

AUTUMN 2003

# Urban Land

## EUROPE

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Capital Development



SPECIAL AUTUMN EUROPEAN MEETINGS ISSUE



## Three Spanish cities demonstrate at the Summit of Cities and Regions the effectiveness of master planning in regeneration.

Three Spanish cities—Bilbao, Vitoria-Gasteiz, and Zaragoza—were examined during Spain's Summit of Cities and Regions, part of ProyectoCities, a worldwide urban/regional comparative project managed by the Fundacion Metropoli of Madrid. Each city demonstrates how assertive planning, including the production of a physical master plan, alongside astute land management can help cities and regions to transform problems into assets and to devise new sources of activity, revenue, and jobs in a sustainable way.

### Bilbao

Bilbao—a city of 355,000, with 880,000 people living in the metropolitan area—experienced both a municipal and regional economic crisis in the 1980s with the abrupt collapse of the iron and steel industries, which triggered a loss of confidence and pride in the city as a whole.

The collapse also brought the realisation that the city should shape a new economic, social, and physical vision in accordance with the requirements of a modern service-based society, rather than look to industry to generate activity and jobs. The industrial base for many decades had created prosperity but also promoted a negative urban image. Author Ernest Hemingway notably remembered Bilbao as prosperous but ugly.

The new vision would concentrate on place making and public art, on quality of life and urban pride, and on accessibility from the outside and mobility within. Under the watchful eye of Ibon Areso Mendiguren, the city's chief planner and now political head of planning as deputy mayor, this vision became embodied in a strong master plan for the city that was adopted in 1989.

The plan concentrated on the transformation of the industrial waterway, Ria de Bilbao, that bisects the city. The implementation

of the master plan was only possible if the key areas along the river, such as railway yards and old warehouses, were controlled by a single body instead of a multitude of public fiefdoms pursuing their own agendas. Such fiefdoms included state agencies, the province, and 30 municipal governments.

The step crucial to Bilbao's renaissance was an agreement by all the political factions to delegate the development of their real estate to a private, nonprofit corporation collectively owned and controlled by them. As a result, the corporation Ria 2000 was founded with Angel Nieva Garcia as general manager. In addition, the Bilbao Port Authority was persuaded that its historic know-how in the handling and storage of goods would no longer be used in the urban part of the waterway, and the railways were persuaded that they would find more added value in joining the citywide vision than in sticking to their own investment plans.

The most improbable tract of waterfront industrial land for development, located a five-minute walk from the central business district, was cleared and provided sites for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and the Congress Centre. The remainder of the waterfront parcel, in the sole charge of Ria 2000, became very valuable, and has been developed with offices, a five-star hotel, and luxury apartments.

The equity generated has been used to rehabilitate other difficult areas, such as the slums of crime-ridden Old Bilbao. There, the waterfront has been turned over entirely to pedestrians, and a new

