



## City of Bilbao

### Intercultural profile

#### 1. Background

Founded in the year 1300, Bilbao is the capital of Vizcaya (Biscay) province and the economic, social and cultural centre of the Basque country (Euskadi). With its population of almost 350,000 it is at the heart of a metropolitan area with over 1,000,000 inhabitants. Like the whole of the Basque country, Bilbao has two official languages: Spanish and Basque (euskera).

Following the harsh economic crisis that struck its major industrial activities (iron and steel and shipbuilding) in the 1980s, the city had to reinvent itself and rise to major challenges: high unemployment, environmental problems and urban decay, high levels of emigration and increasing social exclusion.

At the end of the 20th century, if it was to turn its economy around Bilbao had to make radical changes. After years of economic uncertainty the city has found renewed vigour and is turning into a service-oriented city bent on environmental and urban regeneration. A transformation, owed in part to local government but also to a clear belief in cooperation between the public and private sectors and between the different administrative levels, which has met with much acclaim in other parts of the world.

The symbol of this “New Bilbao” is the Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Gehry, but numerous factors have contributed to the city’s regeneration and profound transformation. Over 25 years Bilbao has gradually shed its industrial skin and rehabilitated emblematic parts of the city. The move to reclaim the Ría, or estuary, has played a major part in the transformation, not only in terms of communication and commerce, but also of the many spaces and opportunities opened up to cultural, leisure and sporting activities developed there.

Finishing touches to the city’s strategic transformation project include the new bridges, the underground and tram systems and the airport. Bilbao is now facing up to new challenges linked to its development and social cohesion. It aspires to be an internationally competitive city and to foster intercultural harmony in a population 7.7% of which is made up of foreign nationals. The city authorities have decided to focus on the intercultural dimension in order to rise to these challenges but also to take advantage of the opportunities diversity offers for the city’s social, cultural and economic development.

#### 2. Increasing socio-cultural diversity in Bilbao

Bilbao, like the rest of the Basque country and Spain in general, is no exception and has seen the number of foreign nationals residing there steadily increase since the turn of the century. This “new” diversity has brought a marked increase in the plurality that characterises Bilbao’s identity.

While there were 3,953 foreigners living in Bilbao in 2000, by 1 January 2014 that number had risen to 26,842, an increase of 22,889 people, but the total number has decreased in the last few years, down from a maximum of 30,191 foreign nationals in 2012. The impact of the economic crisis, returns to countries of origin or moves to other countries, together with the naturalisation of many residents, especially from Latin American countries, explain this decrease.

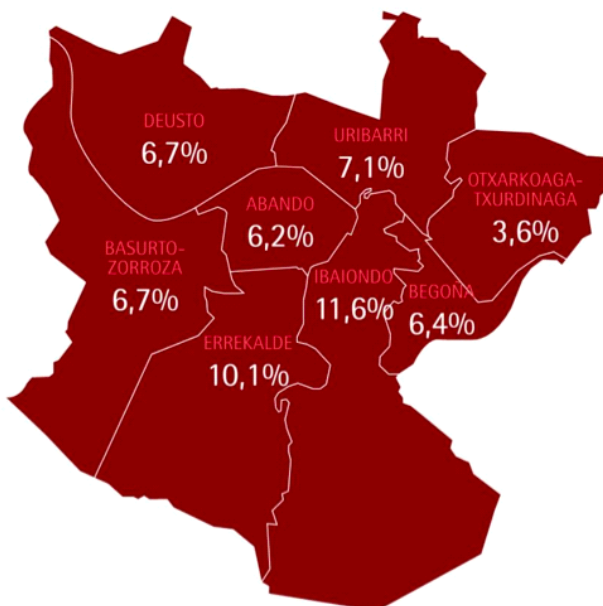
- The countries from which most of the foreign residents originate continue to be Bolivia, closely followed by Morocco and Romania, then China, Paraguay, Brazil, Ecuador and Algeria.

As to the naturalisation process, in 2014 there were 10,234 Spanish nationals living in Bilbao who were born in other countries, principally Colombia, closely followed by Ecuador and, to a lesser extent, European countries such as France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and Portugal.

As regards geographical distribution, after an initial settlement phase the foreign population has spread out into the different districts and neighbourhoods, with no appearance of any form of segregation. The map showing the percentage of foreign residents in each district reveals that there are foreign residents in every part of the city, with no great differences in the percentages.

There is, however, a somewhat higher concentration in certain areas, such as the old part of the city with the San Francisco neighbourhood, and certain parts of Ibaiondo and Errekalde (or Recalde) districts.

#### Percentage of foreigners in the different districts of Bilbao (2014)



In terms of population groups, Africans, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, present the highest concentrations, their patterns and possibilities of movement being more limited.

