

METROPOLITAN BILBAO, SPAIN

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF METROPOLITAN BILBAO



1. Context

1.1 Background

Metropolitan Bilbao is defined as an urban crowding without precise geographic limits, placed on the Atlantic coast in the North of Spain. Its population, nearly 1.000.000 inhabitants, is spread out in thirty municipalities of very unequal population size and weight. Six of these municipalities exceed 50.000 inhabitants: Bilbao, Barakaldo, Getxo, Portugalete, Santurtzi and Basauri. In terms of population, Metropolitan Bilbao is the fifth most populated metropolitan area in Spain, behind Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Sevilla. At a European scale, it occupies the 36th place among European metropolis, with a population similar in size to that of Dublin, Liverpool and Florence.

As to the economic potential of Metropolitan Bilbao, its GNP amounts to 1,400 billion pesetas, which represents half of the Basque Country's GNP. This potential is mainly strengthened by great engine businesses, which have traditionally been the essential protagonists in the economic development of the metropolis. The sectorial distribution of the GNP displays the tertiary nature of Metropolitan Bilbao's economy (52%), although manufacturing still maintains an important weight (32%).

By the late 80s, the municipality of Bilbao, aware of the economic and social difficulties that were strangling the city decides to undertake a massive planning action. The conceptual basis is the conviction that the international competitiveness of a metropolitan area is directly bound to the improvement of the quality of life of its inhabitants, which creates added problems in the case of a traditional industrial metropolis, such as Metropolitan Bilbao, which shows important levels of urban and environmental degradation. On the other hand, the market in which Metropolitan Bilbao businesses compete has ceased being a local one and has turned into a global market - so that the improvement of its businesses' competitiveness requires the incorporation of advanced services in marketing and commercializing which facilitates the opening of new markets for their products. Therefore, the latest challenge Metropolitan Bilbao faces in order to improve its international competitiveness is the availability of a communications infrastructure, as much "physical" (terrestrial, aerial, maritime) as "intelligent"

(telecommunications), which allows it to compete with the metropolis in its environment in equal conditions.

The Strategic Plan, initiated in 1989 and launched in 1992 with the launching of *Action Programs*, is an ongoing planning process without a predetermined deadline. Due to its methodology, and the constant change in the metropolitan environment, the Plan requires permanent updates and is therefore a dynamic process that is constantly evaluated. Up to 1996, the total investment directly linked to the application of the plan amounted to over 16 billion Euro coming from local authorities, private bodies, and from European institutions.

1.2 Objectives and Policies

The Strategic Plan envisions an “intelligent and integrated” urban growth where economic, social and environmental concerns must be carefully balanced. This approach is also fully aware of the crucial notion that urban expansion is closely related to transport priorities. A physical expansion that should privilege motorways and ring roads would inevitably imply an increase in traffic, whereas, a more compact or intensive development related to the regeneration of older areas in the heart of the cities, would increase public transportation and discourage private modes. Public policies have often created surroundings that influenced consumer decisions: many of these policies favor low density, lack of urban continuity, dependence on a vehicle and, in short, isolated development. There is also an economic aspect of growth that is based on the promotion of road transport: cities that promoted a low-density growth allot a much higher proportion of their resources to transport (somewhere between 12 and 16% of their GNP), while those opting for a more compact development reduce this cost to around 4 to 8%. Thus, the Plan believes that an intelligent urban growth represents an "intelligent" economy.

The application of strategic planning to Metropolitan Bilbao was set out in the Strategic Plan for the Revitalization of the Metropolitan Bilbao, initiated in 1989 at the request of the Basque Government and the Bizkaia County Council. Since its start, the Plan, which aimed at solving the situation stressing the role of public-private partnership (over 300 people from the private sector and the public institutions were involved), outlined the challenge of shaping the Metropolitan Bilbao of the XXI century with the following characters: open, plural, integrated, modern, creative, social and cultural. The overall aim of the Plan is to improve the welfare level and the quality of life of its inhabitants through the improvement of the urban environment and the international economic competitiveness of the metropolis. In so doing, the first phase of the Revitalization Plan identified eight critical issues:

1. *Investment in human resources*: i) a modern, flexible and innovative educational system including a university bound to the metropolitan economic structure; ii) training programs and professional formation; iii) appropriate coordination within the public administration.
2. *Service metropolis in a modern industrial region*. Metropolitan Bilbao, leaning on its industrial vocation to overcome the recession, will have to move towards a multi-industrial model during the next years, which will develop into a mixed economy of industrial and advanced services nature, that will allow Metropolitan Bilbao to compete successfully in the European system of cities.
3. *Mobility and accessibility*. The Plan aims to attain a communications system for the Metropolitan Area based on: i) a system of internal mobility that fastens the adequate connection among the different sub regions through a competitive, efficient and modern public transport; ii) a connection with the highways and railroad axis of communication

leading to the rest of Europe; iii) a Port to allow the liberation of areas that nowadays occupy the urban center and the economic development of the Metropolitan Area; iv) an Airport in Sondika as a vertebral axis of the aerial connections in the Atlantic slope.

