

# BILBO EUSKARAREN HIRIBURUA

## BILBAO CAPITAL OF EUSKARA

The Basque language (or euskara), older than the Roman Empire itself, which is said to have no close relatives, and which Basques have used for centuries to represent the world, is the central theme of this exhibition. Specifically, the importance that this language has had in Bilbao, and the people and institutions that have contributed to its development.

### BACKGROUND

According to the studies, the Villa has been closely related to the Basque language from medieval times; as its inhabitants have been using the variant of the Western dialect (Biscayan) ever since. Examples of this are the proverbial book *Refranes y sentencias* (1596), written in Biscayan, or the grammar written in 1653 by Rafael Mikoleta: *Modo breue de aprender la lengua Vizcayna*. The characteristics of the Basque spoken in Bilbao appear in both.

The toponymy of Bilbao is also an example of Basque identity: -uri/uri- (Uribarri, Uribitarte, Urizar, Enekuri, Atxuri...), -ola/ola- (Ametzola, Aizola, Olan, Olabeaga, Olagorta...), -iturri (Iturrizar, Iturriondo, Iturrigorri, Iturrigorribidea...), etc.

In the early 19th century, intellectuals such as Juan Mateo Zabala, Jose Paulo Ulibarri, Pablo Astarloa, Juan Antonio Mogel or Pedro Antonio Añibarro collected the characteristics of the Basque language in Bilbao. Pedro Novia de Salcedo had already written *Diccionario etimológico del idioma vascongado* (1887).

## 1876-1936

### THE RENAISSANCE OF BASQUE CULTURE

After the Last Carlist War of 1876, the abolitionist law imposed by the Liberal Party and the social decline left by the war exacerbated Basque sentiment towards fueros (Basque home rule related laws). The loss of the post-war period gave the people the need to regain Basque identity, culture and language, and led to a cultural movement called the **Basque Renaissance**.

Bilbao was going through a period of change, because the need for manual workers created by **Industrialization** generated a great deal of immigration, and that socio-economically positive wave, created great cultural and ideological needs in society.

The press and literature became the perfect means of satisfying **national identity** and cultural thirst in the context of this social and cultural renewal.

In 1893, Sabino Arana began publishing the weekly paper *Bizkaitarra*, with some **texts in Basque**. The **first weekly papers written entirely in Basque** appeared under the direction of Resurrection Maria Azkue and Ebaristo Bustintza 'Kirikiño': *Euskalze* (1897-1899) and *Ibaizabal* (1902-1903). Under the leadership of Kirikiño, Euzko Jel-Batza (Basque Nationalist Communion) published *Euzkadi* magazine from 1913 to 1937. Soon after, in 1916, *Euzko-Deya* was published by the Euzkeltzale Bazkuna. This latter one was also published in exile in Paris, London, Mexico, and the United States.

Literature began to gain strength (Kirikiño, Txomin Agirre...) and folklorists wanted to regain **oral tradition**. Jose Manterola, R.M. Azkue and Aita Donostia contributed a great deal, bringing together popular knowledge and music, and giving them the prestige they deserved.

**Patriotism** (abertzaleatasuna) and the revival of culture went hand in hand. But in 1923 came the coup d'état of Primo de Rivera. There began a harsh time for Basque culture and society, that extended for seven long years.

After the reign of Primo de Rivera, literary, artistic, linguistic, and personality associations and initiatives began to flourish again. Bilbao was the centre of this movement, born of the needs of political and cultural nationalism: it was **born from the street, and spread there** as well.

Eclecticism and European romantic currents prevailed in Basque art and letters, and the interaction between politics and literature increased considerably in the 1930s. Poetry and short texts became the best suited expressions to the political needs and personality of the people.

It was necessary to introduce the **Basque language into teaching**. Thus, the first ikastolas (Basque schools) of Bilbao arose, in Errotazueta and Belostikale. Following the proposal made in the year 1932 by Emakume Abertzale Batza (Union of Patriotic Women) and Euzko Gaztedi (Basque Youth Force) 1932, **Euzko Ikastola Batza** (Basque School Association) was created to bring together all those who had hitherto been.

Among the intellectuals who promoted and contributed to Basque culture and language in Bilbao are Manuel de la Sota, Angel Agirretxe, Julio Urquijo, Zeferino 'Keperin' Xemein and Karmele Errazti.

On the other hand, the institutions increased their **involvement towards Basque language**, and the material published in euskara increased considerably: books, articles, radio programs... Great progress was made in the field of translation as well; Joseba Altuna turned many great classics of **Universal Literature into Basque**.

