

## CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON OF HERITAGE GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN RENEWAL: INSIGHTS FROM DRESDEN AND PONTAULT - COMBAULT

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**Abstract.** Heritage governance and urban renewal have evolved from historically separate domains – heritage focusing on preservation and urban renewal emphasizing modernization – toward integrated approaches that treat heritage as an active resource for sustainable urban transformation. Germany and France exemplify contrasting governance traditions: Germany prioritizes decentralized, participatory, and adaptive models, whereas France relies on centralized, regulatory frameworks increasingly complemented by participatory mechanisms and public-private partnerships. This article examines the theoretical foundations, national governance frameworks, and practical strategies in both countries, highlighting opportunities for cross-learning to foster socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and culturally sensitive urban renewal.

**Keywords:** preservation of urban environment, Äußere Neustadt, urban planning preservation.

**Introduction.** Urban heritage is no longer a static relic; it is increasingly recognized as a living resource that contributes to contemporary cities' sustainability and identity [1]. Heritage governance encompasses the systems, actors, and tools through which societies manage, protect, and adapt cultural assets within broader urban development contexts. Urban renewal includes strategies for revitalizing urban areas, addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges while maintaining continuity with historical and cultural layers. Global pressures – such as climate change, population growth, housing demand, digitalization, and economic transformation – necessitate approaches integrating heritage, sustainability, and participatory governance [2]. The challenge is managing urban transformation without erasing local identity. Germany and France provide instructive examples of how governance structures influence heritage-informed renewal outcomes. Contemporary urban renewal emphasizes working with the existing urban fabric rather than replacing it, prioritizing social inclusion, climate adaptation, and living heritage [3].

**Analysis of the recent research and publications.** Heritage governance represents a multidimensional system that shapes how societies define, value, manage, and transform their cultural assets. Unlike traditional heritage management, which focused narrowly on monuments or legal protection, contemporary heritage governance encompasses the full spectrum of actors, scales, processes, and outcomes involved in decision-making. Key actors include state authorities, civil society organizations, professional experts, and private stakeholders operating at local, national, and international levels. Processes range from the identification and valuation of heritage to its management and adaptive transformation, producing outcomes such as preservation, adaptive reuse, and urban renewal [4, 5].

Urban renewal refers to planned interventions in existing urban areas aimed at revitalizing physical, social, and economic conditions. Historically, it followed a modernist approach characterized by large-scale demolition and reconstruction – a tabula rasa mindset emphasizing efficiency and modernization [6]. Over time, the paradigm shifted toward urban regeneration and integrated development, highlighting incremental transformation, social inclusion, and cultural continuity [7]. Contemporary urban renewal strategies prioritize working with the existing urban

fabric (“Umbau mit Bestand”), focusing on adaptive reuse, environmental sustainability, and participatory processes. This approach treats the past not as an obstacle but as a resource for shaping resilient and inclusive cities [1, 8].

The intersection of heritage governance and urban renewal is particularly significant. Heritage governance ensures that the values of the existing built environment are recognized and negotiated among stakeholders, while urban renewal operationalizes these values through concrete interventions. Principles guiding the alignment of these domains include continuity and reuse, incremental transformation, social inclusion and participation, mixed uses and diversity, cultural and ecological integration, and multi-level adaptive governance [1, 9, 10]. Continuity and reuse safeguard cultural, social, and environmental value by adapting existing structures rather than replacing them. Incremental transformation enables gradual change, allowing communities to remain embedded in their neighborhoods. Social inclusion recognizes residents as co-creators, integrating local knowledge into planning. Mixed uses and diversity support resilient, lively neighborhoods, while cultural and ecological integration ensures heritage conservation aligns with sustainability objectives. Multi-level governance facilitates coordination across scales, fostering adaptive, learning-oriented strategies.

Several theoretical strands underpin this framework. Heritage studies highlight the socially constructed nature of heritage, where values are negotiated, contested, and politically mediated. Riegl [11] distinguished historical, age, and use values, while Laurajane Smith emphasized the Authorized Heritage Discourse as a social construction of heritage [4,12]. Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge [13] introduced dissonant heritage to illustrate contested meanings. Governance theories, such as Healey’s collaborative planning [8] and Jessop’s strategic-relational approach [9], stress networked, multi-actor coordination and participatory processes. Planning and urban transformation theories, including adaptive reuse [14] and resilience studies [15], frame urban renewal as a systemic process connecting heritage values to contemporary urban challenges.

