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Local politics and planning over transnational initiatives: the case of Guggenheim Helsinki

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ABSTRACT

There has been a tendency to portray municipalities as prone recipients of transnational growth-oriented development initiatives. The processes of transferring transnational urban development models are increasingly depicted as progressively de-politicized, with an emphasis on 'strategic projects' over long-term general planning. This study investigating the Guggenheim Helsinki museum initiative (2011–2016) provides one counter-example to highlight the relevance of local politics and planning. In Helsinki, the mayor-driven attempt at de-politicization was quickly rejected by the city council, which instead kept the initiative under political control, supported by a rich public debate highlighting crucial weaknesses and risks in the proposals. The municipality tried negotiating a better deal and adapting the initiative to the local context, including the museum design being shaped by Helsinki's planning ideals and guidelines. However, the initiative was eventually rejected after a negative risk assessment showing too much dependence on public funding. The study shows that, instead of acting as prone recipients, cities may invest in public debate, improve their ability to assess projects, and avoid bypassing regulations, planning procedures or democratic decision making as if this was required by generic forces of globalization.

Introduction

Cities throughout the world have taken up a remarkable number of large-scale regeneration projects to increase their international competitiveness and speed up economic restructuring. The developments have had an increasingly transnational character through accelerated circulation and transfer of design and policy concepts, such as a variety of waterfront and culture-led regenerations, aiming to put forward new and dynamic city images to attract investors and people. Place-promotion motivated entrepreneurial approaches, involving internationally reputable architects and service providers, suggest ready-made solutions for remodelling cities into tourism and consumption destinations (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993). The rationale of involving a highly visible cultural facility, branded by a famous architect, has been quite straightforward (Jencks 2005; Klingmann 2007; Smith and von Krogh

Strand 2011): to develop a blockbuster facility, attract international attention, and in this way draw more visitors, boosting the local hospitality industry and thus supporting job creation, income and tax revenues.

A specific type of flagship building – a brand museum, aiming to be an internationally visible symbol of the city or the regenerated area – stands out in this debate. Among the 'superstar museums' (Vivant 2011), opening additional branches or franchises has been a spreading fashion since the 1990s, to increase their brand value, visibility and business with complementary services, as well as to use their art collections more effectively (van Aalst and Boogaarts 2002). The most active proponent of museum franchising has been the Guggenheim Foundation (hereafter, the Guggenheim), whose famous Bilbao branch opened in 1997 and which has often been depicted as an engine for urban regeneration and economic revitalization. However, a Guggenheim-driven success story is yet to be repeated. Instead, over the years, the Guggenheim has had numerous unsuccessful attempts, including Guadalajara, Mexico; Taichung, Taiwan; Vilnius, Lithuania (see Ponzini and Nastasi 2016) and most recently Helsinki, Finland, as analyzed in this paper. For example, in Hong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District, a large-scale project by Norman Foster, including a Guggenheim museum, was promoted as a strategic redevelopment project, but it was contested wholesale, encouraging the local authority to change the approach to the design, management, content and some of the actors involved, including replacing the Guggenheim with a locally established M+museum (Carmona 2006). The only approved initiative is the severely postponed Guggenheim museum in Abu Dhabi's Saadyiat Island Cultural District. Interestingly, common to the cases of Bilbao (Baniotopoulou 2001) and Abu Dhabi (Ponzini 2011) is that the local rulers accepted the Guggenheim's proposal unconditionally, including generous public funding. In other cases, they apparently did not, but information on why they arrived at such a conclusion remains scarce (Ponzini and Nastasi 2016). In general, the design dimensions of brand museums and other iconic cultural developments have been investigated broadly (e.g. Jencks 2005; Ong 2011; Sklair 2017), but surprisingly limited attention has been given to local politics shaping their development conditions.

This paper discusses transnational museum development in the light of the rapid transfer of transnational urban development models, with an emphasis on 'strategic projects' over long-term general planning, and the claim of de-politicization of such projects. All three imply an emphasis on growth-oriented urban policy and chosen abstention from strong local control over social aspects of the initiatives, although the projects tend to rely heavily on public funding. However, it should not be assumed that all cities simply follow such a pattern. The research in this paper investigates this understudied issue: how may a local government negotiate, adapt to its planning vision or eventually even reject a powerful transnational project to its advantage? The empirical analysis of the Guggenheim Helsinki initiative (2011–2016) shows an example of how a transnational initiative was critically reviewed in local politics, how the political decision making and the city's planning ideals influenced and reverberated on the initiative, and why eventually the Helsinki City Council decided not to invest in a new Guggenheim museum on Helsinki's main waterfront. While the Helsinki case is an example of strong democratic control and relatively transparent risk assessment by the local government, it encourages broader questioning of the often black-and-white pictures of cities as prone recipients of transnational recipes for growth.

