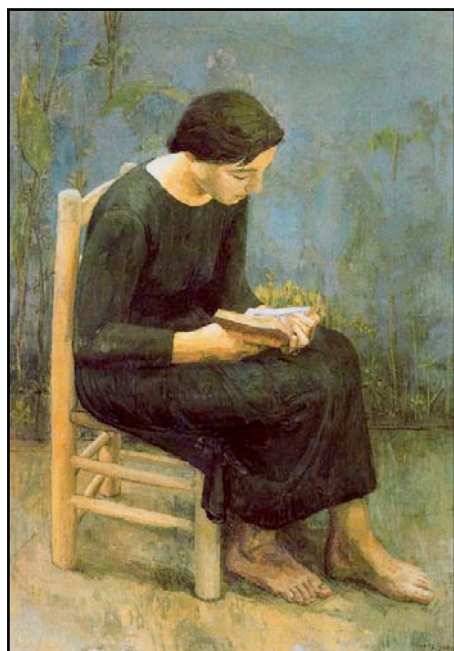




# Basque Writing 4

## READER'S CLUBS



### The Literature Lovers' Revolution

One of the very first Readers' Clubs, the **Literature School of Larrabetzu**, was set up in this small town in the Basque Country in 2003.

The document published by its promoters said, *"We want to learn to read, and to understand what we read. We want to know if anything has been written beyond the established literature we have been taught, who has written it and why; who decides what true literature is, what Basque literature has to say and what it ought to say to world literature."* The literature lovers who gathered under the name Lonely Hearts' Club was calling for the reader's revolution: *"Since the Lonely Hearts' Club was formed, it has been calling on readers to rise up, because we believe that without active reader participation, literature is condemned to die. That is the reason why the Literature School of Larrabetzu was set up. By calling for active literature, we will be ensuring that lively, highly dynamic classes will be held, that debate will be at their heart, with a constant exchange between those who know and those who don't know so that nobody ends up without saying what he or she thinks."*

Since then, dozens of groups and clubs have sprung up here and there in about 30 towns and neighbourhoods. They all share a similar formula: literature lovers who have all read the same book meet once a month and discuss and talk about the book under the guidance of a group leader.

From time to time they invite the author to come and talk about the book, and that way they not only turn a solitary pursuit into a social one, they close the cycle in literary production and offer the writer luxury feedback.

Some of these experiences have been covered in the following pages. Not all of them are there, but the most significant ones are: All the news on literature is gathered and posted on the **Hitzen Uberan** website. **Ibilaldi Literariok** (Literary Excursions) are organised to visit places described in a novel. During the **Eako Poesia Egunak** (*Poetry Days of Ea*) held in the village of **Ea** (Bizkaia, Basque Country) all the inhabitants of the village participate in the organisation of the literary activities and events. **Ahotsenea** organises a parallel literary event around the Book and Disc Fair of Durango, which is acquiring an increasingly commercial hue. The Association of Writers in the Basque Language (EIE) enables the youngest readers to have direct contact with authors through the **Idazleak Ikastetxeetara** (Writers visit Schools) Initiative. **Irakurbide Feminista** (Feminist Approach to Reading) takes a fresh view of the text from the feminist perspective. Finally, we look at

the experiences in **Donostia-San Sebastian, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Bilbao** and **Berriozar** (a small town near Iruñea-Pamplona in Navarre). We gather **the views of two participants** in the clubs. And to finish, the journalist **Hasier Rekondo** interviews the group leader **Isa Castillo**. Isa Castillo has been involved in this activity for many years and today she coordinates the activities of seven Readers' Clubs.

The aim, as always, has been simple and direct: to make a modest contribution from the watchtower of Basque literature to the PEN writers' community. With great pleasure.



*Laura Mintegi*  
*President of the Basque PEN Centre*



## *Readers' groups in the sphere of Basque literature: revolution or resistance?*



### **Iban Zaldia, Writer**

1. There is no doubt that **one of the most interesting phenomena in literature in the Basque language in recent years** has come from demand, in other words, from the readers, rather than from fashions, trends and possible “generational” issues: some of them on a town or city level have resorted to getting together in different groups, in other words, they have given a united response to the literary event. The most usual form adopted by that response has been the reading workshop, in other words, the readers’ club.

