

An autonomous and active journey to school: a case study of good practice

Uma viagem autônoma e ativa à escola: um estudo de caso de uma boa prática

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ABSTRACT

This report analyses an instance of good practice for autonomous and active school walking in a large city of the Basque Country (Spain). Specifically, this work describes the background and development, methodology and phases, strengths and weaknesses, impact, and future challenges of this project. Various techniques such as life history timelines, personal interviews, documentary analysis, and contrast sessions have been used. The strengths of the project include the real impact on pupils and families in terms of work-life balance, the importance of the inter-institutional collaborative network and the inter-municipal relationship. This has been achieved through a group of town councils, the involvement of the entire school community, the leadership and active participation of the municipal technical staff, and the use of new technological tools for the development of the project.

Keywords: child autonomy, independent mobility, active trip, school routes.

RESUMO

Este relatório analisa um exemplo de boas práticas de caminhada escolar autônoma e ativa numa grande cidade do País Basco (Espanha). Especificamente, este trabalho descreve os antecedentes e desenvolvimento, metodologia e fases, pontos fortes e fracos, impacto, e desafios futuros deste projeto. Foram utilizadas várias técnicas, tais como linhas de tempo da história de vida, entrevistas pessoais, análise documental, e sessões de contraste. Os pontos fortes do projeto incluem o impacto real nos alunos e nas famílias em termos de equilíbrio entre a vida profissional e familiar, a importância da rede de colaboração interinstitucional e a relação intermunicipal. Isto foi conseguido através de um grupo de câmaras municipais, do envolvimento de toda a comunidade escolar, da liderança e participação ativa do pessoal técnico municipal, e da utilização de novas ferramentas tecnológicas para o desenvolvimento do projeto.

Palavras-chave: autonomia infantil, mobilidade independente, viagem ativa, percursos escolares

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, cities have become hostile and unsafe places for the children who live in them. The increased use of private vehicles and other safety issues has harmed children's autonomy and freedom, with safe spaces in cities being reduced to playgrounds, often fenced, or delimited with gates. According to F. Tonucci (1997), these are the results of the decisions of adults in which children themselves have not participated.

In this context, administrations, social entities, and schools have set out to reverse this situation and offer children the space and voice they deserve in society and cities. For this reason, Bilbao City Council promotes and supports initiatives for school routes in different schools in Bilbao, encouraging pupils to make the journey to school independently, alone or with their peers, and actively, on foot, or by bicycle. These projects also aim to promote physical exercise, improve health levels, and raise awareness of the need for healthier habits. Finally, the values of ecology and sustainability are also underlined, making less use of motorized vehicles and choosing greener options.

This report analyses this good practice, its background and development, methodology and phases, strengths and weaknesses, impact, and future challenges. This project is part of the collaboration agreement signed in November 2020 between the University of the Basque Country¹, Bilbao City Council and Solasgune², with the assistance of the Basque Government's Department of Health, which aims to analyze Eskolabideak projects³ in Bilbao's educational centres. It is also part of the University-Society project "Autonomy in children's mobility: analyzing the impact of the Eskolabideak project in the educational centers of the Basque Country" (2021-2022), in which other City Councils are also participating together with the institutions mentioned above.

1.1 SCHOOL WALKS: ORIGINS AND CONSEQUENCES

Active travel to school is one of the main opportunities for families to promote physical activity, develop autonomy, or increase the level of well-being of their children. However, in recent decades, active travel has declined significantly. In contrast, there has been an increase in car dependency and a simultaneous increase in the prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents (Sirard & Slater, 2008). These low rates of physical activity are therefore associated

¹ University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU: <https://www.ehu.es/>

² Solasgune: team for educational assistance, policy mediation, and environment design. <https://solasgune.com/>

³ Eskolabideak projects: Projects to promote active and autonomous school routes in the Basque Autonomous Community.

with potential health risks for children such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular, or bone health problems (Andersen et al., 2006; Biddle et al., 2004; Bell et al., 2007; Pan and Pratt, 2008; Leary et al., 2008; Sugiyama et al., 2007; Hedley et al., 2004).

