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THE VILLAGES DU LIVRE:
LOCAL IDENTITY, CULTURAL POLITICS, AND PRINT CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY FRANCE

A Thesis in
French
by
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ABSTRACT

Over the past several decades, the cultural phenomenon of the villages du livre has exploded throughout the Hexagon. Taking their cue from the original book town, Hay-on-Wye, in Wales, rural French communities once in danger of disappearing have reclaimed their economic future and their heritage. Founded in 1961, Hay-on-Wye has served as a model for other towns to establish a used book trade, organize literary festivals, and promote the practice of traditional book arts that include calligraphy, binding, paper-making, and printing. In the French villages du livre of Bécherel (Bretagne), Montolieu (Languedoc), Fontenoy-la-Joûte (Lorraine), Montmorillon (Poitou-Charentes), and La Charité-sur-Loire (Bourgogne), ancillary enterprises such as museums, bookstores, cafés, and small hotels now occupy buildings that had stood vacant for years. The economies of these towns have improved concurrent with government investment in them. Residents now find it worthwhile to remain in the area instead of relocating to larger cities. As a result of these changes, the identity of these villages is evolving as well, as they become magnets for a new form of cultural tourism and de facto sites for preserving the memory of traditional print culture in France in an era of new technologies, such as the e-book.

The book town movement has become an international phenomenon with a strong European dimension. To date, the research conducted on these towns in their European context has focused largely on economic and demographic benefits of their creation as well as on the role of technology in developing communication systems within and between the towns. None of these studies focuses on the French villages, nor do they...
address cultural issues such as identity, print culture, or collective memory. My study analyzes each of these issues and considers book towns as objects revelatory of themes and tensions in contemporary French society. My approach situates itself at the juncture of several fields and disciplines: book history, a field whose goal is to examine print culture as an historical agent and which has seen an explosion of interest in the past twenty years, as evidenced by the pioneering work of Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier; cultural history; and contemporary history (what in France is often called histoire du temps présent).

Relying on these approaches, I address the following questions in my study: Why are there so many book towns in France? How are towns chosen to become book towns? What does the village du livre phenomenon reveal about the status of books and print culture in contemporary French society? Why does this phenomenon seem so important now, when new electronic technologies have challenged the form of the traditional codex? How do the identities of these villages change as a result of their new status as villages du livre? How do books and book arts profit from the existence of these villages and, conversely, what benefits do the villages du livre gain from adopting a new identity based on books? How and why do the villages create new collective memories? How are traditions, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm has asked, ‘invented?’ What is the role of the French state, through a cultural policy aimed at developing and sustaining these villages, in creating and perpetuating these traditions?
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On April 16, 2006, several young Mauritanians paused to pose for a picture in front of a directional arrow that reads “Chinguetti, La Sorbonne du désert – Mauritanie, 3506 km.” The arrow is one of about thirty attached to the newly-erected semaphore, a large green metallic structure that now occupies a prominent area in the center of the small French town of Fontenoy-la-Joûte. Other arrows point to Dalmellington (Scotland), Montereggio (Italy), Mühlbeck (Germany), Saint-Pierre-de-Clages (Switzerland), Bredevoort (Holland), Redu (Belgium), Hay-on-Wye (Wales), and Montolieu (France); in each case, the signs include the distance in kilometers of these towns from Fontenoy-
la-Joûte. A few arrows point to imaginary realms such as Atlantis and Pellucidar. What do these seemingly disconnected locations have in common? Why construct such a monument in a rural French village where the cattle outnumber the humans? And why are the Mauritanians there?

Each of the real places included here is known for its association with books, or, more generally, print culture. Most of them are book towns, rural communities featuring many bookstores and, often, workshops where artisans practice traditional methods of book production such as paper-making, calligraphy, printing, and binding. Even the imaginary places are connected with books. The elusive and probably mythic underwater island of Atlantis has inspired numerous writers since Plato first described it. And Pellucidar, the literary creation of Edgar Rice Burroughs, who is best known as the author of the Tarzan series, refers to a hollow realm in the middle of the Earth inhabited by primitive and imaginary people and creatures.

Among all of the towns listed, Chinguetti bears special significance. In conjunction with the activities feting the tenth anniversary of Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s status as a book town, Fontenoy-la-Joûte and Chinguetti officially became “twin” towns, presided over by Baba Ould Sidi, the Mauritanian Ambassador in Paris. Members of the Association nancéienne des étudiants mauritaniens traveled to Fontenoy-la-Joûte to partake in the twinning celebration, which included special dances and songs. Moreover, Aminata Athie, president of the Association des Mauritanis de Lorraine, supervised preparation of a large meal served with semoule from Chinguetti.

The French press has referred to the Mauritanian town, whose origins extend back to the eighth century, as the first village du livre, in reference to its impressive collection
of 40,000 manuscripts, many of scientific and Koranic texts, some of which date back hundreds of years. Chinguetti, once a major trading post, also boasts the honor of being chosen as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, in conjunction with the nearby towns of Ouadane, Tichitt, and Oualata, all of which were key settlements along the trade routes of the Sahara Desert.¹ The merchants and pilgrims on their way to Mecca who passed through over the centuries brought with them numerous manuscripts – eleventh-century religious treatises, a sixteenth-century book of Arabic grammar, and a seventeenth-century version of a work by the sixth century BCE Phoenician philosopher Thales of Miletus, to name just a few examples – and the towns became renowned as intellectual centers ([n.a.] "Written in the Sands"). Hence, the reference on the sign in Fontenoy-la-Joûte to “La Sorbonne du désert.” But curiously, it was not the government or any organization that took charge of collecting and storing the manuscripts over the years, although recently the Bibliothèque nationale de France and UNESCO have both expressed interest in assisting with the documents’ preservation, but rather Chinguetti’s native inhabitants. A handful of families acts as librarians, storing thousands of the manuscripts in their homes and passing them down from one generation to the next. For example, Sidi Dahi, one of the Mauritanian students present at the Fontenoy-la-Joûte festivities, is from Chinguetti and has an uncle who has assembled “tout ce que les habitants gardaient chez eux sans en connaître l’importance. Des récits de la vie quotidienne au moment du passage des pèlerins se dirigeant vers la Mecque ou des traités...

d’astronomie et de médecine” (quoted in Becker). By preserving such precious cultural documents that provide glimpses into the Arab world’s rich history, including ancient copies of the Koran, families like Dahi’s contribute to safeguarding Mauritania’s patrimoine.

Figure 2

![Figure 2](image)

Figure 2: An advertisement for Fontenoy-la-Joûte's tenth anniversary celebrations. Courtesy of Patrice and Huguette Jacquemin.

It is this kind of endeavor that truly links Chinguetti to its new twin town, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, and to the current book town trend, especially as it has developed in France, where both heritage in general and that of written culture in particular are highly valued. Although the booksellers and artisans of the villages du livre are not considered librarians, as the families of Chinguetti are, they nevertheless perform similar duties in
preserving a part of their country’s *patrimoine*. But the stakes extend beyond written heritage. Just as the desert sands have slowly invaded the streets, homes, and mosques of Chinguetti over the centuries, covering up traces of the past and driving many residents to seek shelter and work elsewhere, so time and the rural exodus of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have devastated some of the French towns that have recently become *villages du livre*. Those residents who have remained are understandably concerned about preventing their towns from fading into oblivion. Becoming book towns has offered them the opportunity to revalorize their unique local and regional histories and to preserve the books and artisanal techniques they showcase.

The semaphore that displays Chinguetti’s name along with those of the other book towns was dedicated as part of the celebratory activities surrounding the tenth anniversary of Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s inauguration as a *village du livre*. And just as it informs and guides its viewers in relation to book towns, it also acts as a symbol that will help guide this study, as it is representative of many of the themes that will be discussed in the following chapters. First, as noted above, the semaphore’s purpose is centered on written culture, which, in itself, forms the basis of much of the world’s knowledge.

Thus, it is an affirmation of books’ importance in contemporary society, despite

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2 The notion of *patrimoine* pervades contemporary French society and is invoked in many situations, including, as André Chastel notes, “[le] patrimoine culturel’ qui embrasserait légendes, mémoires, la langue même; [le] patrimoine ‘écologique’ qui concerne les particularités attachantes, sensibles, vitales, de la nautre; les dernières années ont même vu apparaître la métaphore saisissante du patrimoine ‘génetique’… En s’élargissant, la notion prend une valeur affective plus marquée pour désigner certaines conditions fondamentales de l’existence nationale, voire de l’existence humaine” André Chastel, “La Notion de patrimoine,” *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. II: *La Nation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) 405-50:405. Throughout this study, I use *patrimoine* in its most general sense to mean a heritage common to a group of people.

3 As Nicolas Barker notes, “The book viewed as an historic artifact is, if not the oldest, at least as old as any other human construction. It is also the commonest; there are more books surviving for every period of
increasing competition from other media forms such as film and digital technologies. 4

The semaphore unites real and imaginary book realms in an effort to celebrate the culture and heritage they represent. The inclusion of Chinguetti on the monument provides acknowledgement of its relevance to today’s book towns and links modern-day notions of print culture with its non-printed predecessors, such as manuscripts.


4 Fred Lerner asserts: “Even if the most optimistic dreams of the technophiles were to come true, there would still be a place for the old-fashioned library of printed books. No miracle of digitization will lessen the aesthetic value of a medieval illuminated manuscript or a Grolier binding. No historian of the book arts will accept an electronic substitute for a Kelmscott Chaucer or a Gutenberg Bible. The need to preserve, catalog, and exhibit the masterworks of the book arts will not be abolished by the progress of computer science.” Fred Lerner, The Story of Libraries: From the Invention of Writing to the Computer Age (New York: Continuum, 1999) 202.
A second way in which the semaphore is symbolic is as a tourist’s guide. Although it may seem far-fetched that a tourist consulting the signpost would have stopped there with the intention of actually finding the route to one of the other towns, the signpost, like a guidebook, alerts the tourist to the presence of similar attractions and acknowledges the existence of a certain literary tourism. As the following chapters will demonstrate, some tourists have indeed become book town “groupies,” traveling from one to the next both within and outside of France’s borders. Moreover, these travelers contribute to the popularization of literary tourism.

Finally, the semaphore represents identity and memory. It is no accident that it now stands at the main crossroads of Fontenoy-la-Joûte, as the town’s identity now revolves around books and related artisanal practices. Although Chinguetti is now its official twin town, Fontenoy-la-Joûte is no less related to the other villages listed on the signs. Together, they form an international community of book towns linked through both real and virtual ties they have established. Thus, the monument functions as a commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Fontenoy-la-Joûte, village du livre and as an acknowledgement of its predecessors, both ancient (Chinguetti) and modern (Hay-on-Wye and Redu). But it also honors all book towns – and print culture – in general. And the presence of the Mauritanians at the festivities only amplifies the truly global nature of the book town trend.
The Book Town Phenomenon

Over the past several decades, the cultural phenomenon of the *villages du livre* has exploded throughout the Hexagon. Taking their cue from the original book town, Hay-on-Wye, in Wales, rural French communities once in danger of disappearing have reclaimed their economic future and their heritage. Founded in 1961, Hay-on-Wye has served as a model for other towns to establish a used book trade, organize literary festivals, and promote the practice of traditional book arts that include calligraphy, binding, paper-making, and printing. In the French *villages du livre* of Bécherel (Bretagne), Montolieu (Languedoc), Fontenoy-la-Joûte (Lorraine), Montmorillon (Poitou-Charentes), and La Charité-sur-Loire (Bourgogne), ancillary enterprises such as museums, bookstores, cafés, and small hotels now occupy buildings that had stood vacant for years. The economies of these towns have improved concurrent with government investment in them. Residents now find it worthwhile to remain in the area instead of relocating to larger cities. As a result of these changes, the identity of these villages is evolving as well, as they become magnets for a new form of cultural tourism and de facto sites for preserving the memory of traditional print culture in France in an era of new technologies, such as the e-book.
The book town movement has become an international phenomenon with a strong European dimension. To date, the research conducted on these towns in their European context has focused largely on economic and demographic benefits of their creation as well as on the role of technology in developing communication systems within and between the towns. None of these studies focuses on the French villages, nor do they address cultural issues such as identity, print culture, or collective memory. My study

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5 See Appendix D for a list of book towns worldwide.
analyzes each of these issues and considers book towns as objects revelatory of themes and tensions in contemporary French society. My approach situates itself at the juncture of several fields and disciplines: book history, a field whose goal is to examine print culture as an historical agent and which has seen an explosion of interest in the past twenty years, as evidenced by the pioneering work of Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier; cultural history; and contemporary history (what in France is often called *histoire du temps présent*).  

Relying on these approaches, I address the following questions in my study: Why are there so many book towns in France? How are towns chosen to become book towns? What does the *village du livre* phenomenon reveal about the status of books and print culture in contemporary French society? Why does this phenomenon seem so important now, when new electronic technologies have challenged the form of the traditional codex? How do the identities of these villages change as a result of their new status as

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villages du livre? How do books and book arts profit from the existence of these villages and, conversely, what benefits do the villages du livre gain from adopting a new identity based on books? How and why do the villages create new collective memories? How are traditions, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm has asked, ‘invented’, (“Introduction: Inventing Traditions”)? What is the role of the French state, through a cultural policy aimed at developing and sustaining these villages, in creating and perpetuating these traditions?

What Is a Book Town?

Comment faire un village du livre?

Ingrédients:

- De l’audace, beaucoup d’audace
- De la passion
- Du savoir-faire
- Des libraires exotiques
- Des bouquinistes bien frais
- Des sous et des clous
- Quelques idées (à renouveler)
- Des bijoux de familles

Préparation:

Épluchez, épluchez, épluchez, épluchez, épluchez

Battez, remplissez, rebattez
ajoutez, enlevez, tapissez. . . .

Laissez reposer quelques jours.

Pour patienter, prenez 1 verre ou 2 de ce que vous voudrez mais buvez-en tous!

Si vous doutez du résultat allez à la chasse au Dahu. ("Comment faire un village du livre?")

Although included as a humorous link on the website Montolieu, village du livre et des arts graphiques (http://www.montolieu.net/fabrivil.htm), the list of ingredients in this recipe for creating a book town depicts some of the elements involved in the transformations of moribund rural communities into busy summer centers for purchasing books and learning about book arts. Audacity, passion, and know-how figure prominently in the list of characteristics of entrepreneurs who pursue business and cultural endeavors in such towns. Booksellers form the core of the new bibliophile communities that are created. Sous and clous enable the physical reconstruction of vacant buildings, and ideas bind all of the ingredients together.

A precise definition of a book town is elusive, but most individuals involved in the projects agree upon several common elements: it is a rural village, typically with a population of between 500 and 1500 inhabitants, boasting second-hand and antiquarian bookstores and ateliers showcasing various book arts (Seaton and Alford 107). James Hanna, an American bookseller who has been a key actor in founding book town projects

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9 The Dahu is a fictional mountain creature with shorter legs on one side of its body for ease in navigating its hilly terrain. Gullible visitors to areas like the Alps are challenged to hunt the Dahu.
in Blaenafon (Wales) and, most recently, Atherstone (England), explains that “book town” is defined differently depending on whom you ask:

[People describe them as] a small rural village with lots of bookshops; a themed village with books as a focal point; lots of businesses selling books alongside their other stock; a village or town whose economy is bolstered substantially by the sale of books; a place of culture, of books and music and theatre. If I am asked I will answer all of the above. I care less about the definition than I do about the overall effect a booktown has upon the village or town where it is born.

Booktowns benefit the local economy by giving an identity to the town or village and increasing local, national and international tourism. The theory is that people won’t go out of their way to visit one bookshop but will travel many miles to visit a booktown. To light a fire when a town is down on its luck it needs a new image and a fresh start; the booktown initiative provides that. (http://www.atherstone.org.uk/booktown/what-is-a-book-town/)

Each of the definitions Hanna offers could be used to describe the book towns in this study; their multifaceted nature is precisely what makes them appealing venues to a diverse audience and rich objects for scholarly inquiry. Themed towns and tourism, rural locales, books, and culture – each area that Hanna mentions, in fact – figure prominently in this study. And as Hanna states, what is important in each of these themes / definitions is the overall effect of a book town’s birth on the surrounding area. In general, the
communities of the *villages du livre* have experienced economic difficulties in the years preceding their transformations, but this is part of what makes them good candidates for book town projects. For example, vacant houses and buildings are needed for housing and retail space for booksellers and artisans. This alone is not enough, however, and “[m]ost book towns have developed around villages of historic interest or of scenic beauty” (McShane), which helps attract tourists.

Although the essential characteristics of each book town are similar, discrepancies nevertheless exist among the French towns regarding naming and categorization practices.  In fact, each of the official titles for the six towns in this study is different: Bécherel, Cité du Livre ®; Montolieu, village du livre et des arts graphiques; Fontenoy-la-Joûte, village du livre; La Charité-sur-Loire, ville du livre (also known as La Charité-sur-Livres); Montmorillon, Cité de l’écrit et des métiers du livre; and Salins-les-Bains, pays du livre. Each title bears a slightly different significance. The succinct titles of Bécherel, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, and La Charité-sur-Loire emphasize only books, even though they have all incorporated related activities and arts. These three towns, along with Montolieu and Montmorillon, express the concentrated nature of their projects – in a *cité*, *village*, or *ville*. The connotations implied by *cité* also provide evidence of Bécherel’s early historical importance, beginning in the Middle Ages, when it served as the see of a feudal lordship. *Cité* also calls to mind Bécherel’s designation as a “Petite Cité de Caractère de Bretagne,” an honor bestowed on the town in 1978 for its rich architectural heritage. *Village*, on the other hand, implies a more secluded, rural setting.

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10 Despite the discrepancy over titles, I have chosen to use the term *villages du livre* to encompass the range of monikers utilized by the French book towns.
reminiscent of “la vieille France,” unencumbered by the noise and pollution of modern technology.11

Thus, *cité, village, and ville* each provide information about more than just the size of the towns; they aid in combining a town’s “old” identity with its new one as a book town. Salins-les-Bains’s title, on the other hand, denotes a more extensive area of influence and activities. Interestingly, Salins-les-Bains had originally chosen the title “Cité du Livre,” but was soon faced with legal problems stemming from the copyright on this name claimed by the *Association Savenn Douar*, which initiated the Bécherel project. Consequently, Salins-les-Bains’s organizers decided to change the name to “Pays du livre,” which, like “village,” adds an important connotation associated with “la vieille France.” The longer names attributed to Montolieu and Montmorillon highlight not only books but also activities associated with them, which perhaps suggests to potential visitors who glance only at the titles that these two towns have a greater variety of establishments to explore.

Finally, these appellations have sparked arguments among the towns. A number of interviewees insisted that certain other towns were not *true* book towns. The determining factor in this assertion was the size of the town in question. Some residents of the small towns of Bécherel, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, and Montolieu, with populations ranging from approximately 280 to 800 inhabitants, insist that larger towns such as La Charité-sur-Loire or Montmorillon, which boast populations of 5500 and 7500

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respectively, are not authentic book towns. They support their position by arguing that although the bookstores and artisanal workshops can be found throughout the “true” book towns, in La Charité-sur-Loire and Montmorillon, the shops are confined to one neighborhood. For these residents, an authentic village du livre must fully integrate its book community into the identity of the entire town.

Why is so difficult to establish a precise definition of a French book town, given that France is a country that thrives on rigidly defined classifications and labels, especially when there are economic, cultural, and political stakes involved? Foods and wines conform to the stringent codes of the designation Appellation d’origine contrôlée (AOC). Similarly, towns must meet specific requirements to be selected as “petites cités de caractère,” “villes et villages fleuris,” or “villes d’art et d’histoire.” In part, the answer to this question lies in the fact that no national organization oversees the development of these endeavors, perhaps owing to the newness of the phenomenon. Consequently, there are no specific guidelines to follow, and each town seems resolute about asserting its uniqueness and independence. Moreover, this absence of defining boundaries can also be explained by contextualizing the book town phenomenon within the continuing struggle for decentralization in France, especially since the 1980s. Gilles Bousquet and Alain Pessin note that centralism “. . . is under attack from all sides by claims for local

12 Bécherel’s population is 673, Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s 285, and Montolieu’s 803. “Quid 2006,” 2006, 24 August 2006 <http://www.quid.fr>. Interviewees from the smaller towns would probably consider Salins-les-Bains (population 3487) as another example of inauthenticity. They did not mention Salins, however, probably because it has not yet officially become a book town. Although it hosts a variety of activities centered on the book, Salins has not yet succeeded in establishing a permanent community of booksellers and artisans.

13 This holds true even at the micro-level. In Montmorillon, for example, the local government’s efforts to homogenize business practices among the stores have been met often with resentment from shop owners. Moreover, in several towns, disagreements between individuals have led to the establishment of rival associations.
differences and the diversity of individual interests” and further contend that the tens of thousands of associations created each year in the Hexagon “. . . is but one indicator, among so many others, of the waning identification with large groups and the ideologies they represent, and of the new culture of individuals and the multiplicity of possible ways in which they can come together” (55). Hence the rapidly growing number of book towns, each with its ideas and practices.

Moreover, the issue of classifying a community as a book town is not limited to France. Interest in this trend has resulted in its spread throughout Europe and the world. Each country in which a book town has emerged has incorporated local traditions into such village(s). However, as Appendix D demonstrates, even though the concept of the villages du livre did not originate in France, it has flourished most abundantly there. Perhaps this can be attributed in part to France’s status as the world’s most popular tourist destination (Stovall). The fact that the Hexagon, with nine book towns, currently boasts three times more book towns than any other country also suggests that the context for purchasing and admiring used and antiquarian books carries as much weight as the books themselves, particularly in France, where literary heritage and print culture have historically been held in high esteem.

Existing Scholarship

The success of French and other European book towns prompted the European Union to conduct a study exploring the benefits such endeavors provide to rural areas. From 1998 to 2000, the European Union conducted a study entitled “European Book
Town Network – a Telematics Application based on a Model for sustainable Rural Development based on Cultural Heritage” (Skogseid and Seaton). This study, principally carried out by Ingjerd Skogseid, Researcher in the domain of Information Science at the Western Norway Research Institute, and Anthony V. Seaton, Professor in the Department of Tourism, Leisure, and Human Resource Management and Director of the Center for Tourism Research at the University of Luton (UK), focuses on economic aspects of creating and maintaining book towns. Their findings indicate that the transformation of rural towns into book towns has resulted in new, local economic growth that has allowed remote areas to become more self-sustaining. Skogseid and Seaton also examine various marketing strategies employed by individual towns and networks of towns, with a particular focus on the genesis and development of a virtual Book Town organization (Booktown.net), which was one of the outcomes of the European Union’s project.

With the exception of the research conducted by the European Union and by persons appointed to investigate the Book Town phenomenon in order to assist in the creation of new Book Towns,14 little scholarly research has been conducted on the larger trend of book towns. In an article entitled “Technology by the Book: Booktownnet and SME Cultural Tourism Networks,” Anthony V. Seaton and Philip Alford (also a researcher of the International Tourism Research Institute at the University of Luton) present their findings on the technological needs of businesses in Book Towns. They also consider how the development of a website, BookTownNet, has affected the establishment of links between Book Towns, improvement of sales, and the number of

14 Paul McShane, for example, studied European Book Towns so that he could help establish the first Australian Book Town. Similarly, Anthony V. Seaton used his research findings to help Scotland decide where its first Book Town would be located.
tourists who visit. Seaton and Alford conclude that rather than endangering older practices associated with books (printing, selling, and reading books, for example), new technologies (such as the Internet) can be used effectively to draw attention to the earlier technologies showcased in the towns. Moreover, the creation of BookTownNet has nurtured communication between Book Towns.

However, the authors argue, “[t]he international potential of book towns as cultural networks has not yet been fully tapped and is one that may have great tourism potential as prototype cultural tourism” (120). And one need not look far in France to discover the importance of cultural activities – there, we find events such as the salons du livre, art exhibitions, the Fête de la musique, and Nuit Blanche (in Paris), all designed to attract the public and make culture available to everyone.\(^{15}\) The promotion of villages du livre as cultural tourism entities would coincide well, then, with the emphasis France already places on culture. Of course, this genre of tourist activity would also help to enliven rural areas.

Ingjerd Skogseid and Arild Jansen, of the Western Norway Research Institute, assert conclusions similar to those of Seaton and Alford in “BookTown.Net – A cultural heritage or a technical artifact.” In discussing the development of the Internet project meant to create a virtual environment in which book towns could find mutual support and more publicity, Skogseid and Jansen emphasize the importance of the actors within the

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\(^{15}\) La Nuit Blanche was initiated in Paris by Mayor Bertrand Delanoë in 2002. This event, which exists in other European cities as well, is celebrated by hosting numerous cultural activities in various parts of the city throughout the night. According to Catherine Bertho Lavenir, there are three main goals at stake here: “favoriser l’appropriation des espaces urbains délaissés, diffuser l’art contemporain auprès du grand public, [et] retisser du lien social à travers des célébrations publiques d’un genre nouveau” Catherine Bertho Lavenir, "Les 'Nuits Blanches' à Paris," 11 October 2006, Online lecture, Université de Montréal, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, 6 February 2007 <http://www.cerium.ca/article3192.html>.
network who take initiative in bringing the plans of becoming a book town to fruition. Both of these studies then, focus mainly on technological and practical aspects of book town development as well as on their consequences on tourism and the local economy.

There appears to be no research analyzing the cultural significance of these villages. To my knowledge, no study focuses specifically on the French book towns, nor addresses issues of the (re)creation of local community identities and collective memory, both of which will be important aspects of my dissertation. And scholarly studies on such topics never even allude to the villages du livre. Current research also fails to analyze the cultural significance of books within these environments. Several town “autobiographies” exist, most notably Richard Booth’s My Kingdom of Books, in which the author describes his adventures in creating the first Book Town (in Hay-on-Wye) and assisting in the genesis of others. Similarly, Noël Anselot, founder of the Redu (Belgium) project, and Colette Trublet, one of the initiators of the Bécherel project, have detailed their towns’ transformations in Redu: Un village à livres ouverts and En Avant les Bécassines. News articles focusing on one or more of the book towns have appeared in local and national papers. Television news broadcasts have also dedicated airtime to this rural trend. Press coverage becomes especially noticeable immediately preceding and following festivals held in the towns. Articles and broadcasts offer general information about what the towns have to offer and how becoming book towns has aided local communities. Finally, web sites and brochures produced by the towns provide a mixture of brief histories, anecdotes, maps, lists of bookstores and their websites, and other general information.

These sources offer only a glimpse into the intricate workings of a book town. Possible culprits of the scholarly void we find here include the recent nature of the
phenomenon and a lack of awareness of the towns’ existence outside the regions where they are found. But given the cultural, historic, political, and economic importance of books and print culture throughout French history, the contributions of book towns to these areas of study needs to be thoroughly researched and explored, which is what I aim to do in this study.

**Research Design and Scope**

My work is largely based on fieldwork I conducted during a three-month research trip from September to November 2004, during which I traveled to the French towns of Bécherel, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, La Charité-sur-Loire, Montmorillon, Montolieu, and Salins-les-Bains, and the Belgian town of Redu, spending two to four days in each. These are not the only book villages in France (see Appendix D), but within the confines of time and funds available for this project, traveling to each of them was not possible. Nevertheless, the towns I did not visit would provide valuable information about the book town phenomenon in France and would merit inclusion in future studies.

I chose the above-mentioned sites based on my preliminary research and contacts I had established. During my visits, I interviewed approximately fifty subjects, including government officials, booksellers, artisans, bed-and-breakfast owners, and restaurateurs. Some of these interviews I had prearranged while others happened more spontaneously once I arrived. I began each interview with a standard set of questions (see Appendix C), but since I was also interested in what people might tell me without prompting, I often let conversations flow more naturally. In conjunction with my interviews, I spent time
exploring the towns and observing interactions between the entrepreneurs and their clientele. Besides my ethnographic research, I relied on various primary sources for my data, including newspaper articles, local newsletters, brochures, web sites, and radio and television programs.

A series of illustrations will help demonstrate the scope and aims of this project. Beginning with the micro-level, I consider the main actors within each village du livre:

Figure 5

![Diagram](image)

Figure 5: Actors within the villages du livre.

This diagram indicates interactions that occur between government officials, book town organizers, entrepreneurs, community members, and consumers. It also demonstrates membership in multiple groups. For example, a government official may
also be considered consumer when s/he attends an event in the town. Similarly, entrepreneurs are also community members and may assist in organizing events. Most of the data from this study comes from three of these groups: government officials, organizers, and entrepreneurs. Owing to time constraints, I did not interview community members uninvolved in the development of the book town projects, such as local farmers and retirees. However, their input would be essential in developing a more complete overview of the intricate workings of the individual communities and I have included some of their viewpoints that I encountered in television or radio programs. The other group that does not figure prominently in my study is the consumer; their exclusion resulted from a significant problem I encountered during my fieldwork. Upon my arrival in most of the towns, I found few visitors and many of the stores were closed, even when they displayed signs indicating they should have been open. This can be explained in part by the (unbeknownst to me) poor timing of my visit. As I learned, tourist season in the villages du livre extends from Easter weekend through the end of August. Although websites and brochures gave no indication that the towns were largely deserted for the rest of the year, this was the reality I encountered. Many booksellers had closed their shops or opened them on an occasional basis. One of the benefits of this situation was that my interviewees had ample time to talk, and sometimes thirty-minute interviews turned into hour-long conversations, whereas during the summer, they might have had only a few moments to talk in between customers. Nevertheless, I was unable to observe tourists as they navigated through the streets and interacted amongst themselves and with the book town entrepreneurs and residents. It would be revealing to interview some of
them to find out how they had heard about the book towns, if they had been there before, and what their impressions were.

Stepping back from the inner workings of a village du livre, I also examine the relationship between an individual town and other “units” within France:

Figure 6

Figure 6: The villages du livre in relation to other “units” in France.

How does a town interact with other French book towns? With other themed towns? What links tie it to other book-related events in France? How does it fit in with other local or regional projects? In studying the villages du livre in this manner, I hope to demonstrate their significance within multiple domains in French society, namely tourism, print culture, and lieux de mémoire.
A third way of viewing French book towns lies in their relationship to other book towns worldwide:

Figure 7

Although France is the principal area of inquiry for my study, I have included some information about book towns elsewhere when relevant, notably Hay-on-Wye (Wales) and Redu (Belgium). In addition, I explore efforts to form an international community of book towns. In positioning the French villages du livre within this larger context, I aim to uncover some of the reasons why the book town movement has become so much more widespread in France than in other countries.
Dissertation Overview

Although I consider elements at both micro (specific characteristics of a particular town) and macro (the International Organisation of Book Towns) levels in this study, I have mostly aimed for a middle ground that explores how the *villages du livre* function within France. Specifically, I aim to demonstrate why so many French towns have joined the trend, or are in the process of doing so, at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Furthermore, I seek to analyze what the book town movement reveals about contemporary France. The methodologies I employ, which are explained below, are driven by the varied yet intersecting facets of my research. I have organized my chapters thematically, with each focusing on a specific concept of the book town phenomenon.

I begin by outlining in chapter one the historical development of the book town phenomenon. From its origins in Hay-on-Wye, Wales, I follow the trend’s introduction into continental Europe via Belgium and then explore in depth each of the French towns in this study, addressing the following questions: What heritage is associated with these towns? Why were they chosen to become *villages du livre*? Who was involved in the process of their transformations? What challenges have they faced and what successes have they attained?

In chapter two, I examine book towns from the perspective of book history and print culture, which is important for situating the book town phenomenon in a larger historical perspective that reflects the cultural, economic, social, and political aspects of print culture. Why did these towns choose to recreate their identities based on books
rather than on another object? How do the *villages du livre* relate to other types of book projects, festivals, and salons in France? What effect, if any, do the *villages du livre* hope to have on reading practices in France? In this domain, my approach is influenced by the historians Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier.

Chapter three focuses on how the book town phenomenon fits into the larger category of tourism, and more specifically, regional tourism in France and Europe. What strategies do local and regional tourist agencies use to entice visitors to these rural areas? How does the presence of tourists affect the economy? What products are offered? How do book towns relate to other themed towns in France? Here, a thorough analysis of the European Union Project UR 4001, “European BookTownNetwork – a Telematics Application Based on a Model for Sustainable Rural Development Based on Cultural Heritage” will allow me to contextualize the French book town project within the larger framework of European book towns, as well as within the European Union’s (and France’s) efforts at aiding rural areas to become more self-sustaining. Additionally, I turn to research conducted by Anthony V. Seaton, of the University of Luton (UK), a specialist in tourism who has written extensively on the effects of tourism on book towns (Seaton and Alford; Skogseid and Seaton; A. Seaton).16

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---. *Book Towns and Rural Tourism Development, Part II: The New European Book Towns*. (Glasgow, UK: Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Tourism Research Unit, University of Strathclyde, 1996).
Finally, I explore in chapter four the notions of collective memory, identity, and tradition as they apply to the *villages du livre*. Here, historian Pierre Nora’s work on *lieux de mémoire* guides my analysis. Can the *villages du livre* be considered *lieux de mémoire*? If so, how? What does their presence in contemporary France suggest about the importance of remembering and preserving the past of France’s print culture and of its rural areas? Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’s *La Mémoire collective* also influences this chapter as I analyze how the memories of the towns are constructed based on their new identities. How is a collective memory formed in the *villages du livre*, where communities no longer consist only of “native” townspeople, but also include an influx of new residents who have come to open businesses? How well are these newcomers able to integrate into the community and what contributions do they make to (re)creating a new identity and new memories for the *village du livre*? Lastly, I look at the towns’ new identities in light of what Eric Hobsbawm calls the “invention of tradition.” What kinds of traditions have they invented and what do they hope to achieve by incorporating such traditions into their communities?

An overarching theme that threads through each of these chapters is that of cultural politics. As Gilles Bousquet and Alain Pessin note,

> The role of culture holds a unique place in France, as it is a sphere in which political prerogative is vigilantly exerted and where the need for a certain authority is constantly reaffirmed. This view, long-held in France, dates from the sixteenth century, when the monarchy styled itself as the

Cultural policy is a peculiarly French invention that has no counterpart elsewhere. It recognises that the State has a political responsibility for the arts and creativity, which implies that these are not solely the province of a cultivated elite, but that they must be made available, through appropriate measures, to each and every individual. (52)\(^{17}\)

Cultural politics infiltrates many other areas of French civilization, including the subjects of the following chapters, notably, attitudes toward print culture; tourism; and memory, identity, and tradition. What message does the government wish to send, for example, by considering books as an “exception culturelle” and how does this designation affect reading practices and book sales in France? Why has the government recently aimed to promote the development of cultural tourism in non-traditional locales? Does the government hope to contribute to shaping memories of local communities? of print culture? If so, how? How does the government use culture to project certain images of rural France? for what purposes? How do decision-makers at local, regional, and national levels impact the creation and development of the villages du livre? What are their goals in choosing to promote such endeavors?

Throughout my analysis, it will become clear that French book towns are crossroads where each of these themes – print culture, tourism, memory, tradition, and cultural politics – intersect. They are also points of convergence for the local, regional,

national, and international; the individual and the collective; independence and
togetherness; the real and the imaginary. Investigating the interplay between these issues
will reveal much about the *village du livre* trend, but also about contemporary French
society.
Chapter 1

Novel Utopias? The Historical Development of the Book Town Phenomenon

It was a pleasure to burn.

It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. With his symbolic helmet numbered 451 on his stolid head, and his eyes all orange flame with the thought of what came next, he flicked the igniter and the house jumped up in a gorging fire that burned the evening sky red and yellow and black. He strode in a swarm of fireflies. He wanted above all, like the old joke, to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace, while the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch and lawn of the house. While the books went up in sparkling whirls and blew away on a wind turned dark with burning.

Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451 (19)

In Fahrenheit 451, first published in 1950, Ray Bradbury envisions a futuristic world in which the government perceives books as enemies they must destroy. Hence, it employs firemen not to extinguish fires, but to start them in homes whose occupants have
been discovered illegally hiding books, thereby incinerating all traces of the ‘dangerous’ literature that presents a threat to the government’s operation and to society in general. In this dystopic society, a rebellious minority recognizes the inherent value of books. Most of these outcasts, many of whom are pursued by the government for their crimes involving book possession, live in small groups they have formed outside of cities. In an effort to protect the books, each of them commits an entire novel, play, or essay to memory and then destroys the original. In this manner, the individual becomes the book, reciting it for others to keep it alive. As these walking books age, they must transmit their content to a member of the younger generation so it will not be lost forever. In Chinguetti, as we saw in the previous chapter, families act as librarians, passing on manuscript collections from one generation to the next. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the outcast families act not only as librarians, but as the libraries themselves.

Clearly, Bradbury’s fictional world represents one of the worst-case scenarios for books – a bibliophile’s dystopia in which books are not only unappreciated but are cause for imprisonment for their owners. But what would be the opposite of this? What features would a book utopia have? Can book towns be considered utopias? If so, how? I propose that the book town trend as it exists in France is linked to the desire, at multiple levels of society (individual, group, government), to form utopian communities in the face of globalization and dominance exerted by large urban centers, especially Paris. Moreover, in addition to and as a result of globalization, I suggest that the relatively rapid spread and increasing popularity of the *villages, villes, and cités du livre et des arts graphiques*
stems from a national concern and preoccupation with all things cultural. The following sections explore the theme of utopia as it relates to book towns, detail the development of the book town trend in France, and situate book towns within the realm of la politique culturelle. Since the French villages du livre are largely modeled after Hay-on-Wye and Redu, whose respective founders, Richard Booth and Noël Anselot, became intimately involved with many of the subsequent projects, often acting as advisors, and in the case of Montolieu, investors, this chapter presents an overview of their genesis as well. Exploring the origins of these towns will also provide a framework for understanding the themes in upcoming chapters in this study.

Envisioning Book Utopias

Utopian ideas generally emerge as a result of dissatisfaction with contemporary political, economic, religious, and/or social conditions, among other factors. By venturing into the realm of the imaginary, creators of utopias discover various solutions to problems faced by their societies. They envision happier, healthier lives. The word

18 Here and throughout this dissertation, I use “culture” to describe creative productions and activities. My use of this term includes the notion of “high” culture (painting, music, literature) and “popular” culture (comic books, graffiti, hip hop music). I also consider creations such as architecture, food, and wine in my definition. These areas have been the area of intense scrutiny and debates over the last few centuries, but especially during the twentieth. Part of the reason for this tumult is the relationship between culture and power. See for example Michael Kelly, "Introduction: French Cultural Identities," French Cultural Studies: An Introduction, eds. Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 1-7:1. In addition to political concerns, but related to them is the question of culture’s relationship to identity, at both individual and collective levels. Michael Kelly asserts: “One of culture’s primary purposes is to negotiate the insertion of the individual into society, and it does so by exploring a multiplicity of identities, past, present, and potential, which people (whether as producers or consumers) can recognize and relate themselves to. These identities are the carriers of norms and values, embodied in social structures and relationships of power, and represented in high and popular culture, in symbols, stories, myths, rituals, routines, and exemplary figures. The ways in which they are embodied and represented are complex and infinitely varied over time and place” Kelly, "Introduction: French Cultural Identities,"1.
“utopia,” coined by Thomas More from the Greek words *topos* (“place”) and *eu* (“good quality”) or *u* (a mark of negation), signifies “the place that does not exist,” “the place that is nowhere,” “the beautiful place,” or perhaps “the beautiful place that is nowhere.” Nevertheless, this has not thwarted idealists from attempting to create real utopian societies. In the early nineteenth century, to give just one example, Charles Fourier designed communities called *phalanstères*, organized according to the wealth and personality traits of the 1620 inhabitants they could house. In establishing book towns, wealth does not seem to be a factor for incoming residents, but just as Fourier thought it was essential to have the right combination of personalities, so book town developers attempt to balance the representation of book métiers in the towns. Not all villages du livre achieve the same degree of success in this area, but most try to include booksellers (with diverse specialties) and at least a few book artisans such as paper-makers, calligraphers, and book binders.

These rural venues are not the first book-related attempts to create a utopia. For instance, the ancient library at Alexandria represents a tangible early effort to gather in one place all of humanity’s written knowledge. In the third century B.C.E., Ptolemy I undertook the project of founding this great library in honor of the leader he had succeeded, Alexander the Great, a man well-known for his penchant for learning and scholarship. With an impressive collection of nearly half a million scrolls, many “borrowed” to be copied from visitors to the city, this library was an extraordinary center of learning and scholarship. It has continued to fascinate the world since its destruction.

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19. Once the scrolls were borrowed, they were copied. Sometimes, it was the copies rather than the originals that were returned to their owners. For more on this subject, see p. 188-192 in Alberto Manguel, *A History of Libraries in the Western World*. 
over one thousand years ago. Today, it has been resurrected as the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, which is “dedicated to recapture the spirit of the original,” aspiring to be “[t]he World’s window on Egypt; Egypt’s window on the world; a leading institution of the digital age; and above all a center for learning, tolerance, dialogue and understanding” ("The Bibliotheca Alexandrina: Overview").

French book towns are similar in that they attempt to gather in one venue all of the different kinds of artisanal book arts for the purpose of preserving and transmitting knowledge. They are concerned with becoming educational centers by making as many resources involving books and book arts available as possible. Although unlike the library in Alexandria, whose book collection is permanent, the stock in the villages du livre constantly changes, booksellers still aim to present a diverse selection to their clients.

Jorge Luis Borges presents another example of a book utopia in his short story “The Library of Babel.” In this work, he imagines an infinitely large library that contains every real or imagined book in every language. He writes, “When it was proclaimed the library contained all books, the first impression was one of extravagant happiness.”

Roy MacLeod notes that “Scholars, who for years have taken its legacy for granted, are now re-examining its history for what it can tell us about classical methods of studying literature and science, and about the transmission of ideas across cultural frontiers” Roy MacLeod, "Preface,” The Library of Alexandria: Centre of Learning in the Ancient World (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002).

According to the library’s website (http://www.bibalex.org/English/Overview/overview.htm) the library can hold millions of books and contains all of the following features: a center for the Internet, six specialized libraries (audio-visual materials, the visually impaired, children, the young, microforms, rare books and special collections), three museums (antiquities, manuscripts, the history of science), a planetarium, an ALEXploratorium for children’s exhibitions, two permanent exhibitions, six art galleries for temporary exhibitions, a conference center for thousands of persons, and seven research institutes (manuscripts, documentation of heritage, calligraphy and writing, information sciences, Mediterranean and Alexandrian studies, an arts center, scientific research, and a discussion forum).
Bibliophiles are sure to experience similar excitement upon entering French book towns, where even if they cannot find every book ever published, they can find hundreds of thousands of them for sale in a variety of languages.

Both Alexandria and the Library of Babel aim at being universal. Roger Chartier, however, suggests that a universal library could only exist in immaterial form, “réduite aux dimensions d’un catalogue, d’une nomenclature, d’un recensement.” On the other hand, a physical library can only provide a fraction of the totality of knowledge. He writes, “L’écart irréductible entre les inventaires, idéalement exhaustifs, et des collections, nécessairement lacunaires, a été vécu comme une frustration intense. Il a porté les entreprises les plus démesurées, rassemblant en esprit, sinon dans la réalité, tous les livres possibles, tous les titres repérés, tous les ouvrages jamais écrits” (Culture écrite et société: l’ordre des livres (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle) 128). Perhaps then, we can consider the Internet as a kind of digital utopia that attempts to combine catalogs with texts, thereby placing unlimited knowledge at the disposal of internauts. Indeed, Chartier himself suggests this, stating, “[t]he communication of texts over distances annuls the heretofore insoluble distinction between the place of the text and the place of the reader, and so makes this ancient dream [of universal knowledge] possible, accessible” (Forms and meanings: text, performance, and audience from codex to computer 21).22

These examples focus on acquiring and transmitting knowledge, both of which are important in book town communities. But a book utopia could also be centered on its ability to evoke certain sentiments for its beholders or to imbue its community members

22 Chartier goes on to warn that this electronic medium is “not without risk,” since “each structure for the transmission and reception of the written word profoundly affects its possible uses and interpretations” (21-24).
with an identity. In *Les Mots*, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre fondly recalls his grandfather’s office library:

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J’ai commencé ma vie comme je la finirai sans doute: au milieu des livres. Dans le bureau de mon grand-père, il y en avait partout [. . .] Je ne savais pas encore lire que, déjà, je les révérais, ces pierres levées; droites ou penchées, serrées comme des briques sur les rayons de la bibliothèque ou noblement espacées en allées de menhirs, je sentais que la prosperité de notre famille en dépendait. Elles se ressemblaient toutes, je m’ébattaïs dans un minuscule sanctuaire, entouré de monuments trapus, antiques qui m’avaient vu naître, qui me verraient mourir et dont la permanence me garantissait un avenir aussi calme que le passé. Je les touchais en cachette pour honorer mes mains de leur poussière [. . .].
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(35-36)

For Sartre, the library is a utopia, a *minuscule sanctuaire*, which provides not only knowledge but also comfort, prosperity, and a sense of identity (36). This kind of utopia also relates to the French *villages du livre*, since part of their purpose is to create or affirm community identity. The process of becoming book towns has brought comfort (in the sense that the towns are no longer in danger of “disappearing”), financial prosperity, and a sense of identity, albeit it a new identity that blends a town’s original heritage with a new one based on print culture. But how is a book utopia created?

Just as with other nascent utopian communities, most of the book towns, which began to appear in the 1980s, after the establishment in 1961 of the first modern book town, in Hay-on-Wye, have been (re)constructed culturally, physically, economically,
and demographically as a result of dissatisfaction with the local state of affairs. Nevertheless, in the process of transforming the towns, project initiators and administrators attempted to maintain the cultural, and especially architectural, heritage already present in their communities. At the same time, however, they modified existing structures to accommodate the establishment of bookstores, workshops, cafés, restaurants, and hotels. Obviously, the changes are aimed at improving the local community, but part of the utopian ideal inherent in these projects lies in attracting outside experts to the villages to help revive them. To accomplish this goal, the towns choose to (re)create their identities by centering many local activities on the promotion of book arts, literary festivals, and the buying, selling, and trading of second-hand books. Moreover, they rely on the appeal of their rural locations – where it is quiet, peaceful, relaxing, and “green” – to entice potential visitors. The resulting atmosphere becomes a sort of bibliophile Disneyland. These “ideal” book communities also attract tourists and intellectuals from around the globe. In some ways, book towns’ utopian goals are loftier than those of the libraries of ancient Alexandria and Babel, in that they incorporate more than just books and readers.

In these libraries, one real and one imaginary, a reader’s main interactions would be with books, librarians, and other readers. Book towns, however, grant access to a wider variety of objects: books, handmade papers, calligraphy and binding tools, printing presses, regional foods and wines, to name just a few. Similarly, a much larger network of human contact exists that includes readers, writers, booksellers, artisans, restaurateurs, and bed-and-breakfast owners. Readers borrow books from libraries whereas they purchase them from book towns. In both venues, visitors gain access to written texts that
provide knowledge and entertainment. But the opportunities go far beyond these realms in the *villages du livre*. There, visitors are invited to meet contemporary authors, learn how to make paper or bind books, and enter their own stories into writing contests. They are also exposed to other cultural forms such as music and theater. The *villages du livre* thus provide a more totalizing experience that encompasses, along with the final product (a book), learning about book production and even the process of writing. The universal libraries are for housing books and creating spaces in which to read them whereas the French book towns are not just meant to house books but to rejuvenate communities and valorize the entire process of book production.

Furthermore, if we reconsider the presence of Atlantis on the semaphore of Fontenoy-la-Joûte, described in the previous chapter, it calls to mind not only a sort of utopia, but a lost civilization. Looking through this lens, we can see the French book towns as civilizations that might have been lost if their inhabitants had continued to desert them and if their buildings would have deteriorated without the intervention that has resulted from the influx of new residents and businesses. Such losses reflect what has happened throughout the Hexagon. As Sarah Blowen and her coauthors posit,

> The shift from a rural to an urban society has now been more or less completed in France: the most recent census of 1999 indicates that nearly 80 per cent of the population have adopted an urban way of life. Social problems such as the growth in inequalities and lack of opportunities are therefore increasingly delineated within an urban framework, except when beleaguered French farmers, faced with insurmountable financial problems, make their desperate voice heard. Following the convergence of
urban and rural societies, a large consumption of ruralité on the part of town and city dwellers has also taken place, motivated by a nostalgic quest for roots and identity. (1-2)

French book towns then fill a niche in contemporary society by providing settings in which nostalgia – in the form of rurality in general, but also in the form of literature and traditional methods of book production – takes precedent and is glorified. Such glorification of a rural environment is not a new phenomenon in France. The Vichy government, for example, developed an entire campaign to instill in French citizens the values associated with a retour à la terre. But whereas the Vichy regime used this strategy to redirect attention away from defeat and the Occupation, book town developers’ motivations for tapping into the current vogue for rurality and nostalgia are based largely on the desire for economic profit. The bucolic areas in which book towns are located also offer alternatives to mass tourism destinations and allow visitors to escape some aspects of globalization, such as the presence of McDonald’s, in urban centers.

Beginnings: Hay-on-Wye (Wales 1961)

Nostalgia has had a considerable effect on the creation of French book towns. This is a theme that will be further discussed in the next chapters. But this sense of nostalgia can even be credited in part for the creation of the first modern book town.

