

The New Louvre in Lens: A Regionally Embedded National Project

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ABSTRACT *The creation of a second Musée du Louvre in Lens, a declining manufacturing city, clearly refers to the prototypical case of the Guggenheim Bilbao. However, this paper shows that the motivation and origin of the Louvre-Lens museum are very different, since it was decided by the central state and primarily funded by the regional authorities with a shared belief in the necessity of bringing art to the working class in a city lacking cultural facilities. This shortcoming made the project highly risky, and its successful implementation can only be explained from a theoretical perspective by various kinds of regional embeddedness. Finally, regarding the impact, even though this project was not directly inspired by the example of Guggenheim Bilbao, a positive effect is hoped for, and the paper aims to assess the possibility of producing the Bilbao effect.*

At the end of your four terms, will you retain a memory?

Lens. Implanting the Louvre at the heart of the coalfield, in an area which has suffered all crises and all wars, will remain an exceptional project and memory.
(Former Louvre President Loyrette, *Le Monde*, 23 March 2013)

1. Introduction

In 2012, the *Musée du Louvre* opened a subsidiary in Lens, a former coal-mining city with only 36,000 inhabitants. This little-known city was hit by the rapid decline of the mining industry from the 1960s to its last pit closure in 1986. The unemployment rate at the end of 2012 was 17.7% in the Lens-Hénin region, which is much above the national average (10.2%) and the third highest rate in France. At first glance, Lens shows many similarities to Bilbao in the early 1990s (Plaza *et al.*, 2009): an old manufacturing past in traditional industries, economic decline, a position outside the tourist circuits and a northern climate.

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However, the resemblance stops here, as the main objective is neither to put the city on the map of Europe nor to revive its urban economy. Our hypothesis is that the Louvre-Lens is part of a much wider objective: to open the collections to a larger public in order to contribute to culture-based social development and possibly avoid a lock-in situation (Renard, 1985; Grabher, 1993). As a result, the Louvre-Lens case appears less similar to the Bilbao model than to the famous culture-based reactivation strategy run by the Ruhr area (Kunzmann, 2002; Heidenreich, 2013), well known in northern France thanks to early relationships developed within the Traditional Industrial Regions of Europe network.¹

Nevertheless, it is clear that the decision to settle the world's most famous museum of fine arts in a small manufacturing city of such obscurity increased the risk of implementation failure (Breitbart, 2013). As a result, the achievement of the project would have been unrealistic without various forms of embedding—organizational, financial, institutional and artistic—mutually reinforcing in a cumulative process.

Of course, local players do not hesitate to take advantage of this new cultural facility, and it is worth evaluating the possibility of producing the “Bilbao effect”, even though reproducing this effect was not the motivation for the initiators.

Therefore, the paper first analyses the objectives of creating a second Louvre in Lens in order to assess the extent to which the comparison to the Bilbao model remains relevant. The second section shows, from a theoretical point of view, that the completion of this new museum must be embedded at the regional scale in order to be successfully achieved. The last section endeavours to estimate the potential “Guggenheim effect” despite the initial gap with the common reference model and the very recent opening of the museum.

The analysis is based on 23 standardized interviews with local and national actors carried out in the last semester of 2011 in order to reconstruct the formation of the network. Face-to-face meetings with the participants seemed particularly appropriate in order to identify the involved stakeholders and study emerging and evolving networks. To complement the research material, we have collected various official reports, unofficial documents and available statistical data.

2. A Reference to the “Bilbao Effect” but Above All a Cultural Project

2.1 An Apparent New Replica of the Bilbao Model

The number of new museum projects has increased to such an extent that a magazine attempted to give an overview of this trend on a global scale (Beaux Arts Magazine, 2010), as well as a historian of fine arts with exclusive attention to museums of contemporary art (Lorente, 2010). Indeed, the establishment of the Guggenheim Foundation in Bilbao (1997) has prompted a number of similar projects in other European cities hit by the decline of their traditional industries. The local authorities are attracted by the supposed positive impact on economic growth, the most common meaning of the so-called-Bilbao effect (Plaza, 2007).

In many ways, the new *Musée du Louvre*, which opened in Lens in December 2012, looks like the archetype. The decision-makers made an explicit reference to the original model as the creation of a second Louvre in Lens, decided after a regional delegation visited Bilbao (Box 1). Indeed, according to a specialized journalist “the ‘Bilbao effect’

is the absolute Grail of the local politicians”, explaining why “for fifteen years the whole world files off” (Le Chatelier, 2012). Even the cost of Louvre-Lens (€150 million) is the same as for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (GMB) (€154 million). Therefore, the Lens museum could appear as a new and obvious example of what Plaza jokingly calls GLAMUR (Global Art Museums as Economic Re-activators) (Plaza, 2008).