In addition, active and autonomous travel to school can also promote children's mental health (Fotel and Thomsen, 2003; Fyhri and Hjorthol, 2009; Mendes de Paula & Mendes de Paula, 2021). Several studies have highlighted the benefits of these journeys on personal well-being and development (Fagerholm & Broberg, 2011; Shaw et al., 2013), social relationships (Jones and Ogilvie, 2012), and children's psychosocial development (Prezza et al., 2001).

1.2 INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL PATHWAYS PROJECTS

In recent decades, numerous projects have emerged in the international sphere that promote active and autonomous journeys to school. One of the first initiatives is the project "Let's go to school alone" in the Italian city of Fano, which set out to encourage the independent school route and the autonomous movement and participation of children in the city (Tonucci, 1997). Another early initiative was promoted in the city of Odense (Denmark) called "Safe routes to school in Odense, Denmark" (Tolley, 1997), in which specific measures were established to help children walk to school. As a result of these initial experiences, similar projects have emerged in other countries such as New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and Spain (Valverde, 2018).

1.3 PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

School journey projects can be initiated by an entity or collective but always in collaboration with other agents and administrations (DGT, 2013). Avellaneda (2015) claims that the key to the success of these projects is based on the sensitivity and support of the institutions themselves. Moreover, the possibility of the project's success depends largely on whether the administration involved has a good system of interdepartmental coordination (Avellaneda, 2015). Otherwise, a lack of understanding and collaborative work can lead to technical or political coordination problems (Mor, 2007). In Spain, most of the projects developed have been promoted, coordinated, and financed by local councils⁴. These have been responsible for collecting the voices of the educational communities (families, schools, and students), managing the physical changes in the streets, and evaluating the effectiveness of the measures adopted (L'Institut Infància i Adolescència de Barcelona, 2017). In other cases, public

⁴ Examples: Pamplona's Council Hall or Getafe's Council Hall.

institutions in some localities have required the help of private entities to manage the projects to achieve the established objectives.⁵ These entities may belong to various professional fields depending on the specific needs of the project. Thus, agents can be found from the educational field, such as social educators, whose objective is to dynamize and coordinate the people involved and execute and review the various phases of the project. There are also other experiences in which administrations have required the support of architects for a better design of the city and its neighborhoods to create more accessible and safer environments. Finally, the families take part in some of this projects, taking decisions or supports when needed, and this is an important part for good results in the schools activities (Pizzolatto et al., 2022).

2 METHODOLOGY

This work is part of a wide-ranging investigation that has been carried out since 2019 on the impact of the Eskolabideak program on children in Bilbao's schools. Specifically, it is a case study that aims to highlight the value of the School Pathways initiative promoted by Bilbao City Council, together with Solasgune, as the program's driving force and the Basque Government's Department of Health. This research is also part of the projects promoted in the Haurren Hirien Sarea.⁶ (HHS) network involving both the municipality of Bilbao and Solasgune.

Stake (2013) defines a case study as the study of the particularity and complexity of a singular case to understand its activity in specific circumstances. Concerning Best Practices, there is difficulty and debate regarding the concept and criteria when considering this concept (Roman et al., 2019). Nonetheless, there is general agreement regarding the value of these practices, that is, they allow documenting, extending, and extracting profitable knowledge from the comparison of experiences and projects (Escudero, 2009); they provide knowledge applied to reality, allowing us to know both the possibilities and limitations of implementing a given action; they generate internal and external knowledge networks (Rodríguez et al., 2018); they allow learning from others; and they facilitate and promote innovative, successful, and sustainable solutions to shared problems (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2015).

The objectives of this case study are:

⁵ Examples: Valencia's Council Hall or Bilbao's Council Hall.

⁶ HHS: Haurren Hirien Sarea: Network of municipalities to restore our communities as healthy, participatory, and inclusive learning environments. <https://www.haurrenhiria.eus/>

1. To systematize the methodology and ways of working implemented in the Eskolabideak project in Bilbao.
2. To identify the strengths and points for improving the project in the various participating educational centers.
3. To analyze the elements related to children's participation, collaboration with the educational centers, and the sustainability of the processes promoted.
4. Determine the impact of this project on children who can walk to school without an adult figure.

Specifically, the following data collection techniques were used in this case study:

- Life history - timeline. The aim is to go through the milestones that have taken place since the project's start-up with those responsible for the Bilbao City Council project and the Solasgune organization. During the first part of the dynamic, the case's route, potential, impact, and critical aspects are considered. In the second part, an attempt is made to systematize the methodology that has been applied, using a flipchart to map out this process with the help of the interviewers.

