



Basque Writing 14

IKASTOLA

THE STIMULUS FOR THE BASQUE LANGUAGE



Basque School of Algorta, 1935

It was back in 1908 that the first *Ikastolas* (Basque-medium school), were set up. They were schools that taught in Basque, yet the concern for Basque-medium education had existed before that time. There are testimonies dating back to the 17th century about the concerns of parents and teachers for educating the Basque Country's children in Basque, and in the Continental Basque Country were written the first school-books in this language.

In 1876, coinciding with the abolition of the Historical Basque Rights, a call in favour of education in Basque emerged within Basque society and *Ikastolas* began to spring up at the start of the 20th century. Even though the revival of the language was the main factor, one is struck by the fact that these Basque schools were pioneering in many other respects as well: a) In Spain and France only the boys used to go to school while the *Ikastolas* used to take both girls and boys, b)

the children started school from the age of three onwards in the nursery schools, c) the local people were in charge of the *Ikastola*, in other words, the body closest to it, d) parents gave priority to their children's training above the official certificates, and e) within a short time four laws on education were passed, proof that pointed to the concern for education.

Over 100 years have passed since then and today, too, the *Ikastolas* are pioneers in terms of language, pedagogy and values. The *Ikastolas* have managed to turn monolingual environments into bilingual ones by taking their commitment towards the language beyond the confines of the school building. They have achieved better academic results when compared with other schools. English has been introduced into the classrooms of six-year-old children. They have developed coeducation and equality in particular. They have implemented a pioneering

methodology to combat bullying. They are immersed in the spirit of co-operation, not only in their administrative setup but also in the relations between students, teachers and parents.

In this publication Begoña Bilbao and Karmele Perez write about the emergence and historical background of the *Ikastolas*. Imanol Igeregi explains the *Ikastola* values that had already been expressed by parents way back in the 17th century. Koldo Biñuales provides in-depth knowledge about what was known as the "immersion model" enabling monolingual children and youngsters to become bilingual, and which was spread throughout the town in the process to revive the language.

Hur Gorostiaga's testimony provides us with an insight into the situation in the Continental Basque Country, where education exclusively in French prevails and where the *Ikastolas* are making a constant effort to offer Basque-medium education.

Zuriñe Mendizabal has for many years been organising the popular festivals in support of the *Ikastolas* in which thousands upon thousands of parents, students, teachers and citizens work throughout the year to bring together *Ikastola* loyalists on one festive day, combining demands and economic assistance.

Finally, we have Koldo Tellitu looking towards the future and explaining how close the relationship is between the *Ikastolas* and Europe.



Laura Mintegi
Basque PEN



ORIGIN OF IKASTOLAS

AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

We have come across the word *ikasola* among the neologisms of the writer Larramendi (1690-1766) for the term *eskola/école* despite the fact that the word *Ikastola* was used by Arana-Goiri for the first time in 1897. In 1898, R. M. Azkue opened the first primary school on Jardines street in Bilbao. Even though both words, *ikastola* and *ikastetxea*, were initially used with more or less the same meaning, nowadays *ikastola* is a Basque-medium school, and *ikastetxea* is the word used for any school.



The Chief Committee of the Koruko Andra Mari Ikastola, around 1914

The demand for Basque-medium education has to be set in the year 1876. After the *Foruak* (ancient Basque rights and privileges) were lost, social movements spearheaded by Basque-language loyalists such as Sabino Arana, Julio Urkixo, R. M. Azkue and A. Kanpion issued a proclamation in support of the language.

At the start of the 20th century, there were three *Ikastolas* in Bilbao. The above-mentioned *Azkueren Ikastetxea*, *Itziargo Ama* in the Plaza Berria (1908-1924), and *Arantzazuko Ama*, and set up in 1914. In Donostia-San Sebastian, Muñoa opened the *Euskal ikastetxea* (1914-1936).

In Oñati in 1918, the first Congress held by Eusko Ikaskuntza (Basque Studies Society) exerted a great influence on the building of Basque education and the Basque curriculum. Among the papers presented, the influence of the pedagogical movement known as the “*Eskola Berria*” (The New School) emerged. The pedagogues in the Basque Country had contacts with those of Europe: Ferriere, Montessori, Decroly and others. That way, the bases of their pedagogy were used to develop student activity and autonomy.

