



"Common values of the Grand Sites of France"

Framework document approved by the board of the RGSF [Réseau des Grands Sites de France – Network of Grand Sites of France] on 2 October 2014

"Value: What is considered to be true, beautiful, good, from a personal viewpoint or according to the criteria of a society, and what is given as an ideal to be achieved, as something to defend."

Larousse dictionary.

Introduction

The action by members of the Réseau des Grands Sites de France (RGSF), which groups together the authorities that manage the Grand Sites of France that have been approved or are planned is part of the policy of the **Grand Sites of France**.

Of national importance, this policy brings together the State and the local authorities to protect, manage and develop sites that have exceptional landscapes, protected in accordance with the well-known law of 1930. It has gradually been formalised in a pragmatic way over the last 30 years, based on real experience implemented on the ground by complementary action, first by the State, which instigated this policy and which plays the sovereign role, and, second, by the authorities which, in view of the diversity of the territories involved, ensure the management of the Grand Sites.

The **principles, objectives and tools of this policy**, to which the authorities concerned subscribe, are formalised in the "Reference document on the policy of the Grand Sites of France", produced by the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, in partnership with the RGSF.

Additionally, when it drew up its 10 year plan (2013-2022), the RGSF thought it necessary to further develop the basic values that unite its members. In 2013, collective work within the RGSF then began on the values of the Grand Sites of France, helping to build a common basis to inspire the operation and management of each site.

The aim is to show members' agreement on what is involved for authorities to become a member of the Network, the common beliefs that members of the Network wish to share, defend, promote and implement in concrete terms in every approved or planned Grand Site of France.

This document, which outlines the characteristics that are specific to the Grand Sites of France and the values that are jointly held, was approved by the board on 2 October 2014.

Throughout the text, what is said of the Grand Sites of France applies both to the approved Grand Sites of France and to Grand Sites that are planned and not yet approved.

The Grand Sites of France, exceptional landscapes

The Grand Sites of France are primarily landscapes, remarkable, iconic landscapes. The members of the RGSF recognise that these landscapes have an exceptional, unique, singular character, that justifies their **protection** (ranking). Every Grand Site has its own **personality**, which has a certain **permanence in time**.

This personality is closely linked to the place's particular history. But a Grand Site also has a living character that links the site with the past but also with the future. This characteristic involves the place's ability to evolve. The roots of the place, strongly expressed in the landscape, give it an **authenticity that is sustained by the diversity of natural, human, historical and cultural components**.

The managers associate the Grand Sites with the terms "**landscape**" and "**heritage**" by referring to an alliance of natural and cultural values, more than to the terms "nature" and "biodiversity".

The landscape, as a combined work by man and nature, makes the Grand Sites of France stand out within all the groups of natural spaces that are protected as part of biodiversity (parks or reserves).

The sense of place and experience of the site

Since the creation of the RGSF, its members refer to the concept of the sense of place to indicate the particular personality of every Grand Site. This individual personality is based on its tangible and intangible character, which is related to an evaluation that is partly objectifiable and partly sensitive to the place, by the person who is experiencing this.

Discovery, and the daily experience of a Grand Site of France, leads to a particular experience of the place that is unique and that cannot be duplicated (that even the manager of the Grand Site, an elected official and an expert, never tires of and can testify to). This is felt all the more because the visitor will encounter places "that take your breath away", where one "feels very small", places that can provide a feeling of enjoyment, of stimulation of the senses, of emotion, that can go as far as a form of ecstasy.

The result of this is that managing or developing a Grand Site of France presents a responsibility and requires a particular expertise: this is because it means both taking action on the substance of a site, but also on intangible elements and on precious symbolism. This requires care, sensitivity and particular prudence from everyone.

In contrast, everything that favours the standardisation of the site leads to a loss of personality of the Grand Site and denies its exceptional character. The sense of place should, on the contrary, be clearly observable, crystal clear, so that everyone can experience the place.

The reference to the sense of place has contributed to establishing the principles of the policy of the Grand Sites and to sustaining the debate on values within the RGSF.

Dynamic conservation

With regard to protection, the members of the RGSF are extremely committed to a global approach to protecting these landscapes, including biodiversity, the historical and cultural heritage and the social and economic practices that shape the Grand Site. They give the protection of the Grand Sites a public interest value and therefore a value as a model for French society.

For members of the RGSF, the protection of a Grand Site of France does not mean wrapping it in cotton wool or making it into a museum, **which would result in** sites that are frozen or that are shrines.

There is a way to reconcile protection of the heritage and to maintain its living, open and welcoming character. This is what the RGSF is looking for, by excluding the trivialisation, degradation or destruction of remarkable landscapes, but also the desertification of these places that have mostly been inhabited through history.

The inhabitant of the site is one of the essential stakeholders in the success of the Grand Site of France approach. The heir to a landscape that has been shaped by previous generations, he is one of the guarantors of the **transmission of the capital of the landscape to** future generations. His participation in the conservation and development of the Grand Site of France depends on him claiming ownership of the sense of place and on his participation in the project to conserve, manage and develop the area.

