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Volume 7

**Tourist Destinations According
to Stakeholder Strategies**

From Clusters to Local Tourist Systems

**Pierre Louart, Jérôme Piriou
and Philippe Violier**

ISTE

WILEY

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coordinated by
Philippe Violier

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Introduction

Tourist Destinations: At the Crossroads between Geographic and Organizational Proximity

I.1. The origins of this reflection

Reflections on the challenging relationships between geographic and organizational proximity are nothing new in spatial economics. The initiative can be attributed to Alfred Marshall. Actually, the interaction between the strategies of economic actors and decision-making in the capitalist world leads to a duality between, on the one hand, the places that concentrate companies under the aegis of agglomeration economies (even though impaired by certain limitations); and, on the other hand, marginalized territories. Economic dynamics are influenced by their demographic counterpart to such an extent that desertification threatens depreciated areas. There are certainly some exceptions: entrepreneurs who decide to settle in their homeland despite all odds, insofar as radical innovation can be a game changer and cause the abandonment of formerly privileged spaces. The mining basins in north-western Europe offer good examples of these reversals of fortune. Spatial concentration often reflects a concentration of companies, encouraged by the search for economies of scale.

By the end of the 19th century (1890), Alfred Marshall noted that between metropolises and the margins, certain spaces flourished, which – far from being defined as residual forms or by the use of outdated techniques (Gaffard and Romani 1990) – could be considered as innovative environments, insofar as non-market relationships and certain forms of quasi-integration enabled them to develop and remain at the cutting edge of progress. This reflection was later pursued, particularly in Italy. Giacomo Becattini relied on it to explain the dynamism of “The Third Italy”, located in the center of the peninsula and which, after World War II, offered a

growth model based on original principles, which differed from both the Mezzogiorno and the classic mechanisms at work in the northern region.

The analysis was then taken up by numerous authors, including Michael Porter, who focused on the concept of *cluster*, now very popular in Quebec.

Porter (1998, p. 197) provided the following definition:

A cluster is the geographical concentration of interconnected companies: suppliers and service providers in related industries and associated institutions; the firms delivering the final product cooperate with universities, as well as with their competitors.

In 2000, Porter emphasized the importance of social relations between more or less formal actors and refined his approach by assimilating the cluster to a territorially integrated value chain. Even though the terms are often used synonymously, clusters differ from simple networks (Bédé 2015). For Thorelli (1986), a network comprises two or more companies, linked by exchange relationships which last over time, and whose stability makes room for reciprocal trust between the actors. However, as Tinsley and Lynch (2001) pointed out, the network is not exclusively dependent on space. In other words, geographical proximity is not a sufficient condition for it.

1.2. The fortune and misfortune of words

Although other expressions (such as Localized Industrial System) are used, the term “cluster” seems to have prevailed. Cluster is now such a popular term that it has ended up designating realities that are unrelated (or poorly related) to the definition provided by Porter. For example, Atout France set up thematic clubs for stimulating exchanges among professionals identified as coming from different backgrounds. Therefore, there was a coastal club, an urban club, etc. Then, the term “club” was replaced by that of “cluster”. However, in Porter’s mind, the concept of cluster combines organizational proximity (quasi-integration) with geographical proximity (e.g. a small distance). Describing a national-scale network as a cluster amounts to considering that distance is irrelevant. However, it is an essential explanation not only of the agreement, trust and cooperation construction between companies, but also of a certain dynamism and a ferment of ideas leading to innovation. In this sense, the concept of cluster involves an innovative environment, in the spirit of GREMI (Tabariés 2005), emphasizing the fact that inter-organizational relations can be influenced by the territory.

The term cluster continues to be increasingly used. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the term was used for denoting particularly active outbreaks of infection. Since then, it has lost much of its relevance.

At some point, the term was replaced by that of ecosystem, imported from life sciences and adapted by Moore (1996). Although Glon and Pecqueur (2016) explained that territorial ecosystems are sets of private and public actors establishing relationships with one another and with their territory, and who pursue collaborative goals beneficial to all, the use of this term raises certain questions when we trace back its original meaning. In point of fact, the ecosystem describes the relationships that exist between living beings and their environment, within a biotope. It therefore describes mechanical and compulsory links. Transferring this idea to the social sciences amounts to minimizing the still dominant part of the actors' strategies.

For this reason, the authors of this book have chosen to activate an already old expression that has retained its full meaning: Localized Industrial Systems, and in the case of tourism, Localized Tourism Systems (LTS).

I.3. Aim of the book

The aim of this work is to analyze the particular conditions in which such systems are deployed in the field of tourism. In this work, tourism will be understood as a system whose purpose is the recreation of individuals (Knafou and Stock 2013¹). Other forms of motility will be intentionally left aside (despite institutions and a portion of researchers persisting in the idea of integrating them), considering that the differences in nature are such that an amalgamation does not enable us to understand what is at stake in these movements, based on individual projects and on the use of completely free time. As Elias and Dunning (1995) pointed out, "traveling while on vacation" constitutes a specific moment and an act that makes it possible to combat routine actions most effectively:

By "routine actions" we mean recurrent channels of action enforced by interdependence with others, and which impose upon the individual a fairly high degree of regularity, steadiness and emotional control in conduct and which block other channels of action even if they correspond better to the mood, the feelings, the emotional needs of the moment (Elias and Dunning 1995, p. 80).

¹ A first edition of this dictionary included the entry "tourism" in 2003. The new edition has not made any changes to this text.

Even though tourism was the heart of the investigation, other worlds were also studied as soon as a pattern could be found. This was the case, for example, of the production of spirits or culture.

Our approach² began with case studies, chosen on the grounds of their relevance. These analyses are detailed in Chapter 1. This is followed by two reflective chapters. The first of these is tackled from the perspective of two geographers. The second one translates the views of two specialists in management sciences. These disciplines differ in their relationship to action. While social geography is concerned with analyzing the strategies of actors placed in a particular local context, managers are keen on investigating the actions put in practice by individuals and their organizations to carry out their projects, and on issuing recommendations. The authors considered that such complementarity (which makes a multidisciplinary approach relevant) should be reflected in the book's construction. Each perspective is presented in a different chapter. Chapter 4 proposes a typology of clusters applied to the field of tourism and develops recommendations for action.

² This work was built as a continuation of the research program “CONNECT: *Construction, knowledge, evolution of the tourism cluster*. Innovation in destinations' governance and development of tourism clusters” financed between 2016 and 2020 by the Pays de la Loire region, via the *Recherche innovation formation* (RFI), Angers Tourism Lab.

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: