The Impact of Iconic Buildings and Star Architecture on the Sustainable Development of Cities

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Abstract

Today, as a result of post-industrial capitalism and globalization, architecture has become a powerful communication and marketing tool. Architects are thus called to give shape to contemporary visions and trends in society, through innovative and relevant ideas. One such emerging trend, which has gained a large audience, is sustainable development. Architecture, in its twofold character as a physical environment and as a communication instrument, can play an important part both in generating a sustainable environment and in increasing public awareness on the matter. Iconic architecture and star architects have a strong image and substantial influence on the public, and therefore play an important part in spreading new trends. The present work investigates three contemporary iconic projects of star-architects in an attempt to determine their approach to economic, cultural and environmental sustainability and their contribution to the sustainable development of cities.

Rezumat

Sub efectul globalizării şi trecerii la capitalismul postindustrial, arhitectura a devenit un important instrument în brandingul de oraş. Arhitecţii sunt chemaţi ca prin idei inovative, relevante cultural, social şi economic să materializeze viziunea şi sistemul de valori al societăţii contemporane. Dezvoltarea sustenabilă a devenit o preocupare socială majoră, iar arhitectura în dubla sa calitate de mediu fizic şi instrument de comunicare poate fi un mijloc de dezvoltare durabilă şi o metodă de conştientizare a publicului cu privire la importanţa acestei tendinţe. Arhitectura iconică şi arhitecţii cunoscuţi au prin imaginea lor un impact puternic asupra publicului şi astfel un rol important în propagarea anumitor tendinţe. Lucrarea de faţă analizează trei exemple de arhitectură contemporană iconică, aparţinând unor arhitecţi celebri în încercarea de a determina felul în care răspund cerinţelor de sustenabilitate economică, culturală sau din punct de vedere al mediului şi rolul lor în dezvoltarea sustenabilă a oraşelor.

Keywords: city branding, iconic architecture, culture, urban regeneration, sustainability

1. Introduction

Place marketing activities have developed significantly in the last decades in the form of city branding and nation branding strategies. These activities are not new, such initiatives have also been used in the past whenever communities needed to draw attention on development projects,

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such as new neighborhoods, new infrastructure or new public buildings. The difference today is the context of these programs, generated by globalization. This phenomenon determined a strong competition between countries and cities for attracting financial and human resources, and so, branding programs have become essential for continuous development.

City branding activities consist of various actions through which public and private institutions mean to sell the local image, hoping to attract foreign investment, tourists and possible residents. This is motivated by two reasons. On one hand, there is a need to attract financial capital, to create jobs and develop the local economy, while on the other hand these actions aim to convince the locals of the opportunity and benefits of the urban projects, even though these might not entirely be in their interest. [1]

Promotional actions are taken in various fields from PR and advertising to economic incentives, sports and cultural events and architecture. Architecture has a key role in promoting the post-industrial city as a place of cultural consumption. It has a double mission: to build an external image of the city, according to the way it needs to be perceived and to convince the locals of the benefits of the urban renewal [2]. By this, the importance of architecture transcedes the symbolic and the functional aspects, to become a catalyst for urban transformations [3].

One of the main directions of promotion through architecture is building new iconic edifices. The disappearance of industrial activities provides the physical space for new projects designed to enhance local pride, as well as to draw the attention of tourists and investors on the economic, social and cultural processes of urban regeneration. Iconic buildings thus become powerful branding tools on behalf of the city, providing immediate recognition and instant fame.

2. Cultural economy and iconic architecture

Used in the context of signs, to underline a resemblance to the reality which they indicate, the term *iconic* was first used to describe specific representations of the Byzantine painting. It was later used in the context of computers as a reduced image suggestive of a whole category of real or virtual objects, and now it is used more and more in architecture to emphasize the spectacular, mysterious, symbolic or impressive character of buildings which have become or were intentionally designed to become famous in the last half century.

Iconicity in architecture is not a new phenomenon. The history of architecture is a history of superlatives, built around monumental, symbolic buildings, which became famous beyond their geographic areas. They were designed as symbols of secular or religious power, but over time, they have exceeded the fame of their patrons and turned into urban landmarks. Their iconicity is not reduced to their monumental character, their symbolism or fame. It is a proof of their cultural importance, and of the fact that by ritual usage they have come to build the identity of the local community. Since the middle of the twentieth century, there has been a paradigm shift in the production of iconic architecture. Iconicity has become an important resource for meaning and power and it is produced intentionally to achieve political, social or economic capital.

