

Buildings as Catalysts for Urban Development

One concern in considering building complexes as urban designs and as public policy issues lies in their catalytic effect on their neighbourhoods. This concern was certainly a motivating factor behind John D. Rockefeller's plans for Radio City in New York (see Chapter 7 on Rockefeller Center). It was also that of Robert Moses, Head of the City Planning Commission of New York in the 1950s in promoting the proposal for Lincoln Center (see Figure 7.7). His goal was to eliminate the slums north of Columbus Circle and build a 'glittering new cultural centre' in order to change the character of the whole west side of the city. He succeeded but 7000 people were displaced by the project (Caro, 1974). The building of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan had a similar purpose (Ruchelman, 1977). The *Grands Travaux* of French president François Mitterrand in the 1980s and the recent (2000–3) development of the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles had similar aspirations. The latter, designed by Frank Gehry, hopes to have the same catalytic effect on Grand Avenue as the Guggenheim Museum has had on Bilbao.

All buildings shape the flows of people and of winds, they add to or detract from the streetscape. They form part of the skyline. They can, as the Pioneer Place scheme, result in an improvement of the cityscape in a way that makes it attractive for further development. Museums, libraries, and new well-located retail space can all spur urban development. The Canary Wharf scheme was the lead project in the development of the Docklands area of London and parking garages were in Glendale (see the case studies of both in Chapter 8). Perhaps the most widely publicized building that has acted as a catalyst for development during the past decade has been the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

CASE STUDY

The Guggenheim Museum (completed 1997) and the Abandoibarra master plan, Bilbao, Spain: a building as a catalyst for development (in progress)

During the 1990s, the city of Bilbao turned a corner. It was a declining port city in the Basque region of northern Spain largely unknown to the world. Today it is very different. A number of major projects developed by the Basque government have regenerated and modernized the city: the Metro, the Euskalduna Congress Hall, the Tramway, the Port of Abra, the Airport and

the most important of all in bringing Bilbao to the eyes of the world, the Guggenheim Museum (see Figure 6.4). These projects have, according to the city's mayor, Iñaki Azkuna, elevated the self-esteem of the city and given it confidence to participate in the globalizing world.

The spur for the planning effort that has led to the revival of Bilbao was the flood