Transnational urban models and local politics

An often-told story is that cities optimistically perceive locality-based international initiatives as essential features to make their mark and step up the ladder in a suggested city hierarchy (Beauregard and Pierre 2000). However, the spread of such developments, including brand museums and other iconic cultural buildings, requires suitable urban policy and planning conditions (Wansborough and Mageean 2000). Attention is drawn to three tendencies favourable to shaping them: the transfer of transnational urban development models; an emphasis on 'strategic projects' over long-term general planning; and the claimed de-politicization of major urban development processes and projects. All these tendencies can be found in the literature, but they have been rarely discussed in the light of counter-examples of cities demonstrating high local control over transnational initiatives.

First, urban development models have become increasingly transnational, and they are transferred rapidly across continents. Scholars have explained how initiatives spread among cities and why they are inclined to follow 'best practices' and ready-made solutions. For example, Ward (2010) has shown how, among other strategic policies, the business improvement district policy, which originated in North America, travelled to different cities and adapted to their political context, influencing their urban governance. In another geographical context, Bunnell (2013) has explained how Asian cities tend to generate new urban policies by using antecedent cases as prototypical examples, following what are imagined as hierarchical city models. In China, Chien (2013) argues that applying isomorphism has been a key strategy to gain the stipulated upper-level acceptance of large land conversions. In Europe, Sarah González (2011) has argued how urban policy and projects in Barcelona and Bilbao became reference models for other cities, which apply them as simplified narratives, often stressing the success and downplaying the risks and side-effects. The alleged success of the Guggenheim museum in driving Bilbao's regeneration has added to an extensive debate on the role of architecture and culture in branding places and igniting growth. However, critical scholars widely agree that the perception of one museum as a miracle-maker is an oversimplification of a complex process, and that such initiatives may succeed only if they are embedded in a broader strategy and development vision (among others, Sudjic 2005). However, that is not to say that the idea has not had considerable impact, because of policy-makers' willingness to believe in a simplified rationale (e.g. Evans 2003; Julier 2005; González 2011).

Second, urban regeneration has shifted the planning interest increasingly to so-called strategic urban projects considered as punctual (e.g. important building, complex, area) or systemic (e.g. infrastructural) interventions modifying the structure and functions of one area or part of city, contributing as a catalyzer for the greater material, social and symbolic change of a city or a region (Oosterlynck et al. 2011). In planning theory, 'strategic planning' emerged in opposition to traditional approaches, a comprehensive and technical view and top-down planning paradigms (see Albrechts 2004). Nonetheless, the practitioners' use of the term can be somewhat misleading, because at times so-called 'strategic' projects tend to repeat in practice the above-mentioned characteristics. Policy and financial tools used in strategic projects generally favour the involvement of (transnational) private investments, while the role reserved for the state is to secure the conditions for real-estate appreciation (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). Under these conditions, a 'strategic project' with momentum and high expectations of economic and image benefits can become

acceptable even if it contrasts with a politically established overall city vision. The local authorities may be pushed to accept functions and schemes in a piecemeal fashion, without consistently relating them to general strategies or structure plans, or even the political constituency and potential economic partners of the project itself (Ponzini 2013). Hence, the decisions regarding the areas dedicated to strategic projects, and eventually their financial prospects, often try to escape democratic decision making. The 'exceptionality' of the intervention is considered to be an excuse to legitimize bypassing land-use regulations and even common planning procedures (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). In many cases, cultural and entertainment amenities play a role in such development schemes and associated growth regimes (Lloyd and Clark 2001; Clark 2004). With regard to museum developments, the high interest expressed by politicians and public figures in such initiatives tend to derive more from goals of increasing spectacle and visitor numbers (see Vivant 2011) than from matters of enhancing local culture or heritage, consolidating identity or developing public space and the urban realm at large (Gospodini 2002, 2004; Kong 2007).