- Individual interviews. Five interviews were conducted with the agents involved in the educational centers where the project has been developed to obtain a real and practical vision of the project and its process.

- Documentary analysis. All written documents or documents published on the Internet related to the case were compiled and analyzed. Specifically, public documents of the project, press clippings, reports, diagnoses worked on in different centers, and work minutes were analyzed.

- Contrasting session. After a first report, the agents involved in the project offer their point of view and make the relevant modifications to adjust the collected results to reality.

A qualitative analysis of the information from the field phase was conducted to obtain the first report, using the Nvivo software.

2.1 ESKOLABIDEAK BILBAO PROJECT

2.1.1 Background

In recent decades, initiatives have been promoted both globally and locally to encourage children to walk to school independently. Bilbao is no exception. As early as 2009, a public school in the municipality began this initiative inspired by Tonucci's work and framed it within a community campaign with the slogan "It takes a neighborhood to educate children." Moreover, and driven by grants from the Basque Government's Department of Health to

promote physical activity and reduce sedentary lifestyles among pupils, different schools in the municipality have been developing projects with this objective since 2015.

The project led by the Mobility and Sustainability Area of Bilbao City Council began in 2016. In that year, the Department considered incorporating school routes into its regular work, which was also being promoted at the national level in different places.

In 2017, the drafting of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan began, which involved a participatory process involving various agents. In this context, a connection was established with the head of the social action area. The opportunity then arose for the Mobility Area to participate in HHS, a Basque network of cities for children inspired by the international project The Children's City, led by Francesco Tonucci.

2.1.2 Development of the project

The project began in 2017 with the sending of the guides, and work began with an educational center. The Mobility and Sustainability Department is promoting this project to enable the children of Bilbao to walk to school without an adult figure. In the words of the project promoters themselves in a presentation at a school:

The aim is to create alternatives so that children can walk or cycle to school with friends. To create spaces in which children can regain autonomy in play and movement. (Project presentationc2_documentation)

As we have seen in the theoretical framework, this has various benefits for the personal development of the children. It also encourages them to go with friends on foot or by public transport when this is not possible. This encourages less car use and promotes healthy habits and the use of more sustainable transport. In addition to these aspects, the project also points out the positive effects of coexistence and solidarity. Unlike other places in the Basque Country, this project is being developed in a large city such as Bilbao and is led by the Mobility and Sustainability Department. Specifically, the initiative is led by a technician from the City Council and another technician. From the beginning, there has also been technical support from Solasgune: educators with experience in other projects of this type (for example, those carried out in municipalities such as Leioa) and facilitators from HHS, where this experience is located. Other important agents in this project, as we will see in later sections, are the management teams and the AMPAS of each school.

As mentioned above, the project began in 2017 with a request for collaboration from two schools to promote the school pathways project that they had begun to work on, incorporating a third school with very special characteristics in the area. In the latter school, as

there was no AMPA, the decision was taken to work with the management, and thus, the project began. This experience is special because the center had unique characteristics: very few pupils per class, 100% of which were of overseas or gypsy origin. It is, therefore, a population that poses a challenge and requires flexibility in the methodology due to their socio-economic and linguistic features.

In subsequent years, work began with other centers that contacted the City Council area, thus expanding the network.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this project is now well-established, having been modified over the years based on the evaluation of the different actions that have been carried out. In some cases, it is similar and shares the same strategies and actions as other similar initiatives (e.g., diagnosis, survey, mapping). However, new actions have also been incorporated into this methodology, such as using the GIS.⁷ or the feedback meeting with families after the first diagnosis phase, and a phase that has not yet been completed, which is the feedback from the area on the diagnosis carried out and the possibilities for improvement.

Before starting with the description of each phase, it is important to highlight some methodological principles of this project:

- The Mobility and Sustainability Area establishes that the objective is for children to travel to school with friends and stresses that it is essential to collect data from pupils to develop the first phases.
- The project is flexible and adapts to the reality and phase of each school.
- The project is placed at the service of the educational center, with the aim that in the medium term, it can be autonomous and does not require technical support from the outset.
- The complexity of developing these projects requires the collaboration of different agents such as the management of the educational centers, their teachers and families, and other school or community agents.