**Left: Bilbao's former docklands provided the raw material for major transformation.**

**Below: Ria de Bilbao, which bisects the city, has been the focus for regeneration.**







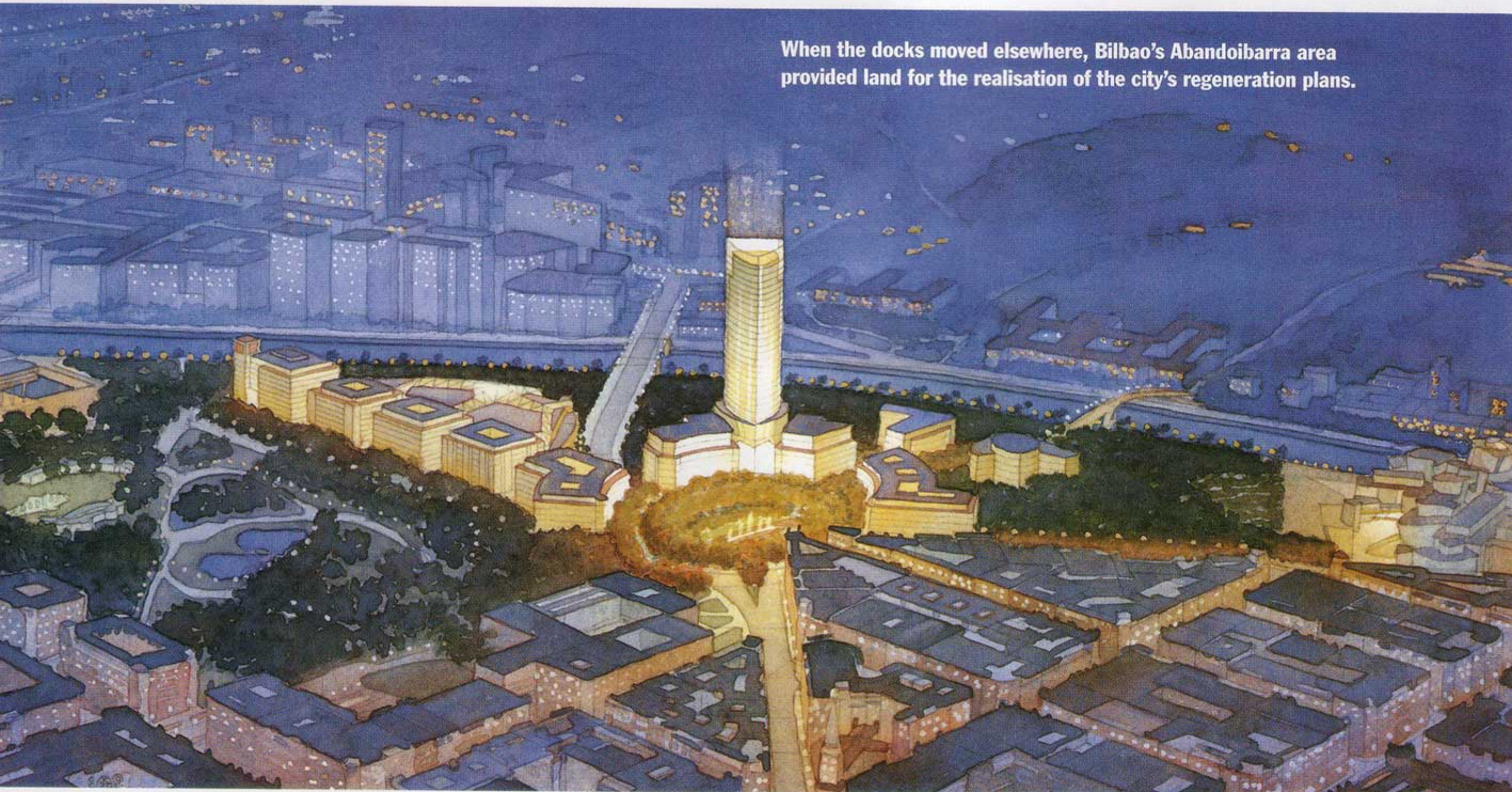
The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is now among Europe's leading cultural attractions.

©GUGGENHEIM BILBAO MUSEO

tram line with exclusive rights-of-way, which follows the waterfront, opened in December 2002. Old Bilbao now attracts new investment, the existing commuter rail line running south of the waterway has been modernised, and a new metro train service crosses the

city and runs north of the waterway along urban marinas towards the new port.

Bilbao's economic, social, and environmental vision has been to switch from industry to services and culture and to consider its



When the docks moved elsewhere, Bilbao's Abandoibarra area provided land for the realisation of the city's regeneration plans.



underused waterfront, tracks, and wharves as an asset rather than a liability. This vision was implemented through an effective public/public partnership aimed at coordinating the high-quality front-end public investments needed to attract the private sector.

### Vitoria-Gasteiz

Vitoria-Gasteiz, a small town regarded by many as the jewel of the Basque country's architectural heritage, has a population of 220,000 in the municipality and 290,000 in the wider province. It became the capital city of the newly created Basque Region because of the rivalry between Bilbao and San Sebastian, neither of which would accept the other as capital. Such a windfall might have jeopardised Vitoria's historic low-rise townscape and generated urban sprawl, but, in fact, neither appears to have happened, thanks to a strong physical master plan approved by all political factions under the leadership of Mayor Alfonso Alonso.

The master plan provided for high-density urban extensions that followed the 19th-century tradition of high-density, low-rise blocks with enclosed gardens. A strictly enforced urban boundary was also designated. Astute land management of these extensions helped generate the resources needed for a careful restoration of the city's architecture—in particular, the cathedral and the town square, a winner of a Europa Nostra Award, which recognizes achievements in the protection and enhancement of Europe's natural and architectural heritage.

