THE NEW RURAL IN *LES PLUS BEAUX VILLAGES DE FRANCE :*
HERITAGE PRESERVATION, PROMOTION AND VALORIZATION
IN THE POST-AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department
of Geography

Chapel Hill
2014

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ABSTRACT

Hélène Bérénice Ducros: The New Rural in *Les Plus Beaux Villages de France*: Heritage
Preservation, Promotion and Valorization in the Post-Agricultural Village
(Under the direction of Stephen Birdsall)

In the face of changing agricultural production methods and current debates in agro-
politics, and the consequent socio-economic challenges in the countryside, many rural
communities everywhere invoke their history, heritage, traditions, local identity and memory to
articulate their survival. In industrialized countries, the pressures of industrialization and
urbanization restructured rural livelihoods to extinction, leading scholars to examine the "rural
residue". As the agrarian landscape disappeared, its rebirth is often mediated through
patrimonialization. Multiple labels have emerged branding landscapes as heritage, ranging from
the prestigious World Heritage designation to localized labels.

This research investigates the complex and multi-scaled processes by which vernacular
places are classified and constructed as *heritage* and analyzes the impact at the local level by
stepping behind such a label. Fieldwork centers on a case study in France where, based on
specific heritage and development assessment criteria, the *Association of the Most Beautiful
Villages* has granted its coveted label in rural areas for the last thirty years in response to
communities' mobilization and engagement in the valorization of their heritage resources. This
comprehensive ethnography explores the ways in which the renowned organization shapes place-

based development that is grounded in local architectural patrimony, sense of place, community involvement and vernacular culture to foster tourism and socio-economic rehabilitation.

Photo-elicitation and interviews conducted in member-villages with institutional actors, mayors and residents provide insight into what ensues in places tagged as heritage sites. After reviewing the administrative and cultural context of heritage preservation in France, the study highlights how residents relate to place, perceive changes occurring in the heritage landscape they inhabit, and participate in heritage management and landscape design. Conclusions suggest that a development model based on using local heritage as a resource results in the reconfiguration of residents' gaze and rescaling of insider-outsider and public-private dichotomies at the same time as place labelization is integrated in local governance. The model also advances a normative view of the rural heritage-scape that transcends the local through the network's national dimension and diffusion abroad. Understanding how heritage preservation reshapes French villages gives important cues for rural localities around the world contemplating similar development paths.

To my parents, Albert and Jaqueline Ducros, enlightened and tireless wanderers, who taught me to be curious about the world and question the invisible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Innumerable are those who in some big or small ways have contributed to this dissertation, whether deliberately or not, far or close. The dissertation is only a snapshot of a long process in which many have left their mark, too many to thank them all individually. The realms in which they have impacted my work intersect in many ways: institutional, personal, familial, intellectual, financial, emotional.

I am grateful to my dissertation advisor, Stephen Birdsall, who welcomed my ideas and led me to the completion of the project, through good as well as uncertain times. His approach to the cultural landscape shaped my reflection and resonates throughout this work. My dissertation committee, Tom Whitmore, Nina Martin, Carol Crumley, and John Florin challenged my thinking with questions and considerations about the topic and helped push it further than I had anticipated. Among them, special thanks to Tom Whitmore who most likely did not expect to be held back from a well-deserved and action-packed retirement life to spend countless hours

Robic at Géographie-Cités for kindly taking the time to speak to me about geography when I first started.

I have been lucky to have several mentors who have touched my spirit. They advised, encouraged and influenced me in profound ways. I hold much admiration towards the exceptional human beings and remarkable scholars they are. The late Brian Bromberger always made law school a special place through his positive energy, quick and crisp mind, genuineness, and sheer humanity. He always believed in me and I regret that I cannot share this day with him. Kenneth Broun influenced me by his wisdom and knowledge about the law and so many other things, but mostly by his kindness and care. In a category of their own, Nortin and Carol Hadler, mentors, friends, second family, have been the nurturing foundation of my support system in Chapel Hill, guiding me through the meanders of life, academia, or simply through a good bike ride.

Of course, I must thank my closest friends: Joseph Palis, Angela Cacciarru, Dilys Bowman, and Becky Dobbs, all graduates of UNC-Geography but so much more to me. Among them, the latter two concretely contributed to this work by lending me their cartographic talents and enthusiastically creating maps for me. *Merci* to the local expatriate French squad, who especially made sure I kept my sense of humor throughout the isolating writing process, and frequently also fed me: Marie Bouquier, Claire-Juliette Beale, Natacha and Thierry Besançon, all excellent ambassadors for France's regional diversity (Auvergne, Normandy, Lorraine, and the Vosges). Thank you to Tina Mangieri, Ina Wallace, Jill Kilby, Fran Richmond, Anya Avrutskaya, Guillermo Hernandez, Christian Chan, Seth Murray, Lisa Marshall, Matt Reilly, Yves de la Quérière, and Norberto Kerzman for their unremitting support, encouragements, and

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABF   Architecte des Bâtiments de France

DATAR   Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'attractivité régionale

DOM-TOM   Départements et territoires d'outre-mer (Overseas territories)

INSEE   Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies)

PBVF   Plus Beaux Villages de France (Most Beautiful Villages of France-MBVF)

SCOT   Schéma de cohérence territoriale

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ZPPAUP   Zone de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural, Urbain et Paysager

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INTRODUCTION:

RURAL CONTEXT, PATRIMONIALIZATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1977, Reader's Digest published a book in French entitled *Les Plus Beaux Villages de France*[1] (Sélection du Reader's Digest 1977). Two to three full pages of photos, along with corresponding texts written by regional personalities, were dedicated to each of the hundred and one villages selected. Later on and by chance, this album fell in the hands of Collonges-la-Rouge Mayor, Charles Ceyrac[2], at a time in which he pondered the uncertain future of rural France. Happenstance or serendipity? Surprised and interested to find his own Corrézian village featured in the volume, he would write to the hundred mayors of the other showcased rural *communes* to share his preoccupations and propose to them to unite in order to better confront the challenges of a shifting world (see letter below). Who could have thought that this collegial and courteous mailing would become the seed for an official, independent, and structured association that has endured through three decades and become a standard for other organizations in France and beyond? Formally founded in 1982, today not only does the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* count 156 member-villages in France, admitted through rigorous evaluation, but the model has spread to other places across the globe. Indeed, it is under its aegis that the *Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages of the World* was created in 2013. Beyond the simplicity and unpretentiousness of its chosen terms, Charles Ceyrac's letter already implicitly

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[1] In English: *The Most Beautiful Villages of France (MBVF)*

[2] Charles Ceyrac passed away in 2008. He remained active in shaping the PBVF until his death and today his spirit remains present in the ways *Association* officers envisage their work and the continued mission of the *Association*.

posed an array of broad theoretical and practical questioning addressed by human geographers in their research: the transformation of rural societies, milieu, and landscapes, the apprehension of space and history, place-planning and development, preservation and valorization of cultural heritage, and local and national identity resilience, among other critical themes which emerge as societies are further urbanizing, industrializing, and globalizing.

> We seem to be living in the midst of a second and more massive *völkerwanderung,* in a period when old landscapes disappear and new landscapes involving new relationships, new demands on the environment are slowly taking form. And as I see it, it is in those places where what we call landscape studies can be particularly rewarding (Jackson 1980, p. 17-18).

There are several hundred regional cheeses in France and 46 of them even protected by geographical indication (*Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*, or AOC). This may make people smile. But it is to be understood by recalling that the multi-millennial anthropization of the French territory has faced a diversity that has few equivalents in terms of geomorphology and biotopes for such a limited expanse (just smaller than Texas). On the Atlantic coast: sandy in Aquitaine, rocky in Brittany, chalky in Normandy; elevated mountain ranges where the Alps offer the steepest summit in Europe; old Massif Central that spreads a track of extinct volcanoes; great cereal plains in the sedimentary basins; deep forests in the Jura and Vosges massifs; soils appropriate for vineyards and husbandry; Mediterranean landscapes where mimosa and olive trees bloom; and more. In each of these colonized ecosystems, societies developed *savoir-faire* adapted here to altitude; there to pluviometry, snow and wind; to water courses, rapid or indolent; to marshes; and to locally available materials: walls built in tender tuffeau in the Loire region, with somber volcanic basalt in Auvergne, in hard Armorican granite, in golden limestone in Provence, or in rosy sandstone. Here roofs will be steeply sloped, there they will be flat; here they will be covered with heavy basalt slabs, here in wooden shingles; elsewhere in tiles –

roman, pantile, flat, or fishscale; in slate; or in thatch. Patiently, people have selected grape

varieties and a multiplicity of domestic animal breeds. Surely, History, with a capital H, also

marked these landscapes: invasions, wars – national or international – left medieval castles,

today in various states of ruins, fortified churches, villages perched on hilltops in Provence,

ramparts and battlements often girding them to shelter them from barbarian raids. Finally,

Christianity scattered its monasteries, its abbeys, its churches or modest chapels across the land.

This is how were born the *terroirs*, the *pays,* and the French landscapes – shaped by both Nature

and Culture and the web of relationships between both.

Globalizing forces not only alter the cultural landscape, they also modify the ways in

which societies apprehend this landscape and give it significance. Since the middle of the 20th

century, rural landscapes in particular have undergone profound transformations all over the

world, not only in their physical characteristics, but also in the meanings people attach to them,

whether these populations inhabit the landscapes at stake durably or simply come into contact

with them ephemerally, as visitors or observers. The old landscape has to die for its rebirth to

occur and for people to realize its value.

> …there has to be that interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity. (…) Ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins. There has to be (…) an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape. (…) The old farmhouse has to decay before we can restore it and lead an alternative lifestyle in the country (…) That is how we reproduce the cosmic scheme and correct history (Jackson 1980, p. 102).

As landscape mutations occur, a sense of instability and uncontrollable loss of diversity

and identity arises (Antrop 2005), which is often countered by a deepened sense of attachment to

the idealized and fleeting local landscape, the arena for everyday life. This profound bond comes

to be expressed through the making of landscape into "heritage", a conceptualization which in

turn further alters the relationship between communities and the newly patrimonialized

landscapes in a feedback effect. Scholars speak of "patrimonialization" (Nora 1997; Chastel

1997; Hervieu 2012), or "heritagization" (Poria, in Waterton and Watson 2010; Smith 2006;

Walsh 1992; Harvey 1989) to refer to the transformation of the past into cultural heritage, a

process that is "a defining feature of postmodern societies" (Wood 1999, p. 31) and a "very

French notion" (Hervieu 2012, p. 10) that renders something communal, such as land, landscape,

agriculture, or food, making it public and intergenerational as it sacralizes it.

> Heritagization refers to the processes by which heritage is constructed. This concept has been widely used among scholars in the south of Europe in contrast with the invisibilization of this term in English…. In the last few years, the term "heritagization" is being employed in English with the same meaning as the equivalent term in French, Portuguese or Spanish… (Rogerio-Candelera, Lazzari, and Cano 2013, p. 388-389).

In the last decade, nowhere has the interest in preserving rural landscapes of the past

through patrimonializing them been more pronounced than in Europe, as evidenced by the

scholarly production, institutional support, grassroot endeavors, and political mobilization

leading to the ratification of the *European Landscape Convention*[3] by 31 member-states of the

Council of Europe in 2004. Indeed, the so-called *Florence Convention* (Council of Europe 2000)

makes explicit in its Preamble and recognizes in law that "the landscape contributes to the

formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural

heritage" and thus deserves protection (Sassatelli 2006). Furthermore, through the Convention,

"the creation of monumental heritage landscapes are credited as key 'emblems' of modernity and

of the 'imagined community' of nationhood" (Butler 2006, p. 465). In addition to the Florence

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[3] European Landscape Convention (2000, Florence), CETS No.: 176, full text available at
http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=176&CL=ENG
http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/176.htm

Convention, the Council of Europe created the Faro Convention in 2005 (Convention on the

Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, European Council 2005) to complement its heritage

preservation administrative and legal instruments. Under Article 1 of the Faro Convention, the

parties are bound not only to recognize that "rights relating to cultural heritage are inherent in the

right to participate in cultural life, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights"

(Article 1.a), to "recognize individual and collective responsibility towards cultural heritage"

(Article 1.b), but also to "emphasize that the conservation of cultural heritage and its sustainable

use have human development and quality of life as their goal" (Article 1.c). Under the

Convention, cultural heritage is defined as "a group of resources inherited from the past which

people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly

evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment

resulting from the interaction between people and places through time" (Article 2.a) and "a

heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they

wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations"

(Article 2.b). In conjunction, these two European conventions invite a collaborative dialogue

between landscape and heritage discourses and specialists and put cultural landscape at the heart

of heritage policy-making, whether at the national or European scale.

Among nations, France was one of the first to muster forces at the local, regional, and

national levels to engage in a reflection on the value of local landscapes at the same time as the

idea of a centralized nationhood was built. *Pays*, *paysage*, *terroir*, *or campagne* are all

constitutive of national cultural heritage worthy of protection and represent historical vessels for

local identities. Indeed, stemming from a long tradition of interest in everything regional and

local in France, the 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a rising awareness over the waning of

lived-in rural vernacular landscapes as local associations like "*SOS Villages*"[4] emitted a solemn

warning cry about the ongoing extinction of rural communities and the inability of rural

landscapes to support rural livelihoods sustainably and retain their characters as *lieux de vie*.

Historically and predominantly rural and peasant in its essence, France has indeed experienced

radical alterations in its countryside since the end of WWI, for reasons unique to its socio-

political history but also for reasons it shares widely with other industrialized nations in Europe

and beyond. Thus, the French experience constitutes a valuable terrain to attempt to decipher

how some responses to the destabilizing effects of a globalized world on rural experiences have

resulted in a re-invention of the local through a mix of bottom-up and top-down endeavors of

heritage preservation, valorization, and promotion. In looking at how a multi-scalar politics of

heritage-making and heritage conservation contributes to the creation or re-creation of the

"local" and its inhabitants' identities, this study is positioned at the intersection of scholarship on

place, landscape, social and individual memory, identity, history, and sustainable rural

development. At a time in which scholars evoke a "preservation impulse"(Lowenthal 1985),

"patrimonial inflation" (Jeudy 2008), "patrimonial obsession" (Jeudy 2001), "galloping

patrimonialization" (Hartog 2003), "patrimonial hypertrophy" (Drouain 2006), "patrimonial

proliferation" (Gravari-Barbas et al. 2008), "patrimonophily"[5] (Gravari-Barbas 2005), the "Noah

syndrome" (Choay 1992), "obsessive patrimonial commemoration" (Wood 1999), today's

"abundant", "omnipresent" and "ubiquitous" nature of heritage (Harrison, 2013), and generally

the systematic turning into heritage of anything past, from tangible objects and immaterial ideas,

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[4] SOS Village was renamed "Notre village, terre d'avenir" (Our village, land of the future) in 2006. This association was also created under the impetus of Charles Ceyrac whose motto for this association was "Too much is too much, our 32000 villages are agonizing and are going to die!" This organization developed around the idea of sustainable development as defined in the Agenda 21. http://www.notrevillage.asso.fr/

[5] Neologism by Gravari-Barbas. In French : *patrimonophilie*

to vast expanses of territory, this research unveils the motivation and processes by which

patrimonialization can occur in the particular context of rural communities, or *rural communes*,[6]

the actors involved, and the result of such patrimonial fever on local rural communities as well as

the prospects it opens for a sustainable future and place development.

Figure 1: Mr. Ceyrac's village, Collonges-la-Rouge; Corrèze

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[6] The French National Institute for Economic Studies and Statistics (INSEE) estimates that 70 percent of the French territory is classified as « rural », i.e. two thirds of the 36,767 administrative "communes" and 25.2 percent of total population in France. A *rural commune* is the smallest administrative unit in France. In the rural setting, the *commune* may include an urban core such as a village, along with scattered hamlets and agricultural land around it. The only requirement is a 2000-inhabitants threshold, over which a locality is considered urban. The population median in rural *communes* is 423 inhabitants (INSEE 2013).
http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/default.asp?page=definitions/espace-rural.htm

Letter to colleagues: The birth of an idea[7]

Mr. Mayor and Dear Colleague,

As I am, you are fortunate to administer a commune wherein one of the most beautiful villages of France is located and you often feel much joy and pride because of it.

However, surely, this responsibility is heavy, even more so because our inhabitants and visitors are, legitimately, more demanding than many others, wishing we preserve and even enhance this inestimable heritage, envied by many foreigners and constituting our Nation's pride.

But alas, our needs and our burdens are, more often than not, well superior to our resources and means and, in spite of our good will and that of our Municipal Council, our problems often remain unsolvable.

This is the reason why, along with a few friends (who asked me to contact you and our colleagues) we thought that it would probably be useful to seek to create among us a link for meetings, contacts, and discussions, which could take the form of an Amicale[8] or an Association.

One more Association, will some say? Eh….. yes and why not?

First, the benefit of such Association would be that we get to know each other, but also it would allow us to benefit from each other's personal experiences, and allow us to study the specific problems encountered in administering these villages.

Therefore, we could, through this Association, further draw general attention to our heritage and even perhaps prepare together, with the goal of presenting them to Public Authorities, either wishes or propositions susceptible to bring us additional aid or facilitate our task, under whatever form.

Here are a certain number of ideas, but certainly there must be plenty others that justify, it seems to me, such an Amicale or Association.

If this idea does not seem interesting to you, accept my apologies for having bothered you: I would understand your position very well.

If, on the contrary, this project catches your attention, which I greatly wish, I would be pleased if you could let me know by filling out the form included here with additional remarks if you have them to make.

Hoping to have the pleasure to meet you in a near future and, of course, to welcome you in Collonges-la-Rouge, allow me, dear Colleague, to present to you my best sentiments.

Charles Ceyrac

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[7] Initial August 1981 letter by late Mr. Ceyrac, to mayors whose villages were featured in the 1977 Reader's Digest volume *Les Plus Beaux Villages de France*; translated from French by author.

[8] The equivalent of a "club" (*Amicale* is based on "ami" = friend)

How do the past, present, and future of rural landscapes get articulated in modern developed economies? In 1982, at the same time as J.B. Jackson (1980) reflects on cultural landscapes and the "Necessity for Ruins", Charles Ceyrac proposed one response when he gave the impulse for the creation of the *Association des plus beaux villages de France* in reaction to the unfolding "rural crisis" and the growing difficulties facing rural *communes* in France. As Mr. Ceyrac's letter mentions, one of these difficulties is the cost of maintaining local heritage (*patrimoine*) holding national cultural significance on limited revenue bases. The rural crisis, which some argue finds its root as far back as the middle of the 19th century (Jean and Périgord 2009), resulted from various interlocking dynamics: changes in the composition of rural populations, triggered by the 20th century rural exodus and new forms of mobilities in the 21st; the affirmation of regional urban and industrial poles; the perceived homogenizing effects of cultural globalization; and the impact of supra-national economic and agricultural European Union policies on local communities, such as the Common Agricultural Policy implemented in the early 1960s.

Since 1982, this evolving context has prompted local elected representatives all over France to apply for their village to become a member of the *Association*. Beyond the borders of France, the concept has also inspired other nations and regions to create corresponding associations along the same model (Wallonie- 1994, Québec- 1998, Italy- 2001, Japan- 2005, Romania- 2010, South Korea-2013, Spain - 2013, and Saxony- 2013). Furthermore, the formal alliance of these national/regional associations into an international Federation, the *Most beautiful villages of the World,* indicates that the model appeals as a collective response to territorial and cultural challenges beyond the confines of France's specific context, in places as culturally diverse as Asia and North America. Other nations are currently observing the model

and developing their own version, while the French association continues to be solicited for information from local actors in all corners of the world. Indeed, the *Association* has received requests from places such as Cyprus and the Republic of Congo, and most recently Russia. Because the French association is the archetype for all others and has been active for the longest span of time, its successes and challenges are best able to elucidate the dynamics at work and the results on the ground.

In France, 156 villages (as of April 2014) embody the aspirations of the *Association* today (Map 1). Selected according to an extensive set of criteria set up in the *Charte de Qualité* (Chapter four), the admitted villages strive to maintain the integrity of local physical, social and cultural landscapes while avoiding the artifices of museumification, Disneyfication, and the construction of soulless themed spaces intended primarily for consumption by visiting "others". Village selection entails the evaluation of material and immaterial elements, from architectural and environmental qualities, to the assessment of the efficacy and appropriateness of the local policies implemented to promote territory and patrimony. The Association's three-fold mission – (1) heritage conservation and valorization, (2) visibility, and (3) economic development- rests on the notions of village, *pays*, *terroirs*, and the fusion of local cultural and natural landscapes, while integrating the national dimension of heritage that is prevalent in France. Hence, the *Association* can be analyzed as a territorial development project which uses heritage preservation as a means to implement place-making policies. Indeed, analyzing the nature of the local places that result from an active politics of heritage preservation, enhancement, and promotion in the 21st century rural contexts, and the ways in which these places are implemented, interpreted,

made legible, and experienced by an array of participants is an object lesson on the relationship between history, culture, landscape, development, and identity resilience.

Map 1: Locating the 156 Most Beautiful Villages of France

Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France

Map by Dilys Bowman for Helene Ducros, June 2014
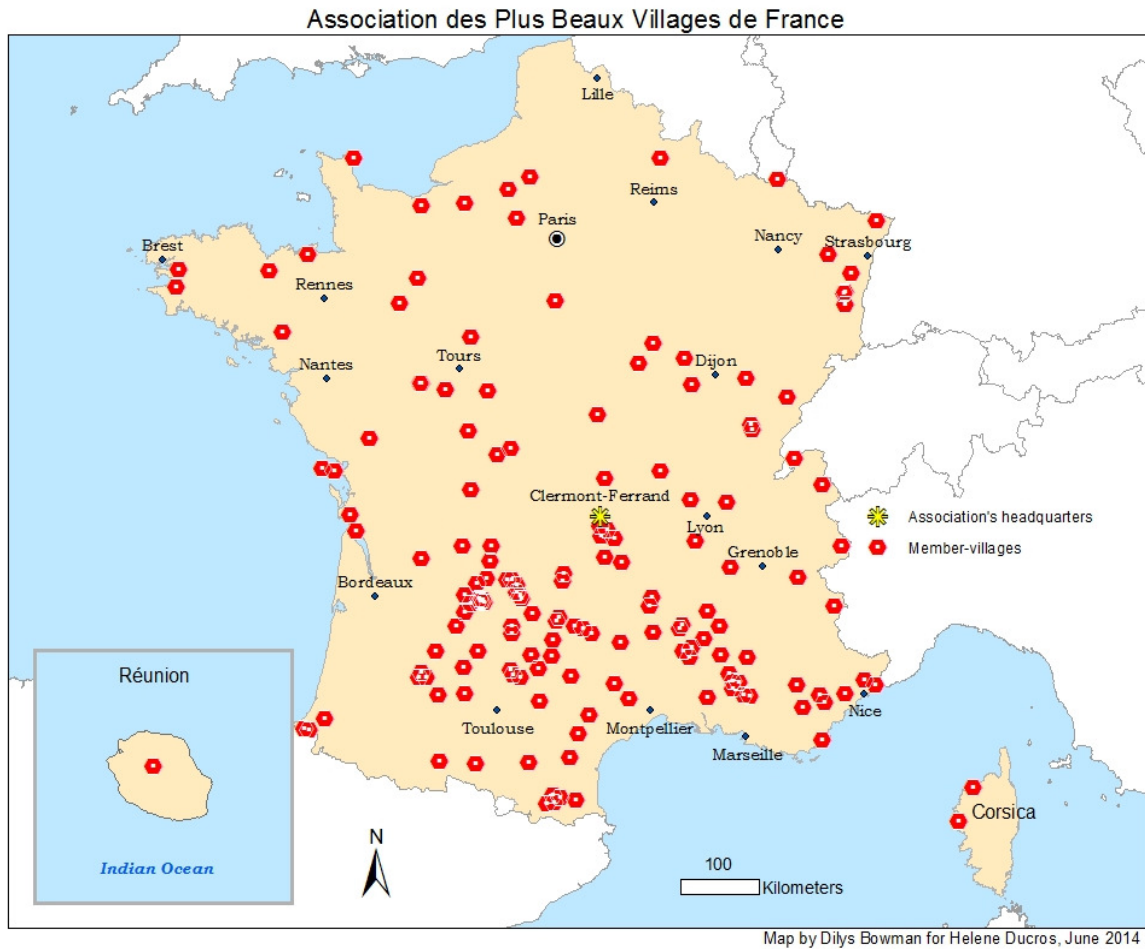
This study is centered on the (re)creation and use of heritage in building, re-building, transforming, and maintaining local rural communities in what they have that is tangible or intangible. It inquires into the motivations and expectations of the actors involved and successes and impediments met in implementation. Understanding the nature of the places that result from

this grassroot associative case-study provides answers as to the effects of such development

policies generally, as these heritage-based development schemes increasingly arise everywhere

in the world. What kind of places does a policy of heritage preservation produce? How are places

transformed and re-invented as a result? In what various ways are such places lived in and

experienced by local communities, individuals, and short-term visitors? Are these places

functional, sustainable, and consensual? The inquiry into the *Association des plus beaux villages*

de France (PBVF) addresses these questions as it is led by five central debates:

I-   Landscape as heritage

II-   Heritage-making as revitalization strategy in rural areas

III- Heritage as place of encounter (between actors/spectators, outsiders/inhabitants)
      and thus a place of social and political transformation

IV-   Heritage as instrument for the retaining of the local under pressure from
      globalization (local identity resilience)

V-   Blending of heritage conservation and sustainable development ideologies and
      policies

First, as we look at the postcard-like views of the villages that have become members of

the PBVF, the notion of landscape as heritage is not to be taken for granted. Complex questions

are implicated in this process: How is the past made into heritage and by which processes? What

in the landscape of the past is retained or "forgotten"? Whose memory is validated and for what

explicit and implicit purposes? The patrimonialization of landscapes and places is the starting

point of the investigation as the *Association* is explicitly concerned with using and creating

heritage as a socio-economic revitalization strategy in the countryside (the third prong of its

mission). Consequently, the second theme examines the relationship between heritage-making

and rural development. The notion of "development" is not to be approached in its restricted and

limited mere economic dimension. To what extent is economic success part of the project? Is it a goal or a means to reach other goals such as the resurrection of communal life in the village and the preservation of old stones as the locale where residents' lives unfold? As a result of its heritage-making development strategy, the *Association* invites a multi-layered encounter: between heritage and people, between insiders and outsiders, between decision-makers and individual and collective memories, and between the different gazes held onto heritage. Thus, the third theme addresses the patrimonialized landscape as a place of exchange which reveals the nature of the relationship and possible tensions between the actors involved as well as the dichotomy between visitors and inhabitants, although this dimension is not the focus of this study since the tourist population is difficult to delineate and to capture due to its diversity in practices, motives, and origins. Nevertheless, the study will expose the social and political transformations the landscape and the community undergo through the encounter, from the perspective of residents. Fourthly, the question of identity resilience ought not to be overlooked in the development dimension of the Association's project. Indeed, identity is a central component in the analysis of the *Association* as its rural villages not only become places of encounters between actors and spectators but also between past and present. Indeed, "thinking of heritage as a creative engagement with the past in the present focuses our attention on our ability to take an active and informed role in the production of our own 'tomorrow'" (Harrison 2013, p.4). To what extent does heritage become the locus and a means of resistance for local identities that may feel under pressure from globalizing forces and territorial re-organization, such as the push for *communes* to join in a *communauté de communes*, or the recent debate over the possible suppression of the identity-producing *département* proposed by some politicians? Finally, as those local identities may be (re)born and strengthened, the project turns to the future and to the

legacy to be transmitted to future generations. Heritage conservation cannot be separated from the context of sustainable development policies as they clearly overlap in their basic ideologies; yet heritage preservation policies may be in conflict with the ways in which sustainable territorial development strategies are implemented. This research addresses whether the potential tension between agendas of sustainable development and heritage-making may be resolved in the context of a particular development project grounded in rural heritage preservation. Generally, the five interrelated facets of this research aim to contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which people get attached and attribute value to place under pressure from globalization, as well as how they use place to cope with global forces and address the challenges they bring about, while, as will be shown, paradoxically capitalizing on those same forces to promote place and strengthen local identities.

This dissertation will establish existing theoretical debates over heritage landscapes, generally and more precisely in Europe, as to position the project of the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* in the literature to show how it stands an illustrative case study and a useful lens through which to address these debates (Chapter One). In Chapter Two, the inquiry will be concretized through an explanation of research methodology and a detailed account of fieldwork activities. The approach will need to be contextualized through an explanation of the local historical perspective and administrative framework for heritage preservation in France, as well as a portrayal of how rurality has evolved in France on the ground and the ways in which the rural world remains a significant component of national culture through its idealization (Chapter Three). Highlighting the concept of the village and its visibility in 21st century France is essential to fully understand how the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* has

emerged as a response to the challenges faced by rural *communes* since the 1950s and has

developed in a cultural and historical context that supports it and on which it draws to shape its

objectives, structure, and practices (Chapter Four). The outcomes of the *Association*'s

labelization processes will be identified in terms of the effects on villages and villagers (Chapter

Five). Hence, Chapter Five will put mayors and villagers at the center of the discussion by giving

them a voice through in-depth ethnographic data collected during fieldwork. This Chapter will

bring out the ways in which people relate to each other in the rural heritage landscape and how

they relate to the place itself, as well as the opportunities and challenges arising under the label.

Conclusions will be drawn about the impact of development policies based on heritage

preservation in rural areas when it comes to place and communities' identity, the emergence of

new tools of governance in the local, and the question of economic impact (Chapter Six).

PLACING THE *ASSOCIATION OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES OF FRANCE IN THE THEORETICAL DEBATES OVER HERITAGE LANDSCAPE*

Five approaches to place the *Association* in the theoretical background

1. Landscape as heritage

Geographers have been particularly interested in the holistic concept of landscape, especially since the 19th century. More recently, contributing to the emerging field of "heritage studies", cultural and social geographers in particular have paid much attention to the conceptualization of landscape as heritage and to the effects of the patrimonialized landscape on places and people. This research is situated in this lineage. How do people (as individuals or communities) come to attribute value to landscapes and places? What processes do they choose to manage and promote those landscapes deemed appropriate to represent a certain past and to be sustained and transmitted to future generations as markers of individual and collective history and identity?

The history of geography demonstrates multiple approaches to landscape that correspond to different inquiries into it and different conceptions of the relationship between nature and culture overtime. Today, "landscape" is widely understood to be a cultural object. Among others, Carl Sauer (1925) defined the relationship between landscape and culture: "The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result" (p. 343). It is invented and its function is to ensure the permanency of our time and space perception frameworks (Cauquelin 2000).

Cauquelin (2000) considers the landscape as the built equivalent of nature and exposes the work we do when we "see", i.e. interpret, the landscape, in much the same way Meinig talks about the beholding eye in his *Ten Versions of the Same Scenes* (1979). Other theoricians of landscape define it as *oecumene*, that part of the Earth that is inhabited. This conception views landscape as demonstrating the relationship between a human group and a terrestrial expanse where not only societies' "geographicity" is produced (a mode of existence and practices that produce consciousness of nature and space), but also where "mediance" is produced, i.e. a way to live and inhabit space taking into account *milieu de vie* and "corporeality" (Berque 1993, 2002). The phenomenological approach understands corporeal and perceptual contexts as both constitutive of meaningful experiences and of *being in the world* (Merleau-Ponty 1945). As such, in both cases, landscape and human societies are irremediably interconnected. However, while Cauquelin (2000) approaches the notion as an "invention", for Berque (1995) the landscape constitutes rather a "discovery".

The 2000 *European Convention* incorporates both conceptualizations in its holistic definition: "Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors" (Council of Europe 2000). Furthermore, reconciling the dichotomy between vernacular and exceptional cultural landscapes, the *Convention* considers "landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes". Moreover, the Convention explicitly integrates economic and ecological utility, as well as cultural and aesthetic value in its approach to landscape protection.

This holistic view of landscape finds an echo in the contemporary approach to rural milieu that is inscribed in the legacy of the humanistic French School of geography and the concepts of *pays* and *genres de vie* elaborated by Paul Vidal de la Blache (1903) in his seminal *Tableau de la*

géographie de la France,[9] and by his disciples from the mid-19th century to the 1960s.[10] In this tradition, rural livelihoods associated with particular local milieus play a key role in landscape apprehension. The tangential position of rural studies in France between history and geography also plays a part in the ways in which the landscape is conceptualized <u>over time</u>, as layers of past and present human activities. Additionally, when it comes to the built environment in the landscape (monuments and buildings), the intellectual legacy driving the *Association* inherits the reflection started during the French revolution as Republican "vandals" endeavored to destroy physical reminders of the *ancien régime*. "Vandals" is a term coined then by the Abbé Grégoire in his fervent campaign to defend historical vestiges, which led to a reaction in public opinion and the birth of a national moral sense of responsibility towards historical artifacts, often local and infused with regional significance. At the national scale, this emerging patriotic sensibility laid the foundations for an intense national politics of monumentalization supported by various institutions and bureaucracies (Poulot 2001; Chastel 1997; Sax 1990). It is in this context that the notion of "*patrimoine*",[11] patrimony or heritage, was first conceptualized in the late years of the Terror. In its early conception, heritage in France would be "national" in character but nonetheless contingent on regional and local riches and artistic treasures, as well as dependent on regional learned societies and local elites for its discovery, explication, preservation, and display (Gasnier 1997).

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[9] The *Tableau* was written as Volume I of Ernest Lavisse's influential *Histoire de France.*

[10] Principally Jean Brunhes, Albert Demangeon, Emmanuel de Martonne, and Roger Dion.

[11] From the Latin *patrimonium*, that which is related to the father.

Many geographers have elaborated on the concept of landscape. This study draws principally on the foundational landscape perspectives developed by David Lowenthal, Donald Meinig, and Yi-Fu Tuan in particular. The time in which these geographers wrote, in the late 1970s and 1980s, also corresponds to the time in which the main questions underlying the mission of the *Association* were brought to the fore. Thus, they provide a useful intellectual context to understand the underpinnings of the *Association*'s philosophy and practices.

For David Lowenthal (1985), since the 1980s the landscape has come to be "saturated with 'creeping heritage'" (p. xv) due to the multiscalar expansion of objects and places categorized and recognized as "heritage". Landscape itself is one of them. The landscape is a form of relics and in that sense it is one way we are able to connect to the past. The landscape thus exists in the present and in the past at the same time but it is contingent on our personal environment, history, culture, and world views. The way we apprehend the landscape is influenced by the things we already know and understand, a personal schema that makes us able to discern elements of the landscape and give them meanings. Thus, for Lowenthal, not only is the landscape an entity we view from a particular vantage point, but we are also implicated in the making of it through our personal perception. The result of our coming into contact with the landscape as a *relic* is that it gives us a more intense sense of place and heightens our awareness of the past. The urge to display relics also leads to the need to protect them, which renders some modifications unavoidable in the present (Lowenthal 1985). Protective measures may cause relics to become less intelligible or less "authentic" but these same measures will also delay decay and prevent total disappearance and oblivion. Thus, authenticity for Lowenthal is not necessary nor is it possible. Its meaning and criteria are not fixed. "Authenticity is in practice never absolute, always relative" (Lowenthal 2008, p 4). Alterations are unavoidable since we

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look at the past landscape from a present standpoint, and with a purpose. In opposition, the 1964 *Venice Charter* on preservation of artifacts dictates that alterations, not only are avoidable, but must be understandable as alterations and should not "falsify" history, a conception of "authenticity" which is allowed more flexibility in the subsequent 1994 *Nara Document on Authenticity*.[12] However, for Lowenthal, the debate over falsification is altogether misled. The question of whether it is harmful or not is largely immaterial since alteration is simply inevitable. The debate over the plausibility, value, usefulness, and content of the notion of authenticity is one dimension of the analysis of the implementation of the *Association*'s criteria in this study. When trying to understand how landscape becomes patrimony in the context of this research, the three central patrimonial attributes Lowenthal (1997) considers as crucial are relevant dimensions to examine: its materiality (we perceive it tangibly with all our senses); the context and container it provides for artifacts, thus valorizing them; and its stability, which makes us feel secure in our environment. These three characteristics factor in throughout the investigation of the *Association* as a territorial development strategy leading to place resilience through heritage preservation.

Meinig disentangles the various ways in which we look at the landscape (1979). Echoing Lowenthal, Meinig asserts that what we see in the landscape is not so much the objects appearing within it (Lowenthal's materiality and container), but what we have in our head. Furthermore, Meinig recognizes that the landscape embodies the interaction of humans and environment over time, a position adopted in the *European Landscape Convention*'s holistic conceptualization of the European landscape. His "ten versions of the same scene" are echoed in the French humanistic geography approach to landscape and the ways in which the historical dimension is

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[12] http://whc.unesco.org/archive/nara94.htm

underscored locally by the established concepts of *terroir, "foodscapes"*, and craftmanships, that associate landscape as territory (location, place) with productive livelihoods inherited from ancestral traditions (whether reconstructed or revived).Thus, landscape is recognized as heritage because it has accumulated traces of the past and layers of history. Unveiling these layers has several effects: pedagogy, self-reflection, and adventure (Meinig 1979).

A phenomenological approach to landscape is another pertinent framework in this study for it encourages the fusion of objective and subjective visions, "the eye and the mind's eye" (Tuan 1974, 1979). This approach assumes people experience the landscape from within, rather than as outsiders viewing in. This is a key component of the *Association*'s processes as the people inhabiting the landscape are called upon to be part of landscape appreciation. Indeed, the *Association,* rather than "reinventing" the village, explicitly aims at reinstituting the villages as active lived-in places after the period of stagnation rural communities have undergone, albeit today's inhabitants may not be doing the same things as those who were there before the abandonment period of the last 50 years. In fact, "the countryside is becoming a place for living, not for making a living" and "landscape and rural life are becoming ominously disjoined" (Lowenthal 1997). This disjunction can be approached as a break between the structure of the landscape and the processes from which the landscape results (Antrop 2005). The *Association*'s ambition is to remedy this experiential disconnect.

Place resilience relies on the successful retention of local populations whose purpose and occupations can remain locally grounded. Based on their realities and experiences, different people will take away different things from the landscape (Tuan 1979; Meinig 1979). The social scientist, the inhabitant, the tourist, the business owner, the local farmer, the rural returnee, or the

elected official, all will feel a sense of place rooted in their own knowledge and experience of a

particular place (and experiences of *other* places as well). The *Association* aims at triggering this

sense of place and attachment to place for insiders and outsiders.

Sense of place is characterized by a deep attachment of people to place that can be

expressed through caring for it (Tuan 1974). The concept of *oikophilia*, or love of home, has

been used to support the notion that people can only care for the local and that they are the ones

that can do it best because they know it best (Scruton 2012). How does the act of "caring" for

place intervene in the *Association*'s project? While Tuan's sense of place often seems to be at the

root of place preservation and place promotion policies, paradoxically it is this same caring that

could lead to the creation of "non-places" (Augé 1992), intended to facilitate mobility and the

management of large influx of outsiders such as tourists. The negation of place is triggered by

movement and voyage (de Certeau 1980). It refers to two realities, that of spaces that are

constructed for specific purposes such as leisure, transit, or transport, and that of the relationship

that develops between people and those spaces (Augé 1992).

> An authentic sense of place is above all that of being inside and belonging to *your* place both as individual and as a member of a community, and to know this without reflecting upon it. This might be so for home, for hometown or region, or for the nation. Such an authentic and unselfconscious sense of place is perhaps as important and necessary in contemporary societies as it was in any previous societies, for it provides an important source of identity for individuals, and through them for communities. But however great the need for such a sense of place may be, the possibility of its development for many people in technologically advanced cultures has been undermined by the possibility of increased spatial mobility and by a weakening of the symbolic qualities of places (Relph, 1976 p. 65-66).

The landscape of home (Tuan 1974) is particularly relevant, offering insight into the ways in

which local inhabitants may experience the heritage landscape and grant it meaning as a home

and place of dwelling. This debate is addressed by sociologist Luc Bossuet (2005) in his study of

the ways in which Puycelsi's inhabitants actually *live in* and *live* the village in the shadow of the

Association, unveiling the tensions that may arise from different ways to dwell and apprehend

the lived world. Bossuet's analysis reveals two distinct modes of "*living in patrimony*". In the first one, people live it as a privileged relationship with the past and preceding generations, while in the second, people are attracted to the prospect of enjoying and profiting from the historical, architectural, or natural characteristics of the landscape they come to live in. Thus, in the first approach, he theorizes that heritage is *felt* before it is *lived*, while in the second case, it is first *evaluated*. These two motivations and conceptions in turn lead to different uses of and mobilization about heritage in everyday experiences. When relating these findings to Tuan's analysis of place, it is clear that each approach translates to a different sense of place. The daily experience of living in the patrimonialized landscape ranges from living *with* a place (stronger sense of place) to merely living *in* a place (weaker attachment to place), to use Tuan's conceptualization.

The study of the *Association* aims to answer questions about the heritage-making process when it comes to landscapes and the places that compose them. When and by what processes does the landscape become "heritage"? How does the *patrimonialization* of the landscape affect it and the people coming into contact with it? The notion of heritage itself is a project with a history (Harvey 2001). The term has taken on different meanings and triggered different actions since the time of the Enlightenment. From inalienable and fundamental goods derived from lists and inventories, heritage came to take on its modern meaning rooted in culture and has endorsed moral and pedagogical functions (Chastel 1997). Heritage often cannot be separated from the history and history-making of the nation (Harrison 2013).

In Pierre Nora's influential *Lieux de mémoire*, Marcel Roncayolo (1997) asserts that the transformation of landscapes into heritage rests foremost on the notion of memory of places,

which itself is part of the memory of the Nation. Furthermore, he notes, it is the debate on urbanism that has forced us to look at the countryside with a renewed interest, and led to the transformation of inherited landscapes into patrimony, as well as the ensuing affirmation of the trend towards conservation.

The relationship between heritage and memory is thus at the forefront of the question of heritage-making. How is memory transformed into heritage and what are the consequences of such transformation on memory itself and on the perception of landscape and place in the present? Furthermore, what alterations does mnemonic appropriation bring about in the landscape? When an entity, whether it is a material object or immaterial notion, is viewed as heritage by the collective, what is lost and what is gained for individuals and local communities? Henri-Pierre Jeudy (2008) deplores the loss of "accidental transmission" when heritage is institutionalized and memory loses its fluidity and plasticity. Patrimonial obsession creates a situation in which objects are in control of transmission: objects themselves conserve us, rather than the other way around. Resting on Jean Baudrillard's famous phrase "it is the object which thinks us", Jeudy (2008, p.63-65) notes that instead of giving life to objects, we are in fact possessed by them.

Hence, the question of whether the heritage fever that is characteristic of our era hinders personal remembrances or enriches them is posed. Michel Rautenberg (2003) suggests that patrimonialization detaches symbolically the heritage object from its context and that this rupture results in perpetuating the remembrance of the past in a stabilized and universalized form with a reductionist effect on domestic memories. Furthermore, the issue of how legitimacy and authenticity intervene in the making of heritage and the sustaining of memory comes to the fore. Whose memory of place gets elevated and validated to the level of communal heritage with

moral and universal value? Whether or not we accept Maurice Halbwachs' thesis (1950) that makes all memory collective, we can investigate the role of individual remembrances in the creation of local landscapes. By looking at the processes of remembering the landscape of the past versus appropriating it as heritage, we can scrutinize the transformation that occurs in the meaning that people give to place and landscape when these come to be patrimonialized and to a certain extent depersonalized and decontextualized through collectivization. Universalized and made into an irrevocable past, heritage changes the relationship that social groups entertain with time and place.

As Chapter Four will further demonstrate, the *Association*'s statutes attempt to delineate the ways in which village localities come to be recognized as heritage. In Europe, and in France in particular, the ideal of the "village" was constructed in the 19th century when the countryside came to be somewhat sanitized after the Revolution, under the influence of the first mass tourists who travelled around for leisure, health, or education, as in the British Grand Tour or the French Apprentice Tour. Hence, already in the 19th century, the countryside was transformed and shaped by travelers' demands and urban tastes for exoticism, which were supported and encouraged by the emergence of the first tourist guides and the generalization of the use of the illustrated postcard at the end of the century, all producing stereotypes of the local along with literature based on local picturesque and its official imagery (Gasnier 1997). In Brittany for example, as in other regions of France in the 19th century, "at a time when modern tourist infrastructure was taking root …, the guidebook defined the terms of authentic encounter with the region …" (Young 2012). At the turn of the century, as the consumption of local spaces grew considerably through literature, tourism, and images, in actuality local *savoirs* came to be increasingly

homogeneized across the national territory, so that already then the local was a re-creation for the purpose of being revitalized and for the reimplanting of local memories (Gasnier 1997). According to Gasnier, this project of "localization" has been undermined in the 20th century due to the strengthening of a national culture and the patriotic project of the French state. For many, however, the two dynamics co-exist and are co-dependent. Instead of the rudimentary conceptualization of French nation-building as a strict antagonism between local and national,

> what has emerged in its place is a less linear and deterministic understanding of French nation building, one more keenly attuned both to the dynamic ways in which locality and nation have interrelated in specific contexts, and to the role local actors and cultures have played in enabling new forms of French identification (Young 2012, p.3).

Today, at a time in which the French nation, not unlike other Western nations, is engaged in an excruciating introspection over its *identité nationale*, the local may be once again at the forefront of collective remembrance and national identity rebuilding. Indeed:

> No country has so fervently propagated notions of cultural universalism; yet France has also become the somewhat unlikely champion of a certain vision of cultural particularism, as it contended first with the perceived challenges of "Americanization" and then with globalization at different junctures of the twentieth century (Young 2012, p.3).

Within the *local*, the *rural* has a role to play in territorial development and identity resilience, at a time in which even the highest executive refers to "*territorial fracture*" when speaking about the current anxiety of the rural world in France. (François Hollande, Président de la République, televised Press Conference 15 January 2014).

2. Heritage-making as socio-economic revitalization strategy in rural areas

From a universal moral imperative in the early 19th century, heritage has assumed an important role amidst socio-economic development strategies in the 21st century. Once a patriotic

duty and symbol of what has been called the Enlightenment Triad (the museum, the library, and the archives) at the service of the perfectibility of the Nation and guarantor of its sustained grandeur in the future, today heritage is positioned at the heart of the question of utility (Gravari-Barbas 2005). Localities can legitimately ask whether renovating historic monuments makes sense in the current socio-economic conjuncture. Some have answered in the negative and architectural patrimony has been destroyed in certain places and in cases in which it had not been listed (yet) on the National Inventory. Localities are often not able to come up with millions of Euros to renovate 19th century churches, for example, and a wave of destruction is currently underway, at the risk of erasing a dominant symbol of local identity and attachment to place (Le Point 2013). Other municipalities and/or dioceses have opted to sell their religious built patrimony to private entities (Le Figaro 2013; Libération, 2013). At the end of 2012, 14 churches and 20 chapels were for sale in France, deemed to be transformed into hotels, offices, apartments or commercial centers. "Church recycling is unfortunately happening" regretted the *Observatoire du Patrimoine Religieux* in 2013 (Le Figaro 2013), while noting that this phenomenon is also present in Belgium and the Netherlands. By selling to private entities, the risks are known that patrimonial value and integrity may be lost. The State itself has started selling its own patrimonial assets. Recently, four national historic properties (although the four 18th and 19th centuries *hotels particuliers* are registered and classified as *Monuments Historiques*) were to be acquired by wealthy Russians, Chinese, and Qatari princes, for a 250 million Euros revenue in national coffers (Le Figaro 2012). The State, like local municipalities and individual citizen-proprietors often can no longer afford to maintain architectural heritage and must make choices in development projects, often in the midst of a very controversial socio-political environment.

On the other hand, when cultural heritage is approached as a means to a better future rather than a financial burden, it remains a core element of local development strategies in many devitalized places in the world. Many rural and post-industrial areas claim the status of heritage today, supported by international and regional consensual documents produced by institutions like UNESCO, HEREIN (European Heritage Network under the Council of Europe and its Cultural Heritage and Technical Assistance Division), and others. Many policies of cultural heritage conservation are explicitly incorporated within socio-economic development strategies. These are based on culture and cultural heritage as a way to guarantee economic and cultural sustainability, continuity with the past, and transition into a promising future.

Thus, both heritage preservation and economic development may converge in the politics of "territorial development". While this is not a new phenomenon, it has accelerated and widened in scope since the 1970s. It is the absence of and impossibility for industrial strategies in certain areas that triggers the implementation of cultural strategies for economic development (Zukin 1995). Globally, the economy of culture is a growing sector in places as diverse as developing countries, the United States, Europe, or Asia. Heritage preservation, enhancement, and promotion is at the center of this economic trend.

The use of culture as a lever for economic development can be understood through the notion of the "symbolic economy", a production system whereby both space and cultural meaning are produced and where cultural exchange takes place (Zukin 1995). Public culture becomes the locus for the negotiation of images that are socially constructed and thus always fluid and changing. The symbolic economy in the city sheds light on the ways in which images and re-created narratives are commodified and "place-entrepreneurs" become the orchestrators of social exchanges in public spaces (Zukin 1995). These re-inventors of place help us satisfy our private

needs (need for togetherness, entertainment, or connecting with an imagined past). While

Zukin's "symbolic economy" argument provides explanations for urban neighborhoods, it can

also be applied to the use of cultural markers as economic resources for local rural development,

based on the production side of culture. The European Union (EU), for example, clearly

incorporates culture as a local-level economic (and political) tool in the instruments it has

developed to promote cultural diversity and uses the preservation of unique characteristics of the

local as economic assets.

The European Commission is actively involved in promoting the "economy of culture" and

encouraging a "creative economy" in the development of the culture industry at various scales.

The local scale is particularly targeted in responding to the challenges brought upon by

globalization:

> Paradoxically, whereas creativity constitutes a response to some of the economic challenges raised by globalisation, it requires initiative and organisation at a local level. To put it another way, creativity is both global and local – hence the term "glocality". This feature of localisation is a positive aspect of creativity: not only does creativity nurture economic competitiveness but it helps retain talent (and corresponding jobs) locally (European Commission 2006).

The 2007-2008 Arcade cultural project constituted another European endeavor focused on

the role of the local in shielding culture and identity from cultural and economic globalization. It

was designed as a project to promote awareness, cooperation, and exchange about practices and

evaluation of case studies which incorporate the cultural component in the development process.

The following statements make clear the symbiosis that exists between culture, economy and

identity in the local at the European level:

> Globalisation or the removal of barriers to free trade has resulted in the opening of local economies to competition from foreign cultural industries producing films, books and music. There is a risk that the activities of local cultural industries might decrease or simply cease to exist, resulting in a loss of work for local cultural actors but also with major consequences in terms of local cultural identity and social cohesion (Arcade 2008, http://arcade.acted.org/resources.html).

Cultural projects do not only bring economic benefits in terms of job creation and income-generating potential but also contribute to individual development and community stability. Indeed, a sense of identity, self-esteem and the core values of a community are also acquired through the expression of a community's culture, including: language, music, visual arts, crafts and traditional practices, theatre, poetry and song. Because of the reciprocal relationship between culture and development, the cultural dimension of development cannot be ignored. To be effective and sustainable, European development programmes should respect and promote the cultures of the intended beneficiaries (Arcade 2008, http://arcade.acted.org/resources.html)

While the creative economy emphasizes economics in the present and in view of the future, cultural preservation is sometimes perceived as being merely backward-looking, nostalgic and sentimental, thus not conducive to contributing to socio-economic development. However, heritage preservation has been used effectively and creatively as an economic resource for decades, arguably since the 19th century in France. In fact, preservation is today at the center of many development strategies at the local level there, aiming at the future rather than simply gazing backward in time. Localized patrimonial resources are part of the cultural creative economy as they are supported by tourism, one of the fastest growing industry of the 21st century.

Economic development in the rural areas of developed countries rests on multi-dimensional and multi-actor processes at work in these regions (Terluin 2003). A combination of endogenous and exogenous factors characterizes most rural development policies in industrialized countries. What contributes to development there is a combination of local action, including the exploitation of cultural and social capital, with exogenous networks (Terluin 2003). Many concrete models have been put into practice incorporating local cultural heritage for economic development, although it would be a mistake to isolate the economic function from the pedagogical effort and identity reinforcing agenda, as all three are intertwined in most territorial development policies. Local museums, eco-museums, house museums, seasonal festivals, re-

enactments, Skansen-type villages, villages inspired by Ford's Greenfield village, historic villages such as Colonial Williamsburg or Old Salem, regional parks, and historic theme parks: all constitute strategies of local economic and territorial development that are rooted in heritage-making and heritage-preservation. All have encountered some level of success and some drawbacks depending on content choice, time, and place. These various models have been developed and used differently in different places and at different times. They are created out of a particular culture to be consumed in a particular culture and at a particular time, so that the same concept can adopt different attributes in different places. The *Association des plus beaux villages de France* has been a model for other associations in other parts of the world, thus suggesting that the model may have universal appeal or at least may be adaptable to various cultural, historical, and economic contexts as an appropriate response to shared development challenges.

The question of which conceptualization of "culture" is being validated and utilized in these models is important as it translates into tangible results in the management of space, the shaping of place, and the resulting lived experience of people there. When it comes to territorial development, the dichotomy between "high" culture and vernacular culture is particularly meaningful. High culture in France is sanctioned by national institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and its sub-directorates, most importantly the *Direction générale des patrimoines* which oversees architecture, archives and museums. One of the Ministry's main instruments is the inventory of *Monuments Historiques* which grants the highest level of protection to monuments and buildings which a commission of experts has decided present artistic or historic value. But high culture is only one component of the model under review in this study. Indeed, the French

tradition of *ecomusées* is particularly relevant in this research as well, as the *Association* can be

seen as combining both the ethnographic ecomuseum conception of culture (local, dispersed,

bottom-up, vernacular, concrete, and centered on the specific relationship between nature and

culture in a particular region) as conceptualized by George-Henri Rivière and Hugues Varine in

the 70s (Hubert 1985; Poulot 1994),[13] with a more national high culture conception (national

registry, top-down). In fact, to be considered as a candidate for admission, a village must

contribute a minimum of two sites/perimeters listed on what is the equivalent of the National

Register in the United States. At the same time, grassroot and local political support is evaluated

as crucial in admission as the *Association* explains itself as primarily local and decentralized in

its conceptualization.

