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Ecologies of practice



FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026 - Photo: Erika Ede

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Editorial

Cultural practice does not develop in isolation. It takes shape through relationships: between institutions and communities, governance and implementation, research and education, culture and place. This issue of ENCATC Magazine explores these relationships through the idea of Ecologies of Practice, bringing together perspectives on cultural policy, urban transformation, sustainability, participation, heritage and organisational development.

Bilbao and the wider Basque context offer a particularly rich lens for exploring these questions. Over several decades, cultural development has evolved alongside urban regeneration, environmental recovery, public governance, innovation and social participation. The contributions gathered in this issue reveal how these different dimensions intersect, and how lasting development depends on the capacity of institutions, sectors and communities to work in relation to one another.

Many of these reflections grew out of the **2026 ENCATC Academy on Sustainable Cultural Policy and Management**, held in Bilbao in April. The Academy brought together researchers, educators, practitioners and policymakers to examine how sustainability can be embedded more deeply in cultural organisations and across the cultural and creative sectors. Its focus on the green, social and digital transformations opened a wider discussion on governance, skills, collaboration, organisational cultures and the conditions that enable cultural practice to remain resilient and relevant over time.

This issue begins with the Basque cultural context, looking at the relationship between identity, language, cultural policy and territorial development. From there, it moves into Bilbao's long process of transformation, showing how culture has developed alongside infrastructure, environmental regeneration, innovation and coordinated public action, supported by clear political vision and will.

Other contributions bring the focus closer to institutional practice. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao reflects on how sustainability is integrated into governance and everyday decision-making; La Perrera highlights the role of youth participation, experimentation and learning; Azkuna Zentroa shows how cultural space can connect artistic practice, education and public life; and Teatro Arriaga demonstrates how environmental responsibility can be embedded within a historic performing arts institution.

These institutional perspectives are complemented by research and policy reflection. Laura Johanna Noll and Leticia Labaronne address the gap between ambition and implementation in the sustainable transformation of arts and cultural organisations, underlining the importance of stronger connections between research, policy, education, funding and practice.

ENCATC member Anna Ochmann extends the discussion further by asking what cultural policies are ultimately trying to enable and by focusing on the broader conditions that allow creative practice to endure.

The final featured contribution also reflects ENCATC's collaborative dimension. Developed through a partnership that grew from connections within the ENCATC community, Claire Giraud-Labalte's article traces the history of the Czartoryski Museum in Kraków and the remarkable journey of its collections. Through themes of memory, displacement, preservation and European cultural exchange, it offers a historical perspective on how cultural heritage is shaped, protected and transmitted across generations and borders.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the City of Bilbao, and in particular to Mr. Gonzalo Olabarria Villota, Councillor for Culture and Coordinator of the Mayor's Office and Cultural Policies, and Mr. Asier Abaunza Robles, Councillor for Urban Planning, Strategic Projects and Public Space. We are equally grateful to the Department of Culture and Language Policy of the Basque Government, and in particular to Mr. Andoni Iturbe, Vice-Minister for Culture, and Ms. Ana López Asensio, Director for Cultural Promotion and Cultural and Creative Industries. Our thanks also go to the many local partners, institutions and professionals who supported the 2026 ENCATC Academy and contributed to the development of this issue.

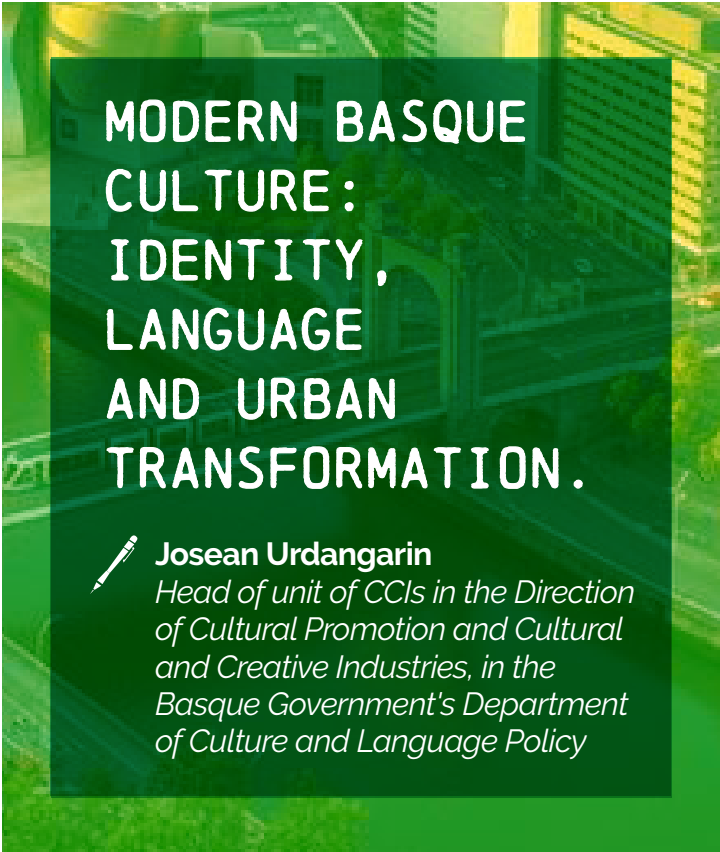
Their generosity, expertise and openness helped shape an issue in which local experience could be placed alongside research, policy reflection and perspectives from across the ENCATC community. In bringing these voices together, we hope to offer a fuller picture of the relationships, choices and conditions that sustain cultural development over time.

GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens
ENCATC Secretary General

December 2025

GiannaLia





MODERN BASQUE CULTURE: IDENTITY, LANGUAGE AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION.



Josean Urdangarin

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This brief overview aims to provide insight into the cultural and creative strategies developed in the Basque Autonomous Community over the last decades. It also briefly describes the process of urban and social transformation in one of the three capital cities, Bilbao.

Basque culture today encompasses a broad cultural ecosystem

Modern Basque culture is the result of a complex interaction between historical continuity, linguistic singularity, industrial modernization, democratic institutional development and globalization. Far from being limited to folklore or heritage, Basque culture today encompasses a broad cultural ecosystem that includes cultural heritage, the artistic creation and expressions and the cultural and creative industries. The Basque Country is a dynamic cultural region in Europe, combining a strong cultural identity with openness to innovation and internationalization.

From the perspective of international cultural policy, the Basque Plan for Culture (2004-2015) was significant not only because of its contents, but because it introduced a new model of cultural governance for a stateless nation with strong cultural autonomy. It represented a shift from isolated cultural programmes toward a comprehensive, long-term cultural strategy based on participation, evaluation, cultural rights, international projection, and the concept of culture as a strategic factor of development.



Azkuna Zentroa - Photo Wikipedia

The Plan's impact continued beyond its formal implementation period, and in 2025 the Basque Government approved the Culture 2028 Strategic Plan, as the framework for public cultural policy. The Plan seeks to place culture at the centre of public policy and social development. Its principal priorities are: culture as a public good; strengthening Euskara and Basque cultural identity; professionalization of the cultural sector; digital transformation and governance and cooperation.

The actual most significant challenges include: Globalization and competition from dominant global cultural platforms; Ensuring the vitality of the Basque language in digital environments; Generational renewal in traditional cultural sectors; Sustainable cultural financing; Attraction and retention of creative talent, and a Greater international visibility of Basque culture.

The following are some indicators of the impact of these cultural planning processes. The institutional and governance impact is reflected in the creation of the Basque Cultural Observatory (2007) and permanent shared governance institutions. The economic impact is measured by the fact that cultural and creative industries (CCIs) represent 10.25% of all companies in the Basque Country (34,791 people), accounting for approximately 4% of Basque employment. In 2022, cultural activities represented 1.98% of the Basque Country's GDP, generating a Gross Value Added of €1.713 billion.



Regarding social impact and cultural participation, 22,425 cultural activities were programmed in the Basque Country throughout 2025, representing an 8.5% increase compared to 2024. The Basque Country averaged 61 cultural activities per day, distributed throughout the territory. In 2025, almost 40% of the cultural programming was conducted in Basque, reinforcing its role as a language of creation and performance. At the same time, more than 40% of live arts activities were free, guaranteeing access to culture for diverse audiences.

In this second part we will deep on Bilbao's Urban Transformation (1990-2026): From Industrial Estuary to Metropolitan Waterfront. Bilbao's transformation was an integrated metropolitan strategy combining environmental restoration of the Nervión estuary, redevelopment of obsolete industrial and port land, transport modernization, institutional innovation, and economic restructuring.

Until the 1970s Bilbao's economy was based on steel production, shipbuilding, port logistics and heavy industry along the estuary. These industries occupied extensive riverfront sites and physically disconnected the city from its waterfront. The industrial crisis of the 1980s caused severe unemployment, environmental degradation, and abandonment of strategic urban land. The Nervión estuary was heavily polluted, and many riverside areas became obsolete industrial brownfields.

The turning point came with the Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao (1991) and the Creation of Bilbao Ría 2000 (1992). The objective was to coordinate large-scale redevelopment through land-value capture and public collaboration. The strategy followed a clear sequence: clean the estuary, move port activities, reclaim the industrial land, and build metropolitan connectivity and create a new economy identity. Bilbao shifted from an Industrial economy to a knowledge, services, culture and innovation economy. This sequence is crucial. Cultural landmarks came after institutional, environmental and infrastructural reforms had already begun.

Cultural landmarks came after institutional, environmental and infrastructural reforms had already begun.

Abandoibarra, the best-known project is the symbolic heart of the transformation. Formerly were shipyards, port facilities and railway infrastructures, progressively the area became a mixed-use district combining: culture, housing, offices, parks and public space. The waterfront redevelopment covered approximately 348,000 m² and required over €200 million of investment. Construction lasted roughly from the mid-1990s until 2011. The key projects were the Guggenheim Museum (1997), the Euskalduna Conference Centre (1999), university extension areas, three -kilometre waterfront promenade and residential and office developments. Abandoibarra demonstrated how industrial land could become a central urban district integrated with the estuary. In the centre of Bilbao, Azkuna Centre (originally known as the Alhóndiga, built between 1905 and 1909 as a wine warehouse), reopened as a modern culture and leisure centre in 2010.



Today the most important chapter in Bilbao's transformation is Zorrotzaurre, the continuation of the Bilbao Model. This project represents the continuation, rather than a rupture, of the regeneration strategy initiated in the 1990s. Historically Zorrotzaurre was an industrial peninsula occupied by factories and logistics activities, partially isolated and exposed to flood risk. Following deindustrialization, large areas became underutilized.

The masterplan designed by Zaha Hadid proposed opening the Deusto Canal completely, transforming the peninsula into an island with mixed-use urban development, public waterfront access and extensive green infrastructure. The canal opening was completed in 2018, making Zorrotzaurre physically an island. The main features are housing (5,500 to 5,600 dwellings, around half publicly protected housing), innovation districts, technology firms, creative industries, parks and civic spaces. Zorrotzaurre also will be a laboratory for renewable energies, net-zero emissions, smart grids and sustainable mobility. Next steps are the extension toward Olabeaga and Punta Zorrotza, creating a new western development corridor along the estuary.

Zorrotzaurre represents the transition from culture-led regeneration to innovation-led, climate-conscious urban development.

Zorrotzaurre is the latest expression of this same model. Whereas Abandoibarra symbolized the transition from industry to culture and services, Zorrotzaurre represents the transition from culture-led regeneration to innovation-led, climate-conscious urban development. Thus, the real continuity from 1990 to today is not architectural but territorial, connected by the strategic reappropriation of the Nervión estuary as Bilbao's central urban axis. Since the cultural point of view, this year 2026, the Museum of Fine Arts is opening its expansion designed by Norman Foster. At the same time, in the Old Town, the Euskal Museoa is redefining Basque identity with a revolutionary museum concept in Unamuno Square.

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INSIDE GREAT MINDS

JOSEAN URDANGARIN

Head of unit of CCI in the Direction of Cultural Promotion and Cultural and Creative Industries, in the Basque Government's Department of Culture and Language Policy

Interview by GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens
ENCATC Secretary General

What gives you the most pleasure in your day-to-day work?

The idea that we are developing more diverse, innovative, and forward-looking cultural and creative sectors has motivated me over the last years. Especially because the CCIs are providing effective and innovative solutions to social issues in collaboration with the citizens, and in many cases, to global, not just local, challenges. Likewise, cross-innovation and broadening horizons based on diversity are very stimulating challenges.

Are tough decisions best taken by one person or by a group?

Decision-making, in general, depends on the structure and organization of work. For decisions to be informed and well-supported, they must be integrated into work processes, and in my case, this relies on stable and well-trained teams. This means having trained individuals working as a team, collaborating with other external teams, in other partner organizations, and within diverse ecosystems. This aspect is fundamental for making difficult decisions, although ultimately, the decisions are made by those with the authority to do so.



What do you do to relax?

Family, reading, and travel are essential to me. Born in a small coastal town on the Basque Country, marine ecosystems have always fascinated me, leading me to explore the seabeds of almost every corner of the world as a diver.

Do you read management books?

I occasionally read management books, those more related to my areas of work. I believe that rigorous case studies with verifiable results are constantly improving their narrative style, making them more accessible and interesting nowadays.

Do you want to be liked or respected?

Respect and credibility are fundamental assets for working in public administrations and in their relationships with the private and mixed sectors. Furthermore, expanding collaborative networks to include people with different perspectives is clearly beneficial.

What is your personal and professional background?

My university education is a degree in Basque Philology, and from 1989 to 2002 I worked as head of Language Planning, engaged in the fields of qualitative and quantitative research and areas related to status planning for the Basque language, in the Basque Government. Thereafter, I participated in the development and implementation of cultural policies in the

Basque Country (Basque Plan for Culture), coordinating cultural institutions and sectors. Currently, my areas of activity focus on defining and promoting policies for Cultural and Creative Sectors, and comparing them internationally. Finally, I coordinate the RIS3 Creative Euskadi 2020-2030 strategies, within the Euskadi 2030 Science, Technology and Innovation Plan (PCTI 2030).

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What's your leadership style?

I believe that balancing the available information before attempting to communicate, and properly contextualizing the content for the intended audience, is essential for effective communication. Furthermore, providing reasoned feedback on results after the completion of processes and decision-making is fundamental. Perhaps a focused and proactive approach to communication best reflects my own style.

Who inspires you?

In my professional life, I have been inspired by authors such as Ramon Zallo, Pier Luigi Sacco, and Luca Dal Pozzolo. On a personal level, Fernando Pessoa and Jacques Cousteau, among others, have been sources of inspiration.

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What does success look like to you?

The progress in governance strategies in the cultural and creative sectors, with projects that achieve a social impact, makes me feel fulfilled.

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What gets you out of bed in the morning?

Except for our cat Akiko who sometimes wants to talk at night, what keeps me awake at night is the absolute lack of sensitivity towards the protection of our seas and the passivity in the face of accelerated climate change.