In 1920, when the Euskaltzaindia (Basque Language Academy) had been in existence since 1918, the Provincial Council of Bizkaia was to back the first initiative to institutionalise Basque-medium teaching: *Auzo Ikastolak* (Neighbourhood Schools). With respect to the training of the teachers, an appeal was made calling for the setting up Chairs of the Basque Language. As a result of that, the association by the name of *Euskaltzaleak* (Basque Language Loyalists) organised the *Eusko Biltzarra* (Basque Congress) in Donostia-San Sebastian and Bilbao in 1931. It gathered together many teachers to tackle subjects relating to bilingualism and teaching that were arousing concerns and interest all over Europe. Anize to Olano was tasked with explaining the aspects of the language, because as a member of the Pedagogy Department of Eusko Ikaskuntza he was in contact with experts in the matter such as Bovet, Davies and others, people who were lecturers at European Universities. Olano and Landeta, among others, expressed the wish to explore the models and means for bilingual teaching used in Europe, and also to find specific solutions and

applications that could be useful right in the Basque Country. The beginnings of *Ikastola* textbooks has to be put into that context, because an opportunity presented itself to work on mathematics, reading, geography, history and other subjects in Basque. Europe provided the model for Basque teaching as well as textbook production.

In 1932 at the time of the 2nd Spanish Republic, the *Eusko Ikastola Batza* (League of Basque *Ikastolas*) opened 14 *ikastolas* in Bizkaia, and one each in Tolosa and Bergara (in Gipuzkoa). Although most of the teachers were members of the *Emakume Abertzale Batza* (League of Women Basque Patriots) they worked in both the private *Ikastolas* and in the public schools. Later on, in 1936, when the Basque Government became responsible for education, most of the above-mentioned schools were turned into the “*euskal eskola*” (Basque School) and two innovations were incorporated into the curriculum: teaching in Basque and the use of the Dalcroze pedagogy combining music with physical education.

After the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) the *Ikastolas* went underground. Nevertheless, they survived by continuing in private houses and discreetly. The best-known ones are the ones Elbira Zipitria opened in Donostia-San Sebastian in 1942 and later the San Nikolas *Ikastola* set up in Bilbao in 1957. In the 1960s, new *Ikastolas* were set up across the Basque Country together with the legalising of the ones in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. In 1970, the Ministry of the Spanish State approved the law on Basic General Education. Thanks to that, the situation of the *Ikastolas* was normalised and they spread all over the Basque Country as a result. This new era also led to pedagogical innovation; and alongside that, the publications of the Edili, Sendoa, Cinsa, Gordailu, Iker projects and similar teaching materials were emerging. The *Ikastolas* have always used a modern methodology; the Saioka project in the 1970s and the Urtxintxa, Txanela and Ostadar



The children of Lauro Ikastola around the year 1966

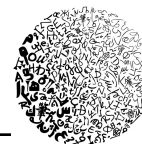
ones today have developed ones designed to support child development, the starting point being always the Basque-speaking perspective. The *Ikastolas* are an institution covering the whole of the Basque Country. Taking the European co-operative model, this Association of *Ikastolas* brings together 108 *ikastolas* and 54,000 students.

Today, Basque-medium teaching is absolutely everywhere. Over 80% of students are studying in Basque in the Basque Country in the public or private network.

Begoña Bilbao Bilbao

Karmele Perez Urraza

Lecturers of the University of the Basque Country



PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES OF THE IKASTOLA

The modern history of our *Ikastolas* (Basque-medium schools) began in the 1960s. Right from the start, a number of ever-present themes have appeared along our route: our social nature, the desire to secure the revival of Basque and the transmission of Basque culture for the upcoming generations, being involved in new pedagogical moulds... They all make up our identity, they give each *Ikastola* and the *Ikastola* collective a special character.

The *Ikastolas* are schools created by the people for the people and emerged out of popular initiative in the 1960s; in the view of a broad sector of society, the schools at that time (Spanish state schools and private religious schools) were failing to address their requirements and needs (particularly with respect to the revival of Basque and the transmission of Basque culture). And this step was made within community work, from town to town, accompanied by the gradual incorporation into this project of other parents, teachers, staff, ordinary citizens, cultural and sports associations and many other kinds of groups.