23 For more on Vichy’s political use of culture and rurality, see Christian Faure, Le Projet culturel de Vichy. Folklore et révolution national 1940-1944 (Lyon: Centre Régional de Publication de Lyon, Presses Universitaire de Lyon, 1989).
founded by Richard Booth, a businessman whose eccentricity has contributed to the book town movement’s fame and international development. His current residence of Hay-on-Wye (Wales), with a population of approximately thirteen hundred, has a long history of acting as host to travelers, as evidenced by its many inns and pubs. Sheep farming has always played a major role in financing the town, although a strong trading industry also earned it status as a market town. By the mid-twentieth century, however, its economy had slowed and it seemed on the verge of being forgotten – until Booth returned after graduating from Oxford. He had attempted, unsuccessfully, to pursue the career as an accountant that his family desired for him, but after only a few weeks in London, he decided that city life did not suit him and he returned home to become a bookseller, opening his first shop in 1961. In his autobiography, My Kingdom of Books, he reflects: “Buying a small shop in Hay-on-Wye meant that, instead of playing a minor rôle in a major business, I could play a major rôle in a minor one” (17). The numerous other booksellers (in Hay-on-Wye and abroad) who have followed his example seem to share this attitude. Convinced that “a town full of bookshops could be an international attraction,” Booth proceeded with his idealistic project in spite of limited financial and moral support ("Welcome to Richard Booth's Bookshop Ltd."). He began by purchasing an old cinema and filling it with thousands of books. Other entrepreneurs eventually joined in and opened their own bookstores.

In the early 1970s, Booth purchased and moved into the twelfth century Hay Castle. Fed up with the local and national governments’ inability to turn Hay’s economy around and their general lack of concern, on April 1, 1977 he announced Hay’s new status as an independent kingdom (“Home Rule for Hay”) and proclaimed himself king.
In response to “a world increasingly ruled by impenetrable bureaucracy, and self-interested big business organizations, the Kingdom of Hay was created as an alternative to embrace the good humoured common sense of ordinary intelligent people, which of course ought to be the basis of good government everywhere, always!” (Richard Booth Ltd. "The Original Hay Peerage For Aspiring Lords & Ladies: Hay Independence"). In *My Kingdom of Books* he states:

A political philosophy was needed but this did not present much of a problem. My Royal Manifesto stated that the highest civilizations the world has ever seen were the small city states of Renaissance Italy and fifth-century Greece, where decisions had been dominated by human knowledge rather than bureaucratic control. Hay-on-Wye was declaring independence from the bureaucratic control of the Central Government.

My Cabinet was picked in five minutes in the pub. Most were wearing jeans and there was a high proportion of lorry drivers. The advantage of Hay’s small population of 1,500 was that I could give everyone a top government post. (141)

Everyone including his horse, that is, whom he appointed foreign minister, just as the Roman Emperor Caligula had done centuries before. A poet laureate, George Barker, was also chosen and asked to pen the new kingdom’s national anthem, which offers a curious glimpse into the free-natured spirit of Hay but also emphasizes the importance of its rural

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nature. Some of the key motivations behind this first book town have also driven subsequent projects, at least in France. Most notable, perhaps, is the anti-central government attitude expressed by Booth and by interviewees in the French book towns. France, of course, has been struggling with decentralization for much of the twentieth century. Instead of accepting the domination of national regulations, standards, and tastes, participants in these book town projects favor the local and regional, as characterized by their working-class inhabitants (in Hay, lorry drivers and failed accountants). Other motivations, further discussed in the following chapters, are the desire to support artisanal production and the struggle against globalization. In Booth’s founding of a fictional kingdom, he envisions his own utopia, a world that cannot be

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25 The Hay National Anthem:

Lord Host of Host, asleep on high
awake and cast a kindly eye
on independent Hay-on-Wye.

Let long the liberal urm here flow
with fruits that from our labour grow:
conserve them long, Lord, here below.

Let flourish here the lame and odd,
the hazel twig, the unknown God,
and this independent sod.

Let your goodwill establish by
this river under neutral sky
a truly rural Hay-on-Wye.

Let us at every parish crisis
invoke Apollo, Dionysus,
the I-Ching and even Isis.

Let us and our direct descendants,
with you, O Lord, in close attendance,
depend upon our independence.

adversely affected by what he sees as the foolish decisions enforced by an all-too authoritarian national government.

Booth’s irreverence for the government always succeeds in attracting media attention and in offering comic relief, yet Booth clearly cares about the causes he promotes and uses his celebrity status to draw attention to issues the government might not otherwise address. For example, half serious, half in jest, he chose a flag for the town and printed a booklet called *Independence for Hay*, in which he emphasized the importance of buying and selling local products to support the town’s economy rather than purchasing industrial products easily available elsewhere. In his autobiography, he stresses that “[t]he decline of rural areas is not inevitable if we take our destiny into our own hands” (*Kingdom*, 142-43). One need only glance at the hundreds of thousands of international bibliophile tourists who journey to the Welsh countryside annually to visit this small, book-filled town to understand the truth of his statement.26

Much of the national and international attention Hay-on-Wye receives results from Booth’s eccentric personality and his publicity stunts. His quirkiness is often cited in local, national, and international newspapers. Journalist Patrick Kidd, of the London *Times*, describes him as “one of the looniest locals (in the nicest possible way),” evidencing this claim by explaining the system of honors Booth will confer upon anyone who wishes to buy them: “For £50 you can become a Duke of Hay, £35 will allow you to be called a Baron, and £25 will get you a knighthood. Maybe he isn’t so loopy after all”(8). “King Richard” could hardly have known what a sensation his “crazy” idea

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would create and how many villages around the world would try to emulate Hay’s success.

After witnessing the transformation of Hay-on-Wye from a run-down and forgotten town to a booming mecca for booksellers, artists, tourists, literary fans, writers, and even celebrities, other European communities became fascinated with the idea of creating their own book towns. Redu, Belgium and Bécherel, France, became the second and third book towns in Europe, in 1984 and 1989, respectively. They and other towns subsequently transformed imitated Booth’s model in the hopes of avoiding the ruin they faced by stimulating their economies and ending the exodus of villagers, especially the younger generation, to large urban centers. In some instances, as we will see, individual impresarios like Booth led book town projects’ development while in other cases responsibility and action stemmed from groups or government agencies.

Today, Hay-on-Wye is considered the second-hand book capital of the world, a success that can be attributed to Booth but also to booksellers within the town as well as to public interest in bibliophilia and in the uniqueness of Hay. Each year, the town hosts a weeklong festival at the end of May which attracts around 70,000 visitors, including well-known writers Maya Angelou, Margaret Atwood, William Golding, and even former President of the United States Bill Clinton. The literary celebration has served as a model for other book towns to follow, although none has achieved the same status and prestige of the original, perhaps because they are not yet as firmly established as Hay, and in France, perhaps because there are so many book towns that the attention is spread out among them. Although he has struggled with health problems, including a stroke, Booth continues to appear in public and monitor his kingdom. His success with Hay-on-
Wye has inspired many small communities around the globe to join the book town movement.

**Redu (Belgium 1984)**

“Né en 1924, j’ai toujours été passionné par les livres et par l’écriture.” With these words, Noël Anselot, Richard Booth’s first disciple, opens his book *Redu, Un village à livres ouverts: La merveilleuse histoire du premier village du livre d’Europe continentale* (13). Anselot began writing at age seventeen and worked for several years as a journalist before becoming a director of BP Oil, in Belgium, in 1953. He first discovered Hay-on-Wye in 1978 while visiting Wales. During his stay, he met Richard Booth, who had just purchased a large collection of several thousand books and manuscripts from a family only thirty minutes away from Redu. Anselot immediately bought the entire collection from Booth, and upon his return to Belgium began cataloguing it, building up a library on the history of the department of Liège. Shortly thereafter, Booth contacted him to inquire about the possibility of a partnership, stating in a letter: “My interest would be in stimulating Hay with international connections, explore [sic] the European book business and not direct financial return” (23). Anselot seriously considered Booth’s suggestion and began envisioning how a book town could work in Belgium.

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27 By mentioning he was not interested in direct financial return, Booth meant that he would not expect any recompense from the partnership. This ties in with his attitude toward political autonomy: not wanting to be ruled over by someone else, he reveals in this letter that he did not wish to rule over another book town outside of his own “kingdom.” Nevertheless, he was still interested in establishing foreign relations.
The town of Redu, located in the Francophone part of Belgium, was similar to Hay-on-Wye in that it was a rural community largely dependent on farming. Like the Hay of the 1950s, Redu was experiencing a decline in its economy and its small population of 450 was aging ("Redu - Village du Livre"). But it had potential. Firstly, it is ideally located in the heart of the Ardennes Forest, in the valley of the Haute-Lesse, and less than an hour and a half from Brussels. The surrounding countryside and woodlands are picturesque and attractive to would-be visitors. In fact, the official website of Redu, Village du Livre (www.redu.info) cites this pleasing atmosphere as the determining factor in the town’s achievements: “le secret [de son succès], c’est d’abord une situation magnifique et une nature verdoyante qui fait qu’à toutes les époques de l’année, il fait bon se balader dans les rues du village et les forêts qui l’entourent.” The nearest train station is in Libramont, so visitors must access the town by car. From whichever direction they enter, they will immediately encounter one or more of Redu’s approximately thirty bookstores, workshops, or restaurants.

But none of the bookshops and few of the eateries would have existed without Noël Anselot’s intervention. After drawing inspiration from his new friend Richard Booth, he opened the first bookstore in Redu in 1980. At that time, it was only open by appointment, and it would take another four years before more definitive plans would be designated for the future of Redu. In early 1984, Anselot, along with Gérard Valet (a radio program producer) and Henri Lambert (a café owner in Redu), began planning a first “Fête du Livre et de l’Espace,” to take place during Easter weekend. In February of

28 The Euro Space Center is located in nearby Transinne. Redu wished to promote both the book town and the Space Center at once, and the festival provided a perfect opportunity.
the same year, they sent a letter to the inhabitants of Redu inviting them to attend a
meeting about the future of Redu. Some of them participated in an exploratory visit to
Hay-on-Wye to gain a better understanding of what future might be in store for them as a
village du livre. Anselot contacted over one hundred friends and colleagues in the book
industry to participate in the first festival; he also contacted the press, both in Belgium
and abroad. Approximately sixty professionals and a number of private exhibitors
journeyed to Redu and set up stands in the school, barns, stables, and streets. During the
festivities, a special ceremony, attended by political figures including the British
ambassador to Belgium and the mayor of Hay-on-Wye, honored a new twinning
(jumelage) with Hay-on-Wye. As with Chinguetti and Fontenoy-la-Joûte, the twinning of
the towns is mostly symbolic. When the linkage first took place, residents of Hay-on-
Wye and Redu visited their twin towns, where they were welcomed enthusiastically. But
since the twinning was established, few trips have taken place.

After the initial success of the Easter weekend festival, which has become an
annual event attended by thousands of visitors, Redu began to assume a more permanent
status as booksellers and artisans searched for houses and old buildings they could use as
homes or stores. Some of Redu’s own inhabitants joined the endeavor (more so in recent
years), but most of them came from other regions of Belgium, and even from abroad.29
Since its inauguration as a book town, visitors from other prospective book towns have
journeyed to Redu to seek ideas and council: Colette Trublet and Yvonne Prêtèselle from
Bécherel, Michel Braibant from Montolieu, both in France, and representatives from

29 Miep Van Duyn, owner of the bookstore De Eglantier & Crazy Castle, for example, came to Redu from
The Netherlands. Her story and those of other newcomers to booktowns are recounted in the next chapter.
other countries worldwide, including Italy and even Japan. In Redu, they find a well-established book town that organizes numerous activities throughout the year, including concerts, pedagogical activities, monthly book fairs, and several large festivals (La Fête du Livre, La Nuit du Livre). If any doubt remains about the impact books have made on this Belgian community, one need only glance into the small Parc Léon Magin, dominated by an enormous statue of an open book, created by the artists Kulbach and Wilmsen. Finally, near the center of town stands a large wooden pole with directional arrows pointing to different book towns around the globe and their distance from Redu. It was perhaps this post that inspired Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s prominent new semaphore.

Along with Hay, Redu has been enormously influential in planning and developing French book towns, especially the early ones of Bécherel, Montolieu, and Fontenoy-la-Joûte. This is largely due to its location in the Francophone area of Belgium and its proximity to France. These factors have been encouraging motivations for French project initiators to visit Redu, easily communicate with booksellers, artisans, and community members, and gain a sense of how they could adapt the concept in their own towns.

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30. The festival of La Nuit du Livre is held during the first weekend in August. Bookstores remain open all night, some not closing until 6:00 a.m. the following morning. Music, readings, and other activities keep visitors entertained throughout the event.

31. Noël Anselot laments the fact that no plaque has been added to the park to indicate the names of the artists or the donor. Thus, unless visitors’ curiosity is so aroused that they ask a local resident, the source of the statue remains a mystery. Noël Anselot, *Redu. Un village à livres ouverts: La merveilleuse histoire du premier village du livre d’Europe continentale* (Bruxelles: Editions Racine, 2004) 127.
The village of Bécherel is tucked away in Brittany’s countryside, thirty kilometers from Rennes, and two hours from the coast that harbors Dinard, Saint-Malo, and Mont-Saint-Michel. Its name provides evidence of its Celtic heritage. In Breton, *beg* means “point”, *ker*” means “place”, and *el* refers to Iltud, a companion of Malo, one of Brittany’s founding saints; the former founded Bécherel (Savenn Douar). As one of the highest geographical points in the department of Ille-et-Vilaine, it served throughout the centuries as a lookout and stronghold.

The town first became important during the Middle Ages, during which time it served as the see of a feudal lordship. The ramparts that surround Bécherel, built in the late twelfth century, once offered protection and fortification. Today, the vestiges of five of the towers provide scenic overlooks on the surrounding countryside. Of the twelfth century castle that once dominated the hillside, all that remains intact is a part of the dungeon. When it fell into ruin in the sixteenth century, stones from the castle were reused to build homes in the town center, many of which still stand. Thus, just as the many bookstores operating in the town today have offered books a second chance, the castle was granted a new life, albeit in a new form.

Current residents of Bécherel need only glance at some of the street names in the town center – Rue de la Chanvrerie and Rue de la Filanderie – to be reminded of the town’s former glory as a prosperous economic center that thrived on linen and hemp production from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The linen produced there was known throughout France, and even abroad. Many of the fifteenth and sixteenth century
granite houses in the medieval town center, once the homes of Renaissance nobles and
merchants, also reveal Bécherel’s earlier privileged status. However, the Industrial
Revolution was hard on the town, and the once-thriving textile industry was eventually
replaced by that of tanneries. Later, the Bécherellais became well-known for their dairy
industry, although it collapsed in 1972. Several years later, in 1978, an industrial pork-
meat factory was established. This year also saw Bécherel honored as a “Petite Cité de
Caractère de Bretagne” for its rich architectural heritage.32

By the 1960s, Bécherel’s population had waned considerably and its economy
was faltering. In Bécherel: Un village à livre ouvert, author, bookseller, and antique
dealer Francine Szapiro recounts an episode in which a friend explained to her that in the
1970s Bécherel “était un village condamné . . . Comme presque partout dans les terres, à
l’écart des hauts lieux touristiques et des grands circuits économiques, les vieux
mouraient, les jeunes partaient. Les commerces fermaient les uns après les autres. ”
Szapiro contends that “Bécherel perdait peu à peu non seulement ses habitants, mais aussi
sa mémoire et son âme” (14). Such a loss has particular resonance in Brittany, where
cultural memory is strong, especially since it was independent of France until the early
sixteenth century and remains a seat of Celtic culture.

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32 This honor, perhaps a designation meant in part to increase tourism, is conferred by the Association des
Petites Cités de Caractère de Bretagne, created in 1975, which “regroupe une vingtaine de petites
agglomérations de l'espace rural, présentant pratiquement toutes les caractéristiques d'une ancienne ville et
dotées, de ce fait, d'un patrimoine urbain de premier ordre, en phase avec leur histoire et leurs activités
prestigieuses d'hier.” Comité Régional du Tourisme de Bretagne, “Patrimoine: Cités d'art de Bretagne,
art/indexCAB.cfm Path: Petites Cités de Caractère>. An explanatory brochure, Petites Cités de Caractère :
Interpreting the Heritage, describes the towns thus: “[They] are, first and foremost, man-made sites, and
their form has depended on the activity, creativity, and taste of the communities which, down through the
generations, have fashioned them. Homogeneous, harmoniously marrying style and architectural form,
these are privileged spots where Brittany’s history and identity have been forged – places of renown which
still bear the hallmarks of genius and spirit. They are doors opened out on the passage of time.”
At the same time Bécherel was losing its essence, an occurrence not unusual for other towns in the region during this time period, a group of Breton idealists composed of about twelve families and several individuals led by Colette Trublet, a psychoanalyst by profession, had begun to search for a place where they could positively impact the world. This group had become disillusioned with life in large cities and with the ways in which the French government attempted to control markers of regional identity such as language and culture. They felt that this déculturation severed them from their values.

In *En Avant les Bécassines*, a book which chronicles the transformation of Bécherel into a Cité du Livre, Trublet explains, “Nous aimerions que la France ne se situe pas en ennemie, ni en colonisatrice, mais respecte en nous une volonté d’exister de manière tout à fait légitime . . . ” (70). This echoes the concerns Richard Booth had expressed concerning Hay’s independence and the overall theme in most of the book towns of local / regional versus national. Concerned about their children’s futures, Trublet and her family and friends began reflecting on ways to maintain their Breton heritage in modern society: “Nous voulions ‘vivre autrement’, créer de toutes pièces une dynamique permittant de créer des emplois, nous enraciner chez nous, en utilisant un des espaces de la zone rurale qui se désertifie et nous en servir comme d’un tremplin pour préparer l’avenir” (1). “Vivre autrement” eventually became their mantra, and they decided to relocate as a group. Though not well-defined at the onset of their discussions, their dream project was centered on the idea of living “alternative” lifestyles which would permit them to use their individual skills to create “un lieu d’activités économiques et professionnelles” while simultaneously satisfying their cultural interests (15). Their criteria for choosing a site were based on a town’s geographical situation, its
size, the proximity to a city, and the number of visitors to the area. They were especially concerned about integrating three concepts into their new environment: autonomy (from the government), solidarity (among themselves), and creativity (21). From 1983 to 1985, the group searched for a town that would serve their needs. By 1985, they had decided on Bécherel. Colette Trublet; her son Erwan and his wife Yvonne, with their three children; Catherine and Annaïg, Trublet’s daughters; a friend, Brigitte, and her sons moved to the small Breton village. The same year, their association Savenn Douar (“le tremplin”) registered their statutes at the prefecture of the Côtes d’Armor in Saint-Brieuc. The five women involved drove the project forward, and while many townspeople found their dreams too idealistic, they surprised everyone, including themselves, with their eventual success.

To help initiate their project, Colette Trublet met with Bernard Le Nail, the director of the Institut Culturel de Bretagne, who, although pessimistic at the outset, gradually warmed to the idea of helping the women pursue their goals. During one meeting, he mentioned the book town of Redu, Belgium as an example of the type of economic and cultural transformation that might be possible in Bécherel. Shortly thereafter, in 1988, Colette Trublet and her daughter-in-law Yvonne Prêtseille spent three days visiting the Belgian town and became entranced by it. Two years later, they would visit Hay-on-Wye, but they had already made up their minds. They would revitalize Bécherel by converting it into a book town.

To gauge the potential of Bécherel to draw in visitors and businesses, Savenn Douar organized the first Fête du Livre to take place during Easter weekend 1989. Many of the houses in the ancient town center, which had stood empty for years, were finally
put to use when their owners agreed to permit the booksellers use of the ground floors. Eventually, some of these houses would be sold and become permanent bookstores or homes. Savenn Douar invited a number of booksellers, as well as individuals and groups, to participate in the festival. More than thirty booksellers displayed their wares, some of whom had to return to their stores after the first day to procure more books, since sales exceeded their expectations. Writers, poets, musicians, a Breton language specialist, and artists also journeyed to the town to join in the celebration. Several debates and lectures were included in the events as well. The group was careful to ensure the event was advertised in local and regional newspapers, which they credit in part for the great success of the first Fête du Livre. This event now takes place each year, and attracts visitors of all ages.

Enough interest had been generated to encourage Savenn Douar to pursue its plan of developing the centre ancien. Many of the abandoned houses were renovated to accommodate both bookstores and living space. At the earliest stage of the Cité du Livre, there were only four permanent booksellers (all of whom were débutants) and one artistic bookbinder. Other booksellers rented space during the year. Trublet’s eldest daughter, Catherine, opened a Bar-Crêperie-Snack-Animations called An Duchenn Hud (Le Tertre magique, in French) which became quite successful. Eventually, Savenn Douar decided to ensure ownership rights on “Bécherel, Cité du Livre” ® by having it registered as a trademark with the INPI (Institut national de la propriété industrielle) (Trublet 127).

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33 In addition to hosting small concerts or public readings, Catherine has also incorporated Breton language lessons into the activities the establishment offers to its public. In keeping with one of Savenn Douar’s original goals, many of Bécherel’s attractions (bookstores, artisanal workshops) and activities (festivals, language lessons) focus on preserving and promoting Breton heritage.
Other booksellers and artisans eventually arrived in the town, which currently boasts more than two dozen bookstores and a handful of ateliers and restaurants. Throughout the year, a marché du livre enlivens the first Sunday of each month. In addition to the booksellers and artisans of Bécherel, colleagues join them from other areas of Brittany, setting up their merchandise in the main square. Three larger (and more publicized) festivals coax books and book arts into the spotlight: the annual Fête de Pâques, at Easter, which “opens” the season; La Nuit du livre (an all-night affair held during the second Saturday in August), complete with music, readings and exhibits; and Lire en fête (part of a national French festival) which takes place the second and third weekends of October.

After continually witnessing the benefits the Cité du Livre brings to the town, the local government has recently become more involved in projects associated with its festivals and its promotion. Several factions of booksellers coexist, sometimes at odds with each other, but overall the Cité du Livre continues to run smoothly, thanks in large part to the efforts of Savenn Douar and the Comité de Concertation pour le développement de “Bécherel Cité du Livre” (presided over by Edith Guimard). The community has also benefited from press coverage in newspapers and television news programs.

34 This seems to be modeled after Redu’s Nuit du livre that has been held the first weekend in August for nearly twenty years. Most other book towns also plan a nuit du livre. This nocturnal festival is also similar to La Nuit blanche celebrated in Paris.

“Mon petit village”

Mon petit village
Est tout en étages.
Une à une, les maisons
Montent en colimaçons.
A la roche
Elles s’accrochent.
Montolieu fait le gros dos
Entre la Dure et l’Alzeau35
Au creux de gorges profondues
qui font une joli ronde
Et rendent folles les maisons
Dans leur joyeux tourbillon

Anonymous36

The image of Montolieu presented in this poem attests to its charm and highlights some of its defining characteristics. It lies at the foot of the Montagne Noire, in the department of Aude, only a short drive (seventeen kilometers) northwest of the medieval walled city of Carcassonne, which is classified by UNESCO as a patrimoine mondial. This southern town of the Languedoc-Roussillon region earned its name from the rocky plateau upon which it was established, Mount-Ouliou, which marked the limit of the olive groves (Jordy). Two gorges lie on either side of the plateau, through which flow the Dure and Alzeau Rivers before they join to form the Rougeanne. Rows of houses line the rocky edges of the plateau. The origin of Montolieu dates back to the construction of a monastery in 810 (Charles). For centuries, economic activity in the town was largely based on agriculture. However, that gradually changed beginning in the fourteenth

35 The Dure and the Alzeau are two rivers which join at Montolieu to form the Rougeanne River.
century, at which time a burgeoning textile industry brought renown to the area, earning it a solid reputation for its quality cloth exports, especially wool. In the sixteenth century, a manufacture royale was established; its importance would later decline following economic difficulties, but it would regain significance after the town’s transformation into a village du livre. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Montolieu was a prosperous community with 2,500 inhabitants. However, industrial transformations in the mid 1800s led to a general crisis in the textile industry, and by the mid twentieth century l’exode rural had taken hold as villagers began migrating to large cities. Today, only about eight hundred residents remain ("Escapade à Montolieu, village du livre").

In addition to textiles, Montolieu is also known for its church, Saint André, which dominates the town center. Built at the end of the fourteenth century, it can accommodate four thousand parishioners and is now classified as a historic monument. Finally, a number of mills in the surrounding area once animated the local economy. One of the most important of these was the sixteenth century Moulin à Papier de Brousse, only seven kilometers away and one of only seven of its kind in France. Others were used for tanning or producing flour. A nearby forge produced steel. Most of these industries had dramatically slowed or ceased in the twentieth century. A historian of Montolieu, Pierre Jordy, laments, “Montolieu n’est plus la ville industrielle d’autrefois et il n’est pas étonnant qu’il soit dépeuplé,” but does not despair: “Mais il peut encore avoir un bel avenir si les projets en cours se réalisent. Il peut devenir un centre de repos pour personnes âgées et un milieu accueillant pour les touristes” (100). It has already succeeded in accomplishing the latter. As the book town’s reputation has grown, Montolieu has expanded its services. The Musée Michel Braibant welcomes visitors and
provides information about the museum’s collection, the town, and the surrounding area. To help meet the increasing numbers of tourists’ needs, a Syndicat d’Initiative was established nearby in 2001.

The story of Montolieu, Village du Livre et des Arts Graphiques, begins in the late 1980s with an energetic and determined Dutchman, Michel Braibant, who lived in the nearby town of Saissac and practiced his book-binding trade in Carcassonne. As his retirement approached, he reflected on how he could profit from his new leisure time while simultaneously contributing to cultural development in the area. He decided to single-handedly create a Conservatoire Européen des Métiers et des Arts Graphiques centered around three concepts: it had to be cultural, tourist-oriented, and create jobs (Abrassart). In 1989, he chose Montolieu as the site for implementation of his plan, for several reasons: the mayor was willing to allow the development of the project, premises were available for the installation of bookstores, and the town was attractive. Earlier, Braibant had wished to transform his own town of Saissac into a village du livre, but local government resistance had prevented him from pursuing its development. In 1990 he deposed the statues of an association loi 1901 called “Mémoire du livre.” To help convince the town’s residents of the benefits books bring to the town, Braibant also invited Richard Booth and Noël Anselot to Montolieu. After speaking with villagers at an informational meeting about their own book towns, each of them decided to buy a house in Montolieu and open a bookstore. The mayor and some other local officials seemed more reticent, and a second association, called “Montolieu, Village du Livre,” was established in 1990 to help both attract tourists and convince entrepreneurs to relocate there (Abrassart).
Braibant sent letters to booksellers and book artisans inviting them to embark on the new book town adventure with him. Eight of them replied and they established three poles to solidify the associations’ goals: the creation and development of bookstores, the opening of a museum tracing the history of writing (to be set up in the former Manufacture royale), and the renovation of the paper mill in nearby Brousse, which had in earlier times (especially the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) added to Montolieu’s prosperity but which had closed in 1981. They successfully accomplished each of these aims. Moreover, the advent of the Village du Livre et des Arts Graphiques benefited the economy of the town, especially since fewer residents decided to leave the area. Both the local épicerie and the school, once in danger of closing, were allowed to remain open, with sixty students attending classes in 1999 ("Escapade à Montolieu, village du livre").

Michel Braibant passed away on August 26, 1992, but the book town project he set into motion has grown significantly over the last fifteen years in terms of the number of bookstores and the kinds of activities offered (festivals, public readings, and pedagogical workshops, for example). During the same year, the Conseil Général de l’Aude appointed a Comité de Pilotage to define the objectives of the village du livre and to outline financing possibilities which would help the town with expenses such as road signs and advertising. Montolieu is firmly established as a village du livre and has met with much success in its book-related endeavors.
Approaching the tiny village of Fontenoy-la-Joûte by car, one is greeted with rolling hills of farmland, the gentle mooing of cattle, and finally, a glimpse of the town itself: rows of stone houses with tiled roofs, and, jutting out from among them, the Eglise Saint-Pierre. The uninformed traveler, without seeing the road signs indicating the village du livre, would hardly imagine the large concentration of books, booksellers, and artisans found within such a rural environment. Indeed, even from within the tiny town of 285 inhabitants, when a visitor stands at the threshold of one of the fifteen bookstores and watches somewhat bewilderedly as a tractor drives by, he or she would certainly marvel at the juxtaposition of print culture with the countryside.

This farming community, located in the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, six kilometers west of Baccarat (the world-famous Cité du Cristal), and within two hours driving distance of Nancy, Metz, and Strasbourg, dates from the early twelfth century. It was laid out in a star-like pattern to provide easy access to the surrounding fields over the years. Many of the houses lining its three main streets were built in the eighteenth century in typical Lorraine fashion, with rounded archways at the front door and with sides of neighboring houses adjoining, presenting to the viewer their narrow fronts that deceptively suggest tight inside quarters. This architectural heritage remains a source of pride for villagers and greatly contributed to its selection as the Lorraine town that would become a village du livre.

Like many small villages in France, Fontenoy-la-Joûte had been suffering economically and demographically in the latter half of the twentieth century as many of
its inhabitants chose to move closer to big cities. Prior to its inauguration as a village du livre, no businesses had existed in the town for two decades. The last café had closed in 1971. The idea of transforming Fontenoy-la-Joûte into a book town was conceived by three men who wanted to help revitalize a rural economy in Lorraine: the Révérend Père Serge Bonnet (a Dominican, and director of research in sociology at CNRS), François Guillaume (a member of the political party Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, a deputy of Meurthe-et-Moselle, and former Minister of Agriculture), and Daniel Mengotti (a history and geography teacher). The town had no prior association with the various book trades, but the three men were familiar with the success of Redu and thought they might be able to initiate economic, cultural, and demographic changes in their own region by pursuing a similar project. In addition to creating jobs and attracting tourists, they also envisioned encouraging reading practices for everyone by offering “la culture pour tous” in an environment that could be enjoyed as a family. Here again, as in other book towns in France, the ideal initiators sought was democratic and egalitarian.

After having identified the village du livre theme, Bonnet, Guillaume, and Mengotti formed an association called “Les Amis du Livre” in 1994 and began searching for a location to implement their plan. They needed to ensure that the town they chose was far enough away from Redu to avoid problems stemming from competition.

Moreover, they wanted to find “un vrai village” in a rural setting with “de belles fermes

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37 This political party was created in 2002 and is currently presided over by Nicolas Sarkozy. The party’s website explains the reasoning behind its creation: “Les dernières décennies du XXème siècle se sont caractérisées par la méfiance du citoyen à l’égard de la politique. Voulant répondre avec clarté et sincérité à cette inquiétude, les familles gaulliste, démocrate-chrétienne, libérale, radicale, sociale et indépendante- ont souhaité se rassembler dans un grand mouvement qui transcende désormais les anciennes frontières.” See “UMP: Imaginons la France d'après: Tout savoir sur l'UMP,” 30 Jan 2007 <http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/l_ump/notre_histoire>.

38 This idea, which coincides with the practice of decentralization, is analyzed below.
lorraines” which could be rehabilitated to serve as bookstores or homes. In Fontenoy-la-Joûte, many farmhouses, stables, and barns had stood empty for years. Thus, ample space would allow the introduction of new businesses to the area. François Guillaume explains, “[l]orsque nous sommes intéressés à ce village, il y avait trente-trois maisons vides en train de s’écrouler, donc l’objectif c’était aussi d’essayer de sauver ce patrimoine rural...” (“Villages à voir”). In other words, despite outward appearances, Fontenoy-la-Joûte still had much to offer and its rich cultural heritage could be highlighted through its renovation. Although many buildings had to be remodeled, emphasis on preservation rather than modification took precedence in order to showcase regional architecture. Furthermore, the need for this type of reconstruction meant employing local architects, masons, and electricians from the area, thereby further supporting the local economy.

But rather than jump headfirst into the transformation of the town, Les Amis du Livre decided to test the waters to ascertain what kind of attendance they could expect. Just as in Bécherel, a series of book festivals and markets were held for two years prior to the installation of permanent bookstores and workshops. The first of these dimanches du livre took place on September 4, 1994, attracting sixty-four exhibitors, including booksellers and artisans of various book trades, and almost 11,000 visitors from thirty-three departments as well as from the bordering countries of Germany and Belgium.

The five dimanches du livre held in 1995 (May 28, June 25, July 30, August 27, and September 24) attracted around 22,000 visitors (Association "Les Amis du livre" 6). As word spread and as the success of these markets became evident, the number of exhibitors grew. During the May fête, sixty-seven stands were set up, while in September this number had grown to eighty-seven. Widespread press coverage in local and regional
newspapers and on television and radio programs also contributed to the growth and success of the project. Les Amis du Livre, in conjunction with the municipality of Fontenoy-la-Joûte, decided to forge ahead, and from January to April 1996 it underwent preparations for the town’s inauguration as a *village du livre*. On February 7, a large informational meeting was held for townspeople and prospective entrepreneurs, including booksellers who would be moving or commuting to the area from the regions of Lorraine, Alsace, Bourgogne, and Champagne, and also from the Belgian towns of Liège, Mons, and Brussels (7). The notaire, a representative of the Commission départementale de sécurité (pompiers), a tax inspector, an insurance agent, a banker, an accountant, a representative of the Chambre départementale de commerce et d’industrie answered questions on a number of subjects concerning specifics of living and working in the town. Les Amis du Livre acted as a liaison between entrepreneurs searching for locales and property owners wishing to rent or sell. Financially and physically, the association contributed to preparing the new establishments and the village itself for inauguration.\(^39\)

In all, eighteen businesses were opened on April 28, 1996 in the presence of numerous local and regional officials. Initially, bookstores were meant to be open each Saturday, Sunday, and holiday, although some remained opened daily during the busier summer months. Since its grand opening, on the last Sunday of every month from April to September, a large, outdoor book market is held, attracting several thousand visitors. Approximately fifty booksellers and artists of various book trades participate. Fontenoy-la-Joûte succeeded in drawing in 64,000 visitors in 1996, 91,000 in 1998, and 100,000 in

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\(^39\) For example, they assisted with the planning and construction of a parking area and public restroom facilities and with the installation of a second public phone booth.
1999. As of 2000, thirty-seven jobs had been created in the town and twenty-two houses had been sold for rehabilitation as bookstores or workshops (Fontenoy-la-Joûte [n.p.]). Les Amis du Livre continues to work closely with the municipality and with a separate organization, L’Association culturelle et artistique de Fontenoy-la-Joûte, made up of booksellers and artisans, to ensure that planned activities and festivals run smoothly and that the village receives subventions from organizations such as the Lorraine region, the Centre régional du livre de Lorraine, and the Conseil Général de Meurthe et Moselle.

**La Charité-sur-Loire, Ville du Livre (22 April 2000)**

As its name suggests, the Burgundian city of La Charité-sur-Loire lies along the banks of the Loire River, two hundred kilometers southeast of Paris in the department of Nièvre. From the ramparts that surround the once-fortified city, one can see a panorama that includes the town, the river and its sturdy sixteenth-century bridge, and the priory, an establishment rich in history, architecture, and Roman art that each year attracts thousands of tourists, mostly from the Ile-de-France region. The natural reserve of the Val de Loire, accessible by hiking trails, begins at the city limits. Nearby are the Fôret domaniale des Bertranges (10,000 hectares) and the vineyards of the Charitois, which produce Chardonnays, Pinots, and Sauvignons. Unlike the tiny villages of Bécherel, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, and Montolieu, La Charité-sur-Loire is a town of six thousand inhabitants and the area that has been designated the “Ville du Livre” occupies only one of its neighborhoods near the river.
It is best-known for its rich history as a religious center. The abbot of Cluny founded a large priory in the town in 1059, which quickly attracted monks (up to two hundred at the beginning of the Middle Ages), as well as prelates and nobles who built homes in the area. It also drew numerous pilgrims who depended on the monks’ generosity. Their frequently repeated phrase “Allons à la charité des Saints Pères” eventually led to the rebaptism of the town’s name, earlier known as Seyr, Phoenician for “ville au soleil.” The arrival of so many newcomers and passersby aided economic development and contributed to the area’s prosperity.

The priory, often called “la fille aînée de Cluny,” exerted great influence and at its peak had four hundred dependencies throughout the Christian Occident, some of which were found in cities such as Constantinople and Venice. The town was fortified with ramparts and rapidly expanded. The priory continued to evolve between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, although with the arrival of the Revolution, all but a dozen monks had deserted the once prosperous and sprawling religious establishment.

In 1840 Prosper Mérimée, then inspector of the Monuments historiques, saved the famous twelfth-century Eglise Notre-Dame (as well as several other important buildings) from destruction when it was suggested that a road be constructed where it stood. Over the centuries, the quarter housing the priory and all of its buildings, which take up several hectares, has been divided among a number of private owners. However, since 1975 the Mairie has been reacquiring the properties gradually and restoring the buildings in the original enclosure (Malroux).

In 1999, the Eglise Notre-Dame was classified as a patrimoine mondial by UNESCO owing to its history as a major way station on the pilgrimage route to Saint-
Jacques de Compostelle (Spain). A plaque commemorating this honor hangs on a stone wall near the church. At approximately the same time La Charité-sur-Loire received this recognition, one of its inhabitants busied himself by trying to add books to the list of the town’s attractions. Christian Vallériaux, a native of Cosne-sur-Loire, had worked for twenty-three years as a bookseller in Paris, dealing in antiquarian and rare books. In 1994 he decided to move to La Charité-sur-Loire, in part because his sister lived there. Upon his arrival, he opened a librairie / antiquité. In an interview for a regional magazine, he explains, “Je me suis rapidement rendu compte de l’importance du livre dans une région comme la nôtre, pauvre en offre de manifestations autour du livre… (quoted in Branchu 14).” During his second year in his new town, he, along with some colleagues (fellow booksellers and entrepreneurs), created a Foire du livre ancien, held in July, which attracted 3000-4000 visitors.

Still, the idea of founding a book town did not occur to him immediately. According to Vallériaux, the idea

... est venu peu à peu. Le succès commercial de la Foire du livre ancien aidant, le nombre de visiteurs, l’absence de concurrence, le projet d’implantation de l’A 77 de Cosne à Nevers, la proximité de Paris, la présence d’un patrimoine extraordinaire, une ville touristique connue, bref les atouts de la Charité m’ont amené à vouloir créer une manifestation moins ponctuelle. (14)

He found further motivation in the success of the book towns of Redu, Bécherel, Montolieu, and Fontenoy-la-Joûte. Consequently, Vallériaux and several others in the
town created the Association Seyr-Livres and outlined a tentative plan for developing the historic neighborhood, located near the priory and next to the Loire River, by transforming it into “La Charité-sur-Livres.” He envisioned installing a number of bookstores, as well as workshops centered on traditional book arts such as calligraphy and book-binding. At the time, approximately two dozen business premises in the surrounding streets stood vacant. For Vallériaux, this was the perfect opportunity to help revitalize the community and attract more tourists, adding to those who came to visit the priory. In 1999, the project’s development solidified, and Seyr-Livres began communicating more closely with the mairie to negotiate details of the neighborhood’s transformation. At the beginning, there were nine book dealers (eight of whom specialized in antiquarian books, and one of whom sold new books) and one book-binder. After having contacted friends and acquaintances in the book community to draw entrepreneurs to the area, Seyr-Livres received about forty dossiers in return (14). Although not all of those who replied established businesses in La Charité-sur-Loire, their general response demonstrated a strong interest in the project, and many of them would contribute to its development in other ways, such as participating in book festivals in the town.

Finally, April 22, 2000 saw the official inauguration of the new “La Charité-sur-Livres” quarter. The following year, Seyr-Livres was awarded the “trophée du tourisme de Bourgogne” for its accomplishments ("Marché de printemps: La Ville du Livre fêtera son 4e anniversaire"). Thanks in large part to the economic revival in the historic quarter and the greater number of visitors frequenting the area, the city repaired several streets
downtown, which, in addition to resolving some traffic issues also made the area more welcoming.\footnote{40}

Some tensions exist between the book dealers and the local mairie. The former have felt that they are not receiving enough funding, that the city was not taking the project seriously enough, and that communication between the two groups needs improvement. The newly-arrived entrepreneurs have been especially irritated since they have committed a great deal of time, money, and ideas to create the book town neighborhood and since they offer what they see as a high quality product. In a letter addressing the situation, Christian and Marie Valleriaux-Herbreteau write that the project includes “deux librairies de haut niveau sans équivalent dans aucun village du livre d’Europe continentale,” along with five “de très bonne qualité” and four smaller bookstores. These bookstores attract visitors to La Charité-sur-Loire, which benefits the town, but they feel that the town is not adequately acknowledging their contribution with funding and other efforts to promote the book neighborhood (Valleriaux-Herbreteau). Consequently, representatives from each side have been meeting to discuss problems and solutions, and in the fall of 2004 two interns were employed to meet with both groups and help devise some strategies for improving the Ville du Livre. In the meantime, La Charité-sur-Livre continues to host its monthly book market as well as its other main festivals, the Nuit du livre (in August), and Lire en fête (in October).

\footnote{40} The newly remodeled area opened to circulation in April 2003, and was officially inaugurated 13 July 2003, by the mayor, in presence of prefect, the sub-prefect, and local officials. "Rue du Pont - Place des Pêcheurs: Le bas de la ville officiellement inauguré," L’Écho Charitois 17 July 2003.
Montmorillon (9 June 2000)

Picturesque Montmorillon stands on both sides of the Gartempe River. Like Montolieu, this town in the region of Poitou-Charentes (department of Vienne) is linked through its past to the book industry through its production of paper. Already in the eleventh century, two windmills, les Moulins au Roi, stood watch over the town. Later, during the seventeenth century, the Grands Moulins and the Moulinet des Mas were built (in 1604 and 1671, respectively) to run the papeterie, which had been constructed in 1603 by Paul Thomas, the seneschal of Montmorillon, under the written authorization of King Henri IV. At that time, Montmorillon boasted status as a royal town. It was the seat of a sénéchaussée as well as several religious establishments. The presence of numerous monks, jurists, lawmen, and merchants, all of whom consumed great amounts of paper, provided a market for several generations of maîtres papetiers in Montmorillon (Gésan 5).41

In the mid-eighteenth century, paper fabrication slowed in Montmorillon, owing to the overpowering competition of les grandes papeteries of the Compagnie Royale des papiers d’Angoumois. At the Moulinet des Mas, on the left bank of the Gartempe, two separate windmills operated until the Revolution, at which time more technologically advanced paper-making sites in neighboring provinces drove them out of business. Furthermore, the events of the Revolution caused the monks to disperse and Montmorillon lost its status as a sénéchaussée (21). The great quantities of paper Montmorillon had once consumed were no longer needed, and the dawn of the nineteenth

41 The best-known paper-makers practiced their trade in the town between 1607 and 1789 (16).
century saw the transformation of the paper mills into flour, wheat, and tanning mills. In 1846, the Moulinet des Mas was converted into a brewery, where quality beer was produced until 1963.

Modern-day Montmorillon is divided into two halves, the “old” and the “new,” by the Gartempe River. In the 1990s, Montmorillon had 7700 inhabitants, but the medieval area of the town was largely deserted and run-down. As in La Charité-sur-Loire, it was only this ancient neighborhood, rather than the whole town, that would be reconstructed and reused as a village du livre. The idea for the Cité de l’Ecrit et des Métiers du Livre was jointly developed by the Conseil Général de la Vienne and the city of Montmorillon, who had learned of other book towns in France and saw the project as a way to restore the run-down quarter while concurrently promoting cultural, social and economic activity and establishing links with Montmorillon’s past history in paper-making. A pamphlet describing the unfolding of the project explains: “La géographie des lieux, le patrimoine architectural existant, la disponibilité de nombreux locaux, un quartier menacé par une désertification rampante en font un lieu idéal pour l’implantation de la ‘Cité de l’Ecrit’ . . . Du coup, cette opération à l’origine culturelle et touristique prend une ampleur économique en même temps que social” (Edit-France 2).

Furthermore, the project readily fit in with other developments and attractions in the region, especially the nearby and highly successful Futuroscope, “The Numerical City” created in the mid 1980s just outside of Poitiers. Futuroscope is an amusement park focused on technology, and in particular, visual images, especially involving interactive video games, computer animation, and the cinema. Futuroscope and La Cité de l’Ecrit are often cited in regional tourist brochures as complementary day trips, where one can
experience both the “word” (in Montmorillon) and the “image” (at Futuroscope). Finally, Montmorillon already had a tradition of playing host to the Salon du Livre of Poitou-Charentes, a biannual event that never failed to attract thousands of visitors and a number of prestigious authors.

A steering committee, organized by the city government, considered ways to revitalize the area and came up with a six point plan: to establish a hall [sic] aux bouquins anciens, to bring in book artisans (paper-makers and book-binders, for example), to set up workshops in illumination and calligraphy, to open a café-musique, to create a maison de l’Ecrit/Ateliers d’écriture, and to establish a résidence d’écrivain (Edit-France 5). They contacted numerous professionals to obtain their input and invited some of them to participate in the renovations. “Les réactions,” they claim, “ont toujours été enthousiastes” (2). They invited book town experts Richard Booth and Noël Anselot to visit the town and offer advice; the presence of these men also lent credibility and legitimation to the project. Both men agreed it had great potential for success. Finally, one of the strongest supporters of the project was and remains the prolific French author Régine Deforges, perhaps best known for the erotic literature she has published and for her novel La Bicyclette bleue. She was also the first woman in France to own a publishing company (opened in 1968) and is a visible literary figure in contemporary France, especially since she maintains a column in the newspaper L’Humanité. Deforges was born in Montmorillon, and despite facing heavy criticism for what some considered her scandalous literature, she has played a large role in its development as a village du livre and in helping to publicize the project. She has also been very active in promoting the Salon du Livre held in the town.
At the beginning of the Montmorillon project, the municipality purchased approximately twenty houses they restored to prepare them for use as bookstores or ateliers (Montmorillon: Cité de l'Ecrit 3). Following months of reconstruction, the Cité de l’Ecrit et des Métiers du Livre officially opened on June 9, 2000. Since then, a variety of activities have animated the streets, restaurants, bookstores, and ateliers, including public readings, theater festivals, debates, and workshops. Every other year the Cité de l’Ecrit continues to host the Salon du Livre of Poitou-Charentes, which draws writers, readers, and bibliophiles of all ages to the area and helps promote and publicize the Cité de l’Ecrit.

The renovations of the medieval neighborhood and the installation of several dozen new enterprises have improved the local economy by bringing tourists to the area and creating new jobs. In addition to the “planned” new businesses, several individuals have undertaken private initiatives to open restaurants or chambres d’hôtes as a direct result of the success of the project. The Cité de l’Ecrit prizes its ability to attract all ages of tourists, from the youngest readers and writers to those in their eighties and beyond.

Although they admit that their inspiration for the Cité de l’Ecrit stemmed from other book towns in France, most notably Bécherel, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, and Montolieu, the Montmorillonais initiators are careful to distinguish their project from those of their predecessors by emphasizing l’Ecrit in all of its forms: “Cela concerne tout aussi bien des supports comme le livre que des moyens modernes de communication comme l’ordinateur ou les médias” (Montmorillon: Cité de l'Ecrit 12). The 2004 Dossier de presse for Montmorillon asserts, “La Cité de l’Ecrit et des Métiers du Livre est plus qu’un simple Village du Livre. Avec l’accueil d’une dizaine d’artisans des métiers du
livre, ce site s’affirme comme le pôle national majeur des savoir-faire liés à l’écrit et au livre : calligraphie arabe, latine et chinoise, illustration, écriture, enluminure, gravure” (4). Their use of bold lettering serves to attract a broader clientele and highlights what they consider their unique identity. Despite their insistence on how they differ from other French book towns, they still find it beneficial to collaborate with their siblings/rivals. At the initiative of the Conseil Général de la Vienne, the city of Montmorillon organized and hosted a Rencontre Européenne des Villes et Villages du Livre et de l’Ecrit on March 12, 13, and 14, 2002. Approximately forty representatives from sixteen book towns participated with the aim of establishing connections with each other and exchanging ideas and information (10).

**Salins-les-Bains, Pays du Livre**

Of the towns in this study, Salins-les-Bains stands apart in that it is at the early stages of becoming a book town, but has not yet achieved this status. It is located in the mountains of the Jura department, in Franche-Comté, forty kilometers from Besançon and eighty kilometers from Dijon. It became a fortified town in the thirteenth century, and its two forts, Belin and Saint André, helped protect its greatest resource: the salt waters that procured the town money, power, and reputation beginning in the Middle Ages. The entire community was built around the salt industry (and starting with the

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42 Original emphasis.
43 The participants included: Montolieu, Bécherel, Cuisery, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, La-Charité-sur-Loire, and Montmorillon (France); Mühlbeck and Waldstadt (Germany); Bredevoort (The Netherlands); Sysmä (Finland); Grythyttan-Hällefors (Sweden); Wigtown and Dalmellington (Scotland); Hay-on-Wye (Wales); Redu (Belgium); and Saint-Pierre-de-Clages (Switzerland).
nineteenth century, the earthenware it produced), including extracting, evaporating, and transporting the precious “white gold.” Although the saltworks closed in 1962 following years of struggle as they were unable to compete in the market, many of the structures built in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries remain. Furthermore, the briny waters have been put to a new use in the spa industry. Indeed, Salins-les-Bains has become a renowned center for its thermal baths, which draw approximately 55,000 thousand visitors annually for health or relaxation purposes (Jourdant 3).