JOSEAN URDANGARIN

Josean Urdangarin is the head of unit of CCI in the Direction of Cultural Promotion and Cultural and Creative Industries, in the Basque Government's Department of Culture and Language Policy. The holder of a degree in Basque Philology, he worked as a manager and head of Language Planning from 1989 to 2002, engaged in the fields of qualitative and quantitative research and areas related to status planning for the Basque language. Thereafter, he became involved in the work of drafting and developing cultural policies in Euskal Herria (Basque Plan for Culture). At present, his fields of activity are related to the development of strategies for the Cultural and Creative Industries Policies in the Basque Country.



Credit Port of Bilbao

HOW BILBAO BUILT A CULTURE OF REINVENTION, FROM THE GUGGENHEIM TO TODAY'S GREEN TRANSITION



Iván Jiménez Aira

*President of the Bilbao Port
Authority*

The real 'Bilbao effect' goes beyond the museum: the city is an example of how innovative thinking, long-term strategy, and public-private collaboration can turn periods of transition into opportunity.

Bilbao is known as one of the world's greatest urban transformations, turning a declining industrial city into a global success story through a bold investment. Now, as support for the green transition comes under pressure, Bilbao is taking another bold move, betting that clean energy can power its next chapter.

Many doubted a museum could revive a collapsing industrial city.

To understand the approach, we must look at the history. In the 1980s, deindustrialisation swept across Europe. In Bilbao, it hit hard, wiping out more than 60,000 manufacturing jobs, crippling Bilbao's steelworks and shipyards, polluting the Nervión River, and pushing unemployment up to 35%. With the city in freefall, the Basque government launched one of Europe's most ambitious regeneration strategies, placing a radical new Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Gehry, in the heart of the city's decaying port region.

At the time, it seemed like an extraordinarily expensive risk. Many doubted a museum could revive a collapsing industrial city, and other cities had even rejected the Guggenheim proposal before. But the bet paid off almost immediately. The \$100 million public investment paid for itself in just six months, attracted nearly four million visitors and generated around €500 million for the local economy in its first three years, and became the catalyst for Bilbao's wider urban regeneration and economic windfall.

The museum went on to put Bilbao on the map internationally, backed by the culinary and artistic history of the Basque Country. Cities elsewhere have tried to copy the 'Guggenheim effect' or 'Bilbao effect', but almost none have matched it. So, what made this example so successful?



Credit Port of Bilbao

The simple answer is the region's entrepreneurial, forward-thinking mindset. The museum was a symbol of a broader long-term vision across three levels of government. During the 1980s decline, the Basque government, the Biscay Provincial Council, and the Bilbao City Council jointly approved the Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Bilbao, a decades-long regeneration effort spanning infrastructure, transport, culture, and the environment. By the time the Guggenheim even opened, Bilbao had introduced new subway and tram systems and committed approximately 1 billion euros to cleaning up the Nervión River.

It was never just an investment in a building.

The building's structure was also cleverly rooted in the local culture. The regional expertise in shipbuilding meant its steel shapes posed little challenge compared with the complex curves of ship parts. The technology and infrastructure needed were already there, a legacy of the steel industry. The building used local materials: iron ore from the neighbouring mountains supplied the steel. Effectively, the industry that collapsed found a second life inside the museum.

What made the plan unique was that it provided an actual coordinated mechanism for delivery. Public, private, and social actors came together around a shared strategy and financing that looked past the immediate cost toward long-term economic stability and results. The different levels of government established Bilbao Ría 2000, a joint regeneration agency responsible for coordinating land use, infrastructure and investment across the metropolitan area.

It was never just an investment in a building. When asked why the Basque Government had committed so much public money to the project, the finance minister said the choice was between three more kilometres of highway or "a project that had the potential of changing the image of our country."

The real legacy of Bilbao's transformation is a way of governing change. Faced with challenges or periods of transition, the region has consistently sought to get ahead of change rather than be caught by it. This matters today because Europe faces another defining transition: the shift to clean energy. Once again, the Basque Country is treating this necessary shift as an opportunity to reinvent its economy.

Elsewhere, decarbonisation is facing pushback over fears it will hollow out industry, undercut competitiveness and cost too much, particularly for green hydrogen. But the Basque Country has made another bold bet. As it did in the 1990s, it has turned challenge into opportunity, building on its industrial strengths to develop a green hydrogen economy that keeps its heavy industry competitive while significantly cutting emissions.

The real legacy of Bilbao's transformation is a way of governing change.



Once again, collaboration between public, private and social actors is what makes it work. The Basque Hydrogen Corridor brings together 78 organisations, including eight public institutions, heavy industry, energy companies, start-ups and universities. Its ambition is to decarbonise the entire hydrogen value chain, from production to distribution, while accelerating innovation through shared expertise and coordinated investment.

This approach is already producing solutions that reach beyond the region. Basque start-up H2SITE - a spin-off from Tecnalia, the Basque Country's largest private research centre - in this network has developed technology, now exported internationally, that enables hydrogen to be produced on-site at industrial scale, reducing one of the sector's biggest challenges: transportation. In Italy, H2SITE has partnered with SNAM, one of Europe's largest gas infrastructure operators, to separate hydrogen from natural gas within existing pipeline

**Collaboration
between public,
private and social
actors is what
makes it work.**



networks, proof that solutions developed for Bizkaia's industrial base can scale to other industrial regions across Europe.

The spine of this ecosystem is the Port of Bilbao. Agreements with ports in Germany and the Netherlands, position Bilbao as an export corridor, funnelling hydrogen towards Northern Europe's growing demand. Collaboration with energy company Petronor has secured investment and widened opportunities. In fact, Petronor is currently building a renewable hydrogen electrolyser at the port, capable of producing 2,000mt of e-fuels annually for use in shipping from 2027. As a multi-molecule port - capable of handling multiple low-carbon fuels and energy carriers - Bilbao is becoming a producer and distributor of alternatives alongside hydrogen, including synthetic fuels such as e-methanol and e-kerosene.

Petronor has also partnered with O.C.O Technology to launch the EU's first Accelerated Carbonation Technology plant at the port. It is the first site in Europe to convert captured CO₂ and industrial waste into construction aggregates at scale, turning waste fly ash into limestone rather than sending it to landfill.

The port is also a clear example of the green transformation beyond heavy industry. It is sailing well ahead of EU targets, set to become the first port in the Atlantic arc to become fully electrified by 2027. This is alongside investment in shore power and renewable generation from solar and wind, so ships can cut engines at berth and recharge, rather than burning up fossil fuels. As well as a production site, the Port of Bilbao is an energy hub, coordinating the generation, storage.

This has practical benefits beyond emissions too. European cruise trends are shifting, with customers increasingly seeking more sustainable, culture-centred experiences, and ports offering shore power are becoming more attractive stops as a result. Passenger traffic at Bilbao rose by 20% last year, outpacing many of Europe's holiday ports. Italy's, for comparison, grew closer to 4-5%.

The port also encourages sustainable innovation and environmental protection. It operates the Bilbao Port Innovation and Research Centre to support green start-ups, while a 21-station environmental monitoring network and the Port of Bilbao Biomonitoring Plan, delivered in partnership with the University of the Basque Country, provide scientific oversight to protect and enhance marine biodiversity.

The impact extends well beyond economics. The green transition is reinforcing a culture of innovation, sustainability and, perhaps most importantly, collaboration. That collective approach may be one of the Basque Country's greatest competitive advantages, and one that other regions would benefit from adopting.

There is clear continuity between Bilbao's reinvention in the 1990s and its response to today's energy transition. The transformation was never really about a building. It was about a region that learned, decades ago, to plan collaboratively and think long term, and to continue doing it. This is what's visible again now, in the port and across the Basque regions' industries.

None of this happened by accident, and none of it happened quickly. Three decades separate the Strategic Plan from today's hydrogen corridor, and the throughline between them is not patience alone but a habit of thinking ahead of the problem rather than reacting to it once it arrives.

The green transition is reinforcing a culture of innovation, sustainability and, perhaps most importantly, collaboration.

For other European regions navigating their own transitions, Bilbao offers a compelling blueprint: coordinate early, invest consistently, build on existing strengths, and turn disruption into a catalyst for renewal.



IVÁN JIMÉNEZ AIRA

Iván Jiménez Aira is President of the Bilbao Port Authority, where he oversees the Port of Bilbao's strategy to advance decarbonisation, digitalisation and industrial competitiveness. Previously, he spent more than two decades leading innovation and internationalisation initiatives, including a long tenure as Director of Bizkaia Talent, where he helped establish the Basque Country as a leading destination for global talent, building strategic partnerships with more than 700 organisations and a network of over 23,000 professionals across 120 countries. He holds degrees from the University of Deusto and ESADE, and has completed executive programmes at MIT.



GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO BEYOND THE BILBAO EFFECT

Few museums have so completely transformed the relationship between a cultural institution and the city that surrounds it as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Conceived through an extraordinary partnership between the Basque Institutions and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, the Museum opened its doors in October 1997 and rapidly became one of the most recognizable landmarks of contemporary architecture and culture. Designed by US architect Frank Gehry, the building—a vast sculptural composition of titanium, limestone, and glass—altered not only Bilbao's skyline but international perceptions of what a museum might represent within a city.

More than a spectacular building, however, the Museum emerged as a new cultural force within Bilbao: an institution whose arrival contributed decisively to the city's urban, economic, and social regeneration. The phenomenon became so influential that the expression "Bilbao effect" entered the international vocabulary of cultural policy and urban development. Yet nearly three decades later, the more interesting question may no longer be how a museum can transform a city, but how an institution created amid such extraordinary expectations continues to redefine its purpose once the moment of transformation has passed.

The Museum's story remains inseparable from the story of Bilbao itself. It did not simply occupy a place in the city; it helped to redefine it. At the same time, it developed within an international constellation of Guggenheim museums that includes the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, and the projected Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. The network enables its institutions to share collections, projects, resources, and expertise, creating a model in which cultural exchange operates across institutional and geographical boundaries.

FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026
Photo: Erika Ede

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Bilbao therefore occupies an intriguing position between international network and local institution. Its participation in the Guggenheim constellation gives it access to an extensive Permanent Collection encompassing works across the Guggenheim collections, including the Museum's own holdings, while its artistic program combines presentations from that collection with temporary exhibitions. Together, they are intended to provide a broad and continually evolving perspective on modern and contemporary art.

This dual identity—simultaneously Basque and international—remains fundamental to understanding the institution. It also raises questions familiar to museums throughout the world: how can a globally connected institution retain a meaningful relationship with its immediate cultural environment? How can international circulation coexist with local responsibility? And how can the advantages of scale and network be translated into distinctive experiences for audiences?

At the heart of the Museum lies a commitment to modern and contemporary art and to the transformative possibilities of cultural experience. Art becomes a space of encounter: between past and present, artists and audiences, individual experience and collective reflection. But in Bilbao, that encounter is inseparable from architecture.

Gehry's building is not simply the Museum's container; it is one of its principal actors. Exhibition galleries—some orthogonal, others dramatically irregular—are organized around the monumental central Atrium, while the relationship between the building's sculptural forms, the Nervión estuary, and the surrounding city continually shifts as visitors move through and around it. The Museum itself describes the relationship between art and architecture as a mutually enriching dialogue. This is perhaps one of Bilbao's most enduring contributions to contemporary museum culture: the proposition that architecture can actively shape the interpretation and experience of art rather than simply provide its setting.

Yet the international visibility of the architecture can also obscure another dimension of the institution. Behind Gehry's extraordinary silhouette lies an increasingly complex museum organization concerned with governance, collections, research, education, audiences, accessibility, environmental responsibility, and institutional accountability.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Foundation is governed through a Board of Trustees and an Executive Committee, while the Museum's operations extend across multiple areas of activity. Its institutional reporting encompasses the artistic and educational program, visitor figures, economic impact, membership, and economic-financial information. Such structures matter because contemporary museums are increasingly evaluated not only through exhibitions and collections, but through the ways in which they exercise stewardship, demonstrate accountability, and articulate their value to society.

The Museum places transparency, ethical conduct, and responsible management within this wider institutional framework. Its stated mission extends beyond preserving and exhibiting cultural heritage to researching works of art, creating meaning around them, and providing access and education to broad and diverse audiences. Culture, in this formulation, is not simply something presented to the public; it becomes part of a social responsibility.

That ambition is particularly visible in the Museum's approach to accessibility. Recognizing that visitors encounter museums differently according to language, cultural background, education, age, disability, and other circumstances, the institution developed a global accessibility management system. In 2003, it became the first museum in the world to obtain certification under the UNE 170.001-2 accessibility standard. Measures have ranged from Braille floorplans and sign-language tours to multilingual services, adapted information points, staff training, improved signage, and the removal of architectural barriers.

The significance of such measures goes beyond technical accessibility. They suggest a broader evolution in museum thinking: from providing access to a building toward considering the diversity of ways in which people encounter, interpret, and participate in culture.

Innovation is approached with a similarly expansive definition. For the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, innovation is not synonymous with technology. It extends to curatorial research, conservation, education, audience development, institutional partnerships, and management. The Museum explicitly links innovation to the need to rethink how art can remain meaningful to increasingly diverse and discerning audiences and how education can be approached through new and multidisciplinary perspectives.

This is an important distinction. For museums, innovation is often most productive when it becomes less visible—not a technological spectacle in itself, but a capacity to question established practices, reconsider relationships with audiences, and adapt institutional structures to changing cultural expectations.

Environmental sustainability has likewise moved from the periphery of museum management toward its centre. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao implemented an environmental management system based on ISO 14001 and received certification in 2004. Its approach encompasses energy and resource efficiency, recycling, waste management, environmental auditing, staff training, and efforts to reduce the environmental consequences of museum operations.

These commitments situate Bilbao within a much wider transformation taking place across the museum sector. Institutions that were once primarily assessed through the quality of their collections, exhibitions, and scholarship are increasingly being asked to consider the environmental and social consequences of how culture is produced, transported, displayed, and experienced.

The Museum's social ambition similarly extends beyond its galleries. Its Volunteer Program, for example, connects members with educational and community activity, including introductory talks and workshops on modern and contemporary art in cultural centres, homes for older people, and contexts involving groups at risk of social exclusion. Here, cultural participation moves outward from the museum building and into the social fabric around it.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao therefore offers a compelling case study of the contemporary museum as a multidimensional institution. Its significance cannot be reduced to the global fame of its architecture, nor even to the art it presents. Its identity emerges at the intersection of multiple forces: art and architecture, collections and audiences, international ambition and local responsibility, innovation and stewardship, cultural excellence and public service.

This may ultimately be the more enduring legacy of Bilbao.

The Museum demonstrated spectacularly in 1997 that a cultural institution could participate in transforming the identity and trajectory of a city. Nearly three decades later, its continuing relevance lies in a more complex proposition: that transformation is not a single architectural or urban event, but an ongoing institutional process.