Finally, de-politicization, which has been easing pro-growth coalitions in promoting strategic and large-scale development projects (Orueta and Fainstein 2008), has become part of a rationale in urban policy making in times of austerity. When both public and private local resources become scarce, decision makers tend to streamline (and de-politicize) choices in order to welcome (transnational) investments and solutions, maintaining the political consensus among relevant stakeholders, even if this might require lowering the quality of the interventions or limiting planning powers (Metzger, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck 2014; Ponzini 2016). There is a strong belief in a neo-liberal policy dogma in setting the agenda (Pinson and Morel Journel 2016), as well as in transferring successfully applied policies from one place to another (McCann 2011). A typical approach to strategic projects, including outstanding cultural facilities, rather implies the creation of a partnership between public and private actors to speed up the negotiations on zoning, building codes or urban design standards, and developing suitable funding solutions in which the public sector may contribute, but eventually have limited say and power. However, an inclination towards business-friendly and pro-growth public governance does not imply that an informed local government could not make decisions improving projects and their contents (see Hubbard 1996). Moreover, as Shaw and Porter (2009, 5) explain, a de-politicized policy argument 'does not take into account systems of governance that cannot comfortably be described as neo-liberal'. Although there might be 'extraordinary unanimity on urban regeneration policies' (including high-profile art museum initiatives, for example), 'yet there are opportunities for dissent, critique and conflict ("politics", in short)' that have an effect on outcomes (Shaw 2009, 251).

This paper investigates how a local government can tackle a transnational initiative in other ways than simply receiving it, including modifying it, adapting it to local conditions or rejecting it altogether. A 'paradigmatic' Guggenheim initiative provides a fruitful ground for deepening the debate on how urban politics deals with transnational initiatives: setting the conditions; negotiating the development, the funding and the design principles; and controlling and adjusting (or not) the promoted project to meet the local development vision.

Materials and methods

The empirical analysis concerns the Guggenheim Helsinki process, from announcing the viability study in 2011 until the proposal's final rejection in the City Council in 2016. The analysis is divided into two parts, first describing the process and discussing how the initiative was dealt with between the municipality and the Guggenheim, and second analyzing it as a planning issue. Considering the theoretical framework, the first part focuses on the transferability of the concept: what was proposed and how it was debated, who carried out the initiative, and what types of decisions were taken and by whom, including an attempt to de-politicize the issue. The materials include the Guggenheim's proposals for Helsinki (Guggenheim Foundation 2011, 2013; Guggenheim Helsingin tukisäätiö 2016),[1] as well as a set of more than 500 media articles, mainly from the leading Finnish daily *Helsingin Sanomat*, but also from Finnish national broadcasting news *YLE*, other Finnish newspapers and international media used to cross-check viewpoints on the policy process and reduce possible biases. The main goal of the qualitative investigation was to highlight the main steps in the decision-making process, as well as the positions and viewpoints of the different groups of actors regarding the investigated themes. The second part analyzes the planning and design conditions in the chosen location, and more precisely how the politically established regulations and guidelines influenced the proposed museum design. The analysis is based on relevant planning policy documents, the Guggenheim's proposals (to the extent that they tackle the site), the Guggenheim Helsinki architectural competition programme and jury reports, and reporting news collected from local and international media.

The politics of whether to develop Guggenheim Helsinki

In January 2011, the City of Helsinki's mayor's office agreed on the Guggenheim Foundation conducting a viability study for establishing a new Guggenheim museum in the city, following Helsinki's proposal (Lyytinen 2012). The vision that spurred this initiative was Helsinki as a rising Northern European tourism hub. Helsinki is indeed well connected to the Baltic Sea region, with a fast train connection to St Petersburg, but also to Asian metropolises via its airport, which has Europe's fourth largest volume in Asian passenger traffic. The city's strategic interest is to raise the number of international visitors (Helsingin kaupunki 2009; Helsingin kaupunki 2013), and Guggenheim was perceived as a suitable brand to increase the draw. The Guggenheim saw in Helsinki favourable conditions in the importance given to education and culture, and in the stable economy and stable political leadership (Guggenheim Foundation 2011), but also in the strong airport and the growth potential among Russian (emphasized before the Ukrainian crisis) and Asian tourists (Frilander et al. 2015). In the press conference on the viability study, Mayor Jussi Pajunen (the National Coalition Party) declared repeatedly how Helsinki's exemplar was Bilbao (Heinänen and Uimonen 2011).

