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Sanja Rodeš, *Griffith University*

## The Museum after the “Bilbao Effect”

This paper reflects upon the museum type in the wake of the discourse on the so-called ‘Bilbao Effect’. The regularly-invoked effects of economic stimulation and iconicity - the system Terry Smith called the “iconomy” -, experienced in Bilbao after the opening of the Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum in 1997, have shaped the status of museums as major public commissions of economic and cultural importance to their cities. This paper aims to argue that the ‘Bilbao Effect’, while somewhat a globalized concept, is not a neatly transferable idea and its use as a category is limited.

Two examples of recently opened museums will be discussed to demonstrate the way the Bilbao Effect figures in contemporary museum architecture, and the limits of the concept. The examples will be discussed by looking at their architectural designs along with their reception by the public and potential visitors; exposing the cause and effect relationship of contemporary architectural design and the increased media and general public’s attention. It further aims to investigate the translation of ‘iconicity tools’, proven economically successful for the Guggenheim in Bilbao, to two different museums. The first example is The Museum of Twenty-First Century Arts (MAXXI) in Rome, Italy by Zaha Hadid Architects, opened in 2010. This discourse questions the conceptual iconic qualities of the Bilbao Effect to MAXXI in a city whose image is already created by architectural icons, where the museum aims at changing the image of the Flaminio district. The second example is Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp, Belgium by Neutelings Riedijk Architects, opened in 2011, as part of the urban renewal project of Antwerp’s suburb, Het Eilandje. Framing the Bilbao Effect as the primarily successful instrument for city/suburb economical and urban regeneration, the paper treats this effect as a necessarily complex notion, difficult to replicate but arguably widely sought, suggesting that it represents the concept with elusive mechanics.

## Introduction

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry and opened in 1997 with an estimated project cost of \$US 228.3 million, is regarded as the museum that triggered the proliferation of over-expensive, iconic buildings with eye-catching forms.<sup>1</sup> The aim in designing such buildings is to attract attention from the public and possible profits, along with urban regeneration. This museum seemed to have the appropriate timing and form to make an impact. Since the World Wide Web became publicly available in 1991, it left an open space in the media (complementing television and print media) for the visibility of the museum, unavailable to an earlier generation of buildings regarded as iconic on architectural or cultural terms.<sup>2</sup> In 2001 a worldwide survey of art museum buildings listed eighty-four active projects.<sup>3</sup> While the proliferation of museums is arguably marked by their increased visibility following the technological developments in the media communication of the 1990s, the term 'Bilbao Effect'<sup>4</sup> can be used as another method in explaining their proliferation.

The term 'Bilbao Effect' appeared in literature in the late 1990s to explain the phenomenon where the cities were in pursuit of having a building designed by Frank Gehry - and soon after, by other world-renowned architects - in order to achieve the same economic outcome the Guggenheim provided for Bilbao.<sup>5</sup> In the first three years after its opening the Guggenheim amortized its initial construction costs and within the first four years, attracted five million people.<sup>6</sup> Hal Foster argues that the Guggenheim is "an image accumulated to the point where it becomes capital",<sup>7</sup> - a reversal of Guy Debord's statement that "the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image"<sup>8</sup> - designed to "assist in the corporate 'revival' of the city ... being made safe for shopping, spectating, and spacing out."<sup>9</sup> Foster stresses that the contemporary world is dominated by "visual culture", which is a "heightened spectacle pervaded by visual commodities and technologies, information and entertainment."<sup>10</sup>

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1 Beatriz Plaza, "The Bilbao Effect (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao)," *Museum News* 86, no. 5 (2007), accessed 20 January, 2014, [http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/12681/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_12681.pdf](http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/12681/1/MPRA_paper_12681.pdf); Terry E. Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 21.

2 Although the World Wide Web was not immediately put to use by the general public, it facilitated the creation of the first global network and the dissemination of information. See Christoph Kronhagel, *Mediatecture: the Design of Medially Augmented Spaces* (Vienna: Springer, 2010), 37; and Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: New York: Routledge, 2009), 2, 221. Considering the appropriate façade, Rem Koolhaas argued that the Guggenheim in Bilbao is "the most non-generic building in the world". See Rem Koolhaas, "Stress test," Lecture, Cornell University, accessed 19 January 2014, <http://www.cornell.edu/video/?videoID=1646>.

3 Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 19.

