

Report on the Survey of the Current Situation of French Characteristic Small Towns

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1. A Brief Introduction of French Characteristic Small Towns

i. The Origin of French Characteristic Small Towns

The Association Nationale des Petites Cités Caractères was founded in 1957 and originally consisted of more than twenty small rural settlements. In principle, only small towns with population less than 6000 were allowed to join. Those small towns should maintain urban heritage style and features of first-class, which could demonstrate the history and value of that particular place. Before enrollment, each member of the small towns would be asked to provide a list of historical architectures and structures, a list of rural tourism service facilities such as restaurants and accommodation, a set of supporting policies for protection and the action plan for coming years. Each small town of the association was to sign and carry out a regulation to promise to maintain and manage its heritage. The association would evaluate the implementation in these towns according to the demands of the regulation.

The French PCC regulation has made it very clear that the particular responsibility the government should take in promoting the development and protection of the small town, including the protection, maintenance, promotion of the value, glorification, activation and reuse of the public space, as main scenic spots or guidance. This responsibility involves not only the public architecture, but also the

private ones; not only the reparation of the building, but also the promotion of infrastructure; not only the improvement of the common service facilities but also the provision of at least one decent demonstration space.

Besides the promotion of those hardware condition, the government should enhance the soft power at the same time, so as to play vital role in both enhancing the ability of tourist reception and propagating local cultural characteristics. That means more better restaurants and accommodation are needed, more ways for information promotion and advertisements and more training for the professional reception personnel.

The work plan of the government should take into consideration in long term as well as in short term. In addition to a long-term plan to promote the value of the heritage, we should also work out a plan focusing on culture and festival activities, display and sales activities of local products and craftwork. This kind of culture and festival activities should be organized by local government or other importing organizations and bring the local citizens into play.

PCC already has a history of over forty years now, and consists of over one hundred small towns, which claim a population of over 500,000. PCC has been playing an important role in the development of these towns and leaved a deep impression.

ii. The Function of French Characteristic Small Towns

In general, PCC plays its role in three aspects.

First, it is a way to solve the problem. PCC provide the leaders of its member towns a way to balance local development and heritage protection. In terms of the French planning management system, the existence of PCC could assist the local government to gain technical support in both Schémas de cohérence territoriale of overall direction and zone d'aménagement concerté at the micro level.

Secondly, it has become a logo of tourism brand. Through 40 years of development, PCC has been making efforts to intensify the characteristic features of the member towns, organize social activities, recognize and promote local products and craftwork, so as to explicate the cultural and touristic features of the member towns and become more and more competitive. Till now the symbol of PCC has become the best name card of French characteristic rural tourism.

Thirdly, it has built an interactive network among these member towns. As a platform, PCC provides strong professional technical support to the towns covering aspects including planning, architecture, marketing, network, tourism and so on, so that those remote towns will not lose the opportunity to get

professional guidance. Meanwhile, PCC also creates a platform for the French small towns to do foreign promotion in order to accelerate the development of local tourism.

Hence, we could say that in the recent 40 years of development PCC has been and will still be an attempt to find a new way to develop in the future. It will fully balance between the livelihood of the local and the promotion of culture and tourism, and finally help to turn these characteristic towns into true and valuable vigorous heritage.

II. Search Hardly for Development Direction of Industry Transformation: Characteristic Small Towns in La Grand East

i. A General Impression of Characteristic Small Towns in La Grand East

La Grand East was formed by the combination of three bygone regions Alsace, Champagne Ardenne and Lorraine in 2016 after the implementation of French administrative division reform. The research was conducted in Troyes and six PCC small towns which were within the territory of Aube and Haute-Marne of the bygone Champagne Ardenne.

On the whole, La Grand East is an industrial and mining area with powerful economy for the reason of traffic and history. The condition in Aube is much better than that in Haute-Marne in terms of various districts in the region. Troyes is especially excellent in city scale, economic vitality, population structure and many other aspects as a generalized satellite town of Paris.

Nevertheless, with the transfer of industrial gravity center in the recent decades, local traditional mining industry has been gradually declining and the few manufacturing industry left almost disappeared for the relocation of global industry. Consequently economic vitality has been declining obviously and a variety of problems concerning the sustainable development has emerged.

