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**Public cultural facilities designed by star architects: Simulacra for attracting media exposure?** (\*)

**Abstract:**

Following the supposedly transformative role that the Guggenheim Museum designed by star architect Frank Gehry has played in the town of Bilbao, the buzzword “Bilbao effect” has become a popular and widely circulated term, to describe the transformative urban effect generated by spectacular architecture designed by star architects. The “Bilbao effect” became an urban policy in motion (Gomez and Gonzales 2010), denoting the adoption of commissioning spectacular buildings to celebrity architects as a an urban policy tool in medium sized cities aspiring to steer their urban transformation. The premise of this urban policy tool is that the arrival of such buildings to town contributes to place (re)-branding, city marketing, management of identity and tourism.

Not every commission of a star architect for the design of a public cultural facility seeks to emulate the Bilbao effect. However, by investigating the development of the profile of commissions, which star architects get, we are able to describe whether such a trend is actually substantiated or not. This paper traces the development of the commissioning of public or semi-public cultural facilities to Pritzker Prize Laureates of 1989-2009. This investigation addresses the hypothesis whether increasingly cities undergoing urban transformation are hiring Pritzker Prize Laureates for the design of public cultural facilities. Having identified a sample of projects, i.e. public cultural facilities designed by Pritzker Prize Laureates, this paper then investigates the media outreach of this sample in selected international newspapers and the impact of this exposure on the media profile of their respective cities. Are these projects simulacra that are built for the specific purpose of inhabiting the media landscape and thereby expanding and changing their respective cities’ media coverage?

Nadia Alaily-Mattar holds the position of research associate at the chair of Urban Development at the Technical University of Munich (TUM), where she teaches and researches topics of futures oriented urban planning, urban and regional planning and the role of architecture in urban development. Since September 2015 Nadia has been managing an inter-disciplinary research project, funded by the German Research Fund (DFG), titled “Star architecture and its role in re-positioning small and medium sized cities”. Nadia received a PhD Degree in Planning Studies from the University College of London (UCL) in 2010, a Master’s degree in Housing and Regeneration from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 2005 and a degree in architecture from the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1996. She has worked as an architect in Beirut, Lebanon and as research associate at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA).

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