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Global museums in the twenty-first century

The Guggenheim foundation and the rhetoric of cultural planning in Vilnius

The fact that a Guggenheim museum is being planned in Vilnius is indicative of the conviction that cultural "de-provincialization" can only be achieved by taking part in global projects. Skaidra Trilupaityte describes how Frank Gehry's "architectural miracle" in the former backwater of Bilbao marked the start of the Guggenheim Foundation's policy of expansion that today has cities around the world queuing up to pay the Guggenheim license fee. Meanwhile, writes Trilupaityte, city planners ignore that the cultural needs of the local population are quite different from those of business and the tourist industry. Vilnius is not Bilbao!

Many of the larger museums all over the world are struggling to redefine their functions. Nowadays, the modern museum is no longer a mere repository for exhibits or a place for new production, but also a centre for research and information; an educational centre equipped with a library; a storage room for photographic negatives, video and DVD collections; and an organizer of specialized programmes. In addition, museums in different countries are insistently encouraged, albeit for very different reasons, to follow in the footsteps of contemporary culture industries and to increase the numbers of visitors by offering them entertainment. As a result, educational functions are often inseparably intertwined with mass consumption and corporate advertising. Museums are also closely related to processes of urban regeneration and cultural "revival" in contemporary cities.

Processes inspired by globalization and the so-called new economy have turned upside down traditional principles of urban planning. While culture used to be seen as a secondary component of social and economic development, now it is considered central to it. Shopping malls, alongside stadiums and multifunctional entertainment and recreation complexes, have become catalysts for city growth. Nonetheless, if competing post-industrial cities wish to attract larger numbers of tourists in order to significantly expand their service sectors, and thereby increase the revenue to the city budget, they need more than that. "More" here means "the new museum", which is expected to replace the old, "boring" one. In the consciousness of museum visitors, the latter tend to be associated with unique collections and permanent exhibitions. New museums, on the other hand, are futuristic, often theatrical spaces, "containers" full of the glamour of travelling blockbusters.

It is hardly possible to compare the numbers of museum visitors and their preferences in recent decades with, for instance, the situation that existed in the interwar period. The end of the Cold War has allowed many more people to easily access major cultural centres all over the globe. These new realities have created unexpected challenges for the most famous museums, whose visitors

are mainly tourists. Many museums are pressured by the lack of financing. In addition, because of the lack of museum spaces in major metropolises, hundreds of thousands of artworks languish in storage rooms. Therefore, the founding of new branches of a particular museum in other parts of the globe is becoming a new and increasingly popular source of financial income, as well as an attractive political strategy. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (SRGF),¹ under the leadership of Thomas Krens, is the most explicit example of an international network of such satellite institutions.

The rhetoric of cultural planning in post-industrial cities is closely related to the activities of museums (or other major cultural centres), which no longer belong "exclusively" to the cultural sphere. This is well illustrated by the so-called "Bilbao effect", an aspiration of many cities of the world and now intensively popularized in Vilnius. The former mayor of Vilnius, Arturas Zuokas, realized long ago that it would not suffice to crowd the city with shopping malls and entertainment parks in order to encourage consumption; the founding of a world famous museum would be the most direct way for the capital of a small and obscure post-Soviet country to make its mark on the map of the new global economy. A number of people working in the sphere of culture share the former mayor's ambition, albeit for differing reasons — for instance, the conviction that opening a branch of the Guggenheim in Vilnius is the only opportunity for Lithuania to "recover" the works of Jurgis Maciunas and Jonas Mekas. This optimistic belief in the cultural future of the city at the same time reveals implicit resistance to Soviet-style stagnation, something that still characterizes some of Lithuania's cultural institutions. Doubting that advantages exist in cooperation between local cultural politics and world famous museums indeed seems more than silly;² nevertheless, rather than insisting on the post-Soviet aspects of the "Lithuanian mentality", it seems more worthwhile to look at municipal cultural planning against the context of regeneration in other post-industrial cities. It is also worth analyzing some principles of the development of twenty-first century global museums.