As to age, the data confirm, as usual, that the foreign population counterbalances the high rate of dependence among the native population. In the native population there are 1.77 people to cater for the needs of each dependent person, compared with 5.26 people among the foreign residents.

### 3. Diversity management policies in Spain

Spain took in most of its immigrants in the period from 2000 to 2010, at a rate far higher than the United Kingdom, Germany or France, where the numbers remained more or less constant over the same period. Other southern European countries, like Italy, also experienced a marked increase in immigration, but not to the same extent as Spain.

In Spain integration did not become an issue until a few years after the arrival of the first waves of immigrants, first at the local level, and subsequently at the level of the Autonomous Communities and the State. Indeed, the idea of integration did not even appear in the wording of the first Aliens Act of 1985, and it was not until the 1990s and more specifically 1996, that the question arose, drawing as it did so on the greater experience of the local and Autonomous Community authorities in the matter.

Some of the plans that emerged confined themselves to transcribing the various departmental measures of the local and Autonomous Community authorities relating to the immigration present in their territories. Others went a step further, placing such measures on a broader theoretical plane (debates on multiculturalism, interculturality, living together, diversity, or civic citizenship), even shaping municipal and autonomous authority services and actions to suit this approach; some would incorporate budgetary provisions and evaluation mechanisms, which were not always fully implemented. Be that as it may, the integration plans grew and spread like any other instrument of the organisation of administrative activity, although their very spread and multiplicity helped to create a veritable patchwork of integration models in Spain, rather than one single model.

#### The tools of integration policy

The Act of 1999 finally paved the way for a State integration model in coordination with the other administrative levels. An Immigrant Integration Fund was set up with substantial resources and State Citizenship and Integration plans were developed. The economic crisis led to cutbacks in funding, however, and a loss of interest in the issue.

- Model based on equal rights and duties. Limited distinction between “regular” and “irregular” through compulsory registration in the municipal register, giving access to local public services
- Development of the Citizenship and Integration Strategy:
  - First Plan (2007-2010)
  - Second Plan (2011-2014)
- Immigrant Integration and educational support Fund:
  - State funds distributed to the municipalities by the Autonomous Communities (with sharp cutbacks in recent years);
- Compared with the rest of Europe (MIPEX-28), Spain ranks somewhere in the middle in terms of best practices, with slightly favourable results.

One salient feature is that in spite of the serious impact of the economic crisis in Spain, just as large numbers of immigrant workers were arriving, it is safe to say that, for the time being, populist anti-immigration propaganda has not received as much support as it has in other European countries. Exactly why this should be the case is unclear, but it is something definitely worth noting and indeed analysing in order to clearly identify the reasons behind it, as this is one of the major challenges facing Europe in this century.

#### 4. The social immigration Pact in Euskadi

With somewhat lower than average percentages of immigration than in other parts of Spain, the different institutional levels in the Basque country have been promoting policies and initiatives to foster the integration of immigrants for a number of years now. The Basque Government, the Provincial Authorities and many municipalities have set projects in motion to foster integration and harmony and prevent xenophobia. Civil society has also played a decisive and highly proactive role, welcoming new arrivals and helping them settle in, and cooperating with the authorities on numerous projects in favour of integration and mutual understanding.

In 2011 the Basque Government took on the preparation and approval of the **Social Immigration Pact in Euskadi**. A document drawn up by a joint committee of people with experience in the social, political, economic and academic fields. The Pact was a key part of the Basque Government's **2011-2013 Immigration, Citizenship and Intercultural Harmony Plan**, the document that laid down the strategic lines for the government's immigration policies.

The objectives of the Pact were:

- To make a joint analysis of the challenges and opportunities immigration represented for the Basque country.
- To generate a vision, widely shared by the authorities and society as a whole, of an integration model that guaranteed civic rights, intercultural harmony and social cohesion.
- To agree on the main lines of a participatory model of governance of public integration policies.

At the Council of Europe experts' first meeting when they visited Bilbao we had an opportunity to see how the Pact had developed and what stage had been reached, with the help of Xabier Aierdi, adviser to the Basque Government and one of the main Basque experts on the subject, on which he has been working for many years at the University of the Basque Country.

Mr Aierdi commented that the Plan was developing quite slowly. The aim was to produce a standard-setting document establishing a set of values and commitments to be promoted by the different institutions and players involved through various policies and actions. The Pact considers diversity as an opportunity for the Basque country to redefine the Basque identity based on a shared commitment to live together in harmony. Mr Aierdi advocated setting up an independent committee to monitor the Pact and report on the progress made by the institutions concerned in honouring their commitments.

