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<sup>1</sup> For the "Technological resources  
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## THE LOUVRE MUSEUM IN LENS

by

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### Overview

Lens is situated in the heart of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais mining basin. Now that the mines have closed, the question is what can be done to revitalise the city ? It is only thirty kilometres from Lille, which is currently enjoying economic regeneration in contrast to Lens. Following the example of Bilbao's revival which was greatly boosted by the construction of the Guggenheim museum there, Daniel Percheron seized the opportunity to create a regional branch of the Paris Louvre museum in Lens, and promised financial backing from the Nord-Pas-de-Calais regional council. Rather than borrowing from the permanent collections of the Paris Louvre, this project involves building a new 'Louvre museum' outside Paris. The aim is to enhance the museum as a 21<sup>st</sup> century encyclopaedic showpiece with a cultural, educational, social and civic role. After its expected opening in 2012, the 'Louvre-Lens' should attract hundreds of thousands of visitors and enable Lens to forge itself an identity which will be a key to its future social and economic prosperity.

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# TALK

**Daniel Percheron :** The Louvre-Lens project is part of a political wish to redevelop the Lens urban area which suffered greatly following the closure of its coal mines. This is the subject of my talk. Before I start, Gilles Pette, the regional council director in charge of the project, will make a few general remarks regarding the timetable of events, the project's financial and administrative management, the scientific and cultural innovations of the museum, and finally the visitors whom we hope to attract.

## **The timing : eight years from start to finish**

**Gilles Pette :** During the 1990s, the management of the Louvre museum decided to expand the museum outside its original walls and beyond the Paris region. In 2004, the French president, Jacques Chirac, officially chose the city of Lens as the site for the future museum. In 2005, a protocol agreement was signed between the project's partners, namely representatives from the State, the Louvre, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region (which was named as contractor for the construction of the museum), the Pas-de-Calais *département*, local authorities from the Lens-Liévin urban area, and the city of Lens.

At the end of the same year, and under the supervision of the regional contractor, an international architectural competition was launched and was won a few months later by Sanaa, a Japanese agency. In 2007, the first pre-project version and later the definitive pre-project were adopted. In 2008, the initial consultation on the construction was unsuccessful, and so we launched a new invitation to tender. The building work should start at the end of 2009, and is due to be completed in 2011. The museum should be open to the public in 2012, eight years after the initial decision.

In practical terms, the museum will be built in a lovely, 20-hectare site in the heart of the former mining area, near two large slag heaps. The surface area of the buildings will be twenty-eight thousand square metres and the exhibits will be displayed in an area of more than four thousand square metres. The entrance foyer alone will cover an area of nearly four thousand square metres. It will symbolise the museum's open atmosphere and will be large enough to house the necessary equipment to welcome visitors from all walks of life.

## **Financial and administrative management**

A steering committee which brings together all those involved in the region under the joint presidency of the president of the regional council, Daniel Percheron, and the president of the 'Grand Louvre', Henri Loyrette, oversees the project. It supervises and guides an operational committee which ensures constant political monitoring. A scientific and cultural team works with the operational committee to make sure that the cultural image – nique to the Louvre – is preserved. There is also an appropriation committee which is in charge of helping to integrate the Louvre into its new area and ensuring its conformity. Lastly, there is a technical committee which answers to the operational committee, and which is responsible for the preparation of files and follow-up by calling on the necessary people in other ad hoc work groups.

The investment budget is one hundred and fifty million Euros. The region finances the majority of the costs, however the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) also provides an important amount. The other sources of finance are the *département*, the Lens-Liévin urban area, the Lens city council, and a few sponsors.

The operating budget will be twelve million Euros per year. It will be financed by the region (nearly 60 %), museum funds (20 %), the urban area and the city of Lens (10 %), and the *département* (10 %).

## **New ways to present art**

As far as the scientific and cultural aspects of the museum are concerned, the Louvre-Lens is neither intended to be a branch of the Louvre specialising in specific works (such as those from a particular era, for example), nor the opposite, ie. a simple replica of the Paris museum without a specific character. The intention is to exhibit paintings or sculptures which come from all the areas of the Paris museum, and which are in keeping with the views of art in Lens.

In the Paris Louvre, because of the museum's history and architecture, the exhibits are displayed according to historical periods such as Ancient Times, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and so on. In Lens, they will be exhibited side by side in the same gallery which will be called the 'Galerie du temps'. Works from Ancient Times will be displayed next to those from the 19th century. This should produce a new effect and allow visitors to have a different perception of art and history.

