



# THE CASE OF LOUVRE-LENS: REGIONAL REGENERATION THROUGH CULTURAL INNOVATION

Elena Borin<sup>1</sup>, Ivan Paunović<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Ferrara (Italy)

<sup>2</sup>Singdunum University, Belgrade (Serbia), Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (Germany)

## Abstract:

The principal aim of this paper is to investigate the relocalization process of the world famous Louvre museum into an ex-coal mining region in the northern France. The further analysis has shown that the project is embedded into the wider regional cultural innovation policy. This policy, apart from development of Louvre-Lens museum, also focuses on development of the cultural offer in the ex-coal mining zone through the WHS (World Heritage Status), as well as in Lille-the former (2004) European capital of culture. All three cultural attractions are located in the region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. An important part of the regional policy was the promotion and active development of cooperation between all three regional cultural partners, as well as active involvement with various cultural and tourism stakeholders. The development pursued primarily social and cultural objectives attempting to revitalize an ex-coal mining region which suffered high unemployment rate due to deindustrialization.

## Key words:

ex-coal mining area,  
urban regeneration,  
culture,  
UNESCO world heritage,  
universally accessible culture.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The paper presents a case study of a project of urban regeneration and regional tourism enhancement through culture that has been enacted in the region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France. The major elements of this initiative included re-localization of Louvre museum in the city of Lens, and inscription of the former mining area in the UNESCO WHS list.

The relocation of the Louvre museum contains some elements of rejuvenation models through acclaimed cultural establishment implemented in other cities, such as Bilbao or Liverpool. However, it takes into account the issues of balanced regional development through culture that are similar to the Ruhr region revitalization project. The case study highlights a more participative and collaborative approach to different types of stakeholders in the region, as well as between potential competitors as the city of Lille (the 2004 capital of culture), and the positive results that such approach could generate in terms of balanced regional enhancement through culture.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sigala and Leslie (2005), the central issue of the policy of universally accessible culture is how to strengthen small cultural operators and regions with valuable cultural resources. This means that national and regional governments, as well as cultural operators need to increase the capacity and competencies (such as new technology application and use, project management) of small cultural heritage institutions. The case of Volterra, presented by Lazzeroni *et al.* (2013), demonstrates that the cultural heritage development is an important strategy which affects the well-being of the local population, as well as the overall economic development of a small town. This type of economic development works through creation of new jobs, as well as retention and attraction of qualified human resources. However, according to Sigala and Leslie (2005), it is important to foster and promote the community awareness and understanding of their own cultural resources. In this sense, the community should understand and be aware of the actual and potential benefits of cultural tourism.

\* brnlne@unife.it



The approach to cultural economy development proposed by Lazzeroni *et al.* (2013) on the case of Volterra emphasizes the need to start from the authenticity of the territory. In other words, the activities planned should be in line with the local cultural context. However, as the authors note, authenticity of cultural heritage does not imply a static attitude or rejection of any novelty or change. On the contrary, the town must respond to the challenges of global competition, while being strongly locally rooted: it must act “globally”. Similarly, McDonnell and Burton (2005) note that one of the specifics of the contemporary cultural tourism market is the demand for regional and local tourism experience. As the authors note, this is mostly triggered by the fact that tourists live in an increasingly globalized and homogenized world. Therefore, niche marketing and emphasizing the regional and the local becomes the distinguishing factor in the minds of the tourists.