The concept and content of the Pact are doubtless very pertinent and it has considerable political and symbolic value, even if its real influence in terms of practical policies has been slight. It will be interesting to see how things develop in the future.

#### 4. Diversity management policies in Bilbao

As in many cities, Bilbao's approach to diversity management policies has developed in recent years. As the immigrant population grew, the first focus was on policies and projects specially designed to facilitate the reception and integration of the newcomers. These policies had no common thread, however, and their disparity made it difficult to assess their efficacy and move towards a more integrated, coordinated approach.

In 2011 the municipal authorities adopted the **Bi-Open Municipal diversity management Plan (2011-2013)** with the aim of "building a city of education in the values of living together in harmony and openness to diversity". In that Plan interculturality now appeared as one of the basic concepts. Since then steps have been taken to widen the approach, with less emphasis on immigration and integration and more on an overall diversity management strategy, with the aim of moving towards an intercultural city.

However, this Plan still lacked a comprehensive vision and practical approach, and the municipal authorities have recently spent months working on a new diversity management strategy.

In the first meeting we had with a wide spectrum of local protagonists both the Mayor and the Head of Equality, Cooperation and Citizenship defended the positive aspects of diversity and emphasised how important and useful the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities programme was for them. They stressed the importance of joining the RECI network and the fact that their new strategy was largely inspired by the 14 indicators in the ICC index.

The strategy is being developed through a participatory process and questionnaires have been circulated to local residents on the Web and in the neighbourhoods to identify the main challenges. The idea is to canvass the neighbourhoods and involve as many bodies, immigrants' associations and other local players as possible.

Internally this means not addressing the issue solely through the social services but gradually involving other actors from other fields, such as participation, employment, culture, etc. The greatest challenges have to do with education and the young descendents of immigrants, but there are also those related to harmonious living together, interaction, religion, enterprise and diversity as an opportunity. Note, however, that moving towards genuine transversality and considering diversity as an "advantage" is no small feat and much remains to be done, particularly in pedagogical terms.

Some key aspects of the process:

- The need to provide intercultural training for municipal employees and others whose work involves serving the city's inhabitants (the Ellacuría Foundation is already dispensing training in the police academy, and some serving police officers have also received training on a voluntary basis).

- Diversifying the profile of civil servants takes time, as the law requires them to be Spanish nationals, but the city council is making overtures in this respect to firms which provide municipal services or to which certain tasks are outsourced. Social measures have been added and certain groups, such as women, young people and immigrants are awarded more points.
- Efforts are made to make immigrants more visible in society, and the council's communication strategy is making every effort to project a more realistic picture of the city.
- In order to further the transversal approach to interculturality, efforts are being made to ensure that the Government Plan reflects diversity in every sphere rather than only in the educational sphere as is the case at present.

It should be noted that as a result of the municipal elections held in May 2015 the government team has undergone some changes, even though the same party (PNV) is still in power. However, even though there is a new mayor and head of political affairs, the messages the new team is sending out indicate that the commitment to developing an intercultural strategy and its active membership of RECI will continue as before.

Thanks to this first meeting of ours with many stakeholders from various walks of life and the visits we subsequently made, we were able to gain a better overview of the real situation, the challenges and some of the city's more relevant programmes in respect of cultural diversity management. Compared with other cities it was very interesting to have an opportunity to discuss subjects like education with the Basque Government, as most of the responsibility for these things lies with the Autonomous Government.

The purpose of this report is not to offer a detailed description of all the diversity management policies in place in Bilbao. The aim is to provide an overview together with some concrete examples we saw in action during our two-day stay in the city. In that short time we were able to talk to a number of local actors both in the administration and from local bodies and associations. Needless to say, however, there are many activities that have not been included in this report, which, although not exhaustive, focuses on quality and makes certain recommendations based on the strengths and weaknesses we identified. It is important to note that the reports of visiting experts supplement those drawn up on the basis of the Intercultural Cities Index, where more information about municipal diversity management policies in Bilbao can be found.

## 5. Examples of efforts to welcome and integrate immigrants

One of the main things newcomers to Bilbao need upon arrival is background information on the basic services and resources available to them and how they work. In Bilbao, amongst other services, there is a **Multilingual Resource Guide** that explains the basic formalities and things that newcomers to the city of any origin need to know about.

The Guide gives information about civic services, health care, welfare, housing, employment and education, as well as documents for foreign nationals. Although this is practical information aimed

at new residents, the subject matter covered is so wide-ranging that it is useful for all the city's inhabitants, some of whom are unaware of the services and resources available to them.

