

Small Towns in France: Dedicated National Policies and Local Application

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Introduction

- Small Towns in France: issues of definition and of attention
- National Policies Dedicated to Small Towns
- Example of Local Application (Saint-Eloy-les-Mines)
- Discussion/general issues for ST

Small Towns in France: issues of definition and of attention



ST, an unidentified object in French official statistics:

- no official definition (commune/urban unit/urban area)
- and the statistical criteria have changed (from Urban Unit to Density grid)

Figure 1 – Répartition de la population française en 2017 selon la taille de l'unité urbaine

Urban Units

	Population	Part (en %)	Nombre d'unités urbaines	Nombre de communes
Agglomération de Paris	10 785 092	16,1	1	411
200 000 à 1 999 999 habitants	16 824 170	25,2	35	1 325
100 000 à 199 999 habitants	3 819 001	5,7	26	333
50 000 à 99 999 habitants	5 052 310	7,6	72	641
20 000 à 49 999 habitants	4 358 378	6,5	144	813
10 000 à 19 999 habitants	3 368 678	5,0	242	798
5 000 à 9 999 habitants	4 225 139	6,3	612	1 268
2 000 à 4 999 habitants	4 428 918	6,6	1 335	1 991
Hors unité urbaine	13 919 171	20,8	///	27 388
Ensemble	66 780 857	100,0	2 467	34 968

/// : absence de résultat due à la nature des choses.

Lecture : 7 % de la population française vit dans les 1 991 communes qui composent les 1 335 unités urbaines de 2 000 à 4 999 habitants.

Champ : France.

Source : Insee, recensement de la population 2017, composition communale des unités urbaines 2020.

Density grid

	Type de commune	Population	
Villes	Grands centres urbains	25 258 625	39%
	Centres urbains intermédiaires	8 222 136	13%
	Petites villes	3 913 141	6%
	Ceintures urbaines	6 344 970	10%
	Urbain	43 738 872	67%
Rural sous influence des villes	Bourgs ruraux	6 752 850	10%
	Rural à habitat dispersé	5 625 605	9%
	Rural à habitat très dispersé	399 899	1%
	Rural sous influence urbaine	12 778 354	20%
Rural autonome	Bourgs ruraux	3 410 095	5%
	Rural à habitat dispersé	4 324 700	7%
	Rural à habitat très dispersé	1 250 518	2%
	Rural autonome	8 985 313	14%
	Ensemble	65 502 539	100%

Source : Olivier Boulga-Olga, d'après l'Insee, données 2021

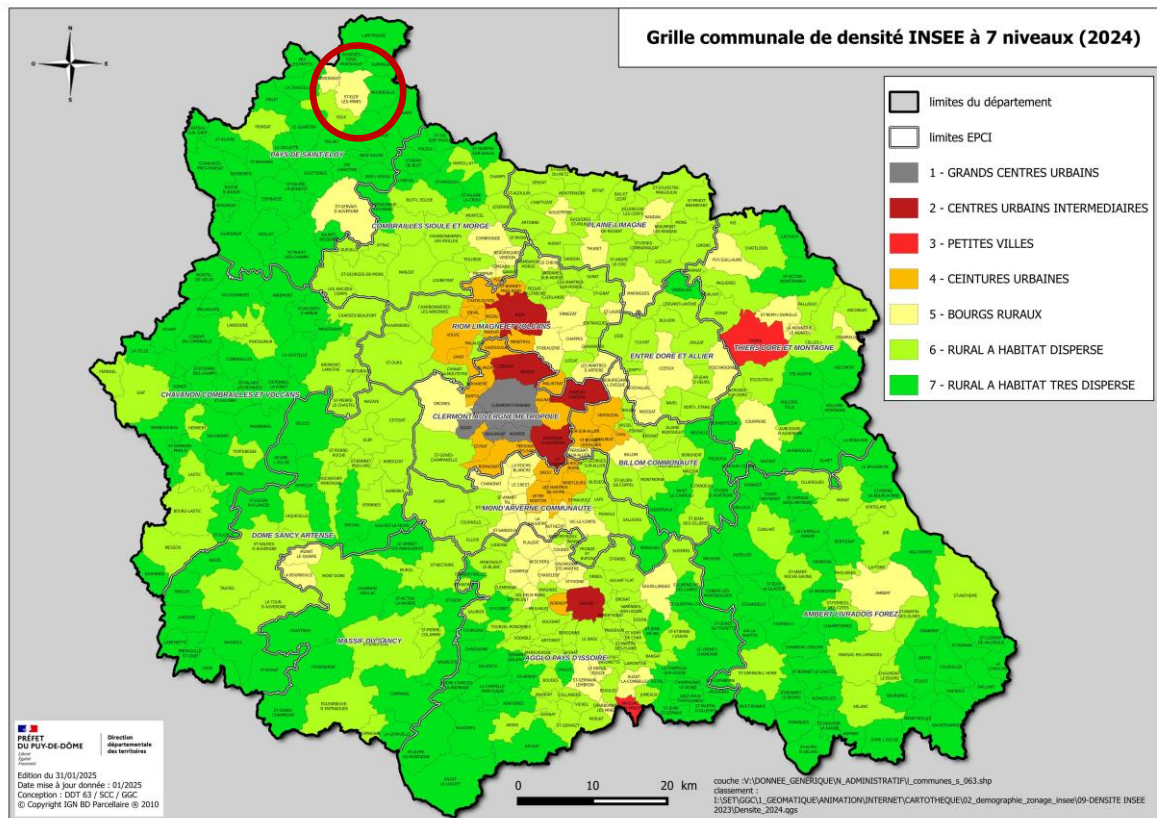
Need to identify ST by their level of facilities

