
Case Studies

The analyses discussed in this work are based on case studies. They will be exposed in this first chapter, presented one after the other, with no pre-established order other than alphabetical.

1.1. Amnéville or the extravagant invention

Amnéville-les-Bains unexpectedly emerged in the middle of the industrial wastelands. Why and how did this happen? And what became of this destination after the death of its creator?

1.1.1. *The opportunistic idea of an entrepreneurial mayor*

The transformation of Amnéville into an innovative tourist area was the result of Jean Kiffer's work. This doctor was the city's mayor from March 1965 to August 11, 2011, for eight successive terms, the last of which was interrupted by his death. He was also a deputy for three terms: member of the RPR (Rally for the Republic), and then the DVD (*Divers Droite*).

After the crisis in the Lorraine steel industry, Jean Kiffer transformed industrial wastelands into tourism and leisure-dedicated areas, obtained a spa resort label in 1987, which enabled him to open a casino. By the time he died, the tourist site had generated 2,000 direct jobs.

Confronted with the decline of local industries, Jean Kiffer became an active promoter of lucrative leisure activities and contented himself with bringing jobs and economic stability to the city's inhabitants.

For a color version of all of the figures in this chapter, see www.iste.co.uk/louart/touristdestinations.zip.

Until the 2000s, Jean Kiffer benefited from a period during which the authorities were not too meticulous as to the methods used, and where certain regulatory or administrative privileges were accepted in exchange for positive socio-economic effects. From an industrial point of view, the region was in so much decline that, despite sounding too adventurous, the options encouraged at the moment ended up proving profitable, as they contributed to the economic momentum and generated profits.

A century later, Jean Kiffer could still illustrate Fayol's theories on the business manager (Hatchuel 2019). Contrary to what has been said in reductionist analyses, Fayol did not aim to exalt the manager's "temperament", nor to highlight the art of giving orders or being obeyed.

He assigned himself complex and surprising missions for his time, such as stimulating a permanent and indefinite improvement of the activities he was responsible for, and acting as a political leader (*sic*), attentive to giving substance to the social body of his company (Hatchuel 2019, p. 95).

In this perspective, Fayol strove to combine "the general and the private interest" (*ibid.*, p. 96). To be engaging, he emphasized the need for a "general action program", which could be the subject of directives when the future was predictable, but could become "an adventure, when the unknown was major" (*ibid.*, p. 102). Finally, when Fayol spoke of foresight, he implied "protecting oneself against known dangers and guaranteeing the regeneration of forces for unknown future battles", which required "mutual aid, solidarity and social justice" (*ibid.*, p. 103).

In the case of Kiffer, the tyranny of an authoritarian and proactive project manager was reinforced by the pressing need to regenerate the territory. Confronted with unimaginative bureaucrats, he took pleasure in showing that we could actually change the context and invent a different type of economy, based on tourism and leisure. He transformed the a priori depressing image of a city deemed as devastated. In doing so, he relaunched works and modified the city's image to mirror his own views. He even built a second city, juxtaposed to the first, over former mining sites.

In order to achieve the results described hereafter, Jean Kiffer managed to elicit the residents' trust (who made the most from financial benefits) and national support (through his political affiliation, relationships and accumulated experience as an elected official). He acted in phases: a gradual start, followed by a massive deployment when greater resources arrived, and a continuation of activities against all odds – even when difficulties began to accumulate – until his sudden death in 2011.

Jean Kiffer designed his leisure city as a global product obeying a traditional management life cycle (preliminary tests, then a leap forward and seizing favorable

circumstances, and finally the management of a maturity phase, followed by the renewal of needs in the face of a more difficult context or new competition).

At the economic level, Amnéville was built as a conglomeration of activities¹, accompanied by the strengths and weaknesses of this type of model. On the strengths side, this model makes it possible to draw in an audience with diverse needs, means or interests, who can choose from a variety of attractions. As far as weaknesses are concerned, it is difficult to excel in every aspect. Insofar as quality facilities compete with those in bigger cities (e.g. in Metz, Luxembourg, at Center Parcs), there may be a leak in visitor engagement, except among those who prefer the proximity of “everything on spot”. Besides, in a more demanding and strictly controlled economic system, business models may prove less profitable.

However, let us focus once again on Kiffer’s initial intuition, fostering leisure and tourism to reinvent the local economy. At a deeper level, he was one of the pioneers in territorial decolonization (at a time when Parisian centralism was even more significant than nowadays). Throughout his life, he strove to reveal the innovation potential of territories, as well as their ability to become independent.

By the time of Kiffer’s death, Amnéville had 10,000 inhabitants (compared to 8,000 during his first mandate), which translates the unforeseen development of a town having experienced the end of the steel industry.

1.1.2. The rise of a popular park with multiple attractions

After the German annexation of 1871, and until 1918, Amnéville was known as Stahlheim (the city of steel). Workers’ towns were built near steel factories. At the beginning of the 20th century, the town had less than 5,000 inhabitants. It should have experienced its deindustrialization like the rest of Lorraine. From the moment he was appointed (1965), Doctor Kiffer began developing common public facilities (for sports, youth and the elderly). It was during his second mandate (from 1971) that he decided to transform the landscape into a City of Leisure, by combining public facilities and private creations, to match the opportunities that arose. In the 1980s, growth was rapid, Kiffer was in a hurry. As soon as revenue was generated, he invested in new projects.

From the outset, Kiffer acted as a visionary and created large facilities to attract a large audience. Since attendance was still low at the time, he could satisfy the demand and make the place more enticing.

¹ This is not the Puy du Fou model, also deployed from a centralizing pilot, but primarily based on the same expertise shown elsewhere (the art of putting myths and history fragments on display). The reader may refer to the 2021 special issue of *Point* on Puy du Fou (“a culture of challenge and commitment”), coordinated by Catherine Golliau.

The acceleration of the trend began with the exploitation (in 1986), of ferruginous water at 41°C, known for treating rheumatologic and respiratory conditions. This made it possible to invent the concept of “Amnéville-les-Thermes” and, three years later, to install a casino, which in turn became a source of income and investment for new activities.

Keeping his composure, Kiffer aimed to turn Amnéville into the leading thermal center in France (by democratizing access to this type of care). Besides the spa center, mainly attended by rather elderly people (Saint Eloy, 1986), a fitness area for all audiences was created (Thermapolis, 1996); and, seven years later (2003), a luxurious establishment for wealthier clients (Villa Pompeii).



Figure 1.1. *Villa Pompeii, the last balneotherapy establishment built in Amnéville in 2013. Picture by Jérôme Piriou, 2019*

In the meantime, a zoo was established in the neighboring town of Hagondange (1986), but was called “Amnéville Zoo”, which helped to broaden the site’s potential centers of interest. In 1987, a tourist office (*syndicat d’initiative*) was opened.

Now, let us discuss the issue of the casino (currently owned by the Georges Tranchant Group). Its installation (1989) was made possible thanks to the existence of the thermal baths. In 1988, Charles Pasqua (at the time, Minister of the Interior and an acquaintance of Kiffer) issued an authorization to equip casinos with slot machines (“one-armed bandits”). This made them accessible to a popular clientele

and made them highly profitable², by providing considerable *royalties* to the cities having them on their territory³. Amnéville benefited from an abundant source of income, which made it possible to invest in new projects (double extension of the thermal baths, *Galaxie* performance hall, cinemas, museums, sports activities, and an indoor ski slope).

As to the scope of the supply, the facilities are large everywhere.

The thermal facilities (Saint-Eloy, Thermapolis, Villa Pompeii) occupy three sites with varying functions and which cater to different audiences, accommodating not only spa guests, but also users seeking relaxation and curious day-visitors. In 2017, there were over 600,000 visitors, including nearly 16,000 subsidized curists for an 18-day period (8th rank among 110 French thermal establishments).

The Seven Casino has 350 slot machines and gaming tables, the fourth largest in France.

There are numerous sports facilities (multi-activity park, lake, golf course, swimming pool, ice rink, and treetop adventure course). The Snowhall is the only indoor ski slope in France (200,000 visitors annually, or a quarter of the skiers in the Vosges massif).

The *Galaxie* performance hall has 12,000 seats, hosting important stars and shows. There is also a multiplex cinema, managed by Gaumont, with 12 screens.

In total, the activity list spans 70 possibilities (from miniature golf to the aquarium, from summer tobogganing to pedal boats on the lake). The promotional brochure claims real pride in having created a tourist resort in the middle of nature, “over former steel slag heaps”.

It is nonetheless difficult to determine what the 6 million visitors announced annually correspond to (most of them being counted on several facilities, or several

2 “Representing 83% of the gross gaming revenue, the 10,684 slot machines installed exclusively in 137 of the 154 French casinos transformed this type of leisure in seven years. When their operation was authorized, they generated 1 billion francs in earnings every year for traditional games alone, a panorama which had been declining since the mid-1970s. However, slot machines (actual piggy banks programmed to retain up to 15% of the sums played), have made casinos earn no less than 1 billion additional francs every year [...]. Such a financial upheaval did not occur without a profound change in the game culture”. Formerly reserved for high society, “casinos now homogeneously welcome all socio-professional categories”, Mr. Castaing, *Le Monde*, February 13, 1990.

3 Casinos must return a significant portion of their profits to host communities.

activities). The length of stay on the site is also unknown, as there are several types of accommodation (approximately 15 restaurants, 13 hotels, *bungalow* rental units, etc.).

Behind the concept of Amnéville, there is the desire to offer sensations, the pleasure or relaxation (health restoration), at a reasonable price, for a population with limited resources. At the same time, visitors have the ease of trying a bit of everything and, if necessary, making their choice on site, depending on the moment's desires.



Figure 1.2. *Leisure activities within walking distance. Picture by Jérôme Piriou, 2019*

We may ski one morning, see the zoo in the afternoon and, why not, spend the following day at the thermal baths. Or, within the same family, each member may follow their distinct pleasure. While it is true that we may jump from one place to another, this option is not cheap since everything is immense and spectacular. Personal or seasonal events can also be organized (family gatherings and cousin fests, Valentine's Day, Halloween, etc.).

Admittedly, there is a bit of patchwork, and everything is not clean or perfect. However, who could say such about a city, even a prestigious one? In Germany, Europa Park, one of the most visited parks in Europe, also offers atmospheres of all kinds, which are both evocative and kitsch, with sporting options for all tastes, and an abundance of places to stay, eat or drink.

1.1.3. Excesses or shortages with serious long-term consequences

Dr. Kiffer was authoritarian. He was driven by a healthy kind of rage, trying to make Amnéville escape its reputation as an ominous town ("Longwy perhaps, but

not us”). Despite his excesses, he had a great capacity for recovery, which earned him the support of the city’s inhabitants. After all, he had good ideas, projects, an ability to publicize the city’s attractiveness and to invent opportunities for people to come or stay there.

As C. Rollot has shown⁴, thermal opportunities span a wide variety, from the ordinary cure to the aquatic circuits, from light therapy to the fitness space, from cryotherapy to massage mattresses. Most importantly, the mayor welcomed the new residents, and helped them to get settled and find jobs. By 2018, “eighty percent of the four hundred and sixty-five employees at the thermal establishments came from Amnéville or the neighboring communities”⁵.

However, the mayor’s imperious grip – until then an apparent source of speed and efficiency – brought about three disadvantages. Although he was able to promptly sweep them away during the period of strong growth, their effects would be felt afterwards, since the beginning of the 2000s; and even more so, after his death in 2011.

1.1.3.1. *The headlong rush (financial risks and the undermining of bureaucratic constraints)*

Jean Kiffer’s art came down to acting quickly, by associating his establishments with an alluring commercial logic and an innovative concept of popular tourism. As shown in a newspaper cutting from the 1990s⁶, he went to great lengths to find new customers.

4 C. Rollot, *Le Monde*, July 5, 2018, *Amnéville-les-Thermes, du bassin sidérurgique aux bassins aquatiques*.

5 C. Rollot, *Le Monde*, July 5, 2018.

6 “Actually, everything happened very quickly after the detection of a ‘miraculous spring’, Saint-Eloy, which had been flowing there since the dawn of time and whose virtues no one really knew, before the experts revealed its properties for treating rheumatism and certain respiratory conditions. The water table was found at a depth of 900 meters (first drilling in 1979) and the thermal center could open its doors in June 1986 [...]. Its success was immediate at the local level. Amnéville established itself as the first spa resort in Lorraine, ahead of, in order, famous spa towns as Vittel, Plombières-les-Bains and Contrexéville. Doctor Kiffer had the genius idea of creating ‘a local spa’ by setting up minibus shuttles, up to 50 kilometers around – that is to say, reaching Luxembourg and West German borders – in a region where silicosis is widespread. At the same time, three hotel-restaurants were built, including one by former steelworkers who invested their severance pay and a block of furnished studios and apartments to accommodate the elderly, in particular”. Not only did visitors come for treatment, but also to relax. “Alongside sports facilities, leisure places of all kinds sprouted like mushrooms”.

Meeting no real opposition at home (there was no opposition list in his last municipal elections), Kiffer always claimed to have overcome challenges (making the most from opportunities) and often amused himself by “confronting the administration with the *fait accompli*”. According to his closest acquaintances, “he embodied the local law”. He was not afraid of offending his colleagues from neighboring towns, having an extensive and flexible conception of the territory. The advantage, for him, was to move at full speed, even though there was a risk of a headlong rush.

To move forward, Kiffer used professional taxes: while Unimétal, the first French factory for long products (cast iron sector), paid a little over 20 million francs in taxes per year, in 1989, the casino became the second largest taxpayer in Amnéville, paying nearly 10 million francs annually. In Kiffer’s words, this made room for a kind of “municipal capitalism”. In this spirit, with far-fetched dreams, he acted by mixing public resources with paternalistic private management.

This led to a meta-organization⁷ logic, where politics became involved in all aspects, playing on the snowball effect of the process. Commercial success brought in money and optimized accounts, especially thanks to abundant tax revenues. In this conglomeration of opportunities, there was no need to excel in all aspects, because competition was still weak and the appeal to popular audiences was innovative. It was a good illustration, before its time, of the Blue Ocean Strategy⁸ (according to which we should compete in blue oceans, devoid of intense competition).

In this situation, the mayor played a key role and kept a tight grip on every issue surrounding him, playing on several tables at the same time. Opportunistic, economically shrewd, unconventional, Kiffer used and abused his territorial sovereignty, until his borderline “arrangements” were finally called into question. For him, obeying stringent laws came down to breaking the dynamism he had been able to establish.

Kiffer’s point of view could be understood. Many public rules are restrictive and in conflict with the creative opportunities of entrepreneurship, which require acting quickly or confronting competition. Regulation may undermine creation (“in France,

7 This notion has been well conceptualized by various authors in organization theory, in particular by A. Goran and N. Brunsson. A summary of their analysis was produced by H. Dumez (*Annales des mines, Gérer et comprendre*, 2009, 95, p. 77–78). The reader may also refer to an article by V. Leys and P. Joffre, *Méta-organisations et évolution des pratiques managériales*, *RFG*, 214–4(241), 121–134.

8 W. Cham Kim, R. Mauborgne, 2009.

the administrative time for creating or managing economic activities doubles that of Germany, and triples that of the United Kingdom”⁹).

However, in the case of Kiffer, this resulted in a sort of administrative cavalry, camouflaging the fact that certain operations had bypassed the legal framework and could lead to administrative, commercial or even criminal disputes. He ignored respect for certain rules, hoping for a logical *fait accompli*, given the difficulty of turning back the clock.

Over time, the mayors from surrounding districts gained further power, the administration woke up, and greater demands challenged cookie-cutter solutions. The requests for adjustments followed one another.

Kiffer was condemned on several occasions by the courts and indicted by the Court of Auditors for his management of Amnéville. As his anger increased, shortly before his death, he wanted to rename the city by its German name, declaring it “the virtual Principality of Stahlheim” (resistant as steel). “The Republic, which has only harmed us, the Republic that we never needed. The Republic, I leave it aside”¹⁰.

At the same time, territorial benchmarks were changing. The relevant environment was expanding, Metz had awakened (thanks to the Pompidou Center inaugurated in 2010), Luxembourg was developing its competition and parallel attractions were being organized, in the same region, for other audiences.

1.1.3.2. *The nepotistic management of activities*

Jean Kiffer, a centralizer and a despot, surrounded himself with loyal people and whom he promoted in the structures he created or developed, except in the autonomous establishments which he included in his territorial space (namely, the zoo and the casino). He always had a preference for commitment (affiliation) over technicality or managerial competence, judging that he could manage with the necessary expertise on his own.

This nepotistic distribution of responsibilities had two disadvantages. While it is true that the employees who owed their position to Kiffer (due to family, emotional or political reasons) were grateful to him, they kept their jobs regardless of their actual results, without necessarily seeking operational improvement or financial optimization. They did not always have the required managerial qualities. Furthermore, they were “merely following orders” and had little means to challenge certain hierarchical choices, even in case of objection.

9 Comments made in 2018 by a manager who owns companies in the three countries.

10 This was the theme of his last greeting speech to the population of Amnéville, in January 2011.

1.1.3.3. *The creation of an amalgam, with juxtapositions lacking synergy*

Overall, the tourist town of Amnéville had become a sort of amalgam (in the sense of an alloy, a mixture, a combination of opportunities). While in some respects it worked properly – by creating a set of mixed interactions – in others, it gave the impression of being a heterogeneous and mismatched system, made up of bits and pieces.

This is not necessarily a problem for a tourist destination, since the same place can attract various kinds of people, tackling different itineraries, provided that these surroundings do not repel one another. In this case, the mix was rather favorable, since the supply was aimed at rather popular audiences, even though Amnéville offered a range of more selective activities.

Even though the tourist supply seemed insufficiently coordinated – due to its gradual expansion following opportunistic developments – it adapted quite well to contradictory or complex tourist expectations (depending on the people or groups, as well as at the individual level).

After all, amalgamation is the business model of city centers. It must be varied, there must be something appealing to all tastes, but with a minimum of homogeneity in relation to criteria such as the people's *habitus*, their social marking, etc. There may be preliminary neighborhood choices, although this is debatable.

However, there are two potential drawbacks which should have been taken into account:

- The absence of real synergy: by juxtaposing attractions, we do not necessarily optimize their complementarity.

- The lack of quality in part of the supply: in a conglomerate logic, we may lack expertise, or even leave some activities unsupervised, with any problems arising in terms of production or marketing. For example, this is what came upon *Galaxie* (poorly chosen schedule) or the zoological park (erratic management), with further repulsive effects for the audience (poor equipment maintenance, animal mistreatment, non-respect of their remains, expensive shows without a good return on investment). We also risk losing customers to competition whose supply is more technical or more qualified.

This quality competition appeared after the beginning of the 2000s.

For example, the supply at the thermal area of Mondorf-les-Bains was enriched (set on the France–Luxembourg border, just 36 km and 35 minutes away). It is the only spa center in Luxembourg, with a stylish park filled with works of art, art

nouveau houses and a casino. The city of Metz strengthened its cultural policy through the development of its downtown area, the enhancement of its cathedral and the relocation of the Beaubourg National Center for Art and Culture; also, a neighboring Center Parcs is almost physically attached to the city. Although there is a factual market segmentation, Amnéville, Metz and Mondorf-les-Bains do not cater to the same audiences. Then, the question arises: Can a leisure city be exclusively in the low end of the supply? The creation of Villa Pompeii revealed an opposite desire.

1.1.4. Three challenges for the future: cleaning up the accounts, expanding audiences, optimizing the supply

When the creator of Amnéville City of Leisure died, the new scenario was challenging: increased competition, a conglomeration of establishments difficult to manage, tactical errors on the part of certain actors, financial problems, increased administrative requirements, and less invested appointed officials who sought to protect themselves rather than to act on the margins of legality.

The visitors were still there, their numbers satisfactory, but behind the scenes was a different reality.

Succeeding Kiffer as mayor, Doris Belloni (former deputy mayor) was not easily elected at the end of 2011. Everyone knew there were adjustments to be made. She promised an audit of municipal finances and pledged to “protect the city to the best interest of its residents”. It was evident she tried to free herself from old habits, all the while paying homage to “the one thanks to whom she was there today”.

Belloni’s management was tumultuous and did not resolve any internal problems. Rather, she worsened them. For example, she harbored strong hostility against the director of the *Galaxie* and created tensions with other equipment managers. However, she had enough time to create a public company (SPL, *société publique locale*) to manage leisure facilities and infrastructure dependent on the city, seeking to better separate municipal activities from establishment management. Now renamed “Destination Amnéville”, the structure also housed the tourist office and its staff.

In 2014, Éric Munier succeeded Belloni, winning against her in the municipal elections. He renewed his function for six years in 2020. The man was a lawyer at the Thionville bar. After measuring the internal tensions between structures and management (as well as the city’s financial problems), he chose the slogan “to calm down, to clean up and restart”. After being appointed to his office, he declared: “legal knowledge is essential in a lot of discussions [...]. I am not here to make

myself rich, I am not looking for income or a springboard for a career [...]. The main goal is to keep investment projects despite a poor cash flow". He clearly focused on the real town and its inhabitants, without reducing the destiny of Amnéville to its tourist activities. "Management will have to be done reasonably. We are recovering from a situation where finances are the black spot. Before embarking on new projects, we will first have to clean up".

Regarding the transition between Kiffer and his successor, Munier made a harsh observation:

the Kiffer era ended with his death. The transition with his deputy mayor did not work. We need to change our vision [...], to abandon disputes, find the solutions adapted to the expectations of the municipality and the requirements of each tourist structure. All my interlocutors are open people, determined to emerge from a crisis, engaged to Amnéville, eager to work towards a reset with clarity and confidence.

In fact, some establishments had financial problems (for example, the Snowhall), management difficulties or requested help for their renovation¹¹.

The authors of this work visited Amnéville for three days in August 2019. They met around 10 managers on site, as well as other actors in Metz and the *Center Parcs des Trois Forêts*. The scenarios were contrasting, rather favorable for the thermal establishments and the casino, complicated for the *Galaxie*, and difficult at the zoo, despite the large number of visitors. We could feel the nostalgia of a bygone great era and the hope for a city's revival. However, there was no entrepreneurial energy on the part of the town hall, nor, for that matter, any commercial or marketing initiatives. The focus was rather placed on general management, infrastructure (if necessary) and control, with the desire not to deviate from a conventional administrative framework.

At the end of 2020, with the Covid-19 crisis, the first layoffs arrived. The public company parted ways with a third of the tourist office's staff, at a time when it would undoubtedly have been more appropriate to relaunch marketing projects.

Contrary to Jean Kiffer's habits, the new mayor invoked management separation in relation to other threats weighing on the thermal center, as well as on a portion of the 2,500 employees working at the City of Leisure: "employers are the associations or structures that manage jobs [...]. I can only deplore the fact that there are layoffs".

¹¹ Six years later (2020), once the Covid-19 crisis was over, the goals were the same, revealing that the situation was still challenging: "we must continue the work started: governance of the Galaxie, the work at the thermal center, the relabeling of the thermal and tourist site... We must continue to clean up the city's finances, which are always very delicate".

For its part, the zoo was taken over by an investment company. The latter replaced the historic director with someone who was supposed to turn things around and innovate. This person did not stay for long, though. Another replacement came in 2021, by a graduate promoting ordinary projects, imitating what large zoos do, without seeking to build a truly unprecedented initiative.

Following pressure to dismiss staff, the director of the thermal establishment resigned and slammed the door. The head of the *Galaxie* was invited to dismiss.

Nowadays, a large portion of the Kiffer system has been disassembled and resold to interested buyers. Among them, we can fear there will be predators (e.g. investment funds primarily concerned with financial profitability), or systems with conventional productive efficiency, which copy what already exists without seeking to be original.

The historic conglomerate may evolve towards another type of modality: a constellation of structures with their own decision power, which will require a minimum of overall coherence to ensure the destination's attractiveness, knowing that the internal itineraries and uses can diversify, depending on the visitors.

The aim of social paternalism will fade. It is not certain that the facilities are still dedicated to supplying jobs to the city's residents.

The purchasing operators each have expertise in their own type of activity, but with standardized management models. The role of "Destination Amnéville" could be reduced to infrastructure management, global communication and territorial development, provided that it generates clever and strong communication (which is not the case at present). Otherwise, the "spirit of the place" could be lost.

Service initiatives are also a source of worry. For example, the zoo is developing playing areas, improving its catering proposals, and bringing its shows in line with the times (bird scenography, as in many other recognized zoos). If Kiffer had lived, he would have made arrangements with Chinese entrepreneurs to have the pair of pandas before everyone else, including Beauval!

Today, Amnéville's pioneering period is over. At the town hall, it is the lawyer's language that predominates. All things considered, do we still have the energy to take action?

On the Municipality of Amnéville website, we can only see images of the town hall. As to the City of Leisure, there is only a summary description of the major attractions, without carrying much momentum:

Built over former slag heaps, a vestige of the steel industry, its tourist and thermal site, dedicated to well-being and relaxation, combines a variety of choices at the same place: water (with a thermal center and an Olympic swimming pool), snow (with the Snowhall, a unique indoor ski slope in France), nature (with a magnificent golf course and one of the most beautiful zoos in Europe), gaming and music (with a casino and a performance hall, the second largest in France). In addition to a wide range of activities, the thermal and tourist site offers outstanding catering and accommodation.

1.2. Center Parcs: a system driven by a large company

Center Parcs is a particular type of localized tourism system (LTS), built around an establishment depending on a powerful group. This company's head office is based in the Netherlands and belongs to the Pierre&Vacances Group, founded by Gérard Brémont in 1967. The latter imported the principle of vacation residences into France, that is, a set of residences (at least 100, according to French regulations) intended for tourist rental. The modality is as follows: first, the group undertakes a real estate development operation, builds the residences, then sells them to investors and finally facilitates them for rental management. Owners are individuals or companies who benefit from a tax reduction equal to VAT, provided that they agree to rent the residence for a period of nine years. At the end of the contract, a new period can be initiated.

1.2.1. Brand history

The principle of a resort¹² located in the countryside and close to a metropolitan area is older than the French model. This concept was gradually perfected. Center Parcs was founded in 1968 in the Netherlands. The initial idea was to offer the Dutch a formula combining comfort and relaxation close to large cities. Innovation was introduced by Piet Derksen, who had previously founded a chain of sporting goods stores, Sporthuis Centrum, whose first shop opened in Rotterdam in 1953. At the very beginning, he sold tents. Given their success, he then invented a bungalow formula which he deployed at a first campsite acquired in 1966, in Reuver (the Dutch Limburg). He designed it "with incredible luxury [...] for the time: sanitary building with saunas, main building with restaurant, dance room, TV room,

12 A resort is an enclosed tourist place managed by an operator who offers customers a global response to their needs, including accommodation, catering and leisure activities.

swimming pool with paddling pool, playground and supermarket...”¹³. In 1967, the entrepreneur moved onto permanent houses arranged in such a way as to limit the views. In 1975, five parks were installed. In 1980, he innovated once again with the creation of a new park, financed by the sale of the Sporthuis Centrum, within which the first tropical aquatic paradise was created amidst 600 bungalows in Eemhof in South Flevoland. In 1981, the group established itself in Belgium in Erperheide, then in De Vossemere in 1987. The same year, he established a foothold in England at Sherwood Forest and in France at Bois Francs, in Normandy. Meanwhile, in 1985, the brand became Center Parcs.

The company was acquired¹⁴ in 1989 by a Scottish brewing group Scottish & Newcastle, looking for an opportunity to diversify in a sector of consumption of its products. The smaller parks were closed, as the group established itself in Germany at Bispinger Heide in 1995, and the tropical paradise was renamed as Aqua Mundo. Then, in 2001, the continental residences joined the Pierre&Vacances group. In 2015, the six establishments set up in the United Kingdom fell under the group “Center Parcs UK”, owned by the American company Brookfield Property Partners (Wikipedia, accessed on March 3, 2020).

The year 2022 was marked by an in-depth restructuring. The founder Gérard Brémont had to hand over the reins, while new shareholders entered the capital: “the British investment funds Fidera and Alcentra (approximately 20% and 25% each) become the new owners, associated with the French real estate asset manager Astream, which played a more industrial role”. The triple principle of real estate development, sales to individuals and rental management, which made the group’s fortune, had been shelved. In 2017, the allure of the proposal was undermined as the tax advantage granted to investors who rented their property for a period of nine years came to an end. Then, the pandemic also produced devastating effects. A total of 27 parks are part of Center Parcs Europe, a subsidiary of the Pierre&Vacances-Center Parcs group: seven are located in France (one unit opened in 2021), five in Belgium, six in Germany and nine in the Netherlands.

1.2.2. The proposal

Each resort comprises a set of residences located in a wooded park around a vast building, Aqua Mundo, which, in addition to an aquatic complex maintained at a temperature of 29°C and made of wave pools, houses a “wild river”, slides and

13 “50 years of innovative holidays. Center Parcs together, for real”, Irene Van der Linden, Robin Stam and Michel Haans, Krikke Special Books, in *Opdracht van Center Parcs Europe NV*, 2017.

14 Piet Derksen died in 1996.

various other elements (such as the “water tree”, fun activities, restaurants and shops, particularly local products). It is a type of above-ground tourist location (MIT team 2005) in the sense that it offers a seaside and a tropical type of proposal close to the urban areas of north-western Europe, while sparing the constraints and fatigue of access.

The principle is to offer stays combining accommodation and access to partly integrated leisure activities less than two hours’ drive from the metropolises of north-western Europe. Catering and other leisure activities are subject to an additional charge. The formula is attractive and benefits from a high fill rate. Center Parcs constitutes the flagship of the Pierre&Vacances group¹⁵.

This assertion has been contested. Several projects are currently blocked or have been abandoned in France, such as in Roybon in Isère. The dispute mainly relates to environmental damage, because the company seeks wooded and relatively hilly areas for its locations. However, the creation of direct and indirect jobs constitutes a response to the desertification of the countryside. While the proposal attracts city dwellers who do not spontaneously move from the daily universe and urban work to discover a bucolic environment, the leisure proposals are not always attractive. Marc Augé (1997) has emphasized their artificial dimension, as compared to the “real” countryside. Although temporalities are different, the latter can be considered a social production, in that the resorts meet a real need.

The principle of clubs, implemented here, was invented in England by a stall holder, Jérémy Butlin, who tried to respond to the desperate wandering of tourists who stayed at a bed and breakfast, and were kicked out at 10 a.m. First, he provided facilities to accommodate physical activities and to promote sociability among individuals. It was a failure. He then supplemented his proposal with the presence of facilitators, responsible for encouraging idle city dwellers to become active. This innovation, in turn, was successful. In fact, for individuals to transition from the hierarchical and time-measured world of work (see Elias and Dunning (1995) and their reflection on routines), to long-term free time spent at a place that may very well be pleasant but unknown, is not obvious and requires mediation. The desire for the countryside, associated with calm and rest, comes up against the risk of idleness and boredom. A comprehensive response to tourist needs, the company offers accommodation and leisure activities to a population lacking the dispositions and skills (Guibert 2016) required to satisfactorily experience *deroutinization* (Elias and Dunning 1995) in the countryside.

The dispute also seems to be anchored in the illusion of a perfect world, without any effects on the environment. Of course, the resort involves a transformation and

15 Clement Guillou, *Le Monde*, March 10, 2022.

an occupation of the space, but therein lies the very principle of a production establishment. In addition, it is a coherent response to the need to escape routine, and this, within a short distance from Western Europe major cities. While proximity is considered as a virtue (in response to the environmental damage caused by transport, particularly air transport), this is not perceived in the case of Center Parcs.

