BILBAO EFFECT: IS IT POSSIBLE TO TRANSFER TO INDIAN CITIES?

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JUNE 2018, Xabier Arruza

After taking part in the last BW Smart Cities Conclave with the topic â??Bilbao â?? A Journey from Industrial Decay to a Global Smart Cityâ?•, we are sure that the fascinating urban transformation of Bilbao Metropolitan Area can inspire and match Indian cities big challenges and expectations. Bilbao today is a prime example of urban restructuring, having transitioned from a post industrial city, to a city of services, culture, design and creativity. Therefore, it has been internationally awarded several times, with special mention to LEE KUAN YEW World City Prize, considered the Nobel Prize of Cities, by the city-state of Singapore in 2010.

Despite the different starting points and characteristics of Indian cities regarding Bilbao, the need for a change and improvement, is the basis in both cases. India is facing a huge urbanization process, above the capabilities of their current cities in terms of population, peopleÂ´s needs, sufficient and good quality housing, sanitation, transportation or parks and community spaces. To avoid this situation and based on the data we have had access to, with the expected migration to urban environments in the next 25 years, a city of one million people should be built each month in India.

That needs to face at least four important elements that in Bilbao were successfully developed:

- Design of a holistic long term vision strategic plan, based on a broad consensus between all the levels of Governance, stakeholders and the proper inhabitants.
- The adaptation of the city planning to achieve a sustainable growth.
- Consider the environmental damage as a competitiveness loss.
- Integrate equity and social cohesion into the development of the planning.

1. **Strategic Plan:** Bilbao is one of the unique case where thanks to a strong leadership and commitment, a broad consensus was possible to develop a systematic and long-term plan: 25 main projects in 25 years.
2. **Sustainable Growth:** a transformation not just focused in urban issues, but in the design of a new economic model towards knowledge economy and based in advanced services, culture, design and creativity. The transformation process itself, created the conditions necessary for innovation and excellence of the local companies.
3. **Environmental Damage:** industrial dismantling and environmental remediation of the river and its banks, as well as brownfields along the river, were key factors to create new urban spaces of high value and to improve remarkably the quality of life of their citizens, reaching a top of 99% regarding the quality of air.
4. **Equity and Social Cohesion:** gain a complete and balanced city, providing equal public services in each district or city area.

Based on the data we have had access to, with the expected migration to urban areas in the next 25 years, a city of one million people should be built each month in India. This innovative model of transformation is known under the concept â??Bilbao Effectâ??, describing how a city in economic

decline was brought in huge financial growth and prestige, metamorphosing to a totally new energetic city.

Bilbao became the symbol of successful economic and cultural revival, the reason why other cities around the world took notice from Bilbao as an inspirational model. In addition, Bilbao showcased that economics and architecture should be considered together, proving how other cities and urban areas can affect their urban environment in a good way.

From our experience and with the aim of transferring somehow the â??Bilbao Effectâ?• to Indian cities , we would make the following suggestions:

- Foster national urban planning and planned city extensions, linking them to the overall process of national development, as somehow Smart Cities Mission India is doing.
- Bet for compact design cities, creating districts with all the public services nearby, in order to avoid need of transportation.
- Establish adequate provision of common property, including streets and open spaces, together with an efficient pattern of buildable plots, avoiding the informal settlements.
- Develop an urgent environtmental remediation process, specially regarding to air pollution and water sanitation, as way of protecting the healh of the inhabitants.
- Open cities and territories to Knowledge Economy. The wealthiest cities today are not those with the greatest natural resources, but those which has best educated people.
- Open different ways for the participation of the citizenship and stakeholders in the overall process of rethinking.

All the above points, towards gaining one of the main Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN â?? Transforming cities and human settlements to be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Based in the experience gained during the Bilbao Metropolitan Urban Transformation, some of the best professionals that took part in it founded â??Bilbao Urban & Cities Design Groupâ?• to which I belong. On behalf of this Group, I would like to welcome Indian Cities delegates in our city, to experience live a real and successful show case and help them to find out the way to transfer Bilbao Effect to Indian Cities.

Disclaimer: *The views expressed in the article above are those of the authorsâ?? and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of this publishing house*.

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