Official classification of Centrality levels/communes



Example of Saint-Eloy-les-Mines

- Municipality/commune:
3,400 inhab. 2022
- Urban Unit of 3 municipalities:
5,300 inhab. 2022
- an intermediate equipment and services centre
- a market town (“bourg rural”)



= Different definitions of Small Towns

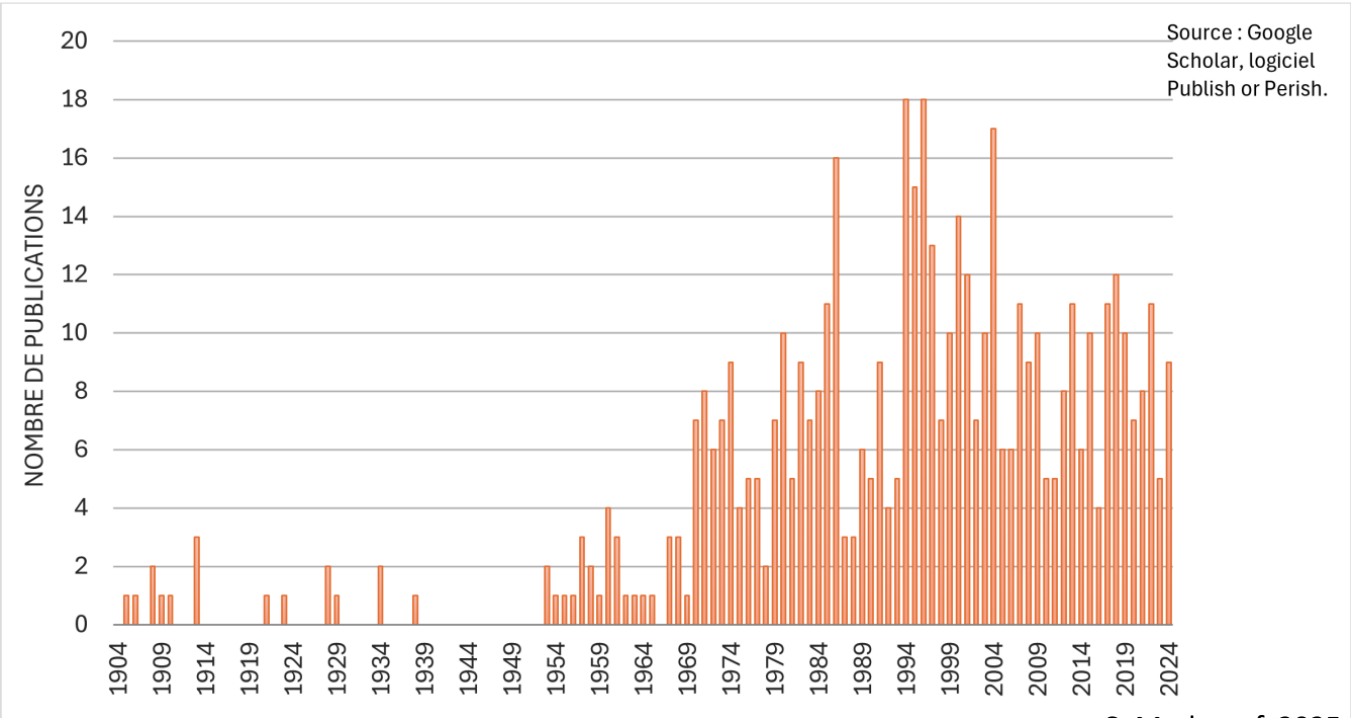
Definitions of Small Towns in France According to Different Sources

	For Associations of Elected Officials	For Researchers	For the State
Small Towns	Municipalities with 2,500 to 25,000 inhabitants (Association des Petites Villes de France)	Urban units with 5,000 to 20,000 inhabitants (Laborie, 1978; Mainet, 2008)	Municipalities and their inter-municipalities with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants and exercising centrality functions (ANCT, 2020)