From the start, the **Country of the Basque Language**, *Euskal Herria*, appears in our imaginary, concurring with the definition made by the *Euskaltzaindia*, the official academy of the Basque Language: "*Euskal Herria is a European country... Historically it is the territory of Basque speakers and the Basque language, located in the western Pyrenees, across the mountain range that forms a frontier between France and Spain*".

But that being the case, these characteristics do not exhaust the content of this early attempt. Not only in the concept of school, **in the pedagogical aspect, too, our *Ikastolas* brought innovation** to the Basque Country: modern pedagogy (Freinet, Freire, active pedagogy), pre-primary and immersion models, co-education, the adopting of its own specific curriculum... and other innovations originating in the *Ikastolas* were introduced into Basque education.

Gradually, we have arrived at today's reality and our *Ikastolas* define us in this way: "*the Ikastola is a Basque-speaking educational organisation that has its own legal identity, which manages its own education project through the co-operation of its students, students' parents and professionals, in interaction with the environment close to it, and by promoting the IKASTOLA model in the collective organisation of Ikastolas, in order to develop Basque-speaking schools and education and to assist in making society more cohesive*".

Along the way our *Ikastolas* have been specifying shared, social ownership, because that is the foundation of each *Ikastola*. In today's *Ikastolas* the members of the school community in general,

and the parents of all the *Ikastolas* in particular, are the legal "owners of the project", and their participation in the decision-making is legally guaranteed because they are the owners of the *Ikastola*. Consequently, on the basis of the agreement on the responsibility of all parties and the distribution of responsibilities, if one wants to promote the shared social ownership of all the strata that make up the *Ikastola*, the participation and the power of decision of all sectors have to be underpinned by agreed, flexible formulas.

From the starting point of the autonomy of each *Ikastola*, the **co-operation, collaboration and solidarity** are promoted and implemented among the *Ikastolas* through the Association of *Ikastolas*. Each *Ikastola* forms the group, it is a member, and the network of *Ikastolas* strengthens each *Ikastola*. We have given that meeting place for all *Ikastolas* the legal setup of a European co-operative, the *Ikastolas* of the Basque Country, a European Co-operative Association. We work in a team and as a team we make the main decisions.

The Association of *Ikastolas* represents the *Ikastolas* before the institutions and in general before Basque society, and it coordinates and directs the pedagogical sphere, the social sphere, teaching materials and many other services of the *Ikastolas*. We have created effective resources and tools to guarantee these functions. These include, for example, the Solidarity Fund (all the *Ikastolas* contribute to this fund in support of small *Ikastolas* and those with special needs) and the agreement on the stability of *Ikastola* staff (that way the jobs of all the staff on permanent contract are preserved in a collective way).

We are a team, we are an educational and social movement. Furthermore, even if our *Ikastolas* form a movement, we are a services enterprise; we combine both aspects. Insofar as we are a team, set up as a popular movement, we have to provide quality, effective services to meet the wishes and needs of our members.

In short, our *Ikastolas* were born to provide "*an autonomous, self-managed social response to the gap in Basque and education detected in the Basque Country in the 1960s during the Franco dictatorship*". It is clear that since the start we have had a popular vocation or tendency, and that feature has been grafted into our DNA. At a time of globalization, our challenge is to maintain and develop our popular nature, our social nature.

Imanol Igeregi

Director of the Association of *Ikastolas*





Lizarra ikastola eta murgiltze proiektua

The first *Ikastola* (Basque-medium school) was set up in Lizarra (Estella) in 1933 during the 2nd Spanish Republic and at a time when Basque had completely died out. However, three years later in 1936 all the Basque schools in Navarre were closed down by Francoism. Once the attacks perpetrated by the dictatorship had eased, a number of families set up the first *Ikastola* in the Iruñea-Pamplona area in 1965, and the

To change the students' habit of speaking in Spanish, we had to conquer all the spaces of the *Ikastola* for Basque and we started step by step. Our first target was the classroom. After ensuring Basque use within the classrooms, we conquered the corridors. The walls crammed with motivating slogans and images became an effective call for the students to speak in Basque. And finally we set about Basquising the playground. To get the students into the habit of speaking in Basque on the playground, they played in Basque twice a week with the help of the teachers. From time to time the older students organised these games for the younger ones and that way they had the chance to speak to the younger ones in Basque.