For some years now, Vilnius has been encouraging cultural tourism, especially in the form of conferences and world congresses. Predictably, this process is marked not only by the homogenization of services (for example, the quickly spreading franchise-type hotel architecture), but also by the offer of "uniqueness". In this respect, the Lithuanian capital is no different from the many other cities (not only in Europe) competing to be able boast the "tallest building in the region", "the biggest international event", "the most impressive cultural complex", and so on. That this rhetoric has come to Vilnius (with Kaunas and Klaipeda in tow) can be explained by the fact that the city has lately begun taking part in the processes of globalization integral to the neo-liberal economy. It would be a mistake to suggest that this economy manifests itself as a rational and fully controllable process. Neoliberal development is not governed exclusively by numbers, but also relies heavily on belief. For instance, the belief that it is precisely the *new* city that is attractive to tourists obligates city leaders to begin processes of radical expansion and in turn requires citizens to put their faith in ambitious and controversial — or "progressive" and "future-orientated" — scenarios.

It is specifically the "image question", as opposed to anything else, that makes culture an ideal instrument in municipal politics. In the past few years, the population of Vilnius has been repeatedly reminded that it is high time that Vilnius, which aspires to become a *real* (read "western") city when it comes to culture, possess a new concert hall, a national stadium, the biggest entertainment park in the Baltic region, a multifunctional exhibition and

educational centre, a prestigious world class museum, and so on. Similar desperation is felt in relation to certain symbols and dates of local importance, be it the creation of a dynamic multicultural city through the "Vilnius — European Capital of Culture 2009" project, or the millennial anniversary planned for the same year to mark the alleged emergence/discovery of the country. Multifunctional urban complexes, either in the planning stages or already under construction, costing millions and integrating both national and business interests, are always imagined to be unequivocally conducive to economic growth.

The rhetoric of symbolic economy, with its emphasis on challenges, usually rejects more subtle or not very "comfortable" issues of identity, as the latter supposedly fail to meet the demands of contemporary society. This does not mean that consumers' cultural expectations are altogether ignored. On the contrary, they are often activated as new futuristic "success stories". Besides, visions of the future often recover both "distinctive historical context" and "the original atmosphere of the locale". Cultural industries are thus very naturally integrated into far-reaching plans. Ironically, even the first "great" shopping mall in Vilnius, the "Acropolis", once openly cursed by artists, has today joined the list of sponsors of the planned "Hermitage–Guggenheim Vilnius".

So far it has not been important whether the Hermitage–Guggenheim, conceived as part of a multifunctional cultural centre, will operate together with the Jonas Mekas centre for visual arts, the Litvak cultural centre, and the art education centre, or what principles such partnership will be based on. Certain rather trivial details related to this project betray several features of the symbolic economy — the proponents of the project initially gave varying and often vague budget estimates. That the intended functions of the hypothetical cultural centres have constantly changed and intertwined in the recent reports may seem to be a sign of disturbed cultural identity or lack of priorities, but only at first sight. Such ephemeral visions are in fact symptomatic of urban civic boosterism. Public relations tend to play a big role in the sphere of urban planning, and Vilnius is no exception. It is typical of its future-oriented scenarios that the new complexes, which often only exist as "paper" projects, are nonetheless supported by the belief that the massive investments intended for them will eventually attract both investors and tourists, and thus pay big dividends.

The twenty-first century museum and the expansion of the SRGF

Thomas Krens stepped in to head the Guggenheim Foundation in 1988 when it was experiencing serious financial problems and suffering from lack of space. The Guggenheim of the time could not compete with the bigger and more famous New York museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Under the slogan "grow or perish", Krens nurtured a global strategy for the institution that many called "visionary". Instead of focusing his efforts on one place, or founding semi-autonomous branches in the same city or at least the same country (like the Tate Gallery in the late 1980s), Krens decided to establish close relationships with famous museums all over the world, to open Guggenheim branches in other countries, and to attract foreign sponsors. Eventually, the SRGF began to license its "trademark" and thereby largely replicated the corporate model (hence the media's occasional use of the label the "Guggenheim consortium").

In 1988, when Krens became the director of the Guggenheim museum, the foundation inherited a collection of 10 000 artworks, only three percent of

which could be exhibited in the famous Frank Lloyd Wright building on Fifth Avenue and in Venice. In the early 1990s, however, the museum purchased new collections, launched several expensive reconstruction projects, and established close relationships with various European cities regarding the setting up of Guggenheim branches. This cost the foundation more than fifty millions dollars. Tension among the members of the Board of Trustees heightened and some resigned. The US art world was not unanimous about the SRGF's new involvement in the game of global culture; nor was it favourable towards the foundation's reliance on foreign capital. The "aggressive" strategy the museum relied on in the 1990s, while controversial (largely because of the "inappropriate" agreements the museum signed with banks to increase its authorized capital), was general considered inevitable in order to help preserve elite art in today's world.³ Krens's harshest critics, however, compared his activities to the illegal practices of the infamous Enron corporation.

