

ART FOR WHOSE SAKE? MODERN ART MUSEUMS AND THEIR ROLE IN TRANSFORMING SOCIETIES: THE CASE OF THE GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades the industrial decline of many western economies has forced them to turn towards the tertiary sector in order to diversify their infrastructure and find new sources of income. One of the characteristics of this process was the development of urban regeneration plans, which recognised the potential of the cultural sector for economic development. Central to this approach was the use of modern art museums as magnets for tourism and inward investment. This practice has produced a number of examples, the most famous being the Guggenheim Bilbao. The phenomenal success of this museum has caused it to become a model and this is why it ought to be examined critically. The creation of the museum is initially considered in the framework of particular historical and political circumstances. It is then placed in the context of the local cultural policy, a combination of theory and local political aspirations. The involvement of the external factor – the Guggenheim Foundation – is considered next, followed by an assessment of the museum in both quantifiable and non-quantifiable terms. Lastly, the preference shown in modern art museums to play this role is discussed. It is concluded that the Guggenheim Bilbao is the outcome of special political and socioeconomic circumstances, which renders it a unique case that should not be replicated uncritically.

INTRODUCTION

During the last quarter of the 20th century many western economies suffered a severe crisis due to a decline in their industries. Largely attributed to high competitiveness in the international market, this phenomenon brought about a massive economic and social change. The urgent need of the affected economies to find alternative financial sources in order to survive and cope with the rising social problems defined an international tendency of a turn towards the tertiary sector. Services in a rapidly and perpetually changing world, facing the challenge of globalisation, have now come to be of an unquestionable value, which the post-industrial economies seem to have set to reinforce and sustain to their own benefit.

The passage from the industrial to the post-industrial era obviously requires strategic planning in all sectors. In this light, one of the major concerns of the authorities in the former industrial countries is the drawing up and implementation of “urban regeneration” plans. Under this term are grouped many aims: radical architectural restructuring of an area, environmental planning and protection, creation of employment opportunities, attraction of foreign investment and improvement of the citizens’ quality of life, to name but a few.

History so far has shown that one of the main approaches towards urban regeneration relies heavily on the exploitation of the cultural sector’s potential. Most plans that aspire to deliver renewal boast a pivotal strand of cultural development. It appears that “culture,” in its broad, not always easily definable sense¹, is seen as a focal point, from which radiate not only opportunities in economic terms, but also – and maybe more importantly – the hope for a change of identity of the transforming societies. The establishment of cultural facilities essentially signifies a diversification of the infrastructure and the creation of new images within a society.

Central to this approach has been the development of modern art museums, especially during the past two decades. A tendency with, as it seems, universal validity, it has produced many examples, ranging from art centres incorporating additional activities’ spaces, such as the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MOCA) to the more strictly defined art museums, such as the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the recently opened Tate Modern in London. Despite the fact that these museums are not expected to deliver urban regeneration in their own right and are rather the core of extended development proposals, they have nevertheless come to be considered a *sine qua non* of every self-respecting regeneration plan. The result is the constant planning for and creation of what could be

¹ For a discussion of the term see J. McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere*, p.6.

described as “super-museums,” which receive international appraisal and recognition for their grandeur and are hailed as the new multifunctional means of renewal of the urban areas.

It remains a fact, though, that the selection and use of modern art museums to play this part raises a number of issues. It leads to the questioning of the identity of the art museums today and to what extent these are reduced to mere tools for economic upheaval without serving any of their social purposes and functions. It also prompts us to reflect on their dependence on special historical and political circumstances and how these affect them. Furthermore, it questions the underlying reasons for the particular significance of modern art museums for this role in relation to other types of museums.

The present dissertation aims to examine these issues taking up as a case study one of the most famous, recently-created modern art museums. The Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa (hereinafter Guggenheim Bilbao), now in its third year of existence, is one of the examples *par excellence* of an art museum originally conceived as part of an urban regeneration plan, namely that for Bilbao, a city with a long industrial tradition in Northern Spain. What renders this museum particularly interesting is that its phenomenal success – due to a combination of stunning architecture, a big name collection and huge amounts of publicity worldwide – will most probably set it as a precedent for other projects. The new museum Frank O. Gehry, the architect of the Guggenheim Bilbao is preparing for the revitalization of the New York docks (Eakin 2000; Campbell 2000), the plans for the museum in Sao Paolo and the fact that five Italian cities, South Africa and Australia have already bid for their Guggenheim museum (Binney 2000) is the most obvious proof of that. And even when the brand is not involved, new, imposing modern art museums are used in urban regeneration plans in a similar manner all around Europe and the United States.

It is therefore essential that if an original example tends to become the norm, it is examined carefully and critically considered. This is becoming increasingly important at a time when new museological debates call for a democratisation of museums and the notion of “internationalisation,” because of its scale, means greater social responsibility. Furthermore, the issues pertinent to the museums’ role in urban regeneration ought to be considered as a combination of theory and practice.

Thus, Section One will include a historical overview of the city of Bilbao, mainly in relation to its economic development and its industrial decline. An examination of the city’s urban regeneration plan as related to cultural centrality will follow, set against existing theories and current trends.

Section Two will examine the creation of the museum with reference to this background, as well as the politics of the Guggenheim Foundation. Emphasis will be put on the negotiations and agreements

preceding the building of the museum as well as on the conditions of its function.

Section Three will deal with figures and opinions. It will feature a section on the quantifiable, economic benefits of the Guggenheim Bilbao for the city, especially as related to tourism, employment and the Gross Domestic Product. This will be followed by another section focusing on the art of the museum and its impact on the public and the local artists. Issues such as the acquisitions policy of the museum will also be considered critically reference will be made to the museum’s impact on the quality of life, as this is defined by theory and the population’s attitude.

In Section Four there will be an elaboration of arguments regarding the international tendency, or better still, insistence for use of especially modern art museums as urban regeneration tools. The reasons and results will be explored in general and in relation to the Guggenheim Bilbao in particular.

It should be clarified here that the term “modern art museums” is used in this study to mean museums that exhibit both modern and contemporary art for ease of comprehension. This also echoes the practice of most museums of this kind, which tend to use the term “modern” in their definition, thus avoiding any misunderstandings that may occur by the use of the word “contemporary,” the meaning of which is not absolutely agreed in the history of art.

It is hoped that this study will raise more questions that it can answer and will place the issue of modern art museums as urban regeneration agents in a frame that will make a contribution to an enhancement of awareness and feelings of responsibility both on the authorities’ and the public’s part.

1. SETTING THE SCENE: HISTORY, POLICIES AND POLITICS

Historical overview

In Northern Spain, on the banks of the Nervión river, lies Bilbao, a seven-hundred year old city founded by Diego López de Haro in 1300. The capital of Bizkaia, one of the three regions of the Basque country along with Alava and Guipuzkoa, the city is the fourth largest in Spain. Its urban population is about half a million people; its metropolitan area, however, an agglomeration of 30 towns and cities, covers a land area of 412 square kilometres, with a total population of over one million (Sharp 1995).

Already a significant port in the beginning of the 16th century, Bilbao came to be a point of reference for the industrialization and development of the entire Iberic peninsula by the second half of the 19th century. Its growing industries of steel, shipbuilding and chemicals made it the economic and social capital of the Basque country at the dawn of the 20th century, a position which invested it with high esteem and consideration, still held by the city today both in Spain and abroad (Sharp 1995).

After Franco’s death in 1975 Bilbao went through a social and economic crisis resulting from severe de-

cline in the city's industries. A phenomenon largely attributable to the fact that Franco had based on these industries an essentially domestic economy, avoiding exports and foreign markets for political control reasons (Kurlansky 1999), it was reinforced by Europe's demand that Spain abandon the government protection of industry in order to enter the European Economic Community (*ibid.*). Combined with the fact that the service sector was underdeveloped, the industrial recession caused a general decay in the environmental and social character of the city, emigration, marginalization (Sharp 1995) and, as a natural outcome, feelings of depression and stagnation to the population.

Unemployment was probably the worst consequence; the workers too old to be retrained were incorporated in pension schemes by the Spanish and Basque governments and many of those coming from other parts of Spain returned to their regions. In 1990 the unemployment rate was 26 percent, with a very high 50 percent still remaining today among young people of the ages eighteen to twenty-five (Kurlansky 1999).

In addition to the economic crisis, Bilbao had to face the political scene, as it was formed after 1977 with the collapse of the oligarchy and the prevalent terrorist activity of ETA (*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*, "The Basque Country and Freedom"). When the Basque Nationalist Party (hereinafter PNV) took over at the beginning of the eighties, it had to work towards Bilbao's resurrection as well as the retention of the city's voters. Moreover, the party's loss of hegemony in Guipuzkoa in the autonomous elections of 1986 and of control in the cities of Vitoria and San Sebastian rendered Bilbao a matter of political urgency (Juaristi 1997).

Policies, politics and plans

The situation was obviously calling for solutions. Bilbao was not alone. Several western economies, notably in Europe but in the United States as well, were facing similar problems. It is in this framework that an international tendency towards the tertiary sector, which was thought of as a catalyst for the crisis, emerged. Within this new orientation, the development of cultural policies was perceived as an important means for diversifying local economies, attaining a higher level of social cohesion (Bianchini in Bianchini and Parkinson 1993), attracting investment, advancing different interests (Griffiths 1993) and regenerating civic and individual pride (Arts Council of England 1988).

The involvement of Bilbao with a development of a cultural policy within this international perspective was the result of a number of coinciding interests and initiatives. The need for a new orientation of the city towards a "post-fordist" (Griffiths 1993; McGuigan 1996), flexible specialisation model under the pressing political and economic circumstances led to the revision of an existing plan in 1986 (Gonzalez 1993; Bilbao Metropoli-30 1998). Urban regeneration was

now on the spot and the city's future was discussed in a series of conferences and symposia alongside the successful examples of other formerly industrial European cities. Already building on its reputation as a trade fair and exhibitions centre, Bilbao was now considering the cultural sector's potential. Glasgow's experience, which had been nominated as "European City of Culture" for 1990 (see Booth and Boyle 1993), provided the framework for this (Gonzalez 1993). In 1990-91 a strategic analysis of the revitalisation of Bilbao, commissioned by the Department of Economic Development and Planning in conjunction with the *diputación* (provincial government, the second governing body in the Basque country, the third being the municipality), also highlighted the critical importance of cultural centrality for the city's future (Gonzalez 1993).

Furthermore, the governing PNV had very good reasons to be interested in the development of a cultural policy for Bilbao. Firstly, the party still had the Department of Culture under its control, even though it was co-governing with the Socialists at this given period (1986-1990). The PNV, also, had always been concerned with the preservation and promotion of the Basque national identity, which was expressed through high investment on the retention of the Basque language and the protection of the Basque cultural heritage (Gonzalez 1993). Moreover, the PNV was hoping to regain Bilbao's favour after its electoral defeat and at this point culture, with its alleged benefits for the population's quality of life and self-esteem, seemed a good opportunity.

The *Plan General* (Strategic Plan for the Revitalization of the Metropolitan Bilbao), initiated at the request of the Basque Government and the Bizkaia County Council in 1989 and completed by 1993, was the outcome of Bilbao's preoccupation with its renewal (Bilbao Metropoli-30 1998b). The main objective of the plan was to change the city's image, which would represent an economic transformation and a higher quality of life (Gonzalez 1993). For the redevelopment of Bilbao, internationally renowned architects would undertake a number of projects. Among the most important ones were the expansion of the port of the city, the creation of a new subway system by Sir Norman Foster and the reconstruction of the Bilbao airport and construction of the Urbiarte Footbridge over the river Nervión by Santiago Calatrava (Sharp 1995; Fact Sheet).

As in many other Spanish cities including Barcelona, Malaga and Valencia, a public-private sector partnership was formed into an organization, the *Bilbao Metropoli-30*, which would be responsible for the implementation of aspects of the plan and promotion of its aims (Bilbao Metropoli-30 1998). This approach was not new to the city, as apparently already by 1980 Bilbao had a tradition in the collaboration of the public, private and voluntary sectors, at least as far as culture is concerned (Gonzalez 1993).

The plan was concerned with eight critical issues, among which were urban regeneration and cultural

centrality (Bilbao Metropoli-30 1998a). As far as urban regeneration is concerned, the Strategic Plan features, among others, the following elements: *infrastructures and collective equipment, various emblematic buildings* “which contribute to foment social and cultural centrality of the metropolis and to improving its external image and appeal,” *a zone of planning and management, the recovery of the damaged urban infrastructure* “through the exploitation of the obsolete or abandoned industrial spaces...” and *an estuary*, the “vertebral axis and integrated element of the metropolis” as well as a “distinctive factor of Metropolitan Bilbao’s attractiveness” (Bilbao Metropoli 1998a).

In terms of cultural centrality the plan aspires, among other things, to attain a cultural dimension for Bilbao by rendering it a *point of reference in cultural circuits and industries* “which are developing at an international scale” and giving it a *private initiative and infrastructures* “that allow the access of all collectivities [sic] to culture, transforming the emblem of the city” (Bilbao Metropoli-30 1998a).