Next to this permanent, main exhibition (the works will be on show for five years), the Louvre-Lens will organise two temporary exhibitions each year ; one during the summer months, intended for international visitors especially tourists ; and the other during the autumn, aimed specifically at school groups and people who live in the region.

As well as a place to exhibit art, our museum will also help to find ways to attract new visitors especially those who do not usually go to cultural places like this spontaneously, as is the case for the inhabitants of the mining area in which the museum is being built. There will be educational workshops and a research laboratory to establish how to bring works of art into contact with specific visitor populations.

### **Five hundred thousand visitors per year**

The Louvre-Lens will be situated in the heart of the largest European conurbation, located between the cities of Lille and Brussels and extending more or less as far as Paris, London, Amsterdam and Cologne. Because of transport networks which serve the Lille urban area - aeroplanes, high-speed TGV trains, motorways - and links which will be improved between Lille and Lens, Lens will be very well served. With this in mind, we estimate that seven hundred thousand visitors could be welcomed in the first few years, and this will level off at five hundred thousand in subsequent years once the novelty has worn off.

**Daniel Percheron :** I was born in the Houillères area of Lens' 'cité 12', so I know at first-hand the human realities of the area which will be home to the future museum. Firstly, this area is characterised by a huge loss of vitality caused by the closure of the coal mines during the 1970s, and the closure of the textile factories later on. Two hundred and twenty thousand jobs were lost when the coal ran out, one hundred and sixty thousand when the textile factories closed, and one hundred thousand when iron and steel production and shipbuilding were cut back. Because of this, when I started in politics, it was clear to me that we had to find a way to give this area some sort of future to which it could aspire. The arrival of the Louvre-Lens now enables us to plan that future more precisely, as I will demonstrate at the end of my talk.

But firstly, I want to pinpoint the main elements which helped this project to emerge. One factor is the motivation of the local political team which envisaged the possibility of a future for this area, and resulted in the local authorities buying the land of the Houillères area where the museum will be located. Secondly, one must not forget the aspiration of the management of the Louvre to expand outside Paris. Lastly, a series of small events brought these two factors together and allowed us to hope that one might be the solution for the other.

## **Deconstructing our cities ? No way !**

In 1986, the Lacaze report (named after the highly-ranked civil servant who wrote it) was ordered by Pierre Méhaignerie, at the time the minister for equipment, housing and town and country planning. It proposed an idea which may have been logical in theory, but was untenable for elected representatives like me. The idea was that mining towns were defunct because they had been entirely organised around the extraction of coal, and this activity was over. It was therefore necessary to 'deconstruct' them. The Lacaze report believed that the deconstruction of old cities would allow the construction of new cities, a method used in the development of other parts of the country.

To prevent the destruction of our cities and to preserve their identity, as the elected representatives, we decided it was the duty of our local authorities to buy the enormous mining heritage which belonged to the Houillères area. It was a long process, but in 2002, the SOGINORPAS (Société de gestion immobilière du Nord-Pas-de-Calais) joint commission, made up of communes and local authorities, became the owners of one hundred thousand houses and numerous plots of land including the area which two years later would be designated as the site for the future Louvre-Lens museum.

### **The Louvre, the world's leading museum**

In a way which bore no relationship to this initial account, but roughly at the same time, the Louvre changed the vision it had of itself. In the first few years of the 2000s, it realised that it was the leading museum in the world, and decided to consolidate this status recognised unequivocally by connoisseurs throughout the world. The Louvre set about promoting itself in some of the world's major cities (including Atlanta, Abu Dhabi and Tokyo). This was generally very well received and numerous exhibitions outside Paris were held. It learned how to 'translate' and transport its works of art to non-French settings. Finally, it decided to work more closely and on a long-term basis with certain cities by setting up permanent exhibitions in buildings intended purely for this purpose.

However, this international movement ended up by causing some hostile reactions in France. Critics said that the Louvre had a culture of unrestrained commerce and was neglecting its country of origin. The idea emerged that this museum, which was so famous throughout the world, should try to present its wealth of art treasures to the public in France, in a city other than Paris. The idea to create a branch of the Louvre outside Paris was put forward in 2003 and formalised in 2004.

### **The connection with Lens**

The last stage of the connection between the Louvre and Lens was marked by two features : the realisation of the positive role which a cultural innovation could play in the development of a region, and the support which I received from Henri Loyrette when I suggested that Lens could be one of the hosts for the Louvre project.