One of the main issues emerging out of the use of culture for economic gain is that of

knowing whether pecuniary prospect leads to the corruption of cultural resources and cultural

creativity or a passéist approach to place development. Indeed, often the compromise stands

between historic accuracy and authenticity on one hand, and accessibility, legibility, and the

enjoyment/entertainment factor on the other. Does the *Association* represent one such

compromise in the context of tourism development? In her research involving a ghost town in

the American West, Dedya DeLyser (1999) engages the issue of authenticity and concludes that

visitors' understanding of authenticity is less concerned with historical accuracy than

encountering history as they have imagined and romanticized it. Bodie, California, is carefully

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[13] The *écomusée* was defined by Rivière and Varine as "a museum that is dispersed through space, interdisciplinary, and which demonstrates the role of Man through time and space, in his natural and cultural environment, thus inviting the population as a whole to partake in its own development through various means of expression based essentially on the reality of sites, edifices, objects, which are real things more meaningful than the words or images that invade our lives." (François 1985)

managed as a town that died in the past and is being preserved as a decayed place rather than the

booming commercial city it once was because that is visitors' experiential expectation. Thus,

seeking authenticity does not necessarily rely on respecting historical accuracy. In Bodie using

heritage for economic benefit means looking backward to a certain chosen point in the past. Does

the *Association'*s project provide a different answer to the ways in which the past can be used for

economic development in rural areas?

Increasingly, culture and economics are integrated in the politics of development. Cultural

economist Xavier Greffe (2005), writing for the OECD report *Culture and Local Development*

notes that culture influences local development in three ways: 1) by disseminating benchmarks

conducive to synergy among players and project implementation, 2) by creating an environment

that is attractive to residents, visitors, and tourists, 3) by providing leverage for the creation of

products that combine aesthetic dimension and utilitarian functionality. These three influences

make cultural heritage a major economic stake and transform it into an industry that puts

memory and the past at the service of the present and the future. The second prong in particular

points to the importance of visitors and tourists. The symbiosis between culture and economics

transforms heritage places into sites of display, exchange, and encounter.

> Heritage and tourism are collaborative industries, heritage converting locations into destinations and tourism
> making them economically viable as exhibits of themselves ..... Once sites, buildings, objects, technologies, or
> ways of life can no longer sustain themselves as they formerly did, they "survive" – they are made
> economically viable—as representations of themselves (Di Giovine citing Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2008, p.10).

3. Heritage as place of plural exchange and multi-layered encounter

Through place patrimonialization, the way groups and individuals relate to that place and to

each other there can be transformed. The heritage landscape attracts different types of people

who are looking for a variety of often pre-determined experiences. Thus, sources of conflict may arise from the interaction of different motives and objectives. Indeed, the encounter that takes place in the local heritage space is multiple. First, local inhabitants are faced with heritage itself, in a self-reflection venture. This self-reflection forces people to examine how they relate to the past as it influences the place and society they are part of. But it would be erroneous to look at the local inhabitants as a heterogeneous aggregate. In fact, in many regions of France, rurals, neo-rurals, foreigners, and increasingly a new category named "*rurbains*" (those whose working life is urban but who have delocalized to the countryside and commute to the city), all share a claim to heritage, but based on different ways to look at it and resulting in different ways to engage with it and dwell in it. Thus, the second dimension of the encounter is the dialogue among diverse local constituencies with differing motives and uses for patrimonialization, different gazes onto heritage, and different practices related to it and within it. The third encounter relates to the tourist industry and the insider-outsider dichotomy. Temporary visitors seek a specific experience in heritage places (as shown in the Bodie study) and the relationship between viewers and inhabitants can reveal much about the ways in which the ideal of the local and the aesthetics appeal of the countryside are lived on each side as well as the types of exchanges that take place. Fourthly, the relationship between administrations, heritage professionals, and grassroot associations is also being shaped in heritage, making it a site of power dynamics and political transformation.

The "mirror" of heritage and conservation strategies are characterized by a permanent process of reflexivity and self-reflection (Jeudy 2008; Gravari-Barbas 2005). For heritage to be legible, a society must look at itself, its objects, its *lieux*, its monuments as in a mirror. It must

produce a split between itself and the image of itself; and that image is made into a spectacle to be viewed from the outside. Living in a heritage site triggers a dual attitude towards place. That "betweeness of place", theorized by Entrikin when speaking of any lived space, emerges out of the fact that we live in the place and are part of it through memory and construction, and we also view it as something external and separate (Entrikin 1991). Heritage-making represents the attribution of meaning to place, in part by transforming history and culture into symbolic representations. It is the fear of losing continuity in history and culture that fosters the cult of the past in Europe (Jeudy 2008). Through self-reflection, the heritage place invites a bi-directional exchange between place and dwellers. Place marks its occupants. And the patrimonial place is itself transformed as it transforms the ways of life of its occupants. In this incessant exchange, people dwell in the heritage place, which dwells in people (Gravari-Barbas 2005).

The second dimension of the encounter that takes place in heritage spaces is the contact between indigenous locals. As heritage is created, recreated, and transformed, issues of social recomposition arise. Sometimes this social reconfiguration can be radical, as in cases of gentrification, but often it is more subdued and less visible, yet very real. Geographer Maria Gravari-Barbas (2005) has attempted to decipher the different ways in which people occupy heritage spaces. Her inquiry into the practice of living in the heritage highlights ensuing constraints and possibilities. The multiplicity in the nature of the relationships between people and their milieu creates different modes of inhabiting. Co-habitation involves sharing the constraints and benefits of patrimonial spaces. Under pressures from technological and economic changes linked to deindustrialization, as well as the new residential and functional mobilities triggered by globalizing factors on one hand, the relationship between individuals and space has

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been altered, which transforms relationships between individuals on the other. Rural places are inhabited differently today than they were decades ago. However, while globalization is often feared as a process bringing standardization throughout different locals, it might on the contrary encourage a less uniform local population in the countryside, through ease of mobility, increase in leisure time, technologies of telecommuting and delocalized distance working, for example. As a result, a more heterogeneous local population displays different levels of attachment to place and transforms the bases on which belonging occurs (Gravari-Barbas 2005).

Should patrimonial spaces be attributed new functionality based on today's social needs? For Gravari-Barbas (2005), changing the function of heritage places should be done cautiously, with sensibility, intelligence, and taking into account the lived experience, memory, and representations of those who made it into heritage. The main question raised is that of integrating the patrimonial human and social context with the re-interpretation of the meaning of the place, site or monument, tradition and modernity. Several factors may influence the ways people dwell in heritage. Bossuet (2005) finds that the mode of inhabiting may depend on people's relationship to time (as duration). Three types of relationships with the patrimonialized place based on duration of residence have been identified: the long term inhabitants, those who are relatively new but intend to stay for a long time, and those who inhabit it intermittently (second homes or vacation residences). The question of time is essential in the way people inhabit heritage and in the ways inhabitants become actors in the appropriation of history and place. Living in heritage means meeting others in a common way of life, taking into account the social and historical framework to seek consensus with others and accept common values of heritage while integrating rules and structures necessary for the survival of heritage in the form agreed

upon by the collective. Conflicts arise when living is sacrificed to sustaining heritage and when

individual and communal histories and objectives are discordant.

The third level of encounters in heritage emerges out of the intense "touristification" of

heritage places through the tourism exchange. Since the Third Republic (1870-1940), tourism in

France has boosted the construction of local identities:

> Ethnic minorities … have … found themselves pressed to negotiate their relationship both to an
> international tourist economy and to the modern nation-state as they have become the subjects and objects
> of modern tourism, and doing so has not uncommonly entailed the revival or reinvention of indigenous
> cultural expressions … (Young 2012, p.7, speaking about the Breton experience).

Heritage places are the locus for the construction and expression of alterity. The cultural "other"

is created through the exchange between local inhabitants and short term visitors in search of

exoticism. Gravari-Barbas (2005) focuses on alterity and the relationship between resident

populations and populations in transit in heritage sites. To inhabit necessarily entails to "receive"

(as in "host"). Mediation is necessary between local indigenous populations and mobile

exogenous populations. However, the question of who is an outsider and who is an insider

imposes itself. What constitutes legitimate insider status? Some theorize that the fundamental

encounter is between the sedentary and passing inhabitant. The "other" is the tourist or the

immigrant (Violier 2005). Furthermore, the inhabitants of the heritage countryside constantly

bear the "ethnographic gaze". They become actors expected to maintain the symbolic resources

of the *terroir* they represent. They are turned into "ethnic pictograms" for the viewing of

outsiders, such as the tourist (Jeudy 2008). The tourist gaze and expectation for out-of-the-

ordinary experiences shape the tourist environment and demarcate the "other" (Urry 2002). And

it is this exogenous gaze that often triggers the host to renew his own gaze onto his culture and

heritage. The tourist's or outsider's gaze can prompt patrimonial recognition among locals and change the insiders' practices linked to heritage, thus impacting place and the dynamics that create and shape it.

The last dimension of the encounter taking place in heritage is that between heritage professionals and local populations. Many actors meet in heritage: inhabitants, associations, elected politicians, architects, heritage experts and technicians, NGOs, and other "place entrepreneurs". Coming to a consensus on patrimonial representations results from constant negotiations and requires exchanges, concessions, compromises, clarity in project planning, and transparency in community consultation. At times, the cluttered relationship between these various constituencies can lead to incompatibilities and incoherence between practices, representations, and management of patrimonial places because of the opposition of two main politics of restoration and preservation: conservatist and modernist (Gravari-Barbas 2008). Lowenthal (1985) describes that heritage practitioners take pride in creating artifice to be consumed by the public and raises the question of ownership and control. What needs to be done so that heritage remains about "us"? In fact, appropriation of local heritage by various institutional actors and heritage professionals may result in the dispossession of the local population (Jeudy 2008). The transformation of heritage into economic or political resources can hollow the *lieu de mémoire* of its substance and void it of historical cultural meaning. For example, it is difficult to evoke industrial memory when the *lieu* is void of its industrial content (Jeudy 2008). The same could be said of agricultural or artisan memory in the 21st century countryside landscape. The encounter between administrators of heritage and local associations creates new regulatory and pedagogical relationships between civil societies and those who hold institutional political power, whether national, regional, or community-based actors.

4. Heritage as weapon for identity resilience and (re)building

"The mobilization of history and cultural traditions in response to the rapid social changes of the past two centuries is one of the major phenomena of the modern world" (Wilson 1997, p.4). The acceleration of social changes and the fear of cultural homogenization have made people more than ever cling to the notion of identity. The uses and practices of heritage spaces incorporate an identity building dimension because heritage is used as a means to differentiate and assert uniqueness. In certain regions, it is through tourism that regional distinctiveness has been shaped and local cultural heritage promoted (Young 2013). As such, heritage-building can become a defense mechanism for identities coping with the standardization brought about by economic, cultural, or scientific globalization. Lowenthal (1985) notes that heritage attests our identity and affirms our worth because history is for all but heritage is for us alone. Furthermore, heritage benefits us by being withheld from others and the falsified legacies it relies on become integral to group identity and uniqueness, which is key to identity claims. To have an identity means to be clearly different from "others". This difference can be asserted through various means, from biology to cultural expressions like language, dress, foods, and history-based performances. Most importantly, the identity question is intimately linked to heritage because it involves the memory of social groups and its material realization. Heritage is also linked to stakes of spatial and territorial appropriation, as it is a way to legitimate this appropriation through filiation. Hence, identity building finds an effective support in heritage-making, since both constitute spatio-temporal processes connecting individual, familial, and regional histories.

Brian Graham and Peter Howard (2008) focus on the relationship between heritage and identity, both terms difficult to define, both dynamically implicated in spatial and temporal

appropriation, and both constructed. The relationship between the two concepts is multi-faceted

and plural. It is supported by memory and public or private markers and expressed through

various practices and institutions at various scales.

> The interconnections of heritages and identities are all around us, entwining the local with the regional, national and global, everyday life with political ideology. ... The meaning of the past in the present that unites all heritage lies at the very contested core of who we are and of who others want us to be (Graham and Howard 2008, p.13)

One of the primary stakes in heritage is to signify identity of a region or a nation (Jeudy

2008). For Jeudy, the obligatory reference to identity which underlies the process of the

reconstitution of the past (or museographic conservation) seems to be a defense against the

phenomenon of globalization because it challenges the risk of socio-cultural confusion and loss

of cultural identities. Identity exaltation actually depends on patrimonial consecration, and on its

"separated contexts" such as parks, museums (p. 54). And because cultural differences become

accepted when they are museographed, cultural tourism in Europe is to be analyzed through the

lens of identity and the defense of alterity (p. 59).

The cultural commodification that may result from the tourist industry and the

commercialization of places is often said to have a negative effect on local identities. But in

Santa Fe, "stereotypes, at once idealized, romantic, and often implicitly denigrating, have been

reclaimed by ethnic groups as weapons of resistance to cultural domination and tourist

commodification", so that local identities can reinvent themselves even in the context of false

traditions, by using the latter to their advantage as identity builders (Wilson 1997).

Heritage serves as a crossroad. It is a site of exchanges, appropriations, negotiations, and

tensions. It relies on *lieux de mémoire*, conceptualized by Nora as "any significant entity,

whether material or non-material, which by human will or work has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (Nora 1996, p. xvii). Heritage gets mobilized in the culture and identity discourse on which heritage itself depends for authority, legitimacy, and continuity. Can heritage-making strengthen local identities? Perhaps, but it may also transform them. However, many also warn of the tension between professing a fixated heritage which meaning lacks plasticity and the concept of identity which needs to remain always fluid for a society to move into the future (Jeudy 2008; Rautenberg 2003; Lowenthal 1985). Cautioning against cultural immobility, Lowenthal (1985), citing Pierre Boulez, notes that "a civilization which tends to conserve is a civilization in decline" (p. 384).

5. Heritage conservation vs. sustainable development: Merging past and future in the landscape

Can the village of the past and the village of the future meet? Both heritage and sustainable development are notions that have mobilized much attention in territorial development policy since the 1990s. In fact, in France, since the new Millennium, the heritage fever has rivaled with the obsession and omnipresence of "*le développement durable*", for which the Ministry of the Environment was even renamed in 2004 as the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development. Although the Ministry has known a series of renaming since then, the term "*durable*" (sustainable) has remained in each new title.

In the 21st century, local development is more than ever associated with sustainable development as the tensions between local and global, long and short term, culture and economics are exasperated. The economic component of sustainability has been at the forefront of the debate on the impact of globalization on local communities for a long time. However,

today geographers are among those who attempt to analyze globalization's cultural and social impact on those communities as well. Cultural and natural heritage are both intertwined in the same system of economic, ecological, and socio-cultural sustainability. This is particularly true in rural communities where cultural and physical environment are often directly and explicitly dependent on each other since livelihoods there are anchored in ancestral know-hows that rely on local natural resources.

Thus, heritage frequently plays a consequential role in the implementation of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Agenda 21 policies at the local level in France. A priori, both the notion of heritage preservation and the notion of sustainable development emerge out of the same logic as they focus on the tripod of: conservation, continuity, and legacy to future generations. Both aim at integrating a temporal dimension to development and are concerned with the management of non-renewable resources, whether tangible or intangible. Increasingly culture and cultural diversity are understood as one kind of depleting non-renewable resource. Even those who approach heritage as merely a symbolic resource cannot deny that through its contribution to the tourism industry, it has become an economic resource as well. Indeed, not only does heritage create local jobs directly related to the culture industry and cultural resources management, it also strengthens local spending and creates jobs in the related hospitality industry.

One symptom of the plausible alliance between heritage conservation and sustainable development is that a number of the villages in the *Association* under study bear additional labels pertaining to their efforts for an environmentally sustainable local development politics, such as "*Station Verte*" (green station), or "*Village d'Avenir*" (village of the future). Heritage preservation has become only one component of sustainability among others. This convergence

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between heritage preservation and sustainability is expressed by Gravari-Barbas and colleagues (2008) in their comparative study of two French cities when they demonstrate that both concepts aim at "better articulating societies' present with their past and their future, in a logic of intergenerational transmission and solidarity" (p. 2). The study reveals however that the tautology is not realized in practice and that convergence of patrimonial preoccupations and the objectives of sustainable development is not to be taken for granted as both movements are subject to different pressures, from demography and land tenure, to artistic authenticity and cultural legitimacy. In contrast, Galla (2003) reports successful integration of sustainable development principles with new museology politics in Vietnam. In rural China, Feiner and colleagues (2002) also show that regional planning can ally concerns for tourism, infrastructure, ecology and historic sites preservation in a cohesive rehabilitation policy with favorable and sustainable results. In light of these diverging accounts, we can question in what cases the two notions might converge in their implementation at the local level and inversely what factors may intervene to create tensions between both agendas.

Until recently, the emphasis was principally on the economic dimension of sustainability. However, the cultural/social sphere of the concept, which is clearly present in the 1987 Bruntland Report (which led to the 1992 Agenda 21 and the founding of the Commission on Sustainable Development at the Rio Earth Summit) is increasingly gathering notice and being used in the politics of development. In the *Association*, three aspects of heritage intersect to support cultural sustainability: the natural/ecosystem heritage of the landscape and region, the built heritage (monuments, buildings, and artistic production), and local culture specificity (livelihood, language, artisanship, know-hows, gastronomy...).

Development includes culture; and cultural diversity is one pillar of sustainable development. One way to conserve diversity in the face of globalizing cultural forces is through heritage preservation agendas. But because of the widening of what represents heritage today, the concept may encumber other ways to utilize and manage space, places, buildings, and landscapes. For example, patrimonial pressure may get in the way of sustainable development when destruction or drastic transformation appears to be the only way to project a locality into a functional future. Culture is not static. But heritage seeks stability and tends to be fixated as a means to legitimacy and intelligibility. Therefore the issue of sustainability vs. immutability emerges in the public debate on cultural heritage preservation and development. The proponents of sustainable development strategies may be in conflict with conservationists whom they accuse of "museumifying" places, fixating culture, and idealizing the past, rather than developing territories dynamically. Moreover, depending on the specific local circumstances, both notions may be articulated and interpreted differently by local elected officials and inhabitants, as shown in Gravari-Barbas' (2008) comparative study in historic neighborhoods in two French towns (Nantes and Angers), demonstrating that the conception of both notions evolves differently in distinct historic, economic, and political contexts.

In the past, heritage was understood merely as monuments and buildings (often through the National Registry of historic and protected sites), but because the notion has been extended to landscapes and immaterial cultural entities, its convergence with sustainable development agendas is made more problematic. Sustainability criteria and local culture may not lead to the same interpretation of heritage and are not necessarily responsive to memorial and identity factors to the same extent. Are the member-villages in the *Association* able to reconcile both agendas, or do local officials encounter difficulty doing so, and what are the limitations of this

convergence under the label[14]? Other villages in France have chosen to opt out altogether from a strictly heritage-based development strategy and to focus on dynamic "re-use" of cultural resources rather than mere conservation, as the mayor of Saint Macaire has explicitly done in his sustainable development strategy (Evin 2009).

   Another dimension of the possible tension between sustainable development and heritage protection policies lies in their implementation when it comes to agricultural landscapes. The 20th century witnessed the disappearance of the French peasantry, an experience that had already started in the 19th century, and with it the disappearance of agricultural landscapes associated with agrarian peasants. The question of how to reconcile contemporary agricultural policies that encourage competition among agro-exporters with sustainable cultural development is brought to the fore when "*agriculteurs*" are increasingly portrayed as "*jardiniers du paysage*" (gardeners of the landscape) and deemed socially responsible for the landscape as cultural heritage.

   Preserving cultural heritage as a way to preserve cultural diversity in Europe has been the main concern of the Arcade Project (Awareness Raising on Culture and Development in Europe).[15] Through Arcade, the European Commission aims to exploit culture and heritage as central elements of sustainable development policies in Europe. In the words of project Coordinator Florent Le Duc: "Any sustainable development programme that excludes the cultural component limits its chances for success" (Acted 2008). In fact, sustainable development is one of the most prominent themes in local development policies in France. The debate over

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[14] "Label" here refers to the process of having received the approval of the *Association* and being endorsed as a member of the *Association*. The words "label" and "labelization" are used on the ground to represent the certification or accreditation under the qualifying terms of the *charte de qualité*. The *Association* chooses to grant its "label" to villages as a result of the certification process. By extension, the "label" is used to embody the *Association* as a whole, with its processes and goals.

[15] http://arcade.acted.org/index.html for full report.

these agendas concerns the danger of equating "durable" with "immutable." Such confusion can lead to conflicts in the implementation of heritage conservation and sustainable territorial development projects. Nevertheless, associating ecological and cultural heritage preoccupations with equitable economic development resonates with the notion of sustainable development as it was first conceptualized in the Brundtland Report in 1987.

Most heritage scholars would agree that heritage simultaneously sustains and constrains us, as individuals and as a society. In the late 20th and the 21st centuries, the focus in heritage-making and management has centered around the exploitation of the past for the benefit of economic, political, and identity concerns, sometimes with devastating results in terms of tragic ethnic wars and nationalistic impetus. The heritage fever that has "contaminated" most of the world has transformed the relationship between people and the relationship between people and their environment. As a result, it has also transformed heritage places themselves and the way in which heritage is being claimed and legitimized in policies of territorial development. But heritage is not to be apprehended as a given. It is a construction, the result of an intellectual, social, and political process over time that implicates various actors and involves careful selection, remembering, oblivion, enhancement, and promotion.

Globalization is at a juncture. Indeed, at a time in which people speak of the necessity for "de-globalization", "de-growth", "un-growth", or "steady-state growth" (Scruton 2012; De Young and Princen 2012; Latouche 2006), the local is more than ever asserting its role in providing better lives for people as a haven from the negative effects of globalization on our quality of life. While the strict focus on economics is waning to the benefit of an integrated view of development incorporating qualitative dimensions of culture and social experiences as well,

cultural heritage has a part to play in this new development orientation as it contributes to revive and valorize the local, with its expected unique landscapes, identities, and specific *genres de vie*. However, can heritage overcome its tendency for immutability and give way to the necessary plasticity to allow for people and identities to move into the future sustainably? This research seeks to understand if and how "patrimonophily" can in fact contribute effectively to durable and sustainable territorial development and understand the kind of places that will result. By approaching the PBVF as a case study which may provide concrete answers in the five debates over heritage landscapes, the study investigates practices of place-making through heritage preservation on the ground. The creation and evolution of the PBVF and its insertion into public debates around these wider thematics and within which Mr. Ceyrac's letter acts as an implicit trigger, is rooted in the heritage landscape theoretical framework. It raises questions which necessitate a closer look into the actors implicated in these processes (Chapter 2). This study rests on the diverse actors who intervene in the *Association*'s functioning at various levels, from organizational actors to villagers themselves (Chapters 4 and 5). Those actors, consciously or subconsciously (the "eye and the mind's eyes"), are themselves dependent on historical, administrative, geographic, cultural, and educational contexts in which ideas and actions have been shaped for centuries (Chapter 3).

CHAPTER TWO:

CONCRETIZING THE INQUIRY THROUGH QUALITATIVE METHODS

2.1.   General question

To understand if patrimonial conservation in the countryside can remedy the decline of the rural by creating opportunities for territorial and economic development, it is useful to concentrate on the emerging phenomenon of territorial and place labelization. Increasingly, heritage-scapes come to be sanctioned by "labels", be it the renowned and global UNESCO World Heritage Sites or others. Indeed, an increasing number of thematic multi-scalar heritage-based cultural "labels" and their associated logos are affixed to places and territorial expanses and play out in the landscape. While the intent is one of preservation under certain criteria and the goal is a certain revival outcome, more attention still needs to be placed on the influence those labels have on the evolution of the place itself and the people living there, much in the vein of work that has been done on the livelihoods of people living in wilderness reserves and national parks across the world. When it comes to heritage labels, what are their effects on place itself and the inhabitants residing within it? Is place theming/place labeling contributing to rural resilience in industrialized countries? Do those labels confer a place to the local in the 21st century debate over development? Through a case-study in rural France, answers are sought. The *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* offers a valuable terrain to question the decentralized processes of localized labelization, the actors involved and the results on the ground. As a model for similar organizations and agendas around the world, it constitutes an

excellent place to start understanding non-State-led heritage labelization practices, assess the results, and give a voice to the people most affected by the process, i.e. direct actors and residents of those places.

2.2.   Research questions and working hypotheses

Four main inquiries lead this study. First, in order to address the ways in which heritage preservation projects can affect rural areas which decline has accelerated since the 1950s, the study interrogates the ways in which the label granted by the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* (MBVF) contributes a response to the decline of rurality in France. One hypothesis is that, beyond each individual member-village, the MBVF has impacted the ways in which the rural is perceived in France, by contributing to making it a patrimonial object and shaping expectations about the rural from within and without alike. Secondly, the study inquires into the ways in which residents live with the label and the ways in which the village, life in the village, and the rural lived space may have been transformed under the label. As suggested by the literature, the patrimonialization of rural spaces changes the ways in which people relate to place and to each other within the place, and may accentuate the different stakes people have in the place. Thirdly, because the localization project could lead to hyper-localism, the study looks into whether or not the MBVF leads to hyper-nationalist or hyper-regionalist cultural entrenchment. The MBVF insists on its national dimension even though it focuses on local specificities and is based on fostering different "locals". But instead of constricting itself to hyper-localism, it seeks to highlight a national whole that is made of unique parts anchored in the local. While its international expansion is proof of its global vision of rural challenges, it offers a solution that is rooted in a network of "locals." Fourthly, labelization projects have often been

accused to commodify place. Does the MBVF project result in heritage commodification in a purely economic/commercial endeavor? The MBVF is a place-based community development project in which the commercial/economic dimension supports an endeavor with wider social and identity scope. Finally, the study examines the future that is envisaged for the MBVF within French rurality by its stakeholders. The *Association*'s 30 year anniversary is an opportunity for introspection and self-evaluation. The future is likely to bring a continued professionalization of the processes, with the Association continuing to serve as a model of rural development strategy for other local and national associations in other countries, as well as positioning itself as the core for a transnational network of like organizations worldwide.

2.3.   Qualitative Methods and Informant Sampling

This study relies on qualitative methods and fieldwork which took place over two years and three separate stays in France, ranging from two months to six months in duration. Since the research questions seek to investigate experiential space, situated action, and landscape evolution, ethnographic methodology was used: semi-structured and unstructured interviews, as well as participant-observation, which took place in five sites. Tools used were a digital recorder, a field journal, and two digital cameras (one compact and one DSRL). This study required a planned organization that nonetheless remained open to adaptation when warranted by such circumstances as distance, availability of key participants, ease of finding nearby lodging during the off-season or during the busy tourist season, business hours, weather conditions on secondary roads (heavy fog or black ice preventing all driving on some days). Operational constraints were dealt with through trial, error, and adaptation to ad hoc demands. The main constraints emerged in terms of distance between sites and key informants, availability of key informants, lodging

options, and the fact that in France, one can only rent a car for 30 contiguous days, which forced me to return to my point of origin (Paris) every 30 days to return my rental car and pick up a new one. I took advantage of those days in Paris to interview informants that were based there, catch up on documentary research, and make further contacts with institutional or administrative actors.

There were two main phases in the study: the conceptual documentary phase based on my prior wide-span literature review and documentation obtained through preliminary work, and the concrete phase. *Non nova sed nove*, the conceptual phase involved bibliography analysis in the context of the field, providing me with a basis for the formulation of questions to be asked in situ. The concrete phase consisted in fieldwork. It targeted two registers of actors: institutional and villagers. The field inquiry was non-linear, and can be broken down as comprising four main parts: 1) research on documents, 2) encounters in situ with local officials (Mayors, municipal council members, tourist bureau officers), 3) encounters with the *Association*'s officers (three officers at the headquarters, one at the Secretariat, and the President whom I met in his own village of Gordes, Vaucluse) and *Association*'s partners, and finally 4) encounters with the villagers. The four phases did not develop chronologically, but were rather intricately overlapping throughout the duration of the research, allowing me at times to take a step back in order to look closer into the field. The number of interviews that would be necessary to provide answers was not set ahead of time. This number was set at the point when saturation would be reached. Leaning on Michael Patton's (1990, 2002) qualitative inquiry methodology, and in order to reach generalizable results that would lend credibility to my conclusions, I executed a deliberate and purposive sampling of information-rich cases guided by data already collected, time, and resources.

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research … (Patton 2002, p. 230).

I used a combination of snowball sampling, maximum variation sampling, and opportunistic sampling. Snowballing gave me easy and rapid access to people who were willing to participate and apt to give me answers. Toward the end of each interview, I asked the informant "Who else do you think I should speak with?" in order to acquire leads for additional information-rich cases. However, in order to address the risk of over-homogeneity in snowball sampling in small places such as villages, I combined it with the sequential maximum variation sampling (heterogeneity) method to ensure the representation of a wide range of experiences.

When selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of finding: (1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity (Patton 2002, p. 235).

Based on my encounters with informants, I organized the sequencing of the study as I progressed, selecting the diverse types of subsequent informants I needed to include in the sample to engage the many dimensions of place and community. This sampling strategy proved useful in giving me access to a meaningful sample when a sizeable one was not possible. It allowed me to gather diverse local stories and obtain more complete data about the experience of place than with simple snowballing. Finally, the opportunistic sampling (or emergent sampling) method that "takes advantage of whatever unfolds as it unfolds" (Patton 1990, p. 179) allowed me to seize opportunities which I had not predicted in advance. It "involves on-the-spot decisions about sampling to take advantage of new opportunities during actual data collection…after fieldwork has begun." (Patton 2002, p. 240). Opportunistic sampling is

accepted as a strength of qualitative research and fieldwork, in particular when collecting data on everything and everyone is not feasible. It requires the researcher's willingness and ability to adapt methods and planning on the fly, as well as the capacity to analyze on the spot what precisely constitutes an opportunity. Often, the interviews and participatory data resulting from this sampling method were the most meaningful and enriching to capture the essence of local experiences.

2.3.1. Preparatory conceptual phase

This phase was founded on the knowledge I acquired through my bibliographic review of key Anglo-American literature as well as French literature (often not translated into English) on conceptual aspects related to this research: place, landscape, local community, village, heritage, and place "labelization". The conceptual approach was continuously influenced by findings and opportunities in the field, such as my unplanned participation in an international conference on territorial labelization held in Clermont-Ferrand (*Labellisation et "mise en marque" des territoires*, 2011), among other initially unpredicted happenings. During this phase, I established my first contacts as a bridge into the field (via email, phone, or posted letters) and made my first observations based on the positive responses, refusals, and non-responses.

2.3.1.1. Research on organizational material documents

Records, documents, artifacts, and archives –what has traditionally been called "material culture" in anthropology – constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs…
In contemporary society, all kinds of entities leave a trail of paper and artifacts, a kind of spoor that can be mined as part of fieldwork (Patton 2002, p. 293).

To prepare and supplement field observation and interviews, I collected public and non-public documents such as brochures, reports, memoranda, charts, and official and unofficial documents such as letters or emails generated by the organization, as well as photos to be used as another source of case data. These provided important data about organization processes, regulations, and explicit goals. Analyzing institutional documents would allow me to contextualize organizational texts, to understand why they were generated, and to link them to other sources of data (interviews and observations). It is widely accepted in qualitative research that, especially in the inquiry into an organization,

> these kinds of documents provide the evaluator with information about many things that cannot be observed. They may reveal things that have taken place before the evaluation began. They may include private interchanges to which the evaluator would not otherwise be privy. They can reveal goals or decisions that might be otherwise unknown to the evaluator (Patton 2002, p. 293).

Through the content and language used in reports and meeting minutes, I was able to access the conceptual debates within the *Association*, as well as the nature of the interaction between different actors. Furthermore, public mission statements and the *Association'*s newsletters since 2005, *Point.com*, indicated the progression of the *Association'*s processes as presented to the outside. Organizational records obtained provided an offstage look at the processes behind the label and the ways in which those processes developed over time.

2.3.1.2. *Institutional level: Organizational fieldwork*

At the institutional level, I interviewed key organizational informants in three places: Clermont-Ferrand where the *Association'*s headquarters are located, in Collonges-la-Rouge where the secretariat has been established since founder Charles Ceyrac was mayor there, and in Gordes where the current president is mayor. I interviewed the three current officers at the headquarters,

as well as one of the co-founder, the secretary, and the president. These interviews proved crucial not only to get critical mass of information about the *Association*'s history and present structure, but also to gain access to other resources: documentary and human resources. The president in particular made it possible for me to participate in key Association business in subsequent months. The staff in Clermont-Ferrand and their wide knowledge of the field gave me important information to help me in my sampling.

2.3.1.3. *State of the field (context)*

To better understand the processes behind heritage and other territorial labels, I researched and got acquainted with other labels present in France, from the international UNESCO Heritage Site label to others with more local scopes. This gave me tools to gauge where the PBVF stood with relation to other heritage-based organizations in the context of diversity and sometimes confusion of territorial labels. Participation in the conference held in Clermont-Ferrand in 2011 on the "*Labellisation des Territoires*" was useful to identifying the goals and challenges of other labels which punctuate the French landscape and to establish comparative features through which to approach the label of the PBVF. I also was interested in possibly teasing out the rivalry or interaction between certain labels in the same region or same village and to find out how the village dealt with overlapping labels (such as PBVF and UNESCO existing in one place) when that co-existence was present.

2.3.1.4. *Official and public documentation (administrative documents, etc.)*

Another phase of the study included research into the INSEE database (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques), the French census institution. The database is entirely

available online through research by *commune*. I also compiled public documentation on each village in which I interviewed institutional informants. This documentation included all available village promotion literature, site information, maps, and place advertisement material. This literature is meant to project to the public what the place is about. Its review revealed what and how local heritage was put forth by the various actors implicated in place promotion. This literature also included tourist brochures available at the Tourism Office, the Association Guide, postcards for sale in various shops when available, brochures available for free or for a small purchase price (such as a pamphlet of a proposed "walking tour" of the village sold for 1€) or leaflets about different heritage sites open to visitors, and any other documents which were provided to me at the *Mairie*, such as reports, unpublished or official memoranda, photos, or maps.

2.3.1.5. *Field visits for preliminary assessment*

Once the research on document phase over, preliminary field research consisted in visiting a number of villages in various regions of France to get a sense of those places, assess practical access, as well as the a priori willingness of people to participate in the project. I also became acquainted with the region surrounding these villages, and other cues to help me categorize the member-villages into a typography. My approach was to start wide and narrow down as I proceeded in time and space. Preliminary fieldwork allowed me to formulate my first field hypotheses and to devise a plan for testing them.

2.3.2. Fieldwork inquiry: Qualitative methods

The inquiry took place at two levels: institutional and residents *in situ*. I approached the *Association* directly. I went to its headquarters in Clermont-Ferrand to meet its officers to learn more about the *Association*'s history, internal organization, and functioning. While organizational decisions are in fact made by the mayors of member-villages, it is from the headquarters that the *Association*'s trajectory takes shape and is diffused. It is the operation center. I was generously welcomed and was able to confirm some of my preliminary choices as appropriate villages to target for in-depth study, as well as get new ideas and advice. The honesty and openness of the *Association*'s staff in speaking about the organization's goals, missions, opportunity, challenges, and limitations were encouraging. This is a group of people who not only are committed to their jobs, but who also ask themselves questions about what it is the *Association* does, wants to accomplish, and the consequences of their actions. They are used to self-reflection as they are often confronted by the media when solicited for comments, interviews, or advice. Meeting with one of the co-founders of the *Association*, also based in Clermont-Ferrand and close collaborator and friend of late Mr. Ceyrac, helped in understanding the genesis of the *Association* and its progression into a modern and globally recognized label. Thanks to Mr. Chabert, Mayor of Gordes and President of the Association, whom I first interviewed at length in his village of Gordes, I was granted permission to observe the Assembly of the *Commission Qualité* and to shadow the *expert-qualité* in one of his expertise visit in view of possible listing of a candidate-village. Later in the process, I was also invited to observe the first official meeting of the international network of the *Most Beautiful Villages of the World* when sister associations met to approve by-laws and discuss the terms and strategy of a super-association in the form of a *Federation*.

<u>List of key organizational informants interviewed:</u>

Maurice Chabert, *Président* since 1996

Pascal Bernard, *Délégué général et chargé de qualité*

Anne Gouvernel, *Chargée de Communication*

Cécile Varillon, *Chargée de Développement*

Aurore Touchard, *Intern* (2012)

Jean-Claude Valeix, *ex-Délégué général* and expert in the *Commission Qualité,* co-founder of the *Association*

Corinne Tronche, *Secrétaire*

As a result of these interviews, I was invited as an observer in three key moments in the life of the *Association*:

- Shadowing the *Expert Qualité* in a *visite d'expertise* of a candidate village, from the initial presentation by the village Mayor and discussion about motivations to join, to the visit of the village first with the Mayor and municipal team, and then alone with the expert.
- Observation of one of the bi-annual meeting of the *Commission Qualité*.
- Observation of the first annual meeting of the international *Federation*.

In addition, other key informants outside the *Association*'s core were mayors and local institutional personalities: 22 mayors and 9 municipal council members and tourism office officers were interviewed across France. I conducted preliminary interviews over two summers during times of intense touristic pressure in certain areas, while I conducted the bulk of my

interviews with residents during the participant-observation phase which took place in fall and winter. In 22 villages, I conducted a limited number of interviews among local institutional personalities such as the mayor, members of the Municipal Council when the mayor was not available, or officers of the local Tourism Office. These preliminary interviews usually took place over several days and gave me much to think about in terms of the issues each village faces and helped me in assessing the usefulness and feasibility of a deeper on-site inquiry. The state of saturation was reached after the 15th interview (and thus 15th village), after which it became clear that no matter the region, villages face similar conditions across the French territory, with some idiosyncratic dimensions due to specific geographic or historic factors, such as a particularly difficult terrain, historical crop disease, religious war and pilgrimage, and others. I also learned the local population size in the winter to ensure that if I were to come back in the subsequent winter, I could have access to a sufficient sample to conduct interviews.

In addition, I interviewed other partners and/or institutions connected to the Association. The six interviews led me to the Readers' Digest representative (Member of the *Commission Qualité* meeting), EDF-ERDF (Electricité de France- ERDF is the distribution network for low to medium voltage electricity - Member of the *Commission Qualité*), *Braille et Culture* (in Aigueperse) fostering a partnership dedicated to making PBVF accessible and intelligible to non-seeing persons, the Tour Operator *Come-to-France* (2 interviews in Paris. The company was in ownership transition. Therefore, I interviewed the previous owner who started the partnership with PBVF and the new owner), and Atout France (Agence de développement touristique de la France).

During the actual on-site observation phase, I interviewed approximately 80 residents across five villages in different geographic and administrative regions of France. Interviews

lasted from 30 minutes to several hours. Formal or informal one-on-one interviews, or informal small group conversations also took place when the opportunity presented itself. Interviews were conducted in French and without an interpreter. I am a native speaker of French and was born and raised in the French culture, which facilitated not only strict verbal linguistic comprehension, but also comprehension of cultural connotations in certain expressions and words used, as well as voice inflection, chosen moments of silences, and even gazes, facial and body expressions (hands, shoulders, etc.) which can mean as much (or more) as many words actually pronounced.

A note on privacy and confidentiality:

It is paramount to me to respect my informants' confidentiality. This poses some difficulty in addressing and analyzing results when my interlocutor or the village he/she is speaking from could be identified. For example, identifying someone as, let us say "the old baker's daughter", when there is only one baker in the village, would make it easy to identify who this person is. Therefore, I have either not used data that could lead to identification or I am presenting it in a way that could make it less meaningful to the project than if I revealed who said what. I accept the drawback. In small communities such as the villages I visited, to some extent privacy may exist, but anonymity does not. Everyone is someone's relative or neighbor and would be easily identifiable if too much precision were given about individual respondents.

2.3.2.1. Institutional: participant-observation in key moments in the life of the Association

I was a participant-observant in key moments in the process of labelization and the life of the *Association*. First, I was able to shadow the expert-technician in an expert visit for

membership evaluation in a village which was subsequently accepted as a new member in the *Association* (Montclus, Gard). This consisted in: observing the initial meeting between the *expert-qualité* and the Mayor and some members of his Municipal Council; following the *expert-qualité* in his evaluation visit and photographic reporting of the place. Secondly, I was invited to observe one of the bi-annual *Commission Qualité* meetings (Roussillon[16], Vaucluse). These meetings consisted in spending two days with the *Commission*, from formal meetings to meals and local activities such as the visit of "*Le Chemin des Ocres*" (Ochre trail). Thirdly, I attended the first *Most Beautiful Villages of the World* meeting (Gordes, Vaucluse). This meeting consisted in spending several days with the delegations from other countries, attend formal meetings, press conferences, presentations, celebrations, and attend formal events and organized cultural activities such as the visit of the "*Village des Bories*". Finally, I followed a site-visit by expert technician and *Commission Qualité* delegation for "re-expertise" (Hell-Bourg). This site visit consisted in observation during the delegation's four-day visit, formal meetings and press conferences, meals and cultural visits in the region. The group was composed of the president and his wife, several mayors who sit on the *Commissions*, the executive and secretariat staff. Wives and husbands also accompanied several of the officials and were part of the activities as well. I was able to speak with them too. Participation-observation in these four organizational events was key to my understanding of what happens in the functioning of the *Association*, but also what does *not* happen, for example, staff interactions, explicit mention of certain issues, or conflict over a contested matter.

> If social science theory, program goals, implementation designs, and/or proposals suggest certain things ought to happen or are expected to happen, then it is appropriate for the observer or evaluator to note that

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[16] Roussillon is known for its history of ochre extraction and being the center of American scholar Laurence Wylie's account of the transformation of the rural in France in "A Village in the Vaucluse" (1957 for the first edition).

those things did not happen…Making informed judgments about the significance of nonoccurrences can be among the most important contributions an evaluator can make…(Patton 2002, p. 295-296).

2.3.2.2. Fieldwork in villages

The second level of my inquiry consisted in fieldwork in the member-villages themselves. The identification of representative case studies was not as simple as first thought. First, it was impossible to do preliminary visits to all of the 156 member-villages. The basis for what cases would be representative and thus useful for my demonstration arose from the 22 preliminary interviews. Saturation of potential themes occurred pretty early in preliminary fieldwork. Many of the same issues surfaced, whether the village was located in the South, the North, a mountainous region, a highly touristic region, or an off-the-beaten-path region. Basically, what I came to appreciate were the challenges of the *rural,* which had lost population and significance acutely over the last half century or more and the efforts of people to remain on the map. After the initial fifteen interviews, it was clear that more interviews would teach me about the idiosyncrasies of each place -regional, local and also personal- but they would not teach me much new substance as far as the motivations for joining the *Association* and the effect of the label on the life of the village. However, a set of objective features came up repeatedly in conversation:

a) The year of accession to membership. This was helpful on several fronts. First, accession year allowed me to identify the context that triggered the initial motivation for joining the network, as well as identify if the label succeeded in facing the issues it was supposed to remedy, to inquire into accomplishments, disappointments, and possible organizational and social tensions, as well as landscape evolution (in the case of villages that have been members for a while). Second, it was also useful because of the difference in treatment of

the "first generation" villages when it comes to applying evaluation criteria (as will be explained in Chapter Four).

b) Population composition. These data were not only available from the Mayor's office but are readily accessible on the national census database (INSEE) in great detail for each of the 36,000+ *communes* in France. The categories I highlighted were the ratio of permanent resident vs. intermittent or second-home dwellers, as well as the percentage of the *commune*'s population still involved in agriculture vs. tertiary industry. I also found out from the Mayor's office the number of foreigners, *rurbains*, or neo-rurals. These could seldom be established in precise numbers, but often were estimated in a general statement of percentages.

c) Available local economic resources by sector. The information on economic resources by sector is available on the INSEE database for each *commune* in France. While many villages in France can no longer be considered agricultural, some remain so. What other resources are available aside from potential tourism revenues? Some villages who seek the MBVF label have zero commercial outlets. In those cases, the label cannot be considered to be an economic endeavor as much as an existential necessity.

d) I also distinguished those villages that were isolated members of the *Association* from those that were located in a cluster, as the villages of the Vaucluse are, for example. Included in my "isolation index" was also the ease of access as far as major roads and highways. Generally, I sought to identify whether the villages I was interested in were located on the way to something else, such as the villages that are on the highly traveled route to Spain where all of Northern Europe crosses France to reach vacation spots in

Southern Europe. At the top of the isolation index was the only PBVF not located within the metropolitan borders of France but situated in a *DOM-TOM* (Département et Territoires d'Outremer, or overseas French territories). Hell-Bourg, in La Réunion Island (Indian Ocean) is the only village of this sort, and I included it in my sampling. I was authorized and invited to combine the timing of my study there to overlap with the *Association* delegation's visit to the village and its re-inspection.

e) Finally, I looked at whether or not villages bore other labels to see how the PBVF label compared locally in people's minds. I included one village which is also located within a UNESCO site perimeter and another which bears another local heritage label in addition to the PBVF label.

Map 2: Locating research field sites with respect to all member-villages

Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France - Field Sites

Map by Dilys Bowman for Helene Ducros, June 2014
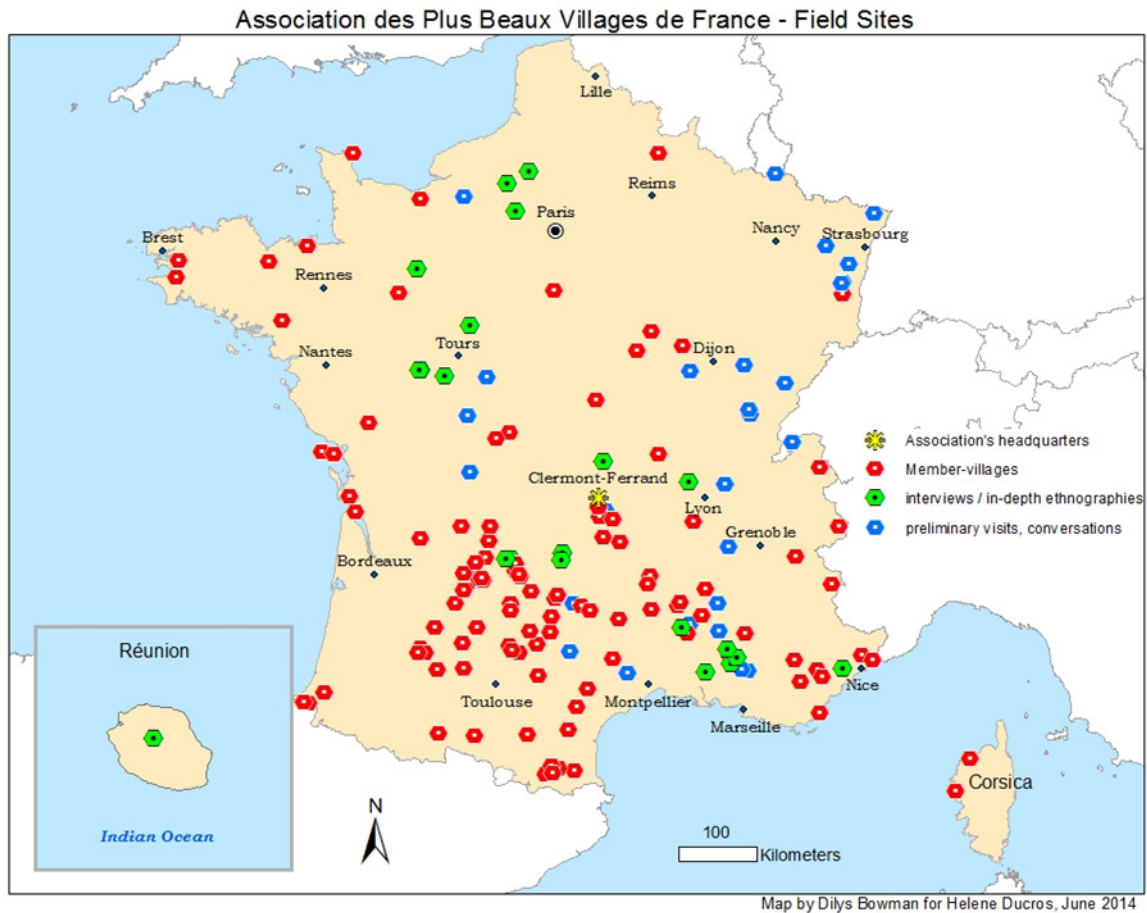
Participant-observation

Participant-observation started at the institutional level. During the *Commission Qualité* meeting in Roussillon, I was present over the two-day event. I observed the presentation of candidate villages and re-inspection cases and deliberations, discussions about past events, future events and direction to take for the *Association* generally. This was a key moment for me to understand how villages are granted the label. During the first meeting of the *International Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages of the World* in Gordes, I was present during the discussion and adopting of the by-laws of the new supra-association. This was useful to me because in deciding on the goals and mission of the *Federation*, the purpose of the French

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Association and other sister associations was teased out and reiterated, as well as the direction to be taken in the future, based on mistakes made and shortcomings observed. I was also able to attend all presentations made by the sister associations, presenting their respective network to each other, as well as speak with representatives of countries that were there as observers because they are trying to create such networks themselves. During the Federation meeting, I formally interviewed the President of the Walloon Association, representatives of the Japanese Association (the President did not attend), the President of the Italian Association, official representatives for the Canadian Association (the President was not present), the President of the Spanish nascent Association (the Association has since been officially created), and representatives of the Saxony nascent Association (also created since then). The President of the Romanian Association was not present but I subsequently interviewed him via Skype. I conducted interviews in French, in English, in Italian, or in Spanish, or combination of two languages when necessary. Speaking or listening in the language of my interlocutors (except in the case of the Japanese delegation where conversations took place in English), without having to resort to an interpreter, was important to make conversation flow naturally. The expertise visit in Montclus (Gard) was the second participant observation event. It allowed me to shadow the expert and observe the process from initial meeting with the mayor to the constitution of the photographic report which becomes the basis on which the deliberation takes place over the candidacy. I was thus able to follow a case from initial candidacy to final labelization. Finally, being a participant-observer in Hell-Bourg, La Réunion, gave me the opportunity to understand the process of confirmation, through the re-expertise visit. Hell-Bourg was a special re-expertise visit since the President and other key officers also came along. It became another opportunity to mingle with the Association's officers on-site and observe interactions. In Hell-Bourg, I attended

the presentations made by the Association's officers to the population and other local service providers. These presentations have a pedagogical function and aim at involving the population in the project. I was able to observe not only the messages that are put forth but also the reactions and questions that the local population had.

Interview guide approach and unstructured (informal conversational) interviews

The bulk of my field data is in the form of interview results. "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe" (Patton 2002, p. 340). To complement participation-observation, interviews provided me with information about past events or behaviors I could not observe, personal thoughts and feelings of participants, as well as hidden meanings in the place. Once I had identified a handful of villages in which to work, I proceeded to let the Mayor know why I was there and what my goal was. Usually Mayors gave me good leads as to where to start and whom to visit to start the process. They graciously directed me to key people in the village who may or may not want to talk to me (in the end, most did). This allowed me to use the snowball sampling technique to recruit participants in the study. In each village, one or two people who were greatly involved in the life of the village frequently made it a point to introduce me to people they perceived as being part of the soul and history of the place, often elderly people, or descendants of local families with deeply rooted ancestry in the village. In many cases, the same names came up repeatedly. I often learned the local genealogical links of my informants by accident. "Did you speak to …… already? What did she say to you? ….. She is my aunt, you know. She was just here last Sunday to visit."

I used a mix of interview guide approach, in which I prepared a set of questions on a set choice of themes I wanted to explore, and unstructured interviews (informal conversational). The

guide approach made it easier to stay focused when the respondent did not have a lot of time to devote to the interview. The informal conversational interview method offered me much flexibility to adapt my questions to the conversation flow. I used this latter method in the sites where I remained for a long stretch of time and when able to revisit the same person for a second or third conversation. These interviews generated the most data in terms of conversation length and topics covered, but were the most difficult to analyze in terms of finding common themes and patterns of reactions to similar topics.

On the ground, my approach was not linear, yet it was progressive. I started with the village mayors. It was sometimes difficult to make initial contact with certain mayors as many emails and letters remained unanswered, perhaps because of gatekeepers filtering workload for mayors. Several mayors never responded in spite of my repeated efforts. Once I was able to establish contact, I received further leads about whom to contact, from mayors themselves or the *Secrétaires de Mairie*, the latter becoming important sources of information. After we spoke in depth about motives for joining the *Association,* expectations, difficulties and successes under the label, we talked about the process of my study. Usually, mayors were very generous with their advice, giving me phone numbers and briefing me on who these people were and why they might be of interest for my purpose. I was sometimes warned about an individual's brusque manners ahead of time but encouraged to persevere and get him/her to talk. This proved a helpful advice as some people required persistent efforts before opening up to me. Once I had a dozen names, I called and usually left messages. Few called back, but when I called again at night to make sure they were there, they had already thought about whether or not they wanted to participate and the conversation was straight forward.

