



What is the legal basis for protection?

Summary of legal measures

In the canton of Neuchâtel, heritage protection is subject to the following legal dispositions:

- Cantonal Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage (LSPC) of the 4th September 2018
- Rules of application for the LSPC (RLSPC), of the 25th January 2021 (revised in 2012)

The following are also to be considered:

- Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage (LPN) of the 1st July 1966 (revised 2020)
- Federal Act on Spatial Planning (LAT) of the 22nd June 1979 (revised 2019)
- Directive for the Federal inventory of historical networks in Switzerland (OIVS) of the 14th April 2010
- Cantonal Territorial Planning Law (LCAT) of the 2nd October 1991 (revised 2019)
- Cantonal Construction Law (LCC) of the 25th March 1996 (revised in 2020)
- Rules of communal planning

Each of these texts defines a highly specific field of protection: "protected", "inventoried", "ranked in a long-term inhabited zone", "ranked outside of the urbanised zone", etc. Although they are used interchangeably in modern language, these terms nonetheless cover different legal statutes.

Heritage – a partner in the Cantonal Director's plan

The objectives pursued by the Heritage Conservation Office are within the scope of the Cantonal Director's territorial planning (as adopted in 2011 and ratified under its updated form by the Federal Council in 2012). It consists of a document which reunites the fundamental principles of Cantonal Territorial Planning, and that aspires to give some coherence to the activities of state and communes, such that they may structure and influence Neuchâtel territory.

① Use the link on the French page, to get to know the aspects ("files") of the Cantonal Director's plan the Heritage Conservation Section is associated to.



Beyond legislation

Added to legal measures are numerous interventions (initiative rather than coercive) designed to contribute to the long-term conservation of Neuchâtel's heritage. Solutions therefore need to be found and agreed upon by the authorities and/or the proprietors to save structures displaying the qualities noted in one or other of the thematic inventories that do not have legal backing (gardens, military installations, industrial heritage, religious structures, etc.).

An ancient preoccupation

During the drafting of the first decree on the conservation of glacial deposits in 1895, and measures taken by the canton of Vaud in 1898, the History and Archaeology Society of the canton of Neuchâtel composed the legal draft they would present to the authorities in 1899. The first law on the protection of historic monuments in the canton of Neuchâtel was passed in November 1902 and was in force by 1903. The third Swiss canton to apply such legislation, Neuchâtel revised its law in 1950, 1964 and 1995.

A rich array of heritage

Neuchâtel Canton today counts some 800 monuments and objects (fountains, signs, etc.) protected under the title of Historic Monuments. Although the first 307 "monuments" listed in 1906 reflected a heritage essentially composed of churches, castles and mansions these notions have since considerably broadened. We now see rural cottages, witnesses to industry, 20th Century architecture, urban property, etc. being incorporated in the lists.

An international dimension

If Neuchâtelois law is precocious and results in considerable local preoccupation with heritage conservation and protection, it is nonetheless part of a much wider context. From local initiatives to international resolutions, heritage professionals have progressively outlined shared ethical and legal rules: the Athens Charter (1931) and Venice Charter (1964), The Hague Convention (1954) and diverse recommendations from the European Council amongst them. The contents of these international dispositions constitute an essential reference framework for defining the missions of heritage buildings protection.