Welcome and sharing

The Grand Sites of France are living places, lively and bustling. Their managers are very keen that these should be places that welcome visitors and **share with them the spirit of these places**. The values to be shared should be strongly communicated by local decisions and they should be **proposed and accessible to all, irrespective of** culture or financial means.

In a Grand Site of France, it should be possible to take the time to discover, to encounter the treasures of the place and share them through talking and discussing with the inhabitants. The experience of the site is also taking time to just "be" in an environment, a landscape, a heritage that transcends us, to return to what is essential. A Grand Site of France creates a link, maintains social cohesion and contributes to **transmission** between generations.

A Grand Site of France should invite contemplation, emotion, and encourage knowledge, through the "answers" provided for the public, that makes the heritage accessible. Visitors should have the impression that a part of the world, a piece of history and the heritage of a society are being revealed to them. In a way, they are in turn **initiated**. The aim is to inspire an attachment to these places, a desire to return and to share the experience.

Development of the site

The plan to develop a Grand Site is based on the values that justified its protection and it should serve these.

The managers are aware that the biggest challenge is to solve congestion at the **sites**, which makes the quality of an experience illusory and which can destroy, or at least conceal, these exceptional sites.

The members of the Réseau des Grands Sites de France seek a balance between protection, openness and development, the **symbiosis between activities and landscapes**. They advocate controlled development of improvements and restraint.

They refuse trivialisation and standardisation, that leads to the loss of the sense of place. They are opposed to a danger of "total development, over construction". They willingly set the Grand Sites of France against theme parks and other amenities that are disruptive of the places where they are established.

Finally, they want to distance themselves from the sirens of the easy option, simple solutions and the irreversibility of development.

Sustainable economy and local development

A Grand Site of France is a catalyst for sustainable local development. It guides the territory towards the future. The management of the project mobilises the partners in shared **governance based on** consultation.

Uncontrolled urbanism that destroys efforts to protect and develop landscapes, as well as **property speculation that** mainly takes place at the cost of agricultural land, are two dangers that confront the managers of the Grand Sites.

The reputation of the Grand Sites of France and their many visitors may have resulted in badly controlled places of "high commercial pressure", that arouse greed, that can be similar to the privatisation of a public good. Ultimately, excesses go against the quality of the place and the experience of the visitor, and cause local imbalances.

The managers of the Grand Sites distance themselves from these counter values, represented by the excessive commoditisation of the site, a strict response to the market, submission to the demands of competitiveness.

The members of the RGSF consider that their mission to manage a Grand Site does not fit with a plan for commercial profitability. The priority should be to look at the **indirect consequences** of the Grand Site for its territory. The economy generated by a Grand Site is first of all perceived as a factor of local development and as a tool that can contribute to conserving the treasures and the heritage of an entire territory.

The Grand Site is a place where local initiative and national, even international, reputation meet and combine. The project itself should emerge from the territory and should improve **local activities and products**. It should not create a situation of two-speed local development that would strongly affect the inhabitants.

The financial means allocated to the projects should as a priority ensure the quality of what is achieved, whilst making sure that there is good control over the use of the funds. The managers of the Grand Sites are very committed to strong partnerships and to a fair distribution of financial **contributions to the projects**, with regard to places that have a great influence, that benefit a whole region, whose municipalities or local authority associations cannot and do not want to take on the burden alone. They rightly consider that the **users contribute towards the** maintenance costs of the sites, amenities and services from which they benefit.

Position and role of the manager

Given the special character of the Grand Sites of France it is essential to permanently search for a **balance between protection and openness, between visits and conservation**. This inevitably leads to an ability to manage complexity and to accept and integrate the inconsistencies.

Above all else, a Grand Site requires a global approach that allows a synthesis between the historical, economic and social vision (the principles of sustainable development).

The ability to **predict**, to have a long-term vision, to have an on going dialogue with stakeholders in the project and to "work together" are qualities emphasised by the teams of elected officials and professionals involved in the Grand Sites of France.

The managers call for an approach that starts from an analysis of the site and that involves local stakeholders and inhabitants. Elected officials and experts note, with concern, the bureaucracy or a vision that is sometimes too theoretical or disconnected from the land.

The managers highlight the **search for excellence and quality**, the values of ethics in action, in the sense of the public interest, of transparency.

This management should itself hold the **values of exemplarity**, both with regard to how operations are managed and in the process of consultation and governance (modes of decision-making and stakeholders).

Just like the inhabitant of the site, the manager sees himself as a **guide** who accompanies the visitor, he has a role to share and transmit the values and spirit of the place.

In conclusion, however, the members of the RGSF want to refrain from giving lectures or becoming elitist. And they are aware that nothing is worse than announcing values without implementing them. They are committed to basing their action on this set of values.