



Zabala Innovation Consulting, 30 years of encouraging innovation in Europe

Interview with **José María Zabala**, founder and director-general of Zabala Innovation Consulting

ZABALA Innovation Consulting is a company from Navarre that has been **encouraging innovation as a key factor of competitiveness** for thirty years. The company plays the role of interlocutor and is relevant for companies, technology centers and universities at national and European institutions that promote the I+D+I policies and programs.

We interviewed José María Zabala, founder and director-general of ZABALA Innovation Consulting, on the occasion of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of this family business which currently employs more than 200 professionals at its offices in Pamplona, Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla, Valencia, Vigo, Brussels, London and Paris.

Asesoría Industrial Zabala was born in Zizur (Navarra) in 1986. In 2008, the company was transformed in ZABALA Innovation Consulting and moved to its current headquarters in Mutilva. After the change two derived concepts underlay the evolution of the company: internationalization and the importance of innovation as fundamental parts of the activities of the company. Which services does the company currently offer to its more or less 1500 clients?

J.M.Z: The company was founded with the aim of supporting companies, research centers, universities and governments with respect to I + D + i management for both strategic planning and also during the process of obtaining financing of European and national programs or even during the next operating earnings. At the moment, 100 % of ZABALA's activities focus on converting innovation in a key factor for competitiveness of our clients. In order to do this, we launch dissemination actions related to themes of innovation, we manage the secretary of different international networks, we run I + D + i studies for public bodies at all levels, we accomplish large projects of European collaboration, we collaborate in the detection of funding opportunities and we work on the exploitation and transfer of the results of different phases of projects.





“The position of ZABALA as specialist for European projects allowed us to be the eighth Spanish company with more funding in the VII EU Framework Program and the first SME, according to the balance of Spanish participation published by the CDTI”

Our areas of expertise are dedicated to Health projects (Biotechnology, Chemistry and Agro-food), Smart Cities (Transports, Environment, Materials and Energy), ICT (Open Data, Security, Mobile and Internet) and Production Technologies searching to improve processes and products of industrial sectors.

The foundation of the company coincides with the entry of Spain into the Common Market. ¿Can it be said that Europe has been considered a key element for ZABALA from the beginning?

J.M.Z: Indeed. Europe has been a member of the DNA of the company from the beginning. At this moment, we were aware of the opportunity that was present and we managed to become one of the elected organizations to participate in the Sprint project that was born within the Framework Program of the European Commission for the purpose of creating a network of innovation agents in which firms from Portugal, France, Belgium and Scotland participated.

The international ZABALA project starts with the opening of the office in Brussels in 2003. What were the motives that boosted the establishment of the company in Belgium’s capital?

J.M.Z: The opening of the office in Brussels implied a crucial decision for the evolution of ZABALA since it allowed the creation of a department of European projects in the company that required to double the staff (54 employees in 2003) and the opening of an office in Madrid (en 2005) in order to meet the demands of new clients.

Since then, we have taken major steps forward in European projects and we are currently a recognized and relevant company in this area. In this regard, ZABALA is the eighth Spanish company with more funding (500 million Euro) in the VII EU Framework Program and the first SME, according to the balance of Spanish participation published by the CDTI. Likewise, not in vain, we obtained in the second year of application of the 2020 Prospect a return of more than 120 million euro for our clients, leading more than 290 projects.

José María Zabala graduated as Chemical Engineer at the University of Louvain (Belgium, 1968-73) and Doctor of Applied Natural Sciences (1973-1976). He founded ZABALA Innovation Consulting in 1986 and manages the company. It is the leading consultancy firm in innovation management that currently provides services to more than 600 business customers, technology centers, universities and governments. In recent years he realized more than forty studies for the European Commission and for different Ministries. He participated in the elaboration of the three Technology Plans of Navarre, La Rioja, Valencian Community, Cantabria, Extremadura, Northern Portugal and Limburg (The Netherlands).



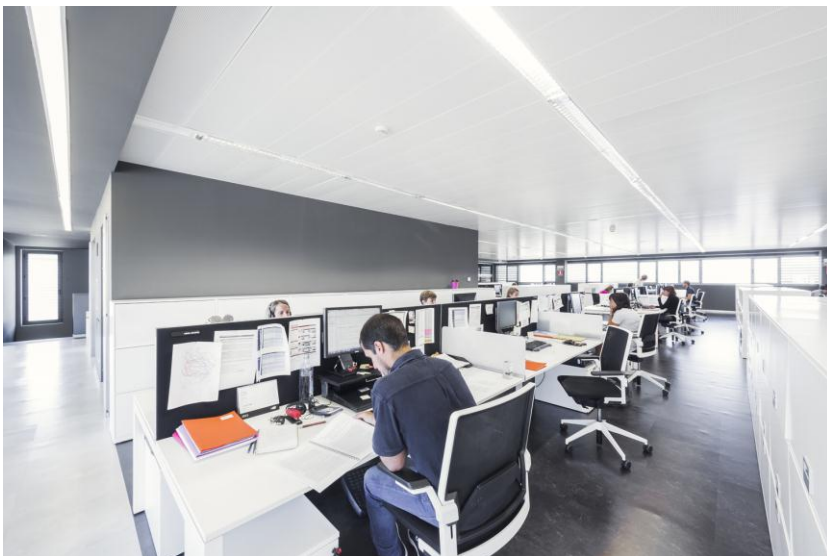
Brussels, London and recently Paris. What stands out from your internationalization plan and future challenges for the company?

J.M.Z: Internationalization is one of our most immediate goals. Since two years ago we have a department especially dedicated to the management of internationalization. Innovation and internationalization are two sides of the same coin. It corresponds to the fact that the most innovative company is usually the most internationalized. We boost our project until 2020 by means of searching partners, which are nowadays about 30 and are located all over the world, and the opening of new offices. In 2015 an office was opened in London and this year, coinciding with our anniversary and under the name **GBA ZABALA CONSEIL EN INNOVATION**, we have settled in Paris. Internationalization allows us to accompany our clients where they decide to settle and it as well allows us to being able to address more European projects with other companies and other organizations.

Another one of our challenges is the incorporation of some developments in our services portfolio which meets new demands of our clients and which are in line with European tendencies and strategies such as innovative public procurement and social innovation. Likewise we try to reinforce the office in Brussels and the representation at the EU. It's work that requires commitment and our team is committed to it.

We are proud that Zabala Innovation Consulting is one of our members. What are the benefits of being a member of the Chamber for your company?

J.M.Z: The Official Spanish Chamber of Commerce in Belgium and Luxembourg has been a fundamental point of support for the development of our activities, especially at our offices in Brussels. We work with all kinds of organizations and we are especially aware of the importance of a good business contact network, which provides information about business opportunities. The Chamber is like this. If we furthermore add other strengths such as proximity, confidence and professionalism, which is the case here, the relationship consolidates over time.



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