To consolidate this new Basque-speaking behaviour we often made

them repeat the same activity and in the end we managed to reduce the use of Spanish while Basque gradually prevailed in all areas of the *Ikastola*. *Ezina ekinez egina* (achieving the impossible through effort). The next step was to conquer the street. To do this the *Ikastola* children went around the town's squares playing and singing in Basque. Having gone beyond the confines of the *Ikastola*, we went around promoting the



habit of speaking in Basque in the streets of Lizarra.

But there is no doubt that the family was the most important player that strengthened our students' Basque the most. Despite not speaking Basque, parents taught their children to love Basque. I would like to stress the importance of the parents. Every night they would put Basque stories and songs on the tape recorder for their children to listen to so that they would have dreams in Basque. As the children had learnt to love Basque at home, they were keen to speak in Basque at the *Ikastola*.

The main players in this Basquisation process were the sense of excitement, suggestion, motivation, *joie de vivre* and loving Basque. Students between six and eight were using Basque in all spheres. Students aged nine and over tried to improve their own levels of Basque and correct the barbarisms of their friends. And finally we encouraged the senior students to get into the habit of correcting each other.

Ikastola of Lizarra got going in 1970.

At that time we did not receive any help whatsoever, textbooks were of poor quality and the teachers had not been properly trained. But once these obstacles had been overcome, the Lizarra *Ikastola* designed an innovative project in 1980 to Basquise non-Basque-speaking children. By examining our situation in depth, the conclusions we drew were dire because our older students only ever used to speak in Spanish, even in front of the teachers.

For several years we tried to change the situation through discourse, but to no avail. At a staff meeting our head teacher presented the following plan: "So that Basque is not an artificial, strange language for our students and so that it can be a useful tool for them to express their feelings and emotions, the students need to use Basque automatically. If our students have a properly-rooted habit of speaking in Basque, they will automatically use Basque in any sphere. That is our ultimate aim."





The utopia of living in Basque in our Ikastola was turning into reality. Many educators criticised our behaviourist methodology and cast doubt on it. Nevertheless, it has to be said that we encouraged positive efforts and rewards in order to change the students' behaviour and we proved that it was possible to achieve proficiency and a habit of speaking in Basque.

We would like to stress that campaigns in favour of Basque were regularly organised at our *Ikastola*, because these events had a tremendous impact on the students. **Three times a year the whole Ikastola became immersed in the world of Basque**, thus building a motivating atmosphere. The *Ikastola* was becoming transformed and the students were happy to express their attachment to the Basque language by saying yes to it. The records of Basque use in the classroom monitoring sheets were very high and despite hearing barbarisms, the only language in all areas of the *Ikastola* was Basque. At the end of the campaign **we organised a huge Basque festival** with all the teachers and students congregated in the play-

ground to reward the students for their behaviour in favour of Basque.

But despite the fact that the attitude with respect to speaking Basque inside the *Ikastola* was considerable, there were also weak points in our Basquisition process. **During the holidays and over the summer in particular there was significant reduction in Basque use.** So that the progress made in the *Ikastola* would not be lost, we ran

atmosphere and get to know the Basque Country. They were amazed when they heard grandparents, shop assistants, families and everyone speaking in Basque.

Through these exchanges, **our students internalised the fact that it was possible to live in Basque**, and Basque use gradually spread to all spheres. **The presence of Basque saw a steady increase in the streets of Lizarra** and the long-forgotten festivals and traditions — Olentzero, St. Agatha's Day verses, Carnival, etc. — were celebrated once again. During these years **there was a dramatic rise in enrolments at the Ikastola**, because the families were very much in tune with the



holiday campaigns and organised games and many summer activities.

For the youngest students there were summer schools in Zerain and for the older ones camping and orienteering across Urbasa. Nevertheless, because Basque was not the language of the majority of the inhabitants of Lizarra, our students had to identify themselves in front of the Basque speakers in other towns and villages. So we organised exchanges with families in Etxarri, Laudio, Azpeitia, Ondarroa and the Continental Basque Country so that our students could experience a Basque

Ikastola project. As the initial fears gradually faded, the commitment in favour of Basque in the Lizarra area grew and grew. In a place where Basque had died out completely, it began to be revived with a strength that no one had expected.