A first example is the Sydney Opera House. In an effort to increase their cultural potential and furnish the water front with a spectacular architectural object, the local authorities decided through an architectural competition organized in 1956, to entrust the Danish architect Jørn Utzon this mission. In 1973, after fourteen years of construction, the building became the first recent edifice designed to be an iconic image for a city. In the years that followed, the building has enjoyed a huge success and in 2007 it became part of the UNESCO World Heritage. Despite the apparent success, the construction work has been associated with a number of technical and structural

problems, a long-running construction process (1959-1973) and exceeding fourteen times the original budget [4]. All these things have anticipated a set of problems that would become a leitmotif for much of the subsequent iconic architecture.

The production of iconic architecture in the second half of the twentieth century is influenced by a number of social, political and economic phenomena and comprises two main directions. On the one hand, there are a number of public cultural buildings: museums, libraries, theaters and concert halls, which provide a great freedom of formal expression and are designed to increase the cultural prestige of cities and meet the requirements of an increasingly educated public, be it local or tourist. On the other hand, there is an increase in private investment that contributes to the changing skyline of cities, in the form of office buildings or shopping centers.

France, one of the first European countries which turned to the cultural economy, started in the 1980s, under the patronage of President François Mitterand a large programme of public investment in infrastructure and cultural amenities. The project, launched in 1982 under the title "Grandes Operations d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme", was designed to celebrate the anniversary of two hundred years after the French Revolution and to highlight the role of Paris and France in culture, economics and politics at the end of the twentieth century. In less than two decades, Paris was endowed with eight large-scale buildings which significantly changed the city's image: the Pyramid of the Louvre Museum, the Orsay Museum, The Parc of La Villette, The Arab World Institute, The Bastille Opera, the Great Arch of La Defense, the Ministry of Finance Headquarters and the National Library of France. [5]

Similarly, other European capitals have taken actions to achieve cultural infrastructure since the 1980s, albeit at a smaller scale. In London, a number of works have been made during this period to enlarge existing cultural institutions and build new ones. The British Museum was extended in 2000 through a project signed by Norman Foster, which covered the interior courtyard and turned it into the largest covered public space in Europe [6]. Tate Gallery was extended by James Stirling, between 1980 and 1987. A new Tate museum, called Tate Modern, opened in 2000 in a former power plant on the banks of Thames. The project was designed by architects Herzog and de Meuron, who are also involved in a new extension, currently in progress. In Madrid, the Prado Museum has undergone successive transformations, most recently under the work of Rafael Moneo in 2007. Similarly, new expansion projects were conducted for the National Museum Reina Sofia (Jean Nouvel) and Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum.

All these examples have in common a very important thing. They are located in cities with a rich cultural life and they represent natural gestures of local authorities, in partnership with various organizations, to provide spaces for exhibiting vast existing art collections which had previously been hidden from the public for lack of exposure space. Undoubtedly, these renovations and expansions, with high urban visibility, often associated with famous architects, contribute to the prestige and image of cultural institutions and their cities, but they are not conceived to achieve these goals. Functional justification exists beyond the aesthetic impact and economic rationale.

In the late 1990s, the idea that cultural institutions, especially museums, appear from local, objective needs, due to an existing and underutilized cultural potential, changed. Cultural buildings such as libraries, museums, exhibition halls and concerts, either justified in the urban functions or not, are viewed as trophies, or as saving objects which through their cultural aura and iconic presence are able to change the fate of cities, to stop the urban decay and transform the local economy. This vision, particularly adopted by cities deeply affected by the disappearance of industries, has its origin in the "Bilbao effect".

The building of the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao as part of a wider urban renewal project

represented a turning point in the history of the town, in that it managed to catalyze further large-scale transformations. Being in essence an act of force, of implanting a subsidy of a famous foreign museum in a post industrial city in decline, the project has proved a winning formula and generated numerous attempts to reprint worldwide. Based on an apparently simple formula, a city in need to be saved, an iconic building, a famous cultural brand and a star architect, the museum's success in the urban regeneration should be seen in a broader social and political context. Social changes in the post Franco era, the European integration, the need to reconfigure national and cultural identity in the Basque Country were major milestones in building consensus and the implementation of the action plan for reinventing the city. [3]

The Bilbao phenomenon has led to a reassessment of the role of the iconic architecture. Frank Gehry acknowledged in an interview that after Bilbao he is often sought to do "Frank Gehry buildings" proving that clients are looking for something special in his projects that would provide the iconic character and the guarantee of success. Many cities, encouraged by the Spanish example are seeking to produce iconic buildings, and this has generated a hyperinflation of the iconic, in which every new building attempts to monopolize the attention from the last one. [7]

