



**KINKU ZINKUNEGI** *coordinator of Euskara Munduan Plan*

## *A sign of identity for Basque communities*

**1989-1990 ikasturtean Ardanza lehendakariak sortutako “Argentinan euskaraz” proiektua finkatuz joan da eta beste herrialde batzuetara zabaldu da. 2003an, Miren Azkarate Kultura sailburuak hiru eskakizun beteko zituela hitzeman zuen: bertako irakasleak trebatzea, irakasleak eta ikasleak material didaktikoz hornitzea eta aktibitatea diru-laguntzen bidez finantzatzea.**

The seed for Euskara Munduan, a plan created to bring Euskara classes to the Basque centers, was planted in Argentina in 1989 by a group from the Basque community who presented their idea to Lehendakari Ardanza during a visit by the former Basque president. Little by little other Basque centers around the world began adding their names to the list, including countries from Latin America, the United States, Canada and Australia, as well as clubs based in Spain, Paris, London and Rome. Sixteen years after the launching of the plan, originally called “Argentinan Euskaraz,” several thousand people have learned Euskara outside of Euskal Herria and the project is more active today than ever before.

Program coordinator Jose Franzisko Zinkunegi, whose work falls under the auspices of the Institute for Basque Culture, Language and Adult Literacy, HABE (Helduen Alfabetatze eta Berreuskalduntzerako Erakundea), has closely watched appreciation for Euskara spread to all corners of the world. Familiar with the actual conditions and circumstances of Basque communities abroad, his insight helps shed light on the process involved in reviving a language.

### **Young people are the driving force in Argentina**

“In 1989 there were no longer any Basque immigrants in Argentina keeping the language of their forebears alive,” said Zinkunegi. “Euskara was lost and a group of young people from the Basque center told Lehendakari Ardanza that they needed support to revitalize it. That was the birth of Argentinan Euskaraz, a program which took its first steps in 1990. It began with a three-month *barnetegi* program (live-in Basque language school) in the village of Macachín, La Pampa, taught by two teachers from Euskal Herria.



Seventeen Argentinians signed up as students, and after the experience was through they went back to their Basque centers to teach beginning Euskara classes to 175 students.”

From 1990 to 1995 efforts focused on training Euskara teachers so they could respond to the demand in Argentina. In 1996 a second phase got under way. It was decided that more intensive training was needed so that the Argentinians themselves would be equipped to take over the process, although the program would still be funded from Euskal Herria. “We set ourselves a goal: by 2000 Argentina would be completely autonomous in terms of teachers,” said Zinkunegi.



Above and below are pictures taken at one of the *barnetegis* organized in Argentina.

Argentinan,  
hirugarren eta  
laugarren  
belaunaldiek  
egin zuten  
eskakizuna.

"We began bringing people to Euskal Herria when they reached level 6 and here they would continue their language studies in *barnetegis* for periods of up to three months. As they became more comfortable with the language, we would provide them with methodology resources and basic teaching skills so they could teach classes at their Basque centers. You have to keep in mind that these people were volunteers, not trained teachers, and they all came from different backgrounds and professions.

The funny thing with the Argentinians was that the demand for learning Euskara came from a group of young people. They were third- and fourth-generation descendants of Basque immigrants who felt the need to revive the language of their ancestors. Zinkunegi went on to explain that was "common for first-generation immigrants to place little importance on their own language. They downplay its importance because what they really want is for their children to learn the language spoken in their new country. Euskara was a language that stayed at home around the dinner table. In Argentina all of the people are 'hyphenated' Argentinians, meaning they're either Italian-Argentinians, Polish-Argentinians, Basque-Argentinians... They're all Argentinians, but somewhere in that confusing welter the Basque-Argentinians insist on asserting their 'Basqueness.' They feel the need to let they world know they're Basque. The elements that survived as signs of identity are family names and folklore, but the language was lost. But the younger generations have shown great interest in reviving the



