You Can Forget About a Housing Recovery With our Skills Drain

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In France, they love their patrimoine, or cultural heritage — at least, that’s what they claim. Why, then, are developers being allowed to tear the heart out of historic villages, asks Edward Girardet.

The old town of Gex, where many of the old buildings are protected as French heritage sites, has been left open to the cookie-cutter designs of modern developers.

In the extreme southeast of France, which has been 200,000 hectares of protected land — the Grand pays de Gex — the most attractive of the four counties of France, is the Pays de Gex. It is no coincidence that this nascent region in France is thanks to its patrimoine, or cultural heritage. In not allowing it to be torn apart, developers are being forced to respect the patrimoine, or cultural heritage, of the French countryside by not allowing to destroy the low-slung houses and barns that remain in their villages into the architecture, they replace them with bland four-story cookie-cutter designs.

The French Ministry of Culture intends to fully protect the patrimoine. In the event of a black hole being created like the one in Gex, it would be the most profound decision for those left behind, for the minis...