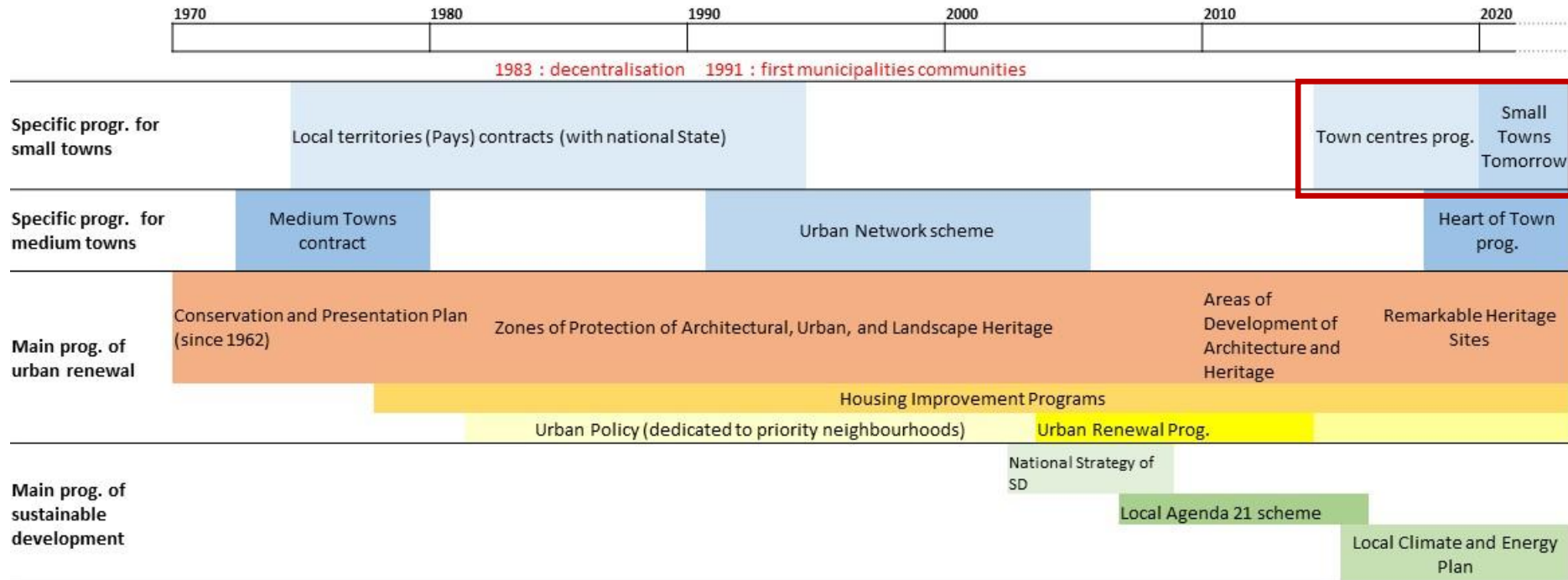


Recent attention from researchers and public actors : « small towns moment » in France

French-language publications with ‘small town’ in their title, from 1904 to 2024



Timeline of main national development and urban renewal policies in France



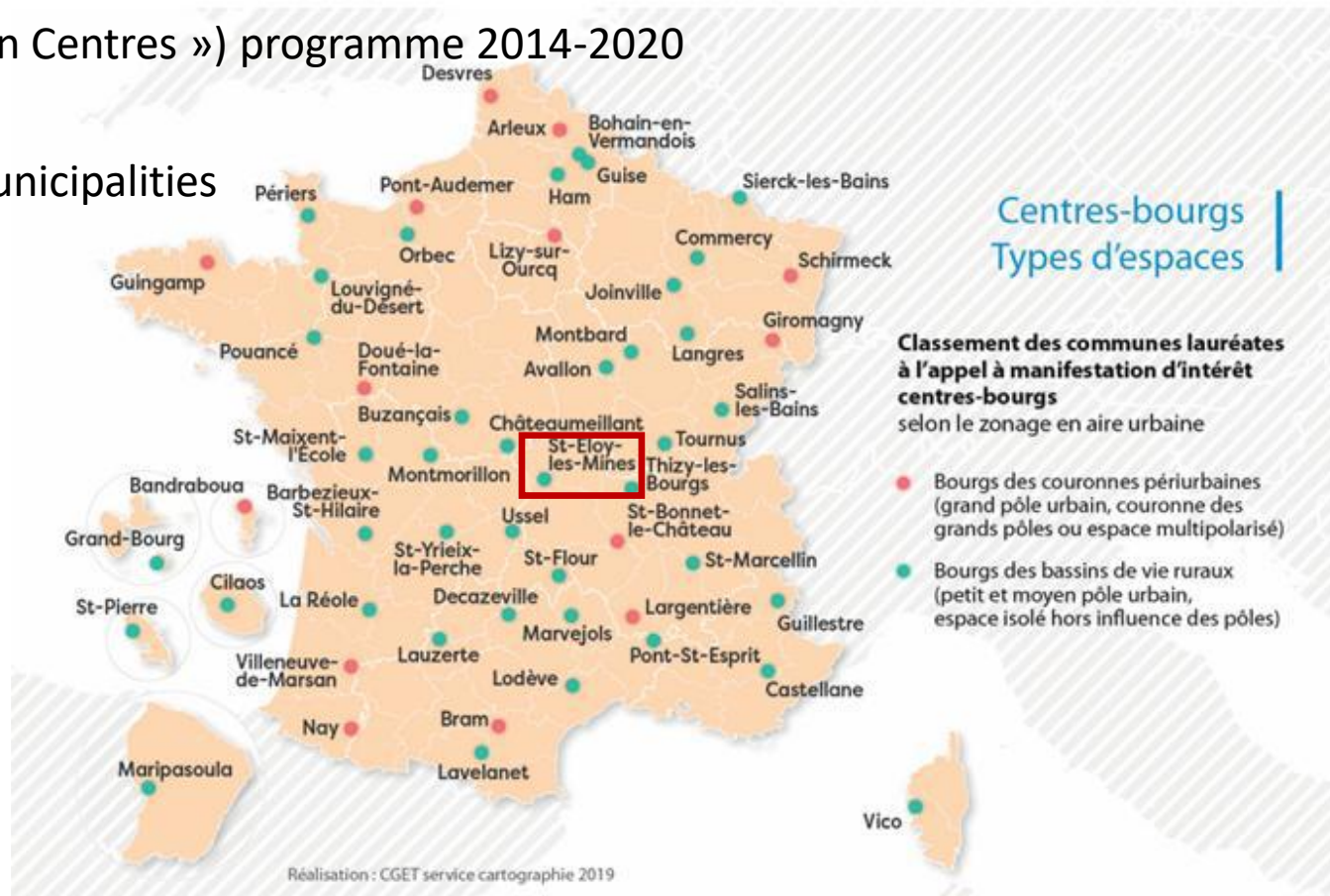
Recent evolution of public debate and public policies dedicated to Small Towns



National policies dedicated to ST: beyond diversity?