Local tourism office staff were also helpful in identifying potential informants, even calling them to ask them if I could walk over to their house immediately. I was quite impressed by the willingness of people to participate, willingness that only made sense when I realized how proud they were of their village and thus happy to speak about it to an outsider who did not mind listening. Although my interviews really took the shape of a long conversation most of the time, I did have a general template of questions (Appendix #1). Interviews were guided or unstructured and questions open-ended. The conversation was two-way with many people questioning me about not only my study or my life, but also about the United States, President Obama, how it was to live in the US, and other American matters. Those villagers who had traveled to the United States were happy to reminisce about their experience with me, sometimes pulling out photo albums to prove their statements. Unstructured interviews also took place in an ad hoc manner in the daily moments of village life. For example, I conversed with villagers on the convenience store's doorstep, standing in the butcher shop, at the garden gate, in a café, and many other places. The experiential data obtained through these interviews gave me access to experiences of place, behaviors in the place, opinions, values, and sensory experiences ("what do you see…?").

Recorder, notebooks, and conversation flow

To keep track of my interview data, I recorded most interviews, but not all. The recorder was, at times, an obstacle interrupting the flow and continuity of the exchange and creating distance. My recorder was non-intrusive as far as size and visibility, but some people were self-conscious about it. "Is your *thing* there recording all this?" or when saying something a little cheeky about something going on in the village: "Eh, is it still recording?" Such comments

indicated that the recorder was a mechanical hindrance for certain people, limiting how much they were willing to confide. Therefore, I mixed recording and not recording, depending on who I had in front of me. When not recording, I would take notes in my notebook. Even my taking notes elicited interrogations sometimes. Several times I got a "what are you writing so much about", or "oh, so what I am saying is interesting then?", or "if you keep at it, you will need another notebook very soon!", or "is the trunk of your little red car full of these notebooks full of notes?" (obviously my car had been noticed in the village), and other playful commentaries. Sometimes, my taking notes became part of the conversation: "Now *this* must be written, you take note of it, you write it, you need to write it down, go ahead write it down, and you can say *I* said it", punctuated by a vigorous tapping of the index finger on the table. While no-one refused to be recorded when I asked, cynical allusions were recurrently made to the inadequacy of privacy laws in the United States and the abusive use of private data, and the fact that my reassurances and IRB disclosures did not mean much to them and that it was not those ethical claims which made them accept to speak to me. "What are you going to do with the cassette, give it to Obama!?"

Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and several hours. Sometimes, they continued the next day. At times an interview led to others or group interviews in a continuous flow, since other family members may have been coming in, or other villagers, and sometimes interviews turned into a visit of the house, the garden, *apéritif*, and even dinner. One villager took me around by car to show me all the sites in the village, all the roads and fields in the surroundings. One took me to the cemetery to explain to me who was a true insider and who was a late comer, the proof lying in the family names on the oldest tombs. The villager also wanted to explain to me the familial genealogy of the village by showing me which families had been associated with

which over time, as you often see hyphened names on family tombs, indicating two branches of the same family being buried there together. In another, I crawled with its 80 year old owner in the subterranean galleries of the local privately owned castle ruins transformed into an occasional grain silo. Sometimes interviews gave lieu to my helping with a task, such as bringing wood in before dark, washing fruits for jam-making, or fetching the newborn kittens in the shed so they did not freeze to death that night.

Photo-elicitation

Finally, I also conducted photo-elicitation in two villages because it is a particularly useful tool in an investigation about experiential space. What has been coined as "phenomenography" (Sonnemann 1954, p. 344) describes the use of images to understand the emotional experience and intent of the photographer. It became clear to me early that conversation presented limits when questioning people about their surroundings and the heritage landscape they inhabited. People could not necessarily capture in words what they felt or saw. Hence, sometimes they took me with them to physically show me a particular issue they wanted to express during the interview. This challenge has been observed by others (Michelin 1998; Luginbühl 1989, 1991) who sought other ways to get to landscape representation of people who live within that landscape.

> The technique of disposable cameras can constitute a very good support to apprehend the affective dimension of landscape, tease out the elements that inhabitants consider as the most representative and engage in a dialogue over the future. The photographic support serves as a leading thread for the interview… Moreover, the questions forced him [the respondent] to ponder, to go see on site the reality he wanted to show. During the interview, he is much more motivated, and his remarks are much more precise (Michelin 2008, p. 66).

Based on the advice of Professor Yves Michelin, the author of one of the rare published photo-elicitation projects in rural France, and in spite of the costs and logistical demands (remind people to take the photos, cost of buying a large contingent of disposable cameras, and cost of developing the film in expedited mode with an hourly or daily turnaround), photo-elicitation proved a very efficient way to implicate villagers in the project and to open up the conversation to more meaningful and thoughtful commentaries on the village as a place of living. Photo-elicitation was very successful in one village, while moderately successful in the other, for reasons I will mention later.

The process took place as follows:

- During the initial interviews, I mentioned the photo-elicitation project and inquired as to whether or not the particular informant would be interested and willing to participate. If so, I left with the person a disposable camera (36 poses) and a written questionnaire comprising five questions to be answered with a series of shots (Chapter 5). I gave them about one month until I would be back to collect the camera.

- Two weeks later, I mailed a reminder that I would be back soon to collect the cameras and have the films processed.

- Many subjects completed the assignment at the last minute. Several never did. One did not answer the questionnaire and instead took photos of his friends. And one participant only took six photos. Several of those who preferred to participate using their own digital cameras ended up sending me photos after I was already gone, so that it was impossible to delve into their choices orally. Several who promised digital photos never completed the project.

- Once the photos printed on paper in the nearby town, I had a final interview with the photo-eliciter to determine the meaning attributed to the images in response to the particular questions.

The photo-elicitation process generally worked well, although some issues arose. For example, a few participants felt uncomfortable "*being a tourist in my own village*". Several ended up taking their pictures either very early in the morning or late at night, "*when no-one could see me, because they would have thought I was crazy*". "*The others would wonder what I'm doing and think that I'm up to no good spying or something like that.*" "*Oh, I'll send my wife, it's better she is the one that does it, me I can't, they'll wonder what I'm fiddling.*" Older people were not as comfortable with the process for fear of not using the camera in the right way. One person had someone younger accompany him in order to take the photos. In one village, there was much interest for the project and people asked me if they could have access to all the photos taken at some point in the future. I plan to return to that particular village to arrange for an exhibit to share the results with the whole village and give a return to the community.

Questions aimed at a better understanding the relationship of village dwellers with their surroundings and how they see and experience the place (Chapter 5). Inspired by Michelin's (1998) template, my questions targeted the landscape as public display, landscape as intimacy, and perceived landscape evolution under the influence of the PBVF label. In the village where the project did not work as well, a number of circumstances were responsible. First, in a village located close to a cluster of mid-size cities, many active people worked in the city during the day and were very busy with commuting over long days. Subjects who worked did not always have the time. Even if they initially intended to complete the project, they often did not or took a few

photos close to their home. And second, in one of the villages there was a certain level of anxiety about what would be done with the photos. I subsequently learned that some years earlier, a graduate student from the nearest city's university conducted interviews there and in the end did not respect people's anonymity. The politics of the small place is not to be neglected. Thus, I have been especially careful not to portray people in a way that could identify them or their respective communities. Beyond the direct methodological impact, the photo-elicitation process already gave me precious information about the strength of collective identity in the place. The camera being associated with being an outsider, the "visitor", it created unease for certain people to step out of their role and identity as one of the locals. It also revealed some people's difficulty to look upon their surroundings with a discerning eye that splits the landscape into various elements. "*What should I photograph? I'll have to photograph everything!*". "*It's that the village, it's a whole, you know*".

2.3.3.   Researcher situatedness and reflexivity

Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to observe herself or himself so as to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of her or his own perspective and voice as well as –and often in contrast to- the perspectives and voices of those she or he observes and talks to during fieldwork. Reflexivity calls for self-reflection, indeed, critical self-reflection and self-knowledge, and a willingness to consider how who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear, and understand in the field and as an observer and analyst (Patton 2002, p. 299).

My ambiguous situatedness, as a French person who has been expatriated in the United States for a long time, generated many interrogations among my participants. How could I be so foreign, yet so familiar to them? Often, I was told "you don't even have an accent". This was a surprising comment for me to hear, since I am a native speaker of French, but it revealed the ways in which I was perceived overall or at least in the beginning: as a foreigner. I certainly did

not have an accent, except when I proposed to use English to interview a British couple who owned and operated a café/restaurant: as soon as I opened my mouth in English, "oh, an *American* accent!" Now a "transnational", I was born and raised in Paris, which could have been a problem as Parisians are often stereotyped as arrogant second-home vacationers in the countryside, but because of my acquired "foreign-ness" through expatriation, my informants did not hold it against me. Furthermore, in spite of being a Parisian, I have always been in touch with the rural world throughout my childhood during vacations in the Perche region.

The fact that I have been away from the French context for a while also made people better prone to take the time to explain to me how things work (or do not work), and it also helped me remain neutral in comments about national or regional politics, a common tangential topic of discussion. But while I was able to keep the necessary distance from my respondents because of my foreign-ness, what helped me the most was comfortable familiarity with French people, a good knowledge of culture and milieu, and the ability to make them forget I was there to conduct a study. People confided in me that they were initially nervous about my coming into their community but that they were now very comfortable with it. People commented: "too nice for a researcher", "such simple contact", "contact is easy with you", "with you, we can see that you are truly interested», « most importantly, come back to see us", all comments which were not only validating as an ethnographer, but extremely gratifying. Figuring out early the basic social parameters of the place made me feel comfortable with my informants and contributed to validate my research methods and my successive strategic sampling choices about whom to speak with as well as where to engage in participation observation.

2.3.4. Data exploitation

The results from interviews are utilized in a synthetic manner. Recorded interviews were recorded were transcribed. In order to lead to generalizable results, I identified thematic patterns among responses. The themes selected were: attachment to place, perception of change in the place, self-positioning in the place, attitude towards the label of the *Association*, evaluation of what the label brings to the local, attitude towards "*patrimoine*" and heritage preservation generally, attitude towards the rural, and assessment of future local development.

These themes allow for an understanding of what living in heritage signifies to rural residents concretely, the ways in which residents apprehend their role in heritage preservation, and the ways in which the *Association*'s project is understood and lived by the people most concerned. The results from the photo-elicitation project were treated in similar terms through the images selected for capture as well as the follow-up conversations over those choices. In order to analyze these data meaningfully, it is important to explain the historical, institutional, administrative, and cultural contexts in which it is generated.

CHAPTER THREE:

PATRIMOINE: HISTORICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

As "an artistic and monumental inheritance in which we can recognize ourselves" (Chastel 1997, p. 1444), the idea of *patrimoine* in France results from centuries of reflection based in history and culture and resting on a complex institutional and administrative apparatus that regulates and finances preservation and restoration projects at various scales. To fully understand the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France*, it needs to be placed in the wider historical, administrative, and cultural context. This context has shaped French institutions and actors engaged in heritage preservation today, as well as the French sensitivity and collective responsibility felt towards heritage, whether national or local. Historically, the concept of "*patrimoine*" as apprehended in France emerged at the crucial historical moment of the Revolution (Heinich 2009; Chastel 1997; Sire 2008). The concept emerged out of history of destruction. The ways in which it has evolved is immersed in history and culture.

The French context for understanding the concept of "*patrimoine*" can be broken down into four historic phases: the emergence of a national patrimonial consciousness at the Revolution, the invention of historical "*objets-monuments*" during the 19th century, the development of new memorial entities and expansion of patrimonial terrains in the 20th century, and, since the 1960s,

a movement from preservation and restoration to "*mise en valeur*"[17] under the Venice Charter

approach (Sire 2008). This chapter first addresses the historical dimension of the idea of

patrimoine in France and its key historical figures and institutions, as well as the international

framework influencing heritage preservation in France today. The chapter will then tie this

framework to the cultural forces influencing the ways in which specifically *rural* heritage is

apprehended by the state and the general population as they directly influence the ideological and

practical structure of the *Association*.

3.1.   Historical dimension and framework: *Patrimoine* and monuments men

Many are those who mobilized for and shaped France's patrimonial consciousness. But

four individuals are most often pointed to as the main architects of the modern notion of

patrimoine. Their influence permeates patrimonial institutions and the French conception of

heritage and heritage preservation. Over the course of one century, Henri Grégoire –known as

the Abbé Grégoire-, Alexandre Lenoir, Prosper Mérimée, and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc

fundamentally changed the heritage landscape in France, by creating and transforming

patrimonial consciousness into modern concrete processes and a durable institutional structure.

3.1.1. Henri Grégoire (1750-1831): Patrimonial consciousness

Henri Grégoire, or the "Abbé Grégoire", was an ecclesiastic with many callings:

abolitionist activist, supporter of universal human rights, and a prominent intellectual and

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[17] Literally "put into value" or "made into value". A phrase difficult to render into English and that Young translated
by "outfitting" (2012, p. 49).

political figure of the 18th century. He approached heritage preservation as a public responsibility (Sax 1990). At the same time as individual freedoms were fostered and people were escaping the shackles of the monarchal system, the nascent Republic came to institute a new sort of obligation as a result of his awareness campaign, that of respect for cultural artifacts as more than property. "There are two things in an edifice: its usage and its beauty. Its usage belongs to the owner, its beauty to everyone; therefore destroying it means exceeding one's right" (Victor Hugo in 1832, cited in Chastel 1997, p. 1444). Prior to the Revolution, cultural properties (belonging to the crown) were seen as costly to maintain, as were châteaux, for example, or mere sources of material parts, as were precious stones and metals (Sax, 1990). With the Revolution came waves of destructive behavior on the part of the *sans-culottes*. Corroborating Jackson's argument about the necessity for ruins, this destruction created an impetus for preservation and the first patrimonial awakening in France. The Abbé Grégoire condemned revolutionary "vandals", a term he coined then from the name of the Germanic hordes who destroyed Rome in the fifth century. In his *Mémoires* (p. 346), the Abbé Grégoire writes "I created the word in order to kill the thing". Vandals were revolutionaries who, in their quest to extinguish the *ancien régime*, and in spite of early but ineffective decrees prohibiting pillages, destroyed all things associated with it. They were unable to dissociate physical evidence from the values of the old order. In his report to the Convention in 1794, the Abbé Grégoire recorded all destructions perpetrated by vandals and presented solutions as to means of recovery[18].

The Abbé Grégoire was one of the first public figures to point to the talent, creativity, and skills of the creators of this physical evidence (artisans, artists) rather than to the proprietary's

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[18] Rapport présenté à la Convention le 31 août 1794 sur « les destructions opérées par le vandalisme et les moyens de les récupérer ».

status in an effort to depoliticize art (Sax 1990). "The essential quality of the Republic reposed in the genius of individual citizens as revealed in the achievements of science, literature, and the arts" (Sax 1990, p. 1156). Therefore, the preservation of common artistic and intellectual assets inherited from the past became a patriotic duty under the freedoms of the *République,* and an element of progress. Furthermore, the Abbé Grégoire did not envisage culture in a restrictive manner. High culture and artisanship both had a place in his approach. For him, the state, the Nation, should be equally attentive and protective of both. But it would take a while for this idea to take hold since during the Third Republic, "considered neither art nor - at least prior to the rise of French ethnography and the establishment of French ethnographic museums - artifact, the objects of rural culture occupied an uncertain cultural space within France's main cultural institutions" (Young 2012, p. 41). While the Abbé Grégoire is seen by many as the force behind patrimonial consciousness, he did not venture into the evaluation or aesthetic assessment of what ought to be included in national patrimony.

3.1.2. Alexandre Lenoir (1761-1839): In-situ vs. ex-situ preservation debate

Once patrimonial awareness had emerged and the *République* had mobilized around issues of national heritage and preservation of cultural artifacts, debates arose as to what form this preservation should take and what processes should be engaged. Can we best ensure protection of artifacts by detaching them from their surroundings, or should we make every possible effort to keep artifacts as integral parts of their cultural, geographical, and historical environment? Lenoir's contribution to the new patrimonial impetus was the creation of the *Musée des Monuments Français*. The *Musée* opened to the public in 1795 and Lenoir administered it over the next twenty years. The museum initially consisted of a dépôt for the

pieces that had been confiscated from religious establishments at the Revolution. Lenoir would stage the works in ways that did not necessarily correspond to artistic or historical accuracy (Stara 2012; Sire 2008).

> The Museum of French Monuments begun life as a temporary depot of the French Revolution, but under Lenoir's guardianship, it acquired permission to open to the public as a permanent exhibition in 1795. The collection consisted mostly of religious and otherwise commemorative sculptures from France. These pieces were not considered 'high art' of the kind that was consistently claimed by the Louvre. They were, rather, legitimised as public exhibits through their historical relevance and their role as the new category of 'national patrimony' – this being a place and time where the great inventive project of history was beginning its modern acceleration (Stara 2012, p. 265).

The museum closed in 1816, creating a polemical climate over *ex-situ* display of art pieces and the argument that moving pieces outside their context into museums contradicted the inalienability dimension of national artistic production. This led to the restitution of the works to their previous owners (Sire 2008). This debate remains relevant today as it animates preservationists, heritage management professionals, and politicians worldwide. While Lenoir's ambition did not concretize into a lasting institution, others such as Prosper Mérimée and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc were successful in moving post-Revolution institutions forward and transforming them into a modern heritage management apparatus.

3.1.3. Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870): Patrimonial policy apparatus

Prosper Mérimée is better known outside of France for having written the famous short story that inspired Bizet for his *Carmen* opera. However, Mérimée was much more than a talented fiction novella writer. Historian and archeologist, he also became *Inspecteur Général des Monuments Historiques* from 1834 to 1860. In 1834, he ordered a comprehensive inventory of historic buildings in France in order to make possible the prioritizing of state funding

allocation dedicated to restoration efforts. The list was established by sorting buildings by

département and historical periods: Antiquity, Gaul, Middle Ages. He disparaged the XVIIIth

century, however, and did not hesitate to order the destruction of XVIIIth century edifices, which

he considered built in "bad taste" (Fermigier in Nora, 1997).

Mérimée would be instrumental in the development of the culture of restoration in France

and in making evident not only its historical and identity-making utility, but also its material,

practical, economic, and social utility. For him, failure to restore churches, palaces, or city halls

meant having to build new ones and incur consequent costs. Furthermore, he stressed that

restoration projects would provide jobs to local artisans and workers across the whole national

territory, thus ensuring social peace, slowing down urbanization, and alleviating cities' working

class misery. At the same time, it would promote artistic trades and savoirs-faires (Aziza 2003;

Fermigier 1997). His views on the social and political function of heritage preservation reveal a

modern outlook on the relationship between employment, poverty, urbanization, and national

cohesion. Furthermore, Mérimée was not satisfied being an office-bound *administrateur*. In his

position as *Inspecteur Général*, he took his job to the field as he traveled incessantly to find and

record unknown or hidden architectural and artistic resources all over the French territory,

meeting with local antiquaries, archivists, learned societies, restoration and preservation activists,

architects, collectors, and local politicians. He is credited for producing the first catalog of

France's patrimonial riches. To honor his immense legacy, when in 1978 the Ministry of Culture

created its architectural patrimony database, it gave it the name of *Base Mérimée*. This database

was subsequently made available online in 1995. It includes listings of religious, domestic,

agricultural, industrial, commercial architectural resources, as well as heritage gardens, school

buildings, funerary buildings, and more.[19] Naturally, Mérimée came in close contact with people involved in concrete restoration projects on the ground, people with whom he developed collegial affinities and even friendships.

3.1.4. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879): Implementation debates

Eugène Viollet-le-Duc was a colleague and friend of Mérimée. If one looks carefully, a statue of Viollet-le-Duc represented as an apostle can be seen on the steeple of Notre-Dame in Paris (one of his "inventive restorations"). A medievalist architect and engineer, Viollet-le-Duc and his restoration projects continue to raise controversy, reaching even contemporary national press (Le Figaro, 27 January 2014). While in the United States, he is mostly known for being the teacher of Bartholdi, whom he advised on the structure of the Statue of Liberty before Eiffel replaced him upon his death, he is mostly associated with the 19th century restoration theory and policy concerning what restoration should entail: A strict reconstruction to a condition which once was, or a reconstruction which leaves space for innovation and even invention of a condition that could have or should have been. In this debate among restoratists, Viollet-le-Duc advocated for a restoration that allowed creative interpretation of architectural patrimony, and as such was subject to numerous criticisms from people such as John Ruskin in England or Auguste Rodin in France. Today many art historians agree that his vision has often been oversimplified, if not misunderstood by its main detractors (Sire 2008). He approached restoration as a modern endeavor which involved more alterations than maintenance, repair, or reconstruction, but rather aimed at (re)establishing a building in a complete state which could have never existed at any

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[19] Access to the *Base Mérimée* at: http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/inventai/patrimoine/archi/archi_fiche.html

given time (Sire 2008; Foucart citing Viollet-le-Duc, 1997). He was concerned with unity of style, logic in structure, and was interested in preserving/recreating ideal styles and "*monuments-types*"[20]. He recognized that an edifice could not be fixated in a perfect state because it was subjected to the passage of time. For him restoration could never purports to be complete, but instead could only represent the result of difficult intellectual and economic priorities and choices that were subject to compromise and even contradiction (Foucart 1997). His artistic, material, and philosophical engagement was exercised in practice over restoration projects that targeted the outside but also the inside of historic edifices, as he was also concerned with the preservation of utility as well as aesthetics. "Out of the hands of the architect, the edifice must not be less practical than it was before restoration" (Viollet-le-Duc, cited in Foucart 1997, p. 1626).

Today, Viollet-le-Duc's legacy is tangible in the debates over the nature and the processes of preservation and restoration. Some historic buildings have even been recently "de-restored" to their state before Viollet-le-Duc's intervention. Furthermore, the contemporary dilemma of handling a politics of patrimonial preservation in concert with a "utility" agenda highlights the contemporary debate over the sustainability discourse and puts Viollet-le-Duc's ideas once again in a situation to stir controversy. In spite of his polemical legacy, Viollet-le-Duc remains a key figure in the development of heritage management processes and to this effect, he was honored in the most universal way possible when he received his very own *google doodle* on January 26th, 2014 in celebration of the 200th anniversary of his birth, making him a personality of global significance in the 21st century via an instantaneous click of the mouse.

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[20] "Typified monuments"

Figure 2: Viollet-le-Duc's Google Doodle (1/26/2014)

3.2.   Administrative and institutional framework of heritage preservation: A simplified picture

The four figures of Henri Grégoire, Alexandre Lenoir, Prosper Mérimée, and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc were instrumental in the emergence of a complex institutional and administrative framework from the first days of the nascent *République*. Three main institutions dedicated to the identification, surveying, registration, and protection of national heritage are particularly relevant to the understanding of how projects of heritage promotion such as the *Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France* have emerged and gathered support in the national context: The Ministry of Culture, the Monuments Historiques, which Mérimée headed, and the National Architect. Beyond the national context, international organizations also affect the ways in which France has developed its heritage politics.

3.2.1. National context

3.2.1.1.   Ministry of Culture

The Ministry of Culture (in France called the *Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication* since 1997) is an institution that exists in numerous countries' governments, although not in the United States. In France, it is an important institution as it influences all patrimonial policies, from national to local, oversees a wide range of cultural projects, funds and regulates endeavors in various heritage making and heritage preservation enterprises. The Ministry of Culture was created during the Fifth Republic by President Charles de Gaulle for the purpose of establishing a cultural politics at the national scale and to promote the use of France's rich culture as an asset for its global position. A few key features of the Ministry's politics are the democratization of culture, access for all, and support for the creative arts. Pedagogy, protection, research, and promotion of culture are all part of its socio-political agenda. Its mission covers architectural patrimony, as well as graphic arts, music, cinema, and literary production. "It leads a politics of conservation, protection, and valorization of cultural patrimony and all its components; it favors the creation of works of art and of the mind, as well as the development of artistic practices and teachings." (Ministère de la Culture 2014). On the ground, it also oversees protective patrimonial "labels", such as *Jardin Remarquable* (heritage gardens), *Monuments Historiques* (heritage buildings), *Maisons des Illustres* (heritage houses), *Ville et Pays d'Art et d'Histoire* (heritage towns), *Patrimoine du XXe siècle* (20th century heritage), and *Patrimoine Européen* (European heritage). These are among other "labels", each with its own logo that can be encountered in the French landscape. The Ministry is a centralized top-down institution, but since 1977, it has decentralized some of its functions to the Régions. The DRACs (*Directions régionales des affaires culturelles*) were thus created, and, since 1992, have been

placed under the direct authority of regional and departmental prefects for the local implementation of national cultural policies (Ministère de la Culture, 2014).[21] Encouraged by this movement towards a decentralized system of cultural resource management, many non-governmental, grass-root, and local cultural endeavors have emerged, such as the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France*. Such non-governmental efforts receive no funding from the Ministry and stand outside of any direct national governmental action.

3.2.1.2. *Les Monuments Historiques*

In 1819, the institution of the "*monuments historiques*" was made into a national budget item. The Abbé Grégoire had made patrimonial preservation a duty of the Nation. Mérimée had effectuated a census across the national territory of "remarkable" architectural assets. Both led to the 1841 "*classement*" (the equivalent of the Registry in US heritage policy) of national heritage sites (or "*Monuments Historiques*"). Prefects were asked to provide a list of all the sites on their territory in order of priority to be able to receive adequate funding for the conservation effort. The classification as a legal tool for protection has known several waves of modernization to adapt it to changing contexts.

Today the main tasks of the *Monuments Historiques* is to identify, list, protect, conserve architectural or "movable" patrimony (furniture, paintings, etc.). In 2007, it was reported that the cost of maintaining the *Monuments Historiques* was almost 11 billion Euros for an estimated economic benefit of 21 billion and 500,000 direct or indirect jobs. Furthermore, this investment also aims at national cohesion as it claims to "favor appropriation of national patrimony by the

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[21] More information can be found on the Ministry's website: http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Regions

public" (Ministère de la Culture 2014)[22]. In the 20th century, the aesthetic dimension of the institution has been replaced by a more scientific "action pole". "Beauty" is not a factor for the registry. Instead, authenticity and originality (understood as "rarity") translate a desire to preserve the meaningful and significant, so that both the farmhouse and the castle can be listed side by side as "typical" and thus subject to potential protection (Heinich 2009, p. 245-246). In order to implement restoration and conservation policies on the ground, the *Monuments Historiques* depend on the *Architectes des Bâtiments de France* (architects for historic buildings).

3.2.1.3.   L'Architecte des Bâtiments de France

The *Architectes des Bâtiments de France* (or "ABF" for short) are public servants. Their tasks are multi-fold. They may contribute to decisions in maintaining and conserving architectural patrimony as well as serve as independent and free consultants. They are involved in all aspects of restoration, from financial considerations to work in the field. They are also involved in all aspects of contemporary development (new constructions or transformations) around areas which include protected sites. This makes them very relevant to the *Association* and residents of member-villages since one requirement for membership is to have two such sites on the *commune.* The ABF was first created in 1897 but they became public servants in 1935.

With the expansion of the patrimonial scope to include landscapes and environment, the realm of their competencies has grown to include urbanistic and development authority. In 1993, the ABF was merged with the *National Corps of Architects and Urbanists* in an effort to ally

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[22] http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Disciplines-et-secteurs/Monuments-historiques/Histoire-et-missions/La-politique-nationale-en-faveur-des-monuments-historiques.

patrimonial policy with dynamic urban development and "reasoned management of existing resources". There are 190 ABF today, selected through a rigorous "*concours national*". (ABF Wesbite 2014). They exert authority on restoration of national public monuments but also on private proprietors' restorative interventions on private property when the latter is located in or about a protected perimeter. Consequently, most PBVF residents are subject to the ABF's approval for transformation, restoration, or destruction of their property.

3.2.1.4.   « Le territoire-patrimoine »: the patrimonialization of landscape in practice

While not a formal institution per se, the landscape as a patrimonial object has become a leading idea in patrimonial policies today. Indeed, at the turn of the 20th century, the idea of "territoire" and specifically regional territory was swept into the notion of heritage as it became valorized and exploited for identity reinforcement and local cultural resilience. As part of this territorial identity project, the landscape became object of patrimonialization in France (Fournier et al. 2012; Poulot 2006).

> The aesthetic territory, i.e. the collection of pittoresques vistas and touristic sites, mobilizes the attention of guides and voyage literature. At the beginning of the XXth century, associations emerge, notably devoted to the protection of landscapes, on a model of sociability that was mobilized in the past against monumental vandalism (Poulot 2006, p. 174).

However, during the 20th century, the purely aesthetic reading of the landscape gave way to a more diverse apprehension which not only includes ordinary as much as extraordinary landscapes (Poulot 2006; Luginbühl 1989) but also what is invisible in the *territoire* in terms of lived space and cultures (Poulot 2006). This was a departure from the past necessity for concrete and tangible representation of patrimony, like monuments and buildings. And the transmission of invisible heritage is made through the idea of the common.

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Patrimony, in both its banal and intellectual representations, no longer evokes the strong mark of ancestors in collective memory, nor monuments to transmit to posterity, but rather the materials of an age often deprived of dates, names, and beyond this the set of immaterial resources (Poulot 2006, p. 177).

Today, France's cultural politics rests not only on the national apparatus supporting territorial patrimonialization, but also must take into account an increasingly influential context of international agreements and programs which contribute to further patrimonial awareness in institutions and on the ground.

3.2.2. European Union and international context

In addition to the French administrative apparatus which influences actors and processes of heritage-making at the local level, transnational organizations increasingly determine the philosophical and legal context in which patrimonial conservation, valorization, and promotion take place.

3.2.2.1. *Major conventions to which France is a signatory that impact heritage policy*

France is a signatory to a number of significant international agreements concerning heritage preservation and management. Three major accords are the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964) and its spin-off Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), as well as the Florence Convention or European Landscape Convention (2000). All three provide the setting for patrimonial projects at the international, national, and local levels. The 1964 Venice Charter incorporates the critique made against Viollet-le-Duc for aiming at the ideal edifice and stylistic unity, to favor instead a recourse to restoration as an exceptional measure (Article 9) and privileging permanent maintenance (i.e. conservation)

(Article 4). Under the Charter, restoration must be based on historic documents and stop where

"hypothesis starts" (Article 9). Furthermore, decision-making must occur in concert with the

parties at stake, rather than unilaterally by a single project manager (Article 11). The edifice or

monument is to be preserved in harmony with its surroundings, so that the volumetric ratio

remains unchanged. Hence, the perimeter around the preserved item also becomes subject to the

Convention (Article 6). Article 6 thus reinforces the argument for *in-situ* preservation.

In 1994, the "*Nara Document on Authenticity*" emerged as a complement to the Venice

Charter, in an effort to detangle the contested meaning of "authenticity" in heritage management

and encourage adherence to international agreements when evaluating heritage entities in their

respective cultural context.

> In a world that is increasingly subject to the forces of globalization and homogenization, and in a world in which search for cultural identity is sometimes pursued through aggressive nationalism and the suppression of the cultures of minorities, the essential contribution made by the consideration of authenticity in conservation practice is to clarify and illuminate the collective memory of humanity (Nara Document 1994, Article 4).

The Document is particularly concerned with validity and credibility of sources upon which

heritage value is granted and the role given to the local communities who have produced the

cultural heritage at stake. Although the Nara Document uses the language of "authenticity" in

defining judgments and responsibilities under the agreement, it does not provide a direct and

clear definition of authenticity itself. Instead, it asserts that knowledge and understanding of

credible and truthful sources of information about cultural heritage and its meaning are the basis

for authenticity (Nara Document, Article 9). Conservation is much more than physical

maintenance and occasional restoration. It also entails an intellectual process aiming at

deciphering cultural heritage history and meaning.

Finally, the 2000 European Landscape Convention offers another useful framework through which to approach a study of rural heritage management in France. The landscape is very present in popular culture and collective imaginary in France, a presence that can be attested by the grand popularity of television programs about French rural heritage in the last two to three years. Rural landscape is also a topic of debate on prime time radio that has even featured geographers such as Gilles Fumey on national radio on October 2012 to discuss rurality in France (France Inter, la Tête au Carré, 8 October 2012). Also revealing of the national interest in landscape was the fact that the 2012 annual International Festival of Geography held in Saint-Dié-des-Vosges was focused specifically on: *The Facets of Landscapes; nature, culture, economy*. The Council of Europe defines landscape broadly: "As a reflection of European identity and diversity, the landscape is our living natural and cultural heritage, be it ordinary or outstanding, urban or rural, on land or in water" (Council of Europe 2000).

At the turn of the new millennium, in a cultural climate of uncertainty due to the global context, the European Union sought to enlarge its patrimonial field to include an entity of a new kind. The European Union definition of the landscape as that "part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings" represents a spatio-temporal holistic vision of the landscape that includes people, societies, and duration. Furthermore,

> "Landscape policy" reflects the public authorities' awareness of the need to frame and implement a policy on landscape. The public is encouraged to take an active part in its protection, conserving and maintaining the heritage value of a particular landscape, in its management, helping to steer changes brought about by economic, social or environmental necessity, and in its planning, particularly for those areas most radically affected by change, such as peri-urban, industrial and coastal areas (Council of Europe 2000).

The policy is based on the recognition that landscape is borderless and that local inhabitants have a key role in assessing landscape value and contributing to landscape management policy.

Experts no longer have a monopoly over landscape planning. This Convention leaves room for grassroot action and associative organizations to accept the accountability for their local landscapes, as a European "responsibility" beyond nationalist concerns.

The European Landscape Convention is one illustration of an increasingly prominent European-scale context in the valorization, promotion, use, and enlargement of the heritage field and is an important component of cultural and economic tool in EU programs aimed at the local. Local, national, and European heritage driven endeavors now co-habit and often depend on each other. In particular, the celebrated *European Heritage Days*, which came out of France's *Journées Portes Ouvertes*[23] begun in 1984 under the auspices of the French *Ministry of Culture*, have been launched by the European Council and the Commission as part of the European Cultural Convention. Once again, France was the impetus behind the cultural promotion project. *European Heritage Days* are now celebrated in 50 countries during the month of September. One important dimension of the *Journées du Patrimoine* is to give the public free access to privately owned heritage or heritage that is usually not open to the public for visits.

> Each year, national and regional events are organized around a special theme. These themes vary in each country from year to year. They include such topics as: specific forms of heritage (e.g. farmhouses, musical instruments, culinary traditions, garden architecture); specific periods in History (e.g. Medieval heritage, Baroque heritage); society's approaches to heritage (e.g. heritage and citizenship, heritage and youth) (Council of Europe Website Journées du Patrimoine).

I was able to observe the implementation of this Europe-wide program in one of the PBVF in 2012 when the theme was "hidden heritage" (*les patrimoines cachés*).This program aims to promote European togetherness and celebration of a common heritage. It places the local at the center of the European construction project and gives a role to the vernacular and the ordinary in the local. In France, during the *Journées du Patrimoine*, it is common to see long lines of people

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[23] Open Door Days, now "Journées du patrimoine".

waiting to enter a local heritage site, in an atmosphere of cultural effervescence and excited discovery.

3.2.2.2.   UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Beyond the European Union projects, UNESCO provides the largest scale framework of heritage management with its World Heritage Sites, in French "Patrimoine de l'Humanité". France is a signatory to the World Heritage Convention. France counts 38 UNESCO sites (often encompassing great ensembles rather than individual sites), which places it in fifth position in terms of numbers, on equal footing with Germany and behind only China, Germany, Italy, and Spain[24]. This is meaningful because in many localities across the French territory, several heritage "labels" may cohabit, each representing its own heritage assessment processes and responsibilities and implicating its own set of actors, from local to international. Furthermore, although the Convention does not constitute a set of legal obligations beyond the obligations laid out in French law, the responsibility of international visibility and evaluation may weigh on municipalities' choices about politics of development that fuses heritage preservation and valorization with territorial and inhabitants' demands about use. UNESCO sites have been criticized locally as displacing anthropic livelihoods by modifying territorial management planning for forestry, pastoralism, and agriculture in their "natural sites", such as in La Réunion's cirques. This raises a set of questions about the tensions that can arise between heritage validation and subsequent preservation and other development agendas based on local resources other than heritage, and about the sustainability of these various territorial development visions and agendas.

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[24] http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/

In particular, the tension between heritage preservation and other agendas or necessities of territorial development emerges in the conflict between heritage preservation and sustainable development. The goals and techniques of preservation policies have limits and can lead to challenging relations between actors and development agendas on the ground, resulting in open conflict at times. Policies that may conflict are those perceived as gazing into the past as opposed to those aimed at dynamic and future development in localities that feel the need to disentangle themselves from the restraints of heritage, such as regions experiencing drastic demographic pressures or adverse economic indicators. Also in conflict may be policies aimed at reconfiguring place in order to accommodate large flows of heritage tourists. The development of infrastructure catering to local inhabitants as opposed to those designed for hosting visitors is a challenge that many rural localities must face. This is certainly the case among members of the PBVF. France underwent municipal elections on March 23rd and 30th 2014. These elections cover mayors and municipal councils who were to be elected for the next 6 years. In villages that are members of the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France*, local mayoral campaigns raised issues involving the tensions between heritage preservation and forward development, sometimes acrimoniously. Recently in Eguisheim's elections (Alsace), an electoral list was presented to counter the incumbent mayor's pro-tourism politics, led by a desire to keep Eguisheim for its inhabitants rather than catering to visitors (Litaud 2014). The concept of sustainable habitat can also find itself at odds with the national and international conventions relating to heritage preservation. As sustainability has become a topic on every politician's lips, how can localities reconcile the demands of the 21st century race for saving the planet and the desire to preserve multi-centennial habitat? These are also challenges that must be addressed in heritage villages.

3.3. Rurality in France in the 21st century

3.3.1. The context of globalization: new territorial exigencies, actors, tools of local governance, and development agendas

The global context has brought new challenges for rural France. New territorial dynamics and stakes, new actors, new centers of authority, all have emerged in the local as the global increasingly takes shape as a significant force in socio-economic development. In France, what that has meant is increased mobility as a basis for territorial integration at the global scale, a "metropolization" of the territory, a "technopolitan" development focus, and a redefinition of border regions in the European Union context (Acloque 2011). In rural areas, the transformations of agriculture that aimed at retaining competitiveness on global markets has led to differentiated rural territories and a redefinition of the role of rural spaces in national development policies. Scholars observe that after the rural crisis and its consequent desertification, today, as an aggregate, rural spaces actually experience a renewal. Demographic growth is one indication of a certain revitalization through and occurs through the bolstering of the residential function of the countryside, often as second homes or peri-urbanization trends strengthen (Acloque 2011). However, the French *campagnes* are increasingly diversified, some retaining their agricultural vocation, usually in the fertile cereal openfield plateaux or wine regions, others becoming more fragile when small-scale agriculture could not be sustained or where agropastoralism is being challenged, and finally those that have become satellites for urban centers. Furthermore, border regions have acquired a new role with northern and eastern areas of France being increasingly integrated in transbordered spaces when it comes to economic, migratory, and cultural development. This transborder cooperation is encouraged and often funded by the European Union through various programs such as Interreg and FEDER. In maritime regions, globalization

has led to an intensification of economic sectors based on maritime transport and containerization.

Globalization has also made possible the touristic explosion on which France was able to capitalize because of its existing infrastructure, the fact that it has been a destination for visitors since the European aristocracies chose it, and also because of its geography as a crossroad between northern and southern Europe, giving France a national territory rich in opportunities for touristic offerings (littoral, mountain, navigable rivers, and canals). Intensification of the high speed rail network, aimed at shrinking distances within France but also between French and European destinations, has also led to residential changes in rural areas, as quicker long distance commutes transform second homes into primary residences. Finally, global environmental stakes and sustainable development agendas have shaped territorial policies in rural areas. For example, in rural spaces with low population density, 48 *Parcs naturels régionaux* (PNR) have been created since 1968, representing 3.6 million inhabitants, 8.3 million hectares, and including 4180 *communes* over 71 *départements*.[25] Even though it is the *communes* that initiate the classification, PNRs have created local tensions between development agendas based on multifunctional use or tourism on one hand, and natural preservation imperatives on the other (Acloque 2011, p. 242). This is the case in the Luberon where four member-villages can be found.

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[25] http://www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.fr/fr/decouvrir/parcs.asp

3.3.2. Territorial organization: *Région, Communes, DATAR, Communautés de Communes, ZPPAUP* and *Pays*

3.3.2.1. *A few terms to be defined in the French territorial policy context*

To fully understand French rurality, it is useful to provide an overview of the relevant territorial organization and instruments. A few terms need to be defined and contextualized.

Région

"Region" is a polysemic term. The concept of region can be approached as a limited and bounded territorial and administrative space, but also as a political or cultural space. In France, the 22 *Régions* take on a geographic and political function.[26] Historically and culturally, France's rural landscapes have been articulated around two cultural frontiers: the North-South divide, defined as the cultural limit between *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl* for some, or the limit between customary and oral law for others, or even the landscape limit between roofs steepness or hollow vs. flat tiles; and the East-West divide, defined around rural and agricultural history, landscape, and habitat typologies (Piercy 2009). Today these regions tend to face different crises, based on their differing economic specializations and geographic characteristics (mountainous, littoral, fertile plains, etc). But today, the *Région* has come to reinforce a "local" identity as it constitutes an official administrative entity above the *département*. Not only does one belong to a *département* but also to a *Région*. One symbolic political effort to give more meaning to the region is the recent switch from having car license tag bear the *département* number, to bearing a stylized pictogram representing the region, the official logo for each of the 27 regional councils

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[26] In June 2014, President Hollande's government launched a controversial projected territorial reform that would overhaul the current map of Régions. The reform aims at simplifying the existing regional structure and diminishing the number of regions to 14.

(22 in Metropolitan France + 5 overseas). While the project was to do away entirely with the

département number, popular reactions against the disappearance of that territorial but deeply

cultural identifier made the government backtrack and currently both *Région* and *Département*

appear on the license tag (before only the *Département* appeared). Moreover, while it used to be

that one had to bear the geographic identifier of his/her residence, people can now choose any

département and region they want to exhibit on their tags, giving people an opportunity to claim

appurtenance to an imagined "local" even when they do not reside there.

The 21st century sees the reconfiguration of French space, partly under the influence of

European Union Treaties and global commercial dynamics which push towards spatial

specialization, but also the European regional project which encourages decentralization in

member-states ("Europe of the regions" project). The French Région intervenes in terms of

fiscality, transport policy, economic development, professional development projects,

education/research, and territorial development under the leadership of the prefect and the

regional budget. Increasingly, localities turn to their Regional Council rather than the central

state for subsidies, project validation, and development questions. This new organization of

authority bears on how heritage preservation and valorization projects become implemented (and

often funded). However, the current government is questioning the efficacy of the region as a

territorial unit and considering reshuffling the spatial scope of the 26 regions, in yet another

territorial reform. The most local of all territorial units in France remains the *communes*,

especially relevant in the rural context.

Commune

What is a *rural commune* in France? Since 1789 the *commune* has been the smallest

administrative territorial unit in France. In English, it would be equivalent to a "municipality" or

a "district". In the French countryside, even though people still refer to "villages", the relevant unit for state policies and statistics (economic, census, etc.) is that of the *commune*. In the rural setting, the *commune* may include an urban core such as a village. The *commune* then includes the village historic heart, along with scattered hamlets and agricultural land around it. INSEE, the national statistics and census institution defines the rural by default: a *commune* is rural if it is not urban, i.e., "rural space" is that which brings together small urban units and rural communes not belonging to a predominantly urban space. The basic requirement is a threshold of 2000 inhabitants, over which a locality is considered to be urban. Many of the villages that are part of the *Association* have much less, even when counting secondary residences. Furthermore, although rural space still represents 70% of the French territory and two thirds of all 36,000+ communes, it has lost ground to urban space in the last decade by 19%, mostly because urban space absorbed previously rural *communes* or rural *communes* came to exceed the population threshold and lost their rural dimension and legal categorization.[27] A mayor is mayor of a *commune*, not a *village*. But the *Association* grants its label to the "village", i.e. the historic heart, what is often called locally "*le bourg*", the "urban" part of the rural commune. My interviews of people living in scattered hamlets and isolated farms on the *commune* but outside the *bourg* were incorporated into the set of responses about the inside-outsider sentiments within the same rural *commune*.

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[27] Today, cities cover 22% of national territory and are home to 47.9 million residents, which represents 77.5% of the French population.

DATAR

To support territorial management, the DATAR was signed into existence by the Général de Gaulle in February 1963. The *Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'attractivité régionale* (DATAR)[28] is placed under the authority of the Prime Minister. Its mission is to stimulate and coordinate state territorial planning policies. In partnership with an array of local and national planning actors, it aims at sustainable development based on territorial attractiveness and cohesiveness within an enlarged Europe. DATAR projects focus on various dimensions of territorial collectivities: geographic or sectorial. It is closely tied to the European Union in the ways it implements international cooperation projects and has participated in certain European Union negotiations on territorial politics. It is also specifically implicated in rural development policies. It defines its mission as:

> Listening to territories, helping them as much as needed, initiating politics for which they are co-actors along with State services, means to echo the Delegation's logic for which articulating the national and the local constitutes an evidence. Moreover, the DATAR has come closer to European institutions and administrations of other EU member-states as the politic of European cohesiveness is built and as the first reflections on European territorial planning emerged (DATAR Mission Statement 2014 Website).

Communauté de Communes

One of the newest of all territorial organizational echelons is the the *Communauté de Communes* or commonly referred to as "*Comm' de comm'*". Since 1992, it has constituted a voluntary communal grouping that can be created for a limited duration. It is approached as the response to the regional decentralization efforts which minimized the weight of local communes in territorial policies. Thus it can be seen as the bridge between the *Région* and the *commune*, away from the departmental organization, of which some politicians question the relevance

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[28] http://www.datar.gouv.fr/la-datar

today, in spite of strong popular support for it as a source of local identity. Officially, the comm'
de comm' is defined as "a public intercommunal cooperation establishment which joins several
contiguous communes without enclave. Its object is to associate communes within a space of
solidarity, as to elaborate a common spatial use and development project" (Article L 5214-1 du
Code général des collectivités territoriales). Its jurisdiction and competencies include items such
as use of space, economic development activities, environmental management, housing and
habitat policies, roads, cultural, sport and education infrastructures, and other social activities.
Today, out of the 36000+ French communes, over 98% are part of intercommunal cooperation
organizations, in spite of the fact that they have been widely criticized on the ground for taking
power away from local mayors, lacking transparence in decision-making processes, and for
causing conflicts between different constituencies at the communal, departmental, and regional
levels.

ZPPAUP: Zone de protection du patrimoine architectural, urbain et paysager

There are several planning instruments *communes* can have drafted. Increasingly, since 1983
the ZPPAUP comes to complete the traditional PLU (Plan Local d'Urbanisme) because it gives
communes' mayors an active role in local heritage management. It seeks to identify, analyze, and
give a diagnostic on monumental, urban, and landscape heritage. Furthermore, it delineates the
perimeter of protection that will serve as a reference for all future projects of construction
(Ministry of Culture, 2008). The ZPPAUP is not compulsory for *communes*, but for the
Association it is an indication that a village takes patrimonial preservation seriously and in the
long term. The document serves as assurance that zones of interest will be preserved from
sprawl, contemporary constructions or destructions. Even in the rural context, actors speak of

"urbanistic documents to refer to planning documents in the context of a village, since a village can be approached as a small urban center.

Pays

The *pays* has been recognized by the 1995 Pasqua Law. It aims at reducing spatial and social inequalities by favoring a development that is based on a partnership between administration, civil society, and local elected officials, in a system of governance that encourages participative democracy (Jean and Périgord 2009). The *pays* is considered to constitute a scale of action that is most appropriate to engage in a reflection on the organization of services, from employment to education or health, particularly in rural areas with low population density. It is defined as "a coherent space, founded from a geographic, economic, cultural, and social homogeneity, which allows for the expression of common interests that are structured by a territorial project relying on a solidary relationship between urban and rural space" (Jean and Périgord, citing Lorquin, 2009, p. 111).

All these different levels of territorial organizations are important to the study because they constitute entities that either guide the *Association* and its members or with which they need to deal when designing projects and assessing possibilities on the ground. The rural *commune* is not an isolated unit but is part of a web of territorial jurisdiction, with a particular hierarchy and centers of authority, as well as a history. This jurisdictional web is very complex. Included in this presentation are only those layers that are most directly pertinent to the experience of the members of the *Association*.

3.3.3. Visibility of the Village in Contemporary France

France has a rich rural history, well-documented and celebrated since the Revolution for the valor of its peasants and local their know-how as the back-bone of the nation. Since the turn of the new millennium, France has become most infatuated with its rural landscapes, and particularly its villages, as conceptual instruments useful to examine the disjuncture between past, present, and future. For the French, the question is to know and affirm who they are and where they can go from now, at a time in which "being French" is tested. From books aimed at lay audiences to scholarly works built on concrete research, it appears that the village is omnipresent, resurging into mainstream media with full force. A quick inventory of village-centered volumes in a local mainstream bookstore on the main avenue in Aix-en-Provence in 2012 revealed over 15 different titles featuring the village as the main object. Thus, the village is well in evidence as a consumption item.

The audio-visual industry has capitalized on this craze and further contributed to making the village an object of dream and longing. For example, in 2012 and 2013, France 2, TV channel part of the *France Télévision* national media giant, has organized nation-wide interactive programs to determine which is *Le Village Préféré des Français*, in a sort of reality show competition, in which French viewers voted for their "favorite village" out of a selection generated by the network (almost all of them were members of the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages*). In 2013, the show broke audience records that night (20% of viewers), outdoing other programs such as popular American series, with 5.5 million viewers tuning in (numbers by Médiamétrie, on Télé Première 2013) and creating an intense buzz on public forums and social media. Furthermore, viewers did not hesitate to rush and see for themselves

the places portrayed in the TV show. Indeed, the 2012 winning village recorded an 87% increase in the number of tourists that summer, a trend which the Tourist Office Director qualified as "*formidable*", saying that it saved the 2012 season from touristic morosity caused by the economic crisis (La Dépêche, August 2012). The fact that the increase was not sustained in the following year proves the direct TV effect (La Dépêche, August 2013). Both years, the winners have been swamped with unprecedented tourist flows as a consequence of the TV show, sometimes as early as the very next day, to the point that some mayors of villages on the list voiced their discontent about being chosen, for fear of not being able to absorb the steep hike in visitor numbers. Just being nominated created anxiety in some places: "It will attract so many people that we won't be able to welcome them all. It will be a problem" confided one unenthusiastic Mayor after his village made the 2013 list (La Dépêche, May 2013). In Eguisheim, winner of the 2013 edition of the TV show, a counter-movement emerged claiming "*Eguisheim, village préféré des Eguisiens*" (Eguisheim, Eguisians' favorite village), to express discontent about the 143% increase in visitors since the village received the winning title (Litaud, 2014).

The success of the interactive TV show revealed not only that the question mattered to audiences but also perhaps that they had likely already visited those places and formed a strong opinion or had personal attachment to the region, and thus were able to vote for a particular candidate. The trend had just started. Last September, France 5 proposed a report on "*La France des Villages*", while private network M6 investigated the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France*, placing it at the center of a broadcast titled "*Douce France*" (Sweet France), highlighting the *Association*'s selection process and development outcomes in labelized villages in terms of tourists' expenditures. Beyond national TV, the village has recently been a recurrent

theme for reflection and conversation between social scientists and philosophers on national

primetime radio shows, and photo books and calendars designed around village themes and

language abound in bookstores. The village sells. It taps into an intangible that is deeply

engrained in the French imaginary of the nation as a mosaic of *pays*. In the midst of this village

obsession, an old debate has re-emerged as to what constitutes a village today and whether or not

the village, as the rural entity that we imagine, in fact still exists.

      The historiography of the village as a socio-geographic concept would be a long one.

However, a few volumes can be mentioned to help contextualize the discussion in which the

Association has emerged and continues to evolve. The debate over the waning of the village is

not new. Two scholars stand out to exemplify the legacy in which the *Association* under review

here has emerged and continues to evolve: Roupnel and Weber. Roupnel (1932:203) defined the

village as "the expression, materially produced by human means, of the soil, relief, waters and

fields; encompassing all human values and characters inscribed in soil and places". For Weber

(1976, p.45), villages epitomise *pays*, which he describes as an impossible concept to translate

into English: 'native land', mythicised through legend, habits, languages, customs, and

singularities, a place grounded in local territory, withdrawn into its specificities, and beyond

which everything is 'other'. Thus, at the centre of today's French nostalgic cravings for the

campagne emerges the quaint imagery of the village: its winding road leading to a steeple, plaza,

fountains and Daedalian cobblestoned paths.

      By the 1970s, rural ethnographer Pascal Dibie (1979) observed the village's decline and

noted that as the village opened up to the outside world, it concomitantly relinquished its

originality and eclipsed its social function. "In a very short time, the village first uncovered its

shoulders, a few rooftops, then it showed its arms, and finally it exposed itself to the gaze of hurried passersby heading south on N6" (Dibie 2006, p. 29). Dibie condemned the consequences that people's individual stories no longer came to be constructed *in* the village and *with* the village. For him it is centrifugal forces operating in the countryside that resulted in the loss of the memory of place and in the disjuncture between past and present social history, which echoes Lowenthal's understanding (1997). Dibie's thesis that it is the increased visibility of the village that triggered its vulnerability is directly challenged by today's efforts at taking the village out of oblivion by specifically making it more attractive and accessible to tourists. Today, it is precisely visibility that villages seek as their chance for survival. Far from being considered a vulnerability, staying on the tourist's map has become essential for resilience.

More recently, sociologist Jean-Pierre Le Goff's (2012) "End of the Village" thesis finds itself in complete agreement with Dibie's conclusions that openness is what killed the village. In a volume which received considerable media attention (another symptom of the relevance of the debate), Le Goff studied a village community in the Vaucluse, placing the village in the globalized context of modern France, and highlighting the divide between myth and reality, like others have done before (Levy 1994). He exposes that tourism, television, peri-urbanism, automobiles, and the invasion of well-meaning neo-rurals since the 1960s have transformed the village in a way that simply reflects socio-historic evolutions in French society at large. From a place of social cohesion, the village has become a place where people are disconnected from each other and from the place itself, in a double alienation process.