The viability study included a development proposal (Guggenheim Foundation 2011). The potential Helsinki branch was described as a 'non-collecting' gallery that would share exhibitions with the Guggenheim network, but would also run locally produced exhibitions in curatorial collaboration with the New York headquarters. Design and architecture were considered to be fields of specialization. Not too humbly, the proposal suggested that Helsinki has 'no signature space that symbolizes Helsinki's aspiration to be a cultural capital

and that makes the city immediately legible to tourists' (Guggenheim Foundation 2011, 10), and that the Guggenheim would deliver such a place, later in the revised proposal called no less than 'a symbol of the new Helsinki' (Guggenheim Foundation 2013, 6). Economically, the proposal suggested a very favourable arrangement with virtually no risk for the Guggenheim. The Guggenheim would provide its brand and content management, while the City of Helsinki (possibly with the financial support of the Finnish government, foundations, corporate donors and private citizens) would be responsible for financing all the costs, including the construction of a new museum facility (estimated at €130–140 million), the net operational funding costs (€6.8 million per year), and a licensing fee ($30 million for a period of 20 years). The proposal was initially presented as a 'take it or leave it' deal.

A heated public discussion quickly polarized into two positions. Supporters argued that it was a unique opportunity and praised the Guggenheim for enhancing Helsinki's international touristic and cultural profile. On the opposite side, critics pointed out weaknesses and open questions in terms of democratic decision making, economic calculations, content expectations, missing details in the urban design and development aspects, and a lack of alternatives in the discussion (Ruoppila and Lehtovuori 2012; Taipale 2012). The issue also split city councillors into camps of pro-growth supporters who believed the museum would create significant tourism attention and subsequent wealth, and those who were sceptical about the benefits of shouldering the majority of the costs – and the risk – on the public purse, especially at a time of austerity. The division of opinions broadly reflected the right–left political axis, but most political parties were also fragmented internally, with the issue thus escaping simple lines of interpretation.[2]

In a de-politicized manner, Mayor Jussi Pajunen had agreed that Helsinki City Council should take the yes or no decision in a mere month, but this proved practically and politically impossible, meaning that the City Council demanded a proper process. After concerns started to rise, the mayor proposed making only an 'agreement of intent', revising details but carrying on preparations, including an architectural competition, but also agreeing that the decision would already be binding, to include penalties of several million euros should either party withdraw. In May 2012, the members of Helsinki City Government rejected the agreement of intent by a vote of 8–7, considering its conditions too problematic even to take the issue to the City Council (where the decision would have been negative, too, according to the pre-surveys). The chairpersons of the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party, the two large groups voting against, described the agreement of intent as 'unfavourable' for the municipality, especially because it depended completely on public funding, with the Guggenheim selling its services rather than co-operating in the initiative, as noted in *Helsingin Sanomat* articles ("Vihreät esittävät Guggenheim-hankkeen hylkäämistä" 2012; "Pajamäki: Aiesopimus Helsingille epäedullinen" 2012). An editorial in a Finnish tabloid *Iltalehti* ("Guggenheim Helsinki kaatui" 2012) regarded the process as 'a school book example of what happens when an initiative is prepared by a small circle of people, and aimed to rush through the democratic decision-making process before municipal elections' to be held the year after, reflecting the unacceptable lack of negotiations over the conditions. Despite the rejection, the Guggenheim's director, Richard Armstrong, immediately announced continuing interested and not wanting to give up (Laitinen and Sirén 2012).

The talks between the Guggenheim and the mayor's office resumed again in autumn 2012, and the next spring the Guggenheim assigned a PR office to lobby for the museum among local politicians and interest groups. Richard Armstrong even later admitted that the

Guggenheim was 'too naïve and too American' not to start with a participatory approach (Sirén 2013). In September 2013, the Guggenheim handed in a revised proposal (Guggenheim Foundation 2013), suggesting the architectural competition as the next phase, with costs covered by private funds raised by the Guggenheim entirely, to entice Helsinki politicians back into the game, and with the time for the City Council's binding decision to be only afterwards (Guggenheim Foundation 2013). The revised proposal discussed the museum's overall economic impact, suggesting partial funding by the State of Finland, given its tax benefits via increased VAT revenues from the hospitality industry. Private funds were promised to be collected to cover the licensing fee ($30 million for 20 years), and the fee for the Guggenheim's annual operations was reduced and tied to attendance goals, raised slightly to 550,000 visitors annually. In January 2014, the Helsinki City Government accepted the Guggenheim's initiative to organize the architectural competition, and reserved the relevant lot temporarily, however stressing that this did not indicate whether the museum would be built or not. The competition, launched in June 2014, received 1715 entries, which made it one of the largest ever for a museum site. The attraction of such a number of entries can be explained by open competitions for major museums being rare (Huber 2014), against an expectation of inviting star architects only (e.g. Sklair 2017). The choice in Helsinki — agreed upon since the first proposal (Guggenheim Foundation 2011) — was probably influenced by the commitment of Finnish decision makers to open competitions for important buildings in pivotal locations.