The case study presents a unique concept in post-industrial city revitalization which includes both the cultural flagship projects in restructuring former industrial areas, similar to cases of Dundee (Di Domenico & Di Domenico, 2007), Glasgow (Murphy & Boyle, 2006) and Bilbao (Gomez & Gonzalez, 2001; Gomez, 1998), as well the revitalization of old coal mining area with the world heritage status, similarly to the Rhine-Ruhr region (Ćopić, *et al.*, 2014; Prosek, 2006). The cultural development in the presented case study is coordinated at the regional level, similarly to the development in Sicily (Le Blanc, 2010) and Nuremberg (Bialk-Wolf, Pechlaner, & Nordhorn, 2013), while innovative IT is used to facilitate strong stakeholder engagement, similarly to the case of Genova (Chiabai, Paskaleva, & Lombardi, 2013). In contrast to the cities of Istanbul, Pecs and Essen (Polat, 2013) and Lille (Baudelle & Krauss, 2014), the city of Lens and the wider region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais have not used the capital of culture status to promote themselves internationally. The three main core strengths of the cultural development strategy in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais are the presence of an internationally renowned museum (Louvre) in Lens, the WHS designation of the old mining basin, and the former European Capital of culture status of the city of Lille. While the internationally acclaimed museum presence has a proven positive impact on the recognition of the destination in the international cultural tourism market (Gomez & Gonzalez, 2001), the impact of the WHS status has been somewhat disputed and controversial, and does not seem to contribute significantly to the international recognisability (Poria, Reichel, & Cohen, 2013), except in the case of developing nations (Ryan & Sari, 2011). However, there is an undeniable attractiveness of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais old mining basin on one side, and an international market for industrial heritage tourism (UNWTO, 2011) on the other side. Having an internationally acclaimed museum as a major attraction, with the help of the WHS status and the already established cultural brand of the city of Lille could prove a powerful combination for the future branding of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region in the cultural tourism market. This is important because as Plaza (2008) emphasizes, heritage investments have become effective employment generators only to the extent that they become effective tourism magnets. Some authors even go so far as to claim that the primary goal of revitalization projects in post-industrial cities, which suffered high unemployment rates, should be employment creation (Gomez, 1998). The

authors also see unemployment as the primary indicator to measure the success of these types of projects. However, arts and cultural sector have been used not only for solving the unemployment issues, but also to achieve goals such as economic diversification, image enhancement and social cohesion (McCarthy, 2006). In this sense, Jeannotte (2003) argues that investing in culture positively affects the sustainability of the communities. The author suggests that cultural participation encourages acceptance of “institutional rules and shared norms of behaviour “through connecting individuals to social spaces for interaction.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The importance of „democratizing “culture through relocation of Parisian cultural institution into the French periphery has been a leitmotif of cultural discussions in France over the last 10 years. The main aim of the so-called democratization process is to increase the general accessibility to works of arts on the entire territory of France. This process resulted in famous opening such as that of the Centre Pompidou in Metz and the museum Louvre-Lens. However, the project of re-localization of the Louvre museum in Lens was also combined with a more general aim of urban regeneration and tourism enhancement through culture of the entire region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France, a former coal-mining area that was experiencing a long period of economic and social downturn.

Since 2003, talks have been carried out about the possibility of creating a branch of the famous Louvre Museum in some other region in France. The choice of opening it in the region Nord-Pas-de-Calais was based on various reasons: the region was located in a strategic area, at the border with Belgium, with the potential of attracting visitors from North-Western Europe and with good accessibility through highway and rail services. The region also experienced the successful re-launching through cultural initiatives of the city of Lille, with the European Capital of Culture event. Moreover, the region is a former coal-mining area that is densely populated (4 million inhabitants), and that had suffered a period of economic depression due to a decline of the coal mining industries. The main idea was that the region could be “revitalized” through creation of an important museum, as already successfully initiated some years ago in Bilbao (a case study that was frequently mentioned and analysed as an example by the people in charge of the Louvre-Lens project).

As declared by the municipality and metropolitan council, the choice to focus on the city of Lens was mainly based on the objectives of cultural democratization and contribution to the broader regional development. However, the focus was not primarily on economic objectives, but mainly on social and cultural objectives. In order to implement this strategy, the project aimed at involving a broad range of stakeholders, belonging to different sectors and categories. This was achieved through creation of governance structures for regional planning, through their involvement in the governance bodies, as well as through creation of other projects and associations related to the Louvre-Lens. Moreover, a candidature for the inscription of the former Mining area in the UNESCO WHS list was carried out almost simultaneously with the Louvre-Lens project, to further



increase the attractiveness of the area. In contrast to Bilbao or Liverpool, where the focus was mainly on the city, the Louvre-Lens project aimed at promoting the development of the entire region linking it with other significant cultural attraction points (e.g. Lille, as the 2004 European capital of culture and the former coal-mining area) and initiatives, purporting the importance of the embeddedness of the museum in its territory (Baudelle & Krauss, 2014).