2. **The idea of the readers’ group is not specifically Basque**, even though some people might like it to be –we Basques are constantly obsessed with being the first, i.e. having an almost pathological tendency for starting an activity

as if no one had ever done it before. We now know that it probably originated in the Anglo-Saxon world and that its roots appear to go back to the 18th century at least. Nor is it that old among us, because the first groups of this kind began to emerge only about fifteen years ago, often driven by the initiative of municipal libraries and services and similar to the model existing previously in the Spanish-speaking sphere, at least in the Southern Basque Country (administered by Spain). In Spain, the *fashion* of reading workshops began to spread a few years previously.

3. Yet it is true nonetheless that **this phenomenon does have certain special characteristics** within the sphere of literature in the Basque language that could to a certain extent account for the success achieved –or its prominence, rather than success. On the one hand, the limited size or dispersion of the Basque speech community: if we Basque speakers encounter difficulties living our daily lives in our own language, it is even more difficult for us Basque readers to discuss literature among ourselves, bearing in mind that we are but a small fraction of that language community; not in vain did Bernardo Atxaga add the subtitle “the magazine of the 1,700” to his *Erlea* project, in view of the potential number of people who regularly read in Basque. The clubs have become a place of refuge for these dispersed readers, a chance to bring together small communities of readers. And as far as the offer is concerned, i.e. the writers, the clubs offer them the chance to meet their limited public, and also perhaps to reduce the sensation that they belong to a literature that seems to have more writers than readers; what is significant in this respect is the presence in more than one of these groups of writers acting as guides or coordinators, in other words, as an experienced reader.



4. Indeed, **the spread of the literary offer has been a factor very much to take into account** over the last few years: at one time it was possible, if one was interested, to conduct a fairly detailed and full-scale monitoring of the latest works in Basque literature. Due to the expansion in the number of writers and their works over the last twenty to thirty years, this has become virtually impossible, and increasingly, a selection has to be made. In that respect, the market for Basque literature has turned into a real one: small, yet a market nevertheless, which has its advantages –a growth in diversity–, and certain disadvantages –the saturation of the offer, the distortions incorporated by the various forms of marketing techniques, etc. The reader often feels lost. From that perspective, the critics have not done their work very thoroughly, and the readers' clubs, in my opinion, have made a contribution towards carrying out a kind of sifting or filtering work, to a certain extent at least.

5. In connection with this, I would say that **the readers' clubs also reflect a sociological change**: the decrease in the *militant* Basque reader, which was more widespread at one time, and the increase in pleasure-seeking readers –for want of a better name. Put much more simply, I suspect that a large proportion of the Basque readership, in the 1960s and 1970s for example, were *militant*, in other words they read in Basque because they were driven by their commitment to the language and the motherland, and in that respect, they were basically ready to accept anything. Yet since the 1990s –perhaps with the incorporation of the first generations who had the chance to complete all the levels of their education in Basque– there has been an increase in a different kind of readership; it is “more omnivorous” and in some way “more homologous” than that of the neighbourhood literary systems. Most likely, both can be found in the readers' groups, apart from others that might not fit into this strict classification, but I have the impression that this latter type has been the most dynamic power within them.



6. Finally, **we must not forget the learning and literacy process of Basque itself**, which has been feeding into this phenomenon. The readers' groups have *also* been a tool for taking the learning of Basque and its incorporation into society further, and that is why it comes as no surprise to find that Basque language groups or Basque Language Learning Centres are the promoters of readers' clubs, alongside libraries, arts centres and women's groups, among others. In such groups, this would be expressed on occasions by comments that continue to be heard about, for example, the “good quality Basque” of this or that book. It is difficult to tell whether that is to the detriment of the (“literary”) *autonomous* aim of the readers' clubs, and to what extent.

7. I have had to leave many things unsaid, but I hope that this summary has reflected the strengths and weaknesses of this phenomenon. That is why I have included a doubt in the title as if I were the drama queen: **What are the readers' clubs a symptom of?** Of a consolidation of the literature system of the Basque language (*revolution*), or do they constitute the final protective effort of the last Mohican (*resistance*)? Time will tell (as always).





# READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

## In the Wake of the Words

The movement existing around literature in the Basque language is tremendous. The **Hitzen Uberan** Internet Project set up a year ago by the EIE-Association of Writers in the Basque Language is an initiative that fits into that context. It not only reflects what is created, spread and organised around literature in the Basque language, it has been deliberately set up to offer the movement a display window and useful tool.