The declaration of the winner in June 2015 commenced the finalization of the third proposal with the reviewed funding solution. The preparations were led by the Guggenheim Helsinki Support Foundation, which had been founded by the Guggenheim together with the Finnish Hospitality Association (MaRa), representing hotels and restaurants, and the Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries RT (Guggenheim Helsinki 2017), reflecting the coalition for growth driven by the service and building industries. It established a working group together with the mayor's office, and invited representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as the Ministry of the Economy and Employment, to draft an implementation plan and a funding model. The key ministers of the sitting central-right wing National Government were initially favourable towards partial state funding (€40 million), but the populistic party Perussuomalaiset (The Finns Party), represented by four out of 14 ministers, made it a governmental question, which led to the funding model being overturned in September 2016. Many believed this blow would have ended the initiative. Nonetheless, the final proposal, released in November 2016, suggested establishing the museum with municipal and increased private funding. The funding scheme suggested dividing the estimated €130 million investment between the City of Helsinki (€80 million), the Guggenheim Helsinki Support Foundation (€15 million) and a loan (€35 million) taken by the to-be-established property company owned by the City of Helsinki. The Support Foundation, which would have transformed into being the museum operator, would have covered the loan payments with the money taken from ticket sales, but the City of Helsinki would have guaranteed the loan, thus bearing the risk. The City of Helsinki would also have been responsible for funding the maintenance of the property and exempting it from land rent, which was a previously unheard of practice in Helsinki. These subsidies together were estimated to be €6.5 million annually. The licensing fee ($30 million for 20 years) would have been covered by private funds. All the operational costs would have been taken care of by the Support Foundation, with the deficit calculated very optimistically at only €0.4 million

annually, to be covered by donations from wealthy Finnish business owners and patrons of art. Importantly, however, the proposed agreement (Helsingin kaupunki 2016) implied that in the event of not meeting the targeted audience numbers and consequent income, the agreement 'would need to be changed', meaning that the municipality would need to increase its funding. Altogether, the initiative still depended predominantly on municipal funding, which had been the major problem since the beginning. In December 2016, the City Council overruled the proposal by 53–32 votes. The Guggenheim also announced its decision to end the initiative (as summarized in Table 1).

Since the first proposal, the transferability of the model, meaning the potential "'Bilbao'" or 'Guggenheim effect', had inspired a lively local debate on the credibility of the promises, as well as on how reasonable the choice to invest in a brand museum was. In particular, the estimated high number of annual visitors (550,000) — crucial for the funding model (with estimated ticket revenue at €6.5 million annually) and positive externalities — was a major concern. The number is equivalent to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen and Moderna Museet in Stockholm, which both receive approximately 500,000 visitors annually (Guggenheim Foundation 2011), but which draw from much larger urban regions that already have more visitors than Helsinki. The Guggenheim Helsinki would have needed no less than triple the number of visitors compared to Helsinki's current choice for similar audiences, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art (opened in 1998, designed by Steven Holl), which has welcomed only 175,000–200,000 visitors annually. Moreover, the calculations suggested that the great majority of visitors should also purchase admission at a relatively steep price. This is in stark contrast to experiences in Stockholm's Moderna Museet and Helsinki's Kiasma, where only half of the visitors have been paying customers (Alanen 2012). Another concern was whether a museum specializing in architecture and design could be compared to regular art museum visitor numbers. Yet another question was whether the Guggenheim would have had the assumed drawing power among Asian tourists less familiar with the brand.[3] At a more profound level, an often-repeated critical question was whether a brand museum was a good instrument for standing out as a visitor destination in the first place. People who shared this viewpoint suggested that rather than copying an already familiar development model, the city should come up with a genuinely inventive (and preferably local) idea instead. This idea was also supported by international and local activists, who organized a critical counter-competition called Next Helsinki (2015), parallel to the official architectural competition.[4] Overall, the Guggenheim initiative launched one of Helsinki's largest public urban development debates in a decade.

