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The Railway Area as an Engine for urban Change



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The Abando Train Station seen from El Arenal

The methods we used to develop our work on the given area included sites visits, photography and brainstorming. We were also fortunate to have a group member with local knowledge about Bilbao and the train station area.

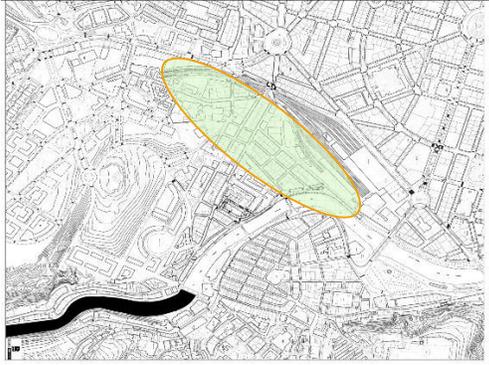
In the old images of the city, the Abando train station appears as the first element in the development of the Ensanche neighborhood. Its presence today still has an undeniable strong impact both on the city structure, image and functionality.



Development of the Ensanche



El Abando beginning of 1900



Study Area



San Francisco Street view to the Abando

We have also seen that there are areas with a lot of potential. The rail yards continue to serve the function for which they were originally intended by bringing people and goods into and out of the “heart” of the city of Bilbao. From those observations and discussions made over the few days we worked together, our group came up with two general guiding ideas for the transformation of this area:

First main point: the railway station should remain in the center of Bilbao

This is justified by the fact that it is already a great transportation hub that promotes sustainable mobility in Bilbao. The rail station area in its present state already serves an essential transportation and mixed function. From our investigation we have identified certain elements that can be refurbished, rebuilt and adapted to better serve the surrounding neighbourhoods, the people of Bilbao as a whole and visitors to the city.



1. The rail station should remain in the centre

2. The existing area can be revitalized to connect different realities in the area

Illustration of points 1 and 2

Second main point: the existing area can be revitalized to connect different realities in Bilbao

The basis which follows the rest of this presentation is founded precisely on this second point.

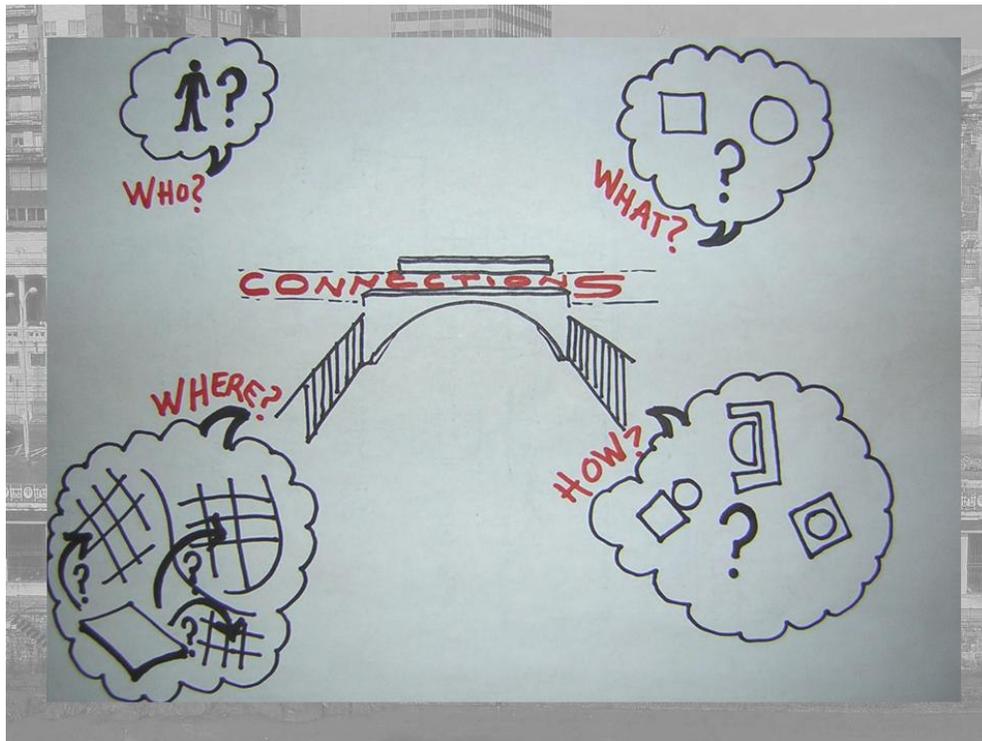
Although Bilbao has been widely recognized to date for its urban revitalization, spending a few days here, particularly in Bilbao la Vieja, one can see that room exists for improvement. At a physical level, differences can be seen in the urban infrastructure and the quality of public spaces in different parts of the city. From a socio-economic perspective, disparities can be seen in wealth, education and opportunities available to the local population.