The museum was harshly criticized when the Krens administration initiated an unprecedented sale of the twentieth century artworks (several decades before, the sale carried out by the Metropolitan had provoked similar criticism). Nevertheless, the greatest attention has been focused on the transplantation of the SRGF museum spaces to other countries all over the world. Coinciding with the new opportunities opened after the end of the Cold War, the Guggenheim's expansion has even been compared to US foreign policy. In that period, and for the first time, the SRGF surpassed the initiatives of the MoMA.⁴

In 1991, the SRGF began negotiations regarding a Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. Krens, who at the time was searching for a location for a branch in Spain, initially did not react to the Basques' invitation. But they did not give up. Several years before, preoccupied with the international image of the city, local politicians had initiated massive urban regeneration: in 1989, a twenty-year plan for the development was scheduled (the period was, of course, provisional) with the budget of 1.5 billion dollars. The new museum was supposed to become just another highlight of "art and culture" in the context of Bilbao's postindustrial future, along with a new centre for performing arts, other cultural institutions, parks, and the like. Much attention was to be devoted to the new infrastructure of the city; thus a new dock in the harbour was built, roads were paved, telecommunications updated, the airport adjusted to accommodate business class passengers, and so on.

Soon Bilbao could boast spectacular new buildings designed by world famous architects such as Norman Foster, James Stirling, Caesar Pelli, and others. However, in the mid-1990s, the attention of the world media suddenly fell on Frank Gehry's impressively constructed Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (GMB). While Gehry's work was not a pre-condition of "the big scheme", the appearance of this particular building in an obscure Spanish city is usually considered Krens's greatest personal achievement.

Bilbao as an example of cultural postcolonialism

Dozens (and, indirectly, hundreds) of studies have been written to discuss the processes of Bilbao's urban regeneration. Nonetheless, I would like to leave the urban and economic effects aside and to point to critical discussions, inspired specifically, in the case of Bilbao, by the new phenomenon of a "museum corporation," which is now becoming a powerful means of cultural enterprise in the new economy of international tourism.⁵ Keith Moxey's question seems well-founded: Has the opening of the GMB proved that the local government

succeeded in controlling the capital and in making it work for the city? Or maybe the capitalist museum has subordinated the local government for the sake of bigger profits?⁶ On the other hand, even if one chooses to evaluate the purely economic effects, it is hard to say whether they are going to be long-lasting. In the future, the Bilbao success will have to be sustained by continued interest among visitors and the frequency of direct flights from international airports to Bilbao.⁷

US professor of anthropology Joseba Zulaika, researcher in Basque studies who has carried out probably the most exhaustive analysis of the history of the founding of the museum in Bilbao,⁸ had been extremely critical about the new cultural invasion even before the construction of Gehry's architectural "masterpiece". Having seen Bilbao's obvious revitalization, he has softened his initial position.

Nonetheless, an active transformation of the city has not altered Zulaika's doubts about certain principles of the activities of the newly licensed museum. According to him, this project has set a political precedent for an irreversible sacrifice of cultural autonomy for the sake of globalization. He has labelled the Bilbao experiment a "Krenified museum", a historical innovation that can be defined a licensed global institution based on the logic of gambling and seduction; that exploits the advantages offered by the gentrification of post-industrial cities; that invests into spectacular "emblematic" architecture and manipulates the media extremely skillfully; and that generates theatrical images in order to evoke the interest of international tourists. Such institutions organize large exhibitions — blockbusters — that surpass the limits of "mere art", and naturally tie them into New York auction culture, as well as the cycles of the Wall Street stock market.

Discussing the negotiations between the Basques and Krens, researchers pointed out several astonishing phenomena. First of all was the fact that the negotiations were shrouded in complete secrecy.⁹ The autonomous Basque government invested huge amounts of money and, taking on all the risks for the future of the project, signed an agreement that the Basque people knew almost nothing about. The Basque parliament was left in ignorance, as were the political partners of the regional ruling party. Although the local representatives of culture did not have much influence during the negotiations, certain influential politicians of other European countries did participate in the process; they included supporters of large intercontinental cultural projects and cultural globalization. It is possible that terrorism was a main reason why Basque officials humbly and silently accepted the conditions raised by Krens. They had come to the conclusion that no other public relations move would be able to alter the image of Bilbao as much as news about the new GMB in Spain.