2.2 PHASES OF THE METHODOLOGY

The following is a description of the nine phases of the practice analyzed. As we will

⁷ GIS: Geographic Information System. A computer system for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on the Earth's surface

see, some of these are established, while others are in the process of reflection and improvement.

1. Contact with the school: in this first interview, the project is presented, the two conditions mentioned above are highlighted, and it is stressed that the project is adapted to the needs and circumstances of each school. These circumstances are carefully noted and it is decided in which classes it will be implemented. It is also important to address any fears and apprehensions involved in starting the project in this first phase.

2. Survey: A survey is carried out to obtain information about the mobility and autonomy of the students in the participating classes. Specifically, we are working with an abridged survey⁸ based on that used by the international project "Children's City."

3. Data mining: After collecting the results of this survey, these are returned to the class and the school. The philosophy is that "*the data is theirs, so we have to give it back to them, because it belongs to them*" (Professional2_time line). This phase closes with a summary of what emerged from the surveys and the work in the classroom. Some of the issues that have emerged in various centers can be seen in the following table.

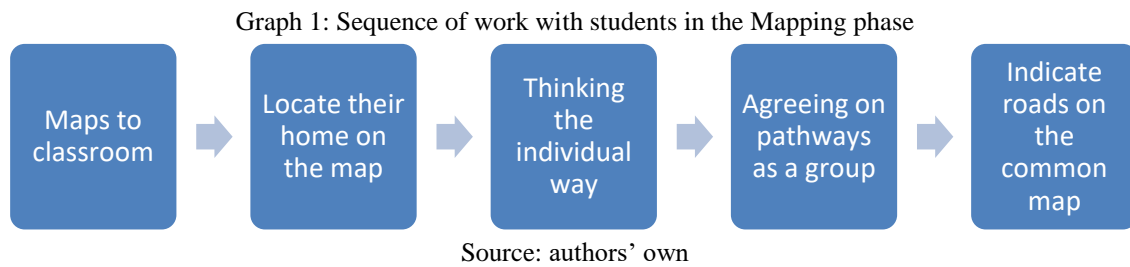
Table 1: A sample of the results of the classroom work

Source: own elaboration

4. Mapping: The next phase is mapping. In each class, or by an interclass system, a graphic representation is created of the paths used to travel from their homes to school. This is an extensive task as it involves creating scale plans and bringing them into the classroom to

⁸ The survey is at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1OjKvq8T6eo5IDO7X85zfo_0LT8MijZoTh8ZMFhxLpIw

work on the paths. Other technicians from the town council have been involved in this work due to its complexity. The sequence of work in the classroom is as follows:



5. The session with families: in the third year, the need to work on families' fears and involvement in the project was raised. For this reason, a session was devised in which children bring their families to the meeting and explain to them the work carried out. The fact that the children themselves explain what they have worked on has allowed many parents to get involved and participate.

6. Diagnosis: after the mapping and the family session, the children make a diagnosis. This is conducted on the street, walking along the different routes that have been mapped and identifying the difficulties and obstacles associated with the routes.

7. Testing week: for a week, the pupils are invited to try out the routes they have designed to see if it is possible to use them and identify the different difficulties that may arise. However, the children do not wait until this week to test their work. With the activation of the project itself, they usually start to implement the route without prompting, which indicates that the mere fact of working on the autonomous school routes encourages activity in the pupils.

8. Return of the diagnosis: this phase is planned but has not yet been carried out. This phase aims to return the diagnosis carried out by the children, with municipal data on the area (accident rate, black spots, interventions, etc.).

9. Evaluation: continuous evaluation of the project has several components. On the one hand, this is carried out in the periodic meetings held by those responsible for the project to discuss its development and new steps. On the other hand, there is one carried out annually with those responsible for the program in each educational center and its agents. Finally, a pre-post test evaluation is planned to observe the project's impact on the independent mobility of pupils. The aim is to run the first survey again sometime later when the project is already established and see what changes have occurred. Unfortunately, this was planned to take place during the time at which the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, so it has not yet been possible to carry this out.

2.3 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

In this section, we will present the strengths and weaknesses of the project based on the information analyzed.