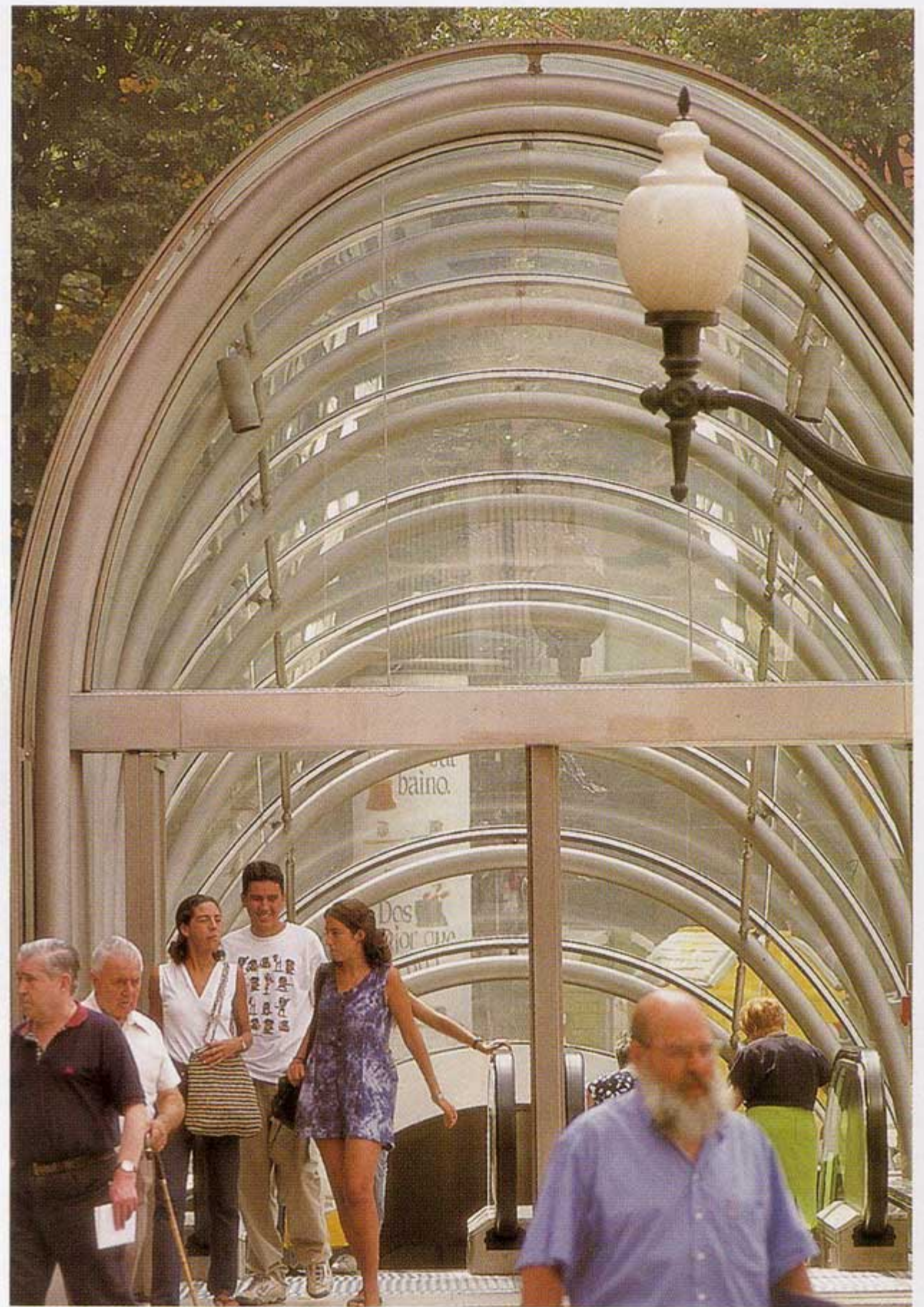
Vitoria's present size and high density have given rise to plans for a new tram and high-speed rail station.

### Zaragoza

The story of Zaragoza—with a municipal population of 610,000 and a provincial population of 860,000—is also one of opportunity. The city is positioned in the middle of the Iberian Peninsula between Madrid and Barcelona, a location that offers potential to benefit from the new high-speed rail link connecting those cities, as well as from the branch line towards the north coast. This opportunity nevertheless has to be realised by providing the appropriate intermodal connections between the airport, providing access from abroad, and the railway, and thus the means to forward goods inland. The city also needs to provide land for a logistics park, warehousing, and light industry.

Logistics has become the key to the planning strategy for Zaragoza and the region, the autonomous community of Aragon. To this end, the community is developing 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres) near the city centre as Plaza Project, a logistics platform close to the Madrid-Barcelona motorway, the airport, and the tracks of a planned high-speed train. This public investment, to be operational this year, is expected to attract a cluster of companies of sufficient size to generate synergies and encourage further development.


Another opportunity for regional development stems from the existence of substantial water resources and a tradition of irriga-



**Transportation in Bilbao has been boosted with the construction of a new metro railway line that traverses the city. Design was undertaken by architect Sir Norman Foster.**

tion, owing to the presence of four rivers, principally the Ebro, and the proximity of the Imperial Canal of Aragon. The community, therefore, naturally is opposed to the Spanish National Hydrologic Plan, which seeks to divert water from the Ebro towards the Mediterranean coastal basin.

The community has created the Aragonese Institute of Water, which is regarded as a centre for policy debate about water management and conservation. Moreover, it has announced its candidacy to be host of the 2008 World Exhibition and proposes that water be the central theme.

The Summit of Cities and Regions, held in Bilbao, Vitoria, and Saragoza in December 2002, was attended by more than 30 top officials and by representatives from nongovernmental organisations: universities, strategic partners of the Fundacion Metropoli, and urban-related institutions, among them the Urban Land Institute, the International Society of City and Regional Planners based in the Hague, and the Brussels-based Foundation for the Urban Environment. The summit ended with a roundtable of 14 leading planners. 

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