Another unusual thing was that the Basques were asked to pay twenty million dollars of the Guggenheim *brand* license fee. It is difficult to conceive how Krens succeeded in persuading the Basque government that the conditions of the agreement would be advantageous for the region. The Basques were obligated to collect enough money to begin the construction of the museum building, launch its activities, and accumulate its collection (to which fifty million dollars was allocated), and to give the US museum the right to share in the future profits. Meanwhile, the Americans were to be allowed to organize all exhibitions and programmes at the Bilbao museum. In this context, discussions about buying and selling are irrelevant. It is necessary to speak about transactions rooted in confidence and belief, or else, the semantics of

promise and seduction, whereby economic exchange is replaced by what anthropologists call symbolic exchange or potlatch economy.¹⁰ Contact with New York's glamour, as well as the stock and auction market of the world metropolis, was not the only thing Krens promised the Basque officials. He also suggested that they join in his imminent global triumph. The local politicians decided to take a risk. But what was it Krens that offered them, while splashing out Basque tax-payers' money at New York auctions, himself risking nothing? The only thing he could promise was world fame for the backwater city of Bilbao — a "win-win situation" so favoured among the participants in corporate financial culture.¹¹

Symbolic exchange does not know the notion of "too expensive". Symbolic exchange is the sphere of promises, formulaic statements, and belief in power. In Bilbao's case, the asymmetry between the "leading" and the "receiving" sides is especially striking because the New York museum, trapped in a financial crisis and incapable of covering its own expansion and reconstruction expenses (a large number of its employees were laid off to cover up the cracks in the budget), undertook to take over an entire European city, albeit one smitten by post-industrial economic desperation. Thus New York needed Bilbao no less than Bilbao needed New York. In the context of Bilbao's economic success, traditional arguments about "capitalist conspiracy" are hardly persuasive. But cultural projects cannot be judged exclusively according to commercial profits.

The fact that the New York institution strategically controls the entire project is a good illustration of precisely the asymmetry of cultural globalization. What from the local perspective was a caricature of democracy¹² was labelled "international co-operation" by the creators of the museum. Bold statements about risky challenges became common in the Bilbao media and the citizens of Bilbao were urged to retain "confidence in success". The project expenses were termed "strategic investments" as opposed to "subsidies" (subsidies meaning budget money allocated exclusively to support local culture), and so on.

Once the world media had glorified the "Bilbao success", numerous cities all over the world desired to possess their "own" Guggenheim. Contemporary planners no longer seem interested in buildings whose walls were decorated with pictures. A contemporary city wants something else, a Krensified museum, a seductive building capable of evoking desire in the crowd; a building which could also be used as a museum.¹³ Zulaika has repeatedly compared Krens to Don Juan because of his abilities to evoke desire in other people. Desire has thus become inseparable from the concept of the "miracle"; the two are intertwined in the peculiar new discourse of the urban regeneration process, which integrates the features of both persuasive traditional design and "architectural genius". In short, many nowadays believe that the quickest way to regenerate a city is not only to attract international corporations, but to transform it into a place of attraction for international tourism, a place where the mass consciousness is visualized through unique and memorable architectural structures.

Globalization of the SRGF

It is symptomatic that numerous Guggenheim museums only exist in the images broadcast by the international media, which regularly report about new projects here or there, still on target or already underway. It is easy to believe their reality, despite the fact that most of the images are no more than computer

animations. The year 2005 saw talk about prospective Guggenheim satellites in Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, Taichung and Guadalajara; the latter two were initially imagined as projects to be realized in cooperation with the Hermitage State Museum.¹⁴ Shanghai, Singapore, Beijing, Gwangju, Macao, St Petersburg, Moscow... Here and there, announcements were flashed up about yet another prospective SRGF museum, illustrating well the ephemeral "urban drive".

