From Lille2004 to Lille3000: The voyage goes on

Context

The three main cities of Lille Métropole (Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing) share a common path of great industrial strongholds, mainly focusing on the mechanical and textile industries. The decline of those industries in the 1960s triggered the beginning of a difficult economic period for the metropolis and the whole of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. The new economic focus became the services economy. From the 1990s onward, reconversion toward the tertiary sector allowed for an economic renewal, embodied in the construction of a new business district (Euralille), and the development of a higher education cluster made up of three universities and numerous specialised schools (“grandes écoles”), thereby turning the metropolis towards a knowledge-based economy.

In parallel to the economic evolution of the metropolis, its cultural profile has also considerably changed since the 1990s. A rich, cultural offer has flourished in Lille, be it in terms of leading cultural organisations (the Palais des Beaux-Arts, second largest art collection amongst French museums, the National Orchestra of Lille; the LAM, a modern art museum in Villeneuve d’Ascq; La Piscine, a former swimming pool turned into a museum) or festivals (the electronic music festival NAME - Nord Art Musiques Electroniques, Tourcoing Jazz Festival). This long-term cultural development culminated in 2004, when Lille achieved considerable success as European Capital of Culture (ECoC).

The 2004 ECoC (“Lille 2004”) was on the one hand the recognition of a long-term culture-led policy, and on the other hand a trigger that enabled cultural dynamics to bring sustainable changes to the city. Inspired by previous ECoCs such as Glasgow (1990), Lille planned large-scale urban regeneration projects, but also made use of the title to promote the city nationally and internationally. These dynamics are reflected across local cultural strategies, from the bid to become ECoC to the 2004-14 cultural policy (“Lille: a cultural capital in Europe”).
From Lille2004 to Lille3000

From the beginning of its bidding process, Lille 2004 was never conceived as a short-term event, but rather a series of cultural events that would be able to change the transform the city’s image. The ECoC was an opportunity to renovate the region’s historic and cultural buildings and convert the city’s derelict buildings into new cultural spaces. For instance, Lille’s Opera and Palais des Beaux-Arts were extensively renovated. Brownfields across the entire region were also rehabilitated and turned into cultural centres, including the transformation of 12 derelict industrial buildings, such as former factories, mills and breweries, into “Maisons Folies”. These unique multidisciplinary and participatory cultural spaces were maintained after 2004 and are closely associated with the improvement of community life. With more than 2,500 events and 8 million visitors, the EcoC was undeniably an impressive success, but ensuring that Lille 2004 made lasting changes remained a challenge. Lille 3000 is an association set up to capitalise on the success of Lille 2004. It organises large-scale “cultural seasons” every three years, revolving around a main theme:

• In 2006 the Indian culture was the main focus of the “Bombaysers de Lille” cultural season.

• In 2009, Lille 3000 launched the Europe XXL event: Europe was placed at the heart of the festival, during which Lille and the Eurometropolis opened up to Eastern European countries that had been transformed by the fall of the Berlin Wall: exhibitions, radical productions and new venues were featured, including the refurbished Gare Saint Sauveur.

• In 2012, Lille Fantastic revolved around the transformation of everyday objects and places. Alongside international artists, local residents were encouraged to take part in the events that shaped the city in the course of three months.

• In 2015, Lille Renaissance explores how other “renaissance cities” across the world have reinvented themselves (Rio de Janeiro, Detroit, Eindhoven, Seoul or even Phnom Penh). Artists from all over the world will also look into how the notion of “renaissance” takes shape in today’s world.

Challenges

As many post-industrial areas (such as Liverpool or Bilbao), the Nord-Pas de Calais region lost 400,000 jobs over 40 years (1946–86), and consequently suffered from a negative image despite its economic renewal. Such regions are also characterised by successive waves of immigration, and making the most of this high degree of cultural diversity was a clear goal of Lille’s cultural policy.

Furthermore, the metropolis of Lille (and the broader Nord-Pas de Calais region) is highly diverse in socio-economic terms. Reaching out to very different audiences was therefore another key challenge to address. Finally, a right mix had to be found between promoting and retaining local talents and raising the profile of the city with international artists.