Box 1. The main steps in the construction of the Louvre-Lens (2003–2012)

2003: Speech by Jean-Jacques Aillagon, Minister for Culture and Communication, in favour of relocating and decentralizing Parisian main cultural institutions

Agreement between the Louvre and the regional council in favour of Nord-Pas-de-Calais

Call for tenders by regional medium-sized cities for hosting the future museum: six proposals received

2004: City of Lens chosen by the President of the Republic Chirac and his Prime Minister

2005: Official agreement between the partners; international architectural contest

2006: Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council visits Bilbao

2008: Cultural project adoption and building permit

2009: Results of the call for tenders for the building work to begin

Dec. 2012: Opening of the museum

However, it would be a mistake to claim that the Louvre-Lens was created with the vision of reproducing the alleged Guggenheim success story. In actual fact, the reference to Bilbao was a powerful driver in rendering the project acceptable for the ever-hesitant regional councillors. They were attracted by the fascinating success story of a former depressed, old industrial city with no cultural legacy.

However, the first study on the potential economic rate of return was commissioned after the decision was taken (Werquin, 2005) (Box 1). It is based on the ratio between the expected economic benefit for Nord-Pas-de-Calais and the investment cost for the regional and local authorities. The calculations considerably overestimated the expected profit on the basis of an opening in 2009, an investment cost of €100 million and 650,000 visitors a year. Moreover, this assessment was far removed from the present sophisticated models and did not escape the most common methodological errors observed in such economic impact studies (Bonet, 2011; Seaman, 2011). Another attempt by Nord-Pas-de-Calais *Préfecture* followed four years later, but this official report (Goriainoff & Brocq, 2009) proposes only an international benchmarking of success factors and possible economic impact analysis methodologies, referring among others to a study of the Parisian Louvre by Greffe (2009), an expert in cultural economy and local development. This simple chronology could be a sufficient argument to show that the perception of the museum as a direct “economic engine” (Plaza, 2010) or “power station” (Museum Ostwall, 2010) was not the primary motivation. In addition, the field trip in Bilbao was organized after the decision to build the museum as well as after the economic analysis (Box 1). The fact that both the travel and the commissioning of impact studies happened “after” the signing of the official protocol establishing the financial commitment of each donor proves that the decision was at least partially disconnected from hopes of local economic benefits.

2.2 Primarily a Cultural Project for Educational Purposes

The Louvre-Lens project does not reflect a purely economic objective. Like the Centre Pompidou-Metz (Krauss, 2013), it is typical of the French conception of culture as an exception and its essential goal is to bring culture to new audiences—an objective shared by the Louvre, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council and the Ministry of Culture (Box 1). The city of Lens itself was chosen among seven candidate cities because its population was considered to be the most geographically and culturally distant from museums.

However, among the regional political elite, the sociocultural objective of enlarging the public attendance of museums is closely connected to a belief in the role of education and culture in redevelopment. From the standpoint of economic theory, museums provide merit goods generated by people with a higher education level. They stimulate collective pride and produce option and bequest values (Johnson, 2003). These external benefits are particularly expected in declining cities and among the working class, especially in former mining areas ordinarily characterized by a poor level of education and excessive loyalty to the bygone productive system. A deep cultural shift seems necessary to make structural change possible. The regional council has understood for a long time the decisive importance of a culture-based revitalization strategy, as proven by the Lille 2004 European Capital of Culture success and its fantastic branding effect on the regional capital city reputation. The vision of culture as an economic driver is directly reflected in the expenses for culture of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council, amounting to 25% of the total funds devoted by the 23 French regions to culture (excluding overseas). Very recently, just before the new Louvre opening, the regional council financed the settlement of the famous Parisian *Institut du Monde Arabe* in a closed spinning mill of a depressed district in Roubaix. This shrinking former textile centre—“The French Manchester”—welcomed numerous North African immigrants before becoming the second poorest city in France in terms of population income. As a result of this conception of museums as tools for a socio-cultural policy, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council is the main financier of the Louvre-Lens (Box 2) and consequently its contractor.

Box 2. Who pays for the Louvre-Lens?

- Local authorities: 75% of the project (building and surrounding park)
 - Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council (59%)
 - Pas-de-Calais *Département* (*Conseil Général*) (6%)
 - City of Lens (3%)
 - Lens-Liévin Metropolitan authorities (3%)
- European regional development fund (20%)
- Private sponsors (€10 million since 2007) (5%)
- Central state (4%)

2.3 A National-Regional Project, Not an International–Local One

Resulting from an initiative of the central state and mostly funded by the regional authorities with a shared belief in the necessity of bringing culture to a broader public, the Louvre-Lens project is principally a regional and national initiative and not primarily a local and international one like the GMB.