For Alain Leduc, an antiques dealer in Salins-les-Bains, these assets gave the town all the more reason to pursue its development as a village du livre. Leduc asserts that the idea for such an endeavor came to him approximately twenty years ago, but it was not until January 28, 2000 that he began its realization, when he founded the association “Salins-les-Bains, Cité du Livre” (Leduc). Shortly thereafter, in March of the same year, he published a letter in Le Salinois, the municipal bulletin of Salins-les-Bains, introducing the association and its goals and inviting others to become members. After mentioning the success Hay-on-Wye has experienced, Leduc cites Salin’s already well-established ability to attract visitors to its thermal baths before invoking the area’s more book-related history, of which “Salins-les-Bains, Cité du Livre” would simply be the next chapter. In the fifteenth century, Jehan Desprels printed the first book in Franche-Comté in the town. A century later, Mayor François de Merceret founded the Couvent des Capucins, one of the oldest public librairies in France, and the oldest in Franche-Comté. Moreover, a number of writers, journalists, poets, diplomats and scholars have hailed
from Salins over the years (Leduc "Une Nouvelle Association! 'Salins-les-Bains, Cité du Livre" 6-7). 44

The mayor of Salins-les-Bains fully supported Leduc’s idea, and in the same issue of Le Salinois published a letter explaining actions he had taken to promote the project with the prefect of Jura and the president of the Conseil Régional (Jourdant 3). He urges town residents to engage in discussion and to present themselves at the mairie if they have commercial premises to sell or rent. Hence, from the onset, local politicians, along with the association Salins-les-Bains, Cité du Livre, assured public knowledge of the project and encouraged as much participation and support as possible. They have received financial support from the government organization Opération de Redynamisation de l’Artisanat et du Commerce (ORAC) which has allowed them to organize a number of activities. 45

In conformity with the majority of other book towns, the association found it prudent to experiment with several book festivals before fully committing to the project. The current president and vice president of the association, Daniel Clot and Daniel Chatelain, respectively, along with other association members, corresponded with prospective book dealers and exhibitors to organize the first Journées du Livre, which took place 21 and 22 September 2002. Since then, it has become an annual festival with activities that include exhibitions, public readings, and workshops. What has changed,

44 One notable individual was Jules Marcou, a nineteenth-century geologist who, among other areas of research, studied and wrote about the Jura Mountains.
45 This group, funded by state, regional, and departmental funds, undertakes “des opérations collectives et individuelles destinées au Commerce et à l’Artisanat.” One of ORAC’s main purposes is to provide funding to help modernize and renovate local businesses. Bureau ORAC, “Opération de Redynamisation de l’Artisanat et du Commerce: Note explicative,” (Communauté de communes du pays de Salins les Bains, Département du Jura, [n.d.]).
however, is the name of the project, from “Cité du Livre” to “Pays du Livre.” Clot and Chatelain work closely with the municipality and with prospective entrepreneurs to ensure the project’s development, in direct correlation with the economic, cultural, and educational aims first established by Alain Leduc, who remains involved in the project. For the association, highlighting their town’s rich history is as important as promoting reading, writing, and book arts.

**The Book Town Trend**

Although Hay-on-Wye remained the only official modern book town in the world for more than two decades, with its first successors not arriving until the mid and late 1980s, interest has grown exponentially in this project, especially in Europe, where the phenomenon repeatedly proves its value as a way of enlivening cultural activities in the countryside, attracting tourists and helping to sustain rural development. It is difficult to determine exactly how many book towns exist, since some of them are in the early stages of development and since the term “book town” carries multiple meanings, as mentioned in the introduction. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is undeniably impacting communities internationally. Richard Booth and Noël Anselot have worked closely with many of the project initiators in the new book towns, and their influence is evident.

As the “family” has grown, it has attracted more attention not only from bibliophiles and the media, but also from governments, at local, regional, national, and even international levels. In France, for example, local officials have increasingly

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46 See introduction.
developed a keen interest in supporting the projects because they see them as a way of promoting cultural activities, with an emphasis on reading and art (book arts, but also painting, sculpture, music, and theater), strengthening their towns’ economies, and preserving and highlighting the local patrimoine. At the regional level, the villages du livre receive support in the form of funding and advising from organizations such as the Centres régionaux du livre throughout France, which are directed on the national level through the Ministry of Culture. Finally, the European Union has also played a role in the development and spread of the book town movement. From July 1, 1998 to June 31, 2000, they carried out Project UR 4001: “European Book Town Network – a Telematics Application based on a Model for sustainable Rural Development based on Cultural Heritage” to study the effects of the creation of book towns on local economies. Project leaders Ingjerd Skogsied (researcher at Stiftinga Vestlandsforsking, Norway) and Anthony V. Seaton (professor at the University of Luton, England) collaborated with five European book towns: Bredevoort (the Netherlands), Fjaerland (Norway), Hay-on-Wye


48 This project was part of the larger Fourth Framework Telematics Programme of the CEC, DGXIII, a European Commission division active from 1994-1998 that granted ECU 13, 215 million funding for research and technological development activities for its member countries. See The European Commission, “The Fourth Framework Programme,” 1 February 2007 <http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp4.html>. Project UR 4001 grew out of interest in “research carried out at the University of Strathclyde into the economic regeneration effects of specialist book dealing in rural towns, which constitute the partners in this telematics program” Ingjerd Skogseid and Anthony V. Seaton, Book Town Status and User Needs Analysis (European Union, 1998). The University of Strathclyde research was reported by Anthony V. Seaton in academic journals, specialist book journals, and government reports. See bibliography for Seaton references.
(Wales), Montolieu (France), and Redu (Belgium). They identified five application areas to work towards:

- Wholesale of books between book selling enterprises within and between book towns
- Virtual book town organisation
- Marketing the book town network as a pan-European tourist trail
- Specialised global marketing of high value book items
- Marketing of and information about activities in the book towns to the global book-lovers [sic] community (Skogseid and Seaton)

This project will be discussed in further detail in the chapters that follow, but it is important to mention it here as an example of the international importance the book towns have acquired. One of the outcomes of the research project was the creation of the International Organisation of Book Towns, which provides various forms of aid to established and nascent book town communities ("I.O.B. - International Organisation of Book Towns").

The *Villages du livre: Maisons de la culture for the Twenty-First Century*?

Book towns have more to offer than just financial return, though. Indeed, culture constitutes one of the main *raisons d’être* for the *villages du livre* on at least three levels. First, the towns are repositories for literature, one of the major staples of French culture. Second, they are venues in which artisanal methods of book production (part of France’s

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49 This project will be examined in greater detail in the following chapters.
cultural heritage) can be perpetuated. Finally, they act as a kind of living museum that showcases local culture, including architecture and various *produits de terroir* such as cheeses and wines.\(^{50}\) Because of this emphasis on culture, and because the towns have requested funding, it is natural that the book towns have garnered the attention of the French government. After all, culture and politics have been intimately linked in France since at least the Renaissance, during which François I became a leading patron of the arts. Later monarchs followed his example of State support, most notably Louis XIII and Louis XIV. This royal patronage, according to Philippe Poirrier, “joue un rôle essentiel dans l’évolution des productions et pratiques culturelles,” (*L’État et la culture en France au XXe siècle* 15) although *la politique culturelle* as we understand it today was not “invented” until 1959, with the creation, under the presidency of Charles de Gaulle, of a Ministère des Affaires culturelles, headed by André Malraux (Urfalino 9-14).\(^{51}\)

One of the new ministry’s most notable contributions was the notion of the *droit à la culture*, a utopian idea that everyone, whether rich or poor, should have access to culture and the enrichment it would bring to their lives. In an effort to make culture available to the greatest number of people possible, Malraux created the *maisons de la*

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\(^{50}\) Each of these themes will be further analyzed in the following chapters.

culture. As he explained at the inauguration of Amiens’s Maison de la culture on 19 March 1966, part of the purpose of such cultural centers was to teach people what human greatness is and to love it. In his view, it was the role of the University to teach them to appreciate it. “But it is love that must exist first, for, after all, not all forms of love give rise to explanations” (59).

In some ways, the villages du livre share common ground with the maisons de la culture. Like the latter, French book towns seek to make culture, in the form of literature and art (book arts but also music, painting, sculpture, and theater), available to a vast audience, without discriminating against the social class or educational background of their visitors. With this goal in mind, it makes sense that they have proliferated throughout the country, following the example of the maisons de la culture. However, while Malraux’s plan sought only to teach love for rather than understanding of the arts, the villages du livre try to engage and educate their audience as well as teach them to love culture.

The development of book towns in France comes several decades after the creation of the maisons de la culture. The latter were promoted under the centralizing Gaullist republic. In contrast, it is no coincidence that the villages du livre gained momentum beginning in the 1980s, a decade marked by the decentralizing trend of the Mitterrand regime. In 1982, the French regions as they exist today were officially recognized as “collectivités locales” that would elect their own representatives beginning (after a transitional period) in 1986. After receiving this official recognition, it follows logically that regions would attempt to define themselves in relation to other regions. Book towns provide a means of expressing regional identity in that in addition to
promoting print culture, they highlight numerous regional features (geographic, architectural, gastronomical) in the towns that differentiate them from other book towns and other regions. Furthermore, many bookstores in these villages contain sections devoted to regional literature and history, a genre that many booksellers reported as one of their bestsellers, and one with which they attempted to familiarize themselves if they did not know the region before arriving in the book town.

Decentralization laws of the 1980s also led to changes in how culture was perceived. Jack Lang, then Minister of Culture, expanded the notion to include not only “high” forms of art such as classical music and theater, but also popular forms of artistic expression like graffiti, bandes dessinées, and popular novels such as those that might be found in book towns. At a UNESCO-sponsored international conference of cultural ministers held in Mexico, Lang proposed that culture and the economy were “One and the Same Struggle” (113) and urged his fellow ministers to fight against imperialism coming from outside forces. Many interviewees in this study echoed this same sentiment in relationship to the villages du livre, which use culture as a means of self-sustenance. In his speech, Lang doesn’t mention America, whose films, television shows, music, and fast food restaurants have become omnipresent in France, but the implication is clear. To protect their national cultural interests against domination from American (or other)

52 Lang’s cultural policies became the subject of great controversy. One of his critics, the prominent intellectual Alain Finkielkraut, bemoans a “malaise dans la culture” (11) owing to the intrusion of sports, fashion, and le loisir into what was once a domain that required thought. He argues that those who oppose equating Beethoven with Bob Marley are seen as puritan and despotic, as attempting to “freiner la marche de l’humanité vers l’autonomie” (155). He elaborates, “La non-pensee, bien sûr, a toujours coexisté avec la vie de l’esprit, mais c’est la première fois dans l’histoire européenne, qu’elle habite le même vocable, qu’elle jouit du même statut, et que sont traités de racistes ou de réactionnaires, ceux qui, au nom de la ‘haute’ culture, osent encore l’appeler par son nom” (157-158) before pessimistically concluding, “La barbarie a donc fini par s’emparer de la culture [. . .] Et la vie avec la pensée cède doucement la place au face-à-face terrible et dérisoire du fanatique et du zombie” (183). Alain Finkielkraut, La Défaite de la pensée (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). See also Fumaroli, L’Etat culturel: essai sur une religion moderne.
culture, the French government has established regulations to ensure a certain percentage of television and radio airtime is dedicated to French programming. It has also instituted the practice of *exception culturelle*, which excludes cultural products from free trade agreements. Similarly, French book towns’ goals include protecting rural environments from domination by urban centers and safeguarding both the processes and products of print culture in the face of mass industries.

*eu or u?*

As noted earlier, Thomas More coined the word “utopia” from the Greek words *eu* (“happy”) or *u* (“no”) and *topos* (“place”). After having surveyed the development of the towns, it is time to return to the question of how, if at all, book towns are utopias. Which of the potential meanings of “utopia” do they fit? Are they happy places? Are they ideal environments for books, the opposite of the dystopic world described by Ray Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451*? Or, if we interpret “utopia” as “no place,” can we say that the book towns are utopian in the sense that their goals cannot be fully realized?

Paradoxically, the answer to each of these questions is yes. They are happy places (*eu + topos*) for books in that books are valued, protected, shared, and celebrated. They are also happy places, in theory, for those who choose to work there, surrounded by fellow bibliophiles who share the same desire to live amidst the objects of their passion. And they are happy places, theoretically, for tourists who visit them. Indeed, French book towns are advertised as idyllic rural settings conducive to quiet reflection and reading,
venues where book lovers can find everything they could possibly want or need within a few steps.

However, several issues interfere with the image of the *villages du livre* as “happy places.” For example, one dilemma faced by most of the book towns involves their hours of operation. Most advertise that they are open year round, yet from September to April many booksellers vacate their premises to attend large book fairs where they will almost certainly earn more money. Several interviewees claimed there was no point in staying in their bookstores when they would have few, if any clients during the fall and winter. But this means that some tourists – or researchers, for that matter – who decide to visit at those times may be met with closed doors, few dining options (if any), and a general ghost town atmosphere. A number of booksellers in this study reported that many of these tourists become upset with the lack of shopping and dining options, especially since some of them had traveled hours to get there. Moreover, several of the booksellers who stay to open their stores as scheduled expressed that they had developed bitter attitudes towards their colleagues who left on a regular basis during the off season. They maintained that this was not the idyllic atmosphere that had been presented to them by the project initiators when they invited the booksellers and they grow tired of tourists complaining to them, especially since their shops are open. This problem develops into a vicious circle, since tourists who leave discontented are not likely to return, which may result in fewer stores remaining open during the fall and winter because of low frequentation.  

Attempts to regulate the problem have met with

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53 Some interviewees, however, admitted that they enjoyed the fall and winter months and did not mind the lack of tourists because they had more time to take inventory of their stock and they were able to direct
mixed responses. For instance, as the Montmorillon project was being developed, the local government created a set of statutes governing operating hours, but some interviewees expressed resentment at having someone dictate when they should be in their shops. On the other hand, tourists can visit more shops and dining establishments.

Another group to consider in questioning the “happy place” translation of “utopia” is the original town members. Has the conversion of their towns made it a better, happier place for them? Here, my analysis is more speculative than objective since I interviewed few people belonging to this category. Moreover, interviewees within this group were involved in the projects, having opened their own bookstores. On one hand, the towns must have become happier places than previously because their economies have been reinvigorated and some of the new businesses (or businesses that were on the verge of collapsing), such as convenience stores and cafés, provide services that were needed but lacking. Yet every summer their once quiet towns host thousands of tourists. Do they view this as a loss of privacy? This remains to be explored in future studies.

In some senses then, a book town can be seen as eu + topos, a happy place, but there are too many elements that do not fit into this equation to conclude that this is the only interpretation. It is more practical, perhaps, to understand utopia as it applies to the book towns as u + topos, in the sense that the ultimate goals for the completed projects – the book towns – are idealistic in nature but cannot be fully realized. Promotional materials for the French book town of Montolieu frequently cite one of Michel Braibant’s (the project’s founder) mottos: “Il n’est pas de réalisation qui ne soit d’abord utopique.”

more attention to their Internet sales, which provide a great percentage of their income during the off season.
This attitude acknowledges the fact that not every aspect of an idea will reach fruition. Although Braibant does not specifically mention his book town project in his statement, he would have certainly had it in mind, having faced considerable skepticism before finally succeeding in persuading others of the feasibility of his plan to transform Montolieu into a village du livre. Braibant’s experience parallels that of many book town initiators, especially Richard Booth and the pioneers of the 1980s (in Redu and Bécherel), whose struggles have eased the transition for subsequent book towns. Their persistence has resulted in the renovation and invigoration of run-down and deserted towns or neighborhoods, and as the book towns have developed, they have gradually added new features (special festivals or concerts, for example) and improvements (such as public restrooms or telephones). So perhaps the lesson here is recognizing the utility of using a project’s potential as a springboard, acting on ideas, and continually working from the u + topos towards the eu + topos.

**Conclusions**

This overview of the development of the book towns in this study provides a reference point for understanding the themes that will be examined in the next chapters, namely print culture, tourism, memory and identity, and cultural politics. As the above analysis illustrates, these towns share numerous similarities. First, it is clear that the villages du livre form a national and even international community of like-minded individuals interested in preserving the patrimoine culturel and historique, in terms of both print culture and the towns themselves. However, in addition to the desire to act as
“guardians” of these legacies, project organizers also use the book towns as a means of renewing local economies that suffered as a result of the *exode rural*. The transformation of small, dying villages into tourist attractions encourages young people to stay in the area and also makes these locales appealing to potential residents from other departments, regions, or even countries. In order for a book town project to be successful though, certain requirements must be taken into consideration. Is its location easily accessible? Is it picturesque? Does the town have an interesting history? Are there other points of interest in the area? Can booksellers and artisans be persuaded to relocate? Finally, each of the *villages du livre* discussed here has resulted from the hard work of individuals or groups who have dedicated considerable time and energy into ensuring their fruition. As a result of their different ideas and strategies, each of the projects is also unique.

For example, the earlier book towns, especially Hay-on-Wye and Bécherel, seem to have been inspired in part by a hippie, sixties counterculture that sought to break away from an established, centralized government norm in favor of a “back to the land” utopian approach to living and governing. This is exemplified by Hay’s mock declaration of independence and by the political stance assumed by the Bécherel project initiators. The latter case also ties in with a larger movement to maintain Breton identity in the face of domination from the French government. In the most recent projects, on the other hand, such as Montmorillon and Salins-les-Bains, this rebelliousness is absent. Indeed, the people involved with their development, although some of them happen to be government officials, seem less politically motivated and more driven by the financial benefits they can see in their town’s future.
Another significant difference among the *villages du livre* is the extent to which their new status concurs with their histories. Montolieu, Montmorillon, and Salins-les-Bains are the only towns in this study that boast any links with the history of book-related industries. The background of the others varies, with farming being one of the main historical means of sustenance (see Figure 8 for a summary). In these cases, the new traditions and identities the towns claim, which are now based on books, have been largely fabricated or invented. This trend raises some interesting questions concerning how memory is constructed and will provide the basis for much of chapter five.

In addition to comparing the historical background associated with each of the towns in this study, Figure 8 also serves as a reminder of their geographical diversity. Situated throughout France, the *villages du livre* represent different regions, climates, traditions and lifestyles. Wherever one lives in the Hexagon, a book town is never more than a few hours away by car or train. This is particularly striking compared with the ratio of book towns in other countries. The next chapter will further address the question of why book towns have proliferated so noticeably in France by analyzing the historical significance of print culture there.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Region / Country</th>
<th>Historically Known For:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hay-on-Wye (1961)</td>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>Sheep farming; being a market town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redu (1984)</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bécherel (1989)</td>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>Feudal lordship; linen and hemp production; tanneries; dairy industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montolieu (1989)</td>
<td>Languedoc-Roussillon</td>
<td>Olive groves; farming; textiles; nearby mills including tanning, steel, and paper mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fontenoy-la-Joûte (1996)</td>
<td>Lorraine</td>
<td>Farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montmorillon (2000)</td>
<td>Poitou-Charentes</td>
<td>Paper production; seat of sénechaussée and several religious establishments; flour, wheat, and tanning mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salins-les-Bains (not yet fully established)</td>
<td>Franche-Comté</td>
<td>Salt industry; thermal baths; having printed the first book in Franche-Comté; having one of the oldest libraries in France (and the oldest in Franche-Comté)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Historical industries of the book towns
Chapter 2

*Un Produit pas comme les autres, des villages pas comme les autres: Books and Book Towns in French Society*

Patrice Jacquemin is a gregarious *bouquiniste* who, when not visiting with his customers, busies himself by categorizing newly arrived boxes of used books or straightening those already on the shelves. Huguette, his wife, helps in the store, maintains the website “Fontenoy-la-Joûte, village du livre” (<http://www.ac-nancy-metz.fr/fontenoy/Default.htm>) updates their store’s online catalog, and ships orders to clients. The couple clearly enjoys being surrounded by books. From 1975 to 1995 they lived in Nancy, where they ran a bookstore called “Le Temps des Cérises,” before leaving the city definitively to move to the tiny farming village where they now reside. In April of 1994, Daniel Mengotti, a history and geography teacher and one of three initiators of the Fontenoy-la-Joûte project, approached them in their store to request their participation in a large used book market in Fontenoy-la-Joûte, fifty-five kilometers from Nancy. Although the Jacquemins listened politely, upon Mengotti’s departure, they agreed, “C’est sûr que ça ne va pas marcher;” his goals were unrealistic and he would never find enough booksellers (H. Jacquemin). However, when Mengotti returned several months later he had progressed considerably in organizing the event and convinced the couple to participate.

Pleased with the results of the first festival, the Jacquemins decided to get involved with the five festivals held in Fontenoy-la-Joûte in 1995 and, finally, to join the
nascent village du livre project. In all, eighteen booksellers accepted Mengotti’s proposal, but the Jacquemins were among the first. They immediately searched for a house and purchased a farm complex in the center of town, consisting of a large barn on one side that now houses the bookstore and a living area on the other. In a style typical of Lorraine architecture, the narrow front of the house deceives the eye by making the structure appear much smaller than it actually is. In truth, the building stretches far back from the street. Inside, Patrice built 7000 meters of wooden shelves on two levels to hold thousands of books of all genres, prices, and sizes. Within this massive warehouse, they hoped to create the largest used bookstore not only in France but in Europe (P. Jacquemin).

After having chosen a location in which to live and work, the next step for the Jacquemins was finding a name for their store that would appeal to potential customers. Huguette explains the process they underwent in deciding on “À la recherche du livre perdu:”

[C]e qui était important pour nous [. . . ] quand on a choisi, ce qu’on voulait, c’était que notre nom apparaîsse en première position dans l’annuaire et dans la liste des bouquineries. Donc il fallait absolument que ça commence par ‘a’. En même temps, il fallait que ce soit commercial, il fallait [...que...] les gens comprennent tout de suite que l’on vend des livres d’occasion. Donc, euh, « À la recherche du livre perdu », c’était, c’était parfait. [. . . ] [Ce nom] a indiqué tout de suite quelle était notre profession. Et en même temps, [pour] le troisième critère, il fallait que [. . . ] l’enseigne soit littéraire. Et en littérature française il existe un écrivain
très important, c’est Proust, qui a écrit *À la recherche du temps perdu* (H. Jacquemin).

The idea came to them as they consulted for inspiration an alphabetical list of books printed in France. The first title listed was *À bas toutes les armées*; they knew that “À bas tous les livres” would simply never work for a bookstore. But when they read the next title, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, it was “. . . le coup du foudre. Il réunissait toutes les conditions” (H. Jacquemin).

Although other bookstore owners may not have gone through the same process in choosing the names for their enterprises, the three criteria Huguette lists – that the name begin with “a,” that people understand immediately what kind of merchandise they had to offer, and that it be literary – reveal a number of important issues faced by the booksellers of the *villages du livre*. The first criterion demonstrates an advertising strategy aimed at drawing attention to the shop. For the Jacquemins, choosing a name that starts with the letter “a” (and the word “à”) ensures that their bookstore’s name will be the first one potential visitors and clients see when consulting websites, brochures, and as Huguette mentions, the phone book (assuming people read the list from top to bottom). The Jacquemins enjoy the privilege of this “number one” spot. Additionally, Patrice is especially proud of the fact that their bookstore was the first to officially open during the town’s inauguration on April 28, 1996. The ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by local and regional officials, took place directly in front of “À la recherche du livre perdu.”

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54 Officials included Jean-Marie Vanot (mayor of Fontenoy-la-Joûte), François Guillaume (deputy of Meurthe-et-Moselle and former Minister of Agriculture), and Jacques Baudot (president of the conseil général). According to journalist François Moulin, in addition to the (newly) resident booksellers, approximately fifty other professionals (booksellers and book artisans) as well as more than 6,000 visitors
Other booksellers in the French book towns are just as enamored with books and employ similar strategies to promote their stores. Not everyone can have their names at the top of the list, but their inclusion enhances publicity. In some villages du livre all bookstores are automatically listed in brochures. Elsewhere, in Bécherel or Montolieu, for example, only those individuals who have paid association dues earn this privilege.

The second criterion, that the store’s name convey information about the merchandise sold within, demonstrates another type of business strategy. The expression “À la recherche du livre perdu” clearly indicates the Jacquemin’s profession as dealers of second-hand books. The last criterion, that their name be literary, reveals the Jacquemin’s wish to establish direct links with French literature, but it also ties in with one of the main goals of the villages du livre, namely, creating locales in which memory and nostalgia (of the towns, the regions in which they are located, and of print culture) are highlighted and “sold” to tourists. The reference to Proust’s magisterial À la recherche du temps perdu offers the enticement of “escaping” into the memories of the past, an experience that occurs on many levels, from personal to national. The latter category includes print culture’s past, part of which is on display in the villages du livre. These quests reveal the strong sense of nostalgia associated with both literature and books, since the clients who pursue them often search for very specific editions. Just as a pain au chocolat would never elicit the same poignant memories as a madeleine for Proust, the clients searching for the books of their youth will not be appeased by simply finding a newer edition of the same story. As bookseller interviewees reported, their clients wish to see the same

also attended inaugural day activities (Poirrier, Histoire des politiques culturelles de la France contemporaine.)
familiar book jackets they knew when they were ten years old and to relive their own personal experience of reading. The clever name the Jacquemins chose for their store suggests to customers that they only need to visit their shop to find their long-lost BDs or an early edition of *La Tour de France par deux enfants*, especially since “À la recherche du livre perdu” houses an inventory of around 200,000 books, about one third of which are also online.  

Other booksellers employ similar strategies to attract potential clients by clearly denoting a shop’s contents in its name. In Fontenoy-la-Joûte, we also find “Au bonheur du chineur” and “L’épicerie culturelle.” The first, a reference to Emile Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames*, appeals to those who enjoy browsing through stacks of old books, just as the fashionable ladies of nineteenth century Paris amused themselves by frequenting the fictional department store of the same name. The second bookshop’s name denotes a marketplace where one can shop for essential cultural “sustenance” (i.e., literature). Similarly, in Montmorillon, we find “De la Trappe aux Livres,” a *bouquinerie/bar/pochothèque*. The nomenclature of this interesting trio suggests a secret hiding place where one may find forgotten books or treasures, if one takes the time to look. In Bécherel, “Le Livre enchanté” hints at a fairy-tale-like atmosphere in which one can experience the magical powers of books. It takes more than a catchy title to succeed, but it is common for booksellers to take advantage of word play strategies to promote their businesses.

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55 It is estimated that collectively the bookshops of Fontenoy-la-Joûte contain 800,000 books. Thus, the Jacquemin’s collection makes up one fourth of the book town’s merchandise. One could argue that many clients today would rather search for books online, from the ease of their own homes. This is true to some extent, yet not all used books are listed online, and some clients, according to booksellers interviewed for this study, prefer the tactile pleasures of physically searching through the books.
While the first two criteria Huguette mentioned address the desire to succeed financially in a business enterprise, the couple also wanted to ensure a connection to France’s literary heritage. And how better to attract a bibliophile clientele, or anyone remotely interested in books, by referencing one of twentieth-century France’s greatest writers, Marcel Proust? This desire to cement ties with literature is shared by many of the other booksellers and artisans in the *villages du livre*. Some bookstore names include a reference to a component of books, such as “Paragraphes” in Fontenoy-la-Joûte, “Droit au Chapitre” in Montmorillon, or “Voyelles” in Montolieu. The latter two are also plays on words. The expression “droit au chapitre” signifies having the right to express one’s opinion whereas “Voyelles” refers to Rimbaud’s famous poem. Other bookshops also reference a specific author or the title of a literary work. For instance, in Fontenoy-la-Joûte, Françoise Fouminet christened her shop “Le Chat Botté.” A clear reference to one of Perrault’s fairy tales, this name also holds personal significance for Fouminet. Among family documents, she found an envelope from her uncle Georges Fouminet’s *huilerie* business in Paris, where he worked in the 1930s and 40s. As his copyrighted trademark he had chosen *Le Chat botté* as a *clin d’œil* at the family name – *Fou* (crazy) *minet* (cat / kitten). Thus, for Françoise, this title proved fitting for her new business. The envelope that inspired her now hangs framed on the stone wall behind her cash register with a brief identifying note that reads “L’origine du Chat botté.” She adopted the logo for her store, and it now adorns a large white, black, yellow, and red sign outside of her bookstore. The colors are significant in that she wished to draw attention to her local heritage by including the yellow and red colors of the regional flag of Lorraine.
Some booksellers choose more exotic titles to attract visitors. For instance, those interested in escaping reality for awhile might decide to venture into “Mille et Une Pages” in Montolieu. This name suggests that just as the heroine Scheherazade ensured her own survival in recounting to the king the numerous tales of *Mille et une nuits*, so the visitor will find security and adventure in the books s/he finds there. Similarly, individuals who travel to Bécherel might be enticed into “Neiges d’Antan.” This reference to the “Ballade des dames du temps jadis,” the well-known excerpt from François Villon’s *Testament*, also relies on a public fascination with nostalgia to bring in customers.

Each of these bookstores, along with many stores not listed here, draws on the fame of their well-known namesakes or on their names’ associations with other aspects of the book industry to attract potential clients. The careful selection of names can be explained in part by the need to earn a livelihood. However, it is also reflective of a
broader phenomenon in France, the importance assigned to books and literature. I suggest in this chapter that one of the reasons book towns have become so prolific in France – much more so than other genres of themed towns – is because literature, particularly canonical literature, plays a key role in French society and contributes to establishing a unique French identity. This role is evident symbolically in government attitudes towards culture, especially as expressed in cultural policies. Most notable, perhaps, is *l’exception culturelle*, the idea that cultural products (such as cinema and television) should not be considered the same as other kinds of merchandise in international trade agreements.

Literature’s significance is also evident physically in the form of monuments and streets dedicated to the country’s *grands auteurs* and in the many literary festivals that take place throughout the country.

In contrast to the continuing popularity of literature, however, some *métiers du livre*, although still valued, are rarely practiced today. In bringing artisans such as paper-makers, calligraphers, and book binders together, book towns establish centers where their trades will presumably thrive and where they will become educational opportunities for the public. Thus, in some ways book town organizers envision themselves as guardians of this heritage. Similarly, they view the villages as repositories for used and antiquarian books, which are objects with their own rich histories. The booksellers and artisans in the *villages du livre* act as agents who provide access to this cultural past. But why is culture so important to the French?
Culture in the Countryside

One of the motivating factors behind the development of French book town projects is the desire to imbue rural environments with culture. This is not to say that no culture existed in these areas before, because it did in the form of local traditions, handicrafts, gastronomy, architecture, and so forth. What was largely absent, though, was what is often referred to as “high” culture, including literature, music, dance, and theater. Bringing these types of activities, most of which now take place in the villages du livre, to the countryside parallels national efforts to decentralize that have been a government concern for most of the post-World War II period.

Although defining culture remains problematic, there is no question that it occupies a unique place in French society (Dubois; Cook; Poirrier; Donnat; Hewitt “Culture”). The French government’s interest in culture has a long history, one that dates back to at least the reign of François I, patron of the arts par excellence.56 One of the cultural domains in which this monarch’s influence can still be appreciated today is his policy concerning newly printed books. Of this, Roger Chartier writes: “It was not for personal reasons that François I created a new royal library at Fontainebleau around 1520; then, in 1537, made it obligatory to deposit of a copy of all of the ‘works worthy of being seen’ in the library at Blois [. . .] These collections had a totally ‘public’ purpose: they were intended as places for the conservation of books and as a means for protecting all meritorious books from falling into oblivion” (Forms and Meanings: Text, Performance, and Audience from Codex to Computer 26-27). The villages du livre

56 See also Poirrier, Histoire des politiques culturelles de la France contemporaine.
similarly aim to protect books, along with the artistic processes that produce them, from falling into oblivion. The policy of the dépot légal, of course, still applies today.

Some of the most interesting developments in the relationship between culture and politics have occurred over the course of the twentieth century. The resulting atmosphere is one that has not only allowed for but encouraged the creation of the villages du livre. Each regime in France has used culture for its own ends (Poirrier). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Philippe Urfalino suggests that Charles de Gaulle’s appointment of André Malraux as Minister of Culture in 1959 and the latter’s creation of the Maisons de la Culture marked the invention of la politique culturelle. Malraux’s goal was decentralization, making culture available to as many people as possible, a strategy that would strengthen the nation as a whole and reaffirm French identity. De Gaulle’s successor, Georges Pompidou, expressed the belief that the country’s leader “a le devoir d’accompagner symboliquement la modernisation du pays” and that the president should play an important role in cultural affairs (Poirrier). Combining these two ideas resulted in the creation of the Centre Beaubourg, now the Centre Pompidou, a cultural venue dedicated to showcasing modern art and providing public access to books and other printed materials. The Centre houses a large library, several cinemas, and the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM).57

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57 Besides using culture to present an image of a strong, united France and to educate its citizens, French leaders have also used culture as a means of leaving their individual marks on their country. For example Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s presidential term resulted in several noteworthy cultural projects: the Musée d’Orsay, the Cité des sciences de la Villette, and the Institut du Monde Arabe. The Grands Travaux undertaken by François Mitterrand, including the Louvre pyramid and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, among others, also reflect a concern with both affording cultural opportunities to the public and with his own posterity. See Malcolm Pollard, "The Fiction of Mitterrand and Cultural Policy: Politics and Its Discontents," French Cultural Studies 10 (1999). 21-37; Wayne Northcutt, "François Mitterrand and the
Under Mitterrand’s leadership, and with Jack Lang as his Minister of Culture, the budget appropriated to culture increased seventy-four percent, expanding from 0.47% to 0.76%. For this Leftist government, culture and the economy were intimately linked. Therefore, stimulating cultural development was seen as an investment that could only benefit France (Dubois). It is the same in the villages du livre, where the addition of culture – in the forms of literature, books (as artistic objects), music and theater – has brought tourists and revenue to once-faltering communities. As Jack Lang remarked in a speech, mentioned in the previous chapter, culture and economy are one and the same struggle. In response to the question of sagacity of doubling the cultural budget in a time of economic crisis, Jack Lang addressed these remarks to the Assemblée nationale on 17 November 1981:


La culture, c’est donc la vie de l’esprit. Elle ne peut être confinée en une lointaine forteresse, éloignée des douleurs et des peines des hommes; elle est la vie même. (384)

Similarly, book town project initiators view a crucial link between the advent of print culture to their communities and a rejuvenated economy. Culture is thus a means of strengthening France economically, but also, because of its intimate links with everyday

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life, an affirmation of identity. This notion of identity was echoed fifteen years later in 1996 by Jacques Rigaud in his report to the Minister of Culture on behalf of the Commission d’étude de la politique de l’État. Rigaud explains:

Le but de la politique culturelle est d’accomplir la République, c’est-à-dire de donner à chacun, par un accès réellement égal aux œuvres de l’esprit, la possibilité de se former une conscience citoyenne dans sa plénitude. Qu’il s’agisse du droit de tout être à l’expression de son identité et à la reconnaissance de sa dignité, de l’adhésion à un lien social incessamment renouvelé dans une communauté plurielle, de la participation sous toutes les formes au patrimoine des valeurs de l’art et de l’esprit qui s’est enraciné dans le corps même de ce pays et s’enrichit jour après jour par la création en tous domaines. La culture apparaît décidément, dans son heureuse et constante diversité, au cœur du projet de société.

Ainsi le développement de la vie culturelle bénéficie à la démocratie et donc aux individus, aux citoyens; mais il profite aussi à la nation en tant qu’entité, à l’État en tant que structure. […] Renan disait que la nation procédait du sentiment partagé d’avoir fait de grandes choses ensemble et de vouloir en faire d’autres encore. La culture, principal dépositaire de l’héritage du passé et de l’imagination concrète ou poétique des projets futurs, constitue un facteur décisif de cette identité et de cette solidarité constitutives de la nation. (515)
Here, culture, at the heart of society, provides social cohesion. Rigaud’s remarks also reflect the continuing trend to decentralize culture and make it available to as many people as possible. This is one of the main goals of the *villages du livre*, according to *dossiers de presse*, project descriptions, newspaper articles, and interviewees. Moreover, creating cultural venues in the countryside ostensibly provides access to greater numbers of people. However, ironically, among the target audiences of the *villages du livre* are urban dwellers who want to get away for an afternoon or a weekend. This group of people probably already has greater access to cultural arenas than their counterparts who live in the countryside, farther away from theaters, libraries, and opera houses.

Culture as Rigaud sees it is valuable for its ability to help strengthen identity – individual identity, but also the identity of France as a nation. It is not surprising then, that towns in this study have chosen a cultural object – books – as a means of affirming or recreating their own identities. This topic is addressed in many of the documents concerning the towns’ developments, such as *dossiers de presse* and project descriptions. We find the same attitude expressed in the Budget 2005 du ministère de la culture et de la communication. The document states:

> Le ministère de la culture et de la communication contribue activement à la politique du Gouvernement en faveur de la cohésion sociale. Cette priorité met en lumière toutes les actions relatives à la lutte contre toutes les exclusions, mais aussi à la promotion de la diversité culturelle et au dialogue entre les cultures et les peuples.

> L’action du ministère s’oriente résolument vers l’accès plus effectif à la culture de tous les publics. La promotion de l’égalité des chances, l’égal accès à
la culture, sont un facteur de cohésion sociale. La nomination dans chaque DRAC d’un correspondant culture et exclusion, permettra l’intégration sociale par la culture des personnes les plus démunies [y compris des personnes hospitalisées et des prisonniers]. (Ministère de la culture et de la communication 69)

This viewpoint emphasizes the cohesive benefits offered by culture. Again, this is a theme we find in the *village du livre* projects. By inviting booksellers and book artisans to live and work in these towns, project initiators hope to strengthen local communities, most of which were suffering from the impact of rural exodus. The newcomers and the original residents can work together toward a common goal of rejuvenating the towns. Furthermore, ties between the book town and peripheral communities are solidified, as often workers from these nearby towns are hired by the new enterprises or as masons and painters when abandoned structures are renovated to become bookstores. Some of the activities that take place in these locales, such as a weekend festival dedicated to a particular author, also provide social cohesion by bringing together people whose interests coincide.

Overall then, the French national government, in its various forms and under different leaders throughout the twentieth century, has used culture to promote unification, valorization of the *patrimoine*, economic development, and a better understanding of the country’s identity. This official stance towards culture provides insight into the French book town projects, each of which reflect similar attitudes towards the culture they promote, their communities, and the nation. By invoking culture, book town developers seek to strengthen community ties, stimulate economic development, affirm local and regional identities (albeit while concurrently adopting new identities),
and preserve local, regional, and even national heritages. Numerous forms of culture are valorized in the *villages du livre*, including music, theater, painting, and local architecture or gastronomy. Nevertheless, the main focus remains on print culture, which reflects a national concern with promoting French literature and with preserving heritage, in this case artisanal methods of book production.

The three excerpts above demonstrate a consistency in cultural policy over three decades. Recently, cultural policy-makers have been reevaluating the place of *le livre* and *la lecture*. The 2005 cultural budget for France reflects an increasing interest in promoting these areas, both of which “seront prioritaires” (4). The amount of funding dedicated to this area rose 2.7% from the previous year, for a total of 13% of the overall cultural budget. According to this official document, “[l]a politique du livre et de la lecture poursuit trois axes forts: soutenir l’économie du livre, maintenir et ouvrir de nouveaux lieux, améliorer les collections et le rayonnement avec la BnF” (55). The first two of these three goals are germane to the creation of French book towns in that the towns are new places for books where the book economy is stimulated (along with local economies in establishments such as restaurants or *gîtes*).

The 2005 budget also reflects the fruits of efforts to obtain a better balance between funds devoted to Paris / Ile-de-France (52% of the budget) and those devoted to the regions (48%) (4). Here again, decentralization is key. And the *villages du livres* represent one of the types of endeavors that would profit from attempts to balance fund distribution. For example, the Directions régionales des Affaires culturelles (DRACs), under the umbrella of the Minister of Culture, receive more funding from the national cultural budget and are in turn able to devote more financial aid to book town projects. In
some towns, this means providing assistance with start-up costs for new entrepreneurs. It can also mean earmarking money to boost advertising campaigns. The assistance they provide book towns is an investment in the region, since book towns, in addition to selling books, seek to showcase the regions in which they are located.

**Cultural Exceptions**

Lieu de révélation et de mémoire, vecteur de connaissance et d’information, champ de débat et d’affrontement, porteur d’émotion et de fantaisie, le livre, comme en une sorte de point focal, a condensé depuis plusieurs siècles tout la réalité du monde. C’est pourquoi on peut parler du ‘monde des livres’ et que tout ce qui touche à son avenir concerne notre devenir collectif, la crise du livre traduisant d’une certaine manière nos incertitudes face à l’avenir.

François Rouet, *Le Livre: Mutations d’une industrie culturelle* (8)

Jack Lang stressed the importance of investing in culture even in, or rather especially in, times of economic crisis. But the crisis can also be extended to concerns about foreign domination over cultural products and the effects of globalization on France. One of the challenges the country has faced over the last few decades is the great influx of outside cultural influences, notably from the United States. Here, it is not only the volume of cultural products that is cause for concern, but the general attitude towards culture. Serge Regourd, a law professor at the Université des sciences sociales de Toulouse, contends that while the United States views culture as an entertainment
industry and thus adopts a commercial approach to cultural products, resulting in the propagation of the American way of life, the European, and more specifically, French, concept sees culture as an artistic production “inassimilable à une simple production marchandise” (Regourd). For this reason, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) decided in 1993 to characterize cultural products (mostly those of cinematographic or audiovisual nature) as separate from other kinds of products traded internationally. This has resulted in regulations dictating that a certain percentage of songs played on the radio, television shows broadcast, and films shown in cinemas be French in origin. Regourd concludes that cultural, political, and economic issues are interdependent and that American dominance in the cultural realm is linked with its hegemony in geopolitical, economic, and military realms.

Closely related to the overall issue of the dangers of large industry domination of the international cultural market is the *loi sur le prix unique du livre*, also called the Loi Lang, adopted in 1981. Just as some French products presented meek competition with their American counterparts, so independent booksellers were finding it difficult to compete with large chain stores such as Fnac. The latter consistently offered books at prices up to twenty percent lower than publishers’ recommending selling prices, a sales strategy not economically viable for smaller bookstores. Unable to stay afloat faced with impossible competition, some bookstores were forced to close. The Loi Lang states that publishers will decide prices for their books and that this information will be printed on the covers. All stores must sell the books at this price, although they may offer a reduction of five percent, with the further specification that “[l]es détaillants peuvent pratiquer des prix inférieurs au prix de vente au public mentionné à l'article 1er sur les
livres édités ou importés depuis plus de deux ans, et dont le dernier approvisionnement remonte à plus de six mois.” François Rouet believes this law “donne clairement ‘un ballon d’oxygène’ aux détaillants, achalandés ou non, qui ne voulaient ou ne pouvaient pratiquer le discount” (284).

Although the prix unique especially applies to new books, the spirit of the law – of helping David fight Goliath by preventing small bookstores from closing because of domination from large corporations – is omnipresent in book towns. At the most basic level, bookstores, whether chains of large corporations or small shops run by only one employee, offer the same product: books. But they differ, vastly in some cases, in terms of the types and quality of service offered, as discussed below. Even with the prix unique, though, independent bookstores still face significant challenges. Consider this excerpt from L’Economie du livre en Basse-Normandie, a report presented to the Conseil Economique et Social Régional de Basse-Normandie: “...dans un grand centre-ville, les librairies sont plus menacées par les grandes surfaces spécialisées et les hypermarchés de la périphérie, d’où un mouvement de concentration parfois important qui s’effectue souvent au profit des libraires indépendants les plus puissants” (Renard 65-66). This helps explain why some neighborhoods in cities are known for their bookstores and it offers yet another explanation for the increasing number of booktowns throughout France. The report also reveals the complexity of some of the issues that affect independent booksellers today:

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La diversité de la situation des libraires et le profond individualisme qui caractérise la profession expliquent la difficulté à mettre en place des organisations professionnelles représentatives. Cette absence de vision collective nous renseigne également sur les raisons pour lesquelles la loi sur le prix unique doit son existence à l’implication forte des éditeurs et non, comme on serait porté à le croire, à celle des libraires. (66)

Even though the *loi sur le prix unique du livre* benefits independent booksellers and indeed, was created expressly to protect them, their individualism has prevented them from organizing themselves as a group and selecting representatives. This issue has also surfaced in book towns and presents a paradoxical contrast to the desire for social cohesion desired by project initiators. Although some booksellers in these towns do bond and form effective teams, others reject what they perceive as authoritarian attempts to dictate how their businesses should be run. The book towns thus reflect trends that are prevalent in the nation as a whole:

Le manque d’organisation de la profession constitue un problème. Il explique le manque d’informations disponibles sur cet acteur, notamment sur l’état de la librairie indépendante au plan national. Ce défaut a longtemps empêché la profession de faire front face aux difficultés, et notamment de faire valoir son point de vue auprès des éditeurs et des pouvoirs publics. (Renard 66)

This report’s assessment of the bookselling profession also sheds light on a question first raised in the introduction: why are there no regulations to control the establishment of
new book towns? If booksellers cannot organize themselves in general, it is an enormous task for them to agree on business practices and qualification factors for a place to be considered a book town. One thing all of the booksellers, book artisans, and initiators agree upon, however, is the value of books and literature.

Why Book Towns? Heritage and Literature in France

In France, the government considers books as “un produit pas comme les autres.” This viewpoint sheds light on the importance of print culture in France and by extension, the significance of book towns within this context. The report on the book economy in Normandy, mentioned above, offers this viewpoint on books’ uniqueness: “Parmi les biens de consommation, le livre occupe une place singulière. En effet, sa nature est double en ce qu’il est à la fois un vecteur de la connaissance et un bien économique” (7). Similarly, the Centre national du livre explains:

Par sa diversité (370 000 titres disponibles) et parce qu'il est un véhicule privilégié de la culture, le livre ne peut être considéré seulement comme un "produit". Ce patrimoine écrit doit être partout à la disposition du public; c'est pourquoi il est indispensable qu'un réseau dense et diversifié de librairies soit maintenu et développé. La loi sur le prix unique du livre n'a pas d'autre but que d'y concourir. (<http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/Structures-regionales-livre.html>)

The book then, is not simply an object of leisure or of knowledge, but a “patrimoine écrit,” which explains its immense significance in French culture as well as in the *villages du livre*. *Patrimoine*, a concept often mentioned in relationship to French pride and history, denotes a rich legacy inherited from generations of ancestors. As such, it is important to study and preserve it. And since books are a form of written heritage, this *patrimoine* is available to everyone who has access to a library or a bookstore, although certain kinds of texts, such as ancient manuscripts or rare editions of books, will only be available to a select audience (scholars, librarians, preservationists, for instance). This separates books from other non-portable types of *patrimoine* that must be enjoyed at a particular site (monuments, buildings, or museums, for example). Books can even be considered as *lieux de mémoire*, a concept that will be further addressed in chapter five.

Christian Vallériaux, a bookseller and one of the principal initiators of “La Charité-sur-Livres,” insists that “[l]e livre est un projet magique [. . .] Le livre, c’est le véhicule de la culture. C’est *le seul* véhicule de la culture” (Vallériaux). He believes that other media forms, such as compact discs and movies, also transmit culture, but because books have existed for so long and perhaps because they are a compact and portable way to store information, they are what truly connect France with its past. Many of his peers in the *villages du livre* agree. In addition to acting as a reminder of heritage, the booksellers and artisans interviewed for this study cited knowledge, self-improvement, entertainment, and escape as some of the benefits books provide. Moreover, each of them believed reading to be an essential activity in life. While one could argue that their opinions are biased

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61 For a thorough discussion of the implications of this term, from its Roman origins to its current connotations, see Chastel, "La Notion de patrimoine," .
given their occupations, the fact remains that France hosts three times more *villages du livre* than any other country, including Wales, the country where the phenomenon originated. Given the status in France of books as “un produit pas comme les autres,” it makes sense to consider book towns, which completely cater to this national heritage and obsession, as “des villages pas comme les autres.”

Addressing reading and “la culture du livre” in France,” Bernard C. Swift states:

In the self-image of educated French people, the preoccupation with reading is as central as the price of bread. Literacy, with numeracy, is commonly regarded as the key to the economic and social welfare of the nation and to personal success: it is thought to give individual self-respect and to enable people to control their lives and attitudes. Provided that there is no censorship, reading and the availability or books are seen as marks of the advanced, free society, encouraging independence of mind as well as civic virtues and social solidarity. (265-66)

Reading thus offers a means of social advancement. And if the preoccupation with reading is as central as the price of bread, why not extend the analysis to say that just as bread provides sustenance for the body, so does reading for the mind? Of course, books are available throughout France, but the concentrated nature of the book towns, in which a visitor can find so many products and activities related to print culture, is one that does not seem to exist elsewhere in France; the *villages du livre* offer an unparalleled smorgasbord for book enthusiasts. Swift also hints at a concern with using literature as a means of reasserting France’s lost grandeur. Similarly, the development of the book
towns, with one of their main focuses being on literature, aids in reaffirming local, regional, and national identities in a productive light.