Under the influence of Jose Ariztimuño 'Aitzol', the first bertsolaritza (the singing of improvised songs following different melody and rhythm patterns) championship and Euzko Olerti Eguna (day dedicated to poetry cultural events) were held. This was the time of the greatest flourishing of Basque literature, through the works of 'Lauaxeta', 'Lizardi', 'Orixe', and other poets.

### CONGRESSES OF BASQUE STUDIES

Between 1918 and 1922, three Congresses of Basque Studies were held to bring together experts from all branches of Basque culture, in order to decide how to proceed in the future. The first was held in 1918 in Oñati, and as a consequence, **Basque Studies Society** (Eusko Ikaskuntza), as a scientific cultural meeting point in the Basque Country, and **Euskaltzaindia**, as a centre for the cultivation of the Basque language and the development of a Standard Basque (euskara batua), were born.

### RESURRECTION MARIA AZKUE ABERASTURI

Lekeitio 1864 - Bilbao 1951

He was one of the four founders of Euskaltzaindia and president of the academy from 1919 to 1951. He was one of the most brilliant and prolific defenders of the Basque culture of all time.

He worked in various fields: ethnography, linguistics, journalism, vocabulary, music, theatre... Among his works the following stand out: *Euzkal-Izkindea* (1891), *Euskara-Gaztelania-Frantsesa hiztegia* (1906), *Euskal Kantutegia Herrikoa*, *Euskal Morfologia* (1925), and *Euskalerriaren Yakinza* (1947).

### ESTEPAN URKIAGA LAUAXETA

Laukiz 1905 - Gasteiz 1937

"Everything must be given to get our beloved freedom."

He was a Basque writer and journalist, nicknamed 'Lauaxeta' (Lau Haizeetara 'to all and sundry'). This revolutionary of Basque poetry adapted from traditional poetry to the romantic currents of Europe, breaking with the style of traditional poets. His most remarkable works are *Bide barrjak* (1931) and *Arrats beran* (1935).

Between 1931 and 1936, while living in Bilbao, he taught Basque and wrote in the magazines *Yagi-Yagi*, *Euzkerea*, *El Día*, *Yakinza* and *Euzkadi*.

He dedicated himself fervently to politics, in favor of the nationalist side. In 1936 he joined the Basque Army, obtaining the rank of commander. On 25 June 1937, he was arrested by Franco's army and executed in Vitoria.

### SORNE UNZUETA UTARSUS

Bilbao 1900 - Urduliz 2005

"I am moved by the sweet wind, but I shall not be driven by the storm."

Militant Basque woman, she learnt Basque when she was young, and became both a writer and a teacher.

Active member of Euzko Ikastola Batza and Emakume Abertzale Batza, she showed herself as a faithful defender of women's vote.

She published several tales, articles and poems in various magazines, under the nickname 'Utarsus'. Her work was compiled in the book *Idazlan guztiak* (1998).

## 1936-1957

### WITH DETERMINATION THE IMPOSSIBLE CAN BE ACHIEVED

The war of 1936 disrupted the cultural development that had preceded it. The first years of the post-war period were severe, and under the influence of the Franco **dictatorship**, many of the Basque thrusters were imprisoned and shot, while other took the **road to exile**: 'Orixe', Jokin Zaltegi, Teleforo Monzón, Andima Ibiñagabeitia...

The threats imposed by Francoism completely silenced Basque language and culture. Francoist school model banned and punished euskara, but the language survived in the inner atmosphere of the household, hiding in the shadows. The **ensorship** imposed by the Church on literature must also be mentioned, since the Index of Forbidden Books showed that writers in Basque were strictly forbidden.

This situation led to the romantization of our language, and Basque became a **symbol** of freedom and the struggle of the patriotic environment.

In this context, the role of **Euskaltzaindia** was essential: Krutwig and Azkue managed to give the institution a boost, stabilizing its situation in during Franco's dictatorship.

In 1950, the first **district festival committees** (jai-batzordeak) were established. Folklore became one of the only ways to promote Basque language and identity. In Bilbao, **Dindirri Dance Group** (1944) and **Txinpartak Theatre Group** (1951), among others, did great work in this field. In the 1950s, plays, publications, books, bertsolari recitals and other cultural expressions began to emerge again, opening the door to the refreshing of Basque culture.