#### *Awareness of the Guggenheim effect*

One day, when I was attending a conference on territorial identity in Arras, I heard a talk about the 'locomotive effect' that the construction of the Guggenheim museum, with its unique architecture, had on the economic revival of Bilbao and the entire Spanish Basque country. Even though I am not an expert, I will outline the main effects of the construction of the Guggenheim museum as Lens' story may turn out to be similar.

The Basque government took the decision to construct a museum in the 1990s and the museum opened its doors in 1997. It was the first step in line with a policy of economic revitalisation in a region which had been severely hit by the closure of heavy industry. Like Lens, Bilbao also suffered from very high unemployment.

To emphasise the idea of rebirth and renewal, it was decided that the architecture had to be innovative and daring. However, it upset the community and created strong feelings of dissatisfaction (66 % of the population expressed negative opinions about the museum), until the museum opened its doors. After the inauguration, local opinion changed and the museum's success was almost immediate. Visitors from all around the world started flocking to the museum. I must stress that because the collection of exhibits was not particularly exceptional, it is undoubtedly the architecture which was responsible for its appeal.

Because of this success, the regional elected representatives took advantage of the change in attitude of the community and decided to reinvigorate their city, especially around the Nervion River which was the historical centre. The riverbanks were completely redeveloped, remnants of heavy industry were destroyed, and modern, economic activities were encouraged to set up business. They also started developing large centres for applied research. In the end, the museum, as a starting point, generated a revitalisation operation for the region costing three billion Euros, in other words twenty times the museum's budget of one hundred and fifty million Euros. One consequence was a rapid drop in the unemployment rate to less than 4 %.

In the space of ten years, and encouraged by the novelty of the Guggenheim museum, Bilbao created for itself a radically new future. When I heard this remarkable story, even though I had not yet envisaged a cultural re-launch of Lens, it struck me and made a deep impression and stuck in my mind.

#### *Encouraged to put forward our candidature*

In 2004, Lille became European capital of culture. At that time, Lille's mayor, Martine Aubry, asked me how we should put Lens in this dynamic process. I realised that my city would merely have a subordinate role if it became part of the same movement, so I looked for a special idea. It was then that I met Henri Loyrette in March 2004. He had come to take part in one of the festivities in Lille. Having read a little beforehand in a brief article in a newspaper that the Louvre was hoping to find a decentralised site in France, I asked Henri Loyrette if the choice of city had been more or less decided. He replied that he was still studying proposals from Lyon, Montpellier, Amiens and several other cities. I asked him if it would be ridiculous to put Lens forward. He replied emphatically 'No, it would not be ridiculous at all.' So I did, and in the end, President Chirac chose us.

Going back to my immediate concern about finding an idea which would allow us to take part in Lille's revival in our own way, I suggested that works from the Louvre be shown at a temporary exhibition in Lens and its surrounding mining towns. Important works of art were exhibited in 2004 in various belfries in the Lens region, attracting a large number of people who were not normally museum-goers. Rodin's Kiss was installed in Liévin's belfry's hall and attracted more than fifteen thousand visitors. This success helped many local decision-makers to consider the idea of a cultural centre in this region in a more favourable light. A little later on, I accompanied the local elected representatives on a trip to Bilbao to try to assess the Guggenheim effect. This visit made us realise that a substantial cultural operation could become a tremendous fillip for local economic life.

### **Encouraging the population**

To enable an economic revival similar to that witnessed in Bilbao, my strategy consisted of giving people the incentive to forge ahead and preparing them mentally and as well as putting the necessary infrastructure in place.

#### *Convincing the elected representatives and the population*

A project to build a museum with innovative architecture in the middle of a mining area could be seen as a gimmick or a touch of madness by a community in search of employment and purchasing power. Since the local elected representatives are particularly well respected, I

made every effort to convince them, as I was sure that they would be able to convey their conviction to the people they represented. The trip to Bilbao was part of my approach. I also tried to persuade them that our current delay was not a black mark, by using a football analogy : in football, we are on a par with Lille ; Lens had even recently won the French Football Cup in a jubilant atmosphere. If Lille had succeeded in its economic redevelopment, then why not us ? To make this idea happen, we created Euralens based on the model of Lille's economic centre, Euralille, developed during the 1990s.

### *Establishing the infrastructure*

To facilitate transportation, we are going to construct a route for trams which will cross the various urban areas in the Lens region and will provide a rapid link between Lens and Lille with its high-speed TGV train station. We also want to redevelop the housing around the future Louvre-Lens to make the accommodation more modern especially in terms of ecology and electronic communication.

