

# Day 16 - Kelly Zona

The 'Guggenheim Effect' refers to the rapid influx of tourism and gentrification that overtakes a city with a new cultural icon. The term was coined in reference to the new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. While the iconic museum by 'starchitect' Frank Gehry was able to create a successful brand for Bilbao and generate a huge influx of art tourism, these effects are not without their downside.

While the Guggenheim in Bilbao did generate a large amount of tourism for the city, these tourists tended to be at least moderately wealthy. (Vicario, 2395). The museum also brought the wide reaching effects of gentrification along with it. In Bilbao, residential rents skyrocketed to be amongst the highest in Spain. Commercial rent prices shot up as well (Vicario, 2386-2388). Many criticize the museum for these adverse effects, as well as the fact that it has detracted attention away from other local institutions. Because of its intense international focus, the museum did not do much to promote local artists. It took ten years for local artists to be recognized in its exhibitions [5].

A new Guggenheim will be built in the new Saadiyat Cultural District of Abu Dhabi, leaving many wondering exactly what the consequences of the 'Guggenheim Effect' might happen there.

A blurb on the project website sums up its the vast scope:

*"In its essence, Saadiyat is a multi-faceted island destination offering a great variety of attractions to many different people. A buzzing business hub for international commerce; a relaxed waterfront home for residents; a cultural magnet for arts aficionados; the home of dazzling architectural icons; a pristine beachfront tourism destination and a focal point for compelling sporting experiences, such as the Gulf's first tidal and ocean golf courses. It will also be the only place in the world to house architecture designed by five individual Pritzker prize winners. Saadiyat will be an irresistible magnet attracting the world to Abu Dhabi – and taking Abu Dhabi to the world."* [3]



It seems that Abu Dhabi is trying to recreate the Guggenheim effect to the extreme. It is described as the "world's largest single arts-and-culture development project in recent memory" [4]. The cultural district will boast not only a new Guggenheim, but also a New Louvre. It will not only have designs by Gehry, but by other starchitects including Zaha Hadid, Jean Nouvel, and Tadao Ando [3].

But with such grandiose plans and so much money being thrown into this project, who will this new cultural district be for? No doubt this will throw Abu Dhabi into the limelight of the international arts scene, but for a project that aims to promote local culture, might it end up hurting that which it seeks to promote? A local community member voices concern "One can only hope... that the policy of the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi is more open than in Bilbao," referring to the fact that it took a decade to start exhibiting works by local artists [5]. And while some point out that "everyone knows that art is good for the economy," who will benefit ? [2] As in the case of Bilbao, will the money stay concentrated in the hands of the wealthy?

It may be too early to tell exactly what consequences the 'Guggenheim Effect' will have in Abu Dhabi, but we may have a pretty good idea, judging from the effects in Bilbao.

Bibliography:

Lorenzo Vicario and P. Manuel Martinez Monje, Another 'Guggenheim Effect'? The Generation of a Potentially Gentrifiable Neighbourhood in Bilbao" in Urban Studies, Vol. 40, No. 12, 2383--2400, November 2003

1 <http://www.guggenheim.org/abu-dhabi>

2 <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Guggenheim+Abu+Dhabi+on+hold/24880>

3 <http://www.saadiyat.ae/en/>

4 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/01/arts/design/01isla.html?pagewanted=all>

5 [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2007/abu\\_dhabi\\_culture\\_boom](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2007/abu_dhabi_culture_boom)