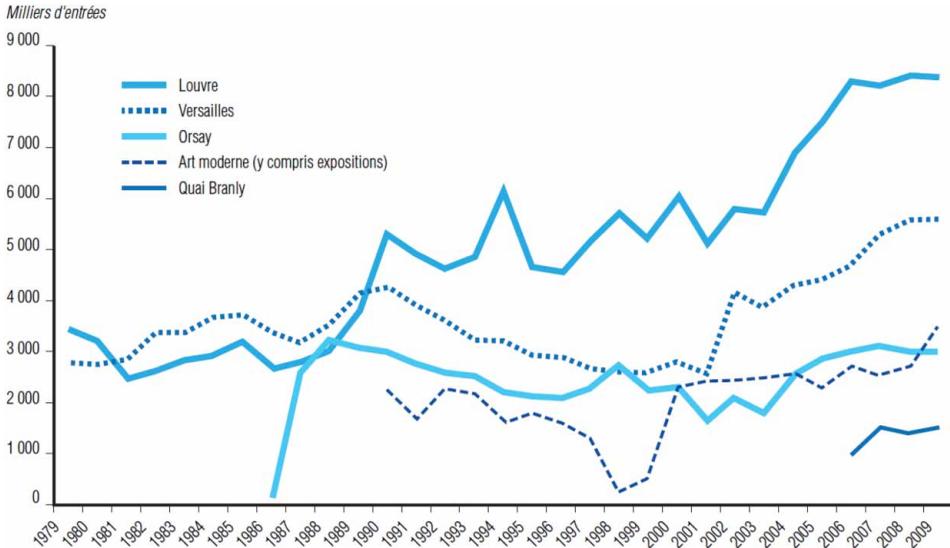


Figure 1. Development of the total number of visitors of the five national museums exceeding one million per year (in thousands).

Source: Lacroix (2010).

The Louvre was very affected by the 2003 statement of the Minister for Culture Jean-Jacques Aillagon in favour of the partial relocation of central cultural institutions outside of Paris, not only because it was the largest museum of arts in the world but also the most visited (5.78 million people) due to steadily growing attendance (Figure 1).

The will of the President of the Louvre to create a “Louvre II” somewhere in the province may appear as a response to the growing public pressure, serving as a push factor which made a huge difference with Bilbao. While the Louvre-Lens can therefore be characterized as a national project, it is also a regional project. Indeed, it is clearly the result of the meeting of two key actors sharing a common vision of the need for art dissemination: the *Président-directeur* of the Louvre *Etablissement Public* (public institution), Henri Loyrette and the President of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional assembly, Daniel Percheron (Box 1). Loyrette was described by a former member of the regional directorate as “prisoner of his 150,000 m² [the space of the Louvre in Paris deemed insufficient] and of his curators” [in other words, a staff of conservative-minded curators hostile to relocation]. Previously, he was President of the Parisian Museum of Orsay devoted to contemporary arts. He is a modernist curator and even a visionary. As a member of the high-level central administration, he is very sensitive to the public mission of a national museum. According to the Republican ideology resulting from the French revolution, he wants to put the Louvre at the service of the nation. As expressed by the President of the Republic, François Hollande, at the inauguration, “the Louvre continues its revolution, a democratic revolution”. Percheron had a sense of intuition about the potential role of culture in the long-term regional economic and social transformation of his native old industrial region. Educated in history, Percheron loves Ancient Egypt. He is an influential regional socialist politician born near Lens. Such a pair representing the national and the regional levels is rather usual in cultural policy-making within the

Table 1. A decision-making comparison between Guggenheim Bilbao and Louvre-Lens

Main characteristics	Guggenheim Bilbao	Louvre-Lens
Goal	International city branding business model	Culture-based education policy
Initiative	City mayor	Central State
Level of decision	Global and local	National and regional
Funding	Global and local	Regional

French system, where covenants between these two levels have become normative since the decentralization laws of the 1980s. This decision-making process explains several important differences compared with the alleged Bilbao model (Table 1).

The Louvre-Lens project does not refer to a local–international business model, but is the outcome of a regional–national political project. It is a public project where private donors are very weak. Moreover, it is not the fruit of a city initiative, for example such as Bilbao or the Centre Pompidou-Metz, the Louvre Abu Dhabi franchise model or the Luma foundation-sponsored landmark tower to be built by Gehry in the city of Arles (Provence). The local VIP engaged early on in supporting the project was not the mayor but the president of the regional council, who even had to instigate the Lens municipality application to the regional call for tenders for hosting the museum. The city and the metro authorities are palpably only followers. Furthermore, the final choice of an unknown city demonstrates that international branding was definitely not central. Bilbao was certainly not famous before hosting the Guggenheim museum. However, it was at least a regional capital city, an important manufacturing and banking centre and a European metropolis, unlike Lens.

3. Theoretical Outcome: A Socially Deeply Embedded Project

3.1 Theoretical Foundation: The Need for Social Embeddedness

In principle, the more surprising the host city and the more famed the museum, the more risky the project. That is clearly the case, as noted by President Hollande himself: “it was a foolish bet” (*Le Monde*, December 8, 2012). Much more than Metz, a regional capital city, the traditional working-class city of Lens was originally considered as very unlikely to host a world-famous museum due to its very poor cultural orientation. Resistance came from the Louvre curators and more broadly from the artistic culture. The supposed role of the Louvre in the revitalization of a region was questioned by some Parisian art historians who were opposed to the instrumentalization of museums and collections: “is it the role of the Louvre to revive an economically deprived French city?”²

Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, we must consider that only the support of a sustainable network could make it possible to achieve such a large and unexpected cultural project, especially in a national third-tier city. The basic argument of the sociologies of organizations and networks is provided by the observation that human activity is embedded in social relations. Networks emerge when actors—individuals as well as groups—develop and maintain lasting relationships. A network is defined as a set of relationships between participants. Their level of autonomy is limited as networks produce their own institutions, reinforcing the interdependencies between actors and constraining individual behaviour. This general phenomenon is described by the concept of

“social embeddedness” (Polanyi, 1944; Granovetter, 1974, 1985). The French sociologist Bourdieu (1980) demonstrated how the economic actors regularly rely on their social relations in order to succeed in economic life, using their “social capital” as a decisive non-economic resource.