### **A 21<sup>st</sup> century vision of Lens**

Analyses carried out by academics, such as Laurent Davezies, highlight two models of prosperity for modern cities. The first consists of sustaining a level of global economic competition as a result of companies which are able to maintain their place in this economic struggle. The second is based on a powerful, local economy, in other words, an economy which is fuelled by the state redistribution of wealth (civil servants, the retired, and so on), because of durable state infrastructures and local well-being, resulting in the revenues being spent where they are redistributed. In view of the arrival of the Louvre, but also because of the type of housing we have (mainly detached houses often with a large garden covering an area of a few hundred square metres) and the proximity of the economic centre of Lille, we will draw our inspiration from the second model in our pro-active approach.

This method of development will allow the urban area to achieve a new economic boom and to be part of a new wave of modernisation in the region. The presence of state institutions is often a good opportunity to create international networks. In our case, the Louvre will automatically open doors to the world by the tourism it will attract and also by relationships established with other cities which possess large museums. With this in mind, I suggested to Henri Loyrette that we create an association of cities linked to the Louvre which would include Atlanta, Abu Dhabi, Belo Horizonte, Paris, and perhaps Damascus.

Finally, the revival of Lens and its region, associated with that of Lille, should form an urban zone of three million inhabitants and allow it to reclaim the human and economic dimensions which have been part of its history for centuries (since Charles the Bold's famous kingdom of Burgundy in the 15th century), some of which had been lost during the last few decades.

## DISCUSSION

**Question :** *In order to understand the astonishing risk that you took in order to develop Lens, one must be aware of the extreme poverty in coal-dependent communities following the closure of the coal-mines. In the 1980s, most of the inhabitants of Lens or Liévin had never been to Lille, even by bus, because they had never been able to afford the journey. Their sole means of relaxation was a walk around the cemetery because this was free. Even today, 70 % of the population of Liévin (thirty-three thousand people) are exempt from paying tax. In the first place, one has to look at the extreme economic and social factors in order to appreciate the way in which these regions have had to develop in order to become prosperous.*

**Daniel Percheron :** As well as the dramatic economic situation which occurred when the coal ran out, one must not forget that it was accompanied by the collapse of the social organisation which deeply affected workers in the area. The owners of the collieries controlled almost all the aspects of the miners' lives, ranging from professional, medical and social concerns, to housing. The population of the coal basin was not used to taking any initiative and using what Laurent Davezies calls a 'collective intelligence'.

### Culture : an engine for development

**Q. :** *You used the example of Bilbao to convince yourselves that a high-level cultural development could create regional dynamism. However, there are also similar examples which are much closer to home, such as the revival of Valenciennes, led by Jean-Louis Borloo, which was initiated by the opening of a theatre.*

**D. P. :** Quite right. Immediately after his election as mayor, Jean-Louis Borloo saw culture as a very important force for development. He made culture a priority and created the Phénix theatre which was one of the factors which re-launched Valenciennes, and was subsequently granted the status of 'scène nationale' (a label given to public theatres whose aim is to promote contemporary works and to take part in the cultural development of their city and region). This is not the only example in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. Previously, Pierre Mauroy (a former mayor of Lille) had the same idea when he decided to launch the 'Orchestre national de Lille' (National Orchestra of Lille) and entrusted its management to Jean-Claude Casadesus with the specific aim of making classical music more accessible to the masses. He wanted music to become one of the reasons why the local population should be enthusiastic about its city. In fact, with the passage of time, this orchestra has become both a means whereby the city has achieved more widespread recognition, and has provided support for the local population.

**Q. :** *However, despite these numerous examples, the cultural infrastructure is not seen by politicians as an important driving force and even less so by the population. In academic terms, I do not know any theoretical or practical research which has helped to clarify this phenomenon and to give it the recognition it deserves.*

**D. P. :** Because cultural investments are not usually regarded highly by the population, they are necessarily a delicate subject for politicians. By promoting and financing a cultural establishment, a politician runs the risk of being accused of not being in touch with the aspirations and needs of its inhabitants. Based on examples from Bilbao, Lille or Valenciennes, when one decides to launch this sort of operation, one must have a very careful communication strategy. Therefore, in the case of the Louvre-Lens, I am not sure that I will publicise the start of the building work – laying the first stone, for example – whereas I would not have any hesitation about publicising the launch of a stadium or a new transport system. And yet, we can be almost certain that the day the museum opens, the local population will be proud and full of admiration and will quickly realise the benefits to be gained.