The alarming end of the village is not a new concept. Le Goff in fact resurrects the title of a book by demographer Henri Mendras (1967) who, in the late 1960s, sought to substantiate the correlation between the decline of the village and that of the peasantry to less than 5% of French

population, upholding, as Weber did a decade later, that the visceral connection between those two entities is at the center of the rural world. Edgar Morin (1967) and Laurence Wylie (1968) both had attempted to explain the changes taking place in village communities under pressure from the modern world and questioned the sustainability of rural lifestyles. Pringle and Schaeffer (2010) documented the conversion from a local economy based on mineral extraction activities to a tourism-led economy and concluded that such development resulted in the degradation of existing social structure and the loss of meaningful relationships between inhabitants. "The countryside, as we usually understand it, i.e. as a space that is structured by agriculture and the ways of life it engenders, is dead and forever dead" (Lévy 1994). If villages and peasants must know a common fate, how can villages survive now that peasants are no longer? This question has animated much of the literature on the concept of the village as the expression of rurality in today's France (Le Goff 2012; Dibie 2006; Lévy 1994; Weber 1976; Wylie 1968; Mendras 1967; Morin 1967).

As in the 1970s, once again France is at an identity crossroad, faced with the destabilizing economic and social forces of globalization. As social scientists worry about the end of the village, it is clear that the village is not dead in the French tourist's imaginary. More than ever, the village and countryside serve as a refuge from anchorless modern and urban lifestyles. The rate of second home ownership in France is the highest in Europe, and 60 percent of these homes are purchased in rural setting - a phenomenon described as a French specificity (Dibie 2006; Robin 2011; DATAR 2012). Many of these homes constitute familial heritage, inherited at the passing of older generations. In spite of wide regional variations, this number, in

constant increase over the last decade is an important component of tourism-based development plans in rural zones.

Additionally, it is estimated that rural tourism has increased by 5.4 percent since 2007, as measured by the number of paid nights (DATAR 2012). Rural tourism covers 85 percent of the national territory and accounts for 35 percent of all touristic visits nationally. However, this number may grossly underestimate the role of the rural in national tourism statistics as in many rural localities the only means to measure visitor flows are through recorded visits at the tourism office or entries at a local museum. In many places, neither exist, and even when they do, many visitors do not opt to visit them since many villages have created infrastructures for free self-guided tours with public interpretation panels. Systems in place are not consistent nor accurate to account for a tourist population that varies widely in terms of practices. In villages that have made paid parking a source of revenue, such as Collonges-la-Rouge or Les Baux-de-Provence, entries in a pay lot constitute frequentation indicators, although inaccurate if as in Les Baux parking is free in the off-season. Furthermore, DATAR's report indicates that rural tourism represents 20 percent of all tourism commercial consumption in France, as measured by the number of nights purchased in local inns, but considers that 70 percent of tourism nights in rural areas are not taken into account. Those nights escape commercial transactions because visitors stay in their secondary residence, with family, or with friends. Thus, it is difficult to obtain meaningful numbers. Even so, it is estimated that the trend is upward. The UN World Tourism Organization (2013) ranked France the #1 tourist destination in the world, with near 83 million international tourists annually, this for a country with a population of 65.7 million. Also revealing is the fact that France remains the destination of choice for 80 percent of French

domestic tourists (Ministère de l'Artisanat, du Commerce et du Tourisme, 2012), a trend that has firmed up as the economic crisis changed vacationing habits to the benefit of shorter trips and closer/cheaper destinations.

3.3.4. Cultural and intellectual basis for attachment to the village

3.3.4.1. Contemporary attachment to the rural

The recent success of TV programs glorifying the village reinforces the argument that rural territories are not only an economic stake but constitute for French citizens a very personal connection with a past that is perceived as lost. At the turn of the millennium, the Ministry of Agriculture conducted a survey and found that two thirds of French people identified as having social ties to rural milieu, mostly family ties (IPSOS, 2002). Among those, 61 percent declared having a personal attachment to rural milieu, while 72 percent had a sense of belonging to a specific *pays* or region of France. Furthermore, 95 percent thought it important to preserve and valorize national rural patrimony to transmit to future generations a sense of identity as well as benefit economic development. As far as what "rural heritage" means, the IPSOS survey revealed that two-thirds of French people conceived of the rural as villages and vernacular heritage such as houses, fountains, or barns, rather than extraordinary buildings and monuments. Seventy percent of them had also been actors in material or immaterial manifestations such as festivals or fairs, as well as directly participated in heritage-making and preservation projects.

3.3.4.2. Literary tradition

Along with ancestral familial ties, the myth of the rural rests on a strong imagery sustained by centuries of artistic and literary production tightly woven into the fabric of popular

culture and shaping the expectations of French domestic tourists. The construction of the myth of the rural in France leans on a long tradition of classic literary works such as 19th century George Sand's rural novels. Her depiction of peasant life in the Berry region has nourished the imagination of generations of school children to this day and encouraged attachment to the land with powerful images: "They love this soil drenched of their sweat" in *La Mare au Diable* (1846).[29]

Figure 3: Paperback book cover "La Mare au Diable" (first published in 1846)

Jean Giono's novels in the 1930s and 1940s further idealized the rural. Giono forewarned the dying days of a village in *Regain*, writing the story of what happens in a village when only one villager remains. His treatment of the nascent village crisis was premonitory but remained hopeful as the village resurrects at the end of the novel. The theme of the decline and renaissance

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[29] « Ils aiment ce sol arrosé de leurs sueurs. »

of the village is recurrent in Giono's opus, translating wishful optimism to mobilize attention around the fate of French villages. Both classic authors are part of the literary baggage of most school children. Numerous cinema and TV adaptations of their works have further popularized the thematics at stake, making of the village a cultural object of contemporary relevance.
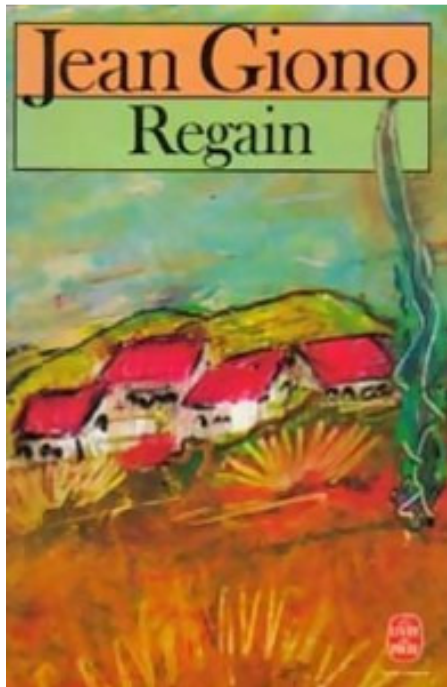
Figure 4: Paperback book cover "Regain" (first published in 1930)

3.3.4.3.   Artistic tradition
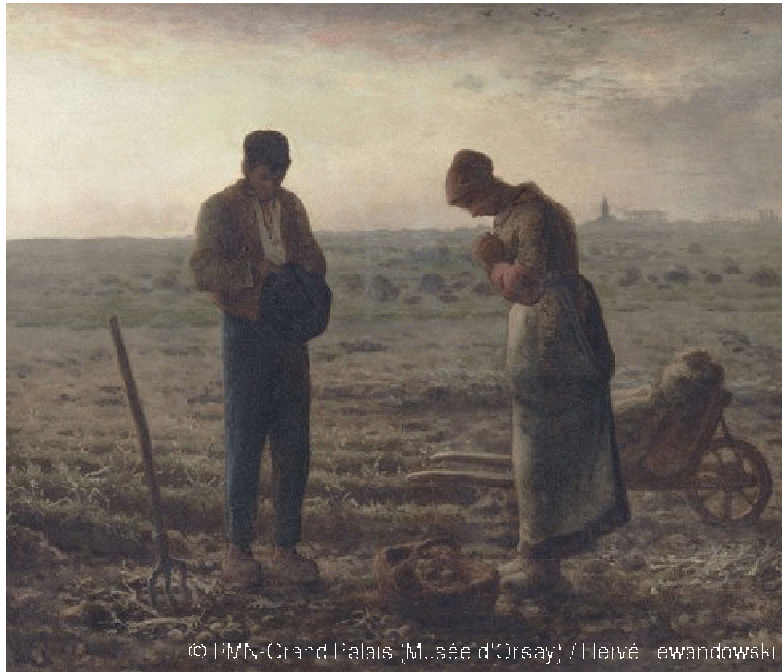
Figure 5: The Angelus by Millet (1859)
Oil on canvas, collections Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France

Artistic movements have also contributed to shaping the national sensibility to the rural. From the bucolic scenes of the Barbizon School, to the Breton landscapes of the School of Pont-Aven, to today's painters, artists have long fed the nostalgic imagination of generations for the countryside. Many painters have rendered their own vision of the land, whether mythical, ideological, or psychological, but always "re-invented" (Bernard 1990). In the 19th century, peasants and rustic themes were expressed in paintings by Millet or Courbet, and became images that delineated a social ideal under threat from industrialization and urbanization. It is through the figure of the peasant that the rural is asserted in many works by Millet. The "painter of peasants", as he has been nicknamed, embodies in his subjects all social mutations taking place in the middle of the 19th century, as French society witnessed the expansion of industrial cities

and the acceleration of the rural exodus (Bernard 1990; Laclotte and Cuzin 1987). Images glorifying the rural have filtered into popular culture and sustained nostalgia for themes alluding to life before industrialization (with complete disregard for the harsh reality of peasant life). Since the 19th century, even commercial advertisement iconography has called on the peasant to trigger emotions based on the anxiety resulting from life in the city, which produces a longing for an imagined time in which we had closer ties to the land (Maynaud and Chevrel 2008).

The end of the 19th century was also the time when the emergence of the first tourist guides and the generalized use of illustrated postcards produced and maintained stereotypical imagery of the rural (Gasnier 1997). As the postcard developed into a tool vehiculating ideals about the countryside, the first mass tourists arrived in the villages with urban sensibilities, tastes, and expectations about what the rural should look like and feel like, often resulting in a folklorization of the countryside and its inhabitants in a dynamic that is not unlike the processes of Urry's "tourist gaze" (2002). In Brittany, Young (2012) describes how regional distinctiveness was constructed through the touristic exchange. Already in the 19th century, rural populations had understood the opportunity and learned to deliver what was expected (Ripert and Frère 2001).

At the same time, interior décor became infatuated with the countryside, an infatuation expressed in the bucolic scenes of toile de Jouy and even earthenware motifs. It is revealing that toile de Jouy is once again very popular nowadays in interior design. This multi-faceted exaltation for the rural culminated in 1937 with the creation of the *Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires*, meant to highlight regional agrarian and cultural diversity and remedy a void that other European countries had filled before France. "French ethnographic researchers lamented

that France lagged significantly behind many of its European neighbors in according institutional recognition and financial support to study of the country's rural folk cultures, and in establishing national folklore and ethnographic museums" (Young 2012, p. 42).

3.3.4.4. *Intellectual legacy of the Vidalian School: Pays, lieu de vie, and terroir*

The literary and artistic context is intertwined with the intellectual context of the time. The intellectual basis for the rural myth is inscribed in the legacy of the humanistic French School of Geography and the concepts of *pays* and *genres de vie* elaborated by Paul Vidal de la Blache (1903) and disciples from the mid-19th century until the 1960s.[30] In this tradition, rural livelihoods associated with particular local milieus play a key role in landscape apprehension. "The geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache's Tableau de la France … was the most significant intellectual expression of the new inclination to recast regional diversity and particularity as the defining characteristic of French national identity." (Young 2012, p. 35).

The Vidalian tradition is indeed particularly influential in the ways in which the French as a nation approach the rural as a milieu where nature and culture come together in a holistic way. The *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France*'s mission seeks to incorporate this holistic view of place in its selection and evaluation criteria for member-villages, resting on notions of milieux de vie where societies produce place-specific *genres de vie*. Vidal de la Blache's disciples would adapt the concepts to the concerns of their time. Jean Brunhes developed the notion of place-based livelihoods, while Jules Sion focused on ecological harmony as a basis for regional character. The French Vidalian school emphasized the importance of

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[30] Principally Jean Brunhes, Albert Demangeon, Emmanuel de Martonne, and Roger Dion

history in regional history (Buttimer 1971), and many in that lineage focused their research on the history of rural-agricultural settlements. Historians such as Marc Bloch and Roger Dion in the 1930s have endorsed that legacy, both interested in the ways in which rural landscapes get shaped by societies who depend on them and inscribe their lifestyle onto them at the same time, in a two-way relationship. The legacy of these scholars among many others in the approach to the rural in France are still felt today as they have laid the conceptual vocabulary by which the French apprehend rural landscapes and rural communities.

Equally significant in this discussion as it applied to the way the *Association* envisages rural development is the notion of *terroir*. Echoing the *pays,* it indicates the symbiotic and unique relationship between place and livelihoods, between nature and culture. Associated with agricultural production, it connects soil qualities, climate, savoir-faire, and local milieu. Terroir and heritage combine to produce important stakes in place-development, particularly when it comes to tourism. *Terroir* has become an influential tool that is exploited as a tourism pull factors in the design of local economic policy. Terroir becomes another item in the rural tourism toolkit and becomes patrimonialized through labelization. Recognition by outfits such at UNESCO constitutes another powerful asset, as in the case of the Cévennes agro-pastoral terroir. National or local labels of "produits du terroir" such as cheeses, wines, and other delicacies, also play a role in perpetuating the idea of exceptionalism in the French countryside, as well as fostering a sense of perennity and pride, a trend existing since the 1920s (Gasnier 1997).

3.3.4.5.   Political will

The political response has been ambiguous over the years. As administrations come and go, the attention placed on the rural varies. The rural world has always been important in French politics since France is still an agricultural super-power in the world. Governments must weigh the benefits of an agricultural politics vs. a rural politics, which are often sensed as antithetical today since agriculture means agro-business rather than "rurality". "Rural space", "rurality", "rural development", or "rural affairs" have been explicitly part of the Ministry of agriculture since the 1970s. For example, the Ministère de l'Espace rural et de l'Aménagement du territoire, was a symbolic but short lived ministry (2009-2010), soon replaced by the *Ministère de l'agriculture, de l'alimentation, de la pêche, de la ruralité et de l'aménagement du territoire*, and today by the *Ministère de l'agriculture, de l'agroalimentaire et de la forêt*. This evolution in the vocabulary and the disappearance of any allusion to the rural world has many in rural communities angry as it is felt as the embodiment of a political will which favors agro-business over terroirs or rural livelihoods. However, both the European Union and the French state have taken steps to support rural areas through the creation of the Rural Excellence Poles (*Pôles d'excellence rurale*). For the purpose of the label, "rural" is defined in economic terms but not only. The label is granted by the DATAR since 2005 to localities whose development project aims at promoting natural, cultural, and touristic assets according to several criteria such as proof of innovation, ambition to create jobs, prioritize sustainable territorial development, and the demonstration of a strong rural character. These poles are aimed at valorizing rural areas in terms of professional dynamism and employment, while at the same time affirming cultural identities based on ancient tradition and enhancing material and immaterial heritage as assets for research and tourism promotion. It also seeks to develop cultural policies that are inclusive of local populations.

Generations in France have internalized the imaginary of the village, through stories in rural novels, glorification of the peasant and rural landscapes in artistic production, modern media, as well as political volition and institutions which cater to the rural. The 80 percent of French tourists who choose France as their destination bring to rural areas expectations shaped by their sensitivity about how the countryside should make them feel. This is precisely a key dimension of the *Association*'s mission. Today, it aims at preserving rural heritage and valorizing the local, but before all it professes to "*create places of emotion*". Producing places which elicit tourists' emotional response is one of the main objectives behind the label. Now that the historical, institutional, territorial, and cultural contexts that explain the position of the rural in France and the heritage apparatus in place in those regions are laid, the specifics of the *Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France,* its motivations, processes, actors, and results on the ground can be introduced.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE *ASSOCIATION OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES OF FRANCE* AS ONE RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

The *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* emerged in the early 1980s, after decades of decline in the French countryside at a time in which rural mayors initiated a reflection about how to best address the challenges they were facing: rural exodus leading to depopulation and an aging population in rural communes, the disappearance of trades and livelihoods traditionally linked to farming, and the rising cost of maintaining ancient habitat. Reviewing the motivations and the expectations of the *Association* will help explain the internal functioning that resulted from that reflection.

4.1.   What is the *Association*, how did it start, what motivates it, what structures it?

Since Mr. Ceyrac first thought the idea, the *Association* has evolved. Although its basic structure was laid out early on, its development to its present form did not take shape overnight. This development can be broken down into four chronological phases:

4.1.1. Four development phases

- Analytical Phase (1981-1983): Diagnostic, prognosis, observation, information gathering, empirical (Outcome: "First generation villages").

- Strategic Plan Phase (1983-1991): Define, choice of targets, positioning, identify resources (Outcome: "Second generation villages").

- Operational Phase (1991-2005): Concrete implementation, marketing plan, work with internal and external resources. (Outcome: *Charte de Qualité (*assessment criteria; Defining "quality")

- Professionalization Phase (2005-today): Re-structuring, specialization of tasks and objectives, formal implementation of the three-axis strategy, strengthening of admission criteria, international expansion, rapprochement with local territorial policy and instruments (Outcome: Specialized staff; reinforcement of partnerships; development of communication tools).

4.1.2. Analytical phase: Fortuitous encounter between a mayor, an applied geographer, and a Reader's Digest book

4.1.2.1. A myth of origin grounded in reality and human relations

"*The story of the Plus Beaux Villages de France began with an encounter, in 1981, between a man and a book. The book was an album going by that same name published by Sélection du Reader's Digest, and the man was Charles Ceyrac, Mayor of Collonges-la-Rouge*." (PBVF website)[31]. The genesis of the ideas that would lead to the creation of the *Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France* indeed lies in a book, but with two men rather one. While Charles Ceyrac is the man with the initial vision and will, Jean-Claude Valeix, his long-time friend and a professional practicing in the field of territorial development and planning is the other key character in the invention of the model across all four phases of the concretization of the project. For Pascal Bernard, who took over Jean-Claude Valeix's position as *Délégué Général* in 2007, he constitutes the "steering kingpin" (*cheville ouvrière*) of the *Association* "*who structured, who wrote everything that needed to be written to bring this Association to its realization*". The history of the *Association* presented here is a synthesis that comes out of personal communication with Mr. Valeix and his recollection of the genesis of the organization as well as the role various actors assumed along the way to bring the project to fruition. His account is completed by interviews with current *Association* officers (Pascal Bernard, Anne Gouvernel, Cécile Varillon, and Corinne Tronche), as well as President Maurice Chabert and the mayors who were part of the first generation of member-villages whom I was able to meet and interview.

At its beginnings, the *Association*'s mission was primarily to bring the idea and reality of the village out of oblivion in the face of economic struggles. But also basic to the mission was

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[31] http://www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org/en/about-us

the goal to preserve villages in the face of the existentialist crisis about the meaningfulness and functionality of the village as a social, historical, and political entity based in local identity and expressed through local patrimony. By the 1980s, the French countryside had suffered decades of crisis resulting from a range of interlocking dynamics: changes in the composition of rural populations, affirmation of regional urban and industrial poles, and the impact of supra-national economic and agricultural European Union policies on local communities (Jean and Périgord 2009). France's villages, the back-bone of its rural history, were dying. In spite of the large number of rural *communes* and a national interest in decentralized "territorial development", village mayors found it difficult to be heard concretely in the political process and development planning at the national level. Increasingly national-level planning operated in a context in which the European scale planning drew more attention. This is the time period when the term globalization was first uttered and when all eyes turned to the global. Not coincidentally, it is in this bleak conjuncture that the *Association* emerged out of a coffee-table book encountered by chance in a Parisian bookstore.

Indeed, the Mayor of Collonges-la-Rouge, a striking red stoned village in Corrèze, was also Senator and thus traveled to conduct business in Paris regularly, where he particularly enjoyed walking. Now deceased, Charles Ceyrac cannot tell the story of the beginnings that he liked to share. But his friend and collaborator Jean-Claude Valeix remains to give his testimony of the early excitement and struggle. He readily takes you into the story of the project, as he would read you a story-book. Thus, he narrates the day when, along one of his Parisian promenades, Charles Ceyrac was stopped in his tracks when his attention was caught by a book cover in a bookstore window: The 1977 Readers' Digest Selection book of photos entitled "*Les*

Plus Beaux Villages de France" (Sélection du Reader's Digest 1977). It is already in its preface

that Mr. Ceyrac must have recognized his mission:

> Today, this instinctive groupings of houses that we call "village" is thrust in a resurrection that is easy to explain. Gone the time of abandoned villages, passed that of dead villages! Everything is going so fast that we must hurry to fix the beauty of these harmonies that emerged spontaneously. France does not lack them: most of its 33,000 communes are villages. But rare, and rarer will they be tomorrow, are those who bear witness for a whole regional civilization where were naturally intertwined stone and quarries, wood from the *pays,* and the savoir-faire accumulated almost genetically by lineages of builders, and the adaptation to the site, sometimes subconscious." (Reader's Digest 1977, p.5)

Figure 6: The original 1977 Reader's Digest album, cover and example of inside page

In addition to full page photos, the volume was rich in information about technical

architectural aspects, such as house ornamentation, slate roofs, or dovecotes, included a complete

glossary of architectural terminology, as well as explications about themes pertaining to life in

the rural world, such as cohabiting with animals, or the general organization of the village.

Mayor Ceyrac was surprised, interested, intrigued, and probably flattered to find his own village

included in the volume, along with a hundred others. In the train, Mr. Valeix continues, on his

way back to Collonges, he delved into the volume and immediately thought that the volume may

contain a response to address the development struggles of the rural world. Committed to the

rural cause, he saw in the approach and focus of the book an opportunity to revive villages and

decided to contact the mayors whose villages were also featured in the book, in an attempt to

gauge interest in a collaborative development project (see Mr. Ceyrac's letter in Introduction).

Out of the hundred, sixty-six mayors would respond and the *Association* took shape rapidly after

that.

After an initial and informal meeting where ideas and expectations were exchanged, for

Mr. Valeix, what principally emerged is the clear indication that what attracted these localities'

mayors who responded was not only to meet to discuss common problems and goals, but to also

define those goals. Hence, Mr. Valeix recalls, what came out of the initial meeting in the

analytical phase was two-fold:

1) Much material to think about in terms of what an Association could/should

accomplish, and

2) A calendar for action, with three more meetings planned that year for the provisional

bureau to develop the strategy of the Association and lay out its by-laws.

In March 1982, in Salers (Auvergne), the Constitutive General Assembly of the

Association took place and the initial statutes were approved (Association Statutes 1982). The

statutes have practically remained unchanged since then, proving that the early goals and

function of the structure were well thought out. They are still valid today, even in a context that

has somewhat changed, mostly due to the explosion of the tourism industry in the last twenty

years. Through its statutes, the goals of the *Association* were carefully delineated around a general mission. That mission united localities in a common desire for the preservation of localized diversity based on the necessity for quality. The initial statutes had already defined the professional functionalities of the *Association* around the three poles of "quality", "notoriety", and "development". Charles Ceyrac, who was said to master the art of the formula, put it in these subtle terms: "*se connaître, se faire connaître, se faire reconnaître*", which in English means- in less catchy terms - "to know ourselves, to make ourselves be known, to make ourselves be acknowledged". Hence, since the beginning of the project, three dimensions were clearly delineated: identity preservation and transmission, desire to share with others who they are, and necessity to recover a significant role in national affairs.

4.1.2.2. What is an "association" in France: The Law of 1901

In his letter to colleagues, Mr. Ceyrac envisages the creation of an "*Amicale*" (club) or "*Association*". In the US context, an equivalent group may be termed a "non-governmental organization" and be expected to answer specific legal requirements. Likely, in France, associations constitute specific entities with their own legal context and obligations. Under the 1901 Law regulating such entities, associations are close to what would be called "non-profit organizations" in the United States. [32] In its Article 1, the Waldek-Rousseau Law known as "la loi 1901" grants freedom of association and defines an associative contract as "the convention by which two or several persons place together, in a permanent way, their knowledge or activities for a goal other than partaking in benefits. It is regulated, for its validity, by general principles of

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[32] Full text at http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006069570

law applicable to contracts and obligations." [33] An association is freely formed, is declared, and must create statutes delineating its object, ruling bodies, legal representatives, and headquarters' address. Clermont-Ferrand was chosen by the PBVF because not only was it where Jean-Claude Valeix was based, but also because it is a mid-size city, away from the pressures of villages themselves and geographically it is located in the center of France, which made sense since the vocation of the *Association* is national coverage. It gave all members relatively equal access geographically, and gave Jean-Claude Valeix relative even access to all parts of the territory as well. "I*t would not have worked if the Association resided in one of the villages*", he says.

An association must also choose a name for itself, which it owns and to which it has exclusive use rights.[34] The new *Association* chose to retain the Readers' Digest book's title as its formal name. The statutes of associations leave great liberty to its members who voluntarily join around a common project and shared activities. Only two basic rules limit its activities, which can be varied in nature: it must not cause public unrest and its members must not share in pecuniary benefits. If the Association is not declared at the *Préfecture,* it cannot seek judicial recourses nor own assets, although it does have legal existence. Some associations with "public utility" fall under more specific rules. However, few organizations exist that are deemed to be of "public utility" due to a heavy burden of proof of that utility.

An *Amicale* ou *Société Amicale* is in fact an association which names itself as *Amicale* as it would call itself a "*club*". The word is often used in the local context in which "*amicale*"

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[33] Article 1 : « la convention par laquelle deux ou plusieurs personnes mettent en commun, d'une façon permanente, leurs connaissances ou leur activité dans un but autre que de partager les bénéfices. Elle est régie, quant à sa validité, par les principes généraux du droit applicable aux contrats et obligations ».

[34] http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/citoyen/participation/association/qu-est-ce-qu-association.html

(based on ami = friend) makes sense when locals come together. At the time in which the idea

for the *Association* emerged, the 1901 Association seemed appropriate to the founders because it

is a structure that remains quite flexible. Today, the *Association* intends on using the 1901 law to

secure and protect the exclusive use of its name and brand, which was registered with INPI

(National Institute of Industrial Property) as well. The *Association of the PBVF* is a development

project, a club of Mayor-friends, but it is also a *brand, a trademark* with legal rights and

economic value.

4.1.2.3. Initial phase: First generation villages and first partners

The initial phase in the construction of the model went fast and Mr. Valeix remembers

that the main protagonists were satisfied. The climate was cordial, which he attributes to Mr.

Ceyrac's quality as the "*parfait rassembleu*r", able to transcend political opinions and speak to

all "*familles politiques*" around converging themes that were of a mobilizing nature. As a

militant Gaullist, Mr. Ceyrac did have objection to only one "political family": the Front

National (FN), which, as a nationalist party, already at the time was involved in political

strategies which could have been understood as converging towards the *Association*'s strategies

with regard to rural territorial development and "French" values. Early on, it was decided to

exclude the FN from the project, but otherwise all political parties were invited and welcome.

Today, as French identity is being challenged and the FN has gathered momentum in the last

municipal elections (April 2014), it will be interesting to watch how this perceived threat of

political co-optation develops. Interviews with *Association*'s officers revealed that they are

conscious of the danger of political recuperation and instrumentalization and remain vigilant

about it, while nevertheless remaining realistic about current political shifts in small towns across the national territory.

The "first generation" of member-villages, as it is referred to today, was based essentially on the Readers' Digest's choice for inclusion in the book and the mayors' willingness to join forces for a project for which the contours were still to be precisely determined. No other criteria were in place for membership, only a desire to be together and support each other rather than specific and defined elements of place quality. Upon solicitation by Mr. Ceyrac, the Readers' Digest quickly became one of the core partner in the project, granting the *Association* a yearly subsidy and remaining the publisher for the *Association*'s tour guide (*Association* record, sponsorship letter). Along with long-time friend and applied geographer Mr. Valeix, Mayor Ceyrac would spend years designing and fine-tuning a development model based on heritage protection and rehabilitation, always remaining attentive that the character of the "rural", as they understood it, was not denatured. Charles Ceyrac passed away in 1998. Today, Jean-Claude Valeix is the only one left who can describe those initial struggles, and also the driving passion and devotion that went into creating the model from scratch. As the living memory of the beginnings, he remembers how he and Charles Ceyrac were able to rally key actors to their cause, obtaining their assistance thanks to their professional and personal networks across regional and national institutions. In a moving and laudatory tribute in the *Association Bulletin* to Charles Ceyrac in 2007, Jean-Claude Valeix remembers the first tribulations, the excitement, the joys, the encounters, and Ceyrac's exceptional capacity to listen, gather, convince, communicate, and make himself available – over good wine if possible (Bulletin 2007).

4.1.3. Strategic Network building and Second Generation Membership

Once the *Association* had been formed, Valeix recalls that the primary objective for the young organization was to increase the density of its network, keeping the notion of quality as the principal objective. "The *Association* gathered instantaneous and spontaneous notoriety", which translated into numerous calls from mayors from all over France, much coverage in diversified press, and lay audience and academic publications (Valeix). Considering this took place in pre-internet times, it is noteworthy that "word spread quickly that the organization had been created, that it had something to say and do, and that it spoke to many" involved in place-development and heritage resource management.

This empirical phase dealt with addressing the multiple candidates that presented themselves. Until the 1990s, the extent of the selection process was that the Bureau would designate three of its members to visit the candidate villages, separately and incognito, and then report back. In actuality, Valeix and the current *chargé de qualité* Pascal Bernard concede, the system did not work because Bureau members, themselves mayors, were often too busy to devote much time to these inspections. Also, they often did not go incognito either, raising the risk of friendly pressures. Therefore the procedure had to change if the *Association* were to remain true to its mission and its principles of quality and legitimacy. Coming to this realization resulted in one of the key moments in the development of the *Association*, when Charles Ceyrac proposed to Jean-Claude Valeix that he join the *Association* full time. Until then Mr. Valeix had been present to all *Association*'s business but this was in addition to his full time job as a successful territorial planner and developer. "*It was a big decision for me. One that involved me, but also my family. I decided to leave a promising career in the private sector to jump into the unknown, where everything still remained to be invented.*" "Everything was to be done. That is

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what was exciting. But we did not know where it would lead us." His desire for adventure, his passion for the thematics at stake, his friendship with Mr. Ceyrac, his intimate knowledge of the field, and his utmost respect for local elected officials (the "*élus*") with whom he had worked for years on numerous projects all over France, made his take the plunge, in agreement with his wife and family towards whom he indicates feeling guilty today for having been away on the road so much for over a decade in order to put this project on its feet.

4.1.4. Operational Phase: Implementation – Defining "Quality"

The next phase was implementation. The structure had been built, but the application method was still to be created. Priority was given to the quality aspect, and it is apparent from multiple conversations with *Association* officers over two years that this has been the guiding light for the *Association* to this day. But how to define "quality", concretely and materially? What should be the criteria of quality when measuring the "beauty" of rural villages, all so different one from the other? The *Association* needed to create, sort out, and test selection criteria on the ground. Today, interviews make clear that many in the *Association*, whether mayors, residents, or officers, agree that the first generation choices were "*limite*" ("borderline"). In fact, several of those choices have given lieu to the rare exclusions or voluntary withdrawals upon subsequent re-evaluation. *"It's really difficult to let these villages know that they really should not be in the Association. We keep them, to honor the fact that they were the pioneers, but things have moved towards better attention to quality now."* Furthermore, Jean-Claude Valeix, not only had the professional competencies for the job, but had behind him a network of professional acquaintances from his profession as a planner, and was well introduced in the ministerial milieu. Mr. Valeix evokes that many people were following the initiative and that

notably it quickly captured the attention of the tourism industry. "*Many people closely followed all this, people with whom we could think… The chances that we had, they are imputable to and they rest on human relations as the basis for everything*". For Mr. Valeix, the success of the project lies in the extraordinary man that Mr. Ceyrac was, able to foster human relations all along: "*passions amicales, connivences, et complicités*" (friendly passions, connivances, and complicities).

One of those relations was an officer at the *Direction du Tourisme* in the *Ministry of Tourism*, with whom Mr. Valeix had worked when he worked in the private sector. Through this personal relationship, the *Association* was able to obtain its first public subsidy. Before that, the organization was entirely dependent on volunteer and unpaid work. After the first subsidies from the Ministry of Tourism, the DATAR became interested and contributed as well. These subsidies were used to enhance the capacity of the structure and strengthen the network. Jean-Claude Valeix qualifies his approach as one of "developpeur-aménageur" (developer-planner) rather than geographer. However, both his academic and practical training as a field geographer appear everywhere between the lines. He reminisces that although trained at the Sorbonne, where geography and history were taught in an indivisible tandem, his sensibility was formed in his studies but also through his practice as an applied geographer and landscape specialist. Mr. Valeix's talent as a story teller continues as he describes how his passion for landscape was formed early on in high school when his teacher asked students to analyze landscapes geographically by looking at photos projected on a screen. For him, this pedagogical moment was the "*coup de foudre*" (literally 'lightning strike', i.e. love at first sight), which motivated him to further his geographical training. As he started a career that would lead him to fight difficult realities of local development, he describes that he came to understand even more deeply that

history and geography are two dimensions that enrich each other and play out on the ground in complex ways. He asserts that it is this understanding that he carried into the ways in which he structured the *Association* to fulfill its mission of place development through heritage preservation. Mr. Valeix's account of the beginnings of the *Association*'s project kept me with him for several consecutive hours. It is evident that as the *Association* matured, so did the reflection of its creators. Today, he is able to assess what happened, by looking back and putting order into it. But at the time *"it was pure madness, we were building as we were going. Things happened fast."*

4.1.4.1. "Quality" building: Defining "beauty" on the ground

The second phase of the Association's project was devoted to developing a shared and precise understanding of "quality", as well as implementing a system of assessment on the ground. After the empirical phase, the Ceyrac-Valeix tandem faced the issue of defining quality/beauty. *"We realized we were confronted to a node of complex, nuanced, and not necessarily evident dynamics, and that the task would not be a simple one."* Through the first meetings with mayors, *"it was also clear that the idea of a rigorous quality evaluation methodology created anxiety."* While all agreed on the necessity for "quality", the idea of defining it along specific criteria made local officials fear exclusion down the road. Today, when speaking with mayors, this sentiment is still palpable within the *Association*. There is a generalized sense of hesitation towards a rigorous application of the method which has been established, because it is difficult to exclude friends- which other mayors represent- from the project. In this sense, the original vocation of a friendly "club" (*Amicale*) can still be felt. In a country that counts more than 36,000 mayors (two thirds of them in rural *communes)*, it is

extraordinary to see the connection they feel to each other, especially strong among mayors of rural *communes*. However, human laxity eventually had to be faced with a strengthening of the criteria, so that exclusions can now occur if a village no longer possesses the quality dimension required. It was thus decided to address the issue. It was thought that rigorous criteria would address two challenges: 1) provide a necessary level of homogeneity within the network as new members were accepted to join; and 2) address "counter-examples" such as villages which have fallen victim to their success and are now plagued with over-frequentation by tourists, with all the negative implications on place quality that can entail. *"This was a difficult trajectory to correct because not only local officials are friends, but local economic actors on site have benefited from this hyper-touristification, which for them is beneficial but disastrous for the image of the network."*

4.1.5. Support building

4.1.5.1. Initial successes and failures

At the beginning, the *Association* received its financial impetus from the Readers' Digest. Later, the *Association* was able to obtain public funding from five Ministries and sub-Ministries: Tourism, Equipement (public works), DATAR, Environment, and Agriculture. The breadth of support the *Association* was successful in mobilizing at its beginnings, from tourism, to territorial development, infrastructural development, environmental politics, and even agricultural politics, is an indication of the width of its scope and the interest it generated as an organization that could tie together many dimensions of local rural development. Today, no Ministerial public funding supports the Association.

It is revealing to note that the Ministry most expected to be on this list and to be drawn to a project of place-building through heritage protection in fact never was, i.e. the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Culture was never interested, nor was the European Union, in spite of solicitations early on.

"*With the Ministry (of Culture), no dialogue was ever possible. There is over there a very passeist spirit, very Festival d'Avignon, Parisianism, as soon as you move down to work on the ground, with the goal of bringing in local populations, you are seen as less than nothing. We were treated like litter, even when we went there with someone from another Ministry, the Ministry of Tourism, and that we knew the Ministry of Culture had received funds to allocate to precisely this type of projects. We never received a penny from Culture*" (*Association* Officer).

The European front was also a disappointment in spite of numerous attempts to get Brussels' attention. "*It's a world eaten by technocracy and lobbying*", Mr. Valeix indignantly assessed. In the end, it was decided that villages would also be required to contribute a modest membership fee when they were accepted to join (today it is 3 Euros per inhabitants). When speaking with mayors, the membership fee was never raised as a problematic spending and residents in two villages even expressed that if the Municipal Council decided not to pay it anymore, they would give it to them:

"*I'll pay it for them, I'll give it to them, but we can't lose the label over a few hundred Euros, even a couple thousands! That would really be the wrong reason*".

And

"*how many are we? What's that in our budget for the commune? No, no, if people tell you the fee is too much to pay, it's because they want to find something to say, don't listen. It's like everywhere, there are always complainers.*"

On the other hand, in conversations, residents frequently seem to know only vaguely that a fee was associated with membership and did not appear to care. *"I think we pay something for the label, you know, I'm not sure how much though, I guess it must be worth it, mostly for the*

commerces in the village." And others believed that it was in fact the *Association* that pays the

commune for harboring its label: "*They have to pay us something, so they can tell we are a*

PBVF. In fact, it's normal, they even put us in their guide book, so then they must pay

something." This reveals a lack of comprehension on the part of some residents, not only of the

financial underpinnings of the *Association* and of the responsibility of the villages, but more

widely of the general functioning of membership (more on villagers in Chapter 5).

4.1.5.2. Reader's Digest: from the 1977 trigger book to durable partnership

Charles Ceyrac, after having seen the original book, contacted Reader's Digest as a

potential partner for the *Association*. Mr. Valeix relates that the connection was easy. In the

beginning, the alliance was forged around an immediate friendship between Mr. Ceyrac and

Henri Capdeville, then Managing Director for the publishing group's French division (interview

with Reader's Digest representative). The partnership has been renewed in 2007 for 20 years

(Point.com January 2008). According to a Reader's Digest France representative, in the United

States, Reader's Digest has been an institution since the 1920s which does not purports to be

intellectual but rather targets "deep America". In France, Reader's Digest has had a different

connotation. "*France is the country of people who know everything. For many, Reader's Digest*

became a tool of development" (interview with Reader's Digest France representative).

Since the beginning, Reader's Digest chose to accompany the project (*Association*

archive, Partnership Letter, 13 November 1986) in the form of a financial aid and the publication

of a village guide, through which Reader's Digest discovered its vocation as a publisher of

discovery guides, which is not something they had anticipated doing at first (interview with

Reader's Digest representative). So, at the same time as Reader's Digest was helping the *Association* to get on its feet, it was also developing its own expertise into a new kind of commercial venture. Admittedly, the economic ramifications were not a primary concern on the Reader's Digest's agenda, at least not initially. "*It was about a friendship between two men, and then there were public relation benefits for sure*". "*Reader's Digest constituted a historic partnership, but it's an intimate one, we are not in the logic of profit, it's another logic*"; "*It's like a part of the family, we are not in a merchandizing logic*"; "*It's not a financial partnership, it's a cultural one rather, but we must be accountable to shareholders, so it must be balanced with indirect publicity*" (communication with Reader's Digest representative). In fact, today Reader's Digest reveals that they had other products in mind, such as a DVD, but those were subsequently abandoned. Today, there are two products published by Reader's Digest in the scope of the partnership: A book and a guide (smaller format, aimed at giving traveling visitors practical and superficial information). The book is referred to as the "album", as opposed to the village guide which came later. The original volume is the one Charles Ceyrac stumbled upon in the beginnings. Re-edited several times since 1977, the album constitutes a coffee table book where the visual content has primacy but nonetheless containing textual contributions by numerous specialists, such as historians, archeologists, journalists, heritage management practitioners, and various academics who have good knowledge of the region about which they write for the album. Some (as the author here) may regret that in the more recent re-editions, the very technical, yet exceptionally rich, text boxes of the first editions have disappeared.

Figure 7: Display of MBVF Reader's Digest products at the Collonges-la-Rouge Secretariat

4.1.5.3. La carte Michelin: Put villages "on the map" (visibility, notoriety, legitimacy)

Another support medium created early on was the map of the PBVF. Reader's Digest admits that they could have published the map, but "*in France, Michelin is the map of reference. We could have done it, but we don't have the brand for it*".[35] For the *Association*, the choice of Michelin was an "*evidence*" (Valeix, Bernard), not only because the map of reference is the Michelin map in France, but also because Michelin happens to be one of Clermont-Ferrand's flagship industries and corporations, right there at the *Association*'s fingertips. But Michelin never became a partner in the same way as the Reader's Digest did. For Michelin, "*it was strictly about a commercial partnership, and it's always been so…They saw the opportunity for*

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[35] The maps produced by the *Institut Géographique National* (IGN) are also main protagonists in the "map of reference" debate, as the *Institut* produces numerous maps and at various scales.

commercial endeavor in their association with the Most Beautiful Villages of France" (Valeix).

No-one at Michelin was interviewed in this project.

Moreover, Michelin constitutes an additional factor of publicity, notoriety, pertinence, credibility, and excellence. "*In France, a map is a Michelin map. We are in the same logic of looking for excellence, in terms of quality, not elitism*" (Cécile Varillon). Today, the map of the MBVF (1/1 000 000 scale) sells about 10,000 copies a year, number which the *Association* would like to see increase. The map is seen as one link in the complex chain of factors that bring people to member-villages. It is part of an apparatus of products that people rely on to make destination decisions, "*ranging from the presence of a three-star restaurant, or a lake, family in the region, the Michelin guide[36], the Red Guide[37], the vicinity of a touristic itinerary, etc*" (Varillon). The map is one tool that helps the *Association* invite people to show up in places that are not necessarily located on their general access trajectory, as is the case for many of these villages. The map is another way to take the village out of oblivion, to literally put these places on the map, to seek development through visibility ("*se faire connaître*").

4.1.6. Restructuration in 2008: Asserting activity axes and professionalization

> "Expertise, loyalty, kindness, self-sacrifice, humility, discretion, are some of the numerous qualities of the man who carried our association to this day and decided to hand over the baton…Jean-Claude created the association in which today we all recognize ourselves and, in spite of vicissitudes, he never surrendered. As the association turns a page of its history, I wanted, in all of our behalf, to address a great thank you to Jean-Claude Valeix". (Maurice Chabert, President, Point.Com, July 2008, p.1).

Since 2008, the Association has been restructured and the work Jean-Claude Valeix did on his own now relies on three full time staff, one for each of the three components of the

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[36] The "Green Guide"

[37] Michelin guide of restaurants covering the national territory

mission: *Qualité*, *Notoriété*, *Développement*. This gives a good idea of the scope of the task he was covering by himself, but also reveals that the *Association* has grown beyond the critical mass sought and is hence a mature organization with defined poles of action employing a specialized staff with academic and professional training in planning, communication and tourism. In fact, two of the new delegates came with diplomas in tourism studies as well as field experience in place promotion. Today, while he no longer has any official role, "Monsieur Valeix" is solicited by the *Association'*s staff on a regular basis on specific points and he remains part of the *Commission Qualité*. Because he worked so closely with Mr. Ceyrac and, as one of the original "*têtes pensantes*" (thinking heads) in the creation of the *Association*, he has a good synthetic vision of its mission, its functioning, its practical methodology to reach concrete realities, and the pitfalls that it must avoid. Even though he officially retired years ago, Jean-Claude Valeix's presence is still strongly felt in the day to day of the *Association*, even if he is no longer there in person (his office is now left unoccupied). Indeed, the current team confides that, when faced with particularly tangled issues, they are guided internally by the question: "*What would Monsieur Valeix do?"*

4.1.7. The *Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France* – Practices behind the "label"

As described previously, the *Association* emerged in a context of rural desertification, changes in agricultural production methods which moved local production from individual farms to agro-business driven industrial agriculture in which peasants became entrepreneurs, and the resulting general transformation of rural life and rural population composition. In reaction to this context, the *Association* developed a mission meant to address these changes. The objectives are supported by a precise approach and defined methodology aiming to enhance local rural

patrimony to make it a resource to be exploited for development when traditional resources are no longer an option. However, while development is often understood, especially in the US, in a purely limited economic dimension, the *Association* seeks much more than a result quantifiable in Euros. It first seeks to mobilize actors around the key concept of place "quality", translated into "beauty" in the *Association*'s name, and carried through an assessment of "heritage value", which is measured by the *Charte de qualité*.

4.1.7.1. The (simplified) internal structure

Most importantly, the structure is designed so that authority resides in the mayors of member villages. "*We work for the Mayors. It is them who make the decisions. This is how Mr. Ceyrac wanted it*" and "*Our bosses, they are the 'élus'*"[38] (Pascal Bernard). As stipulated by the law, the *Association* comprises a bureau, a *conseil d'administration* (board of directors), and three commissions aligned on the three facets of the *Association*'s mission and action poles (qualité, notoriété, développement). Positions in these decision-making groupings is open to all mayors of member-villages. Each commission convenes twice a year (for a total of six *Association* meetings a year, plus the annual General Assembly). However, there are also unspoken and unwritten rules that intervene in practice. An effort is made to spread authority across a sample with territorial diversity to avoid regional "copinage" (cronyism). For example, *Association* officers explained that it is preferred to allow in the Bureau mayors who represent different regions of France, and it is unlikely that two mayors from the same region could serve together. Fortunately, there are enough groupings between the administrative functions and the three commissions that all who want to implicate themselves in the workings of the *Association*

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[38] The term "les élus" is often used to refer to mayors (literally: "the elected ones")

can find a place. While in the beginnings villages were accepted based merely their desire to partake in the project, since 1991 the *Association* has adopted a formal set of criteria by which to assess heritage and the landscape value – or "quality"– of each candidate.

The "*Charte de Qualité*" has become the node for all processes. The *Commission Qualité*, which makes decisions on the implementation and practice of the *Charte* is therefore particularly sought after. Decisions of which village is accepted to join are made there, as are decisions about which member-village should be excluded ("déclassé"). There is a sense among mayors that if a ayor is a member of the *Commission Qualité*, his/her village is somewhat protected (although when his/her village is being reviewed, that person leaves the deliberation room). *"I tried to get on the Commission because for sure if you are there, it's a protection, you are sitting right there, but it does not mean they are not going to tell me if something is wrong. They tell you*" (a mayor). Participant-observation at the *Commission Qualité* meeting made it clear that at the heart of the three Commissions, friendships, collaborations, and complicities are formed and that the "déclassement" is a difficult moment which happens rarely. Hence the necessity to establish a strict entry procedure. Because of the friendships that make exclusion very difficult, mayors agree that there should be strict barriers to entry in the form of a tough admission procedure guided by objective factors. Members of the *Commission Qualité* assert:

> "*It's not us, they have it or they don't have what it takes.*"

> "*There is a Charte de Qualité. It's the Charte that decides.*"

> "*But you know, they know when they don't have what they need to get in, they see the Charte and they know. Sometimes I even wonder why they send in a dossier.*"

4.1.7.2. The process of "classement" (labelization), "reclassement", and "déclassement":
How the Association creates "heritage

Initial "classement"

Since 1982, the *Association* has not wavered in the vision and implementation of its project. This coherence over time is one factor contributing to its success and endurance. The label embodies a triple promise: that of a municipality to the *Association*'s mission, that of the *Association* towards the municipality in terms of advising and informing, and that of the *Association* to the visitors. The network can only remain meaningful and successful if a relationship of trust is created between the label and visitors as well as between the villages and the process. The label, acting as a brand, has become a guarantee of what to expect. At the same time as it is shaped by expectations of the rural, it also shapes visitors' new expectation. It represents a normative discourse and practices about local heritage legitimacy and cultural significance.

In practice, the triple promise is enabled by a demanding labelization process. First, a village fills out an application. At that point three criteria are mandatory:

1) The *commune* must be "rural" per the national statistics office (INSEE), i.e. with a population of no more than 2000 (many member-villages have much smaller populations, in the 100s);

2) It must have on its territory two sites that are recognized on the national inventory of protected sites (fully registered or simply listed); and

3) It must present proof of the community's assent (through the Municipal Council's deliberation agreement) (*Charte de Qualité*).

While shadowing the expert in "quality" (one of the 3 full-time officers) and sitting in on the *Commission Qualité*, I was able to witness the process in action. The expert first meets with the mayor of the candidate-village to get a sense of the motivations and readiness for commitment. If there is an urbanism document[39], such as a *Plan Local d'Urbanisme* (PLU) or ZPPAUP, they go over it together to identify possible problematic zones today and in the future. These *documents d'urbanisme* are a major sign for the *Association* of the political will to protect and fixate rural character in the long term, and it has become an implied requirement. Such documents are not compulsory under French law and are costly to have drafted, usually by external consulting firms. The expert then conducts an assessment visit in the village, assigning a grade for each criteria of heritage quality, access, and legibility for the public. Along with producing a grade sheet, the expert conducts a photo-report that he will present to the next *Commission Qualité* for deliberation.

The *Commission Qualité* is composed of mayors from member-villages, experts, and partners, and convenes twice a year to decide on candidates based on the expert's report and the recommendation of those commission members who have visited the candidate sites (often anonymously). Yearly, only about 10 percent of candidate-villages are accepted into the *Association*. There is no absolute quota nor quota by region, although candidates from a region where there already exists a cluster of member-villages will unavoidably be compared to nearest member-villages, which can influence the objectivity of the assessment. In other words, if a candidate happens to be located a few miles away from a village with very high heritage quality,

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[39] Even though the term "urban" may be surprising when speaking about a village, this is the term used by developers and planners on the ground, as villages are simply small urban centers, with building, streets, etc.

it will implicitly be judged against local standards in order to keep the label coherent geographically (visitors are likely to visit more than one PBVF in a particular region).

When the verdict falls, it is rarely a straight yes-no decision. A particular village can indeed be admitted as is, but frequently it is admitted with some contingencies and the expectation that a number of projects should be undertaken before re-inspection. In this case, the label can be used by local municipalities to convince residents of the necessity of such and such projects. If a village is outwardly denied membership, it can be excluded with no possibility of ever being accepted (in the case of the presence of some unacceptable feature such as contemporary village sprawl, or a complete lack of "heritage value"), or the door can be kept open when the *Association* sees potential for improvement. In this latter case, the village is informed that a later application would be considered when the municipality is ready to present a stronger dossier. In this case, recommendations for improvements are also made. "*We help them*" (President Chabert). Once a village is granted the label, the municipal team, the mayor, and the inhabitants become stewards of local heritage and responsible for upholding the demands of the label, in public spaces as well as private spaces if those are visible from public vantage points.

Re-evaluation process - Incentive for localities, burden too

The process of "reclassement" and "déclassement" aims at enhancing the credibility of the *Association*. "*Villages are not PBVF forever. They should not think that once in, they can let loose of their efforts. Because for some, that's what they think*" (Commission member). In 2011, it was thus decided that a regular and systematic process of "re-expertise" would take place every six years in each member-village, which means that every year the Délégué Général is

responsible for around 26 re-evaluations of member villages, in addition to the incoming new candidacies. Yearly, he is on the road to visit around 40 villages, executes and presents reports on each, is present at the various meetings of the *Commission Qualité* and *Assemblée Générale* and any other ad hoc project meetings. This makes for a busy position with frequent seasonal peaks:

> "*My job as a technician is to analyze, to abstract all of that and to present the village in the most objective way possible.*"

> "*I even think the expertise visits should take place at four different times in the year, to make it truly exhaustive, because from a point of view of the landscape context, it would be more interesting. Right now, they take place from April to August or September, which poses problems in terms of fairness of evaluation because it's the hyper-touristic season and the weather is always sunny, so subjectively you think everything is great.*"

4.1.7.3. The process of patrimonialization on the ground: How MBVF "makes" heritage

Recap of the process

Practically, the "*labellisation*" or "*classement*" process takes place through a series of steps:

- A village submits a request. At this point two criteria are eliminatory: 1) the *commune* must be "rural"; and 2) it must include two sites recognized on the national inventory of protected sites (natural or architectural).

-The "quality expert" (one of three full-time officers) meets with the village mayor to learn about motivations, commitment, and to look over a *Plan Local d'Urbanisme* (PLU) or ZPPAUP if they exist, and to identify challenges.

-The expert completes his village assessment, assigning a grade for each criteria of heritage quality, access, and legibility. The photo-report is produced.

-The Commission (composed of mayors from member-villages, experts, and partners) convenes.

-The verdict, rarely a straight *oui/non* decision, falls.

In 2012, the Association turned thirty years old. It was an opportune time for the mature

organization to reexamine motives and rethink practices in a changed context: intensification of

mass tourism (some villages receive over a million visitors over the three summer months),

hyper-mobility, new means of communication, *rurbans*'[40] emergence, and the

internationalization of the network.

4.1.7.4. Charte de qualité: Criteria defining the "beautiful"

> History, or a dependence on history, is still essential, even though it is a history which treats the vernacular and the everyday event. Art also belongs with landscape studies …, for it is only when we begin to participate emotionally in a landscape that its uniqueness and beauty are revealed to us (Jackson 1980, p. 18).

> "*For us, a landscape of quality is about creating an emotion. That is what we try to do, we want to create places of emotion" ("lieux d'émotion") (Association* Officer*).

