

«IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE CENTRAL ROLE OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS IN URBAN PLANNING IS EMBEDDED THROUGHOUT THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION»

Posted on 30/04/2025 by Naider



Victor Trimiño | Director of Sustainability – Bilbao City Council

Victor Trimiño Vegas (Burgos, 1992), is Director of Sustainability in the [Mobility and Sustainability area of Bilbao City Council](#), promoting policies for a greener city. A physicist with a master's degree in space science and technology, he combines his technical knowledge with an active career in Basque politics. Previously, he was a proxy in the General Assembly of Bizkaia and a councillor in the Galdakao City Council.

« It is imperative that cities are now at the forefront of the solution in terms of pollution, emissions, consumption or resource use »

Egun on Victor, thank you for accepting Naider's invitation. Let us start by looking up. Not only from your position as Director of Sustainability at the Bilbao City Council, but also as a citizen, if you see fit: how do you see the great climate-energy challenge facing society as a whole?

As you say, this is a challenge for society as a whole, a global problem that requires global responses. But this global vision is fully compatible with affirming the role that local policies and cities like Bilbao have to play in meeting this challenge. For all these decades, big cities have been part of the problem in terms of pollution, emissions, consumption and use of resources, and it is essential that we are now at the forefront of the solution. We must do so because of the impact that cities have, because of their role as exemplary actors, but also because acting in time will have an impact on the quality of life of the inhabitants of our cities.

Having said that, and without renouncing the leadership role that public institutions must play in the fight against climate change, it is also important that each actor in our society is aware of the role he or she can play and is consistent with it.

We have entered a period in which climate and decarbonisation policies seem to have been sidelined at the geopolitical and geo-economic level. How can local policy work to address a challenge of this scale? How far can the role of city councils and local authorities go?

Local institutions are always the closest to the citizen and have the most direct impact. This determines the way we develop our policies. Furthermore, the role of local councils is key in matters that have such an impact on the fight against climate change, such as the sustainable and healthy mobility policy that we promote in the area, regeneration and rehabilitation, urban planning and the renaturation of cities, etc., and all of this is something that we in Bilbao are very aware of and are managing with the objective of climate neutrality, adaptation to climate change and environmental health.

It is true that, due to the limitations we have in terms of resources or legislative capacity, it is essential that the rest of the institutions are aligned with us in terms of objectives, so that climate policy can have a positive and significant impact on the city. In this sense, although we count on the Basque, Spanish and European institutions as allies, we are concerned about the movements that are taking place at the international level, and also those of some political or economic sectors at the national level, which are trying to discredit climate change policies.

Bilbao's international model of urban and economic transformation in recent decades has become an international benchmark. But it is possible that it is more associated with other cities with the idea of a green and sustainable city. Does the City Council promote collaboration with other municipalities, European networks or institutions, with the idea of promoting the city's sustainable policies and strengthening its knowledge?

I believe that all the citizens and institutions are very proud of the transformation that Bilbao has undergone in recent years, as can be seen from the improvement in the city's air and water quality, or the fact that we have become a city at the forefront of sustainable mobility in Spain, in terms of traffic calming, promotion of cycling and the recent implementation of the Low Emission Zone. It is true that we now need to step up our efforts to incorporate elements into our urban planning that will make our streets and neighbourhoods more resilient to the effects of climate change, which are still to come but are already being felt. Needless to say, we are looking around us and at other cities, both national and European, to learn from all the actions that have been successful in this regard. And being part of city networks or multi-city platforms is a very interesting tool for us to create synergies, to learn, to share resources or to show what we are doing.

That is why we participate in networks at regional level, such as Udalsarea, or at national level, such as citiES or those promoted by FEMP, but also in international forums or spaces, such as Eurocities or the Covenant of Majors.

All this allows us to integrate new perspectives and knowledge, but also to go out and tell others what we do and what we are proud of.

How are the opportunities offered by such collaborative frameworks integrated into the city's long-term policies and strategies, such as the 2050 Environmental Strategy and the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)?

These spaces are an opportunity to contrast, compare and share the different paths and tools used to achieve common goals. It is true that each city has different characteristics and starting points, but the fact that cities from different parts of Spain or Europe share this vision creates a force that multiplies the capacities we would have if we acted in isolation.

This experience in the above-mentioned frameworks, when working on the development of our Environmental Strategy or the implementation of our SECAP, allows us to identify points for improvement when comparing ourselves with other cities, but also to be aware of the degree of progress we have made in many areas in Bilbao and the road we have already travelled, for example in the area of sustainable mobility, where Bilbao is a benchmark.

Contact with other cities allows us to identify areas for improvement, but also to be aware of the degree of progress we have made in many areas in Bilbao.

How is the planning and management of green infrastructure integrated into the overall strategies for adapting to climate change and improving environmental health in Bilbao? What policies can be implemented to meet commitments, improve environmental parameters and restore the city?

On the one hand, by using technical training and tools that allow us to know the starting point, the evolution and the degree of compliance (or non-compliance) with the objectives.

Thanks to the work of the Environmental Strategy and SECAP, in which we work with Naider, we have a very rigorous study of the risks in our city in the face of the effects of climate change and

what our current situation is in terms of green infrastructure in Bilbao. In this sense, it is very important for us to work at a technical level with indicators and monitoring and evaluation methods that allow us to know the degree of improvement we are achieving in Bilbao.

