



Spain News Greening

Guggenheim backlash: environmentalists and local groups oppose new development

A planned development of a new Guggenheim museum in the Basque region has caused backlash from locals and environmentalists. They say that the museum, expected to bring in tourism, will cause environmental harm and bring challenges to local populations.

[The Guggenheim Bilbao](#), which opened 27 years ago this month, has played a significant role in Bilbao's transformation from post-industrial decline to a cultural tourism hub. A new Guggenheim Museum situated on the Urdaibai biosphere, mostly between the towns of Gernika and Bermeo, is in its early stages of development. Opponents and critics including Greenpeace and Ecologists in Action, [argue](#) that the project was initiated without adequate public consultation and caution that it could turn the area into a tourist hotspot, causing irreversible environmental harm.

The development of the new museum is forecasted to attract over 140,000 visitors annually to the protected natural area. Some are concerned that an influx of visitors will require new infrastructure—such as roads and hotels—which could jeopardise the biosphere reserve's balance.

With its [UNESCO protected status](#), the marshlands comprising the biosphere play a crucial role in sustaining the biodiversity of the region. are vital for bird life, serving as both a nesting site and a crucial stopover or wintering location. These coastal wetlands also function as an important natural nursery for many marine species that spend their early years in the area.

Image: Puppy, by Jeff Koons, outside Guggenheim Bilbao, [Harvey Barrison](#), CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

The local group, the [Guggenheim Urdaibai Stop Platform](#) (GUS) have extended the reasons for challenging the development. Its manifesto cites environmental issues, challenges to the local population, overcrowding and anti-democratic acceptance of proposals. They note that the financing will have to be partially sponsored by public funding, estimating an extra 50 million. In light of this, the group has collected 7,175 signatures in support of the objections against this change.

However, the director of the Guggenheim Bilbao, Juan Ignacio Vidarte, has [said](#) that the museum will be accountable for responsible tourism in the area stating ‘We think a certain kind of tourism – but not just any kind of tourism – is compatible [with Urdaibai’s status as a natural reserve] and we think the project we’re proposing has taken that very much into account.’

The museum [described](#) the development as “a project intimately aligned with its surroundings where art, culture, and nature converge; an initiative which underscores the constant collaboration between human beings and the environment, and where active dialogues between the landscape and artistic creation find a coherent, unique expression.”

Although the development plans have sparked such controversy, the Basque regional government and the provincial authorities in Biscay emphasised that the plan was in its very early stages.

Read More: Artnet News | [Guggenheim Expansion Plan Sparks Fury: Will a New Museum Destroy a Protected Wildlife Preserve?](#)

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