Evelyne Pisier, former Directrice du Livre et de la Lecture, offers a French viewpoint on reading and literature in France, one that also calls to mind the designation of books as “un produit pas comme les autres”:

La lecture n’est pas une pratique culturelle comme les autres: elle a une place à part, en même temps qu’elle est l’affaire de tous. La lecture est la condition de l’égalité des chances dans la société à tous points de vue, qu’on parle de chômage, qu’on parle de populations défavorisées, qu’on parle de revenu minimum d’insertion, qu’on parle d’épanouissement scolaire ou culturel, d’affirmation de soi, etc. La lecture est centrale, parce qu’elle est aussi la condition d’accès aux autres pratiques culturelles: on ne pratique pas le théâtre, la musique, voire le cinéma ou la télévision de la même manière si l’on sait lire ou non. (120)

Viewed through this lens, the *villages du livre*, with their emphasis on reading, are venues where people can be initiated into the realms of other cultural domains. And in fact festival activities in the towns often include musical and theatrical performances. French book towns are thus offering a public service and aiding in the democratization process, attempting to make culture in its various forms available to a wider audience. However, the towns are not available to everyone. Only two of the towns – Montmorillon and La Charité-sur-Loire – have train stations. The others must be accessed by car. This means that only people who already have a certain social status that gives them access to a car or money for a train ticket will be able to visit. On the other hand, many groups of
schoolchildren visit the towns; these young citizens gain early access to the cultures that book towns make available to the public.62

In a debate with Roger Chartier about reading as a cultural practice, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu elaborates his assessment of the power of books on society:

> Lorsque le livre [. . .] est un pouvoir, le pouvoir sur le livre est évidemment un pouvoir. C’est pourquoi les gens qui sont étrangers au monde intellectuel s’étonnent de voir comment les intellectuels luttent, et avec une violence inouïe, pour ce qui leur apparaît comme des enjeux triviaux. En fait, les enjeux peuvent être d’une importance extrême. Le pouvoir sur le livre, c’est le pouvoir sur le pouvoir qu’exerce le livre.

(292)

When books become models for ways of living, Bourdieu explains – here, he is thinking of Darnton’s analysis of readers’ responses to Rousseau’s writings (see below) – their power is extraordinary. “Ainsi, je pense que la lutte pour les livres peut être un enjeu extraordinaire, un enjeu que les intellectuels eux-mêmes sous-estiment. [. . .P]ar un livre on peut transformer la vision du monde social, et à travers la vision du monde, transformer aussi le monde social lui-même” (293).

In this sense, familiarity with or possession of the *patrimoine écrit* constitutes what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as cultural capital, a kind of symbolic currency that plays just as important a role in society as does economic capital. Cultural capital exists in three

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62 It would be interesting to study which schools organize trips to the *villages du livre*. Are they schools from privileged or underprivileged areas? From urban centers or the countryside? Obtaining this information was not feasible given the constraints of this study, but would be worth pursuing in future studies.
forms: an embodied state (knowledge acquired from family and school), an objectified state (the possession of goods such as paintings or books), and an institutionalized state (institutional recognition in forms such as titles or diplomas). Individuals must work to earn this intellectual “currency;” reading and studying literature provide means of gaining entry into more prestigious social categories.

In this light, books act as status symbols that separate the “haves” from the “have nots.” For some “haves,” this means possessing the knowledge contained within books. For others, however, it means actually possessing books of great monetary value, as determined by their rarity, uniqueness, or the notoriety of their authors. The esteem associated with owning books dates back to the Middle Ages, when only the very wealthy and the Church could afford to purchase bound and illustrated manuscripts. Following the invention of the printing press, books and other printed materials soon became available to a larger, more diverse audience, especially scholars, but eventually the bourgeoisie in general. Later, the colporteurs brought literature and almanacs to the French countryside, thereby helping spread the ideas and messages these texts conveyed.

The advent of paperbacks and the creation of a network of public libraries in France has also aided in providing easier access to books. Nevertheless, no matter how many books are produced, read, and shared, there still remains a distinction between those that are mass-produced and their expensive collector item counterparts. In the villages du livres, it is not uncommon to find a selection of the former ranging in price from one to twenty

euros. A much smaller choice of the latter often contains incunabula that cost upwards of 500 euros.

One could argue that neither collecting costly, rare or antiquarian books in the hopes of gaining social recognition nor simply reading in order to appear “cultured” sets France apart from other countries. Yet according to Priscilla Parkhurst Clark,

[a] different literary ethic functions in France [than elsewhere]. Writers there have the prestige and the privileges they do because of their ties to political life, because of the moral authority of literature, because the writer is a public figure, and, above all, because French literature reaches decisively to the political past. Literature in France speaks of the ideals and aspirations of a country. (35)

Literature thus provides a crucial link between the past and the present; it offers the French a common reference point from which they further their understanding of an individual’s place within the larger cultural, social, and political domains of contemporary France. Thus, we can also see the villages du livre, with their emphasis on literature and literary events, as places where the past and the present converge, as will be discussed in chapter four.

Literature is valued in France because it is considered a patrimoine écrit, but also because of the prestigious status of writers in the country. Though the historical development of French literary and print culture has been extensively analyzed elsewhere, it will be worth noting a few highlights here to provide further insight into why the book towns choose to dedicate activities such as festivals and writing contests to
specific writers and why the book town trend has become so popular in France.\textsuperscript{64} In essence, the villages tap into a national fascination with the Hexagon’s \textit{grands auteurs} to promote both literature and themselves. Even during the Middle Ages, writers (most notably, religious authorities) exerted significant influence on their country. This has been the case to varying degrees ever since, especially since the invention of Gutenberg’s printing press in the mid-fifteenth century allowed intellectual knowledge to be disseminated to a much wider audience. Hence, the large-scale reproduction of Martin Luther’s \textit{95 Theses} helped instigate of the Wars of Religion in France. In a similarly influential but less violent vein, French Renaissance author and humanist François Rabelais turned to humorous, satirical literature to express his criticism of established authority. A century later, under the famously ostentatious reign of Louis XIV, plays by Molière and others used wit to offer social commentaries on courtly life and even presented models of the proper modes of speaking, behaving, and dressing.\textsuperscript{65} When poets, playwrights, or contemporary historians were persuaded by royal support, they ensured that the greatness and glory of the monarch would be recorded for posterity. On the practice of royal patronage, Roger Chartier comments:

\begin{quote}
[T]he dedication to the prince is not to be understood simply as the instrument of an unsymmetrical exchange between one person who offers a work and another who accords his patronage in a deferred and generous countermove. It is also a figure by means of which the prince seems
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{65}In some cases, they presented just the opposite by creating characters who were the antithesis of refinement and class. For example, today no one would wish to be referred to as a \textit{tartuffe}. Thus, writers have influenced the French lexicon.
himself praised as the primordial inspiration and the first author of the book that is being presented to him, as if the writer or the scholar were offering him a work that was in fact his own. In this extreme figure of sovereignty, the king becomes a poet or a scholar, as was King James I, and his library is not only a treasury for the preservation of threatened wealth, a collection useful to the public, or even a resource for private pleasures. It becomes a mirror that reflects the absolute power of the prince. (*Forms and Meanings: Text, Performance, and Audience from Codex to Computer* 42)

Again then, we see that books are more than mere objects and that they can exert influence in political and social realms. This further explains the emphasis French book towns place on celebrating the *grands auteurs* but even lesser-known writers whose works highlight local and regional accomplishments.

Upon the death of the Sun King in 1715, French literature was again transformed. Enlightenment authors became instrumental in demanding change while at the same time engaging French, and even European, society both politically and socially. For instance, guided by the dream of “enlightening” as many people as possible, Diderot and D’Alembert, along with their collaborators, embarked on the monumental but controversial *Encyclopédie* project. The fact that it was banned demonstrates the extent to which the texts were considered politically, socially, and scientifically threatening to the established order. Nevertheless, its publication allowed the educated French public to further their understanding of the world. In fact, printed materials became even more
intimately linked with daily life and a new relationship was established between writers and society. For example, ordinary citizens corresponded with authors like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, offering commentaries, confessing their deepest sentiments regarding the author’s novels or essays, or even asking for his advice on issues such as child-rearing. The Enlightenment *philosophes*, therefore, played a vital role in encouraging the pursuit of knowledge, albeit for the literate portion of the population. Insofar as print culture is concerned, the *villages du livre* share some common goals with the Encyclopédie project, especially in that they set out to educate (or “enlighten”) the public about numerous aspects of book production. Furthermore, other than the fact that new books are generally excluded from the merchandise, the bookstores as a whole tend to be all-inclusive in terms of the kinds of books they sell: clients can find all genres as well as works from many different time periods.

In the 1800s literary appreciation and public visibility grew as increasingly *l’homme et l’œuvre* were understood as a harmonious synthesis. As Michael D. Garval asserts, “the great writer was seen as the greatest of great men” (32). Dominating the main literary trends of the new century, the Romantics and Realists continued to uphold the precedent set by their forerunners: their ideas prompted reactions to social and political issues, as the public sought leadership in these writers. When Victor Hugo, arguably the best-loved writer of the 1800s, passed away in 1885, the entire nation mourned him. It was not simply that they had lost an author, but rather a symbol of France itself. The government’s decision to inter his body in the necropolis of the

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Pantheon, above whose entry visitors read *Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante*, reveals the extent to which he embodied the ideals of the Republic. In fact, as James R. Lehning states, Hugo’s funeral “offered the opportunity to draw together all French men and women in support of the Republican regime and portray the Republic as identical to the French nation” (79-80). Of course, Hugo is not the only writer entombed in the Pantheon. His neighbors include Voltaire, Rousseau, Zola, and Dumas. France’s willingness to bestow this honor upon these individuals demonstrates the great respect some of its most famous writers earn. Priscilla Parkhurst Clark assesses the Pantheon’s significance in these terms:

> A symbol of country, the Panthéon carries a special burden. The men buried there – military men, statesmen, scientists, and writers – recall in their diversity the original Greek conception of the pantheon as a temple for all the gods. The French heroes incarnate the public figure in the broadest and most various sense of the term, the individual whose life and work exemplify the best that France has achieved. Writers occupy a privileged position among those buried in the Panthéon, and they do so because they articulate the definition of country that is personified by the

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67 Not without controversy, however. The government’s involvement in the planning of the funeral procession and the subsequent burial in the Pantheon became a battle over the assertion of “republican mastery of public spaces” (80). The fact that the ceremony surrounding the death of a literary figure created such a political stir provides evidence of the significant role the most successful French writers of the nineteenth century had obtained in society. Lehning concludes that “. . . the ceremony marginalized both opponents of the Republic and those within the republican movement who favored a more radical regime. At the same time, it created a moderate Republican version of the people: nonpolitical, self-disciplined, and peaceful, a stark contrast to the revolutionary crowd of earlier years” (84). For more on the Pantheon, see also Mona Ozouf, "Le Panthéon, l'École Normale des morts," *Les Lieux de mémoire, t.1 La République*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) 139-66.
others. The writers in the Panthéon [. . .] fused the public world of country with the private word of belief. (4-5)

The Pantheon also demonstrates the continued influence of writers on their country. For instance, on the occasion of the transferal of André Malraux’s remains to the Pantheon on 23 November 1996, President Jacques Chirac announced to his audience, “Le Panthéon n’est pas seulement un lieu de recueillement et de souvenir. C’est un lieu de vie, car les valeurs qui sont honorées ici, à travers celles et ceux qui reposent sous ses voûtes, sont d’abord des valeurs vivantes” (528).

Leading into the twentieth century, it becomes difficult to ignore the powerful impact the French literary establishment exerted on political events. With the publication of “J’Accuse . . .!” in January 1898, Emile Zola challenged anti-Semitism and government authority and provoked heated debates throughout France regarding the Dreyfus Affair. Writers on both sides of the issue contributed to the formation of public opinion and to the judicial process throughout Dreyfus’s trial by feeding daily newspapers. Moreover, the word “intellectual” dates from this period. This hotly contested scandal is only one of many in which some of France’s most prominent literary figures have presented themselves at the forefront of a “battle,” whether it be literal (World War II, Algeria) or symbolic (feminism, religion). Writers such as Jean-Paul

Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and more recently, Françoise Sagan, Patrick Modiano, and Alain Finkielkraut, have achieved a sort of cult status in France and throughout the world. Not only are their books sure to sell but their ideas remain influential in a wide variety of domains – art, philosophy, history, sociology, and politics.

As Nicolas Hewitt contends,

\[I\]n France, and thanks to its education system, cultural figures, especially writers, are members of the governing elite in a way in which, in other societies, they are often excluded or, at least, more removed. In this context, it is important to emphasise the prestige and real political power of the intellectual: a figure who, whatever his or her specialist discipline, is listened to with respect on issues of general concern and who consequently wields very concrete power: from Charles Péguy at the time of the Dreyfus Case to Régis Debray, who fought with Che Guevara in Bolivia and who became a senior foreign policy advisor to François Mitterrand.

At the same time, there was an increasingly important association between culture and national, and local, prestige, which assumed greater significance as the nation’s industrial, imperial and political might diminished. (9)

The twentieth century has repeatedly thrust the French literary elite into the spotlight, in part thanks to the founding of high-profile literary prizes, including some famously
refused ones, as in the case of Sartre declining the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964.\textsuperscript{69}

Moreover, from 1975 to 1990, “Le Roi Lire,” Bernard Pivot, exerted considerable influence on reading and literature with his hugely popular literary television program *Apostrophes.*\textsuperscript{70} This show was not aimed at elites, but at the average television viewer. Pivot credits the show’s non-elitist approach with its success: “C’est précisément cette manière non universitaire [. . .], non pédagogique, plutôt conviviale, spontanée et populaire, de converser avec les écrivains et les intellectuels, et de parler des livres, qui a, en partie, fait le succès de l’émission” (31).

Besides through prizes and television shows, France further honors its elite writers by using their likenesses to represent France. For example, prior to the introduction of the euro as the official monetary unit, the visage of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry graced the fifty-franc note alongside his beloved creation, *le petit prince.* The design even included a representation of the little prince’s drawing of a snake that had eaten an elephant. The fact that not only an author but the fictional character he created appeared on a commonly-used official government monetary note clearly demonstrates

\textsuperscript{69} Priscilla Parkhurst Clark contends that “[a]lthough all of the vast number of literary prizes awarded in France do not have a great impact on sales, the most notable ones [like the Prix Goncourt and Médicis] have a spectacular impact” (19).

the extent to which literature is intimately linked with daily life in the Hexagon. Beyond the fifty franc bill, however, *Le Petit Prince* has become an integral part of the country’s culture. Quotations or images from this story are found in a variety of merchandise, including postcards, stationary, writing utensils, and even dolls.

Literature’s significance in France is also manifested in the many streets and squares bearing the names of famous French writers. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson notes that Paris boasts a significantly greater proportion of “literary streets” than other Western metropolitan cities. The prominence of some of these streets and the distance dedicated to certain writers are also telling, especially when we compare these strategies of street nomenclature with their counterparts in the United States, where numbers (32nd Street, Fifth Avenue), trees (Maple Street, Oak Street), and states (Pennsylvania Avenue, Michigan Avenue) dominate city maps. Most American streets named for individuals are more likely to honor important community members or politicians, and not writers (nor artists or scientists).

Ferguson further explains that other “urban icons” such as plaques, statues, buildings, and monuments also contribute to memorializing writers. In fact, the majority of Parisian statues of people depict writers. Moreover, she writes,

> [s]treet names also beget other codes, bus stops and subway stations, cafés, dry cleaners, and grocery stores. Take the marvelous collection of urban icons that celebrate Balzac: a short street off the Champs-Elysées close to the Etoile, a large corner café and a statue opposite (the ordinary piece by Falguière, not Rodin’s masterpiece), a movie theater, a plaque affixed to the place where Balzac’s house stood . . . (392)
His house in Paris is even a museum. Thus, we see a striking desire to honor France’s great writers by immortalizing their names (and likenesses) throughout the capital. This provides a tangible link with the cultural, social, and literary history of the *patrimoine*, which helps establish a continuum between the past and the present. Furthermore, the presence of such commemorative objects serves a didactic purpose, since accompanying plaques often briefly describe an author’s main accomplishments. Even street signs include succinct identifying information, such as “écrivain.”

Although Ferguson focuses her comments on Paris, it is easy to extend her analysis to viewing the capital city as representative of the nation. Other towns in France similarly acknowledge writers by naming streets and plazas after them or by erecting plaques or monuments. The *villages du livre* choose to honor writers in a different manner. Rather than recognize authors on an individual basis, although some do in the form of special weekend festivals, these towns celebrate all French authors by encouraging reading, meeting contemporary authors, and inviting writers to live in residence for a summer or a year. Although visitors can find the translated works of foreign writers and even a selection of books in other languages, the primary focus remains on France’s literary achievements, which the towns’ booksellers are eager to promote. Besides encouraging appreciation of literature, book towns also endorse admiring books as objects rich in *patrimoine* by highlighting the importance of traditional *métiers* associated with book production (calligraphy or illumination) and by drawing attention to the inherent artistic qualities of books (handmade papers or bindings).

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Le pâtissier n’est pas gourmand des gâteaux qu’il cuit. Ce n’est pas à tort que les cordonniers passent pour les moins bien chaussés des hommes. Généralement, les magasins d’armes, c’est par de pacifiques créatures qu’ils sont tenus. L’homme qui vend des mappemondes, dire de lui qu’il est un irréductible sédentaire, c’est trop peu. Se doute-t-il seulement qu la terre est ronde ? Cette monstrueuse indifférence du négociant à l’endroit des denrées dont il trafique est le meilleur gage de son succès. N’en doutons pas, celui des commerçants qui saura éprouver pour sa marchandise le maximum de répulsion, c’est d’abord l’opulence. Mais Léonard, le malheureux, aime ses livres ! . . . Soupèsant, bichonnant, caressant ses volumes, il suit du regard leur lignes pures, palpe leurs angles parfaits, salis, cornés, annotés, c’est de bon cœur qu’il les cède. Mais ces cubes rigides, ces rectangles solides… Une délectation géométrique monte des boîtes magiques pleine de ris, de larmes, de soupirs, de science, de phantasmes, Il est des heures où le bouquinistes ne sait plus si c’est la qualité du texte ou le grain du papier, la disposition heureuse des couleurs de la couverture ou la qualité d’âme qui fut enfermée là qui fait, lorsqu’il soulève un volume, que s’échauffent ses pommettes et que s’accélère le rythme de son cœur.

Pierre Véry. Léonard, ou les délices du bouquiniste, 1946 (p. 23-24)
“Le livre n’est pas un produit comme les autres.” It follows, then, that many of the “métiers du livre ne sont pas des métiers comme les autres,” especially those métiers that involve used and antiquarian books. Like Léonard, le malheureux, booksellers and book artisans derive pleasure from working with their merchandise. Many of them are drawn to reading books, but they are also attracted by other elements of books such as paper, illustrations, and bindings. Their fascination with these objects can perhaps help us understand more about the book town phenomenon. What do they see as the significance of the villages du livre? How do they define their roles within them?

Jean-Pierre Gouy, one of only seven maîtres-papetiers in France according to Montolieu’s book town website, left his home in Charentes to live and work in the book town of Fontenoy-la-Joûte after having been invited by individuals developing the project. In addition to producing beautiful handmade papers at the Maison de l’Imprimerie (formerly a farm complex), he offers visitors information about the history of paper and also demonstrates how old printing machines functioned.

In La Charité-sur-Loire, calligrapher / gilder / graphic artist Patricia Muller produces brilliantly colored letters and drawings reminiscent of those associated with the first illuminated manuscripts of the medieval period. After completing studies in graphic design, she worked as a maquettiste in the publishing industry before orienting her career to the more traditional art form of calligraphy. She enjoys sharing her knowledge and love of this creative process with others through workshops and seminars she teaches and through the festivals and salons in which she participates.
Fellow artist Ker Eddin Adili practices both Roman and Egyptian calligraphy in Montmorillon, far from his native Egypt. His participation in this métier continues a family tradition that has lasted for several generations; he began his education in the art at age five, under his father’s instruction. A true master craftsman, he makes his own papers and inks using flowers and powders he personally selects on trips to Africa. Typically, he will spend several months traveling to find the right ingredients for his projects and he brings back enough of them to last him three or four years.

In Montolieu, bookbinder Marc Rogez credits his teacher and mentor, the late Michel Braibant, with providing him with the skills needed to practice his current trade (earlier he had worked on ships). He speaks with emotion about the importance of preserving books and explains that clients often come to him wishing to save important family heirloom books in need of repair. His workshop is full of tomes perched on shelves and countertops, tools, presses, and a variety of materials such as colored cloths and leathers used for making book covers. He also owns a collection of original books he handcrafted, which he shows upon request. Their covers are unique in texture and design and testify to his expertise as a book artist.

In addition to producing beautiful and original creations, each of these artists enjoys transmitting his or her knowledge to the public. The same can be said of their counterparts in other book towns throughout France. Moreover, these master craftsmen and women appreciate living and working in book towns where they can interact with equally enthusiastic colleagues. As a group, they strive to promote interest in their traditional métiers and maintain a link with their historical predecessors. The book crafts they practice have existed for centuries and thus constitute part of the ever-important
patrimoine. Moreover, until the late twentieth century the book as an object was the principal means of transmitting literature, which, as discussed above, garners particular appreciation in France.

In an article describing the teaching of the trades associated with book production, Roger Jauveau, a censeur at the Ecole Supérieure Estienne des arts et industries graphiques, notes:

Les métiers du livre représentent les maillons essentiels de la chaîne graphique dont la fonction est d’assurer la réalisation des produits qui relèvent du secteur des arts et des techniques de la communication. Plus précisément, les métiers liés à la fabrication du livre ont pour mission d’assurer – qualitativement d’abord – la transmission d’un message dans le sens émetteur-récepteur ; ils doivent aussi garantir la fiabilité de la transmission, quant au fond, et privilégient, quant à la forme, la promotion (l’optimisation) du message. (68)

If the main goal of the métiers du livre is communication, as Jauveau suggests, the artisans who practice these trades have a great responsibility to their audience, for the messages they transmit extend beyond words printed on a page. The quality of paper on which type is printed bears a message, as do the bindings, illustrations, and font used in books. In direct opposition to the well-known adage “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” these artistic elements speak to readers and collectors about the monetary worth of the book as a whole. Furthermore, handmade or hand-repaired books allow their creators to express unique personal messages. The same text bound and printed by two independent
artists or establishments can carry two very different messages based on presentation.

Writing on the book trade in Paris at the Maison Clavreuil from 1878 to 1939, Bénédicte Marminat similarly describes the messages books convey:

Le livre ancien, prolongement de la conscience humaine, témoin d’une époque, d’une société, d’un art de vivre, a endossé une peau fabriquée de la main de l’homme. La reliure, la typographie, les feuillets, le contenu sont les marques qui constituent la personnalité du livre. Ces caractères sont des témoignages vivants que les historiens utilisent à nouveau. (6)

All of the métiers du livres, the “maillons essentiels de la chaîne graphique,” converge to produce the final product: a book. And while an overwhelming majority of the necessary tasks in the publishing process now take place in an assembly line format, those who continue to practice artisanal methods of book production remain especially important in contemporary French society, in part because of the uniqueness and quality of the products they produce or repair. They provide a direct link with France’s historical past (and patrimoine) since they employ the methods their predecessors have been using over the centuries. Modern calligraphers are no longer found only in monasteries where they work by candlelight, but rather in offices and workshops throughout the country. Nevertheless, they practice the same trade and produce similarly detailed Gothic or Roman letters and illuminations. The same can be said of paper-makers and book binders. Jauveau notes, “L’enseignement des métiers du livre s’est adapté, s’adapte et continuera de s’adapter aux évolutions” (69). Although times and technologies have changed, practitioners of these métiers remain faithful to their heritage.
For artisans of the book trades, a *village du livre* provides an ideal workplace environment, at least on the surface. In forming small, concentrated communities of calligraphers, bookbinders, paper-makers, and booksellers, they strengthen their collective voice and increase public awareness of their professions. In a television interview, Marc Roger expands on the idea of the community the project provides:

> Pour moi ce qui est très important dans ce que je fais aujourd’hui c’est que je me sens partie d’un projet global. Je ne suis pas seul à m’être installé ici. On est tout une équipe... et ce travail commun permet de faire avancer... tout le projet d’une façon très intéressante. C’est un [incomprehensible] économique qu’on a mis en place et chacun, il contribue à sa manière, chacun il participe. Ce que je crois est très important, c’est de ne pas être seul, pour moi. Ça m’aide beaucoup aujourd’hui à tenir effectivement. (quoted in "Les Villages qui renaissent")

One way the artists work together is by offering a variety of pedagogical workshops or seminars in which they share their knowledge with learners of all ages. Their dedication to education is particularly important since in contemporary society, it would be easy to overlook artisanal methods of book production. The artisans of the book towns serve as keepers of France’s book-producing heritage. Thus, like a library, a *village du livre* serves as a resource center containing a great variety of information that serves multiple purposes: education, research, or entertainment. In the case of the *villages du livre*, however, there are not only books, but book artists – “historians” of their trades, in a sense – available for the public’s education. And the towns view these trades as essential
to the book town environment. The website of La Charité-sur-Loire insists that “[r]eliure et calligraphie sont des activités complémentaires à la vente de livres anciens, c’est pourquoi elles trouvent naturellement leur place dans la ville du livre” (Ville de la Charité sur Loire).

All of these métiers act as ways of preserving artisanal methods of book production and to educate the public. But when it comes to selling used and antiquarian books, it is the booksellers who shine. Like the calligraphers, binders, and printers, the booksellers are generally enthusiastic about living and working in book towns. In addition to being part of a true bibliophile community, many appreciate the lower overhead costs they find in the small communities. Two main categories of booksellers exist in the towns: those who deal mainly with used books dating from the last century, and antiquarian book dealers, whose collections include texts from earlier centuries. Usually, shops include some of both.

The booksellers in these towns play various roles in terms of services they offer the public. For them, selling books entails much more than simply marking prices, operating a cash register and maintaining records. This separates them from their counterparts in large chain stores who are not expected to exhibit the same depth and breadth of knowledge. In French book towns, booksellers become “Renaissance” men and women, learning as much as they can about as many subjects as possible in order to help guide the reading and purchasing decisions of their clientele (and to earn a profit). Or they can refer clients to colleagues who specialize in such domains. Occasionally, this

72 It is important to note, however, that success in a book town often means dramatic increases in cost of real estate and rentals.

73 See below for more on used and antiquarian books.
“referral” service leads to humorous anecdotes. Consider, for example, the misunderstanding that took place when bookseller Miep Van Duyn (Redu, Belgium) sent one of her frequent customers, a native Dutch speaker, to a friend’s store. The man collected all kinds of books with pigs in them, including children’s stories and biology texts. Since he visited Van Duyn often, he asked her to set aside anything she might come across. The genre did not matter, as long as there were pigs; nor did the price, as he sometimes enhanced his collection by purchasing books from her for several hundred euros. One day, he went to the store of a French-speaking colleague Van Duyn had recommended and naïvely asked if he had any “livres cochons.” The bookseller did not understand that the Dutchman had mistakenly transformed the noun “cochons” into an adjective without realizing that its meaning had changed. Thus, he thought the man was asking for “dirty books,” which he did not have in stock. His shock increased when the Dutchman informed him, “Well, uh, your colleague Miep, she always puts them aside. She’s collecting them for me.” Eventually, the bookseller realized there must have been a misunderstanding, and told Van Duyn what had occurred, after which everyone had a good laugh (personal interview).

This humorous anecdote demonstrates a significant characteristic of booksellers in the villages du livre: they often attempt to work together to help visitors find what they are searching for, even if it means sending clients to their competition. The same types of interactions take place when clients bring in books to sell; if one bookseller is not interested in purchasing everything, s/he refers them to colleagues who may be, especially if the books in question fall under the category of one of their specialties. Most booksellers focus on several genres (crime, art, politics, nature, gardening, medicine,
children’s literature, aviation), but they also usually maintain a small selection of other genres in which they may not invest personal interest. Having such books on hand allows them to cater to the purchasing trends of their clientele. For example, old school textbooks and monographs on local or regional history and culture are always in demand. Even though some of the booksellers are not from the regions where they now live, they dedicate shelf space to such regional genres and educate themselves about the history of the area to enhance their proficiency and better serve their clients. Moreover, this allows them to remain competitive.

The skill associated with recommending books to clients presents a further challenge since book stocks change daily. Nevertheless, presiding over a perpetually evolving inventory also has its advantages. Charles Dodeman writes:

. . . les bouquinistes sont des collectionneurs qui n’ont pas besoin de beaucoup d’argent pour avoir entre les mains, - le temps d’un éclair, soit ! – tous les trésors de Golconde. Leur collection se renouvelle indéfiniment ; de sorte qu’ils n’ont pas le temps de regretter ce qu’ils ont vendu, leur intérêt intellectuel, autant que leur concupiscence, étant immédiatement sollicité par un objet nouveau à acquérir ou à déterminer.

(10)

74 In his autobiography *My Kingdom of Books*, Richard Booth claims:

Exploiting the very narrow specialisations which emerged in post Second World War publishing is a way of linking European, American and Far Eastern Book Towns.

“What do you mean by ‘narrow specialisation’?” a journalist once asked me.

“Specialists in the photography of the bee,” I replied.
Thus, the booksellers benefit from the perpetual turnover. Their rich collections provide them with reading and enjoyment, but also earn them a living. Finally, in opening these collections to clients, they are able to unite books with new owners, which many interviewees describe as highly rewarding.

For a newcomer to the bookselling trade, establishing the first stock can present both a challenge and an adventure, as demonstrated by the personal experiences of booksellers Chaumont and Miep Van Duyn, booksellers in La Charité-sur-Loire and Redu, respectively. Chaumont opened his store “Avec le temps” in March 2004 shortly before retiring from his job in international management. After having spent years traveling to the Middle East, Africa, and La Réunion, Chaumont was looking forward to settling down in the picturesque town and spending leisurely days selling books. He began with a selection of only 600 books in the store, many of them from his own personal library. With the advice and support of his family and friends, including colleagues in La Charité-sur-Loire, this number grew to over 7000 by October of the same year. Like other booksellers in the villages du livre, Chaumont is passionate about reading; he has been particularly intrigued by his favorite author, Jules Verne, since childhood. However, his approach to bookselling differs somewhat from that of his peers. He lends books out on an honor system for three or four weeks at a time. If a client decides that s/he wants to keep it, s/he returns to pay for it. According to Chaumont, clients purchase ninety percent of the books he lends out. One young woman borrowed a number of books from him to help her prepare for the baccalauréat. After she learned the results of the examination, she returned to tell him, “J’ai passé mon bac grâce à vous.” Chaumont did not say whether or not she had purchased any of the books she had
borrowed; what mattered to him was the fact that he had made a difference in this young woman’s life (personal interview). In this instance, Chaumont clearly played the role of mentor. In the next example, Miep Van Duyn acted as a student.

Having taught Dutch language and literature to teens in the Netherlands for years, Van Duyn decided to leave the school system to pursue a new career as a bookseller. Although she enjoyed teaching, she knew she wished to explore another career and lifestyle. Becoming a bookseller would give her the opportunity to continue working with books and literature, but from an entirely new perspective. However, Van Duyn’s knowledge of buying and selling books was limited. Part of her preparatory strategy included asking one of the other booksellers in Redu if she could spend a few days in her shop to get an idea of how things worked. Still, when she first opened her own shop, getting started was difficult. She explains how she acquired her first inventory:

Well my first stock of books was just crazy. I had many books myself. I bought some uh, in old people’s homes and things like that. [...] I went to book fairs. [...] I had no idea which book[s] would sell, so I [...] made many, many, many mistakes, and even if somebody had warned me off I think I wouldn’t have believed him or her because I was following my own taste, my own preference. (personal interview)

Today, Van Duyn has learned from these first experiences and now buys her books from different sources, primarily from public auctions and from people who want to sell their private libraries. Occasionally, she purchases books from clients who bring them into the store to sell. After years of experience, she has learned more about pricing books, but like
many others in her situation, still consults used book websites to help her when she has questions.

Other novice booksellers recounted experiences similar to those of Van Duyn. When they first embark on their new careers, they find themselves in unfamiliar territory and have little to offer their clients. Yet, they learn by trial and error: sometimes they discover after selling a book that they could have earned three or more times the price they asked, while other times they find they have sold it for too much. Usually, however, it is the clients who profit from their early mistakes. These early experiences can prove to be both frustrating and rewarding.

Booksellers and artists in the villages du livre do much more than simply sell books. In fact, they play a pivotal role in the daily functioning of the towns in which they live and work. They help organize conferences and festivals, design marketing materials such as websites, posters, and brochures, and interact with local and regional officials. They also hold meetings among themselves to discuss problems that arise. Their participation in such activities helps build a sense of community in their own group as well as between members of the book towns and local and regional government officials. Moreover, their endeavors promote the town and its various activities to both the media and the general public. Since tourism to these rural areas stimulates the local economy, it is in everyone’s best interest to entice visitors.

75 Despite these efforts, problems do arise, often based on personality conflicts. These types of political issues will be examined in the next chapter.
Monsieur le Premier ministre,

Le livre et le patrimoine écrit sont au coeur de notre civilisation. Aussi j’ai souhaité, dès 1981, qu’un immense effort national soit entrepris pour permettre à notre pays de rattraper son retard et de reconquérir son rang en Europe. L’adoption de la loi sur le prix unique du livre, la construction d’un millier de bibliothèques départementales, communales et associatives, la multiplication des clubs de lecture dans les lieux publics, la modernisation de la Bibliothèque publique d’information (BPI) du Centre Pompidou, ont été dans ce sens.

Mais beaucoup reste à faire.

Letter from President François Mitterrand to the Prime Minister, on the plans for building a new national library August 1988 (445)

In his preface to Noël Anselot’s *Redu: Un village à livres ouverts*, Jacques De Decker, the secrétaire perpétuel de l’Académie royale de langue et littérature française de Belgique, describes Anselot as the “premier artisan de ce chantier hors normes, [le] premier bâtisseur de cette cathédrale de livres” (7). This characterization offers two ways of viewing the villages du livre. First, the word chantier implies a work in progress. Although written twenty years after its official inauguration as a book town, De Decker still sees Redu as a building site. As such, it has its own “command centers” in the form of a tourist office that guides visitors to places of interest and also in the form of the
“foreman’s office” which serves as a unifying and directing entity for the chantier’s workforce. In this case, the foreman is the president of Asbl\textsuperscript{76} Redu, Village du Livre (in 2004 Henriette Luyckx held this position) and her office is her bookstore. Under the foreman, teams of specialists (printers, calligraphers, binders, booksellers, hoteliers, and so forth) work on the projects essential to the construction site. They have at their disposal numerous tools and supplies necessary for their trades.

In this metaphor, Redu remains a site of continual change and improvement. The entire construction team contributes to the process of (re)building the town in the physical sense (remodeling existing buildings or creating new spaces) but also in an ideological sense (creating an image to present to the public). Moreover, the team arranges monthly and yearly activities (workshops, seminars, festivals) for visitors. Designating Anselot as the artisan behind the project coincides with the image of book towns as artisanal communities and describing the chantiers as “hors norme” reveals the unique opportunities presented by Redu and other villages du livre.

De Decker also employs the image of a “cathédrale de livres” built by Anselot to describe Redu. This metaphor provides other revealing connotations. Cathedrals are sacred places that house holy relics (here, books) and welcome the faithful devotees who come to worship. In Redu, the “faithful” range from the occasional tourist to the admirer of book arts and the dedicated bibliophile. Their degrees of “religious” dedication vary, but many of them come to the town to “worship” books by admiring or purchasing them or by participating in celebratory functions such as festivals or dedications. Moreover, the pastoral nature of Redu and other book towns provides a sort of sanctuary for its visitors.

\textsuperscript{76} Association sans but lucratif.
And just as cathedrals are admired for their architecture, their sculptures, and their stained glass windows, so book towns are admired for their own artistic components – their local architecture, but also the creations they produce and display – papers, bindings, and illuminations, for example. Gothic cathedrals are also connected with books in that they once acted as *bibles en pierre* that could be “read” by the illiterate. Therefore, cathedrals themselves were books, as Victor Hugo explains in *Notre Dame de Paris*, mentioned in the previous chapter. To complete the analysis, cathedrals are larger and more important than their church counterparts. Constructing one constitutes an immense achievement that requires patience, dedication, and vision. As the builder of the “cathédrale de livres” Noël Anselot successfully exhibits each of these characteristics. The same can be said of individuals and groups responsible for the appearance of other book towns in France and throughout the world.

Whichever metaphor we consider – the *chantier* or the cathedral – De Decker acknowledges Redu’s importance (and by extension, that of other book towns) as a special place for books. More than just a bookstore or a neighborhood of bookstores, Redu, like other *villages du livre*, has created a dynamic community that revolves around promoting, preserving, and even “worshipping” books and book arts.

*A la recherche des livres perdus*

One of the distinctive features of the *villages du livre*, however, is the special status bestowed upon used and antiquarian books, perhaps because they are considered a *patrimoine écrit*. Although some booksellers do carry new books – Catherine Guérin in
Bécherel, for example – most do not. Indeed, the towns provide a haven for these types of books. According to Jacques Abrassart, who authored an article on the history of Montolieu, “[l]e livre neuf, de l’avis des professionnels, n’a guère sa place dans un village spécialisé, à moins d’y figurer comme succursale d’une grande librairie urbaine” (Abrassart). His statement suggests that if a town has conscientiously decided to dedicate itself to preserving the literature and texts of the past, there is no point in using store space to promote contemporary literature and new books that are readily available elsewhere. Aurélie Marand, director of the Conseil régional du livre de la Lorraine, concurs: one easily finds new books in urban centers, but used and antiquarian books, especially collectors’ items, prove much harder to locate. The villages du livre give the latter group a second chance and facilitate exchanges between antiquarian booksellers and book collectors. Reflecting on the cultural importance of books in France, Marand explained, “Le livre est un vrai patrimoine important” (personal interview). Her comment confirms a belief about the status of the book in France as a significant realm of memory, where one can discover and learn from a common cultural heritage.

Of course, the villages du livre are not the only places in contemporary France that cater to the used book market. Numerous librairies d’occasion exist in all major urban centers as well as in many smaller cities. In addition, one cannot forget the bouquinistes that display their merchandise along the banks of the Seine in Paris or the Saône in Lyon and at scores of weekly or monthly book markets across the country. Their presence continues a tradition several centuries old. Bouquinistes first made their appearance in France in the mid-sixteenth century as a result of “la profusion des livres” that existed following the increasingly widespread use of the printing press and greater
availability of reading materials. In *Bouquinistes et bouquineurs*, Octave Uzanne, whom Willa Z. Silverman identifies as a “paragon of bibliophilia in fin-de-siècle France” (« Books Worthy of Our Era?” 239) describes their presence in the capital in the following manner: “En effet, les Bouquinistes foisonnaient sur les piles de ce grand pont [Pont Neuf] . . . ; c’était comme un hôpital de la librairie...” (26-27). As Maurice Chavardès explains, the used book trade in France became especially prosperous during the Wars of Religion, at which time raids and pillages on Protestant homes, notably on the more upscale châteaux, brought a great quantity of livres anciens into market circulation (69). A similar phenomenon would occur around 1795, when revolutionaries confiscated the libraries of aristocratic émigrés. At that time, Chavardès notes, “Les quais regorgèrent de livres rares, de manuscrits inestimables” (111). And again in 1830, when “. . . la plus grande marée de livres anciens enregistrée avait submergé Paris” (Viardot 383).

Concurrent with this surge in inventory, some of the more notable booksellers of the time began producing catalogues of rare books they had accumulated. This trend increased over time, and in the seventeenth century it became particularly popular as booksellers and their clients realized the advantages of this advertising strategy. For the former, catalogues provided a means of increasing sales; and for collectors, it meant locating items more quickly and easily (69).

In *L’Apparition du livre*, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin describe the growing importance of used books and used bookstores in the world of *lettres*. They note that

les livres imprimés gardaient alors leur intérêt bien plus longtemps qu’aujourd’hui. Au XVIIe siècle encore, le livre, le livre d’étude surtout: objet de valeur qu’on conserve soigneusement, que l’on revend parfois et qui fait d’ordinaire une longue carrière. C’est dans les éditions aldines que Racine, par exemple, prit contact avec les tragiques grecs. Et dans ces conditions, le commerce du livre d’occasion se développa et joua un grand rôle. (334)

Thus, books were not viewed as disposable objects but rather as resources to be consulted repeatedly. They became important items in personal libraries and collectors searched diligently for books that once belonged to well-known individuals. In Paris, of course, many of these kinds of used books were to be found along the quais, but also in any of the bookstores in the Latin Quarter that carried *livres d’occasion*.

Moreover, the *longue carrière* to which Febvre and Martin refer coincides with the notion that many of the booksellers of the *villages du livre* mention – that used books are especially important and valuable because of their “previous lives,” or provenance.⁷⁸ For instance, Sylvain Langlois, formerly an accountant and now owner of

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⁷⁸ Jean Viardot notes that the importance of provenance in book collecting dates mostly from after 1789. He writes: “La provenance, c’est le pedigree d’un exemplaire: établir la provenance d’un exemplaire est donc lui assigner – par déchiffrement des marques ou traces de possession qu’il peut porter – une filiation de possesseurs successifs, et plus singulièrement désigner le premier ou distinguer le plus remarquable d’entre eux. Son histoire ainsi constituée, ou tout au moins jalonnée, l’exemplaire sorti de pair trouve identité ou singularité. La pertinence d’un envoi, la connivence d’un texte ou d’un auteur et d’un possesseur, le pouvoir consécrateur reconnu d’un collectionneur peuvent attacher à l’exemplaire une charge...
the shop “Librarie Langlois” in Bécherel, described during an interview “la magie d’avoir un livre ancien dans les mains.” He is enchanted at the thought that Henri IV or Catherine de Medici could have once held the same books he now sells to his clients (personal interview). Aurelie Marand’s comments about books as a *patrimoine important*, cited above, reflect a similar idea. She asserts, “Les livres ne sont pas des produits comme les autres. Ils sont des objets commerciaux, mais ils sont aussi culturels” (personal interview). Books are not only valuable for entertainment or informational purposes. They are also important cultural objects. As such, they are often housed in venues where they can be showcased and appreciated. Just as the design of the Bibliothèque nationale de France entailed designing a building whose form would match its function – with its four main towers resembling giant open books and a “garden” of trees in the middle serving as a reminder of paper’s origins – so the *villages du livre* have been (re)modeled to reflect their new identities as centers for preserving books and book arts. For instance, empty buildings of various sorts – barns, houses, and restaurants – were renovated to house bookstores and workshops. Moreover, the signs outside of the bookstores serve as a constant reminder of the towns’ new identities. In some book towns, monuments or other structures have been erected to draw visitors’ attention to the book-related nature of the towns. Examples include a large stone statue of an open book in Redu and the metallic semaphore bearing the names of other book towns that was recently dedicated in symbolique, une vertu évocatrice supplémentaire qui renforcera son hisorialité (je ne dis pas historicité) et achèvera de la métamorphoser en tabernaule du sens, en livre hanté” (387-388). See also Willa Z. Silverman, "Unpacking His Library: Robert de Montesquiou and the Esthetics of the Book in Fin-de-siècle France," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 32.3 & 4 (2004). 316-31; Christian Galantaris, *Manuel de bibliophilie*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions des Cendres, 1997).
Fontenoy-la-Joûte (see Introduction). Thus book towns are in some senses reliquaries for part of France’s written heritage.

“Ceci tuera cela”

“Ceci tuera cela. Le livre tuera l’édifice.”

Victor Hugo, *Notre Dame de Paris* (237)

Prior to the invention of the printing press, according to the narrator of *Notre Dame de Paris*, architecture was “le grand livre de l’humanité” (238), complete with its own alphabet and grammar, a mixture of geometry and poetry capable of expressing human thought. But with the advent of Gutenberg’s invention, architecture was dethroned. Hugo writes, “Sous la forme imprimerie, la pensée est plus impérissable que jamais; elle est volatile, insaisissable, indestructable. Elle se mêle à l’air” (246). This new development must have seemed utopian to early writers and readers of the texts that were printed. Whereas if a great cathedral were to be burned to the ground, all of the work and human expression that went into its construction would perish along with it, if a printed book were destroyed, the ideas behind its creation would live on in other copies of the text.

This mentality provides insight into the relatively rapid multiplication of book towns in France. If one should happen to burn, literally or, more likely, figuratively, in the sense that one might fail economically and its booksellers and artisans disperse, there will be other centers to carry on the efforts to preserve traditional methods of book production and, perhaps to a lesser extent because of other available venues such as book
fairs and antiquarian book stores throughout France, to maintain cultural centers that facilitate exchanges between book collectors and book sellers. Like the printing press, the “invention” of book towns in France ensures the survival of countless creations (books, in this case) forged of human ideas. In this respect, the narrator of Notre Dame de Paris, sees the utopian possibilities of the printing press:

Certes, c’est là aussi une construction qui grandit et s’amoncelle en spirales sans fin; là aussi il y a confusion des langues, activité incessante, labeur infatigable, concours acharné de l’humanité tout entière, refuge promis à l’intelligence contre un nouveau déluge, contre une submersion de barbares. C’est la seconde tour de Babel du genre humain. (254)

But whereas one of the reasons the narrator values the printing press is for its ability to preserve and transmit ideas to vast audiences, he does not mention the artistic value of the book as an object. The same text can be printed on different papers and bound with different materials, but the essential ideas of the text remain unchanged. But what about the book as an artifact or an artisanal process? Book towns address these concerns by emphasizing multiple facets of print culture: literature; the book as an object with inherent artistic value (especially, perhaps, incunabula and one-of-a-kind books); and the time-consuming process of producing a book by hand, which may involve contributions from at least two or three artisans.

So although some parallels exist between book towns and the printing press, as envisioned by Hugo’s narrator, book towns go beyond the capabilities of the printing press. At the same time, however, we can compare the villages du livre with the
architecture that the printing press is credited with destroying. The narrator explains that the latter rendered architecture, once “le grand livre de l’humanité,” a largely obsolete method of communication, devoid of style and life. Similarly, new electronic methods of communication can be perceived as a threat to the once revolutionary printing press. Thus, the Internet is the “new” printing press, while the “old” printing press assumes the role once played by architecture.

Faced with this new vehicle for sharing and preserving human thought, we ask ourselves questions similar to those Hugo’s narrator poses: Will the Internet (and modern technologies such as e-books) make the printing press obsolete? What will become of book arts? How will modern electronic technologies change the way we read? Roger Chartier contends that:

> [o]ur current revolution is obviously more extensive than Gutenberg’s. It modifies not only the technology for reproduction of the text, but even the materiality of the object that communicates the text to readers. [. . .] The substitution of screen for codex is a far more radical transformation because it changes methods of organization, structure, consultation, even the appearance of the written word. (Forms and Meanings: Text, Performance, and Audience from Codex to Computer 15). 79

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79 Chartier continues: “The electronic representation of texts completely changes the text’s status; for the materiality of the book, it substitutes the immateriality of texts without a unique location; against the relations of contiguity established in the print objects, it opposes the free composition of infinitely manipulable fragments; in place of the immediate apprehension of the whole work, made visible by the object that embodies it, it introduces a lengthy navigation in textual archipelagos that have neither shores nor borders. Such changes inevitably, imperatively require new ways of reading, new relationships to the written word, new intellectual techniques” (18).
Some people worry that this revolution will render books obsolete. The crisis has several dimensions. First, there is the general act of reading. What and how much do people read today? Second, there is the matter of media. Are people reading on paper or on a screen? How are electronic media affecting reading and distribution practices?

According to Christine Détrez, reading books has lost its symbolic prestige owing to the stiff competition presented by other audiovisual, more technologically advanced forms of entertainment, many of which require little or no effort on the part of the participant. She argues that as a result, reading as a leisure activity is becoming increasingly rare among adolescents, who turn away from solitary, intimate activities. Since the future of books remains in the hands of young people whose appreciation for and relationship to them differs vastly from that of the previous generation, it is understandable that France, with its strong literary heritage, would express some concern about the place of books and book arts in the future. It is no coincidence then that the book towns exert so much effort to attract young people to participate in the various pedagogical activities offered. Generating interest in the book technologies of the past and present is an attempt to ensure their survival.  

In the face of the technological revolution taking place today, the booksellers of the villages du livre have expressed various reactions. On one end of the spectrum are booksellers who resist the encroachment of the Internet and other technologies, preferring to do all of their record-keeping by hand and all of their correspondence by mail. On the other end of the spectrum are the booksellers who have fully embraced the new technologies and use them to enhance their businesses, not only for record-keeping and correspondence but also for learning more about their own trade and for advertising and selling merchandise. Instead of seeing technology as competition, they see it as a complementary tool for the used book business. Ironically, despite the menace of the electronic world for books, it is in cyberspace that book towns can find the most efficient means of diffusing promotional materials to a mass audience.

Will the book disappear? Many scholars think this is unlikely. Robert Darnton insists on the “extraordinary staying power of the book,” which:

- has proven to be a marvelous machine – great for packaging information,
- convenient to thumb through, comfortable to curl up with, superb for storage, and remarkably resistant to damage. It does not need to be upgraded or downloaded, accessed or booted, plugged into circuits or extracted from webs. Its design makes it a delight to the eye. Its shape makes it a pleasure to hold in the hand. (“The New Age of the Book” 5)

On a similar note, Laurence Lerner states, “. . . the physical existence of a book is more important than the physical existence of an electronic file. Who derives sensuous pleasure from the pale grey of his computer casing, or the electron flow across the screen?” (161).
Francisco Delich concurs, noting that “[d]igital books . . . are incapable of replicating the aesthetic pleasure which intimately combines the hand, the eye and the feeling of turning pages. Nobody ever mistook cinema for theatre. In the two cases the pleasure can be immense, but it is different” (36). Interviewees in this study echoed similar viewpoints.