Museums themselves must continue to change.

They must reconsider whom they serve, how they operate, how accessible they are, how responsibly they use resources, how they connect local communities with international cultural conversations, and how artistic experience can remain meaningful within rapidly changing societies.

Seen from this perspective, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is no longer simply a monument to the transformative power of architecture, or a celebrated destination for modern and contemporary art. It is an evolving cultural platform—and, perhaps more importantly, an ongoing experiment in what a museum can be.

Its enduring significance lies precisely in its ability to bring together worlds too often considered separately: art and society, architecture and institution, global networks and local communities, cultural ambition and civic responsibility.

The "Bilbao effect" changed the international conversation about museums and cities. The question now is what comes after it.

INTERVIEW WITH

GOIZANE MENDIA

Sustainability Officer at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Interview by GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens



FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026 - Photo: Erika Ede

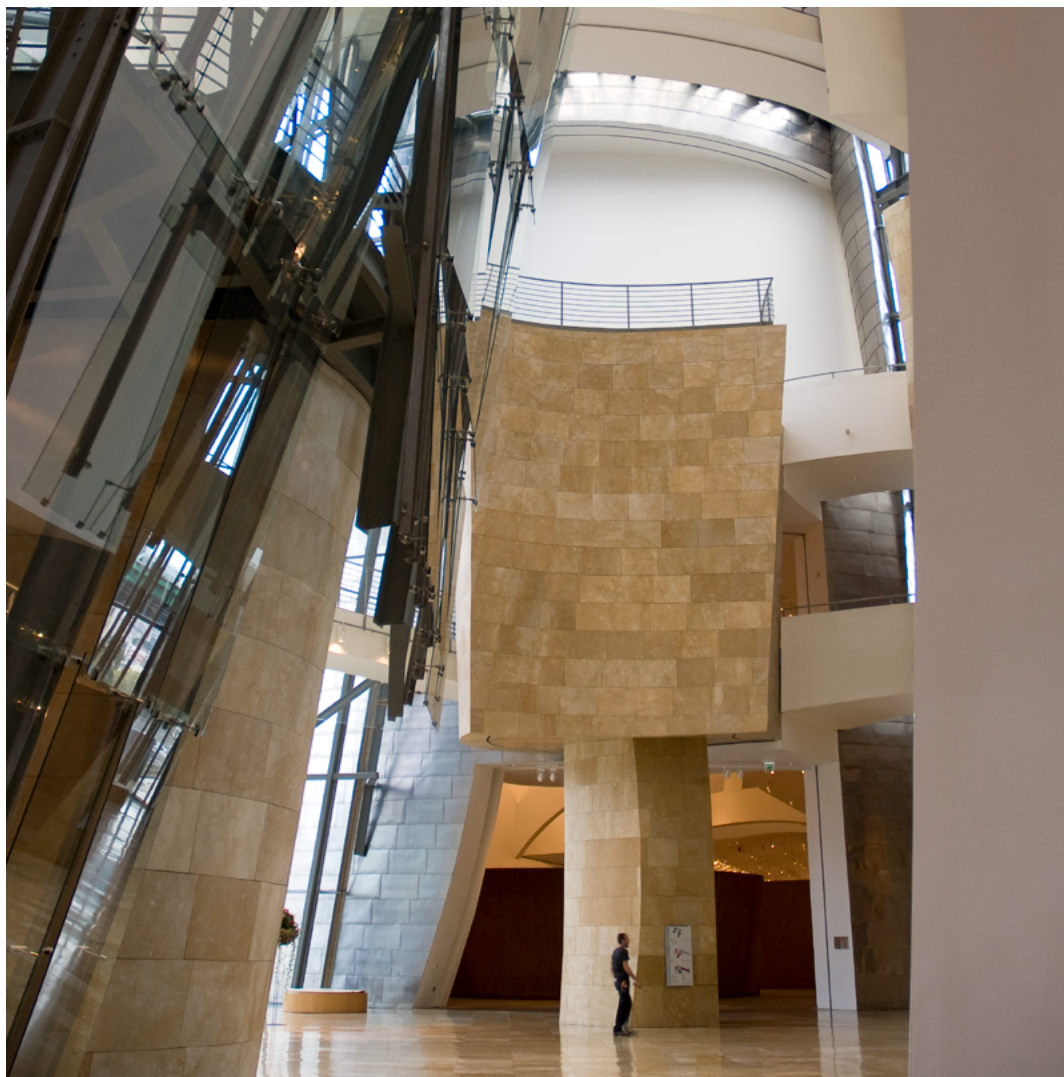
Sustainability has become a strategic priority for many cultural organisations, yet every institution defines it differently. How does the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao understand sustainability, and how is this vision embedded in the museum's overall mission, governance, and long-term strategy?

At the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, sustainability is an integral part of how the Museum operates, makes decisions, and fulfils its mission. While reducing environmental impact remains a priority, sustainability also means ensuring that the Museum can continue creating cultural, social, and educational value over the long term.

This approach has evolved over more than twenty years. Since 2004, the Museum has operated under an ISO 14001-certified environmental management system, embedding environmental considerations into its daily operations. Building on this experience, in

2021 the Museum developed an Environmental Sustainability Strategic Framework aligned with its corporate strategy, reinforcing sustainability as a long-term institutional priority.

As a cultural institution, we see sustainability as supporting our core mission. Operating within an iconic building requires constant adaptation, balancing environmental responsibility with the care of collections, the visitor experience, and the Museum's operational needs.



FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026 - Photo: Erika Ede

This vision is put into practice through a clear institutional framework, Board-level commitment, a cross-functional organisational structure, and annual action planning. GUZero, our Green Team, brings together colleagues from across the organisation to coordinate the Museum's environmental sustainability agenda, while other working groups contribute to priorities such as equality, staff well-being, and the promotion of the Basque language. Together, these structures provide continuity, enable departments to contribute, and make sustainability part of the Museum's everyday work. Since 2025, a dedicated Sustainability Officer position, made possible through the Getty Global Art & Sustainability Fellows programme, has further strengthened coordination and long-term development.



FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026 - Photo: Erika Ede

The Museum has implemented a range of environmental and operational initiatives over recent years. Which measures have had the greatest impact—not only in reducing the museum's environmental footprint but also in transforming organisational culture and decision-making?

The greatest impact has come from combining technical improvements with changes in museum practice and the way the organisation works. Measures such as LED lighting, solar panels, and certified renewable electricity have significantly improved energy efficiency and reduced operational emissions.

We have also integrated sustainability into the Museum's core activities. This has included revising environmental parameters for collection care, expanding the use of reusable and rental packaging, promoting virtual couriers and lower-impact transport, increasing the reuse of exhibition materials, and working with suppliers to incorporate environmental and social criteria into procurement. Rather than relying on a single initiative, progress has come from many complementary actions across different areas of the Museum.

The biggest transformation, however, has been organisational rather than technical. Sustainability is no longer considered a separate environmental issue; it now informs everyday planning and decision-making. Environmental considerations are now discussed from the earliest stages of projects, alongside conservation requirements, operational needs, visitor experience, and budget. This has strengthened collaboration across departments, helped identify practical solutions, and made sustainability part of everyday work.



FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026 - Photo: Erika Ede

Museums increasingly face the challenge of balancing ambitious sustainability goals with the practical realities of preserving collections, hosting exhibitions, and welcoming large numbers of visitors. How does the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao navigate these potential tensions, and what have been the most important lessons learned?

Museums constantly balance competing objectives. We are expected to preserve collections, create ambitious exhibitions, welcome diverse audiences, and at the same time reduce our environmental impact. Rather than treating these as competing priorities, we see sustainability as a way of making better-informed decisions across all of them.

This means integrating environmental considerations from the earliest stages of planning, alongside conservation requirements, curatorial ambitions, operational needs, visitor experience, and budget. Instead of fixed solutions, we assess each project individually, looking for opportunities to reduce impacts while fulfilling our mission.

Perhaps the most important lesson has been that sustainability is rarely about finding a single perfect solution or choosing between environmental responsibility and cultural ambition. More often, it is about bringing different perspectives together to find better solutions. The best outcomes come from collaboration, flexibility, and a willingness to question established practices rather than from any single technical measure.

Beyond environmental sustainability, cultural institutions are also expected to contribute to social and economic sustainability. How does the museum engage with local communities, artists, partners, and public authorities to create long-term value for the region, and how do these collaborations shape your sustainability agenda?

For us, sustainability is not only about reducing environmental impacts, but also about creating lasting cultural, social, and economic value.

This commitment is reflected in our cultural and educational programme, where sustainability increasingly informs exhibitions, public programmes, and learning initiatives. A recent example is Arts of the Earth, which explores artistic perspectives on ecology, natural systems, and our relationship with the environment, bringing artists, audiences, and researchers into dialogue.

Collaboration is central to the way we work. We work closely with public authorities, educational and research institutions, cultural organisations, community groups, Corporate Members, and suppliers to develop projects, exchange knowledge, and address shared challenges. These relationships bring different perspectives and expertise, strengthening our connection with the region while improving our practice.

Internationally, networks such as the Gallery Climate Coalition, the Getty Global Art & Sustainability Fellows programme, and the Culture for the Planet Alliance enable us to learn from peers, share our own experience, and contribute to the development of more sustainable museum practices. These collaborations do not simply support our sustainability agenda; they continually inform and shape it.



FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026 - Photo: Erika Ede

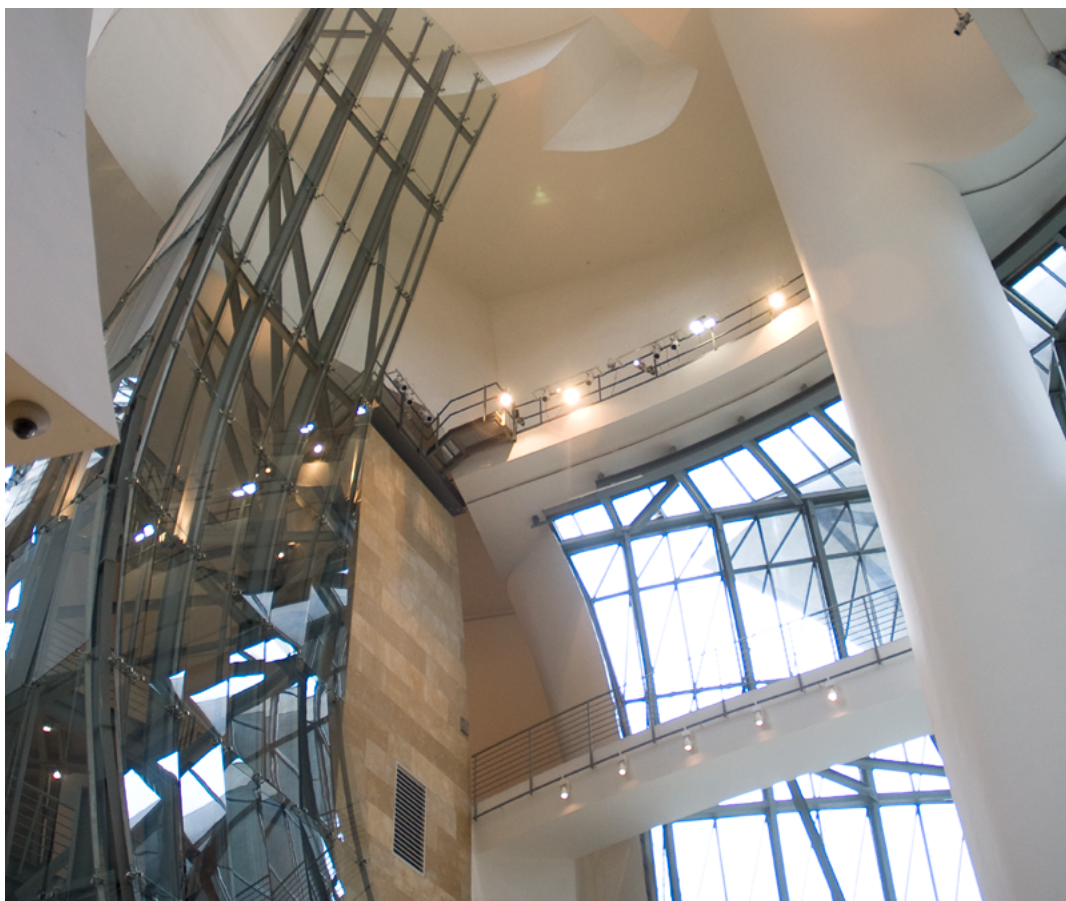
Many museums are looking to measure the impact of their sustainability efforts more systematically. What indicators or evaluation methods does the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao use to assess progress, and how does this evidence inform future decision-making and accountability?

Measurement is essential to assessing the impact of our sustainability efforts. Our annual Sustainability Action Plans include clear objectives, responsibilities, indicators, and regular monitoring, allowing us to track progress and refine priorities over time.

Since 2019, the Museum has measured and publicly disclosed its carbon footprint, progressively expanding the analysis to cover all three emission scopes and provide a more complete picture of its environmental impacts. This evidence helps us identify where the greatest impacts occur, assess the effectiveness of our actions, and prioritise future efforts.

Alongside carbon accounting, we are developing indicators that reflect the specific realities of museum practice, including circularity, logistics, and resource efficiency. Independent certification through ISO 14001, ISO 20121, and ISO 14064 provides additional transparency and external verification.

Some aspects of museum practice, however, are more difficult to quantify. Cultural and social value cannot always be captured through conventional indicators, but they are no less important. Measurement provides a foundation for accountability, learning, and better-informed decisions, while recognising that not every meaningful outcome can be expressed in numbers alone.



FMGB, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2026 - Photo: Erika Ede

Many of our readers work in museums and cultural organisations with far fewer financial and organisational resources than the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Based on your experience, what advice would you offer to institutions that want to make sustainability a core part of their strategy? Which actions can generate meaningful change regardless of an organisation's size or budget?

The most important step is simply to begin. Sustainability does not start with large budgets or sophisticated tools, but by bringing people together and creating space to discuss the organisation's impacts, priorities, and opportunities.

From there, identify realistic priorities and start measuring what is feasible. Simple indicators, such as energy use, travel, waste, or materials, can provide valuable insights and help guide future decisions.

Focus on the actions within your control: reuse materials, question established practices, collaborate locally, and learn from others. There is no single model for a more sustainable museum, and the best solutions are often those that respond to each institution's own context.

Meaningful change rarely comes from one major initiative. It is the result of many small, consistent decisions that, over time, become part of the organisation's culture.



GOIZANE MENDIA

Goizane Mendia is Sustainability Officer at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, where she works on integrating environmental sustainability across institutional practice as part of the Getty Global Art & Sustainability Fellows program.

She holds a Master's degree in Sustainability Leadership and Change Management from the University of the Basque Country (EHU) and brings over a decade of experience across international cultural institutions, including sustainability-focused research, in collaboration with the Swiss National Museum and Gordailua, the Heritage Collections Centre of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa.

Her work focuses on embedding sustainability into organisational processes, coordinating the Green Team of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. She fosters dialogue across disciplines and teams, and works with indicators and reporting frameworks, ensuring their application in institutional practice. She contributes to integrating environmental criteria into institutional strategies and supports alignment with evolving standards and policies across the organisation.

INTERVIEW WITH

ASIER ABAUNZA

Councillor for Urban Planning, Strategic Projects and Public Space

Interview by Cristina Ortega Nuere



Bilbao's urban transformation has become a global reference point. Today, however, cities face new challenges related to climate change, social inclusion and resilience. How is Bilbao redefining its urban development model to respond to these challenges, and what role does sustainability play in this new chapter?

On the one hand, the 2022 Master Plan (PGOU), which sets out the roadmap for the city over the next twenty to thirty years, is based on the same premise as the 1995 plan: not to consume greenfield land for the new developments that are proposed. In other words, all new construction is carried out through the redevelopment of land that has already been previously used.

In addition, efforts are being made to consolidate, strengthen and expand Bilbao's Green Belt, as well as to create new green spaces within the city's urban fabric and also in the areas where new developments are being undertaken.

Particularly noteworthy among these is the Zorrotzaurre area. This island serves as a demonstrator of climate change adaptation measures, including systems and interventions for flood protection, the creation of new green, pedestrian and public spaces, the construction of highly energy-efficient buildings, and the promotion of renewable energy sources. This same approach is also being followed in the city's other neighbourhoods, starting from the challenging reality that those developed in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s lacked public open spaces and green areas; and, given their high density, creating such spaces is a difficult task.

Culture has been central to Bilbao's international identity and regeneration. How do you see the relationship between cultural institutions, such as the Guggenheim Museum, and the city's broader sustainability objectives? In what ways can culture contribute to creating a more liveable, inclusive and environmentally responsible city?

The urban transformation undertaken in Bilbao also meant placing culture at the heart of these urban transformation policies. The underlying idea was that culture is an investment that generates other forms of economic activity and dynamics within the city. If Bilbao is recognised as a benchmark and a leading city for hosting professional events and conferences, it is precisely because it offers a broad, diverse and attractive cultural programme that helps draw this type of professional event to our city. From this perspective, public-private collaboration with the main stakeholders in the cultural sector has been key to strengthening this dynamic, and we have developed a range of facilities that have helped reinforce the city's cultural network.

Particularly noteworthy is Bilbao Arte, for its role in promoting local artists and hosting artist residencies, as well as Azkuna Zentroa, which has played a major role in promoting contemporary and modern art through the wide range of activities it delivers. In addition, within the framework of this public-private collaboration, support has been provided to other production centres and cultural projects such as Harrobia Eskena and Pabellón 6, as well as to many other initiatives in which the City Council works together with different artistic sectors to promote cultural activities. Some of these, such as those already mentioned, are permanent initiatives, but I would also like to highlight the importance of annual festivals and events that have become firmly established in Bilbao's cultural scene, including short film festivals, fantasy film festivals, mountain film festivals, Kalealdia, the international street theatre and performing arts festival, and many other festivals and activities promoted by the City Council to bring culture closer to citizens and to make Bilbao an attractive city from a cultural perspective as well.



Public space is increasingly recognised as a key component of sustainable urban development. What principles guide Bilbao's approach to designing and managing public spaces that are not only environmentally sustainable but also foster social cohesion, accessibility and quality of life?

We began almost at the same time as the major urban transformation processes by creating what we call 'Corazones de barrio' (*Neighbourhood Hearts*) —a strategy aimed at strengthening public spaces across all the city's neighbourhoods in order to encourage economic, social and cultural activities in the public realm. To achieve this, a number of avenues and streets were transformed into pedestrian or semi-pedestrian environments, fostering commercial corridors, public squares capable of hosting social and cultural events and activities, and the creation of new green spaces close to residential areas.

We also promoted the development of pedestrian corridors linking these 'Corazones de barrio'. At the same time, through the installation of mechanical vertical transport systems, including lifts, we improved accessibility throughout the city and enhanced these pedestrian routes across all neighbourhoods. In this way, we have been able to strengthen connections between all parts of the city through a network of pedestrian itineraries, while creating, in each neighbourhood, an appropriate public space where all

kinds of social and cultural events and activities can take place, helping to reinforce the identity of each area and generate activity within it.

The design of these spaces must therefore strike a balance between creating new green areas and providing hard-surfaced public squares where markets, cultural events, local



festivals, sporting activities and many other events can be held. The design of these spaces must therefore accommodate the full range of uses required of these 'Corazones de barrio', making the best possible use of the limited space available.

Many of today's urban challenges cannot be addressed by public authorities alone. How does the City Council collaborate with cultural institutions, universities,

businesses and civil society to develop and implement sustainability initiatives? Are there governance models or partnerships that you believe have been particularly successful?

The Bilbao City Council regularly collaborates with a wide range of social organisations and companies of all kinds in the development of its policies and the implementation of its urban transformation processes. Thanks to this public-private collaboration, it has been possible to deliver a large proportion of the projects that have been implemented in our city.

This collaboration includes organisations working to improve participatory governance and sustainability, such as UNESCO Etxea and the Secretariat of the United Nations Local2030 Coalition, which is headquartered in Bilbao.



It also extends to organisations more closely linked to the third sector and social cohesion, with which we promote a wide variety of initiatives. We also work alongside other public institutions, including the Basque Government, the Provincial Council of Bizkaia, the Basque Energy Agency (EVE), and the Spanish Government, to advance regeneration and urban transformation projects.

In addition, many smaller-scale projects involve both businesses and local organisations in initiatives that are more closely connected to neighbourhoods and communities. Likewise, numerous events have been delivered with the sponsorship of different companies, including, for example, reforestation initiatives in our urban parks and along the Green Belt.

Urban regeneration projects have often been assessed through their economic impact, particularly in terms of tourism and investment. Today, sustainability calls for a broader understanding of success. What indicators does Bilbao use to evaluate whether its urban policies are contributing to environmental resilience, social equity and citizens' well-being?

The PGOU includes a series of indicators that allow us to ensure that we are meeting the objectives set at the city-wide level. In addition, as part of its Governance and Transparency policy, Bilbao City Council has various indicators—through its Observatory—that assess both municipal policies and citizens' perception of the public policies being implemented.

This Observatory, which has been operating for a considerable period of time, allows us to track the evolution of these public policies over time and understand how citizens' perceptions of these policies are changing.

Bilbao continues to inspire cities around the world. Looking ahead, what do you consider to be the most important lesson from Bilbao's experience for cities seeking to integrate sustainability into their urban development strategies? If you were advising policymakers elsewhere, what would you encourage them to prioritise?

Both for the implementation of sustainability-related policies and for any initiative aimed at the urban transformation of a city, I believe that the two main ideas are, firstly, to be ambitious regarding the projects that are intended or desired to be implemented; but, at the same time, and equally importantly, secondly, to be realistic about the measures that the municipality is capable of implementing within its own boundaries.

In many cases, we encounter numerous physical, legal and regulatory obstacles to the implementation of certain measures which, although they may be positive for the city as a whole, ultimately cannot be brought into practice. Therefore, it is important to maintain this dual perspective: on the one hand, an ambitious approach in terms of the objectives to be achieved; and, on the other hand, keeping our feet firmly on the ground regarding what is actually possible to do.



ASIER ABAUNZA

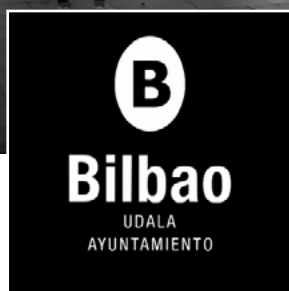
As a Councillor of the Bilbao City Council, Asier has since 2007 developed a career focused on improving the city through urban planning, mobility, the planning and management of public works and services, and the management of public space, promoting policies that strengthen a sustainable, balanced, and innovative urban model. His training as an Agricultural Engineer has enabled him to address the challenges of urban transformation with a technical, cross-cutting, and long-term vision. He has actively participated in the transformation and urban regeneration of Bilbao, and has shared the city's experience in international specialized forums, explaining the processes that have guided its recent evolution, including general planning and the recovery of the estuary as a driver of change. He has also held responsibilities on various Boards of Administration, including those of the Artxanda Funicular, Bilbao Ria 2000, SURBISA, Municipal Housing Agency, MercaBilbao, BioArtigas, and Bilbao Metropoli 30, contributing to the coordination of strategic services and facilities for the city. His work is guided by a commitment to a sustainable, balanced, and inclusive Bilbao, always focused on improving urban quality of life and maintaining the city's role as an international benchmark in urban transformation and planning.



CRISTINA ORTEGA NUERE

Cristina Ortega Nuere has been Chief Executive Officer of the World Leisure Organization since 2016 and combines this role with teaching at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. She holds a PhD in Leisure and Human Development and a Master's degree in Leisure Management. She graduated from the University of Deusto and completed further studies in London at Middlesex and Westminster University. With over two decades of academic and research experience, she has led more than 50 research projects, published extensively, and served as editor-in-chief of several scientific journals. She was President of ENCATC for four years and chaired its Policy Group Monitors of Culture, involving over 40 cultural observatories worldwide. A specialist in cultural policy and evaluation, she has been a jury member for the European Capitals of Culture and contributed to cultural governance in the Basque Country. She is also the author of a key reference book on cultural observatories and regularly speaks at international conferences.





EDIFICIO LA PERRERA

La Perrera is a municipal facility managed by the Youth and Sports Department of Bilbao City Council and serves as the flagship hub of the Bilbao Gazte STEAM strategy. Through this space, the Youth Department promotes programmes, activities and opportunities aimed at fostering innovation, creativity and the active participation of young people in the city.

The story of Edificio La Perrera begins in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1922, architects Adolfo Gil Lezama and Pedro Ispizua designed a highly specialised building in the Basurto district to address a specific urban need: the safe storage of flammable and hazardous materials. It was conceived as an essential piece of municipal infrastructure, protecting the city from the risks associated with Bilbao's rapidly expanding industrial activity.

As Bilbao evolved, so too did the life of the building.

Its architecture clearly reflects this original purpose. The building was organised as a system of compartmentalised cells, reinforced with concrete and fitted with heavy metal doors designed to contain and isolate potential accidents. Every structural element prioritised safety, separation and resilience, making La Perrera a highly functional industrial facility rather than a conventional civic building.

As Bilbao evolved, so too did the life of the building. Over the decades, La Perrera assumed a succession of very different roles, serving as a municipal dog pound, an infectious diseases centre and, later, a general storage facility. These successive transformations mirror the wider social and urban development of the city, demonstrating

how public infrastructure has continually adapted to changing civic needs.

Today, La Perrera has entered a new chapter as a vibrant centre for creativity, learning and participation. The facility is managed and promoted by the Youth and Sports Department of Bilbao City Council, which has transformed the building into a public space dedicated to young people, innovation and community engagement. While continuing to host artists, cultural organisations and collaborative initiatives, La Perrera has also become a key municipal resource where culture, education, technology and social participation intersect.

Throughout the academic year, the centre offers an extensive programme of free activities for young people aged between 12 and 30. The programme is structured around four main areas inspired by the STEAM approach: arts, technology, sustainability and critical thinking. Within these themes, participants can take part in a wide range of practical and creative workshops, including robotics, the design and construction of an electric vehicle, philosophical practice sessions exploring contemporary social issues, and upcycling projects that encourage environmentally responsible design and creative reuse of materials.

Alongside these programmed activities, La Perrera actively promotes autonomous learning and personal initiative. Two-hour induction workshops provide young people with the skills required to independently use the centre's specialist equipment and creative facilities, including 3D printers, laser and vinyl cutters, sewing machines, audiovisual production equipment and ceramic workshops. By enabling young people to confidently access these resources, the centre supports experimentation, collaborative making and the development of self-directed creative projects.

Support for youth-led initiatives extends beyond access to facilities. Through the *Konekta Ideiak* programme, the centre regularly launches open calls for innovative projects, offering financial support alongside professional mentoring. Each year, one

Today, La Perrera has entered a new chapter as a vibrant centre for creativity, learning and participation.



or two selected projects receive tailored guidance throughout their development, helping transform ideas into viable social, cultural or creative initiatives. Young people's participation in shaping local youth policies is further encouraged through *Gazte Panela*, a space for reflection, dialogue and the co-creation of proposals and initiatives in which young people from Bilbao work alongside Bilbao City Council to improve the municipality's response to the needs and aspirations of its younger population.



La Perrera also provides a range of free public resources that reinforce its role as an accessible community hub. These include a municipal library, a digital access point, GAZ – Youth Emancipation Support Service, which provides information on housing, employment, education and training opportunities, financial support, mobility programmes and other practical matters associated with emancipation and a series of flexible multi-purpose spaces available for young people to study, meet, collaborate and develop their own initiatives.



At its core, La Perrera functions as a platform for sustainable cultural and social development. By combining accessible infrastructure, technical training, creative production, youth participation and community collaboration, it promotes innovation while strengthening social inclusion, local identity and environmental responsibility. Its interdisciplinary model encourages dialogue between different disciplines, communities and forms of knowledge, contributing to a more democratic and participatory cultural ecosystem.

In this way, La Perrera stands as a compelling example of how historic public infrastructure can be reimagined for contemporary urban life. Once designed for containment and control, it has been transformed into an open environment for creativity, exchange and collective imagination, reinforcing Bilbao's commitment to youth empowerment, sustainable innovation and inclusive cultural development.

**Once
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INTERVIEW WITH IZASKUN MURO FRÍAS

Deputy Director, Youth and Sports Area, Bilbao City Council

Interview by GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens



La Perrera has become one of the most innovative spaces for young people in Bilbao. What was the original vision behind the project and how has it evolved since opening?

La Perrera was created as a youth innovation lab: a space designed for young people but, above all, built together with them, listening to their interests, concerns and aspirations. From the very beginning, it was conceived as an open place where people could learn, experiment, share knowledge and develop their own projects. Since its opening, the project has evolved and strengthened thanks to the active participation of hundreds of young people, partner organisations and local stakeholders. This experience has enabled us to continuously adapt both our programmes and facilities to the changing needs and interests of young people, making La Perrera a hub for creativity, innovation and participation in Bilbao.



How does La Perrera encourage creativity, entrepreneurship and collaboration among Bilbao's younger generations? Can you share some inspiring success stories?

La Perrera promotes creativity, entrepreneurship and youth collaboration through initiatives such as KONEKTA IDEIAK, a programme that helps young people transform their ideas into projects with social, cultural or technological impact. Through training, experimentation and mentoring, participants develop innovative proposals that often take shape as public exhibitions and installations. Calls such as Green Glam, Green Sormena and ICC's + AI have enabled young creators to showcase their work, expand their professional networks and strengthen their presence within Bilbao's cultural and creative ecosystem.

