



## CULTURE



# Bici Lab: The bicycle as an engine of social cohesion

**The capital's bicycle museum** has been a revolution in the idea of understanding bicycles and this type of cultural infrastructure for a year now

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In recent years, Andorra has been able to exploit its potential in the world of cycling. Idyllic mountains that delight all those who are passionate about pedaling two wheels have been the ideal setting to attract a multitude of cyclists, whether great professionals or amateurs, to be able to practice this sport. In addition, the country has taken advantage of this push to be able to celebrate major sports competitions around a vehicle that is not only a sport, but means many more things such as more ecological and economic mobility. In these circumstances, an innovative and creative museum was born, world leader in the field of the bicycle, which welcomes not only visitors who seek to discover stories about bicycles, but also multipurpose acts and events related to this vehicle, as well as transmitting and rediscovering the bicycle in various realities and functionalities interactively. The Bici Lab is this avant-garde center that tries to spread and promote the growth of the bicycle in Andorra and make this tool the origin of many other aspects. Its director, Eduard Tarrés, opens the door to the Bici Lab for us

to discover the thousand and one faces of the immense world behind the two pedal wheels.

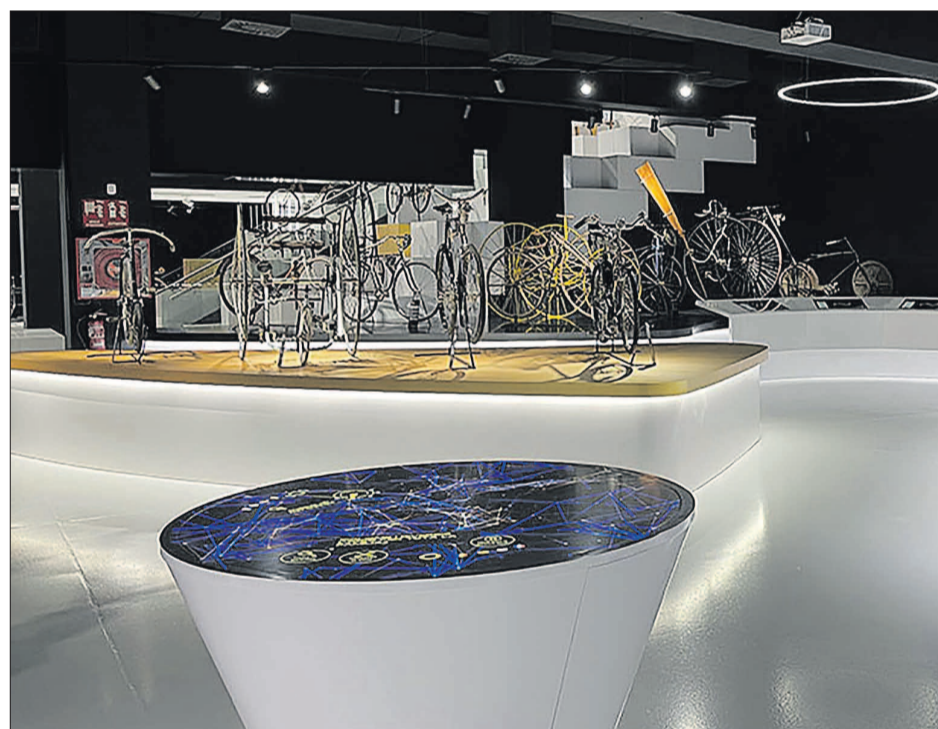
The Bici Lab is defined by its director as a «21st century museum», that is to say, this is a space where you don't just see static artefacts one after the other, no. It is a space that must be alive, that has an active dynamism around its area. This idea is summarized in the concept of «social museum», where an attempt is made to create a network around the bicycle and, through this, where critical society is promoted. For this purpose, the bicycle is an ideal item that has exemplified these aspects throughout its history. The director of the museum explains that «the bike has two centuries of history and it also serves us as an excuse to talk about contemporary

**The Bici Lab offers a modern conception of the idea of a museum in the 21st century**

**history, what has happened in these two centuries, and why you can touch on from more technical topics to what are the cities like; it gives you many different approaches.»**

A tangible example of this can be found in the first exhibition that Bici Lab carried out until last July 15th, in which the link between the bicycle and feminism was exhibited. As Tarrés explains, «it's a fairly unknown but very powerful story, because the suffragists already used the bicycle as a tool to fight for social equality». The director mentions that these women are pioneers in the defense of their rights, «who get on bicycles against the opinion of their husbands and against the opinion of doctors, who told them that they would lose their virginity, that they would become sterile and that they will become lesbians».