To address these differences in the urban fabric, we view **the railway station area as an engine for urban change.**

And similar to the area's primary use as a transportation hub, connections is the theme that can drive that engine. A revitalized rail station area can reinforce *existing* effective connections as well as establish *new connections* with surrounding areas.

To develop the initial concept of connections into a more concrete list of intentions, we felt the need to answer 4 important questions which would show us how to proceed. Those questions are:

Who, what, how and where do we want to connect?



Connections to establish

The 'who' question can be answered quite simply by saying that residents of and visitors to Bilbao should benefit from improved connectivity in the rail station area.

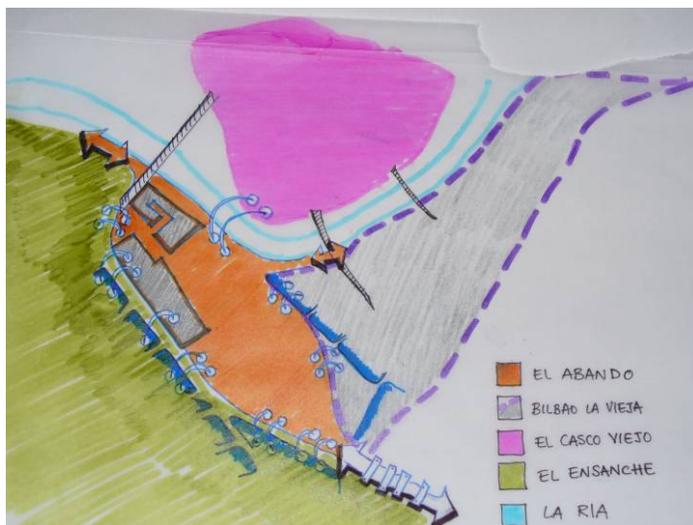
The *what*, *how* and *where* questions require however more in-depth analysis....