Although writing is essentially individual work, literature itself is an act that has a social dimension. Basically, it is an act of communication between two people, between the writer him- or herself and the reader, but it is one that takes place constantly and often in surprising ways. There are agents that are essential for making that basic act of communication of possible: publishing houses, translators, illustrators, front cover designers, organisers of cultural events, the increasing number of readers' groups... So this basic act of communication often assumes a broad dimension. There may be many difficulties and obstacles in the context of small cultures and minority languages, but there are

also advantages in many cases. To give an example, it may be easier for the reader to meet the writer face-to-face and receive information about his or her work directly. There is nothing unusual about readers and writers seeing each other face-to-face in the organising of cultural events, a characteristic that is unthinkable in many hegemonic cultures. The writer writes about society, the readers read about society, the reader of the writer's work is society itself.

Throughout the time in which *Hitzen Uberan* has been up and running, it has been a witness to that enriching reality: literary schools, cultural weeks, readings, shows, roundtables, countless meetings of readers' groups, etc. With the resources provided by the Internet, *Hitzen Uberan* is a project that is constantly changing and adapting, and it sets out to offer that reality a tool that is the most effective possible.



**Oier Gillan**

### Fact Sheet

#### Features:

- It is a Website open to everyone.
- It was set up by the EIE-Association of Writers in the Basque Language.
- It posts news dealing with literature written in Basque.

#### Funding:

- Government of the Basque Autonomous Community
- Charter Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa
- CEDRO (Spanish Centre Managing Authors' Intellectual Property Rights).

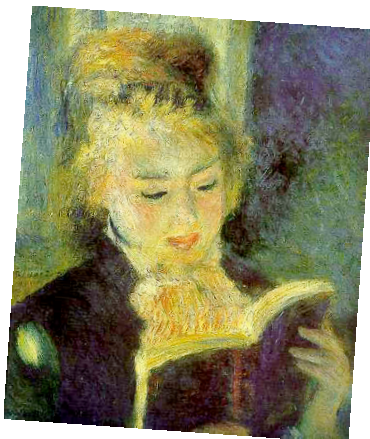
READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

# Literary Excursions

An excursion in the heart of Iruñea-Pamplona to get to know the hotels, streets, other buildings and surroundings in the novel *Zulo bat uretan* (A Hole in the Water). The experience was carried out with two groups, as requested by the readers' themselves. The organisers were the readers' club of Arratia and people who meet through the Zaldiko Maldiko group and the Karrikiri Basque shop in Iruñea-Pamplona. It took about two hours. There were fifteen adults in each group. It was followed by a discussion about the book, and a meal.

When it is reality that comes to the aid of fiction, there is always a temptation to go back, in other words to get out of the book and walk the streets. Undoubtedly the most famous is the Bloomsday commemoration and celebration held in Dublin on 16 June nearly every year. The name derives from Leopold Bloom, the protagonist in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, and the event includes practically everything, including the food and drink. In Galicia, they like to re-enact what takes place in *A Esmorga* in the city of Ourense and written by Eduardo Blanco-Amor. Getting to know the locations in *Zulo bat uretan* and requesting the chance to walk in the footsteps of the journalist Imanol

Arellano in the heart of Iruñea-Pamplona may strike one as strange: there is little in the way of fun, just a coffee at Roche's, a stroll around the Arantzadi park, to walk along the banks of the river as far as the Arrotxapea bridge, and all this just to make a floral offering in the waters of the Arga river on the spot where the main absence in the novel appeared dead. In the book Juana Ardanaz was killed by the intimidation of the post-Spanish Civil War era. That is why it seems both strange and beautiful in equal measure to see people's eyes filling with tears in a tribute to a fictional character. This is certainly a sign that reality and fiction are not far removed from each other.

**Iñigo Aranbarri****Fact Sheet****Features:**

- It is an outdoor event organised by a Readers' Club.
- It is a guided visit to places described in a novel.
- The author himself is the guide or the expert on the book.
- In addition to seeing the place, meals are usually had in the bars and hotels described

**Funding:**

- Out of the Readers' Club's normal budget.



# READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

## Poetry Days of Ea

We at the “*Herrijeri Emon Arnasa*” cultural association organise *Eako Poesia Egunak* (The Poetry Days of Ea, a village in Bizkaia).

We turn the town upside down to make visitors and the local people feel at home: and we use an old custom for this: voluntary work done for the benefit of the local community.

The poet Gabriel Aresti came here when he was seriously ill in search of peace and quiet, and here he wrote some poems. “*Ea-ko koplak*”, dated St. John the Baptist’s Day 1974, and “*Enaden Begiak*”, a protest against the Ogeila nuclear power station, are the ones that remain in our imaginary.