What role does La Perrera play in shaping the future of the city and attracting young talent?

La Perrera contributes to Bilbao's future by providing spaces based on trust, dialogue and participation, where young people become active protagonists in the city's transformation. It also promotes projects and activities that encourage STEAM vocations and skills (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), supporting the development of young talent and helping connect it with the challenges of the future.

What kinds of cultural, educational and social initiatives can visitors and residents expect throughout the year?

In addition to programmes led by GAZ Bilbao, the municipal youth emancipation support service, whose workshops help young people in their personal, academic and professional development, La Perrera hosts a wide range of cultural, educational and technological initiatives throughout the year. These include flagship events such as the World Robot Olympiad (WRO) and the European Robotics Week, as well as exhibitions, study rooms, talks, conferences and networking events that encourage learning, innovation, creativity and the exchange of ideas. In this way, La Perrera has become a dynamic space for meeting, experimentation and collaboration, open to young people and the wider community.



How does La Perrera collaborate with local organisations, universities, artists and companies to strengthen Bilbao's creative ecosystem?

La Perrera strengthens Bilbao's creative ecosystem through close collaboration with local organisations, universities, artists, businesses and public and private institutions. One of its main tools is the free provision of spaces such as multifunctional rooms, meeting rooms, coworking areas, the Maker Gunea and the podcast room, making it easier to develop projects, activities and collaborative innovation processes. In addition, it maintains partnership agreements with a wide range of organisations, generating synergies that foster knowledge exchange, creativity and the implementation of initiatives with a positive impact on both the city and its young people.



Looking ahead, what are your ambitions for La Perrera over the next five years, and what message would you like to share with young people considering Bilbao as a place to study, work or develop their ideas?

Our ambition for the next five years is to strengthen La Perrera as Bilbao's leading space for young people, reinforcing its role as a hub for creativity, innovation and participation. We want to expand opportunities for young people to develop their own projects, experiment with new technologies, access training programmes and build connections with other stakeholders across the city. We also aim to continue promoting initiatives related to STEAM skills, sustainability, the creative economy and entrepreneurship, helping transform ideas born at La Perrera into projects with a real impact on the city. In addition, we aspire to strengthen collaborative networks beyond our local environment, fostering exchanges with other regions and creating new opportunities through national and international partnerships.

What are the main priorities of Bilbao City Council's Youth Department in supporting young people today?

The Bilbao Hiri Gaztea 2022–2025 Youth Strategy, currently under review, was created with the aim of supporting young people in Bilbao on their path towards independence and personal development. Designed with the direct participation of young people themselves, it seeks to provide resources, spaces and programmes tailored to their needs and interests, while promoting values such as participation, coexistence and commitment to the city.

Today, the main priorities of Bilbao City Council's Youth Department are to strengthen STEAM and digital skills through the Bilbao Gazte STEAM strategy; support youth emancipation and independence; foster young talent and the development of personal projects; and encourage young people's participation in the life of the city. Our goal is to provide opportunities that enable young people to develop their full potential.



Bilbao has earned a reputation as a dynamic city with a high quality of life. How do young people participate in shaping its future through public policies and citizen participation initiatives?

Young people participate through the initiative known as the Bilbao Youth Panel (Bilboko Gazte Panela), a space for dialogue and participation between young people and the City Council. The panel contributes to the development of the local Youth Agenda, helps young people better understand how the City Council operates, and identifies the interests and concerns of Bilbao's youth. These ideas are then translated into concrete projects proposed and developed by young people themselves.

What challenges do you think Bilbao's younger generations face, and how is the City Council responding to these changing needs?

One of the main challenges facing young people in Bilbao, as in many European cities, is access to housing and the difficulties of building an independent life project. Other important challenges include access to quality employment, emotional and mental well-being, and the rapid social and technological changes that are shaping today's world.



Through different municipal departments, Bilbao City Council seeks to respond to these needs through comprehensive youth policies, promoting services, programmes and a wide range of resources designed to support young people in different areas of their lives.

If you had to describe Bilbao in three sentences to a young person considering moving to or visiting the city, what would they be and why?

"Welcoming and culturally vibrant"

Bilbao is an open and friendly city where it is easy to feel at home. It also offers a rich and diverse cultural scene, with museums, festivals, exhibitions, concerts and a wide variety of spaces dedicated to creativity and innovation.

"Full of educational and training opportunities"

Bilbao offers a broad and diverse educational landscape, including university studies, vocational training and specialised programmes adapted to the challenges of today and tomorrow. The city is also committed to innovative and strategic sectors, enabling young people to develop skills and knowledge in areas with strong future prospects, such as technology, the creative industries and healthcare.

"High quality of life"

Bilbao combines the opportunities of a major city with the comfort and accessibility of an environment where everything is within easy reach. The quality of public services, efficient mobility, and the proximity of green spaces and natural surroundings make it a highly valued place for young people to live, study and work.



AZKUNA ZENTROA ALHÓNDIGA BILBAO



Bárbara Epalza Azqueta
Head of Marketing at Azkuna Zentroa

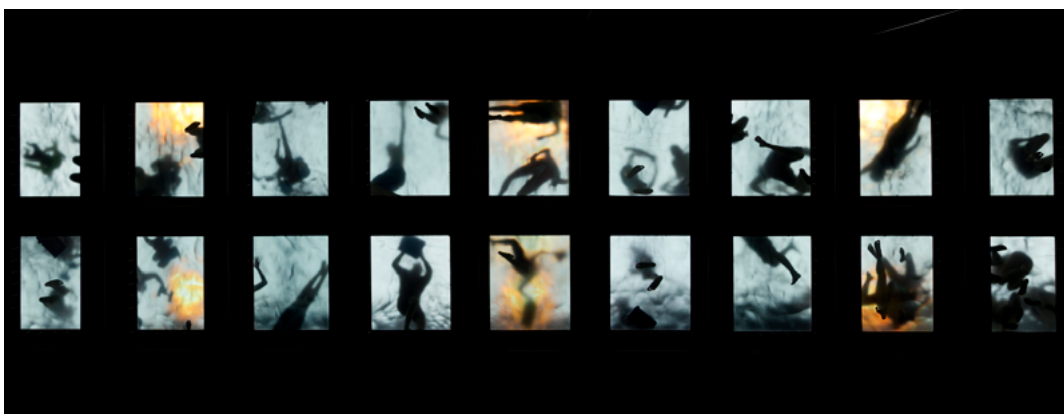
Azkuna Zentroa-Alhóndiga Bilbao is Bilbao's Centre for Society and Contemporary Culture. It is a living public space where culture becomes a shared experience. Here, culture is not simply something to consume or observe, but something to practise, discuss and create together. Rooted in the local context while maintaining a strong international outlook, the centre's mission is to connect people with contemporary culture and, through these encounters, contribute to building a more creative, critical and inclusive society.



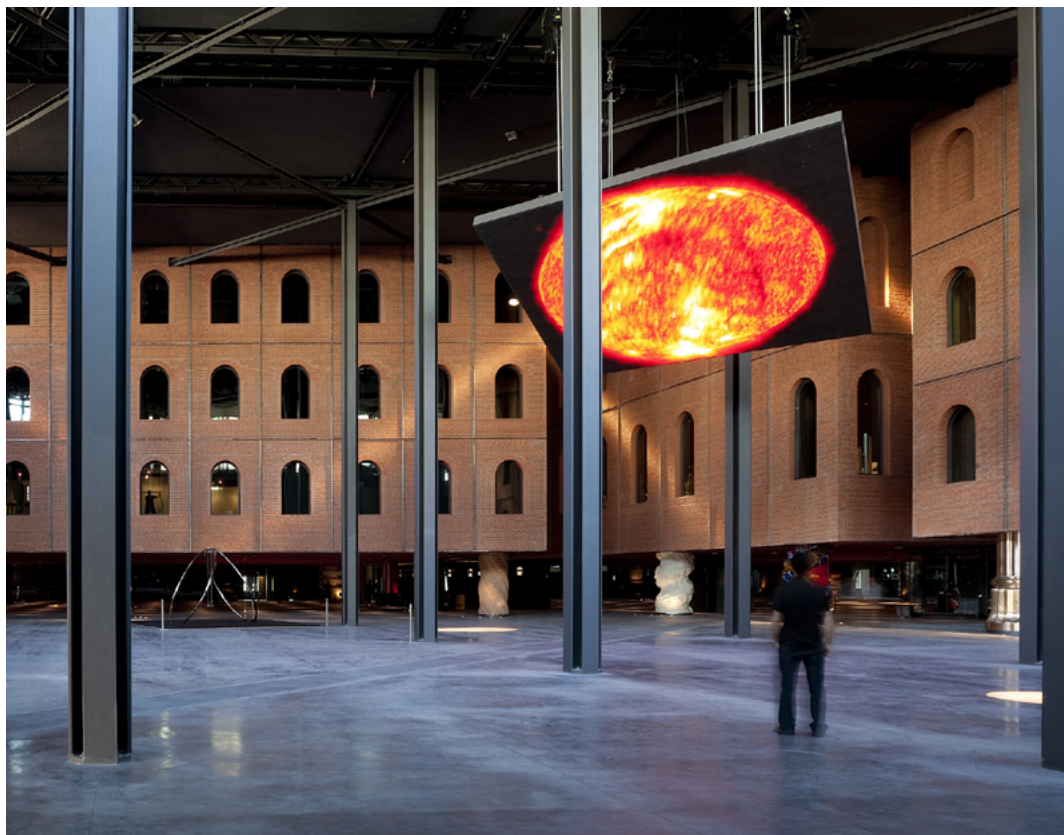
**It is a living
public space
where culture
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experience.**

Collaboration lies at the heart of Azkuna Zentroa's approach. Artists, cultural practitioners and creative communities come together through multidisciplinary programmes that encourage experimentation and exchange. Special attention is given to contemporary Basque artistic production and feminist perspectives, while education and cultural mediation are considered fundamental tools for the development of critical thinking and using artistic practice as a driver of social transformation.

This vision takes shape through a rich programme that includes five interconnected areas: Contemporary Art, Live Arts, Cinema and Audiovisuals, Society, and Literature.



Exhibitions, performances, film screenings, workshops, publications and educational activities create opportunities for dialogue across disciplines and invite audiences to become active participants rather than passive spectators.



It was Bilbao's historic Alhóndiga wine warehouse but was reinvented in 2010 as part of the city's wider cultural and urban regeneration.

The building itself tells a story of transformation. It was Bilbao's historic Alhóndiga wine warehouse but was reinvented in 2010 as part of the city's wider cultural and urban regeneration.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the city's rapid industrial and demographic growth led to the expansion of El Ensanche, a new urban district where some of Bilbao's most emblematic buildings were constructed. Among them was the Alhóndiga, a large municipal warehouse commissioned by the City Council in 1905 and designed by architect Ricardo Bastida to store wine, oil and pickled goods. Innovative for its time, the Modernist building combined stone and brick with one of the earliest uses of reinforced concrete, reflecting Bilbao's industrial ambition and commercial vitality.

For more than sixty years, the Alhóndiga played a central role in the city's economic life. However, as Bilbao's industrial economy declined during the second half of the twentieth century, the warehouse gradually lost its function and closed in the 1970s, becoming a symbol of a city facing profound economic and social change.



Its rebirth came decades later. Reopened in 2010 as Azkuna Zentroa, the former warehouse became one of the landmarks of Bilbao's wider urban regeneration strategy, launched in the 1990s to transform the city from an industrial centre into a service- and knowledge-based economy, with culture positioned as one of the main drivers of renewal. Rather than erasing its past, the project embraced it: Ricardo Bastida's historic Modernist façades were carefully preserved and restored, while the interior was completely reimaged by French designer Philippe Starck. The result is a striking dialogue between heritage and contemporary architecture, where the classical exterior gives way to an unexpected, open and highly distinctive public space.

Since its reopening, Azkuna Zentroa has continuously evolved, progressively redefining its role from a leisure and cultural venue into a dynamic platform for contemporary culture.

Today, Azkuna Zentroa is much more than a cultural venue: it is a vibrant community that brings together thousands of artists, cultural practitioners and citizens. Alongside its multidisciplinary artistic programme, it offers public services such as the Mediateka BBK library, a physical activity centre, cinemas, an auditorium and exhibition spaces.



BÁRBARA EPALZA AZQUETA

Bárbara Epalza Azqueta is Head of Marketing at Azkuna Zentroa. After completing secondary school in France, she moved to Bilbao where she graduated with a degree in Marketing & Business Administration. She completed an MBA/European Management Programme master's degree in France and U.K. where she learned the importance of cooperation and cultural exchange. She has 25 years of experience working in strategic and operational marketing, analysing and studying the market, creating services and products. Half of her career has focused on finding solutions and connecting with companies and organisations for social, cultural, and contemporary innovation projects.



TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION OF ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS: A RESEARCH-BASED, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH



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Sustainability has become one of the defining challenges faced by arts and cultural organisations worldwide. Among others, museums, theatres and opera houses are increasingly expected to contribute to responses to climate change, biodiversity loss, social inequities and broader questions of collective wellbeing. Yet arts and cultural organisations face a difficult paradox: they are expected to drive societal transformation while struggling to transform their own practices and operations.

This paradox was at the centre of discussions during the *14th ENCATC Academy on Sustainable Cultural Management and Policy* held in Bilbao in April 2026. Bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, representatives of funding bodies and emerging as well as established professionals, the Academy provided an opportunity to explore how the cultural sector can move beyond isolated sustainability initiatives towards more systematic and measurable forms of change. It also offered a platform to present preliminary findings from the research-for-action project *Culture for the Planet*.

The discussions in Bilbao revealed a growing consensus across the sector: sustainability needs to become a strategic commitment of arts and cultural organisations in supporting organisational as well as broader societal transitions within the planetary boundaries.



Rethinking Sustainability in the Cultural Sector

Sustainability debates have evolved considerably over recent decades. Earlier approaches often framed sustainability through separate environmental, social and economic dimensions. Contemporary thinking increasingly emphasises the interdependence of ecological and social systems. Research on planetary boundaries and concepts such as Kate Raworth's Doughnut Model have shifted attention towards operating within ecological limits while ensuring social wellbeing and justice.

This shift has important implications for arts and cultural organisations. Sustainability is not simply about reducing emissions or improving operational efficiency. It requires organisations to reconsider how governance, artistic programming, community engagement, organisational culture and resource use contribute to long-term resilience and societal wellbeing.

Culture itself occupies a unique position within this discussion. As former UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay stated, culture should not be viewed as a peripheral sector to be supported but as a central force to be mobilised. More recent literature reframes culture as infrastructure. Accordingly, culture may be viewed as *patient capital* that yields long-term *cultural dividends* by strengthening human potential, fostering innovation, promoting social cohesion, encouraging environmental stewardship, and contributing to economic resilience.