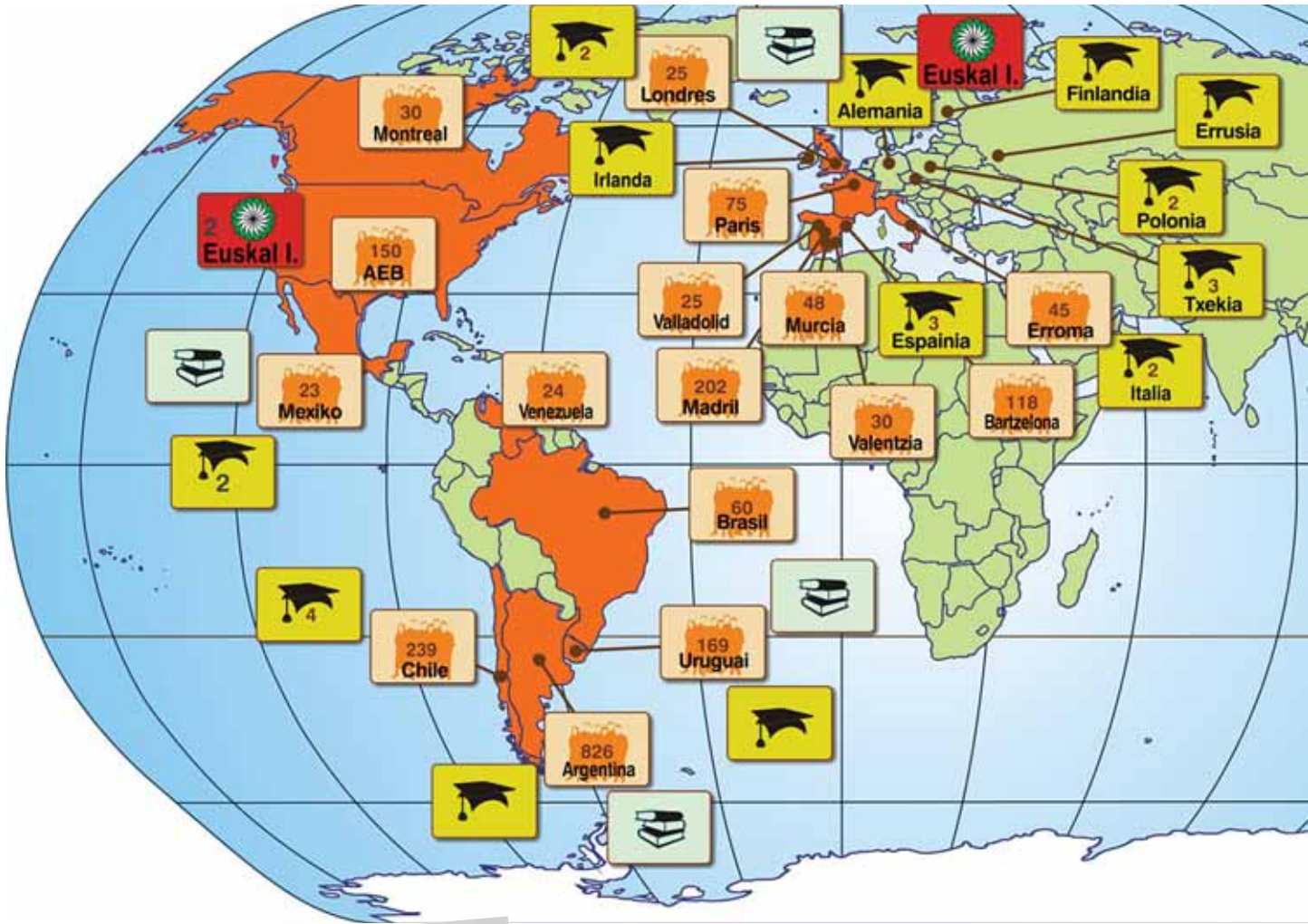
language, and since these are the people now at the helm, it's really encouraging.