One of the strengths is that, although the project is still in the first phase of implementation and at the halfway mark of the five-year timeline, the emergence of the pandemic has slowed down progress. But, as we will describe later, we can now see its impact on the centers and their pupils.

I believe that yes, I believe that families and students it has had a very positive impact in that it strengthens their autonomy, they feel more grown-up, more responsible, more accountable. Families stop being so dependent at 9 o'clock in the morning. (Teacher3_interview)

They come more relaxed, they don't come running. I mean, for example, I see how they come walking, and they come walking, talking to each other, they generate much more... I don't know... group belonging. Even interaction between different age groups, which is also very interesting and which is not very common here. (Teacher5_interview)

As can be seen in the cases where the project has started, there is evidence of an impact on the children. But also, as the following testimony relates, in spite of the project being in its early stages and being interrupted by the confinement, it raises questions to the students and families about the following issue: Why not enable greater autonomy for children to travel to school with their friends? The following testimony also shows the impact of this project on issues such as family reconciliation.

Some pupils (...) talked about it at home, and the families thought it was a good idea. The fact is that six children in 6th grade come alone, and they make four trips because they don't stay for lunch. They meet at three different points and pick up friends. Above all, at midday, when the parents might be more pressed for time, they go to school alone and then in the afternoon they also go alone. (Teacher5_interview)

A strong point of this project is the network and collaboration it has established from the outset. This includes an inter-institutional collaboration with the Social Action Area to identify which area could lead it, which was key to its promotion and support. Also, in the process, the support and resources of different areas of the City Council have been key. An example of this mentioned above was the collaboration of technicians from the area for the mapping phase. Another important collaboration in some schools where the need to work with families on the fears and doubts that arose with the project was that of the psychologist

responsible for the municipal Parents' School project, who, as can be seen in the following discourse, made an important contribution to this process of school pathways.

We found out that there was a psychologist in the Health Department of the local council who was very aware of the whole issue. (...) And we organized a meeting with her. (Professional1_life line).

The second dimension of collaboration, which has been discussed in the background section, is that of HHS. For the people in charge of the project, having the reference and support of other technicians from the municipalities where the project is being carried out has not only been enriching, but has also given meaning and strength to the project. As stated by the person in charge, the training and activities carried out in HHS have been essential for developing the project. This coordination has also led to collaboration with the UPV/EHU and the Department of Health to evaluate the program developed in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years.

I believe that HHS training is the starting point for many municipalities. In other words, some municipalities approach it a bit like, well, OK, and so on, and after the training, because this same training we have had now with Zumaia and Gatika, and you see that there is a change, it's like: OK, now I understand it, and I know what I'm getting into. (Professional2_life line).

In this sense, a final network — at first informal but gradually taking shape — is the one that has been generated with the educational centers and their various agents. As the project has progressed in each center, it has been possible to weave networks of collaboration on the task and the project — in some cases with the management teams and in others with specific teachers or families. One teacher mentioned the following in this regard:

From the moment it requires the involvement of families, if the families themselves are the ones who promote it, that is when it is most interesting because not everything can be handed over to the school management. After all, at the end of the day, it is in a field that is relevant to them, which is not ours. We will receive the benefits of working on the children's autonomy, but we didn't have that demand (Teacher 1_interview).

Another strength of this project is the direct involvement of Bilbao City Council through technicians from the Mobility and Sustainability Department. Sometimes these programs are subcontracted, and the role of the public administration remains as a subsidizing entity and guarantor that is offered to the service that has been contracted. In this case, the area, through technical staff, participates in their leadership and development, as well as in all the decisions that are taken. Doing so from a large City Council such as Bilbao makes available resources that would not otherwise be accessible. We have previously seen how some of these resources have been human resources in the mapping phase, training with families, or dealing with

changes in street fixtures, traffic, and other issues. Again, these are issues that fall under the responsibility of the same area in charge of the project.

In this section, everything related to GIS plays an important role. This technological development opens up many possibilities for this program. As the City Council is involved, changes and improvements can be made to this geological identification system, unthinkable for a smaller city council, let alone the entity providing the service. As mentioned in other sections and will be discussed later, the use of GIS opens up new avenues and possibilities for school roads. This technology has been commonly used internationally to work on this issue when diagnosing the difficulties and barriers to road safety (Wong, Faulkne, Buliung, 2011). Some experiences in Spain have also used GIS as a tool for school roads (Alberola et al., 2014). Being able to use this in a large municipality and the possibility that this way of working could be extended to other municipalities are contributions and strengths of this project.