Likewise, arts and cultural organisations enjoy high levels of public trust, create spaces for dialogue and reflection, and help shape collective narratives about the future. This gives them a significant capacity to contribute to sustainability transitions both within their own institutions and across society. At the same time, these organisations often depend on resource-intensive practices, international mobility, energy-demanding infrastructures and complex production processes. The result is a dual responsibility: to inspire sustainable futures while confronting their own environmental and social challenges.



The Gap Between Ambition and Implementation

While awareness of sustainability challenges has increased significantly throughout the sector, many organisations continue to struggle with implementation.

Research conducted within the *Culture for the Planet* project highlights several structural challenges. A literature review on sustainability research in arts and cultural management revealed a fragmented landscape characterised by disconnected thematic areas, limited comparative evidence and a persistent gap between conceptual discussions and practical implementation. Much of the available research remains qualitative and highly context-specific, making it difficult to establish common benchmarks or sector-wide approaches.

The review also found a strong concentration of research on museums, while theatres, opera houses and other cultural organisations receive considerably less attention. Furthermore, cultural policy scholarship often addresses sustainability primarily at a discursive level, offering limited operational guidance for practitioners. As a result, organisations frequently find themselves navigating sustainability transitions without clear frameworks, shared indicators or established standards. Commitment is growing, but the sector still lacks the collective, global infrastructure needed to translate ambition into measurable progress.

From Research Project to Global Alliance

Recognising these challenges, the *Culture for the Planet* project focuses on co-producing practical solutions, including processes and frameworks that support sustainability transitions in museums and performing arts organisations. This ambition led to the creation of the *Culture for the Planet Alliance*, a global community of practice that brings together dozens of (founding) members including international museums, theatres, opera houses, sector associations and funding bodies. The *Alliance* is based on a simple observation: sustainability transitions require collaboration, shared learning, and collective action.

A key milestone was the co-creation of the *Declaration of Lausanne* during the inaugural *Culture for the Planet Summit* in 2025. Signed by all founding members, the *Declaration* recognises the central role of arts and cultural organisations in fostering a good life for all within planetary boundaries and calls for coordinated action across the sector. It acknowledges that sustainability efforts remain fragmented despite widespread commitment, dedication, and engagement. It therefore promotes a collective approach based on forward-looking governance, transparency, collaboration, capacity building, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Signatories commit to integrating sustainability into their organisational strategy and decision-making while supporting the development of sector-wide frameworks and standards.

Importantly, the *Declaration* frames sustainability not as an individual organisational challenge but as a shared responsibility requiring institutional and systemic responses. A coordinated global effort is needed while respecting different cultural, political and geographical contexts.

Building the Infrastructure for Change

One of the central lessons emerging from the research is that sustainability requires more than good intentions. It requires structures that allow organisations to understand



where they are in their change processes, measure progress, and learn from one another to institutionalise sustainability over time. For this reason, the *Alliance* has focused on developing practical mechanisms that bridge knowledge and implementation. These include a global community of practice, a sustainability management system, sustainability indicators, a future qualification programme and a global standard for arts and cultural organisations.

An analysis of more than 70 sustainability standards and certification models across different sectors demonstrated both the benefits and limitations of existing approaches. While standards can enhance transparency, trust and visibility, many remain insufficiently adapted to the realities of arts and cultural organisations. The challenge therefore lies in developing a standard that is sector-specific and aligned with existing reporting systems. The proposed answer is to adopt an existing ISO standard to the specific requirements, capacities and holistic processes (ISO/AWI 26540 Event sustainability management systems: Guidelines for application of ISO 20121:2024 in cultural organisations).

Another concrete measure and one of the key developments so far, is the creation of a modular set of 34 key sustainability indicators covering governance, social and environmental dimensions. The indicators emerged from a systematic review of academic research, sector toolkits and professional guidelines, followed by an expert validation process involving specialists and practitioners from the *Alliance*. The resulting framework recognises that organisations are at different stages of their sustainability journeys. Indicators are organised across basic, intermediate and advanced levels, enabling gradual implementation while maintaining common reference points across different organisational and geographical contexts.

Sustainability Is a Human Capability

Focus groups, interviews, and case studies conducted within the *Alliance* reveal substantial skills gaps and training needs in the field of sustainability across the sector. Beyond technical knowledge, organisations require professional, methodological, social and self-management competencies in leadership, communication, collaboration, systems thinking, impact measurement, and fostering organisational change.

Particularly notable is the emerging profile of sustainability leadership roles. Effective sustainability leaders must be capable of recognising entanglements, connecting diverse stakeholder groups, and inspiring collective engagement. Somewhat surprisingly, participants consistently highlighted soft skills and qualities such as empathy, patience, resilience, curiosity, and the ability to balance long-term vision with practical implementation.

At the same time, organisations continue to experiment with different governance models for sustainability. Responsibility may rest with dedicated chief sustainability officers, project managers, interdisciplinary green teams, executive leadership or cross-organisational structures. However, many institutions are still searching for arrangements that best fit their organisational contexts, suggesting that the professionalisation of sustainability management remains an evolving – but highly rewarding – process.



The ENCATC Academy as a Laboratory for Collective Action

The *ENCATC Academy 2026* provided an opportunity to collaboratively test and advance these ideas. In the workshop *Developing a 10-Point Change Agenda for Sustainability in Arts & Culture*, participants worked in peer groups representing museums, policymakers

and funding bodies, research and education institutions, and cultural networks. Each group was tasked with identifying strategic priorities, concrete actions and institutional responsibilities capable of accelerating sustainability transitions within their respective fields. A common message emerged: Progress depends on stronger connections between research, policy, education, funding and practice. It requires spaces where different actors can exchange perspectives, challenge assumptions and develop shared solutions.



Looking Ahead

The sustainable transformation of the arts and cultural sector remains a work in progress. Significant challenges persist, and there is still much to learn about how sustainability can be embedded into diverse organisational and cultural contexts. Research is essential to tackle this issue. But research alone is not enough. Sector-specific solutions require research and collaboration, shared frameworks, actionable tools and communities capable of turning knowledge into practice. For arts and cultural organisations, the specific challenge is to manage their own organisational transition, inspire change beyond the organisation, and demonstrate how arts and culture can contribute to a future that is socially just, environmentally responsible and resilient for generations to come.



LAURA JOHANNA NOLL

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THE ARRIAGA THEATRE: HISTORY AND SUSTAINABILITY



Jabier Bergara

*Stage Manager & Theatre Green Book
Coordinator*

The Teatro Arriaga is a historic Neo-Baroque public theatre and one of Bilbao's most recognisable cultural landmarks. Situated in the city centre, it plays a prominent role in the local cultural landscape while also serving as a reference point for sustainability within the performing arts sector.

It was the first theatre in Spain to obtain the European ETC Theatre Green Book sustainability certification, reflecting its strong commitment to environmental responsibility across its artistic productions, day-to-day operations, and building management.



The theatre is closely connected to Bilbao's wider process of urban renewal, which increasingly focuses on ecological transition and cultural innovation. Within this context, the Arriaga has developed a comprehensive sustainability approach that includes improving energy efficiency, reducing waste, promoting the use of circular materials, and engaging audiences in environmental awareness.

Through these initiatives, the theatre demonstrates how cultural institutions can actively contribute to climate action, combining artistic quality with the objectives of the European Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Arriaga Theatre has a long and eventful history that reflects the cultural development of Bilbao. The tradition of performing arts in the city dates back to the 14th and 15th centuries, when the first documented performances of mimicry, chants and religious music took place.

The current theatre has its origins in the late nineteenth century. After earlier theatres were destroyed or demolished, a new venue was planned in 1882. The company Nuevo Teatro de Bilbao was established in 1885, and despite a tragic construction accident in 1887, the theatre was officially inaugurated on 31 May 1890. Over time, it became popularly known as the Arriaga Theatre, a name that was officially adopted in newspaper advertisements in 1902.

The theatre has faced several major challenges throughout its history. It was completely destroyed by a fire in December 1914 and, after a difficult reconstruction

The Arriaga Theatre combines its artistic mission with a strong commitment to environmental sustainability.



process, reopened in June 1919. In later decades, the theatre changed management several times before becoming municipal property in 1978. Between 1981 and 1986, extensive renovation works strengthened the building, although severe flooding in 1983 caused significant damage. Following restoration, the theatre reopened in December 1986, and in 1990 it celebrated its first centenary.

Today, the Arriaga Theatre combines its artistic mission with a strong commitment to environmental sustainability. Since 2023, it has followed the criteria and protocols of the Theatre Green Book, aiming to reduce the environmental impact of both its daily operations and its productions.

The theatre prioritises the use of environmentally friendly materials.

Its sustainability strategy focuses on several key areas. The theatre prioritises the use of environmentally friendly materials and aims for at least 50% of the materials used on stage to have been previously used. It promotes energy efficiency by reducing unnecessary electricity consumption, making efficient use of heating and cooling systems, and taking advantage of natural light and ventilation whenever possible.

The theatre also works to minimise waste by encouraging recycling and reducing paper use. Sustainable transport is promoted by encouraging artists and staff to use public transport, bicycles, walking or car sharing, while remote meetings are considered whenever long-distance travel can be avoided.

Finally, the Arriaga Theatre actively shares its sustainability initiatives with audiences and theatre professionals and encourages feedback to support continuous improvement and contribute to a more sustainable future.



JABIER
BERGARA

Jabier Bergara holds a degree in Fine Arts and has built an extensive career in the performing arts and audiovisual sector. For ten years, he worked as a stage manager at the Bilbao Opera (ABAO), and since 2023 he has served as stage manager at Bilbao's municipal theatre, Teatro Arriaga, where he also coordinates the Theatre Green Book initiative.



Photo Michalina Kuczyńska

BEYOND SUPPORTING CULTURE: RETHINKING CULTURAL POLICY THROUGH CREATIVE PRACTICE



Anna Ochmann

*Visual Artist, Cultural Manager
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Institutional funding, heritage protection, infrastructure development, artists' mobility, educational programmes, digital transformation and, increasingly, climate change adaptation have become established components of both national and European cultural strategies and public policies. Yet policy debates continue to focus primarily on what should be supported, while much less attention is paid to a more fundamental question: what are cultural policies actually trying to enable?

Although this may appear to be little more than a shift in perspective, it in fact challenges the very object of cultural policy. If the purpose of cultural policy is to foster cultural development, then institutions, funding, infrastructure and programmes are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are instruments that make something more fundamental possible: people's ability to engage in cultural and artistic practice.

This article argues for shifting the focus in precisely this direction. Rather than asking how to support the cultural and creative sectors (CCSs), it asks how to shape environments that enable people to sustain creative practice over time.

Climate change serves here as a revealing case - not because it is the only challenge facing the CCSs, but because its consequences make visible relationships that have long remained largely unnoticed. They reveal that the possibility of creating has never



Photo Michalina Kuczyńska

depended solely on talent, funding or infrastructure. Rather, it has always emerged from the relationship between people and the environments in which they act, understood broadly to include the social, institutional, organisational and material conditions that shape creative practice.

Creative practice depends on conditions

Debates on culture tend to focus on what is relatively easy to identify and measure: the number of cultural institutions, audiences, levels of public funding, artists' mobility or the economic contribution of the cultural and creative sectors. They also frequently concentrate on creators themselves - their skills, entrepreneurship, employment conditions or access to labour markets.

The recently published *Culture Compass for Europe* places artists and cultural and creative professionals firmly at the centre of European cultural policy. It highlights the need to improve their working conditions, strengthen the resilience of the sector, support their wellbeing and enhance their capacity to respond to challenges such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence and climate change. This marks an important shift - from viewing culture primarily through the lens of institutions and heritage towards recognising the people who create and sustain it. Yet if cultural professionals become the central point of reference for contemporary cultural policy, a further question inevitably follows: what kinds of conditions are needed for creative practice to flourish over the long term?

Creative practice is not simply the outcome of talent, nor merely a consequence of access to financial resources. It develops through the dynamic relationship between people and their environment - a relationship that can expand, constrain or even prevent the possibility of action.

It is a network of interdependencies that enables creative practice.

Here, *environment* should be understood in its broadest sense. It encompasses not only physical workplaces, but also organisational models, economic security, social relationships, education systems, technologies, health, public policies and the many other conditions that shape people's ability to create, experiment, collaborate, recover and develop both their creative practice and their own artistic language.

The quality - and dynamic configuration - of these relationships determines whether creative practitioners can take risks, develop new competences, sustain long-term creative practice and maintain continuity in their work. The same environment also generates constraints: economic insecurity, overload, precarious employment, organisational barriers and changing environmental conditions. Together, these factors constitute an environment that can either expand or diminish human agency.

From this perspective, culture is not simply a collection of institutions and programmes. It is a network of interdependencies that enables creative practice.

Climate reveals what was previously invisible

Within the cultural sector, discussions on climate change have focused primarily on two issues: reducing the environmental impact of cultural activities and strengthening the resilience of cultural organisations, creative practitioners¹ and cultural heritage. Both perspectives are essential. Yet climate change also reveals something more

¹ Some of the reflections presented in this article draw on the author's experience gained through the Green CCircle project, which supports the green transition of the cultural and creative sectors (CCSs) by promoting green skills, sustainable practices and innovative approaches. More information: <https://greencircle.eu/>



Photo Michalina Kuczyńska

fundamental: creative practice has always depended on conditions that were long taken for granted.

A stage technician assembling a structure during a heatwave, artists rehearsing in historic buildings that cannot easily be adapted to rising temperatures, or a freelancer whose income depends on an event postponed or cancelled because of extreme weather - each of these examples demonstrates that climate change directly affects the everyday conditions under which creative practice takes place, and sometimes whether it can take place at all.

For many years, the ability to organise rehearsals, exhibitions, concerts or outdoor events formed an almost invisible background to the functioning of the cultural sector. Today, however, the growing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are turning previously predictable conditions into sources of uncertainty and risk. They reveal that the capacity to sustain creative practice has always depended on a particular configuration of conditions: environmental circumstances, the quality of space, economic security, organisational arrangements, access to infrastructure and the wellbeing of the people who create culture.

Climate change therefore does not alter the relationship between creative practice and its environment. Rather, it changes the conditions under which that relationship unfolds,

increasing uncertainty and reshaping the profile of risk. This, perhaps, is the most important lesson offered by climate adaptation. It suggests that cultural policy should be concerned not only with institutions and resources, but also with the conditions that allow those resources to support creative practice.

From supporting resources to enabling practice

European strategic documents increasingly rely on the concept of resilience. In climate policy, resilience refers to the capacity of societies and systems to function and adapt under conditions of increasing risk. In cultural policy, it is most often understood as the ability of the sector to maintain continuity and prepare for future crises. This perspective is both necessary and valuable - but it is not sufficient.