Due to the decline of economic vitality, those towns are no longer attractive to the youth and the problem of aging population is becoming more and more serious with the aging rate of several towns surpassing 60%. The main problem many towns are facing is how to promote the attraction to the popularity and to prevent or delay the hollowing out of the towns.

Because of the insufficiency of economic vitality and population, the fund for protection of local historical features and infrastructure construction is quite limited, mainly from financial support of superior government. Therefore the shortage of maintenance fund is a general problem to many towns. To tackle these difficulties, many towns have been conscious that developing culture and

tourism is important to local economy and are seeking more suitable financing and construction mode.

2. Each Town Seeking Development Direction by Showing its Special Prowess like the Eight Immortals Soaring over the Ocean

The research involved small towns including Troyes in Aube, Ery-le-chatel and Tonnerre (which used to belong to la Bourgogne next to Aube) surrounding Troyes, Chateauvillain, Vignory, Bourmont and Joinville in Haute-Marne.

a. Central City in the Region: Troyes

Troyes is the provincial capital of Aube, and an important satellite city around Paris as well. It is one hour and a half's drive away from Paris and there are also trains between them, which means they are closely connected and you can commute to Paris from Troyes.

Troyes used to be a mercantile city in the Middle Ages but, as time goes by, the present population is around 60,000. Although the number has reduced compared to the peak one of 75,000 in 60s and 70s, the present population is

comparatively steady with a reasonable structure.

The historic district located in the center of the town is preserved intactly and repair rules of historical buildings has been worked out by making special laws and regulations. After years of investment, the style of historical district and the quality of buildings are well guaranteed. At the same time, many historical buildings with good locations have been utilized as far as possible with the premise that the original style should not be damaged.

The protection of the historic district in Troyes is much more than simply conserving the original historical information. It is the integration of modern design into the respect for history that features the local characteristics and visual impression.

b. Make Full Use of Natural Scenery: Bourmont, Chateauvillain

There are many national parks and forest green lands in Haute-Marne. PCC towns close to these landscape resources take it for granted that they should focus on the use of these parks and green lands in developing cultural tourism.

Bourmont is a small town located in a mountainous region and is famous for its stylish church and a famous quarry of Middle Ages. By joining another natural

park association, the town obtained a special authentication and thus stressed its characteristic of tourist resources.

Chateauvillain is situated at the entrance of a grand national forest park. Wild animals in the park occur occasionally near the town, which provides the tourists with precious memories of full contact with animals and plants. Tourists can have a close observation of the state of life of wild herbivorous animals such as deer. This not only helps to conserve the old town perfectly, but also provides a really special tourism experience place.

c. Insistence on Being Small but Beautiful, Giving Consideration to People' s Livelihood and Developing Step by Step: Ervy-le-chatel

Ervy-le-chatel is a small town originated in Middle Ages. By renewal and reconstruction of cultural heritages, new functions are given to these buildings. Different from most towns in China which mainly aim at tourism development, the renewal and reconstruction of historical buildings in Ervy-le-chatel always imports function to promote livelihood so that places are created to promote the local characteristic color glass craft culture.

Till now the original post in Chateauvillain has been reconstructed into a cultural center, the prison has become a library and folk houses were renovated into the

residential activity center. Those projects were connected through well-designed pedestrian passages so as to provide wonderful urban public living spaces.

After years of continuous renovation, Chateauvillain has become a small and beautiful town with comprehensive livelihood facilities. In the future, with the transformation and development of the whole la Grand East, more and more citizens in Paris are expected to migrate here so that Chateauvillain can have truly sustainable development.

d. Take Full Advantage of Historical Buildings: Joinville

Joinville lies by the side of La Marne and was named after a noble who once participated in the Crusades. Railway station was built early here so that the town developed and expanded to a great extent in the recent century. The old town covers a large area and has many historical buildings. The styles and features are well-preserved. Many regions are extremely distinctive, such as the area around the church and that by the river.