The Centres-Bourgs (« Town Centres ») programme 2014-2020

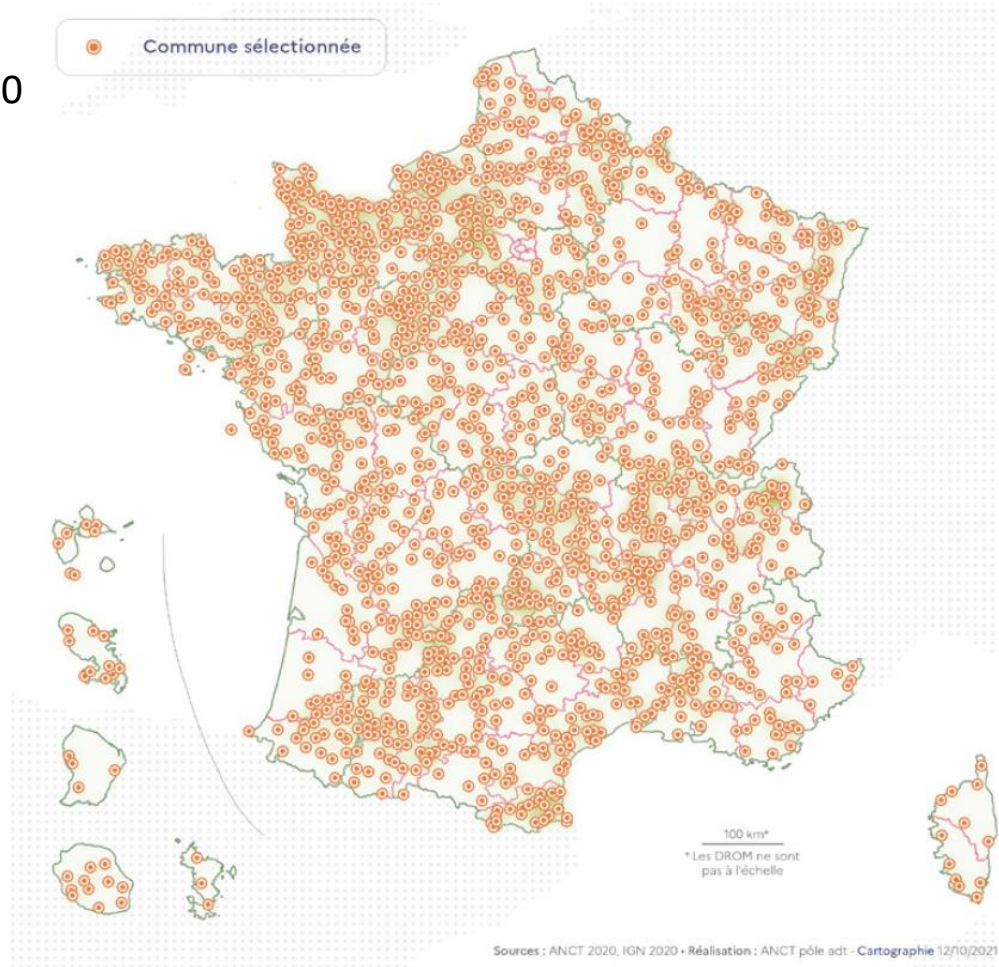
54 « winners »/selected municipalities



The « Small Towns of Tomorrow » (STT) programme 2020-2026

1,646 winners (« small towns » less than 20,000 inhabitants/communes or inter-municipal communities) : no lower threshold

- Funding of project engineering
- Help to get fundings for specific actions
- Creation of a « ST Club »/network





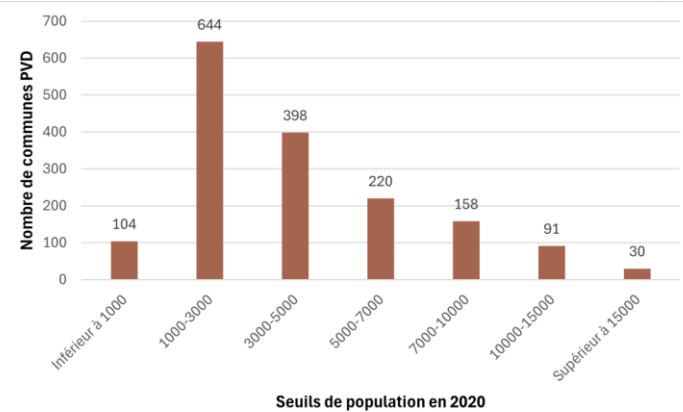
Main objective: a « tailor-made » programme to « improve the **living conditions** of residents in **small towns and surrounding areas** by supporting local authorities in pursuing dynamic and environmentally friendly development paths »