If we understand the primary purpose of cultural policy as enabling creative practice, resilience can be interpreted differently. It becomes the capacity of an environment to sustain the possibility of creating despite changing conditions. The shift may appear subtle, yet it fundamentally changes how cultural policy is understood. The central concern is no longer only whether institutions can survive the next crisis, but whether people will continue to be able to create, experiment, collaborate, learn and sustain their own creative practice.

From this perspective, heatwaves, rising energy costs, infrastructural constraints and precarious employment are not separate problems requiring separate solutions. They all affect the relationship between people and their environment, and therefore their capacity to act. Climate change is simply one of the processes that makes this dependency visible. Artificial intelligence, digital transformation, changing models of work, increasing precarity and the mental health crisis operate in similar ways. Each reshapes the environments in which creative practice develops. Each raises the same question: how can we sustain the possibility of creative practice when the conditions that support it are themselves changing?

The central concern is no longer only whether institutions can survive the next crisis, but whether people will continue to be able to create.

For decades, European cultural policy has focused primarily on identifying what should be supported. Cultural institutions, heritage, infrastructure, artists' mobility, cultural participation and the development of the cultural and creative sectors have all become established areas of public intervention. More recently, this list has expanded to include digital transformation, sustainability and climate adaptation. Each respond to genuine societal needs. What they share, however, is a common assumption: public policy tends to concentrate on what can be identified, funded and measured.

Yet if the possibility of creating emerges through the relationship between people and their environment, the effectiveness of cultural policy cannot be assessed solely by the number of resources it provides. It must also be judged by whether those resources genuinely expand people's agency. This shift in perspective has important implications for evaluating public policy. Alongside questions such as how many institutions have been established, how many events have been organised or how many people have participated in culture, another question becomes equally

important: do these interventions actually strengthen people's long-term capacity to sustain creative practice?

Climate as a test for the future of cultural policy

From this perspective, climate adaptation is no longer simply an environmental issue. It becomes a question about the conditions under which people working in culture are able to sustain their practice.

Rising temperatures and increasingly frequent extreme weather events are already affecting the organisation of cultural activities. Outdoor events are rescheduled or shortened, historic buildings require costly adaptations, and cultural institutions face growing expenses associated with maintaining safe working environments and protecting collections. Museums and archives must preserve stable storage conditions despite increasingly volatile external environments. Event organisers are required to balance public safety with the need to reduce energy consumption, while artists and freelancers increasingly bear the financial consequences of postponed or cancelled events. Yet many of these costs still fall outside the mainstream logic of cultural funding.

This raises an important policy question: should expenditure related to climate adaptation - including safe working conditions, infrastructure upgrades and organisational adjustments - be recognised as an integral part of cultural policy rather than as a purely technical cost borne by individual institutions, organisers or creative practitioners?

A similar argument applies to the wellbeing of those working in culture. While the positive effects of cultural participation on public wellbeing have received growing attention in recent years, considerably less discussion has focused on the wellbeing of artists and cultural professionals themselves. Yet the capacity to sustain creative practice depends not only on talent or financial support, but also on working conditions, economic security, health and opportunities for recovery. Burnout, exhaustion and wellbeing therefore cease to be issues relevant only to occupational health. They become central to the long-term resilience of the cultural sector itself.

If creative practice is to remain possible under conditions of growing uncertainty, these issues should become an integral part of cultural policy rather than being treated solely as matters of labour law or human resource management.

Conclusion

The consequences of climate change for the cultural and creative sectors reveal that the capacity to sustain creative practice has always depended on the quality of the relationship between people and the environments in which they work. Climate adaptation therefore offers more than a response to environmental challenges. It provides an opportunity to rethink the foundations of cultural policy itself.

Perhaps the central question is no longer how cultural institutions can be supported more effectively, but how to shape environments that enable people to continue creating under changing social, economic, technological and environmental conditions.

Such a shift in perspective does not imply abandoning the established priorities of cultural policy. Institutions, infrastructure, funding and programmes remain indispensable. What changes is how their role is understood. Rather than constituting ends in themselves, they become elements of an environment whose primary purpose is to expand people's capacity to sustain creative practice.

The next step in the evolution of European cultural policy may therefore lie not in replacing existing instruments of support, but in complementing them with a stronger focus on the conditions that enable creative practice to endure despite increasing uncertainty.

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ANNA OCHMANN

Anna Ochmann is a visual artist, cultural manager and researcher whose work brings together artistic practice, cultural policy and international cooperation across the cultural and creative sectors (CCSs). Her research explores the relationships between people and their environments, focusing on how social, spatial and institutional conditions enable or constrain human agency, creative practice and wellbeing.

She is currently working on his doctoral thesis at the University of Koblenz (Germany) that seeks to redefine the concepts of comfort and safety in domestic space. Her interdisciplinary research examines the home as a regulatory environment, investigating how relationships between people and their living environments support wellbeing, restoration and a sense of agency. An integral part of the project is an art-based research component, which employs artistic practice as a method of knowledge production.

As President of the ARTeria Foundation (Poland), she develops and leads international projects in the fields of culture, education and the cultural and creative sectors. She has contributed to several European publications on cultural policy and on the status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals, including the *Voices of Culture: Status and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural and Creative Professionals* report, produced as part of the structured dialogue with the European Commission.

MEMBER *Story*

Originally published in French in the Académie Cahier 2026, this article is presented here as part of the ongoing collaboration between ENCATC and the Académie littéraire de Bretagne et des Pays de la Loire. This contribution reflects a shared interest in European cultural heritage, museum history, and the circulation of ideas, people, and collections across borders. By tracing the remarkable history of the Czartoryski Museum in Kraków, it highlights ENCATC's role in connecting members and partners around research, knowledge exchange, and diverse perspectives on Europe's cultural history.

THE TRIBULATIONS OF A SITE OF MEMORY: THE CZARTORYSKI MUSEUM IN POLAND



Claire Giraud-Labalte
Art Historian & Cultural Heritage
Expert

The story of the Czartoryski Museum in Kraków is not only the story of a collection; it also bears witness to the preservation and relocation of artworks, as well as to European cultural exchanges. Today, it houses one of the most important collections in Poland and among the most significant in Europe. But beyond the exceptional works it preserves, what memory does the museum now embody?

The story features the Czartoryski family, one of the most illustrious families of the Polish aristocracy, whose name was well known in France in the cultural and political circles of

the 1830s, at the time of the Polish uprisings, and associated with figures such as Chopin, Delacroix, and Montalembert¹. Based on archives studied in Kraków², the account of this eventful adventure aims to highlight Princess Izabela Czartoryska. It unfolds at the turn of the nineteenth century and reveals several links between Poland and western France.

Poland: Intertwined Destinies of a Family and a Country

One cannot avoid a brief reminder of the intertwined and complex history of Poland and the Czartoryski family. Originally from Volhynia—in the northwest of present-day Ukraine—this family descended from the dynasty that had governed the Grand Duchy of Lithuania since the fourteenth century, a territory extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. In 1569, the Union of Lublin between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania created the “Republic of the Two Nations,” endowed with a single monarch, parliament, and currency.

In the eighteenth century, the elite prepared reforms intended to strengthen this state, which was subject to foreign influences (Russia, Prussia, Austria, and France). The powerful Czartoryski “Familia” prepared one of its own, Adam Kazimierz (1734–1823), for the throne, but he was ultimately replaced by his cousin Stanisław Poniatowski³, elected King of Poland in 1764 with the clear support of Russia. Following successive annexations of its territory (1772, 1793, 1795), Poland disappeared from the map in 1795 and would not regain its independence until 1918.

Princess Izabela (1746–1835), Muse of a Family of Patrons, Travelers, and Patriots

Let us focus on Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734–1823) and his wife Izabela Fleming (1746–1835), born in Warsaw into a family originating from Pomerania. Married in 1761, the couple had five children (Teresa, Maria, Adam Jerzy, Konstanty, Zofia). They lived the life of the great aristocratic and cultivated European families of the eighteenth century, a life that can be imagined through abundant correspondence and memoirs very often written in French. Through their travels and commissions placed with artists and merchants, the Czartoryskis regularly enriched their collections of books, objects, and works of art.

During her youth, Princess Izabela enjoyed attending balls and entertaining herself in Warsaw. She accompanied her husband to the territories he administered, notably in Podolia—on the left bank of the Dniester—and on several journeys, to London where she met Benjamin Franklin, to Holland, to France, and elsewhere. In Paris, she was not yet twenty years old when, around 1763, she was introduced to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, admitting at the time that she had not “read a single line of his works.” After this meeting, she developed a boundless admiration for the writer-philosopher, who was revered within her circle of friends. She would sprinkle her own memoirs with quotations and seize every opportunity to acquire “mementos” (portraits, letters, etc.) of this “extraordinary Being.”

¹ Cultural context discussed in: *Les Années du Romantisme. Musique et culture entre Paris et l'Anjou (1823–1839)*, edited by C. Giraud-Laballe and P. Barbier, PUR, 2012.

² Awarded a Thesaurus Poloniae research fellowship in 2016, administered by the International Cultural Centre (ICC, Kraków), I was able to spend three months working on the archives preserved at the Czartoryski Library (National Museum in Kraków), currently closed for renovation works.

³ Last king of independent Poland (1764–1795), Stanisław Augustus II—lover of the future Empress Catherine the Great—was forced to abdicate in 1795; he ended his days in exile in Saint Petersburg.

Endowed with great curiosity, Izabela Czartoryska continually expanded her education through reading, visits, and encounters, particularly appreciating gardens, poetry, history, and so forth. She also took her role as a mother very much to heart and was deeply affected by the tragic death of her daughter Teresa in 1780. Finally, she supported her husband, who was actively engaged in politics as a patriot and moderate reformer. In 1785, the couple withdrew to Puławy, on the banks of the Vistula south of Warsaw, to the family estate for which they felt particular affection. Their palace became a political meeting place and an independent intellectual centre for the elite, nicknamed the "Athens of Poland," enriched by a theatre, a large library, and an extensive collection of works of art. Beginning in 1786, the opera *Matka Spartanka*⁴ (Spartan Mother) was performed there, in which the lady of the house played the heroine who urges all the women of the city to persuade their sons to fight against the enemy. Through this role, Princess Czartoryska became the symbol of the patriotic and influential woman⁵. Her destiny was henceforth intimately linked to that of Poland.



Izabela Czartoryska, engraving after a drawing by Maria Cosway, 1790. Czartoryski Museum.

⁴ Opera written by the poet Franciszek Kniaźnin, with music by Wincenty Lessel.

⁵ BCZ 6137, Lettres d'I. Czartoryska.

1789: The time had come to complete the preparation⁶ of her eldest son, Adam Jerzy, aged nineteen, for a public career. Izabela was entrusted with the mission of chaperoning him in Great Britain for two years. Together they took advantage of the summer of 1790 to make "a tour" of England and Scotland, discovering country houses and gardens, the wild landscapes of Ossian's epic, as well as mines, ruins, and the history of the Middle Ages, newly fashionable at the time. In Stratford, Shakespeare's birthplace, Izabela purchased "pieces of wood" taken from the playwright's armchair. Her romantic sensibility then coincided with a growing awareness of the dangers threatening her own country.

Mother and son returned to Poland just after the adoption by the Diet of the Constitution⁷ of 3 May 1791. Events then accelerated; in 1793, Russia and Prussia imposed a second partition on Poland. Princess Izabela supported a group of patriots who launched an uprising; in vain. Dismantled by the three powers—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—Poland was erased from the map in 1795. The Republic disappeared! The homeland had disappeared! "We have been erased from the concert of nations," she wrote.

The Temple of Memory (1801)

"The attachment I feel for my homeland is a rare and infinite emotion. [...] when we were erased from the concert of nations, I said to myself through tears: My homeland! I could not defend you, but I want at least to immortalize you. It was then that I built the Temple of Memory! There I gathered memorabilia of Poland, once so great and so happy!" (I. Czartoryska).

Having passed into Austrian territory, devastated and plundered, the palace of Puławy was restored as soon as possible, as was the park. A fervent patriot as much as a lover of the arts and literature, Princess Czartoryska embarked on an ambitious undertaking in the service of a national cause: to gather and preserve all kinds of memorabilia, monuments⁸ in the original sense of the term, that is, reminders of the glories and miseries of Poland intended to stir the memory of those who encountered them.

These traces came from royal treasures or aristocratic collections. Izabela collected various fragments from the royal castle and from sarcophagi in Kraków. Allied families entrusted her with trophies—including the one commemorating the famous victory of the King of Poland Jan III Sobieski over the Turks at the Siege of Vienna in 1683—as well as banners and weapons, manuscripts, and precious objects.

Within the Arcadian landscape of Puławy, Izabela envisioned a sanctuary open to visitors, which she called the *Sibyl* or "Temple of Memory." The Polish architect Aigner built it on

⁶ At Puławy, the education of the children was entrusted to figures such as the economist Du Pont de Nemours and the mathematician Jean L'Huilier.

⁷ This was the first Constitution in Europe, promulgated four months before the French Constitution, which Poland was forced to repeal following the Second Partition imposed by Russia and Prussia in 1793.

⁸ Monument, from the Latin *monumentum*, derived from *monere*, meaning that which calls to mind or stirs memory. In this sense, a monument is any artefact erected by a community to commemorate, or to cause future generations to commemorate, people or events. One may speak of *sites of memory* (*lieux de mémoire*) since the publication of the work directed by Pierre Nora (1984–1992).



Puławy, Temple of Memory. "From the Past toward the Future. 1801. I Open the Temple of Memory." © Patrice Giraud.

a rocky escarpment overlooking a branch of the Vistula, taking as his model the famous circular Roman temple of Tivoli⁹ that overlooks the waterfalls of the Aniene. Offering an almost sacred experience intended to restore the morale of a people outraged by the loss of their homeland, and even to shape a vision of hope—such was Izabela Czartoryska's intention, summarized in the motto inscribed at the entrance: "From the Past toward the Future," and symbolized in the key designed by her own hand: "1801. I Open the Temple of Memory."

The concept is akin to that formulated by Alexandre Lenoir¹⁰, founder of the Museum of French Monuments, opened in 1795, of which the Czartoryskis had probably heard. However, the creative spirit of the Polish princess found expression at Puławy in quasi-religious rituals. Holding the key to the "Temple" in her hands, she led a procession in 1809 to welcome the Polish soldiers of Napoleon's army: knights in their historical armor and girls dressed in white carrying reminders of Poland's glorious history.

⁹ This famous temple in Tivoli also inspired the Temple of Vesta at Clisson, which overlooks the Sèvre Nantaise. See C. Giraud-Labalté, "Clisson: A Scent of Italy," in *Allers et retours en Europe*, Académie littéraire de Bretagne et des Pays de la Loire – Cahier 2024, Dec. 2023, pp. 45–49.

¹⁰ Entrusted in 1791 with collecting and arranging at the Petits Augustins in Paris the monuments mutilated or threatened during the Revolutionary period, Alexandre Lenoir conceived the Museum of French Monuments, open in Paris from 1795 to 1816, which brought together primarily architectural and sculptural elements.