The Bici Lab has already completed its first year since it opened in October 2022, although the idea of opening a modern bicycle museum on Andorran land already began to develop in January 2018. At that time, the Riberaigua family donated the collection that makes up a large part of the museum and it was agreed to grant this a space of 1,700 square meters «in the yolk» of Andorra la Vella by



►► Permanent exhibition of the Bici Lab.



►► The Bici Lab, during a reception of La Vuelta stage.



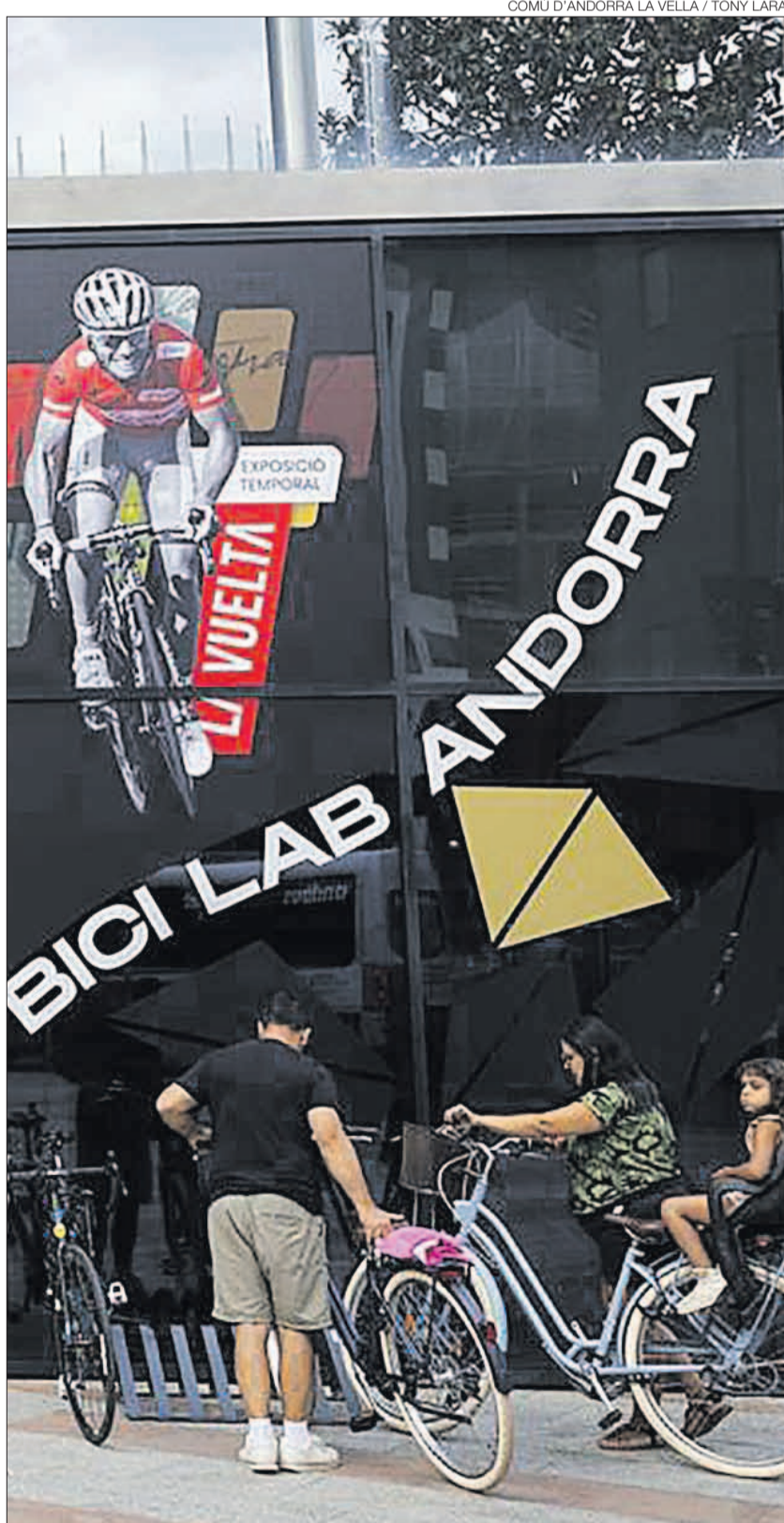
BICILAB



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## Eduard Tarrés

DIRECTOR OF THE BICI LAB

«The potential of this Andorra Territori Ciclista brand was born to promote safe cycling mobility»

«Museums that talk about the bicycle as a total thing and with a thousand realities, in the immediate environment, there are none»

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the Municipality. The institution already saw, at that time, **«the potential of this Andorra Territori Ciclista brand that was born to promote safe cycling mobility, but which ended up transforming almost unintentionally into a projection of Andorra as a destination to come to training and cycling, and the BiciLab was seen as a complement»**. The tourism potential remaining in the country also gives, over the years, a cultural side behind the bike, a centuries-old sport that is not just a sporting activity, but **«is mobility, health, play; there are a thousand variants»**. This is the idea that collects and forms the BiciLab.

The museum quickly became an example to follow in this type of bicycle-focused infrastructure, and not just because of its extensive collection. A few months ago, the director of La Vuelta a España, Javier Guillén, visited the center taking advantage of the stage that passed through the Principality and praised the infrastructure mentioning that in a country like Spain you could not see a museum like the Bici Lab. Tarrés humbly states that **«we are not unique, there are other bicycle museums. In Spain, which I control, there are three important ones, one in Haka, one in Menorca and one in Santander. What happens is that they are private collections, which are mostly very focused on the world of sport, not so much on the bicycle, but on the world of cycling. Public museums that talk about the bicycle as a total thing and with a thousand realities, in the immediate environment, in Spain or France, there are none»**. This factor makes the Bi-