The “network” concept allows the position of an actor to be considered inside a large set of relations, thus stressing the collective dimension of social action. An individual actor could not succeed without the support of his network which gives access to resources he would not have otherwise. When viewed from this perspective, it is possible to interpret a cultural project as a trigger for setting in motion previously segregated actors, transforming it in what Star and Griesemer (1989) have called a “boundary object”.

3.2 *A Regionally Embedded National Project*

In the case of decentralization of the Louvre, the risk was eventually weak due to confidence between the two principal partners. Their convergence of views allowed the avoidance of any paralysing conflict: from the start, each of these two key drivers perceived that it could be a win-win game. Moreover, whereas ministers often change, especially for culture, the two leaders have remained in their respective positions for a long time. The prime minister and the president of the Republic supported the Lens project proposed by the minister of culture and the *Musée du Louvre* while the regional council easily followed its influential president. Consensus was efficient enough to enlarge the initial limited circle. The project’s proper dynamics have led to a snowball effect, attracting more and more supporters and especially numerous regional stakeholders.

An initially mutual and personal understanding between two protagonists thus became an unprecedented alliance between their respective institutions, constituting a decisive success factor. Just as with the Centre Pompidou-Metz (cf. Krauss, 2013), the combination of national commitment (supported at the highest level) and the resoluteness of regional actors who were very sensitive to the role of culture as a tool for development in areas suffering from a heavy social legacy has fostered a fortunate agreement around shared values. Therefore, what could have remained a supporting circle limited to a small range of inventive local politicians evolved into a regional strategy, contributing to its multifaceted embeddedness. The “Grand Lille” (Great Lille) strategy which has been implemented since the 1990s progressively led to Lille’s candidacy for the Olympic Games (which failed) and to becoming the European Capital of Culture (which was successful in 2004). The location of a new “high-speed railway” junction in Lille instead of a Paris–London direct line has also indicated how efficient a collective effort aimed at creating new infrastructures and events can be.

3.3 *A Cultural Project Jointly Developed by Two Institutions Sharing Complementary Resources*

As a result of mutual trust, the Louvre-Lens appears to be a project jointly developed by two institutional promoters sharing their resources. The Louvre-Lens benefits from scientific and artistic autonomy. The artistic conception of the museum is the result of discussions between the Louvre and the regional council. The museum has no collection of its own but a semi-permanent one, as Paris loans objects from its collections for five years with a turnover of 20% a year. Since the opening, the main Time Gallery displays some

300 masterpieces, mixing periods and merging civilizations against the traditions and the preferences of the curators responsible for the different departments of the Louvre. Most of these pieces of art do not come from the Louvre reserves but from its presently exhibited collections. The objective is to avoid the so-called Prado effect—displaying only a small fraction of the collection. In addition, every year the Louvre-Lens will also host two major temporary exhibitions coordinated with those at the Louvre in Paris and in the other regional museums. There is no licence because theoretically the Louvre collections belong to the people. Conversely it pays almost nothing: the investment and operating costs (estimated at 15 million a year) are covered by its public partners, above all the regional council.

In addition to its essential financial participation, the regional council can claim expertise in monitoring a large-scale project. It is an important resource that is rarely mentioned in the literature. This skill was very useful in solving the technical problems caused by the first architectural project, which has proven to be impossible to achieve due to a glass roof which was too large. Eventually the problem was solved, at the cost of some extensive delays. The experience in project monitoring of the regional council, responsible for the construction of high schools, helped it to attract large and reliable companies involved in public works. In doing so, it has confirmed its ability to be a contracting authority.

However, some concerns were raised about the final cost that rose from €100 million—the initial maximum cost—to €150 million because the selected architectural project was the most attractive but also the less precise. But the regional council's experience in acting as contractor helped it to implement the project. The final cost is quite standard for a cultural facility of this magnitude.

The resources of the Louvre and the regional council are thus complementary: the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region brings substantial financial resources and construction capacity while the Louvre provides its collection—a patrimonial resource—, its label, its prestige and its artistic know-how. However, cultural knowledge is not the exclusive prerogative of the Louvre, since the regional council has its own culture department staff. This credibility of expertise also encouraged more balanced relationships between the two leading institutions as well as mutual respect, making the success of the construction project possible.

Reflecting their leading role, the two main institutions are associated in close partnerships both in the “steering” and the “operational committees” as well as in the original “appropriation committee”. Whereas the “scientific committee” is dominated by the Louvre curators, the “technical committee”, responsible for the monitoring, seeks to involve all partners. The Louvre-Lens shares the same president as the Louvre-Paris, but has its own director. The organization of the management structure is clearly egalitarian and even rather to the advantage of the Lens institution, which benefits from more self-government than the Centre Pompidou-Metz. Since 2011, it has been given the legal status of public institution of cultural co-operation. That implies a board of directors in which the majority of the seats have been attributed to the local and regional public authorities that elected the director of the Louvre-Lens.

3.4 The Museum as a Catalyst for Social Networks: A Condition for Implementation Success

The duplication of the world's most famous museum of fine arts in a completely unknown town would not have been possible without the social embeddedness of its initiators, as in

the case of the Centre Pompidou-Metz (Krauss, 2013). Indeed, the range of actors was progressively widened to other spheres that have supported the initial limited circle. A regional growth coalition building process has led to the involvement of stakeholders from various horizons and different political opinions.

Important figures such as the director of the regional cultural agency joined in supporting the mobilization of culture in favour of broader goals. Similarly, the sub-prefect of Lens has greatly invested in associating many players from all backgrounds and all sides to foster a consensus with regard to the economic reactivation strategy. These state representatives present themselves as neutral actors, defending public interest so that they benefit from total legitimacy and respected authority. In comparison, respondents to the architectural competition and the museum builders appear as actors playing a secondary role due to their dependence on the decisions affecting them.

As the project includes an urban renewal objective, the circle of planners has been assigned through Euralens, the body specifically devoted to creating development visions, urban planning and economic reactivation. Euralens creates links between numerous actors from various circles including the “Mission Bassin Minier”, an operational body acting as a development agency for the former coal-mining area.³

The cooperation with other regional museums has led the Louvre-Lens to be described as a “cultural hub at the service of its region”. Locally, there is no competition as Lens has no other museum. It is associated with various neighbouring cultural facilities, including scientific and technical centres, coal-mining heritage, natural sites and theatres.

The political staff in Lens as well as the regional council could be nothing but receptive to this move which was aimed at proving and expressing the whole nation’s gratitude to this area and its people for their contribution to French industrialization. This ideology disseminated by the local politicians is deeply rooted among the inhabitants who for a long time expected a special strong act showing national recognition—what Gueit (2005) calls “reparation”. That explains why the inhabitants were split between the feeling that the future Louvre would not be for them and their pride in having been chosen by the central government. This symbolic choice is perceived as the long-awaited evidence of the state’s gratefulness for what that area and its people have achieved for France during two-and-a-half centuries of coal-mining. The ideology of the Louvre museum—the artworks belong to the nation, they have to be shared with everyone—satisfied the local aspiration of being repaid by the nation.

Amazingly, the City of Lens itself seemed suspicious for political reasons once the decision was taken. Of course, the Mayor was enthusiastic and did his best to win the call for tenders. But as the project goals were rapidly extended to economic reactivation and urban regeneration by the regional council and the sub-prefecture, the local politicians became increasingly reluctant. Indeed, the political members of staff of the former coal-field were described as keeping to traditional practices, including patronage uses and protest political culture. Their discourse cultivates a magnification of the mining heritage and the backward-looking local MPs and mayors began to fear they would be unable to control the decision-making process and possible politically dangerous and extravagant expenses. The president of the regional council was obliged to create Euralens, the local NGO especially devoted to urban regeneration due to poor local political engagement. In short, what was originally unanimous support of the project was followed by a lack of confidence due to possible political costs regarding urban regeneration process management.

We can thus identify several geographical circles demonstrating regional embeddedness: a “city” circle—the politicians of the municipal and metropolitan authorities, cultural actors and the inhabitants; a “sub-regional” circle corresponding to Euralens and coalfield development agency perimeters and to the desired connections with the coalfield UNESCO World Heritage strategy that was successful in 2012; and an essential “regional” circle due to the central role of the regional level and to the mainly regional public target.

To conclude this issue, the construction process has led to various kinds of effective regional embeddedness: “organizational” as proved by the trusting and complementary relationships between the main two partners; “financial” as demonstrated by the regional council budgetary commitment within a larger partnership; “institutional” resulting from political, symbolic and financial supports by regional relays at various levels; and finally “artistic” due to strong ties with the “Mother-House” and growing cooperation dynamics within a regional network of museums. The learning effect is obvious in the light of experiences from Lille 2004 European Capital of Culture, which had already spread exhibitions and performances to other cities throughout the region as well as in Belgium. Further cooperation is also underway with other national cultural institutions, such as the Centre Pompidou Paris or the Palace of Versailles, which have installed exhibitions in several medium-sized cities of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, confirming the construction of new cultural networks.

The success of the Louvre-Lens demanded not only regional embeddedness or even relationships with national partners, but also wider global connections. The question is whether the arrival of the Louvre has been powerful enough to give access to international networks. More generally speaking, the possible Bilbao effect is an issue to be addressed despite the initial gap with the reference model, which itself has to be qualified as some stakeholders actually expect a positive impact, but there are also many external observers who are unaware of the main official goal. That is the question of the various possible effects of the project beyond the purely cultural and social original expectations.

4. Assessing the Possible Louvre-Lens “Bilbao Effect”

The so-called Bilbao (or Guggenheim) effect refers to four dimensions: local–global linkages; symbolic flagship architecture use in urban renewal and city globalizing; culture-based urban regeneration process; economic development (Del Castillo & Haarich, 2004; Haarich & Plaza, 2010; Plaza & Haarich, 2013). In spite of the recent opening of the museum, let us consider these various poles.