The "criteria," or *charte de qualité,* were developed as a double approach aiming at

evaluating not only urbanistic and architectural qualities, but also the demonstrated will when it

comes to *mise en valeur*, development, promotion, and animation of heritage. The urbanistic

quality is appreciated in terms of the characteristics of village surroundings, dimension of built

mass, homogeneity of built mass, and diversity in "*cheminements*" (i.e. ways to meander in the

village). These factors favor small and gathered general structures to the detriment of villages

built on linear plans. The architectural quality is measured in terms of harmony and homogeneity

of built volumes, harmony and homogeneity of façades and rooftop materials, harmony and

homogeneity of openings (doors and windows), harmony and homogeneity of façades and

rooftop colors, and presence of symbolic décor elements. On the ground, the expert takes notes

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[40] A word used by the State and social scientists to refer to people who live in rural *communes* in proximity to bigger cities where they work.

of these criteria and fills out a form to synthesize his findings. He will then present it the

Commission Qualité in addition to his photo-report documenting his observations.

Example of a diagnostic form

LES PLUS BEAUX				*Commission qualité*	
VILLAGES DE France				**XX/XX/2011**	
		VILLAGE NAME	Département		
			Région		
		XXX	ha.		
		XXX	inhab.		
Date and reason for evaluation :		XX/XX/2011	Evaluation 1		
Village listed on :		XX/XX/2011			
			DIAGNOSTIC FORM		
			Low	**Medium**	**High**	**Very High**
1. HERITAGE REALITY					
		• Protected		●	
2. VILLAGE QUALITY					
	■ Urban	• Surroundings			●	
		• Size/dimension			●	
		• Homogeneity				●
		• Street/ Road network		●	
	■ Architectural	• Volumetry				●
		• Rooftops				●
		• Façades			●	

		• Ordinary vernacular heritage elements		●		
3. ENHANCEMENT						
	■ Urban policy	• Urbanism		●		
	■ Aesthetic treatment	• Networks			●	
		• Public spaces			●	
		• Built environment		●		
	■ Enhancement	• Lighting		●		
		• Vegetation				●
	■ Control over flux of visitors	• Traffic			●	
		• Parking			●	
		Committee Decision :				

In addition, the criteria devoted to the evaluation of local political will to engage in satisfactory management of local heritage assesses a series of enhancement, valorization, promotion, development, and usage qualities.

4.1.8. Geographic location of member-villages

One word must be said about the geographic location of member-villages that is revealing of several dynamics. Glancing at the map immediately renders evident that a disproportionate number of *Plus Beaux Villages* are located south of the Loire River (an axis regularly used to separate north from south), with several dense clusters, compared to the sparse and scattered pattern of member-villages' location in the northern half of the national territory.

Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France

Map by Dilys Bowman for Helene Ducros, June 2014
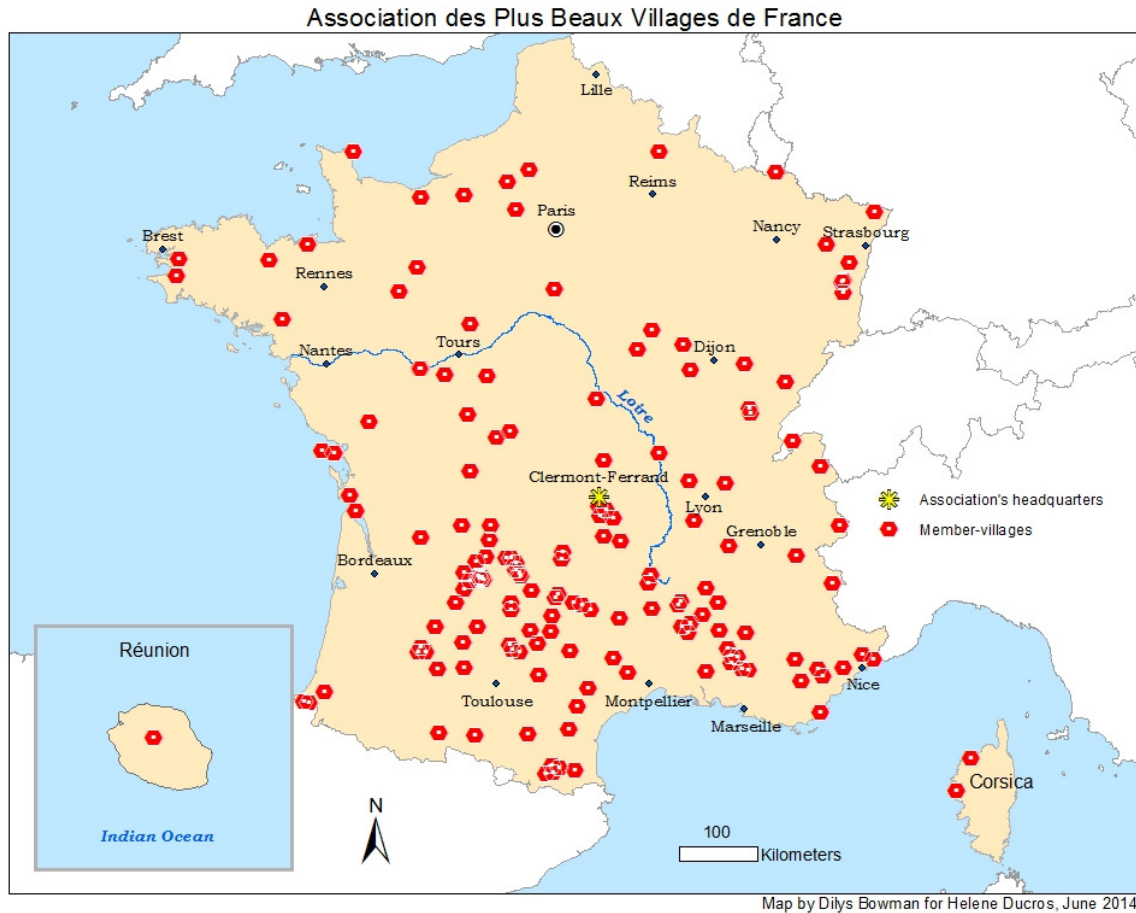
Map 3: An uneven geographic distribution of member-villages

This distribution can be explained by local history, decision-makers' local development politics over the last three decades, as well as the evolution of regional agriculture. More generally, the geography of the *Most Beautiful Villages of France* is linked to economic opportunities (or lack thereof) in the particular region at stake, as well as the social and historical forces that made it possible for a valuable centuries-old built-heritage to be still standing and without the proliferation of unsightly contemporary sprawl.

"Why do we have *Plus Beaux Villages de France* today? It's easy. It's because of poverty and abandonment. The map of the PBVF is principally a map of poverty in France's *campagnes* …. What people overlooked and deserted before was in effect preserved, in its own 'juice'. They left it alone, there was nothing there, just utter poverty, so today it can be a resource locally. It's a lucky thing… In their

misery, these places got very very lucky." (*Association* President 2014, in response to the question over geographic distribution).

There are two main dimensions in the explanation for the geographic distribution of PBVF: the presence of a physical heritage of architectural and historical interest and/or the necessity to explore new development paths, such as tourism, because of the decline in local economic activities. As the previous quotes indicates, both aspects are connected historically. The fact that these places found themselves on the margins of urbanization and industrialization from the 19th century on is one component of the explanation for the regional distribution of member-villages. Moreover, it is this convergence of the presence of a preserved heritage and the desire for a new path for development in the 20th and 21st centuries (since membership is based on a voluntary application) where other opportunities may not exist, that makes certain villages more likely to seek membership and to be qualified as members.

Few villages seek membership in the rich cereal plains of the center of France or the industrialized north. Furthermore, let us not forget that many localities were heavily bombed by German or Allies' fires during the First World War or the Liberation combats of 1944, so that many villages lost their architectural heritage and thus would not be able to meet the necessary heritage quality criteria. On the other hand, it is also to be noted that in the southern part of France a number of member-villages have had a touristic vocation since the 19th century or even prior to that, especially in the case of those localities that are situated along pilgrimage routes, such as the villages that have flourished on the Way of St. James. Conques in Aveyron is one example of a long-established halt for pilgrims, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site, with its 11th century Romanesque abbey, also listed on the National Inventory (*Monuments Historiques*).

The *cluster* effect can also be partly explained by the fact that within a region local mayors know each other and may encourage each other to submit a dossier.

> "I told the Mayor of … that he should try his luck, they need it over there. It's worked for us, it definitely brings us people and new businesses. It would be nice to have more than one PBVF in the area, so even more people come. When people visit PBVFs, they like to do several in a row, without great distances in between, especially because we are not on a main highway route. So it'd be good for them to be a PBVF, and it'd be good for us too to have more than one in the area. In my opinion, if we are too isolated, it may not be as positive for the region as a whole, and for the single village either. At the same time, if there is too much concentration, it may hurt us, but I doubt it." (a Mayor of a PBVF in a region with only scattered members)

> "We do not solicit villages to seek membership. But locally or within a region, mayors talk to each other. If they get along well, they share information and they may influence each other to seek membership. That's how you can explain some neighboring *communes* being members sometimes. Of course, they also have to have what it takes." (*Association* Officer).

Another dimension of membership which needs to be mentioned is that of regional pride and regional identity. Alsace, for example, is a region in which agriculture is still a vital part of the local economy, with successful and world-renowned wine production. So why would villages there seek membership if the motivation were purely economic? As a border region with a strong regional identity, it is important for people there to be recognized at the national level, beyond the tangible economic benefits. Furthermore, one factor that can explain the geography of member-villages is also the presence of competing organizations with regional reach, such as in Brittany, another area of France with a strong regional identity and where a local association has brought together localities under the label of "*Les Petites Cités de Caractère*" since before the *Plus Beaux Villages de France* were created, so that a lesser number of villages in that region may be drawn to the national-scale organization today.

Finally, one element to consider in answering the question over geographic distribution is that of the internal functioning of the *Association* itself and the processes by which villages are accepted as members. Although the procedure is based on objective criteria, human subjectivity,

architectural familiarity, and aesthetic sensibilities may play a role in the selection process since the members of the *Commission Qualité* are themselves mayors of member-villages and may be influenced by what they have in mind about what a MBVF should look like, thus privileging villages with architectural traits that resemble their own *communes*, which may result in excluding villages that are very different and most likely located in regions where different materials are used, for example (Chapter 4 will expand on this matter).

Explaining the distribution of PBVF member-villages is an intricate task because many underlying forces combine and converge to create an array of situations: the state of the agricultural sector vis-à-vis other economic opportunities (such as tourism), the presence of valuable built-heritage (which is itself linked to socio-economic history in many cases), local political will, historical events that unraveled locally, but also the nature of the terrain (a village on a rocky spur is less likely to have developed unsightly "sprawl" or developed industrial capacities), regional pride and regional network effect. All these make it that localities may be motivated to seek the label and that they may have what it takes to be accepted in.

Below: a sampling of member-villages having successfully been submitted to evaluation (all photos by author):

Figure 8: Oingt (Rhône; Région Rhône-Alpes)

Figure 9: Charroux (Allier; Région Auvergne)

Figure 10: Brousse-le-Château (Aveyron; Région Midi-Pyrénées)

Figure 11: Saint-Quirin (Moselle; Région Lorraine)

Figure 12: Séguret (Vaucluse; Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur)

Figure 13: Candes-Saint-Martin (Indre-et-Loire; Région Centre)

Figure 14: Gerberoy (Oise; Région Picardie)

Figure 15: Gordes (Vaucluse; Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur)

Twenty three criteria to evaluate heritage value and heritage management

The evaluation form used in the field is a template that was created based on the twenty three criteria listed in the *Charte de Qualité*. The *Charte* is made available to candidates (it is readily available online on the Association's website), so that the process is transparent and candidate villages know what to expect.

Valorization (11 criteria):
        Existence of a *document d'urbanisme* (PLU or ZPPAUP for example)
        Control over permanent or temporary automobile traffic
        Organization of parking
        Aesthetic treatment of visible electric or telephone lines (underground lines are favored, or they should be flushed against facades at to minimize visual interference)
        Existence of a color palette (for doors, façades, shutters, etc.)
        Treatment of public lighting
        Illumination (of monuments or village vistas)
        Vegetal enhancement and flowers
        Treatment of advertisement and signage
        Treatment of public spaces (squares, market halls, etc.)
        Façades renovation

Development (5 criteria):
        Knowledge of touristic flow
        Presence of leisure and hospitality offerings
        Presence of artistic craftsmen or services
        Presence of commerce and shops
        Participation in intercommunal structures (communauté de communes)

Promotion (4 criteria):
        Presence of an information point for the public
        Organization of guided visits
        Publishing of promotional documents
        Directional and informative signage

Activity offering and facilitating ("animation") (3 criteria):
        Presence of places devoted to festive occasions (covered or outside)
        Organization of original and quality events
        Organization of permanent or temporary events

Committee Decision options are:
Admitted
Admitted with reserve
Temporary No
Definitive No

Figure 16: Example of the treatment of utility meters in public space

Figure 17: Burying electrical lines in Charroux (Auvergne)

4.1.7.5. Other charters generated by member-villages

In addition to the *Charte de Qualité* that is part of the *Association*'s main framework, member-villages are increasingly interested in generating additional tools to address various

challenges in the utilization of public space and designed to address precise issues, such as the

expansion of café terraces on the public domain and commercial architecture (shop façades,

window contents, signage, advertisement, lighting) in the village. According to the *Association*'s

Délégué Général, these *chartes* have been in existence for decades, but mostly in the urban

setting. However,

"*with the development of rural tourism and the ensuing financial appetites, certain villages adopt these chartes in order to control terrace sprawl and attempt to avoid that the commercial use of the public domain bring more inconveniences than advantages.*"

The *chartes*

"*…allow communes to question and find solutions on different aspects of the life of the city (commercial life, accessibility, access for health and firefighting services, tranquility of residents, aesthetics…)*".

Charte des terrasses

"*To give the city-center a coherent identity*" (La Charte des terrasses de la ville d'Eguisheim)

Eguisheim, a member-village located in Alsace, elaborated a detailed document dictating

the ways in which restaurant and café terraces could make use of public space (i.e. streets and

squares). The objective is to "affirm patrimonial, touristic, and cultural identity" of the village.

"The appearance of terraces and signage must provide a supplementary asset to the commercial

dynamic of the village and to the quality of living surroundings for residents, on the same footing

as façade restoration and window arrangement" (p.3). The *charte* constitutes a detailed

description of the procedure to follow to apply for permission to exercise commercial activities

on public space, the spaces in the village that are not to be occupied at all by commercial

activity, and rules of aesthetic coherence around color palette, material, furniture style (from

umbrellas to chairs, tables, and awnings, flower pots, and signage with various functions). In La

Bastide-Clairence, where a *charte des terrasses* was also drawn, it was seen as necessary to

operate a "conciliation…between, on one hand, the needs of shopkeepers and artisans when it comes to the use of public space and commercial attractiveness, and on the other hand the imperatives linked to the valorization of urban space, public safety, as well as access for people with reduced mobility." (Charte de la Bastide-Clairence, p.1). Recommendations for each type of elements are made via photos of do's and don'ts, privileging homogeneity, noble materials, minimized visual pollution in terms of colors and patterns, and light use rather than compact.

Figure 18: Yvoire, Haute-Savoie (Rhône-Alpes)

Figure 19: Pérouges, Ain (Rhône-Alpes)

It is no surprise that these tools have emerged in the management of space in the member-villages. Restaurants for tourists have replaced the "café du coin" (corner's café). In the heavy and sunny tourist season, flows of tourists crowd these places and expansion of space for tables and chairs in the front part of the restaurant when it is not possible in the back can get quite dramatic, as to even hinder pedestrian passage in some places. Moreover, the visual disturbance is seen as irreconcilable with the aesthetic dimension of the "beautiful" villages. "Our village, touristic commune, but also listed among the 'Most Beautiful Villages of France', is characterized by various spaces protected by the Monuments Historiques and remaining under the guide of the Architecte des Bâtiments de France" (Charte de la Bastide-Clairence). The *Association*, along with national heritage institutions, serve as a legitimization for the regulatory *charte*.

Charte des commerces et façades

    Chartes addressing other services have also emerged, such as the ones on shops and commercial façades. In Domme, a simple "Charte des commerces" regulates the appearance of shops and all associated commercial displays, from façades to window decoration. It dictates the maximum size of signage, the type of lighting authorized (prohibiting neon lights, blinking lights, fluorescent lights, "heavy" design, materials other than wood, metal, iron, glass, or plexiglass) and excluding the use of plastic for all outside movables, such as planters which must be made out of stone or wood, or chairs, tables, and umbrellas, which must be made of either wood (natural or painted), lacquered metal, rattan, wrought iron, or toile.

The drawing of these urbanistic documents is entirely attributable to the villages themselves, although it is probable that the ABF and regional "Conseils d'Architecture, d'Urbanisme, et de l'Environnement" are vested in the projects and serve as consultants. The *Association* also plays an important role as, upon request from member-mayors in 2011, it organized technical workshops on the occupation of public space during the annual general assembly. Moreover, it encourages villages which had developed these regulatory tools to share them with others via the Extranet site to which all member-villages have access with a protected password. From the point of view of the *Association*, these tools are still too recent to be able to draw conclusions about implementation and results, but it sees the use of public space as an increasingly important stake in local development, so that these *chartes* may emerge in an increasing number of member-villages. "*The Association will advocate for these tools by inviting mayors to go on our extranet*" (*Association* officer).

4.2.   Evolution of the *Association* at the institutional level

The current phase in which the Association exists is characterized by professionalization and internationalization. While first generation and second generation villages still face relatively favorable treatment with respect to the *Charte de Qualité*, new candidates face an organization which has tightened its admission criteria, reorganized as to address the different poles (*qualité, notoriété, developpement*) of its original mission more efficiently, and expanded its influence outside of the borders of France, creating an international network around the common thematics of life and development in the "rural". First generation villages are those that joined in the first wave when Mr. Ceyrac made the initial call. Second generation villages (1982-1990) are the generation "coup de coeur" (heart-stopper), which were admitted under limited scrutiny. And

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third generaion villages are those which were admitted post 1991 under the scrutiny of the 23 criteria of the *Charte de Qualité*. Since 2005, the new strategy is aimed at reaffirming values and approach, clarifying competencies, and re-centering authority around the mayors, as to not "getting stuck in immobilism" (La lettre d'infos des Plus Beaux Villages de France, October 2005).

4.2.1. Professionalization on the ground and mobilization of local elected officials

> *"Today we need to acquire and maintain a critical mass. If we want to have weight, visibility, and everything that goes with it, the capacity to mobilize at once visitors and media, future partners, we need that critical mass. Today one of the main challenges of our network is this critical mass, this national dimension that makes it possible for us to mobilize actors, gives us visibility and also legibility of our actions".*
>
> *"I also would like an evaluation of our tools, concretely."* (Pascal Bernard, Délégué Général des *Plus Beaux Villages de France*, in 2011).

Professionalization of the structure of the *Association* has taken place since 1991. After phase one, it became clear that in order to acquire legitimacy and constitute more than a group of mayor friends joined in a common development mission, the structure and means had to be complemented by a rigorous methodology to face its goals efficiently and meaningfully. While some critiques came from the outside in terms of the validity and legitimacy of the label, changes were mainly the results of reflections *within* the organization. While this professionalization started with the establishment of the formal criteria for admission, the process is on-going, with the *Association* expanding its toolkit with new means to achieve the goals set in 1982. New technologies make it possible to generalize exchange opportunities in order to share information and best practices across regions. Annual meetings of the global network enables "older" associations to learn from the ways in which newer associations are organizing and incorporating modern technology into their methodologies.

4.2.1.1. Professionalization in methodology

Increased networking and internal communication

"To create a solidarity network, concerned with the preservation and valorization of our

communes' exceptional patrimony as to make it into the bedrock for their development"

(Maurice Chabert, President, in Point.Com, January 2007). Since 2005 and the formal

establishment of the communication pole of activity (with the hiring of a full time delegate for

the pole "notoriété/communication"), the *Association* has become a tool in development

strategies on the ground. It has developed avenues for direct exchanges between communes. The

Association serves as a facilitator to foster dialogue and the diffusion of best practices between

its members, while effacing itself from the function of making direct recommendations. Several

tools have spurred this development: the extranet and its "tool box", an internal newsletter

published four times a year, and the *ateliers techniques* (technical workshops) it organizes during

the General Assembly week end on themes chosen by the mayors. The consumption of these

various communication means vary with the parties' comfort level with modern technology and

willingness to implicate themselves in the network nature of the project.

Internet and Extranet "tool box"

The extranet was created in 2011 to provide a direct link between mayors as to enhance

their authority in the network. The site is the members-only part of the internet site that was

created in 2006. It is reachable via password protected access. The "tool box" is where mayors

can contribute documents that exemplify best practices, such as the various *chartes* devoted to

the utilization of public space. Also there can be found meeting minutes and other *Association*

business documents. The extranet traffic has been irregular and currently the Association would

like to enhance the frequency of use of this tool as well as get accurate measures of traffic. "*I would like to implement a monthly or tri-monthly indicators to analyze the functioning/dysfunctioning of our tools"* (Pascal Bernard).

Point.com Newsletter

The current newsletter, *Point.com*, started in 2006 to replace the *Lettre d'Infos*. It is published four times a year to give general information about the Association's doings, villages' news, office of tourism results, announcements of mayors' death, new candidates and new members, etc. It is meant to establish a meaningful link between member-villages and to incite mayors to get involved in the life of the Association. In just a few pages, it is able to inform all project's constituencies of new directions and events; it reinforces old ideas with new means and new energy; and it keep members involved in the life of the *Association*. Several mayors interviewed described that they look forward to receiving their *Point.com* to discover what has been achieved and how new projects are going in various member-villages. The newsletter is written in non-technical terms but remains precise and complete. It is also sent to those in the general public who have subscribed as "*amis*" and pay a yearly fee to support the *Association*.

Ateliers techniques: Workshops dealing with use of space

Since 2010, technical workshops have been organized over the week-end of the annual general assembly. These are led by *Association* staff and external experts and may address particular issues about heritage management or space management. Examples of themes are: distance working as an avenue to develop PBVF (2010), the use of the ZPPAUP as a tool to efficiently protect and enhance a PBVF (2010), commercial activities vs. life in the village in the

public domain (2011), artistic trades as development in PBVF (2011), parking challenges (2012), the question of "*intercommunalité*" (2012), how to make commercial endeavors more durable and dynamic in historic centers (2013), the PBVF and accessibility- technical and economic constraints in relation to the 2005 law on disability- (2013), or managing motor homes and RVs (upcoming in 2014). Through these pedagogical workshops, information and knowledge is diffused, best practices are exchanged, and common visions over particular space management issues shaped.

Effort at integrating and contributing to other heritage-based events locally

The *Association* is also taking advantage and integrating into its strategy other heritage-based events such as the *Journées du Patrimoine* organized at the national level, *Journées Européennes des Métiers d'Art* at the European level. "For the PBVF these days are the opportunity to be valorized as sites of creation and talent through an event of European scale." (Point.com January/February/March 2014). The PBVF benefit from the high visibility and notoriety of these events and it is an opportunity for the label to receive publicity in return.

4.2.3. Working with local Tourism Offices and partnering with Tour Operators

The division of labor within the *Association* with the creation of the *Commission Notoriété* and *Commission Développement* in 2005 marks a turning point in the realm and scope of activities to support the *Association*'s objectives. Even though tourism had always been one of the pillars which reinforced the *Association'*s mission, until those organizational branches came to delineate their respective fields of action, tourism was more of a context rather than a tool to

directly exploit and trigger. It is revealing that the two *déléguées* in charge of these axes of development within the organization emanate from academic training in the field of tourism as well as professional experience in place-development, place image development, tourism consulting, and tourism sector of small cities' chambers of commerce. Considering that over 300 people applied for the positions at the time, it is clear that a training in tourism studies and applications was favored as an asset to palliate some of the existing challenges and to prepare the future.

Connecting with local Tourism Offices and encouraging the development of tools to measure tourism flows and characteristics through those offices has become an important part of the *Association*'s activities. Local Tourism Offices are embedded in the villages and on the front lines for contact not only with visitors but also with residents, so that they constitute a great source of data for the *Association*. Additionally, the Association has partnered with tour operators since its beginnings, with various level of success. Rather than selling package trips to villages, currently the tour operator "*4 roues sous un parapluie*" has been selling a 2CV Rally going from Paris to Cannes in the mythical two horse-power Citroën which, the legend goes, was created for a farmer to transport a dozen eggs without breaking them, or two farmers and a sack of potatoes, or two farmers and a keg of wine. Whatever the legend one believes in, it is revealing that the 2CV is associated with rural life and farming, and thus it is sensible that two symbols of the village and the 2CV unite in a joint patrimonial endeavor. Through an itinerary that takes participants through twenty PBVF, this endeavor is meant as an opportunity to visit the villages "another way" (PBVF website). The 2 CV adds a nostalgic and ludic dimension to the travelers' experience, away from mainstream tourism conceptions.

Figure 20: Charroux, September 2012, on the day of the Journées du Patrimoine

4.2.4. Effort at quantifying results

4.2.4.1. In terms of "frequentation"

Since 2005, the *Association* has struggled with trying to quantify the impact the label may have on the villages in terms of numbers of visitors. In cooperation with local tourism offices, instruments have been implemented to try to evaluate trends in visitors' statistics. "The question of harmonization of the system evaluating the number of visits remains whole… The counting procedure is not subject to any regulation on a national scale" (Point.com, January 2006). Furthermore, the difficulty of distinguishing between different types of clientele, from day passage to overnight stay, visitors' origins, or reasons for visit, makes it challenging to evaluate economic impact, especially because the structures set up for observation are locally based and data collectors are not equipped with the necessary instruments for such analysis.

However, member-villages persevere in this effort and in many cases are able to establish trends. In 2009, the Association's conclusions, based on a survey in 45 member-villages (30 percent of the network at the time), were that the number of visitors was thought to be "good", with an improvement in the off-season, but that tourists had reduced their spending in villages (Point.com January 2010). More or less identical conclusions were made for 2013, based on the responses by 31 percent of the network. The number or visits seem stable with four out of five respondents evaluating the number of visits as good or very good, with an amelioration in the off-season for 65 percent of respondents. Furthermore, visitors are French for 53% and foreign for 57 percent[41] and the ratio is considered to be stable (in descending order foreign visitors are Belgians, British, Dutch, Germans) (Point.com, January/February/March 2014). These numbers are based on surveys at information points such as tourism offices. They are not systematic and counting procedures present many challenges, especially in villages when no such structure exists. Furthermore, the proportion of the villages partaking in data analysis has not increased in the last five years, indicating a weakness in the ability to mobilize structures on the ground to effectuate that work, the ability to face the challenges associated with the procedural aspect of counting visitors, or a disinterest on the part of local mayors to respond to the request.

4.2.4.2. In terms of population

The *Association* is also interested in following the demographic trends in PBVFs. Since its mission is to keep life in the villages, have the member-villages lost of gained population since obtaining the label? In 2009, the census revealed a slight augmentation from 106,580

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[41] 53+57 = 110%. Numbers are those published in Point.com.

inhabitants to 107,139. This change equates to the national average of +0.5 percent yearly growth in rural population (Point.com January 2010), indicating that PBVFs are not experiencing a specific demographic trend.

4.2.5. International expansion: From national to local, from local to international

"In 25 years of activity, the *Association*'s approach went beyond national borders and was imitated. More than a recognition, an opportunity for cooperation at the European scale and even beyond" (Point.com, January 2007, p. 4).

4.2.5.1. The "network" dimension – from local to national to global scale

The *Association* model has been adopted and adapted in eight other nations worldwide since 1982. The push for the construction of the Association as a network took a new dimension in 2003 when the French, Walloon, and Italian networks together formed the *Federation of the Most beautiful villages of the World* with the objective to "promote, through permanent exchange of experiences and know-hows, a sustainable territorial management and development model for, based on the participation of local actors and guaranteeing the preservation of architectural, environmental, and immaterial heritage." (Point.com, January 2007, p.4). In spite of different national traditions of landscape appreciation, the cultural transfer of a local idea about heritage and identity preservation was possible because it addresses common global challenges. The French model was successfully adapted to other cultural, historical, and economic contexts. In 2012, the international *Federation* was officially created, its by-laws voted, and its logo adopted in 2013. France, Wallonia, Italy, Canada, and Japan are founding members. In the longer term, it

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is envisaged that several of the remaining national associations will be able to join the international network formally.

The international expansion was not part of the project as initially conceptualized by the Ceyrac-Valeix tandem. Although a community of communities was the goal, France was seen as the limited context for it. It was a surprise for them to be contacted by a Walloon mayor wanting to start a similar association in the Francophone part of Belgium. From that point on they considered whether or not it would be possible to externalize the concept. At the time, Mr. Valeix remembers today that they did not have responses for the proposition and it seemed to them to be pure folly in the face of the challenges with which they already dealt in France. Therefore, Mr. Valeix recognizes, the international network established itself a bit in spite of them. Outside networks took the French model as a template but the *Association* did not do much for them initially. It was the Italian and Japanese associations that pushed for an official international dimension for the network. "*The movement happened without us, we did not have time to devote to it. But the question was posed … If the concept were to be exportable, then caution needed to be exercised in the way it was produced and reproduced in each context* (Valeix).

The spread of the concept made clear that in many countries the sensibility to the notion of "heritage" existed but that the content varied greatly from country to country, even within Europe. The other important question immediately posed by the externationalization of the concept is that of knowing if memory could be internationalized at the European scale. When asked why the model works particularly well in France, Mr. Valeix asserts that it is in France that there exists the greatest political sensitivity to the rural, even though this sensibility has been fading. In the 1980s and 1990s, the political sphere paid much attention to the rural world. It is

telling that it is the Ministry of Agriculture that was one of the initial funding agencies for the project, while the Ministry of Culture received funding requests with much disdain, placing the model in the political outlook as a rural development project rather than a "high culture" endeavor. For Mr. Valeix, the international expansion is a "hollow shell" and he is still not convinced of its benefits. For him, it is more about validating the value of a model out of pride than about accomplishing results in concert with other countries. He questions whether Mr. Ceyrac would have chosen that path. If so, it would constitute the first emancipation from the original *Association* model.

4.2.5.2. The Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages of the World

"What would Mr. Valeix think now?" In July 2012, sister associations met to formally discuss the legal formation of the *Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages of the World* and finalize its by-laws. Aside from delegations from Japan, Wallonia, Quebec, and Italy, representing officers for the nascent Spanish association were present, as were observers from Saxony (both associations have been officially created since then). Over the few days spent exploring common goals and motivations and sharing best practices in terms of implementation, one thing became clear: the place of the rural in those nations remains central to the resilience of the idea of the nation under pressure from globalization. Observation of discussions and deliberations revealed that for all representatives present, the rural is seen not only as the place that captures the past but also as the place that makes the future possible. This possibility is made feasible by the development of heritage tourism and the conversion from an agriculture-based local economy to an economy of reception.

Heritage attractions are part of … 'new' tourism, especially in terms of their supply. Particularly in the 1980s, their popularity became an established feature of tourism demand and promotion. Countries are now in effect being relabeled for tourism purposes, to invoke an integrative heritage theme for their localities. The emphasis on heritage products has become a phenomenon across the developed world. A heterogeneity of attraction types has also developed, further emphasizing the diversity inherent in the 'new' tourism era. (Prentice 2005)

Through rural landscape preservation, the socio-economic aspect of the rural is saved. The French association model has been adopted in nations as distinct and geographically distant as Japan and Québec, because the challenges faced by many rural areas are comparable there. The criteria were adopted to local specificities. For example, in Romania, less rich in terms of architectural patrimony (destroyed in part during the Ceausescu era), the focus is on human capital and folklore. It is accepted by the officers that most villages in the Walloon Association would not "pass" the French criteria, but their criteria were rewritten to create an evaluation grid which is consistent with the reality of Walloon rurality.
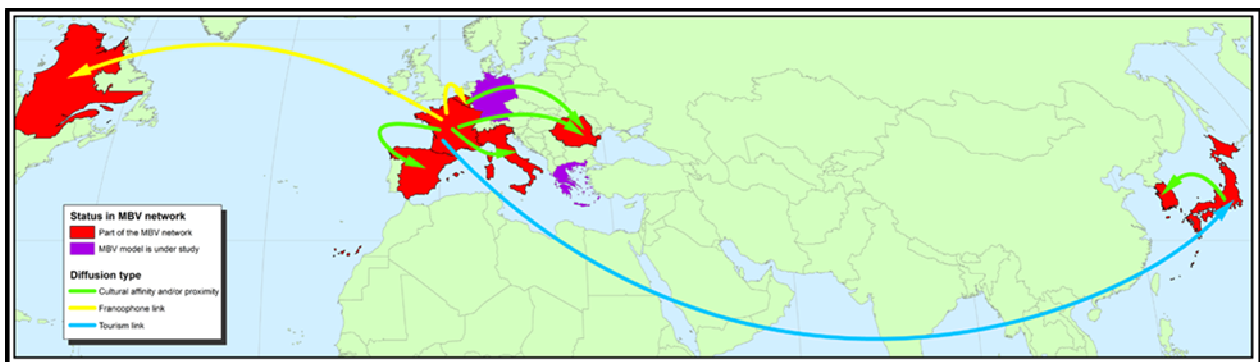
Map 4: Diffusion map
(By Dr. Rebecca Dobbs, 2013)

The diffusion of the French model and the movement from a national to an international network followed a trajectory of geographic, cultural, and linguistic affinities. Interviews with the Presidents and other official representatives in seven national associations but South Korea revealed the way the concept circulated from France to other parts of the world. While it took

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more than a decade for the French model to be noticed beyond France's borders, it was the

Francophone parts of Belgium and Canada that became interested first. Through individuals'

travels within the Francophone linguistic zone, exchanges were made and a collaborative

network of mayors and community organizers emerged. Italy and Romania, always close to

France culturally, expressed their interest in the Association model as well. The Japanese

association might be a surprise, but not considering that France and Italy are among the top

destinations of Japanese tourists (UN World Tourism, 2011). Through their travels to Most

Beautiful Villages in other nations, the Japanese brought the idea home. Most recently, under the

guidance of Japan, South Korea formed its own network in 2013, indicating that a new diffusion

center is emerging in Asia. Even though Spain, a neighbor of France, only just created its official

national network, activity to create regional labels based on the model existed before that.

Table 1: Diffusion Links

Association	Created in	# of villages to date	Diffusion Link
Mature national Associations: Full-members of the Federation of the Most Beautiful of the World			
France	1982	156	Collonges-la-Rouge: Epicenter
Wallonia	1994	24	Cultural affinity/Francophone
Québec	1998	35	Cultural affinity/Francophone
Italy	2001	208	Geographic/Proximity
Japan	2005	49	Geographic/Tourism and business travels
National Association exists; Observers in the international Federation			
Romania	2010	81	Geographic/Education and business travels
Spain	2013	14	Geographic/Proximity
Korea	2013	6	Geographic/Proximity
Saxony	2013	new	Geographic/Proximity
No legal Association; interest in the network			
Crete			
Russia			
Democratic Republic of the Congo			

In all these countries, the combination of difficult economic conditions and the richness of local history and architectural vestiges led to the identification of "historic" towns where heritage interpretation and its communication to the public have become crucial activities. Admittedly, the *Association* sees the internationalization of the network as an opportunity for further development and legitimation. In 2013, to this end, the *Association* teamed up with Atout France, Agency for Tourism Development under the Ministry of Artisanship, Commerce and Tourism, to publish a bi-lingual "how-to guide" directed towards any nation that wants to create a national association and join the international network (Atout France 2013). The French *Association* likes to remind critics and competitors that it is the only place-quality label in France that has been able to export its values and practices. Far from being inward and past gazing, this is another element to prove that it aspires to be an organization of its time, embracing globalization and preparing a sustainable future for rural communities everywhere, in effect conjuring the twilight of the village by resolving the disjuncture between past, present, and future. Interest has spread globally, from Malta to Bulgaria or Poland. Recently, the *Association* was contacted by an association representing village communities in the République of Congo-Brazzaville that expressed interest in importing the model and learning from the PBVF experience to enhance the lives of agropastoral villages "in harmony with the socio-economic realities of Congolese villages and localities" (Source: PBVF correspondence).

4.3. Brand management: evaluation, surveillance, exploitation

Consequences of this global success are increased visibility but also increased threat to the model from imitations or illegal use of the brand name. As the *Association* took stock for 30 years of efforts in rural France, it was also time to assess its visibility, impact, and coherence as a

"brand". From the day in August 1981 in which Mr. Ceyrac first wrote a letter to his fellow mayors of rural *commune*s to today, the PBVF modernized and professionalized not only with regard to its evaluation techniques and internal organization but also in terms of its image and the value of that image in the public space. The brand of "*Les Plus Beaux Villages de France*" became a registered trademark in February 1991, with a renewal and modification of this registration in 2001 and 2011. It was also in 2011 that the "brand portfolio" was enlarged to include two additional trademarks: the "*Marché aux Vins des Plus Beaux Villages de France*" et "*Journées Artisanales des plus Beaux Villages de France*", putting the Association "at the heart of several financial and technical partnerships" (*Association*, internal document).

4.3.1. Tie-in products

Under its brand, the *Association* produces and/or distributes a limited number of products sold commercially: Guide, album, map. However, the ways in which the commercial structure is set up show a concern for having the distributors on the ground benefit from the sales so that there is a local influx of revenues. The network has also created two major events which have themselves become brands in the legal sense (registered trademarks): The *Marché aux vinx des Plus Beaux Villages de France* (wine market), in which member-villages participate to showcase and sell local wines; and the *Journées Artisanales des plus Beaux Villages de France*, in which artisans settled in PBVF showcase their crafts and artisanal production for sale. No revenue is generated for the *Association* per se through these events. They constitute opportunities for the member-villages to use the visibility of the PBVF brand to attract visitor-consumers and to provide a revenue opportunity for their residents. But they are also understood as instruments of public relation: "The tie-in products…are not only national promotion tools to be sold to the

public, but also public relation tools: present to constituents, local dignitaries, public and private partners." (Point.com October 2009).

4.3.2. Brand protection

The *Association* has hired an intellectual property counsel to evaluate, protect, and regulate the brand and use of the brand. The main challenges the *Association* now faces arose from unfair competition and the lack of standardization in the agreements it holds with partners over the use of the brand. Furthermore, as the *Association* has grown and professionalized, the need to qualify and quantify the notoriety impact of its brand has become essential as a legitimization tool. To that end, the private intellectual property firm has been charged with several short term and long term tasks with respect to brand evaluation, protection, and exploitation. In the short term, the *Association* has solicited (source: internal document):

- a notoriety study, i.e. an evaluation based on concrete and objective data of the impact of the restructuration of the brand since 2005. This study is meant as a tool to justify itself internally to its members, for example when it comes to justify the membership dues, as well as externally, for example to the media. The question asked is "How known are we?"

- a financial evaluation, i.e. an attempt to quantify the economic value of the brand and assess the impact of investments and activities undergone. This evaluation is seen as a useful and concrete tool to place the *Association* in a stronger position in new or re-negotiations of partnerships. The question asked is "How much are we worth?"

- an audit of all agreements linked to the brand, in an effort to harmonize all of them and protect

the *Association*'s legal rights and financial interests. The question asked is "How exposed are we

legally?"

For the longer term, the *Association* mandated the creation of formal "rules of use" of its

brand, as well as a system of surveillance over the use of any of its brand portfolio components

in order to facilitate intervention when illegal or non-compliant use occurs. It also seeks long

term consulting services on intellectual property. In this respect it positions itself in the same

way as a private commercial brand would, using the same tools of protection.

The success of the *Association* and its resulting increased visibility has created a

competitive situation, which has been coined in the media as "*la guerre des labels*" (label war)

and to which the *Association* needs to react if it wants to retain legitimacy, purpose, authority,

validity, and significance regionally, nationally, and now internationally. Today, people act and

react to brand stimuli. We are all mentally formatted to value and desire what we recognize.

Hence, the *Association* approaches its development and sustainability as a successful brand to tap

into this trait of modern societies, and it is organizing to develop the needed tools for

justification, protection, and communication.

4.3.3. The logotype or "logo" for short: identity, self-representation, and communication

In 2012, the *Association* adopted a new logo with the goal of renewing its image to

present to the public the face of a contemporary and dynamic institution while preserving enough

of the old logo that the new logo does not do away with 30 years of successful identification on

the landscape. What the *Association* calls its "*capital notoriété*" is a precious asset for any

labeling organization, especially at a time when instant identification and recognition can make

or break a brand.

Figure 21: Panels showing the old (left) and new (right) logos

Notice the different formulation: From "One of the Most Beautiful Villages of France", the new sign displays instead "Listed among the Most Beautiful Villages of France". The difference is subtle but shows the intention to account for the "process" behind the label.

4.3.3.1. Communicating *about* the landscape *in* the landscape

The communication aspect at its most fundamental is the logo of the *Association*, as well

as those chosen by each sister association to represent its respective heritage landscape ideals.

These logos communicate these ideals to the public in direct ways. As part of the member

agreement, each village must agree to the use of the logo and its display at the entrance of the

village, on a large panel along the side of the road. The logo is part of the vocabulary that the

associations use to translate their approach and values about local landscapes. Each logo

encompasses normative discourse and practices about local perceived authenticity and historical

and cultural significance. The iconography chosen in the logos serves to indicate to the visitor landscape singularity and *genius loci*. An effective logo must be legible, elicit interest, decipher the landscape, and establish trust. A relationship of trust must be created between the logo and the visitors if the network is to remain meaningful and successful, i.e., the logo must be legible and visitors must not be disappointed by what they find. It elicits interest by alerting the viewer that a place is significant. It deciphers the landscape by extracting its meaning through minimalist iconography, and by doing so it starts shaping the visitor's gaze. And the logo establishes trust as it becomes a guarantee of heritage quality and enjoyment for visitors, at the same time that it creates expectations and responsibilities for both visitors and inhabitants.

Figure 22: Panel featuring the logo at the entrance of Baume-les-Messieurs (Jura)

4.3.3.2. Legibility imperative:

As a communication tool, the logo:

- Tells the visitor this place is significant and why

- Prepares the visitor for what he should see in the landscape, shapes his "vision"

- By the seal of approval, inspires trust, it gives a guarantee of heritage "enjoyment"

Interviews with presidents or representatives of each national association revealed that much work and reflection go into designing a legible heritage logo which is to be posted in public spaces. The logo constitutes a direct communication opportunity with the public as it articulates a normative discourse about local authenticity and place significance. The logo is meant to elicit an immediate mental, visual, and emotional reaction about the landscape, often drawing on easily identifiable nationalist or regionalist symbolic imagery. Through their logo's iconography, each association in the global network expresses and transmits its heritage landscape ideals, rooted in its specific historical and cultural context. The cultural images and visual references chosen constitute a vocabulary to signify landscape singularity and *genius loci* to the visitor. Overtime, the logo results in a relationship of trust with visitors who develop expectations about heritage landscape certified by the network. At the same time, inhabitants of the landscape are influenced to envision their place of living through the logo imagery.

4.3.3.3. Comparing international logotypes: Self-representation iconography and cultural symbolic significance

Table 2: International network of the Most Beautiful Villages associations

ASSOCIATION Date of formation # of members (as of April 2014)	Iconography significance (as explained by representatives of each Association – except for Korea that could not be interviewed)	Official logotype
Les Plus Beaux Villages de France 1982 156 members	National symbol of the hexagon Religion/catholicism : Church steeple Green: countryside, rurality 2012 logo: the road invites newcomers and gives movement, landscape is not static nor fixated in the past, echoes the road in the Walloon logo. Flowers removed because of an ambiguity with an existing flower-based logo	
Les Plus Beaux Villages de Wallonie 1994 24 members	Echoes the French model (hexagon, colors, general layout, 3 flowers) Rurality Steeple: Religion marks the landscape	
Les Plus Beaux Villages du Québec 1998 36 members	Echoes cultural symbols used by the French and Walloon models, here adapted to local circumstances. Underlines the key role of waterways in Québec's development, as well as forests and rural milieu. Symbol of the church as a place of reference in Québécois village landscape and place-identification; importance of religion. Nationalist symbol: Fleur de lys	
I Borghi Piú Belli d'Italia 2001 217 members	Focus on built and material heritage Condenses different architectural typologies to express the depth of time and layers of history in the landscape, as well as regional cultural diversity in Italy.	
The Most Beautiful Villages in Japan 2005 49 members	Symbiotic relationship between natural and built environment Kayabuki traditional habitat (the logo shape outlines a thatched roof house) Combines rurality and landscape aesthetics Landscape ideal based on the Satoyama concept which supports the traditional agricultural system and biodiversity Symbols include: wet rice paddy and vegetable fields, rivers and streams, both at the center of small farm agriculture Gentle colors to express harmony and tranquility	

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Cele mai Frumoase Sate din România 2010 30 members	Rurality and agriculture Dominated by the Carpathians Reference to the network through the Hexagon and 3 red flowers (from the old French logo and current Walloon logo) Importance of regional diversity (includes symbols of the 5 historic regions of Romania) Importance of streams in rural life Place of the Catholic religion in national culture	
Los Pueblos mas Bonitos de España 2013 24 members	Rurality ; symbol of the maroon earth and green fields House is at the heart of the landscape Focus is both on natural landscape and inhabitants	
The Most Beautiful Villages in Korea 2013 6 members	Symbols refer to agriculture, rural habitat, water ways, and mountains.	
The Most Beautiful Villages of Saxony 2013 9 members	Colors are meant to indicate diversity. Focus is on built heritage.	
The Most Beautiful Villages of the World 2013 (France, Wallonie, Italie, Canada, Japan)	The global dimension is indicated by the meridian/parallel graticule. The winding roads remains, borrowed from several of the national logos. While the church has disappeared (a reference that tends to be European in nature), a medieval donjon indicates the historic and temporal dimension of heritage, while the houses indicate the lived-in dimension. The logo was designed by the Japanese team and officially adopted at the 2014 Federation General Assembly. Graphics and fonts were chosen as to facilitate adaptation to various diffusion and distribution media, such as pins, which the Japanese currently use as a promotion tool for their national association.	

The logo for the International Federation was designed by the Japanese based on discussions which took place in 2012 at the Constitutive Assembly. The graphism and fonts were created with the production of tie-in products in mind. In fact, the style was adapted as to be reproducible on smaller media, such as pins (the Japanese association often gifts pins as part of its public relations strategy).

4.4.   Comparing the *Association* model to other models of rural heritage promotion

Rural heritage is shared with the public through various means. In an effort to target a public with multiple and varied interests, the offerings have diversified greatly from the single local and formal history museums, to include more participatory and performance-based events. The development of local festivals, fairs, and other "fêtes des terroirs" around particular local themes such as wine-making, artisanship, agricultural traditions, and other key past or revived local activities is a key component of place development today, especially in the summer months. Other projects have taken the form of direct entertainment such as a *Disneyland*-inspired historic theme park. The *Parc Astérix* north of Paris, after the world-renowned Gaul (comic series translated and popular in 107 languages)[42] is one example of entertainment and pedagogical goals being conjoined in a commercial enterprise praising the resilience of the famous "indomitable village" in the face of Romanization, which could be analogized as "Globalization" today. The *Parc Astérix* places second in visitors' numbers, only behind *Disneyland* Paris, thanks to new marketing methods that brought into entertainment new dimensions such as ecology and the discovery of ancient manual trades (Le Monde, Dupont-Calbo, 2013).

4.4.1. Historic village promotion models

Other models of historic village preservation based in the local can be used as points of comparison and context to understand the nature and mission of the Association's project. Indeed, the use of local vernacular culture as a lever for development is not novel. Various models of territorial development have been put into practice incorporating local cultural

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[42] http://www.asterix.com/la-collection/les-traductions/

heritage for economic development, often combining economic, political, pedagogical, and identity-reinforcing functions. Two models are particularly relevant to position the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* in the context of rural museology and public history. Specifically, the "open air living museum" and the "ecomuseum" embody precursor models through which legacy the Association can be apprehended. Like the various associations *of the Most Beautiful Villages of*, these two models constitute strategies of local economic and territorial development that are rooted in heritage-making and preservation, are concerned with interpreting and producing local history for audiences, and seek to enhance or even (re)produce place identity. All have encountered successes and met with criticisms depending on time and place.

4.4.1.1. The open-air museum: historic villages as pedagogical theater

The open-air living museum is a popular model of historic towns in Northern Europe, starting with Sweden's Skansen village in the late 19th century, and in the United States with, for example, Ford's Greenfield Village and Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg in the 1930s. Those villages may be the product of a complete invention and staging like Ford's village and Skansen, meant to be replicas of the past, or instead they can be the result of an effort at selective preservation and restoration of an existing village *in situ*, such as Colonial Williamsburg. Both versions seek to promote a certain understanding of the past by putting the visitors, who have purchased a ticket to enter the gated perimeter, in the reinterpreted context of the time, among costumed actors who act out the "living in the place in the past," often delivering demonstrations of various lost crafts like wood-cutting, glass-blowing, weaving and spinning, or candle-making. Visitors can walk around within the designated perimeter at their own pace or opt to join a

guided tour. A gift shop may propose souvenirs for purchase at the end of the visit. At the time, Skansen's fold museum represented "a new connection between modern forms of spectatorship and emergent notions of rural authenticity… with mannequins functioning as 'in-between figures', capable of signifying presence and absence, the living and the dead in their representations of rural life" (Young 2012, p.46, drawing on Sandberg 2003).

The recurrent criticism made of these models comes in terms of problematic "staged authenticity", rewriting of history, obliteration of selected memories, and faulty pedagogical effects. Re-enactments and costumed performance practices in living museums have also been critiqued as limiting historical discourse by silencing interpretive possibilities (Magelssen 2007). The open air living museum model has elicited a wide range of criticisms since the time it emerged and continues to be condemned in spite of efforts to address critiques and the general indication that the balance of power in heritage sites may be shifting to give more prominence to groups that were overlooked before (Richter 2005). Among many negative analyses, the main critiques are that these projects lack a clear central idea, lack realism in the representation of folk life, encourage romantic nostalgia and static utopia, are elite-driven and elite-commemorative, project a particular desired social order, are disconnected from history, or exhibit a one-dimensionality based on fantasy, while erasing untidy historical events (Wallace 1996; Anderson 1984). It is safe to say that these models are what the *Association* strives *not* to be. Instead, visitors and residents can mingle in member-villages. Visitors come when they want without being restricted by a schedule; they stay as long as they want; and although guided tours may be available during the tourist season, most often a self-guided tour is the rule. This is made possible by well-orchestrated signage schemes and pedagogical displays throughout village

streets (see below) as well as the availability of an official MBVF guide published by Reader's Digest that can be purchased in many libraries in France or on-site in member-villages. Sometimes the presence of a local museum or house museum comes to complement these efforts at landscape legibility.

Figure 23: Examples of signage for self-guided tour

Saint-Saturnin
c'est aussi...

« TEL EST MON US » (tel est mon usage) est la devise qui est écrite deux fois sur le fût de cette fontaine d'époque Renaissance mais de style encore très gothique, qui devait alors se trouver dans la cour du château. Les blasons du réservoir, bûchés à la révolution, laissent entrevoir ce qui pourrait être les armes de Jean de la Tour d'Auvergne et Jeanne de Bourbon-Vendôme, mariés en 1497. La fontaine daterait donc des environs de 1500. Au XVIIème siècle ont été rajoutées les armes de la famille De Broglie, acquéreur de la baronnie en 1668. Le « M » finement sculpté sur les pinacles du réservoir est sans doute une allusion à Marie, souvent associée à l'eau : « source de toute vie ».

PORTE DE LA HALLE
XIIIème SIECLE

La tour de VINGTAIN érigée à l'angle du Logis Neuf protégeait l'entrée souterraine du Château et gardait la Porte de la Halle qui accueillait le marché du mardi et 3 foires annuelles. Ces édifices furent détruits avant 1548.

GATE OF HALL
13th CENTURY

The tower of VINGTAIN erected next to of the New Lodging house protected the underground entrance to the castle and guarded the gate of the hall where the Tuesday market and 3 annual fairs were held. These buildings were destroyed before 1548.

MAISON DE LA PREBENDE
XVème - XVIème SIECLE

Messire Barthelemy COLOMBIER, prêtre, donne cette maison pour payer une messe hebdomadaire en l'Eglise d'OINGT. Incendiée lors du sac du village, elle fut reconstruite avec les pierres des remparts. La croix qui orne le linteau de la porte la dédie à une fondation pieuse : la PREBENDE.

HOUSE OF THE PREBEND:
15th - 16th CENTURY

Sir Barthelemy COLOMBIER, priest donatedthis house in return for a weekly mass in the Church of OINGT.
Destroyed by fire during the plunder of the village, it was rebuilt with stones from the ramparts. The cross which adorns the door's intel dedicates the house to a pious foundation : the PREBEND.

circuit des cases créoles

15 15

Tour du Village

4.4.1.2. The ecomuseum: Vernacular culture

The ecomuseum model is also valuable because it emerged in France and thus is linked to the same tradition of integrative heritage-making based on the nature-culture relationship as the *Association* which places great value on the broad landscape context around each member-village built structures. Georges-Henri Rivière, who was familiar with Skansen and many European ethnography museums such as the German Heitmatmuseum, or regional museum (Gorgus and Chabaud 2000), with Hugues de Varine were the founders of ecomuseology in the 1970s. They were concerned with community sustainability, ecology, and regional ethnology. The ecomuseum seeks to preserve, enhance, and transmit knowledge about the material and immaterial heritage of a geographic territory, including local habitat, population, and vernacular culture, but also the tools used for local livelihoods, machineries, animal breeds, plant species, as well as intangible practices and know-hows. The ecomuseum is essentially rooted in interdisciplinarity, relies on local memory and participation of local residents, and aims to trigger reflection and exchanges in social debates (Rivière 1985). It is meant to be as much a conservation center as a center for conversation, to use Rivière's language.