As seen from the above, urban regeneration and cultural centrality seem to interrelate and complement each other in the *Plan*. Infrastructures are aimed at in both cases, a planning and management zone can embrace and promote the private initiative and the emblematic buildings in combination with the estuary’s attractiveness, if divested with cultural characteristics, can enhance the city’s competitiveness at an international level.

The planned cultural infrastructures, namely the Guggenheim Bilbao, Euskalduna Concert and Conference Hall and the Cultural Centre, will eventually form a cultural complex in the central area of Abandoibarra on the Estuary, an area of 345.000m² (Bilbao Ría 2000) which will become a “leisure, culture and businesses” area embellished with green spaces and will “ensure the consolidation of Metropolitan Bilbao as a cultural metropolis offering advanced services of international ranking” (Bilbao Metropoli-30 1998b). This bears great resemblance to the so-called “cultural quarters” found in many European and American cities.

A cultural quarter could be defined as a “geographical area which contains the highest concentration of cultural and entertainment facilities in a city or town” (Wynne 1992). Apart from the historical ones, such as those found in Paris (Montmartre), London (West End) and New York (Soho), which were developed over time, cultural quarters are now emerging as aids to urban revitalisation. Different strategies are employed to serve this scope, namely residential development of redundant industrial buildings, new forms of retailing and development of the nightlife economy (ibid.). A practice that has been taken up successfully by cities such as Boston, New York and Toronto, it has produced many examples in Europe as well, such as the Olympic Village in Barcelona, La Villette in Paris and the Southwark area in London, which is currently being redeveloped. Notably

in the United Kingdom and outside capital cities, similar attempts have been very successful in Newcastle, Dublin (ibid.), Glasgow and Salford (Baillieu 1995; Vasagar 2000). The creation of this kind of urban area, even though dubbed “cultural,” is actually primarily considered as a niche for new markets, based on the assumption that arts will act as a magnet for locals and tourists alike and therefore prompt the creation of facilities and attract investment.

This is just one of the orientations of the cultural industry that favours greatly the establishment of public-private partnerships. It is becoming increasingly important that both the public and the private sector administer the merging of cultural provision with the business world, complementing as they do each other in terms of expenditure and experience. As Wynne points out, this partnership “between local government, arts associations, development agencies, property developers and organisations representing local commercial interests” is one of the categories of arts-led urban regeneration planning within which several projects have been created (1992; see also Arts Council of England 1988). Of course, if not carefully organised, this network could prove problematic in terms of authority and competition for funding. Unity towards the common scope, though, is more likely to diminish this possibility. In any case, the Bilbao Metropoli-30, itself a public-private partnership organisation, considers this collaboration as a base for the culture and art in Bilbao (Bilbao Metropoli-30 1998).

The emphasis put by the *Plan* on the construction of emblematic buildings, finally, is in line with another trend traced in urban regeneration policies. Many cities invest in “flagship” developments, which are thought of as catalytic projects for the cities’ renewal, justifiable by the attraction of other investment (Bianchini, Dawson and Evans cited in Smyth 1994). The concept, which originated from Baltimore, could be defined broadly as “a development in its own right, which may or may not be self-sustaining; a marshalling point for further investment [and] a marketing tool for an area or city” (Smyth 1994). In a city that is making efforts to create new economic conditions, any additional source of investment is welcome. But more importantly, when the principle aim of the city’s regeneration is the change of the city’s image – recurring in the *Plan* – it is clear that powerful marketing tools for its projection are needed. And, indeed, flagships are there to “mark out ‘change’ for a city” (Bianchini, Dawson and Evans quoted in Smyth 1994), thus contributing to its development in terms of economy and policy (Smyth 1994).

The “emblematic buildings” can in addition be related to the particular political situation. In a region where ethnic identity has a significant importance, both on a private and a governmental level, a visual reminder of it distinctive enough to become an emblem could serve as a point of reference and generator of civic pride.

The successful examples of other cities' market-orientated practices and the policies shaped around them seem to have provided Bilbao with a good frame for a well-orchestrated cultural plan that would considerably enhance the city's economic potential. It was in this climate that the Guggenheim Bilbao was created: an emblematic building springing from a public-private partnership, which would marshal further development, attract foreign investment in the prescribed cultural area and at the same time project the city's art image to the entire world.

The Guggenheim Bilbao, however, was the product not only of the Basque aspirations, but also of the Guggenheim Foundation's politics. It would therefore be interesting to see how the Basque administration and the Foundation got involved with each other and what preceded the creation of the museum.

2. TOWARDS THE CREATION OF A NEW MUSEUM

The first plans

The importance of the cultural provision for Bilbao's regeneration, as outlined in the *Plan*, made quite pressing the need for an appropriate building to play the role of a marshalling point and a magnet for investment. This was further enhanced by the anxiety of the aforementioned politically disfavoured PNV to retain or enhance the number of its voters in the region.

The most obvious solution, at least in terms of cultural quality, would be the exploitation of the existing Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao (Fine Arts Museum of Bilbao). Hosting one of the finest collections in Spain (Juaristi 1997), featuring Old Masters, contemporary art by important European and Basque artists and interesting examples of Basque art, the museum is renowned both in Spain and abroad. The building, however, stands inconspicuously off the Deusto bridge, behind a busy road, and is an elegant but modest construction, whose identity is only defined by a sign reading "Museo" and a few banners advertising the temporary exhibitions.

Clearly, and despite the value of its collection, which ranks it along other famous museums in Europe, this museum could never make it as the centrepiece of the city's cultural development. The explanation here is threefold: first, the building is not visually stimulating and therefore cannot function as an emblem. Secondly, it has a collection of Old Masters, which, as will be discussed later in this study, is not characteristic of the art museums linked to urban regeneration plans. Thirdly, it is considered by the PNV as an expression of the dominant cultural style of the plutocratic city in the beginning of the century (*ibid.*), and is therefore dismissed as such.

In their search of a building that would serve as a symbol for the city and satisfy the demands of the cultural industry the Basques were initially orientated towards the conversion of Alhóndiga, a derelict wine warehouse located in the centre of Bilbao, into a cul-

tural centre. The then nationalist mayor of Bilbao, Gorordo, first entrusted the 28,000m² surface building to Oteiza, one of the artists of the 50s Basque avant-garde, whose aesthetic theories had defined the official nationalist art. Oteiza was planning to turn Alhóndiga into a laboratory of avant-garde artistic experimentation, but in the end he fell out with the nationalists and abandoned the project in 1989. The subsequent declarations of Gorordo for the creation of a big glass cube based on the walls of the Alhóndiga, which would constitute a post-modern emblem for the city, were never materialised by the time he left the PNV in 1991 (*ibid.*).