Meanwhile, rumours about prospective Guggenheims in Rio, Taichung, Hong Kong, Edinburgh, Sydney, and Venice (Punta della Dogana) have since evaporated. Frank Gehry's idea for a large and expensive project in New York's lower Manhattan was "subdued" for an indeterminate period of time by the events of 9/11. A Guggenheim branch opened in SoHo, New York, in 1992 (the Arata Isozaki project) and was closed in 2001. It is an interesting yet hardly publicized fact that new Guggenheim spaces in the USA have never proved to be as commercially profitable as was expected at the start.¹⁵ Simultaneously, SRGF projects in other countries are not only competed over, but usually encounter strong ideological resistance. Conflicts between local governments and the national (or regional) administrations are frequent, and have proved a major factor in the SRGF's failure to set up several new branches in Europe.

Deborah Solomon, in her discussion of Krens's museum activities (or more precisely, his financial policy related both to the selling of artworks at auctions and also to the dubious practices of their purchasing), argues that the Guggenheim "consortium" can be treated as a straightforward manifestation of American pragmatism. This pragmatism has freed itself from a respectful attitude towards works of art and from the pretence that art is religion, and museums the equivalents of churches. In this respect, at least, the Guggenheim "consortium" is much more honest than anyone else.¹⁶

The expansion of the twenty-first century global museum is related to local economic resources and global financial flows as opposed to the specificities of local art. This is probably best illustrated by the example of the United Arab Emirates. At the beginning of June 2006, the SRGF officially announced the start of the construction of a museum building designed by Gehry in Abu Dhabi, on an artificial pier in the newly projected Saadiyat Island cultural district. So far, the Abu Dhabi project is the largest of all Guggenheim satellites, a quarter as large again as the GMB. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan is confident that the museum will be able to accumulate a prestigious art collection by the time it opens in 2012.¹⁷

The projects of the Guggenheim expansion are closely related to its unfailing partner, the Hermitage museum in St Petersburg. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the state museum began to seek new strategies. Until 1993, when the state gave the Hermitage a huge historical government building located nearby, the museum had only been able to exhibit five percent of its collection. The new building needed to be renovated, however, for which there was no money allocated. The Hermitage director Mikhail Piotrovski set out to look for private sponsors. Having noted the success of the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, he suggested to Krens a cooperation in which each museum use the other's collections, attracting revenue from shared exhibition spaces throughout the world.¹⁸

The contract was signed in June 2000; and at the beginning of 2001, the two museums signed a triangular cooperation agreement with the Kunsthistorisches

Museum in Vienna. The SRGF was obligated to help the Hermitage to attract sponsors for the renovation of the museum buildings in St Petersburg and to prepare a feasibility study.¹⁹ The renovation of the Hermitage was additionally financed by several Russian businessmen seeking to improve their reputation after the infamous privatizations of the 1990s. One of the main sponsors of the Hermitage was Russian oligarch Vladimir Potanin, listed among the richest people in Russia. His company, Interros, has recently begun cooperation with the SRGF, while Potanin himself has been admitted to the board of trustees.

In October 2001, the Hermitage–Guggenheim exhibition centre opened in Las Vegas with an exhibition of the nineteenth and twentieth century European "Masterpieces and Their Collectors". The opening ceremony took place in one of the world's largest casino and hotel complexes, Venetian Casino Resort, in the so called Jewel Box space of the hotel foyer. At the same time, the Guggenheim closed a somewhat larger, but unsuccessful gallery, the so-called Big Box. The interiors of both museums were designed by Rem Koolhaas. The Las Vegas initiative had nothing in common with greater urban regeneration of the city and was only related to the expansion of the corporation. Sheldon Adelson, the head of Las Vegas Sands Corp. and one of the richest people in the world, considered the possibility of opening a Guggenheim in his new complex, the Venetian Macao in the city of Macao. However Adelson's luxurious hotel and casino complex, which declares itself to be largest in the world, opened in August 2007, has not yet advertised its museum spaces. Las Vegas Sands relationship with the world casino industry is particularly intriguing to the Baltic States, since the government and business leaders of the Kaliningrad region have recently set out to transform Kaliningrad into a centre for the gambling industry, even if their "amusing offers" have not yet succeeded in attracting Adelson's attention.²⁰

What possibilities of expansion do world museums have in the Baltic region and, more specifically, in Lithuania? This should be revealed by a feasibility study currently being prepared.²¹ In the meantime, it is hardly possible to speculate about the "format" of the Guggenheim–Hermitage hybrid in Vilnius. The expansion of global museums in the twenty-first century is determined by flexible business logic as opposed to conventional standards of museum ethics. Usually, any city that wants to receive an architectural project by the SRGF pays two million dollars in advance for a study of possibilities, prepared by companies with international experience and in close cooperation with the SRGF. In Vilnius's case, the authors of the study are never mentioned, either in the official press releases issued by the municipality or anywhere in the media; only the identity of the sponsors of the study is known.