## 1957-1979

### THE FLOURISHING OF BASQUE CULTURE

Speaking euskara during the dictatorship was not easy; it was mainly used in intimate atmosphere, between friends and at home. In this context, in order to deal with this censorship and injustice, many people made the choice of continuing to live a Basque way of live, without setting aside their culture and identity.

The protection of the church was often the only refuge where people could gather and perform activities. That is why most of the activities related to ikastolas, magazines, dance groups, night schools and Basque culture developed under the protection of the church.

At this time the **first ikastolas** were given in St. Nicholas church (1957-1958). Due to complaints, the schools were moved to Iralabarri (1958-1959), then to private houses (1960-1966), and finally to the Resurrection Maria Azkue ikastola (1966-1969). When the need to enlarge this school arose, Lauro Ikastola was born (1970). When talking about the development of the first ikastolas in Bilbao, the work made by women has to be mentioned: Juliana Berrojalbiz, Rete Rotaezte and Maria Angeles Garai stand out, among others.

Another Basque site was that of the church of St. Anton, under the safeguard of the priest Claudio Gallastegi. There they began to officiate **mass in Basque**, and *Kili-kili* (1966), which began as a catechesis material, became a **comic book for Basque children** to learn to write and read, spread throughout the Basque Country. Jose Antonio Retolaza was the master mind behind that.

The **Euskerazaleak** association (1967), one of the first associations created to promote Basque, also worked hard to introduce the Basque language into teaching.

On the other hand, in the 1970s, Verdes bookstore (1906), led by Javi Escudero and Asun Zuluaga, became a key meeting point for Basque culture.

Dance groups, choirs, mountaineering groups, etc., became places of encouragement for the use of the Basque language during this period. As our language was a sign of nationalism (abertzaleatasuna), the passion for learning the Basque language spread. It was then that the first **night schools** (gau-eskolak) were founded in Santuxu. The founders included Joseba Arrieta, Patxi Urizarren, Martin Basterra, Joseerra Etxebarria, Tasio Erkizia and Joseba Basterra, among others. From this initiative, the following **Euskaltegis** (centres to learn euskara) flourished: Bilbo Zaharra (1973), Juan Mateo Zabala (1974), Ulibarri (1975), AEK (1976), Gabriel Aresti (1978) and Zubizarri (1978).

In 1970, the summer courses to learn euskara offered by Labayru were launched in Derio, with Ander Manterola, Karmelo Etxenagusia and Mikel Zarate as main promoters. The Labayru Institute was founded in Bilbao as well, in order to protect those courses.

However, the condition of euskara improved even more when the University of Deusto began offering **studies in Basque Philology** in 1976. Gotzon Garate, Mikel Zarate, Patxi Altuna, Alfonso Irigoien and many others were in charge of teaching. They increased our language's well deserved reputation and prestige.

Several musical and theatre groups were also created in order to promote Basque culture and language during this period. The music band **Oskorri** was one of them, founded in 1971, and which filled the squares and halls of the Basque Country with people until 2015. Their first album, Gabriel Arestien Oroimezez, was released in 1976.

At that time a breakthrough band made up by literary lovers also appeared: **Pott Banda**. In 1977, Bernardo Atxaga, Joxemari Iturralde, Joseba Sarrionandia, Ruper Odrorika, Jon Juaristi and Manu Ertzizilla met in Bilbao to create a publishing house. The group lasted three years, and revolutionized the history of Basque literature.

Likewise, Euskaltzaindia held the closing event of the **Bai Euskarari** campaign in 1978 at the San Mames football field in Bilbao. 40,000 Basque supporters (euskaltzales) joined, and numerous Basque singers and music groups participated: Pantoxa eta Peio, Urko, Mikel Laboa, Xabier Lete, Oskorri...

Another highly relevant event was born that same year, what today we know as **Aste Nagusia** (The Great Week), based on the proposal presented by the kompartsa (festive troupe) Txomin Barullo in the Contest of Ideas organized in 1978. It was their idea, among other things, to create these festivities, and since then they have become the soul of Aste Nagusia. Moreover, this new festive model served to spread the Basque language in society from the very beginning.

Ehe enthusiasm and emotional aspect of the people, became the core of a recovery process that helped overcome the void that our culture was in, even without the existence of Basque institutions. Thanks to this cultural resistance, our culture emerged over the next few decades.

### EUSKALTZAINDIA

Euskaltzaindia was founded in 1919, after the First Congress of Basque Studies held in Oñati, with the aim of preserving, studying, spreading and improving the Basque language. Four euskaltzain (Basque academics) were elected: Julio Urquijo, Koldo Elizalde, Arturo Campion and Resurrection Maria Azkue. The latter was the first President of the Academy.