The aim of the city authorities is to give as many people as possible access to this information, so the Guide can be consulted in seven languages: Basque, Spanish, English, French, Romanian, Chinese and Arabic. The general impression is that it is a very useful instrument which many actors distribute to the populations concerned and which can also be found on the municipal Web page on diversity and living together.

Another facility that was set in place some years ago, but this time to encourage participation by immigrant groups, is the **Bilbao Municipal Immigration Council**. It was created to encourage exchange with and participation by foreign residents, to allow them to make suggestions and help shape public policies. Efforts also continued to promote the values of solidarity and respect for diversity and encourage intercultural exchange and sharing. The Council includes immigrant organisations and others working with the immigrant population, and there are 4 working groups, on awareness, communication, gender and participation.

In addition to the Immigration Council there are other sector councils in which diversity is gradually being incorporated as a cross-sector theme, with increasing numbers of participants from different ethnic backgrounds, although much still remains to be done in this sphere. Above all, various people commented on the lack of immigrant presence on the district councils and the city's other participatory bodies. Clearly, in Bilbao as in many other cities, a lot of work will have to be done before the participatory bodies and processes truly represent the plurality and diversity of its population.

Still in the context of participation, but this time at the initiative of the immigrants' own organisations, the **Peoples of the World Festival** is well worth mentioning. It is a social awareness-raising project, designed to foster cultural awareness and interaction between Basque society and the immigrant communities living in Bilbao. A social initiative instituted by immigrant associations with the support of public institutions. At present it involves 48 associations, including some which are not immigrant associations.

Juan Carlos, the representative of the federation, told us that the aim is to go beyond the anecdotic "folklore" dimension and give more serious thought to the "we", the "us" and to "open identities", and to bring down the mental barriers. They are very active in the Municipal Immigration Council, which has allowed them to exchange views and cooperate with other players, and they are involved in the Social Immigration Pact. He placed considerable emphasis on empowerment and the will to play an active part in the transformation process: "we don't need anybody to hold our hand, we want to do it ourselves". He accordingly believes that diversity must be present in every participatory sphere, in the district councils, for example, where the immigrant community is not yet very present, and on all the cross-sectoral bodies. They want to have a say on all issues, not just those that concern "them".

## 6. Education

In the first meeting we had with the local protagonists we were able to talk to the representative of the Department of Education of the Basque Government, who explained how the education system is evolving to address diversity. Initially diversity was not acknowledged and the focus was

solely on the situation of certain communities, such as gypsies or children with special needs who did not attend school. These children were subsequently enrolled in schools, but the work was done outside the classroom, and generally with a view to their “assimilation”. In time resources were devoted to helping them in the classroom, but still without incorporating or acknowledging diversity in the pedagogic approach, be it for gypsies, immigrants or pupils of whatever origin.

Over the years, as diversity increased, the accent has been placed on a more “inclusive and intercultural” school model. One of the most complex problems is language; education is dispensed in two languages - Spanish and Basque - but many pupils only know Spanish and others cannot even speak that. As many of the children from other countries spoke different languages, however, this was seen as an opportunity to promote multilingualism.

As to the impact of immigration on academic results, a study was commissioned to assess the impact, and the findings showed that increased diversity in the classroom has not adversely affected performance. These findings are no doubt very useful to the anti-rumour strategy, but to turn diversity into opportunity requires resources and above all getting families involved in their children’s education. Four-year plans are being implemented in schools involved in the inclusive schools programme, and special resources are being made available to foster language learning, with intercultural monitors assisting teachers and concluding agreements with embassies to offer the teaching of foreign languages such as Arabic, Portuguese and Romanian.

The following are some of the main challenges that have been identified where education is concerned:

- the lack of role models of diversity in society, be they teachers, police officers or politicians, complicates inclusion efforts;
- some laws are a hindrance: for example, only Spanish nationals can become teachers (or civil servants in general) and this is an obstacle which is difficult to overcome;
- this reality affects the expectations of foreign pupils, particularly where the parents have a university education but work in unskilled jobs;
- access to university for immigrant children is a problem and this should be one of the factors taken into account when assessing the real inclusion of immigrant families.

These are no doubt challenges that face many other cities, especially in countries like Spain where there has been a sharp increase in diversity in a relatively short time, and where there are actually legal obstacles to the recruitment of foreigners to certain public-sector posts.

## **7. The University link and the role of perceptions**

### **The Immigration Observatory and cooperation with the university**

In Bilbao as in other Basque cities it is interesting to note the close link with the university when it comes to obtaining data on, or a deeper understanding of, the reality of migration and living together in diversity.

