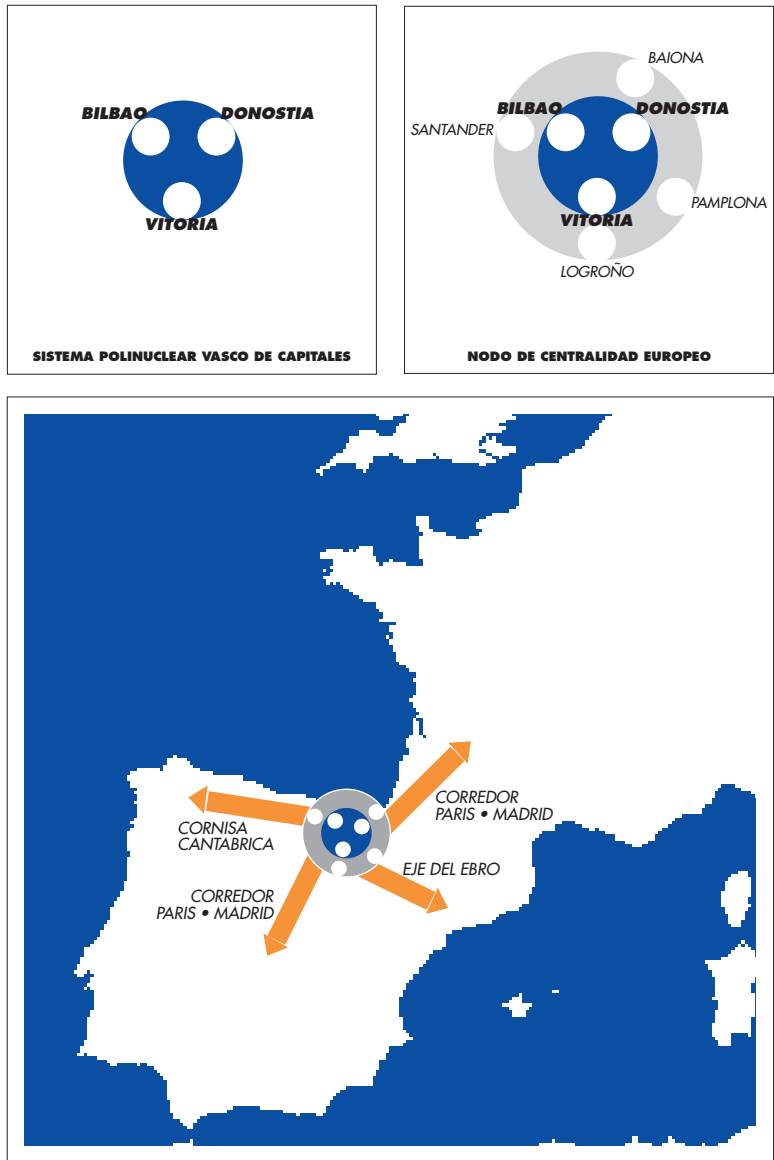


6.2 Bilbao: a European hinge point.



fifteen or so medium-sized Basque cities that lead the “Functional Areas,” or the intermediate regions within the provinces, are important nodes necessary for the integration of the urban and the rural. Their role is not only in maintaining this delicate territorial balance, but also in maintaining the social balance through the strong feeling of ownership of its citizens, and in the balance among places of residence, work and leisure.

These medium-sized cities are facing the challenges by improving their urban quality and their integration with the environment. The urban decline will need to be stemmed, their economic base strengthened and greater links for cooperation and exchange established.

3 *Revaluating the system of rural nuclei with connections to the natural*