1.2.3. *The Center Parcs actor system*

Center Parcs is an actor system characterized by a main company that builds subcontracting-type relationships according to two main methods. On the one hand, the group establishes bonds which are managed at the central level and shared by all establishments. For its part, restoration is given in concession to the Areas company, a former subsidiary of the Elios group which became independent after being sold to a pension fund, PAI Partners. It specializes in *retail travel*, the implementation of catering solutions that target mobile populations. It is therefore present in airports, train stations or motorway areas. It sets up points of sale in these sites and establishments that are franchises of different brands such as McDonald's, Brioche Dorée, Exki or Paul. Areas claims 150 brands. The choice for each "flow location" is made depending on the characteristics of the demand.

On the other hand, relationships are established with local companies, chosen by the local management of each Center Parcs. For instance, markets for local products are established through partnerships established on site. In Hattigny, in Moselle, it was the farmers who asked the management to be integrated.

Apart from this, there is a third method, less controlled by the company manager. Derived from the tourist inflow of each establishment, it is based on the secondary mobility of individuals who circulate from the resorts and undertake excursions in an area estimated at a 45-minute travel radio. For the *Bois aux Daims* branch, located in Vienne, the share of visitors exploring the surrounding area is estimated at 27%. About half had planned these outings before coming, while the other half designed the project once there. Non-residents tend to go out more. This is also the case for the wealthiest visitors and those choosing the longest stays. At *Bois aux Daims*, the department struggles to retain Center Parcs customers, apart from those in Futuroscope. There, Center Parcs is the most visited place (32% of respondents), ahead of Saumur (Maine-et-Loire, 24%), Chinon (Indre-et-Loire, 12%), the Fontevraud Abbey (Maine-et-Loire, also 12%) and Puy du Fou (Vendée, 11%), which are positioned far ahead of Poitiers (6%) or the *Vallée des Singes* in Romagné (5%). However, beyond the visits, excursions outside the park generate benefits in catering (for 46% of households out) and businesses.



Figure 1.3. Communication from the Center Parcs company at “Bois aux Daims”, which affected both the activities offered within the resort and the establishments and places located in the surrounding area (source: website, screen capture from July 22, 2022)

As each tourist establishment is negotiated with legitimate actors, territorial imposition strategies are given free rein. In Vienne, at the Center Parcs known as “Bois aux Daims”, even the local products distributed on site are sponsored by “Futuroscope”.

The establishment of a group unit represents a significant volume of overnight stays (1 million for “Bois aux Daims”, based on an average length of stay of 4.5 nights for 125,000 customers). This naturally boosts departmental tourism. For example, the economic benefits for Vienne were estimated at 4.5 million euros in 2017. Despite the efforts made to encourage individuals to circulate primarily in Vienne, the phenomenon also affects bordering territories, because boundaries are porous.

On September 16, 2022, the group, in difficulty, was recapitalized. It came under the control of three funds (25.4% for Alcentra, 24.2% for Fidera, 8.8% for Pastel Holding), to which creditors were added for 11.9%. However, Center Parcs is considered the firm’s jewel.

1.3. Cognac: spirits giant, tourist dwarf

Cognac is an eau-de-vie and commonly referred to as a spirit. Its production is based on wine and is elaborated by distillation. Blending and aging are ensured at a vineyard of the same name, in the south-west of France, north of Bordeaux. Wine culture on the banks of the Charente dates to the 11th and 12th centuries when monks developed land plots, called “brandes”. Wine production was exported by barges, flat-bottomed boats which also transported salt to Rochefort, where the barrels were unloaded before reaching ports in Northern Europe. Altered by the sea voyage, the wine was then distilled by the Dutch in order to be made drinkable under the name of *brandy*, derived from *bandwijn*, which means undertow. However, its reputation was ensured by the British merchants who created several specialized houses in the small town of Charentes (Girard 2016): notably John Martell in 1715, James Hennessy in 1765 and the Scottish baron James O’Tard, whose grandson co-founded the Baron Otard house in 1795 (Coussié 2011).

1.3.1. A product with a strong international reputation

In 2012, 168.5 million bottles of cognac were sold, generating a turnover of 2.381 billion euros. That same year, cognac was the *leader* of French exports in the wine and spirits sector. Moreover, cognac is almost entirely sold abroad, with 97% of exports. This high rate can be explained by the history of cognac. The founders of the trading houses not only turned towards the international market in the 19th century but have also done so more recently. Since the beginning of the 21st century, these houses have sought to ensure growth on several international markets and to regulate production, following the crisis experienced at the end of the 1990s when the “uncertainties of world trade and political contentions hindered its [the cognac’s] development” (Bernard 1996). In 2012, the cognac industry recovered from this crisis. A 3.1% increase in sales (as compared to 2011) brought about a 16% additional revenue. However, a wine region does not automatically become touristy.

On the contrary, in comparison with this product’s global notoriety and the dizzying economic figures of the spirits industry, the tourist activity in the town and at the Cognac vineyard is far more modest. In 2013, the average length of a stay in the town of Cognac was only a day and a half, with the tourist office only receiving 40,000 visitors. This figure is far lower than the attendance at the Bordeaux tourist office, which recorded just over 842,000 visitors the same year. One of the explanations stems from the fact that the town of Cognac has a limited hotel supply intra-muros (351 rooms for 10 hotels on January 1, 2020) and an atomized offer of guest rooms and lodgings within the vineyard. However, hotels are not the driving

force of tourism, but rather the general visits, which in turn induces investment in accommodation.

In fact, during an interview, an institutional tourism actor stated that “people don’t know that there is a vineyard in Cognac. I don’t know how they think cognac is made, but not with wine or vines in any case, they don’t know that Cognac is a town, they see the product without knowing that it’s a vineyard”. On the one hand, multiple operators are involved in enhancing the vineyard’s value by proposing enotourism, or spirits tourism. On the other hand, the vineyard actors are engaged in a process promoting tangible and intangible heritage. However, within this territory, the economic power and reputation of the large cognac houses occupy a considerable place, sometimes shadowing the tourism development actions undertaken by institutional actors.

1.3.2. *An existing tourist activity*



Figure 1.4. *Circuit departure point for visiting a trading house by boat in Cognac. Picture by Jérôme Piriou, 2013*

Strictly speaking, trading houses receive visitors without intervention from institutional tourism actors. According to the Poitou-Charentes Regional Tourism Committee, trading houses welcomed 55,966 visitors in 2012.

The intervention of multiple actors in enotourism even led the president of the tourist office, also vice-president of the French National Inter-professions' Bureau for the Cognac appellation (BNIC, *Bureau national de l'interprofession du cognac*), to declare in April 2014, during a conference for the representatives of the Charente tourism sector: "there is a strong need to connect the economic players in the region".

1.3.2.1. *Over half a century of public reception*

The main visit to Cognac is to the large trading houses. Six circuits exist in Cognac and one in Jarnac. These circuits are all designed following the same schedule. The first part is devoted to the presentation of wines and soils. The second part focuses on barrel-making and their export by barge. A final phase is dedicated to cognac distillation, a task during which the cellar master plays a key role. For some actors, the storytelling of this phase heavily relies on folkloric elements: as an institutional actor from Cognac suggestively stated: "there is a permanent flirt between the brand's history and the legend". The Baron Otard company, located in the royal castle of Cognac, claims to be responsible for the first opening to the public in 1963: "the intention was to promote the local know-how and to show pride in what the region was capable of doing at the time". Originally, the development of visiting tours was open to customers, "then little by little the [cognac] houses opened up, because there was a demand, and they offered visiting tours with increasingly wider ranges". However, the activity was not profitable, as its primary goal was to sell bottles: "our guides are not expected to act as museum tourist guides, but rather as ambassadors, wishing to share an experience around the brand". All the houses have renewed their circuits and overflow with imagination to differentiate from one another: "we always have the desire to stand out thanks to a little something, at Rémy Martin we take the little train, at Hennessy we take the boat (Figure 1.4), Baron Otard is set at François I's castle", an institutional actor from Cognac amusingly declared. However, behind a desire to showcase the production of cognac lies a brand strategy driven by a collective will. These large houses yearly reinvest 20–40% of their turnover in *marketing* and promotional support. The brand must be sold, particularly to target luxury markets. The AOC label (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*) thus fades into the background, as the product is difficult to perceive for its terroir by non-connoisseur foreigners. Small houses like Frapin – which also open their doors to the public – have more interest in developing knowledge of the product rather than the brand, which is less well known and will find it arduous to compete against the big players.

1.3.2.2. *A recent development*

However, we have observed an evolution over the past 10 years, alongside the desire to become part of a wine tourism project. In 2013, Rémy Martin received the national wine tourism prize awarded by Atout France, a sign of recognition, even

though their target is not the tourist, but the consumer. Moreover, the term “enotourism” is controversial, because “for some actors, in the expression ‘enotourism’, the most important thing is tourism, whereas if one says that to the inter-professions’ bureau, the most relevant part is ‘eno’, the product”. This is not necessarily incompatible, as those responsible for visiting circuits at Martell suggest: “the idea is for visitors to come to Cognac, we target an international audience”. At Rémy Martin, for example, the visit is considered as an activity in its own right:

The management’s goals are shared... The first goal is to be able to convey the territorial and family roots to the clientele, for them to value the product’s authenticity, but the second goal is ultimately to continue to develop circuits and experiences like a small business.

Beyond that, visits to these houses go well beyond the tour circuit, depending on the services purchased. Some can cost thousands of euros:

The trading houses all have prestigious châteaux or outstanding guest houses in the vineyard, where they receive their clients. It is not ordinary tourism, they receive their customers, broadcasters, advertisers, importers, hoteliers: the focus is on customer relations (As reported by the Charente Departmental Tourism Committee).

For example, at Rémy Martin, we may purchase a one-day stay at the castle, served by a chef.

1.3.2.3. *Also present in cultural patronage*

We also see that cognac houses invest massively in the cultural sector and private sponsorship. For example, they financed the Cognac Crime Fiction Fair in order to lobby in favor of the drink by advertising scenes of cognac consumption in detective films. This initiative was abandoned due to lack of success. Therefore, they undertook other promotional actions, such as organizing the Cognac Blues Passions festival, where the houses invested a significant budget to invite loyal customers and offer privileged access, each house with its own VIP lounge. The town took part in its own way by providing a subsidy, but above all, by lending the Town Hall’s public garden, which was privatized for the occasion. Other major cultural actions were implemented, such as hosting Picasso or Sempé exhibitions at Hennessy, classical music concerts at Meukow and even creating a corporate foundation at Martel in 2016, to welcome various artists who change regularly. At the end of the day, all these trading houses are differentiated by their blending of the final product, which contributes to the brand’s specificity. In short, while the houses consider themselves complementary on the circuits, they are above all competitors on the products: As we were told at Rémy Martin:

All the visits are interesting, there is certain complementarity to them. If we have visitors, we can send them to Hennessy, to Martell, without mentioning their names, but it also depends on whether we have visits to offer at the moment (or not). Our main interest is for the customer not to leave the territory.

The tourist office is considered an impartial actor when it comes to advising visitors.

1.3.2.4. *Cognac branch houses*

Trading houses may sometimes invite tourists to visit the winegrowers they work with. However, among the winegrowers who produce for their own benefit, there are only very few who offer tours. Moreover, they do not intentionally seek to do so:

For the time being, our turnover is growing. What could really motivate us, is a crisis. The wine is selling very well at the moment, the price has been increased by the trading houses and everything is organized by the trading houses, but some producers know how to preserve themselves.

Opening a wine property involves not only welcoming the public, but also wanting to share the terroir, the product and the company's history. Unlike other trading houses, in the Cognac vineyard, producers are not single producers, but rather cultivate Pineau and Charentais wine in addition to cognac.

Other companies occasionally open their doors as part of group visits organized by the tourist office. This is the case of the glassmaking company Verralia (Figure 1.5) or the agricultural equipment company Grégoire, both located at Château-Bernard, in the Cognac agglomeration. For these businesses, openings enable them to raise awareness about the wine professions and the different sectors, and to counter the fact that the Cognac vineyard suffers from a lack of staff for these companies which require specific qualifications. The interest is weakly related to the territory's tourist economy, but rather to the agricultural and industrial economy. Other wine diversification companies are also seeking to make themselves known, such as producers of premium vodka or vinegar. For example, the Baume de Bouteville company, created in 1990, targets a different market, the food market, while taking advantage of local know-how in the production of raw materials, cauldrons and barrels. It opens its doors to the public, but under limited reception conditions, depending on staff availability and the site's security:

We are enhancing our structure to welcome more groups and visitors. There is a sign on the factory's door to convey that the factory is open,

but we do not mention any fixed trading hours, because we first focus on production (retail, boutiques, the distribution network, and catering).

The company also welcomes a few visitors sent by the trading houses and winegrowers, but their number is marginal compared to the groups sent by the tourist office.



Figure 1.5. *Glassworks for manufacturing cognac bottles, temporarily open to visitors. Picture by Jérôme Piriou, 2020*

The action taken by winegrowers for promoting tourism, particularly with “Les Étapes du cognac” circuit, is insignificant for the trading houses, when compared to the purchase of wine and the communication deployed on an international scale. While small trading houses understand the link between the territory and the cognac appellation, for the “big players”, the BNIC’s (*Bureau national de l’interprofession du cognac*) actions should focus on attracting talent, improving the image and providing an adequate infrastructure:

The work of the BNIC, especially of the communication department, mainly addresses training... creating a school, an institute, a sort of academy, we agree on that. But, on the other hand, the visibility aspect in the town and developing enotourism is not our job, it is the job of the local actors.

However, there has been evolution in the BNIC’s discourse, since as part of the development of a social responsibility strategy, certain territory-related aspects have been included. In 2019 and 2020, the inter-professions’ bureau invited local actors (tourism, heritage, spirits, industry) to attend participatory workshops. Nevertheless,

there is still a lack of articulation between the houses and the elected officials: “for example, the BNIC was not present for the regional season’s greetings... there seems to be certain contempt from BNIC elected officials towards local officials”.

Briefly stated, the houses do not need other actors to rely on but can work properly on their own: collective organization only functions in times of crisis. On the contrary, for the winegrowers who open their establishments for “Les Étapes du cognac” circuit, the purpose of tourism is not just to sell. There is indeed an emotional dimension coupled with the commercial one: “it [the circuit] is very popular among enthusiasts, as something to indulge in, but behind it there must be real economic impact”. Those seeking to develop communication emphasize the importance of their vineyards, the grape varieties, their quality, the art of distillation; in other words, their sales pitch is rooted in the terroir and history. However, that approach is highly individualistic, as some producers do not know one another. The role of “Les Étapes du cognac” is to “show that there is a card that can be played with another member, to let people know what happens at each production stage”. In Charente, “the walls are high”. This expression reveals the desire of cognac producers to hide undeclared production and the traces of mushrooms on the cellar facades, resulting from the escape of alcohol vapor, “the angels’ share”. It also proves the compartmentalization between viticulture actors. Ultimately, even with an exceptional product such as cognac, little do the large trading houses with a strong presence at various shops in international airports (New York, Beijing, Shanghai, etc.) contribute for winegrowers to promote their territory, because the strategy is not the same.

1.3.3. First obstacle: the weight of the large trading houses

1.3.3.1. Internationally oriented, trading houses alone at the helm

As it happens in other vineyards, in Cognac, the distribution of activities is clearly established, following strict specifications to comply with the AOC label (*appellation d’origine contrôlée*) obtained in 1936. The winegrowers produce the wine, the trading houses purchase it, they control the aging of the *eaux-de-vie* and ensure their quality (matching requirements specific to each house). The BNIC (*Bureau national de l’interprofession du cognac*) is the institution responsible for promoting the product on an international scale. It plays a major role in fixing the prices of the grapes that will be commercially exploited. No less than 4,255 farms work under exclusive contracts (or not), for 277 traders. Each trading house has its own alcohol distillation and aging system (Bernard 1996). Furthermore, the most powerful among them manage a large part of the production chain, from contracts with the winegrowers to the management of sales points and the marketing of bottles

around the world. Even though there are many houses, the cognac market is highly concentrated, since 80% of sales of cognac bottles are made by four large trading houses (Hennessy, Rémy Martin, Martell and Courvoisier). The crisis experienced at the end of the 1990s led many houses to join large international luxury groups or in the wine, spirits and alcohol sector. Hennessy, already merged with Moët, joined LVMH. Martell joined Pernod Ricard. After joining forces with Martini & Rossi, Baron Otard was included in the Bacardí group. More recently, Courvoisier (located in Jarnac) was integrated into Beam Global Spirits & Wine. Also, the main decision-making centers have relocated from the Cognac vineyard to Paris, New York and even Bermuda. This trend signaled the end of the massive local investments in vogue since the 19th century. According to an institutional actor, these houses “are nowadays disconnected from the life of the town (of Cognac). The activity of these houses is based on repositioning them in production and marketing”. On the contrary, an entrepreneurial actor states the opposite: “here are major private players, large companies with their own interests, for which the public policy perspective is often quite disconnected from that of the companies”.

To explain the trading houses’ strategy, a local actor testified: “large houses need neither a cluster, nor heritage recognition, nor tourism”. Moreover, the actors of tourism are well aware of the situation: “trading houses have a market presence backed up by their capital, their target is not the tourist, but the consumer, that is why we sometimes have problems with communication”. Moreover, the BNIC is well aware of the power of branding:

Cognac is a vineyard where the appellation is almost erased by the commercial success of the big trading houses. Consumption at an international level mainly points to Rémy Martin, Hennessy, Martell, people know it is cognac, but hardly do they know that cognac is also an appellation or a town.

For example, the person in charge of the visit circuit at Martell confirms the brand’s interest:

We are now negotiating with Russian, Chinese and American tour operators. The idea is to make people understand where Cognac is. When I was asked to take care of Martell, I had the address book of all the operators who work with Mumm, and they found it interesting to develop an action in the town of Cognac.

The company managed the contacts directly, without the intervention of traditional tourism actors. According to the BNIC, the houses welcoming hundreds of Chinese visitors without making the territory profit are using the wrong strategy:

They [the territorial communities] say we are there for the product, for the territory. But if they are not present on the territory, in the long term, they will be discredited for international receptions. They cannot be legitimate on our territory if they are not there.

Truth be told, with a budget of 2.4 billion euros (surpassing the Champagne inter-profession in 2013), the inter-professions' bureau is mainly financed by the trading houses, in particular, by Hennessy, the leading firm.

1.3.3.2. *A few of the initiatives by small houses and winegrowers*

During one of the city enhancement sessions organized in June 2017, 14 professionals with a diverse background – hospitality sector, tourist office, consulting, air force, heritage association, aerodrome, catering, university, industry, Chamber of Trades, EPCI (*Établissement public de coopération intercommunale*) – discussed some of the actions to be carried out:

- the launch of an association to inventory the intangible heritage of the Cognac vineyard, “cognac’s know-how”, with a view to applying for the inclusion on UNESCO’s World Heritage List;

- avenues for improving the accessibility conditions to the territory by road, rail and air;

- partnerships with public institutions (notably with the EPCI establishments) to facilitate recruitment and reception in the territory;

- creation of a welcome guide for companies and employees.

During the cluster’s first three years, these sessions made it possible to engage different actors:

Working helped us to clear the landscape. This sketch made it possible to outline the territory, make it sustainable, determine what we were going to build on it, outline a scenario, roughly get to know the forces involved.

However, participation was random and tended to decrease over time:

At the beginning there was a lot of enthusiasm, everyone contributed their view and the exchange quickly turned into *brainstorming*, everyone practically said the same thing every time. Then the interest faded a little. This was problematic and no apparent solution arose.

Furthermore, the arrival of new members required adapting the format. Coordinating a community of around a hundred members, with only one cluster director and two project managers, is a particularly perilous exercise. Also, a certain form of autonomy was launched around project workshops in order to better target participants (examples of themes: creation of a platform bringing together job offers in the region in relation to the spirits ecosystem; design of a guide to economic attractiveness; writing of an article for the specialized press). However, again, the question of numbers arose; we said that there should not be more than three to four persons, but each time there were a little more people who positioned themselves.

Furthermore, representatives of major cognac trading houses took part in the discussions and were often the driving forces. However, the process of gathering various actors in the pursuit of a collective project is sometimes complex. “The goal is not to come with preconceived ideas and impose them in a discretionary manner”. On the contrary, the largest cognac trading house was not a member of the cluster. The “Spirits Valley” cluster had to develop a persuading force and find its place:

We have positioned ourselves, this is not only strategic, but also political. Compared to an environment with existing clusters, compared to the BNIC, to the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, finding our place in this ecosystem, our place as a catalyst, our place as a unifier, is a daily job. We are starting to have legitimacy, but it involves long-term work.

Finally, at the beginning of 2020, among the members of the “Spirits Valley” cluster, a core of companies and organizations renewed their membership. However, for others, it is more complicated to devote time to the collective, especially as an inter-professions’ bureau already exists for the vineyard, and product diversification by the actors (vodka and various spirits) does not make up part of its current policy.

In the vineyard, the association “Les Étapes du cognac” helps to promote tourism in viticulture-dedicated sites. At the end of the 1990s, a general councilor of the Ségonzac canton brought the idea of a group of young farmers to create a tourist route, as the one already existing in Alsace. While in other vineyards, it is the inter-professions’ bureau that coordinates this type of activity; this is not the case in the Cognac vineyard. The local communities, in particular, the General Councils of Charente and Charente-Maritime, have taken up the reins. In 2000, a circuit was created, called “Les Étapes du cognac”, because the name “La Route du cognac” had already been registered by a communications company from La Rochelle. The association is organized around three colleges: the financing agents (departments,

the region, trade unions, the inter-professions' bureau), the institutions (tourist offices, departmental committees and regional tourism committee) and the members, who are mainly winegrowers (173 members in 2013). The association has four main missions:

1) support members on a voluntary basis for improving their structure to create a wine tourism offer within the farms (creation of shops, discovery trails, etc.). The particular trait of the Cognac vineyard is that 95% of winegrowers work with the trading houses, direct sales constituting only a small part of sales;

2) propose entertainment, by organizing summer activities;

3) compile a directory with the support from the Cognac Experience platform of the Charente Departmental Tourism Committee;

4) network and facilitate exchanges among winegrowers regarding the supply's complementary nature.

The association is financed up to 17% by annual contributions from members based on a forecast budget of approximately €150,000. The complement is provided by various actors. The most important financing agent is the Cognac inter-professional association (18%), then Pays Ouest Charente, who pays its subsidy via the General Council of Charente (13%), then the General Council of Charente (12%), the General Council of Charente-Maritime (8%) and finally the county of Haute-Saintonge and the region of Pons. In 2010, the association received the "Vignobles & Discoveries" label delivered by Atout France to qualify the wine tourism offer, based on an evaluation grid for each actor category (winegrowers, hoteliers, catering, etc.). A first sign of alert came in 2013, when local authorities reduced the amount of the subsidies to the association. They expressed their desire to disengage:

It is also a way of inviting the inter-professions' bureau to take over, the local authorities think that it is not up to them to pay for a cognac which is doing very well... they might pay for it if there was a crisis, but these are also political reasons and we are in the middle of all this.

Finally, in October 2019, the budget deficit meant the end of the association.

1.3.4. Second obstacle: an organization of the sector essentially oriented towards the production of wines and alcohols

In 2010, a university study carried out for the DREAL (*Direction régionale de l'environnement, de l'aménagement et du logement*) of Poitou-Charentes and the

DDT (*Direction départementale des territoires*) of Charente revealed the existence of a group of activities resembling a cluster:

The geographical concentration of complementary activities – the establishments in the territory specializing in each of the production stages of the Cognac *eau-de-vie* – a priori reveals the existence of a cluster (Bouba-Olga et al. 2012, p. 182).

However, the creation of trading houses during the 18th century made it possible to develop an industry around the production of Cognac within the vineyard itself. At the same time, paper production was established there thanks to mills and industrial machines. There was also the manufacture of barrels and glass, notably through the creation of a quasi-automatic glass molding machine invented by a Cognac glassmaker at the end of the 19th century (Bouba-Olga et al. 2012). Then, we must be able to market the Cognac, transport it, store it. By 2012, there were an estimate of between 13,500 and 16,000 jobs directly or indirectly related to the territory's production: "75% of the agglomeration's economic activity is linked to its production" (Bouba-Olga et al. 2012, p. 182). Some companies were in charge of manufacturing wooden packaging, corrugated cardboard, hollow glass and printing materials. The production of Cognac requires numerous activities around cooperage, glassmaking, corking and even packaging.

In addition to the presence of actors involved in the production of Cognac, the presence of a cluster can both be explained by cognitive factors and transaction costs (Bouba-Olga et al. 2012, p. 186):

- A local concentration of related activities for companies to reduce transaction and transport costs caused by distance: Saint-Gobain (a glassmaking company) strategically settled in Cognac, close to the trading houses and wine properties.
- The production of *eaux-de-vie* requires a meticulous know-how, with specifically related activities within the Cognac vineyard. The Vicard cooperage, established in Cognac since 1925, produces 40,000 barrels per year, adapting production to the houses' expectations, particularly concerning the composition of the wood favoring aging, in particular for the oldest *eaux-de-vie*, kept in small barrels called "dames-jeannes" carefully stored in the cellars' "paradise".
- A training program, specific to the region, intimately related to viticulture and enology, justifying the presence of a university campus in Ségonzac and even a cooper school in Cognac.

– Social relations between the actors have fostered international development. Territorial anchoring is key to the AOC label (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*), because it delimits the vineyard and specifies the conditions for producing Cognac complying with strict specifications, which also justifies the choice of location for the industries.

The constant sales growth in Cognac bottles prompted the trading houses to encourage winegrowers to plant more vines. On an area of approximately 75,000 hectares, 250 hectares were authorized in 2016, 800 hectares in 2017, 1,557 hectares in 2018 and 3,474 hectares in 2019. This authorization is subject to deliberation by the Charentes-Cognac wine region council under the chairmanship of the regional prefect, and validation by the French National Institute of Origin and Quality (INAO, *Institut national de l'origine et de la qualité*) and FranceAgriMer. Afterwards, an inter-ministerial decree establishes the limits so that winegrowers can submit individual requests. The Cognac industry is likely to continue growing in spirits sales, even though some winegrowers fear a reversal of circumstances, remembering the oil shock of 1971 and the crisis of the late 1990s. Other actors in the Cognac industry are joining forces in order to consolidate sales and maintain an international positioning for the star product from the Charente region.

1.3.5. The creation of clusters in the Cognac vineyard

In June 1998, in a gloomy economic context for the cognac industry, a handful of independent entrepreneurs in the packaging sector grouped their forces under the leadership of the Angoulême Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI). It was the director of economic and international action of this CCI (also the general delegate of the French National Institute of Packaging Design), who launched the “Atlanpack” cluster with a desire to create a “Spirits Valley”, borrowing the concept from the American Silicon Valley. Originally limited to the Poitou-Charentes region, the cluster opened to neighboring regions in 2002 in order to integrate a total of around a hundred companies, 60 of which are located in the Cognac vineyard. With an annual budget of €450,000, 30% of which was self-financed, the rest of the subsidies came from Europe, the French State, the Department of Charente, the Cognac agglomeration and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The packaging sector (which not only works for the cognac industry, but also for the agri-food or pharmaceutical industries) benefits from this cluster of companies. Being awarded a certification (a “label”) by the Ministry of Rural Space and Territorial Planning in 2010, it promotes the region’s know-how and network coordination. Training on careers in packaging (both at high school and degree level) was proposed from 2003. It is dictated at a high school in Angoulême, and there is also a master’s level training at the University of Poitiers. Certified as a cluster in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine

region in 2016, Atlanpack was limited to 62 members in 2020. Every year, a forum brings together professionals in the sector.

In 2010, a study was carried out for the DDT of Charente and the DREAL of Poitou-Charentes. The resulting report was entitled “Cognac, analysis of a cluster of activities” (Bouba-Olga et al. 2010). The above-mentioned study was relayed by the mayor of Ségonzac (appointed to the regional council) and was carefully read by the Charente Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In 2013, a new study was commissioned by a research firm. In 2015, a new association was created, the “Spirits Valley”, whose goal was:

To ensure the promotion and influence of the know-how of the cognac sector by local actors, to develop and produce *super premium* spirits in collaboration with all the actors involved in the value chain, with a view to promoting and stimulating the growth of the local economy.

This association was not responsible for exclusively bringing together the actors in the cognac sector. This project engaged all the actors in the “premiumization” of the cognac value chain. This included the corkers, the labelers, the cooperers; in short, all the different services required for other spirits such as Grand Marnier, liqueurs or vodkas. This cluster differed from the BNIC (whose role was to regulate the AOC sector) by a desire for networking with all the operators in the spirits chain. Governance was mainly ensured by public actors. In 2017, the board of directors was exclusively formed by local or consular appointed officials (president and vice-president of the Departmental Council of the Charente, Charente departmental councilor and president of the tourist development agency of Charente and Charente-Maritime, mayor of Cognac and vice-president of the Charente Chamber of Commerce and Industry and president of the Cognac delegation). Its president was an industrialist, elected to the Charente Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In 2020, this board of directors diversified, incorporating actors from the industrial, academic and even transport fields. During the launch phase, at the beginning of 2016, elected officials injected an operating investment of €250,000 into the association (financed by the Charente Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Department of Charente, the European Union, the French State and the Poitou-Charentes region). In January 2018, the association opened a membership phase with an amount indexed according to the turnover of the adhering organization. In June 2019, the association had 100 member companies and institutions. At the very beginning, between 2016 and 2018, four to six working sessions were organized yearly around four axes: economy, training, attractiveness and logistics.

In 2016, the incubator of the Cognac branch of the Charente Chamber of Commerce and Industry welcomed the creation of a local branch of the

“Inno’vin” cluster, created six years earlier at the *Institut des sciences de la vigne et du vin* (ISV), located near Bordeaux. Led by an employee of the Charente Development Agency – the economic development body of the Charente Departmental Council – the goal was to provide those involved in the Cognac vineyard with an exclusively wine-producing cluster. In 2016, the “Inno’vin” cluster had an annual budget of €380,000, half of the funding coming from members and the other half from the local authorities. In the Cognac vineyard, coopers who already worked extensively with Bordeaux winegrowers were members. Then, they were joined by cognac houses, various industrialists (vat manufacturers, etc.) and scientific and university laboratories.

In 2017, the Grand Cognac agglomeration, then chaired by the mayor of Cognac, launched the project of a Cognac Trades Center, by purchasing a site from the Hennessy company. However, in 2018, the project became more ambitious and gained momentum by engaging cooperage, glassmaking and trading actors. The desire was to create a center which would bring together business incubators, clusters and economic development services from the EPCI. At the same time, the “University of the *Eaux-de-vie*”, a university center located in Ségonzac, benefited from funding for works to increase its activity and receive more students. The aim was also to respond to a strong demand for labor and the need for specific qualifications to meet the expectations of the cognac industry.

The landscape became not only marked by the extension of vines, but also by buildings and cognac’s characteristic industry. Indeed, there were cooperages, glassworks, but above all cellars (recognizable by the stone’s blackness, caused by a microscopic fungus which settles on the vaults of the buildings where barrels age). The cellar master’s role is to ensure the production of cognac, a blend of *eaux-de-vie* resulting from double distillation. Large and smaller trading houses control the production, particularly viticulture, and market several types of cognacs, which vary depending on their aging degree (Piriou 2018b).