Global frameworks further embed heritage governance within sustainable urban development. UNESCO’s Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Recommendation [1], the Council of Europe Faro Convention, [16] and SDG 11.4 of the UN Agenda 2030 [17] emphasize participatory planning, integration of heritage with social, economic, and environmental objectives, and recognition of heritage as a resource for community development.

**National Contexts.** Germany’s federal system exemplifies decentralized and participatory heritage governance. The federal government provides legal frameworks and funding, the States enforce heritage protection, and municipalities implement urban renewal projects in collaboration with civil society and private actors [3, 18]. Germany’s urban renewal has evolved from post-war *Flächensanierung* (comprehensive area redevelopment), characterized by large-scale clearance, to *behutsame Stadterneuerung* (careful renewal) and the concept of *Umbaukultur*, emphasizing incremental transformation, adaptive reuse, and social cohesion [3, 18, 19]. Programs such as *Soziale Stadt* integrate social objectives, fostering resident participation and neighborhood cohesion. Dresden’s *Äußere Neustadt* demonstrates heritage as socially embedded and dynamic, revitalized through collaboration between residents, creative economy actors, and municipal authorities [20, 21, 22].

In contrast, France has historically emphasized centralized heritage governance. The Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Territorial Cohesion oversee heritage and urban planning policies [23], while agencies such as *Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine* (ANRU) manage urban renewal programs, and the *Service des Monuments Historiques* ensures heritage compliance. Regional authorities coordinate with municipalities, and local urban agencies like APUR implement projects with private developers [24]. Initiatives such as the *Programme National de Rénovation Urbaine* (PNRU) and the *EcoQuartier* program integrate sustainability, social inclusion, and heritage preservation, illustrated by projects like the *Coulée Verte de Pontault-Combault* [25, 26].

Germany’s decentralized, participatory, and adaptive model contrasts with France’s centralized but increasingly collaborative approach. Both countries increasingly converge in integrating heritage with social, environmental, and economic goals: Germany offers lessons in

community engagement and adaptive reuse, while France provides insights into regulatory rigor and systematic heritage protection.

This integrated framework situates heritage governance as a driver of urban transformation, connecting theory with practice through principles, global guidelines, and national strategies that emphasize sustainability, participation, and cultural continuity.

**Main material and results.** Comparative Insights. A comparative analysis highlights complementary strengths in Germany and France's approaches to heritage governance and urban renewal. Germany's local autonomy and participatory practices encourage innovation and adaptation, ensuring urban renewal is socially embedded and responsive to local needs. In contrast, France's centralized system provides regulatory consistency and robust heritage protection, while recent initiatives such as Réinventer Paris [26] demonstrate growing collaboration with local stakeholders and private partners.

Both countries prioritize integrating sustainability into heritage governance and renewal practices. Germany's focus on adaptive reuse and incremental transformation reduces embodied carbon and enhances resilience. France increasingly aligns urban renewal projects with climate and biodiversity objectives, often leveraging policy instruments and funding incentives [15, 26, 27]. In both contexts, heritage is understood not merely as a static past to preserve, but as a dynamic driver of identity, social cohesion, and sustainable urban development.

Lessons from each country are mutually instructive. Germany could benefit from France's strong regulatory frameworks and systematic compliance mechanisms, while France could draw from Germany's participatory, incremental, and adaptive strategies to strengthen community engagement and long-term sustainability. The integration of social, environmental, and cultural considerations illustrates that heritage governance and urban renewal are increasingly aligned as complementary tools for adaptive urban transformation

**Case Studies. Dresden (Germany).** Dresden provides a rich example of heritage governance intertwined with urban renewal, where the city's layered history and civic engagement shape contemporary urban transformation. After extensive wartime destruction and subsequent neglect during the GDR era, inner-city neighborhoods, particularly the Äußere Neustadt, experienced social and physical decline. Recognizing the district's historical and cultural value, local authorities and residents initiated dialogue between 1989 and 1991, laying the groundwork for participatory urban renewal processes [20, 21]. In 1990, Stiftung Äußere Neustadt conducted a professional neighborhood survey documenting the built environment and identifying adaptive reuse potential, offering evidence-based guidance for future interventions (Fig. 1.) [22].