The Guggenheim Factor

This instability and uncertainty of actions prepared the ground very well for the Guggenheim Foundation to come into the picture. It was Carmen Giménez, former Director of National Exhibitions for the Government of Spain and currently Curator of Twentieth Century Art at the Guggenheim Bilbao, who brought the Basques in contact with the Guggenheim in early 1991 (van Bruggen 1997). Thomas Krens, Director of the Guggenheim Foundation, supports that Giménez's initiative was based on Spain's general desire to have a Guggenheim in the country after the success of the permanent collection's exhibition at the Reina Sofía the same year (Jodidio 2000). It has also been suggested, however, that the Basques did not have an internationally renowned collection for the new cultural centrepiece they were going to create, nor did they have the expertise to run it, and this was why they turned to the Guggenheim (van Bruggen 1997). If objections can be raised as regards the second reason – not all great museums have reached their status because they relied on international experts; moreover, very capable Basque staff run the Guggenheim Bilbao today – little can be argued against the first one. The reality of an increasingly competitive international cultural arena, which had then started to come dimly into sight, rendered the prospect of the involvement of a big name of the art world in the city's plans very appealing.

It is true that Krens was seeking at that moment to locate a site for his planned expansion of the Guggenheim. His vision of an internationally expanding museum, combined with his embarking on economies of scale (MacClancy 1997; Krens in Jodidio 2000), meant the creation of more museums bearing the Guggenheim brand in addition to the existing ones in New York and Venice (Peggy Guggenheim Collection). Nevertheless, several attempts with other cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, Moscow, Vienna and Graz had been unsuccessful (Kurlansky 1999) and at the time the Guggenheim was examining the possibility of Salzburg, where Hans Hollein had already prepared plans for a "museum without a face." The project however, was stalled (the reasons given are many and diverging) and it was then that Krens was obliged to turn towards the remaining solution of Bilbao, which he had initially dismissed because

“Bilbao was not the centre of Spanish cultural life” (Jodidio 2000).

Krens first visited Bilbao in April 1991 in the company of Giménez and consequently commenced the negotiations with the Basque side. His long museum experience and the Basques’ conspicuous eagerness to establish a partnership with the Guggenheim “legitimised” the fact that he played the leading part in the meetings, discussions and agreements that preceded the creation of the museum.

The possibility of the Alhóndiga, which had already been the favoured site of the PNV, was quickly ruled out by Krens. He deemed the building was inappropriate as an exhibition space (van Bruggen 1997) and the location terrible (Jodidio 2000), supported by the expertise of Frank O.Gehry, whom Krens had invited to Bilbao in order to “get another opinion” (van Bruggen 1997). This was no less than the subtly imposed involvement of the famous North American architect, who had already worked for Krens in 1988 on the conversion of the Sprague Technologies in North Adams, Massachusetts into the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) (ibid.). Quite unsurprisingly, Gehry was the one to propose the new site by the river (ibid.), be nominated as one of the three architects to take part in the architectural competition for the museum (ibid.) and win it, too.

This does not in anyway mean that Gehry was the wrong choice. On the contrary, he produced a literally stunning, mature architectural piece, greeted as one of the best buildings of the century and already a point of reference in museum architecture (see Newhouse 1998; Cano 1997) – even though if a replication of this style continues, as indicate some of his previous buildings and the ones he is currently designing, the Guggenheim Bilbao could be reduced to simply the best example of a series. Gehry indeed managed to satisfy both the Basque aspirations for an emblematic building with a great market potential and Krens’s vision for a construction with effects analogous to that of the Chartres cathedral in the 14th and 15th centuries (Krens interviewed by Jodidio, in Jodidio 2000). His creation was one of what Giovannini describes as the “stellar buildings [which] will help define the cultural pecking order” in a unified Europe where cities are becoming increasingly more important as nations are receding (Giovannini 1997).

What is of great importance here is the degree of intervention of the Guggenheim Foundation in Bilbao’s plans, facilitated by the Basques. The PNV’s nationalistic drive towards a building that would have the power to project the Basque country’s importance in the region and abroad and the planners’ strong credence to the indubitable efficiency of such an operation led to a quasi-unconditional surrender of the Basques to the Guggenheim’s will. On the other hand the Guggenheim, acknowledging the situation, took the risk and stretched the limits of its conditions as far as possible. It seems that Krens realised the strategic location of Bilbao, away from big com-

peting European and Spanish cultural centres, which an appropriate background – a spectacular building – and good promotion could turn into a success. This was a great opportunity for the Guggenheim, that had to be treated very carefully in general and particularly at that time, when apparently the Foundation was in financial difficulty².

Thus, Krens set his terms even though he was “not really determined to encourage [the Basques]” (ibid.), but most probably knowing that the Basques would accept anyway. He demanded that a new, 35,000m² building of a \$150 million cost was built by the Basques on a prominent site, that it was owned by them and that a subsidy in the region of eight to ten million dollars was provided for it. Despite offering to use the Guggenheim’s collection as the core of the museum, he also required that the Basques developed a collection of their own, for which they would initially have to provide \$50 million as a “sign of good faith and willingness to proceed” (ibid.). Finally, the Guggenheim would organise a closed, three-week architectural competition with participants the groups of Arata Isozaki, Coop Himmelblau and Frank O.Gehry, each of which would be given \$10,000, one visit and no requirements in terms of their presentation (ibid.).

Krens’s conditions greatly favoured the Foundation. Not only would the Guggenheim Empire acquire one more museum to exploit, but it would also do so with much responsibility handed over to the other side. It would make an immediate profit from the subsidy and avoid providing items from its collection, thus keeping enough in stock to be able to open more museums in the future. Furthermore, it would be able to control the quality of the new building by essentially choosing an architect it trusted. It finally did so, even though the competition was carefully designed so that its “international” character could not be defied and the Basques would be officially responsible for the architect’s selection.

The public-private agreement between the Basque administration and the Guggenheim Foundation for the creation of the Guggenheim Bilbao came in September 1991. In the first instance, the Basques paid into the Wall Street 2,000 million pesetas (\$13.5 million³) in consideration of the compromises, obligations, uses of the name and reputation of the Guggenheim Foundation (Chacón 1997). This move alone indicates the Basque administration’s anxiety to obtain a symbol for Bilbao, which would be

² According to Joseba Zulaika, the Guggenheim in 1990 was in search of \$70 millions to pay off its debts, while in 1994 the journalist Andrew Decker was referring to the Guggenheim as a museum “desperately in need of resources”. See J. Zulaika, “...Y Xabier Arzalluz dijo si”, *El Mundo del País Vasco*, 18 October 1997.