This is where Aresti built a house; a human, faulty, imperfect house. And because we saw that the house needed to be finished, eight years ago we started to organise the *Eako Poesia Egunak*. We wanted to see whether poetry was still worthwhile, and for this purpose we brought together readers, writers, literature lovers and townspeople.

We have learnt much from each other along the way, and we are not only building Aresti’s house together, we are renovating it.

Poetry is the focus of the Ea initiative, even though it is developed in a very broad way (with plays, lectures, readings, concerts, etc.).

Poetry may be a genre with a minority following, but this initiative receives a positive response every year, because writers, authors and townspeople feel it is very much their own as a result of the atmosphere created.

We develop our own characteristics as the event evolves from one year to the next:

- We usually have an initiative specially created and prepared for Ea..
- What has emerged in recent years is an innovative identity, a trend for experimentation.
- The considerable presence of women, thus ensuring a view from the gender perspective.
- We have authors from the whole of the Basque Country, from the Northern (French administered) Basque Country, in particular.
- Every year we make an effort to ensure the presence of a guest. We have had writers from Italy, Somalia, Kurdistan, Catalonia, Andalusia and Brittany.
- We have turned the surrounding natural spaces into stages for poetry and the word.
- And over the last few years new projects have come to fruition here. The Painting and Poetry project: every year a different artist does some work at the windows of the houses in Ea.
- We publish a news sheet accompanied by comments, photos and poems called *HarrikadIE*; it deals with the initiative and publicises the programme.
- For the first time this year we published the first issue of *Zaldiarri Bilduma* with the text produced specifically for Ea.

We want to bring literature to Ea, a passion for debate, the beauty of poetry, and naturally, to make people feel more at home than in their own homes. Every year we invite all literature lovers to come on the third weekend in July.



**Mariasun Landa**

### Fact Sheet

#### Features:

- Poetry is the main focus.
- The townspeople organise and participate in all the literary events.
- Townspeople and writers are present at the meals organised in a family atmosphere.
- The readings, music festivals and plays take place at open-air venues around the town.

#### Funding:

- Government of the Basque Autonomous Community, Charter Provincial Council of Bizkaia, Ea Town Council, the BBK savings bank and Ingeteam (private engineering company).





# READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

## Ahotsenea

Following the 2009 Basque Book and Disc Fair in Durango (Bizkaia, Basque Country) a concern emerged among authors and artistes: what place had creativity had until that moment, what place should it have in the future, and who was responsible for changing the way the authors and artistes participated in Durango.

While seeking a solution for these concerns, we saw an initial axiom or kind of rule: our task as authors and artistes is to specify what place creativity should have in the Fair, and we came up with an idea: **Ahotsenea**: the centre for authors and artistes.

Ahotsenea is a specific centre for authors and artistes, and it has two spaces: one for music and one for literature.

So that everything that happens at Ahotsenea can be heard live, it is spread over the Internet throughout the Basque Country and worldwide. While Ahotsenea is open, anyone who does not have the chance to go to the Book and Disc Fair and Basques living outside the Basque Country get an opportunity to hear about what Basque authors and artistes are up to

Before the programme is drawn up, we like to get the agreement and approval of writers, musicians, editors, recording companies and publishing houses.

The programme is made up of interviews, roundtables, conversations and performances of live music which

the authors and artistes who go to the Fair are involved in, but what we need to do more than anything is to ensure the participation of literature/music lovers and viewers/listeners.

The interviews are long and deal with what has been read as well as live readings, delivered in a calm, fairly direct, deeply probing way, to provide what is not normally available to those who go to the Fair: a warm, lively welcome together with the author or artiste, a chance to ask questions. The kind of atmosphere we want to create which reminds us of a word that is used in the West of the Basque Country to express good, warm, delightful weather: *aroa*.

As we think it is worthwhile mentioning the aims, let us say that we want to attract once again those enthusiasts who stopped coming to the Book Fair over the last few years, and at the same time, to create a new *aroa*, in both senses of the word ("weather" and "era").

To achieve this, the involvement of the authors and artistes is essential, because we are the ones who have to offer our fans something else, apart from just signing books and discs and allowing our faces to be seen here and there. We want to promote a direct relationship, the yearly settling of accounts, physical contact, and why not, to enable our fans to tell us what they want to tell us.