The role of iconic architecture has changed significantly in recent decades, be it public or private, cultural or corporate. In the past, the iconic character was achieved through a temporal process of negotiation and ritual use, and as a result, iconic architecture found its place in the collective identity. Today, the iconic is required by the market and it is intentionally manufactured as a marketing tool that can successfully promote city brands, corporate or personal brands. In a world fascinated by everything new, the latest news, films or music videos, architecture has to keep the pace and the best way is by its image. Iconic buildings are made to be visually consumed before being used for their intended purpose and this is what motivates all those who produce architecture to increase their image. Globalization characterized by increasing corporate power at the expense of national states, determines the democratization of the iconic object, making it possible for every individual to have its own iconic building at the expense of the coherence of the city, which thus becomes a curiosity store. [8]

Since the 1980s, with the new focus on cultural economy, many European and American museums have expanded their activities by building new exhibition spaces, or new facilities such as shops, cafes, restaurants, educational spaces, conferences halls or auditoria. Together with cultural activities, these new spaces have become very important in the economy of museums. They have come to represent attractions themselves, and have become important tools for advertising culture. Aiming to attract an ever larger audience, these institutions seek to overcome their traditional role to educate, by showing a more flexible approach to culture, thus competing with the new spaces of mass culture, the cinemas, the malls or the amusement parks. [9]

The Bilbao effect together with the idea that museums are indirect sources of income for local economies contributed to spread the idea that iconic architecture of museums can be an image boost for cities, able to catalyze development and to revitalize towns. Many European cities in search of a new identity after the disappearance of industries, embraced this path, and started building impressive cultural venues, meant to remove them from obscurity and put them on the tourist or investment world map.

3. Case studies

Santiago de Compostela is the capital of Galicia, in northwestern Spain. The town, which has a permanent population of about 95,800 people and around 30,000 students, is a place with a strong cultural identity. The main cultural and architectural landmark of the city, the Cathedral of St.

James, whose construction began in 1087 on the site where Apostle James is said to have been buried, has been an important pilgrimage destination since the eleventh century. During the Middle Ages, the pilgrimage to Santiago was one of the most important religious events of the Catholic world. The importance of the city's cultural and pilgrimage routes was recognized by UNESCO, who included the historic centre (1985) and the pilgrimage route, the Camino de Santiago (1993) in the world heritage. The city has a rich Romanesque and Baroque architecture and also a great variety of new constructions made by Spanish and foreign architects since the 1980s. [10]

Encouraged by a period of economic prosperity and the experience of Guggenheim Bilbao, local authorities have organized in 1999 an international architecture competition for the creation of a cultural center. This was meant to become an iconic image for the city, and to put Santiago de Compostela on the cultural map of Europe.[11] Cidade da Cultura, Fig. 1 was set to include several cultural and artistic institutions: a museum, a library, an archive, an international art center and a center for music and drama. The site, Monte Gaias is a large hill area (700,000 sqm), overlooking the city. The competition featured local architects in addition to a number of famous architects: Jean Nouvel, Rem Koolhaas, Dominique Perrault, Daniel Libeskind, Ricardo Bofill, Steven Holl. The winning design belongs to Peter Eisenman and was considered to best suit the site. [12]

Construction started in 2001 and after twelve years of works it stopped in 2013 due to lack of funds. Project costs, initially estimated at 108 million euros, reached 287 million euro, by the time the construction ceased. Despite the initial promise, the project required massive interventions for modifying the topography, which completely transformed the site. The complex covers an area equivalent to the historical center and only provides a few of the spaces mentioned in the initial project: the museum, library and archives as well as two centers: Center for Cultural Innovation and Center for Creative Enterprising [11]. Although it was conceived as a new epicenter of cultural life the building is not successful among the locals. Its location outside the city, far from the university and any other urban facilities, as well as its accesibility by car or public transport reduces the number of visitors. Inner spaces are oversized and most of the time remain empty. Like the interior, exterior spaces have an overwhelming, monumental scale and do not seem to take into account the size of the city they are addressed to. The stone cladding, conceived as a reinterpretation of the traditional granite architecture in the area, fails to create an attractive space adapted to local climate conditions. Moreover, the giant building represents a large financial burden on the city and requires high maintenance costs, Fig 2. [13]

Figure 1. Cidade da Cultura, Santiago de Compostela

This project clearly demonstrates that iconic architecture and star architects are not always a valuable investment for the city. Such gigantic constructions, born of out of political ambitions, fail to become the desired monuments and to attract public appreciation, and instead they become huge burdens. Eisenman's project demonstrates an important feature of the production of iconic

architecture, and that is lack of responsability at any level from the social, cultural, economic to the environmental level. Based on design specifications that exaggerated the need for spaces, compared to the size of the town, the project enhanced the grandiose scale by creating indoor and outdoor spaces hard to control, maintain and manage. The architect failed to provide valuable consultancy for his client's own good and instead further stressed the iconic image, regardless of the costs. This proves that the pride of such achievements and personal brand enhancement are far more important for architects than the economic and social sustainability of the projects or the genuine expression of authentic community needs.