The Gothic House (1809)

A few meters from the barely completed Polish memorial, Izabela undertook the construction of the "Gothic House" to gather there other mementos accumulated at Puławy. Her travels and readings had nourished her imagination, developed her taste for Celtic legends and medieval history, and strengthened her interest in illustrious figures from every country and every nation whose lives invite reflection on the glories and miseries of human existence. The project expressed the Romantic spirit prevailing in Europe.



Puławy, Gothic House, catalogue, 1828. Lithograph by J. Richter.

Freely inspired by Gothic architecture, the building designed by Christian Aigner incorporates into its exterior walls stones taken from historical sites across Europe. Inside, the princess displayed numerous objects acquired during her travels: the chair and other mementos of J.-J. Rousseau obtained in Switzerland; the backrest of W. Shakespeare's chair acquired in England; and so forth. In her memoirs, she wrote: "On this chair, near this fireplace, Shakespeare always sat, and it was his favourite place. [...] After his death, his corner and his chair became objects of respect and curiosity both for his compatriots and for foreigners. [...] sitting on this chair, in my delirium I saw before me Juliet, Romeo, Miranda, Desdemona, Hamlet, and Ophelia."

The family contributed to the Gothic House by bringing back souvenirs from their travels. Around 1800, Adam Jerzy acquired in Italy paintings by great masters, including *Lady with an Ermine*, known as "La Belle Ferronnière" and attributed much later to Leonardo da Vinci. Later, their daughter Maria took a "stone and a piece of a cabinet" from Petrarch's house in Padua. In Ferrara, she appropriated a fragment of the door of "Tasso's prison."

Aristocratic friends and military officers were among the donors, contributing a fragment of the tomb of Romeo and Juliet in Verona, as well as thirty-seven Gothic stained-glass windows taken from Aachen. She was also given "a perfectly crafted ivory portrait of Sigismund. A Spanish sword dating from the time of the Goths. A superb vase that belonged to Lorenzo de' Medici. Queen Elizabeth's ring. [...]."

Through correspondence or via her Polish network, the princess also obtained objects from French antiquarians such as Alexandre Lenoir and Vivant Denon, director of the Napoléon Museum from 1802 to 1815. She thus acquired fragments from the royal necropolis of Saint-Denis and relics of Abelard and Héloïse. Denon sent her several very interesting objects, including "a small box containing the ashes of Rodrigo and Chimène", stolen from Burgos Cathedral during the French occupation, around 1810.

Among the most precious manuscripts, she gave pride of place to a fifteenth-century illuminated parchment volume acquired from a Parisian publisher. It was one of the copies of the *Book of Tournaments of King René of Anjou*¹¹ concerning "the form and manner in which a tournament should be undertaken." The work evokes the chivalric spirit of the Middle Ages promoted by Princess Izabela and the Polish aristocracy in these terms: "The chivalry of former times elevated our minds and made the world more just [...] It belongs to the past, but tournaments, hunts, jousts, banners, and emblems [...] continue to nourish our imagination."

The princess continued her efforts and in 1828 published the *List of Mementos Preserved in the Gothic House of Puławy*. Although she herself does not seem to have used the term museum to designate the two buildings that contained more than 4,000 objects, her undertaking ranks among the most remarkable museological initiatives in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

¹¹ Livre des Tournois of King René of Anjou, acquired from Charles Pougens. Czartoryski Library, MS 3090 IV. This manuscript is one of five copies of the original codex preserved at the National Library of France (MS fr. 2695).

From the Wanderings of the Collections ... to the National Museum of Kraków

After the November Uprising of 1830, Russian forces marched on Puławy and confiscated the family properties. Izabela Czartoryska immediately closed the Temple of Memory and the Gothic House, and set about packing, evacuating, and hiding the collections before the bombardment of the palace. She withdrew to Sieniawa, under Austrian rule, where she died in 1835. Condemned to death by the Russians, her son Adam Jerzy went into exile in London and then settled in Paris, where he gathered loyal supporters—Chopin, Adam Mickiewicz, and others—with whom he founded the Polish Library in Paris in 1838. Together with his wife, he acquired the Hôtel Lambert on the Île Saint-Louis in 1843, which became the seat of a government-in-exile and a major intellectual centre for Poles who had taken refuge in France.

After 1848, most of the Puławy collections that had been hidden in Poland were transferred to Paris. Honored in 1865 at the Palais de l'Industrie and later at the Universal Exposition of 1878, they conveyed an image of the royal and noble history of vanished Poland, used by the Czartoryskis and their friends both as an instrument of foreign policy and as a means of rallying their compatriots.

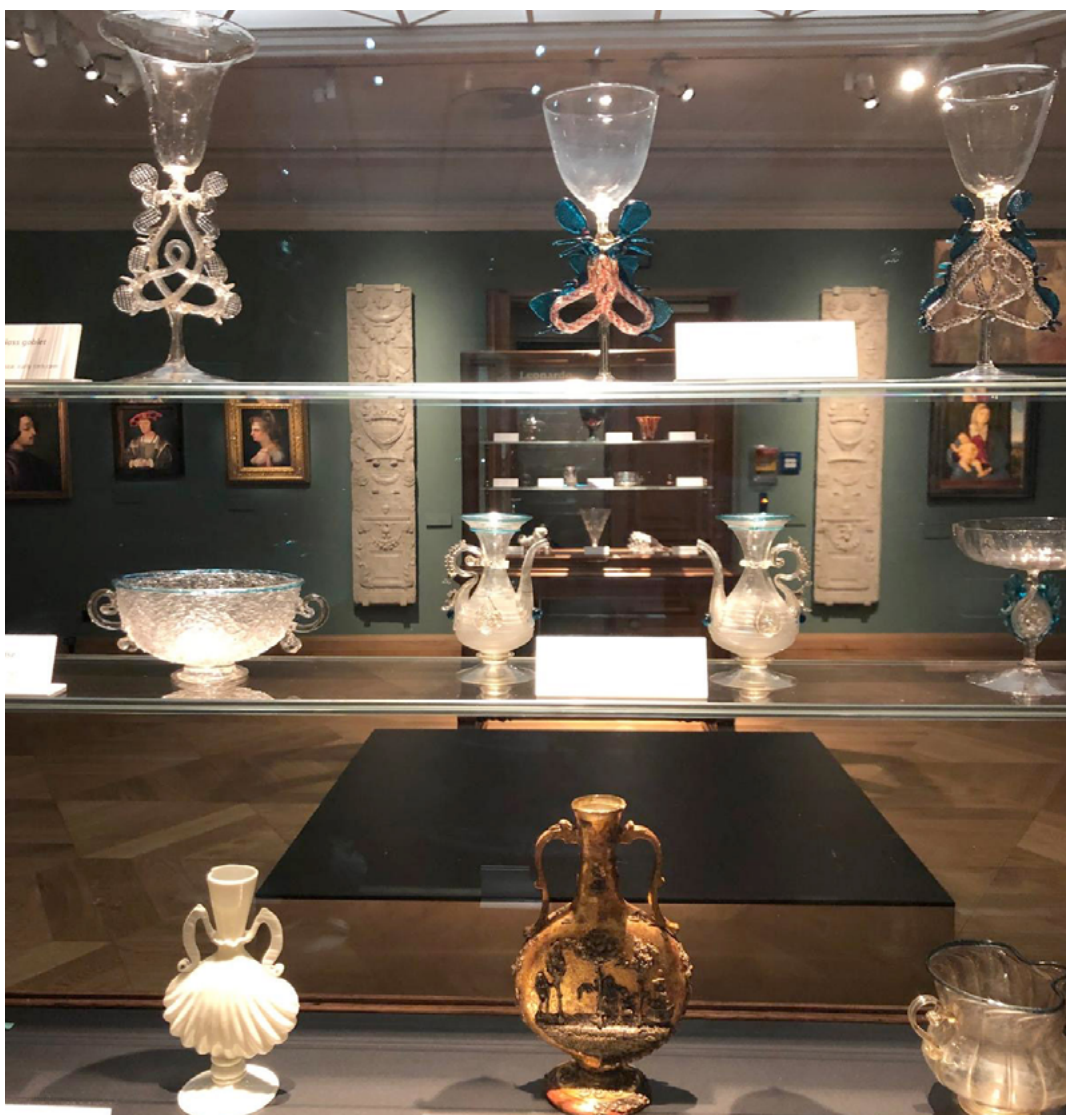
In 1871, Władysław Czartoryski—Izabela's grandson—transferred what remained of the family collections to Kraków, into historic buildings adapted by a French architect. He inaugurated the "Czartoryski Museum" in 1878. Partly looted during the Nazi Occupation, the collections were nationalized in 1949 and subsequently managed by the Princes Czartoryski Foundation until the acquisition of the buildings and collections by the Polish State in 2016. Since then, as an integral part of the National Museum in Kraków, the Czartoryski Museum reopened its doors to visitors in December 2019.



Czartoryski Museum, Kraków, before 2016. Photo by Paweł Mazur, from the ICC Collections.



Renovated Czartoryski Museum. © Paulina Florjanowicz



Czartoryski Museum, collections. © Paulina Florjanowicz

To disappear, to be moved, to change, to be forgotten, to be reborn, and so on. This story raises several contemporary issues. It illustrates the spoliation of cultural property, from the removal of stones to the acquisition of objects belonging to national treasures: widespread and later contested, this practice justified the adoption of heritage preservation measures at the national, European, and international levels. In terms of transmission, what idea could we form today of this country, of this Polish nation before 1830, without these “sites of memory” created by a remarkable woman? Since memory shapes our identity, this adventure ultimately demonstrates Princess Czartoryska's attachment both to her native Poland and to European culture.

For Further Reading

Adam Zamoyski, *The Czartoryski Museum*, Azimuth Ed., 2001.



*Interior view of the International Cultural Centre (ICC), Kraków.
PHOTO Paweł Mazur / ICC Collection*



CLAIRE GIRAUD-LABALTE

Dr. Claire Giraud-Labalte is an esteemed Art and Cultural Heritage Historian and Senior Lecturer. From 2004 to 2013, she led a Master's programme in cultural management at Université catholique de l'Ouest, Angers, which uniquely integrated cultural heritage and performing arts management.

At the European level, Claire is a deeply committed actor to advance the discussion and advocate for continuous education and the necessity of a multidisciplinary and integrated approach to cultural heritage. She is involved in several key policy forums both regionally and across Europe. Since 2012, she has served as an ENCATC Ambassador. From 2013 to 2023, she was the Chair of Territoires Imaginaires which designs and organises immersive events to highlight landscapes and heritage, inviting a large audience to live unique experiences, nourished by the knowledge of the territory and the imagination. From 2018 to 2023, she also was the first Chair of a network, the *Pôle Patrimoine de la Région Pays de la Loire*.

Additionally, she is a board member of l'Académie Littéraire de Bretagne et des Pays de la Loire, the Deputy Chair of the Mission Val de Loire UNESCO Scientific Committee, an expert to the European Commission and the Council of Europe, and a member of the European Heritage Label Panel.

Claire has significantly contributed to various projects, including the Niger-Loire Governance and Culture UNESCO project (2007-2012), Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe (2015), and the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century (Council of Europe, 2017).

She remains highly dedicated to her research activity, with a focus on the point of view of European travellers in the long 19th century, notably the Czartoryski family and Prosper Barbot—an artist active in Italy in the 1820s, whose notebooks she plans to publish.

OUR FAVOURITE THINGS

Elena Raevskikh

– Public Policy Researcher & Cultural Policy Expert –
shares some of her favourite things from ENCATC!



My favourite recent article from the ENCATC Magazine is **Memory, Art, and Cultural Sovereignty: From the Royal Letter to the Universe of Clara Haskil** by Dr. Liliana Turoiu

(Professor, PhD at UNArte), because it offers a thoughtful reflection on the human dimension of cultural diplomacy. Rather than presenting diplomacy solely as an institutional practice, the article shows how artistic sensitivity, mutual understanding, and shared memory create lasting cultural connections. Through the remarkable story of pianist Clara Haskil and carefully examined archival sources, it demonstrates how art can become a form of cultural sovereignty, preserving identity and building bridges across political and historical divides. It is a compelling reminder that cultural diplomacy is ultimately grounded in the recognition and protection of artistic and cultural values.

My favourite ENCATC education programme is the Book Exchange Programme, because it embodies the spirit of knowledge sharing that defines the ENCATC community. By encouraging members to exchange publications across countries and institutions, it helps cultural management and policy research reach new audiences while creating opportunities for dialogue and collaboration. I also have a memory that is particularly dear to me. In 2022, the ENCATC General Secretary, Mrs. Gianna Lia Cogliandro Beyens, and her team invited me to contribute hard copies of newly published cultural research reports from Abu Dhabi, including publications from the CultureSTATS-AD initiative, which documents and analyses the emirate's culture sector. Thanks to this ENCATC initiative, these reports travelled beyond their place of origin for the first time, opening the way for new conversations, partnerships, knowledge exchange, and lasting friendships.



My favourite book in the ENCATC Series is **Measuring Cultural Engagement: The Evolution and Development of Cultural Access and Participation Surveys** by Dr.

João Leiva Filho. Although the book is forthcoming, I have already become familiar with its central ideas through the exchanges and experience-sharing I have had with the author since the ENCATC 30th Anniversary Congress in Brussels and Antwerp. What makes this book particularly valuable is its global and comparative perspective on how cultural engagement is measured. By tracing the evolution of cultural participation surveys across different countries and examining the opportunities and limitations of quantitative research, it offers important insights for researchers, policymakers, and cultural managers. I believe it will make an important contribution to strengthening evidence-based cultural policy and to better understanding participation in culture.

My favourite ENCATC event has to be the 33rd ENCATC Congress in Barcelona, Spain, not only because of the outstanding exchanges across its sessions and the opportunity to discover more about the city's vibrant cultural landscape, but also because it provided a unique opportunity for the ENCATC community to formulate research-based policy recommendations for the MONDIACULT Conference, which took place just a few days later. One of my most rewarding experiences was co-leading, with the invaluable support and mentorship of Dr. Cristina Ortega Nuere, Director of 3Walks, the Working Group *Strengthening Cultural Observatories and Rethinking Cultural Measurement for Future Policy-Making*. Bringing together around 70 participants, the Working Group generated inspiring discussions, fostered new collaborations, and reinforced the importance of developing stronger evidence and innovative approaches to inform future cultural policymaking. The outcomes of this session also inspired several follow-up events and publications developed within the Working Group.

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Our contributors are leading academics, researchers, experts, practitioners, and policy makers. They are recognised by the industry we belong to as influencers. For our magazine, they are generously providing us with high-quality content, commentary, the best industry practices, and personal stories. Their contributions aim to help ENCATC to achieve its mission of helping the cultural sector become stronger and more sustainable. **This publication is made possible thanks to the financial support of the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.**

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