On top of these large-scale cultural seasons, Lille also promoted forward-looking exhibitions, such as Furturotextiles in 2006 (an artistic project mixing the textile heritage of the region with new technologies, now hosted across Europe), and cultural cooperation with renowned partners, such as in 2009 with the Saatchi Gallery for a “Silk Road” exhibition.
Budget and financing

Lille 2004 was by far the largest cultural investment for the metropolis with €73 million spent, divided as follows: 18% from Lille metropolis, 18% from the state including ERDF funding, 18% from private sponsors; 15% came from the regional council of Nord-Pas de Calais, 11% from the city of Lille, 9% from the Nord Département, 5% from the Pas de Calais Département, and 6% from other European funds. The four cultural seasons each cost an average of €8 million.

Impact

The impacts of Lille 2004 have been well-documented and an evaluation report was produced. Lille 2004 is estimated to have attracted 9 million people through 2,500 cultural events in 2004, with 750,000 visitors just for the opening event. Additionally, 300,000 people decided to take part in activities organised across the region in the 12 “Maison Folies”.

An impressive 96% of visitors considered Lille 2004 a success and recommended visiting the city. The tourism office welcomes around 40% more visitors in “normal” years (when there is no ECoC or cultural season) than it did before 2004, almost half of them international visitors (compared to 20% before the ECoC). People from 60 countries visit Lille every year (most are from Belgium, the United Kingdom or the Netherlands).

In relation to growth and employment, Lille considerably benefitted from the ECoC as jobs in cultural activities grew by 22% and the hospitality sector gained 15% across the metropolis from 2003 to 2008, reaching a 71% occupancy rate in “normal” years.

The first three cultural seasons each welcomed around 2 million visitors over their duration. Beyond these impressive figures, Lille is now clearly positioned as a cultural capital and often quoted as one of the most successful ECoCs since the initiative began (alongside Liverpool and Glasgow, to name two).
Transferability

A well-established structure instilled confidence in the project. The “Team 2004” (more than 100 people) was composed of professionals from economic, cultural, tourism, communication, urban and social fields. Lille 3000 follows this same dynamic and works hand-in-hand with local authorities and grassroots associations.

Sustainability

Since the initiative was put on the agenda in the late 1990s, the 2004 ECoC has been established as the starting point of a long-term project designed to make sustainable and concrete impacts. Financial support has also proven its sustainability, with already four large-scale cultural seasons supported after the 2004 ECoC.

The aim of Lille 3000 is to continue the momentum started in 2004 through major cultural events, and it has secured a strong presence in regional, national and even international media. This momentum has spread across the region, and Nord-Pas de Calais is now seen as one of the most vibrant regions of culture. The opening of the Louvre Lens is also a strong indicator of the sustainable cultural dynamics spreading across the whole region.

Tips

- Political will and support from local politicians throughout the whole project;
- A limited budget (given the scale of the project) and innovative partners;
- Strategic geographic situation (close to London, Paris and Brussels);
- Engaging audiences by promoting access to culture for all;
- Ambitious cultural programming with internationally acclaimed artists;
- Creation of sustainable and unique cultural places;
- A communication strategy matching the international remit of the project.

Management level and partners

The association of Lille 3000 is coordinating the project and its cultural programme. However, such large-scale events require strong coordination with institutional partners such as Ville de Lille, the Nord Département, Lille Métropole, the Nord-Pas de Calais region, the French state, and also other cities of the Eurometropolis (including Belgian cities Kortrijk and Tournai). Official private partners also sponsor the initiative: SFR, Accor, EDF, Caisse d’Epargne, Total, AG2R, Auchan and Vinci.

Lillie 3000 has a strong participatory component and many seasonal cultural events are organised by local associations (including leading ones such as l’Aéronef, la Fête de l’Anim or the “Maisons Folies”) in order to work across the whole metropolis. International partnerships are also developed, for example with Mons (ECOC 2015) this year.

Links:
www.lille3000.eu/lille3000/en

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