The concept of embeddedness of the museum in the whole regional territory is testified by both the composition of the funding of the museum and the governance commitments for the project and its related initiatives.

The Louvre-Lens is governed by a steering committee and operational committee. The steering committee brings together the main public subjects of the region. Significantly, it is presided by the president of the regional council (not the city council as in other similar cases), while the president of the “Grand Louvre” in Paris is in charge of overseeing and guiding the operational committee (the Louvre-Lens has its own head); the scientific and cultural team works with the operational committee to ensure successful project realization. Throughout the implementation phases, the appropriation committee was created with the aim to help the Louvre to integrate into its new area and ensuring embeddedness with the local population.

As for the funding, the majority of the costs were financed by the region and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Other sources of finance are the *département*, the Lens-Liévin urban area and municipality as well as other sponsors. The composition of the sponsors is particularly interesting: there are exceptional sponsors (e.g. Veolia and Crédit Agricole, Nexans, Orange), local banks and retailers, but also the Great Lille Chamber of Commerce and Industry, that instead of interpreting the museum in Lens as a possible competitor decided to favor it in order to contribute to geographically balanced development.

Balanced development was the goal of another urban planning body, the *Euralens association*, formed in the period 2009-2011. Notably, the focus was not just on the city itself, but on its broader context: its perimeter of action indeed included 113 municipalities, with 8 poles of excellence surrounding the cities of Lens, Béthune ou Hénin-Beaumont; this territory comprises an area of 760 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of around 576000 inhabitants. The official creation was in 2011. According to the statute of the association, its main objective is to create a forum for discussing the economic, ecologic, social and cultural transformation of the territory following the Louvre-Lens project. The association members are representatives of the local authorities (regional and municipal) together with the representatives of a variety of local stakeholders, including local Universities, tourism associations (e.g. the Mission Bassin Minier, the agency in charge of promoting the coal-mining area), cul-

tural associations (the most important local theatre association Culture Commune) and the Chamber of Commerce of Artois. Even through the structure of the association is based on an equal participation of its different members; the Cercle de Qualité (Circle of Quality) was established to give advice on projects and initiatives. The association has so far identified 5 priority lines of actions and promoted the creation of 6 clusters on the territory (logistic, digital services for culture, eco-products, sports and leisure, crafts, and the newly created cluster of services for senior people).

As presented above, the Louvre-Lens was used as a driver for the re launch of the area on the basis of culture, but was also strongly linked to the need to establish a flourishing environment around the museum. One of the most relevant critical points identified at the beginning of the project was the lack of local creative industries (Baudelle & Krauss, 2014) that were considered essential to fulfil the potential and attractiveness of the area as a culture-creative hub. Though this is still a drawback of the project, significant initiatives have been promoted (such as the Louvre-Lens Vallée to unite the cultural industries related to the digitization of cultural assets) to create the favorable cultural and creative environment around the city of Lens, following the theories of Florida (Florida, Mellander, & Stolarick, 2008), but also what was later identified as the ecology of culture approach (Holden, 2015).

The need to use the Louvre-Lens as a lever for cultural enhancement of the whole area was closely followed by the candidature to the UNESCO World Heritage List of the former coal-mining area. The candidature was launched almost contemporarily to the museum project. It resulted in the official inscription in the WHS list in 2012, just a few months before the opening of the museum. The cultural initiatives and events in the former coal-mining cities increased the attractiveness of the region and created a varied cultural tourism offer for the visitors and tourists.

