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1. Introduction: Guggenheim Helsinki proposal

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation maintains a worldwide network of art museums. Their purpose is to increase public awareness of and appreciation for art, architecture and visual culture. The Guggenheim Foundation has long had the ambition of opening a fifth museum in Helsinki. Advocates of Guggenheim Helsinki state that “Finland has capability to advance the Guggenheim’s mission to promote the understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, urbanism, and other manifestations of the visual culture of our time”. They argue that the Guggenheim Helsinki project would be a strategic investment for both Helsinki and Finland, raising the international profile of the entire region. Guggenheim Helsinki would present internationally significant exhibitions of artworks from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries while also specializing in Nordic art and architecture. Its prestigious, waterfront location would act as “a welcome center for visitors and a year-round focus of culture and entertainment for city residents.”
The City Council of Helsinki voted to reserve a prominent waterfront site for the architectural competition of the proposed museum. Advocates state that from a global perspective, Helsinki is emerging as a city to watch. During the past few years, Helsinki has earned positive mentions in international media channels, including high rankings on Monocle Magazine’s ‘Most Livable Cities in the World’ list. Finland’s political stability and high-quality education system have laid the groundwork for a strong national economy. Creativity, design and technology are sources of national pride. “Helsinki is one of the best places in the world. We are convinced that the museum would benefit the city and the country as a whole as well as the Foundation,” said Richard Armstrong, Director of the Guggenheim Foundation, to the Finnish daily Helsingin Sanomat.

For the time being, there is a debate going on in the City of Helsinki, whether about 130 million Euro (plus VAT) tax money should be invested in the construction of a new trademark art exhibition space. This would also mean that the city would donate the most valuable piece of land in the Southern Harbor for this purpose. In addition, the city would pay 5 – 10 mio Euro annually in salaries, maintaining the building and the purchase of exhibitions. Obviously, this is a major investment of the State and City of Helsinki. Opponents of the project have launched a counter-competition, Next Helsinki, as a riposte to what critics have branded a misguided vanity project (Wainwright, 2014), and as a symbol of the Finnish capital ‘selling out’ to an American brand. In the next section, we will share our view on the proposal, and raise few points that, in our opinion, make the Guggenheim Helsinki extremely risky project.
2. Our counter-arguments

OUR 3 ISSUES WITH THE GUGGENHEIM PROJECT
2.1 Is the proposition financially sound?

Though we appreciate and agree with the claims presented. However, several factors make this investment a major risk. We will provide our counter arguments for the Guggenheim Helsinki project, in the light of analysis of the official proposal and our knowledge of the economic situation. First of all, the economic situation in Finland does not look bright at the moment. Being part of European Union, Finland is exposed to decisions coming from the European Bank. Also, tourism of Helsinki is very dependent on Russian tourists visiting the city. However, as Russia is undergoing an economic depression as well (among other uncertainties), tourism from our eastern neighbor has declined enormously. There are no guarantees about the situation getting better anytime soon. Another argument can be made; Russian tourists are not coming for cultural activity but rather shopping and other activities. This applies to some extent to Asian tourism as well; thus Guggenheim cannot trust on Russian and Asian visitors, which in recent years have been top tourists segments.

As for Finnish visitors; though Finnish people would most likely be excited of the new cultural space and visit, their visit would hardly be frequent. Rather, they would most likely visit once or
twice in a time period of several years. Also, many Finns are resisting the project in the first place. This is a comment when asked a local security guard near the site (Wainwright, 2014): “I’m not paying my taxes to be handed over to an American corporation to do with what they want. If we’re spending that kind of money, it should be on our own national museum, not another outpost of a global company.”

The proposal was renewed 2013 with new estimated financial figures. Estimation of previous 527 000 visitors was raised up to 550 000. This figure is based on an estimation by BCG questionnaire that got 2500 responses from Finnish people and 550 tourists. From an accounting perspective, we claim that 3000 responses, only 500 of which from foreigners and rest from locals, is not enough to estimate an amount of visitors with such estimate. 550 000 will unlikely been hit for the reasons elaborated above.

Benchmarking can be made for further analysis. With close to 11 million commercial overnight stays per year (Stockholm Business Region, 2013), Stockholm ranks number ten on the list of the most attractive destinations in Europe. Copenhagen, then, has 8.5 million annual overnight stays (Wonderful Copenhagen Annual, 2013). The number of overnight stays in Helsinki is less than a third of Stockholm’s figures, and less than half of Copenhagen’s. These cities’ most popular museums, Moderna Museet and Louisiana Art Museum attract 500 000 and 600 000 visitors respectively. Estimated 550 000 seems extremely high compared to those figures and places considerable emphasis on the so-called ‘Guggenheim Effect’ (see e.g. Deutsche Welle, 2012).