Even if most of these people do not believe the book will actually disappear, the omnipresence of new technologies and constant talk of the perceived crise du livre seems to have led to a desire to ensure that the traditional paper book will still be appreciated. In a sense, this is an expression of nostalgia for something that still exists. As we will see in the following chapter, the overall appeal of nostalgia has been instrumental in creating and marketing these book town environments.

In a short story entitled “La Fin des livres,” published in 1895, Octave Uzanne and Albert Robida imagine a futuristic world in which books are no longer read. The narrator tells an audience at a dinner party: “l'imprimerie qui, à dater de 1436, régna si despotiquement sur nos esprits, me semble menacée de mort, à mon avis, par les divers enregistreurs du son qui ont été récemment découverts et qui peu à peu vont largement se perfectionner” (e-text at www.gutenberg.org/etext/2820). People of the twentieth century, he explains, become listeners rather than readers, carrying with them pocket-sized gramophones from which they hear stories and news. As the narrator of Notre Dame de

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Paris prophesied that “le livre tuera l’édifice,” the narrator of “La Fin des Livres” predicts: “le phonographe détruira probablement l’imprimerie.”

To the contrary, Roger Chartier expresses optimism about the new realms of discovery made possible by electronic media and their effect on traditional print culture:

. . . il faut rappeler fortement que la conversion électronique de tous les textes dont l'existence ne commence pas avec l'informatique ne doit aucunement signifier la relégation, l'oubli ou, pire, la destruction des manuscrits ou des imprimés qui auparavant les ont portés. Plus que jamais, peut-être, une des tâches essentielles des bibliothèques est de collecter, protéger, recenser et rendre accessibles les objets écrits du passé. Si les œuvres qu'ils ont transmises n'étaient plus communiquées, voire même si elles n'étaient plus conservées que dans une forme électronique, le risque serait grand de voir perdue l'intelligibilité d'une culture textuelle identifiée aux objets qui l'ont transmise. La bibliothèque du futur doit donc être ce lieu où seront maintenues la connaissance et la fréquentation de la culture écrite dans les formes qui ont été et sont encore majoritairement les siennes aujourd'hui. (Chartier "Lecteurs et lectures à l'âge de la textualité électronique")

Moreover, Chartier suggests that another ambition “. . . pour les bibliothèques de demain pourrait être de reconstituer autour du livre les sociabilités que nous avons perdues.” In many ways, the villages du livre fulfill these roles Chartier assigns to the future library.
Their pedagogical focus serves to make books and book arts available and understandable to the public. Book towns also stimulate the kinds of sociabilities Chartier mentions, such as touching books, browsing for long periods of time in bookstores, and interacting with booksellers. However, the villages du livre rely on modern technology and electronic texts to convey their messages. For example, their websites provide up-to-date information about upcoming events. Thus, they have found a way to preserve “architecture” and accept the arrival of the “printing press.”

In this chapter we have seen evidence of the significance of written heritage in France. Culture, in its broadest term, plays an enormous role in government affairs, in daily life, and in forging identities, whether at the individual or national level. From the French government’s viewpoint, cultural products cannot be likened to other forms of merchandise because of their nature. Within the realm of culture, literature garners special recognition, especially since, as many French leaders and scholars believe, it is the gateway for being able to understand and appreciate other forms of culture. It is a patrimoine écrit, one of the keys to understanding France’s past. Literature also functions as a tool that grants access to nostalgia. Besides literature, books are valued in France as objects with value in their own right, whether because of their provenance, the quality of materials used to produce them, or perhaps for the artisanal process by which it was created.

This overall attitude toward books and literature has resulted in an environment in France favorable to the creation of special centers – the villages du livre – dedicated to promoting these attributes. They differ from other book centers – such as libraries, book
fairs, museums, and bookstore neighborhoods in urban centers – in that they include all of the following characteristics: a focus on used and antiquarian books, the integration of booksellers and artisans into the local communities, a concern with transmitting knowledge and heritage through pedagogical activities, and a desire to stimulate a local economic system by attracting tourists to the area.

Although the main focus, at least for marketing purposes, remains on books, it is important to remember that the towns are also striving to preserve and promote themselves. Becoming book towns provides them with a means of stimulating their local economies and attracting visitors and newcomers to the area. The next chapter will consider the role of rural tourism in the functioning of these towns: What is the status of rural tourism in France? What strategies are employed to promote rural tourism, and in particular, the villages du livre? How do book towns compare with other themed towns in France?
Chapter 3

Culture for Sale: Tourism and the Villages du livre

Nous sommes avant tout des commerçants, nous cherchons à développer notre chiffre d’affaires, mais nous sommes aussi des agents culturels, nous travaillons avec les grandes institutions culturelles françaises et étrangères : bibliothèques municipales, archives, musées, etc. Pour développer notre projet, nous devons vendre la Charité. (quoted in Branchu 14)

In this brief interview excerpt, Christian Vallériaux, a bookseller and one of the principal initiators of La Charité-sur-Livres, reveals three key points related to the villages du livre. First, no matter how lofty a bookseller’s or a town’s cultural or educational aims may be, business must take precedent. Book towns cannot survive on goodwill alone. Their entrepreneurs need to earn a living and the revenue garnered from tourists and government sponsorship is required to maintain and improve the town (in terms of the availability and condition of public facilities as well as the town’s overall appearance, for example).

Second, in addition to their financial goals, Vallériaux and his colleagues are also concerned with their roles as cultural agents. The ‘culture’ in question here falls into several categories. There is print culture, as discussed in the previous chapter, but there is also local or regional culture, in the form of produits de terroir, traditions, and
architecture. Local and regional culture is significant here, because booksellers cannot rely solely on bibliophiles’ purchases to earn a profit, although interviewees in this study reported that this group constituted an important percentage of their clientele. Thus, the towns must attempt to attract a wider consumer base. For this, they must “sell” their towns in addition to their other goods (books, papers, art work). The last part of Vallériaux’s claim thus reveals that there is more at stake than simply selling books. Indeed, the towns are on display for public consumption.82

Since the goods for sale, notably books, book arts, and towns, are mostly focused on the past, it becomes clear that an important aspect of the book town promoters’ strategies is their reliance on the power of nostalgia to attract visitors and buyers. Susan Carol Rogers contends that “rural lifeways . . . figure in France as powerful loci of nostalgia and fantasy about a lost past and as potentially potent emblems of national or regional identity” ("Which Heritage?" 475). David Lowenthal takes the idea of nostalgia a step further by suggesting that it is in fact a destination:

Nostalgia is today the universal catchword for looking back. It fills the popular press, serves as advertising bait, merits sociological study; no term better expresses modern malaise. [. . .] If the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it ‘the foreign country with the healthiest

82 Similarly, the French nation itself was “put on display” at the 1937 World’s Fair. See Shanny Peer, France on Display: Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World’s Fair, SUNY Series in National Identities, ed. Thomas M. Wilson (New York: State University of New York, 1998). Peer argues that “references to rural France, regionalism, and folklore figured prominently in efforts to rearticulate French national identity during the twilight years of the Third Republic, recurring in the discourse of both Left and Right, and culminating in the 1937 Exposition” (3) and that the image of France that was thus portrayed was both modern and traditional, much like the images the villages du livre attempt to project.
tourist trade of all’. But like other tourists, those to the past imperil the object of their quest. (4)

Visitors to the villages du livre embark on nostalgic voyages in several senses: they search for books that evoke nostalgia, they partake in traditional methods of book production (calligraphy, binding), they appreciate the local heritage in its various forms (gastronomy, architecture), and they view the rural environment as a means of escaping urban concerns. In essence, they are being invited to journey into the past – their own personal pasts or France’s – and to enter an environment where nostalgia reigns.

I argue in this chapter that much of the drive behind this quest for nostalgia comes in response to globalization and the ‘dominance’ of Paris, Lyon, Marseilles, and other cities where life is more fast-paced than in the countryside. Paradoxically, however, book towns and other similar rural endeavors rely on the communication possibilities offered by global technologies – most notably the Internet – to attract, correspond with, and conduct business with their potential audiences; to establish networks with colleagues and with other book towns; to learn more about their own trades; and to keep track of their businesses.

Vallériaux and his bookseller and artisan peers must navigate within this global yet nostalgic realm, mixing their passions and their roles as cultural agents with their

83 Richard and Julia Sharpley propose that “[a]s modern (urban) life has become faster, more stressful and less ‘authentic’, the countryside has increasingly come to be seen as a rural utopia, a green and pleasant land (Newby 1985) where people can escape from the present into a nostalgic past. In effect, the countryside has achieved almost mythical status as a simpler, better place than the city, where life is slower, more natural and more meaningful” Richard and Julia Sharpley, Rural Tourism: An Introduction, Tourism and Hospitality Management Series, eds. Stephen J. Page and Roy C. Wood (London: International Thomson Business Press, 1997). They reference H. Newby, Green and Pleasant Land? Social Change in Rural England (London: Wildwood House, 1985).
financial needs. And at the heart of the issue in French book towns is the tourist. After all, part of the goal in creating themed towns is to draw in visitors who will bring money to the area. So in addition to whatever cultural goals a town may have in terms of preserving print culture or local architecture, project planners, booksellers, and artisans must also consider how they can make the locale attractive to potential tourists.

This chapter will begin with an overview of some general trends in European tourism since World War II, especially cultural tourism, with the goal of understanding how the book town phenomenon in Europe, and more specifically in France, exemplifies and perhaps contributes to these trends. Next, the chapter will investigate the appearance of themed towns throughout France. What do these kinds of venues reveal about rural tourism? How are they related to the villages du livre? This discussion will lead to an analysis of the Book Town Network, established in 1998 to further understanding and development of European book towns. What were the goals of this project? How do the French villages fit in? What are the benefits of membership? Finally, the chapter will explore advertising strategies the towns employ to attract visitors, specifically in terms of brochures and websites. What aspects of the villages are highlighted and why? Who is the intended audience for these materials? What does the information the materials present reveal about the image the towns wish to convey?

Recent Trends in European Tourism

According to a 2003 report of the Commission Européenne, Europe is the most visited destination in the world. Moreover, France attracts more tourists than any other
country worldwide (Stovall 415). The tourism demand has doubled over the last twenty years, creating more than 20 million jobs. The Commission credits several factors for this growth, including the introduction of the euro, improved transportation systems, and new forms of information technology that simplify vacation planning (Commission Européenne 1). According to Tyler Stovall, “[m]ass tourism in particular has emerged not only as a key industry in the modern era, capable of changing the lives of millions of people, but also as one of the most potent sources and symbols of globalization” (415).

But in recent decades, alternative forms of tourism have gained ground on conventional mass tourism: “De récentes études de marché montrent qu’un nombre croissant de voyageurs cherche à découvrir non seulement de nouveaux endroits, mais également de nouvelles formes de tourisme. Ils sont également en quête de produits de qualité, d’un tourisme plus écologique et de séjours plus courts mais plus fréquents” (2). The book towns of Europe, and specifically those of France, fulfill each of these five criteria. First, most are located in areas seldom frequented in the past. Second, visitors who travel to the villages du livre partake in a new kind of tourism centered on the appreciation of books and book arts. Thus, book towns constitute both nouveaux endroits and nouvelles formes de tourisme. Among the French book towns, with the exception of La Charité-sur-Loire (already frequented by individuals interested in the town’s well-known priory, cathedral, and associated religious buildings), the villages of France that became book towns could hardly be considered tourist destinations. In all likelihood, their visitors were spending time with relatives. Today, of course, this is no longer the case. However, the reasons people add the villages du livre to their itineraries differ from those that might attract them to more traditional tourist destinations such as large cities, coastal towns, or
mountain resorts. Indeed, the families, teachers, book collectors, and weekend strollers who venture to any of the villages du livre to peruse the book shops, learn about a traditional book art, or listen to debates or lectures are participating in cultural tourism, which is further explained in the next section.

The towns also fulfill the third criterion tourists seek in that they offer produits de qualité. Their book artisans in residence are professionals, some of whom have established reputations nationwide and some of whom have few peers. For example, Jean-Pierre Gouy, of Fontenoy-la-Joûte, is one of four artisans in France who still practices traditional paper-making. He laments “son métier [. . .] voué à disparaître”:

En ce qui me concerne je ne peux pas payer un apprentis car il n’y a pas assez de demandes pour subvenir au salaire de 2 personnes, de plus ce métier n’existe pas, il n’y a pas de fonction reconnue par l’Etat… Ce n’est pas non plus un métier qui s’apprend, il n’y a pas de formation pour cela, on fabrique maintenant le papier mécaniquement, le papier fait main n’est que du haut de gamme…c’est dommage mais c’est comme ça. (quoted in Touchard)\textsuperscript{84}

Gouy’s job consists not only of producing high-quality, handmade papers, but also of identifying vintage papers and producing similar ones for his clients, a task requiring very specialized knowledge and skill. Produits de qualité also inhabit the bookstores. In one sense, this can refer to luxury volumes, but it can also refer to the general stock, which

continually evolves, ensuring that clients will never step into the same bookstore twice. Interviewees reported that this was one feature that kept clients interested in returning.

But the idea of a quality product transcends mere shopping possibilities. Promotional committees and local or regional governments endorse the towns themselves as products for consumption by emphasizing the value of local historical sites, architectural traits, and gastronomic specialties, all of which allow visitors to experience the authentic flavor of the community. Additionally, in many cases street renovations, in conjunction with improvements in amenities (public restrooms, public telephones, large directory signs posted in the streets), contribute to the overall perception of the quality of the towns.

Beyond the physical produits de qualité of the villages du livre, visitors also have access to intellectual stimulation, in the form of readings, debates, workshops, exhibits, and concerts.

The fourth criteria mentioned above, ecological tourism, also applies to book towns. Tourism to these locales is ecological in that it is not harmful to the environment. To the contrary, it highlights the benefits of the rural atmosphere, full of fresh air and free from urban pollution. Moreover, most of the circulation within the town takes place on foot. Finally, in response to the fifth contention, that tourists seek shorter but more frequent trips, French and European book towns make ideal afternoon or weekend destinations (although it is possible to stay longer) since they are small and can easily be seen in a short amount of time. For tourists who come to shop for books, frequent visits (even if brief) are also beneficial because of the constantly changing stock.

85 Nevertheless, some of this authenticity, especially as it relates to a town’s link with print culture, are invented, as we will see in chapter five.
These five requirements describe characteristics shared by most of the book towns and help explain some of the reasons for this phenomenon’s success. But it is also beneficial to consider how differences among book towns contribute to attracting visitors.

The Commission Européenne report further explains:

Le développement d’un tourisme durable basé sur la richesse du patrimoine naturel et culturel est l’une des approches qui permettrait à l’Europe de relever ces nouveaux défis, et de tirer profit de l’évolution des préférences du marché. La diversité de ses paysages, de ses climats, de ses cultures, de ses traditions et de ses langues, en font, en effet, une plate-forme privilégiée pour ces formes de tourisme plus pointues et de plus en plus recherchées. (2)

Each book town community is unique, with its own history, customs, and language based not only on the country’s national roots, but also on local or regional ones. For example, groups in several French book towns have made efforts to revive regional languages such as Breton (in Bécherel) or Occitan (in Montolieu). If one were to visit each European book town, one would encounter the many paysages, climates, and cultural differences mentioned above.

An additional contributor to book towns’ success in France (and in Europe) can be revealed by analyzing the phenomenon within the context of recent European tourism trends, including natural tourism (hiking, canoeing), adventure tourism (white water rafting), educational tourism (courses in conservation, cooking local cuisines, painting), and cultural tourism (festivals, visiting historic monuments, learning about local
The villages du livre share commonalities with each of these categories. They are natural tourist destinations in that one can often find hiking trails within the vicinity, as is the case in La Charité-sur-Loire, Bécherel, and Montolieu. In fact, the towns tout their rural locales as one of their main attractions. Often, the inclusion in brochures or websites of a list of local bed-and-breakfasts further enhances the allure of spending a quiet weekend in the countryside.

French book towns can also be considered as forms of adventure tourism. Although white-water rafting is absent from the agenda, adults and children alike are invited to participate in themed weekends or festivals, such as the Nuit du Livre in Bécherel, during which shops remain open all night while musicians and other entertainers enliven the streets. But even in the absence of scheduled festivals, they are still marketed as adventures. One brochure encourages tourists to partake in “l’aventure de l’imprimerie” (Montolieu: village du livre et des arts graphiques).

Alternatively, for some people, embarking on a search for a specific book can provide excitement.

In terms of educational tourism, the villages du livre have established a precedent of organizing a variety of pedagogical activities designed to attract tourists, provide work for artisans, and preserve book arts. At “Utopiarts” in Montmorillon, Enzhi Yang teaches stagiaires about the history of writing, how to prepare inks, how to use calligraphy tools, and how to create traditional Chinese calligraphy. The title of his workshop parallels the theme of utopia that runs throughout the book town projects. Of it, he states on his

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86 Richard and Julia Sharpley attribute the “heightened interest and participation in more specialist, individualistic and authentic forms of tourism” to “[m]ore recent social and cultural changes, such as a greater interest in heritage, environmental concerns, the move towards healthier life styles and a rejection of the mass consumer culture of the 1960s and 1970s” Sharpley, Rural Tourism: An Introduction 1.

87 Emphasis added.
website, “il existe une [sic] monde idéal? en tous cas, on a fait ce que l’on pouvait pour l’approcher” (Yang). In Bécherel, Delphine Macaire demonstrates traditional book binding and restoration. At the Atelier du Livre in Montolieu, children learn how to use printing presses to print their own stories. These represent just a few of the pedagogical activities artisans offer to individuals and groups. If visitors are less interested in this kind of intense hands-on training, they can converse on a more informal basis with the artisans and booksellers. For example, some bookshop owners possess specialized knowledge about book history, which they impart upon request. La Charité-sur-Loire bookseller Malika Le Grand-Billy lectures about the use of vellum and provides samples visitors can touch to gain a better appreciation for their fabrication and use.

The last category of tourism mentioned above, cultural tourism, also applies to book towns and closely ties in with both adventure and educational tourism as they are understood in these settings. Festivals celebrate specific authors, genres, or literary periods, all of which constitute significant aspects of French culture. As noted in the previous chapter, some of these festivals coincide with national festivals such as “Lire en Fête.” Additionally, visitors to the villages gain exposure to the culture of the regions in which they are found. This means experiencing local social norms, hospitality, traditions, cuisines, art forms, architecture, and geography. Cultural tourism, though it has become more of a catchphrase in recent years, is not a new phenomenon and for the purposes of this study, it merits further exploration of its history and development.
Cultural Tourism

Michel Thomas-Penette, Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, asserts, “Les Européens ont de tout temps été fascinés par le voyage, l’esprit de découverte et de conquête” (14). Valéry Patin, a consultant for the European Commission, concurs, citing three main purposes of cultural voyages: to confirm knowledge acquired through books and study, to transmit national or universal cultural values that will help people learn more about their identities, and to aid the economy (9). The first of these aims applies to the individual traveler, while the last two are clearly government goals. Beginning with ancient Greece and Rome, Patin chronicles the development of cultural tourism through the ages, particularly emphasizing religious pilgrimages of the Middle Ages, voyages to America and to destinations associated with antiquity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the popularity of the Grand Tour of the eighteenth century, and the creation and growth of new organizations and museums for the increasing number of individual voyages during the nineteenth century. Patin notes that with the arrival of the twentieth century and a mobility exponentially enhanced, tourism became even more popular, as did the use of images of tourist destinations. Hence, the multiplication of postcards, stamps, photographs, souvenirs, local products, and visitors’ guides, all of which are used by the villages du livre. In conjunction with this growth in cultural tourism in Europe, accommodations have

88 The Grand Tour consisted of embarking on a voyage to some of the great cities of Europe, such as Paris, Florence, and Berlin. The trip was undertaken by wealthy young people, usually male, and could last from several months to several years. It was often considered a rite of passage. See Brian Dolan, Ladies of the Grand Tour: British Women in Pursuit of Enlightenment and Adventure in Eighteenth-Century Europe (New York: Harper Collins, 2001); Chloe Chard, Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography, 1600-1830 (Manchester [England]: Manchester University Press, 1999); Christopher Hibbert, The Grand Tour (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969).
improved and governments have become more involved in supporting efforts to develop new or existing projects (Patin 10-22).

Scholars who study cultural tourism frequently note the difficulty of defining it. Some consider it a category in its own right while others see it as overlapping with other tourism domains such as regional tourism, heritage tourism, or adventure tourism.\(^89\)

Jennifer Craik asserts that a commonality among the many definitions of cultural tourism is “the emphasis on learning about, experiencing or understanding cultural activities, resources and/or other cultures” (114). Moreover, she explains:

>cultural tourism includes ‘highbrow’ forms of culture – that is, those associated with cultural improvement and development epitomised by the culture promoted by museums, galleries, historic houses and performing arts. It also includes historic and heritage tourism, including visiting sites and buildings of significance . . . Cultural tourism can also characterise tourist experiences of some forms of everyday culture, such as eating out or shopping [. . .] But where do we draw the line? [. . .] Where culture refers to sanctioned and official cultural forms, the definition is not too difficult. But when it comes to various kinds of everyday culture, living culture, popular culture and subcultures, it can be difficult to decide what counts and what does not. (115)

In the villages du livre, we confront the same questions of where to draw the line regarding culture because multiple forms of it are valorized. There are “official” forms of

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culture such as literature, theater (in some towns), and music (especially during festivals), but alongside these forms there is also everyday culture that is present in local traditions, gastronomy, and architecture. These “official” and everyday varieties of culture come mingle in the book towns. They also link them to other cultural tourism initiatives throughout France and even Europe. The following subsections will explore several examples of these initiatives, including cultural itineraries, literary tourism, and French themed towns.

*Cultural Itineraries*

Many of the concerns that result in the creation of book towns – especially in terms of economics and demographics – are reflective of European concerns as a whole. Since its creation in 1992, the European Union has embarked on numerous endeavors to unify its member countries.\(^90\) Despite a diversity of peoples, governments, cultures, and ideas, EU members share common historical and cultural bonds as well as social and political concerns. Thomas-Penette stresses that the contradictions that do exist between European countries and governments – immigration, social tensions, and rural / urban dichotomies, for example – highlight the crucial importance of creating awareness of a multicultural European identity and of sharing values. It is for this reason, he states, that “différentes institutions internationales, dont le Conseil de l’Europe en particulier, ont eu pour souci de répondre à ces contradictions en développant des stratégies qui favorisent la cohésion culturelle et le pluralisme des cultures” (9).\(^91\)

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\(^{90}\) Of course, many of its projects, or forms of them, existed under the earlier version of the European Union, the European Economic Community.

\(^{91}\) Here again though, we must wonder to what extent such cultural cohesion is invented.
One way Europe has responded to these challenges is by creating a series of “cultural itineraries” designed to increase public awareness of Europe’s rich history, culture, and architecture. Thomas-Penette notes that although discussions about the necessity of preserving and promoting European culture and *patrimoine* date to 1954 (12), it is only since the late 1970s that “la notion de tourisme culturel et celle d’itinéraire culturel ont été vraiment reconnues comme des réponses possibles aux grands défis qui se posent aujourd’hui à nos sociétés, en termes de pluralisme culturel, de solidarité et de coopération” (11). Since the inception of the initial cultural itinerary, “The Pathways to Santiago de Compostella”, chosen by the Council of Europe in 1987, more than twenty others have been added, with themes as diverse as rural habitat, Mozart, gypsies, and parks and gardens. Each theme falls under one of three main categories: people, migrations, and *grands courants de civilisation*. A governing body, The European Institute of Cultural Routes, was eventually created (in 1997) to promote and develop each of these routes. Their principal goals include the following:

- to make more visible, to valorise more and to put into everyday practice the common cultural identity of European citizens.

- to safeguard and emphasize European cultural heritage as [a] factor for improving living conditions and as source of social, economic and cultural development.

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92 In parallel with the efforts of the European Union, UNESCO began its own itineraries starting in 1987 with “Etude intégrale des Routes de la soie: Route de dialogue” with the goal of, as this title suggests, renewing or opening dialogue between countries and helping them rediscover historical bonds (Thomas-Penette 13).
to give citizens new possibilities to find plenitude in their spare
time by granting special status to cultural tourism and related
practices. (European Institute of Cultural Routes "The Cultural
Routes Programme of the Council of Europe" 2)93

Although Europe as a whole does have its own identity, part of which is built on its
diversity, how much social cohesion can the Institute of Cultural Routes hope to achieve
in a continent divided into more than fifty distinct countries and territories? Language
alone would probably present a barrier to potential travelers to the destinations on the
Cultural Routes itineraries. Moreover, the institute’s goal of offering “citizens new
possibilities to find plenitude in their spare time” assumes that these citizens need or want
plenitude and that they will want to engage in cultural tourism that requires money, time,
and a desire to learn. These criteria automatically exclude a great portion of Europe’s
population who cannot afford cross-continental trips, who do not have the time to do so,
or who are simply not interested. The institute’s intention here seems noble, yet it seems
to be constructing a notion of European identity that applies only to a select few.
Nevertheless, these goals reveal the extent to which member countries of the European
Union are concerned with preserving national and international identities and cultural
practices, celebrating both divergences and convergences in their histories, encouraging
communication and dialog, supporting economic developments, and even cultivating
knowledge at the individual level.

93 For more information, see also European Institute of Cultural Routes, "Cultural Routes and Landscapes,
One of the most recent additions to the Cultural Route series is the “Itinerary of the Book.” The development of this project underscores the major impact of books on European culture as well as a desire to preserve this common heritage. In the project description, a section entitled “Relevance of the book to our own world” aptly summarizes the *raison d’être* of this itinerary:

The book, both historical and in the modern world, is common to all European countries. Its history in the form in which it is familiar to all is a European development which has taken place over the last two millennia. In this period the book was established as the prime instrument for dissemination of knowledge and ideas, a process accelerated with the invention of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century, and expanding ever since. In spite of the development of new technologies for communication in the twentieth century, the book, in its many forms, has retained a role of prime importance in many diverse areas of modern life. (Hellinga)

The book may be common to all European countries, but access to the printed word, appropriation of texts, and literacy have varied widely among nations, classes, and genders. And just as with the other Cultural Routes, the Itinerary of the Book will likely be undertaken by a very limited group of educated individuals – and in this case, those specifically interested in learning more about the history of print culture. The Itinerary of the Book organizers have established a network of European institutions (such as libraries, museums, and research centers) that own noteworthy collections of books or
book-making materials. A public database, available on the website of the École Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de l'Information et des Bibliothèques (ENSSIB) in Lyon, offers access to 180 book museums throughout Europe (Institut d'histoire du livre). Although much of the project seems more virtual than physical, the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) and the ENSSIB (the two organizations responsible for the development of the project) have also proposed initiating more concrete regional cultural routes that would be under the direction of one or more experts in the area: “Devising routes, preferably with a combination of interests showing aspects of the book, is a form of project that makes use of existing resources while presenting them in a new and attractive form” (Hellinga). To this end, several regional projects (in the Regione Emilia-Romagna in Italy and El Camino de Santiago in Spain) have resulted in the creation of lists and descriptions of the historic libraries and other relevant institutions in the area.

In comparison to the Itinerary of the Book, the villages du livre seek to attract a much wider audience. Although scholars and bibliophiles will find enough materials and activities to stimulate the intellect, other categories of tourists will not feel left behind. Indeed, groups of schoolchildren are routinely welcomed and project planners interviewed for this study indicated that they hoped to see them return with their families. The festivals and debates that take place in book towns appeal to multiple age groups with diverse interests. Potential visitors might learn about a book town from a brochure (found in many syndicats d’initiative in areas close to book towns), from a radio or television broadcast, or by driving by a road sign indicating its presence. They may also

94 For more information, see their website at http://ihl.enssib.fr/.
stumble across one of the book town’s websites. But travelers interested in following the Itinerary of the Book, which is not regularly animated by special events, will not likely find most of these luxuries and will be required to actively seek out the trail. Finally, the shopping possibilities offered by the villages du livre, ranging from very affordable merchandise to expensive collector items, also attract larger crowds than would the Itinerary of the Book, which relies more on educational aims. This makes sense, however, since the impetus behind the book town projects is largely economic, with a focus on local development, whereas with the Itinerary of the Book this is not so much the case.

With both projects, print culture remains a key reason for traveling to these destinations. Each seeks to recognize the significance of books and book arts in European culture and to promote interest in this rich cultural heritage. Both types of projects emphasize the importance of educating the public and preserving books and the materials necessary for producing them. Moreover, the establishment of the Itinerary of the Book proves that the fascination with educating the European public about books and their history is not an isolated phenomenon that exists only in the book towns. And although there is currently no official book town itinerary associated with the Cultural Itineraries initiative, some tourists choose to design their own pan-European book town tours, as discussed below. This ties in with a trend in literary tourism.
Eh bien, de toutes ces poursuites passionnées, il n’en est pas qui soit plus troublante, plus angoissante de déception et d’espoirs, plus intellectuellement absorbante, plus obstinée dans l’insuccès, plus insatiable dans le triomphe, plus riche en joies nobles, saines et pures que la chasse au bouquin . . . Mais nous pouvons bien dire que, noblesse, salubrité et pureté à part, les joies du bouquineur ne le cèdent à nulle autre en variété et en intensité. La volupté physique n’en est point absente : feuilleter un livre longtemps convoité, manier une trouvaille imprévue, caresser une reliure, épousseter des tranches, sont autant de jouissances exquises où la main n’a pas moins de part que l’œil. Le bouquineur qui serre sous son bras un livre récemment acquis ressent l’extase – l’orgueil de la possession : si la lassitude ou le dégoût viennent, ils mettront longtemps à venir. (Uzanne 151-52)

In his 1893 *Bouquinistes et bouquineurs. Physiologie des quais de Paris du Pont-Royal au Pont Sully*, Octave Uzanne, colorfully details the frustrating but addictive and passionate *chasse aux bouquins*, rewarding to the senses of both touch and sight. Although more than a century old, this portrait still applies to some of today’s bibliophiles, whom we can envision embarking on quests for elusive old texts. Even booksellers must be *chasseurs*, according to Christian Vallériaux (of La Charité-sur-Loire), who practices this trade, if they want to run a successful and respected enterprise (Vallériaux). We are left with the notion that the used and antiquarian book business –
from either a client’s or an owner’s point of view – is an adventure in itself, full of joys, disappointments, and encounters with interesting characters.

This kind of search for specific texts can take a serious bibliophile from bookstore to bookstore within a city, but it can also carry them to other cities. In this manner, they become literary tourists. But there are other kinds of literary tourists as well. For example, some travelers are interested in following the routes characters have taken in fictional novels, while others prefer to visit writers’ homes or places they frequented.\textsuperscript{95} Literary tourism in the \textit{villages du livre} includes all of these types of journeys.

Interviewees reported that many collectors came searching for specific editions and that often history buffs interested in the region seek out regional literature (both fiction and non-fiction). Moreover, book towns promote contemporary regional writers by inviting them to read from their works at festivals. Most of the events in which they participate are well-advertised, and the large concentration of bookstores, workshops, and activities encourages potential visitors to embark on a literary tourism journey. One of the added benefits, of course, is that tourists who come from further away may get to discover a new region.

What is so appealing about literary tourism? In France, as noted in the preceding chapter, print culture is especially important to the country’s understanding of its own identity. But this is also true on a more personal level; literature offers individuals new

perspectives on their own place within society. Literary tourism allows people to connect with the authors whose works they read and with the characters in these works. It also allows people to travel to new places and gain new experiences. Within this realm, French book towns act as centers that bring together authors, readers, artisans, and fictional characters. Furthermore, by supporting independent bookstores, they present an alternative to the increasing dominance of large chain bookstores such as Fnac. Faced with this effect of globalization, some book lovers specifically strive to support smaller bookshops and will travel in order to do so. In the United States, for example, writer and college instructor Larry Portzline initiated in 2003 what he refers to as a sub-category of cultural tourism called bookstore tourism that “promotes independent bookstores as a group travel destination” and that has gained increasing popularity since its inception.

Book towns fit into the niche of literary tourism, but they are not alone (in France anyway) in promoting a specific cultural theme. On the contrary, we find a number of themed towns and parks whose presence indicates an interest in devising new strategies to attract tourists, preserve local history, and sustain rural economies.

Themed Towns in France

Le concept de village à thème semble être une voie de développement prometteuse. Depuis une dizaine d’années des projets essaiment sur tout le territoire français. (Hervé 26)

96 For more on bookstore tourism, see "The National Council on Bookstore Tourism," 2006, 20 Dec 2006 <http://www.bookstoretourism.com/index.htm>. The site includes a number of useful references as well as an interesting blog maintained by bookstore tourism’s creator, Larry Portzline.
Les villages à thème se développent pour leur part, en réponse à la difficulté de trouver du travail. Il leur reste à investir la dimension d’une solidarité pour qu’un développement vienne soutenir leur action et pour mettre en œuvre une sorte d’apprentissage de la démocratie au quotidien. L’organisation de manifestations culturelles adaptées aux thèmes qu’ils déclinent dans des activités professionnelles et commerciales sont à la fois des ‘produits d’appel’ et l’occasion d’un travail en commun à partager de manière démocratique. (Trublet 71)

As these quotes illustrate, one of the major reasons local and regional governments have enthusiastically pursued the development of themed towns is because of the economic benefits they provide for rural areas, many of which have “suffered a fundamental transformation of their economic and social structures” owing to “urbanisation, industrialisation and continuing technological advance” (Sharpley 2). Creating a themed town brings employment opportunities for local residents and the tourists who come generate revenue for the local economy. In response to increasing concerns about globalization, rural towns rely increasingly on nostalgia and local heritage (real or invented) to draw in visitors and sustain themselves. They also rely on the public’s interest in immersing themselves in themed environments, of which book towns are only one example. Themed environments can be divided into two categories: villages geared towards respecting and showcasing their “natural” environment or heritage and

97 Indeed, Richard and Julia Sharpley note that “in many areas of both the developing and industrialised worlds, tourism is increasingly seen as a valid and important means of sustaining and diversifying rural economies and societies; in the face of the declining role of agriculture and the increasing marginalisation of many rural areas, tourism has become the new ‘cash crop’ in the countryside” (22).
amusement parks. Although the villages du livre fit more distinctly in the first category, they also share features with the second. In both cases, we also find the marks of globalization.

The more traditional themed villages include places like Villaine-les-Rochers, le village de la vannerie (Centre, Val de Loire); Baccarat, la Cité du Cristal (Franche-Comté); and Vasles, Mouton village (Poitou-Charentes). Villaine-les-Rochers, a small community of just under 1000 inhabitants, has specialized in basketry and wickerwork since the eighth century. Originally, local artists focused on producing general use baskets, but during the twentieth century, their artwork expanded to include furniture and decorations. Today Villaine-les-Rochers’s artisans have redirected their focus to traditional, utilitarian objects. Baccarat, the famous Cité du Cristal, is known throughout the world for the elegant glassware it has manufactured for over 250 years. Visitors to the town can shop for crystal ware or tour the Musée du Cristal.

More recently, the village of Vasles has worked to earn a name for itself as Mouton village. The aims of this project, begun in 1989, are to use one of the area’s resources – sheep, in this case – to both aid the various sheep industries, and, as in the villages du livre projects, to educate the public while simultaneously protecting an “endangered” community, “qui sera bientôt un désert si on ne fait rien,” according to

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98 This list is by no means exhaustive. For a more complete listing of “traditional” themed villages in France, see Caroline Hervé’s “A chaque thème son village,” Village Magazine, September/October 2003 and Chantal Béraud, "Villages à thème: L'originalité, carburant du développement local," Journal des Maires Avril 2004.
100 Similarly, Limoges’s reputation for its porcelain production dates to the late eighteenth century.
101 More information about Baccarat can be found at "Ville de Baccarat: Bienvenue!" <http://www.ville-baccarat.fr/>.
Line Augereau, Directrice du secteur touristique (Augereau 27). Vasles has incorporated numerous attractions to accomplish these goals: a Jardin des agneaux which showcases sheep from all over the world, informational sessions about the history of sheep, and demonstrations of activities such as wool production and sheep dog herding. Augereau explains the rationale behind the project in these terms:

C’est parce que le ‘mouton était en crise’ qu’est né Mouton Village, projet exemplaire de développement local, avec un espace touristique qui sert de faire-valoir à une production agricole. Où les acteurs locaux ont su sortir d’une vision nostalgique de la campagne pour concevoir un projet qui s’appuie aussi sur l’imaginaire lié au mouton. (26)

Much of these comments holds true for other themed town as well. For instance, villages turn to themed projects especially when faced with a crisis, often linked to the rural exodus that began in the nineteenth century and that has caused alarm into the twenty-first. Clearly this was the case for many of the book towns. Additionally, many of the artisans interviewed in this study mentioned a “crise des métiers du livre” as an impetus for the towns’ developments. Modern technologies, they lament, have rendered traditional methods of book production obsolete and some of them fear for the future of their professions.

Another insight Augereau’s comments reveal is the emphasis themed villages place on valuing local development and agricultural production. Initiating projects that both produce quality local or regional products and educate the public in an entertaining fashion allow these towns to provide an effective response to the dominance of Paris,
Lyon, Marseille, and the regional capitals to which rural dwellers migrate. It also allows them to affirm their identities – albeit, perhaps new identities, as chapter five will explore – in the face of globalization. In the villages du livre, local products are promoted along with books. For example, Jacques Abrassart, one of the founding members of the Montolieu project, commented in an interview:


Redu, Belgium has also forayed into the sphere of a joint wine/book town promotion. And similar to the conferences and study groups Montolieu dedicates to preserving the Occitan legacy, weekly Breton language classes take place in Bécherel, where booksellers and artisans also emphasize the importance of the area’s Celtic heritage, as evidenced in the names of some of the stores (Librairie Gwirizienn, Librairie Dazont, Librairie Libr’Ecriture “Morgadenn”) and the presence of a crêperie (Café-Crêperie-Auberge An Duchenn Hud) that serves traditional Breton fare. In Fontenoy-la-Joûte, some of the most valued local “products” are the houses and buildings demonstrative of typical Lorrainais architecture; in fact the presence of such structures are one of the reasons why it was chosen to become a village du livre in the region. Furthermore, many bookstores include a section devoted to literature about the region or by authors from the
region. Interviewees reported that this genre is in high demand. For book towns, as for other themed villages, highlighting local production is both a means of expressing pride and incorporating a useful marketing strategy.

Augereau also mentions nostalgia and the imaginary as driving factors behind themed towns: “Où les acteurs locaux ont su sortir d’une vision nostalgique de la campagne pour concevoir un projet qui s’appuie aussi sur l’imaginaire lié au mouton.” Many tourists today are attracted to the countryside precisely because of its nostalgic appeal. “In effect, the countryside has achieved almost mythical status as a simpler, better place than the city, where life is slower, more natural and more meaningful” (Sharpley 16). While many such towns attempt to project a more contemporary image than they have in the past, it is also true that they often rely on their histories to validate their authenticity. And in the book towns, the preservation of the past constitutes a key ingredient of their success: the majority of the books sold in these towns are antiquarian or second-hand, and the workshops and demonstrations that are held are based on historical methods of book production rather than contemporary methods. In the same vein, homes and barns are renovated rather than destroyed, thereby preserving local architectural heritage. These buildings provide a rich testimony of local history, as described by Patrice Collignon, writing on *l’habitat rural*:

. . . quels précieux témoins de la vie quotidienne sont ces maisons rurales ! Elles constituent chacune à sa manière une réponse à une même question : comment édifier un bâtiment qui répond aux besoins de la vie et aux exigences du travail en fonction du climat, du relief et des matériaux disponibles ?
Comme ces trois derniers éléments varient d’un pays à l’autre, d’une région à l’autre, les réponses à cette question sont multiples. Si on ajoute à cette diversité naturelle l’influence d’autres facteurs humains comme le type d’activités propres à une région (viticulture, élevage…), on comprendra que l’habitat rural traditionnel constitue un véritable *curriculum vitae* d’une région.

Il est, pour qui sait lire, un grand livre d’histoire aux pages d’ardoises ou de pierre. À ce titre, l’humble maison de nos campagnes mérite sinon du respect, du moins une véritable attention de notre part. (15)

Thus these architectural structures serve as valuable tools for learning about a town’s past and for distinguishing one town from another. The cultural uniqueness of each *village du livre* is also noted in promotional materials and cited by interviewees as an incentive to visit multiple sites. Though each village contains books and promotes book arts, they all differ in terms of atmosphere, geography, and culture. To this end, Jacques Abrassart feels that the multiplication of the *villages du livre* “. . . est un bien dans la mesure où cela permet l’élargissement du paysage culturel. Par contre, c’est un mal si l’implantation de ces villages se réalise de manière anarchique. Je pense qu’il faut conserver un éloignement nécessaire, car la clientèle de livres anciens et d’occasion demeure tout de même limitée” (Béraud 37).

Although book towns tend to focus on the past – their own and that of print culture, - the present and the future also figure prominently in day-to-day operations and in the overall identities they are forging. Many of the renovations homes and buildings have undergone entail modernizing plumbing, heating, and electricity. On a larger scale,
public amenities (telephones, restrooms, directional signs) have also been upgraded, as have parking facilities and even streets. Finally, book towns have also turned towards one of the most contemporary tools of today – the Internet – for advertising and sales purposes. Thus, the book towns provide an example of themed locales that have successfully merged the historic and the contemporary to achieve their goals and project the image they desire.

Their incorporation of technology and modernity is also part of what links them to the second category of themed locations that are oriented more towards amusement park-like fun rather than towards preserving a heritage. Immediately, one thinks of Disneyland Paris (originally opened as Euro Disney), but other examples of theme / amusement parks exist in France: Futuroscope, Parc Astérix, and France Miniature, to name a few. Analyzing five considerations themed parks and towns must take into account in their operations will elucidate the relationship between themed parks and towns. The considerations include: purpose, size and layout, financial organization, intended audience, and types of attractions.

The purpose of a themed park or town largely determines how the other four categories are envisioned and realized. A theme park’s principal mission is to entertain a large public while earning as much money as possible. A themed town also provides entertainment, but on a much smaller scale; instead, it focuses on providing a service (often educational in nature) or product to a select public and on sustaining the local economy. And of course, a themed town is still a town – one in which people live and work, a true community, whereas a theme park is completely dedicated to spectacles and
attractions. The latter are also generally much better known and thus attract a greater number of visitors – in the millions, rather than in the hundreds of thousands that themed towns attract. In fact, in 2004, Disneyland Paris was the second most visited locale in Île-de-France, behind only Paris’s Notre Dame Cathedral, with 12,400,000 and an estimated 12,800,000 visitors respectively.

Both themed parks and towns, as their names suggest, are oriented around a central theme: the future, Astérix, crystal, books, or sheep. Parks are also sometimes divided into several themed sections, as is the case in Disneyland Paris, with its Main Street U.S.A., Adventureland, Frontierland, Discoveryland, and Fantasyland. Maps, often cartoon-like in nature (for both the parks and the towns), provide useful references and allow visitors to explore stores and ateliers in an ordered manner to try to see everything. Conversely, the maps also allow visitors to skip around, ensuring that they see the sights that most interest them. In her article “Marketing Mickey: Disney Goes to France,” Shanny Peer evaluates Euro Disney’s attempts to immerse visitors in a specialized environment:

Thus, just as Disney’s theme parks bring two-dimensional storybook and cartoon characters to life, Euro Disney transforms celluloid images of America into a three-dimensional, fantasy world of flesh and stone. In this

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103 ORTIF (L’Observatoire Régional du Tourisme d’Île-de-France), Chiffres clés du tourisme 2004 en Île-de-France (Paris: 2004 - No.8). The same document reports that in 2003, Notre Dame de Paris came in second place, with 10,000,000 visitors, compared with 12,400,000 to Disneyland Paris.

104 The book towns’ use of maps will be further discussed later in this chapter.
fantasy land of America à la Disney, boundaries between myth and reality, present and past are deliberately blurred, and elements borrowed from nature, material culture and the popular imagination are syncretized to create a totalizing experience of participation in the spectacle, suggesting for example that in the Hotel Cheyenne’s Red Garter Saloon, “les hôtes pourront se prendre pour le héros d’un western.” ("Marketing Mickey: Disney Goes to France" 133)

In the villages du livre, the boundaries Peer mentions are also blurred to immerse visitors in a constructed environment focused on print culture and local heritage. Peer’s comments, though in specific reference to Disneyland Paris, can be extended to other themed parks and towns, each of which attempts to unify all of the elements of a visit, enveloping guests in a harmonious (in theory) symphony of entertainment, cuisine, lodging, and in some cases, education. The degree to which these goals are attained varies with each project.105

From a financial standpoint, themed parks and towns operate in vastly different realms. The former are generally run by large corporations with considerable budgets for development and advertising. One of their main purposes is to earn a sizeable profit. Thus, admission fees are usually substantial, as are prices for food and souvenirs. Themed towns, on the other hand, are generally developed in response to an economic or demographic crisis in a rural area. As a result, they operate with significantly more

105 Moreover, in the Disney theme parks, the culture that is presented for consumption differs from country to country. When Disneyland Paris originally opened, for example, many of the French employees were disgruntled because of Disney’s attempts to enforce its American rules and traditions in France, such as not serving wine in the park.
modest financial means. With few exceptions (special events, for example), themed towns do not charge admission. In the case of the *villages du livre*, the income the town receives comes from various sponsors (including from all levels of government and often from sponsors like banks or local businesses) and is spent mostly on infrastructure development (such as improving roads or creating and posting maps or directional signs). In some cases, individuals within the book towns also receive subsidies. In Montolieu, for example, the municipality offered financial assistance to bookbinder Marc Rogez to help restore the house he uses for his workshop. Although artists in Montolieu are eligible for such aid, booksellers are not. Some funds are also used to develop promotional materials such as posters, brochures, or plastic bags imprinted with a town’s logo.

All of these financial considerations affect the quantity, quality, and form of the final product. But of course, themed parks and towns must take into account which consumer group they are targeting. In this realm, it becomes evident that although the expectations regarding the number of tourists differ greatly, the two categories of themed projects also share the goal of welcoming a varied audience that includes people of all ages and from many countries. In theme parks, this criterion is perhaps most notable at Disneyland Paris, where posted signs rely on pictures (rather than just language) to direct visitors, much like signs posted for the illiterate populations of the Middle Ages. The presence of these ‘guides,’ readable by speakers of many languages, underscores the global nature of the park.

In book towns, the desire to appeal to a multicultural audience is evidenced in the stocks of the bookstores, many of which contain a selection of foreign language texts. Admittedly, these texts could also be for a French audience, but brochures and websites
that include information in several languages are clearly aimed at foreign tourists. Nevertheless, as with French theme parks, the majority of tourists are French. Among them, most come from nearby departments, fewer from surrounding regions, and fewer still from farther away. But the fact that visitors do travel from all over the country to visit the villages du livre serves as testimony to the growing appeal of this type of cultural / rural / literary tourism. Bookseller Patrice Jacquemin maintains records of all checks he receives as payment from visitors to his store; he reports that he has welcomed visitors from ninety (of ninety-two) departments in France (personal interview). Furthermore, as in theme parks, tourists also travel from abroad, mostly from the neighboring countries of Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and England. Some also arrive from more distant locales like the United States or Japan.

A last characteristic of themed parks and towns (in particular the villages du livre) is the presence of attractions such as exhibits or shows. Both themed parks and towns generally contain one or more permanent or temporary exhibits. In the book towns, exhibits are generally modest in size. Some may be displayed in a museum. For instance, the Musée Michel Braibant in Montolieu is dedicated to showcasing the history of printing. Meant to be visited in a predetermined chronological order, the exhibit begins with items demonstrating the earliest forms of written documents and progresses into the twentieth century. On a much smaller scale, the owners of La Librairie Ardennaise (Redu) have portioned off a small area of their bookstore to display several printing presses for which they charge a small admission fee to see. These exhibits are permanent. However, temporary exhibits are also common, especially during festivals and in a handful of bookstores, which display paintings or photographs produced by local artists.
In the latter example, booksellers both decorate their shops and encourage recognition of local art, which in turn stimulates the local economy and helps area artists find audiences for their works. Thus, like amusement parks, which in addition to maintaining their core attractions constantly undergo renovations or other “improvements” to encourage repeat visits, book towns continually offer a new experience in terms of merchandise, as new stock arrives to replace what is sold, and in terms of exhibits.

Another attraction common to both themed parks and towns is live performances. In parks, these include elaborate costumes, stages, rehearsed routines, and music, and are geared mostly towards entertaining an audience. Book towns’ performances take different forms and vary in their entertainment or educational goals; often the boundary between these goals is blurred. For example, concerts, public poetry readings, calligraphy demonstrations, and debates can be both amusing and intellectually stimulating, depending on one’s interests and tastes. This does not mean, however, that France’s theme parks never focus on pedagogy. On the contrary, some of them do provide educational opportunities and promote national heritage. For example, France Miniature, located twenty minutes southwest of Paris near Elancourt, is a five hectare park filled with miniature models of the “140 plus beaux monuments de la France” divided into six geographical areas (Ouest, Est, Nord 1, Nord 2, Sud Est, Sud Ouest, and Centre) ("France Miniature"). Pedagogical guides for school groups address themes such as history, geography, architecture, botany, and gastronomy. Here, models of structures from throughout France’s history, such as the Arènes d’Arles, the Place Bellecour of Lyon, castles and cathedrals from various regions, and of course the Eiffel Tower, are on
display to be appreciated but also enjoyed. Of course, the reception of these parks and villages also impacts whether their message is educational or entertainment-oriented. In other words, different visitors could appreciate these attractions in various ways, despite what the organizers wish to promote.