³ All conversions are based on the exchange rate of \$1= 160 pesetas.

owned by it exclusively, and the Guggenheim's business spirit. This is further confirmed by the \$20 million the Basque government gave to the Foundation in subsequent years (\$10 million in 1992 and \$10 million in 1993, see Chacón). The initial plan for the construction of a 33,000m² surface building that would cost 10,000 million pesetas (\$62.5 million) was altered to that of a 24,000m² under heavy criticism of the project being so expensive and having no clear points, which, however, ended up costing 14,000 million pesetas (\$97.5 million) instead (ibid.). Apart from that, it should be noted that the Basques were considered only as cost estimators and contractors (Gehry in van Bruggen 1997), not intervening with the design at all.

Following a feasibility study carried out by GESTEC, IBS S.A. AND KPMG, the construction started in 1994 and the Guggenheim Bilbao was opened to the public in October 1997. The museum is managed by the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Foundation, an organization including representatives of the Basque administration and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. It is financed and owned by the Basque administration, but the Guggenheim operates it and provides curatorial and administrative expertise as well as the core art collection and programming (Guggenheim Bilbao Fact Sheet).

It is evident from the above that the Guggenheim found in the Basques a good client for its expansion, who furthermore allowed it a high degree of intervention. The Foundation imposed conditions that were very beneficial to it and managed to percolate through the existence of the museum, keeping under control its most important functions. It would be interesting to see, then, what the impact of the creation of the museum on the city was.

3. ASSESSING THE MUSEUM

The economic aspect

Point number five of the Basque objectives in the Feasibility Study carried out for the Guggenheim Bilbao suggested that the museum would have a "significant positive economic impact on the region" (Guggenheim Bilbao Feasibility Study 1992: 1.3). This was based on the assumption that "the international reputation of the Guggenheim Foundation and its collections, in conjunction with the extraordinary qualities of the architectural design of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, would increase tourism and stimulate spending" (ibid.).

This objective is indicative of the recognition of tourism's importance for economic development plans based on cultural provision. Tourism is a worldwide dynamic sector, which by 1990 accounted for 5.5 percent of the world Gross National Product (Boniface 1995). In the changing western societies in the past few decades, several factors have prompted the emergence and upheaval of especially "cultural tourism," namely a section of tourism that focuses on the provision and exploitation of cultural sites and

facilities. The boom in communications, the growing availability of leisure time, the increased demand for entertainment and stimulation and the claim for an equal right of access to the same information are some of the influencing circumstances (ibid.). It could also be suggested that, as business travelling is becoming increasingly frequent, this sector is further supported by the companies' demand for high quality cultural services provision to their employees.

Cultural tourism, as a relatively new area, has not as yet been the subject of extensive research. Some studies, however, have demonstrated that there is indeed a connection between the creation and sustenance of cultural tourism facilities and economic development. This is based on the observation that the influx of both overseas and domestic tourists induced by the cultural provision in turn causes increases in spending and tourist establishments' attendance and generates employment. In Britain, for example, it has been noted that 60 percent of the tourists visit the country for its museums and galleries (Arts Council of England 1988). Also, as Myerscough has shown in his study of the economic importance of the arts, in 1986 27 percent of overseas tourist spending was specifically induced by the arts (1988). In general, it is estimated that for every dollar spent on tourism, up to four dollars can be created in spending through the "multiplier effect" (Feasibility Study 10.20).

According to the analysis of its impact⁴, presented in the beginning of 2000, the Guggenheim Bilbao has proved very successful in that respect. In the first year of its existence the museum received 1,360,000 visitors, exceeding the estimated number of the most optimistic scenario of the Feasibility Study, which anticipated 801,032 visitors (Feasibility Study 10.4). The second year the number of visitors rose to 1,265,000. It is estimated that 79 percent in the first case and 87 percent in the second came to Bilbao exclusively to see the museum, or prolonged their stay in order to visit it.

The total direct visitor expenditure in these two years came to 72,000 million pesetas (\$450 million), five times the initial investment of the museum. This, of course, refers to construction costs only, which were 14,000 million pesetas (\$87.5 million). From this expenditure the economy of the Basque country obtained added value and income estimated at more than 56,000 million pesetas (\$350 million) for the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Part of the increase in income created additional revenue for the Basque Treasury calculated at 10,449 million pesetas (approximately \$65.3 million) in Value Added Tax, Corporation Tax and Income Tax. For the year 2000, with 1,000,000 estimated visitors,

⁴ The analysis ("Impact of the activities of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao on the Basque Country") was carried out by the Guggenheim Bilbao, based on the model commissioned from KPMG Peat Marwick (Review 1999).

the income would come to more than 25,000 million pesetas (\$156.2 million) of GDP, which amounts to a revenue of 4,664 million pesetas (\$29.15 million) for the Basque Treasury (Review 1999).

The museum also appears to have made a significant contribution to employment, as it has maintained 8,899 jobs (Review 1999). This figure, however, does not represent the total number of jobs actually created, as it partly refers to jobs already existing before the opening of the Guggenheim Bilbao. According to the Feasibility Study, five hundred jobs would be created during the four-year construction plan and after its opening the museum would employ two hundred people (Feasibility Study 10.19). Many of the total of the jobs referred to must be in the tourist industry or in related activities such as retail and entertainment, namely the areas that attracted the major amounts of expenditure. This allows us to question their quality, for often the jobs in tourism are low-skilled and not well paid, temporary and non-unionised (Wynne 1992). They represent, however, a considerable percentage (0.51 percent) of the total of the employed population in the Basque country and are extremely important given the high unemployment rates.

In all, if the predictions for the year 2000 are verified, the museum will reach a total of 100,000 million pesetas (\$625 million) in income and 15,000 million pesetas (\$93.75 million) additional revenue for the Basque Treasury, thus recuperating the initial investment made for the museum in three years, which is a record.

The Guggenheim Bilbao, despite being only in its third year of activities, has already made a substantial contribution to the Basque economy. The museum's effect, however, should be considered according to other parameters, as well. These are non-quantifiable, but not less important than the economic impact and should be examined in parallel with it.

The art aspect

Normally, after the creation of a new art museum, long and enduring discussions are generated on and around the art housed in it. In the case of the Guggenheim Bilbao, the restricted reference to art, either as a word or as a notion, in both the planning and promotional literature, has reduced it to a matter of secondary importance, which is furthermore overshadowed by the attention paid to the economic benefits or the amazing architecture. Art ought to be considered, though, and indeed not only in its pragmatic sense, namely the artworks, but also in a broader context.