4 Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a Critical History*, 4th ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 344.

5 Frampton, *Modern Architecture*, 344-45.

6 Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 27.

7 Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes* (London: Verso, 2002), 41.

8 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 34.

9 Foster, *Design and Crime*, 41.

10 Foster, *Design and Crime*, 90. The author further argues the link between the visual studies and popular and subcultural forms of expression, which include movies, television, internet etc.

The connection of museum architecture with city economy can also be found in the correlation between museum practice and popular culture. This is an attempt to aid the contemporary museums' survival in view of the so-called "death of the museum", a term which relates to the changed requirements of the audience and gaining actual profit.<sup>11</sup> Once the Guggenheim was complete, its image was reproduced in the mass media and used as a logo for the city in tourist guides, TV, newspapers, and movies.

Bilbao was once an industrial city; however, during the period between 1975 and 1992 it experienced the decline of employment in the industry sector by 34%.<sup>12</sup> This decrease was a result of the economic crises happening in Europe and arriving in Spain in the 1970s and early 1980s, followed by the increased cost of industrial dismantling. In order to overcome the deindustrialization, the city followed the same route previously introduced by Glasgow, where the city government invested significant funds towards changing the city's image through art and culture in the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> In 1990 the Glasgow city redevelopment reached its peak by becoming the European Capital of Culture and by marketing the city to tourists and potential investors. Bilbao received investment totalling approximately \$US1.5 billion in the 1990s from the European Union, Spanish and Basque governments, regional councils, and private enterprises. Hence strategic plans were developed in 1992 for the city's redevelopment. Furthermore, a number of initiatives were launched which invite eminent architects to change the image of the city.<sup>14</sup>

The Bilbao redevelopment was also preceded by the successful urban regeneration of Barcelona, which started in 1979; the renewal was a result of the change in government in the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Redevelopment was also triggered by the 1992 Olympics.<sup>16</sup> Barcelona city's waterfront was redesigned, along with public spaces and gentrification of neglected neighbourhoods, predating Bilbao with the preference for 'starchitects'<sup>17</sup> in the urban redevelopment process.<sup>18</sup> The Guggenheim received significantly more attention than starchitecture projects in Barcelona; the innovative and highly seductive design was the tip of the iceberg in attracting media attention towards the urban redevelopment of Bilbao.

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11 Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17.

12 Maria V. Gòmez, "Reflective Images: The Case of Urban Regeneration in Glasgow and Bilbao," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22, no. 1 (March 1998): 106-21, accessed 23 April 2014, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2427.00126/pdf>.

13 See Gòmez, "Reflective Images."

14 Lucia Iglesias, "Bilbao: The Guggenheim Effect," *The UNESCO Courier* 51, no. 9 (September 1998), accessed 10 December 2013, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001133/113355e.pdf#113376>.

15 John Busquets, "Barcelona Revisited: Transforming the City within the City" in *Cityedge: Case Studies in Contemporary Urbanism*, ed. Esther Charlesworth (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2005), 34, 36.

16 Oriol Nel·lo, "The Olympic Games as a Tool for Urban Renewal: the Experience of Barcelona '92 Olympic Village," *Centre d'Estudis Olímpics*, [http://olympicstudies.uab.es/pdf/wp090\\_eng.pdf](http://olympicstudies.uab.es/pdf/wp090_eng.pdf).

17 Gabriella Lo Ricco and Silvia Micheli, *Lo Spettacolo dell'Architettura: Profilo dell'Archistar*, Sintesi (Milano: Mondadori, 2003).

18 Nel·lo, "The Olympic Games as a Tool for Urban Renewal." Some of the starchitects' projects were: Montjuïc Telecommunications Tower (1989-92), designed by Santiago Calatrava, and Fish Sculpture (1989-92), designed by Frank Gehry.

A number of other projects have since contributed to long-term city renewal in Bilbao. Some of these projects were the Bilbao Metro, designed by Norman Foster and completed in 1995, and the Isozaki Atea residential twin towers, designed by Arata Isozaki and Associates and completed in 2008.<sup>19</sup> Compared with these projects, major attention was given to the new museum, which ultimately had the biggest impact in changing the city's image. The museum was announced as a part of the city redevelopment master plan designed by Cesar Pelli, who won the international competition, organized by the City Council of Bilbao in 1992.<sup>20</sup> Its design was a strategic objective of the redevelopment of the city, reflecting the need for alternative economic activities able to launch urban regeneration and growth.

