). In contrast, far from the idea of service, prosumer initiatives are more in line with the performance era. They include individual and collective blogs, adaptations of initiatives that have been successful in other languages such as the Wordle or Spelling Bee games and, of course, the large number of YouTube channels on a variety of topics that have managed to consolidate.

The year 2020 marks the beginning of a new era in Basque audiovisual communication. In November of that year, EITB's radio, television and Internet companies are integrated into a single one, under the name of EITB Media, which will be responsible for the production of all the content that EITB offers through its channels. The societal transformation is a response to the new globalized audiovisual landscape. In view of this, there is a change in the conception of the EITB group, which changes from being a media conglomerate to a factory of audiovisual products to be broadcasted through the different channels and platforms it currently has or may have in the future. The purpose is to turn EITB into a group that allows the public to watch and listen to what they want, where, how and when they want (EITB, 2022a, p. 34).

In this strategy, no genre is ruled out, not even dubbing (EITB, 2022a, p. 56), but aware that products dubbed into Basque cannot compete with the Spanish and French dubbing offer of the numerous TV channels and OTT platforms operating in the Basque Country, EITB has opted to develop a different offer, made up of quality, entertaining and value-promoting products, such as *Floor Rules*, *Zombie Lars*, *Hardball*, *The Worst Witch*, *Buck or Mighty Mustangs* (Urkizu, 2021).

An important aspect of EITB's new conception is to try to reach all the Basque public with its audiovisual offer, overcoming any kind of barrier that may arise. For this reason, through Vicomtech –an investee technology company– EITB has promoted the development of two applications that can facilitate greater diffusion of products in Basque. The first is Batua, an automatic Basque/Spanish and Basque/English translator, and the second is Idazle, a program for automatic subtitling (EITB, 2022b). In line with this idea of greater outreach, the most important project that EITB has taken on is Primeran, an OTT that encompasses all audiovisual production in the Basque Country (EITB, 2022a, p. 56).

As an OTT platform, Primeran aspires to be the first reference for the Basque public. Since June 2023, it offers a wide range of contents produced by EITB, as well as films, series, documentaries, concerts and shows generated by our audiovisual ecosystem, both in Basque and Spanish. The platform includes an audio section, called Guau, with more than 100 podcasts. Primeran gives priority to the Basque language, so all original

content in Spanish has a version dubbed into Basque. Primeran also offers fiction series and documentaries from other countries, which are dubbed and/or subtitled into Basque. Thus, with Primeran, EITB responds to the demand for more entertainment in Euskera. In the first month, more than 120 hours of series from the Anglo-Saxon and French markets were available dubbed into Basque, and there were more than 50 hours of series acquired in the Northern European markets subtitled in Basque. Primeran adds new content every week, and by the end of 2023 the number of hours dubbed into our language is expected to exceed 300 and the number of hours subtitled in Basque will reach 100. If we add to that our cinema, the programs and documentaries produced by EITB, and the scenic events taking place in our country, Primeran's offer will exceed 1,500 hours in total.

## 6. COMPLETENESS IN THE BASQUE MEDIA SYSTEM

In this article we have proposed to find out whether ETB, as a means of communication, continues to be fundamental in the promotion of Basque. According to the condition of completeness, the communication domain can be useful in the normalization of the language only if we find in the BMS a fully developed set of media of all types (institutional completeness), where different genres of content are available (genre completeness). Therefore, our first task must be to describe the BMS in 2023, the year in which ETB completes 40 years of broadcasting; we will also describe the 2006 panorama in order to appreciate the evolution.

By 2006, standardization efforts had propelled the language to significant levels of knowledge and use. In addition, digital technologies had facilitated the emergence of new communication initiatives, as well as the sustainability of existing ones. It is, therefore, a time of great profusion of media in Basque, as reflected in the report prepared by Arana et al. (2006) for Mercator Media. In 2023 we find ourselves in a moment of crisis. Knowledge of Basque continues to increase, but its use is stagnating, to which must be added the fact that the globalization of the media offer through platforms operating on the Internet is distancing users, especially young people, from offers in minority languages. In any case, it cannot be said that the Basque language remains oblivious to developments in the field of communication, with new types of media such as podcasts and apps.

These two moments are depicted in Table 1. The first column shows the types of media; the second column indicates the amount of each type that formed part of the BMS in 2006, and the third column shows the amount corresponding to the year 2023. The names of some of the most representative media are shown in brackets, and those belonging to EITB are in bold. In square brackets the subject matter is specified or some observation is given. It should be clarified that in the Internet section only the media created specifically for the net have been counted, not the websites or streaming services of conventional media.

Table 1A.- The Basque media system in 2006 and in 2023: PRINT MEDIA

Types of media	2006	2023
Daily newspapers	1 (Berria)	1
Daily local newspapers	8 (Busturialdeko Hitza, Oarsoaldeko Hitza, Hernaniko Kronika...)	8
Local magazines	~ 70 (Herria, Aldaketa 16, Anboto, Eta Kitto, Goienkaria, Ttipi-Ttapa...)	~ 50
General interest magazines	1 (Argia)	1
Thematic magazines	~ 100 (Gaztetxulo [young people], Elhuyar [popular science], Jakin [social & cultural issues], Hik Hasi [education], Senez [professional], Osatuz [professional], Ipurbeltz [kids], Uztaro [social & human sciences]...)	~ 30