Fig. 1. Äußere Neustadt 1932-2014. Walter H. 1932 © SLUB / Deutsche Fotothek, Peter Haschenz 2014

The introduction of legislative and planning tools, notably the Sanierungssatzung (1993, 2023), enabled a balanced approach combining heritage preservation with sustainable development [20, 21]. Since then, the Äußere Neustadt has undergone long-term, incremental regeneration, supported by municipal programs and local civic initiatives [22].

A hallmark of Dresden's approach is the integration of creative economy actors—including artists, designers, cultural organizations, small businesses, and event organizers. Notable examples include Stiftung Äußere Neustadt, blaueFABRIK e.V., Projekttheater Dresden, and Kollektiv NEUSTAD(t)RAUM. These actors contribute to cultural programming, adaptive reuse of historic buildings, and activation of public spaces, maintaining neighborhood vitality and social cohesion. Interventions range from permanent “impulse points” enhancing urban life to temporary measures actively engaging residents, fostering a sense of ownership and co-creation, such as yearly organized events as BRN in June and Festival of light in July [28, 29, 30], (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Temporary events create livable spaces and attract people to the district, functioning as magnet points. Examples include the Festival of Light, Schaubudensommer Katja Friedrich (left), and the Bunte Republik Neustadt, 2017, Anastasia Malko (right).

Today, Dresden exemplifies bottom-up, participatory governance within a hybrid framework, blending municipal oversight with civic initiative. The district retains its Gründerzeit character while accommodating mixed uses, ecological integration, and sustainable retrofitting. Challenges such as gentrification coexist with a strong civic identity, creative economy, and innovative public-space use (Fig. 3) [22].



Fig. 3 Preserved authenticity after the regeneration process (1991–2013) in the Äußere Neustadt. View of Alaunstraße: 1991 © SLUB/Deutsche Fotothek (left), 2013 © Anastasia Malko (right).



Dresden thus serves as a laboratory of heritage governance, where everyday heritage, participatory planning, and incremental urban renewal converge to produce a resilient, culturally rich, and socially inclusive urban environment. It bridges global frameworks like UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) [1] with local practice, offering lessons in multi-level coordination, adaptive standards, and activating heritage through creative use [31]

**Pontault-Combault (France).** Pontault-Combault offers a complementary perspective, demonstrating how centralized frameworks can integrate participatory design, ecological sustainability, and urban revitalization. The Coulée Verte project, a 4-km urban green corridor spanning the city east–west, exemplifies the convergence of built and natural heritage. It links existing urban infrastructure – including the town hall and central spaces – with surrounding woods and green areas, promoting green infrastructure and sustainable public spaces.

The project's governance model is multi-actor and multi-level. The municipal authority leads the initiative, supported by specialized design, engineering, and ecological consultancies. Environmental associations, local organizations, and citizens participate through workshops, public consultations, and co-design activities, integrating social and ecological objectives from the planning phase [25]. Public engagement began in early 2023, with workshops in March and June, followed by construction starting in early 2024. Phased implementation includes the Salle Jacques-Brel sector (Phase 1), the Town Hall area with a water mirror feature (Phase 2), and the Berchères neighborhood with new lighting, seating, and green spaces (Phase 3), aiming for completion by autumn 2025 [25, 26].

Key design elements integrate mobility, biodiversity, and urban aesthetics. Continuous pedestrian and bicycle paths promote soft mobility, while the planting of 33 trees and 3,800 plants in Phase 1 enhances urban ecology. Water management strategies – including infiltration basins and the “mirror of water” – reduce impermeable surfaces and support climate-resilient design. Conceptual threads of wood, water, and stone guide spatial organization, linking natural and built heritage and creating a coherent visual and experiential identity [25] (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Development of the area 1950-2025 Project: Coulée Verte: Green corridors and participatory urban renewal. Pontault-Combault Ville de Pontault-Combault, Atelier Polis (landscape architects and urban planners), Seqens, Sephia (civil engineers), Confluences (ecologists). France: Ville de Pontault-Combault. Open Presentation 28 June 2023.