1.3.6. The instability of institutional structures

Over the last five years, tourism institutions have undergone profound transformations, associated with two main reforms. First, the law of January 16, 2015 relating to the delimitation of 13 large new regions, replacing the 22 existing metropolitan regions, without modifying their integrating departments. Then, the law of August 7, 2015 relating to the new territorial organization of the Republic, known as the “NOTRe” law, which modified the institutions’ competences. Regions became leaders in economic development, while the departments maintained an orientation as guarantors of human solidarity and territorial cohesion. As for the EPCI (*Établissements publics de coopération intercommunale*) establishments, the

NOTRe law amply modified their attributions – particularly the tourism competence – with a compulsory transfer from the municipalities, except for those classified as tourist resorts. In addition, the minimum thresholds went from 5,000 to 20,000 inhabitants, except for mountain areas and sparsely populated areas. This means that the Cognac vineyard experienced notable modifications as to its institutional structures, making it possible to further clarify the role of the different actors and to position the territory as a tourist destination.

1.3.6.1. *At the local level*

The Cognac tourist office, with associative status and created in 1924, has transformed its scope of action over the last 20 years, in order to offer a territory more in line with the vineyards in the Charente Department.

1.3.6.1.1. Grouping and scaling

In 1999, five tourist offices in the west of the Department of Charente (Châteauneuf-sur-Charente, Cognac, Jarnac, Rouillac and Ségonzac) signed an agreement to pool their actions with the aim of creating a tourist center extending across the Ouest Charente region, under the territorial coherence and orientation plan. In 2012, the regional policy of the Regional Council of Poitou-Charentes favored the creation of this Cognac region center, without legal status, and entrusting coordination to the Cognac tourist office. As of 2014, an annual agreement of goals was concluded with the community of municipalities of the Grand Cognac over a period of three years. However, it was the NOTRe law of 2015 that led to the merger between the five tourist offices in 2017, after creating the new Grand Cognac agglomeration (which integrates them and collects the transferred tourism competence). A local Tourism Development Plan was set in motion, defining the axes of the territory's strategy for the period 2017–2019. "Destination Cognac", a shared brand registered in 2017 for the communication and promotion of the tourist office, relies on a solid tourist supply, as well as four reception offices located within the noblest AOC wines. In 2017, the year of the merger, the tourist office, still under the associative status, had 362 members (80 additional ones compared to 2016). The board of directors had five colleges (12 members in the agglomeration college, nine members in the trading and viticulture houses college, four members in the inter-professional structures college, eight members in the college of professionals and representatives of cultural and leisure tourism; and finally, eight members in the college of professionals representing catering, commerce and accommodation). We may also note that 12 members came from the wine and spirits sector (nine members from trading and viticulture houses and three members from inter-professions' of Cognac, Pineau and Charentais vineyards). Together with the elected officials, these members constituted the second representative force on an equal footing. Furthermore, the four largest trading houses were represented (Hennessy, Martell, Rémy Martin and Courvoisier). However, the

Camus and Meukow trading houses, present in this college in 2016, were replaced and supplemented by Maison Boinaud, Cognac Lascaux, Guillon-Painturaud and Fussigny houses. The *marketing* power of Cognac brands is such that the tourist office also promotes urban heritage as a complement to company visits:

Tourists think that cognac is made in a house, so there is a lot of communication work to be done, that is why we are focusing on the town's heritage, because for me the product is closely related to the town. We entice visitors to economic discovery through heritage guided tours, which does not prevent us from selling visits to bottles or cooper manufacturing areas.

The tourist office has a guiding service as well as an incoming travel agency (the only one in Cognac for over 30 years), which receives 300 groups per year and 8,000 people, selling trips, day stays or à la carte proposals along sites associated with the cognac industry (barrel-making, glassmaking, etc.).

1.3.6.1.2. Achievements

In January 2012, the town of Cognac obtained the “Town and Region of Art and History” certification, conferred by the Ministry of Culture and Communication. This distinction was awarded for having emphasized the territory's values and the town's identity around cognac: “we wanted to give a prominent place to cognac, but due to the fact that there are very few vineyards in the town of Cognac itself, it's not that we don't talk about it, but we do not bring it forward in the official file”. The heritagization of the Cognac vineyard is specific, as it encompasses both the cultural and commercial dimensions.

This is what makes the town of Cognac a kind of conjunction between a land where wine is grown, where wine is totally suitable for distillation, where most of the distillations are carried out on the vineyard, and a town with a river, a commercial vector for the merchants and traders in the city.

Cognac has this central role in the systemic organization of cognac production, and the valorization of its heritage by the town is part of the strategy. Once the roles of distillation and of the cellar master have been explained (through a tour of the trading houses), the heritage service evokes the industrial architecture of the cellars, the civil architecture of the cellar masters' private mansions and that of the big banks, testifying to Cognac's flourishing economy in the 19th century. Contrary to this, the trading houses do not promote the town's heritage, but their own products and brands.

Furthermore, heritagization reveals a “paternalistic” system maintained by the trading houses that goes beyond simple wine production. Many big names in the trading houses successively took turns as mayors of the town (Frédéric Martell, Jean-Baptiste Antoine Otard, Gabriel Martell, Paul Firino Martell, etc.), and until the 20th century, half of the members of municipal councils were merchants or winegrowers. From then on, many decisions taken for the town were also compatible with the interests of their businesses:

In the 19th century, Cognac was well-organized to set up a water supply system in all the town’s districts. As good as it was for the inhabitants to have access to water in the town, it was especially interesting for the trading houses to have water in the cellars.

Also in the 19th century, the town equipped itself with sports facilities, as the trading houses made significant investments in different sports (rowing, rugby, fencing). Today, the heritage department of the town of Cognac continues its promotion activities, through guided tours. It also wishes to set up more partnerships with large houses (particularly at the financial level) to organize awareness-raising activities for residents and tourists.

1.3.6.2. *At the departmental level*

Charente had its own departmental tourism agency until 2017. In 2006, the Department of Charente developed a partnership with the Departments of Charente-Maritime and Gironde to offer a joint supply for tour operators via the “bordeaux-cognac.com” web platform, an operation that then came to a halt. Then, in 2008, a consumer communication called the “Cognac Experience” was launched at the request of the General Councils of Charente and Charente-Maritime, each having invested approximately €50,000, in order to boost communication of the Cognac vineyard. In its 2011–2015 Charente Tourism Development Plan, the Departmental Tourism Committee aimed to continue the actions initiated by the Departmental Tourism Committees of Charente-Maritime and Gironde, the BNIC, Cognac’s Tourism Office, the Charente Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in particular, through the websites *Expérience Cognac* and *Bordeaux Cognac*. The strategy aimed to be part of regional policy promoting the “Cognac destination”. The principle of “Cognac Experience” was to create a tourist supply fostering the visibility of the Charente vineyards destination. The goal was to promote tourism in the wine industry and to improve the supply via the association “Les Étapes du cognac”. At the time, the BNIC’s communications director was greatly in favor of this initiative. The departmental tourism agencies then took control of this project.

The persisting concern was bridging the gap between the product’s image and the tourist supply. Tensions also arose between the world of tourism and

inter-professions' bureau, in particular, after a communication issued by *Expérience Cognac* which associated the Charentaise (a type of slippers) with barges and wine.

The problem came down to the fact that popularization was incompatible with the image conveyed by the cognac houses for the sale of their products. At the Charente Departmental Tourism Committee, there is a saying that:

Cognac is not receptive, but deceptive: in relation to the image conveyed, that the product suggests, super high-end. There is not enough high-end accommodation, there are Bed and Breakfast facilities, but Cognac's international clientele does not stay in that kind of lodging.

However, in 2015, the departmental elections tilted the Department of Charente towards the same political side as the neighboring department of Charente-Maritime. This context would then contribute to the merger of the two Charente Committees under a single entity.

1.3.6.3. *At the regional level*

“Cognac-Vallée de la Charente” was integrated into the strategic policy of the Poitou-Charentes Regional Tourism Development Plan (2007–2015) as one of its tourism brands. The mayor of Cognac was also the president of the Regional Tourism Committee of Poitou-Charentes until its dissolution in 2013, requested by President Ms. Royal. The staff and actions were integrated to the services of the regional council, to enhance attractiveness.

As part of the regional organization reform, Poitou-Charentes was integrated into a new and vast entity, Nouvelle-Aquitaine. In May 2017, the members of the Regional Tourism Committees of Limousin, Aquitaine and Poitou-Charentes teamed up to create a single entity, entirely dedicated to Nouvelle-Aquitaine. The association's budget amounted to 6 million euros (three times more than the former CRT Poitou-Charentes) and ensured the promotion of tourism, coordination of institutional actors, offered engineering and economic observation services and finally took part in the development of the Regional Tourism and Leisure Development Plan. This plan for Nouvelle-Aquitaine, adopted in June 2018, identified Cognac as one of the brands to position internationally, or to strengthen on a national market. Furthermore, Cognac was also recognized as a “rural destination identified and structured for tourist clienteles” (ibid., p. 28).

The creation of the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region also contributed to this rapprochement decided by the presidents of the departmental tourism agencies of Charente and Charente-Maritime. A new association “Charentes tourism” was born in

June 2017. This new association considered the Cognac vineyard as a strategic territory for international clients, since it had applied to obtain a “Cognac vineyards” destination contract. This system supported by Atout France allowed the territory to benefit from financial aid of €75,000 and an action program over a period of three years. This application, sponsored by Charentes Tourism, was a compilation of a collective file with around 20 partners, including EPCI vineyards, the BNIC and the major cognac houses. The collaboration worked but remained limited to tourism promotion.

1.3.7. The luxury trap

As long as cognac is positioned as a luxury item, tourism can neither respond to it (due to a lack of adequate equipment), nor develop within that niche.

As for institutional actors, they claim their mission is to promote the territory: “for us, our job is the territory, it is not to sell the product, even if we are lucky enough to have a product carrying the name of a town”. What is also at stake is that before going to the vineyard, visitors have a “high-end” image of the territory, which they associate with cognac brands. The director of the tourist office witnessed the return of the “Rendez-vous en France” trade fair in March 2013, where Russian customers requested services including massages and visits to trading houses with meals: “we have been identified as a niche destination, we are very high-end. So, everything is done on a product that is very emblematic, but which is very difficult to sell”. According to information from the tourist office, individual customers come to tour the town, visit a trading house, and possibly take a boat trip. However, the town of Cognac is a place of passage; tourists only stay for half a day.

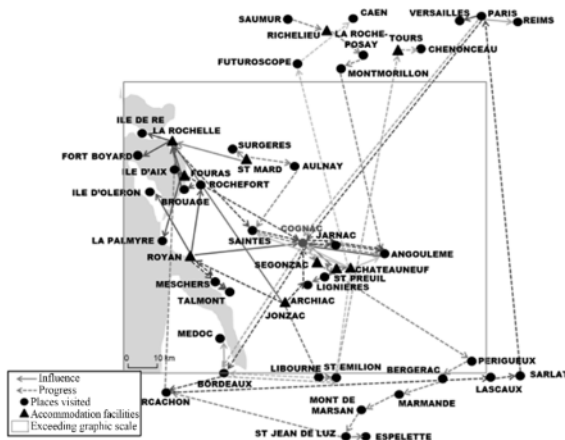


Figure 1.6. *Trips of the 10 tourists interviewed at “François I Square” in Cognac on May 10 and June 14, 2017. Jérôme Piriou, June 2017*

COMMENT ON FIGURE 1.6.— *Among the tourists interviewed, seven were French, one English, one American, one Chinese. Accommodation facilities are located in the Departments of Charente and Charente-Maritime, near Cognac, Royan, La Rochelle and near Surgères. There are three visiting areas: Charente (Cognac, Angoulême, Jarnac), the coast (Royan, the islands, La Rochelle) and the southwest of France (Bordeaux, Périgord, Basque Country). However, some tourists set the visit to Cognac within a more complex route, including the Loire Valley and the Paris region.*

The most important thing to note is the visitor's place of origin. According to the tourist office, flows come from the coast, especially when the weather is gloomy, as well as from Bordeaux and Dordogne. Others integrate Cognac as a stopover along a route between the north and the south of France (Figure 1.6). As for foreign customers, in 2013, the tourist office started welcoming Chinese visitors in family groups, who were looking for luxury services. Unlike Paris or Bordeaux – the preferred destinations for this clientele – the Cognac vineyard could only offer them to a limited extent.

1.3.8. The legitimacy of piloting the governance of actions in the “tourism/spirits” couple

According to Atout France, in 2016, the Cognac vineyard constituted only 4.4% of the French wine tourism offer, compared to 18% for Bordeaux and 17.2% for Champagne. This organization promoting French tourism internationally created an “enotourism cluster” in 2000, which had previously been called “Club Vitivini”, bringing together partners, institutions and French wine professionals from 17 French vineyards within a voluntary and collective frame in order to develop enotourism. The multiplicity of actors in the cognac vineyard evidences the difficulty of defining the legitimacy of an actor. In 2013, interviews conducted at the BNIC and at the Cognac Tourist Office showed that both structures had a prominent role. Furthermore, the Rémy Martin firm, which won the enotourism prize in 2013, strongly believed in the unifying role of this cluster:

The enotourism cluster is developed by dynamic people. At Atout France, the facilitator is someone very dynamic who knows their sector in depth and also knows how to pull the strings with the public as with the private actors. When all these questions have to be tackled, meetings are very dynamic and take place with real subjects.

However, on a vineyard scale, an enotourism cluster still struggles to structure itself. This is quite sad for a territory where the cognac and spirits sectors have been institutionally developing clusters for 20 years and whose state of mind has been present for centuries, as evidenced by an actor involved in the premium spirits cluster, as well as at the tourist office:

This cluster operation has been taking place for 3 centuries now. It became formalized within an institution (a unifying organization) only 2 or 3 years ago. I took part in the genesis of this organization, I found it logical to structure certain subjects, to rely on synergies between the companies to work on subjects such as logistics, infrastructure, the region's allure, tourist appeal, but most importantly, employee attractiveness. This targets the customers, the companies who come for setting up their businesses, it all comes down to simplifying the structure and increasing the quality of life.

1.3.8.1. *The spirits economy dominating the tourist economy*

Everything has been said: in the vineyard, it is easier to create a cluster in the interest of the cognac and spirits sectors, to respond to industrial interests (recruitment, development, innovation) than to promote the tourist and heritage sectors. Something similar happens on the BNIC's side, where members openly admit that tourism is not the priority of their actions:

There is a *gap*, at the collective and at the territorial level. However, very quickly, I saw, and even here internally, that our structure is not yet solid for enotourism, nobody has fully engaged in that direction.

This is also explained by the fact that although some of the trading houses would be in favor of tourism, others, particularly among the largest houses, remain far more reluctant. The interest of these houses is not Cognac: "it's not their playing area, [in fact] it's China and the United States".

Initiatives were launched for the tourism sector, starting with "Expérience Cognac", which in 2008 brought together the departmental tourism committees of Charente and Charente-Maritime, the BNIC, "Les Étapes du cognac" and the tourist office. The problem is that this initiative has not achieved consensus. One of the member actors claimed: "here we say that it was us who asked for Cognac Experience, and for their part, they say that it was a request issued by them". Another actor believed that:

Expérience Cognac is a vast nebula, merely the toy of an institution. This cell would rather make sense on the international map because it is the Regional Tourism Committee who is in charge of the brand 'Destination Cognac-Vallée de la Charente.' They claim they work on communication at a national level, but that doesn't make sense with what we want.

For the tourist office:

It is necessary to redefine what everyone does in the territory, people have to define, people have to know... For me it is clear, we have 'Les Étapes du cognac' which qualify and animate, we play to the music and the BNIC takes charge of professional training and communication on cognac, I would say we have the infernal trio.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the 2010s, the idea of a cognac cultural center was born, whereby the BNIC would be in charge of the training and the tourist office of the "window display": "a joint supply, without getting married in the strict sense, but sharing premises and a common communication strategy". For its part, the heritage department of the town of Cognac even encouraged this project:

It is relevant and even neutral in relation to each of the trading houses. We even said that as Cognac had been labeled as a town of art and history, we should create an interpretation center for architecture and heritage, hosting a documentation center, an educational space, permanent and temporary exhibitions. At present, this does not exist in Cognac.

Moreover, the heritage department of the town of Cognac successfully introduced a panel into the tourist office presenting cognac in all its forms (architecture, cellars, houses), at a place where, until then, there had only been an exhibition of cognac bottles.

1.3.8.2. *Sharing the "cognac" brand for promotion*

In 2016, the relations between BNIC and the tourist office became strained over the communication around "cognac". In December 2015, the tourist office registered the "Cognac spirit" trademark with the French National Institute of Intellectual Property. This brand was used on various products in the store (T-shirts, caps, umbrellas, bags, etc.). For the tourist office, the expression "Cognac spirit" meant "the spirit of the town of Cognac". However, the BNIC did not perceive it from the same angle, but rather as "cognac, the spirit" (in the sense of the drink). Having given its consent during the summer of 2015, the inter-professions' bureau took its decision back in November 2016, considering that the term contravened the appellation's protection. According to the inter-professions' bureau, the trademark registered by the community of municipalities risked being purchased. Therefore, the BNIC bought it from the tourist office to ensure that a third party would never have access to it. The communications director nuanced the tension between the inter-professions' bureau and the community of municipalities via the tourism office: "we took the time to ponder about this case, we reacted very quickly. We all want tourism to develop, and we are working together to develop it".

At the end of the 2010s, the BNIC's position changed on enotourism, and more particularly, as to its place in the territory, no longer falling under the appellation. This strategy also made it possible to reshuffle the cards regarding the actors present and taking concrete action. First, the creation of Charentes Tourism (a tourism development agency common to the two departments) led to the disappearance of the Charente Departmental Tourism Committee, as well as the "Cognac Experience" system. The Poitou-Charentes Regional Tourism Committee also disappeared, together with "Destination Cognac-Vallée de la Charente". As collateral damage from the merger of departmental tourist institutions, "Les Étapes du cognac" association was dissolved in October 2019, weighed down by an economic deficit due to a decrease in public subsidies. However, the brand was taken over both by the BNIC and the Grand Cognac agglomeration. Nevertheless, the brand's future seems uncertain, given the desire to create a "Vignobles du cognac" brand as part of the application for a destination contract supported by Charentes tourism, the EPCI collective, the BNIC and the major trading houses.

To conclude, we can explain the strategy of the Cognac vineyard trading houses via the great autonomy of the houses (without the need for a cluster, nor for heritage recognition, nor for tourism development). In fact, their excellent economic health, ensured by sales worldwide and the notoriety of their luxury brands, justifies their low level of local involvement. Tourism professionals are well aware of this and still try to coordinate the supply of visiting circuits with the territory's tourist supply. However, common ground seems to be found in terms of a territorial *marketing* strategy, aiming not only to promote brands within the vineyard (the storytelling of production), but also to the territory's amenities (for attractiveness purposes).

1.4. Destination Anjou: a system developed by the CCI

This network was gradually formed and drew up its actions on a case-by-case basis, by seizing opportunities or in response to challenges. Its scope of action has always been within the perimeter of Anjou, a name chosen by local operators to counterbalance the low reputation of the region's institutional name, Maine-et-Loire, adopted in 1790 according to the canons of the time¹⁶.

1.4.1. Portrait of an association

Destination Anjou (DA) is an associative structure which brings together the actors from different sectors in the Department of Maine-et-Loire: accommodation

¹⁶ As a matter of fact, in order to erase the names applied to the *Ancien Régime* territories, the Constituent Assembly decided to favor the terms resulting from the hydrographic network.

(25 hoteliers), catering (21) and leisure facilities (19). This case is characteristic for its original approach in relation to the CCIs (Chambers of Commerce and Industry), which generally focus on hotel clubs, or the coordination of a specific sector. In addition to existing sector organizations, others functioned within other sub-sectors, such as the Regional Federation of Tourist Sites (FREST). That federation was created in 2009 to lobby with public actors, particularly in relation to the financing which irrigates the sites supported by the institutions. Although that association no longer exists, its branch was taken by Activa, grouping 12 sites since 1994–1995 and managed by the CCI from 2007 to 2008. Other mergers between complementary actors can be mentioned, such as Escape Orne¹⁷, but the latter is limited to marketing.

1.4.2. Originally: a hotel club

At the end of 1996, the original challenge for a group of six to eight professionals (brought together through mutual acquaintances) was to launch a quality approach as the one implemented in integrated chains. At the same time, there was a hotel club, but it was moribund. “We filled the void”¹⁸. Upon the arrival of Sylvain Dourneau, the CCI asked them what they could do differently, in comparison with a departmental tourism committee.

The *Welcome to Anjou* initiative was a bit of a flop, because it aimed to bring together the actors, but without giving any precise specifications: it was open to whoever wanted in. At the chamber, we studied its feasibility, and we took off... from a hard core” (interview with Sylvain Dourneau).

Furthermore, the CCI seized this opportunity as a lever to bring together the three chambers of the department (based in Angers, Cholet and Le Mans), with a view to merging them under a single entity. In 1998, the statutes of an association were filed. The club worked on the quality approach. The initial catalyst was the need of independent hoteliers to resist competition from integrated chains. This was later reinforced by the chamber’s organizational strategy.

“We started with a quality approach, because that is the mission of a CCI”. The CCI welcomed the club and integrated it with others within the chamber’s frame. Little by little, other missions were added, such as improving the quality of

¹⁷ Name of the tourist actor network formed by the Orne CCI to market its departmental offer.

¹⁸ Interview with Sylvain Dourneau, from the CCI, and Vincent Bouyer, Hôtel de France, and president of Destination Anjou. All quotes are drawn from this interview.

reception. Then, the association moved on to a more general action plan. From that moment on, the initiative brought together independent actors and chain members. The quality approach was abandoned in 2013, because it was no longer necessary: “everyone was doing it” and the France quality label was established.

We didn’t want to duplicate. The quality approach had two virtues... structuring the supply... and rallying the people... It also created a dynamic, a sense of competition, because we organized an event each time, for example, delivering the trophy for the best reception.

However, it was no longer essential. Afterwards, the emphasis was placed on other actions, such as communication and projects to enhance reception in Maine-et-Loire and value the territory’s identity. An action plan was set in motion. A first website was created in 1998.

The idea was to get the restaurateur out of his kitchen, the hotelier out of his room. And it was also a way to bring them together... The environment was modernized through the Internet tool, it functioned as a club, as a network to share good practices.

1.4.3. Revitalization of the territory by a tourist actor

In 2001, the association opened up to visiting sites. The action evolved towards a more global approach and the association strove to establish itself in the institutional landscape, by integrating different boards of directors (such as those from the Congress center, the Anjou Departmental Committee, Angers Tourism or Terra Botanica semi-public companies). The goal was to influence public policies. This development aroused opposition from the departmental tourism committee, which perceived this as head-on competition. A study (“Who does what in tourism?”) made it possible to clarify the roles of each person and to highlight the complementarities between the two approaches. Similarly, when DA considered the implementation of a reservations system, the group backed down in the face of the identical initiative taken by the tourist office. A pragmatic approach was taken, with a focus on the coordination of networks. Initiatives were taken on an ad hoc basis. They were pursued, in case of success, and abandoned if the result was unsatisfactory.

Sometimes, the action had positive effects, but not necessarily the ones expected.

For example, the privilege passport package. The idea was to sell the customer a privilege passport which enabled them to visit all the Destination Anjou sites, with a view to increasing the length of stays. We messed up a bit, we must have sold a hundred boxes.

Although it did not work, there were unexpected positive effects. This made it possible to increase internal dynamics by developing joint thinking, “to work in a slightly different way... to foster the learning side of working differently and of working together”. In concrete terms, there was no shared action for marketing purposes, but the idea was to encourage “business referral”. Although the creation of a reservations system was dismissed, an online availability platform was created, which enabled the actors to refer customers to another establishment in the event of unavailability.

Other opportunities were also seized.

For example, the Cancer Institute asked us to organize a Michelin star banquet for which we all worked together. This increased our notoriety and created a new network within the network [...]. Beyond the marketing, communication, brochure printing operations, [it is] important for people to work together. Apart from the operations which specifically benefit members (an increase in the territory’s notoriety), other events with a beneficial impact are organized, such as, for example “A dish for Anjou”, a contest for the election of a typical dish of local gastronomy.

1.5. The Dordogne Valley: political ambition at the service of administrative division

The goal of local political actors was to propose a tourist destination consistent with tourist practices; whereby, erasing regional, departmental and intercommunal administrative boundaries. How has this ambitious political project been deployed and what are its limitations?

1.5.1. *Tourism in the Dordogne Valley*

The Dordogne Valley is an area that straddles the departments of Lot, Corrèze and Dordogne and whose boundaries are poorly identified. It is crossed by the Dordogne River, whose source is at Puy de Sancy, in Auvergne, and which gives its name to several territories it crosses until its confluence with the Garonne river. This area brings together the highest tourist numbers in the Lot department, comparable to the caves and valleys of Périgord (Milon 1960). In Périgord, the economic effect of tourism is marked by concentrated attendance along the lower Vézère valley and in the immediate surroundings of Sarlat (Delbru and Genty 1986). In 2018, this area (often referred to as “Périgord Noir” due to the color of the cork oaks which characterize the landscape) amounted to 59.09% of the

accommodation supply, generating 42.78% of overnight stays¹⁹. Further upstream, in the Lot department, the bank of the Dordogne represented 34% of the department's capacity and accounted for 33% of overnight stays in 2018²⁰. In addition, it is also along the Dordogne Valley that the most popular tourist sites are located. In the Périgord Noir, the town of Sarlat welcomes an average of 2 million visitors per year. For its part, the International Center of Parietal Art Montignac ("Lascaux IV") received 380,000 visitors in 2018, after welcoming 500,000 in 2017, when it opened its doors for the first time. Similarly, in the Department of the Lot, we can mention the village of Rocamadour, a known stopover for pilgrims on the way to Santiago de Compostela, which welcomes approximately 1.5 million visitors per year, or the *Gouffre de Padirac*, which received 480,000 visitors in 2018. In Corrèze, one village welcomes an outstanding number of tourists: Collonges-la-Rouge, with 700,000 annual visitors. The villages of Argentat or Beaulieu on the banks of the Dordogne also benefit from numerous tourist visits, thanks to their location within the same valley.

However, the geographical reality of the Dordogne Valley does not constitute an administrative reality. In 1974, the geographer Michel Daubet observed that there was an interest in promoting tourism in the "Dordogne Valley":

Beyond this framework, tourist development must be considered on a regional level. Would there not be an advantage in actively developing a joint action to integrate the Vézère Valley, the curiosities of Haut-Quercy and the Tarn gorges, for example, under the same whole? Would it not be essential to encourage the tourist development of the Dordogne Valley throughout its middle course? (Daubet 1974, p. 316)

In 2017, Philippe Violier identified this perimeter as follows: high to very high intensity of attendance in the Périgord Noir, and medium to high intensity north of the Lot. The touristic phenomenon is expressed as a countryside divided between the distant outskirts of metropolises, where villages emerge from their torpor every weekend, and actual tourist destinations, frequented mainly during the summer. For tourist communications, Dordogne uses the historic appellation "Périgord" or "the Lot" (Violier 2017) in Stock (2017, p. 280). As it is customary, for their practices, they operate in combination (MIT team 2011). They are dominated by discovery, particularly those devoted to prehistoric heritage sites, which receive the greatest number of visitors. Castles, churches and medieval villages are abundantly present in the valleys. Many villages have also been awarded the "Most Beautiful Village of France" label (3 in the Lot, 2 in Corrèze, 9 in the Périgord Noir). Gastronomy has a

19 *Analyse Flux vision tourisme Dordogne*, Dordogne Departmental Tourism Committee, "Tableau de bord de suivi de l'économie touristique 2018", p. 7, p. 41.

20 *Analyse Flux vision tourisme*, Lot 2017, p. 26.

prominent place, through the promotion of local products. There are also entertainment activities such as canoeing down the rivers, for example, which offers a different perspective on the landscapes. Tourism is diffuse and manifests as “different non-concentrated forms of tourism which exist in non-touristy spaces, within versatile economies whose dynamics can be either declining or ascending” (Knafo 1995, p. 15). In concrete terms, the presence of tourism reflects an underlying tourist network, that is, the “networking of places through circuits, which reflect itinerant practices more or less influenced by voluntary actions” (MIT team 2005, p. 341). However, there is no tourist institution that embraces the entire Dordogne Valley. This is a result of the numerous administrative (departmental and regional) divisions. Tourism actors are also seeking to overcome these limitations by proposing new tourist organizations to cover the perimeter of the Dordogne Valley, including the Departments of Lot, Corrèze and Dordogne.

1.5.2. Creation of a tourist office for the Dordogne Valley

In 2010, the municipalities in the north of the Department of Lot gathered for developing tourism, the territory’s main economic activity. Despite their opposite political tendencies, two elected officials agreed to bring together the tourist offices in the north of the Lot. These were Pierre Destic (right-wing mayor and president of the community of municipalities of Saint-Céré), and Gilles Liébus, (left-wing mayor of Meyronne and president of the community of municipalities of Cauvaldor). In 2009, the municipality of Rocamadour had already integrated the community of municipalities of Souillac, facilitating the creation of a Souillac-Rocamadour tourist office. In 2010, a joint tourist union was created in order to set up a new tourist office, under the management of the communities of municipalities of Souillac-Rocamadour and Padirac. In 2012, 55 municipalities spreading over two inter-municipalities came together and formed a first tourist office in the Dordogne Valley, administered by a mixed union. Then, 28 other municipalities joined them, convinced by the dynamics of the organization. The status of the tourist office was that of a public industrial and commercial establishment (EPIC, *Établissement public industriel et commercial*), supported by a new joint union. In total, eight communities of municipalities, seven tourist offices and nine permanent offices were merged.

The desire for a merger was driven by the will of pooling resources, something which motivated the elected officials. Until then, each of the seven tourist offices had managed their own brochures and websites, and the major service providers made their contributions to all those structures. The opinion *leaders* among the appointed officials and socio-professionals played a key role in encouraging other actors to follow the collective approach. Another challenge for the joint union was for each municipality to contribute to the tourist office’s financing. In 2014,

exchanges were established with the municipalities on the Corrèze bank of the Dordogne to integrate 65 municipalities and six communities of municipalities through the agency of the EPIC. The new tourist office of the Dordogne Valley was thus created on January 1, 2016. It included 148 municipalities located across nine communities of municipalities and adhered to two mixed unions (the Dordogne Valley region in the Department of Lot and the Corrèzienne Dordogne Valley in the Department of Corrèze) (Figure 1.7).

1.5.3. Aggregation of tourism actors from the Lot and Dordogne Valleys into an association

In 2015, under the leadership of the CEO of the *Gouffre de Padirac*, a 50-member inter-industry departmental network was created. The association known as “Touristic Vallées Lot Dordogne” was born, thanks to the impetus of the Lot Chamber of Commerce and Industry and brought together different actors from the tourist sector: visiting sites, restaurateurs, accommodation providers, holiday villages, travel agencies, etc. From March 2016, meeting events were organized with the aim of creating “synergies between professionals”. At the end of 2019, the association had 90 members, including one legal member, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry – which subsidized the association for the sum of €26,000 – eight active members (the Lot campsite association, the association of boat operators on the Lot river, the association of sites in the Lot and the Dordogne Valleys, the *Gouffre de Padirac*, the association *Bonnes tables du Lot*, the hoteliers association *Logis du Lot*, the *Site Remarquable du Goût* of the Lalbenque truffle market and the Lot Union of hotel trades and industries), as well as other adhering members whose annual subscription was set at €120.



Figure 1.7. Schematic map of the territory of the Dordogne Valley Tourist Office (Piriou 2020b, p. 19)

However, tourist institutions were conspicuous by their absence! For a good reason, the association was formed following the distrust of the Lot Departmental Tourism Committee. These professionals “wished to have their interests heard, to increase the territory’s attractiveness and to gain a better understanding of the departmental tourist fabric”²¹. In fact, the idea was born during a business forum bringing together 70 persons in 2015, where tourism actors expressed the wish to create a new network. An institutional actor explained that the association’s desire to sideline institutions and to create a network exclusively bringing together socio-professionals stemmed from the political opposition between the presidency of the Lot Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Departmental Council of Lot. Confronted with economic difficulties, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry would seek to reaffirm their unifying role, to the detriment of other existing institutions. Anyway, the sites in the Dordogne Valley felt poorly represented by tourist communications from the Department of “Lot”, because they designated the whole of the Lot Valley. In 2019, the Lot Departmental Tourism Committee reviewed this communication and created the destination brand “Vallées Lot&Dordogne”. Now, was this the consequence of distrust or the product of reflection around a strategic positioning?