Having overcome the initial gaps, the *Ikastola* currently offers a quality project by educating 700 students. 46 years have passed since the Lizarra *Ikastola* was set up, but we are still here working tooth and nail to Basquise the Spanish-speaking area.

Koldo Biñuales

Former Principal of Lizarra Ikastola





EUSKARA, ABOVE ALL THE OBSTACLES

Today, in the Basque Country under French administration (Continental Basque Country) 22% of the adult population is Basque-speaking. That percentage is set to continue its downward trend for several years to come because the oldest generations are the most Basque-speaking ones. But over the last few years, thanks to the robust development of Basque-medium education, the revival of Basque has been emerging among the younger generations.

Seaska, the federation of *Ikastolas* (Basque-medium schools) was set up in 1969 and today, by overcoming all the obstacles placed in their way by the French Administration, there are over 3,500 students at 34 *Ikastolas* in the Continental Basque Country. After Basque was banned in France for many decades, the *Ikastola* phenomenon has become a powerful social movement in the Continental Basque Country. In view of the success of the *Ikastolas*, bilingual classrooms also began to be opened in French public and Catholic schools at the end of the 1980s.

Since 1994, the *Ikastolas* have had an agreement with the French Ministry of Education. Today, when the three networks are taken together (public, Catholic, *Ikastolas*), 45% of the children in pre-primary education are schooled in Basque: bilingually in public and Catholic schools (half the classes are in Basque and the other half in French), and through the immersion model in the *Ikastolas* (100% in Basque until the age of 6, after which French is gradually introduced). As a result, the hope has been raised that the number of Basque speakers will increase once again. In the wake of the *Ikastola* movement, *Ikastola*-type schools have sprung up in many other regions of France: in Brittany, Occitania, Alsace and Continental Catalonia.

Nevertheless, today, too, the obstacles placed on Basque by French legislation are considerable. Even though article 75.1 of the French Constitution refers to "regional languages as French heritage", Basque and other autochthonous languages (Breton, Alsatian, Catalan, Occitan, Corsican, the languages of overseas islands) have no official recognition whatsoever. And that lack of

recognition is felt in everyday life. Among all the public TV channels for example, only one offers Basque a tiny slot of less than two minutes per day. Even if the local institutions are making an increasing effort to accommodate bilingualism, the central administration only recognises one language: French.



Even though the *Ikastolas* will soon be celebrating their 50th anniversary, the prefect representing the French State places obstacles in the way of any public funding earmarked for investment in the *Ikastolas*. Therefore, the elected representatives who want to help the *Ikastolas* have to come up with strange solutions for schooling the children, by declaring public premises as leisure centres, even if they are basically *Ikastolas*. And even if they do that, the French State has taken more than one municipal council to the administrative court in recent years on the basis of the Falloux law of 1850. This law will soon have been in force for two centuries; its aim was to protect the heritage of the Catholic schools after the separation of Church and State to prevent the State from seizing Church heritage. Yet nowadays the French State uses it as an excuse to take action against the secular *Ikastolas*.

Like previous presidents, while Nicolas Sarkozy was President, he promised that a law on languages would be passed. Then French President François Hollande also promised to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. But today no one has kept their word.

The Basque Speakers in the Continental Basque Country are pinning their hopes on the year 2017. The fact is that even though the Continental Basque Country is a cultural and historical reality that brings together 300,000 inhabitants and 158 towns and villages, right now it has no administrative nature whatsoever. On 1 January, the Continental Basque Country's 158 municipal councils are planning to set up an "intercommunal" structure to jointly manage infrastructure, transport, economy, tourism and many other powers. The new structure is planning to assume the powers pertaining to the Basque language and culture. Without waiting for official recognition from Paris, our challenge will, in practice, be to give our language and culture their rightful place.

