

BILBAO: PROCESSES AND PROBLEMS OF A CHANGING CITY



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The great transformation process that Bilbao is carrying out, it can suppose an impulse for a city anchored in a past, still based today on day, in a dismantled steel industry. After an economic reconversion that has produced an increase of the unemployment and a lack of potentials new investors, a decline of the city was denounced as strong plaza inside the connections to the north of Europe and, especially, inside their relationship with the Anglo-Saxon countries and those of the center-north of Europe.

In front of this panorama, made worse by violent political and social problems, it is born the macropject for the urban regeneration of the city that contemplates, on one hand, the reactivation of the external investments (with the creation and activation of the Technological Park of Bilbao) and, on the other, the reordering of one of the main axes of the city:the stuary of Bilbao. (This project is called too Ría 2000)

This axis that unites the city of Bilbao with the Cantabrian Sea, is assumed as an intervention nucleus to which they go most of the regeneration and urban reordering proposals. From its initial part, in the town of Santurce, the proposal is centered in the remodeling of the port of Bilbao, with an important bet to empower a reformed area of logistical activity (LAA) that reactivates the marine goods transport, directed in its biggest part to cover the area of influence of the north of Europe. Likewise, by the other side of the port of Bilbao, in the town of Guetxo, they are

carrying out the creation of a marina that covers the needs in this field. (It is not of missing that these performances register in the same proceeding line that other cities, like Barcelona inside the mediterranean arch, they are carrying out.)

This bet for the remodeling of the port and, especially of its area for logistics, it presupposes to have a good net of communications, so much regarding the terrestrial articulations road network and creation of the high-speed train) like in the air ones. It is necessary to highlight, in this sense, the modernization of some of the infrastructures of the airport of Sondika, or the new Intermodal station that will lodge the arrival of the HST, as necessary initiatives for the good development of the industrial centers that the Metropolitan Bilbao seeks to harbor.

Of the outlined regeneration project, in this case, in downtown. The problem becomes worse with the location of what seeks to be the great tourist attraction of the city: the Museum Guggenheim-Bilbao, architect's Frank O. Gehry masterpiece.

Built in the center of the urban estuary, it is one of the first pillars in those which the project of regeneration of the estuary is supported in its passing through the city of Bilbao. Maybe the premature construction of the building of Gehry in an area still without reordering, it should be considered inside a marketing strategy directed to focuss the interest toward an area that, although always present,



was not more than an axis so much non-operative either from the urban point of view as from the aesthetic one.

The construction and activation of the new art center, it should be understood in the context of the politics that the American museum is carrying out with the opening of diverse centers in Europe. There is not doubt that the administration system that governs the museum, follows the same guidelines of other cultural centers that support the old essence of the exhibition space, a not very active art at the same time that a program based on the presence of artists of international fame. The implication between the center and the Basque artistic reality has suffered and, it suffers, the problems of an union to the force, where the voice of the strongest is only listened and that of the weakest is silenced.

The Guggenheim-Bilbao runs off with, proud for some, defiant for other, in the center of the walk of Abandoibarra, after surpassing another of the achievements created in this phase of the project, and, at the moment, excessively little taken advantage of: architect S. Calatrava's bridge. The limitations of mobility that before we pointed out, they are remarked when trying to consent, as much by feet as by car, to the art center. The net of narrow streets that enclose the Museum, the overflowed parking areas or the own sense of direction of its adjacent streets, are points that evidence, or an erroneous planning, or a terrible forecast of visitors to the area. Maybe the best expectations contemplated the possibility that, in great meas-



ure, the visitors coming from the exterior of the city arrived to her without the private means of transport that can collapse that area, but, in fact, they have met with the access of a great number of users that, so much coming from the north of the Peninsula, of the same Basque Country or of next areas on the south of France, they have consented to this area by means of private transport.

The excellent net of communications that you/they carry to Bilbao, makes evident that the displacements toward the capital are more frequent from these areas, but, in turn, they are and they empower the problems of internal mobility that, although some proceedings seek to correct (the Puente Euskalduna, the one of La Salve or the same by S. Calatrava, new nexuses of union of the two margins of the creek, but that they are obsolete if they end in an area with a so high park and ride problematics) they continue being points of constant reordering, dependents of the changes and the mobility flows.