In assessing an art museum officially created to serve the purposes of urban renewal, setting the foundations of cultural centrality, we should take into consideration the impact of its art and its impact on art. An art museum can and should have a double function: that of a provider and that of an instigator of art. Even in their first, most aristocratic form, when they were enjoyed only by the princes, their

social circles and their favourite artists, art museums played this double part. Imbued in a new spirit that calls for a re-examination of the museum's role in society (Vergo 1989), universality of access and a dialogue in all levels, art museums are nowadays more than ever expected to bring art to the public but also prompt and encourage artistic creation.

Since the Guggenheim Bilbao was conceived as a major part of the city's regeneration plan, it seems appropriate that this aspect of the museum is considered primarily in relation to its immediate area of influence and not to the international one, which results from the Foundation's reputation, activities and aims.

Apart from the Guggenheim, Bilbao houses the following museums: the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum (see above), the Bilbao Bullfighting Museum, the Basque Museum, which brings together the Prehistory and Archaeology of Bizkaia and the Ethnography and History of the Basque Country, the Bilbao Museum of Art Reproductions, strong on Classical, Greek and Renaissance art and the Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art, with exhibits related to religious art in Bizkaia (Bilbao Museums 2000). By the time the Guggenheim was built, modern and contemporary art was not represented in any other museum in Bizkaia, and could only be found in a "small but growing collection" of modern art galleries (Guggenheim Bilbao Feasibility Study 1992: 10.17).

An area with a population of over one million, therefore, had no official space dedicated to modern and contemporary art prior to the creation of the Guggenheim. The residents' demand for a modern art museum in Bizkaia was projected by the anticipated yearly visitorship of the Guggenheim Bilbao, which was calculated to 78,176 visitors (Feasibility Study 1992: 10.14). Taking into account the total population of the area, which in 1992 was 1,285,420 (ibid.: 10.10), this meant that approximately one out of thirteen inhabitants would visit the museum. The actual number proved more than double, as the Guggenheim's visitors from Bizkaia amounted to one seventh of the total number of visitors (Review 1999), which means they were approximately 170,000.

Undoubtedly, the Guggenheim Bilbao brought an important representation of modern and contemporary art to the region. It also created for the population the option⁵ to visit a museum and have an encounter with works of art by significant artists of the western European and American art scene of the 20th century. It remains a fact, however, that the museum was implanted in an area that had no experience of a similar institution. The museum's responsibility, therefore, towards both the people who are going to take the option of visiting and those who would visit anyway

⁵ For a discussion of the option of visiting a museum see P. Johnson and B. Thomas, *Tourism, Museums and the Local Economy*, pp. 5 and 98.

but are less familiar with modern art museums is increased. Moreover, and especially in the context of regeneration, a museum should be able to offer enjoyment and inspiration combined with a valuable learning experience.

The museum, of course, has developed 42 educational programmes with 200,000 beneficiaries until today⁶ and boasts the largest number of individual members among all museums in Spain, rising to 11,000 (Fact Sheet). It is doubtful, however, to what extent the art offered by the Guggenheim Bilbao is able to facilitate or sustain these activities. The collection suffers from a lot of discontinuities, as the selection of works of art is done in an “exemplary” way (Feasibility Study 1.8), which does not allow a coherent presentation. This may have occurred because of a restriction which is due to the fact that, despite the agreement for a rotation of the permanent collection between New York, Venice and Bilbao, most of the works residing in the New York building are bound by contract and not available for any move (Feasibility Study 4.5).

In the museum only a third of the exhibition space is taken up by the core collection supplied by the Foundation. The rest of the space is dedicated to the in-depth installations, which come mostly from the Basque government’s acquisitions (see list of acquisitions, Memoria 1997-1998), the temporary exhibitions and the site-specific installations (Feasibility Study 4.8). This is quite controversial if seen against the Foundation’s initial reasons for building the museum, the most important of which was to put on show as many of its collection’s 8,000 artworks as possible (Binney 2000). And it certainly means that the local public is eventually deprived of the privilege of having an extensive permanent Guggenheim collection in its museum.

In addition to that, the temporary exhibitions, even though very enlightening and thought provoking, are still very academic in both conception and delivery⁷. The museum puts special emphasis on them, though, because they are considered to be its main attraction. This, however, is based on a market research which shows that the biggest numbers of anticipated visitors would be from Barcelona or Madrid and South-western France (8,000,000 and 8,998,160 respectively), when the visitors of Bizkaia would only be 1,285,420 (Feasibility Study 10.10). It could be argued, then, that the exhibitions aim more at this kind of public, which would normally have higher expectations than the Bilbao public. One would be inclined to say, however, that the latter is not favoured by this continuous change. A society trying to rebuild itself on its shattered foundations could make better use of a museum that would function as a sta-

bilising factor and point of reference through a strong permanent collection.

The in-depth installations, such as this for Anselm Kiefer, even though contributing greatly to the study of the history of art, still address the specialists. Furthermore, one could go as far as saying that the centrepiece of the site-specific installations, namely Jenny Holzer’s *Untitled*, is quite provocative in a specific way. The installation is nine vertical LED signboards that transmit messages in English, Spanish and the Basque language. Even though it is one of the best examples of her work, its selection here seems inappropriate and underlines an elitist attitude, as it does not seem to take into consideration the fact that 6.5 percent of the population of 10 years or more in Bilbao are illiterate or without studies (EUSTAT Municipal Information).

The creation of a new collection by the Basque government, as imposed by Krens, was nothing more than another example of the Foundation’s exertion of control over the museum, as conceded to the Basque administration was only the final approval of the proposals made jointly by the Guggenheim Foundation and the Guggenheim Bilbao (Feasibility Study 4.12). The principle of the acquisitions was twofold: “to provide a complement to the Guggenheim Foundation collections” and “to provide a collection dedicated to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, and to secure and balance the collection’s relationship between the Guggenheim Foundation and Basque Administration” (Feasibility Study 4.12).

The latter part once more points to the absurdity of the Foundation’s reasoning, as there should be no need for the creation of a collection of the Guggenheim Bilbao, since the museum was built to house an existing collection not on show. The first part offers a different point of view. The Guggenheim Foundation would complement its collection with a brand new collection of its choice, featuring very important names of contemporary art⁸. The Foundation would then be able to decide on their exhibition in the Guggenheim Bilbao, as it controls the artistic programming, and probably exploit them to the benefit of its other museums on the basis of the collection’s rotation.