= Strong focus on **local centrality**

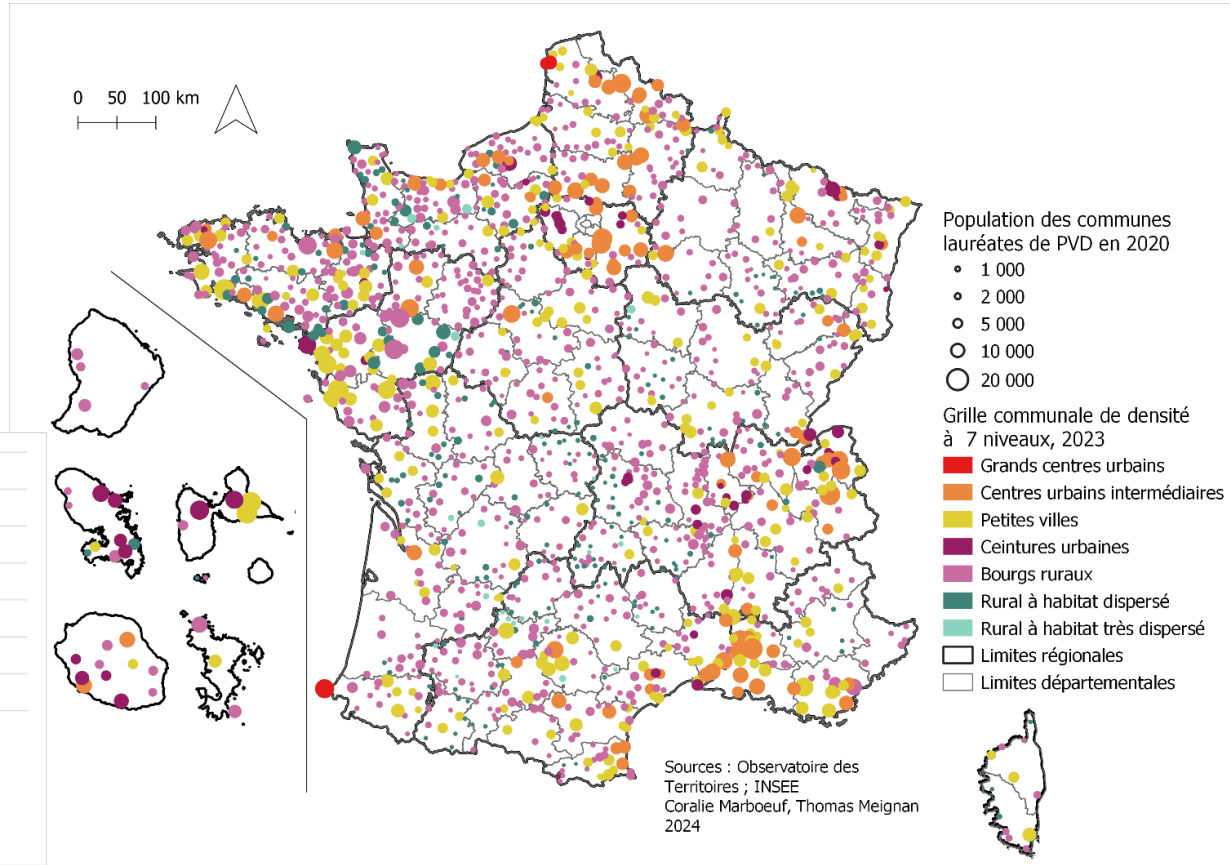
= Stereotypical images of a ST beyond strong diversity of situations

STT winners: a diversity of size and location (from very integrated to very peripheral)