Table 1. Timeline of the key events in the decision-making process.

Year	Month	Event
2011	Jan.	Agreement on a viability study by the Guggenheim Foundation
	Dec.	First proposal, including guidelines, conditions and cost estimates
2012	May	Helsinki City Government rejects the proposal
2013	Sept.	Revised proposal presented to the public
2014	Jan.	Helsinki City Government accepts the new approach by the Guggenheim Foundation
	June	The architectural competition is launched
2015	June	Moreau Kusunoki Architects is declared the winner
2016	Sept.	The Finnish Government decides not to provide funding
	Nov.	Third proposal with increased private funding
	Dec.	Helsinki City Council rejects the proposal

Guggenheim Helsinki as a planning question

The Guggenheim aimed to locate on Helsinki's most prominent South Harbour site, the vivid historical core and vista as the city centre is approached from the sea. The centre of the area is the Market Square, one of Helsinki's main historic public spaces, surrounded by many prominent buildings, but also some waterfront areas with mundane passenger harbour functions (Figure 1). Regeneration ideas have been suggested since the millennium (Helsingin kaupunki 2015). The City of Helsinki is the landowner and thus in a strong negotiating position. Nonetheless, the centrality and symbolic values of the surroundings have made reprogramming difficult. Bold changes were proposed in an extravagant Herzog and de Meuron-designed hotel development by a Norwegian investor (2008) on the Kanava terminal site (Ruoppila and Lehtovuori 2012) as well as an idea and concept plan by ALA Architects on the Makasiini terminal side (ALA arkkitehdit 2008), which both generated stormy public debates on heritage, symbolic values and the sensitivity of the milieu. Consequently, in 2008 the City Planning Board established the overall Southern Harbour planning principles, including: retaining the marine character with a passenger harbour (even if reducing the space allocated for the port operations), appreciating the cultural-historically layered built

Figure 1. The potential sites of Guggenheim Helsinki in the South Harbour. The Guggenheim first proposed a location on the Kanava terminal site (dark grey, without outline), but switched to the slightly more flexible Makasiini terminal site (dark grey, with outline) by the time of the revised proposal (2013), after consultations. Source: the map was produced from the OpenStreetMap data.

environment; drafting the size, placement and functions of new construction; and improving pedestrian and cycling conditions (Helsingin kaupunki 2015). Further insights on placing new construction and developing public spaces were gained in the Southern Harbour open international ideas competition (Helsingin kaupunki 2012), although none of the entries were selected as a basis for further planning. This planning history stresses the importance of a subtle and careful approach, which suggests that the site was, from the beginning, unusually difficult terrain for the ideas of spectacle associated with the Guggenheim museums.

The location in the South Harbour was first and foremost the Guggenheim's choice. Director Richard Armstrong demanded a place that tourists coming to the city for the first time would find easily: 'the place has to be like a lighthouse' (Lyytinen 2013). The preference was easy to digest for the municipality, considering the prestigious actor's suitability in boosting the intended visitor economy in the area. However, Helsinki had also indicated alternative locations in some more profoundly redeveloping inner-city harbour areas (e.g. Jätkäsaari and Kalasatama), which could have offered much more flexible planning conditions, but the Guggenheim did not consider them attractive enough (Lyytinen 2013). In fact, this resembles the situation in Bilbao, where the Guggenheim, following Gehry's expert assessment, obtained a change of location from Alhóndiga to the more spectacular riverfront of Abandoibarra (Baniotopoulou 2001).

Expecting an architectural competition, the Guggenheim's proposals do not describe the museum architecture any further than 'striking', but emphasize the importance of the location: 'the museum's site needed to be not only aesthetically striking, but also conveniently located …, highly visible and easily accessible' in order to 'support the goal of creating a public space that welcomes new visitors and serves as a centre of gravity for the community' (Guggenheim Foundation 2011, 9). In the architectural competition brief, the museum was described as an exhibition space, a platform to connect the public with artists, an engaging place for citizens and tourists, a civic place in which to socialize, a prime destination and an integral part of the waterfront elevation of the historic city centre (Malcolm Reading Consultants 2014a).