Hur Gorostiaga

Chairman of Seaska, *Ikastolas* of the Continental Basque Country





THE TOWN IS THE BODY, BASQUE IS THE HEART

THE MAIN FESTIVALS OF IKASTOLAS

Herri Urrats

Ibilaldia

Nafarroa Oinez

Kilometroak

Araba Euskaraz

To understand what the five huge events known as the main festivals of the *Ikastolas* are, we need to look back over the last forty years in the history of the Basque Country.

For the *Ikastolas*, the 1970s were an important decade because there was an unstoppable rise in enrolment rates. Most *Ikastolas* were in fact set up in the 1960s but the most noteworthy expansion took place just before the demise of Franco. They were, without doubt, dynamic, highly enriching years.

By 1977 nearly 50,000 students were attending the Basque Country's *Ikastolas* and nearly half of them in Gipuzkoa. Some *Ikastolas* had recently been authorised by Madrid, but not all of them. They grew bigger and bigger but space was lacking and having nowhere to accommodate so many students became a huge headache. There was not enough room in the premises let by the Church, ground floor premises, in flats opened by the general public, no more students could be fitted in. Not even an ant. There was a need for new buildings everywhere, an urgent need.

The efforts of the general public to build new *Ikastolas* has to be understood in that situation. Everything was done to raise funds: tombolas, temporary bars, lunches, tournaments, even donating a part of one's salary... all kinds of things, but all of that was not sufficient to buy land and construct larger buildings.

Then a new parent, Josu Erguin, joined the *Ikastola* Committee at the Beasain *Ikastola* during the 1975-76 academic year. He was young and dynamic and had spent the 1969-70 academic year studying in California in the USA. There he had participated in a festival by the name of "Walking for Mankind" in which a walk was organised for a specific social aim, and funding was raised for a health need. Josu remembered the event and brought it to his *Ikastola*: "Why don't we, too, organise something like that so that a plot of land can be bought for the *Ikastola* to build new premises?" Initially people did not take much notice of him because they thought it was impossible to organise anything like that. But Josu persisted and also brought a group of people round to his idea, and they approached the Association of *Ikastolas* to get institutional backing.

The big festival of the *Ikastolas* in Gipuzkoa under the name of **Kilometroak** was held on the first Sunday in October, 1977. It was called *Kilometroak* because each participant made a commitment to him-/herself and to his/her offspring: he/she was prepared to pay a certain sum for each kilometre walked. Each one pledged to pay whatever amount they wanted; and they had to get family members, friends or institutions to sponsor each kilometre walked. Help, sponsorship and payment. Fifteen thousand Basque language loyalists congregated on that first big day. And there were nearly 100,000 during subsequent editions.

The festival was a resounding success because it achieved a good name and raised significant funding. The echo of the event spread to

other provinces faster than the speed of light and that way the experience passed naturally to all the other provinces. In what way precisely? In particular through the secretaries of the Federations because they met on a weekly basis. So, to Bizkaia in 1978 and 1980; to Navarre and Alava-Araba in 1981; to the Continental Basque Country in 1984. That is how the annual events known as **Ibilaldia** (in Bizkaia), **Nafarroa Oinez**, **Araba Euskaraz** and **Herri Urrats** (Continental Basque Country) came about.

It is worth remembering that a number of firm foundations which have been important between the first festival and today were established: they were called **Ikastola Festivals** to promote the *Ikastolas* and the Basque language. **Their aim** was to **raise funds**, and the event had to be organised to build or refurbish **premises**. A **circuit** would be prepared for people to walk round; the visitors would not be short of food and drink; and, in addition, shows for people to enjoy themselves would be available close by free of charge. To ensure everything went according to plan, a **special organisation** was needed to undertake the running of it: an **executive committee** comprising committee heads. Parents, workers, household members, groups of friends and townspeople would work together by means of **community work**: by helping each other, by becoming immersed in the same enthusiasm for the *Ikastola*, by identifying with the aim to drive the project forward together. And all that, that overall organisation, needed to come together **under an umbrella organisation**, and the **Federation of Ikastolas** became that umbrella organisation.

Thus two cornerstones are essential for understanding the festivals.

Firstly, the **attachment and enthusiasm towards the ikastolas of many members of the public**, as they work together in community work. Without their enthusiasm it is impossible to understand the thousands and thousands of hours they put in! Throughout the year there are about 150 people per event, and when the day arrives 1,500 people per event. According to an old saying, "What is impossible is achieved by persevering": the people created the Basque Country's Basque School/*Ikastola* and is keeping it alive.