1.5.4. Assertion of identity and political conflicts

The territorial boundary of the Dordogne Valley Tourist Office finishes at the Department of Dordogne, and particularly excludes the Périgord Noir. Also, a partnership agreement has been established between the Sarlat-Périgord Noir Tourist Office and that of the Dordogne Valley, to ensure promotion among groups. Their respective websites also evoke their territories. The directors observed that tourists systematically came to Sarlat and Rocamadour, even though each of the tourist offices could not market the place located in the neighboring department. Furthermore, in 2015, a Dordogne Valley destination contract was signed for a period of three years, with multiple local authorities in Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Occitanie, including tourist institutions, tourist operators (such as the airports of Brive and Bergerac) and other socio-economic actors, under the leadership of the Public Territorial Establishment of the Dordogne Basin (EPIDOR, *Établissement public territorial du bassin de la Dordogne*).

Along the Dordogne Valley, to the north and to the east, both on the Lot side and on the Corrèze side, the process of bringing together the tourist offices marked the advent of a local institution strengthening the spirit of an interdepartmental tourist destination. However, difficulties persisted in the expansion of those areas, particularly towards Périgord Noir, located in the Department of Dordogne. Personalities played a key role in the extension of a territory of action. For the areas

²¹ Press release “Touristic Vallées Lot Dordogne”, press conference from January 7, 2016.

located in Lot and Corrèze, despite being politically opposed, the two elected officials agreed on the challenges of tourism development. Many appointed officials, not to say almost all of them, governed the tourist offices. In the Dordogne Valley, the political will was to achieve a merger between the Corrèze tourist offices, as evidenced by the comments of departmental and regional elected officials reported in the regional daily press in March 2013:

Christelle Coursat, regional councilor, president of the Limousin Regional Tourism Committee, first mentioned the common base of tourist offices and the Region's support policy, which made it possible to better structure, federate and pool resources. [...] Jacques Descargues, vice-president of the General Council [of Corrèze], congratulated those responsible for having anticipated the merger: he declared that the merger had long been underway in the department. It is more complicated for some, nowadays everyone has identified the need to move towards the tourism of the future²².

Furthermore, the tourist office was not limited to a financing or sponsorship role, as evidenced by the involvement in destination contracts. These conventions allowed tourism actors to become engaged in the governance of the destination, enhancing its attractiveness and competitiveness (Bédé 2015). The dynamic of cooperative actions brought to fruition by the directors of the tourist offices of the Dordogne Valley and Sarlat-Périgord Noir resulted in the signing of a destination contract. This took place between the EPIDOR and other co-signatories: the state, three regions, two airports, six departments, EDF and four tourist offices. However, unlike the Loire Valley, there was no consensus around the Dordogne brand, limiting many activities to the Dordogne departmental boundaries, even though the project called for their loosening.

1.5.5. Ensuring equal governance between Lot and Corrèze

In the Dordogne Valley, as soon as the Lot tourist offices were brought together, the status of a public industrial and commercial establishment was chosen, with a president at its head (who was also to preside over the supervisory Lot community of municipalities), and a director. This was a status created by deliberation of the local supervisory authority, which acted as a legal entity under public law with financial autonomy. However, unlike an association, interventions were limited to local authorities' territories. This status implied a strong political orientation, something which was felt all the way to the management committee, since it mainly comprised elected officials. Within the "Dordogne Valley" association, the

²² Excerpt from the article "Tourisme : la fusion des offices de tourisme à la traîne". *La Montagne*, March 15, 2013, p. 17.

management committee of the tourist office was made up of 15 elected officials from the Department of Lot and 12 appointed officials from the Department of Corrèze. Nevertheless, the originality of governance was particularly striking due to the parity between Lot and Corrèze, mainly through the support of the same number of 10 socio-professional representatives for each of the two departments. To elect this college of socio-professionals, public meetings were organized, bringing together 10 sectors identified with the tourism sector, and during which the elections of representatives took place. The communities then only had to appoint the elected persons. This approach – previously implemented when the tourist office was only set within the Department of Lot – signaled an innovative mode of governance, because at the time, it already included 11 elected officials and 10 socio-professionals. Then, the tourist office benefited from a budget of approximately 2 million euros, including €600,000 from the local supervisory authorities (which provided €10.50 per inhabitant), as well as assistance for a total of €70,000, contributed by the Region of Occitanie and €40,000 by the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region.

The former directors of the seven tourist offices after the merger were entrusted with executive missions within the new structure. Within the Dordogne Valley Tourist Office, the organization chart evolves every year to come out of “silo” mode and to privilege a project management modality. For example, two employees are project leaders, and two other employees are project managers. Due to this, staff training seems necessary to standardize skills. In the Dordogne Valley, the Corrèze bank and the Lot bank did not function in the same way. It was necessary to find solutions to share documents among 148 municipalities whose premises were over an hour’s drive away. Staff were trained in the use of clouds or even a telephone system facilitating rapid exchanges between sites. A person was also dedicated to managing calls, with switchover scenarios, depending on office staffing levels. However, in both tourist offices, particular importance was given to reception teams (with continuous openings during the high season), as tourist activity is strongly related to the notion of service.

1.6. Tourism in the Lake Geneva region: the challenge for actors to step beyond boundaries

Léman Sans Frontière is an association which in 2023 brought together 29 leisure and cultural sites located in France and Switzerland on either side of Lake Léman, also known as Lake Geneva. Their unifying factor is the lake, which has catalyzed their image as part of a marketing collaboration, which has now lasted for almost 30 years. Whether they be interpretation centers, local transport companies, amusement parks, castles, stations, etc., in France or in Switzerland, all the member sites of the association coordinate this voluntary network on behalf of

their organization, in view of creating cross-border tourist destination for the collective good.

Communication with the public represents one of the main pillars of the association's activities: in 1996, a first guide was published, bringing together partner sites. This guide is distributed in each of the sites as well as in various places of passage in the Lake Geneva region (accommodation, restaurants, train stations or airports, tourist offices, etc.). During the 2000s, the sites' information was digitalized, thus enabling the sharing of an unprecedented Franco-Swiss database. Since the beginning of the 2010s, a new direction has been given to the creation of a cross-border tourist supply, including visiting sites, accommodation and transport.

1.6.1. The Lake Geneva basin, tourism development on the French and Swiss shores

The Lake Geneva region is an area which extends around Lake Geneva. This region, which straddles between France and Switzerland, has two cities which are known worldwide. Located along the boundary with France, the Swiss city of Geneva is the largest in the region in terms of the number of inhabitants. It has 185,791 inhabitants, to which must be added the 208 municipalities forming a cross-border agglomeration of nearly a million inhabitants²³, Greater Geneva. From the 18th century, the city positioned itself as a literary crossroads, justifying the arrival of artists. Jean-Jacques Rousseau bore witness to the beauty of the lake landscape:

The view of the Lake of Geneva and its lovely shores had always a particular attraction in my eyes, which I cannot explain, and which does not depend only on the beauty of the sight, but on something more compelling which moves and stimulates me (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, Book IV, 1953²⁴).

The city also stands at an important geopolitical crossroads thanks to the presence of international institutions such as the League of Nations or the United Nations since the 20th century (Tissot 2007).

Fifty kilometers away on the northern shore of Lake Geneva, there is the city of Lausanne, with 139,720 inhabitants. Since the middle of the 19th century, this city

23 Sources: *Mémento statistique du canton de Genève 2018*, Cantonal Statistical Office, Geneva, June 2018, p. 2 and *Grand Genève, mode d'emploi*, p. 2.

24 Excerpt from the pedagogical dossier of the exhibition "D'une rive à l'autre, voyage autour du Léman, acte II" from March 24 to November 10, 2018, town of Thonon-les-Bains, Department of Culture and Heritage, p. 14.

has benefited from the connection to an international transport network and its educational, sporting and healthcare establishments have an unparalleled reputation. Even today, the International Olympic Committee is set there (Humair 2007).

The region has benefited from increased tourism through the development of several resorts along the lake's shores. At the beginning of the 19th century, Montreux, located at the eastern end of the lake, was no more than a group of villages. The municipality has become a real fashionable resort, with a densification of high-standing hotel establishments (Rinaldi 2006). Together with the town of Vevey (19,004 inhabitants)²⁵, Montreux (26,006 inhabitants) forms the "Vaudoise Riviera", a name definitively describing the region by the tourist industry.

On the French shore, other locations have developed to treat patients: Thonon-les-Bains, which has 34,895 inhabitants, and its neighbor less than 10 kilometers away, Évian-les-Bains, 8,965 inhabitants²⁶.

Évian-les-Bains experienced its real tourist development after the discovery of the Cachat spring in 1789, spurring the creation of the famous brand of mineral water with the same name, and the establishment of a thermal spa resort in 1826. The thermal station development was such a success that the bourgeois resort model was replicated around the small outlying towns over the lake's banks (Maxilly, Publier, Neuvecelle). At present, Évian-les-Bains is positioned as a high-end resort, competing with Lausanne, located on the opposite bank (Sceau 1974; Durand and Fererol 2009).

The Lake Geneva region includes:

- over 3 million inhabitants²⁷, including the French and the Swiss side of Lake Geneva;
- tourist and business attendance estimated at over 8.5 million overnight stays in 2017²⁸;
- 28,576 establishments involved in the tourism sector, including 37% catering, 31% leisure activities, 15% accommodation and 10% transport²⁹.

25 Source: Statistical office of the Canton of Vaud, Vaud population as of December 31, 2018.

26 According to INSEE in 2015.

27 Source: *Conseil du Léman*, <http://www.conseilduleman.org>.

28 Sources: 3,054,435 nights in Geneva according to the Geneva Cantonal Statistics Office (2017), "Bilan de l'hôtellerie genevoise", *Informations statistiques*, No. 11, June 2018, p. 2; 3,467,900 overnight stays in Lake Geneva, Vallée Verte, Les Brasses, according to Savoie Mont-Blanc Tourism (2017), "Chiffres clés du tourisme en Savoie Mont-Blanc", p. 9; 1,227,800 overnight stays in Lausanne according to the tourist office of the Canton of Vaud (2018), "Nuitées 2017: une nouvelle année record pour le tourisme", press release from the tourist office of the Canton of Vaud, February 22, 2018.

However, there is no official tourist destination that encompasses the whole Lake Geneva region. This can be attributed to the multiple borders within this region marking territorial boundaries. This situation complicates the relationships between actors on either side of the frontiers (Piriou 2011).

The lake separates two nations: France and Switzerland. Then, within each region, there are other subdivisions. The Swiss part is divided into three cantons (Geneva, Vaud and Valais), while the French part has been split into two departments (Ain and Haute-Savoie). Moreover, these territories are further divided into inter-municipalities and municipalities in the French sector, and into districts and municipalities in the Swiss sector.

Until the 1970s, cross-border relations between France and Switzerland were faint-hearted (Poschet et al. 2001). However, in 1987, the creation of the Lake Geneva Council, a political body for cooperation between the French departments and the Swiss cantons of the Lake Geneva region, initiated collective reflections, particularly for facilitating a cross-border space (banking, insurance, transport, etc.) for a regional population, namely those who cross the national boundary daily as part of a home–work commute. On the contrary, when it comes to tourism promotion, each territory sells its administrative perimeter. In Geneva, for example, the Geneva Tourism and Congress Foundation (which serves as the tourist office), together with the Tourism Advisory Commission, are responsible for the application of the cantonal law on tourism:

1) The purpose of this law is to ease the promotion and development of tourism.

2) In concrete, it aims a) to develop quality tourism matching the demand, highlighting natural and historical riches, cultural and sporting events as well as the traditions of the canton of Geneva; b) to stimulate the promotion of tourism for Geneva; c) to support the economy through the development of tourism (Cantonal Law on tourism in Geneva, Article 1).

The promotion of the tourist destination and the organization of events are limited to the city and canton of Geneva. This same mechanism applies to all the other territories in the Lake Geneva region (Piriou 2018a). The cross-border character of this space (which reflects an idea of passage, of crossing) does not seem to be evident. In 2002, on this subject, referring to the case of the cross-border region of Lille, Pierre Mauroy³⁰ declared:

29 Source: 2014 figures according to the *Union lémanique des chambres de commerce* (2016), “Filière tourisme. Le bassin lémanique: une réalité économique”, 2016 edition, p. 4.

30 Political figure in the city and metropolis of Lille from 1967 to 2013 and former French Prime Minister from 1981 to 1984.

Cross-border organization is not an obligatory thing; it requires the will of everyone on both sides of the boundary (MOT 2002, p. 15).

Several French and Swiss leisure and cultural sites, private owners, and then public actors have come together since 1995 to collaborate in the marketing of a cross-border tourist destination.

1.6.2. Genesis of a Franco-Swiss tourist association

It was in 1994 that the idea of creating Léman Sans Frontière was born, following the initiative of actors from two distinct territories: the pre-Alpine resort of Moléson-sur-Gruyères and the lakeside municipality of Bouveret, represented by their promotion corporations (tourist offices). Established in 1995, the association aims to promote Franco-Swiss tourism, so as to increase tourist visits around Lake Geneva. For the small Moléson resort, designed in the 1960s by Philippe Micheloud, the aim was to capture summer tourist flows. In fact, this private management station is located at an altitude of 1,100 meters. However, the limited number of days of snow cover quickly prompted developers to reorient the resort's seasonality, by betting on summer activities, which bring in between 60% and 80% of the annual turnover. For the small lakeside municipality, there was a desire to convince vacationers who go to the mountains during the winter to make the most of the lakeshore during the summer. Under the leadership of Charles-Henri Coutaz, president of the promotion corporation (tourist office) of Bouveret, the project was to intensify tourist attendance in the municipality around the Swiss Vapeur Parc (created in 1989, a park dedicated to locomotives and miniature railways).

1.6.2.1. Sharing clientele and making tourists sightsee around the lake

This principle of having visitors circulate around the lake then arouses the interest of other actors, such as the *Compagnie Générale de Navigation* (a navigation company over Lake Geneva), or the Evian mineral water bottling company. With 12 sites in 1995, 16 sites in 1996 and 28 in 1999, the association's number of members rose to 26 in 2023 (including 24 sites in Switzerland and nine sites in France). Among the association's members, there are local organizations (most of which are private, such as tourist train sites, gardens, ski lifts, etc.). These local actors also have a say in public and parapublic tourism institutions, with more of a development (or even a prescribing) role. They are mainly tourist offices (in France: Yvoire, Divonne-les-Bains, Monts-Jura, Thonon-les-Bains, etc.; in Switzerland: Romont, Gruyères).

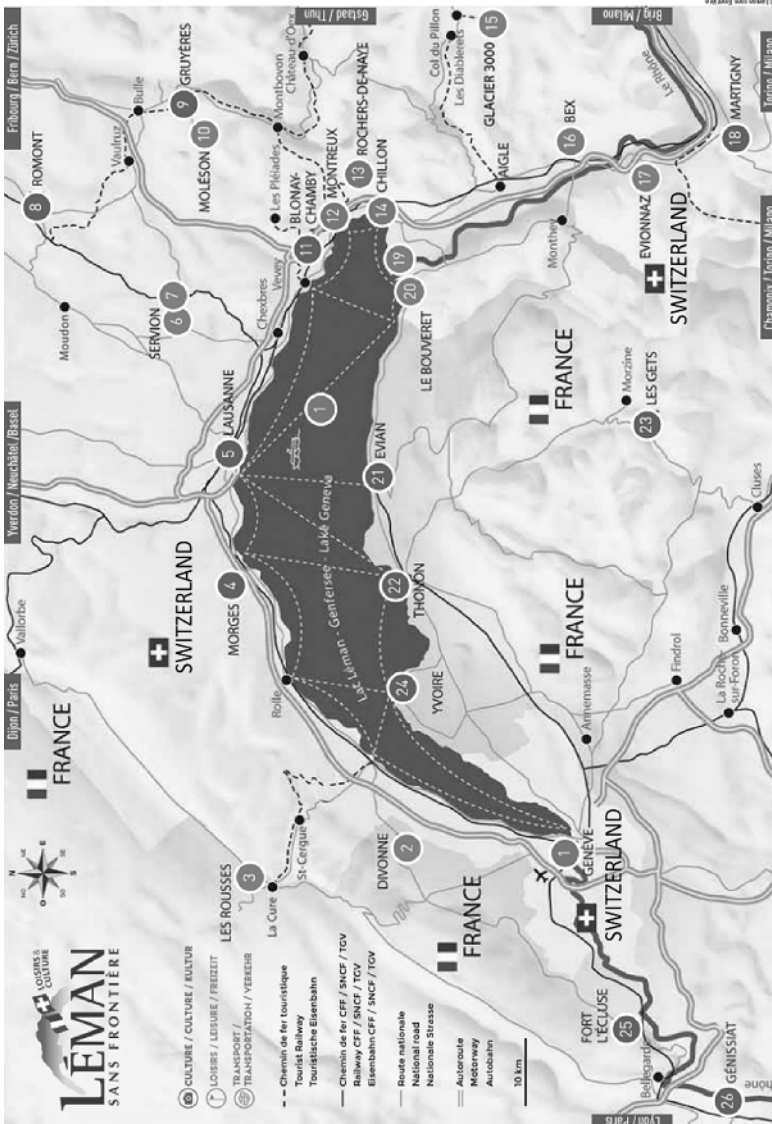


Figure 1.8. Map of the 26 sites of the "Léman Sans Frontière" association in 2023 (Léman Sans Frontière, 2023)

COMMENT ON FIGURE 1.8.– *Among the members³¹, some sites have significant attendance: 365,500 visitors to the Chillon Castle, located near Montreux (Switzerland), 304,800 visitors to the Olympic Museum in Lausanne (Switzerland); others have more modest attendance: 36,869 visitors to the Jardin des Cinq Sens in Yvoire (France); 24,080 visitors to the Château de Ripaille in Thonon-les-Bains (France).*

All these actors are associated in this Franco-Swiss tourism development project. According to the statutes of the association, the starting point is:

To bring together tourist attraction sites with significant visitor potential and supply diversification so as to boost promotional forces and better satisfy the audience, providing them with a variety of quality excursions³².

A directory guide was also developed, with the purpose of reaching out to tourists. Every year, 275,000 copies are published and distributed to all member sites and to the various information and promotion points (accommodation, catering, tourist offices, etc.).

1.6.3. Defining a common strategy for French and Swiss actors

To build a strong presence in the landscape of French and Swiss tourism actors, the Léman Sans Frontière association must define a strategic axis. As an association, the difficulty for Léman Sans Frontière is to bear in mind collective interest, all the while respecting the individual interest of each member. The issues at stake are not the same for all the members:

– A water park, such as Aquaparc, located on the Swiss bank of Bouveret, welcomes over 260,000 visitors per year and generates a turnover of over nine million Swiss francs³³.

– A museum, such as Voltaire’s castle in Ferney (France), now a public property, welcomes 13,924 visitors and collects €1,962 in entry fees over a year³⁴.

31 According to 2016 figures communicated by the heads of tourist offices and tourist sites following field surveys (Piriou 2019).

32 According to Article 2 of the 1995 statutes of the “Léman Sans Frontière” association.

33 Anonymous (2013), “Aquaparc, en route vers quatre millions de visiteurs”, *Le Temps*, June 10, 2013, <https://www.letemps.ch/economie/aquaparc-route-vers-quatre-millions-visiteurs>.

34 *Centre national des monuments historiques* (2017), “Rapport d’activités 2016”, p. 67.

Still, all the sites have contributed 7,000 Swiss francs (approximately €6,400) to the Léman Sans Frontière association over a period of three years. For some, this sum only constitutes an item within the communication budget; whereas, for others, it may represent a real complex financial arrangement, with multiple actors involved and negotiated to the nearest cent. Despite this, the positive aspects of an alliance and the network strategy prevail, embodying a valuable opportunity for member sites. This strategy reinforces commercial visibility and grants access to an enhanced distribution capacity (Frochot and Legohérel 2018, p. 156). Resource pooling makes it possible to achieve significant savings.

The association brings together sites with a prominent international reputation, thus attracting significant tourist flows. Furthermore, these sites act as locomotives for tourist flows to be spread towards smaller sites. They also benefit from the structure's communication (as in the case of the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, or the Evian mineral water bottling plant).

The number of member sites (26 sites in 2023) reveals that the association has branches for managing tourist information, both in terms of dissemination and collection. Whether located in France or Switzerland, regardless of the department or canton, each member distributes the tourist guide, all the while collecting data as to the locality's policy or its tourist attendance. This valuable deployment makes it possible to overcome the constraints of boundaries when it comes to obtaining of statistical data or disseminating communication media. For example, some sites establish partnerships with brochure distribution companies.

At every membership renewal date (every three years), some member sites leave the network, mainly due to financial reasons or changes in management. Except for 15 member sites, which joined the Franco-Swiss collaboration between 1996 and 1998 (and which were still present in 2023), around 10 sites left the network a few years after their first membership. This instability makes the alliance and network strategy envisaged by member sites difficult to pursue.

However, currency fluctuations have an undeniable impact on tourist traffic. For example, in 2015, the Swiss franc was revalued (appreciation of over 30% during the same week). The purchasing power of French tourists in Switzerland is rendered more difficult by the presence of a strong franc. As the Swiss Confederation is outside the European Union, this monetary boundary also complicates alliance and network strategies.

1.6.4. Maintaining the Franco-Swiss collaboration over time

1.6.4.1. Shared cross-border collaboration operations

To encourage the joint promotion of these combined service initiatives, the Léman Sans Frontière association financially supports member sites³⁵:

- 500 Swiss francs (approximately €445) per partner in the context of general public exhibitions (e.g. Mahana in Lyon and the International Tourism and Travelling Exhibition in Colmar);

- 500 Swiss francs per salon in the context of professional exhibitions (e.g. Top Résa in Paris or exhibitions for works councils in Dijon, Nancy, Annecy, etc.).

These salons are located in two well-identified trade areas, bordering the Lake Geneva region (eastern France, Rhône-Alpes, etc.). The construction of a supply including several sites reveals an underlying desire to encourage greater circulation of visitors in the Lake Geneva region, and mainly to increase the attendance of the association's member sites.

Striving to take a leap ahead in the process of combining supplies, the Léman Sans Frontière association requested financial assistance from the Interreg IV France/Switzerland program (2007–2013). A tandem that brought together the tourist office of Divonne-les-Bains (France) and the Swiss Vapeur Parc – both implementing the project on behalf of the association – made it possible to obtain funding for an amount of €556,250 (890,000 Swiss francs), thus marketing 80 supplies in the form of excursions or stays with a total cost of €943,750 (1.51 million Swiss francs).

In 2012, a reflection was initiated in order to reach other visitors, namely local population and tourists who do not consume the combined services, but who may be led to Mix&Match member sites at their will, as part of a discovery trip for leisure and cultural activities³⁶. Without a doubt, at the beginning of the 2010s, the digital tool seemed undeniably useful to visitors for disseminating tourist information.

Between 2013 and 2015, the tourism development agency from Ain (Ain Tourisme, France) and the Bex Salt Mines Foundation (Switzerland) both carried out a Lake Geneva itinerant project called “Mobi- Léman”, on behalf of the Léman Sans Frontière association and the Léman Council. Total project cost: €537,916.

³⁵ Figures communicated to the general assembly of Léman Sans Frontière on April 20, 2007 in Servion.

³⁶ Minutes of the general assembly of Léman Sans Frontière of October 3, 2012 in Neydens, p. 3.

€148,500 in European grants as part of the Interreg IVA France/Switzerland program.

At the operational level, the “Mobi-Léman” project was organized as follows:

– Working groups in each territory (departments and cantons) were made up of representatives from the spheres of tourism and culture.

– Each working group proposed three itineraries in 15 points of interest and wrote scenarios from a documentary base and using technical means (videos, augmented reality, etc.).

– 19 thematic itineraries were created, on either side of the shores of the lake, with a geolocation and coordination service offered via a smartphone application.

– Links between member sites via routes using different modes of transport (car, bike, boat, on foot).

At the end of 2016, the application already had 3,140 downloads.

1.6.4.2. *Developing synergies between private and public actors*

On April 12, 2016, the 20th anniversary of the Léman Sans Frontière association was celebrated. About a hundred guests gathered on the boat *Henry Dunant* (Compagnie Générale de Navigation fleet), during a festive cruise on Lake Geneva between the ports of Lausanne-Ouchy (Switzerland) and Évian-les-Bains (France). The president of the Lake Geneva Council in 2016 and Ms. Virginie Duby-Muller (MP for Haute-Savoie and vice-president of the Departmental Council of Haute-Savoie) testified to the role of the association in the relations between the two shores of Lake Geneva:

It is true that, through the numerous cross-border projects developed since the beginning of the 2000s, Léman Sans Frontière illustrates, the Franco-Swiss tourism initiatives implemented in recent years, in a concrete and exemplary manner.

The recognition by public institutions of the concrete character and exemplary nature of a private initiative to promote exchanges between France and Switzerland confirms the success of Léman Sans Frontière. The alternating presidency of the Franco-Swiss association has contributed to establishing trust among members for 20 years. As stated by the current president, Mr. Philippe Benoît, during the anniversary ceremony, the challenge for the association is now to direct activities on two registers:

To increase the notoriety of the association to the point of making Léman Sans Frontière *THE* essential network of Franco-Swiss sites³⁷.

To be an essential network, the association must ensure the solidity of its operation. With this goal in mind, the extraordinary general meeting of April 22, 2015 validated the clarification of the association's statutes. Two elements were to strengthen the collaborative mindset as well as the network's functioning.

Firstly, in the goals of the association, the new statutes of 2015 insisted not only on localization, but also on sharing (Article 3):

To bring together operators from cultural, leisure or transport activities related to tourism in the Lake Geneva region in France and Switzerland. To develop and promote the activities of its members through mutual exchanges and joint actions.

Secondly, the organization of the association is defined by three distinct bodies (Article 5): the general assembly (supreme body, according to Article 6); the committee (appointed in a general assembly with at least five members, including two per region, an office comprising a president, a vice-president, a treasurer and another member elected, according to Article 17); and the audit body (responsible for verifying the accounts, according to Article 22).

The desire to promote the work of the committee and the office was particularly emphasized, from 2014, under the French presidency of Mr. Yves d'Yvoire (owner of the Jardin des Cinq Sens), when the dozens of underlying meetings were synthesized behind the motto: "Léman Sans Frontière, an association that works"³⁸. It was repeated in 2017 under the Swiss presidency of Mr. Philippe Benoît, director of the Bex salt mines, who summarized the work of the year 2016, marked by the 20th anniversary³⁹:

2016 was also a lot of work, 2 traditional general assemblies, 6 committees, 4 educational days with more than a hundred participants, around twenty trade fairs in Switzerland and France with several thousand contacts, 250,000 brochures distributed in 3 languages.

37 Léman Sans Frontière (2016), "Vingt ans de Léman Sans Frontière: une véritable *success story* franco-suisse", press release, April 12, 2016, p. 2.

38 Minutes of the general assembly of Léman Sans Frontière of Wednesday, April 9, 2014 in Lausanne, p. 3.

39 Minutes of the general assembly of Léman Sans Frontière of April 27, 2017 in Divonne-les-Bains, p. 3.

Léman Sans Frontière is an association that operates on a budget of 280,000 Swiss francs (€186,000), without employees. Besides, 80% of this sum is dedicated to carrying out promotional and communication actions. However, beyond promotion and communication, the association strives to increase cooperation between members. Cooperation also conveys the idea of exchange between members. It can be analyzed by the dialogue set in motion as well as by the role occupied by the actors in this same cooperation (de Bruyn and Fernández 2012). Also, several general assemblies were the subject of thematic conferences for members, depending on the concerns of the moment (Table 1.1).

Date and place	Theme
May 11, 2016 at Fort l'Écluse (France)	Tourism jurisdiction and French law of August 7, 2015 relating to the new territorial organization of the Republic.
April 27, 2017 at Divonne-les-Bains (France)	Symbiosis and importance of links between the tourist office and socio-professional in promotion and marketing.
May 4, 2018 at Gets (France)	Shedding light on cross-border tourism collaboration in the Portes du Soleil area.
November 30, 2018 at Prangins (Switzerland)	Knowledge of German tourism and expectations of “group” customers.

Table 1.1. *Examples of thematic conferences given during general assemblies of Léman Sans Frontière (2016–2018)*

To conclude, the approach launched by private tourism actors almost 30 years ago is part of the logic of cross-border tourism development in the administrative territories of the Lake Geneva basin. In addition to cooperation for the purposes of promotion and marketing of tourist sites and places, the search for a mechanism for understanding the functioning of partners (French and Swiss legal systems, setting up projects with European funding, etc.) has intensified relationships between the actors. A hint of fragility is nonetheless noted, given the fact that certain personalities contribute to maintaining exchanges and initiating collective projects. However, once these personalities leave the network, the intensity of exchanges may receive the impact of the difficulty for successors to become aware of how the network works, or a limitation of commitment.

1.7. *Autour du Louvre-Lens*: a UFO in a disadvantaged economic landscape

1.7.1. *An emerging tourism project*

1.7.1.1. *History*

Unlike other destination contracts aiming to draw attention towards tourist regions already acknowledged as such, the *Autour du Louvre-Lens* (ALL or “Around the Louvre-Lens”) initiative was born to support an emerging tourism project. In any case, this is what happened in the territory where a new prestigious museum (the Louvre-Lens) was established, in order to enhance cultural appeal and thus regenerate a region subject to major economic and socio-political challenges.

After hemming and hawing over its location, the Louvre-Lens Museum was built in Hauts-de-France (then called Nord-Pas-de-Calais), a former mining territory, at the heart of a triple-contour space:

- the closest area (the district of Lens-Liévin, likely to obtain direct effects from the museum’s implantation);
- the extended area, reaching the mining basin and its immediate fringes (from Béthune and Bruay-en-Artois to Carvin and Hénin, Douai and Valenciennes);
- on a regional scale, taking into account the attractions of other important cities such as Arras (to the south-east) or Lille (to the north). In a broader sense, the project aimed to stimulate the coastline of Nord-Pas-de-Calais and the Somme, the Flemish Region and the major tourist towns of neighboring Belgium.

Historically, the idea of setting up the Louvre at Lens was supported by politicians, in particular, by Mr. Daniel Percheron (the regional president at the time). Without his contribution, nothing would have been achieved. It was later supported to varying degrees, by the elected officials of the territory in question, not without local reluctance or conflicts. Special emphasis was placed on other complementary issues at stake: integrating popular cultures, acknowledging employment needs in the broad sense and considering other tourism and culture vectors (e.g. sport, ecology and green spaces, the conviviality of well-living and a festive atmosphere). The Region was a seriously involved partner in the project’s financing and steering.

1.7.1.2. *An incipient tourist orientation*

Although the Louvre-Lens did not in itself awaken an incipient tourist function, it undoubtedly stimulated it, through the political attention it received, and the financial resources that were put into place in complementary goals (economic recovery measures, handcraft, and industrial clusters, etc.).