The Basque Immigration Observatory (Ikuspegi), was set up in 2004, under the auspices of the University of the Basque Country, as a public utility instrument for systematically monitoring the



foreign immigration phenomenon in the Basque country. The city authorities in Bilbao decided to support the Observatory through a cooperation agreement with the University which has made it possible to conduct various types of research, including the annual updating of immigrant population statistics in Bilbao, a “barometer” to chart the perceptions, values and attitudes of the native population towards immigration, and studies on specific neighbourhoods of Bilbao, or on specific communities or situations that affect integration and social harmony.

Pepe Oleaga, an Ikupsegi researcher with considerable experience in this field, presented an overview of the perception indicators that reveal “how we Basques feel about immigration and diversity”. In 2009 the first barometer reading of the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the population of Bilbao with regard to immigration was taken using a questionnaire addressed to the autochthonous population. A second reading was taken in 2014, making it possible to compare the results and create a “tolerance index”.

Mr Oleaga explains that the autochthonous population can be broken down into three groups: the most tolerant, the “don’t knows” and the most averse to immigration. It is interesting that the tolerance index has recorded ups and downs rather than a steady trend. This relates to future expectations and to GDP. Comparing 2009 and 2014 (the period when the impact of the economic crisis was at its worst), we find that the “don’t knows” increased while the more tolerant group grew smaller and the more averse to immigration increased slightly. Although on the whole the results are not bad (the tolerance index actually improved slightly from 57.3 in 2008 to 58.9 in 2014), some negative developments were recorded as regards harmonious cohabitation and the weight of stereotypes. Also, as the findings are broken down by district, Recalde was identified as the district with the lowest levels of tolerance, which helps the municipal authorities to adjust their policies accordingly. As a result, the first stage of the “anti-rumour” project focused on the Recalde district.

Interestingly, in those neighbourhoods with larger numbers of foreign residents the perception the autochthonous residents have of the number of immigrants is much more realistic than in neighbourhoods with fewer immigrants, where the perception is greatly exaggerated.

When asked whether the climate of social harmony in the city had improved or deteriorated, 61% said that it had not changed, 12% that it had improved and 19% that it had deteriorated (3% fewer than in 2009). Only 2.3% of respondents spontaneously mentioned immigration as a “problem”, but when it was actually presented as an option in the question that score rose to 4%.

This constant cooperation with the university and the possibility of relying on studies of people’s perceptions of immigration is a great asset which other cities should consider adopting.

### **The “anti-rumour” project**

On the subject of people’s perception of foreign residents, Bilbao is one of the cities which took part in the Communication for Integration (C4i) anti-rumour project launched by the Council of Europe with EU funding. The project was in fact already under way at the time, but the possibility of joining C4i helped to develop a much more comprehensive anti-rumour strategy. The main target was young people, and the rumours identified with the help of the University of the Basque Country were:

- “we cannot accept any more immigrants, there are already too many of them”
- “immigrants live off welfare and abuse the system”
- “immigrant pupils lower the standard of education and create ghettos in schools”
- “immigration increases crime”
- “sexism and gender violence increase with immigration”
- “immigrants take our jobs from us”.

Once the rumours had been identified and anti-rumour agents trained, a strategy was developed combining different methods and actions: working with young people in audiovisual workshops, with videos, comics, exhibitions, media workshops, training municipal employees, development of a mobile device application, etc.

The municipal authorities rated the project very highly. It turned out to be a means of mobilising many participants and reaching many people. The evaluation made by the Council of Europe team of the overall impact of the project was also positive, although there is clearly a need to work on the evaluation methods and to keep them in place in the medium and long term. In any event, instruments like the Observatory and the perception barometer, which other cities lack, have proved very useful to Bilbao.

## **8. Working in high-immigration neighbourhoods: examples of projects**

Old Bilbao and the San Francisco neighbourhood have the highest percentage of residents of foreign origin and this is also where many bodies and resources devoted to promoting inclusion and harmony are concentrated. Our visit to this central part of the city gave us a closer look at some of the initiatives taken by various bodies with the cooperation and support of the city authorities.

### **AUZOLAN psycho-social scheme for the empowerment of women**

This is a very interesting project for the empowerment of women through psycho-social modules developed by the AUZOLAN association, which has worked with the city authorities for years. The aim is to train empowerment agents (over 200 women have been trained), who then work with their communities and have to “support” a given number of women regarding issues such as reproductive health or gender violence. The workshops last a month and a half and after three months the women meet and fill in forms describing the type of action they have taken. They familiarise women with their fundamental reproductive and sexual rights to make them feel safer and boost their self-esteem. A guide has been published in 8 languages with information on all the resources available to women from the municipality.

In the last two years a new line of action has emerged to prevent female genital mutilation. The focus is on prevention, by helping women to develop the ability to withstand social pressure. For the time being the police have not been involved in this project because the focus is on the social dimension of prevention, but they will need to become involved at some point in the future.

