

ECOVAST – After 30 Years

(A report on the latest 10 years)

ECOVAST was founded on 18 March 1984, in Bellnhausen, near Marburg, Germany, and registered at the Tribunal in Selestat, France. This short leaflet is published to celebrate our 30th birthday. We hope that this statement of what we have been doing during the latest 10 years will keep all our members, partners and friends informed of our work.



Valerie Carter President

What ECOVAST stands for

The European Council for the Village and Small Town (ECOVAST) was set up to further the well-being of rural communities, and the safeguarding of the rural heritage, through two formal aims:

- to foster the economic, social and cultural vitality and administrative identity of rural communities throughout Europe; and*
- to safeguard and to promote the sensitive and imaginative renewal of the built and natural environments of such communities.*

We are a volunteer-based organisation that seeks to influence policy and action by citizen involvement. Our network supports its members, and encourages cooperation between them, as they pursue their activities in rural areas.

Our members come from a variety of backgrounds (including academics, architects, town planners, economists, geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists, historians, industrial archaeologists and rural practitioners) who work in the public, private and voluntary sectors. On our study tours and surveys we visit many varied rural projects and meet people from rural communities in many European countries and in rural areas where political situations vary considerably. These have given us a wealth of experience which we use in our work.

Our key areas of work:

Our work encompasses all areas of rural development but concentrates on:

- **rural tourism, heritage and culture** and their economic potential not only to local rural economies but also across regions and across Europe;*
- **traditional architecture and quality rural buildings** in rural settlements which are important elements in the formation of distinctive cultural landscapes;*
- **the importance of small towns** in terms of their importance not only to local rural hinterlands but also their contribution to distinctive cultural landscapes (in Europe there are many thousands of them);*
- **landscape** promoting the identification of the many different characters, and their contribution to the quality of Europe's rural areas. We support the European Landscape Convention.*

How we operate

We hold at least one International Committee and a General Assembly every year attempting to alternate our meetings between eastern and western Europe - on an even basis if possible. Our Executive International Committee consists of a President, two Vice Presidents (but can go up to four), a Treasurer, and a Secretary General: plus a member of each of our ten National Sections (from Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom). Others can be co-opted onto the committee. Our presidents for the first 20 years came from the United Kingdom (2 presidents); followed by presidents from Luxembourg, then Hungary then Sweden. Over the latest 10 years they have come from Germany, United Kingdom, Croatia and the United Kingdom again. We also have individual members from Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal. Elections take at a Biennial General Assembly held usually in the autumn. We have specific Working Groups on Landscape and Rural Architecture, and a major project on Small Towns. All these meetings are used to stage conferences on topical issues and

make tours of the local areas to look at rural projects and meet rural activists. We are an International Non-Government Organisation not supported by any funding body and relying almost entirely on our own membership fees and occasional donations. We are free to develop our independent thinking and ECOVAST opinions based on our experiences across Europe, not just the European Union. We are members of other pan-European organisations such as CIVILSCAPE and PREPARE (where we were founder members) and also EUROGITES and EUROPA NOSTRA.

Working with European Policy Makers

We work with appropriate European Union Directorates such as DG Agri – as a member of the Advisory Group on Rural Development from 1998 until 2014 and DG Regio – as a member their rural/urban network (RURBAN) from 2011 until 2014 when it was disbanded. We are part of the network Danube Civil Society Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region - leading Workshop 1 – connecting the Danube Region. ECOVAST members participated in the first European Rural Parliament held in Brussels in 2013. With others we became part of the Convention for Urban and Rural Europe (CURE). We are also a member of the Council of Europe (the INGO network). We respond to Policy Documents on behalf of ECOVAST with views relating to our key areas of work. We also attend many international events on relevant topics and make presentations on ECOVAST views.

International Committees and General Assemblies May 2003-May 2014

During this 10 year period we have held our **International Committee** meetings in several different countries: in Otočec, **Slovenia** in 2003; Szigliget, **Hungary** (2004); Retz & Vienna, **Austria** (2005); Bratislava, **Slovakia** (2006); Weyher, **Germany** (2007); Vienna, **Austria** and Wittstock **Germany** (2008); Grieskirchen and Vienna, **Austria**; and Opatija, **Croatia** (2009); Vienna, **Austria** and Wittstock, **Germany** (2010); Becherien, **Luxembourg** (2011); Achberg, **Germany** (2012); Dammheim, **Germany** (2013) and Crawley, **United Kingdom** in 2014.



Znojmo Czech Republic.2005 Energy-saving bldgs.,Austria 2010 Traditional Rheinland Pfalz bldgs 2013
3 places visited on study tour as part of ECOVAST International Committee Meetings

Similarly we have tried try to alternate our **General Assemblies** between eastern and western Europe: we met in Otočec, **Slovenia** in 2003; Szigliget, **Hungary** (2004); Retz, **Austria** (2005); Bratislava, **Slovakia** (2006); Samobor, **Croatia** (2007); Wittstock, **Germany** (2008); Mošćenice, **Croatia** (2009); the Isle of Wight, **United Kingdom** (2010); Vienna, **Austria** (2011); Witzenhausen, **Germany** (2012) and Kozard, **Hungary** in 2013. We keep minutes of both the meetings and the events connected with them.