What brings the ecomuseum and the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* together is that they are both designed to be the result of community involvement and decision-making instead of ruled by a top-down structure. Both attribute value to vernacular common culture, not only "high" culture, even though the *Association* requires that member-villages enjoy two sites that are listed on the national inventory of historic sites (natural or cultural). Interestingly, and not coincidently, the countries with the largest numbers of ecomuseums (Borrelli and Davis 2012, p.34, for an inventory by country) are also countries where *Associations of Most Beautiful Villages* have been created. This indicates that those countries

have historically shared an approach to heritage that combines the same idealization and

valorization of the local.

Figure 24: Ecomusée d'Alsace, Ungersheim. Pedagogical display explaining the making of a half-timbered house (first assembled horizontally and then propped up vertically)

Figure 25: Ecomusée d'Alsace, Ungersheim. Pedagogical display of concepts "Terroir", "conservation", "patrimoine", "living history", "tradition" (in French and Alsatian)

Like the open air living museum, the ecomuseum has not been exempt from criticisms. Early on, Hubert (1985) pointed to the utopia and myth on which it is based, the problem of who really negotiates authority as the ecomuseum becomes increasingly institutionalized through public authority, the uncertainty of its future based on soft funding and thus the potential for political appropriation, and the tendency to represent a "micronationalist fantasy". Hubert called for a new generation of ecomuseums that could cope with the challenges of their time. Other critics question the claim that democratic processes support the ecomuseum model. In France, Japan, and Canada in particular, scholars have suggested that democratic ideals are in fact not always achieved in ecomuseum projects (Davis 2004). Others suggest that because of the increased focus on the identity production facet of the project, the cultural and scientific dimensions are declining to the benefit of place experience, which is itself standardized through commodification (Crozat 2012).

To some extent, the same analysis can be made of the *Association*. Even though the mayors and municipal councils make decisions as representatives of the local population, in villages where political cleavages are pronounced, there may not really exist one voice. "*This is not a grassroot organization. There are people who make decisions. It's the Mayor. It's not us. And I did not vote for them either*" (PBVF resident). As in the case of other types of museums, the ways in which local culture gets represented in ecomuseums can be scrutinized through text analysis to determine who authors exhibits, what the level of agency of the various stakeholders is, who is included and excluded, what interests (political, economic, social) are served, and what interpretations are made possible and for which audiences (McDonald 2007). Finally, the issue of "high" versus "common" culture can be examined in light of the ecomuseum strategy. In this

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sense the *Association*'s project is quite complementary as it is on one hand attached to high

culture in its requirement that a member-village must have on its territory two sites listed on the

national inventory (a very much top-down institution placing villages under the authority of the

National Architect for built heritage structures), and on the other hand attributes value points for

petit patrimoine, i.e. mundane vernacular heritage and vestiges of past local commoners' habitat

and activities (for example, a community oven, a wash-pit, a cellar, or a barn).

4.4.2. Overview of other heritage labels on the ground

How does PBVF see other labels? Is there a competition? These questions are best

answered by Association's officers who have reflected on it:

> *"We are similar to other types of labels. However, the main differences are as follow: Today, we are an established national network which is internationalizing, we have that tendency today. The others, they are still at the stage before that. Plus, they need to go from local, they need to create the national dimension, for me that's going to be complicated for them, especially if they need public money, I am not sure this is a favorable period to mobilize, except if they have special accesses. Also, the population thresholds are different. We are the most beautiful "villages", it's "village", others are "cités" for example, they are more centered on an urban dimension, I think 6000 inhabitants, there are different strata." "I think there is room for everyone, but it poses the question of the multiplication of labels and what it means for the legibility for the visitors when they arrive in the village, whose all these signage, there is enough of them for all tastes. There are also some (labels) that are just about communication, there is no real strategy behind, in any case, not a strategy in the sense that we mean it and we have elaborated ours since the beginning." "Plus, we rely on a voluntary process, we do not approach villages, even if sometimes our Mayors talk to others in their region and may encourage them to try their luck with us." "For us when a village comes to us that already has one of these other labels, it's a powerful   moment . Why do they want to be part of our network? Their arguments, I always ask them that question, why do you want our label, you already have one, Station Verte or this and that, there are fees each time that accumulate. And they tell us, it's the national recognition, that national legibility, that other networks for now do not bring. And even if it brings it one day… For me there was an genius idea at the very beginning. This genius idea it's the naming itself of the network. That name speaks to the visitor. "France, Most Beautiful, and Villages, so it's a superlative. The word village and the word France, and I think it is something that really speaks to people. And we really insist on it. Even the Associations that are created abroad tend to pick up that title for themselves"* (Pascal Bernard 2011).
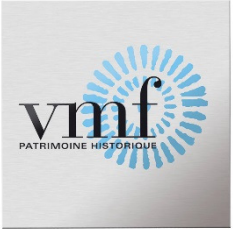
A quick comparative table helps to understand the extent of the "labelization fever" on

the French territory. Few are the towns and villages that do not belong to one or more associative

networks aiming at protecting, developing, promoting, or valorizing local patrimonial resources.

Table 3: Principal place-quality and heritage labels in the French landscape

Information included here is directly taken from these associations' promotional material (website, pamphlets). Many other organizations exist but those are the ones most likely to appear and be recognized at the national level.

Official name	Date of creation and population threshold	Main mission	Territorial span	Members (as of 2014)	Logo
Petites Cités de Caractère	Bretagne 1976 National 2009 Less than 6000 inhabitants	"Enhance the authenticity and diversity of the patrimony of small communes that possess a coherent architectural heritage of quality."	Regional with a recent national-scale ambition. Rather than a true "national" scope, the association has created several sub-national chapters. i.e."les petites cités de caractère d'Eure-et-Loir".	90 (across 5 regions : Bretagne – Pays de Loire – Poitou Charentes – Champagne Ardennes-Eure et Loir)	
UNESCO World Heritage Site	1972	Collective protection of cultural and natural heritage	International	38 sites in France (3 natural, 34 cultural, 1 mixed)	
Villes et Pays d'Art et d'Histoire	1987 Under the Direction du Patrimoine within Ministère de la Culture	Protect urban and landscape *monuments historiques.* Valorization of architecture and heritage.	National	167	
Plus Beaux Villages de France 156 members	1982 Less than 2000 inhabitants (rural communes)	Protect, promote, develop.	National	156	

Plus Beaux Détours de France	1998 2000 to 20 000 inhabitants	Sustainable development of touristic activities based on quality of place and exchanges of best implementation practices among members. Members are cities with strong touristic and cultural potential that are far from most traveled routes.	National	101	
Villes et Villages Fleuris	1988 for its current form. The Association comes out of various endeavors started as early as the 1950s.	Presentation and maintenance of vegetal patrimony. Respect for natural resources and biodiversity. Enhance quality of public spaces. Landscape management. Slogan: "To flower is to welcome"	National Based on a competition. Jury is composed of over 2000 individuals (tourism professionals, civil servants, landscape specialists, planners, journalists…)	Over 4000 (since this number is based on an annual competition, it fluctuates year to year).	
Station Verte	60% <2000	Development tool for rural economy. Based on organizing leisure activity for families and promoting respect for the environment. Guaranteed housing capacity: 200 beds. Tourism Office on the ground 25% of members located in a Natural Park; 30% also « Villes et Villages Fleuris » A number of PBVF has sought this label as well.	National : 87 *départements*	600	
Notre Village Terre d'Avenir	1992 Under the impetus of Charles Ceyrac (Founder of MBVF) Up to 3500 inhabitants	Slogan: "Too much is too much. Our 32000 villages are agonizing and are going to die!" Preserve quality of life in villages. In accordance with Agenda 21 Sustainable Development guidelines. Environment, citizen participation, diffusion of good practices in rural milieu.	National	121	

Les Circulades (Les Villages Circulaires)	1993	Same mission as the MBFV but focuses exclusively on rural communes built on a circular plan (preserve and valorize rural heritage, enhance social cohesion and territorial economic development, and promote federating effect among members).	Regional Languedoc-Roussillon (Aude, Hérault, Gard)	50	Circulade de l'An 1000
Village Patrimoine	2003	Valorisation of rural heritage. Objectives are to enhance living spaces and revitalize territories.	Regional Pays de Flandre, Pays de la Baie du Mont Saint-Michel, Pays de la Lys Romane	23	
Vieilles Maisons Françaises: Patrimoine en mouvement	1958 for the Association of « Public Utility » 1967 for the label	Save, preserve, and valorize built and landscape heritage. Integrate the environment in heritage preservation. Promote artistic craftsmanship and intangible heritage. Labelizes built heritage that is not recognized under the *Monuments Historiques* designation.	National Since 2008, effort to establish connection with similar international organizations to preserve heritage of "French inspiration" in the world.	2 ,200 (in 2009)	

Now that the patrimonial context and the associative network have been explained and the *Association*'s mission and functioning have been described, the next chapter will be devoted to examining what happens in villages that are members of the *Association*. Chapter Five gives a voice to villagers and village mayors who are on the front line of the patrimonialization process as they live in heritage places. Long-time residents will be able to account for change in the place, while newcomers will tell what attracted them to it. The role of the *Association* will be highlighted in the ways in which it may shape place development and social relations in member-villages.

CHAPTER FIVE:

VILLAGES AND VILLAGERS: EVOLUTION UNDER THE LABEL AND PLACE PERCEPTION

The tripartite project of the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* (heritage preservation, pedagogy, development) is a grassroot initiative elicited by dissatisfaction with the insufficiencies of higher level agencies' effects on the rural world and neglect of its concerns. Nonetheless, like top-down development endeavors, it raises the question of aligning community benefits with public heritage restoration and conservation needs. Under the label, do member-villages become places of convergence or divergence? Can the different interests of a variety of stakeholders in the countryside be reconciled through the common development project? The countryside has become the locus for complex uses, which result in a mix of practices and perceptions of rural areas (Butler 1998). By looking at the relationship between the public and private sphere, different attitudes towards heritage places and the PBVF label, as well as the relationship between different types of residents and development components in heritage places– such as heritage protection, secondary residences, tourism, or recreational land use – it is possible to unveil whether this diversity in uses and perceptions can become source of contention in Most Beautiful Villages. It will also reveal the sort of places that are produced by this development path, and whether inhabitants are aware and supportive of the project in which they become de facto actors.

For the *Association*, the member-villages' residents are at the center of its project, as both subjects and agents. Even though the objectives are based on attracting visitors and encouraging hospitality infrastructure, touristification is seen as a mere tool to promote a place of living where inhabitants can experience village life again.

> "The *Most Beautiful Villages of France*, it's first and foremost for the inhabitants. In a village, can you buy a baguette? A piece of meat? If there are services for the residents, they will also serve the tourists. The "cadre de vie" must be enhanced for the inhabitants, and if it is adapted to them, it will be so for the visitors as well." (*Association* officer)

> "Our villages must be places of <u>living</u>, not only places of <u>visit.</u>" (*Association* officer)

> "Our goal is long-term. Our end is to create a situation where inhabitants can live 'in' the village and live 'off' the village." (*Association* officer)

Through interviews with mayors, municipal council members, as well as a diverse sample of villagers in three main sites, this chapter examines the ways in which villagers' attitudes towards the heritage landscape have developed, the concerns that arise as a result of the chosen development path for these localities, and whether the processes behind the label are well understood locally. Open-ended interviews and photo-elicitation were used (Chapter 2). The themes selected for analysis are: attachment to place, perception of change in the place, self-positioning in the place, attitude towards the label of the *Association*, evaluation of what the label brings to the local, attitude towards "*patrimoine*" and heritage preservation generally, attitude towards the rural, and assessment of future local development. In transcribing interview excerpts here, I am particularly careful to avoid identifying my respondents. It is with my promise of confidentiality that they shared their thoughts with me, and without it, these conversations may not have been possible. Because villages are small places where people still know each other, for the most part, and the *Association* brings together only 156 members, it is particularly important to treat interview results in a way that limits as much as possible regional

and place identification. For example, even saying "the mayor of a village in Lozère" may be too detailed of a description, when we know that there are only two PBVF there. This chapter is a report of my ethnographic work with mayors and village residents, an attempt to make them speak through this project about how they envisage living in heritage and in "one of the most beautiful villages of France," as the sign at the entrance of the village reminds them.

5.1. "Maires" (mayors) – Local elected officials ("élus")

The village mayors constitute the living core of the PBVF project.

> "We are at the service of the *élus*. They are the *Association*; the *Association,* it's them. We answer to them and we do what it is they want. We cannot do anything they don't want. This is how Mr. Ceyrac imagined it. He was mayor himself and he knew that this was the way it had to be to work best."

Over twenty mayors or member of the Municipal Council of PBVF's were interviewed for this study. Across a varied territory and across regions with apparently different challenges to face, the mayors' respective discourses were rather convergent, with the differences lying in the regional details of what specific production used to exist in the area or the accessibility to specific resources other than agricultural capacity. Mayors are sandwiched between their Municipal Council and the inhabitants, but increasingly they also bear pressures from other hierarchical territorial organizations, such as the *communauté de communes* or "*intercommunalité*", the *Région*, and other instruments such as *SCOT*. They work on many fronts on various economic and social agendas. Although many mayors are politically aligned with a national party, in reality party politics seems less important in the villages than personal politics, i.e. who the person is seems more important than what party list they are running under.

Furthermore, in France, small localities' municipal electoral lists are not required to endorse political colors (under 1000 inhabitants).

Rural mayors need to be grand diplomats. They are dealing with a rural population that is increasingly varied and with equally varied interests and stakes in local heritage and development of place, as well as varied visions for what ought to be done. With over 36,000 mayors in France and 32,000+ of them in rural *communes*, rural mayors constitute a massive force in shaping what the rural is and will become, even though they have been stripped of some of their powers by the *intercommunalité* and many of the mayors interviewed lamented that this trend can only continue. "They want to get rid of mayors, it would be a catastrophe; mayors know their *communes* the best."

The structure of the *Association* gives mayors decision-making power over all agendas through the three commissions, the *Bureau*, and the *Conseil d'Administration*. They decide together about membership and candidate-village heritage quality, about how to communicate and what to communicate within the organization and externally, and about the general development path to adopt. They also have decision-making power over the budget and how funds are spent within the *Association*. As a result, the mayors who were interviewed all felt somewhat implicated in the project, even if they are not part of any of the Commissions. The level of interest and appreciation varied though, ranging from "I'm glad that we have the label, we all are, people are happy about it, but we can't just look at the label as the only way. There are many fronts on which I must work here", to "for us, the label is the chance for the village. Without it, we would not stand out, and the possibilities are limited," or "It takes work for us, but we hope that it will pay off. We are starting to see some results, but we want more and we are working towards making it possible. The *Association* helps greatly, although I don't always

agree and the inhabitants don't either." Another mayor who has never been part of any of the

Commissions confides: "I really have no intention to commit myself in any of the Commissions,

I have a lot of work here, on top of my regular job; I don't have time. If I were to choose one, it

would be the *Commission Qualité* though, that's where the important things happen. I think there

are mayors who want to be in there to protect themselves and their own village, and that's it.

They have time, that's good for them, but it's not possible for everybody, except once you are

retired."[43]

5.1.1. What is at stake for the villages?

5.1.1.1. Demography, post-agricultural development, social connections, and recognition

Interviews with over twenty mayors, ex-mayors, and Municipal Council members

revealed a commonality of motivations prompting the submission of membership applications.

One leitmotiv in mayors' narratives is that of decline and notably as it ties in with demographic

challenges. "We need to attract newcomers." "We have the problem of an aging population. It's

not great. We need more young people." "Today villages are in vogue, the proof is that you are

here speaking with me, but we fought to keep people here at one time. Rural desertification was

everywhere, a little less around here, but still, we lost the school because there were not enough

families with children." Much hope is placed on modern technology to allow the re-populating of

the countryside: "With distance-working, people can live here and take the train once in a while

to go to meetings in the city, or their car even. That opens up possibilities for a younger active

population to relocate here, or to come back to where they were born to start with, back to the

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[43] Many mayors in France hold a job and fulfill their elected official's duties in addition to their regular
employment.

pays of their childhood." To this effect, many rural communes have invested in high speed internet capabilities.

The other recurrent theme is that of the difficulty of envisaging a post-agricultural rural world, not only economically, but socially. Agricultural villages were places of solidarity and sharing. Mayors and multi-generational resident family members often lament the disappearance of collective para-agricultural tasks as well as the communion of interests and activities around harvest season, whatever the crop or commodity harvested.

> "Agriculture suffers, especially mountain agriculture. There is no hope for it to come back, we must find other ways to use what we still have."

> "We had to suffer phyloxera, no more vineyards, wars of 70 and 14, then the second world war, that was the *coup de grâce*, yet another traumatism. … Now we maintain and valorize our heritage, artisans are coming back."

> "Development opportunities are limited here now that there is no more agriculture and all the activities it generated have gone. We need to find new profitable sectors."

> "Agriculture, it's finished. All the farms around have sold their lands, there is only one that remains active, but the lands he farms are not even on the *commune*, they are 20km from here. No, we can't say that we are an agricultural community anymore, all that has been gone for a long time."

> "Vines? It's over. That's what has been going on. It is a heritage to salvage. But now it's all for 'gardens', you know those AMAP[44], it's *à la mode*, mostly for the *bobos*[45]. The vines that are being pulled will not be replanted. People will forget they were ever there."

> "With prices around here, it's been catastrophic. There has been a race for the m². What happened? Entire apple orchards have been pulled. But today there is an awareness and even someone who has taken up the task of reviving that past. Now people know they can go to him for apples. When you live in a PBVF, it starts you thinking about other things too, not just the built habitat. You know: what else did we do here before that made us live? And is some of that still feasible? What would it take? And what is our *patrimoine* under all its forms? I think it makes people think, at least I hope it does. And even if they come

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[44] AMAP: Association pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne, akin to what is called Community Sustained Agriculture in the USA (CSA).

[45] Colloquial abbreviation for "Bourgeois Bohème."

up with different conclusions. You know, we are in France, maybe you forgot over there in America, but in France people disagree, they quibble, by principle."

"The only thing that remains of our agricultural past is that one plot of vineyard when you first come in, did you see it? The guy who is caring for it wants to make 'organic' grapes. If you want my opinion, it's just a piece of fallow land. Organic does not mean untidy. I don't think he'll last; in any case, that is not a future for the village."

Organic agriculture was mentioned by only two respondents as a viable solution to rejuvenate the agricultural function of the region. "If I had continued in wine-making, that's what I would have done. But it's hard. It's not doing nothing. There are some who tried and after three years it was like fallow plots, there is a particular process, you can't just do whatever." Many respondents who had known the times in which agriculture was still prevalent expressed regrets for what agricultural lifestyles brought to the community in human terms.

"In Autumn in the old times, we would all go and pick chesnuts together in the forest; it's like our bread around here, you see; then we stayed at each others' place to prepare them, eat, drink to warm up, and tell stories, oh, always the same stories in a way. But it was nice. It's like today, I talk with you about this past time, and back then we talked about times even prior to that, with the *anciens*. Now we have televisions."

"Who says label says economic development. What *commune* would refuse it? It is unthinkable to lose the label, it's our security for the future, as long as the label will have that reach and the mediatized impact it has right now. We were an agricultural community, now it's over. So, what's next? Tourism opens up possibilities to think about."

The third dimension of the mayors' discourse is that they wish to revive the social fabric of their villages which has suffered with the end of agriculture and the ties agricultural production used to foster and maintain. At harvest time, people helped each other. In winter, people warmed up at each others' place. As the quote above reminds us, when it was time for collecting chesnuts, villagers would do it together and spend evenings telling stories while they unshelled them, often in a multi-generational context where an important place would be given to reminiscing with the older generations about how things were. Thus, agricultural tasks also led to oral histories being passed on and created a cultural imprint on local societies that was long-

lasting and went beyond agricultural production. In other regions, activities related to wine

production or wheat harvesting rallied people together for several weeks each year, sharing tools,

know-how, and manpower.

"It's hard to maintain the *lien social* around here. Those old social connections, they have a tendency to dissolve."

"There are no more *veillées*[46] at night after work, no more solidarity nor conviviality. Well, it's not new, it's really been since the 1950s."

"The problem now is that there are no more opportunities for transmission of the past, people do not convene much anymore. Still around the family for specific occasions, but less and less as a village community. That is what we need to focus on the most."

And

"Now we organize festivals and fairs, but they are for the tourists. What we need to re-create is a real local associative network. It's hard because people are busy with their own things. But maybe the label has made a difference, in that people talk to each other about it, and also it makes them care about, or question, a common concrete thing. But honestly, it's not a won battle."

Fourthly, interviews with mayors revealed that beyond a strictly localized outlook, there

is a desire to contribute to a wider region with which the village's identity is connected.

"We all need to do our part for the region. There are localities that do nothing, they prefer to disappear, and together with them the region loses too. It's important to think that we can be an attraction center, a focus point that provides a greater impact than just here."
"We are not alone. We can't think like that anymore. We have to do with the area around us. I prefer that we play an active role in the region rather than being passive. That is also my role as Mayor of this village. And the label, without a doubt grants us leverage. Eyes are turned to us more. It's not everything, no, but it's something others don't have."

This sentiment is echoed by others in the *Association*, as in Salers: "We want to

participate to the reconstruction of the region" (La Croix 2007, p. 3).

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[46] *Veillées* (literally "wakes") are the nightly coming together of people in rural areas, to spend time together and often partake in a task as well.

And finally, conversations with mayors make clear the general desire to be recognized (*se faire reconnaître*).

> "The villages that submit their candidacy to the *Association* do so because they want to make themselves known, and the elected officials and the people would like to share it with others."
>
> "We want the recognition of our heritage."
>
> "The label is a mark of valorization. It brings us a beautiful clientele, French and foreign."

Summary of interview findings

It is possible to establish a synthesis of motivations for seeking membership in the PBVF, as described and worded by mayors interviewed in the study. These expressed motivations reflect well the three dimensions of the *Association*'s mission: to know ourselves (heritage, identity, and transmission), to make ourselves known (development as a tourist destination), and to make ourselves be acknowledged (remaining relevant in French contemporary regional and national life). This coincidence is not surprising since the *Association* was designed around mayors' concerns and tailored to address these concerns for a better future. The following inventory records the recurrent themes identified in interviews in response to the question: "What were the motivations behind the desire to become a PBVF?" The same items were brought up whether the village in question sought membership early on, in the 80s and 90s, or more recently. Responses can be organized around three categories: heritage protection/patrimonial attractiveness, social fabric/identity, and development/quality of life.

1-Heritage protection/patrimonial attractiveness:

➤ Enhance the image of the village, by preserving and valorizing heritage

➤ Transmit and maintain heritage

➤ Help us find subsidies for the restoration of built heritage

➤ Recognition of the beauty of the village

➤ Change the attitude of inhabitants towards heritage and gain a legal support to constrain people to abide to obligations.

➤ Save the village from oblivion and decline

2-Social fabric/identity:

➤ Strengthen identities and culture in the village

➤ Enhance the social fabric

➤ Keep local memory alive

➤ Please inhabitants

➤ Trigger inhabitants' pride and awareness

3-Development/quality of life:

➤ Develop notoriety; publicity; benefit from the brand notoriety

➤ Increase tourism and thus give an economic boost; valorize touristic attractiveness

➤ Enhance quality of life in the village

➤ Palliate the rural exodus and other harmful contemporary societal structural modifications

➤ Face the demographic challenge; renew an aging population; attract newcomers

➤ Help us think about development; Get guidance for our development practices

➤ Provide opportunities for young business owners

➤ Provide an institutional support for decisions

➤ To be like the other villages in the area that have the label too

➤ Galvanize the territory

But ultimately, mayors retain great lucidity in their endeavor: "We can't expect too much of a change, the village is too small for big changes." Aware of the limitations they are faced with in promoting a shared vision over the long term, one mayor confides that "changes can only take place if people go along with the project. That's our challenge, that's what limits us here." And another echoes this sentiment in explaining that "changes won't happen suddenly and drastically. That's not the goal in any way. But that's why it's hard because first, we, mayors are only here for six years, we may not be re-elected or even run again, and secondly, people want to see immediate results."

5.1.1.2. Challenges brought about by the label

While the motivations for seeking membership under the label are based on the expectations that it will bring about positive long-term change in the *commune*, participation in the heritage-based development model does not come without cost and constraints, financial and else. Villages must pay an annual fee of three euros per inhabitant. For small communes of 100 to 600 residents, the cost remains very low and in over 100 interviews (mayors and inhabitants), only two people raised the issue of membership cost. Several even mentioned that if cost were an issue, they would gladly personally pay the membership fee for all, if that meant not losing the label. On the other hand, the cost of illuminating monuments at night for visitors' enjoyment was raised five times. In several *communes*, compromises were adopted in which illumination occurs only on the week-ends or until a certain time in the evening. Another cost is that of the burial of electric and telephone cables, which constitutes heavy public works for which the partnership with EDF-ERDF helps greatly since they subsidize the effort.

As far as constraints on the village and villagers, mayors are conscious that the label creates contention when it comes time to approve construction and demolition permits. The Architecte des Bâtiments de France (ABF) is often pointed to as the source of most disagreements. Openings on façades are particularly contentious as modern architectural tastes favor large openings, such as bay windows, when traditional habitat often limited openings in the interest of sustainability and insulation from meteorological hazards. Color palettes for wooded surfaces can also become contentious.

> "Today it's impossible to build anything in …! Openings, no. But even little things. It's all imposed. That is what bothers people. But in truth, the ABF is not that demanding. Even so, recently there was something done on a roof without authorization. The ABF made them remove it and they had to redo the roof as it was. The ABFs have all powers, and that's normal, but all of them don't have the same vision, it's interesting."

> "Our relationship with the ABFs is a little tense. They don't care about cost when they say *refaire à l'identique*"[47], but they are not stupid, we can come to some arrangements with some good arguments."

> "The main obstacle for people is the ABF, it's a big constraint. 25% of people here are *de souche*,[48] it's not easy for them. It's a way to look at things they don't share."

> "If the ABF says something, there is nothing I can do. Sometimes I try to mediate between the individual proprietor and the ABF, just to get information through to each side, since ultimately I am the one that must grant the construction permit. But they have the last say in the decision of what is and what is not acceptable in renovations, and all façade alterations especially."

> "We have a color palette to choose from. Most people abide. You always have the one or two that need to do something else, to make a statement, sometimes it's just personal and has nothing to do with the label or with the color, an old grudge about something, what we call '*querelle de clochers'*.[49] In a way, I prefer that than those who leave the houses to decay and ruin. Eventually, we can reason with people's contrariness. And besides, all it takes is a layer of paint to fix. We are not going to get worked up over paint."

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[47] Redo identically

[48] Of local descent, local stock. Literally "souche" means stump or stem.

[49] Literally: "Steeple dispute", i.e. community rivalry,

Several mayors expressed their difficulties to make ABFs' decisions accepted by the population when those decisions can come across as incoherent or inconsistent from project to project. Although all ABF undergo similar training, as individuals they may have different tastes and visions which are reflected in their evaluations on the ground.

Aside from their sometimes problematic relationship with the ABF and the difficulty they may encounter to guarantee inhabitants' abiding by the *charte de qualité*, mayors also note that the main challenges they face as a result of the label emerge in terms of "making visitors and residents cohabit," "controlling parking and traffic flow, especially in the busy season," and "facing the reality that we don't have enough resources, such as lodging, for many visitors to stay overnight. As a result most tourists just come through, they use our resources more than they bring in benefits for us." For example, one mayor described how the village had to invest in new trash receptacles and hire a municipal employee to pick up trash even on the week-ends as those are the busiest days with the most amount of trash produced by various picnic aficionados, camping-car travelers, and day visitors. Likely, maintaining public bathrooms in clean and working order all throughout the year has become a must in order to ensure visitors respect private and public spaces. Water and cleaning expenses are additional costs to municipalities that cannot be recouped if there are no infrastructure in the village for tourists to spend money, as it is often the case in small localities.

Finally, mayors are keenly aware of the paradox between the desire to recapture a young active population and the fact that the label effects an upward pressure on real estate prices, at the same time as it makes the place more appealing to various service providers, craftsman, or

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business owners, in spite of the challenge of seasonality of tourists' visits. Mayors interviewed

revealed being particularly interested in not only attracting businesses, but attracting businesses

that are open all year long rather than four to six months, from Easter to October, as is often the

case in touristic spots, as well as retaining basic public or private services, such as the post

office, local doctor or nurse, tourist office, pharmacy, media center/library, and school. Many

also deplored the death of the *bar* where people would pass through after work for a beer or glass

of red. When *bars* and cafés have remained or reopened, often their vocation has changed. They

have become restaurants rather than cafés, with set hours reserved for lunch and dinner and

tables reserved for meals eaten by tourists rather than local people to hang out with pals for hours

over one glass. Another issue for mayors is that a *commune* cannot have more than one full

alcohol license for 100 inhabitants and that such licenses are attached to a specific physical

locale, which puts limitations on newcomers who want to start cafés and limits the important

social function of the bar-cafés. Per the *Code de la santé publique*, a "petite licence" or "licence

restaurant" only permits alcohol to be served as an accessory to a main meal, not as a stand-alone

consumption item (legislative section, part III, book III, title III). The disappearance of local

institutions such as the school, the café, the post-office, and the bakery are recurrent items in

mayors' and inhabitants' narrative about the death of the village. As is the turnover of private

residences due to cost of renovation, price speculation, or fiscality.

> "There used to be four or five *bars* here. Now we are not enough people. Now even the new café, they
> can't serve alcohol without a meal. No license. People who just want to come in and pass time over a glass,
> they can't. And often they don't understand why they cannot be served what they ask, and so they don't go
> back. I'm working on it."

> "Right now, there is a full license that is not being used since the closing of the *Auberge*[50]. There is nothing
> going on there, it's empty. But the people who opened the new café, in a really good location on top of it,

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[50] Country inn

cannot get a full license because it's stuck with the *Auberge*. It's not good for their business and for the village going forward."

"The cost of habitat in the village has gone up, it's not possible for the young. And without the young, without families, there are less and less services. We had a school before, now they have to go to another *commune* for school."

"We managed to keep a part-time post office. That was a battle. We are not numerous enough for the State to make those services available to us. For me, the post office has been a symbol of our survival. But you see, only part-time: 'part-survival.' The old folks, they might walk up to the post office, chat up with the *postière* or whoever is there at the same time. She is not from here, she comes from down further, but she's part of the life of the village. That's why we put a bench in front of it. People stop there and the old folks, their legs…"

Figure 26: Two of the services most often raised in conversation
Here, a part-time post office (two hours a day) in Charroux, Auvergne and a pharmacy in Hell-Bourg, La Réunion.
Both services are getting rarer in rural communes.

"It's expensive now here. Often houses are sold out of families around the times of successions, the heirs, they don't want it, they prefer to go to Asia, or to ski, or to the beach, it's different now, and it's too expensive to keep, think about it, taxes especially, and maintenance."

"If I could, I would want the municipality to buy the properties that are for sale or going into ruins, to try to build projects there, and attract young people, even if it means helping them until they are settled and profitable. We tried to do that with a baker, but he did not stay. Things did not work out, so now people are reluctant to trust and support these kinds of endeavors."

"Today, people know and understand the stakes. They budget for renovations and restorations that follow the prescriptions of the ABF and the ZPPAUP. They learned to anticipate expenses. They do get some subsidies, 750 Euros on a roof that pays their VAT[51]."

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[51] VAT: Value Added Tax

"My goal was to have businesses here that target all ranges of visitors. We have accomplished that. We have a café type place, a restaurant, and now even a fancy bed and breakfast and a gastronomical restaurant with a nationally recognized chef. Even people from the surroundings come here to eat there for special occasions. It's clear that without the PBVF label, he would not have wanted to settle here and open up his restaurant. That was the draw: a quality establishment in a quality place, and for a guaranteed quality clientele. It's worked for him and so for us too. Now what we need to do is make sure he can have clients all year around so the business can stay open all year around."

"That artisan-shop is the only one in the village that is open year-around. They never close. It means that if people come during the winter, there is that draw, they know they can go there and get the local specialties we make here. That can make a difference for people in surrounding places in deciding where to take their guests when they visit on week-ends or holidays like All Saints, for example. The parking lot is always open too. We want to say: come, there are things to see and do. The label can help to provide that year-around clientele too. So, it works both ways."

Mayors seem acutely conscious of those centrifugal forces operating in the countryside today, which lead to individual histories being disconnected from the place and to a loss of memory of place, a dynamic that others have observed before (Dibie, 2006).

Pascal Dibie (2006), in his study on Chichery, also explains that being mayor today means to "prohibit, prohibit, prohibit" (p. 47). Many of the mayors interviewed for this study shared this vision, but indicated that the label in a way consisted in a two-face coin. At the same time as it creates an additional layer of "interdictions" based on place quality criteria that must be fulfilled per the *charte de qualité*, it also is a tool for them to justify certain decisions and help them make their residents understand the arguments put forth, so that it does not come across as a negative, but instead as part of a positive project.

"For me, they are killing the village with all the rules, nothing is going on. I can't even sell souvenirs, they see it with a bad eye. There is no life in the village. There is not even a 14th of July celebration."

"They understand that losing the label could be harmful. We don't have grand monuments like a château. What we have and that needs to be preserved and taken care of is our everyday built structures. They are rather ordinary, it needs to be said, when you see what others have, but together they create something worthwhile. And that's why we were able to become part of the *Association*, because others before us have kept them in good shape. If people don't follow and still want to do their individual whatevers on their

façades, it's not going to work. And the majority of them understands that, because they are themselves either sensitive to what they see, or loyal to the people before them, or they are proud of the label deep inside."

"We do not want our village to become cheapened by junk. We are advocating and wanting to highlight quality through the label. Sometimes it's hard to make people understand that they are not helping in the long term by wanting to sell rubbish made in China. Postcards, that's OK, but we don't want T-shirts, hats, mugs, no, really that's not what this is about and we have to say no. Usually people understand but they resent it. Bah, that comes with my job. Our vision is longer term than some of these newcomer commercial businesses. I'm not against kitsch, but not here."

"There is a pedagogical work to be done. People know that they love their village and they feel good here. But they don't realize that by doing certain things wrong we can lose this feeling. This is a place that has kept its spirit for centuries. What we feel here, it's precious, it's easy to lose, others have lost it by not being careful, we don't want to follow them. Even here, there are things we could have done better. We know that, and the *Association* told us in the report when we got re-inspected. In that sense, the label helps us to keep our actions in check and keep an eye out to respect the soul of the place."

A synthesis of the main challenges described by mayors in interviews can be organized around three themes: population administration, heritage preservation, tourism management.

Population:

➢ Make inhabitants and tourists cohabit

➢ "Human management"

➢ Create a situation in which everyone gains something: residents, tourists, business owners, artisans, service providers.

➢ Convince inhabitants to respect the *charte de qualité*

➢ Attract newcomers to start service endeavors (holiday cottages, restaurants, etc.)

➢ Need for retro-active pedagogy

➢ Keep year-around services that will serve the residents

Heritage preservation:

➢ Find ways to enhance habitat

➤ Find subsidies for restorations

Tourism:

➤ Deal with automobile flows and parking

➤ Enhance and maintain hospitality structures

➤ Ensure quality of tourism infrastructures, in harmony with the spirit of place

5.2. Inhabitants

5.2.1. Relationship inhabitants entertain with the place – place perception

For inhabitants of the Most Beautiful Villages of France, what does it mean to live in heritage? And what does "beautiful" mean to them? The *Association*'s project relies on an aesthetic understanding of place. However, residents in the place, while they perceive the "beauty" on their own terms, do not necessarily have a grasp on how the "beautiful" is constructed under the *charte de qualité*. Their perception of place lies on their relationship with it and their position in it.

5.2.1.1. What does "beautiful" mean for villagers?

Interviews reveal different conceptions of the aesthetic component of the *Association*'s project. A sampling of the responses to the question "what does it mean to you for the village to be characterized as 'beautiful'?" highlights recurrent themes.

1-It means eliciting an emotion, an intangible:

"Beauty, it has to be *le coup de foudre*" (love at first sight, literally "lightning strike")

"You have to find something that grabs you in your gut".

"It's le *coup de cœur*, that's all.''

"Beautiful, it's the emotion you get. Yes, there are criteria, but it's really about the emotion, if you can't give the emotion to the visitors, they don't care that they are in front of an exceptional anything."

2-A sentiment of exceptionalism:

"To be beautiful it's not enough to be pretty, or charming, or nice, it's not enough to be in front of the church or in the château courtyard and wow, it's not enough. It's more".

"Being charming, it's not enough, like some other villages are, it means being authentic, exceptional."

"We are not the Association of *pretty* villages. Or *charming* villages. Or *nice* villages. We are the Association of the Most *Beautiful* Villages. That means something, it's something else."

"It's not only about good planning, it's not about flowers, it's not enough to add geraniums or spend thousands of Euros on a special pavement."

"It's not the mayor who makes the village like it is, it's like that and that's it. It's just the way we are. Because of that they decided we should have the label, it's us, not the ones over there, they couldn't anyway."

"There are others that are beautiful, for sure. But everyone cannot be a *top model*[52], otherwise it means what?"

3-A feeling of having succeeded at preserving something from decay and risen above regional and historical adversity:

"Us, we don't see it. But for the *anciens*, it's nice, they see it. They know how it was before. It needs to be said, they know how it was before the Parisians arrived, it was them who saw first, now we forget, but it was so dirty, with the animals in the streets, cows, manure, the *anciens* will tell you!"

"If we can be PBVF today it's because of poverty. What makes MBVFs today, it's not the mayors or the planning, it's poverty. Regions that were economically poor, for centuries, now they are rich in beauty".

"We were abandoned, no railway, no highways, who wanted to come here, who could come here, that's why today we can fulfill the criteria of beauty".

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[52] Sic.

"Often, it's poverty during two or three centuries that gives us our riches today".

"We were very lucky. The village has been forgotten. So no industries came here. We were slowly dying so there has not been any new construction and sprawl. That saved the village so now we can be PBVF."

But skepticism also mitigates reactions to the label:

"For me it does not mean anything, it depends, if you visit a village with the sun and you meet nice people, and then if you visit a village under the rain and you fight with your family in the car, it's not going to be the same, that's for sure."

"We are not any more 'beautiful' than our neighbors, but we have the whole thing better packaged, over there they are more worried about other things, and also they don't want to. Me, I would not be worried if we were not PBVF, I work, I don't see it, for me life is not changed. Yes, it's nice to see people around, like you. Who is going to come around in the winter? If it can make some people happy and also the few commerces can live, then yes, why not. But honestly, I think you can do that anywhere, there are beautiful places all over, I see them when I travel around."

5.2.1.2. Identity in place reinforced by the label

The label recognizes and values a strong place identity in its membership choices. At the same time, it produces and reinforces those local identities around patrimonial components, often linked to building materials, architectural techniques, natural resources, or topography. Most people interviewed expressed being "proud" to live in a PBVF, even when they complained and resisted the resulting constraints and even when they showed a miscomprehension of the processes behind the label. Others exhibited a level of analysis and reasoning that went beyond preliminary expectations, proving that the label triggers a thought process among residents in terms of who they are, where they came from, and how the place encapsulates cultural meanings.

"We are Most Beautiful because of the stone. We are the stone people. When I am away from here, what do I miss? It's the stone".

"Well, here it's ochre, we are all about ochre, even if it's not what we live off anymore, it's in us and all around us."

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"Up here we are the troglos[53], down there they are the river people, it's not the same, but we are a whole, since that is how nature and the ancestors did it together."

"Here you are in Auvergne, in Auvergne there are not so many villages like ours, and that's the reason we got the label."

"With the other PBVFs in the *département,* we are "The most beautiful villages of the Vaucluse", it's this whole corner of France. You can go elsewhere, and you'll see it's not the same, go see for yourself."

"Here it's tuffeau, I could not imagine something else, we are the tuffeau people. You don't have it around and you miss it."

"We are the only PBVF in the DOM-TOM[54], and that means something that it includes us. Creoles are French, let's not forget it."

"The river, that's who we are. It is what makes the village stand out. Just that view and you understand why we deserved the label."

"Here we are still in tile region. Further you will start seeing slate roofs, there is a cultural border there. The tiles, they give a certain personality to our village, a color and a tone, and it's our heritage. All together it creates a certain harmony and that's enough for the label. We don't have much else."

"My favorite view of the village is from the outside, where you can see it in its globality. It's amusing, let's be realist, the village is beautiful when you look at it from the bridge or the beach. It gives the impression of harmony. In truth it is the most complete anarchy. It's the environment around that makes it superb."

5.2.1.3. Insiders vs. Outsiders perceptions of heritage landscape

As people refer to the ways in which their identity is connected to the place, they also address the difference between different kinds of people present there and how that translates in terms of living in place. The main difference is the most obvious one: the inhabitant-tourist dichotomy. However, other elements can differentiate inhabitants within their own community, and often different categories of residents adopt different ways to look at the landscape, at heritage in general, and at the label, depending on their stakes. Who is an insider? This is not an easy question to answer. As the population make-up is changing, the lines between insider and

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[53] People who live in troglodytic habitat.

[54] Overseas Territories and *Overseas Départements*

outsider get fuzzy. Likely, "outsiders" are a various group. One mayor described his efforts to sedentarize "nomadic" tourists and incite them to consume on-site: "They just pass through the region, they have a map of the MBVF and they plow through in their camping-cars." Another mentions the reliance on local visitors, the most loyal ones. "We have more and more local visitors, who come on the week-ends from up to 100 km around. They like the few shops here. They come back several times a year to get supplies of their favorite local specialties." A majority of mayors mentioned that the resident-tourist relationship was one challenge they had to face. The more important the flow, the more acute the challenge. And residents can feel dispossessed of the place when flows are significant.

> "As far as number, we get 150,000 visitors a year. That's nothing compared to the flagship villages. They can get up to a million and a half, or more. But it's still 410 a day. So, every day, we get twice the local population."

> "The real village it's what you see right now, in the winter. No-one around. It's calm, no noise, it's magnificent. We have our village back."

> "Fifty percent of visitors come from the surrounding area. So, are they tourists? They are really just like us, neighbors, we share our culture."

> "Tourists? I'm happy to see them. Even if more come, it won't be dramatic, we are too small and not sufficiently attractive, not like Riquewhir, that's hell. There are no more residents over there. It's a touristic village with only boutiques. Or Rocamadour. Those are excessively attractive places."

Another relationship that emerges as a challenge in the life of the village is that between permanent residents and second-home residents. However, the latter are also difficult to delineate as insiders or outsiders in cases where the home in question has been in the same family for generations. Keeping the house in the family is seen as an indication of care for the place and the village by population that is "*de souche*." Furthermore, second-home residents may be among those most opposed to tourism development. "There are villages where there are many second-homes, and in those, those people on vacation don't really want to see a bunch of tourists turn up

in their village while they are there." "The second-home residents, even though they are here probably because of the label, they don't like it when tourists come around. Who are they? For me, they are worse than tourists, they don't really want the well-being of the village, just their peace and quiet." However, newcomers are often credited for triggering patrimonial awareness in the village.

"Seasonal residents are maybe more sensitive to heritage."

"The Parisians came down in the 60s, they bought ruins basically, nobody wanted them, they were crazy, there was NOTHING here, thanks to them, it's still here, they saved what was to be saved, people from around here, we would have let it go down to ruin by now."

"We criticize Parisians, but it's that Parisian core who came even before we had running water in the village and bought ruins, they are the ones who saved the village. They bought houses, they renovated little by little, room by room, as they could, with little means at the time, they did a lot themselves. Then, other family members bought more houses, they came to the village through relations, families who knew each other in Paris, and it snow-balled. It was by sector in the village. Over there, that street, those were the people of Courbevoie.[55] They regrouped geographically and eventually some of them settled there for good."

"Who wanted these ruins? Not us! Parisians. It was worth nothing. You had to be crazy to buy these piles of stones. They did it, they lived outside for the summers. They fell for the region, for the people, even before the high speed train, they wanted to make it better and leave their mark too, so they took care of those old farms nobody wanted. They never sold. Now it's different, with prices as they are, it does not stay in the families anymore. Divorces, successions, people can't agree, the house is sold."

"The Parisians who came here, and you had to want to come here, it's not a place you travel through to go anywhere else…. we can say it today, it's the Parisian colony who came first who saved the village. They saw something that we did not see back then. Now we learned to see it. For some of it, it's too late. When I think about all that was destroyed or left to crumble… You know, post-War[56] there was a need for money, we had other preoccupations and use for these things."

"In a rural village, it's better to come from the outside. Otherwise you have to face ancestral feuds that no-one even remembers the real cause. Here all business owners came from the outside. Many failed, but some are still here."

 "You have to choose your vision: some permanent residents are happy and proud, they buy into the romanticized aspect; the others not so much."

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[55] A suburb of Paris

[56] Post-war ("après-guerre") usually refers to the time after World War II, still very vivid and a recurrent point of reference in people's narrative about the life of their village.

More recent newcomers also express why they value local heritage and that it was part of the reason they relocated to the particular village. They tend to be sensitive to the landscape and even implicate themselves in the heritage preservation process, either through their own property renovation, or through local associations. They are also more likely to accept and work with the ABF. Newcomers' interest for local heritage in turn influences residents to renew their gaze onto their surroundings.

"I always have my camera on me" (A recent permanent resident in the village).

"I am here because I love these old walls. For my renovations, I called on an architect and together with the ABF they did something splendid. It's really given this place its life back."

"We wanted to leave the city and connect to something old, to share in its preservation. And it gives emotions to be in the "beautiful", even if the daily is not always functional: we are isolated, far from all activities, no public transport, you have to manage and be autonomous."

"When the new artisans arrive, it incites residents to attend to their houses, there is more valorization of heritage, but it's still insufficient, there are still abandoned houses that need to be rehabilitated."

"I came from the Paris region, attracted by the river, calm, new contact with nature, to escape concrete, often ugly."

"The population has changed a lot and that changes life in the village. Before, until the 80s and 90s, there were people *du crû*,[57] now it's the *bobo*s[58]. There are activities for them, but for the real locals, not so much."

"We have to live together, with foreigners and outsiders, with tourists. But here we were a frontier, Auvergne was a frontier within France. Today, frontiers are European in scope. What's a 'foreigner'?

The village being part of a *commune* that can extend well beyond the historic core, different views on heritage preservation arises in the surrounding hamlets or isolated structures in the countryside.

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[57] Literally means "vintage", it means people who are truly from the place.

[58] bourgeois bohème

"The main difference between the people here it's not with the tourists. The main difference is between the people living in the hamlets and in the "bourg", and also between retired and active population, and also between those who work here and those who work in Lyon."

"We live down here. What they do up there, it really does not concern us. Except the price of land has gone up."

"Oh, I never go up to the "bourg" any longer. The people up there, we don't know them anymore, there has been a lot of houses sold. I never had family in the "bourg", I used to go there though for the market and other things. Now we go to the supermarket a bit away from here. There is nothing up there anymore."

"Our Mayor, I like him. But he pays a lot more attention to the "bourg" because of the label. We are not very important, we don't count. I'm OK with it. We don't have the same stakes. I used to be a farmer. Now I am retired. My daughters, they won't take over. But even for them, the village is just an address, they grew up on the farm."

"I think it's important they focus on the village. I mean it *is* beautiful. You must drive on the small dirt road between the two fields there, you can go, people won't mind if you drive off from here, then stop at the oak tree, and look up at the village. That is what I see. I've spent my life working the fields here, with that view. So it means something to me, yes. But I am not concerned with what happens there really."

About heritage promotion activities, residents are split. "Festivals, they are not for us, it's just for the tourists, but we go". A newcomer couple found that village festivals actually helped them to mingle with the older residents. "And also the café", that's where you see the 'faces' of the village.

5.2.2. Relationship between people

5.2.2.1. Surveillance and jealousies among inhabitants

Membership in the *Association* is not eternal and can be jeopardized as the label can be lost as a result of the periodical re-inspections (right now set as happening every six years for each village). Thus, the mayor and residents cannot rest on their laurels and instead must remain vigilant that what takes place in the village is in line with the development vision and the *charte de qualité.* This has given way to a climate of citizen-surveillance. However, interviews revealed

that residents were reluctant to expose their dissatisfaction about other residents and divulge their complaints. Those were usually mentioned in passing and in veiled terms.

> "I'll show you, there are things that our Mayor should not allow."

> "There are little things, not important, but sometimes you wonder why some people can do and others cannot do."

> "I don't want them to come tell me yes or no. And this one, I don't care what he thinks, I know what he says about me, he says it to my face anyway, I can say things too."

5.2.2.2. Relationship with tourists

Interviews corroborated mayors' concerns about fostering a good relationship between tourists and residents. But they also confirmed that the tourism encounter can be a space for exchange that is welcome and appreciated by some residents, even long-term ones. For example, one resident in particular showed to embrace this encounter by purposely leaving her fence open to seem inviting, and commented on how she appreciated it when residents chose to replace their fences with non-opaque material, so visitors can see through and see how the village lives. On the other hand, negative attitudes towards tourists are also recurrent, sometimes mixed in with more positive reactions, showing ambivalence in the exchange. These attitudes, like tourist flows themselves, tend to be cyclical and follow the seasonal variations in the volume of visitors. Figures 24-26 illustrate the sort of issues that can arise when residents and tourists share space, especially when the number of tourists come to overcome the small number of residents in the summer months, while the quotes that follow reveal that the encounter also brings satisfaction among some residents.

Figure 27: Humoristically fed up with tourists in Charroux
On a private home, the plaque reads
"Here on April 17th 1891, strictly NOTHING happened."

Figure 28: Antagonism against tourists
traveling in camping-cars
(notice the added red tape)

Figure 29: Disciplining misbehaving tourists and their dogs.

"The typical resident here is fed up with tourism. By August, they have had enough. They are not born here for that."

"Tourism creates nuisances."

"Some tourists stay among themselves. Like the Dutch, they live in complete autarcy, they even bring their food from Holland! And they leave the place disgustingly dirty behind them. That's my personal opinion. I can say it though, because it's true."

"Now I give guided tours in the village. I have no formal training. I learned by doing. I learned a lot from visitors about architecture. Visitors are with me. When I speak, they listen to me, it's like telling stories to children. I enjoy it. I pass on my love for the village."

"I like to give them a few pointers when I see them look around the place. To make sure they don't miss out on the view and all we have here."

"When we were children, we were here and that was it. We did not have any interest in heritage. Everything came when I met people who loved heritage, me, I had not seen it. I had everything to discover. Through encounters with people from the outside. They were important people, they brought me a lot."

"Before, I always wondered what people found here. Now, I love to take a stroll. It really is very beautiful."

Finally, various visions into the future were expressed by an array of residents. When prompted to explain what heritage represents for them and how they envisage the future in the village, residents demonstrate some anxiety about the development path chosen, at the same time as they assert it is important to them that local heritage be preserved.

"We are not a postcard. We are not obtuse to change and we don't want to return to the past and move in reverse. No, we keep the village conviviality but also ally modernity. There is some nostalgia, that's undeniable, but we move forward."

"There might be a risk of hyper-patrimonialization, the mayor needs to be vigilant."

"Heritage, for me, it's everything that was left by the people before us. But it will be gone if we don't do something. Now, can we make this task prevail over moving forward? That's the question. I think we could do both, but some will tell you it's not possible."

"Our heritage it's all this *bâti*.[59] That, and the *monuments historiques*. We have three listed monuments. That won't ever be touched, there is no worries there."

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[59] Literally, *le bâti* is all that is "built", all built structures.

"For me heritage, it's all the monuments, but also my house, the neighbor's house, it's the whole thing."

"I'd like for my grandchildren to have an idea of what it was here before, so they see where they come from. So we must keep some of this for them. It's shouldn't be just for tourists."

"They'd want us to be a museum. That's not a future for us. But for now, what else do we have? They have to think about something else too."

"It seems normal that with time a little bit gets lost. It'd be foolish to think we can preserve it all at all costs. That's not how people did it before. They destroyed things sometimes, when it no longer suited, so they could re-use the materials. And fires happened too. Today, why do we want to keep it all, it's very expensive."

"Today, it's all or nothing. Everything is disposable and we throw it away before we are even finished using it, or we keep everything, just to have it forever. I think that we have to choose a path in the middle. You know, our ancestors, they transformed things all the time, even habitat. A barn became a house, a shed became a barn, and we put things down to use the building materials to build something else. The village was probably reconstructed with its own material several times over by now. So, keeping everything makes less sense than we think sometimes. It does not mean we should not think about it (…) And also, there are less and less people around who would know how to build something well, with the materials of before. Now, it's almost pre-fabricated constructions. Not built to be here in a thousand years, for sure."

5.2.3. Investigation into personal landscape perception through photo-elicitation

The goal of the photo-elicitation project was to get an understanding of the personal and intimate representation people have of the cultural landscape they inhabit. Village residents were given disposable cameras and were asked to photograph places/landscapes/landscapes elements in response to a script of five questions. Participants were then given the opportunity to discuss their choices in a follow-up interview once the photos had been processed.

Following Yves Michelin's (1998) methodology, the project specifically aimed at unveiling the affective/intimate part of the everyday landscape that each resident considers part of his/her identity and whether it is shared by other residents or remains specific to each individual. It also sought to highlight what might be some elements of the everyday heritage landscape that are seen in a negative light and rejected, as well as those elements of the

landscape that residents recognize as sufficiently constitutive of their *pays* that they would

showcase them to outsiders. Furthermore, to evaluate whether people are aware of the results of

heritage preservation and place-making development policies, the photo-elicitation project aimed

at showing whether residents are conscious of the evolution of the landscape they inhabit. Do

they see and/or understand what may be the concrete impact of the PBVF label on their

surroundings and on place-development?

The script provided to respondents consisted of five questions:

1- If you had to leave your village permanently, what three images would you bring with
   you to remember it and your life here?

2- Since you have lived in the village, what has changed the most?

3- There might be things in the village that you find problematic or unattractive. Photograph
   these instances.

4- If the tourist office needed photos to use in a trade show to attract tourists, what photos
   would you propose?

5- Your village is one of the MBVF. Photograph what you think best reflects the concrete
   influence of the label on the village and the consequence of the label attribution.