The Auzolan association’s psycho-social modules have been developed in Bilbao since 1982, in cooperation with the public sector, to improve the health and living conditions of women in

certain areas not covered by the public health system. The association's team is composed of 13 professionals: doctors, lawyers, psychologists, social workers and administrative staff, and its work has received international acclaim in various forms.

### **Community action: the Gazteleku association and the ICI project**

The Gazteleku association is 35 years old and has various projects under way in different places in collaboration with the Basque public authorities. They work mainly with vulnerable families and young people and explain that they have no specific project on interculturality as such because they include it in all their projects across the board. They organise socio-cultural activities and work in the socio-educational and health fields, with gypsies, young people, etc.

Their relationship with the city's Equality services was strengthened by the anti-rumour project and in July 2014 they joined the ICI (Intercultural Community Intervention) project, which is funded by the Caixa Foundation and supported by the city authorities. The ICI project focuses on two neighbourhoods in the Recalde district, where the highest percentage of immigrants live and where the indicators show the most negative perception of immigrants among the autochthonous population.

The aim of the ICI project is to foster social cohesion through interculturality, generating a culture of cooperation between the agencies at work in the neighbourhood. The idea is to bring together all the actors currently working separately in their different fields in order to identify shared goals and challenges. The next step is to work together as a network so that the community becomes a key instrument of its own development. It is thought that 3 years will be needed to guarantee the sustainability of this process.

There are three protagonists in the ICI project: the institutions, the citizens and their associations and the technical and professional resources. They each work in their own areas and the "community meeting" is where the three protagonists converge.

It is a 3-tier process:

- Establishing relations with the protagonists and identifying the resources and actors at work in the field.
- Study and diagnosis of the community to sound out the opinion of the people living in the neighbourhood regarding their needs, grievances and so on.

When this diagnosis has been completed a mediation exercise will have to take place in order to prioritise these needs and grievances and decide which to work on.

- Community programme to determine how to organise and carry out the work required to respond to the needs and grievances thus identified.

At present the project is in the consultation and participation stage and it is gratifying to see how many people - professionals and ordinary citizens - are interested in participating, and surprising to see how little the various people active in the field know about each other's work. The

challenge is to generate maximum support from the community and involve all the neighbourhood's cultural diversity in the project.

The impact of the project will be measured by an opinion poll, with control groups and objective information, working from the university. It is too early to measure the impact of the project, although the initial reactions are encouraging and everyone seems to think this is a useful means of boosting local attitudes and policies in favour of harmonious intercultural living. The ICI project joins the RECI and other initiatives that are helping to develop the city's intercultural focus.

### **The San Francisco library**

Bilbao has a network of 15 municipal libraries which offer all sorts of cultural services and activities, making them very important sites for promoting not only culture but also social cohesion and interaction.

During our tour of the San Francisco neighbourhood we were able to visit a cultural centre that plays a key role in the neighbourhood: the San Francisco library. Many of the people who use the library are residents of foreign origin, especially from sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb. The centre has adapted its content and activities to the profile of the local users. For example, every day they print two newspapers in French or English and another in Arabic, and there is a vast catalogue of books for children and adults in many languages (Chinese, Arabic, Russian...). There are also dictionaries in the main languages spoken in the neighbourhood, manuals for learning the Basque and Spanish languages and a store of books and videos on the subject of migration. The reading workshops and teaching modules organised there are attended by many local residents from other countries and activities are also organised in cooperation with associations working with immigrants and groups at risk of social exclusion.

During our visit we were able to appreciate the important role the library plays in the neighbourhood and to confirm once again that a network of local public libraries adapted to the social reality is a must for any city with a claim to intercultural status. One improvement that could be made here would be to lengthen the library's opening hours during the week and to consider opening it at least on Saturdays.

### **The Bakuva Foundation and the inclusion of minors**

In June 2008 the Bakuva foundation was created to foster the inclusion minors at risk of social exclusion. It was based in the Bilbao la Vieja neighbourhood, in the old part of the city, especially to work with children attending the Miribilla secondary school, which has a high percentage of foreign pupils. The aim was to make sure these children did not spend all their spare time in the street, by involving them in sporting and leisure activities like basketball, computer skills, handicrafts and so on. It soon became clear that the children needed help learning the language and also with their school work. The person in charge of the centre said that the main challenge was involving the families in the children's education, a role they often failed to play because they felt that the system did not cater for their needs. She also explained that there is a certain segregation in the city, depending on which neighbourhood you live in, and through basketball

matches they arrange for the local children to meet and get to know children from other neighbourhoods.