Table 1B.- The Basque media system in 2006 and in 2023: BTROADCAST MEDIA

Types of media:	2006	2023
General interest television	1 (ETB1)	1 (ETB1)
Local television	~ 10 (Goiena Telebista, Aldude Telebista, Ttipi-Ttapa, Xaloe Telebista...)	7 (Hamaika, Kanaldude, Oizmendi Telebista, Goierri Telebista, 28 Kanala...)
Thematic television	1 (Super Bat [kids; by cable])	1 (ETB3 [kids; by DTT])
General interest radio	1 (Euskadi Irratia)	1 (Euskadi Irratia)
Local radio stations	~ 30 (Bizkaia Irratia, Euskalerrria Irratia, Xiberuko Botza, Arrate Irratia...)	~ 25
Radio format	1 (Gaztea [music])	1 (Gaztea)
Cinema [film projects in Basque]	2	~ 8

**Table 1C.- The Basque media system in 2006 and in 2023: INTERNET MEDIA**

Types of media	2006	2023
Monolingual new media	~ 8 (Sustatu, Bizkaie, Dantzán, Entzun...)	~ 20 (Zuzeu, Kaixomaitia, Txikipedia, Zinea, Unibertsitatea...)
Multilingual new media	~ 5 (Nabarralde, Wikipedia, Youtube, Hiru)	~ 7
VOD	0	2 (Nahieran, Primeran)
Apps	<i>not applicable</i>	5 (3Hiru, Nahieran, Albisteak, Go!azen, Gaztea)
Podcasts channels	<i>not applicable</i>	15 (EITB Podkast, Argia, Berria...)

We are also interested in knowing how the audiovisual offer available to the Basque-speaking community in their language is composed. Table 2 shows the time dedicated by ETB1 in 2006 to each of the television genres.

**Table 2.- Contents on ETB1 in 2006 (Arana et al., 2006, p. 19)**

Genres	Airtime
Culture	22.2 %
News	14.1 %
Miscellaneous	29.8 %
Fiction	6.7 %
Sports	12.6 %
Music	9 %
Quiz shows	1.3 %
Other	4,3 %

Table 3 shows our own calculations for a standard ETB1 week at the beginning of 2023. It is the week of March 27 to April 2, during daytime hours, from 9 AM to 12 PM (nightly rebroadcasts are not taken into account).

**Table 3.- Contents on ETB1 in 2023**

Genre	Airtime
Culture	12.4 %
News	24.5 %
Miscellaneous [magazines]	8.3 %
Fiction	6.2 %
Humour	5.5 %
Cooking	13.3 %
Sports	17.1 %
Music	2.4 %
Quiz shows	3.9 %
Other [realities, entertainment, religion]	6.4 %

In 2023, ETB3 complements ETB1's offer with 90% of its broadcasting consisting of cartoons and 10% consisting of children's and young people's fiction.

Regarding local television stations, in 2006, they based their schedule on informative programs (debates, reports, news) and some local sports broadcasting (Arana et al., 2006, p. 21). In 2023, they have not changed their model.

The great leap in terms of quantity and variety of the media offer in Basque has taken place on the Internet, but not precisely thanks to the new media, which are basically informative. Through the Nahieran platform, besides information, computer and tablet users find entertainment and a good number of movies, short films and series in Basque, which complement the poor fiction programming of ETB1. With Primeran, by the end of 2023 the offer of fiction in Basque will reach 500 hours, enough for those who like binge-watching. Additionally, through its apps, podcasts and new media channels, ETB offers content aimed at specific targets. In many cases, these are innovative and even experimental contents, such as the first audiobooks in Basque, podcast adaptations of plays, or comics for cell phones as a transmedia development of TV series.

## 7. DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the 2020s, the popularization of the OTTs has changed the audiovisual landscape. The bottom-up initiatives that were so strong a decade ago –and even long-established professional programming– have been

eclipsed by the abundant, varied and quality offer of international operators. In addition, digital technology continues to drive the development of new types of media for broadcasting news and audiovisual content, which means a constant technological effort for communication companies. Many of them have found it very difficult to compete and have had to close down, especially those with a local scope. The result is that the presence of minority languages in the media is increasingly endangered, precisely at a time when a large part of our leisure time is devoted to audiovisual consumption.

If a minority community wants its language to survive, it is essential that this tongue not be left out in any domain of daily life. Among other things, it is essential that speakers have a sufficient communicative offer in terms of media and content. In other words, in order for the domain of communication to have a positive effect on the vitality of a minority language, it must satisfy the conditions of institutional and gender completeness.

The Basque-speaking community has been promoting the survival of the Basque language since the 1980s and, among other actions, the media system gets special care. Euskal Telebista was created with the intention of becoming a fundamental pillar of this system and thus contributing to the normalization of the language. In our study we have proposed to check whether ETB fulfills this objective. To assess this, we have reviewed the history of ETB, and we have looked at how it contributes to meeting the conditions of institutional and gender completeness at two key moments: in 2006 and in 2023. Between both moments, we can see that the BMS has been evolving at the pace of the times. This has been possible thanks to EITB –the public initiative–, as many private initiatives have been disappearing over the years.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

In 2023, the Basque media system satisfies the conditions of institutional completeness and genre completeness. As in 2006, the most important elements of the Basque media landscape are ETB and the rest of EITB's media. Among them, we should highlight Primeran, an OTT that offers an alternative to platforms such as Netflix and Amazon. With Primeran, the BMS goes beyond performance along the path it had already started with Nahieran, and definitively enters what we can call the demand era. EITB is, therefore, the main guarantee that the Basque-speaking community has access to fiction and audiovisual entertainment in their language in a globalized context where large media groups and hegemonic languages dominate. Moreover, EITB has the capacity to offer Basque speakers an account of current affairs whatever the medium they choose to get informed. This means that, after forty years, EITB as a whole continues to be useful in the normalization and promotion of the Basque language.

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