

Museum Projects of the Star-Architects

Andrzej Klimek

Technical University of Łódź,
Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Environmental Engineering,
Institute of Architecture and Town Planning,
al. Politechniki 6, 90-924 Łódź, Poland,
e-mail: andrzejrklimek@gmail.com

In the 1980's the amount of new museum constructions started raising suddenly and the most famous pre-existing institutions began to create its external branches in distant locations. Crowning achievement of this process was a grand opening of Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao on the 18th of October 1997, which not only determined the conventional direction of urban renewal in the de-industrialized cities, but also started a new era in the history of a stardom in architecture, formally opening the age of its global range. The most representative cases of the aforementioned phenomena will be presented and discussed. Nowadays many star-architects are specialized in designing the museums, Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind being the most notable ones, and almost every member of this elite has at least one significant constructed object of that function in his or her portfolio. The reason of such a synergy can be found in the facts that they justify such feature as signature design, central urban locations predestine the buildings to become landmarks and their function giving a wide margin in shaping the internal spaces allows architects an artistic treatment of its form. This is a probable explanation why the museum constructions are certainly not the most financially lucrative but even though the most prestigious ones. The paper aims to trace the evolution of world famous museums in the late 20th century and the beginning of 21st century, paying special attention to the role of star architecture in the processes of transformation and to the emergence of the designers elite itself.

Key words: star-architecture, museum networks, museum brands, museum extensions, museum complexes.

Introduction

The most famous architects of modernism in most cases designed several museum schemes, however they have not been belonging to their most famous works. The most significant exceptions are Guggenheim Museum in New York by Frank Lloyd Wright and Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth by Louis Kahn. What is worth mentioning is that both of these edifices were constructed in the latest period of modernism, in 1959 and 1972 respectively. The Pompidou Center in Paris by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano was opened in 1977 and merges the functions of art museum and public library. It was a great architectural event as the scheme was a pioneering use of the new stylistics of high-tech outside Great Britain and it was the first significant use of new cultural constructions in the process of the restoration of the impoverished districts of a city [1, p. 34].

Later, the critics coined a term of 'star-architects'. Initially it meant simply the most famous living designers, but in the middle of a building boom, just before the 2008 real estate market crash, when they dominated the media debate about architecture, this phenomenon started being analyzed by journalists. There have been distinguished their most important features present in this period such as: global scale of activity, acclaim from their peers and environment, expressed by the most prestigious awards such as Pritzker Prize, and a major role of their non-building activity, such as theoretical works, industrial design and the

mainstream media presence especially not relating to their architectural works. Piątek brackets in this group the following designers: Frank Gehry, Tadao Ando, Renzo Piano, Norman Foster, Rem Koolhaas, Herzog & de Meuron, Zaha Hadid, Richard Rogers, Jean Nouvel, SANAA, Daniel Libeskind and Santiago Calatrava [2].

The museums were developing their collections with a strong support of private donors, who were gaining tax exemptions this way, especially in the United States. Such a growth caused a need for new exhibition surfaces and new visitors to fill them and there was coined a notion that both guests and sponsors are attracted most efficiently by a star architectural design [3].

Great museum extensions as a first stage of museum boom

Thoroughly in the 1980's the most visited museums in the world started a streak of their extensions. The pioneering project was the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC opened in 1978 designed by Ieoh Ming Pei, later awarded with Pritzker Prize [4, p. 145]. Addition of the Clore Gallery to the Tate in London by James Stirling in 1987 or the New York Museum of Modern Art extension in 1984 by Cesar Pelli were less spectacular but their authors were among most appointed architects of the age. However, the most discussed museum expansions were erected a few years later. Louvre extension was finished in



Figure 1. Glass pyramid at the Louvre courtyard

1989 to commemorate the bicentenary of the Great French Revolution. This another project of Pei was a part of so-called *Grands Projets*, initiated by president Mitterrand, which probably influenced on a similar campaign in Great Britain a decade later, which would be discussed in the following subsection. Adding the underground part with a main entrance through an iconic glass pyramid in the center of the grand courtyard and eviction of the Ministry of Finances from the northern wing enhanced the exhibition area for almost 40 thousand square meters [4, p. 196] [1, p. 20].

