

# BILBAO AND THE NEW AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE

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*“In these times of crisis and uncertainty that are affecting all countries to a greater or lesser degree, we at the city of Bilbao believe that it is now more important than ever for cities around the world to reflect on culture in all of its forms, paying special attention to its role as a driving force for economic activity and the social transformation of the regions in which it occurs.”*

**The promotion of culture in any of its forms and at any stage of its execution** is not just a crucial element in the development of people and groups. Rather, it is something much more: **Culture has the capacity to act as an engine for economic development and job creation.** Artistic and creative people, as well as cultural industries and any service industry with the capacity to innovate along these lines are joining more traditional sectors—such as the hospitality and transport sectors—to create new possibilities for business and employment. **This is sure to stimulate development in those cities or regions that are most prepared to take advantage of these new opportunities.**

In this sense, this phenomenon is no stranger to our city, which has experienced an extraordinary transformation in terms of both economic activity and urban planning over the last two decades. In fact, it was a museum that acted as both the catalyst of and symbol for this transformation, while also acting as a focal point, directing international interest towards Bilbao.

In the 1980s, Bilbao was known as an industrial city with an economy based on shipyards and the steel industry. In a period of global economic reinvention and serious economic crises, **the city was forced to reinvent itself.**

**In Bilbao, this transformation occurred in the 1990s with the Guggenheim Museum** acting as a symbol for both the city's development and its global recognition. The Museum, on a physical level, **acted as an engine for urban and social renewal for the city** while also acting as a symbol for the vibrant new entrepreneurial spirit spreading throughout the city.

Today, **culture is more than just a way to respond, it is a necessity.** In the complex interplay between economic activity and the social fabric of the community, **the creative dimension of culture can help society face new challenges** of development, democracy, coexistence, justice and social inclusion.

The **local cultural sector** does not just create services; it also makes important **contributions to education, diversity and social bonds, not to mention encouraging tourism, revitalizing the economy and creating unique business possibilities.**

Culture forms the **basis for a system of values and wellbeing for community members while also contributing to the development of how people think.**

Because of this, Bilbao is committed to a **cultural policy based on principles of proximity, public-private partnership and the participation of its citizens.** A city-wide strategy must depend on collective action, and in Bilbao, we have shown that this is possible. **Bilbao has shown that planning culture makes a city.**

This is because success only comes with clear **decision making, planning and, above all else, perseverance.** With this goal in mind, public institutions and the private sector have been committed, since the beginning of this period of urban transformation, to **dialog between culture and the city.** This collaboration is a true pillar in the **city's overall development plan,** along with urbanism and sustainable development.

In Bilbao, **arts, culture and creativity** form the base from which the urban, social and economic renewal of Bilbao has been established. This occurs alongside three axes with strong ties to the unique character of the city and its residents. These are characterized by a strong belief that the **cultural and creative sectors must include our rich and diverse cultural heritage as they contribute to the development of our society and create jobs and economic growth**. It is in this way that we have worked together to nurture the necessary conditions to strengthen cultural and creative sectors of the city.

Today, Bilbao is a focal point for creation and the propagation of art, culture and creativity. **Our cultural policy promotes the development of new artistic and cultural projects in all their forms**, from the most up to date and current to the most classical and traditional. In Bilbao, art, culture and creativity are not just “objects” to be admired; instead, they have truly become a **way of life**.

However, **culture becomes enriched by contact with other cultures**. The way we see it, this means that even as **culture must be a key element in the sustainable economic and social development** of a given region, we must also never forget that culture must also **promote cultural exchange between cities**. It is because of this belief that the new **Agenda 21 for Culture** should be committed to the dynamic sharing of knowledge, experiences and project development between participating cities. In other words, culture must act as a binding force between all citizens.