With their focus on very specialized domains, themed towns provide many educational opportunities. In addition to those listed above, visitors to the book towns can participate in numerous workshops; many of these are tailored to school children, and all are based on some aspect of book production. So, in addition to trying to attract visitors to the towns, the booksellers and artisans, and by extension the local governments or organizations that support them, are also working to preserve the history and traditions associated with the development of print culture. Other themed towns, such as Mouton village or Baccarat, la Cité du Cristal, encourage similar tendencies towards this type of memorialization or continuance of a local heritage.

But as journalist Chantal Béraud states in her article “Villages à thème: l’originalité, carburant du développement local,” “[l]e développement d’un thème donné suppose de savoir s’entourer de bénévoles passionnés (qui peuvent, par exemple, monter une association de promotion), mais aussi d’un réseau de professionnels privés qualifiés” (35). This mélange of enthusiastic volunteers and qualified professionals has been instrumental in developing the book towns in this study. Whether the themes are based on a town’s history or artificially created, part of the trick in establishing or maintaining such endeavors is finding an attractive theme that can be exploited on multiple levels and

106 In addition, the educational aspect of the visit is balanced by ten amusement park rides, such as roller coasters and giant slides.
that is likely to remain appealing over time (34). The theme must be sufficiently interesting to attract a large public to an area to which they would not otherwise travel. Evidently, books and print culture fall under this category, and indeed, Béraud credits the villages du livre with the origins of other themed towns. Christian Vallériaux (La Charité-sur-Loire) concurs with this assessment of the successes of French book towns, stating: “regardons ce qui se passe à Montolieu ou à Fontenoy-la-Joûte. Dans ces deux villages, il n’y a rien à voir. Les gens se déplacent pour le LIVRE. Le pouvoir d’attraction du livre reste très fort” (quoted in Branchu 15). This sentiment is echoed by a Montolivain woman interviewed on France 3. Without the advent of the book town project, Montolieu “serait devenu ce que deviennent tous les autres villages à l’entour. C’est-à-dire un village vide et mort, ce qui est extrêmement regrettable d’ailleurs, car ces villages étaient vivant encore, il y a 40, 50 ans ” ("Escapade à Montolieu, village du livre").

Similarities and differences aside, government officials, tourist agencies, and people working within themed parks and towns often attempt to link such attractions to each other to promote an image of a region that has much to offer the public. Visitors to these areas are invited to experience multiple sites within a network. For example, tourists to the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle (Lorraine) are encouraged to complete a circuit that takes them on a journey where they will experience “cristal, pierre et papier.” A 1998 pamphlet that suggests this route proposes a stop of one to three hours in each of three nearby towns: Baccarat (la Cité du Cristal), Deneuvre, famous for “Les sources d’Hercule” (a Gallo-Roman shrine dedicated to its namesake), and Fontenoy-la-Joûte (village du livre). Interviewees in Fontenoy-la-Joûte also mentioned this route as one of the main benefits of the book town’s location; each of the three towns can promote the
others, thus ensuring salutary economic repercussions, such as increased home values. For instance, Serge Bonnet, one of the main actors behind the Fontenoy-la-Joûte project, noted that only a year after the town’s inauguration “. . . en ondes concentriques, on constate déjà des retombées économiques pour les villages aux alentours . . . et même pour les entreprises locales du bâtiment” ("Le livre est aussi vital que le pain: entretien avec Serge Bonnet, dominicain, sociologue, directeur de recherches au CNRS" 8).

François Guillaume, former Minister of Agriculture and currently a deputy of Meurthe-et-Moselle, strongly advocates the development of such projects and believes that “[l]es villages à thème sont l’expression concrète de notre volonté de faire renaître nos campagnes” ("Redonner vie au milieu rural: Entretien avec François Guillaume, ancien ministre, député de Meurthe-et-Moselle" 1).

Similarly, Montmorillon is inexorably linked with the theme park Futuroscope. Located only ten kilometers from Poitiers, this venue hosts a variety of high tech attractions that focus mainly on images: giant IMAX screens enliven the movie-going experience while intricate video games and simulators give participants a preview of future technologies. Nearby is Technopole, a research center associated with Futuroscope that operates under 700 researchers.107 The seed of the Futuroscope project began in the early 1980s when the president of the Conseil Général de la Vienne, René Monory, focused on a sole ambition reminiscent of the driving force behind many other themed projects. In his own words, cited in Futuroscope-Technopole’s website, he wished to “[c]réer les conditions les plus favorables au développement d’un département rural en

107 For more information see "700 chercheurs… Un pôle national… Une renommée internationale…," Futuroscope-Technopole, 1 March 2006 <www.futuroscope-technopol.com Path: 700 chercheurs>. 
perte de vitesse.” The article continues: “Vingt ans plus tard, le pari est réussi, la logique
de déclin inversée. Entraînée par le Futuroscope, la Vienne n’en finit plus de regarder
vers l’avenir . . . René Monory a doté son département d’une véritable locomotive
économique, créatrice de richesses” (“Futuroscope-Technopole: Changer le cours des
choses”).

It makes sense, then, that the developers of Montmorillon, Cité de l’Ecrit et des
Métiers du Livre, would use Futuroscope as a springboard and a reference point for their
own project. The 2004 *Dossier de présentation* for Montmorillon begins with a section
entitled “De l’Image à l’Ecrit:

Depuis l’ouverture du Futuroscope en 1987, le Conseil Général de la
Vienne conçoit, réalise et finance, en partenariat avec les communes et les
groupements de communes concernées, de grands projets qui transforment
radicalement l’image du département.

Située à 50 minutes du FUTUROSCOPE, la Cité de l’Ecrit et des
Métiers du Livre, à Montmorillon, a été conçue dans cette logique. Ce
pôle culturel, touristique et économique, consacré à l’écrit, au livre et aux
métiers du livre, est un concept unique en France.

La Cité de l’Ecrit et des Métiers du Livre a ouvert ses portes le 9 juin
2000, établissant ainsi une véritable passerelle entre l’Image
(Futuroscope) et l’Ecrit. (*Dossier de présentation: Montmorillon, Cité de
l’Ecrit & des Métiers du Livre*)

We see here a true effort to present a unified image of the department based on its
innovations in terms of educating and entertaining the public by using the past, the
present, and the future. In a ninety-five page document that carefully outlines the strategic plan for transforming the ancient part of Montmorillon into a book town, the same philosophy is presented in the following manner in a chapter entitled “Un projet unique en France – Vienne: L’Image et l’Ecrit.” The depiction of Vienne is one that welcomes both of these domains: “Pour la Vienne, après ‘l’Image’ au Futuroscope, il s’agirait de créer un pôle ‘Ecrit’ à Montmorillon. On mesure la signification et le symbole de ces deux pôles réunis dans un même département du Centre-Ouest. Et on mesure également l’impact médiatique pour le département d’une si ambitieuse politique culturelle et touristique” (Edit-France 11).

Both the dossier de présentation and this project description note the proximity of Futuroscope as one of the reasons why Montmorillon was even considered as a site to implement the book town project: “La Cité de l’Ecrit pourra s’appuyer sur cet important complexe de loisirs consacré à l’image et attirer vers lui grâce à une stratégie de communication spécifique une partie des quelques millions de visiteurs du Futuroscope » (Edit-France 16). This desire to forge a connection between the two attractions seems especially tailored to school children on field trips. One brochure promoting the department includes a list of trips or activities that can be grouped together and accomplished over one or more days. Each suggestion is based on a meaningful connection between the areas in question. Montmorillon and Futuroscope are grouped together under an outing entitled “De Gutenberg à Internet: Futuroscope et Cité de l’Ecrit” (Vienne Loisirs 7). Here, the two venues are presented as opposite ends of a spectrum yet their goals are fundamentally similar in nature. Both seek to inculcate an appreciation of technology, albeit older technologies in Montmorillon. Moreover, the
Internet is an outgrowth of the printing press. Thus, the pairing of these two themed environments also suggests a message of progress and a “vision” of communications past, present, and future. Part of the hope of book town organizers is that the children who participate in such field trips will eventually return with their families; interviewees in Montmorillon, Montolieu, and Fontenoy-la-Joûte all suggested this was true in their towns. Although not every themed town or park has another themed locale nearby to encourage more visits, each of these areas is part of the larger trend of themed attractions within France. The book towns of the Hexagon also form part of a larger system, that of the International Book Town Network.

**Book Town Network**

In *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, the recently orphaned children André and Julien Volden embark on an adventure across France that begins in their native Phalsbourg (Lorraine). Although clearly intended to promote patriotism and instill in its adolescent readers a sense of duty to regain Alsace and Lorraine, lost to the Prussians in the Franco-Prussian War, the story also provides a detailed tour of France, complete with numerous annotated illustrations. Originally published in 1877, this book used the protagonists’ travels to introduce generations of French schoolchildren to the multifaceted cultural, historical, and geographical aspects of Third Republic France. In following the young patriots throughout their journey, readers discover the regions of France and encounter many kinds of traditional activities. As with Futuroscope, there is also a clear message of progress to be achieved through science and technology.
Le Tour de la France par deux enfants is relevant to this study for two reasons. First, it provides an example of the kind of book – valuable monetarily and nostalgically – a collector might seek in a village du livre. Second, the journey undertaken by André and Julien parallels the journey that book town organizers hope bibliophiles and tourists will pursue – one which will take them to multiple book towns within France, within Europe, and throughout the world. Just as the two boys experience a multitude of local and regional customs and landscapes through their travels, so will visitors who embark on a “Tour de France” via its villages du livre. Thus preferably, in addition to purchasing books, handmade papers, and other artisanal products associated with book production, tourists will also learn about local traditions and enrich their personal experiences via their contact with the diverse people and regions they encounter. Moreover, it seems that some book town organizers hope to instill or reinforce a love of a region, just as Julien and André were supposed to have their patriotism and love of France (and the Republic) reinforced throughout their journey. Ideally, not only would the visitors benefit from the interaction, but they would also contribute to the development and sustenance of the local economy when they spend their money on food, lodging, and souvenirs.

This vision of a book town tourist trail did not originally figure into Richard Booth’s plan when he began transforming Hay-on-Wye into the literary mecca it has become. But the international recognition and following the book town phenomenon has attracted grew impossible to ignore. According to journalist André Muriel, one of Booth’s aims is now to “créer un tourisme international autour du livre d’occasion, de collection, regroupés dans un lieu porteur d’un intérêt historique” (“A quoi servent les
villages du livres?" 25). The eccentric Welshman has contributed substantially to increasing interest in and awareness of book towns and to their expansion all over the world. He accomplished this first through the media attention he has continually garnered, second through his key support of emerging book town projects (such as Redu and Montolieu), and third through his 1999 publication of *My Kingdom of Books*, which brought further attention to Hay. When this autobiography was introduced to Japan, the town experienced a notable increase in the number of Japanese tourists it received. In 2003, *My Kingdom of Books* was also translated into Korean, which may result in a rise in Korean tourists ("Booth's Eccentric World Moves on to Korea").

In the 1990s, as the number of book towns grew, the trend attracted the attention of the European Union, which saw it as one of the most successful new tourism developments, and [one which] offers an exemplary model of sustainable rural development and tourism. The results of a study from Strathclyde University (Seaton 1996a, Seaton 1996b) suggests that Hay has been one of the most successful new British tourism developments since the war, outperforming comparable towns elsewhere and making a major contribution to tourist numbers in Wales, particularly from overseas. (Skogseid and Seaton 8)

The towns’ successes led five of them (Hay-on-Wye [Wales], Bredevoort [the Netherlands], Fjaerland [Norway, Montolieu [France], and Redu [Belgium] to establish

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108 Here he is quoting from the *Dossier de présentation* of Saint-Pierre-de-Clages (Switzerland).
an organizational network. Initiators from these towns contacted several research institutions, thus attracting the attention of the European Commission (EC) DG XIII Telematics Application Program (TAP), which funded *Project UR 4001: European Book Town Net Project – a Telematics Application based on a Model of Sustainable Rural Development based on Cultural Heritage*, headed by Ingjerd Skogseid (Stiftinga Vestlandsforsking, Norway) and Anthony Seaton (University of Luton, UK). Thirteen bookstores in the five towns participated in this study, which lasted from July 1, 1998 to June 31 [sic], 2000. The project leaders were especially interested in introducing the use of telematics (telecommunications and computing) into small- and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas.

Within this framework, establishing links between European book towns was of primary importance. Although connections already existed between some towns, researchers and book town organizers felt that further linkages could benefit everyone involved. Interviews of the participants in the project revealed that “[t]here is little contact between individual booksellers or enterprise managers in the different book towns. Contact between book towns [is currently] very individual and between few key people. The interviewed enterprises expressed an interest in getting a better and easier way to communicate between enterprises in book towns” (Skogseid and Seaton 32). By expanding communication possibilities, entrepreneurs could address common problems (and their solutions), the towns could learn more about their domestic and foreign counterparts, and as a result, the towns could mutually promote and support one another.

Introducing electronic technological components into the project provided one of the primary means of addressing these needs. Prior to implementing any new features
into what would become the “Book Town Network” (BookTownNet), Skogseid and Seaton surveyed the participants’ telematics usage. What were their current means of communication (computers, fax, voice mail, pagers)? What kinds of software did they use and for what purposes (administration, inventory control, producing promotional materials)? After completing this assessment, the BookTownNet researchers divided the “user needs” into two main areas. The first category was aimed at providing services within and between book towns. For this, they identified the need for two applications: the establishment of a virtual book town organization (“. . . to promote the book town concept, plan international book fairs, co-ordinate and develop inter-regional retail specialisation, etc.”) and the wholesale of books between selling enterprises within and between book towns (Skogseid and Seaton 34). Beyond providing services between bookstores, the second category’s purpose was to offer services to the public (tourists and book buyers) and was broken down into three applications: marketing of and information about activities in the book towns to the global book-lovers community, specialized global marketing of high value book items, and finally, marketing the book town network as a pan-European tourist trail (Skogseid and Seaton 35).

One of the results of EU Project UR 4001 was the establishment of the International Organisation of Book Towns, whose aims are to:

1. raise public awareness of book towns and stimulate interest by giving information via internet and by organising a International Book Town Festival every second year;
2. enhance the quality of book towns by exchanging knowledge, skills and know-how between the book towns and their individual book sellers and other businesses;

3. strengthen the rural economy by making propaganda for the existing book towns and by offering a medium (e-commerce) to the book sellers, by which they can offer their books to an universal public, also or especially in the quiet season ("winter economy");

4. undertake other activities which can serve the interests of book towns and strengthen independent businesses in book towns, e.g. stimulating the use of information technology;

5. help in these ways maintaining regional and national cultural heritage and to stimulate the international public to get acquainted with it. ("I.O.B. - International Organisation of Book Towns")

Most of these aims address practical concerns that affect advertising, quality control, communications, and sales. But they also reflect a more idealistic concern regarding preservation of a certain vision of culture. Here again the impact of globalization on book towns becomes clear, as technology is required to accomplish each of these aims.

Membership in the I.O.B. is open to associations, organizations, local governments, businesses, and individuals in book towns. Members pay dues according to their status. In 2006, dues were as follows: towns and municipalities pay 1000 euros the first year and 250 euros for subsequent years; organizations and associations pay 250
euros up front and 50 euros a year thereafter; and individuals are charged 100 euros to join, after which they pay 25 euros per year ("I.O.B. - International Organisation of Book Towns").\footnote{This fee goes toward operational costs, such as publishing brochures, reimbursing board members’ expenses, and organizing a biannual international book town festival (Van Duyun).} The organization’s website (http://booktown.net/) includes a brief introduction to the I.O.B., a world map indicating locations of thirteen book villages (two of which are not listed as members – Stillwater [United States] and Kampung Bukar [Malaysia]), contact information for the five managers, and finally, a gateway to its member book towns’ websites.\footnote{As of December 20, 2006, there were eleven listed: Bredevoort (the Netherlands), Fjaerland (Norway), Hay-on-Wye (Wales), Montereggio (Italy), Redu (Belgium), Sedbergh (England), St-Pierre-de-Clages (Switzerland), Sysmä (Finland), Tvedestrand (Norway), Wigtown (Scotland), and Wünsdorf-Waldstadt (Germany). Curiously, the French book towns have withdrawn from the organization, perhaps in response to complaints about being dominated by an authoritative figure or political infighting.}

The aims of the I.O.B., designed to benefit both the public and “interior” users (artisans, booksellers, government officials), tie in closely with the application areas originally outlined by EU Project UR 4001. Every two years, the organization hosts an International Book Town Festival (see Table 0-1), which allows all interested merchants and clients to come together to exchange ideas and to sell or purchase books and other goods.
Figure 9 112

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Bredevoort (The Netherlands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2000</td>
<td>Mühlbeck-Friedersdorf (Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2002</td>
<td>Sysmä (Finland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2004</td>
<td>Wigtown (Scotland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2006</td>
<td>Fjaerland (Norway)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Miep Van Duyn (Redu), one of the founding members of the I.O.B., has played an active role in the group’s operations since its inception. During an interview, she explained:

[The principal benefits of membership in the organization are] exchange of know-how, sometimes exchange of books. In my case, I buy French books in Scotland for instance, and they buy English books here [in my shop]. And I buy books in Hay-on-Wye. […] I… buy books everywhere. […] [F]or me the most important thing is to have […] friendly contact with villages where you feel at home, where you know several people, […] where you have an introduction, where they know you, […] and where you feel welcome. (Van Duyn)

Van Duyn’s actions and attitude regarding this sharing of ideas and books represent a perfect example of the kind of relationship EU Project UR 4001 was hoping to forge among booksellers in the various villages. For Van Duyn, the I.O.B. proves quite useful in furthering towns’ developments. But rather than regarding it simply as an impersonal tool to enhance business, she also uses it to establish and foster interpersonal contact. As a member of the administrative board, she has frequently traveled to meet her colleagues in Switzerland and Scotland. Of these rendez-vous, she explained: “. . . in my opinion it was very fruitful [. . .] because you were staying at each other’s places and you have, where you have a meeting of two hours, afterwards you always think, ‘Oh, we should have discussed this’ . . . [W]e saw each other for several days, and [. . .] there were all kinds of opportunities to discuss things” (Van Duyn). Though the meetings always had a set agenda, Van Duyn lamented the fact that some stimulating discussions were never quite finished. Nevertheless, she enjoys the “friendly atmosphere” and the personal contact these trips provide. “[S]taying in other book villages, we got to know people in other book villages, [which is] very important. [If] you like you can only discuss books all the time. But [. . .] of course when you get to know each other better you also ask about their family and ask about their garden” (Van Duyn).

More than just establishing a peer base, the members of the I.O.B. are helping to develop a unique international community of book towns. The intimate knowledge they learn allows them to disseminate more detailed information to tourists who inquire about other villages du livre. Many of the bookstores visited during the course of research for this dissertation contained brochures from other European book towns and / or an I.O.B. brochure entitled Booktowns in Europe / Les Villes, Cités & Villages du Livre ou de
*l’Ecrit en Europei*, which contains a list of book towns along with contact information for each (Klotz and Bensabbah). According to merchants in these shops, visitors are curious about the other villages and often ask questions about them. During an interview conducted for this study at the Office de Tourisme du Pays de Bécherel, a man entered the office, browsed the leaflets, and asked for information on Fontenoy-la-Joûte (on the other side of the country). Many interviewees reported that their clients had shared with them their impressions of other book towns, and a number of the interviewees themselves had journeyed to see other *villages du livre*.

These kinds of visits often occurred at the outset of a new book town project in an attempt to learn more about what to expect, to generate interest, or to convince skeptics of the feasibility of such an undertaking. Thus, Noël Anselot’s travels to Hay-on-Wye beginning in the late 1970s eventually prompted him to initiate the Redu project (Anselot 16). Christian Vallériaux went to other *villages du livre* in France and abroad before proceeding with his plans for La Charité-sur-Loire. Colette Trublet and Yvonne Prêtéselle, of Bécherel, visited Redu in 1988 before officially founding their own *Cité du Livre*. They spent three days there and reported being warmly welcomed by Redu’s residents; two years later, the women also visited Hay-on-Wye to learn more about its operations (Trublet 110). Townspeople from Fontenoy-la-Joûte were bused to Redu to discover how its transformation affected the community; this trip helped them see the potential for their own town and allayed many concerns they had expressed earlier.

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113 Trublet notes in *Avant les Bécassines* (the story of how Bécherel became a *Cité du Livre*) that it was in fact Bernard Le Nail, the director of the Institut Culturel de Bretagne, who originally thought of adopting Redu’s book town concept.
Similar reconnaissance missions took place when Scotland decided to create its own biblioville. Anthony Seaton, one of the principal researchers in charge of selecting a locale for the new book town, was able to use his intimate knowledge of the other book towns he had studied as part of EU Project UR 4001, mentioned above, to help the Scottish government make an informed decision about which of the candidate villages offered the most ideal location. Another recent example of the use of the book town network is the research conducted by Paul McShane (explained in his 2002 Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia Report), who headed the committee charged with initiating Australia’s first book town.

The desire to initiate and strengthen bonds between towns can also be seen in the meeting of the villages du livre that Montmorillon hosted in 2002. Representatives from book villages in Belgium (Redu), Finland (Kirjakylä Sysmä), France (Bécherel, Cuisery, Fontenoy-la-Joûte, La Charité-sur-Loire, Montmorillon), Germany (Muhlbeck, Waldstadt), the Netherlands (Bredevoort), Scotland (Wigtown, Dalmellington), Switzerland (Saint-Pierre-de-Clages), and Wales (Hay-on-Wye), convened over two days to discuss common issues. The first day’s agenda, entitled “Mieux se connaître pour mieux s’entraider,” focused on legal questions, relationships and partnerships with public powers, the development of private partnerships, forms of communication, and seasonality or permanence of activities. Day two’s theme, “Pour une représentation et une communication à l’échelle européenne: des pistes de réflexion,” was dedicated to exploring problems associated with a disorganized development of villages du livre, competition or “complementarity” between towns, defending common interests to local or international public officials, and the development of an international rare book
research service (Favier). Of this *rencontre* Noël Anselot remarked, “Je ne peux que m’en réjouir car ensemble on travaille mieux. Quelque chose bouge et je peux vous certifier que cette première réunion n’est que le début d’une longue série” (Montmorillon: Cité de l'Écrit 10). The debates and discussions resulted in the creation of four commissions each made up of representatives from three or four book towns. On March 31, 2006, a similar conference was hosted by Fontenoy-la-Joûte.

Despite these attempts to form a more solid relationship between book towns, not all booksellers or town organizers are interested in participating in a national or international network. Some interviewees feel that it is too frustrating to attempt to agree on ground rules for organizing festivals or dealing with administrative issues and do not want to be controlled by a central authority. Rather, they favor the freedom of operating at the local level. Some individuals are simply not interested in the political aspects of maintaining a book town network, preferring to focus only on their own business and their place within their *village du livre*. Distance between towns is also a factor for those who do not have the time or the finances to journey around France or Europe to participate in international meetings. Moreover, with so many different nationalities involved, language inevitably presents challenges.

Another aspect of the book town network that troubles some individuals is the oversaturation of the market. Just how many *villages du livre* can a region, a country, or a continent support? Opinions vary widely on the matter. In 1989, when Bécherel was in the fledgling stages of its new development, Noël Anselot was hesitant about its location. Trublet reports in *En Avant les Bécassines*, “[Anselot] avait l’air de penser qu’un village du livre pour l’ensemble de la francophonie était suffisant. Il a dû se rendre compte
depuis, que notre Bretagne est un peu trop loin des Ardennes belges pour faire de l’ombre à Redu.” Nevertheless, she felt that “. . . il avait et a toujours raison sur le fond. Plusieurs villages du livre concentrés dans un périmètre trop étroit risqueraient de favoriser une concurrence étouffante pour tous” (110). For the same reason, François Guillaume, Daniel Mengotti, and Père Serge Bonnet carefully considered location before deciding on Fontenoy-la-Joûte as the venue for their project. In their case, this was particularly essential since the region of Lorraine borders Belgium not far from Redu and they wished to avoid conflict and competition.

Other entrepreneurs approach the network from a different angle. For example, in 1999, journalist André Muriel reported on the efforts of Raymond Rener and Etienne Moulron (respectively, president and secretary of the Paris-based association Livres en campagne) to help create, organize, and animate multiple villages du livre et du multimédia with the wildly enthusiastic goal of establishing one site per department by the year 2000 ("Sites en construction" 32). These two “villageophiles,” as Muriel calls them, were instrumental in developing the Cuisery book town project and planned to begin others in Sainte-Maure-de-Touraines, Tours, Poitiers, Villerville, Fontaine-Française, and Fontenoy-le-Château ("Sites en construction" 33). However, their optimism and ideas for expansion are a source of contention among officials of already

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established book towns, whose organizers are frustrated with Livres en campagne “de s’être arrogé un rôle fédérateur dans un domaine déjà défriché par les premiers aventuriers des villages du livre” (Muriel "Sites en construction" 33). Jean-Pierre Agasse worries about the competition Montolieu would face from Sainte-Maure: “[S]i l’implantation devient anarchique elle peut induire une concurrence aussi préjudiciable à ceux qui existent depuis plusieurs années, ainsi qu’à ceux qui naissent actuellement. La clientèle n’est pas inépuisable… 500 à 600 kilomètres d’écart semblent un minimum à respecter” (Moran). Noël Anselot expressed a similar reaction in regards to Rener and Moulron’s plan to develop a village du livre at Fontenoy-le-Château: “Ca ne marchera pas ! Peut-être même fera-t-il plutôt du tort aux autres . . . Je suis convaincu qu’il faut un rayon de 500 kilomètres, sinon les clients ne seront pas assez nombreux” (Muriel "Quand le livre bat la campagne" 31). Moreover, Anselot expresses concerns about the proximity of Damme to Redu: “Notons que le village de Damme, en Belgique, est en sursis. Deux sites à soixante kilomètres l’un de l’autre, c’est trop!” Despite public interest in books, book arts, and book towns, the market is limited.

Does the Book Town Network work? In assessing its effectiveness, it is important to consider its physical and virtual characteristics. The former includes actual physical travel between the towns by either tourists or by individuals involved in the organization or operation of these destinations. Interviewees in the French villages du livre who had visited other book towns prior to agreeing to open shops in what became “their own” villages du livre all reported having been pleased and inspired by meeting others who led similar lifestyles and by witnessing the various activities and events they could potentially model. Those who traveled to other book towns following the establishment
of their own book towns showed more mixed reactions, ranging from feeling energized
by the contact with their colleagues to feeling frustrated by differences of opinion to
feeling a sense of “superiority” based on what they perceived as the shortcomings of the
town(s) they visited. As far as tourists are concerned, there is clearly a small percentage
of individuals who delight in traveling to multiple book towns. Anthony Seaton, an
expert on tourism and one of the main scholars involved with EU Project UR4001, finds
that

[b]ook towns present low-risk opportunities for rural development, but
also offer great scope for international networks that will encourage travel
between countries – a key objective, for example, of the European Union.

In the course of my research, I learned of a book collector who spent his
annual holidays driving round all the book towns on the Continent in ten
days. (A. V. Seaton "Scandinavia, the Fatherland, and Bonnie Scotland:
European Book Towns Part 3" 15)

Seaton also predicts that travel companies will eventually create specialist tours that will
cater to bibliophiles wishing to pursue similar adventures.115 In France, according to his
study, international visitors to Montolieu and Bécherel accounted for around 10% of the
tourist population (A. Seaton D3).116

115 In fact, this is precisely what has occurred with the new bookstore tourism trend, mentioned above.
116 In Hay, the numbers were even more astonishing. Seaton writes:
100,000-150,000 (20-30% of tourists) [to Hay] are believed to come from overseas
according to differing ‘guesstimates’ gathered from key informants in Hay. Since Wales
as a whole only attracts 690,000 tourists per year from overseas this would mean that
around 1 in 7 of all overseas tourists to Wales visit Hay, a remarkable achievement for a
small rural town. Anthony Seaton, "The Book Town Concept: Retail Specialization and
Undoubtedly, these tourists happen upon the *villages du livre* in various manners. Some may simply be passing by and stumble across a road sign or brochure indicating a town’s presence and whereabouts. Others, however, will have heard about the towns in advance – perhaps because they live nearby or have spent some time researching the area for vacation purposes – and stop by for an afternoon. Still others have made the book towns the principal destination of their trip or have embarked upon a national or international tour of book towns. Several booksellers revealed during interviews that they have had clients request information about other towns.

The second characteristic to consider when assessing the Book Town Network’s effectiveness is its virtual, or electronic, dimension. Have the efforts of the EU Project in attempting to incorporate telematics usage into these SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) paid off? Do booksellers and other users find the electronic network useful? What if any benefits do they feel it provides? The researchers of Project UR 4001 had wanted to establish an intranet, for use between booksellers in the book towns, and to build up the towns’ Internet knowledge and usage. At the onset of the project, 80% of the enterprises surveyed had access to a computer, but only about 50% were using it in their bookselling business; 20% of those interviewed had only recently obtained a computer and had little experience using it (Seaton and Alford 110). Only 40% of the shops were connected to the Internet, which they used for communication, marketing, and to find information about books; all of these users considered themselves Internet beginners (111). During the course of the study, participants received some training in the Book Town Network intranet and use of the Internet. By the project’s conclusion, they had
gained significant improvements in their knowledge, confidence, and usage of the information technology applications presented by the researchers, “. . . with particularly striking increases in the numbers of dealers using Internet book sites as a pricing mechanism, for auction monitoring, and for general communication with and from the trade” (Seaton and Alford 116).

As both the European Union project and the interviews conducted for this dissertation indicate, most communication within a town takes place in person, with dealers simply stopping by their peers’ shops if they wish to speak with them or attending regularly scheduled meetings. In this case, although it can be beneficial to have access to electronic communication, it is not perceived as being needed to carry out day-to-day operations that take place within a very localized environment. This corresponds with the findings of Seaton and Alford, who conclude:

The intranet system has been a relative failure because, despite its technical promise [. . .] it has been seen to serve no real need, because a communication network between dealers in book towns is less important than communication with the world of all book dealers, a function that has been provided by the rapid development of book sites during the 2 years the project ran. (116)

Still, some book dealers interviewed for this study found that electronic communication between members of different towns aided them in establishing and maintaining connections in locations which they could not readily visit.
In opposition to intranet operations, the Internet has been perceived as a useful tool by many of the booksellers, although some are still resistant to using it. Malika Le Grand reported during an interview that she was the first bookseller in La Charité-sur-Loire to use the Internet. Others, she said, felt that spending time using the Internet to interact with clients was not worth the effort, in part because they have no face-to-face contact. Le Grand, however, has been able to effectively communicate with her customers in this manner and feels that far from isolating her from them, it gives her another method of establishing contact with them. She uses the Internet to send books worldwide and has even met several of her international customers who visited her in La Charité-sur-Loire when they happened to be traveling in or through France (LeGrand-Billy).

Le Grand’s experience exemplifies both the type of business practice Book Town Network researchers wished to initiate and the changes globalization has effected in how booksellers operate. Whereas face-to-face contact used to be of primary significance in bookselling, modern technologies allow for new ways of conducting business that still focus on establishing connections with clients via electronic communications. For an increasing number of booksellers in the villages du livre, the Internet offers a new forum for selling their merchandise, but also a means of attracting clients to the towns and building a relationship with fellow booksellers.\(^{117}\)

Advertising Strategies

La Charité, ville du livre, abrite un ensemble de librairies et d’ateliers des métiers du livre installés au cœur de la cité historique pour le bonheur des amateurs de livres anciens, rares ou d’occasion et de vieux papiers. Un centre d’intérêt au rayonnement international, qui est aussi une invitation à découvrir ou redécouvrir ce site clunisien des bords de Loire. (La Charité sur Loire: ville du livre [brochure] 2)

This description, taken from a pamphlet advertising La Charité-sur-Livres, succinctly demonstrates several strategies the French villages du livre employ to attract visitors. It begins by briefly identifying itself as a ville du livre with an ensemble of libraires and ateliers des métiers du livre, thereby appealing to anyone generally interested in books or book arts. In the same sentence, the pamphlet specifically targets amateurs of three categories of books as well as of old papers. Already, the reader is clued in to the diverse offerings awaiting bibliophiles and mere browsers. The inclusion of this kind of information is to be expected, given the town’s adopted specialty.

However, the advertisement goes beyond the realm of books to include other noteworthy reasons a tourist may wish to consider visiting. History buffs and those interested in cultural tourism or in viewing religious sites may be tempted to see the cité historique (amid which most of the bookshops are conveniently located) and the Clunisian edifices. Mentioning the Loire River elicits images of natural beauty in a peaceful environment, which may entice other crowds, such as wine lovers, Loire castle enthusiasts, or nature buffs. Moreover, the inclusion of words such as bonheur and intérêt appeal to both the
emotions and the intellect, while *international* adds an aura of importance to La Charité. Finally, the fact that the reader is “invited” (“à découvrir ou redécouvrir . . .”) implies a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in which he or she would be considered a guest.

In short, these two sentences promote attractions in both the town and the surrounding area to a wide audience while simultaneously alluding to the *ville du livre* as an entity with international appeal, which suggests its status as part of a larger whole. This advertising approach is typical of French book towns, which rely on various types of media to attract visitors: business cards, brochures, websites, posters, plastic bags imprinted with a town’s logo, road signs, ads in newspapers and in magazines geared towards bibliophiles, television and radio broadcasts, and word of mouth. Some towns have more financial resources than others and as a result are able to take advantage of many or all of these marketing methods. Others have more restricted budgets and must rely on only a few. But in each case, the *villages du livre* attempt to reach as wide an audience as possible. For the purposes of this study, the main focus of the advertising strategies analysis will concentrate on two of the above media: brochures and websites, each of which portrays attractive images of the towns.

All of the book villages in this study produce and distribute brochures.\(^{118}\) The amount and kind of information in each varies but several general tendencies can be noted. Each brochure includes a road map of the local area to guide visitors to the town.\(^{119}\) Moreover, maps of the towns themselves (or of the portions of the towns that make up the *ville du livre*) indicate where everything is located, thus assuring that

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\(^{118}\) For examples of such brochures, see Appendices.

\(^{119}\) This assumes, however, that they will arrive by car. And indeed this is usually the case, since La Charité-sur-Loire and Montmorillon are the only two towns in this study with train stations.
visitors do not miss any shops and also allowing those with specific searching goals in mind to plan out their strategies in advance. Often, these maps are cartoon-like in nature. This adds a note of playfulness to the town’s atmosphere and further links it to its amusement park counterparts (see Appendix for map images). It sends the message that these towns (and the activities which take place in them) are not sedentary haunts for older scholarly types or cemeteries for old books, but rather places of adventure and entertainment that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Next, the brochures each include a list of the towns’ attractions. Here, potential visitors discover upcoming events centered on books and book arts (such as *marchés du livre* and *Nuits du livre*) and they can see not only where they can shop or participate in a workshop, but also where they can find food and lodging. Such lists are further enhanced by details noting specific information about each establishment, such as its location and opening hours, what genres of books it sells, what kind of artisanal products or food one can find there, and what type of lodging to expect (*chambre d’hôte*, *gîte*, or hotel). Furthermore, many of the pamphlets include information about the town’s history and its development as a book village; about half of the pamphlets also provide listings of activities or sites in the surrounding area. This advertising approach helps towns appeal to many categories of tourists, since they can see at a glance the variety of options and activities available.

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120 The only two brochures that do not include this type of map are the Salins-les-Bains brochure, which is not yet fully established (and thus does not have enough shops to warrant indicating their presence on a map), and one of two brochures about Montolieu. However, the two Montolieu brochures function as a pair, and the second brochure does contain a map.
Finally, to punctuate the information a reader gleans from the text, the brochures are each decorated with photos, drawings, or a combination of both. These visually appealing images can further pique a tourist’s curiosity and interest in a *village du livre*. In each brochure, one can find images of different kinds of books meant to appeal to various audiences. The cover of the Montmorillon pamphlet, for example, is a cartoon-like drawing that shows a street scene from the medieval quarter of the town. On the left, an older man with a sprightly gait carries a large stack of books. In the center, a younger man walks while he reads a book, and on the right, a young woman and a boy walk hand in hand towards the center of the book town neighborhood. We see here a representation of both genders and of ages ranging from young to old, which sends the message that everyone can find something to enjoy in Montmorillon, Cité de l’Ecrit et des Métiers du Livre (see Appendix H).

La Charité-sur-Loire’s brochure includes a number of photos (see Appendix G). The cover is composed of a large, richly colored photo which focuses on two leather-bound books with gold lettering and decorations on their spines. Their pages appear to be gilded. The two books are contained within a press, which alludes to the presence of enterprises that focus on rehabilitating and restoring valuable books. In the background, which is out of focus, other similarly rich tomes stand on a shelf. Five smaller photos laid over the top of this image allow the viewer to gain a sense of what else he or she may find in La Charité. The first photo is of used books that appear to belong in the lower price range. Second, we see an image of the church tower overlooking the Loire River. Third is the official sign for “La Charité sur Livres.” Fourth is another bookshelf – this time lined with ornately bound books with gold-lettered spines that appear to be
collectors’ items. Finally, we encounter an outdoor book market on a sunny day with several people browsing through boxes. On the back cover of the leaflet, there is a photo of the inside of the church as well as an aerial view of the town and the Loire River. In this brochure then, we see an attempt to attract individuals interested in affordable used books, collectible books, outdoor book markets, historical or religious sites, and striking scenery.

The Bécherel brochure offers another approach to the integration of images (see Appendix E). Its cover is a beautiful color drawing or painting by Sophie Busson. It portrays a number of thick, ancient-looking books stacked haphazardly. Papers, some rolled, some with tattered edges, peak out from between the books. One of these papers is actually an opened map of Brittany, with a three-dimensional image of Bécherel rising from its midst. Although the heavy-looking tomes seem massive compared to the town, Busson skillfully links the images and the ideas they represent — books, Brittany, and Bécherel all appear intimately connected, almost as if it has always been the case. The irony for those who know the town’s history is that Bécherel’s association with books is a recent development. Upon opening the pamphlet, we find four more photos, including one of a landscape, one of the town’s church, and two of storefronts with painted doors and shutters. Taken together, the images convey a sense of calm, of history, and of ancientness. Curiously, one must look to the text to find people. There, however, the presence of different groups is noted with enthusiasm: “Ecrivains, libraires, éditeurs et amateurs de livres se côtoient avec bonheur [à la première Fête du Livre]. Un public
And several categories of potential tourists find assurance of being welcomed in the town: “Collectionneurs avertis ou simples promeneurs, Bécherel, Cité du livre ® et Petite Cité de caractère, vous souhaite la bienvenue…”

The other brochures – those for Redu, Salins-les-Bains, Montolieu, and Fontenoy-la-Joûte – employ similar strategies in their design. As with the above examples, the main emphasis is placed on appealing to an audience composed of both young and old, male and female, curious promeneurs, nature lovers, history buffs, and of course amateur and professional bibliophiles and collectors. Brochures are mailed out upon request or can be picked up in tourist offices in nearby towns and in the villages du livre. It is worthwhile to note that many bookshops offer not only brochures for their own village, but also those of other book towns across France or in neighboring countries. As mentioned earlier, many also contain the I.O.B. publication that lists all European book towns. Clearly, many of the shop owners see a benefit in mutual promotion of the various villages du livre, and so far, the distance between those already in existence is sufficient enough to not have to worry about competition. By generating as much interest as possible in this cultural phenomenon, book town members can only benefit themselves. The overall image brochures project is one of a quiet yet stimulating environment away from mass tourist destinations and franchises associated with globalization, such as Fnac or McDonald’s. Print culture remains in the foreground, as evidenced by numerous photographs and textual references.

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121 Emphasis added.
Websites of some of the villages further enhance their images. This form of electronic media offers numerous advantages over paper brochures. First of all, and perhaps most importantly, it is possible to include greater amounts of information: calendars can be regularly updated, more details about a town’s history or its development as a village du livre can be added, photos can be clicked on to enlarge them, blinking text can be used as a tool for drawing the visitor’s attention, and links can incorporated to direct viewers to individual stores or to relevant external websites.

The websites of the villages du livre tend to follow presentational formats similar to those for brochures, although some are much more developed than others. First and foremost, each highlights the pervading presence of books in the town through words and images. Each website provides a list of bookstores and traditional book art workshops, including information about the specialization of each. For the increasing number of bookstore owners turning to the web for further exposure, links guide users to their virtual domains. They also indicate locations and contact information for dining and lodging establishments. On the web, some of these maps include hyperlinks that allow the internaut to navigate electronically through the town.

As with the brochures, and perhaps even more so, websites glorify the pastoral environment in which the towns are found. In fact, an idyllic rural setting has become a defining characteristic of the book towns. The website of Fontenoy-la-Joûte explains that a book town must be “a true village, situated in the middle of the countryside and not in any old suburb: coming to a book town must be a complete change of environment for

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122 The websites for Bécherel and La Charité-sur-Loire are actually fairly small and are incorporated into the town’s general website. See Appendix for complete listing of URLs.
the city dweller. One should be able to get around on foot without worrying about traffic. As the websites explain, the peaceful environment offered by book towns is perfect for activities such as reading, meeting authors, and participating in workshops or debates. Moreover, “a true village” offers a certain social and cultural cohesion, bound by books in this case, that does not exist in larger cities. The ideal combination of books, activities, and a pleasant countryside ambiance creates a stimulating, utopian environment where one can participate in a sort of adventure not to be found elsewhere.

With such an interesting recent history, it is no wonder that the websites often offer information on the genesis of the book town projects. They briefly summarize the historical development of the towns over the centuries, underscoring what the area is or was best known for. In most cases, as mentioned earlier, local industries had very little, if anything, to do with printing, binding, or selling books. Next, they explain how the idea of transforming the town into a book mecca was formed, noting key individuals or associations involved in the process. Lastly, they describe the current status of the town, and usually present an image of a community of bibliophiles who live and work together in harmony.

However, one cannot fail to see the irony of using modern technology such as the Internet as a tool to preserve traditional print culture. In a sense, electronic media are the competition of traditional books and book arts: web surfers can read books online, publishers can publish online, and, assuming the individual user has a good connection,

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all kinds of information are available with just a few keystrokes. Nevertheless, the Internet also provides an easily accessible reference for learning more about the book towns. Indeed, given the networking capabilities of web pages, potential visitors may accidentally stumble across a reference or a link to a book town while searching the site of a local or regional departmental tourism site and decide to stop by while in the area. In this manner, book villages can reach yet another audience. In doing so, they can use technology’s advantages to highlight the importance of remembering France’s literary and artistic past, as well as its technologies of the past that allowed print culture to thrive, such as printing presses. Technology has taken on a significantly more prominent role in the functioning of the towns than it did ten years ago. In addition to creating official websites designed to promote an entire town, many individual booksellers and artisans are developing their own personal websites for their enterprises where web surfers can learn more about their business, search for and purchase specific merchandise, or engage in personal correspondence with the owner.

Not all of these virtual tourists and clients will travel to a book town. But their online purchases still contribute to the towns’ economies, and they can also help spread information about the villages through word of mouth, which can prove beneficial. For example, a Monsieur Visset, interviewed for a program called *La Cité du livre de Bécherel* on TF1’s *20 heures*, explained that the most recent visitor to his Librarie

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124 Although an admitted bibliophile, cultural historian Robert Darnton champions the notion of creating e-books that would “contain many layers, arranged in the shape of a pyramid” that would allow readers to do what they want with the book – print it or keep clicking on links to further explore the subject. Darnton explains, “In the end, readers will make the subject theirs, because they will find their own paths through it, reading horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, wherever the electronic links may lead” Darnton, "A Historian of Books, Lost and Found in Cyberspace."

125 It is difficult to ascertain whether or not this has resulted from Project UR 4001, from individual interest, from peer pressure, or from a combination of these factors.
Galerie Saphir, “. . . c’est une Chinoise de Shanghai qui a entendu parler de mon établissement par un industriel français qui est à Shanghai. Un avocat brésilien a entendu parler de ma boutique à Santiago du Chile par une Becherellesse qui est partie à Santiago” ("La Cité du livre de Bécherel"). Similarly, we saw the example of the increase of Japanese tourists to Hay-on-Wye after Richard Booth’s autobiography was published in Japan. These two examples demonstrate the international appeal of book towns and thus justify in part the extent to which the latter attempt to attract as many kinds of tourists as possible. This also ties in with the goals of entities such as the International Book Town Organisation, which strives to establish both a global community of book towns and a pan-European book town trail, similar in many ways to the efforts of the European Institute of Cultural Routes.

When we compile the brochures’ and websites’ advertising elements – images, maps and descriptions, we find that they convey clear messages to their audience. The *villages du livre* offer merchandise and activities for everyone, from the youngest readers to the most seasoned, from the casual bookworm to the discriminating scholar, from the near penniless student to the wealthy collector. They are cultural venues alive with a multitude of activities, whether one prefers to act as a participant or a spectator. They are exciting places to learn about traditional book arts and to help preserve the patrimoine. And they are a welcome escape from the hassles of life in cities. In these towns, booksellers and artisans work together to provide visitors with a memorable experience. Indeed, on paper and on screen, the French *villages du livre* appear to be havens for anyone remotely interested in books. The advertising materials also act as proof that culture is not something that exists only in cities. Each of the towns has its own
individual, local culture, but they are also venues where *la haute culture* such as literature, theater, and music (in the form of concerts) can be appreciated.

**Conclusions**

Europe has far more to offer than beaches and ski resorts. It is a continent rich in cultural heritage. By our actions we want to highlight this and to raise the interest of citizens in other European cultures, traditions, and ways of life. Furthermore, we want country life to be appealing to tourists. For this to happen, the tourism sector has to be encouraged to develop tourist activities in a rural environment. Rural areas can also serve as alternative destinations for vast numbers of tourists, who are simply too numerous for certain traditional tourism destinations that are already overcrowded. . . . Finally, tourism can be enormously effective in building the citizens’ Europe which is the true goal of all of our pro-European efforts: Europe is no longer a matter solely of institutions, regulations and treaties, but has become an element of ordinary people’s lives. (1994 Heinrich von Moltke, Forward, (European Commission - DG XXIII Tourism Unit [n.p.])

Although establishing book towns is an original and creative project, the phenomenon does not seem as unusual when related to other themed endeavors found throughout France and to notable trends in European tourism, especially those that offer opportunities off the beaten track. But it is not just that tourists’ preferences have
changed. To the contrary, as the above quotation illustrates, European organizations are increasingly emphasizing the significance of less traditional vacation destinations, especially those in rural areas. With the advent of modern technologies and the decline in the numbers of family-owned farms and other rural enterprises, the rural economy of Europe has undergone profound mutations in the last century, and especially over the last fifty years. One of the main causes for concern – and this clearly provided an impetus for book town projects throughout France and for the promotion of rural tourism throughout Europe – was the migration of small town inhabitants to larger cities that provided better work opportunities. This exodus could prove extremely detrimental: “... si les villages disparaissent, le patrimoine culturel de la région, et une bonne partie du patrimoine naturel influencé par l’homme, vont disparaître avec eux” (Commission Européenne 27).

Thus, promoting tourism in remote destinations also acts as a form of preservation. And as we have seen, each of the themed towns mentioned in this chapter – and in particular the villages du livre – attempts to preserve one or more aspects of French culture, whether based on traditional activities or métiers, architecture, language, or ways of life. Directing tourists to rural areas such as these serves multiple purposes: it relieves pressure on more popular (and populous) cities and regions; it contributes to economic development and strengthens ties within rural areas; it builds a sense of community throughout Europe, based on a perceived shared cultural heritage; and it highlights less commonly appreciated forms of the patrimoine culturel européen:

Plusieurs millénaires d’histoire n’ont pas seulement laissé en héritage des traces matérielles, telles des bâtiments historiques ou des édifices présentant des particularités sur le plan de l’architecture (murs de pierres
sèches, chapelles, fontaines, constructions de conception architecturale vernaculaire), mais également une abondance de traces culturelles immatérielles, qu’il s’agisse de coutumes, de folklore, de savoir-faire, d’artisanat, de spécialités culinaires, de musique ou de danse . . . (Commission Européenne 21)

This variety is exactly what makes visiting the small towns of Europe so attractive. Their richness, natural beauty, and diversity offer stimulating motivations to travel to multiple destinations. Of course, this ties in with the goals of many village du livre planners, especially members of the I.O.B., who pose the question, “Why stop at only one book town when there are so many others to experience?” Although the towns may be isolated within their regions in the sense that they are rural communities that one might not immediately think of as tourist destinations, they are not isolated within the larger context of book towns. They are linked by common pursuits and lifestyles, by personal contact among those who work in them or those who travel to multiple towns, and by maps or lists in brochures and on websites. Thus, they form a community that is both virtual and physical. In fact, the towns themselves serve as monuments – to books, to literature, and even to the town’s past. Yet we must ask: Which past? Who decides which aspects of a town’s past to emphasize? And what does it mean to create an image for a town based on a past (of print culture) unrelated to local history? The following chapter will address these and other questions as they are related to memory, identity, and invented traditions.
Chapter 4

Memory, Identity, and Tradition: Real or Imagined?