4. *Environmental regeneration*: i) control and management of the air and water quality and efficient management of waste policies (urban and industrial), according to the standards established by the European Union legislation; ii) collaboration in the search of the necessary mechanisms for industries to use environmental friendly technologies; iii) regeneration of the environmentally degraded zones.
5. *Urban regeneration*: i) a system of housing blocks; ii) a system of infrastructures to improve the quality of life; iii) creation of city landmarks for a social and cultural centrality of the metropolis; iv) a zone of planning and management that involves the different public administrations and private initiatives in the process of urban regeneration and that allows the fast implantation of the plans that will be developed at different levels.
6. *Cultural centrality*: the Plan aims at attaining a new cultural dimension based on an enhanced private initiative, better educational system and improved infrastructures.
7. *Coordinated management by the public administration and private sector*: i) development of Territorial Planning for the Metropolitan Area and reinforcement of the municipal urban management capacity; ii) sectorial organizations for the provision of specific public urban services (water, transport, residue, etc.) and exploitation of economies of scale and of associative tendencies; iii) improved management of public services; iv) development of mixed formulas of public-private cooperation for plans of common interest.
8. *Social action*: the Revitalization Plan considers the personal well-being as the fundamental priority of urban development and seeks to gradually remove the structural causes of exclusion.

Phase II of the Plan called for the hiring of a group of experts to make an internal analysis, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of Metropolitan Bilbao in relation to the environment, as well as an external analysis, where the main trends were evaluated. The strong weaknesses reflect an unsustainable growth in the past with an unconscious attitude towards the environment from government, companies and citizens. In Phase III, the aims, objectives and strategies of the Environmental Renewal critical issue were described. In Phase IV, a series of concrete actions to be undertaken were defined and implemented.

At the same time, in order to accelerate the territorial articulation of the metropolis and the converting of building land into developed land, it is essential to promote a vision of metropolitan development that is shared by the different town councils making up Metropolitan Bilbao, while speeding up the instruments of city management. One instrument that will contribute to promoting this vision is the Partial Territorial Plan of Metropolitan Bilbao (to be adopted by the Municipality of Bilbao in junction with the municipalities included in the metropolitan area), currently underway.

The scale and the nature of the aforementioned interventions leave no doubts about the hard character of the policy adopted by the Plan. The outcome will permanently impact the urban fabric as well as the industrial, service and social structure of the area.

2. Institutional Overview

2.1 Institutional Arrangement

The Association for the Revitalization of Metropolitan Bilbao is an association of promotion and research, with full legal and patrimonial responsibility, established in May 1991. Its headquarters were established in Bilbao with the aim of carrying out investigation and promotion work for the revitalization of Metropolitan Bilbao. The main tasks of the association are:

- implementing the Strategic Plan for the Revitalization of the Metropolitan Bilbao.
- undertaking any type of actions derived from the Strategic Plan which are entrusted to its responsibility, and particularly, of those whose aim is the improvement of the external and internal image of Metropolitan Bilbao.
- carrying out study and research projects related to Metropolitan Bilbao, as well as other metropolis that, due to its circumstances, can provide useful knowledge.
- fostering the cooperation between public sector and private sector with the aim of finding joint solutions to problems of mutual interest that affect Metropolitan Bilbao.

The Association, recognized as "Public Utility Entity" by the Basque Government in June, 1992, involves a variety of private and public actors:

- ❑ 29 local and regional authorities (including the Basque Government, the Bizkaia County, and the Bilbao Municipality) take part in the Association, becoming in this way the appropriate forum for the definition of the common projects in whose achievement public bodies can work in a coordinated manner;
- ❑ 2 universities located in Metropolitan Bilbao: The public University of the Basque Country and the private University of Deusto;
- ❑ 51 enterprises, either big, medium or small sized, are members of Bilbao Metropoli-30, which encourages the involvement of the private sector;
- ❑ 22 non-for-profit organizations are active members of the partnership.
- ❑ 26 Associates (embassies, foundations and museums).

The governing bodies of the association, responsible for the effective coordination and implementation of the Plan's actions, are:

- The General Assembly, made up by the all the Members, which is the upper body of the Association. It last met on May 26, 1998;
- The Board of Trustees, which is the governing body of the Association and establishes its specific purposes and aims. It last gathered on May 26, 1998;
- The Board of Directors, by delegation of the Board of Trustees, which is the body of management of the Association.