One would expect that the acquisition of a new collection to be dedicated to Bilbao would mean a focus on Spanish art and particularly Basque artists. The Guggenheim Bilbao had been expected by the Basque artistic circles to cater for the lack of appropriate artistic infrastructure in the city (Badiola 1998). However, in line with the *lehendakari* (president) Ardanza’s statements, that the museum would be reserved for the “best swords” only (ibid.), including the Basque artists, only few of them actually made it through the

⁶ Reported by Juan Ignacio Vidarte, Tate Modern, 7 July 2000.

⁷ As seen at the museum in August 2000 and in the Action Plan and Programming for the year 2000.

⁸ By the end of 1998 the collection already included works by Serra, Klein, Clemente, Motherwell, Basquiat, Kounellis, Sol LeWitt, and Torres, to name but a few.

doors of the museum. Characterised by an attitude described as a “conservative post-modern nationalism...that does not hesitate, given the occasion, to give in to the most imperialist and homogenizing culture” (ibid.), the representation of Basque art in the new collection is restricted. Despite the fact that the museum claims to be placing emphasis on the Basque and Spanish artists (Memoria 1998), of the 53 works acquired between 1996 and 1998, only 12 are Spanish and of these only 7 Basque (ibid.), most of which by Eduardo Chillida, an internationally renowned artist. Even in that case, it has been noted that these acquisitions were a political move aiming to settle any criticism against the blatant absence of Basque art in the museum (Lootsma 1998). The plans for a new museum of Basque Contemporary Art in Vitoria⁹, the administrative centre of the region, have probably been made in the same spirit.

A museum that does not embrace the local artists, or it does so on the condition that they are famous, certainly does not promote the local artistic production and fosters a sort of cultural exclusion. This is not to suggest that, because the Guggenheim Bilbao is in the Basque country, it should uncritically collect Basque art, nor that acquisitions are the only means of encouraging the artists. It is, however, among the obligations of an art museum to provide moral and practical support to the artists under its immediate area of influence. In this case of Bilbao this is of particular significance, because if cultural centrality is one of the city's aims, a strong cultural identity should be forged from within and not be imported.

The Guggenheim Bilbao could at least, therefore, create opportunities for a dialogue between the artists or between the artists and the public, by organising events and short-term presentations. No such action can be traced in the museum's activities, though. Moreover, the city's promotion of “Bilboarte,” a centre for the young contemporary artists opened in November 1998 and destined to form a “triangle of culture” with the Sala Bilborock and the Museum of Reproductions of Bilbao (Informe de Progreso 1998) is not to be seen as a complementary artistic activity, but rather as a reaction to the excluding attitude of the Guggenheim Bilbao.

It is evident, therefore, that the provision of art at the Guggenheim Bilbao was conditional and not directly responding to the needs of the local community, even though the museum was originally designed for it.

The quality of life

The matters discussed above relate to quality of life, a recurrent subject in the *Strategic Plan*. Of course, quality of life is a very broad notion and not easily, if at all, quantifiable (Drenowski 1974; Szalai

1980). The fact, however, that it appears in all the issues that the *Plan* is concerned with renders its consideration essential. As Gonzalez points out, “(i)f quality of life is an interconnected whole consisting of ecological, social and physical dimensions, it must be concluded that in Bilbao the social dimension is not specifically identified in its development plan” (1993). It is true that, even though the *Plan* constantly refers to the improvement of the quality of life, it offers no clear proposals about how this can be achieved on a social level (Progress Report 1998).

This lack of definition is most probably not due to lack of theoretical support. Quality of life has been defined on various levels, including culture (see Dube 1988). It is more likely that a definition to satisfy the two contrasting opinions of the citizens in Bilbao would be difficult to find. If we take into account the results of a survey of the Bilbao citizens regarding their perception of quality of life in relation to cultural policy, we will trace two strands (Gonzalez 1993). One is a portion of the population that relates cultural policy to the making of income for the city, and aims to retain an elitist stance in a city with an established bourgeoisie. The other is that of the people who wish to participate in the city's affairs, and see a development based upon indigenous strengths. It is clear that the making of the Guggenheim Bilbao and the representation of art in it do not satisfy the needs of the latter.

We could say, therefore, that the impact of the museum on the city was considerable in economic terms, but dubitable as far as culture and quality of life are concerned, at least in the way they are expressed by the population. In similar plans, therefore, a consideration of the needs and opinions of the population is vital and has to be combined with any plans aiming at economic development, if a balance is to be kept.

4. THE POWER OF THE MODERN ART MUSEUM

Most of the urban regeneration plans that have used a new museum as the major element of their cultural development have a common denominator: their museums are of modern art. The frequency of this occurrence leads towards the assumption that it is not a coincidence and that there are underlying reasons to it. Questions are raised regarding this preference (and indeed an insistence) on the planners' part as opposed to other types of museums. Evidently, as the museums related to urban renewal are usually created within the framework of a cultural policy, some of the obviously irrelevant types, such as the natural history, science or technology ones are automatically excluded from the discussion. Other types of museums related to culture, however, such as ethnography, archaeological or history museums and of course other types of art museums should be taken into consideration. An attempt will be made here, therefore,

⁹ Information provided by Maite Gonzalez, personal communication, 10 August 2000.

for an analysis of this interesting phenomenon, with particular reference to the Guggenheim Bilbao.

To start with the examples of the ethnography, archaeological and history museums, the fact that, in most cases, they are dependent on an area's heritage has to be underlined. Of course, in the past, many museums were created based on imported collections; the Louvre, the British Museum and the Pergamon are among the most characteristic ones. This practice would not be accepted in modern museological terms, however, which means that museums of this kind would not be easy to create or even desirable anymore. Also, it has to be borne in mind that the formerly industrial areas that host the new museums might not possess a rich cultural heritage and therefore be unable to create a museum that falls into one of these categories. Furthermore, ethnography, archaeological and history museums are often considered specialist and dull museums by the wide public.

To pass on to the art museums types, except for the modern art museums we can speak of the ones that host art of the Renaissance, Old Masters (which is a broad and not always clearly defined art historical area) and 18th- and 19th-century art, if we take a rough breakdown. It is quite usual that we find art from more than one or all of these periods under the roof of one museum. This is due to the special historical and political circumstances under which these museums were developed (see Duncan 1995), which makes their replication in the present day impossible. Also, there are two more reasons for which these museums could not serve as major points of urban renewal today. As has been shown earlier in this study, regeneration planning requires dynamic projects, which are able to represent progress, challenge and change. Art before the turn of the 20th century is widely considered old-fashioned and low-toned, despite its aesthetic value. It cannot, therefore, be associated with progress. Moreover, the collections of this art might bear the names of donors and other private collectors, but are not widely known by them. Brands, however, can be a very distinctive element of projects and a factor of investment attraction.