London National Gallery Sainsbury Wing by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown was opened in 1991. Originally the jury chose a scheme by Ahrens, Burton and Koralek, but its avant-garde design caused a disapproval of Charles, Prince of Wales. Meanwhile Thomas Krens had become a new director of the Guggenheim Foundation and quickly ordered Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel to refurbish its headquarters, finding them 'the greatest work in the collection'. [5, p. 13]

Guggenheim Museums and another worldwide networks

Guggenheim Bilbao

The original Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum had been opened in 1959 in New York and its design by Frank Lloyd Wright, with a characteristic internal spiral ramp, soon became iconic for the late modernist architecture. In the late 1980's, as a result of a constantly enhancing collection, Krens not only decided to renew the classic New York edifice but also to erect a brand new building to present contemporary art. After a short interest in a location in Venice, the preparations for constructing it in Salzburg were much more advanced. Although a curious, located mostly underground scheme by Pritzker Prize winner Hans Hollein has been prepared, Krens found Salzburg, the city of Mozart, too strongly associated with music, not the visual arts and cancelled the project. New locations considered were Japan and Madrid. In the latter, Krens acquainted with the pro-



Figure 2. Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao

posal of another Spanish city of Bilbao, preparing a great project of its post-industrial regeneration by means of exquisite architecture and culture [4, pp. 137-138].

Eventually in 1991 the ground was broken. As late Herbert Muschamp, a New York Times critic, stated right before the grand opening in October 1997, the Bilbao museum gained a great publicity even before being finished: '[P]eople have been flocking to Bilbao for nearly two years, just to watch the building's skeleton take shape. "Have you been to Bilbao?" In architectural circles, that question has acquired the status of shibboleth. Have you seen the light? Have you seen the future? Does it work? Does it play?' [6, pp. 424-425]. Its great success was the exceeding one million visitors per annum on average which was way above expectations and which started a new era in the phenomenon of stardom in architecture. Since then, museums and other brands began to find star-architect and iconic design as a way to succeed. Its central hall visually reminds the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, but the functional solution is different, as the exhibition spaces are situated another way and the vertical circulation is provided by stairs and lifts.

Guggenheim museums worldwide

Briefly in the same time as Bilbao, Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin was opened, but it did not have much in common with the star-architecture. Guggenheim Hermitage Las Vegas, inaugurated in 2001 and defunct in 2008 was the only franchise of this brand, besides Bilbao, constructed by star-architect and opened to publicity so far. In this work of a Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas modern pieces of art from Guggenheim were exhibited together with the classical ones rented from St Petersburg Hermitage [4, p. 139]. This construction was followed by a span of unsuccessful attempts. Plans for a Lower Manhattan branch by Frank Gehry were cancelled after September the 11th terrorist attacks [4, p. 139]. Deyan Sudjic, a respected architectural critic, condemned Guggenheim foundation for forcing Rio

to spend 'so much (250 million \$) public money in a city ringed by favelas, and one that, unlike Bilbao, already had an architecturally distinguished Museum of Modern Art and a thriving tourist industry' [7, p. 286]. Eventually this project by Jean Nouvel also has not been proceeded. In 2008 a closed architectural competition for a project of Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in Vilnius was conducted. Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind and Massimiliano Fuksas submitted their proposals but the whole enterprise has been shattered by a global crisis.

Due to the Guggenheim Bilbao success, the Krens's approach to the art museum management and his thought that the building is a precious of its exhibition gained worldwide recognition. However, Guggenheim branches which had not been built from scratch did not turn out to be so fortunate, which led to their following closure.