It should not be thought that these problems have been ignored totally inside the project of regeneration of the creek of Bilbao. Architect's Pelli proposal seeks, among other aspects, to cover part of these vacua, but its fulfillment is, in these moments, stagnated as much for political reasons as for some evident reticences of the traders, due to the inclusion of a commercial center in one of the projected infrastructures.

The proposal of Pelli supposes, saving the derived prob-



blems of the use of the facilities, the bet for a global vision of the area and not for the vision focussed in the infrastructures contained in the same one. There is not doubt that centers like the Guggenheim or the Palacio Euskalduna, they suppose an advertising reason that make spin the sight toward the great transformation that is carrying out Bilbao, but, in turn, they can end up being disconnected if a global vision of the regeneration process is not held as integration principle.

A measure more, before the interconnection problem among the different infrastructures already designed, it is the inclusion of sculptures that, in the whole margin of the creek, they will link the different achievements, in the today abandoned walk of Abandoibarra. In front of this new contribution it becomes necessary a brief reflection around the concepts that spin around the concept of public art or what some experts begin to point with the light « public-art « difference



During the last decades an evident approach has taken place, forced in some cases, among the positions exclusively «urban planning» and some artistic interventions. These rules re-convert the old prejudices about the public space to integrate it and to understand that this it is not simply an environment at the edge of the urbanization processes. The « public-art », especially the sculptural performances, they are not outlined exclusively like a mere aesthetic contribution, but rather, in many cases, they pass to arrange, physical or virtually, a concrete area. The planners contemplates these incorporations like nec-

essary and they forget the simple ornamental aspects, to those that it was always appealed for the inclusion of this type of works. «The public thing», broadly claimed from different social sectors, it begins to include a multiplicity of performances, in those that only the coexistence, real on the other hand, among the public and the private, can make sense of the general concept of «public-art» «. From the the part of public institutions it has to exist a re-thinking of, a -engeneering of the concepts of urban space that cohabit with the contribution, so much technical as economic, of the private sector.

In the case of Bilbao, this relationship should be sustained in a global planning of the area to intervene which implies the so much acceptance of its potential users, the own inhabitants of the city, as that of those only implied in its elaboration. The city cannot go over to become an exclusively cultural capital, stiller when it lacked these terms in the past. Personally I don't believe that Bilbao can digest this « exclusivity « without already reinforcing other spaces existent in the city. Without an integral conception of the project, the concrete performances in the margins of the creek that end in the Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, can be contemplated as an interference of the American center in a susceptible area for tranformation and and socially claimed. (Maybe for that reason exists already a concrete project for the enlargement and modernization of the Museum of fine arts of Bilbao)

«The public sector owes re-drive its efforts toward an improvement that implies a direct answer to the big exist-



ent infrastructures. Without this cultural re-conversion we won't be able to understand the inclusion of an artistic macro-area in the own heart of the creek. This area should avoid the label of artistic thematic park», exemplified in Valencia, with its megalomalous contribution to what they call the city of the arts and the sciences.»

For anything it will serve a performance of artistic kind, if it is continued ignoring, for the reasons that are, a plan of mobility that allows, truly, an interconnection among the different cultural infrastructures and, in turn, a professionalization of other susceptible centers of benefitting of this performance (galleries, public libraries, cultural centers, public and private, etc.).

We should not forget that a city is a complex engagement of independent structures, but that the reordering processes that should be contemplated are susceptible of interrelation. Without this precept, the crumbling of any city this served. The processes of urban regeneration, and that of Bilbao in this case, they cannot fall in the career againsts the colock to which some projects are guided, but neither we can continue obviating an entire series of problematic to those that sooner or later we have to give answer. (In the same way that should not mortgage the globality of a reform vision in front of the macro-urban actions that are deposited in her).

Maybe this whole unfolding of proposals that they converge in the regeneration of the creek of Bilbao, it should be contemplated from a certain temporal distance, paying a concrete attention to all the performances that are



carrying out. From a global critic and at all partisan, there is not doubt that a bet as which Bilbao proposes, deserves as minimum the attention of all those that we see, in the processes of urban regeneration and in its connections with the public art, a series of necessary transformations in the entrance in a new century. Surely, and without a panphlet demagoguery , the century of the cities.