They have a good relationship with the school and each child has a tutor who liaises with their teachers and parents. 40 of the 80 volunteers who work in the foundation are between 16 and 25 years old. They choose young volunteers to be positive role models.

At present impact indicators based on school results are being defined, but it is too early to have enough data to draw any conclusions yet.

Also, the school is not open for other activities after school hours. To be able to use the school premises would be very useful and the question is being studied.

### **Médicos del Mundo**

Still in the San Francisco neighbourhood, we visited the doctors' association Médicos del Mundo, which has a special programme for promoting intercultural harmony in the neighbourhood on five levels:

- reception
- living together
- gender issues
- combating discrimination
- participation

They explained that the programme is aimed not only at immigrants but at the local population as a whole, as the concept of integration they defend is an entirely two-way process. They also pointed out that their programme is implemented in close collaboration with all the institutions and bodies working in the San Francisco neighbourhood.

The support they provide includes medical care for people who have not been able to register and obtain a national health card; advising them on their rights and helping them with administrative formalities; psycho-social assistance, because many immigrants arrive with great expectations and it is very difficult for them to accept a reality much harsher than they expected. They also organise excursions to familiarise the immigrants with the Basque country and its culture.

In recent years the profile of the beneficiaries has changed. Initially many newcomers arrived from Latin American countries, but of late they come more from Africa and eastern Europe. Once again, the sub-Saharan community is identified as the most vulnerable because it is so difficult for them to get valid documents and legalise their situation. People are also arriving from refugee camps, some with chronic illnesses that require special treatment. The doctors are very critical of the Spanish Government's decree limiting access to health care for illegal immigrants, but stress on the other hand that cooperation with the health Department of the Basque Government is excellent.

However, one of the main obstacles they identify in terms of access to health care for immigrants is the mistaken idea among the immigrants themselves that they have no right to health care. This

is why the first objective is to provide basic information to empower this community by explaining their rights and how the system works. They also point out that there are many misconceptions among the autochthonous population as regards the support and assistance immigrants receive. The anti-rumour campaign clearly still has a long way to go.

The association's activity is not limited to helping immigrants; it also involves bringing pressure to bear to change things, starting with the decree that limits access to health care for many immigrants. They have persuaded the opposition parties to sign a manifesto against the decree and they want immigrants to be able to prove that they are residents by other means and documents than registration in the municipal register.

The association also promotes activities that foster interaction between people of different origins, on the prevention of gender violence among young people, or the fight against discrimination, in cooperation with the schools.

One of the main challenges they have identified is the need to forge a stable network of neighbourhood associations and empower community leaders, especially in the African associations, which are very weak. There is an informal network, but cooperation with the city authorities and other local actors needs to be strengthened. "The associations themselves should adopt a more cooperative approach and learn to share more".

### **The Ignacio Ellacuría Foundation**

Ignacio Ellacuría was a Jesuit writer and theologian, born in Portugalete (Biscay), who advocated the liberation theory. He lived in El Salvador for many years, where he worked closely with the University and strongly defended a negotiated solution to that country's civil war, until he met his death in 1989, murdered by soldiers along with other Jesuit priests.

The Foundation named after him has always been committed to helping refugees worldwide. As in other parts of Spain, they opened this centre, specialised in immigration issues, in an annexe to the church in Bilbao 8 years ago. The aim was to encourage the active public presence of immigrants, which they did through associations rather than through an assistance-based approach. They stress that it is a small but very dynamic and modern centre that is run in a highly professional and transparent manner. They strongly emphasise the pluralist approach of the centre as far as religion is concerned, open to people from various faiths, providing a basis for dialogue on religious diversity. The centre works very closely with the university on this subject and has a research group on religious diversity.

We were able to speak to representatives of associations that use the centre, who confirmed its importance as a meeting place and source of social and personal empowerment. "When I come to the centre I feel like I really belong here!", one association representative told us.

The foundation also offers personalised advice on obtaining aid, and training for leaders. In 2014 they assisted 55 bodies, particularly of African but also of Latin-American origin. An example of its efforts to give more voice to these bodies is organising meetings with politicians during election campaigns so that the immigrant groups can get their message across.

After an intense visit in the course of which we were able to learn more about some of the projects carried by these bodies, it is quite clear that Bilbao has some high-powered groups with a highly professional approach that makes them a prize asset.

## **9. Conclusions and recommendations**

Bilbao has reached a turning point in its diversity management strategy and is currently in the process of defining its future strategy. That strategy is being developed along the 14 lines of the intercultural city index, showing the city's clear emphasis on and commitment to the intercultural approach.