4.1 Unprecedented Local–Global Linkages

The dominant political regional–national root has not impeded the extension to global actors. Without the Louvre museum, it would have been impossible to connect Lens with global circuits, particularly within the cultural sphere. For instance, in addition to art collections of the various regional museums, masterpieces from other museums in the world will also be exhibited, bringing the new Louvre into a both local and an international art circulation network.

The Louvre global brand definitely attracted a “transnational capitalist class” (Sklair, 2005) of famous architects and renowned museographers, opening up an initial national–regional project to transnational elites. The regional council—who had the

final say on the winners as the principal financier—was in search of big names in the circuit of international architecture and global firms keen to gain contracts and enhance their reputation worldwide. Internationalization was effective and consistent with the Bilbao model in this respect. Indeed, the jury chose two architects of SANAA, a Japanese firm, Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, later winners of the 2010 Pritzker, the “Nobel” of architecture. However, at the time SANAA and these architects did not have very many references and the application files were anonymous. These Japanese architects themselves belong to an international consortium with two American museum designers who were replaced for technical reasons by Adrien Gardere, a French but internationally recognized designer and museographer with vast international experience. The redevelopment of the site area was entrusted to the famous architect and urban planner Christian de Portzamparc (2004 *Grand Prix de l’urbanisme*) and equally famous landscape architect Michel Desvigne (since then also awarded the 2011 *Grand Prix de l’urbanisme*)—in other words, “two prestigious, world-famous names”.⁴ President Percheron won the renowned planner Subileau, laureate of the 2001 *Grand Prix de l’urbanisme*. Thus, the Louvre international brand has attracted “starchitects” (Ponzini & Nastasi, 2012) and famous planners as well as engineering global firms, including German, British and Japanese companies that responded to the tender.

The theoretical hypothesis of the key role of integration into social networks is therefore confirmed, but must be balanced by instituting the role of procedures. The legal proceeding guides the institutional game, setting in motion a financial and operational implementation process that leads to the involvement of the globalized elite. Without architecture and urban planning contests, global players would have been unreachable. In this regard, their participation is independent of any special networking. In any case, the Louvre-Lens clearly acts as a point of contact between local and global elites, exactly as GMB does (Plaza & Haarich, 2013).

The numerous visitors coming from various parts of the world of course contribute to the inclusion of Lens on global tourist routes. In fact, 100 days after its very recent (winter) opening, approximately 20% of visitors were accounted for by foreigners, mainly from neighbouring countries (Belgium, UK, Netherlands). Among these 50,000–65,000 people, 60 nationalities were recorded from developed countries (Japan, Canada, New Zealand ...) and developing countries (China, Brazil, South Africa, Spanish America ...).

4.2 A New Image Without Iconic Architecture

An abundance of literature outlines the need for symbolic flagship buildings used as cornerstones of urban renewal and city branding (Kaika, 2010). A “boosterism-ridden architecture” conceived to make “nowhere suddenly in somewhere” (Sudjic, 2005) relies on the potential of instantly recognizable “wow-architecture” for globalizing a city image in the eyes of foreign audiences (Rybczynski, 2002). This trend generally refers to a Harveyan urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989; Alvarez Sainz, 2012) as well as to “aestheticization of urban space in cognitive cultural capitalism” (Scott, 2012, p. 140). Just as Patterson (2012) highlighted the close connection between public cultural institutions and iconic architecture, we could expect a spectacular architectural gesture in Lens. Moreover, the need to change the city’s poor image (Gueit, 2005) could lead the players to perceive

iconic architecture as a precondition for success, as is often hoped in similar places (Lusso, 2009).

In actual fact, the improvement of Lens's image is based on the Louvre prestige, not on iconic architecture, unlike the GMB. The idea was not to become a flagship but, like Folkwang Museum in Essen (Heidenreich, 2013), to serve the works by implementing a functional and practical architecture. This choice of refusing any bold architectural effect is presented as a distinctive innovation. The jury wished to avoid the distraction from the content which is produced by an eye-catching building. Instead, it has preferred to subordinate the architecture to the collection instead of vice versa. The SANAA project also seemed to respect and reveal the site's natural attractiveness (Figure 2). It would seem that a museum of classic arts does not lend itself to such flamboyant architecture as a museum of modern and contemporary art. The desire to make a museum famous and to brand a city does not necessarily imply ostentatious architecture.

This calls into question the theoretical interpretations attributing a major role to architectural distinction in strategies engaged by competing cities. Here, the Louvre's world-famous brand seems sufficient to reach the top league of globally visible museums. It shows that local economy is no longer based on traditional heavy industries but also on art and creativity. Before the inauguration day, reporters already came from Japan, the US and numerous European countries, clearly demonstrating the international dimension of the event. The museum dramatically upsets the traditional image or directly creates a positive one among people who have never heard about Lens, making it exist on a



Figure 2. The Louvre in Lens.

Note: At the back, the 11/19 gigantic twin spoil-heaps, the highest in Europe.

Source: <http://www.nordpasdecalais.fr/upload/docs/image/jpeg/2012-11/louvre-lens.jpg>

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global scale. The *New York Times* ranked Lens 26th among the places to visit in 2013.⁵ That would have been previously unconceivable.

