

GUGGENHEIM 2 IN URDAIBAI: PROPOSALS FOR UNBLOCKING THE CONFLICT AND ARTICULATING AN INNOVATIVE PROJECT IN THE REGION

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Over the past year or so we have been assisting [an excessively debate anger](#) between different institutions of the Basque Country based on a proposal to develop an extension of the [Guggenheim Bilbao Museum](#) in Urdaibai, also called [Guggenheim II](#), carried out by the Provincial Council of Bizkaia in order to provide more space to the art gallery on the one hand, and to "regenerate" an area in a certain decline - to judging by the feelings of some of its neighbors and the main political representatives of the region- but of great beauty and

designated a UNESCO heritage site, which would require special care when undertaking any initiative.

Given this proposal, the Basque Government, also patron of the Museum together with the [Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation](#) that offers the brand and manages the infrastructure, has chosen to position itself against the project for different reasons, among which we could highlight the high budget (there is talk of 200 million euros), the already important existing museum offer or the possibility of a great environmental impact that conditions the current status of Biosphere Reserve.

The Government, however, not only wanted to criticize the project but also put 132 million euros on the table [to finance initiatives](#) that would already appear in previous development plans for the region but until now have not been would have been set in motion in which culture, with a new art "production" equipment, would also play a relevant role.

Having made the composition of the place, what I think is that despite everything that has been said and that to this day it seems that the "Guggenheim 2" project has entered a dead end, I believe that there could be room for understanding. An understanding that starts from the necessary exercise of mutual listening between all the agents involved, Government, Provincial Council and of course citizens, which with loyalty allows progress in the articulation of a common and shared project of integral sustainable development for Urdaibai.

Ideas for discussion

Having said that, this article intends precisely to advance IDEAS that could inspire those agreements around the initial project of the Guggenheim Museum 2 and that will be the foundation of the PROPOSAL that I launch below. A contribution that I understand, however, would not have to mean that this project was not accompanied by the development of "other measures" along the lines of the interesting proposal formulated by the López Government.

Referring therefore to the debate that arose as a result of the presentation of the project by the Provincial Council, I would highlight the following **ideas**:

- First of all, I would say that the political anger that has arisen in recent months has perhaps not allowed us to realize what unites us, beyond the aforementioned positive will. And it is that **both the Government and the Provincial Council seem to be committed to art and culture as one of the main ingredients for the development of the area**, and not only that, but they seem to agree on that this should be led by a unique infrastructure. Isn't this a good starting point?
- Secondly, I share the idea that, for the development of an infrastructure that would have at least partly an exhibition character, **the Guggenheim brand could be an undoubted claim, while I consider the doubts of the Government Councilor for Culture, Blanca Urgell**, about its enormous cost and that the true value would lie in an initiative that sought to "promote and provide facilities for Basque artists who are being created at this time". I wonder if there isn't something that combines both proposals...
- Thirdly, there is the environmental issue and **respect for the Urdaibai Reserve**, which surely

any project with a forecast of attracting thousands of visitors could affect, putting at risk not only the UNESCO's own distinction, but also the maintenance of its current enormous natural value. On this point we also find a diversity of opinions, from those who would speak of prioritizing economic development and those who would uphold the environmental value as something fundamental and therefore should be respected by any project.

- Along with this and before launching a concrete proposal, I would like to add a fourth ingredient and it is the historic **demand that Picasso's *Gernika* be exhibited in the Basque Country**. A masterpiece of the first order but around whose transfer, unfortunately, there is no consensus among the political parties of the Basque Country, [at least right now](#).

A consensus proposal

Once these reflections have been exposed, it would happen if they agree with the **proposal**. First of all, go ahead that it is a personal vision, and that what is finally done must have not only political consensus but, very importantly, the approval of the neighbors themselves. Here are the main elements of a proposal broken down:

- In view of the fact that there is a need for a cultural facility that promotes the region, I would personally advocate a mix, that is, the configuration of a multidisciplinary space. **An infrastructure that was at the same time a museum and a center for high-level cultural production**, gathering the vision of both the Provincial Council and the Government, but this time, it was articulated around the content, not the depart from the mainland. In other words, not insisting on the iconic building model designed by a star architect (in clear decline) and investing resources in the project, in which the center has the best teacher-artists for example.
- A project that has **an exhibition area that, in addition to offering top-level concrete pieces, offers a space for the promotion and sale of works by Basque artists**. This exhibition area, from my point of view, should be articulated around an emblematic piece such as Picasso's *Gernika*. The rest of the work in the permanent exhibition should be articulated from it, counting for example with some version of *The Scream* by the Norwegian Edvard Munch... This may be saying a lot, but working along those lines it would be looking for the soul of this exhibition area to be the criticism of the war, and the need for world peace accompanied by justice.
- **The area of cultural production**, for its part, should, in my humble opinion, **be devoted to giving a boost to its own art, to Basque art**. A place that contributes to the emergence of the new 'Oteizas' and 'Chillidas', drinking from art and the most innovative techniques worldwide.
- Fourth: **Location**. From my point of view, Sukarrieta is not the best place. First of all, because it is located in the heart of the reserve and with poor public transport and accessibility difficulties. Having said this and given my commitment to add Picasso's *Gernika* to this project, I believe that the **municipality of Gernika** itself could be the perfect location, which would put a new argument on the negotiating table for the transfer of this work. The town would also offer very good accessibility and proximity to both public and road transport infrastructures, availability of land and a greater critical mass to accommodate a project of these characteristics, both for its commercial, residential or hotel offer. It would also affect the fragility of the Urdaibai Reserve to a lesser extent.
- Fifth: it is true that the R. Guggenheim Foundation could have a role here, and it is to claim, although this should be more supported by the work, if we are talking about the exhibition space, or in the quality of the school, if we are talking about the production center. My proposal in this field would be more along the lines of **giving input to other partners who for this particular project could complement the role of the Foundation**. I am thinking of the University of the Basque Country, for example, with the Faculty of Fine Arts, together

perhaps with another university of recognized international prestige in the field of artistic training and production.

Therefore, there could be alternatives that can be put on the table. It is 'only' a matter of agreeing. I only hope that the political discussion does not reach the point of blurring the opportunity to build together something that is a magnificent project for Urdaibai and also for the Basque Country as a whole. On with it! Aurrera!

There are no comments yet.