Another museum brands

A couple of other museum brands followed the same way. Tate was the first gallery which started transforming itself into a real network as its initial remote branches were established in Liverpool and St Ives respectively in 1988 and 1993, however in these time they were not much involved in star-architecture. On balance, Millennium Projects campaign in London in the late 1990's resulted with several great museum extensions with a strong participation of the star-architects. They had given their institutions such an increase of prestige and recognition that it enabled their transformations into branded networks.

The most significant case was the construction of London Tate Modern and the simultaneous rebranding of the whole already-existing network by Wolf Olins company. Former Bankside power plant was converted by Herzog & de Meuron architects. The project was really successful and apparently led the designers to Pritzker Prize in 2001. In the same time Sir Norman Foster covered British Museum Great Court with a glass roof and a few years later Victoria & Albert Museum also expected an expansion but the project of Daniel Libeskind called 'The Spiral' was estimated at \$120 million, twenty percent more than vastly larger Guggenheim Bilbao, what forced the board of trustees of the museum to withdraw from these plans [8].

Apart from the millennium campaign, in 2010 this institution made an illustrious competition for their branch in Dundee but the project has been suspended and eight years before a London-based Imperial War Museum created its Manchester department by Daniel Libeskind. Two more recent examples were built at the opposite side of English Channel as Louvre opened its branch in Lens in post-industrial region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais SANAA in December 2012, two and half year after the Centre Pompidou branch in Metz had been inaugurated.

Nevertheless, such a star pattern is not a necessity. Despite many star-architects took part in the competition for the second extension of the New York MoMA, jury chose

a project of Yoshio Taniguchi, who was neither a celebrity, nor his design was iconic [9]. This verdict was commented that the museum was such a strong trademark that it did not need an additional attractor in its architectural form [10].

Complexes of star-architecture

Golden Triangle of Art

A habit of creating entire museum quarters has a long tradition, initiated by South Kensington Museums (also known as Albertopolis) in London and Museum Island in Berlin, both founded in the middle of XIXth century, with such significant later examples as MuseumsQuartier in Vienna. Golden Triangle of Art in Madrid, although its core centerpiece is a world-famous Prado Museum, established in 1819 is a museum complex created mostly in the 1990's by means of star-architecture. Besides Prado, another historic objects forming it are: Queen Sofia Museum, containing the collection of modern art, located in an old hospital building and Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, which an ancient Villahermosa Palace was converted for, both established in 1992. The star-architecture was introduced into the complex more than ten years later, despite the plans to extend Prado were made much earlier and Sir Norman Foster was supposed to be the author [11].

Queen Sofia Museum first alteration was an addition of three glass circulation towers and had been made before



Figure 3. Queen Sofia Museum new courtyard

the opening. As the collection had been expanding and the number of visitors had been constantly increasing, a further extension was necessary after less than a decade. In 1999 an open competition was announced and over 100 entries were registered. Twelve of them were chosen to the second stage and almost all of them were works of either global star-architects i.e. Jean Nouvel, Tadao Ando and Santiago Calatrava, either future stars like Zaha Hadid, either local stars like Enric Miralles or Mansilla Tuñón practice. Eventually it was Nouvel whose proposition had been chosen. The most characteristic feature of this building inaugurated in 2005 is a covered internal courtyard with a 50 meter span.

Caixa Forum by Herzog & de Meuron does not have such an acclaim in the world of art as the rest of institutions composing the complex, but it is placed halfway between Prado and Reina Sofia, so in the exact geometrical center of the Golden Triangle and its architecture was found spectacular. Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron, 2001 Pritzker Prize winners, transformed an old power plant into a cultural and artistic center. The old building seem to be levitating as its foundations have been removed. Instead it has been supported on three pillars located inside the outline of the building, what let the architects create an intriguing public space under the whole structure. The old building was also extended upwards and the adjacent wall was covered with a 'vertical garden' composed by Patrick Blanc. Eventually in 2007 Rafael Moneo constructed an extension of the Prado Museum, which involved inclusion of the near Jeronimos Cloister.