ciLab one of the most unique infrastructures in the country outside its borders in an area that only grows within our borders and which puts the Principality on the map of the cycling world. This cycling effervescence in the country began when **«for 12 or 13 years, professionals have come to settle in Andorra; professionals who are dedicated to the world of bicycles, attracted in part by this and also, let's not deceive ourselves, because it is a place where you live well, where you have good health and are well with your family, where your kids can grow up well»**. These characteristics make Andorra an ideal breeding ground for it to become a cycling hub with a nerve center like the Bici Lab. According to Tarrés, **«for me, the museum, and more so in a place like Andorra, must have this double aspect. It must have the tourist side, but also the side to create a network and society. Andorra is a country with high levels of immigration. Creating social cohesion is one of the almost mandatory requirements for a museum. We try to play this role, we try to create this network and this bond of society through the activity»**.

The Bike Lab also has some iconic pieces from the world of two wheels and pedals. One of them in the bicycle with the largest wheel ever manufactured, the Ailondel. **«It's not a unique piece, but it's very beautiful»**, is how Tarrés describes it. The design resembles a Vespa and is one of the first pieces in history that, despite not being as old as you might think, presents a highly accurate design. Touring bikes were in high demand in the first 30 and 40 years of cycling history and this bike, despite not having comfort as a feature, was shown as one of the first great revelations of pedals.

Even so, the Bici Lab shows a permanent exhibition that goes from the origins of the bicycle to the avant-garde future that is still being developed. In one of the museum's rooms, you can see the evolution of the two wheels throughout history, in a digitized and modern way. In this exhibition, **«we try to explain to you that technology has been present during these two centuries of bicycle history to make an evolution from the first velocipedes, that the bicycle was very snobbish but impractical, until reaching the current bikes, to look at the detail, all the materials and designs, to make the bike more and more efficient. This means lighter, with more resistant materials...»**

The Bici Lab, in just one year, has appeared in the right place and at a historic moment for the country, coinciding with the rise of Andorra as an international nerve center of a sport that is increasingly seen more welcome within our borders. Likewise, this 21st century museum becomes a modern and updated way of understanding these spaces while showing how two wheels and pedals have impacted society throughout its history both in the country and in the international scope, where the name of Andorra is already related to the bicycle. ≡