

SANTURTZI: A NEW BEACON FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEFT BANK AND BILBAO

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Not long ago I was discussing with acquaintances the debate that arose as a result of the publication of the [Iberdrola's interest in installing a new combined cycle group](#) On the slopes of the Serantes, in Santurtzi, a few dozen meters from the San Juan neighborhood, in one of the most populated areas of Bizkaia, the left bank of the Nervión River.

At that time its Mayor, Ricardo Ituarte and his government team [expressed their opposition to the project](#), arguing that "*Santurtzi cannot take it anymore (...) Our town has made many efforts in recent decades to support the progress of an entire country*". Some close people doubted this argument, alleging that other municipalities could also make similar assessments, because obviously, nobody or almost nobody wants a thermal power plant in their town.

A piece of news that appeared yesterday in the written press, however: "[A network of chemical emergency sirens has been installed in the ports of Santurtzi and Zierbana](#)", would corroborate the exceptionality of the "load" that both municipalities already bear today. And it seems that it is no longer just an Air Quality problem in which, by the way, Santurtzi and Zierbana exceed the reasonable limits established by the Basque Government -due to truck traffic and industrial activities-, as the Mayor argues, but we must even now add the risks that these two municipalities assume as a new pole in the practice of locating chemical activities and transport node of these products from the development of the outer port.

When addressing this issue, another commonly used argument is that **this area has a great industrial and port tradition, which a priori could be an ideal location for certain activities**, including the most polluting ones, which they would thus remain "out" of Greater Bilbao. But this argument should not underestimate the fact that **this area is, if not the most populated, one of the most populated in Bizkaia and the Basque Country**, and that these residents deserve just as much or more to enjoy the levels of quality of life that exist in other nearby municipalities.

This argument would gain even more value if we consider that this environmental deterioration has not been accompanied, at least to the same level, by high levels of well-being and employment among its population. And it is that, on the contrary, it is an area that, despite the enormous economic activity associated with the port, surprisingly keeps municipalities such as Santurtzi - which suffer from its externalities- relatively at the margin of the wealth it generates, with [unemployment rates](#) of 17%, in the lead of the Basque Country as a whole, second only to Sestao - by the way, just 3-4 kilometers away- with more than 20%.

It is not a question of "complaining" in any case, but of **giving value to its fair measure** a situation before the institutions should be sensitive when considering the location of certain activities on the one hand, and to establish investment priorities (and their location).

Given this, some proposals for positive action could be the following:

- It seems that the activity that is being concentrated in the Outer Port responds to the most polluting and dangerous activities that would be "relocating" from other municipalities in Bizkaia. My request would be along the lines of avoiding an excessive concentration of these activities. In this sense, I would bet on ensuring a mix of activities that also includes others of a "green" or less dangerous nature and/or linked to tourism and the sea with a progressive return, for example, of some of the cruise ships that now dock on the other side of the estuary in Getxo -and that until recently they did in Santurtzi-. In this field I could place the proposal of the Mayor of Santurtzi to create a "renewable energy study center" that could even be linked

to the San Jorge Higher Education Institute in the same town.

- In this sense, one considers that in terms of quality of life for residents on the one hand, but also for attracting visitors, at least from Greater Bilbao, Mount Serantes has enormous potential. A potential that, however, needs to be developed and improved. A true park and green lung on the left bank, which also maintains and promotes activities with an educational/tourist appeal that can attract schoolchildren or groups from the whole of Greater Bilbao.
- The municipality of Santurtzi in particular is preparing to begin the regeneration of its nearest port area in the coming years. This represents a unique opportunity so that with the involvement of all the institutions (Port, Ministry, Basque Government and Provincial Council) an exciting project is mobilized, which integrates the outer port, and which represents a turning point not only for the regeneration of the municipality but rather for the impulse of the whole of the left bank, now hit once again in a unique way by the crisis. A feedback that above all [should include "software" aspects and not only "hardware"](#), focusing on aspects such as education or training and culture, undoubtedly the main horses of battle in order to overcome that invisible barrier that is surely behind the high unemployment figures.

Definitely new bases on which to build a more sustainable development and which also take into account, now yes, the interest and well-being of the neighbours.

There are no comments yet.