**Figure 10**

In the back of bookbinder Marc Rogez’s atelier in Montolieu hangs a large reproduction of *Relieur*, the first of six plates depicting the art and tools of bookbinding as presented in Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. The image portrays four workers engaged in various stages of this process, one of whom operates a large book press similar to the one Rogez uses. As in Rogez’s atelier, the workshop portrayed in the image contains a large bookshelf upon which stand numerous tomes, presumably awaiting bindings, repair, or, once finished, the arrival of their owners. *Relieur* serves as more than a simple decorative element in Rogez’s shop. It is an object freighted with both national
and personal implications. First, its provenance from the monumental *Encyclopédie* project reveals its status as a conveyor of national memory and identity. The breadth of subjects it covers as well as the number, variety, and expertise of its contributors make the *Encyclopédie* one of the most significant undertakings in the history of French print culture, and indeed, in the general history of the book.\(^{126}\) The plate reproduction calls to mind one of the ideals associated with the Enlightenment, namely transmitting knowledge, which is a key objective in all of the *villages du livre*. The image conveys a sense of what bookbinding entailed in the eighteenth century and its presence in Rogez’s workshop suggests that Rogez is both a recipient and a continuation of this traditional *métier*, embodying and transmitting memory and *patrimoine*. We can also discern a more personal memory and identity, as we find a sense of the lineage between contemporary bookbinders and their predecessors in this trade. Traditional bookbinding is an art passed on through apprenticeships and personal contact. Thus, glancing up from his worktable Rogez will see *Relieur* and perhaps be reminded of the lessons he learned from his teacher, Michel Braibant. The tools he uses are the same as those portrayed in the image, and just as this heritage has been shared with him, Rogez and his peers in Montolieu and other book towns aim to transmit their knowledge and skill to others through lectures and workshops. Admittedly, most participants in such activities will not go on to become artisans themselves, but exposing the public to such forms of traditional artistry can raise

awareness of and perhaps pique interest in art forms with long histories that few people practice today.

Why is it important to maintain such traditions? And how do book towns contribute to this practice? Moreover, how do these towns’ identities change as a result of their eagerness to preserve print culture? Can they be considered lieux de mémoire and if so, how?¹²⁷ How and why are collective memories engendered in these villages? What kinds of traditions have been invented and why?¹²⁸ Which past is remembered and why?

This chapter responds to these questions by exploring the key interrelated themes of memory, identity, and tradition as they relate to the villages du livre. But more than that, it situates the book town phenomenon within a larger national concern with these same issues. As noted in the previous chapter on tourism, although the villages du livre represent an innovative kind of cultural undertaking, they are not completely unique. Rather, they are part of a larger group of themed towns, each of which respond to renewed local, regional, and national interests in sustaining rural environments. Similarly, French book towns’ concerns with memory, identity, and tradition reflect trends in the local, regional, and national consciousness. In this chapter, then, I will begin by underscoring some of the main questions regarding the role of memory in contemporary France and in the villages du livre. I will then address questions of how memory is represented in these venues and by whom. Can we consider them lieux de mémoire? I will also explore the role of collective memory in simultaneously (and paradoxically)

affirming established identities and creating novel identities for local and regional communities. Finally, I will elucidate some of the factors associated with invented traditions and how they further our understanding of the villages du livre. Throughout the discussion in this chapter, it will become clear that these three themes – memory, identity, and tradition – are based on a real patrimoine but also on invented notions. French book towns are thus situated at the juncture of the real and the imaginary. They are a convergence of local, regional, and national memory and of personal and collective memory.

**Memory and Identity in Contemporary France and in the Villages du livre**

In considering how the towns in this study have been physically reconstructed and what kinds of images book town planners work to project, it becomes clear that memory and identity have been key impetuses behind their development. The memory of the towns’ heritage is at stake, but so is the memory of print culture. And the creation of the book town projects has added a third layer of memory that is formed by combining heritage, print culture, and new community members. This third layer includes the most recent memories, those that are being engendered now. These combined memories serve to establish a stronger sense of identity for the towns and render them more visible to the public. Ironically, the process of becoming a village du livre offers a town the possibility of both glorifying its distinctive history as a community and also adopting an identity that links it with similar projects (other book towns) throughout France. The interactions of these various forms of memory have economic, social, political, and demographic
ramifications, some of which have been described earlier, and some of which are discussed below.

The concerns with memory and identity exhibited by these towns coincide with national concerns with and scholarly attention to memory and identity in France, especially over the last two and a half decades. David Howarth and Georgios Varouxakis, contend that “[i]t is difficult to overestimate the importance of the past and of perceptions and interpretations of the past (in other words, memory) for contemporary French society, politics and culture” (2). References to the past pervade discourses by public figures. Howarth and Georgios continue:

To put it simply, there is no way one will understand what the French are talking about today when they debate something if one does not have at least an elementary conversance with French history. Historical references constitute the very vocabulary of French contemporary debates. […]

Obviously, the thing to retain is that, in France, the past is not an affair of the past, left to historians to debate, but part of everyday discourse. (2)

Nevertheless, historians do debate it. Questions associated with how to represent and come to terms with the past have generated much scholarly interest over the course of the twentieth century, both in France and abroad. At the heart of these questions lies the role of memory.129 This has especially been the case since the 1980s. Historian Patrick Hutton

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attributes the interest in memory to the “crisis of national identity in an age of economic globalization,” the “unfinished reckoning with the memory of the Second World War,” and “a preoccupation with the problem of historical time, connoted by the now widely used concept of a ‘postmodern’ age that separates us from the ‘modern’ one in which our conventional conception of history was formed” (534). How do societies remember and for what purposes? Who decides what is remembered? How does official memory differ from local or personal memory? Sarah Blowen and her co-authors contend that “[m]emories and heritage have become the new holy trinity for contemporary academic research” (1) while Alon Confino claims that in recent years “the notion of ‘memory’ has taken its place [. . .] as a leading term, [. . .] perhaps the leading term, in cultural history” (1386). He notes that memory “has been used to denote very different things, which nonetheless share a topical common denominator: the ways in which people construct a sense of the past” (1386). Although each of the villages du livre is unique, to the extent that local heritage and specific individuals contribute to their formation, each also shares a number of bonds with other book towns. Most notable, perhaps, is their emphasis on memory, on constructing a sense of the past. Simply glancing around any of these towns, one discovers numerous signs of this emphasis – in books, posters, maps, logos, store

signs, window displays, and architecture. Conversing with the entrepreneurs or reading promotional materials further reveals this aspect of the towns’ existence. The signs in question serve to commemorate or highlight books, book arts, and even the towns themselves.

Far from isolating these towns as unusual occurrences in France, this desire to form a community centered on remembering the past links the book town phenomenon with other national concerns, many of which are centered on memory and identity. Indeed, within the Hexagon, the past is ever-present and largely influences how the country defines itself. The frequency with which the term *patrimoine* is invoked in French news, literature, and scholarly works demonstrate the significance of local, regional, and national heritages for coming to terms with identity. Over the past several decades, the tensions associated with memory and identity have become perhaps most visible in three areas: in the events surrounding the celebration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution;\(^\text{131}\) in the representations and memories of World War II;\(^\text{132}\) which have continued to remain close to the surface; and third, in France’s struggle to come to

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\(^\text{131}\) Of this bicentennial, Nicolas Hewitt comments, “The events in Paris on 14 July 1989 were important as a statement about France’s political and social identity at the end of the twentieth century, but they also adopted a cultural format of extreme theatricality in which high cultural and popular cultural traditions merged. [. . .] [T]he Bicentennial celebrations were by no means the result of spontaneous or piecemeal enthusiasm. On the contrary, they were the culmination of years of planning at the highest levels of the State, overseen and orchestrated by the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang. As such, they were confirmation of the central role of the State […] and of the importance it accords to culture as a means of affirming national identity.” Hewitt, "Introduction: French Culture and Society in the Twentieth Century,"1.

terms with her colonial past, including the issues the country now confronts as a result of the ensuing immigration. Each of these issues has spawned numerous debates and studies, not to mention hostility, especially in the case of the latter. Matters are complicated when debates arise regarding which memory will be represented, how, and by whom. Which events, people, trends, and mentalities are most important to record or study? How do these violent episodes in French history continue to shape the way the nation views itself today? Although each of these topics can be and indeed has been extensively studied elsewhere, their mention here serves to contextualize the importance and omnipresence of memory within French society and culture. Far from functioning as an innocent or objective concept with one simple version of the ‘truth’ of the past, memory is malleable and multifaceted, often interpreted or controlled by politicians or historians.

Moreover, as Sarah Blowen and her co-authors contend, “[m]emory holds a central position in the shaping of values. The process by which ‘recollections’ are constructed and the uses to which these constructs are put must be part of any analysis of  


how individual, professional and local memories express themselves and how they relate
to the problematic notion of `collective memory’” (3). The towns that have become
villages du livre are curious objects to study in this light since their communities’ values
are being reshaped to encompass memories that have come from outside the towns. Most
notably, the memories associated with book production (in itself a construction tool),
which stem from a national heritage, are being implanted at the local level in an attempt
to preserve this written patrimoine but also the patrimoines of the local communities that
become hosts to the book towns. Since this themed village trend has continued to
multiply over the last two decades and since these towns are not concentrated in one
specific area but rather spread throughout France, their development must be linked with
national concerns. We have already seen how enticing tourist-generated revenue has been
in founding these projects, especially in rural areas of France. However, beyond financial
motivation, individuals, groups, and government organizations also initiate book town
projects as a result of concerns about preserving memories.

**Approaches to the Past**

Among the forms of memory represented in the villages du livre, three stand out.
The first two are book / print culture memory and local / regional memory. Both of these
kinds of memories concern objects with long histories. The third form is that of the book
towns as new communities. At the earliest, this last category dates back to only the 1980s
in France, when the first French book towns came into existence. All of the towns in this
study share similar practices in their approaches to representing these three forms of memory. This section will explore how and by whom the past is represented.

The broadest of these memories is that associated with books. Written heritage is a national concern, as discussed in chapter two, and also shares ties with international developments and communications. The main actors involved in displaying this memory in the *villages du livre* are booksellers, artisans, and initiators of the book town projects. Representations of the past exist in the form of brochures, museums, store displays, and signs. In some of these, we see books, in others, materials used for creating books, and in others, both of these kinds of objects. In most cases, there seems to be an attempt to categorize materials. For example, in most bookstores, books are arranged according to genre. Moreover, special editions or sets, books with unique bindings, and incunabula are often displayed separately, sometimes behind glass cases. The aesthetically pleasing nature of some such displays is effective as a marketing strategy, but it also serves to convey a sense of the artistry and history associated with the merchandise, as evident in calligrapher Ker Eddin Adili’s display of powders he uses to create inks and dyes.
The strategies for emphasizing written heritage rely mostly on non-événementiel memory markers, with the exception of museums in the book towns, such as the Musée Michel Braibant in Montolieu, which is clearly designed to guide the visitor through a chronological development of book history. The museum’s exhibit is événementiel; posters accompanying the displayed objects include dates of their invention or use and other pertinent information.
Figure 12: A lithographic press in the Musée Michel Braibant. Photo by author.

The métiers practiced in the villages du livre have a long history, as discussed in chapter three, yet none of the interviewees in this study mentioned specific dates associated with it. Concerning the memory of written heritage, their comments focused on preserving traditions, on the details of how they carry out their métiers, and on their connections with other book sellers, artisans, and buyers throughout France and, to a lesser extent, abroad. This realm of memory, part of a national memory, is thus represented as being inscribed in a longue durée that encompasses a variety of factors – social, economic, and geographic, for example – in assessing the past.

Similarly, the second type of memory, that associated with local and regional communities as they existed prior to the inception of the book town projects, tends to highlight a total history of the area, with an emphasis on its significant features, including architecture, gastronomy, and typical industries (such as farming or textile production). Important spaces or buildings within a town also become focal points. Examples include
the priory in La Charité-sur-Loire; the Manufacture Royale in Montolieu; and the saltworks in Salins-les-Bains. Each of these structures contributed to the towns’ development. Websites and other written materials offer some insight into key historical events, especially in relation to how and why such events make the towns not only suitable, but in fact ideal locations for book town projects. In some book towns, such as Montmorillon, posted plaques inform visitors about noteworthy historical sites throughout the town. Significantly, the signs in Montmorillon are posted in both French and English to make them accessible to an international audience. Moreover, each plaque directs its readers interested in following “L’Histoire au fil des rues” to a map available in the tourist office, the mairie, and select commerçants.

Figure 13

Figure 13: A plaque in Montmorillon. Photo by author.

Although booksellers and artisans are involved with perpetuating this memory, since they live and work in the towns and interact with tourists who ask about it, it is book town project planners and government authorities who take the most active role in
this effort. First, project planners chose which towns become *villages du livre* based on their local histories and regional characteristics, as discussed in chapters one and three. Part of their goal in establishing these *bibliovilles* was to draw attention to the towns’ inherent characteristics. This has been particularly crucial for government officials who are attempting to increase the visibility of local and regional areas. Moreover, some of their financial contributions go toward restoring buildings that constitute an important part of the towns’ heritage. Representation of the towns are thus used as a marketing tool to draw potential entrepreneurs and visitors.

In contrast to these first two kinds of memory at stake in the towns (print culture and local memory), the third form of memory, that of the towns as *villages du livre*, is recent, dating back little more than two decades for the oldest among them. This form also differs from the others in that it is much more focused on an *histoire événementielle*, marked by a series of dates and events. Each French book town’s inauguration was preceded by a series of annual book festivals meant to gauge the potential success of pursuing a book town project. These first events pinpoint the beginnings of the towns’ new memory and identity. Following them, numerous other occasions have marked the passage of time and change the rhythm of life in the towns. Unlike with the memories associated with the towns or print culture, interviewees in this study often mentioned specific dates or festivals associated with book towns, especially since such events mark a major change in their own lives, since most of them originated elsewhere.

Many individuals contribute to creating these memories, including native residents, relocated entrepreneurs, government officials, and tourists. Such representations are visible in brochures, posters, news articles describing activities that
take place, logos (see below), and signs. Furthermore, spaces are created specifically to preserve these recent memories. For example, as mentioned in the introduction, Fontenoy-la-Joûte recently erected a semaphore to commemorate its tenth anniversary. It also rebaptized the Galerie Guttenberg as the Galerie Daniel Mengotti, in honor of the latter’s contributions to rejuvenating the local community. As part of the celebratory activities, the gallery displayed a series of photos showcasing major events in Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s existence as a book town.

Although the memories associated with these ventures are far from as controversial as those associated with the French Revolution, World War II, the Algerian War, or other memory-related topics that have recently generated scholarly interest, they are just as important in terms of what they are commemorating and how. As we saw in chapter two, print culture has greatly influenced the course of French history by changing ways of thinking and by disseminating and preserving ideas. Local and regional memories contribute to the construction of national identity. Indeed, the idea of village life, such as that described by Laurence Wylie in *Village in the Vaucluse* (first published in 1957), is essential to French identity. Regional identity is similarly paramount to understanding national identity. Preserving this heritage is a means by which book towns can establish a place for themselves in French society. It is also, however, part of a national trend to reconstruct identity.

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France still struggles to redefine the country’s place in the arena of world politics after its sudden decline as a world power and to offer French alternatives to American dominance in films, pop culture, and on the Internet. French regions have been gaining ground in reasserting their significance within the national context, as will be discussed in a subsequent section, and even individual cities have taken measures to promote updated images of themselves. For example, in Paris, events such as *La Nuit blanche*, which celebrated its fifth year in 2006, aim to present the capital as a hip, modern city with a vibrant cultural scene.\(^{136}\) It is the same in the *villages du livre*, where once quiet, unknown rural towns have taken it upon themselves to restructure their communities and attract public attention as places where various types of memory are perpetuated. With so many visible markers of memory, the *villages du livre* in fact become living museums, repositories of memory that are continually reconstructed by multiple actors (native residents, booksellers, artisans, officials) as book stocks change, festivals explore different themes, and innovations take place in the towns.

For such ‘museums’ to be interpreted, however, they need an audience to experience them. This is one of the roles of tourists. In discussing visiting monuments Catherine Bertho Lavenir asserts:

> On les visite avec son corps. On monte des marches, descend dans des souterrains, entre dans des salles sombres illuminées d’un rai de lumière, se perd dans le dédale des couloirs du château de Combourg. . . . La visite du monument est une expérience du corps et une débauche d’émotions.

Unfortunately, the time period during which this study was conducted – the ‘off’ season in the vill
ges du livre – prevented obtaining information from tourists regarding why they chose to visit these sites and how they felt about their experiences there. However, the image of a totalizing experience that Bertho Lavenir describes parallels the goals of book town organizers who wish to immerse visitors in an environment centered on books and book production, an environment that engages both the minds and bodies of participants as they take in the many representations of memory that surround them.

Bertho Lavenir continues: “La visite du monument [or to a book town] est donc une expérience aux multiples dimensions. Qu’elle soit collective ou individuelle [. . . la] façon dont elle se déroule est le résultat d’une sorte de compromis entre les propositions de ceux qui gèrent l’édifice et les attentes du visiteur” (25).\(^{137}\) Perhaps it is stating the obvious, but this last remark reminds us that monuments (including the villages du livre) are constructed, and with specific purposes in mind. For the villages du livre, one of the

main purposes is to perpetuate memories. In their capacity as guardians of the memories mentioned above, can these towns be considered *lieux de mémoire*?

*Lieux de mémoire?*

The notion of *lieux de mémoire* has interested historians (especially in France) since the publication in the mid- to late-1980s of Pierre Nora’s edited volumes bearing this name. The emergence of this concept as a means of understanding identity coincided with a period in France in which national memory was being scrutinized in a very public manner owing to the upcoming bicentennial of the French Revolution. The collection of essays Nora assembled reexamine France’s attempts at preserving memory in *lieux de mémoire* such as “the archives as well as [. . .] the tricolor; [. . .] the librairies, dictionaries, and museums as well as [. . .] commemorations, celebrations, the Pantheon, and the Arc de Triomphe; [. . .] the *Dictionnaire Larousse* as well as [. . .] the Wall of the Fédérés, where the last defenders of the Paris commune were massacred in 1870” (*Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire* 12). Nora explains of these examples:

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138 Assessing *Lieux de mémoire*, Patrick Hutton explains: “One notes that it appeared about the time of the bicentennial of the French Revolution, and it may have displaced that commemorative event in importance. Nora took an innovative approach to historical narrative. In organizing his project, he proceeded from the present backward, as in the genealogical branching of a family tree. The effect was to make the present the primary reference and to open inquiry into the myriad ways in which the national heritage had once been imagined. [. . .] In Nora’s scheme, the relationship between history and memory is reversed. The grand narrative of modern French history is broken up into particular narratives, each relocated at a different site of memory. These places of memory are only loosely connected, if connected at all. Memories are unbound from their fixed places in a grand narrative to become simultaneous reference points for historians reconstructing their cultural heritage” Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *The History Teacher* 33.4 (2000): 538. 533-48. For an excellent review essay of *Lieux de mémoire*, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory," *The American Historical Review* 106.3 (June 2001). 906-22.
These *lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it. They make their appearance by virtue of the deritualization of our world – producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one that inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past. Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders – these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity. (12)

So do book towns qualify as *lieux de mémoire*? At first glance the answer may appear to be no, since native residents continue to inhabit these villages and since, as previously mentioned, the villages function on some level as living museums,\(^{139}\) which might give the impression of a continuity in the towns’ relationship with their pasts. However, further investigation reveals otherwise. To begin, the towns are remains. Each *village du livre* in this study has a long and rich history associated with it, but it is a history that was being neglected or overlooked, since populations were dwindling and aging, and many buildings, some of which date back several centuries, had been abandoned and were falling apart. To fill the shells these villages had become, individuals, groups, or government officials have produced artificial environments within authentic settings.

\(^{139}\) Michel Braibant, founder of the Montolieu project, insisted that this was not the case.
That is to say, since few historical links tie the towns to print culture, the print culture aspect of the towns’ identities is artificial. However, the towns also emphasize their own history (its architecture, for example), which makes the setting authentic.

*Lieux de mémoire* are places where, as Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn explain, “... memories converge, condense, conflict, and define relationships between past, present, and future” (3). This is precisely the case in French book towns. We have already seen how they serve as a meeting point for the memories of print culture, local heritage, and more recent history concerning their new status as *villages du livre*. Such memories are separate yet at the same time, intimately bound. Together, they provide a sense of identity for the towns. Nora asserts that “[i]l y a des lieux de mémoire parce qu’il n’y a plus de milieux de mémoire” ("Entre mémoire et histoire" xvii). Thus, the *villages du livre* are needed because there are no longer any ‘real’ villages where people are making books by hand. In modern society, Nora argues, rural France has been largely ignored as a result of globalization, democratization, massification, and mediatization (xviii). Similarly, the teaching and learning of traditional book arts are often neglected, owing to the mass-production and distribution capabilities of large enterprises and to the appeal of developing computer-based content delivery. In book towns (whether French or other), books themselves constitute *lieux de mémoire*, since they offer links to the past on multiple levels: for individual readers, a community, a region, or a nation. For example, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* presents a nostalgic journey through the French countryside. Contemporary readers can appreciate the text for its story line, but also for
its valuation of rural heritage and lifestyles or for the Republican values it so clearly
evokes.\footnote{140}

Perhaps in response to this need for nostalgia, used and antiquarian books
dominate shelf space in these villages, while new books are scarce. As discussed in
chapter two, many sellers and organizers feel that latter, amply available elsewhere, do
not belong in a specialized town. Aurélie Marand, director of the Conseil régional du
livre de la Lorraine, concurs, explaining that used and antiquarian books, especially
collectors’ items, can prove hard to locate; the villages du livre facilitate exchanges
between antiquarian booksellers and book collectors. Marand, like many other
interviewees, feels that “Le livre est un vrai patrimoine important.” She further explains:

“[J]e pense qu’un village comme ça est intéressant parce que justement on
trouve des livres d’occasion, mais aussi livres anciens, et surtout les
bouquinistes de Fontenoy, pour certains, s’attachent à retrouver les livres
anciens qui traitent de la Lorraine ou qui ont un lien avec la Lorraine et
[…] en cela, ils font un vrai travail lié au patrimoine même de la région et
c’est pour ça aussi que c’est important parce que [sans eux certains livres
seraient complètement oubliés. Ils] les trouvent, ils les achètent, ils […] les
font vivre. […] Ils essaient du coup de faire vivre le patrimoine lorrain à
travers les livres. (personal interview)

The villages du livre, then, are venues where book and literary heritage, but also local and regional heritage, are preserved and celebrated. Their importance as lieux de mémoire is evident in the names and activities of local associations. Groups such as “Mémoire du livre” (Montolieu) and “Les Amis du Livre” (Fontenoy-la-Joûte) organize exhibitions, literary discussions, debates, meetings with contemporary writers, and writing contests. The very nature of the contest created by “Les Amis du Livre” validates a cultural concern with remembering France’s literary past. Open to anyone who wishes to participate, the competition calls for submissions of short pastiches of canonical texts from different periods. Winning entries in the adults’ and children’s categories are published under apt titles such as Les Nouvelles Lettres de mon moulin and Les Nouveaux Jules Verne.141 The preface to the volume celebrating Alexandre Dumas, Les Nouveaux trois mousquetaires, emphasizes the importance of reviving the livres du passé and praises the apprentice writers who chose to “illustrer la langue française” by drawing their inspiration from a great writer and renewing a difficult genre. The preface also praises the opportunity that Fontenoy-la-Joûte offers to future writers by publishing these books: “C’est une noble ambition que d’encourager une création littéraire contemporaine qui soit accessible au grand public. En cette année 1999, le livre demeure le meilleur outil de l’imaginaire et de la sensibilité” (Les Nouveaux trois mousquetaires 6).142 Such an attitude is significant given the omnipresence of electronic forms of entertainment such as movies, video games, and computers. It also serves as further proof of the unique status of literature in France, as discussed in chapter three. Finally, and to further link classic

141 The contest has also paid homage to non-French authors Charles Dickens and Daniel Defoe.
142 Emphasis added.
French literature with its modern counterpart, each volume of winning entries includes a previously unpublished short story by a contemporary author.¹⁴³

These efforts to promote interest in remembering yesterday’s literature can be likened to what Nora calls a *vigilance commémorative*. As he contends, “[l]es lieux de mémoire naissent et vivent du sentiment qu’il n’y a pas de mémoire spontanée, qu’il faut créer des archives, qu’il faut maintenir des anniversaires, organiser des célébrations, prononcer des éloges funèbres, notarier des actes, parce que ces opérations ne sont pas naturelles” (xxiv). The *villages du livre* have attempted to incorporate such practices into their identities not only by reviving interest in books, but also by preserving and creating awareness of traditional book arts. Some towns have established museums that showcase the *métiers du livre*. Most offer demonstrations, lectures, workshops, and festivals. As a brochure that includes information on Montolieu explains, “. . . un village du livre c’est aussi la transmission des techniques et arts graphiques” ("Agir et Vivre entre Ecluses et Capitelles" (Association) 17). Unsurprisingly, then, promotional materials emphasize pedagogical activities available in the towns, especially for schoolchildren. Careful lexical choices emphasize the possibilities for fun learning activities. For example, one brochure lauds Montolieu’s Musée Michel Braibant for offering “un parcours passionnant à travers l’histoire du livre” where one can discover “l’aventure de l’imprimerie” (*Montolieu: village du livre et des arts graphiques*).¹⁴⁴

At Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s Maison de l’Imprimerie, visitors are encouraged to interact with the resident *maître-papetier*, Jean-Pierre Gouy, who, a brochure explains, ¹⁴³ Recent participating authors include Elise Fischer, Gilbert Bordes, and Paul-Loup Sulitzer. ¹⁴⁴ Emphasis added.
works in public and enjoys recounting the histories of paper-making and printing. Children leave with the paper they produce and benefit from “le plaisir… de fabriquer un outil dont on pourra se servir . . . le plaisir enfin de créer” (Fontenoy-la-Joûte: Village du Livre en Lorraine au pied des Vosges). As a final incentive to prospective tourists to make a pilgrimage to Gouy’s workshop, the pamphlet urges, “Profitez-en: ils sont encore . . . une douzaine en Europe à fabriquer ainsi des papiers que l’industrie ne peut fabriquer pour des relieurs, des artistes,… pour le plaisir.” This declaration expresses a concern with a disappearing art form, one that is imperative to preserve, appreciate, and share. Book towns have voluntarily nominated themselves guardians of print culture’s heritage. They are joined in this endeavor by other organizations. At the national level, for example, and as discussed in chapter two, the government created the Centre national du livre, which “a vocation à soutenir l’ensemble de la chaîne du livre (auteurs, éditeurs, libraires, bibliothèques, promoteurs du livre et de la lecture)” (http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/Presentation-.html). This organization dates back to 1946, first existing as the Caisse nationale des lettres, then, beginning in 1973, as the Centre national des lettres, and finally in 1993 under its current name. Each region has its own Centre régional du livre (see chapter two). There is also the Institut Mémoire de l’édition contemporaine (IMEC), created in 1988, which undertakes “une mission patrimoniale contemporaine,” and “assure la conservation et la mise en valeur de la toute première collection privée d’archives contemporaines en France. L’IMEC permet ainsi à un très important patrimoine privé d’être ouvert à la recherche dans le cadre d’une mission publique d’intérêt scientifique . . .” (IMEC). Another example of a ‘guardian’ of

145 Original emphasis.
print culture is the Musée de l’Imprimerie in Lyon, founded in 1964 by historian and maître imprimeur Maurice Audin, in collaboration with book historian Henri-Jean Martin. The museum exhibits a strong desire to preserve the patrimoine. Its principal missions, are to “enrichir, de conserver, de documenter et de valoriser auprès de divers publics le patrimoine livresque et graphique” ("Musée de l'imprimerie [Lyon]"). Like book towns, the museum offers pedagogical activities for both adults and children (such as calligraphy, illumination, and engraving). Its presence in Lyon is particularly noteworthy since, unlike some of the villages du livre that have no prior association with print culture, Lyon was one of the most important centers of printing and publishing in France.146

What impact the Centre national du livre, the Centre régional du livre, IMEC, the Musée de l’imprimerie de Lyon, and similar structures or organizations will have on the cultural domain of book history remains to be seen. Conversely, the influence books and book arts have had on the villages du livre is much more tangible. Just as the towns have revalidated print culture, the books themselves have rejuvenated the towns, saving them from financial ruin and counteracting the rural exodus. Becoming a village du livre is a means of assuring the survival of a town’s own memory. Paradoxically, this means adopting an altered identity. For Salins-les-Bains, it is not the first time. Once, the town was known simply as Salins, in reference to its saltworks. But in 1854, it added thermal water therapy to its attractions to welcome the wave of curists who sought locales that would reputedly improve their health (mountains, the seaside, and hot springs, for

In 1926, the town officially changed its name; now, some locals hope to profit from the newer craze for cultural tourism, specifically, the book town phenomenon. Hence the addition, Pays du livre.

Like Salins-les-Bains, La Charité-sur-Loire also already enjoyed a steady stream of tourists interested in visiting its medieval priory and outlying buildings (classified as a patrimoine mondial by UNESCO). But, unlike today, when thousands of people travel to the villages du livre, most of these small rural communities in this study rarely, if ever, hosted tourists prior to their transformations. Part of their strategy in recreating their image relies on directing attention to the pertinent attributes that already exist, in essence putting the towns on display along with the used and antiquarian books they promote. Some French book towns have attempted to establish ties with the history of print culture: both Montmorillon and Montolieu had earlier profited from the paper mill industry (beginning in the eleventh and seventeenth centuries, respectively), while Salins-les-Bains boasts the honor of having printed the first book in Franche-Comté, in the fifteenth century, and hosts one of the oldest public libraries in France (and the oldest in Franche-Comté), the Couvent des Capucins. These links to print culture allow book town organizers to conserve and highlight the local and regional heritage that already exists. Thus, the towns themselves become the archives that Nora says must be created to battle against the lack of spontaneous memory. For instance, local buildings, many of which were deserted, are remodeled and reappropriated to accommodate the establishment of bookstores, ateliers, cafés, restaurants, hotels, and homes. In this manner, a cowshed in

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Fontenoy-la-Joûte was reborn as a restaurant. The use of preexisting structures, some of which date back several centuries, allows community members to revitalize their economies while simultaneously preserving and showcasing their own unique heritage and memory. Similar practices take place elsewhere in rural France. Susan Carol Rogers contends that such “. . . rural lifeways . . . figure in France as powerful loci of nostalgia and fantasy about a lost past and as potentially potent emblems of national or regional identity” (475).

The names of some of the shops in the villages (*Neiges d’Antan, A la recherche du livre perdu*), discussed in chapter two, reveal another dimension of the towns’ roles as *lieux de mémoire*, places where tourists are invited to visit France’s national past via its literature. As we have seen, the *villages du livre* use nostalgia as a marketing tool, which makes sense, considering the interest French society has expressed in it. Sarah Blowen and her coauthors assert that “[u]nderpinning both the fascination with the past and the desire to remember is a tacit search for identity. The basic unit for understanding social processes has shifted to the local level as it is at that level that current modes of belonging are re-imagined or reactivated (3). Thus, the nostalgia associated with the local, as well as the regional, past is a noteworthy factor in establishing identity for the *villages du livre* and in presenting this identity to the public. Moreover, the *villages du livre* are places where individuals can seek multiple forms of identity – personal identity (especially for entrepreneurs who come to partake in a book-related community), local identity, regional identity, and national identity.
Local and Regional Concerns

As we have seen throughout this study, local and regional issues figure heavily in a discussion of the villages du livre. Clients seek out books by local or regional authors or books about the region and booksellers consequently attempt to learn about these genres. Towns were chosen to become villages du livre based on their rural locations and their perceived potential to rejuvenate local economies, most of which suffered from an exode rural. Revitalizing his own local community was a driving force for Richard Booth when he founded the very first European book town. As mentioned earlier, Booth believed that “[t]he decline of rural areas is not inevitable if we take our destiny into our own hands” (142-43). Far from being just a French problem, developing solutions to sustain and rehabilitate rural environments has been an issue throughout Europe for much of the twentieth century. National and international responses have aimed to strengthen regional identities and explore alternative forms of sustainable development, one of which, as detailed in the previous chapter, entails turning to tourism.

But the questions of regional identity that are pertinent to book town communities – language issues, focus on traditional arts and traditions, and efforts to decentralize control of cultural activities – are not all new to the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. Although the creation of regions as administrative units in France dates only from 1982, as a result of decentralization laws,148 their lineage extends back to the Revolutionary era, at which time the French government began its quest to unify the country. According to

Jacques Revel, “... en affirmant ainsi la priorité absolue de l’unité nationale et en se donnant les moyens légaux de la réaliser, la Révolution invente, d’une certaine manière, le problème régional, ou plutôt elle le révèle en plein jour et elle en fait, potentiellement, un obstacle incontournable.” Eugen Weber argues compellingly in *Peasants into Frenchmen* that during the nineteenth century the French government attempted to stamp out regional differences in favor of a homogenous model for the entire nation to follow.\(^{149}\) To the contrary, however, Anne-Marie Thiesse suggests that recognizing local or regional identities was an integral part of the Third Republic’s strategy to achieve a strong, mosaic national identity. She argues that in assigning “la petite patrie” the role of “premier amour,” school manuals were designed to teach children to love their immediate environment first and gradually expand their appreciation to include the much more diverse and abstract “grande Patrie.” Thiesse contends that France’s geographical and cultural variety affirmed the country’s unity. This ideology, in turn, revived the eminence and distinction of France in foreign countries and also disarmed interior conflicts, especially in social and political domains (3-14).

Issues of regional identity continued to arouse debates into the twentieth century. As Peter Wagstaff explains, “Regionalism has been a constant element of French political and cultural discourse for the past half-century, reflecting a long-standing opposition between capital and provinces, between governing and governed. It is also the focus for an unresolved debate about the dictates of national unity and the demands for individual and local freedoms” (460). Today, regionalism provides fodder for concern. In some of

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the book towns, these concerns become especially apparent, most notably in Fontenoy-la-Joûte, Bécherel, and Montolieu, each of which, significantly, is found close to the limits of France’s borders. In Fontenoy-la-Joûte, the main regional emphasis is tied to Lorraine architecture. Many interviewees in this study drew attention to the wide rounded-arch doorways in the houses and buildings of the town. This typical architectural feature of the region is further valorized in the logo created for the town (see below). This book town’s 1996 *Rapport d’activité* suggests that this desire to highlight the local is not unique to Fontenoy-la-Joûte or even to France: “. . . cette idée novatrice [des villages du livre] séduit le public européen qui recherche l’authenticité et la simplicité villageoises et qui s’intéresse à la préservation du patrimoine tant culturel que rural » (Association ”Les Amis du livre”). Moreover, the Fontenoy-la-Joûte project aimed to benefit the local. One of the project’s principal initiators, Daniel Mengotti, explained the reasoning behind its development:

> L’idée était simple. Premièrement il s’agit d’encourager la lecture bien sûr. Deuxièmement il s’agit de créer des emplois et le village du livre a permis de créer 12 emplois directs. Troisièmement, il s’agissait aussi de sauvegarder le patrimoine rural. Le village du livre en un an a permis de vendre 14 maisons et donc de réhabiliter les maisons. Ca fait travailler [. . .] les charpentiers, les maçons. Il y a plein d’activités. (Quoted in *Les Beaux matins*)

In Montolieu and Bécherel, regional features are most visible in local attitudes towards regional languages. One of the strongest markers of identity, language became a political
issue in France at the time of the Revolution, at which time the government felt that if the country was to be truly united, they needed one language. Consequently, led most enthusiastically by Abbé Grégoire, it sought to eradicate the numerous regional languages or *patois*. Today, the use of regional languages still generates debates -- Should they be taught in schools? How can they best be preserved? -- but since many of them have become endangered, with mostly the elderly speaking them, they have also become more valued and some national or regional efforts have been made to revive them.

Montolieu and Bécherel have also taken it upon themselves to refresh interest in their respective regional languages, Occitan and Breton. In Montolieu, regular poetry readings are held in Occitan; in Bécherel, Breton language classes are even offered.

Unsurprisingly, other regional concerns are particularly evident in Bécherel, and many of them are outlined in founding member Colette Trublet’s book, *En Avant les Bécassines*. Writing about the development of Bécherel, Cité du Livre, Trublet interweaves a story about Brittany’s regional heritage and struggles, which are evoked from the very beginning, in her title. She explains one of the forces that drove her and her fellow founders to seek out a project that would benefit the region:


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151 Nevertheless, in 1999 the Constitutional Council of France failed to ratify the Council of Europe’s European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, stating that the charter conflicted with France’s constitution, which specifically states that the language of the Republic must be French. For the official report, see Conseil Constitutionnel, "Décision No 99-412 DC du 15 juin 1999," 6 October 2006 <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1999/99412/99412dc.htm>.
détriment des Parisiens eux-mêmes qui n’y peuvent rien. Il semble acquis une fois pour toutes, que seule la vie parisienne produit les richesses manifestées dans les monuments, dans la qualité des réflexions et des idées et mérite tous les suffrages. (14)

In the face of this Parisian domination, Trublet asserts:

Nous n’avons pas même les moyens d’échanger nos réflexions, entre bretons [sic] de Bretagne. Radios, télés et journaux ne nous informent que de Paris, de l’art à Paris, de la littérature à Paris, de la pensée politique à Paris, et ne nous donnent les informations qu’à travers la manière parisienne de les voir. La manière bretonne est ignorée, anulée [sic], évacuée. (43)

Staking a claim in a rural community acts as a means of reclaiming part of this heritage. For Trublet and her colleagues, this includes Breton language, artwork, gastronomy, and traditions.

Bécherel’s relatively recent status as the Cité du Livre ®, though it perhaps bears the strongest marks of regional struggles, joins other towns and regions in a larger fight against French centralism, which, note Gilles Bousquet and Alain Pessin, “is under attack from all sides by claims for local differences and the diversity of individual interests” (55). This viewpoint sheds light on the paradox of French book town members’ struggle to come to terms with belonging to a national and international book town community while simultaneously asserting the independence and uniqueness of their own individual towns. Furthermore, the growing number of associations aimed at promoting,
developing, and creating French book towns coincides with what Bousquet and Pessin term a “spectacular proliferation of associations” in France that has recently occurred. “This is but one indicator,” they suggest, “among so many others, of the waning identification with large groups and the ideologies they represent, and of the new culture of individuals and the multiplicity of possible ways in which they can come together” (55). How then, do individuals come together in the villages du livre? What are the benefits of creating a community?

Creating Community

“Si j’étais tout seul ici,” remarks Charitois bookseller Jean-Yves Destin, “ [. . .] ça sera pas bon, non. L’intérêt [. . .] c’est qu’on soit au moins une quinzaine et voire plus une vingtaine. Plus on travaille avec des livres de styles différents, mieux ce sera” (“La fièvre de la lecture à La-Charité-sur-Loire”). Implicit in his statement is the belief that to succeed, a book town must host a community of book sellers and artisans who share the same vision and who can function together as a unit even though their specific interests may diverge. In fact, the more variety, the more they will be able to offer their potential clients. Montolivain bookbinder Marc Rogez shares similar sentiments. He contends:

Pour moi ce qui est très important [. . .] dans ce que je [. . .] fais aujourd’hui c’est que je me sens partie d’un projet global. Je ne suis pas seul à m’être installé ici. On est toute une équipe [. . .] et ce travail commun permet de faire avancer [. . .] tout le projet d’une façon très

152 They note that forty thousand associations were created in 1992 alone, while only several thousand were established during the postwar years (55).
intéressante. C’est tout un [réseau] économique qu’on a mis en place et chacun il contribue à sa manière, chacun il participe. Ce que je crois est très important, c’est de ne pas être seul, pour moi. Ça m’aide beaucoup aujourd’hui à tenir effectivement. ("Les Villages qui renaissent")

 Numerous other interviewees (on television or radio programs and also during personal interviews for this study) echoed these ideas. The focused community such newcomers have formed strengthens their sense of purpose. Moreover, it has blended with the original community of native residents. This combined community is now creating its own collective memories of the towns in their capacities as villages du livre. For example, Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s tenth anniversary celebration activities included a photo exhibit highlighting a number of events that had taken place over the last decade, most of which involved the combined community of newcomers and original residents.

 According to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, individual human memories represent fleeting moments that would be lost without the context of society and a collective memory to bind them together. But how is a collective memory formed in communities like the villages du livre that no longer consist of only native townspeople, but also include an influx of residents who have come from elsewhere to open businesses?

See especially pages 51-96 in Halbwachs, La Mémoire collective. Susan A. Crane criticizes his assessment by pointing out that “collective memory ultimately is located not in sites but in individuals. All narratives, all sites, all texts remain objects until they are ‘read’ or referred to by individuals thinking historically . . . At stake is the role of the rememberer, the designated ritual role of interpreter, the one who speaks for others. But when, in fact, has collective memory ever been uttered if not individually? . . . Individuals provide interpretations for other individuals” Susan A. Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," The American Historical Review 102.5 (1997): 1381-82. 1372-85.
The unique ambience visitors encounter in these *lieux de mémoire* results from a number of reconstructions of the local physical environment. However, it also stems from a change in the community’s demographics. To create as ‘authentic’ an atmosphere as possible, book town organizers invite knowledgeable book specialists from various *métiers* (paper-makers, calligraphers, binders, and booksellers) to relocate to open businesses and integrate into the community. Whereas some of these individuals hail from neighboring towns or regions, others move across the country or even from abroad. Some now live in their book towns while others commute from nearby. In either case, they have become part of the *villages du livre*. Their presence changes both the demographics and the mentality of their communities. Moreover, it contributes to the construction of memories, which become important in forging the identities of the towns as *lieux de mémoire*.

Many of these entrepreneurs, who range in age from twenty to seventy, had worked selling used or antiquarian books elsewhere before arriving in the towns, although some had had no prior experience with book sales. A number of booksellers had been schoolteachers. Others held jobs in accounting, realty, stock management, the clothing industry, and even psychiatry. But regardless of their diverse origins, all of the paper-makers, booksellers, book binders, and calligraphers share the common bond of bibliophilia and a willingness to start over in a second career whose future was uncertain. Thus, each of these individuals appears to be a risk-taker. Many interviewees in this study recounted their decisions to move to the book towns, which entailed leaving comfortable situations and steady work to venture into the unknown, despite skepticism from friends.
and colleagues. For them, the risk was worth it, despite their camp-like living conditions in their new homes, some of which had no electricity, heat, or running water.

Clearly, their passion for books sustained them during such times. Whether avid readers since childhood or converts later in life, they each enjoy reading. But their attitude for books stems from more than sentiments generated by what they read; the tactile pleasures they associate with handling books link them to their bibliophile predecessors and assure them that e-books could never replace their paper counterparts. Reading a screen will never produce the same sensations as caressing a page. The enthusiasm booksellers exhibit for books and book arts contributes to the identities of the villages du livre, and they value the key role they play in supporting the community and encouraging the public to learn more about print culture.

Booksellers, artisans, and those in the service industry in these villages all see many benefits to living and working in an environment so rich in books: they are surrounded by colleagues who share their interests, clients can find them easily, and, perhaps most important, they become valuable resources in perpetuating the memory of books and book arts. Undoubtedly, they esteem their pedagogical roles. Many of these newcomers help introduce the public to both amateur and established artists and writers. Artisans teach subjects such as calligraphy, printing, or binding. Some booksellers, including Malika LeGrand-Billy in La Charité-sur-Loire, lecture on topics such as incunabula and the use of vellum (personal interview). In addition, artists and booksellers alike have dedicated time to learning about regional history in order to pass on this information to interested visitors, and a majority of the shops contain shelves devoted to regional themes or texts written by regional authors. Here again, the significance of
A final, important benefit booksellers and artisans in the villages du livre see is
the satisfaction of knowing they are contributing to a revalorization of the local culture
and history. A decade or two ago, some of the communities were in danger of collapsing.
The advent of the book town projects brought jobs and tourists to the area. Abandoned
houses and buildings one or more centuries old were renovated, and their regional characteristics highlighted. Realty prices have now doubled or even tripled in some towns. Thus, the booksellers and artisans bring life to the both books they handle and the towns they help revive.

**Invented Traditions and Globalization**

The merging of recent community members with the original inhabitants has also resulted in numerous changes in the towns’ quotidian and annual activities, which now revolve around books. In a sense, the creation and development of each *village du livre* project entails the invention of tradition, which, according to Eric Hobsbawm, “. . . is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1). Appreciation of a town’s heritage and of France’s print culture and artistic legacies, support of local economies, and acknowledgement of the richness of France’s rural landscapes are among the values the *villages du livre* attempt to instill, while the “set of practices” to which Hobsbawm refers includes the buying and selling of books, the incorporation of various celebrations, the teaching and learning of the *métiers du livre*, the welcoming of tour groups and schoolchildren, literary rendezvous, and other “new” traditional activities, none of which previously existed in the book villages. That such practices are repeated at regular intervals and involve the same individuals provides a sense of ritual that is further reinforced by the large festival held on Easter weekend each
year to “open” the high tourist season in these towns. Today, these activities have become an integral part of the towns’ identities. The villages du livre host monthly and yearly events. For instance, they hold special book fairs throughout the summer and participate in festivals such as La Fête du Livre, Le Printemps du Livre, and La Nuit du Livre. Like other kinds of festivals in France, such as Lire en Fête, La Fête de la musique, and Journées du patrimoine, which are celebrated throughout the country, an extensive schedule of events accompany these occasions: guest speakers, debates, tables rondes, poetry readings, autograph-signings, artistic exhibitions, and musical or artistic performances.

Books constitute the centralizing force behind each of these festivals. Yet other elements ensure support of local talent and emphasis on regional and local identity. For example, local artists are hired to design posters advertising upcoming events. Moreover, most communities have created a symbol to represent their status as a book village. Generally, their logos include an image of books. Some incorporate a defining characteristic of the town. For example, Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s logo is an open book, arched to resemble a house. The left “wall” features a wide door with a rounded arch, demonstrating a typical architectural trait of Lorraine, the region in which the village is found. Similarly, Montolieu’s logo shows several books aligned on a shelf with a photograph of the Montolivain landscape printed on their spines. When viewers see such images, it becomes easier to equate the towns’ names and identities with an atmosphere rich in books and the ever-important patrimoine.
New community members, including booksellers, artisans, and restaurateurs, contribute to establishing such traditions and use them to integrate themselves into the community. Some traditions are also borrowed from other solidly established, more experienced book towns such as Hay-on-Wye (Wales) and Redu (Belgium), initiated by Richard Booth and Noël Anselot, respectively. These two pioneers have gladly shared their expertise, and in a show of support and solidarity, opened stores in Montolieu when it first became a book town. This type of cooperation plays a significant role in the
success of these endeavors and in encouraging literary tourism. Additionally, it helps both establish a lineage among towns and internationalize the recently invented traditions. A good example of such global networking is the establishment of the International Organisation of Book Towns, whose goals include raising public awareness of book towns, exchanging knowledge among the towns, and maintaining regional and national cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{154} Thus, through collective efforts, these communities work to strengthen and preserve the memory of the book while simultaneously creating new memories for the towns. These memories are perpetuated by those who experience them firsthand, but also by the media. Numerous newspapers, magazines, and television programs have reported the development of the towns as well as on their numerous festivals and activities.

Ironically, the traditions that now animate these towns are not native to these areas. This coincides with Hobsbawm’s analysis. He maintains that “...the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with [the historic past] is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition” (2). As experience proved for most of the towns that became villages du livre, being “ideally” situated in a quiet, rural setting was not enough to attract sufficient visitors to sustain the local economy. They needed more than their bucolic nature to succeed, which meant creating identities for themselves that had little basis in local history. As noted earlier, several villages du livre claim no historic link with book artistry, production, or sales.

\textsuperscript{154} For more details about this organization’s goals, see "I.O.B. - International Organisation of Book Towns."
while others do have some heritage based on print culture, albeit in a form that scarcely resembles the book towns they have become. Certainly, these book-related links represent a significant legacy in which town residents take pride. Nevertheless, even though some activities – such as paper-making – are similar to their historical predecessors, the identity of the towns has changed dramatically. Indeed, their ‘continuity’ with the past, at least in terms of print culture, is primarily fictitious.

Paradoxically then, the French villages du livre invent traditions while simultaneously preserving the heritage and memory associated with both the métiers du livre and with their own historical (and for the most part, non book-related) identities. Pierre Nora contends:

... s’il est vrai que la raison d’être fondamentale d’un lieu de mémoire est d’arrêter le temps, de bloquer le travail de l’oubli, de fixer un état de choses, d’immortaliser la mort, de matérialiser l’immatériel pour ... enfermer le maximum de sens dans le minimum de signes, il est clair, et c’est ce qui les rend passionnants, que les lieux de mémoire ne vivent que de leur aptitude à la métamorphose, dans l’incessant rebondissement de leurs significations et le buissonnement imprévisible de leurs ramifications. (xxxv)

Although French book towns, rather than rely on a minimum de signes, bombard visitors with visual reminders of their role as guardians of print culture, the rest of Nora’s statement clearly applies to the villages du livre in their capacities as lieux de mémoire. To preserve the memories of print culture, but also to preserve their own local and
regional memories, these communities must adopt or invent traditions that will be attractive to the tourists and potential residents upon whom they must depend for survival.

