



Thursday 19 June 9am /10.45 am

How do we develop a territory's image ? Trends and techniques

Expert speaker :

Guillaume ERNER, Doctor in Sociology, Conference Master of Sociology at the Institute of Political Studies at Paris, author of “sociologie des tendances”.

Debate participants :

Benoit FIDELIN, journalist at Pèlerin Magazine, and author of numerous articles about the countryside's image, and its relations with cities.

Jordi NAVAS, Head of communication for the Sève Rurale project, director of "Double Hélice" a communication agency specialising in rural development.

Jean-Yves PINEAU, Director of Collectif Ville Campagne.

Chairman :

Régis DE CLOSETS, newsreader, journalist reporter, and collaborator at Figaro and Paris Match.

Power Point Presentation

The presentation began with a comparison between two types of sandals: flip flops and jelly shoes. The sociologist, Guillaume Erner explained how the notions of trends and territories can sometimes be contradictory. They oppose the provisional and the ancestral, the light hearted and the seriousness of historic heritage. However, Guillaume Erner showed that a territory's appeal depends on public tastes that can sometimes be unclear :

“Finally what determines one territory's appeal over another ?”

By comparing three fashionable places popular with holiday makers - L'île de Ré, Dubai and Lucques in Italy - Guillaume Erner managed to show that territories are themselves victims of fashion : “We can distinguish three trends which relate to the length of the appeal : “fad” meaning places whose popularity is short lived, “Crases” are places that enjoy a long lasting appeal, and lastly “hype” meaning places whose popularity can vanish at any moment”.

Lastly the different aspects of appeal can be changed : the creation of an appealing image can suffice to put a place in the limelight.

Guillaume Erner pronounced the 10 commandments aimed at regions who want to be popular.

1. Regions cannot limit themselves to being convenient for services. No matter how many or how good they are, infrastructures do not suffice in attracting new inhabitants. People are more attracted by the sun and living on the coast, which explains the popularity of the summer resorts in the south of France.
2. Paradoxically territories can create their own authenticity ; their “new authenticity” corresponds to public tastes.



3. Attractive places which have restored old traditions benefit from the flow of people who “return to roots” : Guillaume Erner underlined “we must remember that attachment for a territory is the main reason why people move, it comes before family ties”.

4. During their communication campaign territories should pay less attention to opinion leaders (such as the media), they should look to newer information networks.

- The **connectors** are ordinary influences (family, close of kin and friends).
- The **maven** are the skilled, sources of knowledge who upkeep the territories mythology.
- The **salesmen** are those that sell a territory, they are responsible for marketing actions.

5. In order to appeal to people’s romantic nature, territories need to be able to tell a story. The re-installation of a myth or storytelling can stimulate imagination and encourage people to discover the territory. Storytelling helps to attract new inhabitants.

6. Rural areas are promoted by changing mentalities and reversed trends. It is now fashionable to be a newcomer in a rural area.

7. A prediction made by a territory is a key element to its success. It means using an expert (a well known public figure) to broadcast a positive image and thus give the territory a new image.

8. Anticipation means that a territory's success can be judged in advance. This is based on Keynes theory of beauty contests, meaning that we follow the preferences of the majority.

9. The changing situation means that territories have to find new ways of attracting newcomers. Regions can for example, take advantage of their surrounding environment and exploit it as historic heritage. The example of North America demonstrates preferences for the “wilderness”.

10. Lastly territories should be willing to welcome foreigners, who bring with them new opportunities. How can we put these commandments into actions in a misconstrued countryside, where newcomers are reluctant to go ? Three specialists in rural problems shared their experiences.

As a journalist, Benoit Fidelin had the opportunity of observing changes in rural communities ; he noticed their increasing refusal to give up : “to-day trends have changed, nowadays it is possible to attract people in the most unlikely of territories by proposing the opposite of city life”.

Jean-Yves Pineau who from 2006 to 2007 led a project dealing with the appeal of rural territories, believes that the reception of new inhabitants is the principle challenge for isolated townships : “Over the past one and a half years we have noticed a huge transformation in society with an increased appreciation of the countryside's image”. With this aim in view the creation of a development programme is necessary. The European programme “LEADER +” offers to accompany rural territories at every stage of their development strategy.

On the international front, Jordi Navas went to great lengths to attract city dwellers to the Spanish countryside by creating a TV programme called “Salva rural”, broadcast on the Spanish TV channel Espana Directo. The rural areas around Alicante benefited from this media attention : Jordi Navas explained “we worked with the producers to supervise the countryside's image in order to avoid any stereo types”. The fact that the most isolated of the villages has now 14 new families proves the effectiveness of the project.