4.3 A Culture-Based City Regeneration Process

Locally, reputation management is not absent. The regional councillors and the members of Lens municipal and metropolitan political staff know the benefit they may derive from the Louvre brand, explaining why the museum has generated ambitious urban regeneration goals. The Coalfield Mission led an initial study implemented by the famous architect and urban planner Nicolas Michelin which opened up the prospects for urban design around the site (Figure 2). The Euralens NGO created for this purpose is now in charge of local urban planning and sub-regional reactivation within a comprehensive redevelopment strategy, as such an unbelievable occasion could not be missed. According to president Percheron, the Euralens association is the “unifying structure” devoted to face the huge challenge: “As with *Euralille* at the TGV [High Speed Train], *Euralens* indicates that we are treating the arrival of the world’s largest museum in this city of 500,000 inhabitants, very seriously”. The objective is clearly to maximize the strengths of the Louvre undertaking, described as “a real chance”. The delineation of a restricted perimeter of 1600 hectares is aimed at enhancing the cultural and urban dynamics, transforming a unique opportunity into a coherent urban master plan. This impressive mobilization can be characterized as a positive spreading effect of the museum foundation process. In this respect, a Bilbao effect is already in motion.

4.4 An Uncertain Contribution to Structural Change and Economic Regeneration

Economic considerations were definitely not central in the choice of host city. Lens was chosen for political reasons—total lack of museums and the desire for recognition of the mining community legacy by the nation. It also exhibited geographical assets: a position at the heart of a densely populated region of 4 million inhabitants close to Paris within the European megalopolis; high quality of rail and highway accessibility; availability, centrality and attractiveness of a site already managed by the municipality. However, the local political figures consider the museum as an opportunity for economic reactivation. Indeed, the decline in employment has been very serious, with a 4.2% annual decrease in manufacturing jobs between 1975 and 2007 (2.5% at the regional level) without adequate compensation by a growth in service employment (+1.9% per year).

Traditionally, the first hopes are placed on the expansion of tourism. For the moment, the tourist density (6.6 beds per km²) is very low compared to the region (32.4 beds) (Lavenseau *et al.*, 2012). Lens-Lievin and Henin-Carvin agglomerations (370,000 inh.) have only 17 hotels, 80% of which are zero to two stars. A second four-star hotel will open just in front of the museum in 2014, but private investors are overwhelmed by the Louvre’s unanticipated success (420,000 visitors in four months). The forecasted visitor numbers are 550,000 per reference year, whereas over 700,000 people are expected in 2013. Some tours will be organized in connection with the most visited historical sites of the Great War “remembrance trails”: Vimy Canadian memorial (250,000 visitors per year) and Notre-Dame-de-Lorette French necropolis (150,000).

The opening of the museum is already transforming the real estate market as Lens begins to attract middle-class persons from the more expensive Lille metro area. New resi-

dential developments have anticipated the arrival of Louvre. Gentrification might be the major effect of the new museum, which would have been excluded earlier due to the poor reputation of Lens as a cultural desert, dominated by a traditional working-class and a high poverty rate. Such a process is constitutive of a Bilbao effect (Vicario & Martinez Monje, 2003; Zimmermann, 2008).

According to the mayor, 250 jobs have been created so far by the museum and a further 500 related jobs. Beyond this, the impact model identifies possible future spillover effects based on the development of creative industries by creating links between players inside and outside the sphere of culture. Lens has initiated projects around digital industries. A “promising cluster putting Lens on the world map of digital skills” is officially expected. Several actors have firmly addressed the economic issue, especially the regional prefecture, the Lens sub-prefect and the *Mission Bassin Minier*. These state services have used their authority and impartiality to put all actors around the table in order to identify the development potential and define strategic guidelines. A growth coalition has thus formed around this goal. The report commissioned by the Nord-Pas-de-Calais *Préfecture* (Goriainoff & Brocq, 2009) is based on benchmarking of comparable projects to highlight the key success factors and propose economic impact assessment models. A further study, implemented under the guidance of the *Lens sous-préfet*, identified five strategic development axes to be transformed in “poles of excellence” connected to the museum: logistics, eco-products for building, sport and leisure and two directly bound to the Louvre-Lens—crafts and digital skills in order to create a cultural digital cluster (Euralens, 2010).

As the museum is just opening, assessing potential economic effects remains uncertain. Surprisingly, recent dynamics are not so bad because the Lens-Hénin area has experienced one of the most favourable productive sphere national growth rates between 2004 and 2006 (Degorre & Delattre, 2011). The area is no longer specialized in manufacturing industries but in delivery, transport and logistics thanks to its exceptional geographical location. Many local plants are subsidiaries of large foreign companies operating essentially in industries which demand little human capital, intensive knowledge and innovative technologies. The objective of developing creative industries appears to be very ambitious due to the present potential. Even within the Euralens perimeter including the neighbouring metro areas (Arras, Douai and Bethune), the identified “top 25 companies” include a very small number of firms working in the fields of art crafts, multimedia industries, computing or more generally digital technologies related to creative industries (Euralens, 2010).