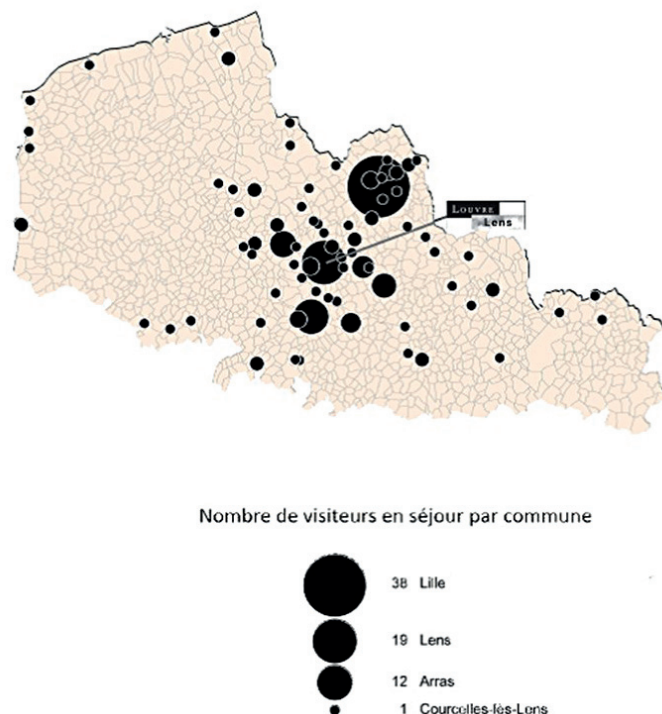


Image 1: Overnight stays of the visitors of the Louvre-Lens Museum  
Source: LOTERR-MMD – Visitor survey 2011 and LOTERR-MLLT – Visitor survey 2013, in (Boquet, 2014)





A systematic study of the spill-over effect of the creation of the museum in the entire region is still undergoing and has not yet been made public. However, as can be seen in the Image 1, in 2013, a preliminary survey on the behaviour of the museum visitors has been carried out. The results testify that a more balanced approach/model to the development-through-culture has been pursued by Lens. Indeed, the visitors of the museum are staying overnight in many cities of the area, not just Lens, and declared that visiting the museum was just a step of a more articulated tourist trip in the region (Boquet, 2014).

#### 4. SUMMARY

The opening of a branch of the Louvre in the city of Lens was carried out as part of a wider regional development initiative. The focus was on the revitalization of the region, not just of the city. The focus was mainly on social and cultural objectives, as well as on promoting balanced development through overcoming competitive approaches. (see Lille Chamber of Commerce participating in funding the museum + results of the visitor survey highlighting that many visitors also stay in Lille). Coalition building process with potential competitors and at a regional level, reveals the concept of embeddedness within the territory. Social cohesion policy through culture is a very important goal to pursue in the regions with high unemployment from a political point of view, regardless of the success of the program in reducing the unemployment rate. It can be claimed that it is even more needed if the unemployment level remains above certain thresholds due to political stability.