Even though the urban regeneration of the city of Bilbao was not new as a strategy, the impact that Guggenheim had in the media set a new standard in terms of the building's iconicity. The desired effect embedded in its architectural design was to achieve the status of a 'super-icon'. The Guggenheim had an element of surprise, which is in its concept unexpected and a one-off event unlikely to be reproduced with equal impact. The conceptual iconic quality introduced by Guggenheim in Bilbao is primarily its "non-generic"<sup>21</sup> façade, likely to attract media attention for looking "nothing like an art gallery ... at least not as architecture had previously been understood."<sup>22</sup> Another conceptual iconic quality is the prioritization of its façade ("container becomes content"<sup>23</sup>); unlike its exterior, the interior of the Guggenheim museum is very conventional.<sup>24</sup> The third quality introduced by Guggenheim and evidenced in the Bilbao Effect is the production of an iconic building by a "starchitect",<sup>25</sup> or at least a high-profile architect.<sup>26</sup> The building also possesses an element of newness to its façade and form, which Kylie Message sees as symptomatic for recent museums:

"The discourses of newness and futurity that are emblematic of Gehry's 'Bilbao effect', for instance, appear to privilege a kind of newness that aspires to the ahistorical, and this can be seen as indicating, paradoxically, a key characteristic of modernist projects that aim to embrace the teleological desire for a continual newness. [...] This presents a dilemma, because if museums choose to privilege images of compulsive, eternal newness but express these images through postmodern theoretical discourses, they function as pastiche rather than offering something entirely new."<sup>27</sup>

19 For more information on the projects happening in Bilbao, see *Proyectos de Bilbao*, accessed 10 December 2013, <http://www.proyectosbilbao.com/index.html>.

20 Arantxa Rodríguez, Elena Martínez, and Galder Guenaga, "Uneven Redevelopment. New Urban Policies and Socio-Spatial Fragmentation in Metropolitan Bilbao," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 8, no. 2 (April 2001), 161-78, accessed 8 May 2014, <http://eur.sagepub.com/content/8/2/161.full.pdf+html>.

21 Koolhaas "Stress Test."

22 Deyan Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex: How the Rich and Powerful Shape the World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 324.

23 Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 25.

24 Martin Caiger-Smith, "Beyond the White Cube: a New Role for the Art Museum?" *Architecture Today*, 11 July 2011, accessed 17 January 2014, <http://www.architecturetoday.co.uk/?p=16139>.

25 Lo Ricco and Micheli, *Lo Spettacolo dell'Architettura*.

26 Sudjic argues that "icon builders" are most confident to choose starchitects or high-profile architects to produce city landmarks by relying on the "list of thirty names drawn from the ranks of those architects who have done it before." Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex*, 318.

27 Kylie Message, *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (Oxford [et al.]: Berg, 2006), 12-13, 65.

The aim was to generate sensationalism and attract media attention, ultimately resulting in an increased number of tourists and a significant contribution to the city's economy. It is important to emphasize that Bilbao had no international reputation as a tourist spot, which was a significant aspect in its successful rebranding and placement on tourist maps.

In subsequent years, construction of the number of museums, cultural institutions, skyscrapers, and other structures designed by starchitects or high-profile architects can be seen as an attempt to achieve similar effects as Guggenheim had for Bilbao.<sup>28</sup> Two recently opened museums are examined here with an aim to analyse what remains of the Bilbao Effect in contemporary museum architecture. The first example is the Museum of Twenty-first Century Arts (MAXXI), designed by Zaha Hadid Architects in Rome and opened in 2010. The second is the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), meaning Museum on the River, which is the museum of cultural history, designed by Neutelings Riedijk Architects in Antwerp and opened in 2011. These examples are also used to test the argument that the Bilbao Effect is an elusive concept. Opposite to what the term Bilbao Effect might suggest - that the effect is somewhat replicable once its tools have been applied - no building since has had the same impact as the Guggenheim.

The two examples are iconic buildings defined with media attention and distinctive urban forms, designed as part of the urban renewal for their respective suburbs. Furthermore, both possess the element of newness to their façade and form, along with a desire to create distinction in a competitive architectural landscape marked with iconic buildings. The paper explores the limits of the Bilbao Effect by investigating the application of the iconicity traits introduced by Guggenheim and further explores how the particular traits were taken on by each museum and pushed into a different direction.

