

## **The Villes et pays d'art et d'histoire: between protection and promotion of heritage in French historic cities**

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### **Abstract**

The cultural French policy Villes et pays d'art et d'histoire ("city and country of art and history") has been developed by the Ministry of culture since 1985 and forms an innovative modality of protection and promotion of urban heritage. In 2015, about two hundred territories (and more than 120 cities) have volunteered to develop this policy.

In the eighties, its first goal was to reinforced tourism by focusing on local development through the production of activities dealing with heritage. Two decades later, its target audience evolves to the local population. Nowadays, the policy is at the crossroads of several local policies such as tourism, culture, urbanism, sustainable development, etc.

This policy, described in France as a "label", can be interpreted as a new way to decentralize French heritage policies. Indeed, the labeled cities have to follow several instructions from the Ministry. Each territory has to recruit a new staff which has to develop the policy. An animateur de l'architecture et du patrimoine (social-worker of architecture and heritage) has to create new guided tours, permanent and temporary exhibitions, conferences, etc. He becomes the representative of the local cultural, urban and touristic policies by being an interdisciplinary stakeholder, depository of the historic knowledge of the territory. Recently, another obligation has emerged. This policy wishes to create new forms of local museums, called "interpretation centers", whose goals are to present and promote territories for local and touristic populations. These museums are presented as the front door of the territory. By giving a frame for local cultural policies, the label Villes et pays d'art et d'histoire presents a new way of planning heritage protection through the support of central administration.