Distribution of STT according to population thresholds in 2020

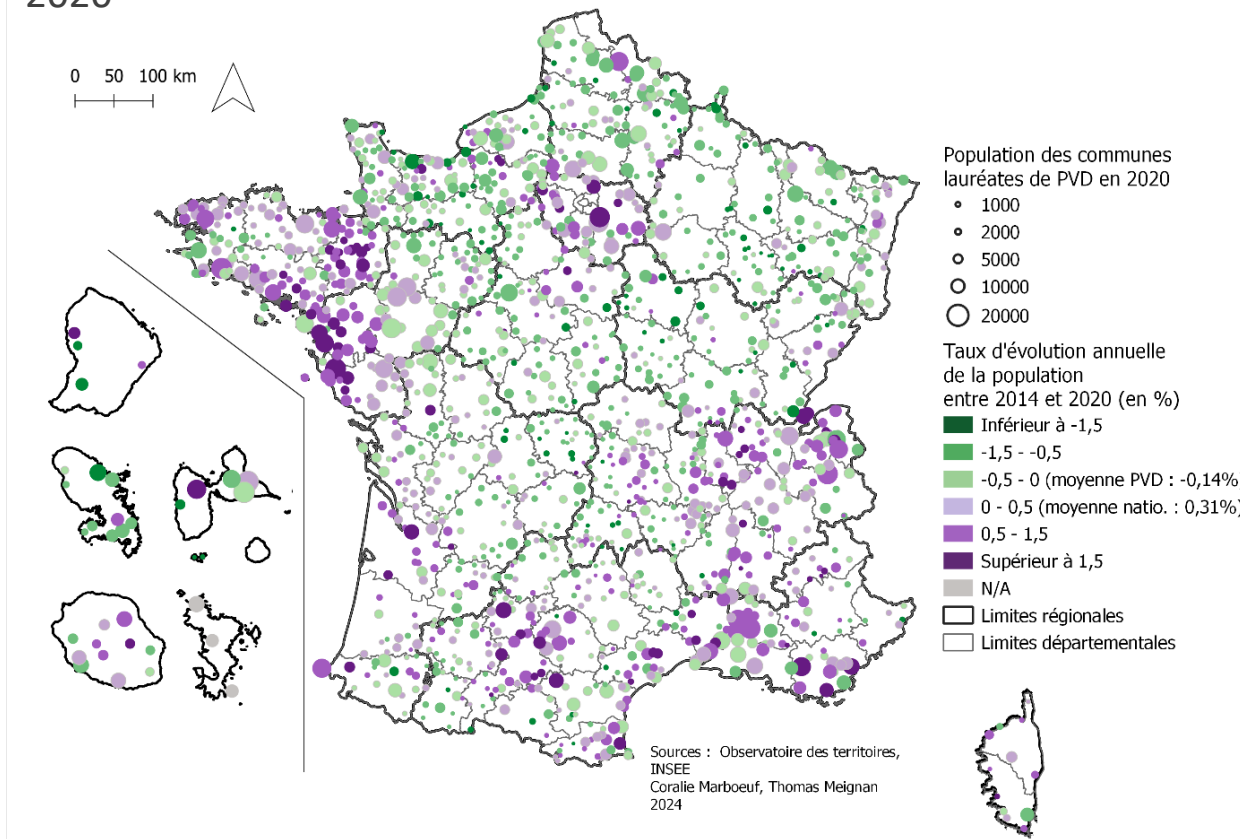


C. Marboeuf, 2025



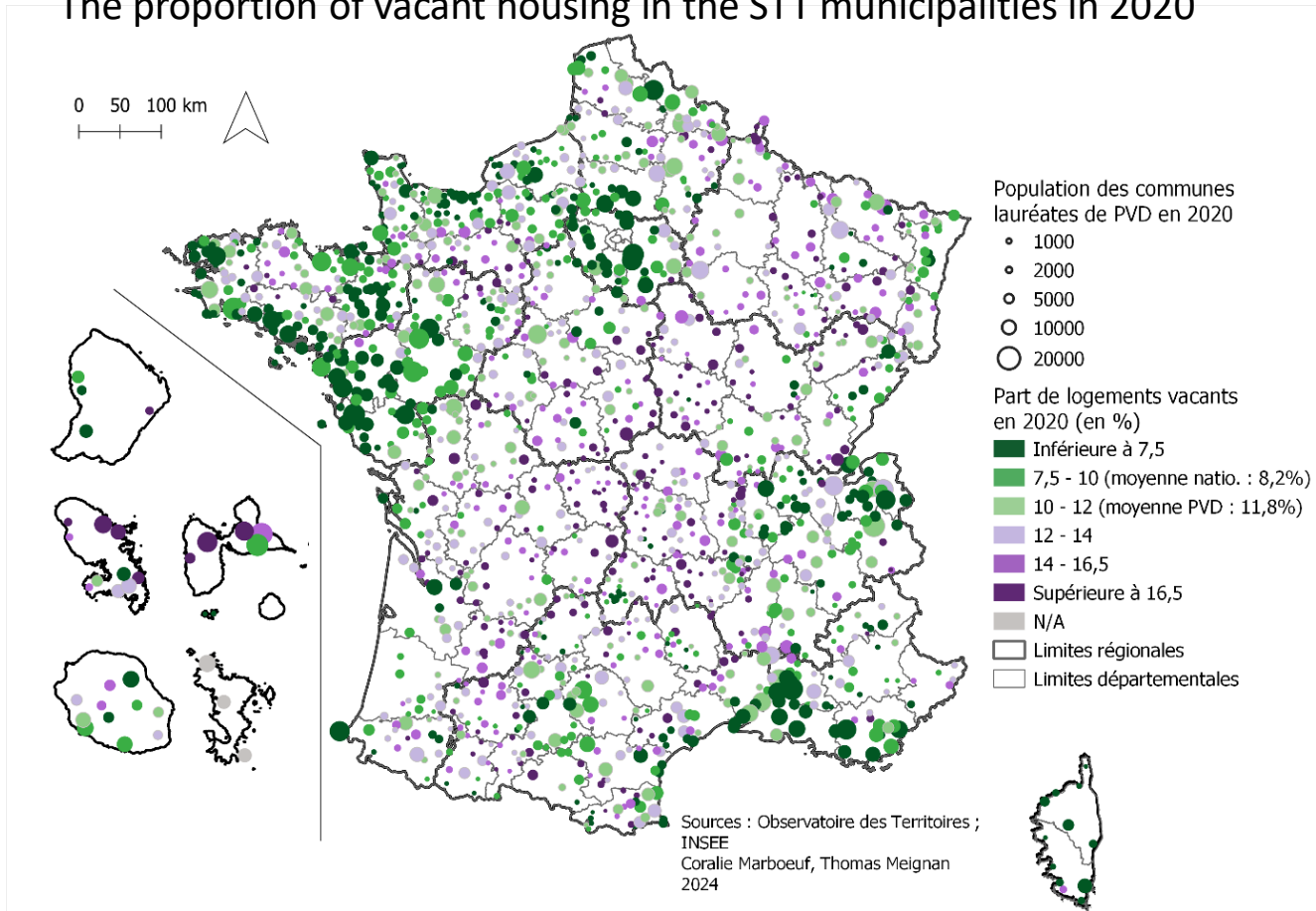
STT winners: a diversity of demographical trends (from very dynamic to very declining)

Annual population growth in STT municipalities between 2014 and 2020



STT winners: a diversity of local planning issues (ex. housing vacancy)

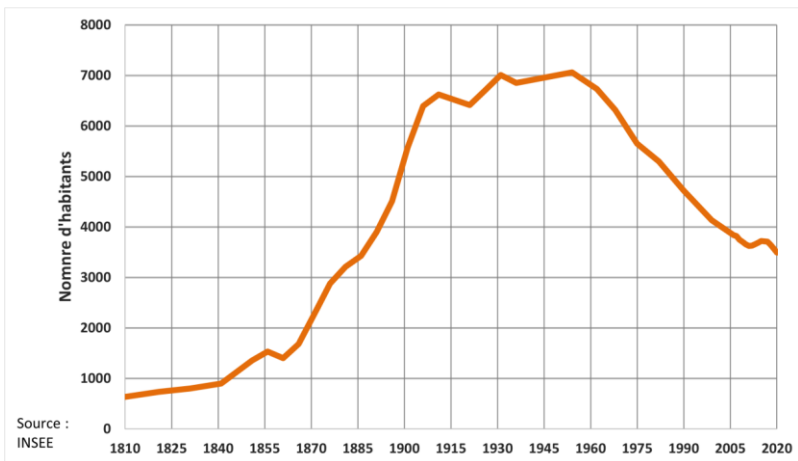
The proportion of vacant housing in the STT municipalities in 2020