The number of people enrolled in Euskara classes in Argentina rose from 175 in 1990 to 273 adults and 91 children in 1995. Now, in 2006, the number is expected to exceed one thousand counting all the different Basque centers in the country.

### From the Southern Cone to the United States

At the 1999 World Congress of Basque Communities held in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque centers from other countries had the opportunity to learn all about the Argentinian experience and join in on the project. Chile and Uruguay were the first of the Southern Cone countries to sign up. Also key to further expansion of the project was the NABO conference held in 2001. "The Basque organizations in the United States were interested in offering Euskara classes and invited us to present the teaching materials we used in our courses. The upshot of that initial contact was laid down two years later at the 2003 congress. The aim was clear: for 75% of the NABO partner organizations to be set up to offer Basque language classes by 2007. That was the challenge they put forth, and from that point on what had previously been called Argentinian Euskarak became known as Euskara Munduan. Teaching Euskara in Basque centers now took on a global dimension.

The people who began to take interest in Euskara in the United States were the children and grandchildren of



Basque immigrants, and most of the people who signed up for the courses already spoke Basque at home. Therefore, the method developed in the U.S. was different from the process in Latin America. Teacher training sessions and workshops were organized in both places, but the pace, time frame and availability of the people are very different. "The idea of people taking part in a fifteen day *barnetegi* in the United States," said Zinkunegi "is virtually impossible." They simply don't have that much free time. The working schedule there is nothing like it is in other countries, so the project has to take a different approach."

So far there have been two meetings. The first was held in Boise in 2005. 25 participants enrolled in a course on how to use Boga, the Internet-based Euskara language program offered through HABE, which includes all levels of Basque culture and language and is structured in five courses or levels. With this as a basis, classes started being offered at the various Basque clubs that had installed the BOGA program. 30 people attended the second meeting, which was held on February 17th, coinciding with the San Francisco NABO meeting. The idea for next year is to organize a *barnetegi* as part of the popular "udaleku" summer



camp program in which children aged 8-16 learn about Basque culture and customs.

### Fulfilled promises

At the 2003 congress Basque Minister for Culture Miren Azkarate took on the commitment to respond to the Basque centers' demands with regard to Euskara. Her pledge was to make sure local teachers received training to eliminate the dependence on Euskal Herria; to provide teachers and students alike with educational materials; and to finance the effort.

At the congress Azkarate also promised to adapt the teaching materials to local needs. "For the first few years the materials used were the same as those used in Euskadi for Euskadi. In Argentina they worked pretty well because the language of instruction was Spanish. Sometimes the references were out of context and the materials had to be adapted to fit the circumstances, conditions, people and geography, etc. of their own country, but in general terms the texts were valid. But in the United States the material just didn't work, so we had to change it and use English as

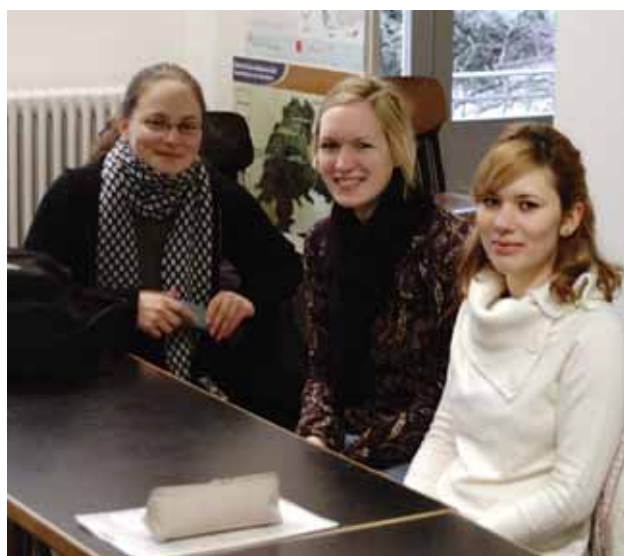
**Otsailaren 17an "Euskararen eguna" ospatu zuten San Franciscon, NABOk 18an eta 19an ospatu aurretik.**

the language of instruction. The commitment we took on in 2003 was to adapt the first three levels to English and French, which is now complete. The first course of the Boga program, that is the first 300 hours, are now available in Euskara-French and Euskara-English. This has made it possible to use Boga in the United States, Sydney and London, as well as in French-speaking communities including Paris and Montreal".