3. Results Assessment

3.1 Barriers and Deviations from Original Objectives

As the Plan did not foresee a strict sequence of implementation steps but rather a series of subsequent action programs, a correct appraisal of the adherence to the original objectives should consider the overall goals set by the 1992 Strategic Plan. In this light, a major barrier faced off by the Bilbao authorities has been the chronic lack of funding which has hampered or at least delayed the implementation of several planned interventions. Considering that one of the distinguishing aspects of the Plan was the ambition of accomplishing an administrative and financial coordination between public and private actors involved in common projects, the budgetary burden proved to be a difficult hurdle on the way of such cohesion.

3.2 Assessment

The open-ended character of the Plan only allows a partial assessment of the results based upon ex-post considerations on the interventions implemented. Moreover, the available information have not made it possible to carefully evaluate the mechanisms behind the coordination of such a multitude of bodies.

Land Use

- ❑ *Coordination*: the approval in the beginning of 1997 of the ARBC (Autonomous Region of the Basque Country) Territorial Planning Guidelines was the first step towards establishing a law that will facilitate municipal planning within the greater model of territorial planning, and which will have the function of covering the supra-municipal necessities and balance out the growth of the different municipalities. These guidelines set the challenge of establishing a territorial model that incorporates a coherent system of cities capable of attracting economic, social and cultural innovations generated in the most dynamic areas of Europe and capable of propagating these innovations in a balanced manner throughout the Basque capitals. Bilbao proposed actions for the ARBC are the following: modernization of land infrastructures, international promotion of the Bilbao airport and the Port of Bilbao, and the incorporation of the ARBC in high speed train routes.
- ❑ *Housing*: In order to tackle the existing difficulties in gaining access to housing in Bilbao (fostered by a 7.3% of uninhabited housing) the Basque Government has started up a Housing Plan which calls for limited price housing offers, positive discrimination towards the needy collectives, fight against fraudulent rent controlled housing, funds towards paying rents and repairing houses, and a centralized real estate information service.
- ❑ *Industry*: a priority consists in the Demolition Program of Industrial Ruins. Up to now 93 hectares of 13 industrial ruins have been recuperated and are now the site of new activities that will contribute to the revitalization of Metropolitan Bilbao. However, 145 hectares of industrial ruins and 350 hectares that are being used by companies that are closing down still need to be regenerated. Once this said, some ruins should be reserved for industrial and mining tourism.
- ❑ *Urban fabric*: the Ametzola neighborhood, occupied in the past by railways which impeded a unified neighborhood, has been revitalized by the tearing down of: the old industrial buildings and the construction of apartment buildings. The regeneration of the central area of Abandoibarra is well under way with the opening of the Guggenheim Museum, the Euskalduna Concert and Conference Hall and the Santiago Calatrava Footbridge. The area will soon be embellished by a promenade and will see the development of a shopping mall. In addition, to provide the necessary land for new business activities and achieve the economic

development desired for Metropolitan Bilbao, a business activity area near the airport has been enlarged (it now houses more than 100 companies).

Transport – Mobility

- ❑ *Airport*: the steady increase in air traffic and the deregulation of air transport are some of the factors that have led to the elaboration and realization of the Bilbao Airport Special Plan for its expansion and modernization. The main feature of the plan is the new terminal and the already constructed control tower. The completion of the first phase of the plan in 1999 will allow the airport to handle 3 million passengers per year. Meanwhile, as a temporary solution to the passenger traffic problem, an extension of the actual airport has just been completed. The Special Plan foresees an investment of 1.3 billion Euro till the year 2025 and will promote the location of service companies connected to the area.
- ❑ *Port*: the Bilbao Port extension has been completed in 1998 and resolved the problem of lack of port surface and attract determinate trades which require large storage space. The port's railway connections still have to be improved in order to make profitable the new facilities and attract higher added value trades. The project also plans to place logistic activities area near the port that will allow the development of industrial activities dependent on maritime transport and services linked to maritime distribution. To this effect, the construction of a free port area and a new goods sorting station is foreseen.
- ❑ *Metro*: the line I of Bilbao's underground system, opened to the public in 1995, has surpassed even the most optimistic forecasts, with a daily mean of 143,000 passengers and a total of 31 million during 1996. It reduced inhabitants' travel time by almost 22 million hours and cut the daily number of cars entering the city by 9,000. When line two is completed in 2006 the total number of passengers per year will be 60 million.
- ❑ *Railway*: the Basque Y railway system that will allow the union of the three ARBC capitals and these with the European network has been hampered by insufficient budgetary funding (only 600.000 Euro have been raised instead of the needed 2.400.000 EURO).
- ❑ *Highway*: throughout 1996, important works of road infrastructures in Metropolitan Bilbao have been developed contributing towards improving internal mobility. However, it is still felt the need to attain a certain level of public-private co-operation in traffic management in order to adopt certain initiatives such as the promotion of flexibility in work schedules to solve the problem of traffic jams during peak hours.
- ❑ *Intermodality*: the Passenger Interchange Project will combine the metropolitan area with local, inner-city and high-speed trains, buses, the underground system and car parks. Due to budget limitations, the execution of the project has been postponed to 1999.
- ❑ *Coordination*: additionally, the transport exchange system will be strengthened by the establishment of a single Transport Authority which will regulate the connections between the different transport companies and encourage the establishment of a unique ticket for metro, buses, and trains.