## National Museum of the 21st Century Arts (MAXXI)

MAXXI received the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2010, the same year it opened. Francesco Rutelli, who was the mayor of Rome from 1993 until 2001, intended to strengthen the position of Rome as a cultural capital by initiating new museum projects for the city.<sup>29</sup> His intention was justified by the international success achieved by Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.<sup>30</sup> In terms of the conceptual iconic qualities introduced by Guggenheim, MAXXI has an element of newness in its façade and it is also

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28 Frampton, *Modern Architecture*, 344-45.

29 Ricky Burdett, "Roma: il Sindaco e i Suoi Architetti," *Domus* 832 (2000): 70-83, quoted in Silvia Micheli, "Architecture in a Foreign Language: How Italy has Recognized Foreign Architecture in the Last Twenty Years," in Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach, ed., *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 30, Open* (Gold Coast: SAHANZ, 2013), 985-96. Some of the museum projects were launched while Rutelli was Mayor: the new wing of the Capitoline Museums, designed by Carlo Aymonino (construction took place in 1993) and the design of a museum building for Ara Pacis Augustae, entrusted to Richard Meier & Partners Architects in 1995. See Micheli, "Architecture in a Foreign Language," 989-91.

30 Francesco Rutelli, *Memoria, Bellezza e Futuro* (Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2008), 42, quoted in Micheli, "Architecture in a Foreign Language," 989.

designed by a starchitect, with a project cost of €150 million.<sup>31</sup> The façade and the interior both have an element of the spectacular; the images of MAXXI in media rest almost equally on its façade and interior, unlike the Guggenheim.<sup>32</sup>

MAXXI is an example of a partially unsuccessful application of the qualities introduced by the Bilbao Effect, namely in terms of a failure to provide profit for the city and contribute to the city's economy. The museum was visited by 479, 628 people in the first 310 days of its opening (up until 30 May 2011), comparing to 1, 307, 065 that visited Guggenheim in 1998, and 962, 358 in 2011.<sup>33</sup> MAXXI also earned approximately \$2.6 million in ticket sales in the first 310 days of opening, while the yearly maintenance costs ranged between \$6.6 and \$7.9 million.<sup>34</sup> After the global economic crisis in 2008, the museum faced funding problems when the Italian government cut its budget to less than €2 million of the €11 million required to run the institution.<sup>35</sup> The museum faced possible closure in April 2012, only two years after opening, because of its rising debt. Since then, new administration has been established in the museum under architect Antonia Pasqua Recchia - the Secretary General of the Italian Culture Ministry - and aims to solve MAXXI's funding problems by introducing a number of activities besides the exhibitions: lectures; music concerts; film series on contemporary architects etc.<sup>36</sup>

There is a significant difference between MAXXI and the Guggenheim in terms of the possible impact of a non-generic façade of a museum: the city of Bilbao - as a non-capital city with a clear media field where the Guggenheim can completely occupy the public's attention - compared to Rome, one of the world's most famous and image-heavy capitals. Rome already counts as one of the most visited cities in the world.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the location of MAXXI is in the residential and military Flaminio district which is approximately twenty minutes drive from the edge of the city centre

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31 "MAXXI Museum of the 21st Century, Rome," Construction Manager, accessed 17 January 2014, [http://www.construction-manager.co.uk/client\\_media/pdfcontent/MAXXI.pdf](http://www.construction-manager.co.uk/client_media/pdfcontent/MAXXI.pdf).

32 Using a simple Google Image search for "MAXXI" and examining the first thirty resulting images, thirteen were images of its exterior, thirteen were its interior, three were 3D conceptual models and one was its ground floor plan.