Is the Guggenheim brand really going to attract equal amount of visitors with Louisiana and Moderna Museet, two of the most popular museums in Scandinavia? For example, Louisiana is currently displaying The Celia Asher collection, including works by Picasso, Miró, Kandinsky, Pollock, Dubuffet, Kiefer and Kelly. Moderna Museet is just finishing up with an exhibition including works by Jeff Koons among others. These two top quality museums are arguably a good representation of how many museum visitors can be attracted in a Nordic capital and the numbers may not be realistic to replicate in the smaller Helsinki.

2.2 Does the ‘Guggenheim Effect’ really exist?
2. DOES THE ‘GUGGENHEIM EFFECT’ EVEN EXIST?

The Guggenheim Foundation is often refers to its success in making Bilbao a world famous cultural destination. In the Guggenheim Helsinki proposal, the foundation claims Bilbao to be an appropriate comparison for Helsinki. The Guggenheim Bilbao has been largely defined as a success and the financial benefits of the project are indeed impressive. However, in reality Bilbao’s narrative is not very compatible with Helsinki. Pre-Guggenheim, Bilbao was an industrial city trying to complete a complete transformation into a modern European city.

The city’s project was arguably a great success, but Guggenheim has perhaps taken too much of the credit, since many other improvements and investments were made in Bilbao during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Similar efforts to become a cultural destination by the Spanish city of Valencia failed miserably, leading into great financial difficulties (Kippo, 10.7.2012). It is hard to argue Helsinki is in need of a similar turnaround, although the discourse around Guggenheim suggests Helsinki needs something new. Guggenheim has been presented as this form of progress (Aronczyk, 2013, pp. 128).
The success of Guggenheim Bilbao has created a phenomenon, often referred to as the Guggenheim Effect (Deutsche Welle, 2012) or the Bilbao Effect (Wainwright, 2014; The Economist, 2013). However, the Guggenheim Foundation does not have a track record of creating this effect repeatedly. According to the Guardian (Wainwright, 2014), franchises in Las Vegas, Berlin, Salzburg, Vilnius, Guadalajara, Rio de Janeiro and lower Manhattan have all been cancelled or closed down.

In addition, the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi project has so far been a disappointment. There have been multiple delays, and especially the labour practices surrounding Abu Dhabi’s enormous cultural project have been heavily scrutinized. For example the activist group Occupy Museums has stated that ‘each time the Guggenheim speaks, its approach to migrant labour issues on Saadiyat Island sounds more like that of a global corporation than that of an educational or art institution’. Guggenheim Foundation’s failures in Abu Dhabi and elsewhere suggest, that instead of being a transcendent cultural force, the foundation might well be a one hit wonder which many cities and countries do not want to collaborate with.

### 2.2 Does the project really make sense for Helsinki and Finland?
Helsinki already has several prestigious museums and due to the downturn, the city is cutting budgets for these. Why bring in another museum if the current ones are not profitable either?

We wonder; does Helsinki and Finland really need to adopt an international concept that has nothing to do with the Finnish identity and culture? Isn’t Finland a strong enough brand already - why not build something truly unique and innovative around what we are known for, and in particular, want to be known for? There is hardly a need for Finland to brand itself as more western or global (Aronczyk, 2013).

We argue, that Finland simply does not have enough demand, at least right now, for another cultural museum. Finland should invest in a more ‘real’ phenomena, which we will elaborate in the next section. The investment is very significant at the time of economic depression. The estimated visits are very unlikely to happen. We argue that the investment is too risky and unnecessary.

3. Our proposal
We argue that we should not “sell” this project for an international brand; rather, we ought to build something new and unique, built around the strengths of Finland and Helsinki. Thus we propose to use the site and investment of Guggenheim for another kind of space that would raise interest and approval among Finns and raise global interest as well as attract foreigners.

Finland has strengthened its brand world-wide during past decades. Finnish brand itself is already strong yet mysterious. We have certain trademarks such as sauna, Santa and the northern lights. We are known for our high level of education and strong information technology know-how. Finland is quickly becoming a technology startup hub.