Analysis of the urban morphology



Analysis of the existing linear structures

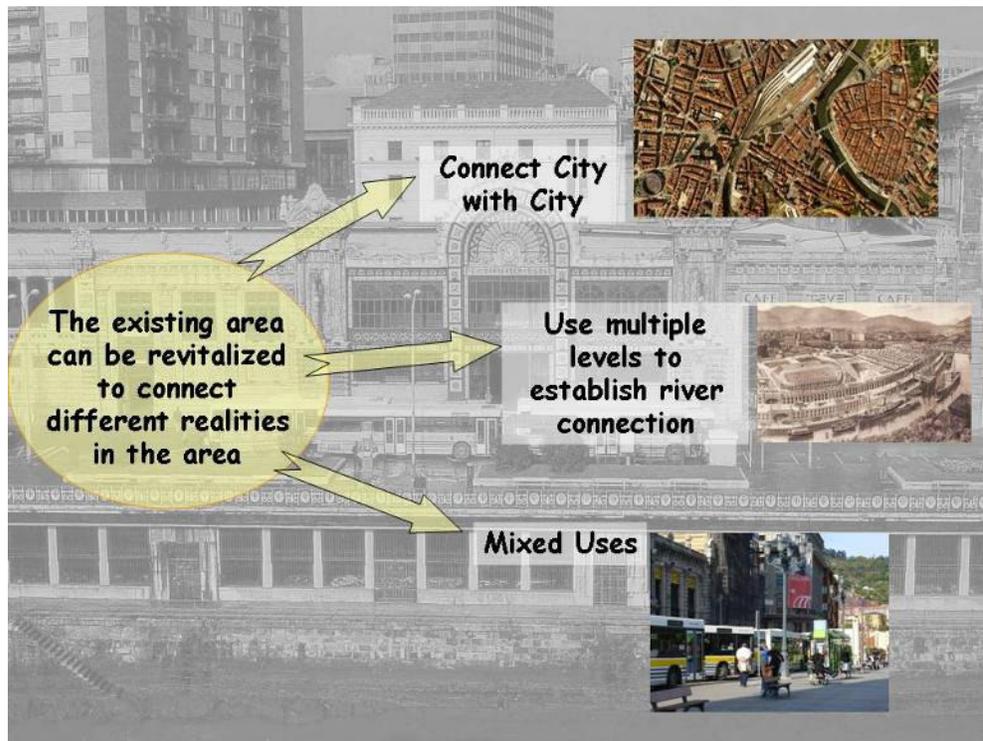


Analysis of the different socio-economical-visual realities

By analysing the existing urban shape of the Ensanche, Bilbao la Vieja and Casco Viejo (the 4 different realities surrounding El Abando), we realized that all of them are similarly compact morphologically speaking. So the main differences are cultural and economical. This fact stresses the importance of creating on the train station area an urban structure that brings them together, breaking the boundaries.

The information taken from our different analyses leads to the conclusion that a successful revitalisation of the area can only be accomplished by:

- **connecting city with city**
- taking advantage of the existing **multiple level situation**, to re-establish connections with the river
- reinforcing the present situation of **mixed uses** which is already an important aspect observed on the area, giving impulse to future regeneration schemes.



Revitalisation of El Abando area

How do we connect city with city?

The important factors to consider at this point are:

Physical connections – which are linking roads, blocks and green spaces around the train station.

Visual connections can be made across the rail yards, the river linking the different urban realities in those areas.

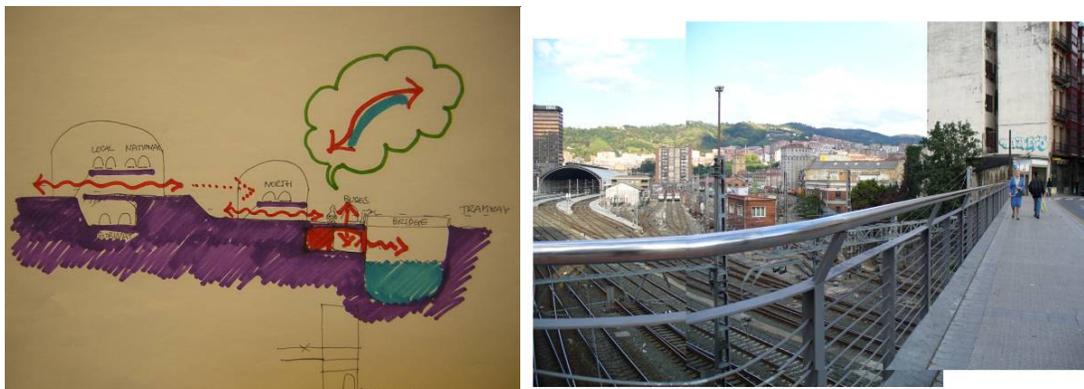
Streets, bridges visual axis to Bilbao la Vieja (...) allow physical and visual contact both horizontally (with the river, the old town) as well as vertically (with what is going on underground)



Physical and visual axis of connection

The scheme of views allows to have simultaneous visual contact with the interesting urban fronts and with the partial vertical openings that allow to percept the railroad under the ground.