Administrative Coordination

- ❑ *Service*: the Provincial Government approved the Human Resources Plan with the aim of modernizing and continuously improving the quality of service which is offered to public administration clients. The plan upheld the idea of a public-private service system which would allow them to achieve efficient competitive public administration. The Municipal administration has also set up a process of auto-evaluation and elaboration of service improvement plans. The Basque Government advanced in the design of the necessary legislative modifications for the carrying out of public administration reforms. The

Government also took advantage of technological advances to automate and simplify administrative processes reducing the use of paper in inter-administrative communication.

- ❏ *Public-private*: notable advances in public-private collaboration in Metropolitan Bilbao have been attained through the development of initiatives such as the Biscay Compact Steelworks Company, the integration of Uniport and the Port Community of Bilbao, the transformation of technological centers in private foundations and the creation of the BIDEAK organization, which will foment private participation in the management and financing of infrastructures. Similarly, in relation to industrial policies, public-private collaboration is being successfully promoted through the Basque Government's Competitive Program, which has consequently promoted the formation of clusters and sectorial associations dedicated to the improvement of various sectors and productive areas. Finally, the administration modernization goes hand in hand with private sector collaboration, in view of the transfer of business management tools to public institutions.

In conclusion, the quality of the urban environment appears to be improving dramatically and the former industrial derelict areas in the inner city are today opportunity hubs for new urban developments. The pace in the complete recovery of the rivers is firm, the industrial derelict land is being recovered for new uses, the environmental quality levels, pollution in air, river and sea, are evolving successfully.

The innovation introduced by the Strategic Plan is a new form of coordination which gathers not only the institutional land use and transport planning authorities but promotes the participation of private and external (universities and research institutes) actors interested in the urban transformation.

3.3 Conclusion

Transferability

When setting up an initiative of such a big scale, several steps have to be taken. First of all, the external and internal factors must be analyzed, wherever possible, by independent bodies and local experts with sufficient autonomy both in the preparation of the study and in the statement of the conclusions. The methodology used for developing the Strategic Plan for the Revitalization of Metropolitan Bilbao can be and has been transferred to other cities together with the evaluating tool, the Revitalization Indicator System, which was developed jointly by Bilbao Metropoli-30 and the University of Deusto. The power of public-private partnerships as a catalyst for change has been successfully proven in the Strategic Plan for the Revitalization of Metropolitan Bilbao. Of course, the establishment and the effective functioning of a planning body such as the Association "Bilbao Metropoli-30" is hardly a smooth and trouble-free endeavor for it requires the convergence of different approaches and interests around a common goal. Reaching a consensus and implementing the projects is the main challenge to reckon with.

Lessons Learned

Arguably, one the most relevant issue at stake is the recognition of the importance of reversing the trend which was letting Bilbao develop vast urban sprawls. In defining the main goals of the Revitalization Plan, the members of the Association issued a key policy statement underlining the intention of promoting a compact urban growth able to attract businesses and residents downtown thus reducing traffic and pollution. Although a modal transfer is not publicly stated

TRANSLAND – Not in-depth study / Metropolitan BILBAO

(whereas mobility and accessibility appears to receive more attention), it must implicitly assumed given the effort placed on the development of new metro lines and the emphasis with which the staggering success of the first lines, opened in 1995, was welcomed. At the same time, the intention of developing a network of intermodal nodes (currently hampered by financial constraints) seems to confirm the willingness to reduce the share of the private mode.

The Strategic Plan focused deeply on the change of attitude towards the environment. Not only should the dereliction and pollution be cleared to create a new urban environment but, more importantly, people's minds regarding the environment issue should evolve. The responsibility for environmental pollution is not only in hands of the government, but it Since the actions directed to the recovery of the urban environment are medium and long-term oriented, they should be addressed in the framework of a Strategic Plan, clearly communicated to the general public.

The establishment of such an independent partnership with more than one hundred members of the metropolitan area is one of the key elements of success (and risk at the same time) of the Revitalization Plan. The coordinated activities between the public and the private sector offer new opportunities for the development of and improved quality of life in the metropolitan area.

Source

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