Financially, the project operates with a total budget of approximately €10 million, with €4 million allocated in 2024 for the Coulée Verte and the Berchères phase costing €464,000 [25]. This phased financial planning ensures transparency and alignment with strategic urban renewal goals.

Pontault-Combault demonstrates how centralized governance can accommodate participatory processes, linking heritage preservation with urban renewal and ecological sustainability. The project embodies contemporary principles: multi-actor coordination, adaptive planning, and integrated design [29]. By combining landscape and built heritage with mobility, biodiversity, and

public-space improvements, the Coulée Verte illustrates the potential of structured urban renewal frameworks to create socially inclusive, ecologically resilient, and culturally meaningful urban corridors [26] (Fig. 5).

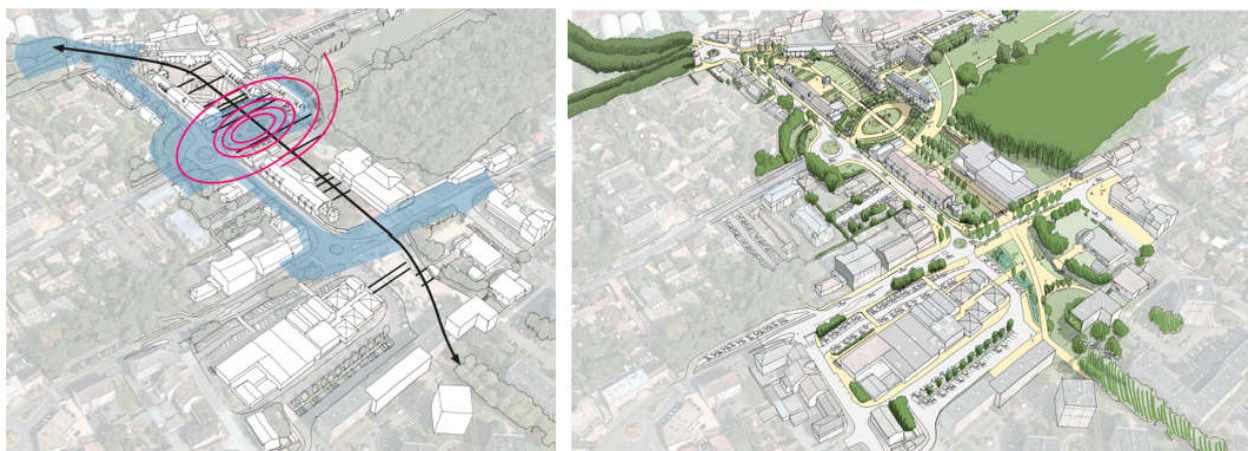


Fig. 5 Creation of the radial heart of the green corridor. Project: Coulée Verte: Green corridors and participatory urban renewal. Actors: Pontault-Combault Ville de Pontault-Combault, Atelier Polis (landscape architects and urban planners), Seqens, Sephia (civil engineers), Confluences (ecologists). France: Ville de Pontault-Combault Open Presentation 28 June.2023.

In sum, Pontault-Combault provides a counterpoint to Dresden's bottom-up, citizen-driven renewal. While Dresden relies on grassroots initiatives to activate heritage and community identity, Pontault-Combault emphasizes structured planning, phased implementation, and municipal leadership. Both cases converge on shared objectives: integrating heritage into urban development, fostering social inclusion, and promoting adaptive, environmentally responsive strategies. (Fig. 6.).



Fig. 6 Promenade before and after. Coulée Verte: Green corridors and participatory urban renewal. Project actors: Ville de Pontault-Combault, Atelier Polis (landscape architects and urban planners), Seqens, Sephia (civil engineers), Confluences (ecologists), and local residents. France: Ville de Pontault-Combault, Open Presentation, 28 June 2023.

