

THE END: THE AGONY OF CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES -PRIVATE INITIATIVE- IN THE CITY

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Here is an anecdote that gives us cause for deeper reflections and that, like everything we deal with in this Blog, we seek that its significance is sufficiently extrapolated to other cases (cities) and that therefore we are talking about "trends".

So, in this case, I am going to refer to the disappearance of cinemas/theaters in the center of the city, at least those that have been led by private initiative. Here is the anecdote: [Bilbao is left without the Capitol Cinemas to make way for Decathlon](#), a large French sports chain that will thus have a 4000 m2 store in the heart of the city. But can we talk about "trend"? It seems to be, by doing a quick search through Google that it is so. The cases of [Ayala Theater also in Bilbao](#) (to make way for a spa and gym), [the Albeniz in Madrid](#), the [Cinemas of the same name in Malaga](#), or closure and subsequent demolition of the [Betrón Theatre](#) in Salamanca.

Often it is a dynamic that goes unnoticed beyond the specific users of these infrastructures of this type who, with a certain nostalgia but also concern, experience these processes that affect their daily lives. Personally, I would say that the public in general is divided between those who consider it "a loss", often shared by those with cultural and artistic sensitivity or who value it, and those who see it as a simple anecdote, surely inevitable, the result of the times in which we live and that in any case would reflect the inability of this or that manager to adapt to changes; or its profit motive, which would effectively advise the sale/rental of a place of this type for other types of uses. As we economists would say, "the market is the market and it imposes its law".

At this point I would like here to make a personal reflection, from the perspective of a public administration (especially the municipal one) on the consequences of this type of phenomenon in the city. **Are they negative? Or are they rather a sample of the new times and before which we should resign ourselves and therefore not act?**

The first thing I have turned to a reference institution, in this case UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and I have found a recent report: ["The Power of Culture for Development"](#) (the power of culture for development) than in its section dedicated to "culture as a vehicle for economic development", he speaks particularly that *"Culture is a powerful engine of the world economy, generating employment and income worth \$1.3 trillion in 2005. Cultural industries represent more than 7% of GDP global"*. And what is most interesting, the following is noted in relation to cultural infrastructures and institutions: *"Universities, museums, cultural centers, cinemas, theaters, craft centers, and other institutions are important generators of employment and revenue. Thus, a museum like the Tate Modern is estimated to generate an economic return of more than £100 million for London every year"*. Thus, what we could deduce is that the closure of this type of infrastructure (theaters in particular), could mean an economic setback for any city (whether or not the public administration assumes that role left by private promoters). In the case of cinemas, on the other hand, if it were shown that the movement is more of relocation to shopping centers in the suburbs, it could perhaps be deduced that this user spending goes outside the city, benefiting in this case the big companies. leisure and entertainment corporations that have built their offer there.

But this is only a part. Along with this, I would add several doubts: Firstly, the disappearance, relocation of culture or the fact that it necessarily has to be accompanied by very important public support, it seems to me that it is not a good sign and perhaps we should take note of it. it.

Education and culture are two of the pillars (if not the pillar) of development, something that everyone seems to recognize today, even more so with the importance that the knowledge economy has acquired, innovation or creativity. Perhaps it is not a matter of worrying and that you just have to think that today there are other channels such as the Internet or television where it is broadcast and that therefore it is not that culture "is dying". In other words, the channels through which culture is distributed have simply changed. But, are these channels effective when it comes to facilitating the dissemination of theater, dance, or independent cinema? And if they were, does this change benefit the city (its economy or the socialization of its inhabitants, etc.)?

And one last thought. Assuming that this type of movement meant "less space for culture" especially the unique, the unpredictable, the local,... **what impact could it have on our society?** Will we become citizens without identity, without values, boring and in which the emotion that comes from enjoying and/or generating a culture that comes from society itself gradually disappears? Perhaps this sounds something catastrophic / alarmist and it will not be so at all. It could, however, add one more interesting element to the debate.

In any case, and finally, what I will do is join those who think that the closure of a theater or cinema is not good news. The enjoyment of culture as well as education or knowledge, for which I understand that it is crucial that they be accessible, is one of the pleasures of this life as well as one of the main tools to develop as people and therefore one of the pillars of our society. Therefore, it does not hurt and understand this as the objective of this article, to raise the profile of this type of news from the anecdotal to the trend, and therefore debate rigorously and if it is considered appropriate and there is room, act.

Photo source: <http://www.malakao.en/malakaon/2010/04/albeniz-cinema-opening/>

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