Saadiyat Island

Saadiyat Island Cultural District is a museum complex in Abu Dhabi currently under construction. It is so significant because it highlights all the tendencies described above: the district is to embrace the greatest museum brands with the stars of architecture with a scale much larger than one singular building. The first complex built from scratch and basing on star-architects publicity factor was The Leeum in Seoul, established by the family of the Samsung brand owners and consisting of museums designed by Mario Botta, Jean Nouvel and Rem Koolhaas [12].

Saadiyat Island is to contain four museums: local franchises of Guggenheim by Frank Gehry and Louvre by Jean Nouvel, Zayed National Museum by Sir Norman Foster, established in a cooperation with the British Museum, and Maritime Museum by Tadao Ando. Another cultural object created by star-architect will be the performing arts center by Zaha Hadid. The same designer has already constructed Sheikh Zayed Bridge leading to the island opened in 2010 [13], however not being part of the 670 acres big cultural district, which is just a part of a larger development of Saadiyat Island natural coastal island in the Abu Dhabi emirate, near its capital, where an area of 27 square kilometers is to provide dwellings for 150 thousands of inhab-

itants. The cultural district is to be a venue for a proposed art biennale.

Conclusions

The strong museum development in post-war America and Western Europe empowered by the tax exemptions led to an emergence of a group of architectural stars, whose distinction become particularly visible after the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao had been opened in 1997.

Obviously not all of the most famous museums designed by star-architects belong to the worldwide-known brands. The amount of such constructions is quite vast, and the most significant examples are Jewish Museum in Berlin, which was a starting point of a global career of its author, Daniel Libeskind, Milwaukee Art Museum by Santiago Calatrava with dramatic movable *brise-soleils* looking like giant wings [14] or the newest one, New Museum of Modern Art in New York by SANAA which apparently decided on the jury verdict which awarded the office with the Pritzker Prize in 2010. The first and the latter case were examples of a strategy of employing a foreign architect virtually unknown in the destination country, not so uncommon in United States and Europe and not always so efficient as these couple [15]. It is an evidence that the strategy of including the building into the museum artistic assets invented by Thomas Krens became popular worldwide, even if not all the most globally prestigious museums are leaning towards transforming themselves into supra-local branded networks. The newest form of museum star-architecture are the entire complexes consisting of various branches of the worldwide brands.

The crucial role of the Guggenheim Foundation and its director in the aforementioned process is an evidence that the museum projects are essential for creating the stars of architecture as well as for maintaining the positions of the existing ones as namely every designer usually called star-architect has at least one museum construction being a notable position in his or her portfolio which was clearly visible at the exhibition called „Museum for a New Millennium: Concepts, Projects, Buildings” in 2002 in iconic Milwaukee Art Museum. Amongst described twelve subjects, projects of only two of them were absent. The first one was Richard Rogers, who though created such a classic edifice as The Pompidou Center in the beginnings of his career and the SANAA office, which gained a significant recognition in museum constructions slightly later. Some of these designers, like Frank Gehry or Daniel Libeskind, are specialized in these function and for the latter it is probably the main one he has been constructing.

Museum projects are aimed to the publicity with an exquisite taste who expect the designs to be challenging for them. Many of these objects are museums of art, what in common sense justifies an 'artistic' form. The function itself is not too challenging, giving a wide margin in shaping the internal spaces, especially since the paradigm of the white



Figure 4. Caixa Forum in Madrid

cube was discarded. It allows such a feature as signature design and common central urban locations of the buildings predestine them to become landmarks. This is a probable explanation why the museum constructions are certainly not the most financially lucrative but even though the most prestigious ones.

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MArch. Andrzej KLIMEK is a doctoral candidate at the Technical University of Łódź. He is interested in social aspects of the profession of architect and the role of criticism in architecture. Currently, his research and writing is devoted to describing the phenomenon of 'starchitecture', using methodology proposed by Pierre Bourdieu.