**Q. :** *Art, tourism and the luxury goods market are areas in which France is the world leader : this is both a fact and it is confirmed by foreigners. This constitutes in itself a major asset in global economic competition. However, French society does not appear to have realised this.*

*The most prestigious 'Grandes écoles' of the French education system base their teaching on industrial and technical professions, areas which were the major source of power in the 19th and 20th centuries. To adapt these professions to the modern world, lessons and research centres dealing with new technologies or biotechnologies are developed, in other words, emphasis is still placed on the technical side. However, in these areas, I fear that we will always lag behind the United States, China or India which have a very large pool of intellectuals because they all have enormous populations. We would be better off if we developed programmes to teach art, tourism and the luxury goods industry. It would be directly applicable to what is considered to be the French competitive asset. And perhaps, as a consequence, this would lead to the concept of technical products which incorporate an aspect of art and luxury which is commercially profitable. Today, we know that clients' choices of purchases are largely influenced by product style, image, and the feeling of belonging to an elite and so on, even in apparently technical purchases. In other words, their choice is linked to reasons which are more often those common to couturiers or perfume makers than coal-miners or electronic engineers.*

### **Differentiating oneself with regards to Lille**

**Q. :** *For the past two decades, the Lille urban area has taken the vast majority of the resources for recovery of the Nord département. Lille has acquired a considerable capacity to attract people. I am worried that the Louvre-Lens is not equipped to compete with the sheer power of Lille, and to increase its economic dynamics in the region to include Lens.*

**D. P. :** Undoubtedly, but this is not our aim. Today, all the mayors in the region, and even the population as a recent survey in the *Voix du Nord* daily newspaper has shown, no longer put their cities into competition with Lille, but prefer to work together with Lille, convinced that 'what is good for Lille is good for us too'. This is a political struggle which Pierre Mauroy won. What is important today is to create a place and an identity for oneself within a configuration which is generally centred on the Lille metropolitan area. I think that as far as Lens is concerned, a place of quality can be built by stressing the local culture and economy.

**Q. :** *Is the Euralens centre not trying to compete with the Euralille centre ?*

**D. P. :** No. In fact, it is the people from Euralille who will help us bring it into being. We are doing it because we also need an economic centre for our local needs.

**Q. :** *I remember a conference given by Pierre Mauroy in 1995 in front of a large number of elected representatives from the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region during which he put forward the advantages of centring the region on one very strong, major city whose leadership could easily be distinguished by those outside. This implied that cities such as Lens, Valenciennes, Ypres, Courtrai and Dunkerque resigned themselves to the fact that they would be secondary to Lille. At the time, the idea was overwhelmingly rejected, and subsequently these cities worked very hard to stand up to the rise in power of Lille. Now, I see that they have accepted this situation and they are trying to find a new energy to integrate themselves into the whole system. From what you say, there is hope that maybe Lens will get there in about ten years' time. It is encouraging.*

**Q. :** *Historically, the labour pool of each city, especially mining cities, was very individual and solid. Does the claim that Lille is the heart of economic life mean that these pools will be broken up ?*

**D. P. :** Yes. This is particularly obvious in transport. Every day, one hundred and sixty thousand cars travel to Lille from the mining areas. This is a substantial volume and these vehicles cause road traffic problems which the new collective transport infrastructure (such as the tramway) attempts to reduce.



### **In the heart of a global economic centre**

**Q. :** *As a Belgian, I naturally think about northern France in terms of integration into the cross-border area of the Flandres-Artois region. You have hardly mentioned this aspect.*

**D. P. :** Jacques Attali put forward the prophetic vision that the only European zone capable of being at the summit of the world economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the zone closest to the high-speed train TGV line from Paris to London, Lille, Brussels, and soon Amsterdam and Cologne. It is in this perspective that we see our development.

In the case of the Louvre-Lens, we think that 30 % of visitors will be from Belgium and the Netherlands, and that 10 to 20 % will be British. Being able to welcome these visitors and integrate them is important to us, and vice versa. The presence of the museum will help to strengthen the cohesion of this geographical area. We are starting to develop all sorts of tourist possibilities which we have in our area in order to take advantage of the volume of expected visitors. For example, the biggest cemetery from the First World War is just three kilometres from the Louvre-Lens site and we are also considering building a centre as a memorial to all those involved in this war. One idea is to put the names of all those killed, in alphabetical order, regardless of nationality, on a wall. This would illustrate the current European friendship which has developed, and overcome feelings of the hatred and dramatic events of the past.

Presentation of the speaker :

Daniel Percheron : professor of history and geography (1963-1979). He was Liévin town councillor (1977-2001), European member of parliament (1979-1983), senator for the Pas-de-Calais *département* (since 1983, re-elected in September 2003), and president of the regional council (since April 2001, re-elected April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2004).

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