But I think that as soon as we see the potential and how to do it... When we have it really set up, no one will have the slightest doubt that this has to be promoted because it is also the future. (Professional1_life line).

It is also a challenge, as this path has only just begun. Changes have been requested at an IT level, which are expected to arrive soon and will be a qualitative step forward so that school routes — as with the bicycle lanes or buses — can be present in this tool and be consulted autonomously by children, families, teachers and pupils, and citizens in general.

2.4 DIFFICULTIES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

While we mentioned earlier that the involvement and leadership of the Mobility and Sustainability Department is a strength, it is also sometimes a difficulty. Communication with a public administration such as a large city council, and the weight of this area, in particular, means that in many of the discussions, other issues emerge that are unrelated to the project. These include dissatisfaction with other actions, attitudes of mistrust towards the institution, or expectations that through this dialogue, the improvements will be solved quickly. Sometimes, but not always, this becomes an obstacle in some of these processes. It is important to advance towards greater democratic maturity and participation, in which public institutions and citizens can collaborate and reach consensus. In this sense, it is important to be clear about deadlines or actions that are not in the hands of the institution so that false expectations are not created. For example, one of the people responsible for the project reports that months and years can pass between the diagnosis and identification of an intervention, its implementation, and its

completion due to administrative time, which poses a difficulty in the relationship established between a problem and its solution.

Another of the project's difficulties — common to others in the local and global context — is the fears and perceived risks on the part of families, and sometimes the centers, to assume autonomy. Sometimes these are related to physical barriers (traffic, or areas with little traffic), and sometimes they have a subjective component of fear of people who might harm them. These fears need to be considered and also addressed by the project, sometimes, as we have seen, through dialogue and offering data.

Another difficulty — circumstantial and unexpected — of this five-year project has been the COVID 19 pandemic and its effect on schools. First, in the confinement phase, everything had to be interrupted, and then schools were forced to take measures to implement health protocols in the second stage of the pandemic. This has meant that, on the one hand, the priorities and energies of the centers have been focused on meeting this new challenge, and on the other, that some of the requirements in these protocols, such as social distancing and bubble groups, made it very difficult to carry out the planned activities. The reality is that the project was halted in most centers, many of which had already begun the project or were at intermediate stages. Although there has been a relationship with the centers, once again, as the following participant states, it is clear that fluid communication and information are necessary at all times so that the projects do not fall apart.

The only thing I could tell you is that since they came to do the mapping sessions, which I think was in February or so, until now, the truth is that we haven't received any more information. So I imagine it's because of the pandemic, but I don't know if the project has come to a standstill and a little more information in this sense... let's see, maybe it's also my responsibility, I haven't asked for it. (Teacher4_interview).

But this pandemic situation has also created new dynamics. On the one hand, the project and the HHS framework promoted a document with recommendations on why, in this situation, it was a priority to continue supporting these initiatives and the responsibility of all agents to make it possible. In this sense, the Basque Government's Department of Health reaffirmed that carrying out school pathway projects in times of pandemic was possible and safe since walking to school is a safer than other transport systems in the face of COVID-19, and is possibly one of the best ways of respecting health advice and preventing contagion among pupils (<https://www.euskadi.eus/informacion/caminos-escolares/web01-a3infan/es/>). For example, in the project's specific context, there was a request from a school along these lines, concerned

how this pandemic situation posed new challenges that could be met by the school pathways project.

They called us to say: Listen, please, we really, really need it, because we have many people, with many..., that is, many families, with many problems, very different timetables, the family..., family reconciliation is a problem, let's see how we organize it. We made an attempt that did not go well because... because of the COVID protocol, the centers are very anxious about it. (Professional1_life line).

At the time of writing this report, the health scare was behind us, and the short-term horizon that is opening up is a relaxation of the various measures. In other words, we are returning to a scenario of new normality in which this project can now be implemented as originally intended. The challenge now is to reactivate all the processes and make up for the lost time that this pandemic has entailed.