### Lessons Across Borders

Comparative analysis of heritage governance and urban renewal in Germany and France reveals complementary strengths that suggest potential pathways for cross-national learning. In Germany, urban transformation emphasizes bottom-up participation, local initiative, and the engagement of creative economy actors. This approach fosters social resilience, neighborhood identity, and adaptive reuse of historic urban fabric, as exemplified by Dresden's Äußere Neustadt, where resident-led renewal has intertwined heritage preservation with cultural vibrancy and community agency [15, 18, 22].

In contrast, France offers structured governance frameworks, centralized oversight, and formal funding mechanisms, enabling large-scale coordination of ecological and urban renewal

projects while ensuring design quality, policy coherence, and alignment with national objectives [31, 36].

Germany can benefit from adopting aspects of the French model, particularly the use of formalized instruments and regulatory structures to scale local initiatives, integrate heritage preservation with housing and climate objectives, and ensure coherent city- and region-wide strategies. Conversely, France can draw lessons from Germany's participatory approaches by integrating local stakeholders and creative actors, embedding social legitimacy and community engagement into otherwise top-down programs such as EcoQuartier, Réinventer Paris, and Action Cœur de Ville [23, 24].

This complementary learning highlights the idea that heritage is not merely a static asset to be conserved, but a living resource that supports social cohesion, strengthens identity, and enables sustainable urban transformation [12]. The following table summarizes these observations across key dimensions of governance, heritage, urban renewal, sustainability, and social inclusion.

Table 1. Comparative Dimensions of Heritage Governance and Urban Renewal in Dresden and Pontault-Combault Malko A. 2025.

Dimension	Germany (Dresden)	France (Pontault-Combault)	Key Observations
Governance model	Hybrid multi-level governance with strong bottom-up participation	Centralized governance with local implementation and PPPs	Germany emphasizes civic engagement and community initiative; France relies on structured, state-led programs executed locally.
Heritage approach	Everyday heritage, adaptive reuse, lived culture	Integration of historic and green heritage in urban planning	Germany prioritizes social-cultural continuity; France integrates heritage with urban infrastructure and landscape planning.
Urban renewal strategy	Incremental, participatory, creative-economy-driven	Integrated, participatory, ecological	Both use participatory approaches, but Germany emphasizes incremental, grassroots-led change while France focuses on structured, multi-actor planning.
Sustainability / Climate	Retrofitting historic fabric, embodied energy, green infrastructure	EcoQuartier standards, sustainable public spaces	Germany focuses on adaptive reuse of existing structures; France emphasizes new sustainable projects and urban resilience measures.
Social inclusion	Local residents, alternative culture, NGOs	Residents' participation via municipal programs	Both aim for social cohesion; Germany relies on grassroots engagement, France on policy-driven mechanisms.
Overall insight	Participatory, adaptive, community-driven	Structured, integrated, ecologically-focused	Convergence: participatory planning, sustainability, heritage as a driver of renewal. Divergence: governance style and scale of actor networks.

Convergences include participatory planning, sustainability considerations, and heritage as a driver of renewal. Divergences lie in governance style, with Germany favoring local autonomy and bottom-up participation, and France emphasizing centralized coordination.

**Principles and Best Practices** The comparative experience of the two countries also reveals six guiding principles for heritage-informed urban renewal. Continuity and reuse emphasize the adaptation of existing urban fabric rather than its replacement, preserving cultural memory while optimizing embodied energy. Incremental transformation encourages stepwise interventions,



allowing communities to remain in place and participate actively in shaping their environment. Social inclusion and participatory processes recognize residents as experts of everyday life, ensuring that renewal initiatives are context-sensitive and equitable. Mixed-use development and diversity support vibrant, resilient neighborhoods where housing, work, culture, and public space coexist. Cultural and ecological integration aligns heritage conservation with environmental sustainability, linking identity and ecology into cohesive urban strategies. Finally, multi-level and adaptive governance fosters coordination across scales and sectors, enabling flexibility, experimentation, and learning in complex urban systems [30, 12].

