

6 New millennium Bilbao

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The city of Bilbao is currently enjoying a greatly enhanced urban image since the Guggenheim Museum opened a few years ago. However, the metropolitan area of the city has been undergoing an urban transformation less heralded but no less dramatic. The roots of this transformation lie in the reconceptualization of the entire Basque Country as a European "city-region," as outlined in the Basque regional strategy developed in the 1990s. The Nervión River, at the heart of the metropolitan area, instead of remaining a physical and social barrier, will become the axis of urban redevelopment for the city-region seeking to face the challenges of the new millennium.

The regional vision of the Basque Country

The Basque Autonomous Community, or the Basque Country, consists of the three provinces of Bizkaia, Guípuzcoa and Alava. The Basque Country enjoys an important self-government headed by the Basque Parliament, located in the Basque capital city of Vitoria-Gasteiz. The Basque Country has its own police force and a distinct tax system managed by the Territorial Treasuries.

The Basque Country is the first autonomous community in Spain to have a regional planning strategy approved by its regional parliament. The "Directrices de Ordenación Territorial" (DOT), or the "Regional Planning Guidelines," is the planning instrument which has the capacity to coordinate the sectoral policies and the urban plans that affect the 250 or so municipalities that comprise the Basque Autonomous Community. The DOT was developed from 1990 and formally adopted in 1997 by the Basque Government.

The basic idea behind the regional planning strategy of the Basque Country is the reconceptualization of the Basque Country as a European "city-region" that will constitute a single job market. As a city-region, the Basque Country would be better positioned to avoid urban sprawl, balance the urban system, and maintain the urban identity of cities, towns and villages.

The Basque city-region sits on the frontier between the older industrial-