In a somewhat similar manner, the French town Metz was provided by the authorities with an iconic brand object, a Pompidou subsidiary, Fig.3. The building, completed in 2010, is the result of a competition held in 2003 and won by architects Shigheru Ban and Jean de Gastines. The stated aim of the project was the construction of a cultural facility affiliated to the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which would encourage the development of the entire Lorraine region. Metz is the capital of the Lorraine region and an important cultural center at national and regional level. The proximity to Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany contributed to the region's economic and cultural effervescence. The city, whose history reaches the Gallic and Roman period, has currently a population of about 120,000 inhabitants. A former industrial center, Metz is still an active economic centre, based on a strong automotive industry, information technology, services, tourism and trade. The city's architectural heritage includes over 100 classified historical monuments, one of the most important being the Cathedral of St. Etienne, built in Gothic style between 1220 and 1522. [14]

The project of the Pompidou Centre is part of a larger regeneration process comprising a 50 ha site, located near the city railway station. The center is seen as an important tourist resource, and was designed to attract visitors from the region and neighboring countries. The museum is considered a success, with a higher number of visitors, than expected in the first year, 800,000 and a constant number of 350,000 visitors per year in the consequent years. However, its operation is surrounded by a series of debates on the relationship between the high costs of maintenance and the indirect benefits of the local economy, which are difficult to estimate. Funding is provided from the budget of several public institutions and their contributions have seen strong fluctuations in recent years due to budget deficit reduction policies at national level. In such circumstances, the cultural programs of the institution are questioned, affecting the role of the museum in the urban development policy. [15]

Figure 2. Centre Pompidou, Metz

Pompidou Metz is representative of a number of contemporary projects that use culture as life buoy for the city. Of course, Metz is not in decline and has a variety of valuable artistic and cultural

events and institutions, but the temptation of a new iconic object, with a cultural aura seems undeniable. When this new construction also bears a renowned name and a famous architectural signature, things become extremely attractive. The construction budget of 69.33 million euros and the maintenance budget estimated at 13.5 million euros seem irrelevant when compared to the promise of fame and wealth. The museum in Metz can be seen as a manifestation of power, a strong gesture that implanted culture in the city, without taking into account the local needs, and the long-term social and economic impact. The question that remains is whether the city needs such an expensive promotional tool when there are cheaper and more efficient alternatives to promote tourism. Seen in this light, architecture is not built to meet social needs, but to create them and to encourage consumption indefinitely.

Unlike the giant intervention of Santiago de Compostela, which neglects both the physical and the social context, the project in Metz is not about integration in the built or natural environment, because this does not really exist and architects just had to design an iconic building, easy to be visually consumed and with a proper interior functionality [16]. Architecture is secondary, the main character is the cultural brand, which relying on the fame gained in Paris promises to become a catalyst for urban progress. As demonstrated by the museum of Metz, iconic architecture acting as a city branding tool is often devoid of the authenticity which could make it a valuable object for the community.

Another recent development in France proves that the "Bilbao effect" is far from having exhausted its rhetorical resources. Louvre Lens is the first branch of the famous Parisian museum and was designed to boost the economy of one of the poorest areas of France, deeply affected by unemployment and social problems, after the disappearance of the local mining industry. Designed by the Japanese team SANAA the museum was opened to the public at the end of 2012, as a proximity museum and a cultural institution complementary to that of Paris. The director of the Lens museum emphasized in an interview in 2013 that the new institution became an indispensable presence for its visitors and that in order to fully understand the cultural importance of the Louvre, visiting the Parisian museum is no longer enough [17].

The opening of the museum marks a change of orientation in the policy of the cultural institution which has agreed to provide its reputation, collection and expertise to help boosting the development of disadvantaged areas on the one hand, and on the other hand to enhance the prestige of French culture beyond its borders. Inspired by the Guggenheim Foundation whose branding program is supported by a substantial economic policy, the Louvre has recently taken a similar attitude by signing in 2007 a partnership with the UAE authorities in Abu Dhabi to build a museum on Saadiyat Island. The agreement stipulates the granting of the Louvre name for a period of thirty years, in exchange for a substantial remuneration, as well as lending artworks from the museum's collection and other partner institutions, and managerial support for the operation of the new museum [18].