33 See Beatriz Plaza, "Urban Regeneration: From Industry to Knowledge Services and Culture. The 'Bilbao Effect' " (paper presented at the conference "Cohesion Policy and Catching-up Regions" in Lublin, Poland, 17-18 November 2011), accessed 8 May 2014, [http://www.mir.gov.pl/konferencje/Lublin/konferencja/Documents/Beatriz\\_Plaza.pdf](http://www.mir.gov.pl/konferencje/Lublin/konferencja/Documents/Beatriz_Plaza.pdf); "MAXXI's First Birthday: 479 628 Visitors in First 310 Days after its Opening," *Artdaily*, accessed May 8, 2014, [http://artdaily.com/news/47863/MAXXI-s-First-Birthday--479-628-Visitors-in-310-Days-of-Opening--1-547-a-Day#.U2ssJ\\_mSy7k](http://artdaily.com/news/47863/MAXXI-s-First-Birthday--479-628-Visitors-in-310-Days-of-Opening--1-547-a-Day#.U2ssJ_mSy7k), and "Study of the Economic Impact of the Activities of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao - Estimation for 2011," 8, accessed 8 May 2014, [http://prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/src/uploads/2012/09/Estudio\\_de\\_Impacto\\_Economico\\_2011-ENG.pdf](http://prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/src/uploads/2012/09/Estudio_de_Impacto_Economico_2011-ENG.pdf).

34 See "MAXXI's First Birthday," and Elisabetta Povoledo, "Italy's Artistic Upstart, the MAXXI Museum, Strives to Make a Splash," *The New York Times*, 22 July 2013, accessed 8 May 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/arts/design/italy-s-artistic-upstart-the-maxxi-museum-strives-to-make-a-splash.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/arts/design/italy-s-artistic-upstart-the-maxxi-museum-strives-to-make-a-splash.html?_r=0).

35 Andrea Klettner, "Architect Takes Top Job in MAXXI Museum," *BD*, May 11, 2012, accessed 17 January 2014, <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/5036503.article>.

36 Povoledo, "Italy's Artistic Upstart."

37 Rome was the eighth most visited city in the world in 2006. See Caroline Bremner, "Top 150 City Destinations: London Leads the Way," *Euromonitor International*, 11 October 2007, accessed 27 December 2013, <http://blog.euromonitor.com/2007/10/top-150-city-destinations-london-leads-the-way.html>. In 2013 Rome was the thirteenth most visited. See Yuwa Hedrick-Wong, "Top 20 Global Destination Cities in 2013," *MasterCard*, accessed 27 December 2013, <http://insights.mastercard.com/position-papers/top-20-global-destination-cities-in-2013/>.

and somewhat out of the way of Rome's tourists.<sup>38</sup> MAXXI was designed with an aim to strengthen Rome's position as a cultural capital and a site for visitors interested in twenty-first century art and architecture (also considering the opening of Museum of Contemporary Art (MACRO) in 2002, designed by Odile Decq).

As for strengthening the position of the Flaminio district as a cultural tourist destination, this suburb has undergone urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century in preparation for the 1960 Olympics. A number of projects were constructed in the area - such as the Olympic village, Olympic stadium and Sports Palace designed by Pier Luigi Nervi.<sup>39</sup> Positioning the museum away from the dense city core did not impact the established image Rome has, strategically building the new, contemporary museum in a district aiming for another urban renewal of the suburb. In the same district is the Auditorium Music Park, designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop and opened in 2002, along with a Bridge of Music by Kit Powell-Williams and Buro Happold, opened in 2011. The aim was to create a contemporary neighbourhood with a new image, resting on sports and culture.<sup>40</sup>

The overall strategy for the urban regeneration of the district/city, introduced with contemporary high-end projects, exhibits some aspects of the Bilbao Effect - such as embedded expectations to attract media attention and change image, which is partially resting on the starchitect's museum project. Unlike the case of Bilbao, the focus is the Flaminio suburb rather than entire city. The international competition for the design of MAXXI was launched in 1998 - which is the first year after the opening of Guggenheim, in which the museum attracted the highest annual number of visitors. The mechanisms of the Bilbao Effect were used in MAXXI aiming to assure the city's competitiveness, along with the revitalization of the Flaminio suburb.

## Museum aan de Stroom (MAS)

MAS is the first museum built in Antwerp, Belgium, for over a century. It opened on 17 May 2011 and the premiere of the museum included a live digital video tour on the museum's web page - the first of its kind in the world - which ran until 5 June 2011.<sup>41</sup> This innovative live video tour attracted media attention while simultaneously attracting visitors to the museum. It is built in the Het Eilandje area, which is the old port area, currently part of a major urban renewal project, designed to attract more

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38 Ellis Woodman, "Zaha Hadid's MAXXI Art Gallery in Rome: Stunning Building, Terrible Gallery," *The Telegraph*, May 24, 2010, accessed 20 January 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/architecture/7760043/Zaha-Hadid-s-Maxxi-art-gallery-in-Rome-stunning-building-terrible-gallery.html>.

39 Christopher Karlson, "Rotch Research: Auditorium Parco Della Musica," *Rotch Traveling Scholarship*, 30 May 2012, accessed 24 April 2014, <http://www.ckarlson.com/blog/2012/5/30/rotch-research-auditorium-parco-della-musica.html>.

40 Karlson, "Rotch Research."

41 Marcia Argyriades, "MAS Museum in Antwerp by Neutelings Riedijk," *Yatzer*, 20 May 2011, accessed 20 January 2014, <http://www.yatzer.com/MAS-Museum-in-Antwerp-by-Neutelings-Riedijk>.



visitors and generate profit for the city.<sup>42</sup> Constructing the new museum building on the waterfront – similar to the Guggenheim in Bilbao or the Sydney Opera House – is marked with an expectation, apparent in multiple statements in Het Eilandje's plan, of creating a new city icon as part of the urban renewal of the suburb.<sup>43</sup> Another museum opened in the same area in September 2013 as part of this renewal project: the Red Star Line Museum, restored by Beyer Blinder Belle Architects and Planners. A new port house, designed by Zaha Hadid Architects is currently under construction.<sup>44</sup>

The images of MAS in media rely mostly on its exterior, with heavy stones used on its façade to represent the gravity of Antwerp's history.<sup>45</sup> The museum is designed by high-profile architects and had a project cost of approximately €33.4 million, and it is designed to be an urban icon of Antwerp.<sup>46</sup> The use of the live video tour for approximately two weeks after opening, suggests an attempt to reach a wide audience and attract tourists, whilst making the content of the museum more entertaining, popular, and in line with modern technologies.

Since 2011, Antwerp has had the third-busiest port in Europe. The city government is investing significant funds into the city's image as a Belgian capital of architecture and culture, already positioned as such in 1993 when it was the European Capital of Culture.<sup>47</sup> According to the Het Eilandje urban renewal plan, MAS is "the most important element"<sup>48</sup> of the cultural axis running from north to south and it is expected to be "a major attraction and meeting point."<sup>49</sup> Some of the existing projects on the north-south axis, expected to be restored by the city, are the Royal Ballet of Flanders, the Shop (restored between 2011 and 2013) and the Montevideo warehouses (restored between 2010 and 2013). The newly opened Red Star Line Museum and MAS are on the same axis.

It comes as no surprise that the city invested significant funds into opening new museums as a part of the Het Eilandje urban renewal plan. Antwerp does not rate as one of the most visited cities

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42 Filip Smits, Maarten Dieryck, Rozemie Claeys, Bonnie van der Burgh and Leo Verbeke, *Het Eilandje: Urban Renewal Towards a Dynamic Neighbourhood by the Water*, Filip Smits, Leo Verbeke, ed. (Hardwin De Wever, Autonoom Gemeentebedrijf Stadsplanning Antwerpen, Grote Markt 1: Antwerp, 2011), accessed 31 December 2013, [http://www.antwerpen.be/docs/Stad/Stadsvernieuwing/Eilandje/Brochure\\_Het\\_Eilandje\\_EN.pdf](http://www.antwerpen.be/docs/Stad/Stadsvernieuwing/Eilandje/Brochure_Het_Eilandje_EN.pdf).

43 Smits, Dieryck, Claeys, van der Burgh, Verbeke, "Het Eilandje," 3, 9, 15, 27.

44 "Building and Tower," *Red Star Line Museum*, accessed 31 December 2013, <http://www.redstarline.be/en/page/building-and-tower>, and "Port House," Zaha Hadid Architects, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/port-house/>.

45 Argyriades, "MAS Museum in Antwerp by Neutelings Riedijk." Using a simple Google Image search for "MAS Museum" and examining the first thirty resulting images, twenty-two were images of its exterior, six were its interior, one was a physical model and one was a cross section.

46 "Museum aan de Stroom Completed in Antwerp, Belgium," *Bustler*, 24 June 2010, accessed 22 January 2014, [http://www.bustler.net/index.php/article/museum\\_aan\\_de\\_stroom\\_completed\\_in\\_antwerp\\_belgium/](http://www.bustler.net/index.php/article/museum_aan_de_stroom_completed_in_antwerp_belgium/).