Now hollowing problem is really serious in the core area of the town and some historical buildings lacking appropriate repair and maintenance are falling apart. The slow economic growth in recent years has led to the lack of drive and financial resources of the owners so that they are not willing to repair the buildings

initiatively. Thus, the protection has become more and more difficult.

In view of the fact that most historical buildings in the town had comparatively complete patterns and were first built with high construction standard, local government decided to retrieve buildings gradually through special legal process, the owners of which could not afford to restore them or were not willing to do so.

After gaining the property right, government will sell the building at a low price such as auctioning it to a new owner capable and willing to pay the repair fee at 1€ or sell it to gain a reasonable profit after entrusting someone with the task to restore it. There have already been dozens of properties for sale with the aforementioned two situations and specialized sales promotion activities were held in the town in the first half of the year. It is understood that the purchasers mainly come from the Greater Paris area, German and Belgium and there are many people come to consult the sales.

By taking above-mentioned actions, Joinville finally find a way to protect the historical buildings as well as the style and features and seek the way of development which can create a larger number of local employment activities, making it extraordinary among so many PCC towns in La Grand East.

e. Without Defined Direction: Tonnerre, Vignory

Except for several small towns with defined development directions and means mentioned above, there are still many rest ones facing development difficulties in La Grand East, which really worries local governments.

Take the fountain landscape formed in the Middle Ages in Tonnerre for example. It is the most characteristic historical heritage in the old town, but it is far from enough to have only one historical heritage in such an old town with a population of over 1000.

Another example is Vignory. It has an old church built in the 14th century and some of the vernacular dwellings have been transformed into exhibition halls to demonstrate the life statue of local citizens and provide the opportunity to experience. However, both of the two are not characteristic enough to distinguish it from other towns with similar heritages. The most distinctive castle is with close relationship to the town, which is somewhat like the castle town in Japan. But this can only be traced in the ancient paintings because of the destruction of the castle.

In our survey, we found that these small towns did have many development opportunities through communication. Tonnerre can orientate its cultural tourism feature based on the long history of dairy industry around Tonnerre. The key point is to combine the local feature with the street reconstruction in core historical

district including the fountain and the area around it in order to form a sightseeing line from the fountain to the cinema. Vignory ought to recover part of the castle landscape on the hill and the relationship between the castle and town so as to recognize the castle town pattern formed in the Middle Ages and reveal the daily life of noble knights and civilians.

As an association, PCC can help to introduce external talents, encourage the local citizens to take part in such divergent discussions and work out the way of cultural tourism development in the future under certain rules.

3. Green Hills and Blue Waters are the Most Precious Wealth: Characteristic Small Towns in la Bretagne

i. General Impression of Characteristic Small Towns in the North of la Bretagne

La Bretagne is located in the area surrounded by Brittany Peninsula in north-west of France, English channel and the bay of Biscay. Rennes is the capital of it. La Bretagne was once inhabited by Celts, and after a long time of culture and language fusion it finally formed its own culture, language and customs, which is obviously different from France. Hence, PCC towns in La Bretagn are quite

characteristic in cultural tourism.

La Bretagne is far away from the core of France and has comparatively independent language and culture. It is one of the few traditional aristocracies and have no industrial and mining enterprises of large scale. In the past, the economy of La Bretagne relied excessively on agriculture and fisheries and the level of economic growth lagged behind the average level in France.

But in recent decades, with the gradually decline of traditional manufacturing industry and mining industry in France, La Bretagne chose an entirely different way of development from La Grand East. The weak prospect in the history became the strong driving force foundation of new economic development instead. La Bretagne has become one of the most agricultural developed regions in France, one of the most concentrated regions of high-tech industry in France and one of the most tourist developed regions in France.

Every year, over 10,000,000 tourists from all over the world come to visit La Bretagne and most of them come for vacation from England, Belgium and German. Their short-term settlements has brought out the development of various industries including service industry and real estate industry.

Against this backdrop, the historical protection and development of every local

PCC towns are in a state of virtuous cycle. Confidence and motive power for the future development can be found in every town. There is sufficient financial support to carry out the planning and construction. In this way, we can improve the environment continuously and discover the historical value so that there will be more tourists, which is advantageous to the promotion of local culture.