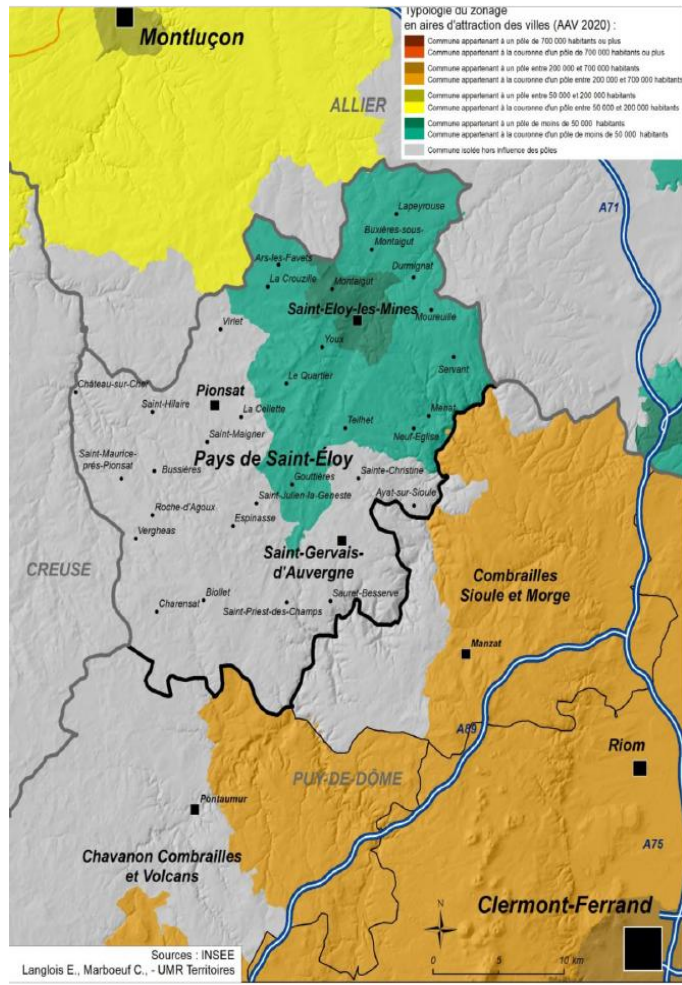
Example of Local Application of the National Programme

The case of Saint-Eloy-les-Mines (France) : from the « Town Centres » programme to the « Small Towns of Tomorrow » programme

A declining former mining small town

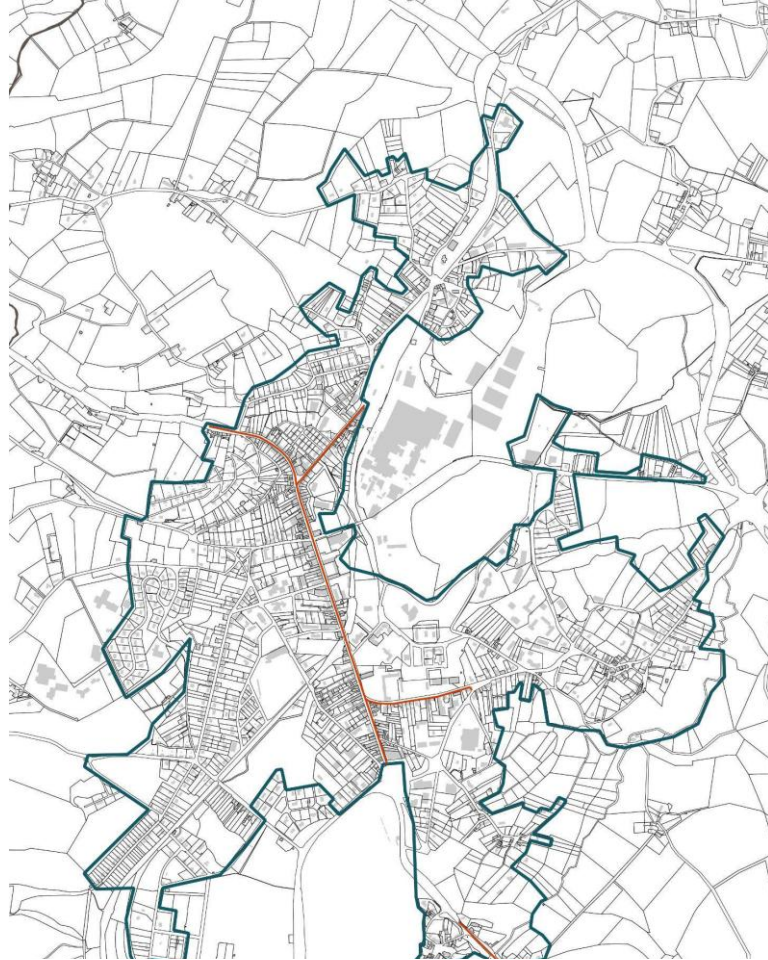


Evolution of the population (from 7,000 inhab. in the 1960s to 3,500 today)



Actions planned in Saint-Eloy as part of the STT programme (in 2021)

Fields	Estimated cost excluding VAT(€)	Prospective partners
Housing	€18,000,000	Social landlords, Housing National Agency, Public Land Agency, etc.
Commercial activities	€300,000	Bank of Territories, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chamber of Trades and Crafts, Region, Department
Services	€3,000,000	State, Department, Inter-municipal authority, Family allowance fund, local associations
Public Spaces	€3,000,000	State, Bank of Territories, Region, Department
City-owned buildings, including energy-efficient renovation of buildings	€6,400,000	State, Banque des Territoires, Region, Department, Massif Committee, Vivier Bois Massif Central, Mon Territoire Numérique, etc.
Land resources	€650,000	Public Land Agency
Internal management and engineering	€700,000	National Agency for Territorial Cohesion, National Housing Agency, Banque des Territoires, etc.
Total estimated cost: €32,000,000 (as a comparison, municipal annual operating budget is 5.5 million and the investment budget is 3 million).		