To boost tourist activity, it simultaneously benefited from four complementary attractiveness factors (beyond many other surrounding museums and cities already mentioned, such as Arras, Douai or Lille):

– the increasing appeal of places of remembrance (international cemeteries, wartime memories, notably the IWW on the occasion of its centenary, widely celebrated in France⁴⁰);

– the valorization of the mining basin, which was included on the World Heritage List around the same time⁴¹, through long-term work carried out locally. This declaration was accompanied by the restoration of several major sites and the development of visits to slag heaps or mining museums;

– the desire to develop circuits and green spaces and to connect them together, for walking, cycling or relaxation, in a territory where ecology had long been neglected in favor of landscape-destroying industrialization;

– the prestige of the urban heritage of certain cities, the belfries⁴² (a regional feature crossing the Belgian border) and the art of celebration (carnivals, the Processional Giants⁴³, clearance sales, fun or sporting events) to awaken an original popular culture.

1.7.1.3. *Tourism as a way out of the economic crisis*

The original idea of the regional president was to rely on examples of regenerative ecosystems from implantations with tourist appeal and development models related to culture, services and the ecological transition.

As usual, it drew on an entanglement of models from different places: for example, Bilbao's revitalization thanks to its dynamic heritage, the relocation of

40 A pass bringing together 11 museums was also designed to create a sort of network of possibilities for visitors, the most popular being Ypres (in Belgium), Péronne (Museum of the Great War), Albert (Somme Museum 1916) and Arras (the Wellington Quarry). However, near Lens, we find the great symbolic places of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette (one of the largest soldiers' cemeteries) and Vimy (with its Canadian memorial). To a larger extent, there are around 50 memorial sites (memorials, cemeteries, museums) in the region, including in Lens itself (Lens 1914–18). According to C. Douay (Somme Museum): "before the start of the commemorations of the Great War, 1914–18 stood for Verdun. Today, more and more French citizens are coming to discover our places of remembrance, even if the British still make up the bulk of visitors. Among the British, almost every family has had one of its members fall on the Northern Front".

41 June 30, 2012.

42 Let us mention those of Douai (14th century), Béthune (14th century) and Arras (15th century), which echo many others in Flanders.

43 *Les Gayants de Douai* are particularly well known.

Beaubourg to Metz, the simultaneous creation of Mucem in Marseille, the Ruhr's older effort to transform its economy and landscape after being Germany's industrial and coal center.

To get out of the economic depression and the stagnation of its residents, it aimed to create jobs, relaunching activity in local towns, particularly in Lens (through Euralens); clusters in the handicraft and new technology fields were thus foreshadowed.

This spin-off policy, relying on the previously mentioned tourist sources, proved to be complex. It sometimes put the cart before the horse. It experienced delays (due to lack of operational branches and resource distribution, the implementation being more complicated than expected, as a result of conflicts between the actors involved). However, contrary to what some hasty analysts may have thought, the conflicts did not extinguish the movement, nor did they reduce the Louvre-Lens to the dimension of a heritage niche with weakened resonance.



Figure 1.9. *Example of mining rehabilitation, following inclusion on the World Heritage List, Wallers-Arenberg site, in Valenciennes. Picture by Pierre Louart, 2019*

They rather created a coepetition atmosphere between local towns, with the emergence of other projects. This happened not only between culture and tourism actors who had learned how to work a little better together, no matter what, but also between the culture imported to the Louvre-Lens and local traditions (which resurfaced by expressing their own demands). In short, the territory found itself in a situation of increasing coepetition.

1.7.2. The logic of a regenerative territory

1.7.2.1. Mining heritage

Even though we can associate the Louvre-Lens with other cultural or tourist markings in the region, its focal point is the mining basin⁴⁴. The testimonies from the promoters, as well as from the park's director and curator of the main collections place a special emphasis on the historical roots of the place as a coal mining site. Moreover, the architects of the SANAA agency remodeled their initial project at the last minute to harmonize it with the environment ("our intention was for the visitor not to note where the landscape ends and the building begins").

Despite an initial emphasis on the metropolis of Lens-Liévin, the cultural impact was necessarily broader, thus extending the tourist scope to the mining basin area, opening up to the region at large. It is in this space that the museum's circuits and resonances were gradually organized.

In fact, the entire mining area experienced unemployment challenges (generally higher than elsewhere in Nord-Pas-de-Calais), and difficulties recovering from its industrial past. In that sense, the territory was relatively homogeneous, compelled to envision its renewal⁴⁵.

44 "At present, the former mining basin constitutes a dense and uninterrupted space of urban municipalities making up the densely populated districts of Béthune, Lens, Douai, and Valenciennes, with respectively 285,000, 362,000, 248,000 and 349,000 inhabitants. The impact of the Louvre's arrival to the heart of a former mining basin will go far beyond the sole territory of the municipality of Lens. Due to the high intensity of transport and communication infrastructure, the city of Lens is connected to the main economic development centers, at the heart of Lille's metropolitan area, which extends from Béthune to Valenciennes, from Arras to Lille and beyond the Belgian border. This calls into question the pertinence of the territorial scale when engaging public policies for supporting the implantation of the Louvre", *La Voix du Nord*, 2012.

45 Facing problems not very different from the ones experienced by the Ruhr in Germany, without completely succeeding in overcoming difficulties.

It could be interpreted as a potentially regenerative⁴⁶ territory, which would likely have its image revitalized by tourism and encouraged to innovate in order to attain socio-economic rebound.

To contribute to the territory's economic rebirth and its social rehabilitation, it was necessary to envisage new equipment, new projects, new deployments of services or industry, as well as work on town planning, culture and overall symbolism.

1.7.2.2. Chronology

In order to attain those goals, let us cite some key dates in five points:

– The preparations were like a stroke of luck converted into necessity. Special praise should be given to Mr. Daniel Percheron, president of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region (Liévin) who took advantage of his connections with the former president of the Louvre (H. Loyrette). He showed a lot of persistence to see the project through. In 2003, Guy Delcourt, mayor of Lens, had already proposed the city's candidacy to host the decentralization of a large Parisian cultural establishment (initiative of the then Minister of Culture). Lens was chosen for the Louvre implantation in 2004. The laying of the first stone took place on December 4, 2009.

– At the same time, Euralens was formed (2009), leading economic, urban and tourist projects (e.g. *La chaîne des parcs*): “born with the arrival of the Louvre in Lens, Euralens is above all a major forum for the territories, a collaborative approach for accelerating the urban, economic, social and cultural transformation of a metropolis in the making” (www.euralens.org). At the same time, within the framework of local development, there were more or less concerted groups (museums, slag heaps, regional towns, tourism, etc.).

“On 21 December 1990, the last *gaillette* (a large piece of coal) came up from pit No. 9/9 bis in Oignies. Around twenty years later, the territory of the former mining basin, still marked by the industrial revolution and past coal mining activity, saw the establishment of the Louvre in Lens and had to prepare to accommodate the 500,000 visitors expected every year under the best possible conditions. Public actors supported the economic reconversion and the numerous transitions that this territory went through, classified by UNESCO in 2012 as an evolving cultural landscape. As part of the Regional Economic Development Plan (SRDE, *Schéma régional de développement économique*), the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region launched Euralens, a tool for the transformation of the territory and a unifying structure for projects”.

Box 1.1. “*Le Louvre à Lens, un défi culturel, sociétal, économique et urbain*”, *Profile pages*, No. 110, September 2012, INSEE

46 Able to be regenerated.

– The beginnings of the museum were largely subsidized and glorified. However, after the launch (inauguration on December 4, 2012) – which did not go without resistance – conflicts between the actors started arising; this was between the persons in culture and tourism, between appointed officials, between the locals and more distant players. There was no proper estimate of the time lapse required to produce lasting effects (truly embodied in the space). Waiting took too long, which triggered criticism or disappointment, and even anger from the actors experiencing the economic side effects (more sluggish than expected). Certain symbolic signs were noted (the opening of the museum restaurant, the Atelier, by Marc Meurin in 2013; shows offered to residents in the Museum Stage; the millionth visitor in January 2014 – that is, 14 months after the opening – the first museum visit for babies over nine months in September 2014).

– In 2015, the signing of the ALL destination contract (see section 1.7.2.3).

– The arrival at Louvre-Lens of a direction, which was both political and cultural (Marie Lavandier, who desired to implement actions rooted in the territory). Strengthening links with the Louvre-Paris, thanks to the installation of reserves in another local site. Synergies (a large meeting in October 2017), the symbolic use of the five-year anniversary after the opening and the 10 years of design, implementation and start-up, as well as a strategic projection (2019) over the following 10 years.

1.7.2.3. ALL (*Autour du Louvre-Lens*)

The destination contract was yet another means for activating the development process, as were two almost simultaneous and happy coincidences: the exaltation of places of remembrance, on the occasion of the centenary of World War I (1914–1918, therefore 2014–2018) and the promotion of mining, leading to a remarkable rehabilitation of sites which can now be “visited”.

ALL (*Autour du Louvre-Lens*) was one of the 22 destinations chosen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to attract international clientele. Instigated by the Departmental Council of Pas-de-Calais, ALL brought together 70 public and private partners, “committed to the tourism transformation of the mining basin”, via a “contemporary” approach (in line with societal trends and novel forms of consumption). The local supply had the advantage of “being out of the ordinary”, an ideal trait for differentiation. It became necessary to bring forward this coherence and territorial originality, to make tourism one of the levers of economic development. How could branding be tackled? How could actors come together to serve tourists? How could they set common goals to increase and improve the quality of the existing supply?

ALL was firstly designed to increase foreign attendance, by strengthening promotion in priority markets (Benelux, Germany, United Kingdom, as well as Japan, because the SANAA agency, designer of the museum, was Japanese, and there were Toyota premises not far away). The available means were (international and local) culture, identity values that the inhabitants were proud of, the organization of events, and creativity (to imagine the tourism of the future, its need for original experiences, its quality and mobility requirements, its use of communication technologies and virtual realities, etc.). Since March 2018, “ALL” branded products have been present in seven pop-ups in Japanese luxury department stores.

ALL also participates in a project for the promotion of jobs and competences (ADEC, *action de développement des emplois et des compétences*).

1.7.2.4. *The Louvre-Lens: an opportunity as a starting point*

The Louvre-Lens was born from a need and an opportunity. In strategic terms, there is more resemblance with the garbage can model by March⁴⁷ than with a premeditated strategy for persuading all the actors. Just as “opportunity makes a thief”, the project’s creators joked about their good luck, attributing it to a constellation of happy coincidences – even though some of those coincidences had been largely driven and oriented.

We could also speak of a “translation” device (in the sense of Callon and Latour). After all, contrary to what Tobelem says (to stigmatize initiative and predict its failure), any emerging project has an “above ground” side. Or rather, it is often designed by thinking about its (real or potential) roots, even though its innovative characteristics require a taming and appropriation process with a certain time lapse before achievement is reached – especially since there is an initial “distance”, even an “incongruity”, between the object and its context, such as Beaubourg in Paris.

In the case of Louvre-Lens (LL), the ALL destination contract was one of the elements which characterized the desire to use all the available means in an emerging context, for the sake of progress.

They quickly realized that the LL would not suffice on its own to redeploy energy in a sector hampered by complex difficulties. The title of the contract is eloquent: it is “around” (*Autour du Louvre-Lens*) that other opportunities should be spotted (while the short form “ALL” conveys the idea of bringing “everyone” on board).

47 This is a very common model in *management* policy. If we plan to satisfy the need for rational demonstration ex post, many decisions stem from incidental opportunities, from unexpected meetings between problem providers and solution providers.

Nevertheless, it was broadly accepted that “the LL was one of the strong levers for the territory’s renewal, with a commitment from various actors to carry out joint actions and transform the territory into a tourist destination” (Grafov 2018).

While the Louvre displays achievements directly related to its territory, we should also take into account the larger events it resonates with. For example, in autumn 2020, it inaugurated a design exhibition which earned the city of Lille the nomination as the 2020 World Capital of Design.

1.8. Mélusine accueil: a system of actors with no intermediation

Mélusine accueil is a network based on the actors’ geographical proximity. All members, except for one, are located inland and the majority of them, in Vendée.

	Effective members	Located in Vendée	Including those outside Vendée
Accommodation	39	39	0
Catering	10 including two off-grid	10 including two off-grid	0
Various leisure and shopping	41	36	four in Deux-Sèvres one in Charente-Maritime
Number of companies	88	83	5

Table 1.2. *The Mélusine accueil network: situation in February 2020 (source: website consulted on February 20, 2020, elaborated by the authors)*

1.8.1. A flexible structure made up of small companies with complementary activities

On the one hand, they are characteristic for the heterogeneity of the members who pay a membership to the association, and, on the other hand, there is a functional complementarity between them. According to the assessment we carried out on February 20, 2020 (Table 1.2), 39 members are accommodation providers, 10 members feature catering and 41 others offer activities or the sale of local products. Dissimilarities multiply within each of these generic categories. Among the hosts, there are hoteliers and owners of rooms or *gîtes*. Among the latter,

members are involved in two national networks, Gîtes de France and Clévacances. Quality criteria provide a sense of unity because all members are awarded with at least three *épis* (“ears of wheat”, according to the Gîtes de France rating system) or three keys. Besides, hotels are members of the Logis group. Catering options range from restaurants to *tables d’hôtes*. However, another difference lies in the fact that not all room rental companies offer this formula. Diversity is the reason for being of this association, its purpose, to provide tourists with the opportunity to program their stay as they wish, choosing from a varied supply. Alongside accommodation providers, many structures offer either leisure activities or the sale of local products. Out of the 41 various choices, only 26 offer a form of leisure activity, sometimes limited to only one season apart from summer. The other 15 proposals are essentially commercial, with boutiques at the manufacturing sites or within the region.

1.8.2. Weak dynamics

The association is chaired by an elected official, assisted by a six-member board of directors, but is not supported by any mediating structure. Despite the number of members tending to increase (82 in 2019), the network is losing momentum, which largely depends on the president’s enthusiasm. The driving forces are running out of steam. This peculiar change may be due to the development of the Internet and the direct links that members establish via their own websites with customers. The deployment of “OTA” commercial sites (Other Transaction Authorities, or generalists like Leboncoin) calls into question such initiatives. However, the interest in being a member is not evident when reading the site. There is no provision for leverage. No tailor-made commercial proposals for customers are offered on the website. What would make sense is tariff reductions, degression, etc. for the tourists who stay at the members’ accommodation in exchange for a proactive promotional approach. The heterogeneity required to match the complementarity sought by tourists in need of a global but flexible response to their needs seems excessive, particularly with regards to the role of production-oriented local crafts and purely commercial activities. These supplies offer little added value to the network, compared to those which offer more or less elaborate entertainment options (in situ exhibitions, training courses, diverse initiatory activities, etc.).

1.9. Experimenting with a tourism cluster in Morbihan

Since 2006, the General Council of Morbihan has embarked on a process for creating clusters dedicated to the department’s important economic sectors: the boating and shipbuilding sector (2007), later electronics, communication, and information technologies (2008) and artistic crafts (2008). For the General Council

of Morbihan, the notion of cluster is meaningful in that it complements public and private actors, thereby promoting the collective development of businesses thanks to economies of scale and resource pooling. Furthermore, the approach is also of interest for the community in terms of territorial marketing, as it helps legitimize the inclusion of the Department of Morbihan among the innovative territories.

1.9.1. A global reflection applied to tourism

In 2012, the president of the General Council of Morbihan, François Goulard, was concerned about the figures for the tourist economy. This department, located in the southeastern area of the French region of Brittany, benefits from tourism consumption for approximately 1 billion euros, impacting 9.5% of jobs. However, according to this actor, tourism is not evenly distributed across the territory. In fact, 25% of the department's municipalities offer commercial accommodation for tourists and are located along the coast. These 560,000 commercial tourist beds generate approximately 3 million euros in tourist tax. They are largely dominated by campsites (103,824 beds for 266 campsites). However, it is the furnished accommodation which is most present in terms of the number of establishments (1,983 establishments for only 9,228 tourist beds). Still, according to INSEE, in 2012, Morbihan had a non-market offer greater than the market offer with 79,706 second homes, 398,530 beds or 71% of the tourist beds in the department. Half of the clientele was made up of families and 80% of the tourists were French, mainly from Brittany and the Paris region. Among the foreigners, half were British. The tourist demand monitoring survey (SDT, *Suivi de la Demande Touristique*) carried out during the summer of 2011 revealed that the Department of Morbihan was in the fifth position in relation to the number of tourist overnight stays, behind the Var, Charente-Maritime, Hérault and Vendée. This finding challenged elected officials. However, the annual number of overnight stays only slightly began to change after the year 2000 (31,746,581 overnight stays in 2000, 34,179,754 in 2001, 34,745,637 in 2003 and 33,376,848 in 2011)⁴⁸. After that, the office responsible for tourism from the General Council of Morbihan started speculating about the possibility of creating a cluster.

The General Council of Morbihan now wished to take charge of the tourist development. However, since December 11, 1978, that mission has been entrusted to the Departmental Tourism Committee, an association under the 1901 French Law, created upon the initiative of the General Council and endowed with a departmental subsidy of 80% as an operating budget. The creation of a tourism cluster was legislated upon and proclaimed during the departmental session of January 30, 2013. Its mission was the “to array all of the actors in the sector, relying on the expertise of

48 *Les chiffres clés du tourisme en Morbihan*, 2014 edition, p. 8.

the Departmental Tourism Committee on all actions relating to the territory's promotion and the engineering required for structuring this sector"⁴⁹. Relying on its tourism department (attached to the economic development department), the General Council of Morbihan claimed its legitimacy over the Departmental Tourism Committee for managing the cluster:

By clearly stating its tourism policy, the department is committed to its partners. The implementation of the [departmental] plan must be closely monitored and managed by the tourism service, acting as the technical representative of the departmental assembly who voted for this program⁵⁰.

By openly stating its policy on tourism, the department wished to commit to its partners. The creation of this tourism cluster matched the will of the General Council to update an orientation plan called the "Departmental Tourism Development Plan", outlined for the 2013–2015 period. It immediately showcased itself as a break with Brittany's Regional Tourism Plan (2012–2014) by refusing to integrate a shared marketing approach⁵¹. We will detail how the Morbihan tourism cluster operated for two years, until the 2015 departmental elections, which put a halt to that system.

1.9.2. *The tourism cluster model for the General Council of Morbihan*

The establishment of a tourism cluster was carried out in a context of tension between the General Council and its Departmental Tourism Committee. In January 2012, an audit noted that:

The collaboration between the General Council and the Departmental Committee was incomplete: no procedure for dialogue and regular consultation had been set up. The agreement associating the Departmental Tourism Committee with the General Council did not make it possible to define a level of articulation between the community and its essential arm for implementing the departmental tourism policy⁵².

49 Excerpt from the Morbihan Departmental Tourism Plan 2013–2015, p. 79.

50 Ibid., p. 81.

51 Report of the definitive observations from Brittany's Regional Chamber of Accounts, Morbihan Departmental Tourism Committee. Fiscal years 2012 and following, March 24, 2017, p. 4.

52 Ibid., p. 19, citing the PwC audit.

As proof of these tensions, the eighth vice-president of the General Council and vice-president of the Departmental Tourism Committee was appointed as the 2013 cluster referent (instead of the fourth vice-president of the General Council, already appointed as president of the Departmental Tourism Committee). Furthermore, the change of director of the Departmental Tourism Committee in 2013 was also revealing of this animosity. Nevertheless, the General Council took control over the departmental tourism policy, justified by the emergence of a tourism cluster:

The General Council of Morbihan has redefined its tourism development policy for the period 2013–2015 and desires to invite businesses, as well as other associative and institutional organizations related to the departmental tourist economy, to tackle a shared reflection work⁵³.

For its part, the Departmental Tourism Committee took note of this organization proposal and included the “active participation for implementing a tourism cluster” in its 2013 action plan. However, that initiative was not included in the financing convention with its collective supervisory authority⁵⁴.

1.9.2.1. *Preparation of the cluster via consultation workshops*

In January 2012, the Morbihan General Council appointed its communications director as head of the tourism department, who would be responsible for establishing a database of tourism actors in Morbihan. Some institutions and companies, such as the Morbihan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, quickly accessed this pooling process; whereas, others, such as the Departmental Tourism Committee, did so less promptly. With the arrival of a collaborator in the tourism department, invitations were abundantly sent to tourism companies and institutions in order to organize consultation among the tourism actors.

In September 2012, workshops were held with the goal of “proposing places of exchange so as to identify the territories’ major challenges and the difficulties encountered”⁵⁵. Coordination fell into the hands of a consulting agency, the head of the tourism department of the General Council and the director of the Departmental Tourism Committee. The participants were grouped into “professional” workshops (accommodation providers, event organizers, leisure companies) and “transversal” workshops (tourist supply and adaptation to clientele, accessibility to offers, attractiveness of the Morbihan region, observation data, tourism and tourist reception professions). During these workshops, participants made comments and observations and envisaged different solutions. For example, during the transversal

53 Excerpt from the Morbihan Departmental Tourism Plan 2013–2015, p. 6.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

workshop “tourist supply and adaptation to clientele”, it was found that the supply of leisure equipment for the “families and youth” audience was not sufficiently clear due to the large number of prescribers. A proposal was made to train seasonal workers on the supply’s diversity for leisure and event sites.

These consultation workshops were allegedly implemented as a new tourism policy that reflected the departmental strategy on tourism, organized around four axes:

- 1) to support tourism businesses in adapting and qualifying the supply to improve its quality and perceived level of value for money, for all clientele and all range levels;
- 2) to support destinations in qualifying their supply and their reception for all clientele;
- 3) to guarantee an outstanding reception in order to develop the destination’s attractiveness and foster guest loyalty;
- 4) to diversify departmental tourism to strengthen and secure its economy.

The tourism department of the General Council was designated for implementing the plan and for monitoring achievements during its enforcement. It was also to assess works as technical representative of the departmental assembly. Concerning the methodology of action, the 2013–2015 Tourism Development Plan had to define the “who does what”, outline the role of the actors and “internally, define the scope of the departmental institution, leveraging the department’s services and the Departmental Tourism Committee”⁵⁶. Implementing the collaboration between private and public actors was inscribed in the tourism cluster’s logic, seeking to make professionals work together and put them in contact with tourism-related sectors of intervention, as well as playing a key role in the supply proposed to the clientele (transporters, developers, promoters, commercial unions, etc.)⁵⁷. The consultation workshops notably brought to light the desire of tourism actors to clarify the roles between the competent structures or authorities.

1.9.2.2. *Organization of the cluster and its pilot committee*

The tourism cluster was launched on April 12, 2013 “to array all of the actors in the sector, relying on the expertise of the Departmental Tourism Committee on all actions relating to the territory’s promotion and the engineering required for structuring this sector”. The cluster presented itself as a tool based on the General Council’s capacity to create, organize and lead a network of actors bringing together

56 Ibid., p. 77.

57 Ibid.

professionals, training organizations, financial partners, communities and tourism-related sectors of intervention. The mode of governance had to ensure the areas of competence of each actor and encourage public and private actions. The risk of engaging multiple actors could be seen as a source of competition or redundancy in the actions to be tackled and end up hindering the readability and effectiveness of departmental policies. A pilot committee for the tourism cluster was instituted in order to guarantee operationality, when implementing the Tourism Development Plan. It brought together three representative colleges:

- appointed officials with seven general advisors, including the tourism cluster referent, the president of the Departmental Tourism Committee and the arts and crafts cluster referent;

- private companies with 17 socio-professional actors (three hoteliers, two managers of outdoor hotels, one lodging manager, two managers of transport companies, two managers of tourist residences and holiday villages, two event managers, one restaurateur, one thalasso-therapy manager, one industrialist, one leisure site manager, one travel agency manager);

- partners with 11 representatives of consular, institutional or federative structures (Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tourist Offices, Regional Council, Chamber of Trades and Crafts, etc.).

Therefore, the members of the board of directors of the Departmental Tourism Committee were not de facto members of the pilot committee. Some persons belonged to it (on a personal basis), but the engagement of “network leaders” representative of branches and professions was not systematic, unlike what happened with the board of directors of the Departmental Tourism Committee.

On this topic, one of the cluster leaders declared:

We were looking for the most suitable persons capable of having ideas, even if these were a bit far-fetched, the goal was to differentiate ourselves from the classic board of directors and to stimulate new ideas. The idea was to focus on people who had a slightly different vision, either by company size or the personality of their managers⁵⁸.

The pilot committee, led by the General Council, validated the actions proposed by the consultation workshops. The cluster referent, a departmental advisor, defined the cluster’s purpose as a desire to:

⁵⁸ Interview conducted at the tourism department of the General Council of Morbihan, in the city of Vannes on November 4, 2013.

get to know the expectations of professionals, for everyone to participate. The idea is to strengthen tourism culture within the General Council by being innovative and competitive in market segments, on certain themes. As for the articulation with the General Council, everyone is expected to get involved. Four orientations are given for the renewal of the Tourism Development Plan which need to be taken up by the cluster. The Departmental Tourism Committee will be in charge of implementing an operational work, particularly in terms of marketing⁵⁹.

The pilot committee was responsible for monitoring the reflection encouraged by the thematic workshops in compliance with the four orientations set by the 2013–2015 Tourism Development Plan. Meetings were held three times a year in assembly. During these sessions, the spokespersons for the thematic workshops presented the actions depending on their progress and the pilot committee issued an opinion. For example, during the pilot committee meeting on October 4, 2013, the president of an accommodation network in the department presented the various courses of action discussed and finally implemented within the thematic workshop “family and proximity” (which falls under orientation #3); and, in particular, a *benchmarking* action on the sector targeting specific clientele. The following step would involve developing a quality charter with an audit of volunteer professionals, and then elaborating a guide. During the meeting, a tourist office director, member of the pilot committee, intervened to clarify that the “family label” already existed and that there was no point in reinventing something that was already properly working. The assembly re-discussed the term, specifying that it was not really a “label”, but a charter of commitment applied to establishments, not to municipalities or tourist offices. At the end of each pilot committee meeting, the actions to pursue were decided upon, together with the actors to be engaged. Therefore, at the end of the pilot committee of October 4, 2013, one thematic workshop (“business tourism”), initially piloted by the tourism department of the General Council, was taken up under the management of the Departmental Tourism Committee in connection with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Also, two thematic workshops continued to be managed by the tourism department of the General Council (“family and local customers” and “tourist signage”) and five new workshops were scheduled, still under the management of the General Council’s tourism service (“overall satisfaction”, “good reception practices”, “tourist promotion of events”, “tourist consumption of secondary residents” and “reception of groups and coach operators”).

59 Introductory speech by the vice-president of the General Council of Morbihan, referent of the tourism cluster during the opening of the pilot committee on October 4, 2013 in Vannes.

1.9.2.3. *Coordination of thematic workshops*

After the launch of the tourism cluster in April 2013, thematic workshops were organized, led by the tourism department of the General Council, in which any tourism professional from the Department of Morbihan could take part. In 2013, five workshops⁶⁰ took place 15 times at different places (in the General Council premises and in tourist establishments). On average, each workshop session gathered 10 persons from diverse backgrounds and distinct professions, in order to discuss the themes defined in accordance with the main orientations of the Tourism Development Plan; and, in particular, the ongoing projects. The choice of workshop themes was the result from the consultation workshops, having made it possible to define the 2013–2015 Tourism Development Plan. As one of the tourism facilitators from the General Council explained, “the idea is for professionals to act as requesters, for us to count on their strength and their mobilization to change things, because we [the facilitators of the General Council’s tourism office] cannot do so”⁶¹. Each workshop session was preceded by a reminder of the cluster’s logic as a place for sharing, inviting the participants to give testimony of their experience, rather than having information passed down by an institution. The goal was to organize joint actions between public and private actors, as well as among the private actors themselves. The facilitators reminded that “putting oneself in cluster mode” requires adaptation:

When I launched the workshops, I insisted on the fact that when we operate in a cluster, it is clear that we are competitors (two hoteliers for example), but even so, this is a place of reflection where we put the collective at the service of everyone. This is what we should cultivate, making it clear that the collective is superior to the individual and once this is properly understood, the participants will realize that by serving the collective, they are also doing a service to themselves, at the individual level. The idea is to reverse the powers, to embrace sharing, solidarity, alliance strategies, all in tune with the new times⁶².

The positions adopted by the members of the Departmental Tourism Committee during these workshops could make relations complex. However, certain participants

60 Five workshops were organized: “targeting specific clienteles”, “outstanding hospitality”, “qualifying tourist offers and networking with tourism actors”, “business tourism”, “secondary residents”.

61 Interview conducted at the tourism department of the General Council of Morbihan, in the city of Vannes on November 4, 2013.

62 Interview conducted at the tourism department of the General Council of Morbihan, in the city of Vannes on November 4, 2013.

who were traditionally considered as “opinion leaders” preferred to let other actors express themselves.

The tourism cluster experiment led by the tourism department of the General Council of Morbihan ended in 2015, the year of departmental elections and the promulgation of the NOTRe law. First, elections changed the presidency of the Departmental Tourism Committee. On March 29, 2015, the departmental elections were over. The General Council of Pont-Scorff, president of the Departmental Tourism Committee since 2004, did not stand for election; so, in 2015, a new president arrived as the head of the departmental tourism institution. Therefore, the former vice-president of the Departmental Tourism Committee and former referent of the tourism cluster took full presidency of the Departmental Tourism Committee. Afterwards, the law of August 7, 2015 (which established a new territorial organization for the Republic⁶³), came to modify the competence of communities, and in particular the department’s economic competence, since it removed the general competence clause and the capacity of the departments to intervene in the economic development area. The department would maintain its orientation as a guarantor of human solidarity and territorial cohesion. Also, on November 1, 2015, a new territorial development department was created at the General Council of Morbihan, which merged the old economic and territorial development departments, and removed the tourism service and its tourism cluster, which would therefore remain in the state of experimentation for the General Council of Morbihan.

1.9.3. Morbihan's tourism system for the actors

The experimentation of a tourism cluster in Morbihan made it possible to identify the functioning of tourism actors, in terms of their professional relationships and their bonds with others. Therefore, the Morbihan tourism system was thoroughly revealed during the thematic workshops, a place for exchanges, testimonies and problem identification.

1.9.3.1. Stakeholder mobilization and institutional tensions

The thematic workshops organized during 2013 mobilized a wide variety of professionals. There, we could find directors and presidents of tourist offices from seaside, urban or rural destinations, hoteliers from independent establishments, hotel chains of heterogeneous ranges, castle owners, managers of museums or leisure sites, etc. During a workshop on the theme “quality of the tourist supply and networking” organized at the General Council in Vannes on June 6, 2013, the

63 Law No. 2015-991 of August 7, 2015 pertaining to the new territorial organization of the Republic, published in JORF No. 0182 of August 8, 2015, p. 13, 705.

participants stated their motivations for participating in this cluster as the session started:

In inland Brittany, we need an external perspective, to improve quality, we are looking for a critical perspective on how to draw visitors in (Castle owner).

How can we ensure complementarity between the tourist office, the department and the Departmental Tourism Committee? Redefining goals in terms of complementarity instead of competition, when we listen to certain directors [of tourist offices], well, it is quite shocking (A tourist office director).

Working in synergy, complementary work, finding a leader to foster networking (A tourist office director).

Identifying the role of each (public and private) actor, creating synergy between the actors of tourism in Morbihan (A communications manager of a leisure site).

I am glad that there is a cluster, it lets us outpour our worries, find instructions, solutions (A director of a travel agency).

Better organization, work on quality, production by workshops and information coming back down, we don't all have a similar vision of what constitutes quality (A tourist office director).

Carefully chosen activities, good events that work well, we also have expectations about New Information and Communication Technologies (NTICs). We are also concerned about defining "non-quality" because we know quality well (A manager of a leisure facility).

In the search for overall information, networking (A museum manager).

There's no point in being alone, networking means that tourists are freed from any barriers (A campsite owner).