This tactic parallels developments in international tourism, especially where heritage and tradition are concerned. According to Nezar AlSayyad, intensified contact between cultures (corresponding to the end of colonialism), postcolonial nationalism (accompanied by a demand for historic monuments and symbolic building), and globalization have transformed attitudes towards tourism over the last two centuries. He maintains:

As these independent nations compete in an ever-tightening global economy, they find themselves needing to exploit their natural resources and vernacular built heritage to attract international investors. Tourism development has consequently intensified, producing entire communities that cater almost wholly to, or are even inhabited year-round by the ‘other’. The new norm appears to be the outright manufacture of heritage coupled with the active consumption of tradition in the built environment.

(3)

Thus, the invention of tradition in French book towns relates not only to similar endeavors in France, but also to international trends in which communities desire or need
to produce some form of heritage to present to the public.\textsuperscript{155} Their “heritage” becomes a consumable good.

\textbf{Towns of Tension}

Any time memory, identity, and tradition are invoked, tensions almost certainly accompany them, as the preceding discussion has demonstrated. It is no different in the case of the \textit{villages du livre}, where the destinies of multiple objects and entities come into play: towns, print culture (especially the trades of book production), and books (particularly incunabula). Actors involved in the projects – whether politicians, booksellers, artisans, or native town inhabitants – differ in their opinions about what must be preserved or changed and about how to ensure these goals are accomplished. They must struggle to determine which parts of the “old” memory to perpetuate and which new aspects of the towns’ identities they would most like to project and remember. Tensions of this type exist within each town and can in some ways benefit local businesses.\textsuperscript{156}

Booksellers interviewed in this study recounted how they simultaneously formed a team with their colleagues in order to promote the town as a whole but also competed with them for clientele and in some cases bragging rights about their “superior” inventory, sophistication, or professionalism. This same kind of tension exists between towns as


\textsuperscript{156} As the narrator of one television program observes, “. . . ici, paradoxalement, plus il y a de libraries, plus il y a de concurrence, plus les affaires fonctionnent” "La fièvre de la lecture à La-Charité-sur-Loire," \textit{C'est mieux ensemble}, France 3, 19 November 2002.
well. Some of the towns, or at least members of some of the towns, work to establish links between themselves with the hopes of learning from each other and becoming more publicly visible and thus, successful. Other book towns entrepreneurs express strong negative feelings about the inauthentic nature of other book towns whose stores and workshops are confined to one neighborhood rather than integrated into the entire town.

Hence, although the villages du livre endeavor to form an overarching identity that promotes the same national memory of print culture, some of them debate the extent to which each contributes to this effort. Furthermore, they struggle to differentiate themselves from one another by asserting individual identities and memories. The 2004 Dossier de présentation for Montmorillon exemplifies many of these tendencies and will serve as an example that elucidates some of these tensions. Among the first emphases of the dossier are the rich historical features of the town. A brief excerpt will serve to demonstrate:

Montmorillon, l’une des plus vieilles cités du Haut-Poitou, est la capitale d’un pays au riche patrimoine. Cette sous préfecture abrite de remarquables édifices qui se situent essentiellement dans le quartier médiéval du Brouard [. . .] Au cœur de cet ensemble architectural d’une incomparable valeur, une vingtaine de maisons ont été achetées et restaurées afin de recevoir autant de libraires et d’artisans des métiers du livre. (Dossier de présentation: Montmorillon, Cité de l’Ecrit & des Métiers du Livre 3)
The (anonymous) authors’ use of bold lettering highlights what they consider the main historical attractions, more of which are listed in the following paragraph. The phrases *riche patrimoine*, *remarquables édifices*, and *incomparable valeur* strengthen the image of Montmorillon as a *lieu de mémoire* and suggest that these sites alone would make a trip to the town worthwhile. But as an added benefit, this historic site is teeming with books and culture – print culture, but also art (photography, for example), theater, and music. Here, memory clearly serves a distinguished purpose and is viewed as a boon in attracting visitors to this “cité chaleureuse” (3).

However, the next section, “Un site unique en France” depicts another dimension of the town’s identity. Here, interestingly, the authors legitimate their status as a book town by invoking the support Montmorillon received from pioneers Richard Booth and Noël Anselot and the presence of the paper mills which “ont de tout temps utilisé les eaux de la Gartempe.” They fail to mention any of the other book towns in France, even though many of them predate Montmorillon’s transformation. To the contrary, they use bold lettering to declare, “La Cité de l’Ecrit et des Métiers du Livre est plus qu’un simple Village du Livre” owing to the presence of a dozen book artisans. In fact, the dossier claims that “ce site s’affirme comme le pôle national majeur des savoir-faire liés à l’écrit et au livre.” *Le pôle*, and not *un pôle*. Moreover, it states that this rediscovery and conservation of the *métiers du livre et de l’écrit* is a “concept unique” to their town, which is “un pôle d’excellence pour la bibliophilie.”

The goals of this section are evident: to stress Montmorillon’s distinctive identity, to provide evidence of its excellence, and to legitimate these claims by establishing links with prominent book town individuals. As it is presented in this document then, one of
Montmorillon’s greatest assets is its independence. However, later in the dossier, the authors turn attention to the theme of community in a section entitled “L’Europe du Livre et de l’Ecrit,” in which the discussion centers on Montmorillon’s hosting of the Rencontre Européenne des Villes et Villages du Livre et de l’Ecrit in 2002. Representatives from sixteen European book towns, six of which were French, attended the meeting, which was meant to exchange ideas, information, and mutual aid.

The disparity between Montmorillon’s dual roles as team player and individual competitor are echoed in other towns, and on multiple levels, from the towns themselves to booksellers within them. Some book towns or entrepreneurs seek cohesion and community (both national and international) in establishments such as the International Organisation of Book Towns, yet some interviewees in this study felt that this kind of group was unnecessary and failed to consider the separate needs of each town. Moreover, as demonstrated in the introduction, French book towns differ significantly in their attitudes towards their official titles. Although in practice most book towns share similar goals (promoting books and book arts, educating the public, preserving heritage, and supporting the local economy, for instance), they choose monikers – villages, cités, and villes du livre and / or de l’écrit – that distinguish them from their book town peers and reveal what they consider to be their unique identity. Paradoxically then, book towns profit from both their independence and their unity. Some tourists journey to multiple book towns precisely because they seek out the cultural differences they find in each town. Booksellers and artisans also traveled to other book towns and use their experiences as a yardstick against which they measure the success and attraction of their own book town.
Several other areas of tension, or rather contradiction, merit consideration here. First, in becoming a book village, a town’s image is altered considerably, although ironically one of the goals in adopting this identity is to preserve the town’s heritage and showcase its characteristic features. Restoring run-down buildings may very well help recreate a town’s prior physical appearance, but at the same time the buildings now serve completely different purposes. Second, the villages du livre stress the importance of preserving neglected or forgotten books and technologies, yet they rely on modern technologies for communication, advertising, and even sales. Third, although ostensibly book towns wish to ensure potential visitors that they are welcome year round, this is not the case, as many shops close or are only open on an occasional basis during the ‘off’ season from September through April. How can the book towns project an image as a site of memory for disappearing books and book arts if they only accept this role when it is most convenient? Each of these three examples reveals conflicts that affect the identity of the towns.

Memory, identity, and tradition represent a strong impetus behind the creation of the villages du livre. Along with economic and demographic necessity they are their raison d’être. It is precisely because these towns, or at least portions of them, were slowly disintegrating that they were chosen as lieux de mémoire. Within the context of a national fascination with memory and identity, it becomes clear that although the villages du livre may seem to have sprung from nothingness, they actually reflect concerns and trends within French society. As analyzed in chapter two, they tie in with France’s obsession with its literary and print culture. The book towns serve to perpetuate artisanal
book arts and to safeguard used and antiquarian books. But more than this, they also provide an arena in which each individual town can fight against the loss of its own memory and identity. Ironically, however, to do so, the towns must adopt identities as *villages du livre*. In their new forms, they become sites where these different memories converge. While it is still too early to predict the long-term benefits the creation of the *villages du livre* will have for both books and rural environments, it is clear that the interplay of real and imaginary characteristics and heritage have transformed these towns from *villages perdus* to *villages retrouvés*. 
Conclusion

The introduction to this study revealed tensions among French book towns as they struggle to define themselves in relation to one another, as evidenced by their choice of unique monikers – villages, villes, cités, and pays du livre, de l’écrit et des métiers du livre, and du livre et des arts graphiques. Such titles serve to highlight certain features present in these towns and to differentiate them from other book towns. Indeed, each of the book towns in this study is unique in terms of its genesis, history, and current status. Whereas the Redu, La Charité-sur-Loire, and Salins-les-Bains projects were all initiated by native residents, the villages du livre of Montolieu and Bécherel resulted from the inspiration of individuals from outside the community, while Fontenoy-la-Joûte and Montmorillon were born from government efforts. Another significant point of divergence is the extent to which the towns’ histories can be linked with books or book arts. In this domain, only Montolieu, Montmorillon, and Salins-les-Bains can claim any continuity with, or rather rejuvenation of local practices associated with book production. In the other towns, print culture has been artificially implanted. We find differing degrees of government involvement and financing in each town. This is an area that requires further investigation. Despite these differences, however, the French book towns also share many qualities, and analyzing them as a whole, as I have aimed to do in this study, reveals some noteworthy trends in contemporary French society. To address what these trends are, I will return here to questions I posed in the introduction.
First, why are there so many book towns in France? The book town trend has been developing worldwide, yet the numbers of these villages in France outnumber those in other countries by at least three to one. Although future research comparing global book towns could nuance some of the reasons why this is the case, it is clear here that one explanation is the special status accorded to literature in France. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that book towns also greatly outnumber other kinds of themed towns within the Hexagon, suggesting that print culture carries with it a certain prestige unequaled by objects such as crystal, basketry, sheep, or Astérix, each of which provides the impetus behind other themed projects. Culture in itself constitutes a critical means of expressing French identity, but within this realm, the book is paramount. In a speech inaugurating the October 2006 national festival Lire en Fête, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, French Minister of Culture and Communication, remarked: “Outil de liberté, miroir de l’individu, support infini et toujours renouvelé de la création, le livre est parmi les biens culturels, sans doute le plus précieux et le plus cher, à coup sûr le plus symbolique de ce que nous sommes” (<http://www.lire-en-fete.culture.fr/spip.php?article119>). Viewed in this light, the villages du livre, as guardians of books and book arts, are also protectors of national identity. Interviewees in this study have concurred with the official government viewpoint that “Le livre n’est pas un produit comme les autres” but rather a “patrimoine écrit” that deserves special recognition. At the national level, this translates to the naming of streets after well-known writers or literary characters, the awarding of prestigious literary prizes, and, more recently (since the early 1980s) the national festival “Lire en Fête.” The government’s cultural policies clearly seek to honor, glorify, and protect France’s written heritage.
These goals coincide with those of book towns, where books and book arts form one of the central attractions.

Given this explanation of the “why” of the book town phenomenon, a second, related question is “why now?” The first modern book town was founded in Wales in 1961. It took more than twenty years for this idea to arrive in France, but since the late 1980s, it has been flourishing. What is it, then, about the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first that has created such a fertile environment in which the villages du livre thrive? We can attribute their development and successes to three main factors. First, the 1980s were marked by the decentralizing trends of the Mitterrand regime, which sought to redistribute authority among smaller units, such as regions and departments. For centuries, authority and culture have been intimately linked in France. It follows, then, that in redistributing authority, new cultural centers are also formed at local and regional levels. An anti-central government attitude is most clearly visible in the genesis of the Bécherel project, whose initiators explicitly denounced the Parisian domination that they saw as a threat to their own endangered Breton heritage. Of course, we must also note that in the villages du livre, print culture is not the only form of culture showcased. Music, dance, painting, sculpture, and theater are also featured to varying degrees throughout the year. Moreover, local culture, in the form of architecture, produits de terroir, language, and other types of heritage are also granted privileged status.

This realization leads to a second explanation to the “why now?” question. Along with the continued focus on decentralization, there has been a tendency over the last few decades to explore, or re-explore alternative forms of tourism, especially as it concerns non-traditional destinations. This is not only a French phenomenon, as evidenced by the
European Union efforts to develop, study, and understand how sustainable tourism affects rural areas. Since book towns have grown on an international scale, they have naturally attracted the European Union’s attention and formed the object of one of their research projects, whose outcome demonstrated how successful such endeavors could be in revitalizing rural economies.

A third response to “why now?” is the rapid advancement in technology that has occurred in the last few decades. In addition to paper books and newspapers, readers now also have access to electronic texts in the form of online newspapers, e-books, and innumerable web sites. Faced with these recent developments some people (including, but not limited to booksellers and scholars) fear that traditional books will disappear. Others argue that they will continue to thrive, especially because of the tactile pleasures associated with reading them. Regardless of which of these outlooks will prove valid, the fact remains that other alternatives to access reading material exist. The presence of book towns ensures not only the survival, but also the appreciation and valorization of traditional books and artisanal methods of producing them. Yet it would be a mistake to consider technology simply as an evil that threatens the past. Although not all booksellers in the villages du livre use the Internet, or even computers, for that matter, to conduct business, many of them do. Consequently, they are able to advertise, sell books, and interact with clients online. Technology also affords them opportunities to form virtual communities with other booksellers and book towns in France and worldwide. By uniting in this manner, they are able to exchange ideas and advice. Thus, using current technology is a means of preserving France’s past technologies and of integrating France into a global community.
Another question I posed in the introduction was “How do books and book arts profit from the presence of book towns?” Although the nature of this study did not allow for an in-depth exploration of this question, which merits consideration in future studies, I would like to propose several conclusions. First, book towns provide a venue in which the public can experience book arts firsthand by participating in workshops and engaging in discussions with resident artisans. Such exposure may generate and increase interest in these art forms that relatively few professionals practice today. Although few participants may actually become artisans themselves, some may be inspired to pursue one of these métiers as a hobby or even as a career.

The books that profit most from these towns are used and antiquarian. But under these rubrics, the most privileged category is regional literature, including both books about the region in which the town is found and books by regional authors. According to interviewees, these books were among the most sought after by tourists. Since many shops carry them, one can deduce that there is an interest in catering to the client who collects such works, but also that book towns are actively promoting the region. Certainly, many other genres of books are also available in the shops. The towns thus serve as a repository for books but also as a place that unites books with owners and as a place that celebrates not only the literature contained within the pages of a book, but the pages themselves, along with the cover, the binding, and the print. In other words, the villages du livre celebrate the book as an object.

Finally, the government involvement with the book towns, which varies from town to town and which requires further investigation, along with the fact that France holds nationwide reading and book festivals, such as “Lire en Fête,” suggests a national
concern with promoting literature and reading. This attitude is also visible in regional and departmental efforts to initiate projects aimed at developing such activities in the countryside.

At this point, with the oldest French book town not even twenty years old, it is simply too early to predict exactly what the overall effect on book arts will be. Similarly, it is difficult to ascertain how books and reading practices may be altered by the presence of the villages du livre. In pursuing these future avenues of research, it will be particularly important to investigate the reception of the towns by tourists who visit them and by community members, whose perceptions toward books and book arts may have changed as a result of the book town projects. Although this realm remains largely speculative for the moment, what is much more tangible is the effect books have had thus far on the towns that have been transformed.

This brings me to two related questions: What benefits do towns gain from becoming book towns and how do their identities change? First, one must remember that each town in this study was chosen to become a book town in order to improve it in some way. But some towns were also selected based on their ability to showcase local and regional heritage. This is perhaps most evident in Bécherel, a “typical” Breton town, and Fontenoy-la-Joûte, with its “belles fermes lorraines.” Adopting a new identity based on books is presented by project initiators as a way of “saving” the town from becoming completely dilapidated and deserted. The improvements are of several varieties. First, there is the cosmetic appearance of the town. Roads are repaved and public conveniences are created, including restrooms, phone booths, and parking lots. Moreover, existing buildings are renovated, thereby preserving local heritage (a second perceived benefit).
This practice also provides employment opportunities for area masons, electricians, and other workers. Another incentive for developing these projects is their ability to enliven the community by bringing in as many as twenty new residents, a substantial number, considering their low populations. Here, however, more research is needed to analyze the attitudes of community members. For example, how do original residents feel about the arrival of new residents? Do new residents feel integrated? Finally, one of the biggest incentives for transforming these towns is increased revenue. The influx of thousands of tourists in the summer months means financial profit not only for booksellers and artisans, but also for other businesses in the towns and surrounding areas, such as cafés, grocery stores, and inns. It also allows for the creation of new businesses.

In seeking out these benefits by becoming a *village du livre*, a town’s identity drastically changes. Although local heritage sites are preserved, there is a melding of a town’s “old” identity with print culture. This is visible physically in a town’s improved appearance as well as in the numerous signs that now hang over the doorways of the shops and those that are displayed at street corners to direct visitors. This new image is also projected in photos and text presented in websites and brochures, and, of course, in logos specifically created to demonstrate the fusion of books with the town. Furthermore, some towns have added additional features to emphasize this new identity, as evident in Redu’s giant stone sculpture of an open book and its signpost (similar to Fontenoy-la-Joûte’s semaphore) displaying the names of other book towns. What is not so visible, though, are the changes in the community, as mentioned above. Moreover, in some towns, notably those transformed earliest, this new identity is already well-established whereas in more recently transformed towns, the “fusion” is still taking place.
So what can these towns’ adoption of a new identity reveal about contemporary France? In addition to the responses I have suggested above, I would like to propose a further conclusion. As seen throughout this study, the concept of patrimoine remains paramount to defining the nation. In the book towns, this is evident in the promotion of France’s rich literary heritage. Yet it is also clear that it is just as essential to preserve and honor local and regional patrimoine. In Village in the Vaucluse, Laurence Wylie describes the pedagogical method of teaching schoolchildren subjects such as history, geography, and literature. They are first presented with a general framework and then with smaller units of information they must fit together. Emphasis is placed on the relationship of the part to the whole. He observes, “Thus a child comes to believe that every fact, every phenomenon, every individual is an integral part of a larger unit. As in a jigsaw puzzle each part has its own clearly defined and proper position. They make sense only if their proper relationship is recognized” (74). Similarly, the adventure of Julien and André, the protagonists of Le Tour de la France par deux enfants, leads them throughout the regions of France, teaching them that the cultural, historical, and geographical variety they encounter is all a part of the larger nation. In each case, the diversity of the varying parts of France is embraced as a means of attaining better understanding of the nation and of their places within it. The same is true of the villages du livre. Located throughout France, the towns differ from each other in many ways in terms of features such as architecture, gastronomy, customs, and language. Yet, at the same time, their local and regional patrimoine comprise the individual parts of the national patrimoine.
Just as the towns are diverse, so the people who have been involved in creating the towns are a seemingly disparate group. Among them, one finds former schoolteachers, accountants, psychologists, and clothiers, each of whom changed professions to become a bookseller or artisan. Some have known no other career. They are young and old, educated and uneducated, pro- and anti-technology. Some are staunchly anti-establishment while others have worked in tandem with the government. Some are members of the government. So what is it that truly binds them together? The answer is that each of them exhibits concern about saving something that he or she views as endangered. First, there are concerns at the local level. Communities, buildings, and entire towns require preservationist efforts to ensure their survival. At the regional level, there are architecture and language to consider. The book towns are places where these can be preserved and revived. And at the national level, there is print culture. Antiquarian and second-hand books, as well as artisanal methods of producing books, are in need of protection from time, from being forgotten, and from technology. The villages du livre projects allow individuals and groups to unite and form a collective effort to address each of these concerns.

However, as I have demonstrated in this study, book town members have been resistant to accept regulations and organizations they view as too authoritarian, even arguing about the titles of their towns, as mentioned above. There may be an explanation for this aversion to categorization. Sarah Blowen and her colleagues put forth the following hypothesis:

It could be that appellation contrôlée is a notion that has spread to the whole fabric of France. This has far-reaching consequences in the search
for identity fixed in a historical continuum which would dispel the fears of coping with rapid social change. For ironically, the process of *labélisation* serves only to distance the past: as a consequence, heritage becomes a fixed institutionalized fact and any organic relationship with the past is lost (Blowen, Demossier and Picard 9).

If *labélisation* distances the past, it makes sense that the *villages du livre* avoid it, for the past is essential to their purposes and identities. They aim to be safe havens for the local *patrimoine*, for traditional book arts no longer commonly practiced and for paper books in an era increasingly dominated by electronic communication. But globalization, rather than marginalize these towns, has actually benefited them by allowing them the possibility of forming national and international networks with other book towns and by granting them access to a larger clientele via the Internet. In embracing technology and globalization, towns are thus able to preserve heritage based on both their own histories and that of print culture. Book towns, then, offer a bridge not only between past and present, but between communities across Europe. What remains to be seen is whether the phenomenon of the book town will continue to grow, or simply survive as a fascinating cultural artifact of the late 20th century.


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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Title of project: The Villages du Livre: Local Identity, Cultural Policy, and Print Culture in Contemporary France

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(814)863-9660

The goal of my research is to study the creation and development of the villages du livre in France. I am interested in what the villages du livre reveal about the status of books and print culture in contemporary French society and how the identities of these villages change as a result of their new status as villages du livre. Furthermore, I would like to know how books and book arts profit from the existence of these villages. I will only be interviewing individuals eighteen years or older. Your participation in this research will benefit society by helping to advance understanding of the importance of the villages du livre in contemporary French society.

I will interview you in French about your involvement with the villages du livre in France. This interview will last approximately sixty minutes. Following the initial interview, I may contact you via telephone or email with follow-up questions regarding your responses. I will audiotape the interview, but I will stop the recording at any point you would like me to. These recordings will be stored on my computer and on CDs for a period of twenty years (until 2024). At that time, the recordings will be erased or otherwise destroyed. My computer is located in my home. The CDs will be stored in a locked desk in my office at the Pennsylvania State University. I will be the only person to have access to these recordings. If applicable, I may also ask you for permission to photograph either your place of business or you at your place of business in a village du livre using a digital or manual camera. If you do not wish to have photographs of yourself or your place of business included in the research, you may decline permission for that portion of the research (see below). Any photos that are included will be stored in digital form on my computer, on CDs, and in some cases, in normal format (on paper) for a period of twenty years (until 2024).
after which they will be erased or otherwise destroyed. The CDs and paper photos will be kept locked in my desk. I will be the only person to have access to them.

You will not experience any risk if you choose to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to stop the interview at any time by notifying me. You may also choose not to answer certain questions. If you have any questions about this study or about your participation in this study, please contact me (see above contact information). You may also contact the Office for Research Protections at Penn State at (814)865-1775.

I would like to use direct quotations from this interview in my doctoral dissertation and in other academic publications. Please indicate whether or not you would permit me to do so by checking the appropriate box below.

_____ Yes, use of direct quotations from this interview is permitted.
_____ No, use of direct quotations from this interview is denied.

Please indicate how you would like to be referred to in my research. I will not use your name without permission. Please check the appropriate box below.

_____ Name
_____ Title (government official, bookseller, entrepreneur, etc.)
_____ Pseudonym (to be chosen by researcher)

If applicable, I may ask you for permission to include photos of either you or your place of business in my dissertation or in other academic publications. Please indicate your preference by checking the appropriate box below.

_____ I do not wish to have any photos of myself or my place of business included in this research.
_____ I give permission to include photos of myself and my place of business in this research.
_____ I give permission to include photos of my place of business, but not of myself, in this research.

If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. The Office for Research Protections may review records related to this project.

_______________________________________ ___________________________
Participant Signature      Date
I, the undersigned Audra L. Merfeld, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

_____________________________  _________________________
Investigator Signature                  Date
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Titre du projet:</th>
<th>Les Villages du Livre: L’identité locale, la politique culturelle et la culture de l’imprimé en France contemporaine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Chercheuse:     | Audra Merfeld  
Candide de doctorat (Ph.D)  
Department of French, Pennsylvania State University  
320 S. Burrowes Building  
University Park, PA 16802  
(814)865-9580  
alm334@psu.edu |
| Directrice de thèse: | Dr. Willa Silverman  
Associate Professor of French and Jewish Studies  
Department of French, Pennsylvania State University  
323 S. Burrowes Building  
University Park, PA 16802  
(814)863-9660 |

Le but de mes recherches est d’étudier la création et le développement des villages du livre en France. Je m’intéresse à ce que les villages du livre révèlent à propos du statut des livres et de la culture de l’imprimé dans la société française contemporaine et comment les identités de ces villages changent comme résultat de leur nouveau statut comme village du livre. En plus, j’aimerais savoir comment les livres et les arts du livre profitent de l’existence de ces villages. Je ferai des entretiens seulement avec des personnes ayant au moins dix-huit ans. Votre participation à ces recherches bénéficiera la société en aidant à avancer la compréhension de l’importance des villages du livre dans la société française contemporaine.

Je vous interviewerai en français à propos de votre participation dans les villages du livre. Cet entretien durera à peu près une heure. Après l’entretien initial, il est possible que je vous contacte par téléphone ou par email avec d’autres questions. J’enregistrerai l’entretien sur bande audio, mais je pourrais arrêter l’enregistrement à tout moment selon vos souhaits. Ces enregistrements seront conservés sur mon ordinateur et sur des CDs pour une période de vingt ans (jusqu’en 2024). A ce temps-là, les enregistrements seront effacés ou autrement détruits. L’ordinateur se trouve chez moi. Les CDs seront conservés dans un bureau fermé à clé dans mon bureau à Pennsylvania State University. Je serai la seule personne à pouvoir y accéder. Si applicable, il est possible que je vous demande votre permission de prendre des photos soit de votre entreprise soit de vous à votre entreprise dans un village du livre, en utilisant un appareil-photo numérique ou manuel. Si vous ne souhaitez pas que des photos de vous ou de votre lieu de travail soient incluses dans les recherches, vous pouvez dénier la permission pour cette partie du projet (voir ci-dessous). Si je prends des photos, elles seront conservées en forme numérique sur mon ordinateur, sur des CDs, et, en quelques cas en forme “normale” (sur papier) pour une période de vingt ans (jusqu’en 2024), après lequel elles seront effacées ou autrement détruites. Les CDs et photos en papier seront conservés dans un bureau fermé à clé. Je serai la seule personne à pouvoir y accéder.

Il n’y a aucun risque à participer à cette étude. Votre participation est volontaire et vous pouvez arrêter l’entretien dès que vous le souhaitez. En plus, vous pouvez refuser de répondre à certaines questions. Si vous avez des questions à propos de ce projet ou à propos de votre participation à ce
projet, veuillez me contacter (voir mes coordonnées ci-dessus). Vous pouvez également contacter le bureau des protections de recherches universitaires à Penn State University au 001 814 865-1775.

J’aimerais pouvoir vous citer fidèlement et exactement (« citations directes ») dans ma thèse doctorale et dans d’autres publications académiques. Veuillez indiquer si vous me permettez de les utiliser en cochant la case correspondant à votre réponse.

_____ Oui, l’emploi de citations directes de cet entretien est permis.
_____ Non, l’emploi de citations directes de cet entretien n’est pas permis.

Veuillez indiquez comment vous préférez que je vous nomme dans mes recherches. Je n’utiliserai pas votre nom sans permission.

_____ Nom
_____ Titre (official du gouvernement, bouquinistes, entrepreneur, etc.)
_____ Pseudonyme (choisi par la chercheuse)

S’il est applicable, il est possible que je vous demande la permission d’inclure des photos soit de vous-même soit de votre entreprise dans ma thèse ou dans d’autres publications. Veuillez indiquer votre préférence.

_____ Je ne souhaite pas que des photos de moi-même ou de mon entreprise soient incluses dans cette étude.
_____ Je donne permission d’inclure des photos de moi-même et de mon entreprise dans cette étude.
_____ Je donne permission d’inclure des photos de mon entreprise, mais non pas de moi-même, dans cette étude.

Si vous acceptez de participer à ces recherches et aux termes cités ci-dessus, veuillez signer votre nom ci-dessous et indiquer la date. Une copie de ce document vous sera donnée. Le bureau des protections des recherches universitaires peut demander de consulter le dossier concernant ce projet.

_______________________________________ ___________________________
Signature du participant      Date

Je, sous-signée, Audra L. Merfeld, vérifie que la procédure de consentement informé décrite ci-dessus a été suivie.

_______________________________________ ___________________________
Signature de la chercheuse     Date
Appendix B

Letter of Introduction to Participants Contacted via E-mail

Cher Monsieur, Chère Madame,

Ayant trouvé votre adresse électronique sur l’Internet, je me permets de vous contacter afin de vous inviter à participer à une étude universitaire sur les villages du livre. Je m’appelle Audra Merfeld et je suis étudiante à Penn State University, aux Etats-Unis. Je suis actuellement en train de faire des recherches pour ma thèse doctorale, qui examine la création, le fonctionnement et l’importance des villages du livre en France. Je serai en France cet automne pour faire des recherches et j’ai l’intention de visiter plusieurs villages du livre afin de mieux les comprendre. J’aimerais bien vous interviewer pendant mon séjour. Il m’aidera beaucoup dans mes recherches d’avoir de différents points de vue de la part des individus dans ces villages (tels que des bouquinistes, des cafetiers, etc.) aussi bien que des points de vue des représentants du gouvernement. Je ferai des entretiens seulement avec des personnes ayant au moins dix-huit ans.

J’inclus ci-dessous quelques exemples des types de questions que je vous poserais. S’il y a des questions que je pose qui sont trop personnelles ou auxquelles vous ne désirez pas répondre, vous ne seriez pas, bien sûr, obligé d’y répondre. Je vous envoie aussi, par fichier attaché, le document de consentement que vous devrez signer si vous décidez de participer à mes recherches. Il n’est pas nécessaire d’imprimer le document. Si vous décidez de participer, j’apporterai tous les documents nécessaires et je vous en donnerai une copie à garder.

Je serais à (nom du village) du (date) au (date). Si vous souhaitez participer à mes recherches, merci de me répondre par email en indiquant quelle heure et quel lieu seraient convenables pour vous interviewer. J’essayerai de vous contacter par email ou par téléphone quelques jours avant mon arrivée.

Voici le genre de questions que je vous poserais :

- Quelle est votre définition d’un « village du livre » ?
- Comment voyez-vous votre rôle dans le village du livre ?
- Comment voyez-vous le rapport entre les livres et le village ?
- Participez-vous à des activités dans le village du livre ? Si oui, lesquelles ? Quels effets ces activités ont-elles sur la vie, la culture et l’économie dans le village ?
- Habitez-vous dans un village du livre ? Si oui, pouvez-vous expliquer comment vous y êtes arrivé ?
Je vous remercie à l’avance, (Monsieur/Madame), d’avoir pris le temps de considérer votre participation à mes recherches.

Veuillez agréer, (Monsieur/Madame), l’assurance de mes sentiments les plus distingués,

Audra L. Merfeld  
Department of French  
Pennsylvania State University  
320 S. Burrowes Building  
University Park, PA 16802  
(814)865-9580  
alm334@psu.edu
Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms (Name),

Having located your email address on the Internet, I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a scholarly study on the villages du livre. My name is Audra Merfeld and I am a student at Pennsylvania State University, in the United States. I am currently conducting research for my doctoral thesis, which examines the creation, functioning, and importance of the villages du livre in France. I will be in France this fall to conduct research, and I intend to visit several of the villages du livre. I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you during my stay. It would greatly help me in my research to have different points of view from individuals who live and work in these towns (such as booksellers, cafetiers, etc.), as well as the viewpoint of government officials. I will only be interviewing individuals eighteen years of age or older.

I am including below some examples of the types of questions I would ask you. If there are questions I ask which are too personal or to which you do not wish to respond, you would not, of course, be obligated to respond. I am also sending you, by attached file, the informed consent form that you would have to sign if you decide to participate in my research. It is not necessary to print out the document. If you decide to participate, I will bring all the necessary documents and I will give you a copy to keep.

I will be in (name of town) from (date) to (date). If you wish to participate in my research, please respond by email, indicating a time and place that would be convenient to hold an interview with you. I will contact you by email or telephone several days before my arrival.

Here are some examples of questions I might ask you:

- What is your definition of a village du livre?
- How do you see your role in the village du livre?
- How do you view the relationship between books and the town?
- Do you participate in activities in the village du livre? If yes, which ones? What effects do these activities have on the life, culture, and economy of the town?
- Do you live in a village du livre? If yes, can you explain how you came to live there?

I thank you in advance (Name), for having taken the time to consider participating in my research.

Sincerely,

Audra L. Merfeld
Department of French
Pennsylvania State University
320 S. Burrowes Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814)865-9580
alm334@psu.edu
Start here
Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Please state your name and profession or title (may be asked, depending on level of consent given).
2. What is your relationship with the villages du livre (vdl)?
3. How would you define a vdl?
4. Do you work in a vdl?
   - If yes, where do you work?
   - How long have you worked there?
   - Please explain what your job entails.
   - What do you feel is the importance of this job in the community?
5. Are there certain times of year that are busier than others in the vdl? Explain.
6. How much do you interact with tourists in the vdl?
   - What types of tourists frequent the vdl?
   - Where do tourists come from? (from the region? from other parts of France? from Europe? from other parts of the world?)
   - What can you tell me if anything about their reactions to the vdl?
7. What kinds of festivals or special events take place in the vdl? Please explain.
   - When are they and how long do they last?
   - Who is in charge of organizing these events?
   - Do you feel these events are important? Why or why not?
   - What role do these events play in the maintenance of the vdl?
   - What role do they play in promoting or preserving print culture?
   - Do you feel these events have an impact on the identity of the town? Why or why not?
   - Are certain events more attended than others?
8. What kinds of businesses exist in the vdl? How do they contribute to the town’s atmosphere?
9. What people in the community play key roles in shaping the identity and the memory of the vdl?
10. Do you live in a vdl?
    - If yes:
      - Have you always lived there?
      - If yes:
        - Please explain how the town’s identity has changed since it became a vdl.
        - Do you view these changes as positive or negative? Explain.
• If no:
  o Please explain your decision to move there. Were you invited to come or did you decide on your own?
  o What kinds of changes, if any, have you seen since your arrival? Explain.
  o Were you welcomed into the community? Explain.
  o Do you feel you are a part of the community? Explain.

11. Do you own a business in a vdl?
  o If yes:
    ▪ What kind of business is it?
    ▪ How long has it been open?
    ▪ Is this a type of business you were familiar with before you opened it? Explain.
    ▪ Did you receive any training or financial aid to help you open this business? Explain.
    ▪ What role does your business play in the community?
    ▪ Do you feel your business is successful? Explain.
    ▪ What kinds of challenges did your business face in the past? What kinds of challenges does it face now?
    ▪ What kinds of advertising do you do? (Would it be possible for me to see examples?) Do you pay for the advertising or is there special funding for this?
    ▪ Do you feel it is important for businesses to function as a community or as individual entities? Do you see competitiveness in the community? Explain.
  o For booksellers only:
    ▪ What kinds of books do you sell?
    ▪ Why did you choose these genres?
    ▪ Why is it important to promote the sale of second-hand books rather than new ones?
    ▪ Do you sell books over the Internet? If yes, can you explain your experience in this domain? Do you find that it is an efficient way to sell them? What problems have you encountered?
    ▪ Were you a part of the European Union Project UR 4001, conducted from 1998 to 2000? If yes, can you explain your participation in this study?

12. Do you feel it is important to establish links between vdl in France? in Europe? Why or why not?

13. For you, what is the importance of the vdl in French culture?

14. Do you feel vdl have an effect on the preservation of print culture? Explain.

15. What impact do books have on the vdl?

16. What role do you think print culture plays in contemporary French society? How does this relate to the vdl?
For government officials or organizations only:

1. In what ways does your organization support the vdl? Please explain.
2. What do you feel is the significance of this support?
3. What can you tell me about how the vdl function (in terms of economy, government of vdl businesses)
4. In what ways has the transformation of these towns into vdl changed their identities?
5. What other kinds of “themed” villages exist in this region and what, if any, relationship exists between them and the vdl?
6. Do you feel the vdl play an important role in French society? Please explain.
7. What is the importance of print culture in France? Explain. Do you feel the vdl contribute in any way to the preservation of print culture? Explain.
10. Do you feel it is important to establish links between the vdl in France? in Europe? Why or why not?
11. Are you familiar with EU Project UR 4001? Was your organization involved in this project? If yes, can you explain?
12. What do you think about the idea of promoting the vdl as a “pan-European tourist trail?”
Questions de l’entretien:

1. S’il vous plaît, donnez votre nom et votre profession ou votre titre. (peut être demandé, selon le niveau de consentement donné)
2. Comment est-ce que vous êtes associé avec les villages du livre (vdl)?
3. Quelle est votre définition d’un village du livre?
4. Est-ce que vous travaillez dans un vdl?
   o Si oui, où est-ce que vous travaillez?
   o Pendant combien de temps est-ce que vous y avez travaillé ?
   o Pourriez-vous expliquer en quoi consiste votre travail ?
   o Comment voyez-vous l’importance de ce travail dans la communauté?
5. Est-ce qu’il y a certains moments de l’année qui sont plus occupés que d’autres dans le vdl? Expliquez.
6. Combiens de contact avez-vous avec les touristes dans le vdl?
   o Quels types de touristes fréquentent le vdl?
   o Que pourriez-vous me dire à propos de leurs réactions au vdl?
7. Quels genres de festivals ou d’événements spéciaux ont lieux dans le vdl?
   Expliquez.
   o Quand sont-ils et pendant combien de temps est-ce qu’ils durent?
   o Qui se charge de l’organisation de ces événements?
   o Pensez-vous que ces événements soient importants? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?
   o Quel rôle jouent ces événements dans le maintien du vdl?
   o Quel rôle est-ce qu’ils jouent dans la promotion ou dans la préservation de la culture de l’imprimé?
   o Pensez-vous que ces événements aient un effet sur l’identité du village? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas ?
   o Est-ce qu’il y a certains événements qui sont plus fréquentés que d’autres?
8. Quels genres d’entreprises existent dans le vdl? Comment est-ce qu’elles contribuent à l’ambiance du village ?
9. Quelles personnes dans la communauté jouent un rôle clé dans la formation de l’identité et la mémoire du vdl?
10. Habitez-vous dans un vdl?
   a. Si oui:
      i. Est-ce que vous y avez toujours habité?
      1. Si oui:
         a. Pourriez-vous expliquer comment l’identité du village a changé depuis sa transformation en vdl?
2. Si non:
   a. Pourriez-vous expliquez votre décision d’y déménager ? Est-ce que vous y étiez invité ou est-ce que vous avez décidé tout seul de venir?
   b. De quelles sortes de changements, s’il y en a, est-ce que vous avez témoigné depuis votre arrivée? Expliquez.
   c. Est-ce que vous étiez bien accueilli par la communauté? Expliquez.
   d. Sentez-vous que vous faites partie de la communauté? Expliquez.

11. Est-ce que vous possédez une entreprise dans un vdl?
   a. Si oui:
      i. Quel genre d’entreprise est-elle?
      ii. Depuis combien de temps est-il ouverte?
      iii. Est-ce un type d’entreprise avec lequel vous étiez familier avant que vous l’ayez ouverte? Expliquez.
      v. Quel rôle est-ce que votre entreprise joue dans la communauté?
      vi. Sentez-vous que votre entreprise a connu une réussite? Expliquez.
      vii. Quels genres de défis est-ce que votre entreprise a rencontrés dans le passé? Quels défis ? est-ce qu’elle rencontre maintenant ?
      viii. Quelles sortes de publicité est-ce que vous faites? (Est-ce qu’il serait possible pour moi d’en voir des exemples ?) Est-ce que c’est vous qui payez pour les publicités ou est-ce qu’il y a de l’aide financier pour ceci ?
      ix. Pensez-vous qu’il soit important pour les entreprises de fonctionner comme une communauté ou comme des entités individuelles? Voyez-vous une compétitivité dans la communauté? Expliquez.
   b. Pour les bouquinistes seulement:
      i. Quels genres de livres vendez-vous?
      ii. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi ces genres?
      iii. Pourquoi est-il important de promouvoir la vente des livres d’occasion au lieu de nouveaux livres?
      iv. Vendez-vous des livres par Internet? Si oui, pourriez-vous expliquer votre expérience dans ce domaine? Trouvez-vous que c’est un moyen efficace de les vendre ? Quels problèmes avez-vous rencontrés?
      v. Avez-vous participé au projet UR 4001 de l’Union Européen qui s’est déroulé de 1998 à 2000? Si oui, pourriez-vous expliquer votre participation à ce projet?

13. Pour vous, quelle est l’importance des vdl dans la culture française?
15. Quel impacte ont les livres sur les vdl?
16. Quel rôle pensez-vous jouer la culture de l’imprimé dans la société française contemporaine? Comment est-ce que cela est relié aux vdl?

Pour des représentants du gouvernement ou des organisations:
1. Dans quelles façons est-ce que votre organisme soutient les vdl? Expliquez.
2. Que pensez-vous est la signification de ce soutien?
3. Que pourriez-vous me dire à propos du fonctionnement des vdl (en ce qui concerne l’économie, le gouvernement des entreprises)?
4. Dans quelles façons est-ce que la transformation de ces villages en vdl a changé leurs identités?
5. Quelles autres sortes de villages “à thème” existent dans cette région et quelle relation existe entre eux et les vdl, s’il y en a une?
6. Pensez-vous que les vdl jouent un rôle important dans la société française? Expliquez.
10. Pensez-vous qu’il soit important d’établir des liens entre les vdl en France en Europe? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?
11. Connaissiez-vous le projet UR 4001 de l’Union Européenne? Est-ce que votre organisation a participé à ce projet? Si oui, pouvez-vous expliquer de quelles façon(s)?
12. Que pensez-vous de l’idée de promouvoir les vdl en Europe comme un « chemin pan- Européen touristique? »
## Appendix D

### Book Towns around the World\(^{157}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australia</strong></td>
<td>Booktown Australia - Southern Highlands, New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Europe</strong></td>
<td><em>Belgium</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Redu (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Damme Boekendorp (May 1, 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>England / Wales</em>:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>  ○ Atherstone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>  ○ Blaenavon (2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Hay-on-Wye (1961)</td>
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<td><em>Estonia</em></td>
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<td>  ○ Võõrikvere</td>
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<td><em>Finland</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Kirjakilä Sysmä (July 4, 1997)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>France</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Bécherel (1989)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>  ○ Cuisery</td>
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<td></td>
<td>  ○ Fontenoy-la-Joûte (April 28, 1996)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>  ○ La Charité-sur-Loire (April 22, 2000)</td>
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<td>  ○ Merlieux</td>
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<td>  ○ Montmorillon (June 9, 2000)</td>
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<td>  ○ Montolieu (1989)</td>
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<td>  ○ (Salins-les-Bains)</td>
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<td>  ○ Villerville</td>
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<td><em>Germany</em>:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>  ○ Montereaggio, paese dei libre (2004)</td>
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<td><em>Luxembourg</em>:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Vianden, Cité littéraire</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The Netherlands</em>:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>  ○ Bredevoort (1993)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Norway</strong></td>
<td><em>Tvedestrand - Bokbyen ved Skagerrak (June 28, 2003)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Fjærlend (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scotland</strong></td>
<td><em>Dalmellington</em> (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Wigtown (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spain</strong></td>
<td><em>Valladolid</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweden</strong></td>
<td><em>Mellösa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Switzerland</strong></td>
<td><em>Saint Pierre de Clages, Village du Livre (1993)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North America</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canada</strong></td>
<td><em>Sidney-by-the-Sea, B.C. (1995)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>United States</strong></td>
<td><em>Archer City, Texas (Book ranch)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Nevada City – Grass Valley, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Stillwater, Minnesota (August 24, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asia</strong></td>
<td><em>Japan</em>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Mijawaga, Gifu (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>  ○ Book Town Kanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Malaysia</strong></td>
<td><em>Kampung Buku Langkawi (December 3, 1997)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{157}\) Dates of inaugurations of these book towns are included in parentheses when this information has been available.
Appendix E

Brochure for Bécherel
Bécherel accueille toute l'année
notre passion pour le Livre

Point culminant de l’Ille-et-Vilaine, ancienne place forte médiévale Bécherel a connu son apogée aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles grâce au commerce du lin et du chanvre. Désertée par la population active dans les années soixante, elle devient :

petite cité de caractère en valorisant son patrimoine architectural exceptionnel.

C’est dans ce cadre chargé d’histoire que l’association Savenn-Dour assurant un Pâques 1989 a organisé
Fête du Livre

Ecrivains, libraires, éditeurs et amateurs de livres se côtoient avec bonheur.

Un public enchanté, des professionnels satisfaits, la fête est un succès. La première pierre de la "Cité du Livre" est posée.

Collectionneurs avertis et simples promeneurs, Bécherel, Cité du Livre® et Petite Cité de caractère, vous souhaite la bienvenue...

Les efforts conjugués de cette association et de la municipalité débouchent bientôt sur l’implantation définitive des premiers bouquinistes. Après Hay-en-Wye au Pays de Galles et Redu en Belgique, Bécherel devient

la troisième Cité du Livre® en Europe,
la première en France

Libraires, relieurs, artistes et artisans d’art investissent les locaux laissés vacants par la mutation économique. Bécherel voit ses murs anciens renaître. Un projet économique à caractère culturel se réalise en milieu rural...

Aujourd’hui, les 15 librairies ouvertes toute l’année proposent

un large choix d’ouvrages allant d’éditions anciennes fort rares aux livres de poche d’occasion en passant par des éditions régionales contemporaines.

Le variété des livres proposés permet ainsi d’accueillir et de satisfaire le plus large public.
Bibliophiles, collectionneurs.

Les livres que vous recherchez depuis longtemps, les libraires de Blâmont le feront peut-être ou peuvent le rechercher pour vous.
N'hésitez pas à passer les voir ou à leur écrire.
Appendix F

Brochure for Fontenoy-la-Joûte

Contact

Documentazione contre envoi d’un timbre affranchi.

Les Amis du Livre
Marie • 54 122 Fontenoy-la-Joûte
Tél. 03 83 71 51 92 • Fax 03 83 71 51 97
www.fontenoy-la-joute.com
lesamisdulivre74@wanadoo.fr

Association Culturelle et Artistique
du Village du Livre
3, rue Saint Pierre • 54122 Fontenoy-la-Joûte
Tél./fax/répondeurs 03 83 71 52 21 ou 03 83 71 53 25
acul@vulfr.net


Merci à nos partenaires

Partenaire du Village du Livre
Centre régional du livre de Lorraine
L’Histoire d’un village de 280 habitants
Fontenoy-la-Joûte fut bâti au XIe siècle à une croisée de chemins au milieu des champs. Les maisons actuelles se sont construites au XVIIIe siècle autour d’un Y renversé. Les fermes lorraines typiques sont juxtaposées, accolées les unes aux autres et bâties toutes en longueur. Étroites de façades, elles accueillaient pendant l’hiver rude et long non seulement le bétail, la famille, mais aussi le foin, la paille, la nourriture, le grain pour les poules, les lapins et auré cochin, le bois (au moins 30 m³ pour un hiver) et permettaient une vie en autarcie en attendant les jours meilleurs.

La chapelle Saint-Pierre
Au sommet de la côte Saint-Pierre (la première cuesta du Bassin Parisien), dominant les Vosges, se trouve la chapelle Saint-Pierre aussi dés 1120 dans la charte de l’abbaye de Senones. Cette chapelle serait le chœur de l’ancienne église reconstruite au XIIe siècle : le linteau trilobé au-dessus de la porte d’entrée avec sa croix patée gravée et la petite fenêtre datent de cette époque.

Le Village du Livre de Fontenoy-la-Joûte,
c’est la réunion de professionnels du Livre dans un village de 280 habitants :
18 bouquinistes (plus de 500 000 livres anciens et d’occasion),
un relieur d’art,
un artisan-papetier,
un calligraphe.
Plus un restaurant et un point de vente de 12 producteurs locaux.

Ce projet de Village a été sagement méri par trois hommes : le Père Serge Bonnet, Nancéien, directeur de recherches au CNRS, François Guillaume, député de la circonscription, les fondateurs et Daniel Mengotti, professeur, ami des deux autres protagonistes et animateur du village jusqu’à son décès en septembre 1999.


Depuis, ce sont plusieurs dizaines de milliers de visiteurs qui viennent chaque année chercher le livre tant convoité, le trouver par hasard ou après de nombreuses recherches, ou tout simplement apprécier la convivialité d’un village qui a une âme.

Plusieurs emplois ont été créés, de nombreuses fermes ont été vénues, aménagées en boutiques de livres avec un respect de l’architecture originale.
Un restaurant accueillant et convivial s’est installé.

Appendix G

Brochure for La Charité-sur-Loire
Appendix H

Brochure for Montmorillon

Cité de l’Écrit et des Métiers du Livre
25 bouquinistes & artisans vous accueillent

Renseignements
au 05 49 83 03 03
www.citedelecrit-montmorillon.com
Appendix I

Brochure for Salins-les-Bains

Salins-les-Bains, Pays du Livre
Appendix J

Internet Resources

Book Town Websites (France):
- Cuisery: Bienvenue au village du livre de Cuisery. <http://www.cuisery-livre.com/> (not included in this study)

Other Websites:
- International Organisation of Book Towns: <http://www.booktown.net>
VITA

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., French, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA (2007)


B.A., English and French, Clarke College, Dubuque, IA (1996)

PUBLICATIONS


SELECTED PRESENTATIONS


