

obsolete, into a renewed area to reconstruct a Bilbao for the next century from the ruins of an industrial past.

Instead of remaining a physical and social barrier, the Nervión River would become an axis for the social and urban reintegration of the metropolitan area. Among the strategies that have been adopted include:

- The extension of the Port of Bilbao, the first phase of which was completed in November 1998, is a key component for the economic regeneration of the region. The relocating of the old port facilities situated along the river to modern, consolidated ones closer to the sea, was also a major step that finally allowed the building of low-level bridges that will physically connect both banks of the Nervión.
- The ambitious program of cleaning the river, eliminating the industrial ruins, decontaminating the brownfields, and, above all, providing new infrastructure to improve access to the area such as new urban roads, the Metro, airport improvements, railway access, port and logistic facilities, and so on.
- Placing new uses on the newly vacated areas and in old industrial buildings. These new uses include cultural and educational facilities, technology and science parks, commercial and government offices, support services, green and leisure space, and also housing. In short, the most sophisticated facilities and the economic activities that will be leading the Basque economy in the new century will be located next to the river of Bilbao.

Accomplishments and projects for the future

A number of specific projects have also been developed in recent years. These projects represent the beginnings of the ambitious urban renewal program of Bilbao.

The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum

The Guggenheim Museum is perhaps the most emblematic of these projects. The waterfront location of the museum, at one end of the Abandoibarra district, below an existing bridge and next to a railway line, was one of the most degraded spaces in the city. The Museum has quickly become a symbol of the renovation of Bilbao, and an international symbol of the innovative vocation of the Basque society as it meets the challenges of the new millennium.

The impact of the Museum on the local economy has been extraordinary. Before the Museum was built, the weekend occupation rate of the hotels in the city was only about 20 percent. Today, it is practically impossible to find a room during the weekends. Some international hotel chains have also begun to develop new hotels.

Some of the local engineering and equipment companies, and others that participated in the construction of the building (which has a steel structure, titanium façade, and stone cladding), are finding new, global markets on the basis of the international publicity provided by the Museum.