Focus on housing

- delimited « regeneration area » for private housing and social housing

- main streets

— Périmètre d'OPAH-RU
— Linéaires d'aide au ravalement de façade

Communauté de Communes
du Pays de Saint-Eloy

OPAH Pays de Saint-Eloy 2016 - 2022
Ars-les-Favets, Buxières-sous-Montaigut, Durmignat, La Crouzille, Lapoyrouse,
Montaigut, Moureuille, Saint-Eloy-les-Mines, Youx

Améliorons nos logements
Des aides pour l'habitat

- > Un accompagnement technique gratuit
- > Des aides financières pour la réalisation de vos travaux

Venez nous rencontrer :
les jeudis de 10h à 13h
Cour des équipages 63 700 St-Eloy-les-Mines

Ou contactez nous :
04 73 90 00 08
opah.sainteloy@urbanis.fr

URBANIS
Centre Bourgeois
Centre Bourgeois
Centre Bourgeois

Agglo
Pays de
Saint-Eloy

Centre
Bourgeois
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Social housing regeneration programme (Les Chapelles area)



Un habitat pour *tous*

OPHIS
PUY-DE-DÔME

- Pour un nouveau cadre de vie, l'OPHIS déconstruit 100 logements répartis sur 8 bâtiments.
- Il s'agit d'un projet majeur de transformation de la résidence, qui comprend également la réhabilitation complète de 8 bâtiments (104 logements)

Fin prévisionnelle : 4ème trimestre 2025

Résidence Les Chapelles

COÛT TOTAL DE L'OPÉRATION : 1 700 000 € TTC
Avec la participation de :

Office Public de l'Habitat et de l'Immobilier Social
04 73 41 16 16
www.ophis.fr

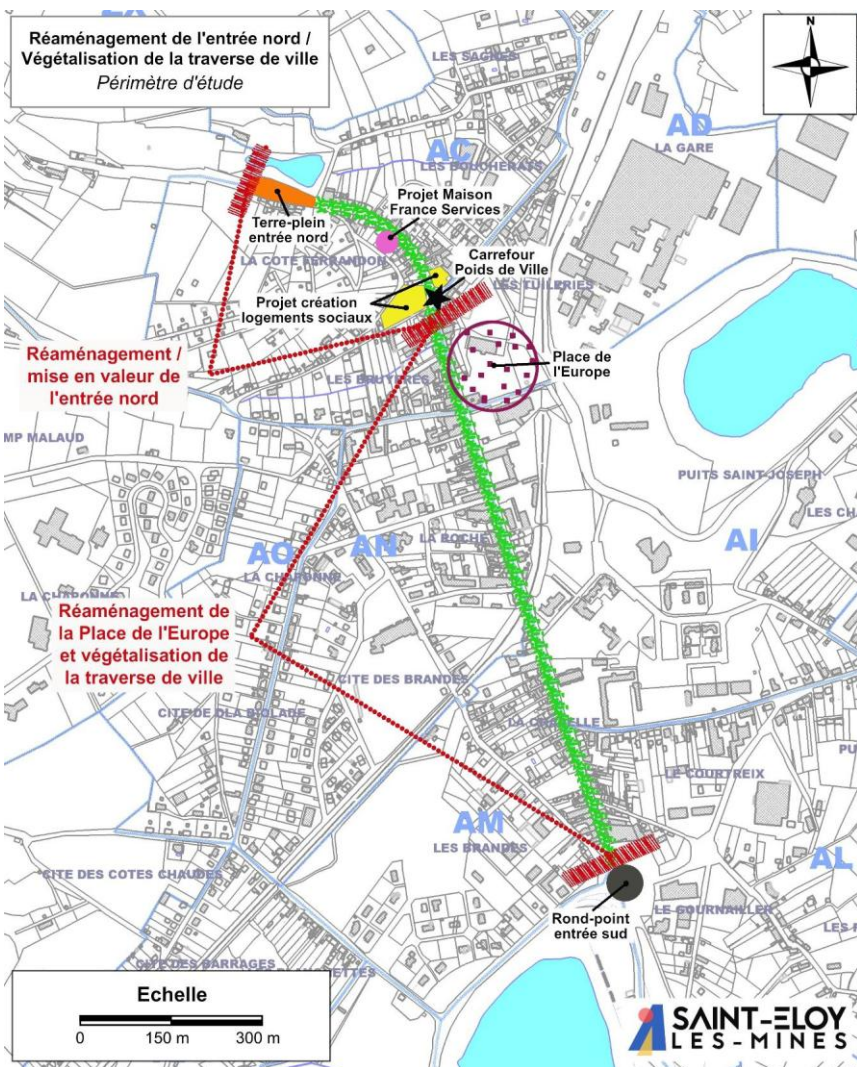
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
Ministère de la Cohésion des Territoires
Subvention Direction des Territoires : 250 000 €

ActionLogement

Subvention : 768 075 €

OPHIS
PUY-DE-DÔME
Fonds propres : 614 000 €

PUY-DE-DÔME
NION DÉPARTEMENT
Subvention Conseil Départemental : 68 000 €



Focus on town centre/main street



Discussion/general issues for small towns

- Issue to **adapt national « vision » to local needs**

Standardization effect ? Convergent conception of the small town and of narratives and policies of revitalization (few elements concerning productive economy)

Issue of time/perennity of the programmes

Issue of policies not only dedicated to devitalized small towns

- Differentiation effect through local appropriation of the program but also competition between ST, due public policies structured around calls for projects
- Importance of investors/variety of actors
- Importance of local engineering and the use of consulting offices for territorial diagnostics
- Lack of private investors



Thank you for your attention

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