One weakness of the project, identified by those in charge and that was planned to be addressed just before the pandemic emerged (and therefore could not be implemented) is the lack of a steering team in which all schools are represented. The idea is to move from working center by center to working annually with all the centers in a steering group that meets periodically. As we have mentioned, this initiative was launched but was hindered by the pandemic. This will allow the project to be richer and more widespread. The contrast and collaboration between the different centers are important aspects of these projects. Also, as in other experiences (Legorburu, Alonso, Blanco, Idoiaga, 2021), annual activities can be carried out involving children and the school community of the various participating centers to reactivate, learn about, or evaluate the project.

We imagine a steering group that reactivates the School Route systematically in September or October and that the centers are already autonomous. (Professional2_life line).

Alongside this issue, there is another area for improvement. Although the project is well known, there is (little) information about it on the website of the municipality⁹. And while it has had an impact on the media¹⁰, there is no large organization representing the initiative, or an updated website with the initiative, information about it, and the actions carried out. Regular information is needed for citizens and the different agents of the educational community on its

⁹https://www.bilbao.eus/cs/Satellite?c=BIO_Servicio_FA&cid=1279157426658&language=es&pagename=Bilbao%2FBIO_Servicio_FA%2FBIO_Servicio

¹⁰ Deia: <https://www.deia.eus/bizkaia/bilbao/2021/09/05/caminando-seguros-colegio/1148370.html>

Europa Press: <https://www.europapress.es/euskadi/noticia-bilbao-presenta-guia-caminos-escolares-favorecer-autonomia-ninos-desplazamiento-colegios-20170131171742.html>

Cadena Ser: https://cadenaser.com/emisora/2020/02/11/radio_bilbao/1581419050_376635.html

development and evaluation. Also, it requires a brand of its own, a logo that identifies the project. In this sense, another area for improvement would be to approach it in a more community-based way, in which more agents can be involved — not only the participating centers. Open and participative spaces could be created in which all the work carried out in the municipality, both in this project and in other initiatives, could be highlighted. Other experiences (Legorburu et al., 2021) have shown that although this is not easy, it is possible to work from this community dimension, generating other synergies with initiatives related to health or sustainability, such as the European Mobility Week held in the municipality.

Finally, in this area of improvement, it is also possible to consider creating bridges and connections, a children's participation group of the City Council, which can play a relevant role in the project. As we have said, working on children's autonomy should be coherently linked to all the phases of the project. This is certainly a challenge worthy of attention.

3 CONCLUSIONS

As we can see below, this study has demonstrated good practice in school pathways. It is a project consolidated over time, with a significant impact on the environment, and leadership and methodology that provides novelties and added value that can be transferred to other initiatives (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2015). It also poses some challenges for the future, partly because it has only been running for five years, and the pandemic situation has had an impact on progress. These challenges can be summarised as follows:

Recover the previous work and the actions carried out, re-engage the centers involved in the project and create a steering group that can lead the ongoing initiatives together with those responsible for the project. This will need to be done once we have entered a new phase of the pandemic.

Improve and develop aspects of the methodology that still need to be defined, such as diagnosis and feedback.

Develop the work done so that the GIS can become a tool at the service of the Project (Wong et al., 2011) and inspire other similar initiatives in other places.

Develop the brand and identity of the project, as well as its community dimension (Legorburu et al., 2021).

Seek strategies to place children at the forefront of the project, giving them a preferential and leading role in which they can give their opinion and play a critical role in the process (Legorburu et al., 2021).

The relationships that have been established throughout the process between the different public and private institutions have undoubtedly led to a situation of mutual benefit, in which each entity involved has achieved the objectives set through joint work and effort. Moreover, through this union, synergies have been generated from which positive results have been obtained for all parties, resulting in complex achievements, such as the participation of numerous schools and their educational community and the involvement of various social agents.

As already mentioned, the present case study has revealed good practice that can serve as a reference for other places. It is a practice with well-defined principles and methodology, which incorporates, as we have seen, proven methodological innovations in the intervention, and the potential to exploit technological tools such as GIS. It is also a good reference practice in the municipal sphere, particularly in large municipalities. It can be of great help to those large municipalities and areas of mobility and sustainability that want to develop initiatives in promoting safe and independent mobility for children on their journey to school.

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