Even if the Spanish Civil War of 1936 brought a sudden halt, from 1950 onwards, Xabier Peña, Eusebio Erkiaga and Alfonso Irigoien began teaching euskara at the Ribera 6 headquarters in Bilbao. In the creation process of ikastolas, the academy became crucial to legalize the Resurrection Maria Azkue Ikastola. In addition, between 1958 and 1982, under the initiative of Alfonso Irigoien, the first Bertsolari Txapelketak (improvised Basque verse singer championships) of Biscay and the Basque Country organized.

As the state improved, new names began to emerge inside the institution: Father Luis Villasante, Gabriel Aresti and Federico Krutwig. They defended the need for a **unified Basque language** (Standars Basque, or euskara batua) and held an assembly in Arantzazu in 1968. There, the first steps towards the creation of a unified euskara were established. The linguist Koldo Mitxelena guided the preparation of the reports made during that meeting.

Shortly after Franco's death, in 1976, Euskaltzaindia received **full recognition**; and in the same year they inaugurated the headquarters of Plaza Berria (New Square).

### MARI ANGELES GARAI

1930-2022

She was the first teacher of the Biscayan ikastolas. Her contribution had a significant impact on the Basque academic training of the students, as well as on the development of the Basque education system.

### GABRIEL ARESTI SEGUROLA

1933-1975

Basque writer and poet born in Bilbao, he became a very disruptive and innovative figure in Basque literature. He focused in social and urban literature, mainly in poetry, as can be seen in his work *Harri eta Herri* (1964).

## 1979-2000

### BASQUE TO ALL AND SUNDRY

Following the social initiative, which had gained strength during the previous decades, **euskara finally entered the institutions**. In 1982, law for the basic standardization of the Basque language (10/1982 Euskararen legea) was adopted, which became essential for the standardization of the use of the Basque language. Along with the adoption of this new law, the possibility of learning Basque at the University of the Basque Country sprang. Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB) brought euskara to areas where it had never been used before (cinema, television series, cartoons...). In addition to creating new professions: journalists, broadcasters, translators, actors, dubbing actors... IVAP/HAEE (Basque Institute of Public Administration), HÁBE (Institution for Adults Alphabetization and Revasconization), the Public Education Network, IRIALE (Basque literacy and training for teachers) or the Basque services of the Municipalities are also from that time.

In 1980, for example, AEK organized **Korrika** (running) for the first time under the motto *Zuk ere esan bai euskarari* (Say yes to euskara). This first edition began from Oñati, and ended up in the capital of Biscay, after passing through the seven provinces.

Literature flourished with great vitality. Social literature, new styles and models, young writers... From 1978 to 1985, several literary journals were published: Pott, Ustel, Oh Euzkadil, Susa, Maizatz, Pamiela... It should be borne in mind that during previous years the night schools of literacy and the euskaltgis had gained strength, as well as ikastolas and there was a strong desire to promote the Basque language.

In 1981, the Labayru Foundation published the literary magazine **ldatz & Mintz**. A tale published with that same name by Mikel Zarate was the first text of the first copy, which named the magazine.

In the same year, the magazine **Aizul** was born with the aim of becoming a useful tool for those who studied euskara. The magazine saw the light thanks to a small team from the University of Deusto. From 1983, took charge of its publication, and the committee has been publishing it ever since.

The works *Narrazioak* (1983) by Joseba Sarrionandia, and *Obabakoak* (1989) by Bernardo Atxaga also opened a new era in literature.

Many cultural expressions flourished during this period, mainly theatrical groups: *Comicos de la Legua* (1969), *Karraka* (1980), *Hortzuga* (1989)... In 1980 the theatre group **Maskarada** also began its career. It was the first group use to Basque professionally. At first there were three people: Iñaki Basabe, Carlos Panera and Marife Berrojalbiz.

Furthermore, bertsolari schools were created, which was an important milestone in encouraging bertsolariem. The **bertsolari school of Santuxu** (1979-1980) was one of the first to open, as a complement to literacy schools, under the advice of Xabier Amuriza. At the same time, the Bilbao City Council began to organize the spring and Big Week's bertsolariem sessions (bertso-saioak) of Bilbao.

In Bilbao, the **Euskara Service of the City Council**, and the **Department of Culture** were established in 1985. The aim was to create a bilingual institution: on one side, to encourage the use of euskara on the streets, and, on the other, for the City Council to use both Spanish and Basque equally.