Years ago, the US accounting firm Arthur Andersen, which surrendered its license after the Enron scandal,²² formulated the hypotheses of the Bilbao "miracle" and the "Cinderella story". At the end of the year 2000, the SRGF signed an agreement with the California based architecture company Gehry & Associates and with the AMO research group led by architect Rem Koolhaas; the two companies have already prepared studies of possibilities all over the world. Such studies are not always related to "emblematic" architecture but are first and foremost "cultural interventions", that is, strategic studies and projects that are not necessarily executed as new museums *per se* (e.g. Berlin and Venice).²³ The Guggenheim's own architectural "miracles" are very frequently unrelated to the local urban situation, as demonstrated by Gehry's building in Bilbao. In Los Angeles, for instance, a building initially designed to host the Walt Disney concert hall was later revised to accommodate a giant MoCA (the idea of a Guggenheim in North Adams was never realized); a similar building

was offered to lower Manhattan in New York.

To ensure the successful functioning of a global museum in Vilnius, it would be necessary to significantly modify the urban environment. Ideas tend towards traditional "theatrical" architecture and a contest among three world famous architects is being arranged. Today, easily exportable "miracles" work most effectively upon the global and mobile business class and tourists in search of new impressions. Meanwhile, the quite different cultural expectations of urban citizens is made subservient to economic results and evaluated in terms of number of potential workplaces and benefits to the city's "peripheries". Vilnius is a striking example; the problems associated with the National Art Gallery, designed by local architects as opposed to world famous stars, have been "naturally" pushed to the margins of the municipal agenda and largely ignored.²⁴

But maybe it is time to stop the usual whining about the lack of finances experienced by local cultural institutions and to believe in the possibility of a *different* future. Perhaps the city's cultural planning should not be evaluated separately from the general situation of the country, even if the former mayor of Vilnius repeatedly emphasizes the differences between the two. Why is it not possible to imagine that a state that has insistently tried to shrug off the issue of hosting its own modernist art in a national institution (due to lack of financing)²⁵ should decide to risk and (perhaps) become a participant in the economy of a totally different caliber, that is, the global economy? The more so since the problems of the National Gallery have recently begun to be addressed, not because of artists' complaints, but because of the international obligations assumed by Vilnius as a future European Capital of Culture 2009 (these obligations are associated with the building of a prospective global museum). That Lithuania does not have a sufficient number of experts to manage the numerous activities of a world institution does not pose a problem. In an asymmetric cultural exchange, the leading side is responsible for experts, curators, and even programs of exhibitions (often mobile). The receiving side only needs to secure the necessary finances.

In other words, in the long run, creating the image of the cultural capital in the region will require significantly larger amounts of money than any local institution has ever imagined. More importantly, the case for the Guggenheim is often rooted in assumptions that Lithuania is a "cultural province", and only "world class" institutions can save it from this historical fate. The question why the collections of works by Jurgis Maciunas and Jonas Mekas could not find a proper place in the National Gallery, something Lithuanian artists have been dreaming about, sounds almost indecently naive in the context of neoliberal economic development. Another related irony is that Vilnius, which officially encourages the development and popularization of non-commercial cinema, has destroyed almost all cinemas that ran during the Soviet period.

Lithuania, as well as other countries, admires the Bilbao "miracle"; but in the context of the SRGF's global strategy, Vilnius should not be compared to Bilbao. The world only started speaking about Bilbao because the SRGF put it on the tourist map. The success story is thus inseparable New York's financial culture at the time when companies as Enron, WorldCom, and the like were at their peak. No other European city was able, and probably never will ever be able, to carry out such stunning gentrification, an almost literal resurrection from the ashes. And since no other city has repeated such a resurrection so far, one should not be deceived by the promises of miracles. There is also no reason to expect that the world will become interested in local Lithuanian

culture after the latter slips into the shadow of the Guggenheim "consortium." The numerous visitors to Bilbao are hardly interested in Basque art.²⁶ The directors of the world's largest museums, as well as Vilnius officials, are aiming at much more, however. The greetings the Lithuanian Prime Minister sent Thomas Krens²⁷ to mark a "very important step in the Lithuanian history" made by Vilnius, situated "at the crossroads between the East and the West," demonstrates that Lithuania is still inclined to rely on the resourcefulness of the powerful.