Moreover, as stated by Cooke and Lazzarretti (2008), cultural economy and creative industries have totally distinctive modes of production and institutional bases. A top-down implementation cannot be excluded (Cinti, 2008), but the question of public interventionism remains controversial (Andersson *et al.*, 2011): the “new Mantra” of local creative-economy policies is often doomed to failure, as postulated by Sternberg (2012), because that kind of intervention must be rooted in the local community (Costa, 2008; Lazzarretti & Capone, 2013). As a result, Potts *et al.* (2008) argue for a shift from a top-down compensatory policy to a bottom-up model, while the Louvre-Lens is a typical publicly subsidized sociocultural project located in an entrepreneurship desert: the 2004 business creation rate was only 5.3% in comparison to 8.7% in France (excluding overseas) and the present economic density expressed by the number of firms relative to population is nothing but the lowest in France (24 companies per 1000 inhabitants, more than twice as low as the national average). Involvement in creativity is very limited among

a population which is very remote from the atmosphere identified by Florida and from the creative people profile (Törnqvist, 2011). Given the poor business landscape, using a museum as a catalyst for creative industries as expected by Florida (2004) or Landry (2008) seems very highly unlikely (Lavenseau *et al.*, 2012).

5. Conclusion

Three main conclusions can be drawn. “First”, the Bilbao effect referring to the direct impact of a cultural project on local urban and economic redevelopment was not central in the initial decision-making process, even though it has inspired further economic recovery hopes. The Louvre-Lens was primarily conceived as a tool for a collective social welfare project (Frey, 2011) by a national and regional institution carried by influential leaders. The dominant Louvre-Lens regional–national political root explains several differences with the international–local Guggenheim Bilbao paradigm. “Second”, the poor attractiveness of the city of Lens made the creation of the museum so hazardous that its achievement can only be explained by its multifaceted regional embeddedness, resulting in a cumulative process. The case confirms that cultural projects are more likely to succeed when the initial key players are followed by other stakeholders. The Louvre-Lens has been a catalyst in creating networks and social bridging that would have never happened otherwise. “Third”, even though the Bilbao effect was not the first goal, we conclude that it is both expected and partially evidenced by unprecedented local–global linkages due to the Louvre’s brand attractiveness as well as by the launching of an unexpected culture-based city regeneration process. However, the case study does not totally fit the Bilbao prototype, as shown by the lack of iconic architecture and by economic recovery uncertainties. In any case, a single global art museum landmark can never become a re-activator alone (Plaza, 2008; Plaza & Haarich, 2009).

Finally, what about the tacit regional goal of moving out of the lock-in effect in a political and social system almost entirely geared towards the glorification of a coal-mining heritage? The Louvre establishment intends to introduce a dramatic change by leading people to turn towards the future instead of re-cultivating the memory of a great era that has now passed. According to Florida (2005), museums can open local communities to a greater diversity, be the starting-point of the cross-fertilization of ideas and therefore contribute to the emergence of an innovative urban area. It is unlikely that new creative entrepreneurs will move to Lens, as a Floridian atmosphere is still very distant. Nevertheless, the Louvre will contribute to regional diversity and openness. Here, the goal is less the creation of external branding in order to sell the city to would-be consumers than to build a new internal community, still loyal to its past—unlike entrepreneurialist strategies (Belina & Helms, 2003)—in order to shape a better future (Therkelsen & Halkier, 2011). Transcending the traditional local identity is hoped by the mayor of Lens: “people will get out of mines to appropriate their museum!”.⁶ The expected mental and “cultural revolution” could take place. The Louvre challenge is not to attract more foreign, globalized, educated visitors—which will happen anyway—but to entice the local people. Thanks to free entrance, 7% of the first visitors came from the outskirts and 50% from Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Most of them had never opened the door of a cultural institution except as captive school pupils. Thus, the Louvre is opening up the population to other historical references and cultural backgrounds. This is a decisive first step towards new horizons, through which an official report referring to the Louvre-Lens expects

“moving surreptitiously from tangible heritage towards intangible assets, from the valuation of things towards the production of services and the symbolism of knowledge and the arts” (Benhamou & Thesmar, 2011, p. 10).

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Notes

1. A network originally associating Nord-Pas-de-Calais, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hainaut and West Yorkshire and supported by the European Economic Community (EEC), the European Parliament and the European Council.
2. For an example of this dispute, see <http://www.latribunedelart.com/lettre-de-gerald-vairon-a-propos-du-louvre-a-lens-et-une-reponse-par-didier-rykner-article001750.html> (in French).
3. Municipalities of Lens-Lievin and Henin-Carvin agglomerations, their respective metropolitan councils, Pas-de-Calais *département*, Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council, Lens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Regional Chamber, the Louvre, Lille Metropolitan Council, Louvre-Lens Association, Artois University, *Racing Club de Lens* football club, Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer (SNCF), local transport authorities, stakeholders involved in culture and tourism including the *Musée du Louvre* itself and *Mission Bassin Minier*.
4. <http://projets-architecte-urbanisme.fr/euralens-michel-desvigne-christian-portzamparc/>.
5. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/01/10/travel/2013-places-to-go.html>.
6. <http://www.artmediaagency.com/en/57413/presidential-inauguration-of-the-louvre-lens/>.

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