The different levels are reinforced by the location of multifunctional activities, as explained ahead.



Different topographical levels allow a rich visual connection both horizontally as well as vertically to the “underground”.

Economic connections can include employment creation, both within a revitalized train station area and in spin off economic benefits to the surrounding neighbourhoods resulting from an improved pedestrian flow.

Urban continuity can also be achieved by creating new places that will host traditional urban activities. For example, empty spaces in the railway area can be transformed into public open spaces that connect principal squares and the area's many uses.

Joining the parts of the city with more city means bringing into the study area the same morphological characteristics as found in the existing surroundings. That means well kept and quality designed public areas, made for the people who live there, where they feel free to develop their activities; designed thinking of the wishes of those actors of public life, and on what they expect to find on the public arena.

The area today occupied by railroad tracks (see image below) would be used to extend surrounding street blocks that host the urban activities like commerce, equipments, housing (...) which contribute to attract people and to a safer and pleasant environment in the public space giving it identity, a place where different entities meet, mix and evolve.



Creating urban continuity

Using multiple levels to establish a connection with the riverfront

The old facade of the station is a part of the identity of this side of the river and connects the observer with the transportation history of the city.

As this building has an entire lower level, continuous to the riverside arcades, it can be an important element for any revitalization projects on the river itself. One issue that should be carefully addressed is the security of the area.

Taking advantage of the already mentioned different level situation, we can achieve two objectives:

1. give continuity to the already existing shore walk in the areas of Abando Walk and Bilbao la Vieja, in which the section of the unused Portugalete station represents an interruption in the pedestrian flow;
2. connection of uses and views between the Ensanche, the river and Casco Viejo.

This way we intent to re-establish the close relationship the city once had with its river.



The different levels of topography and uses uniting the different realities and bringing the Abando area to interact with the river front and Bilbao la Vieja

Open spaces of public areas of green and non-green preserve the existing urban fronts of value. Green areas are to give more value to the urban environment.

The 4 squares (Zabalburu_Sagrado Corazón de María_Circular_Arenal) are a very important part of this scheme of public spaces. They are linked by axes for pedestrians and public transports along which are the functional activities. The same squares are connected with residual spaces in the surrounding grids, and with an open space proposed for the railway, from which the urban fronts can be observed and taken advantage of to value them.

With regards to mixed uses the area is already a transportation hub that provides access to different modes including local, regional and international trains as well as buses, trams, taxis and pedestrian walkways. Public art can play a role in making any new or revitalized public spaces exciting and inspiring. Other uses that can be incorporated in the revitalization of the area include shops and services such as information points, cafes, bookshops, artistic activities such as studios, television design, fashion, arts and crafts. Trades can also be accommodated in schools or workshops. Commercial projects could include rebuilding the warehouses in the rail yards. Any or all of these functions can be used as interventions to connect the rail station with the river and surrounding neighbourhoods, bringing vitality and creativity to the railway area, and fostering a strong urban identity for the future benefit of Bilbao.

Connectivity and the possibility to interact in the urban environment in a challenging, amusing and vibrant way are the key premises to allow the birth and development of creativity and innovation.

When we “make city” we make it for the people who live in it, for those who visit it and for their future generations, having in mind that noone should be excluded. Everybody, with all their differences should find a place and feel they belong to the city in which their life takes place.

That is the main goal of a planner.

4.

From Corazon De Maria Square onwards



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About the site
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Analysis
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Management plan
Conclusion



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Introduction

The Bilbao La Vieja area is a physically and socially segregated part of the city. The mandate of the **Corazon De Maria Square onwards group** was to help establish this integration by utilizing the square as an urban element catalyzing integration.

The Bilbao La Vieja situation is comparable to the Al Raval Area in Barcelona where city integration was achieved by establishing a physical interface of the problematic Raval area with the rest of the city in the form of a cultural centre and a public plaza. The Corazon De Maria Square in this context offers an opportunity of establishing a magnet which will act as a catalyst in the overall integration attempts by the other groups.