At another level, it is essential that the central role that green infrastructure and nature-based solutions must play in urban planning is understood by the public administration as a whole. In other words, it must be integrated into local policies as another service and another element of well-being for neighbourhoods and citizens. To do this, we need a political pedagogy, but we also need to forge alliances with the different actors in the city and with the citizens themselves, so that the implementation of this type of strategy is valued over others that we consider obsolete. I believe that Bilbao has embraced this new approach and we are able to work effectively for a more sustainable, healthy and resilient city.

In terms of climate risk management, which mechanisms and tools do you prioritise for tracking and monitoring the main risks that affect or could affect the city (heat waves, floods, droughts, etc.)?

As I said, within the framework of the Environmental Strategy and SECAP, in which we are working with Naider, we are carrying out a very rigorous study and monitoring of the risks in our city in the face of the effects of climate change. We focus mainly on the risks of flooding and heat waves, because the studies tell us that these are the main threats to the city of Bilbao.

When considering our climate policies, in addition to taking into account the urgency of action and the impact of the actions to be taken, we must always bear in mind the diversity of our population and social justice.

We monitor the risks associated with these events, and through different indicators fed by information that we have digitised and automated, we can know the evolution of these risks both spatially, in the different streets of our city, and over time. In Bilbao, in the SECAP that we approved in 2024, we set ourselves the goal of reducing the risk of floods and heat waves in our city by 50% by 2050, and thanks to the digital monitoring and evaluation tool that we are implementing with Naider, we in Bilbao will be able to know whether we are moving in the right direction or not and act accordingly.

How is the City Council working to ensure that the transition to a climate-neutral and environmentally sustainable city is fair and inclusive, benefiting all neighbourhoods and groups in Bilbao?

In Bilbao, we are very clear that in planning our climate policies, in addition to the urgency of action and the impact of the measures to be taken, we must always take into account the diversity of our population and social justice.

For example, when we talk about adapting to climate change or mitigating heat waves, we have vulnerable groups very much in mind, not only those who are vulnerable because of age or health problems, but also those who, for economic reasons, do not have the necessary thermal comfort in their own homes.

We want to work on being able to compare Bilbao's environmental indicators with socio-economic indicators and see how they are related, and how climate policies contribute to equality between people and between neighbourhoods. Our aim is to ensure that issues such as the development of green infrastructure or the network of climate shelters are evenly distributed across all of Bilbao's neighbourhoods and are accessible to everyone in the city.

It is essential to involve the different actors in the city in the pursuit of the goals we have set ourselves.

Furthermore, if we talk about other types of policies that are included in the PACES, we can see their social impact in all of them. In other words, when we talk about strengthening public transport or the public bicycle rental system, the rehabilitation of old housing or the urban regeneration of certain areas, other types of energy policies... sustainability criteria are, of course, present in all of them, but the social impact of these policies in terms of quality of life, equality, helping those most in need, etc. is also evident. We must also bear in mind that climate policies have a direct impact on the health of the population, especially vulnerable groups, so that climate policies by their very nature have a social, equity and inclusion component.

In this sense, what strategies do you have in place to encourage the active participation and engagement of local neighbourhoods, businesses and organisations in achieving climate and environmental goals? How do you balance incentives and sanctions?

As we have said, it is essential for us to involve the different actors in the city in the pursuit of the objectives we have set ourselves. Bilbao is currently part of the citiES platform, working within the framework of the Climate Neutral Cities Mission - with the collaboration of NAIDER - which consists of working with the philosophy that the quest for climate neutrality cannot depend solely on actions carried out by the public administration, but that the institutions must take responsibility for involving the business and commercial world, the academic world, the associative fabric, the citizens, the media, etc. in climate action. This is the only way to succeed, and the success of this policy will have a direct impact on the quality of life of all sectors of our city.

We also have a renaturation project in Bilbao that we are working on with neighbourhood and environmental organisations, a public-private collaboration project with professional organisations in the sector to renovate the most polluting municipal boilers in Bilbao or, to give another example, we are working with the #HosteleríaPorElClima platform to try to promote sustainability in the hotel and catering sector. These are some of the actions carried out by the Mobility and Sustainability Department in collaboration with other actors in the city.

And as far as citizen participation in the design of our climate policies is concerned, I would like to mention the Bilbao Citizens' Climate Assembly, a deliberative space made up of a randomly selected demoscopically representative sample of the citizens of Bilbao, where since last February there has been a debate on how to build a Bilbao that is better adapted to the effects of climate change.

In short, instead of sanctioning or imposing, we are trying to convince, integrate and encourage. We believe that this is the only way to make us all feel that climate policy and action are our own and that they will be successful.

The Citizens' Climate Assembly is a deliberative space formed by a cross-section of citizens to discuss how to build a Bilbao that is better adapted to the effects of climate change.

How do you think everyday life in Bilbao will change over the next few years?

From the point of view of sustainability and care for the environment in Bilbao, we would like to have a citizenry that is demanding of its institutions in terms of climate policy, but also demanding of itself and capable of developing new habits of more sustainable and healthy mobility, responsible consumption or efficient use of energy, capable of coexisting with nature and living in more "naturalised" cities. And that all these changes in daily life, to which we want the institutions to contribute, are normalised by conviction and consensus, so that they are seen not as a way of complying with the rules or requirements established by the institutions, but as a way for citizens themselves to care for the health of all, to contribute to the equality and well-being of all, and to make cities more liveable and more innovative places.

Mila esker Victor for kindly answering our questions.