Beyond the search for support through the network, the actors' problems differed, depending on the size of their structures and their experiences. On the contrary, the actors identified the existing tensions between the General Council and the Departmental Tourism Committee, which led the facilitators to make the following observation:

We clearly feel that the scope, and the articulation are not yet completely fluid. In the coming weeks we will have a clearer panorama, bearing in mind that we are positioning ourselves as an incubator and a business nursery, and are not tied to a marketing or promotion strategy⁶⁴.

Moreover, the actors felt this difficulty. As evidenced by an accommodation director: “the establishment of the cluster by the General Council was a stone in the shoe of the Departmental Tourism Committee”⁶⁵. A tourist office director declared:

When the department’s tourism service was formed, we had a little difficulty understanding the difference between the role of the Departmental Tourism Committee and the General Council. At first, we imagined that the department desired to regain control of the Departmental Tourism Committee (DTC) and restore coherence, but then we saw that there was another vice-president of the General Council, referent of the cluster and a new director of the DTC who did not want to hear about the cluster. there was certain confusion in terms of information⁶⁶.

The lack of coordination between the services of the General Council was also pointed out by a tourist office director: “politically, within the General Council’s ‘boutique’, it was accepted that the president of the Departmental Tourism Committee did not agree with the General Council’s policy on the cluster, it is absurd”⁶⁷.

1.9.3.2. *Local and regional policies versus departmental policy*

The Department of Morbihan is a territory where the concentration of facilities and tourist numbers is located along the coastal fringe, revealing an imbalance (from the point of view of the General Council). However, during the workshops and pilot committee meetings for the tourism cluster, it became clear that the department was also being held responsible for a lack of will to publicize tourism. In that sense, a tourism professional from Lorient denounced the historic rivalry between Vannes and Lorient:

From Lorient’s viewpoint, it is difficult for us to work together with Vannes. It is a historic fact, even in terms of supply, Lorient has often

64 Interview conducted at the tourism department of the General Council of Morbihan, in the city of Vannes on November 4, 2013.

65 Interview conducted on March 3, 2015 with a tourist accommodation provider.

66 Interview conducted on March 9, 2015 with a tourist office director.

67 Ibid.

been considered as a somewhat secondary territory rather associated with fishing and the naval [...], today we have the impression that the General Council is much more interested in the development of the region of Vannes than in Lorient. There are political choices, I can understand that, but a department is a department⁶⁸.

From this perspective, despite its management by the community in question, the cluster had the merit of encouraging meetings between the actors and “of gaining further knowledge about what my neighbor is doing, having a complementary supply to what I offer. The goal is for the economy to develop at a territorial scale”, declared the director of a tourist office⁶⁹. The question of political power also came into play. In the case of Lorient, it turns out that the municipality and the agglomeration had a “left-wing” political sensibility; whereas, the General Council had a “right-wing” orientation. In broader terms, there was also the question of territorial power. Each appointed official sought to stand out, for which tourism constitutes a strategic means. For example, in the Brocéliande forest, all the communities of municipalities had monopolized the tourism competence (some of them for over 30 years); whereas, this was optional until 2015, to ensure tourism development in their territories. Another example: when the Brittany Regional Tourism Committee created the “Brocéliande destination” straddling the departments of Morbihan and Ille-et-Vilaine – the first tourist destination inaugurated by public and private actors on March 18, 2013 – the Morbihan General Council did not adhere to the tourist destination strategy of the Brittany Regional Tourism Committee. It should be noted that the Brittany Regional Tourism Committee classified the Breton departments according to their tourist attractions. In particular, Morbihan was divided into four destinations: “Bretagne Loire Ocean”, which brought together the municipalities of Ille-et-Vilaine, Loire-Atlantique and some of Morbihan (La Roche-Bernard, Penestin), “Bretagne Sud Golfe du Morbihan”, bringing together Lorient and Vannes, “the heart of Brittany kalon Breizh”, reuniting the municipalities from the departments of Finistère, Côtes-d’Armor and Morbihan, and finally, “Brocéliande”. The actors somehow felt a confrontation between several policies, as expressed by the director of a tourist office: “it all comes down to a question of local power, local structures want to have power, be them the elected officials or technical actors. In tourism, power plays a prominent role”⁷⁰. The interest of the cluster was perceived as a means for creating a participatory intermediate level between local power and departmental power: “animating a network like the cluster is anything but being in power”, explained a director of a tourist institution, “in any case, we are faced with an ego problem”, explained a campsite manager⁷¹.

68 Interview conducted on March 25, 2015 with a leisure site equipment manager.

69 Interview conducted on March 9, 2015 with a tourist office director.

70 Interview conducted on March 9, 2015 with a tourist office director.

71 Interview conducted on March 3, 2015 with a campsite manager.

1.9.3.3. *Networks of belonging to break free from territorial and organizational impositions*

In the face of a heterogeneity of public and parapublic counterparts, who carried out their actions on multiple territorial levels and acted on behalf of their territories in tourism development and promotion, the tourism professionals in Morbihan had to become organized. Proximities were established by sector, by territory, by theme, which facilitated the creation of networks. Within these networks, professionals exchanged information and knowledge they considered necessary, because they voluntarily adhered to these networks. As a tourist destination, “Absolument Brocéliande” brought together approximately 50 professionals, without a legal structure, “it is just a network which gathers professionals. Its intention is not to create immediate economic benefits, we operate on exchange, on the sharing of values. We are more in tune with development than with promotion”, declared one of the members⁷². On the coast, seven tourist offices in the Auray region also created an association in May 2010. The goal of the “Group for the promotion of Quiberon Bay and its islands” was to publicize their destination. At the time, the directors of the tourist offices sought to go beyond municipal limitations, foreshadowing collective competence by the Auray agglomeration community. Other tourist offices on the Morbihan coast (those in prominent tourist destinations) shared their reflections with 20 other tourist offices in seaside resorts in Brittany via the “Sensation Bretagne” network. For them, “the idea was to globally promote the coastline, including a coordination component and a digital strategy, given the fact that the big seaside resorts had a locomotive effect on the small destinations”, stated the director of a tourist office⁷³. The actors also grouped up by sector. This was the case of the Union of Hotel Trades and Industries, the National Federation and the Breton Union of Outdoor Hotels. Some networks were even supported by the Departmental Tourism Committee. This is what happened with the Departmental Association of Leisure Facilities, who were subject to a partnership agreement in 2006. For leisure equipment professionals, “it was an important network, as it provided key knowledge and launched work sessions around common themes (depending on the topic chosen). One may attend the meetings, or not”, declared the director of a leisure facility⁷⁴. Finally, another form of gathering (the thematic network) mobilized actors around a common subject or a shared value. This was the case of sustainable development, which brought together 50 professionals from Morbihan, transforming the former professional tourist group from Auray and the Quiberon Bay region called “Morbihan Sud” and created in 2002, into the “Morbihan Responsible Tourism” association. In 2015, the president justified the interest of the association for tourism professionals:

72 Interview conducted on March 9, 2015 with one of the members of the “Absolument Brocéliande” group.

73 Interview conducted on Tuesday, March 3, 2015 with a tourist office director.

74 Interview conducted on March 25, 2015 with a leisure site equipment manager.

The name “Morbihan Responsible Tourism” is more in line with the actors’ approach. It is a professional network, there is an adventure circuit which is very well anchored in this approach, there is also unusual accommodation, or a more classic campsite. The old name “Morbihan Sud” focused too much on the coast. In addition, it did not mark our environmentally friendly footprint, and establishments in the north of the department did not want to join a network called Morbihan Sud⁷⁵.

This network was also part of broader networks. Therefore, the president told us that the eight members of the association’s executive committee were involved in local structures and local meetings (development committees of the region of Vannes, of the region of Auray, the communities of municipalities and agglomeration, the TGV club) with the aim of publicizing actions and keeping their audience informed about innovations, in order to stimulate and trigger new projects. As such, a “car-free vacation” project was launched with the actors, in order to test other modes of travel.

The thematic workshops of the tourism cluster also promoted a rapprochement between professionals in the business travel sector. At the end of the thematic workshops reuniting event and seminar professionals, the “Morbihan business” association was born in 2014 under the impetus of the General Council’s tourism department, and then thanks to the support of the Departmental Tourism Committee and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In 2019, during the change of presidency, the network included a total of 49 members, who hoped that the association would position the Morbihan destination on the “business” market, promote the sector, engage in the qualitative improvement of the supply and facilitate exchanges and synergies. It should also be noted that from 2016, the Departmental Tourism Committee and the Morbihan Responsible Tourism association prepared the creation of a brand and an association called “Green Morbihan”, which materialized after four working meetings in March 2017. Morbihan Responsible Tourism embodied a cluster dynamic itself, since the association claimed to be a nursery and support for professionals engaged in a sustainable development approach. The association played an incubator role for the Green Morbihan association⁷⁶. The terms “business nursery” and “incubator” clearly indicate a cluster approach.

75 Interview conducted on March 3, 2015 with the president of the Morbihan Responsible Tourism Network.

76 Anonymous (2017), “Green Morbihan, la démarche s’organise!” [Online]. Available at: <https://www.morbihan-pro.com/green-morbihan-la-demarche-sorganise/> (accessed: March 9, 2020).

1.9.4. Lessons from a local authority's attempt at "clustering" tourism

The initiative from the General Council of Morbihan to implement a cluster approach in 2012 seemed original, as no other French department had previously embarked on such an adventure. The principle was coherent with a cluster's DNA, something amply known in the industry. However, its inner workings, governance and spatial dimension quickly showed the limitations of having a local authority manage the project at a departmental level, while bringing to light the expectations of tourism professionals regarding networking relevance.

1.9.4.1. Involvement and time granted to the collective

While the tourism cluster experiment lasted, we could note that very heterogeneous actors took part in workshops and the pilot committee meetings. These elected officials, technicians, managers, owners from various professional and geographical backgrounds saved part of their time for collective reflection. As one tourist office director declared, this openness was also sought by the participants:

What I find interesting in the cluster is that it is open to everyone, without necessarily representing any interest in particular, one man, one voice, it's like a forum, we share ideas, it's a real asset. If we don't reach the majority of the opinions, we drop the subject⁷⁷.

However, the diversity of profiles during the thematic workshops also presented the difficulty of giving voice to actors who were more or less trained in the tourism sector, with a deeper or poorer knowledge in the trade. The director of a leisure facility told us:

Between the intention, the idea and its accomplishment, there is a relatively high step. We are confronted with a diversity of entities (in legal structure, in size, in the sector of activity), we are dealing with issues and structures which do not share the same approach⁷⁸.

During the thematic workshops or pilot committee assemblies, it became evident that the actors who mastered "the codes and principles" of the institutional or industrial tourism sector mainly strove to intervene (even almost inopportunistly), on the grounds of a claimed expertise. However, during the presentation, the discourse manifested a desire for participants to express themselves at an individual level:

At each workshop I projected a slide explaining that this is a space for respect, for cooperation, kindness. But there were times when it all got

⁷⁷ Interview conducted on March 9, 2015 with a tourist office director.

⁷⁸ Interview conducted on March 25, 2015 with a leisure site equipment manager.

out of hand. I warned more than one reminding them that we had to be careful and tune ourselves in a benevolent mode. The ‘all we have to do, it suffices to...’, merely showed that some persons are used to being know-it-alls, that they find it difficult to see what others are doing or to call themselves into question⁷⁹.

This situation took place during a “business tourism” thematic workshop in September 2013, when an institutional actor, with an academic training in tourism and experience in multiple positions, wanted to take the lead and impose his actions on the sector. Several years later, a facilitator still remembered the situation:

At the meetings I attended, this actor in question always operated like this: “this is my suggestion, either you take it or leave it!” The cluster’s logic does not work that way. We prefer to give the participants a topic and for them to work on it. This actor in question had created an unspeakable mess during this workshop and the people who took part in it were disappointed in not being able to successfully carry out their actions, they were unable to work correctly as they had during the previous workshops⁸⁰.

This situation revealed the participants’ interest in getting to know each other better and getting out of an “individualistic” game. As one accommodation director explained: “the problem is that we sell the same thing, in the same territory, and we can’t organize ourselves to prevent duplicates and know how to invest where needed”⁸¹. Therefore, the cluster became useful for actions in which the professionals felt lacking, or deprived from the means for seeing their projects through. Moreover, volunteering was required in this type of approach, as a member from the *Absolument Brocéliande* group told us:

What I find remarkable is that we have professionals who are willing to spend time on exchanging information, through educators, work commissions. Actually, they devote their time without expecting immediate economic benefits⁸².

However, we also noted that many of the actors who participated in the cluster’s thematic workshops were actors who already devoted time to various networks or

79 Interview conducted at the tourism department of the General Council of Morbihan, in the city of Vannes on November 4, 2013.

80 Ibid.

81 Interview conducted with an accommodation director on March 27, 2015.

82 Interview conducted on March 9, 2015 with one of the members of the *Absolument Brocéliande* group.

groups. An accommodation provider with networking experience considered that the time dedicated to the collective was beneficial for them and helped them in finding new ideas:

The tourism cluster is the voice given to professionals. This is something that hasn't been officially done before. I have always railed against professionals who say that we do nothing for the other professionals. I believe that I need to include these exchange times in my schedule. During the low season, it only takes 3-4 days per month for attending all the networks. In terms of time, it is not important, what is important is the content⁸³.

For others, choices must be made among multiple requests, as evidenced by a tourist office director:

There are only three of us at the tourist office, so in terms of implications we have to make choices and it is not always easy. I myself belong to the technical committee for the destination with five other tourist offices. I have to spare one day per month, when two meetings are held⁸⁴.

The motivation to participate in these meetings is also that actions are really fruitful. For a tourist office director who did not attend any tourism cluster meetings, the problem was "meetingitis", the attitude of "holding meetings, for the meetings' sake":

I find that the more we communicate, the less effective it becomes. I sincerely believe we cannot hold any more meetings. Sometimes we attend them because it's politically correct to do so. But I have a lot of work, so if I spend half a day and don't get anything out, it's a lost day. I hope that we can come up with something concrete. These meetings are super time-consuming, and when you read the minutes, you have the impression that we are stating truths, that we are knocking down open doors⁸⁵.

A director of leisure facilities suggested coordinating the public actor and the private actor schedule, particularly in terms of deadlines and project achievement:

We need to identify needs, have a roadmap to identify common needs and set goals and deadlines that are not too ambitious. The cluster will

83 Interview conducted with an accommodation director on March 27, 2015.

84 Interview conducted on Tuesday, March 3, 2015 with a tourist office director.

85 Interview conducted on March 25, 2015 with a tourist office director.

prove its usefulness and its actions will become trustworthy. For transformations to occur, the cluster's actions must be successful⁸⁶.

One solution would be to encourage spontaneous groupings to discuss current topics, as recommended by a leisure facility director:

If we want to be effective, we have to work more finely in groups (regardless of whether we are less generalist with equivalent structures around a common topic, or if we have a similar size or common operating issues). We could find rich exchanges in communication, exploiting the other's point of view⁸⁷.

1.9.4.2. *Legitimacy and skills*

Power games were established between the actors of tourism. However, not all actors were competent for the same actions. The cluster principle intended to bring together multiple actors. However, the question of the legitimacy for carrying out actions and piloting the cluster disrupted the proper functioning of this experiment.

The conflict between the tourism department of the General Council and the Departmental Tourism Committee around the cluster tool revealed the perception that the actors had a preeminent role as historic tourism institutions. For many tourist offices, it was the Departmental Tourism Committee who should launch that system: a tourist office director told us:

I think this is the role of the Departmental Tourism Committee, which is a tool of the General Council at the service of tourism. This took me by surprise at the beginning, when we all realized that there was greater engagement on the part of the General Council regarding the cluster initiative.

Another tourist office director even called into question the competence of the General Council to carry out such a system when the Departmental Tourism Committee was already legitimate:

I am a little doubtful about all these initiatives which always begin with a very positive feeling, but ultimately run out of steam, or are not followed by any concrete action. Perhaps a more recognized leader is missing. When I looked at the reports, I said to myself, well, that is the job of the Departmental Tourism Committee, why are we still

86 Interview conducted on March 25, 2015 with a leisure site equipment manager.

87 Ibid.

coming... I think that the Departmental Tourism Committee is sufficiently mature in Morbihan to ask these questions⁸⁸.

However, this same director acknowledged having participated in the creation of a network of tourist offices in the region to compensate for a failure in the promotion and communication mission of the previous management by the Departmental Tourism Committee:

It's true that at the time we had a small problem with the Departmental Tourism Committee, because we were not fully satisfied in terms of promotion. It is true that there was a time when there were practically no trade shows, promotion did not seem to be at the heart of the activity. A need was thus expressed. Now we do a lot of operations with the Departmental Tourism Committee, that is to say, the Departmental Tourism Committee has changed direction⁸⁹.

For others, the General Council such as the Departmental Tourism Committee sought to assert their legitimacy in the face of a specter of territorial reform, which called into question relevance at a departmental level. A tourist office director interviewed in March 2015 seemed pessimistic about the cluster's future, particularly if the Departmental Tourism Committee were to take over:

Does the cluster have a future regarding the open conflict with the Departmental Tourism Committee and the General Council? I'm not sure... Is the Departmental Tourism Committee committed to the cluster's culture? In my opinion, running a network like that is anything but being in power and the Departmental Tourism Committee is currently in power⁹⁰.

For a transport company manager, the problem rather lied in the General Council's motivations to engage the actors:

The General Council has a political vision of things. We are on the field, we see what is happening. So, the cluster allows us to meet, that's good, but we have to stop working for the General Council, which is going to come up with yet another policy with key funding ideas subject to their good will⁹¹.

88 Interview conducted on March 25, 2015 with a tourist office director.

89 Ibid.

90 Interview conducted on Tuesday, March 3, 2015 with a tourist office director.

91 Interview conducted on March 26, 2015 with a transport company manager.

As the director of a leisure facility explained to us, the duplication of actions also made actors lose any hint of legitimacy:

Structures like ours, we have our own *marketing* engine. What is the complementarity with a tourist office or a Departmental Tourism Committee? Well, it turns out that we know them well and we work on good terms, but in all of this, isn't there a loss of means in the goal to be achieved?⁹²

The difficulty of experimenting with the tourism cluster also lay in providing knowledge to less professional actors, who were looking for other actors in the same situation through this approach. As a tourist office director emphasized, the provision of expertise seemed necessary:

We cannot do without support at the local or the cluster level. And when you are in this type of operation, it is very important to have expertise. Things are going extremely fast in the tourism sector, and we have a lot of professionals who are not aware of reality⁹³.

Finally, between information, exchanges, decision-making and actions, the articulation of actors required consensus and, once again, volunteerism. In November 2013, one of the leaders of the tourism cluster explained to us the difficulty on this point:

The relationship with the Departmental Tourism Committee is currently complicated, because it is not easy to understand that we were commissioned by the General Council to work on strategic reflection, on the engagement of public and private actors. We have positioned ourselves as an incubator and a nursery. Then, the promotion mission falls under the scope of the Departmental Tourism Committee, which continues the production chain.

However, following the creation of the departmental tourism agency in February 2019, the agency offered services to businesses or to the territory: the creation of tourism projects; tourism development in the territories, positioning the product/project; valorization of the offer and product marketing. The new Morbihan Departmental Tourism Committee thus embodied far more than a promotional mission as had been imagined by the tourism department of the General Council.

92 Interview conducted on March 25, 2015 with a leisure site equipment manager.

93 Interview conducted on Tuesday, March 3, 2015 with a tourist office director.

In conclusion, the “tourism cluster” approach tested by the Morbihan General Council promoted opportunities for discussion among tourism professionals. The Departmental Tourism Committee, which benefited from a mission by this same General Council, considered itself deprived of its activities, with a feeling of dispossession regarding the networking of tourism actors. The cluster’s trajectory was ultimately marked by the workshop participants, insofar as they did not feel targeted, or had expectations surpassing the cluster’s own skills. The 2015 departmental elections were a pretext to put an end to the cluster system, which had never really worked following a top-down approach. Tourism professionals did not need public actors to act. Conversely, these professionals were structured around a multitude of networks. The bottom-up approach would have been more favorable for the cluster’s formation.

1.10. Saumur and its region: making the territory an internationally recognized tourist destination

Straddling the Loire in the Department of Maine-et-Loire, since the end of the 1980s, Saumur has innovated the tourism competence organization over a large area around the town. The destination is set within a larger tourist area, the Loire Valley. The boundaries of this space are difficult to determine, because the river crosses a set of alluvial plains from Roanne to Nantes, constituting a natural unit. Until the 19th century, the Loire River was used for the transport of wood, hemp, wine. During the 19th century itself, it encouraged artistic diffusion, introducing “Renaissance architecture, art, gardens, as well as luxurious industries such as silks and earthenware” (Dion 1978, p. 10). At the beginning of the 20th century, navigation on the Loire disappeared, giving way to tourist frequentation of the main towns, castles, inherited gardens, enhanced by tourism (Boyer 2005). In 2000, the term “Val de Loire” was included on UNESCO’s Natural and Cultural World Heritage List. The area extended from upstream Sully-sur-Loire to downstream Chalonnes-sur-Loire (Petit and Sanguin 2003). Loire tourism is established outside major concentrated developments, and promotes numerous small towns (Bonneau 1975), thus ensuring a polarizing effect. This is the case of Saumur, which, associated with a few towns and villages, constitutes the Saumurois.

1.10.1. Saumur: a town located along cultural and tourist routes

Since the 17th century, the town of Saumur has been located over the Grand Tour routes. Along the routes followed by these young British people towards Italy, halts were made in France, in particular, in Blois, Tours, Saumur, necessary pauses along a long route (Pittion 2014). Then, in 1843, the first trains began to run between Paris and Orléans, between Orléans and Tours in 1851, and Tours and

Nantes in 1861. This phenomenon encouraged the circulation of tourists towards a destination characterized as “the Loire castles”. Since the beginning of the 20th century, photographs and promotional posters of railway companies have contributed to the promotion of this destination (Bertho-Lavenir 2007). Among the sites referenced for promoting the Loire castles, the Orléans railway company included Saumur as part of the automobile circuits offered in Touraine and the visits to the castles on the banks of the Loire. In the 1950s, the first wild campers were recorded in the meadows of the Loire at Dompierre-sur-Loire and Panay (Bonneau 1975). In the 1970s, it was the cellars and troglodytes that prompted tourism development (Rewerski 1983, p. 568). Certain small towns close to Saumur also showed a certain dynamism in tourism enhancement. Some examples are Montreuil-Bellay or Montsoreau, which created an initiative union in 1968 (Bonneau 1973, 1975; Violier 1999). Saumur has a remarkable tourist location. In a survey carried out in October 1998, Laurence Moisy was the first to stress the fact that Saumur brings together sites recording the highest numbers of visitors in the Department of Maine-et-Loire: “the Fontevraud Abbey and the Doué-la-Fontaine animal park exceed 160,000 visits. The troglodyte village of Rochemenier, the museums of Saumur, the large cellars welcome several tens of thousands of visitors” (Moisy 2001, p. 110). Then, in comparison with Laval and Le Mans, she observed that “the share of visitors on tour in Saumur is far higher than the visitors in transit, which is not the case for the other two cities” (ibid., p. 109). All things considered, traveling to the Loire castles can be organized as an excursion from Paris or as a series of strategic halts along the Loire (Lozato-Giotart 1987; Mirloup 1987). Besides, the Saumurois is set within a “Loire Valley” itinerary, where Saumur constitutes a link town, a multipolar space with a cumulative dynamic (Moisy 2001, p. 109). In this sense, we may better appraise the call for a structuring of the “Saumurois” space by Nantes geographers in 1968: “Saumur must be the capital of a complex extending from Candès to Saint-Mathurin, radiating across the Saumur plateau and across the Baugeois” (quoted by Bonneau (1975, p. 26)).

1.10.2. *The Saumurois: a hub inscribed within a regional space*

In the 1970s, structuring a tourist area around Saumur was not so obvious, as evidenced by the failure to create a structuring hub, bringing together the towns on the banks of the Loire to the west of the town. Despite the creation of an association “Carrefour Anjou-Poitou-Touraine” in 1975, the east of the town remained largely “unorganized” (Bonneau 1975, p. 26). However, indicators on tourist numbers revealed the interest in structuring the Saumur region. The duration of tourist halts in Saumur reached up to two days, longer than usual for a town far from the coast. Convinced of a favorable environment and notable attendance, the town’s actors and the director of the tourist office developed a tourist basin strategy (Violier 1998b, p. 334). In 1989, with the help of the Region, an international tourist hub was

created within the framework of a state-region plan contract, in view of promoting a coherent territory to match tourist practices. The Saumur International Tourist Hub (ITH), with an associative status, brought together 18 members, including the Saumur tourist office, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the two rural regions of South Saumur and the Authion Valley. This tourist basin's territorial base fell within strict institutional boundaries (Violier 1998b). The adopted strategy envisaged a connection between urban actors, relying on rural initiatives in order to create a tourist area in which tourism would have a preponderant role. In 2015, the annual budget of the Saumur international tourist hub amounted to €400,000, including €198,400 from its four public intermunicipal cooperation establishments (EPCI): the Saumur agglomeration (79.6%, i.e. €2.157 per inhabitant), Doué-en-Anjou (6.7%, corresponding to €0.886 per inhabitant), Gennes (4.1%, i.e. €0.886 per inhabitant), and Longué (9.6%, i.e. €0.886 per inhabitant). The goal of this association was to promote a territory more adapted to tourist practices, ranging from the gates of Angers to Touraine and extending beyond the boundaries of the town of Saumur.



Figure 1.10. Schematic map of the territory of the Saumur-Val de Loire Tourist Office (Piriou 2019, p. 133)

1.10.3. Reorganization of Saumur tourism institutions through public policies

The original approach implemented in Saumur made it possible to organize cooperation between different actors, facilitating a new territorial division. The French law of August 7, 2015, relating to the new territorial organization of the

Republic (known as the NOTRe law), attributed the tourism competence to the agglomeration. Therefore, the tourist office was summoned to cover the perimeter of the intermunicipal cooperation public establishment (EPCI). The Saumurois had anticipated these changes in perimeter, since in 2001, a community tourist office was created. This led to the dissolution of the associations which corresponded to the tourist offices of neighboring municipalities (Brain-sur-Allonnes, Fontevraud, Montreuil-Bellay and Le Puy-Notre-Dame), to the benefit of the Saumur tourist office, which endowed them with the status of branches. In that context, the international tourist hub disappeared, as the inter-municipalities had acquired full competences in tourism. In the two years following the NOTRe law, several inter-municipalities shared the development and tourism promotion of Saumur: the regions of Doué-la-Fontaine, Gennois, Loire-Longué and Saumur Loire Développement. Certain inter-municipalities also benefited from sites with the best attendance figures in the Department of Maine-et-Loire (218,523 visitors to the Bioparc zoo in Doué-la-Fontaine, 208,820 visitors to the Royal Abbey of Fontevraud). However, Saumur Castle only had 75,000 visitors. Note that in 2014, the site was only open between April and November.

On January 1, 2017, the perimeter of the inter-communality that integrated the town of Saumur was extended, including the former communities of municipalities of the region of Doué-la-Fontaine, Gennois and Loire-Longué. They all became grouped under the “Agglomeration Community of Saumur-Val de Loire”, with a total of 49 municipalities. The tourist offices of Doué, Longué and Gennes (which had already been working since the end of the 1980s with the tourist office of Saumur, within the framework of the Saumur International Tourist Hub), all merged to create the community tourist office of Grand Saumur (Figure 1.10).

1.10.4. *Defining the role of a new tourist office*

The attribution of the tourism competence to the EPCI modified the historical missions of the association responsible for the tourist office. Until January 2017, the region’s tourist offices were responsible for reception, information, promotion and marketing via the international tourist hub. Some of them were also in charge of organizing outdoor activities and to support hiking. The new tourist office was given new missions relating to engineering and development, the networking of actors and sectors, the coordination of events and activities, and the support of tourist providers, as well as monitoring. The exchanges carried out within the framework of the Saumur International Tourist Hub, innovative for the time, made it possible to create collaborative reflexes between the actors. However, the public authority moved towards the status of a local public company, created by deliberation of the municipal council on March 31, 2017, then of the community council of the Agglomeration Community of Saumur-Val de Loire on April 6, 2017. Among the

actions tackled by the intercommunal tourist office, was the competence to organize and manage an annual event: the Anjou vintage Vélo. Bear in mind that to achieve its goals, the tourist office increased its permanent employees from 19 to 25, including 23 full-time equivalents.

1.10.5. Governance of the public company: collaboration between actors to the detriment of the territory used by tourists

Under the public company's status, only the local authorities (which were also shareholders) had the total control over governance, managing a budget of approximately 1.4 million euros. Elected officials shared seats on the board of directors according to the distribution of capital between the communities (the Agglomeration Community of Saumur-Val de Loire, majority shareholder at 72.22%, the town of Saumur, shareholder at 16.66% and the municipality of Doué-en-Anjou, shareholder with 11.11%). However, the management bodies expressed the wish to create a technical committee comprising 40 socio-professional members (wine union, hotel club, winegrowers, accommodation providers, etc.).

Nevertheless, with regards to tourist practices, the perimeter of the Agglomeration Community of Saumur-Val de Loire (defined in 2017), was not the most suitable. Tourists identified the Loire castle destination, and the names of the old provinces "Anjou", "Touraine", with the territorial denomination around the town of Saumur (Piriou 2012). Despite this, since the end of the 1980s, political actors (region, then inter-communities) had sought to differentiate the Saumur region. The communication provided by public institutions reflected a territorial imposition, in the sense of Claude Raffestin (1980). For example, the Centre-Val de Loire regional tourism committee promoted the castles in its territory, the castles of Chinon, Langeais, Ussé, located in Indre-et-Loire, but not that of Saumur, located in Maine-et-Loire (Pays de la Loire region). However, according to a field survey carried out, some tourists included Saumur in a tourist mobility journey starting in the eastern part of the Loire castles (Blois, Chambord sector) and Saumur, even Angers, constituted the western boundary of the destination. Other tourists associated Saumur with an influential tourist territory, forming a regional hub in its spatial practices (Piriou 2016).

To harness this "frontier" effect, a Val de Loire destination contract was signed in 2014 (and then renewed in 2018), between the French State, the General Directorate of Enterprises, Atout France, the Centre-Val de Loire regional tourism committee and regional agency of Pays de la Loire. Its ambition was to bring the two administrative regions closer together on common themes such as heritage, enotourism, Loire by bike, the art of living and tourism, and nature.

1.11. Saint-Jean-de-Monts: a community mostly gathering small entrepreneurs

Saint-Jean-de-Monts is a case featuring a fragmentation in production, divided into a large number of companies and services, on the one hand, and management provided by a public institution, on the other hand.

1.11.1. Presentation of the place and its touristic development

Saint-Jean-de-Monts is a seaside resort on the Vendée coast. It was established in 1867, although the development of coastal tourism had already begun in Les Sables-d'Olonne, further south, around 1823, and tourists were locally present since 1850. The Pays de Monts is a dune massif planted with conifers under the Second Empire, scattered along a sand spit oriented from the south-east to the north-east and clinging to the rocky points of Sion-sur-l'Océan⁹⁴, located to the south. The prolongation of the dune cord is the island of Noirmoutier. The municipalities of Notre-Dame-de-Monts and La Barre-de-Monts-Fromentine lie to the north of Saint-Jean. The Breton Marshes (a formerly active salt-producing area until the 18th century, later transformed by human action into agricultural marshes through desalination and land reclamation) is isolated towards the interior.