In Germany, these principles are exemplified through participatory neighborhood initiatives, Umbaukultur practices [18, 20, 21, 22], and creative-led regeneration projects, as seen in Dresden, where adaptive reuse of Gründerzeit buildings and the activation of local cultural actors have created a socially resilient urban environment. In France, programs such as EcoQuartier and Réinventer Paris operationalize these principles by combining centralized planning, ecological interventions, and citizen engagement, as in the Coulée Verte project in Pontault-Combault, where urban green corridors integrate heritage, mobility, biodiversity, and public space improvement [25, 26].

Despite their differences, both Germany and France confront convergent challenges, including decarbonizing the built environment, addressing housing scarcity, and reconciling heritage values with social equity. Cross-national collaboration offers opportunities for mutually beneficial innovation. Germany can adopt France's capacity for strategic coordination and large-scale funding, aligning heritage preservation with broader urban and environmental goals. France, in turn, can incorporate Germany's cooperative planning culture to enhance citizen engagement in centrally coordinated programs. Shared European experimentation, such as joint pilot projects on adaptive reuse of modernist housing or carbon-neutral heritage districts, aligns with the EU's New European Bauhaus initiative [27] and promotes integrated, sustainable urban development.

**Conclusion.** Heritage governance and urban renewal have transitioned from separate, often conflicting agendas to integrated strategies that view heritage as a resource for sustainable urban transformation. Germany and France provide illustrative models of how governance structures, legal frameworks, and participatory mechanisms shape the outcomes of urban renewal. Germany demonstrates the benefits of decentralized, participatory, and adaptive approaches, while France highlights the importance of centralized regulation and structured coordination, increasingly combined with collaborative and participatory methods.

Both countries now converge on key priorities: adaptive reuse, incremental transformation, social inclusion, sustainability, and the recognition of heritage as a driver of identity, cohesion, and resilience. Lessons from each system can inform policy and practice elsewhere, emphasizing the importance of flexible governance, multi-level collaboration, and the integration of cultural, social, and ecological objectives. Future research should examine the role of digitalization, climate adaptation, and circular economy strategies as tools to further integrate heritage governance and urban renewal in evolving European cities.

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## ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ МІЖНАРОДНИЙ АНАЛІЗ УПРАВЛІННЯ КУЛЬТУРНОЮ СПАДЩИНОЮ ТА СТАЛОГО МІСЬКОГО ОНОВЛЕННЯ: ВИСНОВКИ З ДРЕЗДЕНА ТА ПОНТО-КОМБО

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**Анотація.** Управління культурною спадщиною та політика міського оновлення тривалий час розвивалися як окремі сфери, зосереджені відповідно на збереженні історичних цінностей і модернізації міського середовища. Однак останні десятиліття в Європі демонструють поступовий перехід до інтегрованих підходів, у межах яких спадщина розглядається як активний ресурс сталого розвитку міст. На прикладі Німеччини та Франції стаття аналізує, як дві різні управлінські традиції — децентралізована та гнучка німецька модель і централізована, нормативно орієнтована французька — зближуються у напрямі комплексних стратегій трансформації міських територій. Німеччина характеризується високим рівнем участі місцевих спільнот, адаптивним використанням історичної забудови та широким застосуванням програм, спрямованих на соціальну інтеграцію й екологічну стійкість. Франція, зберігаючи сильний державний контроль, розширює повноваження муніципалітетів, впроваджує нові механізми громадської участі та формує гібридні моделі управління, зокрема через тимчасове використання територій і публічно-приватні партнерства. У статті розглядаються теоретичні підходи до «живої» спадщини, багаторівневого врядування та стратегічного просторового планування, а також сучасні цифрові інструменти, що сприяють залученню населення та підвищенню якості управлінських рішень. Особлива увага приділена тому, як обидві країни реагують на соціальні та екологічні виклики — зміну клімату, дефіцит доступного житла та потребу в адаптації історичної тканини міст. Порівняльний аналіз демонструє взаємодоповнюваність досвіду: Німеччина може скористатися французькою системною координацією, тоді як Франція — німецькою гнучкістю й локальними інноваціями. Інтеграція цих практик відкриває можливості для формування соціально інклюзивних, екологічно стійких і культурно чутливих моделей міського оновлення.

**Ключові слова:** збереження міського середовища, Нойшадт, охорона містобудівної спадщини.

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