The Bilbao La Vieja area

About the site

The Corazon De Maria square is like a proverbial node in the Bilbao La Vieja area. It is located on the San Francisco Street approximately in the centre of the area. Being the only large open space also commands a functional and recreational centrality. The square being positioned between the river and the Mirabillia Park also offers the possibility of linking the major open spaces.



Site location

Issues and concerns

The Corazon De Maria Square shares the same issues with the rest of the area like isolation, low income, drugs, prostitution, homelessness etc. The main issue of isolation is thus not confined to just physical isolation:

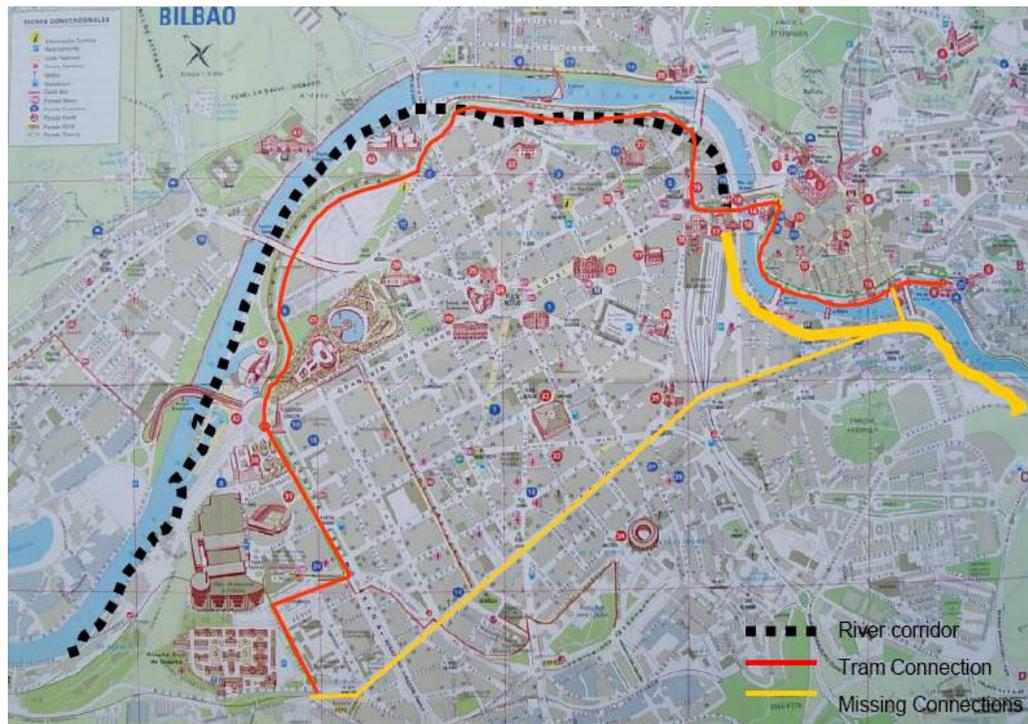
- **Human Isolation:** Lack of interaction and co-ordination. No functional or economic interdependency. The square itself does not feature in the activity cycle of the greater city.
- **Physical Isolation:** Missing connections and activities. The tram network does not connect this part with the rest of the city. Site topography on the edge of the Mirabillia Park is not negotiable and the area is thus not well connected to the western part of the city.
- **Social and economic Isolation:** Closed community with lack of economic interaction due to limited employment opportunities.
- **Infrastructure Isolation:** Lack of adequate transport facilities along with inadequate public health services and lack of cleanliness and waste disposal facilities makes this an undesirable destination.
- **Open Spaces and Views** that this area can offer have been limited in potential as the quarter turns its back to the river. The open spaces network is much fragmented.

The Corazon De Maria square on a whole misses out on an opportunity of anchoring another of Bilbao's urban catalysts like the Guggenheim Museum.