5.2.3.1. Intimate landscape

Question #1, which was meant to elicit responses as to intimate landscape, produced

mixed results. Two categories of responses emerged. About half of the items selected as

"intimate landscape" were also what was selected as the "tourist landscape" (question #3), i.e.

landscape features such as the church, the steeple, the view from the bridge, the view onto the

valley from the belvedere, and other archetypical postcard views. At first, this could indicate a conflation between the officially designated patrimony (national or local) and personal patrimony (based on personal memory of experiences in the place). However, follow-up interviews revealed that these standard vistas, indeed often reproduced on postcards, represented very symbolic elements of the personal landscape of each individual as well, and for different reasons than what the tourist or professional photographer might see there. The layers of the heritage landscape are deciphered differently according to the level of familiarity and length of residence (as Bossuet had observed in his study, 2005). Hence, even though the church may well be listed as a *Monument Historique*, this does not make it any less relevant as personal and intimate patrimony. It also represents for some the place where they were baptized and confirmed, or where they served as altar boys in their childhood. These experiential connections and personal histories in place prevail. The same reasoning applied to photos of typical panoramic vistas onto the village. While for tourists these views represent charming global outlooks of rooftops and façades, for insiders, this is the landscape of "coming home" when they have been away and missing their village. They do not see that view as the postcard that outsiders view, but they see it as the familiar return, they know which roof is which, who is home by looking at whose chimney is smoking, whose lights are on, whose garden is blooming, whose boat is back on the water for the season, whose shutters are closed or open. In a glance, they decipher the landscape of home.

The other half of items selected to express intimate landscape consisted mainly of habitations where respondents were born or had lived, where their parents had lived, and other familial properties. All but one inhabitant who were born in the village photographed their

childhood home, even when that house was no longer in the family. When the home had been demolished, they photographed the site where it used to stand. Many also pointed to areas that have been reconverted into other uses, for example areas that used to be fallow land where they played as children. "When I was a kid, I spent much time with other kids foraging in those parts. We had even found an entrance to some subterranean cave. Now it's blocked."

Personal gardens came up in a great number of responses as well, often with specific descriptions of seasonality. "My garden, when the leaves are falling… Then I can see the castle in the horizon." Or "my garden in May, when roses are blooming." And "the luminosity in my garden at that time of the year, it's magical and I have not seen it anywhere else. I can just sit here with my *apéritif*, it's better than going to the movies. That's what I want to take away with me." Or "the view under snow, or when the water is very high."

The cemetery is another recurrent landscape feature that emerged throughout the interviews, for different reasons. "This is where all of us are and will be." Or "For me, this reminds me of all people before, of how I would come with my mother and others to clean the tombs, set everything straight in there." While only three photographed the City Hall as a part of the intimate landscape, none chose to photograph the *monuments aux morts*,[60] which in French villages is symbolic of the Nation and lists all the villagers who died in various wars, sometimes as far as the War of 1870. The fact that these monuments did not intervene in the ways in which villagers described their attachment to place was surprising. The visceral attachment to place was best expressed by a respondent who said he could not answer question #1: "Where I'll go when I

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[60] Monument to honor the war dead, customarily present in French *communes* and sites for annual commemorative activities.

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leave my village, I won't need photos to remember it. You see, the only way I'll leave and the only place I'll go is at the end of the alley. I'll never leave my village." (pointing to the cemetery) And "I don't see where else I could live. I never envisaged to settle in a place without history. I knew people who said that it was heavy to live in a place where history is so present though." And put simply: "I could have been well anywhere, except that I am best here."

5.2.3.2. Landscape memory

Question #2 revealed an array of changes, depending on when the person first arrived in the village. The main recurring dimensions of change were expressed as loss or improvement.

Loss

- Disappearances of farms and barns

- Abandonment and desertification of old houses

- Disappearance of hedges, fruit trees, and vines

- For sale signs or empty homes

- Segregation of people by sector of the village; loss of "mixité"[61]

- Disappearance of areas of convergence in the village (play field, boules field)

- Disappearance of agricultural activities

- Parking lots where fallow land existed

- Disappearance of the school(s)

- One way street sign and "do not enter" sign ("it's changed even the way we go about moving around in the village. I have to go around now.")

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[61] *Mixité* refers to social diversity.

Improvement

- Renovations of roads and pavement

- Enhanced cleanliness

- Burial of electric lines

- Habitat restoration and rehabilitation

- Modernization of the sewer system

- New boutiques and restaurants

- Flowers in the village

- Cleaning up of ruins

- Potable water at the faucet (inside houses)

> "Things have changed so much, I was born here. The village has changed so much since my childhood. I regret when they remove an element of our heritage. Paintings, gardens, that's not important. On the other hand, to remove a house, that's important, that's a part of history."

> "Before, habitat was dense in the village. A lot has been removed since the 1950s. Everything was old, people wanted concrete, formica, modern things. It seemed cleaner."

> "I used to go to the surrounding farms with my father. In one big room, everything happened there. But in the 50s and 60s we cut these rooms to make kitchens and living rooms."

> "Since the 70s, twenty thirteenth century buildings have disappeared. It's an irreparable loss for our urban patrimony. It changed the physiognomy of the village by changing the street plan, which had been established very early on since evidence suggests that this site has continually been occupied since the Stone Age."

These results are cross-referenced below with responses to question #5 to identify what changes people associate with the label.

5.2.3.3. Rejected landscape

Question #3 about the "rejected landscape" indicated a few common problems perceived by the population:

- Pavement renovation. "It does not look authentic anymore." This pavement renovation was mentioned by many as a major change (question #2).

- Commercial clutter in public space

- Messy front yards

- Abandoned "*petit patrimoine*", such as the village old washpit

- Traffic and traffic signage, number of signs of all kinds everywhere. "All these signs pollute the view." "It's complete anarchy with all the commercial signs." "They need to be consistent with their signs. And differentiate between points of interest, shops, lodging. Right now, it's all the same, it's hard to make sense of it for visitors."

- Cars parked everywhere they are not supposed to be. "They park even in front of monuments." And "Don't tell me they can't walk from the parking lot." "Well, the problem is that the Auberge does not have a parking lot, so people don't want to park in the municipal lot and walk back. There is nowhere for them to park but the street around there." "Look, I was able to catch four of them on the photo. And there is a no-parking sign!"

- New wooden or semi-wooden structures here and there

- Secondary homes ill-maintained

- Empty homes; closed shutters; for sale signs

- Closed businesses "They only open on the week-ends, just to make their money and go. That makes me so mad, because those business owners don't want to be integrated in the life of the village."

- Weeds and brambles

5.2.3.4. Outsider's landscape

As expected, question #4 produced answers that were mostly aligned with postcard-like outlooks, such as the church steeple, the view from the valley or the bridge, the old covered market, but not only. Respondents also put forth practical aspects of the village that they thought tourists would appreciate, such as shaded parking lots, open boutiques, horse carriage, museum, self-guided tour indications throughout the village (in the form of informative plaques dispersed throughout the village). Five respondents also photographed their own home, because they were proud of it and felt that it was representative of the village, especially when that home was also a business. One also mentioned that she posts pamphlets on her gate to inform people about activities that may be going on in the wider region, using her fence as a sort of message board for the tourists, indicating a desire for exchange with outsiders.

5.2.3.5. Impact of the label on the landscape

Finally question #5, which asked respondents to analyze what they thought the concrete impact of the label had been, caused a number of them some difficulty. Most asserted that the label had meant the conservation of heritage generally and the increase in the level of care that residents exhibited for their own property, but they did not know what to show me for it. Several said that they could not show me anything in particular because it was the whole that resulted from the label. "It's the whole, we can't separate it into pieces." However, others were able to identify several levels of impact. First, by showing a tourist population that they found was ever more varied and originating from further places than before, as photos of foreign license plates on cars and Northern European looking tourists evidenced. "We are starting to see Asians too"; and secondly, by showing renovations of façades and street pavement, commercial activities, and

nightly illumination. "It attracts people, not only visitors, also people who establish their business, we now have two restaurants, one café, artists."

Recurrent images in response to question #5 were:

- Groups of tourists, tourists in queue in a boutique, tourists walking with bags of things they bought in local shops.

- Parking lot full of cars on week-ends and parking lot with some cars on a week day

- Electrical lines being buried (these works were taking place at the time), electrical meters out of sight as well.

- Habitat renovation (that had already taken place or that was taking place at the time)

- Tourist office and even the tourist officer was captured in snapshots

- Museum

- Flowers

- Sites where ruins had been cleared up

- Artists presenting their work

- New boutiques and restaurants

- One way street sign and "do not enter" sign

- Nightly illumination

- Public toilets

- The sign featuring the *Plus Beaux Villages de France* logo at each entrance of the village

It can be noticed that several of these items coincide with the items selected as what had changed the most for them in the village, indicating that much of the change is in fact understood

as being a result of the label, or that at least the label is perceived as having influenced the ways in which the village has evolved: Cleaning up of ruins, habitat restoration, new boutiques and artisans, burial of electric lines, and parking lots. Surprisingly, almost no-one's responses to question #5 overlapped with responses to question #3 (problems in the landscape), except for two respondents who indicated that the label brought rubbish and uncleanliness because of undisciplined and uncaring tourists (in the same conversation, this respondent also described how the village was much cleaner than it used to be, as far as rubbish from residents) and caused the profusion of unsightly signage that lacked harmony and was ill-situated (blocking the view in front of monuments for example). Even those respondents who confided that they were skeptical about the label did not produce overlapping photos for questions #3 and #5, suggesting that their skepticism was based on other features of the label than the material evolution of the place. In fact, when questioned, they revealed that it was more the process they had a problem with and the fact that they do not feel consulted enough and that they resented the fact that for them it is only the same few people who benefit from the label. "Some people are very favorable, but some are indifferent. There are some, even on the Municipal Council who are skeptical, often anti-tourism."

5.2.4. Relationship with other labels

Interviews also highlighted the ways in which residents envisage other labels that the village may have been granted. In one village that is also "Terre d'Avenir"[62], one resident expressed that: "I don't see it as a conflict with the PBVF, except with photovoltaics." In a village that is also a UNESCO World Heritage site, residents were split, with some being proud

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[62] Land of the future

that the village had been recognized beyond national borders, while others dismissed it as something they were not part of and even excluded them.

Figure 30: UNESCO label plaque on the Loire river bank in Candes-Saint-Martin

Local identity:
Villages Créoles
(Asssociation in decline)

National identity:
PBVF

Figure 31: Local and national labels co-habiting in Hell-Bourg, Salazie (Réunion)

Figure 32: Two national-scale labels with different foci in Le Bec-Helloin, Eure (Haute-Normandie)

"Tourists will understand UNESCO site, especially those who are not French, and that may even be why they are here. So, it probably brings people in."

"I don't care about UNESCO site, I think that the PBVF label is much more meaningful for us. It's more connected to us."

"Since the UNESCO designation, they think they need to bring in special artists in. But the truth is, those sculptures exhibited down there, none of the locals could make sense of them, they felt completely excluded. It had nothing to do with the village. It's just that now that we are UNESCO, people want to come in an exhibit their work to get visibility. It does nothing for us. It's not what this place is about and it's elitist."

"UNESCO here has been problematic. It's contributed to development challenges because it goes along with drastic limitations on land use in the zone, it's not just the village that it covers, it's very different from the PBVF. Sometimes it's good, but the few farmers left had to adapt, especially with cattle."

"For the UNESCO label, it was different, it was a wider project that did not implicate us directly. It's at higher levels that it was played. It's the big league. We are glad we are included in the perimeter though, it can only add more to our attractiveness. But for people here, I don't think it really means anything. I bet you some don't even know what the UNESCO is to start with."

"The difference between PBVF and UNESCO, it's easy: one people can understand, the other they don't. The PBVF, it's closer to us."

"UNESCO, imagine that! 'World Heritage'. It's important for me. It also means that we have been doing things right. Look at what they have been destroying in other countries, disastrous…"

"I don't think that our seeking another regional label goes against our project with the PBVF. It covers different things, and it's on another scale. There is no competition there. It does mean two membership expenses for us, so we must see results."

"For me, it's also important to provide some basis for local residents to understand the project and to see themselves in it. That's why the regional label also works. It does not have the aura of the PBVF, but people relate to it directly, in their minds, in their traditions, they know what it means

5.3.   Conclusion

For mayors, the label serves to foster inhabitants' pride, facilitate local governance, especially when it comes to defending their decisions over habitat conservation and individuals' behavior in the village, as well as attract newcomers who are likely to settle and establish businesses and services which will cater to the local population as well as potential visitors. The label is also the way for the locality to be part of a national project at the same time at it positions the village within a regionalist territorial development, giving the village more weight because it comes to represent a political and economic asset in the region through the label. "They leave us alone, because 'we' have the label."

Rather than seeing the label as a tool that may block development, mayors see it as a tool of orientation, to positively orient development towards a *quality* result. It becomes a tool to think about development in the face of globalization. The label gives an additional argument that seems more concrete to people than even zoning and urbanistic documents that have legal existence. The label does not constitute legal obligations, but nonetheless tends to have power in making a development argument on the ground and preventing certain things to be done, built, destroyed, etc. "We are just a brand, a private brand, we do not have aesthetic criteria that are enforceable. In this sense I find what we do amazing" (*Association* officer).

The label has had concrete impact on development strategies, but villages must learn to align their vision with that of the *Association*: "There are villages in our network that want to have it all. They want touristic development, agricultural development, artisanal development, industrial development, they want to do everything, and also bring in new populations, we say no no no no no no, you can in fact cumulate different things, but not in any manner, otherwise you will be ousted from the *Association*" (*Association* officer). As far as voluntary demission, cases have emerged but remain very rare. Usually such demissions occur a few months following municipal elections, when a change in the municipal team wants to start anew in the village, looks at the budget, and perhaps thinks it is too costly, without asking too many questions and then do not renew the partnership. This has happened in villages that are holders of multiple labels (and hence responsible for several yearly association fees) and already possess strong touristic attractiveness (on the littoral for example). A village that opts out but would like to rejoin later would be subject to a new application process and subject to the stringent *charte de qualité* evaluation, which they may no longer pass if the village was part of the first generation of villages.

For residents, the label fosters pride in the past and awareness of the value of local heritage, whether material or immaterial, tangible or intangible. It also triggers a sense of responsibility, which varies according to the relationship particular residents entertain with the place and the history they have built in the place (born and raised there, gone and returned, never left, newcomers, or foreign). But interviews also revealed some widespread incomprehension about what the label entails and the processes behind it, some cases of indifference, and some cases of hostility based mostly on the practical constraints the *charte de qualité* imposes, or the inconveniences resulting from the stark contrast between quiet times of the year and the touristic invasions of the summer months when the insider-outsider boundaries intensify. "I like the exchange. But too much exchange kills the exchange."

Furthermore, interviews demonstrate the profound attachment residents have to their village, to the point that several mentioned only leaving "feet first" (i.e., dead). While such an attitude is not entirely surprising and was even expected as being in the widespread order of things, what came out of conversations that was surprising is that this attachment reveals a more complex connection with certain elements of the village, beyond simple monuments and protected built heritage. When one respondent claims that "*stone, it is in us*", it is possible to read in this response a sort of "totemization", since this identification –substantial and organic- with a natural element – permanent in time – also translates, *mutatis mutandi*, the genetic filiation with the "*anciens*" who transmitted it. This expression of sameness and appurtenance to a defined group relies on a logic of classification that distinguishes respondents from other groups within the same place or across places. In "the stone people", residents distinguish themselves, by opposition to other groups: "those of the river", the "troglos", "slate", "tuffeau", or "ochre" people. While it cannot be said that the *Association* is the primary source of such social and

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identity dynamics, it can be envisaged as a catalyst, as it triggers a reinforcement of these identities viscerally based in place and experience of place, in the physical – sometimes even organic– or anthropized components of place, such as tile shape, by renewing people's gaze or triggering their awareness, or by simply validating those classifications.

Figure 33: Residents identify with ochre in Roussillon

Figure 34: Identity-producing troglodytic habitat in Candes-Saint-Martin and Montsoreau

Figure 35: "We are the stone people" in Gordes.

Figure 36: "You can tell where you are and who we are by looking up": round tile, lauze (flagstone), or slate

Together Chapters 4 and 5 presented a summary of fieldwork findings, focusing first on the *Association* itself (Chapter 4) and on the effect of the label on villages and villagers (Chapter 5). Interview results as well as participation-observation findings allow for a series of conclusions to be made about the successes and challenges of the heritage-making project and the potential it offers for rural resilience in France and elsewhere. Beyond the 156 villages it brings together, through the thematics it addresses about the present and the future of the rural, what elements can the *Association* contribute to the examination of the decline of the countryside and the question of the "rural residue"?

CHAPTER SIX:

RESULTS AND SYNTHESIS – *HERITAGE-SCAPES* IN *THE RURAL RESIDUE*

This research has investigated the basic question of the loss of the rural and the ways in which it may be resurrected and under what form. In doing so, it asks about the nature of the rural, how it becomes constructed, what has happened to it, what may happen in the future, how it is perceived, how it can be restored and sustained, and by which mechanisms and by whom. The case study of the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* is positioned in the long-standing concern over the rural-urban divide. This concern is relevant worldwide today, as the global population has become predominantly urban while rural territories still prevail in many countries in terms of surface. As urban planners and architects increasingly aspire to bring the countryside to the city, are we in a new moment in the framing of the question over the "rural residue" (Lowenthal 1997).

What do the manifestations that accompany place-based development through heritage preservation tell us about the processes of place memory, commercialization, the needs being fulfilled, and what forms of local space production and local space experience it is replacing and creating? How is space experienced and regulated in the context of "heritage-scapes", when the temporal becomes spatial, as in Lowenthal's "Past is a foreign country" (1985)? Which past is being mobilized through heritage preservation? What are the relationships people entertain with that past? When something is gone, an impetus often exists to recuperate it and to perceive it as

unique. Does this result in the fetishization of the unique in the local? Furthermore, does patrimonialization of rural spaces result in a certain homogeneization and standardization of the local? At what point then could the *unique* become the *generic*? These questions are addressed through the case study by focusing on the creation, evolution, successes, and failures of the *Association* in their material, spatial, social, and economic dimensions.

In Chapter One, general questions were posed and positioned in the literature on heritage landscape, heritage preservation, and the use of heritage-making in rural identity resilience. Chapter Two addressed the methods used to address these general questions in the field through ethnographic work and research questions aiming at unveiling 1) the extent to which the *Association* under study contributes a response to the decline of rurality; 2) the ways in which the label affects residents and place-making in member-villages; 3) whether the *Association*'s project has led to hyper-localism; 4) whether place commodification occurs under the impetus of the label and the motivation for economic development based on tourism; and 5) the kind of future the *Association*, village mayors, and residents envisage for their village. In order to better respond to these research questions, Chapter Three explained the historical legacies, administrative apparatus, and cultural context of the concept of *patrimoine* in rural France. Understanding this framework was necessary to efficiently communicate field data about the *Association des plus beaux villages de France* in Chapter Four, as well as about the evolution of villages and villagers' experience under the label in Chapter Five. In this Chapter here, a synthesis is made and conclusions formulated to address initial research questions while also proposing to bring the analysis beyond the scope of these questions based on new directions suggested by unexpected and meaningful field results.

6.1.   The *Association* and approaches to heritage landscape: revisiting Chapter One

6.1.1. Heritage landscape

The *Association of the PBVF* echoes multi-layered debates over heritage landscape in its philosophy, structure, and mission implementation. The villages of rural France that are members of the *Association des plus beaux villages de France* constitute not only actual places, but they are also intricately constitutive of the wider landscape around them. Reviewing the promotional literature of the *Association*[63] makes clear the interdependent relationship between specific villages and surrounding landscapes, especially through its reliance on photographs and narratives that inscribe the villages within the greater region and the region's particular physical, human, economic, and historical features. *"The village and the surrounding landscape make one, they are connected through history, history of the people first, but also history of war, history of agriculture, and local culture. Plus, look at them, the very materials used to build our villages, they melt into the landscape, discreet, harmonious, using well each slope, peak, river meander, or terrace"*(Pascal Bernard, Délégué Général).

Moreover, the *Association*'s three-fold mission – (1) heritage conservation and valorization, (2) visibility, and (3) economic development – rests on the cultural and aesthetic idealization of the village and rural lifestyles. These ideals, legacies of early French geography and social history, are also manifest in French contemporary attachment to the complementary notions of *pays* and *terroirs* as sites where cultural and natural landscapes intersect to produce unique places and their associated identities, livelihoods, and products, while at the same time integrating them with a national notion of heritage. The *Association*'s mission echoes this

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[63] http://www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org/ and Guide des Plus beaux Villages de France, *Sélection du Reader's Digest*, 2009.

holistic view of landscape. In leading the decisions over what villages become members, the *Association*'s selection criteria inherit an approach to rural milieu that is inscribed in the legacy of the Vidalian humanistic French School of geography. This can be surprising for an association that claims a national dimension ("de France") in the context of France that is often described as centralized around the idea of the Nation over a regional conception of France (in Weber's "Peasants into Frenchmen" for example). However, many scholars concerned with regional history and development nuance this understanding (Young 2012; Thiesse 1991). "The French national idea was often advanced precisely through the promotion of ostensibly local interests, identities and products" (Young 2012, p.3). The *local-national* dichotomy is replaced by "a less linear and deterministic understanding of French nation building, one more keenly attuned both to the dynamic ways in which locality and nation have interrelated in specific contexts, and to the key role local actors and cultures have played in enabling new forms of French identification" (Young 2012, p.3). The *Association* is able to capitalize on this "knotty relationship between cultural particularity and national unity in Modern France" (Young 2012, p.3) to propose a model that speaks to the local through the national and to the national through the local. Most mayors interviewed in the study explain that what they seek in the MBVF label is the national recognition, at the same time as they describe their efforts, sometimes their passion, for the defense of all things local. The national dimension of the *Association* makes possible the renewal of the regional, while the mosaic of the different "regionals" gives the national dimension of the *Association* its legitimacy, affirming the more complex understanding of the local-national nexus some scholars put forth. *Terroir* and Nation are inextricably tied.

Meinig's (1979) "ten versions of the same scene" are also echoed in the *Association*'s view of the landscape and the ways in which the historical dimension is underscored locally by

the established concepts of *terroir, "foodscapes"*, and craftmanships. These concepts associate landscape as territory (location, place) with productive livelihoods inherited from ancestral traditions (whether reconstructed or revived). The *Association*'s mission espouses Meinig's three dimensions of reading the landscape as heritage in that it aims to offer an avenue for outsiders to discover the multiplicity and uniqueness of the local (adventure), teach about past ways of life (pedagogy), and trigger a self-reflection on how to articulate those past ways with our present and our future, as a region and as a nation. In becoming symbols of the past, the *Association*'s member-villages are re-created to be displayed and promoted to insiders and outsiders alike. They are the product of cultural ideologies and processes that are themselves contingent on time, place, socio-economic contexts, technologies, and societal mutation, since neither landscape nor culture is static.

Caring for the village is one pillar in the admission criteria and is translated into requirements for physical caring as well as intangible characteristics such as the pride felt by local inhabitants. This resonates with Tuan's idea of "care" (1974). However, while Tuan's sense of place seems to be at the root of the *Association*'s mission, paradoxically it is this same caring that leads to the creation of "non-places" as theorized by Marc Augé (1992). In fact, creating a sense of place in Tuan's sense in the member-villages entails the parallel creation of non-places such as large parking lots to accommodate visitors' automobiles, sometimes in a location that had social value in previous times: *"Where you see the parking lot there, we used to play pétanque, but now we must put cars somewhere"* (a respondent).

In articulating past, present, and future, unlike the experience in a historic site such as de Lyser's Bodie, CA (1999), house museums, historic village theme parks, or eco-museums, the *Association* is turned to the future as much as to the past. It puts the past at the service of the

future, reinterpreting the past in the ways it seeks to develop the villages as places for living in the 21st century, rather than strictly as places where viewing, performing, and arguably experiencing a certain past can occur.

> It seems clear that the whole preservation and restoration movement is much more than a means of promoting tourism or a sentimentalizing over an obscure part of the past – though it is also both of those things. We are learning to see it as a new (or recently rediscovered) interpretation of history. It sees history not as a continuity but as a dramatic discontinuity, a kind of cosmic drama (Jackson 1980, p101).

The *Association* fits Harrison's (2013) capture of the relationship between past, present, and future when he speaks of heritage as the place where the "future of the past" unreels in the present (Butler's "present past", 2006). Furthermore, the different actors and stakes implicated in the *Association*'s project show that "the concept of heritage not only encompasses a nation's relationship to history and history-making, but also refers increasingly to the ways in which a broad range of other constituencies are involved in the production of the past in the present." (Harrison 2013, p.5)

6.1.2. Sustainable development vs heritage preservation

With a relatively politically strong and visible green movement in France, sustainable development and environmental policies have held a prominent place in public debates. In this context, it is not surprising that village respondents and mayors clearly were aware of the tensions between development and heritage preservation. Respondents of all ages showed to have engaged in a reflection on the topic. However, the younger respondents who had purposely relocated to the villages were the most concerned. At the same time as they seek a "greener" lifestyle, by moving to the countryside and escaping the tumults of the city, they look for a life in harmony with the environment. They often garden, buy organic food, and generally go out of

their way to be conscientious consumer-citizens. Consequently, several indicated their regret that they are unable to pursue alternative energies (photovoltaic panels are problematic for the harmony of rooftops) and that they have to drive to the nearest town to get their supplies for lack of commercial infrastructures aimed at residents.

> "We can't eat candles and lace; and that's all you can buy here. Oh, and overpriced jams. Who needs jams? We all make our own here! It's really a stupid business for the village."

> "I don't know if we are really any greener than our friends who still live in the city. We really wanted to do this, to try it. To try to slow down and get in touch with something else. To some extent, it's worked. But it is work. I find myself on the road a lot. Now, with the baby, I wonder what will happen when the baby grows up and there is just not much in proximity, so we drive to live. Before, I rode my bike to my job or walked. Now it's too far. The solution is to create a business here. The Mayor is willing to help, we are talking about it."

> "Inside the village, there are no problems; the village is too small. It's in the constructible zones that there is a problem of use for new energies because nothing can be visible. It's normal though, the touristic attractiveness should not be diminished by certain developments that would have unsightly results."

> "It's hard to decide on the matter. Can we transform villages into museums? No, that's not possible. We need to transform houses so that they are inhabited, with recent materials and with openings; we need good architects, that what we need, over the need for more interdictions."

> "It's necessary to make habitat evolve. But it needs to be good and beautiful. We can surely critique what's being done. Someone built himself a wooden chalet here. It's not great. But it's an interesting proposition."

> "Did you see what they did up there? If people are not stopped, we'll come back in 50 years and everything will be wood. The modern obsession with wood! A few famous architects have started the trend, excuse me to tell you this, but many of them from America. Of course, over there wood is everywhere, it's their material of choice. Here, it makes no sense, except to enslave ourselves to some sort of fad."

About the same wooden construction, another respondent reflects:

> "That wooden house flanked on the cliff, you must admit, it's daring. Here? In a region that defines itself by its stone? People don't come here to see a log cabin, they are here for the luminosity of the stone, those changing colors on the stone at different times of year and times of the day. Wood? I'm not against it, but does it bring you any emotion? Yeah,…" (punctuated by a shrug of the shoulders).

These few quotes are representative of the concerns in the debate over sustainable development of habitat in heritage villages. Retention of attractibility to potential visitors or newcomers, dangers of museification, identity-producing habitat, and the heavy regulation which supports a certain immutability of habitat in those places are all items that can become

contentious locally. The *Association*'s position on sustainability of habitat and villages is that villages have always been sustainable and thus will continue to be, in spite of limitations that are intrinsically produced by its labelization process and *charte de qualité*.

Interviews with mayors and the staff of the *Association* reveal that it is a theme that is at the heart of the reflection over heritage in the 21st century. The quotes translates the general sentiment vis-à-vis the issue, although the evolution of habitat in PBVF is not consensual on the ground, as the previous quotes have indicated. There is tension between, on one hand, the desire to renovate and restore habitat as it was, and to keep the physiognomy of the village as it was, based not only on the fact that it is a marker of local identity, but also on the fact that it is the basis for an economy of tourism, and on the other hand the fear of museification brought about by too much restriction on modernization or trendy innovation. This antagonism appears real when comparing answers to the question: "how to do you see the future of the village? Do you think the village is sustainable?"

> *"I think we live a sustainable life here. There are a lot of things we make ourselves. We don't waste much either. In the winter, you see, I make a big fire downstairs and this is the room where I do everything: cook, read, have people over. I don't heat up the whole house. Just what I need."*
> *"Sustainable development, the second-home people love that sort of stuff. They think they can do it for the week end and the holidays, 'part-time' if you see what I mean. Yeah, why not, if it makes them happy. But really, sustainable development is played at another scale. Do you think our agriculture is concerned with sustainable development? Who uses up our water, pollutes our water?"*
>
> *"The village has stood for a while now, there is something we do that's working."*

The *Association*'s line of thought on the matter follows the logic of the previous respondent's thought:

> "*Our villages are intrinsically models of sustainable development. First because they have lasted. They have lasted in time; they have crossed centuries before getting to us. And in what state? It's absolutely astonishing. Why are they models of sustainable development? Precisely because they do not look anymore anything like what they looked like before, in medieval times. What's left? The parcel plan, the structure. Habitations have been rebuilt, many were made out of wood initially, and then they became stone. So people did not seek to expand the villages, they rebuilt them on themselves. Why are they models of*

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sustainable development? Because in terms of spatial economy, they are the opposite of sprawl habitat which is a hyper-consumer of space where on enormous lots you plunk houses. In villages, habitat is super compact, hyper dense, in general with several floors. Plus, we did not build our villages on cultivable land, we did it on infertile lands. They did sustainable development without knowing it was. There was no choice. They conserved cultivable lands around, or terraces. Also, there was great diversity of use and commerces. Downstairs it was artisans and shop keepers and we lived upstairs. This is real optimization of space. Everything was recycled, nothing was lost, and they took all materials locally, stones from quarries or rivers, sands, earth, everything. The result was this symbiosis between villages and their surroundings, so that you almost did not see them anymore" (in conversation with Pascal Bernard).

The *Association*'s approach to sustainability rests not on new technologies but on a renewed choice to use heritage as its foundational capital. *"The vocation of the Association, for 30 years, has been to do sustainable development. With what? From a basis of aesthetic capital. Patrimonial capital: that's our foundation. This aesthetic patrimony nourishes notoriety, which in turn nourishes a certain development politic"* (Pascal Bernard). As it reacts negatively against the excesses of peri-urbanization, village sprawl, and habitat discontinuity in style and space, the *Association* protects its patrimonial capital. However, when it comes to renewable energy, the *charte de qualité* remains an obstacle, for example in the case of solar panels on rooftops. Rather, the sustainability agenda is noted in terms of spatial and resource consumption, but also in terms of social and cultural sustainability.

6.2.   Rurality and the *village* as heritage

David Lowenthal (1997) cautioned that "the countryside is becoming a place for living, not for making a living" and that "landscape and rural life are becoming ominously disjoined." Since the middle of the 19th century, the European countryside has undergone radical transformations. These transformations are due, of course, to industrialization, urbanization, and the massive rural exodus that ensued. Two world wars also contributed to decimating peasant populations. And in the second part of the 20th century, the further and rapid mechanization,

modernization of agriculture, and the resulting regrouping of agricultural plots into contiguous

and large expanses,[64] the emergence of the agro-business complex, the consequences of the

European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the arrival of new populations in the countryside,

and the development of daily life organized around the use of the automobile, continued to

transform the countryside and rural lifestyles in Europe, although not at the same rate

everywhere. Today, over 90 percent of the territory of the European Union is rural. According to

various European Union (EU) statistics, around 25 percent of total EU population lives in "rural

regions" and rural areas receive generous EU funding (between 2007 and 2013, 71 billion Euros

–a 100 percent increase from the previous EU multi-annual budget–, and for 2014-2020 another

89.9 billion Euros from CAP rural development funds).

At the heart of rural life stands the village. Historically, in many cases, French and

European villages in general operated at one time like mini-cities within a regional territory, a

place of trade and exchanges, business, politics, celebrations and commemorations, religious

worship, education, and a place where people scattered in surrounding farms and hamlets could

come to access various services and commodities. In France today, as in other countries in

Europe, many villages have been deserted or stripped of their old functions.[65] Cafés, post offices,

bakeries and butcher-shops have closed. The country doctor moved his *cabinet* to the city long

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[64] The *Remembrement rural* was a plan of land plot consolidation effective as part of the Monnet Plan for reconstruction in the years immediately following World War II. It was implemented with intensity from the 1960s to 1980s (to facilitate access and land exploitation by heavy agricultural machinery, a legacy of the generous Marshall Plan after WWII, when American tractors such as John Deere were introduced in the French countryside), which had not only social consequences on the peasantry but disastrous ecological effects, notably because it encouraged the destruction of hedges, paths, or ditches between fields, the filling of ponds, or the cutting of scattered trees. This not only led to downward pressures on rural biodiversity, but also to a modification of the circulation and networks of surface waters, with deleterious outcomes in terms of soil erosion, water drainage, and water quality due to eutrophication.

[65] For an account of the situation in Germany, see Peter Merkl's (2012) work on Bavarian small towns and villages subtitled "the passing of a way of life".

ago. And even religious services are now only held on a rotation basis every few weeks

(although in many countries the idealized village comes represented with its church steeple as an

identifier of the "rural"). Old farms' shutters are closed most of the year, until summer arrives.

And the echoes of schoolchildren at play are no longer heard. European villages face common

challenges: demographic challenges, with continued depopulation and out-migration (especially

the youth), lower than average income, lack of access to basic services. These difficulties have

emerged in spite of heavy funding by the EU and other national subsidy programs. And they do

not arise uniformly everywhere. Depending on political history and economic trajectory, some

nations have retained a small-farm agricultural sector longer than others. However, increasingly,

as the industrial agro-food model comes to dominate the business side of agriculture and the

number of people involved in agriculture continues to decrease, as is the case in France, rural

residents are struggling to find new resources to make a living.

Chapter Three presented the debate over the fate of the village in France. Some assert that

since the 1960s, we are witnessing the *end of the village* as it has lost its various functions (Dibie

1979, 2006; Le Goff 2012). These scholars warn against the dangers of opening up the village to

the outside world in terms of loss of social cohesion and alienation from place itself. However,

in the context of globalization and the perceived loss of local cultural specificity that the critics

of globalization often theorize about, the village emerges in the European consciousness as a

place where what is perceived as authentic and overall threatened cultural identities have been

most preserved, however that authenticity is defined and legitimized. In France, judging by the

growth of the rural tourism sector and the attention the village receives in the media, the *village*,

as a cultural object, has come to be idealized as the embodiment of bygone living and has

become a refuge from the excesses of cities and the cultural and economic anxieties they

produce. As rural and heritage tourism intensify, the village now also becomes a node where rural identities and economic development can meet.

6.3.   The *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* and heritage-making in rural areas

In this study, research question #1 (Chapter 2) asked whether or not the label granted by the *Association* could contribute a response to the decline of rurality in France. The short answer is yes, but it does so by creating a new (or renewed) sort of village, while its scope reaches even beyond the national scale. In 1982, when a group of rural mayors got together in rural France to create the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France*, they proposed solutions to the demographic, social, and economic challenges their rural territories were facing (in France, defined as any locality of less than 2000 inhabitants). From the start, its mission was to revive the village at the same time that it would preserve its local heritage and find means for the preservation effort (see Charles Ceyrac' letter in the Introduction). It is a project of place-making through heritage preservation. The goals were to retain a local population, by giving residents the local means for livelihood, and also to foster cooperation and exchange between rural localities across the national territory by creating a *network*. The concept for the model is: "to know ourselves, to make ourselves be known, to make ourselves be acknowledged" ("*se connaître, se faire connaître, se faire reconnaître*"), resting on the triple pledge of identity preservation and transmission, desire to share with others who they are, and the necessity to recover a significant role in national affairs.

Since then, the *Association* has strived on a double strategy: First, provide a platform and a rigorous structure to evaluate heritage value in villages that seek membership through

assessment of landscape and architectural riches as well as local heritage management policies and instruments based on local specificity and quality criteria. And second, seek development through place-promotion as a tourism destination. The main challenge encountered is not to let the development prompt destroy the very basis on which the project is based, i.e., the image of the *village* as it is envisioned in our collective imaginary. Through the label of the *Association*, villages seek an avenue for development but not at all costs. Development, yes, but identity and heritage preservation and place-quality first. The *Association* emphasizes that: "*Our villages must be places of <u>living</u>, not only places of <u>visit</u>*".

Today as the *Association* celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, the model has expanded to other countries. Indeed, it has been emulated in eight other countries around the world. Others have also been in contact with the French Association (Cyprus, Poland, Bulgaria, Malta, Russia, Greece, the Congo). In total, almost 600 localities worldwide are connected through the network, and international delegations now meet once a year. While the numbers can seem trivial (what do 600 localities represent globally?), the grassroot and collective objectives and cooperation across borders in a world still dominated by the nation-state give pause. This cooperation was formally recognized in 2013 in France when the *Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages of the World* was made official, of which Wallonia, Italy, Japan, and France are founding members (Japan was particularly keen on seeing this realization come to fruition). It indicates a desire to establish durable collaboration across rural areas in different national settings. The criteria used by the French association to admit candidate-villages are based on the specificities of landscape and architectural patrimony there, as well as the French local and national heritage management apparatus reviewed in Chapter 3. However, others who have adopted these criteria, have been able to adapt them to local heritage realities, rural history, and local heritage management

institutions. For example, in Romania, the emphasis is placed more on folklore and human capital since many rural built structures were destroyed during the Ceaucescu era. In Spain accent is often put on local gastronomical heritage. In Japan, the Satoyama concept drives the evaluation of rural landscapes. In Italy, the focus is on the temporal layers of architectural heritage and depth of history in the landscape. In Québec, quality of life and cultural resilience prime.

For the *Association*, place resilience relies on the successful retention of local populations whose purpose and occupations can remain locally grounded. Through heritage preservation, the village emerges as a dynamic resource for the future of rural areas in Europe and beyond, thanks to a robust rural tourism economy. The *Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages of the World* proposes one avenue for collaboration across borders and across national contexts and local histories. The French association model, although based in the local, is able to transcend the specificities of the local by providing solutions which can be adapted to different "locals".

6.4. Impacts on the ground

Research question #2 proposed to delve into the ways in which residents live under the label and the effects on rural spaces themselves to understand some of the impact of territorial labelization on communities and their respective milieu. What have been the concrete results of the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages* on its members? They are difficult to quantify in terms of economic or demographic outcomes because of great regional diversity and lack of systematic measurement procedures. This is one aspect of its functioning the *Association* strives to improve as it moves to the next phase of its development. *"We need to better evaluate our tools."* In France, the villages of the *Association* have experienced population growth, although

not significantly higher than the national rate for all rural areas. In fact, rural areas are currently experiencing demographic growth for various reasons. But the changes in demographics do not mean that the village resurrects as it was before. In fact, much of the increase in population is due to rurbains, second-homes dwellers, or rural returnees. Expansion of urban poles also means that villages may not be as ex-centered as before, therefore many people may now choose to live in villages but they do not work there and may partake minimally in the life of the village. *"We don't see them, they live behind their walls, they leave in their cars, come back. Even when we have the village fair, they don't care to come out, maybe if they have guests they will. I tell you, if people come live here but they stay behind their walls, no, I don't think that counts as the village 'living again'"* (a respondent).

6.4.1. Successes and accomplishments

6.4.1.1. Success is evident in the demand and lasting distinctiveness

The development model designed by the *Association* has been copied, emulated, and imitated by others locally and nationally. For example, polemical label[66] of "*Circulades*" aims at creating a different kind of heritage-scape based on one particular topographic factor, while the label of the *Petites Cités de Caractères*, which although it predates the PBVF, has emulated it nonetheless in its ambition to move from the regional scale (originally it existed strictly in

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[66] The polemic emerges from the fact that the *Association* of these "circular villages" claims that the shape of these villages of the Languedoc are the result of a deliberate planning effort by an aristocratic family as early as the 10th and 11th century, based on religious symbolism and the circular conceptualization of the cosmos. Historians critically condemn the exploitation of an organically evolutive space (arguing that rather than planned these villages became circular as they were built over centuries) as the source of an invented regional identity, promoted by local officials for purely touristic and commercial ends, and based on a fictitious reading of regional history (Baudreu 2002). Beyond the label itself, the case of the "Circulades" exemplifies the existing debates and caution to be taken when approaching heritage labels. Local heritage is utilized and local history re-written to fit within a created "brand" that local people and tourists accept as a legitimate view of local territorial development. This happens through the use of labelization to create meaning and regional identity based on invented bases that may be interpreted (proven?) as historically unsound.

Brittany) to the national (but still as a multi-regional label, rather than truly national), as well as in its effort to professionalize and give more rigor to its labelization process. The *Plus Beaux Détours de France* were also created, not coincidentally directly copying the *Association*'s name but also picking up where the PBVF leaves off in terms of population threshold since this association's members are localities of <u>more</u> than 2000 inhabitants.

In spite of the profusion of new labels at various scales, the *Association* has succeeded in remaining distinct from other strictly touristic labels through the rigor of its processes and application of criteria, rigor from which it has not departed since the *Charte de Qualité* was first implemented in the early 1990s. It has also been able to retain its integrity in spite of its success and recurrent mediatization, refusing to surrender to media and commercial pressure:

> *"We get propositions all the time, for such and such endorsement of a product or service. We refuse most of them, because if it does not embody what we see as our mission and what we think is best for our villages, and that means also preserving our image, then we don't want to endorse it or put our name on it. Long term, it is not what our villages need. I tell them 'no thank you'"* (Association officer).

The sustained (and recently increasing) success in the media is a compelling indication of the *Association*'s overall success. Driven by audience's demand, the media are logically on the lookout for strong themes and social phenomena. In the thirst for all things "village," the media has found in the *Association* a structure on which to rely for stories and programs. Indeed, the *Association* has been featured in several television programs and to a certain extent has become the face of the village on French national television. This is possible because although focused on localized development, the national aura of the *Association* appeals to the public. It has been successful in keeping that national aura and mission at a time in which regional pressure is strong. It manages to stay true to a national program ("*de France*") while promoting regional and local specificity. That is a source of its strength and durability. The *Association* of the PBVF is

able to incorporate and validate regional heritage while at the same time carrying a strong national identification, even all the way to the DOM-TOM where the creole village of Hell-Bourg, in the Indian Ocean, clings to its identity as a "French village" and is making efforts to keep the PBVF label in a difficult socio-economic context (Journal de la Réunion, 2012).

6.4.1.2. Successes in establishing partnerships and expanding network nationally and internationally

Research question #3 inquired into the risk of hyper-localism and cultural entrenchment. Findings prove quite the contrary, even if the idea of the local remains central. The *Association* has been able to expand its reach by attracting and creating partnerships with other associations whose mission is to make cultural heritage available and legible. For example, in cooperating with *Braille et Culture* in several villages to create itineraries for non-seeing visitors, the *Association* indicates that it seeks to be as inclusive as possible in its mission of place-making and its pedagogical approach to heritage. Aside from the national horizontal expansion of the model through membership and partnerships, the movement towards internationalization and the fact that the model has been copied abroad has now moved the focus and organization around an international network. This *network effect* led to a *federating effect*, highlighting the commonality of projects across national contexts and a revitalization of associative life locally and across different "locals." At the national scale, the network gets further expressed and strengthened through participation in cultural gatherings and festivals around various themes such as wine, artisanship, or the inter-village annual soccer tournament.

6.4.1.3. Success in recategorizing the village in France

Through its *Charte de Qualité*, the sense of responsibility it triggers in residents, the expectation it creates in visitors, and its success with the media, the *Association* can be seen as

exemplifying what it is to be a village in France, and by extension as embodying what it means to be rural. The rural is redefined, recategorized, and reified through the concrete object of the village. The evaluation criteria act as a norm by which to gauge rurality, not only its aesthetics, but also its functions.

6.4.1.4. Social and cultural impact: creates new actors; renews and reinforces local identities

In doing so, the *Association* also has an effect on local identity as it brings in new and localized actors in the process of heritage preservation and place-making. To a certain extent, villagers themselves, whether they are well informed about the process or not (and we have seen they are not always so), become actors in the project, since they must abide by the regulations on use of space. Even private spaces are part of the reason the village has been granted the label and is considered to be representative of local and French heritage. Therefore, even residents must abide by a certain vision of the local and of history. Are they forced actors? Interviews reveal that the resulting identity reinforcing effect is stronger than the sentiment of being forced into a collective narrative of the village history that may or may not be dissonant with individual narratives of place-memory. In fact, a common attitude towards the label is that: *"People are rather happy. It pleases us. We are proud. It comforts the choice they made to live here, or to stay here."* In the network of villages, residents find an extended group of people with common experiences and with whom they can share their struggles and accomplishments as "ruralites." The network serves as a tool for the emergence of an awareness of self-identity, belonging and not belonging, and what connects people to the "other" in the heritage landscape.

"This is how we should think of landscapes: not merely how they look, how they conform to an esthetic ideal, but how they satisfy elementary needs: the need for sharing some of those sensory experiences in a familiar place: popular songs, popular dishes, a special kind of weather supposedly not found anywhere else, a special kind of sport or game… These things remind us that we belong – or used to belong – to a

specific place: a country, a town, a neighborhood. A landscape should establish bonds between people, the bond of language, of manners, of the same kind of work and leisure, and above all a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organization which fosters such experiences and relationships; spaces coming together, to celebrate, spaces for solitude, spaces that never changes and are always as memory depicted them. There are some of the characteristics that give a landscape its uniqueness, that give it style. These are what make us recall it with emotions." (Jackson 1980, p.16-17)

6.4.1.5. Material impact through awareness raising

Aside from rekindling an emotional connection to place, the *Association* has undeniably brought a new or renewed awareness towards built heritage, preservation, rehabilitation, conservation, and a general sense of care and appreciation for historic landscapes. In this sense it meets its motivation to become a source of education about local heritage and heritage valorization strategies. The material effects on the landscape are felt in terms of what tangibly results from the *Association*'s encouragements for certain works to be effected. For example, there is strong encouragement that all utility networks be made as discrete as possible.

> *"In very urban cities, like maybe in American cities, it can look good. Overhead electric lines, they can sometimes structure a perspective, but for us, the visual impact of overhead power lines, whether telephone or electric, around a medieval fortress or medieval village….. We prefer they be underground, or flushed against façades, so they are as inconspicuous as possible"* (Pascal Bernard).

Furthermore, interviews with villagers indicated that they are conscious of what visitors might see and that they are themselves partly responsible for public and private spaces.

> *"I always leave my gate open. That way if people want to come into the courtyard and see for themselves, it looks inviting. I don't mind, most people are respectful, that is why they are here in the first place. Why would they be here, and why would we be here if we did not care about heritage here and do our part to maintain it?"* (A respondent).

Many interviews revealed that the village, in its tangible reality, had much improved, through the awareness that the label brought and usually the work of a few local individuals.

> *"They worked really hard, sometimes against the will of certain people who resisted change and action, and also did not want to implicate themselves. Before, the village was a ruin, that's the truth. Now people have to do something about it. They don't always care, but they need to be educated, so they'll care."* (A respondent).

Another facet of the material impact of the *Association* on member-villages is the departure from an exclusive focus on "*grand patrimoine*" and instead an interest in "*petit patrimoine*", such as washpits, wells, communal ovens, mullioned windows, and other vestiges of vernacular village life. These may not be listed on national inventories. Nevertheless, for the *Association*, they enter into its evaluation of local patrimonial capital; and for residents, they are sometimes a source of more pride and local identity than the local medieval chapel listed as a "Monument Historique" and sanctioned by the Ministry of Culture.

DISTANCES
SUIVANT LA RIVE DROITE DE LA LOIRE.

DE CANDES À

	KIL. M.		KIL. M.
BRIARE	255.278	PORT-BOULET	7.540
GIEN	224.094	SAUMUR	12.675
SULLY	200.779	LES ROSIERS	27.909
CHÂTEAUNEUF	200.576	St MATHURIN	50.692
JARGEAU	192.247	PONTS-DE-CÉ	54.499
COMBLEUX	177.986	LA POINTE	61.789
ORLÉANS	171.584	CHALONNES	74.687
MEUNG	155.110	MONTJEAN	85.592
BEAUGENCY	145.137	INGRANDES	88.850
MER	129.568	St FLORENT	96.878
BLOIS	114.044	ANCENIS	109.675
AMBOISE	76.898	OUDON	118.807
MONT-LOUIS	63.760	NANTES	144.674
TOURS	52.589	INDRET	154.320
CINQ-MARS	35.200	PAIMBŒUF	185.228
LANGEAIS	28.773	St NAZAIRE	202.850

CRUE DE JUILLET 1856
1866

The "petit patrimoine", sometimes called "new patrimonies" has given the impetus for the proliferation of heritage-based associations over the recent decades (Ministère de la Culture 2001). The Ministry of Culture in France defines "petit patrimoine" as the "completely disparate set of objects, traces or vestiges concerning domains – industrial, rural, maritime, railway, etc.- that, until recently, have been neglected and have neither been recognized as *monuments historiques* nor listed on the supplementary inventory" (p.1).Furthermore, it is difficult to establish a list of what is considered "petit patrimoine" since while this heritage appears modest in the face of majestic patrimony that is widely recognized, it is constituted instead by individuals themselves. Instead of being dependent on legitimate administrative and scientific categories, it relies on people's attachment to it and on the ways in which they make it central to their sociability through collective memory and experience as well as the ways in which it has become constitutive of the territory, or place (Ministère de la Culture 2001). The *Association* strengthens this trend as its *Charte de Qualité* identifies "petit patrimoine" as an important component of vernacular landscapes that must be preserved and promoted. The focus on valorizing vernacular heritage, deemed unworthy of official listing at the national level, is one response the *Association* can make to critics who regard it as an elitist organization with few members. "Petit patrimoine" is also the crux of the possibility of exporting and diffusing the model. Everyone has it, everywhere and at all times, even without gothic cathedrals, roman amphitheaters, or medieval donjons.

6.4.1.6. Blurring of public and private space: gardens and façades of private proprietors

Because it is concerned with the vernacular, another way that the *Association* reinforces identities in place is by blurring the lines between private and public spaces. Like this respondent

who chooses to merge her private courtyard into the public space by not closing the gate, many others take pains in attending to their gardens or leaving decorations on the outside of their windowsills as a continuation of the private space into public view, in a logic of exchange and proud display. Gardens in particular constitute an ambiguous space. While private, they come to be collectivized as heritage since they can be seen from the street or any public promontory in the village. Thus, they must be kept up with care. Façades, doors, and windows serve in the same way. In Charroux, Auvergne, where ancient stone fireplaces were discovered in many private residences, a photographic inventory is featured in the local history museum where private spaces are thus on display for the public. This blurring of the public and private scale sometimes elicits resentment as well.

> "I don't care what they say. I do and I'll do what pleases me. I don't think I'm unreasonable. They all have very particular ideas. Who says they are always right? Now I even do it a little on purpose, to make them fret. Oh, it's not in spite, just to amuse myself a bit."

> "I'm not going to say who, but you'll see that there are at least two people in the village who don't pay attention to the impression they give to outsiders. It's important. We want them to come back. And also, it's like showing your home, you want it to be tidy. It's normal we make ourselves pretty when we get a visit, no.?"

Figure 38: Example of a private garden, visible from afar
Thus it is turned into public space through the gaze and expectation of the visitor.

6.4.1.7. Economic impact: hard to measure and generalize across member-villages

Research question #4 brought the examination of the economic question and whether place commodification could result from development strategies that aim at improving touristic appeal of the place. While the material impact on built heritage is easily qualifiable and measurable, the economic impact the *Association* has had on member-villages is difficult to measure across the board, for lack of uniform results and inconsistent measuring tools. How to measure economic success? Fiscal revenues? Number of new commercial activities (such as the number of new hospitality-based businesses on the commune)? The mayors in member-villages tend to encourage entrepreneurs in the hospitality field to start businesses, so that tourists are more likely to stay at least overnight there or in any case spend money on site. However, some villages are either too small, or not equipped with the primary infrastructure for that type of development. Furthermore, there might be a regional spill-over effect whereby commercial enterprise occurs in the vicinity of a PBVF in an effort to attract the clientele of rural tourists, without necessarily being located in the village per se. If located on an adjacent *commune,* the economic fallout is not recorded in the PBVF, but as a regional statistics instead. Interviews with service providers in PBVF villages, especially restaurant owners, showed that PBVF are sought after by entrepreneurs wanting to open a business. *"It's clear that we are here because of the label. If we were to lose the label, it would be disastrous for us. Do you realize? Who would come here?"* (A restaurant owner, not native to the village, residing in the village for less than 5 years). In turn those businesses are encouraged and aided by the region to respond to the demand and revitalize the local economy.

The economic impact is also difficult to gauge in the case of villages with no recent commercial vocation and thus experiencing a complete lack of infrastructure or local

entrepreneurs. For those villages, seeking the PBVF label is clearly less about economics than about visibility and local pride, at least in the short term. Finally, drawing conclusions in terms of the economic impact of the *Association* as a whole is difficult because of the great regional diversity and discrepancies in commercial resources and the history of local tourism since the 19th century. Villages which can rely on a robust and world famous wine economy for example, such as Riquewhir in Alsace, cannot be compared to villages where the economy is based strictly on built patrimony capital. Villages that have traditionally received large numbers of visitors (millions in the summer months), such as those on religious pilgrimage routes, or around lakes such as Yvoire on the Léman, are also not in the same commercial categories as villages with no history of tourism. It is actually through the experience of those villages that seek the label even though they economically do not need it, that it becomes clear that the understanding of the model should not be over-simplified as a purely commercial enterprise that seeks to commodify heritage for the pecuniary gains of a few. The question of heritage commodification through labelization that many raise requires a nuanced answer, as nuanced as the places concerned are varied.