In 1867, the municipal council of Saint-Jean decided to acquire a plot of forest and dune massif belonging to the state. This created a junction between the beach and the town located inland, 3 km from the sea. Until then, as elsewhere, the beach was barely occupied by a customs cabin and frequented by fishermen who stationed their boats. There were also land pirates, who lit fires on the beach for ships to run aground and plunder them. The villagers' habitat concentrated on the town, opposite inland, and extended into hamlets and scattered dwellings along the road (the current departmental road #38), which winds between the dune massif and swamp.

The first tourist establishments were built of wood on the beach itself. From this first core, Saint-Jean's urbanization continued at a slow pace. Apart from a four-story hotel built in 1902 at the end of the *Rue de la Mer*, tourist accommodation was offered by socially heterogeneous villas. A second group, the *Plage des Demoiselles*, developed towards the south. There, a housing estate was gradually built at the junction of Saint-Jean and Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez. The creation, and subsequent abandonment of a military airfield created for the American army during World War I, opportunely ensured this new gap in the forest massif in the 1920s.

A second phase of major tourism intensification took place after World War II and after reconstruction, in the 1950s. In particular, it was mainly marked by the

94 Tourist hamlet in the municipality of Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez.

creation of an embankment promenade and the construction of buildings in towers of 8–10 stories, and five-level bars. Densification was pursued until the 1970s, creating morphological diversity in the buildings, towards the north (see, for instance, the so-called Arc-en-ciel complex), while the dune massif was preserved. Towards the south, the constructions extended over the municipality of Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez. On the latter's territory, two beach stations were developed discontinuously: *Plage des Mouettes* and *Plage des Becs*. The coastal law passed in 1986 put a halt to urbanization along the coastline.

1.11.2. The constitution of a cluster

The creation of a cluster in Saint-Jean-de-Monts in the mid-1980s was derived from the perception of a state of crisis by the local actors. After confirming that the beach station's trade area was shrinking and that the average spending per tourist was decreasing, the initial response came in terms of investment in infrastructure, expected to trigger the return of wealthier tourists. The opening of a golf course in 1986 (accompanied by a real estate offer in villas, and the installation of a balneotherapy center) by a regional investor provided the station with more sophisticated facilities in its northern area, something which was supposed to better meet the expectations of wealthier clientele. Apart from large facilities, the transition from collective housing to villas reflected the evolution of the social representations of modernity. However, the image of the station did not fundamentally improve, and the effects were considered insufficient. This relative failure led, in turn, to a second response.

The reaction, developed in a second phase, came down to structuring the system of actors through a mediating organization with the status of a local semi-public company in July 1993.

This local semi-public company became the legal support for the tourist office and ensured the operation of the nautical base, the Parée-Jésus tennis courts, the archery and the parking area for Primprenelles camper vans, while managing the Odysséa convention center (Ouest-France, June 27, 2013).

All the actions implemented by the semi-public company were based on a network of professionals gathered into clubs, who met on a regular basis. 86 professionals took part in the meetings. The semi-public company was responsible for the secretariat and coordination of those meetings, as well as the mediation between professionals, whose heterogeneity provided a diversity of professional cultures and technical languages, without omitting the tensions related to clashes between sometimes strong personalities.

This did not prevent tensions, though. On the one hand, there was a clash with the town hall services (namely, with the town planning department), regarding the direction chosen. On the other hand, problems arose among the traders who were not integrated into the semi-public company (those at the beach and those in town).

1.11.3. The actions

In the first place, the public actor expressed its intention to revitalize the place by initiating a rehabilitation of the coastal promenade. The latter had been built around 1950 and bordered the seafront. Its buildings were made of parallel-elongated bars, which were perpendicular to two elements located on *Place de l'Europe*. It had been designed according to the urban planning model of the time, which favored cars, with two-lane traffic and parking spaces. On the contrary, its refurbishing was imbued with new designs, which called into question the car's prominent role. Traffic was therefore limited to one lane in each direction towards the interior, as close as possible to the buildings; whereas, parking was organized into car parks. Spaces were reserved for the soft circulation of cycles in particular, of "rosalies" (four-wheeled and pedal vehicles), and for the pedestrian promenade (for which the view of the sea and the beach was reserved).

Once the semi-public company was formed, it would bring actors together and engage them in several joint actions. The first action was to define the strategic positioning of the beach station in order to distinguish it from an undifferentiated seaside supply along the French coasts. The image of a safe beach, ideal for children and family visits was finally chosen. The slogan "*let them play... you can breathe*", which targeted parents, was featured on a double page of the beach station's welcome magazine. The actors exploited the place's characteristics, in particular, the vast expanse of sand which gently extended over 8 km and was surprisingly flat. Indeed, the movement of the tides was not accompanied by the digging of dangerous tarpaulins (along the Channel coast) or *bâines* (along the Landes coast), agitated by dangerous currents. To give credibility to this orientation, further actions were implemented: totems bearing distinctive images were deployed along the beach, so that children could find their way back and avoid getting lost. Likewise, the tourist office hosted a games corner and distributed cards with games.

Another activity for children, the "Kid's Follies", was organized during school holidays. It included shows, exhibitions and art workshops. Obtaining the children's station label strengthened communication. Events were not only chosen and organized during the summertime in order to liven up the station, but also before and after the season, so as to spread out attendance in spring and autumn, and thus improve business profitability.

Date	Event	Description
April	Roller attitude	Introduction to roller skating in dedicated and protected areas set up along the promenade
April 5th and 6th	Decorative moments	Decoration fair
April 12–17th	Kid's Wednesdays	Discovery of activities for 6–12-year-olds
April 12–27th	Kid's follies	18th children's festival, Arcimboldo theme
May 3rd	The Dune	Hike at nightfall. 8, 15 or 20 km circuits
May 1–3rd	The Breaking Wave	Street theater festival
May 10–12th	Antiques fair	7th edition
June 7–10th	Theatrical spring	Theatrical meetings for schools, colleges and high schools
June 14th and 15th	<i>La Mie câline basket go</i>	National junior tournament
June 21st and 22nd	“Naturel' Monts”	Meeting for sustainable development, habitat and organic market
June 28th and 29th	International triathlon	24th edition
July and August	“Touatin” exhibition	Over the esplanade and at the Palais des Congrès
July and August	The Breaking Wave Festival	Outdoor festival including street performances and live music. Free of charge
July and August	Kid's Wednesdays	Discovery of activities for 6–12-year-olds

Date	Event	Description
July and August	Beach planet	Discovery of beach sports: beach volleyball, beach rugby, zen mornings
August 9th and 10th	<i>Cinété</i>	Cinema screenings on giant screen on the beach. Free of charge
August 16th and 17th	Games destination	Free access games for all
September 20th and 21st	<i>Caval'océane</i>	Equestrian competitions and activities on the beach
September 27th and 28th	<i>Vélocéane Du pont d'Yeu</i>	Lively family walks
October 10th to 12th	Creative passions	Creative leisure lounge
October 25th to November 2nd	<i>Ci t'as la trouille</i>	Cucurbit exhibitions, workshops and family rally
November 8th and 9th	Zen Atlantic	Wellness fair. Workshops, conferences and exhibition-sales
November 15th and 16th	Wine and local products fair	Gastronomy week. Workshops, conferences and exhibition-sales

Table 1.3. List of events organized during the year 2008 by the semi-public company Saint-Jean-de-Monts Activities (welcome document published by the semi-public company, produced by the authors)

The semi-public company also implemented actions on the theme of the environment and sustainable development. In the field of transport, an electrically powered “Emma” shuttle provided connections between remote accommodation and the beaches. In addition to the one dedicated to the environment and Emma, five other clubs brought together 80 professionals: the business club, the *e-marketing*, the restaurateurs, leisure and real estate agencies. A weekly schedule was distributed with daily information and recommendations for the general public. A negotiation with the National Forestry Office and funding agents mobilized by the community of municipalities made it possible to develop cycle tourism routes in the forest and, together with the routes established in the urban fabric, constitute a clearly signaled and secure 70 km-network that irrigated the entire territory.

A balance sheet approach can give the impression of ease, or even of certain inevitability. In reality, every action was thought through, then tested, and some of them, failed. For example, the residential leisure village project was not successful. The goal was to modernize the seafront buildings (built between 1955 and 1970), which, by the end of the 20th century, had a degraded image. This question of the gap between the evolution of mentalities and the rigidity of infrastructure particularly affected tourist places built speedily and within the framework of development operations (such as those carried out by DATAR after 1963). Contrary to this, coastlines such as the Côte d’Azur were formed historically, on a progressive basis, and renewed over time. Corrective solutions were attempted. For example, in 1991, the Balearic government adopted a law limiting the creation of new hotels to renovation and upgrading operations: for example, the construction of a three-star establishment at the place of a one-star hotel. However, this decision could be enforced due to a confrontation between a powerful public actor and a small number of hotel groups. The context was very different in Saint-Jean-de-Monts. The semi-public company faced a multitude of small owners (up to 400 for a building), who were also aging and therefore reluctant to invest. The attempt to market a proposal including accommodation and activities for the pre-season was poorly echoed by customers. In fact, the majority of tourists refused to lock themselves into packages which they perceived as rigid. Most came from France, and even more from nearby regions, which meant that they built their experience day by day.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the revitalization of the place represented a successful venture, marked by the rise in land prices and investment in the creation of tourist residences (in particular, at the regional level). The achievements of the local group then passed under the control of a national-scale company, although the transition seemed related to a strategic error. Under the control of national companies, the Lagrange Vacances group and Eurogroup were rebranded as “Madame Vacations”. On a similar note, campsites experienced an upscaling which was accompanied by heavy investment, particularly in the creation of heated swimming pools and wellness facilities.

From 2012 to 2015, the semi-public company was part of the policy of the Pays de la Loire region and subscribed to a regional innovation platform project. During that period, the actors held meetings on a regular basis and consulted with each other in order to define the further development of the beach station.

1.11.4. Evolution of the structure

The cluster was challenged by the institutional change induced by the NOTRE law of August 7, 2015 (*Nouvelle organisation territoriale de la République*), whose provisions on inter-communality had strategic effects for tourism. This amendment was ruled upon and implemented. After three years, the director of the public company, Pascal Nerrière, contented himself with being able to hand over the “baby” to the elected officials, who would be chosen via the ballot box in March 2020.

1.11.4.1. The event

Until that law was passed, tourism fell under municipal competence and could only be transferred to the intermunicipal level following a favorable and explicit vote from the municipal councils. The new text immediately placed tourism at the intercommunal level from January 1, 2017. The community of municipalities, made up of five entities (Saint-Jean-de-Monts, Notre-Dame-de-Monts, La Barre-de-Monts-Fromentine, Le Perrier and Soullans) was therefore subject to the implementation of this public policy on tourism. However, among those municipalities, the first two had tourism as their main economic driver and benefited from a coastline; whereas, the three other municipalities were quite distinct. The municipality of La Barre-de-Monts comprised two different areas: the town and Fromentine. The second element was marked by a maritime culture and animated by the infrastructure connecting it to the island of Yeu. For their part, Le Perrier and Soullans were hinterland municipalities. Soullans is located on the outskirts of the town of Challans, the largest municipality in the north of the department. The profile of La Barre-de-Monts is more *maraischin* (proper to the Vendée region) than maritime. Beyond these nuances, heterogeneity was also marked in terms of tourism because the reception capacity of Saint-Jean-de-Monts beach station exceeded that of other municipalities by far. In fact, Saint-Jean-de-Monts is the second largest French beach station, with approximately 150,000 beds, mainly in outdoor accommodation.

Tourism management shifted towards a new structure: a local public company⁹⁵, whose mission was to concentrate the actions in the field of tourism. Those relating to culture or physical activities (sailing stations, adventure parks, etc.) were separated and fell under the responsibility of municipalities. In Saint-Jean, the semi-public company bounced back and focused on those areas.

At the beginning, the name ‘pays de Saint-Jean-de-Monts’ [given to the new structure] posed a problem, especially in La Barre-de-Monts. That issue was later solved because we worked on the basis of the five pillars of the five municipalities. Work on the identity of each municipality was carried out (the same which had previously been exclusively tackled by Saint-Jean-de-Monts), but the options were finally declined in terms of circuits and products. For example, in La Barre-de-Monts it was the maritime dimension and the broad horizons that were emphasized. Furthermore, Le Perrier wanted its own tourist information office, they got it. It signified an investment of €350,000, but it contributed to building the region⁹⁶.

The local public company integrated the tourist dimension of the six municipalities of the previously created community. The headquarters were located in Saint-Jean, as was the case for the community of municipalities. This change in dimension did not seem to pose any problems internally, as the tourist offices of the different member municipalities had already been working together on good terms. The public company organization chart defined seven poles (territorial influence, reception and consultancy on stays, development, prospection and support, marketing and communication, digital innovation, and finally the resources center, which was shared with the semi-public company Saint-Jean-de-Monts activities). The welcome center placed the tourist information offices of the member municipalities under joint responsibility. However, the staff numbers and system reflected the heterogeneity of the whole (five permanent staff members in Saint-Jean, three in La Barre, two in Notre-Dame; whereas, reception was only seasonal in the other two municipalities). Likewise, responsibilities were distributed. Therefore, the development, support and prospection center were piloted by the former director of the tourism office of Notre-Dame-de-Monts. A management committee brought together the heads of the divisions and the director of the public company; whereas, each department held a weekly meeting.

95 Local public companies (SPL, *Sociétés publiques locales*) have 100% public capital; whereas, semi-public companies (SEM, *Sociétés d'économie mixte*) are mixed economy companies which share their capital equally with private shareholders.

96 Interview with Pascal Nerrière, at the moment director of the local public company, March 4, 2019.

1.11.4.2. *Tourism at the territory's peril*

The islands of Noirmoutier and Yeu retained their autonomy, thus breaking the dynamic. The tourist fabric's continuity in the south was interrupted on an institutional level, since the municipality of Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez (whose area known as Sion had been involved in tourism since 1870) was attached to the community of municipalities of the region of Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie. The latter had over 48,000 inhabitants divided into 14 municipalities, including Saint-Hilaire (the most populated, 11,000 inhabitants) in front of the port of Saint-Gilles (7,655 inhabitants), and beach stations such as Brétignolles-sur-Mer and Brem; whereas, the other components were located in the hinterland. The boundary between the two communities crosses the coastline and the so-called *Demoiselles* district, straddling the territories of Saint-Jean and Saint-Hilaire. This rupture can be appreciated in the urban landscape. The development of the embankment in these last two municipalities was not carried out at the same time, and therefore reflects the ways in which urban planning models have evolved. Formerly implemented in Saint-Jean, the separation of traffic led to a clear and physical distinction between the cycle path and the pedestrian promenade; whereas, in Saint-Hilaire, this mechanism (considered to be more accident-prone) was replaced by a mixed lane. On the other hand, revegetation symbolically reintroduced the dune landscape.

In a similar sense, in the municipality of Sallertaine (contiguous to the territory of Saint-Jean-de-Monts and Perrier), public and private dynamics undoubtedly benefited from being better integrated into the tourist centrality. However, the village fell within the community of municipalities of Challans. Without the separation being complete, the tourism office of Saint-Jean-de-Monts publicized flyers praising the visit to Sallertaine. Likewise, the Océan-Marais de Monts community was advertised on the displays of the Challans office. However, we could note that each territory tended to exclude the other. Therefore, the respective tourist maps presented them as islands and completely erased the existing connections. The tourist map of the CM of Challans Gois also presented two facets: on the front, the territory appeared disconnected from that of the neighboring CM of Océan-Marais-de-Monts (apart from a few links); whereas, on the back, the two of them appeared, as well as the road network.

These multiple splits resulted from the combination of cultivated identities (notably, insularity) and the games of politicians and their personal ambitions. Nevertheless, these centripetal forces were compensated for by the relationships established between the management of some of these structures – firstly with the CM of the region of Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie. On the contrary, the Vendée des Iles union (bringing together since 1992 the municipality of Île d'Yeu, the CM of Océan-Marais de Monts and the community of Challans Gois, from where Noirmoutier left) was not remarkably active, except for the development of a tourist

information website. The public company pays de Saint-Jean-de-Monts worked more with Saint-Gilles, because the two communities of municipalities (CM) shared the same coastline and employment area. There was no centralizing body. Vendée tourism did not fulfill that role. For example:

We have historically worked with Open system, which is the reservation tool for the region and Vendée tourism, but we are going to switch to Eloa – more efficient – which is integrated into the new professional on-demand site, as it facilitates services sales for local structures. We considered maintaining marketing operations, and decided to pursue them, which in turn helped us to “attract more professionals” (interview).

The interest for the public company lay in increasing the links with the CM’s tourism or economic development actors.

1.11.4.3. *The new institutional landscape*

The change brought about by the reform led to an upheaval and a landscape reorganization. Tourism became an intermunicipal competence, but culture continued to be managed by the municipalities. As a result, events organized for children (notably “Kid’s Follies” in the spring, or “Ci t’as la trouille”, its autumn counterpart) escaped the scope of the public company, in charge of tourism; whereas, families constituted the destination’s target. The same happened with events for attracting the public such as “Planète beach”, which offered summer activities in the fields of art, sports or leisure, “Caval’ocean”, dedicated to equestrian arts, or the “Breaking Waves”. The other municipalities equally retained control over their cultural events.

The semi-public company also maintained the reception of all business trips. However, this distribution raised some issues. The public company did not own the space, which belonged to the municipality and was managed by the semi-public company. However, the CEOs of the public company wished to have a space for local producers in the reception hall, open to private concierge services, etc. The same applied to professional mobility or sport, the semi-public company had the infrastructure while the public company was the business provider. A person in charge of coordination was missing. The public company also had an authorization for marketing products. The change in the institutional level therefore induced a discontinuity between the management bodies responsible for tourism and those responsible for culture. By remaining managed at the municipal level, culture embodied the last means for demonstrating autonomy.

Partnerships were established with other structures. Receptive activities for groups were transferred to Vendée tourism, the departmental institution. It was officially committed to promoting the Saint-Jean-de-Monts brand among leisure groups. For the adult group and all groups of children, agreements were concluded with *Objectif séjour* and *D'click tours passion*, the two receptive centers in Vendée that specialize in school and youth trips.

Relations with the services of the Océan-Marais de Monts community of municipalities (CM) were close, and the two structures were coordinated. Indeed, territorial influence is not limited to tourism. Other issues, notably residentialization (the long-term primary or secondary residence of new inhabitants), were also concerned. However, this led to problems with the development of residential spaces as well as business zones. The workshops for businesses were shared between the public company and the CM, because the problems and challenges were the same. This implied relations between the public company's territorial influence center and the CM'S culture and communication department, in particular, through a strategic committee, in which the director of the public company was also involved (devoting 10% of their activity to the CM's tourism direction). The CM also managed five cultural and tourist establishments (Table 1.4). Support for professionals was provided in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Vendée. The environmental question was also coordinated between the public company and the CM. Both structures were based on the approach to corporate social responsibility initiated at the departmental level.

Name	Municipality	Description
Le Daviau	La Barre-de-Monts-Fromentine	Eco-museum of the Breton Marshes
Biotopia	Notre-Dame-de-Monts	Eco-museum of the sea and the forest
Kulmino	Notre-Dame-de-Monts	Water tower converted into a viewpoint
Déambul	Le Perrier	Skiff and carriage ride in the marsh
Charles Milcendeau Museum	Soullans	Former residence of the painter

Table 1.4. *Cultural and tourist establishments managed by the Océan-Marais de Monts community of municipalities. Created by the authors*

The relations between municipalities regarding tourism needed to be built. A discussion was initiated in 2017 to articulate the two levels under a unifying brand but respecting the positioning of each territory, due to the different identities which have been already mentioned. The common brand was adopted: the region of Saint-Jean-de-Monts established itself following a reflection carried out jointly through workshops held in 2018 and 2019. A total of 100 professionals and ambassadors were committed to implementing specifications. The interest for the actors was to be marketed by a local, close structure, something that implied a far lower commission, 3%, than those charged by the tourism offices, often higher than 15%. Furthermore, the relatively low share of foreign customers (10%) made room for this choice.

1.11.4.4. *The adaptation of professionals*

For professionals, the hurdle was also difficult to overcome. Within the semi-public company, before the transition to inter-communality, in Saint-Jean-de-Monts the 86 professionals who took part in clubs intended to increase the quality of services. On the one hand, it was necessary to manage the change in dimension. The period of development of the new organization made it possible to open the game to new professionals who had not previously been involved, or even those who were not directly related to tourism. Workshops were set up with a vote on decisions during sessions conducted by a consultant. The reflection was presented to the board of directors. The transition from the semi-public company to the public company status had the effect of excluding professionals from decision-making, since the capital of a public company is 100% owned by public actors.

A technical committee was organized to reintroduce them, but in a consultative form. It was voluntarily limited to 25 members to be effective and open to personalities representative of vertical networks, because “they have other prisms than the Monto-Montois prism”. Four meetings were held in two and a half years. The last edition also brought together the board of directors, the management of the public company, as well as the general director of community services. This assembly approved a proposal called “Ambition for the future”, a common position which had to be validated by the elected officials during the following elections (March 2020). The proposal came down to “acting as an engaging sustainable destination [...], that is to say, an attractive spot where everyone was involved”⁹⁷.

On the other hand, the clubs also evolved. First, a distinction was made between clubs and sectors. In some cases, the public company actors had a coordinating role in the service’s upscaling, and in the strategy for earning and building loyalty. This intervention was redefined by the distinction between three levels: beginner,

97 Excerpt from the interview with Pascal Nerrière, March 4, 2020.

confirmed and expert, which acknowledged the heterogeneity of professionals. In other cases, professionals required less support. Diversification also took place. In catering, a special operation around gastronomy was carried out: dishes and identity products appeared on the menus, such as eel, market garden flan, cuttlefish rata, without disrupting the region's cuisine. Finally, three themes received particular attention: the environment, an outstanding welcome service and everything related to the customer experience. Pascal Nerrière, director of the public company, insisted: "we also want to play on the proximity, the interaction between the professionals", because the transition from the semi-public company to the public company gave the professionals the feeling of being abandoned.

During the delivery period of the new structure, further actions were pursued. The new website was prepared and relaunched. Trilingual, it enabled the tourist office to send applications to reach a first-class category. Actions around sport continued: the *trail*⁹⁸ station label was obtained and inaugurated on September 1, 2019. It was the first of its kind on the Atlantic coast, aiming to modify the image of Saint-Jean-de-Monts (still perceived as "too popular" for part of the media), and evolution was noticeable in many other aspects. Activities made considerable progress. The tourist tax increased from 10 to 12% after 2017 to reach 1.2 million for inter-communality (including 70% in Saint-Jean-de-Monts), an increase of 7%, and attendance was estimated to 6.5 million overnight stays that year⁹⁹.

Reflection was pursued. The concierge service was among the topics discussed. The challenge was to optimize the time spent by tourists by freeing them from the constraints which held them back. It became necessary to carry out an inventory of needs, which were quite heterogeneous. For example, in La Barre-de-Monts, 600,000 people travel every day to reach the island of Yeu. The intention was to free them from their baggage so that they could further enjoy their passage. Another project was based on the question of the tourist office of the future, transforming it into a meeting place with *La Folie*, the place of attractiveness. Businesses are welcome, and the tourism office attracts tourists.

98 "The *Trail*® Station concept. A *trail*® station is a place 100% dedicated to *trailing*, which offers courses, services and tools both for beginners wishing to learn and be supervised, as well as for enthusiasts looking for ways to organize courses, or complete weekends in one place. Each *trail*® station is attached to a region eager to help you discover its most beautiful landscapes and its best routes and to welcome you for a day, a weekend, or a week". Available at: <https://stationdetrail.com/fr/> [Accessed March 4, 2020].

99 Estimated according to Flux vision orange.

1.12. Innovating tourism: the reason for being of the “Tourism InnovationLab”¹⁰⁰ cluster

Tourism InnovationLab was designed with the goal of developing a cluster, bringing together not only institutions, businesses or start-ups, but also training centers (ESTHUA, ESSCA, CCI, etc.) and research laboratories within the Pays de la Loire. It saw the light of day in 2015 and its main missions are: the coordination of a network around tourism innovation and support for project leaders and start-ups.

1.12.1. Initial system and intentions of the Pays de la Loire region

In 2015, the Pays de la Loire region set up RTI (Research–Training–Innovation) mechanisms in the territory’s promising sectors. Included in the 2014–2020 regional plan for higher education, research and innovation, these RTI action plans aimed at making the skills and know-how of regional actors visible, by promoting cooperation. Inspired in a principle close to that of competitiveness clusters, the intention was to combine academic research with the socio-economic world, to develop regional research, to promote scientific skills for the benefit of regional development and to disseminate scientific culture.

The Pays de la Loire region, comprising five departments and nearly 3.8 million inhabitants, developed around a dozen RTIs on its territory, following a territorial diagnosis.

Relying on specific university capacities (having the largest European training center in tourism with ESTHUA Tourism and Culture, as well as the UFR (Unité de Formation et de Recherche) of the University of Angers gathering over 3,000 students and 25 teachers-researchers specializing in tourism and heritage), the Pays de la Loire region also displays an authentic regional tourism dynamic (sixth largest French destination, 43,000 jobs, 8% of regional GDP) with varied resources: Nantes (cultural city), the Vendée coast, Puy du Fou, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Saumur, etc. The RTI tourism, called Angers TourismLab, was launched on April 10, 2015, for a period of five years. Supported by the University of Angers, it had 12 founding members and 11 associate members, including the three regional universities, ESSCA, the communities, Accor hotels, Unimev, Fontevraud Abbey, *Voyage à Nantes*, Saint-Jean-de-Monts station, Appart’city, Angers technopole, etc.

¹⁰⁰ This case was written by Ms. Aude Ducroquet, lecturer, University of Angers, who also took part in exchanges and field activities, notably in Amnéville, Center Parcs and the Louvre-Lens.

The actions of Angers TourismLab encouraged the development of structuring projects, among which we can mention the following:

– Research: the formation of a Scientific Interest Group (SIG tourism studies), reuniting 150 researchers from various disciplines from 34 laboratories and 17 establishments in the Greater West (from Caen to Pau). Supported by the CNRS, it was officially launched in May 2019. The RTI tourism also enabled the financing of 21 collaborative research projects and the recruitment of doctoral students and postdoctoral students.

– Training: the University of Angers, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Maine-et-Loire and the Higher School of Agriculture (ESA) joined their forces to form a school of gastronomy, wines and spirits called the Gastronomy Campus, offering over 36 training courses. In addition, in August 2018, the certification for the campus of tourism, catering and international professions and qualifications of Pays de la Loire was issued. It brought together all professional sectors in the tourism sector, was jointly supported by the Rectorate of Nantes and the region of Pays de la Loire and partnered a network of actors in a collaborative dynamic to develop an initial and continuing training supply related to the tourism sectors (ranging from CAP level to doctorate).

– Internationally, several partnerships were established, whether in terms of training, research or mobility: China, Mexico, Canada, Indonesia, etc. Furthermore, the Tourism Summer Schools granted training during July and combined it with a discovery of the regional territory.

– In terms of influence, the International Tourism Festival (FIT) was created in 2017. The event took place over several days and involved different manifestations: scientific seminars, conferences, exhibitions, concerts, book fair, etc.

– Innovation: the creation of a cluster, Tourism InnovationLab (TIL), made it possible to bring together over 50 members coordinated by the collective (regular thematic meetings, an annual day, etc.), supporting start-ups (over 130 regional start-ups) via training workshops and a call for projects (31 project leaders received assistance in training, incubation and experimentation). The TIL was part of the national network of France Tourism Lab incubators, led by the General Directorate for Enterprises (GDE). It is this last mechanism, which is particularly relevant to this section, and will be presented and analyzed in the upcoming lines. Aude Ducroquet co-chaired the TIL, along with Thomas Yung (entrepreneur), Jean-Jacques Micoud (LTS Saumur) and Benoit Lequément (Sarthe tourism). As the researcher was at the heart of the system, this engineering research position (Allard-Poési and Maréchal 2014) granted the close observation of the inner workings of this LTS.

1.12.2. The birth of the Tourism InnovationLab cluster

The implementation of this cluster was part of the highly specific context of the RTI and stemmed from the regional desire to make tourism a center of excellence.

1.12.2.1. Getting prepared for the cluster through a feasibility study¹⁰¹

In 2015, the Pays de la Loire regional agency launched an economic feasibility study with a view to setting up an operational provisional structure for Tourism InnovationLab. This study was carried out by an independent consultancy firm. With that goal in mind, a benchmark, as well as interviews with institutional and private structures, were carried out.

The purpose of this study was:

- to define the possible strategic positioning, expectations from regional actors and scope of action;
- to develop recommendations for operational provisions (such as the legal framework, the technical and economic dimensions);
- to develop a roadmap by identifying development levers, prioritizing actions, defining indicators for measuring results and estimating the human and material needs required for optimal functioning.

Working groups were formed and met from March to June 2015.

The first workshop, which took place on March 27, 2015, gathered 37 participants, including 19 companies and clusters, as well as 18 institutional and academic representatives. Its purpose was to identify issues and problems, and to list expectations and needs.

The second one, dating from April 17, 2015, brought together 25 participants, including 15 companies and clusters, and 11 institutional and academic representatives. It helped establish the strategic positioning of the TIL, identify professions and missions, and define its supply.

The last two workshops involved 18 participants, with approximately 70% companies and clusters and 30% institutional and academic representatives. The third one, which took place on May 22nd, focused on the structuring of the action plan and the definition of the economic model. The last one, held on June 23rd, outlined the schedule and developed the operational roadmap.

101 This information has been drawn from internal documents and archives in our possession.

The consultancy firm also carried out around 10 interviews with the managers of the three regional innovation platforms, the director of RTI tourism and six companies and professional federations.

A presentation to key actors and to Angers TourismLab members took place in September 2015. The major tourism trends were revealed. The consultancy firm also emphasized that “the tourism sector still had a very limited culture of innovation at the moment. By means of an incremental approach, the tourism sector had nonetheless been able to gradually renew its supply and to adapt to new consumption trends”¹⁰².

Three strategic goals were defined by the consultancy firm:

- 1) to unite, animate and raise awareness;
- 2) to encourage the emergence of, support and experiment with innovative projects;
- 3) to contribute to skills development.

1.12.2.2. *Organization of the cluster and its pilot committee*

The TIL cluster was launched on November 18, 2015 in Angers with the purpose of “promoting the sharing of experiences, encouraging the emergence and supporting new innovative projects”¹⁰³.

The provisional association gathered 26 companies. The two co-presidents were Thomas Yung, entrepreneur and specialist in Hotel web marketing, and Jean-René Camus, representative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Maine-et-Loire, and manager of a hotel in Saumur. The bureau also included a representative of the Regional Innovation Platform (RIP) for Innovation and Design of the Visitor Experience (IDVE) from Fontevraud, and a representative from Loire-Atlantique Development.

This provisional association held meetings approximately every two months to make progress in governance, communication tools, the definition of missions and goals, etc. These sessions were sometimes supervised by external professionals: communications agency, creativity *coach*, the director of France cluster, etc.

102 Economic feasibility study outlining the operational provisions for the TIL within an RTI tourism center of excellence in Pays de la Loire.

103 See: <https://www.univ-angers.fr/fr/universite/actualites/tourism-innovation-lab.html> (Accessed March 17, 2020).

The governance problem could not be resolved. The tensions between the already existing institutional actors were palpable. The RTI touched on the sensitive area of innovation, which was increasingly beginning to appear at the national level, supported by the General Directorate for Enterprises. Even though the region financed the RTI, the economic development agency was not ready to lose its *leadership*. It therefore opposed the TIL's associative status, and it was impossible to achieve synergies at the workshops on tourism innovation. Sometimes meetings were even held in parallel with the TIL workshops on the shared topic of tourism innovation.