47 Mark Lamster, "Museum aan de Stroom by Neutelings Riedijk Architects, Antwerp, Belgium," *The Architectural Review*, accessed 18 January 2014, <http://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/museum-aan-de-stroom-by-neutelings-riedijk-architects-antwerp-belgium/8616613.article>. For the information on the ranking of Antwerp as a world port, see "Top 50 World Container Ports," *World Shipping Council*, accessed 30 December 2013, <http://www.worldshipping.org/about-the-industry/global-trade/top-50-world-container-ports>.

48 Smits, Dieryck, Claeys, van der Burgh, Verbeke, "Het Eilandje," 15.

49 Smits, Dieryck, Claeys, van der Burgh, Verbeke, "Het Eilandje," 15.

in the world; however, along with Brussels and Bruges, the city is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Belgium, basing its image on new museums, fashion, cultural events, the history of the diamond trade, and the history of the port.<sup>50</sup> Building MAS in a city with such an image inevitably suggests different circumstances to building the Guggenheim in Bilbao: MAS is a contribution to the already established image of Antwerp as a cultural capital. The urban renewal project is expected to increase the number of residents in the area from 1,456 to 6,600 in the period of 2010 to 2020, with MAS being the cultural linchpin of the plan.

Similarly to MAXXI, MAS also explores some aspects of the Bilbao Effect and pushes them in a different direction. The urban renewal plan of the neglected suburb (rather than the entire city) is arguably resting on the museum project with the idea to change its image and renew the city's riverfront, supporting the established city's image (rather than launching a new one). There is an argument to be made on the city government deciding to build the first museum in over a century to strengthen the position of Antwerp and change the image of Het Eilandje as being a product of a competitive trend, initiated by Guggenheim in Bilbao. The concept of the Bilbao Effect, as seen in the example of MAS, is seen in the construction of an iconic museum, in order to assure competitiveness of the Het Eilandje suburb and Antwerp. The aim is also to contribute to the city's sector of culture, which is one of the growth sectors in advanced economies over the last decade.<sup>51</sup>

## The Bilbao Effect and the "New" Museums

Terry Smith's notion of "iconomy"<sup>52</sup> is a specific product of advanced capitalism, highlighting the economic consequences of the heavily mediated iconic buildings designed by architects. Museums have acquired a significant role in the previously mentioned process: "the long-standing but often hidden intimacy between culture and capital is becoming ever more visible."<sup>53</sup> The distinguishing features of museums and cultural buildings over other types of projects (for example, skyscrapers) launched in the Bilbao Effect are the variety of sculptural, non-generic forms, which seem to be more applicable for these types of institutions, particularly art museums. According to Sudjic, it is the loose nature of the layout and the budget which allows space for the manipulation of architects in designing these buildings.<sup>54</sup> Such forms are most likely to attract media attention and generate profit for the city. Moreover, wars, neglect and environmental degradation of the recent decades have been increasingly reconceived in museums, while the museums of contemporary art are part of cultural and entertainment industries (which are, as previously mentioned, the latest years growth sectors of advanced economies).<sup>55</sup>

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50 *Visit Antwerpen*, accessed 2 January 2014, <http://www.visitantwerpen.be/Bezoekerssite-EN/Visitors.html>.

51 Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 20.

52 Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 5-8.

53 Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 21.

54 Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex*, 319.

55 Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 20.

The correlation between the iconicity of architecture and the embedded desire to generate profit and/or urban regeneration is visible in selected examples: both museums have acquired different techniques (such as organizing music concerts in MAXXI, or launching live video tours of MAS) to make its content more popular, entertaining and attractive to wider audiences. What this paper argues is that the term Bilbao Effect merely proposes a strategy for entering into iconomy, while what seems to be a somewhat globalized concept is not a neatly transferable idea and its use as a category is limited. Nevertheless, those responsible for funding the construction of MAXXI and MAS were inspired with the economic incentive, and the media and general public's attention that Guggenheim attracted for Bilbao. These iconic museums are revealing part of the anticipated future of their respective cities or suburbs, each being part of the significant urban renewal.<sup>56</sup> As such, they are positioned as critical elements and indexes of the urban redevelopments enforcing economic rejuvenation and assigning new image to their respective suburbs.

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<sup>56</sup> Marc Augé, "Architecture and Non-Places," Lecture, Embassy of France in Australia, SLCCS and University of Queensland, Brisbane, 12 December 2013.