The building, designed by Jean Nouvel and scheduled to open in late 2015 is a symbol for the new cultural orientation of the United Arab Emirates. Despite this act which promises to transform the Louvre in the first global museum, its physical presence in Abu Dhabi should be seen as a trophy, a part of a series of cultural objects meant to culturally enhance the prestige of a rising political power. Thus, the future cultural district in Abu Dhabi will host next to the Louvre other iconic buildings, signed by some of the most famous contemporary architects: Guggenheim Museum Abu Dhabi, designed by Frank Gehry, the Sheikh Zayed National Museum by Foster & Partners and a Performing Arts Centre designed by Zaha Hadid Architects.

The recent policy of the Louvre Museum demonstrates the spectacular metamorphosis of this institution from its first public opening in 1793 until today, when the museum has become a strong

cultural brand, rivaling similar institutions like Guggenheim or Hermitage for cultural and economic prestige. Unlike the American Guggenheim cultural empire, built in the twentieth century on Solomon R. Guggenheim's industrial fortune, and which distinguished itself through an aggressive expansion and advertising policy, the Louvre has a noble descent and represents a unique cultural heritage. Built as a residence of the kings of France and then turned into a museum for the general public, the Louvre gathers within its walls an extraordinary artistic heritage, increased by many generations of artists and art lovers. The identity of the museum is closely linked to that of Paris and France, making it a superlative in the cultural sphere and a valuable asset for the city and for the country. However, under the influence of neoliberal capitalism, the Louvre has followed the example of other institutions in the field, seeking the best way to popularize its brand and looking for new sources of income, even if this means the disappearance of its authentic aura.

In this context, the project for Lens, can be seen as a branding tool for the museum, in order to attract new visitors and also a humanitarian project aimed to remove the region from the current state of decline and catalyze changes for the better. The initial cost of the museum was 150 million and was financed 60% by the Region Nord-Pas de Calais, 20% of European funds, 6% of the department of Pas-de-Calais, 6% of Community Lens-Lievin and City Lens, 5% and 4% by the state. The annual budget, necessary for the operation is 15.5 million euro and is provided by the authorities Nord-Pas de Calais Region, Department Pas-de-Calais and Lens-Lievin Community. Louvre Museum participates by providing the works of art and advice. Three years after the opening, the number of tourists have exceeded the initial calculations and the effects on the local economy are visible but still dim. As expected, most changes occurred in the tourist infrastructure, which prior to the opening of the museum, was underdeveloped and outdated. [19]

With the increasing number of tourists from the region and the neighboring countries old businesses developed and new ones appeared, especially hotels and restaurants. The city boasts a new center for young artists, soon to open under the patronage of businessman and collector François Pinault and some new stores in the city center. The changes are not spectacular. Official statistics point at 175 direct and indirect jobs created through the operation of the museum and over 220 jobs in trade and services generated as a result of the project. [19]

Like Metz, the economic effects will be visible in the long term. Despite the optimism and the locals' acceptance of the project the question remains whether these strong gestures are the right solution for the sustainable development of cities. As seen in these cases, architecture is nothing more than a promotional tool for the ideology of consumerism. It is not an authentic response to a social need, but a foreign object of political will, disconnected from the local culture and tradition and devoid of any social significance.

4. Conclusions

The City of Culture of Santiago de Compostela, the Pompidou Metz and the Louvre Lens are a few projects that were designed in the late 1990s and during the 2000s, emulating the success of Guggenheim Bilbao. Taken together, these processes of regeneration based on cultural economy are a negotiation between brands. Urban brands need to reinvent themselves and use cultural brands, who also need promotion and visibility. Cultural brands, associated with starchitects' brands produce iconic objects, valid anywhere, which come to replace the authenticity of local cultures and values. Cut off from the local social and cultural meanings and strictly intended to encourage consumption, architecture becomes a mere instrument, with aesthetic potential, subject to the laws of the brands it represents.

In an ideal version, the role of architecture would be that of an object built with responsibility

towards the city and its users, with respect towards the context, with attention to functionality and which arises from an objective need and has a minimum impact on the environment. Thus, architecture, as an object with intrinsic value, could become a valuable resource for the city brand, beyond the formal attributes and the advertising repertoire which proclaim it iconic, before implementation, and which are actually its reasons to exist as an object of consumerist propaganda.

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