The global style of the Guggenheim "consortium" and the "think big" policy seems to reflect the ambitious plans of the Hermitage as opposed to the *Fluxus* spirit, so cherished in Lithuania. According to Piotrovski, "most museums make money in a very primitive way [...]. Tom [Krens] sells intellectual product. He takes risks, but I like it because it's close to how Russian generals used to think — on a big scale."²⁸ Krens himself has also been charmed by Russia. After one of his trips he described it as a fascinating source of energy: "Russia in the twenty-first century has the largest concentration of natural resources around the world," says Krens. "I've never felt such a concentration of money. [Moscow] is as close to Las Vegas as anything I've seen. The entrepreneurial energy is enormous."²⁹

The "Cinderella story" may sound appealing to smaller cities and nations, but it — or anything else, for that matter — cannot guarantee success. It is no coincidence that cities all over the world have refused Guggenheim branches. Even the most serious research has difficulties in evaluating the processes of urban regeneration according to the criteria of long-term "benefits". This is especially applicable to another frequently discussed example of urban regeneration: the Glasgow "effect" that took place when the Scottish city became European Capital of Culture in 1990.

The correlation between globalization and local culture is every bit as complex a phenomenon as economic transactions; certain losses are inevitable. In the context of the current wave of civic boosterism in Vilnius, the encouragement of patriotism is easily "fused" with the prospective multifunctional centres of the future.³⁰ These images and illusions are even more strongly activated with the approach of 2009, when Vilnius will be the European Capital of Culture. Nonetheless, it is time to understand that in the context of universal scenarios of cultural planning, it is not architectural competitions or attempts to attract world calibre investors with visions of multifunctional centres that causes suspicion and concern, but the fact that these things, so important to the country's future, are not discussed openly, critically and constructively. And we know that many bad ideas are hatched in the secrecy of the offices of political and economic elites, seduced by grand visions and blinded by self-interest.

Post Scriptum

On 8 April 2008, an international jury announced that Zaha Hadid had won the architectural competition to develop the project for the proposed Hermitage–Guggenheim museum in Vilnius. This, of course, has not yet turned the plans into reality. Krens, who has long been identified with Guggenheim's world conquering, now is stepping down as the director of the SRGF and one could reasonably expect changes in the museum's international policies. Krens will remain a senior adviser for international affairs and will oversee the creation of the Abu Dhabi branch; however, a further expansion of

the Guggenheim does not look a priority for the SRGF, which is now focusing "more on the foundation's New York flagship museum rather than on funneling resources into developing Guggenheim satellites around the world".³¹ Given this background, and considering the rising local opposition against financing the global museum, it seems likely that the Vilnius project eventually will be laid to rest, like numerous examples in other countries.