The influence of local planning ideals, such as 'the ideals of the Nordic region, including openness and accessibility, should be manifested', could be observed already in the revised proposal (Guggenheim Foundation 2013, 57). The powerful influence of planning guidelines was instead straightforward in the architectural competition brief, guiding the design as it extensively explained the sensitivity of the architectural context and the required public space provision. These conditions had a major influence on the results, because to make it even to the long list, an entry needed, among other things, to show sensitivity to the site and its context, the practical building regulations and consideration for the site master plan instead of focusing on the building only (Malcolm Reading Consultants 2014b). The shortlist of six did not include any star architects. Moreover, most of these entries were ostensibly against the spectacular.

The winning scheme, by Paris-based office Moreau Kusunoki Architects, proposed a collection of linked pavilions, animated by different activities, each respecting the city grid and anchored by a lookout tower. In its statement, the jury focused greatly on the connection to the urban realm, describing the winning design as 'deeply respectful of the site and setting, creating a fragmented, non-hierarchical, horizontal campus of linked pavilions where art and society could meet and inter-mingle' (Guggenheim Helsinki Design Competition 2015).

For example, the nearby park was connected to the building with a footbridge. Furthermore, the jury found that 'the waterfront, park, and city each had a dialogue with the building yet the forms and materials were distinctive and contemporary, without being iconic' (Guggenheim Helsinki Design Competition 2015). Against the expectations of a Guggenheim museum, some international commentators rather considered the building undistinguished, writing that 'it is extraordinary that a design that triumphed over 1,700 competitors should turn out to be rather ordinary' ("Lacking Spark" 2015). In contrast, Mark Wigley, the chair of the jury, praised the 'genuinely dignified' status of the public in the winning design, and argued that it was 'a wake-up call to the Guggenheim and architecture in general' (Crouch 2015). He continued: 'I am so bored with 80-year-old white men getting out of their aeroplanes, not knowing anything about the city but pretending to love the clients and dumping one more uninteresting museum on them' (Crouch 2015). However, even the humble winning entry broke the building height regulation in the area, which was considered likely to become a potential problem later, in detailed planning.

Discussion: local politics and planning of a transnational initiative

This paper has investigated a Guggenheim museum initiative in Helsinki to learn how a local government can tackle a transnational initiative in other ways than simply receiving it. Three relevant issues have been covered in this debate: the transfer of transnational models; an emphasis on 'strategic projects' at the expense of long-term planning; and de-politicization of development processes and projects. In Helsinki, the municipality showed strong democratic control in politics and planning, negotiating a better deal and adapting the initiative to the local context in terms of both urban design and museum management, but eventually rejected it after a negative risk assessment. This provides a relevant counter-example to accounts that depict local administrations as prone to global trends and transnational projects, obsessed with flagship projects to stand out internationally and allowing de-politicization in order to speed up investments, tourism and growth.

The model that the Guggenheim sought to transfer to Helsinki resembled greatly the setting of its branch in Bilbao; the economic and symbolic role assigned to the museum as a visitor magnet, aiming for a broad impact on the hospitality industry. The principles of the Guggenheim franchise were also those familiar from Bilbao and Abu Dhabi, where the local public purse has paid for a great share of the costs, potentially redeemed and exceeded by positive externalities in the long run. The private money was also collected by a local Guggenheim Helsinki Support Foundation, without the direct involvement of the Guggenheim Foundation, and was coming largely from Finnish sources. Rather than partnering with Helsinki, the Guggenheim acted as a transnational agent, lending its brand and access to collections at a considerable price tag. The local debate focused much on the economic credibility of the narrative, including the proposed visitor numbers, and the cost and benefit ratio. Some voices questioned whether the expansion of a wealthy American institution should be subsidized by Finnish taxpayers in the first place. In the end, the major payer and risk taker would have been the City of Helsinki, which led to a negative assessment by the City Council. Regarding the concept transfer, however, the process of adapting the transnational initiative (closer) to the local context is also noteworthy. In particular, the rejection of the first '"take it or leave it"' proposal in 2012 brought the City of Helsinki to a position of asking for more favourable conditions, according to its own vision. It also induced the

Guggenheim to change its approach to wider lobbying and hearing multiple stakeholders, whether in favour or against, representing local business interests, citizens' interests in public space and funding concerns. This led to refining and adapting of the concept, funding and urban design, as documented in the central parts of this paper.

With regard to the position of a 'strategic project' versus long-term planning, the case presented both an example of accepting certain degrees of 'exceptionality', but also of adapting the transnational initiative to local strategic goals as well as planning and urban management conditions. While Helsinki was ready to allocate the Guggenheim a prime site, the project was nonetheless expected to adhere to the already politically established planning guidelines. Moreover, by choosing a symbolically particularly difficult site, the Guggenheim chose – consciously or not – to develop a highly context-sensitive museum complex. The influence of Helsinki's planning ideals and a vision of the place is best reflected in the open architectural competition's powerful emphasis on public space development and integration with the cityscape, in great contrast to an idea of a self-standing spectacular piece of architecture, as in developing a Guggenheim in Bilbao or Abu Dhabi. The analysis has shown how urban design-related questions, such as the relationship between the museum building and its urban context, played a great role in the Guggenheim Helsinki architectural competition.

The political decision making of the Guggenheim initiative started in a quite de-politicized manner, according to Finnish standards. The mayor attempted initially to promote the deal as an individual 'strategic' project, characterized by the little information provided during the preparation, an unusual rush, and an equally unusual take-it-or-leave-it agreement when the proposal was published. However, this approach was immediately rejected by the City Council which has decision-making power. Instead, the initiative was kept under political control by the City Council, supported by a rich public debate highlighting crucial weaknesses and risks in the proposals. The fact that the Guggenheim did not give up after the City Government rejected the first proposal can be interpreted as their way of accepting returning the proposal to preparation. This was also reflected in the Guggenheim's change of approach. Wisely, at all stages, the local government included the possibility to reject any further steps without great cost. The political reception of the Guggenheim initiative in general, and the conditions for developing it in particular, were nonetheless controversial, dividing politicians onto two opposing fronts, broadly reflecting the right-left axis, but most political parties were also divided within.

Conclusions

This study shows that, instead of acting as prone recipients of transnational models, cities can improve specific projects by fostering democratic debates, assessing projects within a long-term vision and avoiding bypassing regulations, planning procedures or democratic decision making as if this was required by generic forces of 'globalization' (Beauregard and Pierre 2000). There are alternatives to the banal transfer of branded large-scale projects or franchised culture-led package deals when boosting tourism and local economy (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002; Sklair 2017). Being more demanding and seeking to adapt processes may improve the quality and public benefits of the eventual solution, not only in terms of urban design (Hubbard 1996; Madanipour 2006). Strategic developments, including the use of brand museums or other major cultural buildings as

attractors or anchors, in most cases heavily depend on public funding, which is why every local government should emphasize rather than diminish their negotiating position on the matter. Those cherishing critical evaluations, as Helsinki did, are less prone to difficulties and risks, which are often underestimated by international boosters and local uncritical supporters. Local democracy, including vivid public debate, increases the social intelligence of decisions (Metzger, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck 2014; Palermo and Ponzini 2015). Most importantly, a strong local democracy and planning competence enables radical questions to be posed concerning a transnational strategic initiative, doubting its usefulness within a broader urban development vision and envisioning possible alternative projects. In the end, most significant urban transformations are conditioned by specific local decisions.

Notes

1. Among all cities in which Guggenheim conducted viability studies or made further proposals, Helsinki is the only one in which all the documents were made public, given the transparency rules of the local administration.
2. In the final vote in Helsinki City Council in 2016, the initiative gained most support from right-wing National Coalition Party (12–9 pro-contra) and Central Party (3–0). It divided especially the politically central liberal parties, the Greens (11–11) and the Swedish National Party (3–3). The leftist Social Democrats (3–12), the Left Party (0–11) were mostly against, as were the populist True Finns (1–6) and others (0–2). The most visible politicians in the debate included the head of City Government Tatu Rauhamäki (National Coalition Party, pro), the head of Social Democrats group Osku Pajamäki (against), and members of City Government Kaarin Taipale (Social Democrats, against) and Hannu Oskala (the Greens, pro).
3. A marketing study reported during the preparations revealed that among 250 Chinese, Japanese and South Korean travellers interviewed at Helsinki airport or in front of the city's main sights, only 20% knew what the Guggenheim museum was and only 10% had visited any of the museums (Sundqvist 2016).
4. The point of the Next Helsinki 'anti-competition' was to argue against "a give-away of government funds ... to this Starbucks museology" and to "inquire as to whether this very valuable site in this wonderful city can't somehow be leveraged beyond a franchise museum building", as explained by one of the organizers, urbanist Michael Sorkin (Edelson 2015).

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