#### REFERENCES

- Baudelle, G., & Krauss, G. (2014). *The governance model of two French national museums of fine arts relocated in the province: Centre Pompidou Metz and Louvre-Lens*. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from <https://belgeo.revues.org/12765#bibliography>
- Bialk-Wolf, A., Pechlaner, H., & Nordhorn, C. (2013). The role of culture in building regional innovation systems and its impact on business tourism: The case of the Nuremberg Metropolitan Region. *Poznan University of Economics Review*, 13 (4), 111-129.
- Boquet, M. (2014). *L'impact Touristique Des Nouveaux Musees: Analyse Des Relations Entre L'environnement Urbain et La Spatialisation de L'impact A Travers Les Exemples Du Centre Pompidou-Metz et Du Louvre-Lens*. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from <https://belgeo.revues.org/12600>
- Chiabai, A., Paskaleva, K., & Lombardi, P. (2013). E-Participation Model for Sustainable Cultural Tourism Management: a Bottom-Up Approach. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 15, 35-51.
- Ćopić, S., Đorđević, J., Lukić, T., Stojanović, V., Đukićin, S., Besermenji, S., Tumarić, A. (2014). Transformation of Industrial Heritage- an Example of Tourism Industry Development in the Ruhr Area (Germany). *Geographica Pannonica*, 18 (2), 43-50.
- Di Domenico, C., & Di Domenico, M. (2007). Heritage and urban renewal in Dundee: Learning from the past when planning for the future of a post-industrial city. *Journal of Retail and Leisure Property*, 6, 327-339.
- Florida, R., Mellander, C., & Stolarick, K. (2008). Inside the Black Box of Regional Development-Human Capital, the Creative Class and Tolerance. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 8(5), 615-649.
- Gomez, M.V. (1998). Reflective Images: The Case of Urban Regeneration in Glasgow and Bilbao. *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 22 (1), 106-121. doi: 10.1111/1468-2427.00126
- Gomez, M.V., & Gonzalez, S. (2001). A Reply to Beatriz Plaza's "The Guggenheim-Bilbao Museum Effect". *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25 (4), 898-900.
- Holden, J. (2015). *The Ecology of Culture*. Wiltshire: Arts and Humanities Research Council.
- Jeannotte, S.M. (2003). Singing Alone? The contribution of cultural capital to social cohesion and sustainable communities. *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 9 (1), 35-49.
- Lazzeroni, M., Bellini, N., Cortesi, G., & Lofredo, A. (2013). The Territorial Approach to Cultural Economy: New Opportunities for the Development of Small Towns. *European Planning Studies*, 21 (4), 452-472. doi: 10.1080/09654313.2012.722920.
- Le Blanc, A. (2010). Cultural Districts, A New Strategy for Regional Development? The South-East Cultural District in Sicily. *Regional Studies*, 44 (7), 905-917. doi: 10.1080/00343400903427936
- McCarthy, J. (2006). The Application of Policy for Cultural Clustering: Current Practice in Scotland. *European Planning Studies*, 14 (3), 397-408. doi: 10.1080/09654310500420958.
- McDonnell, I., & Burton, C. (2005). The marketing of Australian cultural tourist attractions: a case study from Sydney. In M. Sigala, & D. Leslie, *International Cultural Tourism: management, implications and cases* (pp. 16-25). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Murphy, C., & Boyle, E. (2006). Testing a conceptual model of cultural tourism development in the post-industrial city: A case study of Glasgow. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 6 (2), 111-128. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.thr.6040050.
- Plaza, B. (2008). On some Challenges and Conditions for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao to be an Effective Economic Re-activator. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32 (2), 506-517. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2427.2008.00796.x
- Polat, N. (2013). Istanbul, Pecs and Essen (Ruhr region): European capitals of culture 2010 and possible effects on regional development. A comparative analysis. *Human Resources-the main factor of regional development*, (5), 212-218.
- Poria, Y., Reichel, A., & Cohen, R. (2013). Tourist perceptions of World Heritage Site and its designation. *Tourism Management*, 35, 272-274. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2012.02.011.
- Prosek, A. (2006). Culture through transformation-transformation through culture (Industrial Heritage in the Ruhr region-the example of the Zeche Zollverein). In D. Hassenpflug, B. Kolbmüller, & S. Schröder-Esch, *Heritage and Media in Europe-contributing towards integration and regional development* (pp. 239-248). Weimar: Bauhaus-Universität.
- Ryan, J., & Sari, S. (2011). A brand for all the nations: The development of the World Heritage Brand in emerging markets. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 29(3), 305-318. doi: 10.1108/02634501111129266
- Sigala, M., & Leslie, D. (2005). Conclusion, The future of the past: visions and trends for cultural tourism sector. In M. Sigala, & D. Leslie, *International Cultural Tourism: management, implications and cases* (pp. 234-240). Oxford: Elsevier.
- UNWTO. (2011). *Communicating Heritage*. Madrid: UNWTO.