A Flagship project to reinforce the city image? 
The case of “Cité du vin” in Bordeaux city

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Aims of the Research

Since the Bilbao effect has been highlighted (Lord, 2007; Plaza, 2009; Vicario et Martinez Monje, 2003; Arruti, 2004; Baniotopoulou, 2001), policy-makers perceive flagships projects as a wonderful marketing tool to serve their brand strategies (Gonzalez, 2011; Paddinson, 1993; Smith, 2006, Evans, 2003). A flagship project is « a development in its own right, which may or may not be self-sustaining, a marshalling point for further investment, a marketing tool for an area or city » (Smyth, 1994; p4). There are different types of projects: cultural project (ex. Sydney opera), sporting projects (ex IBA stadium in Hamburg), commercial projects (ex. Guiness StoreHouse) (district reconfiguration,) that can be either permanent (a stadium, a museum) or ephemeral (ex festival). A flagship project is characterized by huge investments, a remarkable architecture, often designed by “superstar” architects, and is developed to be the most spectacular city attraction (Grodach, 2008). Considering those points, they benefit from a large media coverage and are conceived as a communication tool (Braun et al., 2014), that can be compared, according to Crilley (1993), to an advertising campaign. In 1998, Hiller highlighted 3 effects generated by those flagships projects: forward linkage (they generate direct and indirect incomes regarding the touristic attendance) (Richards et Wilson, 2004), backward linkage (they improve city image) and parallel linkage (undesirables effects as, for example, gentrification). The question of the impact of flagship on city image is certainly the most interesting one regarding the importance of cities images on tourists and residents’ attitudes and behaviors (Lynch, 1960, Anholt, 2008; Kavaratis, 2004; Baloglu et McCleary, 1999; Braun et al., 2016). But, despite the important interest to better understand the factors influencing city image, only few research support the flagship effect on it. This lack is problematic as, Smith (2006) outlines that « image change is frequently cited as a primary justification for their implementation » (p.394).

Our paper proposes to highlight the question of flagship effect on city image. The work extends behind the researches previously mentioned (Smith, 2006; Zenker et Beckmann, 2013, Lai, 2018) and consider the effect of a cultural flagship on the image of the city. Our research proposes a unique methodology to assess this effect: a before/after experiment.
Case Studied

We studied the case of Bordeaux city, a large French city enjoying an international reputation based on wine. A flagship project named “Cité du vin”, which opened its doors in 2016, has been implemented in order to “confer the city an effective landmark as the world wine capital”. We propose to study the image evolution before and after the opening of the structure: are the attribute-based image of the city changed two years after the opening? Is the association to wine is reinforced thanks to this project? Bordeaux case seems interesting as the “Cité du vin” finalizes an important city reconfiguration program (tram lines construction, football stadium, waterfront, Unesco label …). Since 2016, when the “Cité du vin” was opened, no other event or equipment was released after the numerous projects realized to modify the image city. This lack of huge projects facilitates the implementation of our before and after longitudinal methodology. We then propose a city image evaluation from both holistic (Crompton and Pearce, 1988, 1990) and analytic perspective (attribute-based images: sportive, cultural, oenology tourism …) (Smith, 2006), before and after the flagship implementation. Notice that the case of Bordeaux city is interesting also because the city has a lot going for it (apart of wine): cultural heritage from the 18th century (Unesco World heritage), a lot of modern architectural building to discover, a recognized “art de vivre” (“the best city to live in” according to recent national public opinion survey), a rich naval heritage, etc. It’s interesting to wonder if this flagship project would “impoverished” the image city (Evans, 2003) in strengthening its association to wine.

Methodology

We implemented two online surveys: one in 2016 (947 subjects) and one in 2018 (538 subjects). Both French and foreigner’s citizens participated, the two samples are identical in terms of socio demographic characteristics. The questionnaire, including 20 questions, presented two versions, English and French. For this study, and regarding our objective, we only considered people that did have any information regarding the “City du vin” project in 2016. In 2018, we only considered people that have heard about this project. So, the total sample used is composed of 877 persons: 442 in 2016 and 435 in 2018.

We used in our survey measurement of city image extracted from the work of Smith (2006). We introduced either evaluation of the global image of the city (with likert scale and free associations to the city) and attribute-based image (five point semantic differential scales about the attribute-based image of the city as heritage destination, sport tourism destination, wine tourism destination …) (these dimensions has been extracted from a preliminary qualitative study not developed in this paper).
Results and Discussion

Our results highlight that this project globally reinforce Bordeaux image. They also demonstrate that different dimensions of Bordeaux city are impacted regarding the target considered. For touristic population, all dimensions – sportive, cultural, fluvial and wine related- of Bordeaux images are reinforced. The wine dimension is also the highest one. For local residents, the only dimensions reinforced are relatives to wine culture. Our study supports the influence of a flagship project on city image and confirm the backward linkage effect evoked by Hiller (1998).

References