**Gotzon Barandiaran**

### Fact Sheet

#### Features:

- This is a parallel initiative that takes place in the Basque Country's most important Book and Disc Fair, the one held in Durango.
- There are two distinct areas under the large marquee. Literature (presentations, interviews) and Music (performances).
- Throughout the 5-6 days that the Fair is on, every 30 minutes an author offers a session after requesting an appointment.
- All the sessions are offered simultaneously over the Internet.

#### Funding:

- Charter Provincial Council of Bizkaia and the Gerediaga Association (the organiser of the Book Fair).



# READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

## Writers visit Schools

Since the Association of Writers in the Basque Language (EIE) was set up in 1982, one of its aims has been to spread literature in the Basque language throughout society and to encourage an enthusiasm for reading. This is the context of the activities *Idazleak Ikastetxetan* (Writers visit Schools), *Literatura Jarduerak* (Literature Activities) and *Idazleakaz* (With the Writer).

The *Idazleak Ikastetxetan* programme was set up in 1990 and organised about 260 sessions. 65 writers go from school to school in a programme supported by the Education Department of the Government of the Basque Autonomous Community.

The *Idazleak Ikastetxetan* programme is particularly appreciated by Writers in the Basque language. The writers have the chance to meet their readers in person, and a special relationship is forged. Teachers say this has helped them to encourage a love of reading. The teacher acts as an intermediary to reach the children and teenagers. The work done by the teachers prior to the writer's visit should be praised. The writers themselves gain more and more experience and learn how to grab the students' attention.

A student will not become a book lover overnight, but in that process the writer visiting the school can awaken an interest. When that impact is achieved—even if only one student in the whole class is affected—the work done has been worthwhile.

The *Idazleakaz* programme is the cousin of this initiative. A distinctive feature has been added to the usual sessions: to make known what is written in the Biscayan dialect of Basque. Edorta Jimenez has been the promoter of this, and today's Biscayan writers will be presenting old texts in the Biscayan dialect in the classrooms. The Charter Provincial Council of Bizkaia will be supporting the 123 sessions scheduled to be held during the first year.

The EIE is keen to bring the writer and the reader together. Through the *Literatura Jarduerak* programme cooperation is promoted with local cultural agents to offer talks, workshops, lectures and poetry readings. A broad-based public is targeted in this project: school children, students at centres devoted to Basque language and literacy programmes for adults, library users, members of readers' groups, etc. At the end of the day, it is for anyone who wants to enjoy literature in the Basque language. There were a total of 218 sessions in 2011 and it is hoped that a similar number will take place in 2012.

The aim is the same in the literature activities organised with adults: to bring the writer and the reader together. The EIE is very keen to offer the means to enjoy Basque literature and it plans to continue working in this direction.

The Association itself has also become stronger as a result of such projects. They have led to the expanding of the EIE's infrastructure and the deepening of its professional management.



**Nagore Atela (EIE)**

**Fitxa teknikoa**

### Features:

- The aim is to bring literature to the readers and to achieve this, they are put into contact with the authors.
- The writers volunteer, the schools or readers' groups make a request, and the Association organises the visits.
- The readers read the book in advance and prepare questions.

### Funding:

- The Education Department of the Government of the Basque Autonomous Community.



READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

# Readers' Club of Berriozar

The BIK-Readers' Club of Berriozar [a town close to Iruñea-Pamplona] has been in existence since January 2010 and I myself set it up. Most of us participants are connected with teaching and are in our forties.

We members of the readers' club are a group of people who read the same book at the same time. When we have read it, we meet to talk about it, so that each person can express his or her opinion and we can learn from each other.

We meet at the Public Library in Berriozar thanks to the co-operation of Rafa, the librarian. It is an open group and is not intended exclusively for experts or teachers of literature, but for ordinary readers. If anyone wants to join, all they need to do is go to the Berriozar library and put their name down. Once they have done that, they will receive a copy of the book we are reading and the deadline of one month –or six weeks– to read it so as not to have to rush it. The deadline depends on the difficulty or length of the book, and also on the time the participants have available.

The books we choose are normally the ones in the sets offered by the Navarrese Libraries' Network. I myself choose the book and between one session and the next I give reasons for the choice. When one looks at the list of books we have read in Berriozar, it can be seen that we always mix works written in Basque here with transla-

tions into Basque. We read both short stories and novels.

Within the usual dynamics of the Readers' Club, once a year, we have the *Liburuak Solasgai* initiative, organised on behalf of the Zorroka Basque Group, and we invite a writer or translator to the library.

When we inform members about the sessions of the Readers' Club, we e-mail those who are unable to attend a session so that they know which the next book is, when they can call in at the library to collect it, and how long they have to read it. I usually prepare a notice and at the same time the date appears in the forthcoming events of Berriozar Town Council. And in the same week that the session is due to be held, club members are reminded about the date either through a text message or an e-mail.

Before the session, the announcement of the book appears in my blog "*Ezkabako Talaiatik*", and I sometimes include comments taken from the announcement of the session.

Finally, comments on the book read can be heard on the Berriozar local radio station in its "*Berri on*" magazine programme, so that the people who could not attend the session can read the comments about the book.



**Josu Jimenez**

## Fact Sheet

### Features:

-They meet at the Public Library and the books are obtained through the public network.

- The co-ordinator chooses the titles.

- Comments are written with the remarks that arise during the discussion and are posted on the co-ordinator's blog and broadcast on the local radio station.

### Funding:

-No funding is received.

READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

# Feminist Approach to Reading

The aim of these workshops or seminars is to build awareness about the channels of knowledge and experience arising out of the meeting point between the feminist perspective and the literary one. Feminist theories and feminist activities have marked out the feminist perspective when looking at the world, the public and texts; likewise literary theories and literary activities have marked out the directions of the literary perspective when looking at literary creativity. Frequently, these two ways of looking that separate and move away from each other are brought together in these seminars, and an effort is being made to develop the feminist literary perspective.

So, the ways towards knowledge and the ways for experiencing intrinsic to literature are used in these workshops to feed and develop the feminist perspective.

So these seminars aim to consolidate the community that has three foundations: the Basque language, literature and feminism. Along this way, the reflections, interpretations and concerns developed in this readers' group have been very fruitful; indeed, women have seen that they can develop awareness (or liberation) with the help of literature. So that is sufficient reason for a literary, feminist community to go on networking.



**Iratxe Retolaza**

## Fact Sheet

### Features:

- It was set up by the *Emakumeen Jabetuntza Eskola* (Women's Awareness School) in Ondarroa (Bizkaia).
- An 8- or 12-hour seminar is organised every year to work on the feminist interpretation of literary texts.
- A theme is chosen every year: parenthood, bodies, geography, etc.

### Funding:

- Equality Department of Ondarroa Town Council.



READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES***Readers' Club of Donostia**

In my view, the most interesting phenomenon to emerge in recent years in the panorama of literature in the Basque language is the readers' group. Readers of different profiles and ages tend to meet—even though the majority are women and are mostly linked to teaching, and there are not as many as one would like to see under the age of thirty. That way it becomes a centre for exchanging views and for reflection.

From my own experience I can say that even for those who were not particularly into reading in Basque, getting through between fifteen and twenty well-chosen books were enough to turn them into enthusiasts. And by the time they had become enthusiasts, their critical criteria had been greatly sharpened and enriched, so much so that if only novels for passing the time were programmed, some of them started to complain to me at the end of that “adaptation” period.

These discussions do have their risks of course: when the groups get too big,

the number of people expressing opinions falls and many refuse to speak. Looking to the future, it would not be a bad idea to put all the experiences of these groups together to get discussion going on different levels of sophistication and to give those who act as guides the chance to hone their skills. That would enable them to look for more suitable strategies for dealing with one book or another (instead of just a discussion, it could be more of an analysis on occasions: for instance, to analyse a book in terms of the geographical places mentioned in it by producing the cartography of it, or in terms of the musical or literary references made in it).

That way, the literary meetings would go beyond the monthly discussions, and the debate not covered in the conversation would be developed further or extended and added to on websites set up specially. In addition, relations among the different reading groups could be promoted and co-ordinated by taking this horizontal arrangement a step further.

**Harkaitz Cano****Fact Sheet****Features:**

- They meet for two hours once a month, without the author being present.
- The guide chooses the books from a range of genres and styles, including translations.
- Special attention is paid to new literary publications each year.

**Funding:**

- The Culture Department of Donostia-San Sebastian City Council.