Analysis

Integrated development:

The proposal should establish a functional relationship with the rest of the city through an integrated development of the square. The development should bring in new opportunities in the area so that it becomes a desirable destination for the rest of the city.



Missing link in the transportation network

Transport network:

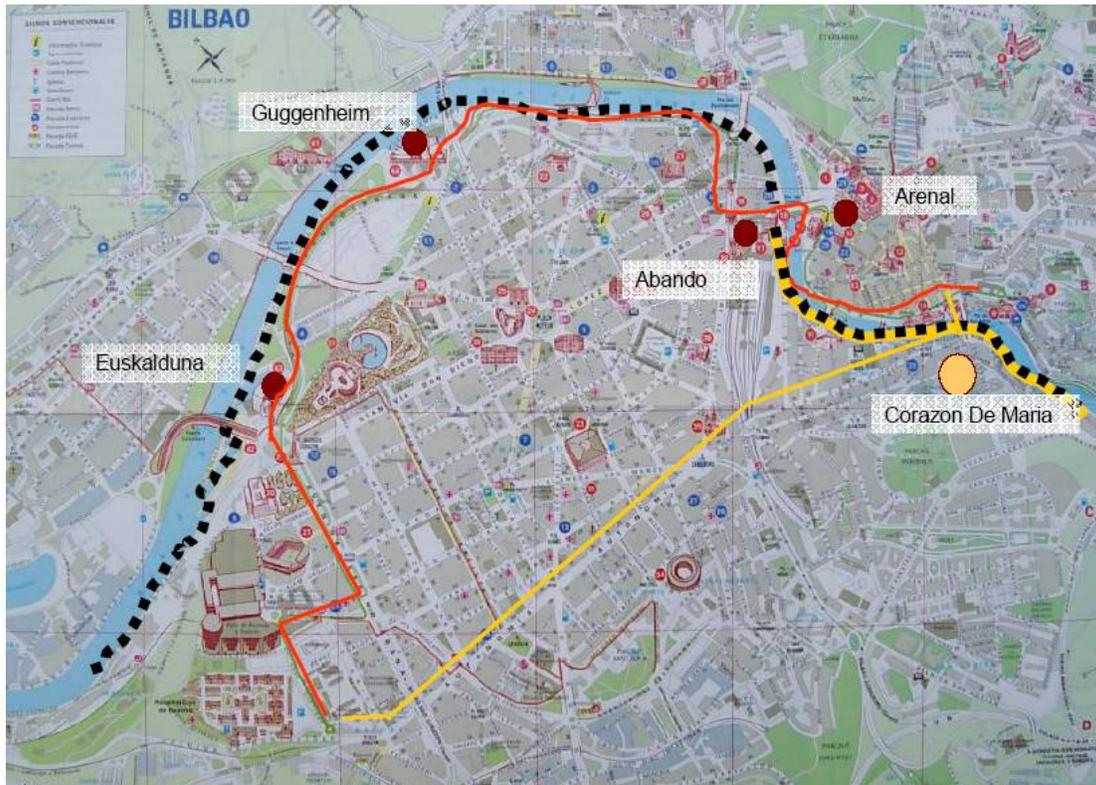
The area lacks a public transportation system. Providing the same also ensures that an induced development takes place near the transport node

Urban catalyst:

Completing the circuit of urban catalysts by intervening in the Corazon De Maria square. A series of public projects in the area would help in the integration and development. The school block can be relocated to free up land for new activities.

Open space network:

Improving cross river connections to ensure a new face and entry to the area from the riverside. Integrating the Mirabillia Park with the river by an open space network passing through the square would activate this area by bringing in commercial activity from the more prosperous commercial and retail district across the river.



Series of urban catalysts

Proposals

Elements:

- Art university
- Medical university
- Media centre
- Boutique shops
- Green art corridor
- Tram network
- River plaza

Activity:

- Vocational training
- Civic facility
- Studio spaces
- Gallery spaces
- Performance spaces
- Retail spaces
- Weekly flea market