The actual elaboration of the plan is helping to strengthen a more comprehensive vision by involving a wide range of services. This is no easy task and, moreover, once the Plan has been finalised efforts will have to be made to maintain this "transversal momentum" developed during the elaboration process. The same applies to the participatory approach developed in the strategy, through consultation with the local residents and the city's various bodies and associations, which will have to be kept abreast of the process and offered attractive, stimulating opportunities for participation to involve them in the development and implementation of the strategy.

Bilbao has many assets on which to build. A series of highly professional bodies and associations doing good work in conjunction with the city authorities. Cooperation with the University, which gives it access to rigorous information on the reality of the situation, how it is perceived and follow-up and evaluation of the policies implemented, although much remains to be done. It also has specific projects which provide it with "outside" help and contacts with other institutions and cities and require assistance with and visibility of the work it is doing (the RECI network, the anti-rumour campaign, ICI...). Community work in the neighbourhoods is important and relies on the various centres and projects, municipal or run by partner associations or bodies. Although there is a higher concentration of immigrants in certain neighbourhoods, there are no serious problems of segregation or cohabitation, so the context is conducive to the pursuit of the priorities being defined in the new strategy.

In this connection, the conversations we had during our visit indicated some of the main challenges that are being tackled and certain recommendations that might be borne in mind:

### **Development of the new diversity management strategy**

Bear in mind the importance of achieving as much political consensus as possible, in order to build up the requisite support and guarantee the sustainability of the policies.

Continue pursuing a truly participatory process by not only consulting the residents and other partners concerned but also keeping them informed of the different stages of completion of the work undertaken, so that they see the strategy as "their" strategy and not just that of the city council.

## **Transversality**

In spite of the progress made of late and the opportunity presented by the development of the new strategy, it is important to be proactive in “recruiting” partners in certain fields, such as urban planning or economic development. From both the political and the technical standpoint this means striving to demonstrate the connections, the impact and the opportunities these partners will benefit from if they too contribute to the intercultural strategy.

## **Participation**

The participatory approach needs to be remodelled so as to rely less on associations as at present and involve a broader and more diverse profile of citizens. In this respect the experience of the anti-rumour project could provide a stimulus to continue innovating and finding new incentives to encourage participation. As it was in Barcelona, the anti-rumour project could be “used” to spread a more comprehensive idea of interculturality and generate new networks that would include partners in various fields, such as commerce, sport, education, culture...

It is important to review the role played by the Municipal Immigration Council and look into means of opening up new areas of participation, for example in the parents’ associations in schools, to contribute to the debate on diversity. There are various examples of cities from which Bilbao can draw inspiration.

## **Identify, organise, prioritise and extend**

Once the new strategy has defined the challenges, objectives and principal lines of work, it is important to base the work on an analysis and diagnosis of what is already being done in the city. When identifying and agreeing on joint objectives it is important to consolidate new forms of cooperation between all the agents involved in order to derive maximum benefit from the efforts and resources invested.

In Bilbao various projects, run by the municipality or by voluntary groups or associations, are having a positive impact and could be strengthened and widened to other sectors and territories. Emphasis on evaluating these projects, broadening their scope, increased cooperation and putting more energy into those solutions which are already working will be fundamental to the next phase. Especially in sectors like education, empowering women or working with young people, where we have seen powerful projects that are producing good results but with limited scope.

## **Working in specific neighbourhoods**

In the San Francisco neighbourhood we saw many examples of municipal initiatives, facilities and projects run by various groups to foster cohesion, mutual understanding and a better quality of life in the neighbourhood.

A further effort is needed, however, if more far-reaching results are to be achieved in the economic and employment spheres, or in housing and the public arena. This means bringing town planners and economists together around the same table with workers in the educational, social and cultural fields. Basic community work must have the support of a coordinated response from every department in order to improve the relevant indicators of well-being and quality of life.



Bilbao has many advantages to be able to advance in this direction and offer an innovative approach for addressing a complex reality that is very widespread in Europe.

Defining an innovative, ambitious local strategy in cooperation with many actors with a view to improving the overall situation in selected neighbourhoods should be a priority of local government. Such a strategy could be the symbol of the “new Bilbao” focusing not only on the international dimension and competitiveness but also on social cohesion and social harmony. It could doubtless be an inspiration to many other cities and emerge as a reference in the field of urban regeneration.

Finding innovative solutions that accompany the “gentrification” process with more inclusive actions that generate greater well-being and more opportunities for all residents is one of the great challenges of this century.

In spite of the economic crisis, recent history and the numerous assets it possesses place the city in a strong position to set itself ambitious goals. Continuing the process of social, economic and urban transformation of recent years means effectively rising to the challenge of turning diversity into an advantage for the city’s population as a whole.