### Internet and distance learning

In 2003 "Euskara Munduan" started up a new system for training instructors, spurred on by the introduction of new technology in daily life. "This phenomenon," added Zinkunegi "has brought about a change in the influx of information so that nowadays Basque emigrants are much more closely connected to their homeland than ever before. These changes have also made Basque centers more open."

Since the project was initiated other formats and media have been created to help students learn from home without the need for a teacher to be physically present. That was when we decided it was time to focus on distance learning.



Students in Frankfurt

**2005eko urtarrilean,  
25 pertsonaz osatutako taldea  
bildu zen Boisen “Boga”  
programa eta auto-ikaskuntza  
kudeatzeko.**

“Our website is designed as a virtual campus, with a teacher from the Lazkao *barnetegi* who designs a new set of exercises every week aimed at the 40 new instructors this year from Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. The local instructors receive the work every Monday, organize their time however they see fit, and send the exercises back to us when they’re finished.

Oral expression, which is not available online, is reinforced with 2 two-week *barnetegis* in Argentina in January and July, coinciding with school vacations. The people who sign up for the distance learning program agree to participate in the *barnetegi* since they are considered an essential vehicle in achieving fluency. The third course using this new system of teaching began in March and, according to Zinkunegi, has exceeded all expectations. “The level the teachers have acquired is much higher than we had ever imagined.”

The offer remains open to any country or federation of Basque clubs interested in training their own local Euskara instructors. In fact, a number of other countries have already decided to take advantage of the program. In Mexico courses are offered at the Basque center in Mexico City, which has installed Boga at their facility. The same holds true for Venezuela, at the Caracas and Valencia centers, and in Puerto Rico. In Brazil, classes are offered at the Euskal Extea in São Paulo. “In January and February 2005 the Boga system was set up at the Brazil center and 30 students signed up. Former university professor Estebe Ormazabal made the São Paulo experience possible by offering to teach the Euskara classes at the center. The most recent addition to the Euskara Munduan program is the Basque club of Montreal.”

The experience has not only been confined to the Americas. In Europe the new Basque center in Paris now has 80 students learning Euskara; in London, although the Euskal Etxea is located in a small office, classes are taught at the Metropolitan University as part of their Basque studies center; in Rome courses have been offered for three years, and the number of students has grown so much that the UPTER (Università Popolare di Roma) decided to create a



**Euskal Liburutegia in Frankfurt.**

department of Euskara in collaboration with ACE (Asociacione Culturale Euskara). In Spain, Madrid and Barcelona had a long tradition of independently organized Euskara classes, all of which have now come under the umbrella of Euskara Munduan. All levels are available in these two major cities. Courses are also taught at the Basque centers in Mallorca, Murcia, Valladolid and Valencia.

### **Basque libraries**

In association with the Euskara Munduan program, a number of libraries specializing in Basque studies are supplied with reading materials in the same fashion as any other public library in Euskal Herria. Around 300 volumes a year are earmarked for Mexico, Buenos Aires and Frankfurt. In Mexico agreement was signed with the National Library of Mexico, and in 2005 another agreement was signed with the Federation of Argentinian-Basque Entities (FEVA). The actual library is located at the Laurak Bat Euskal Etxea in Buenos Aires but a library loan service is available through any other Basque center in Argentina. In Frankfurt a central Euskal Liburutegia has been set up to serve all of Germany. These libraries contain the entire body of Basque literature, plus a collection of reading materials on Basque culture in the language of the country.