In the 1980s, **Xabier Gereño** began to organize Basque dinners (euskaldunon afariak) for the Basque people in Bilbao. On the one hand, they arranged for dinner, after which they involved in debates and conversations. Furthermore, they promoted campaigns to encourage the use of euskara, and it brought together people of different ideology and backgrounds.

In the 1990s, with the aim of strengthening the Basque community, the association **Zenbat gera** was born in Bilbao, promoted by the teachers from the euskaltegi Gabriel Aresti. A few years later, in 1995, the **Kafe Antzokia** opened its doors in Bilbao, where the San Vicente cinema hall was placed before. This concert hall was also opened by initiative of the teachers, and has now become a reference for the culture of the Basque Country. Zenbat gera also launched Bilbo Hiria Irratia (Bilbao City Radio) in 1997.

In addition to that, Abuzo Ikastola celebrated its first **ibaldia** (meaning march or walk, it is a festival organized every year in order to get funds for Basque schools or ikastolas) on May 29, 1994, under the motif *Bilbon badabil, bada Bilbon zer dabil?* (It's around Bilbao, what is it doing around Bilbao?), a direct reference to the state of euskara in the Villa). The goal was to build a new ikastola.

Another reference to be aware of the vitality that euskara had in the different neighborhoods were the magazines that began to be published in each of them: *Zorrotz-Morrotz* in Zorroza (1995), *Berton* in Mahatserrri (1998) or *Prest!* in Deusto (2000), among others.

On the other hand, the 1990s were a promising decade for Basque music. The accordionist from Rekalde **Kepa Junkera** became a revolutionary in traditional folk music and spread it all over the world. He has become the author of several songs that are nowadays considered anthems. From the same neighborhood is the Basque rock band **Zea Mays** (1997) came out. They took their first steps during that same decade, and over the years, they have become a reference for Basque rock music.

## 2000-2024

### 21st CENTURY

In Bilbao, the situation of the euskara has tended to stabilize throughout the 21st century. It is used in institutions, education, the health system and cultural initiatives, as well as in daily life. Over time, the **number of speakers in the Villa has constantly increased**. If we look at the data, there were about 53,000 speakers in 2001, 80,000 in 2011, and 104,000 in 2021. However, we must continue persevering on its use.

Furthermore, while **the socio-cultural needs of the population of Bilbao are changing**, more people from other cultures and backgrounds live today in the city, forming a rich and diverse society. We have moved from bilingualism to multilingualism, becoming an intercultural society.

Basque media is abundant nowadays in Bilbao: EITB, Hamaika Telebista, Euskal Herria magazine (2002-2013), Radio Villa de Bilbao, Nontzeberri and many others. Newspapers and weekly **newspapers are also published in euskara** in many neighborhoods and districts.

Whether by institutional promotion or through social initiatives, many programs are currently focused on the **promotion and spreading of the Basque language**. For example, since the creation of the Advisory Council of the Basque Language in 2016 at the initiative of Mayor Juan Mari Aburto, the City Council has promoted: Biribiko, to promote the euskara in commerce and hospitality; Loraldia, festival of Basque culture; Mikoleta Ipuin Lahiaketa (tale contest); Harrapazank! youth leisure program; Euskeraldia...

**Euskara is today included in all kinds of activities** organized in the city: culture, literature, music, theatre, bertsolaritza,... Spaces such as Sarean or Bira have become ideal for Basque culture to be expressed. On the other hand, the theatres Euskalduna, Campos Eliseos or Arriaga, as well as the other large halls, offer **shows and productions in euskara**.

Writers such as Juana Madariaga, Lutxo Egija, Iruene Urrizelki, Urtzi Urrutiokotxea, Miren Agur Meabe, Miren Agur Meabe, Luigi Anselmi or Amaia Iturbide, help making big contributions to the literary environment of the Villa. In music, the presence of lyrics in Basque is notoriously increasing, with the proposals of young artists such as Ezeze, Txopet, Silitia, Nize, Pimpilpusies, Otoi...

**Leisure and sport** have become key points of encouragement to maintain the Basque environment, both professionally and otherwise.

In compulsory education, the use of euskara is predominant. Also, in the three universities that exist in Bilbao, offer the opportunity to study in Basque. In all areas of the economic sector (trade, hospitality, industry, administration...), many have launched plans to develop its use, and it has also become customary offering their services in Basque. In this situation, it can be stated that **Bilbao is the capital of euskara**.

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