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The international gastronomy exhibition center “City of Gastronomy” in Dijon, France: An upbeat place for Dijon and a must visit site, celebrating the French way to enjoy meals

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French Gastronomy Heritage

In 2010, UNESCO included the “Gastronomic meal of the French” in the World Heritage List. In its application for recognition, the French government pledged to create an “International City of Gastronomy” (*Cité internationale de la Gastronomie*), an original, big-scale initiative dedicated to embodying the values of these social and festive customary practices. At the same time, the initiative aimed to promote French Gastronomy and bring together those involved, encompassing the same sense of “*togetherness, pleasure of taste, and balance between human beings and the products of nature*” as stated in the official definition of the “French gourmet meal” by the UNESCO committee.

To achieve this purpose, in 2011, the government organized a contest for French regional and local authorities to encourage them to propose an idea for an original project involving a place and concept showcasing the gastronomy of the region. Five major French cities entered the contest including Paris, Lyon and Dijon. *Horwath HTL was commissioned by the Municipality of Dijon to conceive of a project and study its economic feasibility.*

International City of Gastronomy

Dijon is the capital of the Burgundy region, internationally renowned for its vineyards. Although each region has a particular cuisine, the gastronomy of Burgundy is among the most famous.

In the center of Dijon, the public hospital was built after the French Revolution in a former monastery, with buildings dating from the 14th century. Modern and rather characterless constructions had over time been installed in the park to accommodate various medical necessities. The subsequent creation of a large modern hospital on the outskirts of Dijon provided an opportunity to question the fate of the old hospital. It was decided that it would be an ideal place to host the International City of Gastronomy.

The historic buildings were deemed ideal to house all the activities related to the project, while the demolition of the more modern and uninteresting buildings would create the opportunity for the development of an adjacent real estate residential programme. In doing so, the profits from the sale of land to a private operator would provide funding for the public cultural project, which would in turn considerably enhance the prestige and value of the plot.

Challenges

The major challenge of the project was to ensure that the City of Gastronomy would be a place of both innovation and a celebration of everyday life for Dijon residents and tourists. Both are important for the atmosphere of the place and the economic viability of the project.

Indeed, visitors look for lively places frequented by locals. Conversely, places perceived as too touristy and artificial tend to be avoided by residents. It is therefore important



to balance the activities between those that cater primarily to residents (a market accompanied by an urban picnic area, a restaurant whose kitchen may be rented for private or business events, cooking courses etc.) and those that mostly cater to tourists (a hotel, a museum, tasting events, specialty shops etc.).

Another balance to be sought lies between activities for the general public and activities dedicated to professionals (oenology school, specialized business incubators, professional co-working and meeting places). Finally, there should also be both cultural activities (museums, exhibitions, events etc.), not directly profitable but which attract visitors, and those activities which ensure economic viability.

Pardoning the pun, a successful atmosphere feeds a favourable word of mouth and people remain the best vehicle for promoting a recreational site. The architectural and landscape features, the quality of the product offering and the organization of small and large events are the ingredients of a successful atmosphere. The key to success is therefore to implement this recipe in the right manner.

The City of Gastronomy would ideally serve as an entryway to the Burgundy vineyard scene, via which car or bicycle tours through the vineyards and neighbouring historical towns such as Beaune and Nuits-Saint-Georges can start. Leading scientific research institutes, as well as SEB-Moulinex, one of the world's leading manufacturers of small kitchen appliances

whose head office is in the Burgundy region, are involved in the implementation of this project.

Network of Cities of Gastronomy

In 2011, the City of Gastronomy project in Dijon was selected as the winner of the competition run by the French government. It was then decided to be continued with the projects in Paris-Rungis, Tours and Lyon as well. Thus, a national network of Cities of Gastronomy was established, each showcasing a specialty of their region. Paris-Rungis, the location of the wholesale food market which is said to be the largest in the world, will specialize in international "farm to table" value-chains, while Dijon will specialize in oenology. The Cities of Gastronomy have the vocation to share and host rotating exhibitions and events.

In the future, a domestic or international tourist will have the opportunity to plan their Tour de France in the Cities of Gastronomy and explore the culinary individualities of the different regions in depth.

Dijon, the first *City of Gastronomy*, with a total surface area of over 20,000m², will open in 2018. Cities in other regions, like Périgueux (in Périgord) or Valence (in Provence), have decided to join this dynamic initiative.

The gastronomy adventure is just beginning!