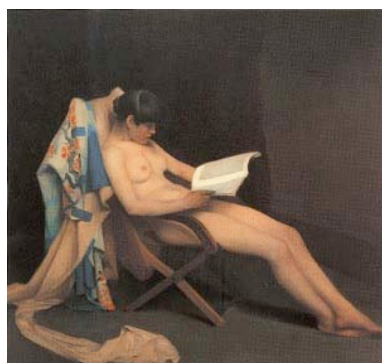


## READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

# Readers' Club of Gasteiz

The Readers' Club of Vitoria-Gasteiz was set up in October 2001 simply to gather together the people of Vitoria-Gasteiz who wanted to talk, in Basque, about books. They meet once a month to discuss a book in Basque. On the whole, people accustomed to reading turned up, but they may not have been accustomed to reading in Basque, or were not sure exactly what to read in Basque (even though there have been other kinds of cases, too).

There are all kinds of participants. There are some fairly mature people (between 40 and 60 years of age) that form a relatively stable nu-



cleus, and young people between 20 and 35, who attend less regularly (to a certain extent because of the genera-

tional changes in the students at the Faculty of Arts in Vitoria-Gasteiz, even though some of them are now regular members). The percentage of men to women is fairly balanced.

But as time has passed I would say that people have come for the pleasure of entering into a discussion. That may be why a fixed core that gives the group some stability has formed.

It is a fairly critical, sharp group that is, on the whole, accustomed to exchanging insightful points of view. When a writer is invited, he or she turns up half an hour or three quarters of an hour after the group has assembled, so as not to interfere in the initial exchanges of opinion. Approximately half the list drawn up for each academic year comprises original works (mostly by contemporary writers in the Basque language) and the other half consists of translations.

Even if the presence of the narrative is high, we try to include other literary genres as well.



**Iban Zaldúa**

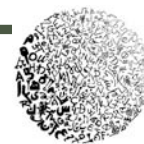
### Fact Sheet

#### Features:

- It is organised by the GEU Euskara Taldea and Iban Zaldúa.
- Premises to meet used to be made available by Hika Atenekoa of Vitoria-Gasteiz until 2010. Since 2011 rooms have been put at our disposal by the Ignacio Aldekoa Arts Centre.

#### Funding:

- The GEU Euskara Taldea pays for inviting the writer and producing the publicity material.

READERS' CLUBS: *SOME EXPERIENCES*

# Readers' Group of Bilbao

*The commitment shapes...*

When we talk about literature, we often refer to "good readers". Just as in a Mathematics master class, we bestow brilliant formulae like this one on ourselves: the more committed the reader is, the better the group will be. In other words, the more one knows about literature or the more skill one can display in understanding a book, the greater the chances of success for our readers' group.

But if the readers' group is to function properly, we believe what is essential is enthusiasm, passion and above all participation rather than participants' knowledge. So it is the commitment shapes the group.

Commitment, motivation, passion... can be strengthened. The participant needs to be pampered, the reader incited, provoked. Techniques need to be used to achieve that: by forming small groups before producing a plenary analysis. If the author has been invited, the text needs to be worked on before he or she turns up (an hour before, for example).

The main aim is only one: to bring the participants closer to each other and to increase their participation, because a committed reader is a conscientious reader.



**Lutxo Egia**

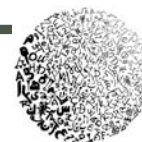
## Fact Sheet

### Features:

- Books written in Basque are read and analysed to encourage discussion.
- Most of the participants are women aged about 45, teachers or housewives, which is the case in most readers' clubs.
- The main aim is to enjoy literature, which is the same as in other readers' clubs.

### Funding:

- Charter Provincial Council of Bizkaia.



# READERS' EXPERIENCES

## Maite, Bermeo



**The Readers' club of Bermeo** (Bizkaia) got going in January 2011. It was initially scheduled to continue until May, but in response to a

wish expressed by its participants, it now meets throughout the academic year.

Eight or nine of us get together with the group leader Isa Castillo once a month; we are all women aged between 35 and 50.

The readers' club is organised by the Town Council's Basque Department in collaboration with the Library. For a long time now these two services have been working to promote literature in Basque and encourage the reading of it. The funding is provided by these two services and is free of charge for the participants.

The group decides which book to read and the library orders copies of the book from other libraries to provide everyone with their own copy. When we have read the chosen book, we meet every month, and talk about it; each person gives his or her opinion, talks about the emotions it has awakened, and any other stories and reminiscences it may have sparked off. In the sessions a good, pleasant atmosphere is created and we all of us participate.

And to enrich the sessions, a writer occasionally comes to the club; Asel Luzarraga came in the spring, and Jasone Osoro and someone else will be coming shortly. These sessions are also enriching, because we have the chance to share our opinions with the author and get his or her responses directly.

Having a group leader is extremely helpful, because she helps to create an atmosphere of trust and assists us in analysing the books in detail, because she often raises issues that we frequently miss.

In my view, it is an excellent idea to set up a club of this kind so that we can get to know literature in Basque

and writers better, as well as develop and encourage a passion for the world of letters and books.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage people to participate in readers' clubs and I would recommend to them that they go on reading, so that that they can dream, go on journeys through a whole host of worlds, and open a door to their imaginations, and all of this, in the Basque language. I hope to go on taking part in this initiative for a long time to come.

## Mateo, Igorre



We have been members of the **Readers' Club of Igorre** (Bizkaia) for a long time and there is more than one reason to go on being members of it.

In my case perhaps, as the writer's concerns, obsessions, anxieties are similar to those of each individual, I get to express my innermost concerns without anyone noticing too much. On the other

hand, each participant can be affected in very different ways by a particular book. I find that not only surprising but curious as well.

Mentioning the weather is an indication of ordinary everyday life, and so is talking about what you've seen or heard on TV. But talking about what you have read in a book could, by contrast, be construed as a sign of arrogance.

Referring in public to a best-seller published in Spanish among literature lovers would be acceptable in certain places, but referring to a work you have read in Basque can turn out to be totally alien in most cases.

If you do not want to feel lost, talk about your literature concerns at the proper place, at the readers' club in your town or neighbourhood.





# THE GROUP LEADER IN READERS' CLUBS

## Isa Castillo:

**"Ordinary readers can spot things that the critics miss"**

Naturally, we found Isa Castillo's desk piled high with books. She invited us over to a hidden paradise in Arratia (Bizkaia) one bright autumn day. **She works as a group leader of seven Basque Language Readers' Clubs:** in Durango, Iurreta, Markina-Xemein, Bermeo, Igorre, and the Euskarabila and Pozokoetxe clubs in Basauri.

**Basque Writing.-** What draws you to reading?

**Isa Castillo.-** I read for enjoyment more than anything. I like getting into other people's lives, getting to know writers' perspectives, seeing how they view life or society. But more than anything, I read for enjoyment. I started to lead Readers' Clubs by chance; I am first and foremost a reader.

**B. W.-** Could you tell us about your work as a group leader?

**I. C.-** I read a lot. On my desk you can see the books I have right now. I also make suggestions to the club members about what to read. When they agree on a book, I have a month to read it at home so that I can comment on it during a session. I programme all kinds of things, not just Basque literature; we also read translated works. Sometimes we read classics. Depending on the budget, we can invite an author to come along and talk about his or her book.

**B. W.-** Borges used to say he was a reader rather than a writer. Do you think the prominence of the reader, which is something that has been lost, could be revived through the Readers' Clubs?



**I. C.-** Much is said about a love of reading but not all the people who come to the club are necessarily avid readers. There are some real reading enthusiasts, but many come because they don't usually read in Basque, others because they don't know what to read, and are looking for ideas... As I see it, the most important thing is this: when there is a dynamic in the group, many of the books read over the years are the same ones. That makes the conversation much easier.

**B.W.-** In an article published in the newspaper "Berria", Lander Garro said we are con-



stantly involved in campaigns to encourage people to read, and he cast doubt on their importance. What do you think about that? Are campaigns and clubs so important?

**I.C.-** My work is not about saving or encouraging anything. The people who show up come to read and discuss what they've read. We feel a need to talk about what we have read, we don't just read and that's it. We have a good time talking about what we have read. I am involved in small towns and villages, and in the villages that stands out a lot, when people meet at the baker's for example we can talk about books.

**B.W. At the readers' clubs do you choose books that are easy to read?**

**I.C.-** No, I don't, although I know people find some books difficult. But you have to bear in mind what each person's reading background is. Nevertheless, we have to ditch our com-

plexes and admit we do not always understand everything. Or perhaps we understand what the author has written in a different way. Unable to find our way in a book is not a bad thing sometimes.

**B.W. Apart from that, as you know the readers well, do you think there is a vast distance between the critics and the readers?**

**I.C.-** When I programme a book, I usually read the reviews, but not all of them. Critics have the theories and knowledge they have acquired at university. Very often an ordinary reader does not see what they spot. But equally often, ordinary readers can spot things that the critics miss. I learn with them all. That is also literature, sharing such widely differing opinions.



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