Secondly, this means of financing created by citizens to help the *Ikastolas* has managed to become a treasure for most *Ikastolas*: because it was the foundation for obtaining land and buildings, and because they have

often provided the collateral required by banks. Solidarity has saved more than one *Ikastola* from death!

In 2017, within about forty years, even if the aims that were basic ones have been maintained, the events have been professionalised over the course of time and have spread across the whole year with many interesting projects. Now, as the fourth decade comes to an end, the festivals are in a reflection process to find out what they want to be in the future, and many forums have emerged, such as the one entitled "Kilometroak Bidea".

Zuriñe Mendizabal Ituarte
Communication- Association of Ikastolas





THE IKASTOLAS, MODEL OF POPULAR EDUCATION

108 years ago, a group of parents reflected on how Basque education should be offered; they were aware that the church and state –and education networks at that time– were imposing an identity that was a far cry from the nature of the Basque Country. So they created the *Ikastola* (Basque-medium school) whose aim was to build its own education system, separate from the Spanish state and the church.

Although during the first 50 years the *Ikastolas* did not achieve that aim, since the 1960s the *Ikastolas* have managed to develop all over the Basque Country, from one town to another and initially clandestinely, despite having to endure Francoist persecution and the fact that they were in a totally precarious situation. Initially, even if the aim seemed to be mere survival, various elements that were to characterise the *Ikastola* education system had already emerged: self-management in their set-up, the adopting of the co-operative model as the basis, and the commitment in favour of modern, progressive pedagogy.

The *Ikastola* has been created and developed over the last fifty years; there has been a revival of the language and culture and a modernising process, something that is intrinsic to Basque society and which is not easy to find in other peoples. It boils down to a popular, community initiative, a dynamic “we ourselves”, a social network, an unregulated social Basque state, built in popular resistance and with a national identity preserved in the collective memory.

The *Ikastolas* have been set up with the nature of a social organisation geared towards education and, to some extent, they set an example of the capacity for contribution that society can display if allowed to organise itself. Since they were created, bonds between individuals have been made around the education communities, networks have been set up between these communities with the aim of building and reviving Basque identity, the colonising trends existing in so-

ciety at specific moments have been resisted, and the transformation of society has been sought.

Today, the *Ikastolas* constitute the only education network that brings the whole of the Basque Country together. 108 *Ikastolas*, 5,000 employees, 54,000 students and their parents –co-operative members– who participate directly make up our community of *Ikastolas*. We have a comprehensive offer: starting from 0 and going right up to 6th form studies and Vocational Training. The *Ikastolas* have been created by the people and for the people. Each *Ikastola* has its own history, development and autonomy, but we all share the most important features of the *Ikastola* model.

We are organised as co-operatives, because that is the institutional type that is closest to citizens and the people. Consequently, parents and staff participate directly in the everyday running of the *Ikastolas*. The parents are the owners of each *Ikastola* and the staff collaborate with them.

In the pedagogical aspect, what stands out most is that we have our own education model, the basis and core of which is the Basque Curriculum. Ours is Basque-medium education and so we want to form multilingual Basque-speaking students and free individuals trained in ICTs. Our pedagogy is advanced and progressive and we are developing a pedagogy of integration through the EKI project.

Under the guidance of a large group of teachers and professionals and committed parents and members, we are producing our own learning materials to develop our education model. We have our own publishing house to manage and market the materials produced by the Association of *Ikastolas*.

Our *Ikastolas* are part of an education network, the *Ikastolen Elkarte* (Association of *Ikastolas*) to assist each *Ikastola* in its specific project, to represent the *Ikastolas* as a group or collective, and to expand Basque-medium education beyond the *Ikastola* sphere. The *Ikastolen Elkarte* is an organisation managed through co-operation and promotes co-operation, collaboration and solidarity among the *Ikastolas*.

We have a European dimension. Europe has been our reference from the start. It is in Europe that we have found progressive pedagogical trends and innovative school models. And we will continue to be more and more European: our *Ikastolas* of the Basque Country are part of a European Co-operative.

Koldo Tellitu

Chairman of the Association of *Ikastolas*



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