Except for Chateaugiron near Rennes, the other three towns involved in this survey are located in Cotes-d'Armor, including Tregor, La Roche Derrien and Pontrieux. All of them have peculiar features. Chateaugiron developed as a satellite town in the suburbs of Rennes. Tregor became a comparatively central town in the locality. And the other two towns near Tregor developed their own characteristic tourism projects according to their own cultural, historical and touristic resources.

ii. Sustainable Development Way by Combining Cultural Tourism and People' s Livelihood

PCC towns in La Bretagne share a common feature, that is the aim of protecting and developing historical towns is not only for developing cultural tourism, but also for the promotion of local livelihood. The ultimate aim is to improve the living condition by promoting local economy.

Tregor is a good example. It has attracted many high-level talents from Paris by

protecting core areas of historical districts, beautifying the ambient environment and creating a good living atmosphere. They set up their own design company, consulting company and other companies in the locality so that more decent job positions are provided and the town become more attractive to the young people. Thus, the rationality of the population structure and the vitality of economy are guaranteed. Several hotels, restaurants and other enterprises directly serving the tourism in the town are set up by some Parisians. They have brought advanced service concept and international vision from the metropolis and helped to promote the service level of local cultural tourism.

In addition, by introducing good schools, building high standard facilities and hospitals for the aged and promoting the service level of the above-mentioned public service facilities, Tregor has become the real central town in the locality and guaranteed the local vitality. On the other hand, this can help to solve the future worries of the high-level immigrants from Paris and promote the attraction of the town.

At the same time of protecting the material space, Tregor also paid attention to protect the local life style and intensified it through appropriate hardware construction. The tradition of Wednesday Market is an example. It can provide the local citizens with daily convenience and at the same time become a new cultural tourism programme which attracts many tourists.

iii. Overall External Publicity with High Degree of Recognition

PCC towns share a common external publicity channel in La Bretagne. They invite famous designers and artists to make a series of propaganda materials through PCC as a platform and intermediary, including series videos, brochures drawing maps and so on. At the same time, they all have similar visual communication elements on their respective networks. This series of measures mean to intensify the unified image of PCC towns in La Bretagne in the public' s eye continuously and therefore form a resultant to enrich the tourism products and cultural experience. Not only can it help to promote the local popularity but also play an important role in encouraging tourists to pay a further visit.

In specific process of visual design, BCC towns in La Bretagne try to modernize, distort and recombine the patterns based on the conventional local ones so as to create a new series not only bearing the traditional features but also full of the characteristics of this era. To employ these new designs in souvenirs, local markings and etc generally has achieved good effects.

iv. The Important Role of Designer in Reconstruction of Villages and Towns

As long as there are requirements for appearance modification in reconstruction

of PCC towns, design schemes by qualified architects are required before implementation. This measure has played a vital role in maintaining the integrity of style and appearance and preventing the heritages from being destroyed by citizens consciously or unconsciously in the reconstruction of villages and towns. Meanwhile, the whole course intervention of the designer also helps to optimize the public environment of villages and towns.

4. Rock from other Mountains Can be Precious as Jade to us: French Characteristic Small Towns as Reference for Chinese Characteristic Towns

Characteristic towns in China have been growing vigorously, but the development mainly depends on tourism in the light of the present practice situation. Some characteristic towns are planned and constructed as new rural tourism destinations instead of towns with characteristic industries. It would be easy to finance and build the image fast in this mode, but the lack of attention to the local citizens would bring latent dangers to the sustainable development. The themes of these characteristic towns are getting more and more identical so that it would be more and more difficult to develop tourism. As long as we fail to attain the results expected, we would meet follow-up financing shortage and finally impede the sustainability of development.

The ways of development of French characteristic towns do provide a lot of reference. From their experience, we can see that besides intensifying the local feature which is generally accepted, promoting local people' s livelihood also should be paid attention to in developing characteristic towns. Only by promoting the local people' s livelihood continuously can the vitality be sustained and thus attract periphery residents to come to consume the products. Only by creating a place frequented visited by local people can we diminish the difference between off season and peak season, reduce the risk of developing tourism and finally help to put the local tourism development on the right sustainable track.