However, although Finland has some strong internationally known icons, our proposition would focus on the people of Helsinki and Finland, and their activities. Instead of communicating a singular ‘national brand’, the proposition puts emphasis on communality, diversity and creativity. Instead of trying to bridge ‘a gap’ between local and foreign understanding of Finland (Aronczyk, 2013, pp. 162), our purpose is to present Finland more like it actually is, not just Santa and sauna.
The Finns have always had a do-it-yourself mentality. One of the most famous lines in Finnish fiction is: “In the beginning, there were the swamp, the hoe and Jussi”. Today, this enterprising spirit is found in the many grassroots activities Finnish citizens take part in. There are for example over 135 000 registered associations in Finland (Patent and Registry Bureau). Some DIY-happenings like Restaurant Day and Cleaning Day have become significant movements. Student-based activities like Aaltoes and Helsinki Think Company are re-defining and motivating entrepreneurship within and outside the universities. This potential should be used as what can be called as a strong nationality; brand identity must not only be representative of particular ways of being but actually lived - embraced and embodied - by the county's citizens if it to be effective as a modern version of nationality (Aronczyk 2008). The new multipurpose space would embrace the Finnish DIY-spirit.

3.1 Our proposition: a multipurpose public space

A multipurpose facility emphasizing:

Communality
Diversity
Creativity
Our proposal is centered on a multipurpose space offering facilities for the citizens of Helsinki and their innovative activities. There are enough one-function buildings in downtown Helsinki (Kiasma, Music House etc.) already.

In addition to supporting already well-established Finnish events such as Restaurant Day, Cleaning Day and Helsinki Design Week, new events could be launched. This would be done with crowdsourcing event concept innovation, also on a global scale. The space would also be open to international non-commercial events seeking for an interesting space. The usage of space would be based on the ideal of co-creation; this would allow for the continuous emergence and exploitation of creative and valuable forms of consumer labor is the true meaning of the concept of co-creation (Zwick et al.). The risk of exploitation would be small, since activities are produced and consumed by the same people. All activities and events would be free of charge.

Overall, the intention is that the space would inspire people to come up with different activities so that the purpose of the building and its surroundings would change over time to reflect the interests of its users. Below are examples of uses and ideas the final concept could include:

Art and event facilities
Our space would include various different facilities for artists and organizers. Different kinds of events including art, music, dance etc. could be organized in the new premises. Individual, association and bigger non-profits would all be allowed. The public art institutions such as Ateneum and Kiasma could offer special exhibitions including co-operative displays with other Nordic museums, such as Arken and Moderna Museet (this has been a good way to attract international artists for Nordic music festivals). For many ascending artists, the space would offer a first chance to show works for the general public. There should be adequate space for un-organized activities as well, leaving space for smaller groups and amateurs as well.

Public Space
We envision plenty of seating, outdoor garden areas and spaces without a certain purpose. The center could become a meeting spot for the people of Helsinki and its visitors. Unlike many public outdoors spaces, restrictions on e.g. skateboarding and street performances would be loosened. The building could also offer quiet rooms for relaxation and working in peace.
**The food hall**

The renewed food hall next to the site would greatly complement the event space. The food hall concept would be developed even further, offering both more classic and modern Finnish cuisines. Local producers from all around Finland would have a chance to impress visitors with their self-produced goods. Iconic Finnish goods such as licorice, reindeer meet, Fazer chocolate, berries and so on would be available. Torvehallerne in Copenhagen could be used as benchmark.

**Co-operation with Aalto University, Taideyliopisto (University of Arts) & The University of Helsinki**

Education is a key component of the Finnish society. The higher education institutes of Helsinki could offer free classes to interested visitors and also display student projects. All three universities have a different profile so they would offer a diverse selection of interests.

**Support for Slush and other start-up events**

In addition to student organizations, start-up event Slush is the focal point for Eurasian startups and technology talent to meet with top-tier international investors, executives and media. The two-day event takes place every fall in the wintry Scandinavia amidst one the most dynamic tech ecosystems in the world. Slush 2014 took place on in Helsinki with more than 10,000 attendees. In the past three years, Slush has grown from a local, 300-person event to become one of the leading tech and startup events in the world, reaching attendees from 68 countries in 2013.

Slush a non-profit event organized by a community of first-time entrepreneurs, students and professional music festival organizers, while backed by founders of Nordic success stories such as MySQL, Rovio, Supercell and Skype. The event keeps expanding every year, leaving very few available spaces in Helsinki to be able to fit it in. The event has been offered to buy so far both to Russia and Sweden with millions of euros. Organizers naturally want to keep it in Finland, however, the space issue will continue. The new hall could serve as a space for Slush, which is quickly becoming one of the most potential and well acknowledged events in Finland. We are in the top of the world in technology and gamification - this potential should be fully captured and supported.

**Architectural considerations**

The building would stray away from so-called WOW-architecture, and be more based on the tradition of Finnish architecture, such as modernist styles of Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen. The building should be environmentally friendly, communicating our close association with nature and
green values shared by many Finns. The milieu surrounding the area should be utilized, we envision a close relationship with the waterfront and good use of outdoor space.

References:


