

Day 16 - Elena Cestero

The “Guggenheim Effect” is the cultural and economic revitalization of a city or certain neighborhoods as a result of an influx of money and interest driven by the introduction of new cultural attractions and aggressive marketing of them such as a high profile art museum. The [Guggenheim Museum](#) in particular has been used for this purpose in cities around the world such as [Bilbao](#) and its newest venue in [Abu Dhabi](#). These projects appear to be successes but the truth is more complicated.

Upon further inspection, the effect seems to primarily benefit the already privileged in each place. While the newly revived cities or areas do attract more tourism and enhance their images, the revenue that is created seems to benefit the few rather than the many. While the tourism (especially art tourism) industry is maximized, according to the authors of the reading, the effect does not seem to translate to an increase in international capital investment and services in the area as hoped. In other words, only certain sectors of the economy benefit rather than the whole society.

As seen in the paper by Vicario and Martinez Monje, Bilbao is the perfect example of this in that, “The city’s revitalisation strategies tended, therefore, to focus mainly on the physical regeneration of the city, while ignoring the socioeconomic aspects of revitalisation.” The result of the Bilbao project was the creation of a consumer center that caters to the wealthy; more or less their own “playground”. Along with these programs came rising real estate prices (both residential and retail) which made the area inaccessible to anyone of lesser means. In addition, while many of the improvements were attributed to local government, much was actually been done by private business. This leads to a greater privatization of the commerce in a city overall which again benefits the wealthy who own the companies but not the general population.

The additional focus on the neighborhood of Bilbao La Vieja (BLV), a poor section of the city with a reputation for crime but an enviable location and architecture, will most certainly lead to its gentrification. While the zone may be revitalized, these measures will most likely drive the current population out. Instead of addressing the problems of the current inhabitants through social programs, the program will instead focus on the physical problems of the neighborhood and most likely result in the current inhabitants leaving and take their issues elsewhere. This will, “accentuate social exclusion and polarisation in the city,” rather than truly transforming the city from of its former economic and social state. In fact, the tables show that while the city’s revitalization has led to more jobs in the professional sector, it has resulted in a decrease in manual labor jobs. Also, while BLV is being touted for its bohemian culture and art scene as motivation for its facelift, this aspect of it will surely be destroyed by the commercialization of the area.

While outsiders now have a much more positive image of Bilbao due to its new reputation as a center for art and culture, the benefit for the masses that inhabit the city is more questionable. It seems that this has also been the case in other cities as well and will be again in Abu Dhabi as the city has created an island cultural district that caters exclusively to the wealthy.

The consequences of the “Guggenheim Effect” on the art market will be monetarily positive as the art market already primarily caters to the elite and this will provide them with further opportunities to interact with, buy, and invest in art. Socially I think the art market will be affected negatively as it is further reduced to a commodity, and the vast majority of the population finds it increasingly difficult to access. I think that the “Guggenheim Effect” would be more significant in benefitting the entire population of a city or region if care were taken to combine the physical revitalization with meaningful social reform.

Additional Guggenheims:



