

Urban heritage conservation in France:
recent evolution and controversy
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This paper aims to discuss the issues surrounding urban heritage conservation policies and tools in the context of the recent legislative evolution in France.

Since the beginning of the 1900s, France developed a consolidated and multi-layered regulatory framework for the safeguarding of urban heritage, composed by different conservation tools at different scales. This approach appears complex to coordinate, due to the challenging articulation between the diverse urban planning documents and stakeholders.

In this context, since the 2010s, a strong debate emerged among both academics and practitioners, to take into consideration a double imperative: on one side, the need to harmonise and to update the heritage preservation legislation, on the other hand, to integrate it within the larger goals of overall sustainable development, which makes the issue of urban heritage protection more complex.

To this end, the former Minister of Culture Fleur Pellerin adopted the law of 7 July 2016, relating to *la Liberté de Création*,

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à l'Architecture et au Patrimoine (Loi CAP) providing a "simplification" and a "modernisation" of the protection of heritage.

The shift in the way of conceiving and protecting heritage is reflected in new ambitions and new tools, aiming at introducing the notion of UNESCO World Heritage into national law, creating new protection perimeters to make urban and landscape heritage protection procedures more understandable and effective and clarifying the regulation of the historic monuments' buffer zones.

On this basis, the paper aims to contribute to the growing area of research on the relevance of actual conservations tools in handling contemporary challenges.

After introducing the existing French urban heritage conservation policies and tools, the paper analyses the effects of this new law on the protection and urban planning systems. Firstly, the simplification of certain tools is discussed, such as the *secteurs sauvegardés*, the *aires de mise en valeur de l'architecture et du patrimoine* (AVAP) and the *zones de protection du patrimoine architectural, urbain et paysager* (ZPPAUP), which are transformed into the *sites patrimoniaux remarquables* (SPR), managed by the *plans de valorisation de l'architecture et du patrimoine* (PMVAP) or the *plans de sauvegarde et de mise en valeur* (PSMV).

The analysis conducted allows a better comprehension of the arsenal of urban heritage protection system in France and opens the possibility of introducing into the preserved perimeters architectures less than 100 years old which are of remarkable architectural and historical interest to the country. Secondly, the contribution highlights the debates around this law, surely necessary, but also controversial when it was first announced. Indeed, as usual in France, when a regulatory change is announced, especially in relation to heritage management, the public debate is tense. Communities of

agglomerations and mayors were worried about a simplified governance which could have led to a disengagement of the French State towards the smallest municipalities. However, the feedback received by the regional and national press on this subject since its implementation shows a completely different response to this law, which seems to reconcile the different levels of decision-making and to provide lasting protection for tangible and intangible urban heritage.

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