6.4.1.8. Political impact: label as tool for local governance

While the economic impact is often envisaged as the one important factor that should be measured, another significant impact the label has had on member-villages is less evident: the label has become a tool for local governance. In fact, the stringent demands made on the villages that adopt the label help their mayors to subsequently control activities of residents, educate them about why certain things are taking place or should take place, and help them in their arbitration of local disputes over territorial development and private and public property

management. Once the label is obtained, most residents want to keep it. Thu, they become more likely to accept municipal decisions such as infrastructure projects or the denial of such projects if they understand that they could result in disfiguring the place (what is often referred to in *Association*'s language as "warts" of the landscape. Often the *Commission Qualité* emits a reserved opinion about a member-village "*to help them.*" *"It's not our goal to punish them, that's not what the decision is about. No, we do this to help them"* (President Chabert). Furthermore, the label gives mayors political legitimacy. In fact, a shared sentiment among a majority of the mayors interviewed in the study is that: *"If we lose the label, I lose the election!"* Other comments constitute evidence of the use of the label as a tool for local governance:

> "*The population has different attitudes vis-à-vis their obligations to heritage. The label gives us another sort of legal support to exercise certain constraints, along with the ZPPAUP.*" (See Chapter 3 on ZPPAUP)

> "*The label gives us an institutional fall-back and support for local development and planning decisions.*"

> "*If I tell them no because of the ZPPAUP, they are not happy, but if I tell them 'understand, we can lose the label if we are not careful about what we do on the commune', now that makes them think.*"

Inhabitants, when faced with the risk of the village losing the label, seem to engage in a thought process which goes beyond their personal interest and concerns to those of the village as a whole, as well as the pride they may feel to be one of the 156 MBVF. At the same time, they would not want to be identified within the community as holding partial responsibility were the village to lose the label. The label thus brings a certain level of peer pressure on the villagers to be good stewards of the local heritage. There is a palpable feeling that develops in conversations with residents that many people are put in the situation to think beyond themselves and beyond the present moment, not only into the past, but very much into the future.

6.4.1.9. Association becomes a tool for local development

The success of the *Association* is supported by a national structure which makes possible the development of certain activities and results in increased visibility. Within its mission of local development, it also takes advantage of national-scale and nationally sponsored projects such as the *Journées du Patrimoine*. It also forges partnership agreements with institutions which valorize heritage in various ways, such as the *Assemblée Permanente de la Chambre des Métiers* and the *Institut National des Métiers d'Art*. These structures give the *Association*'s member-villages opportunities to enhance their notoriety and relevance in the national context of heritage preservation, valorization, and communication. These opportunities are channeled through the development axis of the *Association* and its bi-annual *Commission Développement* meetings where general strategies are chosen. It also encourages territorial development through the principle of the "graft," which can be understood as a modern insert within the old village, with respect to aesthetic factors and visual harmony. The graft is envisaged as one solution to the problem of new habitat in villages[67]. *"They have done a beautiful graft over there, really a beautiful work. That's what we could all think about for the future and to resolve the question of habitat in the village, that's one possibility. It's not easy though."*

Local development is most often based on attracting hospitality businesses or quality artisans to replace lost resources.

> *"There is a tendency to want to favor the establishment of artisanat, it's judicious."*

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[67] The graft is an urban project consisting of integrating a new construction in perfect harmony with the existing structure, so that there is no rupture in the landscape, neither in shape, volumetry, materials used, or style. The graft respects the spirit of place while providing an opportunity to increase habitat in places with little spatial elasticity. They are an expensive solution for small *communes.*

"If newcomer artisans live well, there will be others. Those revenues are necessary, it's a good thing. We'll never go back to vineyards, that's all over now."

"The artisans, that's a good thing. But only if they are going to stay all year around and sell quality products. We don't want junk; that would not be good for the village and our reputation. If people make the trip to come here, we want to be able to show them things that are worth the detour."

"Before, we had a potter here. But since he stopped production, there is nothing for the visitors. We need to show that we have artisans here. All of the village trades have vanished, we can still have artisans, but it takes work. The Mayor's office is working at it; they are trying to bring in people. Sometimes we get disappointed, people don't stay."

In fact:

"The problem is that for young artisans to come here, people who are not retired yet, we need to make it attractive for them to come with their family, their kids too. If the kids are very small, it's not really a problem, but for older kids, there are drawbacks to coming to live here."

Local development is constrained by the difficulty of attracting families to villages. Some hopes have been placed on the possibilities that distance working may offer in the near future. And to that effect, rural areas have invested in procuring high speed internet to rural inhabitants over the national territory. However, it remains a limited sector as of now. *"I work out of my home. I only go up to Paris for meetings. The rest of the time, you see, I am here, in those old stones."* Some people may also be involved in internet-based business, such as this rare book seller or that editor of regional publications.

6.4.1.10. Creating a community of communities across the national dimension

Beyond material and developmental impact, the *Association* succeeds in gathering into an active network a collection of localities which get to know each other, if not directly, at least through the shared sentiment of belonging to a common project and of partaking in the future trajectory of the rural in France. This feeling also encourages individuals connected to the *Association,* because they live in a PBVF or know someone who does, to go experience other members of the network in a more direct fashion.

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"When I travel around in a region where there are PBVFs, yes, of course, I go see for myself, I want to know what they have, I want to know them. I think I've seen quite a few by now" says a resident of Charroux, Auvergne.

"I'm here because my brother-in-law is Mayor of one of the PBVFs, but in Brittany. And we were vacationing around here and he told us there were some of the PBVFs around, so we come to check around" says a visitor in Crissay-sur-Manse, Touraine.

At the institutional level, the *Association* extranet allows mayors of PBVF to share best practices and propose solutions that have worked for their respective villages, such as the *Charte des Terrasses*, and other charters on the treatment of public spaces. Although the extranet is not yet utilized at the level that the *Association* would like, it constitutes a tool to foster a community of communities. The popular annual inter-village soccer tournament is another way to come together, as are the annual wine markets and artisanship days.

"We see each other once a year for the football tournament. Now, that makes for nice memories."

"I did not know that one village, but after the football tournament where they played against us, I wanted to go see it. I was around there to visit a family member, and so I went to see it. You know, like that, we get acquainted, it's nice."

6.4.1.11. Actions taken with awareness of pitfalls

Finally, research question #5 aimed at understanding the future that the *Association* and various stakeholders envisage for the rural. The future is faced with lucidity about successes and challenges, and the willingness to development the tools necessary to react against possible pitfalls. From its beginnings, Mr. Ceyrac and Mr. Valeix were aware of the possible difficulties of local development that encourages touristification, as well as other perverse effects brought about by the danger of immobilism and museification. The *Association* staff, all the mayors interviewed, and a majority of the residents interviewed were extremely aware of these dangers. The topic came up in almost every conversation. There seems to be a geographic dimension to

this fear which is more concentrated in the South (with the exception of the South-West according to Mr. Valeix, where "*there is life, dynamism, joie de vivre, like an explosion.*")

Success is based on the fact that the *Association* remains conscious of the risks for the villages which may fall into excess artifice and hyper-touristic development. Thus the *Association'*s mission is also to remain vigilant in inciting exchanges of best practices that avoid these pitfalls and serve as a consultant and advisor on issues of heritage management, place valorization, and development paths always centered on quality rather than quantity, through the admission process itself, but also through the organization of thematic workshops where experts weigh in and mayors share best local practices.

> "*We know there are risks. When we speak of the Association of the MBVF, we know the positive side, we know it's a beautiful process, but we are conscious about all the risks that it can lead to in the villages, whether in terms of too many tourists in villages, or the arrival of sellers of junk who want to make money because they know there will be many tourists. Too many buses in the village. We know the risks. Like with everything else, we must find a balance between too little and too much, and find a way to share heritage without annihilating efforts that were made on site to preserve the population and the village economy*" (Association officer).

6.4.1.12. The village: born-again as an "imagined community"

> "…There has to be that interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity.… Ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins. There has to be … an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape.… The old farmhouse has to decay before we can restore it and lead an alternative lifestyle in the country … That is how we reproduce the cosmic scheme and correct history." (Jackson 1980, p. 102)

Jackson's "necessity for ruins" dictates that decline is a necessary condition for rebirth (1980). After a period of decay, the *village, borgho, satul, pueblo, or dorf,* can become "born again." In the tug between the global and the local, the *rural* thus has a role to play in territorial development and identity resilience. Through the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France*, the village is resurrected as a new object, based on a new understanding of local resources, no longer as the center of agricultural communities, but instead as a place where local

identities are reinvented through the preservation, valorization, and promotion of architectural, landscape, and social patrimony. Through the *Most Beautiful Villages* global-scale network, the village becomes an "imagined community" of people with common identity, to use the term Benedict Anderson created to describe the nation. Anderson contends that it is "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact …(that are)…are imagined" (Anderson 1983, p.6). Through the *Federation of the Most Beautiful Villages of the World*, in fact, *even* the village becomes an imagined community, a historically and socially constructed community, imagined by people scattered around the globe, who feel common affinities but cannot interact face-to-face, and who find avenues for resurrection in the experiences of other places. Through the preservation and enhancement of rural heritage, they feel they are part of the same group. They recognize themselves and each other, beyond nostalgia and past nationalist ideology. Furthermore, the *Association* triggers a renewed self-awareness and valorization of place. Through the imagined village community, nations of different standing and different heritage traditions within Europe and globally can join in a common project, based on people's identity as *rural citizens*. And at the same time as it counters the very effects of globalization, the network uses some of its means to foster cooperation, such as virtual exchanges, web, extranet, or digital newsletters.

6.4.2. Facing critiques and challenges

6.4.2.1. Reliance on State recognition of heritage value

The criteria of two listed sites as an obligatory factor for membership emerges for some as contradictory to the grassroot mission of the *Association* in which local mayors are the principal decision-makers. In fact, a recurrent critique that the *Association* has had to face is that it

requires each village to show two listed historic perimeters/sites on the *commune* because it may mean the exclusion of certain rural localities and the validation of only a particular quality of "rural." In this sense, it could be considered to promote an elitist approach to heritage. This is a critique which the *Association* receives, but it stands firm on its "quality" axis. Indeed the eliminatory criteria probably results in some exclusions. But the *Association* trusts the way that France may have pushed the patrimonial process the furthest in Europe and appreciate that these listings are not the result of chance. The presence of recognized and acknowledged patrimony is essential to the *Association*'s mission, although its officers also admits that some listings were effectuated in doubtful circumstances, such as those made during the Second World War when many functionaries were overzealous in their work to list historic monuments "*as to not have to attend to more delicate matters*".

Figure 39: Monument Historique plaque in Oingt

6.4.2.2. Inability to control the consequences of reforms of "territorial scale" in rural France

In spite of increased visibility, the village still struggles to be recognized as a meaningful actor. While the village was shown to remain a relevant entity and scale in the French psyche and lived space experiences, institutionally the village remains a secondary entity. A succession of territorial reforms have rendered the distribution of decision-making powers rather opaque and misunderstood by many on the ground. Most *communautés de commune* were created along the ancient perimeters of the "cantons", adding another layer to territorial division. While geographers like to speak of "*bassins de vie*", legislators speak of "*bassins de proximité*". This influences the work the *Association* wants to do because its interlocutors may not be the same at every level of the territory.

When certain villages are integrated in a *communauté de communes,* the Président of that *communauté de communes* becomes actor in the project, in addition to the communal mayor. Mayors

> "*are the ones who work, who have their hands in the mud, who are close to their patrimony and their inhabitants. If from one day to the next, they do not have any more powers, or less powers, we will have to ask ourselves what happens when the President of the intercommunalité does not live in our Plus Beaux Villages de France, for sure he will not have the same interest, at least we can think that he will have less of an interest, at least at first. Maybe in a couple generations this problem may fade*" (*Association* Officer).

Another issue with the *intercommunalité* is the transfer of powers from local tourism offices to centralized regional ones. This means that some villages may lose their place-specific "*Office du tourisme*" to an intercommunal office located elsewhere, a more distant (geographically and hence thematically, it is felt) office responsible for territorial promotion and hospitality for the whole regional territory. Sometimes, after negotiations, this office may be located strategically in a PBFV, but not necessarily, or a village may obtain an "*antenne*", i.e. a satellite office on site.

Furthermore, an increasing number of *communes* are joining SCOT projects, or *schéma de cohérence territoriale*, which is an intercommunal urban planning document aiming at developing coherent development strategies at a scale beyond the *commune* and the village. SCOTs are based on the basic principle of equilibrium between urban renewal, soil management, environmental concerns, and social diversity ("*mixité*"). One requirement that may have repercussions on the villages is that a SCOT may require *communes* to welcome up to 10 percent additional population each year, leading to necessary constructions to host these populations in areas where unattractive "village sprawl" (*étalement pavillonnaire* in rural areas) may jeopardize the label for a village because sprawl constitutes a rupture with the historic core, although contributing to the lived-in mission of the *Association*. Here again, the graft may be a solution.

> *"We want villages with people who live". (Association* officer)

> *"This is what we want, what the élus want in our network. What is a village? It's a village that is alive all year long, not only during the summer. Often in a certain number of our villages, they are ghost villages, shutters are all closed in the winter, and summer everything is open because secondary home residents are there, and in winter there is nobody anymore, it's a real problem for us. Our problem is to work at reconquering historic cores, how to make it so that historic centers are alive, and not only because of second-home residents, summer vendors who sell junk that has nothing to do with the village and who take off once they have earned their butter, no!"* (Association officer)

6.4.2.3. Mitigated successes of community building

In spite of the implementation of communication tools to share experiences and to encourage network-building, villages still may not feel the *community effect* in many cases.

> *"Even between the PBVF within the same region, there are little exchanges, but it depends on the regions, and also on personalities. There are some Mayors, we never see them, they have never implicated themselves in any of the Commission. Sometimes they show up for the General Assembly. I wonder why they want the label. It must please them somehow."* (A mayor, member of the *Commission Qualité*)

Additionally, the flip side of localized pride in the label is that the community of communities can be based on comparison and superior-inferior assessment.

> *"Frankly, I went to visit (*village name*), and I don't see why they have the label, it is not well maintained, it does not deserve it, it makes the label look bad, so us too. People who will go there because they think they'll find something, and then they find nothing, then they won't come here. They'll think they'll come for nothing again. I don't know how it all works, but they need to do something about it"* (A resident).

Jealousies in the region can also arise when a village down the road was turned down.

> *"They don't like us. Why? Eh, we have the label, and they don't. They think we want all the attention. But it's true that thanks to the label, we have more leverage in the Communauté de Communes because our touristic potential is more realized. Some don't like that around here"* (A resident).

The label may give a village power in the region:

> *"The Communauté de Communes wanted us. We didn't go to them. We could have gone to another one. Because of the label we were able to choose on our terms"* (A mayor).

6.4.2.4. Land pressure, real estate prices, and cost of renovation

In interviews, both mayors and villagers often mentioned the fear of gentrification and the fact that real estate prices had exclusionary effects in labeled villages, thus preventing a young population from living in the village, especially because rental opportunities remain very scarce, with little possibility of expanding the rental stock.

> *"If we are not careful, we will become a village for the rich."*

> *"Today, young people who want to come live in the village cannot afford to, and there are no rental options for them either."*

> *"I have a house in the village, it's a family house, which I rent, and I live on the other side of the river now."*

> *"Attractability comes at a price, and that price is out of limits for young people who might want to establish themselves in the village."*

> *"Instead of more beds-and-breakfasts, I would like to see more housing for permanent residents who can't afford to buy."*

Additionally, the constraints of heritage management dictated by the *Association*'s charter and the *Architecte des Bâtiments de France*, translate into costly renovations because of the mandatory use of certain materials, for example, which makes it difficult even to buy and renovate a fixer-upper, and this in spite of potential subsidies from various sources aimed at helping people to renovate national and regional patrimony.

6.4.2.5. Inconveniences and constraints

In fact, among residents' concerns, the main constraints that emerge are those associated with the exigencies of the approved color palette and materials to use for renovation, notably the disfavored use of PVC[68] for windows.

> *"Wood, that's a material that lives. People will tell us that plastic looks the same as painted wood. No, it does not. It does not live, it does not age like wood does, it does not respond to time. We don't want this clean, slick, hermetic look in our villages. Maybe in cities it can pass, and even there…. Especially if you consider that well-maintained wood not only looks beautiful, but also will last forever"* (Association officer).

Rooftops are an important dimension in the evaluation criteria, as they can provide an emotion based on visual impact of harmony and tight urban plan, as well as regional identity, which is expressed in the type of tiles or materials used.

> *"We are at the limit of the flat and round tiles here, it's two cultures."*
>
> *"You can see here, the first thing you notice, what is it? Well, our slates. But do you know today how much it costs to redo a slate roof? Ooooof!"*

General construction materials are also constitutive of identity but can present obstacles for renovations as far as cost.

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[68] Abbreviation for polyvinyl chloride, type of plastic used in construction.

"Here we are the people of stones. All around us it's stones. When I go away, that is what I miss. It's still easy to find them because there are always places you can go and old farms being destroyed, so we can get them there, but there are people who might want bricks, or cinder blocks, then they shouldn't come here!"

"You see, here it's all about tuffeau[69]. There are still a couple of places for it, quarries. But it's expensive. We are in between tuffeau and water, we can't escape that."

Surprisingly, color palettes for shutters and other façade surfaces occasionally stir up discontent and disagreement, even becoming a way to express dissent or dispute about something else.

"There is one who painted the shutters on his house whatever color, when the authorized colors are shown at the city hall. You can't miss it, honestly it's pretty ugly. It's just to bother people, and also against the Mayor, those two don't see eye to eye, but it's nothing to do with any of that. It's better to laugh at it, it will pass."

"The thing is, they picked some colors. Based on what? Some idea they have, like that. We never had grey shutters around here, it's kind of a new thing. I think it looks nice, and you have several choices. It's true that without that, people might do horrible things."

"I have been here a long time. Before it was my grand-parents here. But I don't think anyone asked us about colors. We were just told. I think they are fine, it prevents people from making errors of taste, but maybe we could have been consulted. Do you know if they asked anyone to agree? (respondent asking his wife)

Yards and the front areas of properties that are visible from public spaces can become an issue when inhabitants do not keep them tidy and attractive.

"Did you go by …. Street yet? Go on a promenade there, you will see. I don't know what's going on there, but they need to clean that up. The neighbors don't say anything. I think the Mayor already told them, but they don't care. We do what we must, but not everybody does. There will always be people who want to say no."

Furthermore, non-compliance can cause interrogations among residents as to why a particular item was permitted on a façade and create a surveillance atmosphere within the village, thus loosening social ties rather than tightening them:

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[69] *Tuffeau* refers to the white sedimentary stone found in the Loire Valley. It is strongly identity-producing, especially in villages where troglodytic habitat exists.

"See behind me, I prefer not to turn around, but look discretely, how was that permitted? Everyone is not treated the same. Do you see? It's atrocious, it should not have been permitted, how come it was?"

"Here you see. Some people can do things and others can't. It depends if you are good with the Architecte des Bâtiments de France. Ah, if you have connections!"

Finally, another inconvenience that results from a tourism-based development is the challenges of traffic flow and parking.

"All day long in the summer, big camping cars, there are big signs that say "no camping cars" at the village entry, but invariably they come in and they can even get stuck. I have photos of one, it was so wide, the top of its roof clipped the façade across the street."

Villages deal with traffic and parking issues in different ways: off-centered parking lots, pay lots, lots reserved for residents (with special access), pedestrian areas in the historic core, speed bumps, speed limit signs, chicanes to slow down traffic, especially in villages which are located on a passage to elsewhere (such as those along important rivers).

6.4.2.6. Insider-Outsider dichotomy is exacerbated

While in some cases the tourist flow acts as a welcome exchange, it is not always the case. Moreover, internal cleavages between insiders and outsiders arise in heritage. In one village visited, the insider-outsider dichotomy became acute when an outsider started organizing and promoting local heritage. Although by the time I was there, much time had passed, several respondents indicated their resentment that an outsider would have been permitted to have access to the village riches (notably, the archives), even if it was to valorize them, to take them out of oblivion, and ultimately to showcase the village as a place of rich heritage, even unveiling hidden treasures and creating the local history museum. Quarrels of legitimacy emerge when heritage management actors are not "true" insiders (yet, true insiders may be unwilling to partake

in the project in direct ways, or unable to fully capture the importance of it). When local heritage is being resurrected and appropriated, even if it is for the benefit on the locality as a whole, it matters who does that appropriation and how much of an "insider" these individuals are perceived to be.

> *"He should have never been allowed to rummage through these archives, sometimes until 3 in the morning, I saw the light up there. He was not from those parts."*

On the other hand, the individual in question describes the state of disarray he found the village in and his efforts to raise awareness over vernacular heritage. *"When we arrived, if we hadn't done anything, the village today would have disappeared. It was in bad shape. And people did not care. I found treasures in people's barns, yards, they are all in the museum today. And eventually, it was people who came to bring me things they found or knew they had somewhere."* In other words, it took the gaze of an outsider for people to become aware of their local patrimony, to value it, and to take pride in it.

The insider-outsider dichotomy is also felt in the comments received about tourists. In areas that are moderately touristic, visitors are generally appreciated for bringing life to the village, especially after a dormant winter, and boosting pride in place.

> *"It's nice to see that people come to visit here."*
>
> *"After the winter, I look, and when I see the first cars in the parking lot, I know the season has started and we are going to see people. We need it by then, it's a little sad here in the winter. Oh there are always things to do, you see, like today, compote. And later, I'll probably walk around and if someone is out too, we'll check in, make sure all is OK with them. It's not very deep, but it's enough. It may not look like it, but over the years, we know each other well now."*
>
> *"People are nice. And some are interesting. I talk to them. Often when I am outside in front, they talk to me, I like that,"* says a villager commenting on the encounter.
>
> *"The first to come with the season are the second-home residents. They arrive, they open everything, they prepare the house for the season. We know they'll leave in no time. Life here is a cycle."*

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6.4.2.7. Commodification of culture? Merchandization of heritage?: "Modesty and measure" instead

The *Association* must face critiques that address the issue of heritage commodification. The responses are not simple and lie greatly on the choices made locally by the mayor, the municipal council, and the inhabitants. *"It is necessary to retain a certain spirit, i.e. that the label brings you a recognition and is used to mobilize your population, to move forward a number of things, to enhance place quality while at the same time remaining modest. Many mayors claim this modesty, for me they are the models we must follow"* (Valeix). The ideal village, the success village is one that *"remains in its 'juice', with open shutters, people in the street, boutiques, and an awareness of place brought on by the label. They magnify it, they use it intelligently, and with measure."* The Association recognizes the danger of the misuse of the label.

> *"The label can have a perverse effect, which is that it contributes to orient towards the villages economic partners who only see an economic, pecuniary opportunity, a chance to make money…This was not part of the model and cannot be entered into a model. The mayors have a capital role here."*

In fact, as seen earlier, economic profit in itself is hard to quantify across the board and thus it is difficult to sustain a merchandization argument. What can be asserted is that if an economic dimension does exist, through tourism, it is only an impetus to support territorial development through patrimonialization, and thus contribute to cultural and local resilience. The economic fallouts are very uneven across member-villages anyway, as some experience none.

Is there a conflict between the *Association'*s mission of cultural preservation and economic revitalization goals? Do economic outcomes prevail in the motivations to join the network? Although motivations vary, the answer is: not really or not for all. On one hand, villages such as Riquewhir have sought the label. Riquewhir, rich Alsatian village with global

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reputation, not only because of its half-timbered houses, its UNESCO label, but also its active world-famous wine production, Riquewhir does not need the label of the PBVF for its successful economy or its survival. Yet, it sought it. For the *Association*, the fact that villages such as Riquewhir seek it out is validating, because what else could that village wish for itself? This indicates other motivations than a logic of patrimonial commercialization. Furthermore, those who have done a cost benefit analysis of patrimonialization conclude that the investments made often do not off-set the social costs, while economic benefits emerge only in indirect ways by making the place attractive for residents (Fournier 2012, p. 10). This has been observed in all villages studied in this research.

On the other end of the spectrum, villages such as Crissay-sur-Manse, with one *auberge*, which recently changed hands, and one honey producer, a village with no commercial vocation nor infrastructure, also sought the label. It is likely visitors simply come through Crissay without spending any money. Yet, the residents and the mayor there are very attached to the label, as a sign of their uniqueness, their identity, their cultural significance, their geographic relevance, basically their existence, more than as a basis for a booming heritage-based economy. These two different realities show that the merchandization critique does not hold. Moreover, the *Association* is vigilant over what products (whether a physical object, a service, or a festival) it endorses and conscious that notoriety and visibility can attract commercial activity that is not desirable for its image and the image of its members.

> *"The increasing number of vendors of junk who establish themselves in our villages…, that goes truly against what we wish to accomplish."*
>
> *"We have villages today that should be careful. At the next re-inspection, it will be rendered clear to them that that type of commercial development they can't control or don't want to control, that's not what we are about, and well, they will pay the consequences… Fortunately, that's a small minority of our villages. We make sure that the common core objectives are clear from the beginning and if they choose to be a PBVF, assumably they accept them. In 2014, we might get up to 40 percent new mayors in the municipal elections, it will be interesting to see what happens, yeah, it'll be interesting. And for one, I think the new*

mayors will do the wise thing for their village and choose not to throw away all the work that was done by their predecessors.”

Figure 40: What the Association is vigilant to discourage (“I ❤ Oingt”)

6.4.2.8. Mass tourism and non-places

The perverse effects of mass tourism in places that may not be equipped to receive major flows are easy to imagine. Aside from the congestion, over-commercialization, and “de-authentication” that may take place, another result would be the emergence of numerous *non-places*, such as parking lots, camp grounds (Augé 1992). The automobile, which plays a large role in the development of the *Association* model since member-villages are often only accessible by private automobiles or commercial buses, can become a hindrance in the management of public space and hamper the quality-of-place project. The problem of

"*surfréquentation*" ("over-visiting") is usually mentioned in localities which welcome (or not) millions of visitors each year, often concentrated over the three summer months. But it also comes up as a fear for the future even in villages with modest "frequentation", especially because that threshold is not known.

> *"When we realize we can't absorb the flow, it will be already too late, we have to look at the problem before it arises."* (A mayor)

> *"The situation in some villages has become complicated, when they become factories for tourists, a sort of Disneyland, almost a caricature of a PBVF."* (A mayor)

Indeed, it gets complicated in terms of coherent space management. Is there still space *with* and *for* residents? For businesses other than those directly connected to the tourism industry? These are important questions for the *Association*. It concedes though that the danger of "*hyper-fréquentation*" is created by uncontrolled success. And it understands its role as helping localities to control that success. In some places that do not have any alternative economic activity, the process has gone so far that it is unlikely they will be able to adopt a new trajectory without a lot of courageous decisions with electoral repercussions. In other places, there are redeeming factors. For example, in hyper touristic Riquewhir, the fact that the local economy is still based on vineyards saves them because those villages are working villages, still involved in agriculture. *"Vineyards bring life, people labor there, just go visit during grape-picking (vendanges), smell the air."*

6.4.2.9. Struggling to foster commercial partnerships

In spite of its great success with the media, its continued demand from membership applications, its visibility on the landscape and in people's minds, the *Association* has struggled

to keep successful and dynamic partnerships with a Tour Operator for the organization of sojourns in the villages, in spite of repeated efforts early on. *"We don't know why it's not working. We don't do anything but put service providers in relation with the Tour Operator, and we decide together of the kind of offer, but otherwise this is not what we do best, that's why we want someone else to do it. But for sure, that's an area that we have to work on, I'm working on it."* Most recently, a rally in 2CV, another popular myth, organized around the visit of 20 member-villages between Paris and Cannes seems to be successful as it is recruiting clients for its third consecutive year (*4 Roues sous un Parapluie*).

6.4.3. Impact of the label on rural landscapes in France: fetishizing or normative?

"Museification of patrimony, is literally none other than a standstill on a modern object; which by abstracting the thing from its milieu, transforms it into a fetish. Let us recognize that this is a lesser evil" (Berque 2000, p231).[70] What is the impact of the label on rural landscapes? Are we witnessing a fetishization of the local and the unique? Does the "unique" risk becoming the generic if it is normed under the impact of the *Charte de Qualité*?

6.4.3.1. Impact of the label on the notion of village

6.4.3.1.1. Normative function: Creating a rural reality around a norm

The *Association* reconfigures the idea of the village, creates a myth, reinvents the rural by creating expectations in visitors and shaping awareness and sense of responsibility in villagers. The *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* has themed rural spaces since 1982 in

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[70] "la muséification de patrimoine, ce n'est autre, litteralement, que l'arrêt sur objet moderne ; lequel abstrayant la chose de son milieu, la transforme en fétiche. Reconnaissons que c'est un moindre mal."

an endeavor to integrate heritage preservation, place-making, and economic development. It emerged out of the decline of rural areas and the ensuing nostalgia about re-imagined lost times and lost places. Its success was enabled by the expansion of heritage tourism, facilitated by the intensification of tensions between local and global forces and the consequent revalorizing of *pays* and *terroirs*. Its model of place-making through heritage preservation rests on the collective imaginary in French culture which places the rural at the center of a past to which people long to reconnect. The village has become the mechanism by which the temporal disjuncture gets resolved. Both the *Association* and village visitors have emerged out of the same cultural context.

While the *Association*'s mission was built on this shared idealization of the rural and village yearning, in turn it creates a new paradigm today. By instituting and enforcing criteria by which to judge rural *communes* for the purpose of its label, the *Association* not only validates but creates a rural reality. Even villages that are already members must take care to maintain that reality. If a member-village were to fall short of the criteria upon re-inspection, it would be expelled from the *Association* after having been given a chance to address the critiques and correct the flaws, or it would have the opportunity to voluntarily relinquish the label (as it most often happens). This was the case in Saint-Lizier recently, a village whose mayor decided to leave the *Association* when the development constraints prompted by the label ceased to be economically feasible for the *commune* (Le Figaro 2013; La Dépêche du Midi 2013). By standardizing the ideal and cementing it into implementation projects, the *Charte de Qualité* acts as a normative discourse about the village and generates new desires. As a contract of trust between the *Association* and visitors, the label not only affirms their aesthetic sensibilities, but also mediates the tourist gaze by creating new expectations about the rural, in a feedback effect.

From attachment to specific villages and *pays* described by Weber (1976), the village emerges as a singular ideal. The rural is re-constructed as a social representation through three processes: the effort at self-representation (from the inside – what are we going to put forward for people to see?), the ethnographic gaze of the tourist (from the outside – what do we expect to see?), and the expert evaluation (a gaze with a purpose).

> We use social representations in two ways. First, they enable us to conventionalize the objects, persons and events encountered. Secondly, they help us to prescribe and organize our subsequent behaviors and responses…they are both referential and anticipatory. Prescription/anticipation makes social representations not merely neutral and reactive but also creative and transformative, through their usage by people trying to go about their everyday lives. (Halfacree 1993, citing Shields and Brewer)

6.4.3.2. Internalization of "grand patrimoine" as intimate landscape: Vistas and oikophilia

With respect to self-representation, the research does not confirm the hypothesis initially made that residents would value intimate landscape over officially designated collective heritage landscape. Photo-elicitation reveals that many residents have adopted the recognized and to some extent institutionally sanctioned "*grand patrimoine*" as what they value most in their surroundings, often to the detriment of "*petit patrimoine*" or even personal patrimony entrenched in individual and personal memory of place. Patrimonialization and touristification has led to the internalization of the normative landscape as personal landscape, in part due to the fact that villagers are also tourists in other villages, so that their "scene" in their own village (in Meinig's sense) is mediated by their tourist expectation in other places.

When prompted to identify the place in the village that is most meaningful to them, villagers often indicate a cliché monument, or a point of view onto the village from the outside, analogous to the habitual panoramic postcard views. *"What I like best is the view from the bridge, before you cross the river, you can see it well, with the church, the houses, the river."*

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This standardized image is precisely reminiscent of the logo the *Association* has chosen to encompass its rural landscape apprehension. Can we assert that the intimate landscape is necessarily lost through patrimonialization though? Not entirely, since several of the respondents who participated in the photo-elicitation project and pointed to the postcard-like view as intimate landscape also qualified that *"when I see that view, I know I am home. I don't want to ever lose that view, it's the view of the return home. Look at it, there is nothing like it. Even when you see it every day, it grips you in the heart."* Instead of taking away from personal landscape, patrimonialization may in fact result in residents appropriating the "grand patrimoine" as their own, as the essence of home. The patrimonialized landscape becomes a basis for *oikophilia*, love of home, described as a powerful force in the care for the local (Scruton 2013).

CONCLUSION

In the context of *patrimonophily* (Gravari-Barbas 2005) of the 21st century, it is as

important to understand the processes of heritage-making and patrimonialization as it is to

understand the patrimonialized object itself. Patrimonialization follows a path of successive

stages including cultural awareness in the context of a feeling of loss, followed by the

constituting and understanding of the patrimonial object, followed by the mobilization of local

actors with diverse stakes and objectives, and leading to various valorization and implementation

plans (Fournier, Crozat, Bernié-Boissard, and Chastagner 2012). Identifying the actors,

strategies, and social use of heritage-making is useful to recognize its promise, effects, reach, and

limitations. In the face of the paradox between rural decline and rural idealization in the popular

imaginary, rural heritage becomes one tool for resurrection of waning local identities and sense

of place. The rapid development of the industry of leisure and tourism and specifically heritage

tourism in rural areas, are factors that contributed to the emergence of the *Association* as a

scheme to valorize the local and provide a meaningful present and a promising future to rural

places. The analysis of the *Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France* can be

synthesized around three qualities: its role as a patrimonial preservation force in rural areas, as an

evolving model having an effect on people and places, and as a pedagogical project. As such it

addresses a multiplicity of debates, from the evolution of cultural resource management in a

changing world in which immobilism is not an option and museification is rejected, to the future

of the rural and questions of whether the rural can shape that future locally. Also addressed is the

value of territorial labelization as a strategy to preserve different "locals" through selectivity, information diffusion, and brand visibility.

Thus, this research contributes to the emerging literature on labelization of territories through local associations. What are the invisible processes behind territorial labels? At the onset, this was the central question for the study. Much work has been done on UNESCO heritage-scapes (Gravari-Barbas 2014; Di Giovine 2008), with only sporadic attention to localized efforts to create alternative labelization processes and labels through grassroot and associative efforts. In this way, the study can serve as a model approach to investigate other labeling processes and their effects on places and communities. The study also addresses the wider issue of the reinvention of the countryside at a time in which cities have come to centralize much of economic, creative, and political powers. In this way, it will contribute to rural studies and the debate on the effect of globalization in the countryside when rural places are forced to look beyond traditional primary and secondary sectors' industries for new sources of development. It is also important not to ignore the land use and planning component of the study and the implications of development activity based on heritage preservation on people and place. Finally, although tourism is not addressed as a principal theme in the study, it is present all throughout as a social context that creates possibilities in the use of endogenous resources. Therefore, scholars interested in tourism studies and the effect of tourism as a place development tool will find answers to some of their questions about whether tourism creates places of convergence or divergence. This research is at the same time fundamentally multi-disciplinary and practical. Therefore, it will also appeal to practitioners beyond the academe as it integrates many of the questions they have been asking themselves on the ground and for which they possess the required field sensitivity and knowledge to grasp. *"Send me your dissertation when*

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it's finished, I am going to read that dissertation" (Président Chabert). Even if that does not

happen, the interest is there.

Preservation and development: What development, what future?

In its effort to preserve rural villages and rural life-ways, the *Association* has, to some

extent, managed to alter the nature of the rural around the fixity of built patrimony. Culture and

societies are not static, while buildings usually are. Exploiting nostalgia for place sustainability

can prompt tensions with future-oriented local development policies. However, for member-

villages, social and economic rehabilitation is envisaged through the use of local culture and

rural character, as sanctioned by the *Association*. This place-based rehabilitation is only possible

through tourism. One paradoxical effect the European Union has had is that, in promoting

integration, it also decentralized national power to regional policies, hence increasing localities'

capacity to utilize endogenous resources for development, especially in rural areas. Although

regional variations exist, the rural exodus appears to have ended in France, giving way to a

measurable "return"[71] to the countryside, and the creation of neologisms to translate new types of

rural residents such as *rurbans* who, like tourists, are further changing the physiognomy and

function of the countryside. It is now in rural areas that the demographic increase is the most

pronounced, exhibiting a positive net migration as well as more births than deaths (INSEE 2013).

In the tug between the *local* and the *global*, the preservation of the *rural* represents a key

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[71] "Return" here does not mean that it is actually the same people who left who are returning, but rather a societal return. Return also skips generations, so that people "return" to a place they identify with but have never actually lived in before, only their grand-parents did.

constituent in the development of socio-economic strategies for a materially and culturally sustainable future.

The *Association* as a *Model*

While the *Association* is motivated by localized stakes, the problematic it addresses is a national one, and increasingly even an international one. The *Association* has clearly evolved from its beginnings (extension of the network, diffusion beyond France, professionalization). Yet, while it is now going beyond the practical mission of local heritage preservation, it has stayed true to its original foundation and the root reflection in which Mr. Ceyrac, Mr. Valeix, and the founding village-members engaged in 1982. In spite of its successes in the media and on the ground (demand remains high, with only 10 percent of requests by villages resulting in membership), it has kept its identity, rigor, and consistency, always striving for modesty and control in development. As a model, it has been adopted by others and has now become a global reference for rural resilience. As small scale as this can seem in light of the number of people directly affected globally, through rural mass tourism the *Association* model has the power to shape the rural through the expectations of millions of visitors who are highly mobile and go from place to place in the quest of emotion-producing landscapes. It is able to support and influence the need for the village that our modern societies yearn. The experience of the *Association* demonstrates that in the context of globalization, even a local grassroot organization no longer can remain only local. Through the network effect, the *Association* passes through the global in order to better anchor the local. The global gives it the tools (communication technology), the language ("we are all *ruralites*"), and the necessary exposure to legitimate itself

in the local. The experience also shows that a local or grassroot association must professionalize to go forward, shielding itself from criticisms and failures by specializing processes. It must maintain a rigorous procedure and organization to give itself legitimacy and accountability vis-à-vis local and national populations, public institutions such as the State, as well as the media that are omnipresent in their scrutiny of associative and popular activities.

How does the *Association* envisage its own future? Now that the *Association* has professionalized, it has been equipped with a structure and a set of processes which tend to make the implementation of its landscape canons clearer and less subject to individuals' temperaments, aesthetic sensibilities, friendships and affinities. Thus, the door is open to the possibility of stepping out of a standard Middle Age patrimony and granting the label to a "modern village". This is no longer incompatible with the mission as long as defined quality and specificity are present, although a new aesthetic paradigm would not be easy to institute. *"Today, things are different because the Association has generated its own culture, even if we need to make it be shared again every seven years, when there are municipal elections and a possible renewal of visions."* Will the Association have to adapt its criteria to contemporary and future realities? It is equipped with the reflectiveness, the experience, the plasticity, and the means to do so if necessary. "I think the day is past when harmony, adjustments, can be our landscape criterion; what we contemporary men and women are, and what we are becoming is something which can no longer be faithfully reflected in the visible landscape." (Jackson 1980, p.17)

Information, pedagogy, and awareness

The *Association* strives to inform and educate not only tourists and the general public (through exposure in the media), but also local actors who have direct control over the patrimonial landscape, whether political elected officials, service providers, or inhabitants. While its accomplishments may be difficult to quantify and generalize, it is in its contribution to rural heritage awareness, as well as self-awareness, and its power to mobilize communities and transcend the local that it must be evaluated. But as the *Association* continues to grow and attract new national contexts to its model, the international *Federation* succeeds in raising a heritage consciousness that goes beyond self-awareness, and putting nations of otherwise different economic and political weight on equal footing in their quest for rural identity resilience, quality and sense of place, and the resurrection of the rural as an actor in the future life of the nation. Thus, the village can play a role to address the disjuncture between past, present, and future. While some scholars have asserted that it is excessive visibility that destroyed the village, the member-villages in the network contend that it is precisely increased visibility of the village that will resurrect rurality in France, Europe, and elsewhere.

Does the PBVF constitute a response to contemporary debates about heritage preservation and rural development? It does respond to needs (needs of tourists/visitors and also inhabitants/locals). But it goes further than that. Landscape labels in general do more than signal interest and put visitors on alert. They assume a normative function about landscape and the use of heritage space. But in this case the norm is not set by the State as norms usually are with heritage objects. The label makes it possible for heritage to become actor in the development of territorial resources and allows the articulation of patrimonial resources with other resources.

Rather than a product or an object, heritage is one resource that highlights place specificities which lead to the differentiation that is needed for success in globalized markets (Saez, Landel, and Périgois 2007). However, the project is not only about commercial and economic goals (and I argue not principally), and neither only about place-marketing, although the label uses the tools and language of global marketing to promote its social agenda. "Branding", usually talked about in the urban context, has now become part of the rural development register. Neither is it only about preservation and immobility, even though the identity dimension is a very strong driver for the model. It is none of these dimensions alone but in the ways in which they combine into an indivisible whole. When speaking about territorial promotion, we are at the intersection of the cultural, the social, the economic, the environmental, and the political. The territory or landscape becomes polysemous communication.

Rescaling the countryside: Glocalized alliances in the "rural"

Furthermore, through the *Most Beautiful Villages* global-scale *Federation*, the village becomes an imagined community through the mythification of the village as a universal symbol of embodiment of the past and resilience. From different village<u>s</u> in the plural, the *Federation* creates an abstract of the village in the singular. The place labelization project, which some may call "branding" or "theming", renders traditional scalar designations irrelevant, by making it possible for localities to constantly navigate on their own terms the dichotomies local-global, local-regional, and national-global, also blurring private and public space and the personal with the collective, going beyond the different "personals", "locals", "regionals", or "nationals" as it instead stages the "rural" as the scale of resilience and scale of attachment by which people

connect to place and to each other both spatially and temporally. Sheppard's notions of positionality and wormholes that emerge through relational place-making across "glocalized alliances" provide one lens through which to understand the complex scalar relations that result from the network.

> "The positionality of two places should be measured not by the physical distance separating them, but by the intensity and nature of their interconnectedness… like networks, wormholes leapfrog across space, creating topological connections that reduce the separation between distant places and reshape their positionality…Wormholes are a structural effect of the long historical geography of globalization, reflective of how globalization processes reshape space/time (Sheppard 2002, pp. 323-4).

1982-2012-2042

The 20th century was that of globalization and urbanization. Will the 21st be the century of localization and "villagization"? Will *neo-rurals* suffice to effect lasting re-ruralization? As the countryside is projected to invade the future global city through astonishing projects of suspended farms, pollution eating vegetal walls, and the like, let us *rendez-vous* in thirty years from now to revisit the myth of the village in the mid-21st century *pays.* Today, as the idealized peasant depicted by Millet in the 19th century stands a common reference, close to nature (and in denial of harsh realities of the peasant plight), France's peasant roots are not forgotten. Modern media and the *Association* here have taken over that memorial role, by glorifying everything rural and perpetuating the *Angelus* iconic representation of the rural. This lingering memory is further demonstrated in the immense success of manifestations such as the annual national agricultural fair held in Paris (*Salon de l'Agriculture*), where people by the hundreds of thousand (over 700,000 visitors in 2014 according to Le Figaro on March 2, 2014) come to "recapture the smells, the atmosphere, the noises again". Again. Even if they have never been rural in their own lifetime, they connect with a time prior and a space away, with which they nonetheless feel

affinities and know well through imagination and myth. The 1990 eccentric Great Harvest

project on the Champs Elysées was another confirmation of the persistent rural memory in

France, when 10,000 wheat pallets that had been grown in secret outside Paris were installed

overnight on the world-famous avenue, to the delight of urbanite Parisians and proving that "the

eternal order of the fields has not spoken its last word." In fact, it is said that "it is not true that

the French have a short memory. For still a long time, we are all peasants."[72] Nostalgia. But so

much more.

Figure 41: Leaving Collonges-la-Rouge

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[72] Quotes from the 2014 documentary film by Audrey Maurion, *Adieu Paysans* (featured on national TV on 3/18/14)

APPENDICES

Appendix #1: Guided interview questions

These questions guided the interview process but were not asked as a list. Each question represents items to which I wanted a response in the conversation.

- ❖ Questions for conversation with the officers of the Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France (members of the three bureaux and commissions)

1- Please explain to me the function and main processes of the bureau/commission you are part of? What is its primary role in the Association?

2- How did you come to be involved in the Association?
Is this an activity that you do in addition to another professional activity? If so, how much time do you allocate to it? What is your main occupation? Are you remunerated or is your position here on a voluntary basis? If you receive a salary, who pays it?

3- What are the hardest parts (obstacles) in the work of this bureau? Anything you would like to change about the process?

4- In the time you have been occupying this function, what have been the most common reasons villages' membership applications were rejected? Can you give me examples of villages that have been rejected in the past? How many applications do you get in a typical year, what percentage gets rejected? Typically, do villages reapply several times? Have there been particular years where applications were very numerous or very few?

5- How often do you communicate with local mayors and/or local populations in member villages? On what occasions?

6- In your experience, what are the local mayors' main motivations for joining?

7- Have there been many member villages that chose not to continue under the label? What are their motivations for not doing so usually?

8- In your opinion, what about France specifically makes the model work here? Do you think the French model is adaptable elsewhere, why/why not?

9- What is your relationship with sister Associations created in other countries? What about the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Earth the Association is part of? What is the French Association's role in this international network?

10- In your opinion, what are the main problems facing rural France today? Are those the same as when the Association was first created? Do you think the Association is helping solve those issues and prepare rural areas to face future problems? Do you have some specific examples?

11- Does the initiative to apply for membership come strictly from local mayors or does the Association sometimes seek out certain places and initiate the conversation?

12- Does the Association expect to cap the number of member villages? Why/why not? Would it be possible to have too many "most beautiful villages of France"?

13- Are there under-represented regions in the Association? Which ones? How do you explain it? Would the Association like to be more present there?

14- What do you think about other labels such as *Petites cités de caractère*, *Village fleuri*, *Station verte*, *Villages circulaires*, *Villes et pays d'art et d'histoire*, etc...? Do you cooperate with some of them? Do they compete with your label?

15- In the years you have been at the Commission, what has been its biggest achievement/success?

16- Is it difficult to get financing partners? How is it done? Who is involved in this process? Has the Ministry of Culture shown interest or been involved in any way? Are the Regional Councils supportive in general? When might they not be?

17- How do you see the Association evolving in the next decade? Is the model sustainable under the current pressures in rural areas?

18- Does the Association face criticism? By whom and on what grounds?
(What would you say to people who see these villages as being turned into living museums? Are they wrong? How is that being avoided?)

19- Which villages do you think I should definitely investigate to see the Association at work? Why those? Who else do you recommend I speak with in the Association?

❖ SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE: Interview with village Mayors

Procedure, relations with the Association, and membership-related questions

1- Were you Mayor when the village joined the Association? If so, what role did you play in that process? If not, how have you been involved with the Association and the renewal process since becoming Mayor?

2- What are the main points on which membership rests? What were the main needs driving the desire to be included in the Most Beautiful Villages of France?

3-In your opinion, how easy is the application procedure and what are your relations with the evaluation committees?

4- What local particularities were put forth to support the application of the village?

5 – Was the village's application ever rejected? How many times? On what grounds? What adjustments, if any, had to be made in order to be granted membership? How many times has the village been audited for renewal since initial membership? Have the auditors raised issues regarding the fulfillment of certain criteria? If so, which, and how are you making corrections?

6- In your mind, has the fact that the village belongs to the Association changed your role and your job? If so, in what ways?

7- What do you think the Association brings to the village? Main pros and cons?

8- Is Association membership something people (electors) talk to you about? Is it a topic discussed in official meetings (Conseil général, Conseil régional)? When is it brought up? If not, why do you think people don't talk about it?

9- Do you feel supported by the village population when it comes to belonging to the Association and bearing its logo? Explain why or why not. Can you give me examples of specific interactions on this issue?

10 - If you encountered reticence about being part of the Association, from whom and on what grounds? What do you respond? Have you witnessed a decline in this reticence or changing attitudes with regard to membership over time, or instead a stiffening of attitudes? Why do you think that is? Are you doing anything specifically to change negative attitudes? What?

11 - Are there other associations of villages (other "labels) your village belongs to? If so, which ones? What is being sought by these multiple memberships? If not, why not?

12- Has there been an economic cost of belonging to the network? Have there been economic benefits? What in your mind has been the balance between economic costs and economic benefits?

13- In terms of territorial development for the *commune*, how has the Association affected decision-making? What benefits or obstacles has it brought?

14 –   a) Your village is pretty isolated from other member-villages and touristic centers, how has this affected your decision to become part of the network?

     b) Your village is part of a cluster of other member-villages and located in a touristic region, how has this affected your decision to become part of the network?

15- Is there any competition between member villages within your region?

16- Within the *Région*, there are villages that are not part of the Association, what do you think is their view of your village being part of the Association?

17- What about across different associations (Village Fleuri, Station Verte, Petites Cités de Caractères, etc.)? Are there ways in which these memberships affect each other?

18- How important is the *Région* in the promotion of your village to outsiders? How do you think your village contributes to the development of the *Région*?

19- Do you have contacts with mayors of other villages in the Association? How frequently? On what occasions and for what purposes might you get in touch or collaborate?

20- Have you had disappointments or unrealized hopes from being a member-village?

The village, inhabitants, daily life, heritage

1- Describe your constituents. How many of them? What does the village population consist of? How does this particular constituency profile affect life in the village?

2- What makes your village distinctive from others?

3- In your mind, has the fact that the village belongs to the Association changed life in the village? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

4- Does life in the village vary from season to season? Explain. Is that a problem?

5 – How aware are residents about the village's membership in the Association? Do you think this membership important to them? Is it important to you as a resident?

6- In your opinion and since you have lived here, has the village changed as a result of being part of the Association? How? Can you give me examples?

 7- Do you think that as a result of the village being part of the Association, residents have changed the way they view and interact with their surroundings? How does this change in attitude get expressed or translated concretely?

8- What role do you think the past plays in the life of the village? Do people reflect on the village history?

9- What is your definition of heritage (*patrimoine*)? How is heritage part of the life of the village?

10- Do you think personal memories of villagers are part of the Association's project? If yes, how? If not, do you think they should be?

11- How is memory expressed in the village?

12- What sort of commemorative celebrations take place in the village? Based on what events?

13 - If you had to give me three photos of what represents for you the essence of your village, what would they be of? (possibly if time and schedule permit, I would prefer that they take photos directly and give them to me).

14- Is there anyone in particular you think I should talk to about the impact of the Association on the village?

Going forward, future development

1- Do you plan on continuing your association with the network in the future?

2- What future development and changes do you see and/or wish for the village?

❖ SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE: Interview with Tourism Office Managers

1- Have you been involved in the accreditation of the village by the Association, or its renewal? How?

2- What are your thoughts about the MBVF with regard to your village? Do you support the label's mission? What would you say are its strongest points? In your mind, are there disadvantages to being a member village?

3- To your knowledge, are there people in the village who do not approve of the village membership in the Association? What is the basis for their reticence?

4- Are there particular pressures put on you stemming from the fact that the village is part of the label? Do you think there are pressures on other people? Where/who are those pressures coming from?

5- Do you live in the village? How long have you lived here?

6- What changes, if any, have you witnessed in the village in relation to the label?

7- Do you get a lot of questions from visitors about the label? What sort of questions?

8- In your professional opinion, do many visitors come because of the label or would they come anyway?

9- What are visitors most interested in when they come into the visitors' center? What do they inquire about most? What type of documentation do they take away from your office most? (housing, cultural events...)

10- What are your relations with village residents and what do they talk to you about?

11- Do you think there might be tension between residents and tourists? On what issues? How do those issues get resolved generally?

12- What are the most common complaints you hear from visitors?

13- What sort of development would you like to see take place in the village?

14- Is life in the village very different across different seasons? Is anything done to try to attract visitors outside of the summer months?

15- Do you cooperate with other villages in the greater region or with the Conseil Régional to continue to attract visitors?

16- Is the label criticized by some? By whom and on what grounds?

❖ SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE: interviews with residents

1- How long have you lived in the village? Do you live here all year long? What is your profession/occupation?

2- What attracted you here? What did you find most attractive about the place?
   or

   If born here, what is keeping you here?

3- Do you feel that the village community is close knit? What are its main particularities?

4- Do you have any thoughts about the MBVF label? What are they? What work do you think the Association does here?

Follow-up questions if needed:

    a.   Would you say that the label strengthens the identity of the village or the opposite? Why?

    b.   Do you think the label has forced some changes? Have those changes been positive or negative? Examples of each?

    c.   Have you been asked to do or not do certain things on your property because of the Association? What? How much of an inconvenience is this to you?

5- Do you have any relations with the rest of the residents (week-enders, permanent, seasonal...)? What are they?

6- What types of interactions do you have with visitors/tourists?

7- Since the village has been part of the Association, has it changed the way you look at your surroundings? Have you noticed things you may not have seen before? Have you been more interested in the history of the village?

8- For you, what is the most important place in the village? Why?

9- Do you have any feelings about living in one of the "most beautiful villages of France"?

10- Do you anticipate living here for a long time in the future? In what ways could the village be improved?

❖ Interviews with tourists. These were very occasional, but if the chance presented itself, I often engaged in conversation with people visiting the village.

1- Where do you come from?
2- Is this your first time in this village?
3- How did you find it? What attracted you here?
4- I see you have the guide of the MBVF. Are you visiting others during this trip? What are you looking for in those places? Are you finding it here?
5- What specifically speaks to you here? Has anything been a disappointment?
6- Will you come back sometimes? Why?

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