It was decided that (or rather, without consensus) the TIL would be managed by the RTI innovation commission and coordination would be granted by the innovation project manager. Therefore, the pilot committee joined that of the RTI, and strategic decisions were made within operational committees and pilot committees, mostly led by the different funding organizations.

For even more operational aspects (missions, communication, coordination, etc.), the members quickly agreed on the proposals from Solène Chesnel, the TIL innovation mission manager.

Nearly two years were required to move from the provisional association to the TIL itself.

1.12.2.3. *Coordination of thematic workshops and days dedicated to innovation*

The life of the TIL was organized, and thematic workshops (TIL meetings) were implemented regularly at the regional level. We can cite, for example:

- workshop on design thinking and CTI/ITH aid in Fontevraud;
- discovery of virtual reality and augmented reality in Laval;
- the influence of the digital on tourism in Angers;
- enotourism in Saumur;
- acoustics at Le Mans;
- gourmet tourism in Angers;
- teleworking in Nantes;
- territorial innovation in Sables-d'Olonne;
- the awakening of the senses through sound at Le Mans.

At each workshop, local tourism and innovation actors were invited to properly introduce their activities and discuss the possibility of working together.

The Innovation Days were renamed the Tourist Innovation Meetings (TIM), then the Tourism Spring, and organized on an annual basis. Three editions took place during the International Tourism Festival (ITF) in Angers, and the last one was carried out in collaboration with Anjou tourism and the campus of professions and qualifications:

- June 2017: the theme was innovation in tourist offices and the regional supply to meet such demand.

- March 2018: in partnership with the Transat chair and Montreal's MT lab, start-ups and guests raised the following issue: What innovation, what practices can be proposed across the Atlantic when the city becomes a playing field?

- March 2019: focused on the theme of emotions and feelings at the heart of the tourist experience.

- March 2022: discussed questions related to the sustainability of tourism.

- March 2023: on the metamorphosis of tourism.

1.12.2.4. *Support for project leaders and start-ups*

A particular type of audience quickly appeared during these meetings and workshops: project leaders and start-up entrepreneurs. The first to join the network acted as driving forces and helped define the place of TIL in the entrepreneurial landscape: Baludik, Akken, Sunwhere, etc. Supporting these young companies swiftly became TIL's main mission. During each thematic encounter, a specific workshop was organized for start-ups so that project leaders could exchange ideas with each other. During TIMs, demonstration spaces gave start-ups the opportunity to present their supply to professionals.

In 2018, the first call for projects was launched in partnership with the technology park. A dozen files were received. After examination by the jury, seven project leaders were supported in terms of training, incubation and experimentation. In total, 31 project leaders were supported.

Training days are also organized: sales pitching, negotiation, social networks, legislation, etc.

Since 2018, the TIL has worked under the France Tourism Lab, a seven-member national network of tourism incubators and accelerators aiming to spread the spirit

of innovation, to promote initiatives and to strengthen the visibility of innovative companies. The interest of this network for the TIL and the meetings with other members is to gain expertise and obtain national visibility. *Learning expeditions* were organized in Montreal in 2019, and at the CES in 2020.

The TIL gave these start-ups the possibility of pooling spaces at national trade fairs, such as the “Into days” held in Cannes in January 2019, which brought together all the players in French tourism innovation during three days and offered a demonstration space for start-ups, conferences, *keynotes*, etc.

1.12.3. *The place of the cluster in the Loire landscape*

The RTI system made it possible to develop numerous regional projects. However, it was not easy to federate local actors. Naming the RTI after the city (Angers TourismLab) did not facilitate regional dynamics. In addition, the political change in the region in 2015 blocked the development of the system for a few months, which led to numerous restructurings. January 1, 2018 saw the creation of the public company Angers Loire Tourism Expo Congress, a merger between Angers Loire Tourism and Angers Expo Congress. The region also saw the end of the three regional innovation platforms (RIPs) launched at the end of the 2000s.

1.12.3.1. *The cluster: a top-down desire*

Challenges did not cease to arise, and obstacles sometimes proved too difficult to remove: the system was born from a political will (a top-down approach), with a somewhat excessive ambition to turn the Pays de la Loire region into an international hub for tourism innovation. Reality on the field was far from that desire. Tourist structures were largely disparate; for the most part, small and medium-sized enterprises which were not enrolled in an innovation dynamic. Before this RTI mechanism, the region had launched Regional Innovation Platforms (RIPs)¹⁰⁴. Three of these were dedicated to tourism: the Saint-Jean-de-Monts Regional Innovation Platform (RIP), a futuristic station which focused on innovation *marketing*, the IDVE RIP, interested in the visitor experience, and the underground world RIP (rethinking the Saumur troglodyte world). Criticism of the economic model of these Regional Innovation Platforms (RIP) had been the focus of the electoral campaign of the regional team elected later on. Innovation-related expenses (a multitude of RIPs and launching of RTIs) were judged too expensive for a return on investment perceived as too uncertain and too distant. Consequently, the RIP

104 Unlike the RTI units, driven by the Directorate of Higher Education, RIPs were driven by economic development.

quickly disappeared after the regional elections. The RTIs survived after they were recently launched for a period of five years. Almost two years had to elapse before obtaining a budget line for innovation. Under these circumstances, it became gruesome to launch a cluster on tourism innovation, especially considering it should not be a continuation of the RIPs. Messages were relentlessly contradictory. Moreover, as with every change of political side, the actors who had been involved in the provisions for TIL disappeared, one after the other. The elected officials' awareness on the importance of innovation in tourism came too late and only as a reaction to the various national systems that were emerging. The soil usually present when launching a cluster was not there.

To meet the needs of the field and avoid treading on the borders of existing mechanisms in terms of tourism innovation, two choices were made:

– The first was to help young projects. Even then, it was not easy to find a real position regarding the proliferation of existing structures: the territory was full of incubators, support structures, support systems; and the CCI, founding member of the RTI, was a key player in the territory. Start-ups regretted this regional layer cake and the impossibility of drawing a precise map from it¹⁰⁵. In addition, specific support to tourism had its advantages, as well as its disadvantages. Startups will express this need to exchange with other start-ups who, even though they are in another sector of activity, are at the same level of development and encounter the same problems. Another dilemma: should they help every young start-up to access the tourism sector, or only provide support to innovative structures? The question of what tourism innovation is (and is not), was raised on several occasions.

– The second one involved popularizing academic research work. A newsletter (u'TIL info) presented research work on a given theme and discussed some examples inspired in progress monitoring. Although the professionals found the initiative interesting, the topics discussed were disconnected from their immediate concerns. The “popularized” articles were drawn from the *Mondes du Tourisme* journal but did not offer practical solutions to the problems encountered in the field.

1.12.3.2. *The cluster: a missing and useful link*

Despite its difficult beginnings, the TIL found its place in the regional landscape.

It met the needs of regional start-ups and was useful for bonding and breaking the isolation of the creator, “encouraged by people who had already been there”¹⁰⁶. It

105 Interview conducted in 2018 with a start-up whose project proposed a specialized application to sporting practice.

106 Interview conducted in 2018 with a start-up specializing in activity rating.

offered guidance and the chance of being directed towards the right people. The notion of network also enabled entrepreneurs to get to know each other better, to mix their product supplies (example: equipment for sound walks with an umbrella and content based on the place's history) and to gain insights from other sectors "having knowledge on tourism"¹⁰⁷. "As we knew nothing about it, we tried to integrate a structure of people who knew about it".

The TIL workshops and days, enabled actors from different ecosystems (innovation, tourism, support) to get to know each other, to exchange ideas, to get feedback, exchange good practices and discover innovation. The round tables offered during TIL meetings were immensely popular: "it's really interesting and enriching"¹⁰⁸.

The call for ITC (Innovative Tourism Companies) projects marked a notable step forward in support. It offered a more pragmatic response and a direct and privileged link with regional technology parks to obtain personalized monitoring, with sites and institutions for experiments. This was done in tourist offices (such as Ancenis), in sites such as Fontevraud Abbey, in certain towns (such as Angers), etc.

A working group was also set up with several start-ups to propose a new supply for the troglodytes. This group was suggested by the Saumur tourist office.

Participation in the France Tourism Lab, as well as the national visibility provided by the presence at various events (participation in round tables, workshops or trade fairs), were also significant elements in this dynamic. Following this concern for visibility, the presence on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) was strengthened, broadcasting activities and news related to the cluster and its actors.

1.12.4. *The birth of a new cluster: a difficult positioning in an already complex territorialized system*

The Pays de la Loire initiative, the RTI, is interesting and is inscribed in the regions' desire to define their fields of expertise and strengthen them. Early on, the Pays de la Loire focused on innovation and saw it as an economic springboard: many resources were allocated in that direction and numerous systems implemented. Many...maybe too many.

107 Interview conducted in 2018 with a community platform start-up.

108 Interview conducted in 2019 during the TIL meeting in Saumur with an actor in the enotourism sector.

1.12.4.1. *A topic too distant from the field?*

The multiplication of regional, national, and local networks and mechanisms led to a proliferation of interviews, meetings, workshops, etc. Professionals, whether in the private or public sector, were unable to keep up the pace and respond positively to all requests.

For some of these, engaging in a network was synonymous with visibility and opportunities. Many took part in these systems as an imitative strategy, to obtain legitimacy or to access the organizational field (here we find the arguments of the neo-institutional theory defended by DiMaggio and Powell in 2004). However, they all defended their interests, seeking prompt, if not immediate, results.

The RTI tourism system was an attractive mechanism, and the members were genuinely interested in it (often at the beginning: legitimacy, mimicry, visibility, etc.). However, the immaturity of the mechanism hindered good intentions and the socio-economic actors hoped for concrete solutions to their current problems. They did not necessarily have the vocation to build the system. In addition, the construction phase took too long, with great uncertainty regarding the regional elections.

The same happened to the TIL, the cluster developed by the region to bring together actors involved in tourism innovation. At first, it was seen as an intruder in the landscape of regional tourism players – furthermore, as a limited-time intruder. The RIPs already played this problem-solving role, coordinating the community. Common sense would have beckoned the TIL to become a continuation of the RIPs, but this was not possible. Some RIPs were organized in project mode, and when they disappeared, these projects were taken over by institutions (this was the case of the underground worlds' RIP). Others, whose mission was to coordinate policies, disappeared, as did their dynamics.

Unlike other initiatives (for example, other tourism clusters or destination contracts), the vocation of the TIL was not to develop and sell the Pays de la Loire destination or new regional supplies, but to delineate the tourism of the future. While this ambitious goal was respectable, it did not have any immediate impact and the small structures in the Loire tourist landscape did not feel mirrored by this proposal. Similarly, tourist institutions failed to be recognized as the most innovative players (the delay in digital technology was quite eloquent in this sense). Innovation was not a flagship subject, a priority subject for the actors.

The fact of being unable to concretely address structural problems, contribute to commercial development or even provide relevant information (toolboxes, news, observatory, etc.) slowed down the initial dynamic.

This delicate positioning meant that the main goal (defining the tourist practices of the future) could not really be pursued, as there was no collective intelligence on the subject. While the deployment of start-ups made it possible to provide some answers, this was done without a global vision on the subject and lacked perspective.

1.12.4.2. *An underexploited strength*

Compared to all other existing territorial systems, the strength and originality of this cluster undoubtedly lay in the strong link between academic research and training in this sector. The meeting between researchers and tourist structures was not at the center of the TIL. However, during the annual meetings, the researchers shared their viewpoint on the central topic of the day. Few projects emerged within the TIL. On the contrary, the research projects supported by RTI tourism always mobilized socio-economic actors and great collaborations emerged, but these projects were research projects and not innovation ones. Here lies one of the weak points of a subject which was never addressed within the TIL: what do we call tourism innovation and what types of innovation should we focus on? The innovation supported by the TIL came from start-ups, most of which offered a new tool that could be used for visits, experiences, professionals, tourists, etc.

The connections with training continued to develop. Targeted training was offered in the form of seminars (commercial negotiation, legal statuses, social security contributions, social networks, etc.). In addition, a university diploma was created. It comprised training blocks accessible to all, either in modular form or in diploma form. These modules enabled the student to become familiar with the tourism sector and its challenges, business creation, communication, and innovation in all its forms (creativity, experiential marketing, design thinking, scenography, tourism, and trends, etc.).

Links with students were also developed by proposing student projects to companies, offering internships, etc.

The proximity to ESTHUA, a tourism training center, and the ESO and GRANEM research laboratories, could turn the TIL into a knowledge and collective intelligence hub, a platform for reflection on the tourism of the future, its challenges and establish a trend observatory. “A link between research, businesses, students and citizens, university is at the heart of the system for producing and transmitting knowledge” (Audet and Malouin 1986; Pinte 2006). The university’s mission is to “generate, transmit and capitalize on knowledge” (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995); it is within that setting that “knowledge is developed and popularized” (Pinte 2006).

The experiments carried out by start-ups on the sites contributed to understanding an evolution of practices, which could eventually become

widespread. In short, the TIL could act as a laboratory with the help of the entire territory.

1.12.4.3. *The system's limits*

However, the TIL was not a tourist cluster in the sense of the different definitions; its intention was not to develop the destination. The system set up in this defined territory aimed to turn the Pays de la Loire into a laboratory and develop a collective intelligence dynamic to rethink tourism and imagine the tourism of tomorrow.

Tourism InnovationLab ended in March 2023 and did not gain new support at the regional level. Support for start-ups was reorganized under existing bodies: Solutions&co and regional technology parks. Network management was taken up in a new regional body dedicated to tourism innovation: RDI tourism.

1.13. Nantes: from a little-frequented city to tourist destination

The capital city of the Pays de la Loire region has not historically been touristy, or at least, tourism has not been particularly intensive at first sight (Violier 1998a). Until the 1980s, only Paris was touristy in France. This was to such an extent that Georges Cazes – one of the academic specialists in tourism at the time, together with Françoise Potier – wrote a book published in 1996 signaling the emergence of “urban tourism”, even though Paris had been visited by tourists since at least 1820. However, as in France only the capital city was worthy of it, there was no such thing as urban tourism, but tourism in Paris. In France, tourism spread towards the smaller cities with decentralization, which led major politicians to take over municipalities and to engage tourism as a lever for economic development and as a means of communication to strengthen the place’s attractiveness. Despite appearances, tourism became a major issue in the construction of regional metropolises, and relevant actors dreamed of a European dimension. Martine Aubry in Lille, Alain Juppé in Bordeaux, Jean-Marc Ayrault in Nantes, etc. understood that heritage does not suffice (ultimately, all towns in France have a castle and a cathedral), but the strategy must enrich the supply while the town encourages the tourist practice of discovery; all of this involves the creation of tailor-made events and establishments.

1.13.1. *A late start for tourism*

In the 1960s and 1970s, Nantes was a city that looked elsewhere, towards the sea, and was battered by the collapse of its economic model. Port activities were

shifting towards Saint-Nazaire. The closure of the shipyards in 1987 ended the city's maritime adventure. Although it inherited the function as a regional capital (first within the framework of the seventh plan, the Rectorate being established in 1967 and then during decentralization), the city was absent from tourist itineraries.

1.13.1.1. *New mayor, new outlook*

For Nantes, the election of Jean-Marc Ayrault as town hall in 1989 marked the beginning of a first and real tourism policy. From this date, culture has incarnated one of the main dynamics and components of the Nantes urban policy. This transformation began in 1990 with the installation of the *Royal de luxe* company in Nantes, specializing in street arts and featuring the fantastic giants. This troupe came from Toulouse, where it was no longer supported. Also in 1990, Jean Blaise, associate of Jean-Marc Ayrault since 1982, then mayor of the neighboring town of Saint-Herblain, launched a new cultural program in Nantes: the *Allumées* festival, investing in the city's industrial wastelands in an offbeat manner. In 1995, the city supported another now major event, the musical show *La Folle Journée*, launched by René Martin: nearly 300 classical music concerts given in one weekend at the Nantes Congress Center. In 2000, the 8,000 square meters of the former LU biscuit factory were turned into a cultural venue, the *Lieu Unique*, bringing together a national stage, exhibition venues, restaurants, a bookstore, a nursery and recently, a hammam: nearly 500,000 visits recorded in 2008. In 2007, yet another innovation came about. Jean Blaise brought the art world out from the *Lieu Unique* with the creation of a contemporary art biennial between Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, called "Estuaire" (as the town bearing the same name). It reunited around 40 artists of international stature who set up sculptures and other installations along the Loire, some of which were to remain on site. That same year, the castle reopened after a major renovation, which had taken 15 years of work and five years of total closure. The new organization granted free access to the courtyard and the ramparts, the installation of the Nantes History Museum, and almost total accessibility to four forms of impairment. In addition to this (also in the summer of 2007), under the leadership of François Delarozière and Pierre Orefice, former members of *Royal de luxe*, there was the extravagant *Machines de l'île* project. Initially, two elements were installed: the Galerie des Machines and its famous elephant. 12 m high, it carried around 30 passengers embarked in a basket on its back for a walk of approximately 20 minutes. The walk started at the gigantic naves of the former Dubigeon shipyards, revamped for the occasion. The effect was breathtaking and its success, immediate. Other creations followed, such as the Marine Worlds or the Heron Tree, with equally disproportionate dimensions, exceeding 20 m in height.

1.13.1.2. *From the ephemeral to the lasting*

Essentially, the cultural policy of Nantes was based on event organization. Nearly 20 years later, the desire to transform this one-off cultural promotion into a lever for permanent development became crucial. This was the case of *Machines de l'île* and its articulated elephant, whose inspiration stemmed directly from the *Royal de luxe* shows. The principle was to develop a sort of “theme park” open to the city and strongly attached to the imagination of *Royal de luxe* in a former port district of the island of Nantes under renovation. The *Machines de l'île* project was presented as a novelty, its intention being to turn an experience hitherto exclusively associated with events and hosted by the *Royal de luxe* troupe, into a permanent tourist establishment. That was also the case for the *Estuaire* biennial, whose a priori ephemeral character was transformed into a lasting operation in 2011, thanks to the works recovered from former biennials. A marked tourist route along the Loire helped the visitor to discover them: *Les Anneaux* by Daniel Buren at the end of the island of Nantes and the soft boat *Misconceivable* by Erwin Wurm at the Martinière canal. However, this subject was also a bone of contention. Conflicts arose, for example, regarding the Martinière canal, where a French building architect worked to ensure that the contemporary creation by Erwin Wurm – despite being intended to remain – disappeared as quickly as possible from the landscape. This was done under the pretext that it distorted the canal no longer in use, but whose imagery was too romantic to accommodate a contemporary installation. Through the *Estuaire* operation, the strategy displayed by the cities of Nantes and Saint-Nazaire sought to create a future Loire metropolitan area, with a European influence over nearly a million inhabitants. As time passed, the transition from cultural event to permanent tourist itinerary reflected an acknowledgment of the territory and the events policy conducted until then.

Two elements were characteristic of this development strategy combining culture and tourism. Since its conception, the event had a popular dimension and sought to respect the goals of artistic creation and cultural requirements. Based in Nantes, Jean Blaise defended the idea of high-quality culture, but remaining open to as many people as possible. However, it was key to transforming an essentially ephemeral event into a permanent lever for development. In Nantes, this transformation was achieved through the transition from street theater performance to theme park.

1.13.2. *The construction of a localized system of actors*

This type of construction results from the interaction between the actors engaged in a project.

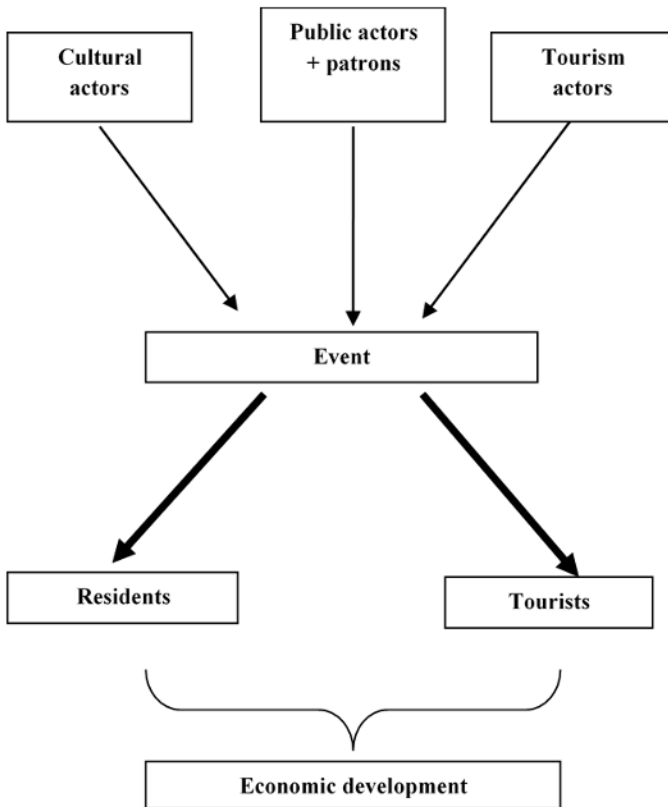


Figure 1.11. *The joint organization of an event by culture and tourism actors induces economic benefits, provided that the expected attendance from permanent residents and tourists is reached. Created by the authors*

1.13.2.1. *The project: seizing the event as a lever for development*

Fundamentally, for the cultural event to transform into a driving force with an impact on others, it must attract external populations, tourists, who, as a result of their passage, generate an economic transfer towards the city hosting the event (accommodation, catering and shops in general; Figure 1.11). Furthermore, tourists appreciate taking part in an event primarily attended by the locals. This is experienced as a guarantee of the desired encounter with the inhabitants and a proof of “authenticity”. If the event only brings together residents (or mostly local inhabitants), the multiplier effect is reduced, and the activity cannot fulfill its driving role. The challenge is therefore to welcome temporary inhabitants, that is, foreigners to the place or at least obliged to settle temporarily where the event takes place, in order to generate economic benefits for the territory. The festive, as well as popular,

dimensions of event policies always have a priority: urban wandering and the metamorphosis of public spaces. The crowds who concentrate along the elephant's route are reminiscent of old-time large gatherings in this part of the city, where people used to assist in the launching of newly built ships. The central question therefore concerns the links that the actors of culture and tourism can weave between them in order to enhance the conditions for tourist attendance. In general terms, this relationship is difficult in France. Cultural circles despise those involved in tourism. The feeling is mutual. Those involved in tourism criticize cultural actors for the extreme secrecy of their productions and subsidization, deemed as excessive for cultural events. The actors of culture mock the commercial dimension of tourist activities and so-called "mass", that is, popular, tourism. Figure 1.11 models the conditions for transforming a cultural event into a lever for economic development.

1.13.2.2. *Chaotic beginnings*

At the beginning, the system in Nantes did not work at its best. Cultural managers had a vision of culture oriented towards the general public (and therefore rather favorable to tourism), but the connection with tourism actors was not smooth. Relationships between tourism and culture stakeholders were tense. Before 2012, the tourist office favored business tourism in its strategy and relied on conference customers. The director considered business tourism as the driving force for attendance to the city and did not believe in the capacity of cultural policy to fulfill this role. In addition, the cultural policy of Nantes was driven by strong, famous personalities who were invited (and imposed on Nantes) by the mayor. Consultation and the idea of networking did not take hold between people, probably because the integration of the different actors was not carefully thought out and no one was really working to bring together the actors from the two environments. Therefore, two organizations related to tourism development in the city developed in parallel. The *Machines de l'île* of Nantes, as well as the castle of Nantes, were managed and promoted by a mixed economy company (the semi-public company *Nantes Culture Patrimoine*), while the tourist office (with associative status) and the Congress center (semi-public company) worked alongside them. For its part, the *Estuaire* biennial was managed by the *Lieu Unique* (Morice and Violier 2009). The way in which the projects were characterized by the different actors reinforced the differing perspectives. The case of the *Machines de l'île* is quite revealing in this respect. The facility can be compared to the concept of "theme park", not ex nihilo on the urban outskirts as usual, but on the contrary, within the city's ramparts. What made its uniqueness was the setting at the very heart of the city, pretty much as a fun fair. However, the facility was not perceived and presented as such by the project's actors and masterminds, rejecting the very idea of a "theme park", but rather emphasizing the concept of "urban theater". In a certain way, this opposition demonstrates the still existing gap between tourism and culture in Nantes. What the actors of culture

feared the most was being reduced to simple and vulgar producers of entertainment parks, synonymous with *disneylandization*, and therefore entailing a cultural misuse.

Although within a few years a form of accumulation began to take place (Michel 2020), this did not constitute a solid policy.

1.13.3. *The mayor's decisive commitment*

The idea of a to and fro in decision-making suddenly became evident. The multiplicity of actors and strategies represented a tremendous waste of energy. The director of the tourist office contacted the mayor. From that moment on, Jean-Marc Ayrault would be responsible for decisions. However, he placed Jean Blaise in charge of operations. The tandem worked efficiently; one ignited the flame of ideas, while the other sealed the decisions. On January 1, 2012, they created a new structure with a local public company status. The public company had a budget of 29.5 million euros, including 59% subsidies and 41% revenue. It hired 350 workers, including 295 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees (210 FTE for *Machines de l'île* and the castle). The capital was shared between Nantes metropolis (68%), the city (17%), the region and the department (each community 5%), and the other members had 3% (the city of Saint-Nazaire, the towns of Estuaire and Sillon, Sud Estuaire) or 2% (Clisson, Sèvre and Maine Agglomeration). Jean Blaise insisted on calling it *Le Voyage à Nantes* (the Trip to Nantes), to the great dismay of internal communications specialists. Like the castle or the Machines, the tourist office (in short, every tourism-related actor in Nantes) was invited to integrate the new structure, but this was not so simple: Jean Blaise imposed his conditions. Even though at the beginning, tourism actors were dissatisfied, success quickly kicked in (as shown in Figure 1.12).

The selection was drastic. The Actors' Council – a flexible structure, open to anyone wishing to join in – cemented the bonds. Success bore witness to this. The integration of vineyard actors illustrated the spreading effect sought by Jean Blaise. The *Château de la Frémoire*, headquarters of the Nantes vineyard wine inter-professions' association, became the seat of festive and culinary events, based on the tasting of Muscadet. For Jean Blaise, culture was to transform the city through the deployment of lasting installations. In 2019, 57 permanent works were set up in public spaces, all of which were connected by a route, the green line. Actors wishing to join the *Voyage à Nantes* had to comply with that rule. Therefore, the tourist bus was reinvented, the Okko hotel offered a room *designated* by a contemporary artist, Julien Nédélec (who went so far as to review the standards for setting up a bed), the vineyard hosted the *Porte-vue*, a panoramic terrace set up behind the church of Château-Thébaud, etc. However, resistance persisted. For example, the project to build a crossing at the Liveau paper mill in Gorges came up against regulations and

some of the residents who rejected Jean Blaise's ferry bridge scheme. Reflection was pursued in favor of another idea.

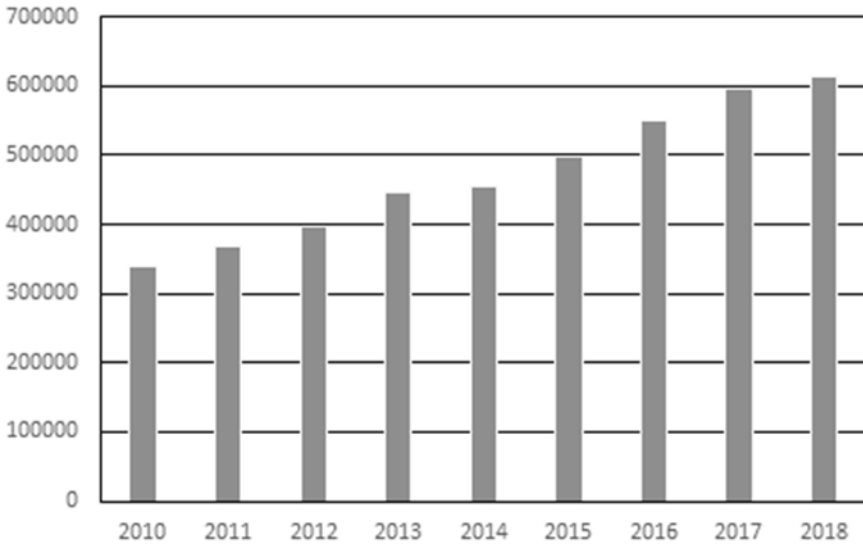


Figure 1.12. Evolution of the number of commercial overnight stays during the summer seasons¹⁰⁹ from 2010 to 2018, according to the tourist tax (source: *Voyage à Nantes*, creation by the authors)

1.13.4. The quality of the places

The conditions for a successful territorial development through events do not exclusively depend on the actors involved. Behind the good intentions, they are not sufficient by themselves. The quality of places is also at stake. As a matter of fact, it is all of the physical conditions and characteristics of a place that shape its quality and contributes to its construction as a recognized and accessible space. However, the ideal dimension has to be combined with the real. In the case of tourism, this quality is appreciated and sought after by the tourist, who will choose to travel to such or such place in order to spend a moment of recreation in the best possible conditions. In this sense, the place's quality is twofold: it is appreciated not only from the inside, in terms of the visit content offered in the place, but also from the outside, the place's location. Nantes is set in an unfavorable position (a western margin destination, eccentric towards the west).

¹⁰⁹ Measurement during the summer rules out the influence of business trips on attendance because business trips present a complementary temporality to that of tourists.

The strategy led by Jean Blaise and Jean-Marc Ayrault comprised two facets. On the one hand, they aimed to strengthen attractiveness through an “intensification” of the place, acting on two levers: revitalizing heritage areas such as the castle (reopened in 2007) and the Museum of Fine Arts (both rehabilitated), and producing new things, such as the *Machines de l’île*, inaugurated in 2007, the *Hangar à Bananes* (HAB, a banana shed transformed from a port wasteland into a contemporary art gallery), or the Memorial for slavery abolition.

On the other hand, they also extended the area by throwing “branches” (according to the term used by Jean Blaise) towards the outside; one towards the estuary, between Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, an in-between space dedicated to wandering among contemporary creations, and incorporating peripheral towns. The other was thrown towards the vineyard, gradually from Vertou to Clisson, which was not obvious at first, between the town on the left and its marked vineyard on the right. The project was included in tourist itineraries, particularly foreigners. That is how the practice of discovery operates through a circuit (Violier 2017), or a network of places along which individuals travel. Only global metropolises, such as Paris, propose stays dedicated to discovery. Following the advice from tourism specialists, then incorporated into the structure, Saint-Malo and Mont-Saint-Michel appeared as milestones in the itinerary “Modern crossing of an old region”, spanning the valley of the Loire, passing through Nantes before heading north. Therefore, a metropolis was built with a European dimension, which profoundly modified the place’s qualities. In the hotel industry, foreign customers represented 13.4% of attendance, but increased to 19.5% during the summer, which is the tourist season par excellence. According to INSEE, International tourist overnight stays increased by 80% in eight years. Formerly very discreet, Nantes was featured on the tourist map with the *Machines de l’île*, an attraction which welcomed 674,395 people in 2017, placing them at the 42nd rank of “the most visited monuments, cultural and recreational sites”, according to the *Tourism Memento* by the GDE (General Directorate for Enterprises, 2018 edition), and the 22nd position outside Paris and its region¹¹⁰.

With success, also came criticism. This is the case with tourism and tourists: it is always too much or not enough, not enough or too much. In the past, Nantes was not visible, but today the effects of metropolization are attracting criticism, particularly the rise in land prices. However, have we ever seen a dynamic city with falling prices? In short, the city in the countryside. It is up to the actors to imagine the regulations that will allow citizens to thrive in a bustling city.

110 The *Château de Nantes* had a better performance, with 1,471,741 visitors, occupying the 14th position globally and the 4th rank outside the capital. The entry is free of charge, which means that the count is broad, including all passers-by and those returning.