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- 1 The SRGF (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation) - a non-profit institution, established in 1937 by philanthropist Solomon R. Guggenheim and artist Hilda von Rebay. It currently owns five international Guggenheim museums. See: <http://www.guggenheim.org>.
 - 2 In this context, the criticism voiced by a member of the European Parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, is symptomatic. He argues that doubting urban cultural projects with large budgets is characteristic "of our backward country, not used to grand visions". See: Vytautas Landsbergis, "Mesku kampas Europoje" [The Bear corner in Europe], *delfi.lt* [online journal], 17 May 2007, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/article.php?id=13230370>.
 - 3 Mark Honigsbaum, "McGuggenheim?" *The Guardian*, 27 January 2001.
 - 4 Serge Guilbaut, "Sleeping in Bilbao: The Guggenheim as a New Cultural Edsel?", in: Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika, (eds.), *Learning from Bilbao*, University of Nevada Press, 2005. p. 134.
 - 5 An extremely exhaustive publication in this respect is the aforementioned collection of articles *Learning from Bilbao*, where the SRGF critique is undertaken not only by well known theoreticians, but also by artists, such as Hans Haacke, Andrea Fraser, etc.
 - 6 Keith Moxey, "Gehry's Bilbao: Visits and Visions", in *Learning from Bilbao*, *ibid*, p. 175.
 - 7 Marjorie Rauen, *ibid*. p. 293.
 - 8 Zulaika's often quoted study describes the process of transplanting Guggenheim in Bilbao as "a history of seduction." See Joseba Zulaika, *Cronica de una seducccion: El museo Guggenheim Bilbao*, Madrid: Nerea, 1997.
 - 9 See Ery Camara, "The Franchise Museum: An Instrument of Cultural Colonization", in *Learning from the Bilbao*, *ibid*.
 - 10 The participants in the potlatch ceremony compete among themselves by destructing material goods they have accumulated over a certain period of time. The winner and the possessor of the symbolic power is the one who destroys more possessions than anyone else. See Zulaika, "Desiring Bilbao", *ibid*, p. 153.
 - 11 For more, see Zulaika, *ibid*. p. 166. See also Zulaika, "'Miracle in Bilbao': Basques in the Casino of Globalism", 2000, <http://www.euskalnet.net/sjf/basquelinks1.htm>.
 - 12 An open letter, signed by 400 Basque artists and intellectuals who demanded that the text of the contract were made public, was dismissed with an explanation that it is not possible to violate the requirements of the text's "constitutional" secrecy. See Zulaika, "Desiring Bilbao", *ibid.*, p. 151.
 - 13 Zulaika, *ibid*. p. 158.
 - 14 "Four New Gugg Branches?", *ArtNet* [online journal], 13 January 2005, <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/news/artnetnews2/artnetnews1-13-05.asp>
 - 15 Solomon, *ibid*. See also Eleanor Heartney, "Growing Pains", *Art in America*, no. 6, June 1999.
 - 16 Solomon, "Is the Go-Go-Guggenheim Going, Going...", *ibid*.
 - 17 Jim Krane, "Guggenheim to build museum in Abu Dabhi", *The Washington Post*, 8 July 2006. See also "Emirates launches 27 billion US dollars arts project to include world's largest Guggenheim", *International Herald Tribune*, 31 January 2007.
 - 18 John Varoli, "Guggenheim and Hermitage forge an alliance", *Art Newspaper* 11, no. 105, July/August 2000.
 - 19 Press release, Guggenheim museum Press Office, 27 September 2000, http://www.guggenheim.org/press_releases/release_51.html.
 - 20 See "Las Vega linksmina losimu zonos Kaliningrade ambicijos" [Las Vegas is amused by Kaliningrad's ambitions for a casino centre], *balsas.lt* [online journal], 4 September 2007, <http://www.balsas.lt/naujienos/verslas/pasaulioverslas/straipsnis154878>.
 - 21 Lithuanian press reported that on 10 July 2007 (elsewhere, July 9) an agreement about a possibility study for such a museum was signed in New York.
 - 22 Enron used its accounting services.
 - 23

In 2000, Krens contended that these studies first and foremost meant a mutual cultural impulse and the creation of aesthetic projects in an active practical environment as opposed to construction of new buildings. See press release, Guggenheim museum Press Office, *ibid.*

- 24 A seemingly paradoxical relationship between local cultural institutions and the prospective "world class" museum has been discussed by Giedre Jankeviciute. See Giedre Jankeviciute, "Kaip pamatyti Meko ir Maciuno kurinius Vilniuje?" [How to see Mekas' and Maciunas' works in Vilnius?], *Naujasis zidinys–Aidai*, no.5–6, 2007.
- 25 More on the construction of the National Art gallery in the time of independence see: Skaidra Trilupaityte, "Istorijos versija ir kolekcijos vizija" [A Version of History and a Vision of the Collection], in *Daile*, no. 1, 2002.
- 26 For more on the hegemony of "universal" aesthetic values and the non-critical promotion of "New York art canons" in the tourism industry of contemporary museums (first of all, the SRGF), see Moxey, "Gehry's Bilbao", *ibid.*
- 27 "The Prime Minister greets the agreement about the possibility study for a Guggenheim museum in Vilnius", http://www.lrvk.lt/main.php?id=aktualijos_su_video/p.php&n=4942.
- 28 See Mark Irving, "An American in Venice", *Time* (in partnership with CNN), 22 June 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,460189-2,00.html>.
- 29 Carol Vogel, "Guggenheim chief retains global vision", *International Herald Tribune*, 29 April 2005.
- 30 This is, by the way, also characteristic of retrospective projections; consider, for instance, the Palace of the Sovereigns or the history of the construction of the House of the Nation, etc.
- 31 Carol Vogel' "Guggenheim's Provocative Director Steps Down", *The New York Times*, 28 February 2008, [online] available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/28/arts/design/28muse.html?ex=1362373200&en=c5dd2bf154e8406f&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

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