Modern art museums, as far as these two parameters are concerned, are ideal. Even though disliked by most people, modern art could be seen as "embodying the spirit of modernisation: an avant-garde vital to the development of society as a whole and thus in the interests – in the end – of all people" (Vaessen 1993). Also, many of the modern art collections that are as a whole or in parts placed in museums are eponymous. The names give added value to the collections and the museums that host them, not only because of their art market importance, but also because they can function as brands, something extremely appreciated in a consumerist society. This attitude is further enhanced by the strong international competition between museums for art, funding and attraction of tourism, which in the 1990s seems to have changed the relationship of the museum and the public, with the latter conceived as a consumer (Wood 1993).

In that sense, the Guggenheim brand fit perfectly the requirements of Bilbao. A city that was in need for economic upheaval, managed to reach its target by using a collection of an internationally famous name, combined with an extremely distinctive building. The Foundation, on the other hand, encouraged by this general climate, took the chance to launch its franchising activities, which have been referred to as "Macdonaldisation" (Villacorta 1997).

Much of the contemporary art exhibited by the modern art museums comes from living "celebrity" artists¹⁰. Nurtured by the media support (as the FLUXUS and the Activist movements have done in the past three decades, only now with any philosophical or political meanings shaken off to be able to respond to a more materialistic, "plastic" 90s mentality), these artists embark on an artistic populism which is sure to bring success both to them as individuals and the museums that represent them. A Hirst or an Emin would bring publicity – positive or negative, it does not matter – to most modern art museums, which would in turn receive an increase in the number of visitors and, consequently, income.

A Koons in Bilbao, with his 12.5m blooming *Puppy* (1992), brought all that¹¹ plus sponsorship. One of the favourite children of media, Jeff Koons attracted with his sculpture the support of the fashion company Hugo Boss, which, after praising the museum and the artwork in a press release, admitted that "the association with the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao underlines the importance of the Spanish market for Hugo Boss" (Lootsma 1998).

On a general note, two more reasons could be suggested for the preference given to modern art museums. It is widely accepted that modern art is an intimidating experience for the public. This is probably because art viewing in modern art museums has always been organised by an élite, interested in addressing mainly the *connoisseurs* and neglecting the public's needs. Thus, the latter would always be faced with the incomprehensible. Today, interpretation plays a significant role in most modern art museums. However, this embarrassment of the many before the knowledge or intuitive understanding of modern art shared by the few can still be a powerful political tool. The less one understands of something, the more imposing it becomes. This provides an interesting parallel with some forms of religion based on the dogma that "one should believe without questioning," which gives the top of the hierarchy the power to manipulate the crowds. If this is seen in conjunction with the notion of the art museums as

¹⁰ For an account of some contemporary artists' relation to the media, see J. Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*.

¹¹ His contribution to income is not measured in terms of tickets, as his artwork is exhibited outside, but in terms of sales of his artwork's replicas and other objects inspired by it, which are the most popular in the museum's shop.

places of ritual (Duncan 1995), it creates a strong argument about the use, or rather abuse, of modern art museums.

Finally, some important changes have occurred in the representation of contemporary art during the last decade. The 90s, at least in Britain, saw the emergence of an "alternative scene," away from the conventional museum (and private galleries alike) and into old factories and warehouses (Stallabrass 1999). Accompanied by a new, artist-curator hybrid (*ibid.*), this move took out of the way the public sector, which was the go-between for funding. The success of this operation might as well have looked like a threat to museums, which would put in jeopardy their long-established order. It could be suggested, therefore, that this was among the reasons that prompted an increased creation of modern art museums.

As is evident from the above, the tendency for the creation of modern art museums as part of urban regeneration plans is caused mainly by market related reasons, as well as political ones, and is enhanced by the current situation in the contemporary art world.

CONCLUSION

The efforts of many western societies to pass from an industrial to a post-industrial era have placed modern art museums in a significant position today. An orientation of these societies towards the tertiary sector has brought about the realisation of the cultural sector's great potential as far as economic development is concerned. City planners and authorities that developed urban regeneration strategies, on many cases adopted this as the vertebral axis of their plans and set up cultural policies, in which modern art museums had to play a central role.

In the late 80s Bilbao, drawing on the experience of other cities, created its own cultural policy, which would help it obtain a diversified infrastructure and change its image. In examining the possibilities for a cultural facility that would function as an emblem for the city, a tourist attraction, a magnet for investment and a marshalling point for development, the Basque authorities became involved with the Guggenheim Foundation. The latter's aspirations to create new international bases for the exhibition of its collection perfectly fit the requirements of the Basques. A series of negotiations and agreements, then, led to the creation of the Guggenheim Bilbao.

A result of a public-private partnership, the museum had to satisfy both sides. The private factor gained great benefits. It created one more museum in Europe based on its own conditions, thus launching its international expansion. Furthermore, it received the amounts of money it needed to come out of its bad economic situation and secured its cultural domination on the newly created museum by attaining control over its programming.

The public factor, on the other hand, managed to obtain an emblem and change the city's image, as

well as boost its economy. It is questionable, however, how much it gained in terms of culture and of an impact on society at large. Of course, this is something that cannot be quantified and therefore examined set against the economic benefits. Not everything in life, however, and especially art and culture can or should be measured in figures. Facts, indications and opinions should be enough to create a picture of a situation. In Bilbao, it appears that art was given to the city under many conditions, in a climate of continuous intervention and in an elitist manner that, if not unapproachable, was at least unwelcoming. Moreover, the art's presence in the city did not advance the citizens' quality of life in its cultural context, as theory and a large portion of the population perceive it. Neither did it promote the local artistic spirit and creativity; on the contrary, it rather impeded them.

The use of art as a tool for reaping economic benefits can also be traced in the general craze for the creation of modern art museums. Modern art, it seems, has long been associated with consumerism and publicity and is still divested with a considerable political power.

Two main conclusions arise from this study. Firstly, that the creation of the Guggenheim Bilbao, was prompted and nurtured by the public and private parts' political and economic needs, which left little or no space for cultural preoccupations. Art was simply the agent for the economic regeneration of a declining city and an indebted organisation. Secondly, even though it appeared within the framework of an international tendency that is producing similar examples, the Guggenheim Bilbao was a specific creation that resulted from special historical, social and political circumstances and should only be seen as such. Its uncritical replication could only produce indifferent clones, which would not only be deprived of any originality but would also perpetuate the misuse of art and of the museums that host it.

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