List of international events where we have made formal presentations

ECOVAST makes every effort to make representations about topics which we are concerned with and to promote these by speaking at international events. This has been true since 1984 but the list below sets out the major events at which we spoke during the latest 10 years

European / National / Regional events

- ECOVAST Poland Conference on regions & tourism in Bialowieza, **Poland** in 2007
- Regional Studies Association conference in Lisbon, **Portugal** in 2007
- Conference on Competitiveness and European Integration Cluj, **Romania** in 2007
- Launch of Rural Development Network in **Cyprus** in 2008
- Irish Rural Studies Symposia in Galway in 2009 and Dublin 2010, **Ireland**



Kastav, Croatian Small Town 2009 Mill Museum Isle of Wight, 2010 Palinka Still Ecseg, Hungary 2013
 Places visited as part of study tours attached to ECOVAST General Assemblies

Strategic Rural Development

- ECOVAST conference on Rural Development held in Bratislava, **Slovakia** in 2006
- International Conference Agriculture and Enlargement held in Zagreb, **Croatia** in 2009
- ECOVAST Rural Development event Ventnor, Isle of Wight, **United Kingdom** in 2010
- 11th session of European Rural University in Perigueux, **France** in 2013

Rural tourism and heritage events:

- Rural Tourism Conference held in Hvar, **Croatia** in 2007
- ECOVAST Rural Architecture tour Weyher, **Germany** 2008
- Conference on Heritage Care through Active Citizenship in Mechelen, **Belgium** 2009
- EUROPA NOSTRA 'Saving European Historic Towns and Villages', Taormina **Sicily** in 2009
- Conference on Voluntary Organizations Active in Field of Heritage, Mechelen, **Belgium** in 2010
- Croatian Conference on Rural Tourism held in Osijek, **Croatia** in 2012
- European Tourism Conference held in Piatra Neamt **Romania** 2012
- ECOVAST Conference on Rural Buildings & Small Towns held in Koszeg, **Hungary** 2013
- Culture and Rural Tourism Conference held in Heraklion, **Greece** in 2013
- Had space at EUROPA NOSTRA stand Trade Fair for Conservation, Leipzig, **Germany** several years
- Seminar on timber-framed churches held at Denkmal Trade Fair 2010

Small towns

- Small towns conference in Retz, **Austria** held in 2005 leading to a major project & surveys
- ECOVAST workshops on small towns held in Makarska, **Croatia** 2006 and St Veit an der Glan, Carinthia, **Austria** 2008 to develop our ECOVAST thinking on small towns
- Small towns conference (part of Interreg III) held in Jyvaskyla, **Finland** in 2006
- ECOVAST conference on small towns held in Samobor, **Croatia** in 2007
- Government La Rioja Small Town Conference held in Rioja, **Spain** in 2008
- ECOVAST conference on small towns held at Wittstock, **Germany** in 2008
- ECOVAST Symposium on small towns held in Grieskirchen, **Austria** in 2009
- ECOVAST conference on small towns held Mošćenice, in **Croatia** in 2009
- ECOVAST Small Towns Research Conference held in Potsdam, **Germany** 2010
- Croatian Small Towns Conference held in Ivanić-Grad, **Croatia** in 2011
- ECOVAST Small Towns Research Conference held in Potsdam, **Germany** 2010
- ECOVAST small towns seminar in Witzzenhausen, **Germany** in 2012

Energy

- Study visit to Energy Town, Gussing in **Austria** organized by ECOVAST in 2007
- Study visit to Becherein village and their energy projects, **Luxembourg**
- CIVILSCAPE conference on Energy, held in Bonn, **Germany** 2012

Rural Urban Partnerships

- Seminar on Rural Urban Linkages, Brussels, **Belgium** 2009
- Meetings of the RURBAN network in Brussels, **Belgium** and an Open Days side event
- OECD Rural-Urban Partnerships Conference held in Bologna, **Italy** in 2013

Landscapes

- International landscape workshop held in Makarska, **Croatia** 2004
- EUROPA NOSTRA Cultural Landscape and Cultural Identity held in Belfast, **Northern Ireland** 2009
- 8 Landscape Workshops held in **Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia & Netherlands**
- Council of Europe meeting European Landscape Convention held in Cetinje, **Montenegro** 2013



Weinviertal, Austria

Zahorie inland sand dunes, Slovakia

Small Carpathians, Slovakia

3 adjoining landscapes: Examples from the ECOVAST Landscape Identification Guide 2006

Survey work:

Our small towns work led to a programme of research by ECOVAST International through a project called Action to Strengthen Small European Towns (ASSET). This included a pan-European Study to identify just how many small towns there are across Europe; two opinion surveys on what is happening in small towns and what have been the consequences of the economic recession; and three studies on 165 individual small towns in South East England. Austria, Croatia and Germany have also undertaken in-depth research on small towns as well as other non ECOVAST bodies. All this research came together at a formal gathering at University of Potsdam in Germany in 2011.

Publications

In the past we produced policy statements on Rural Development (1996); Agriculture and Forestry and Traditional Rural Architecture (both in 1997). In 2006 we updated the 2002 ECOVAST Landscape Identification Guide to Good Practice which now has English, German, Polish, Croatian, Czech and Russian versions. Also in 2006 ECOVAST updated its original statement on the Strategy for Rural Development in Europe – originally produced in 1994 - and refreshed it again in 2008. In 2013 we produced an ECOVAST Position Paper on the Importance of Small Towns based on our research, and sent to the European Union and the Council of Europe. Reference to ECOVAST and our logo is often included in other organisations policy documents.

Formal Policy Responses

We undertake written responses to European policy documents whenever appropriate. We made a formal response to the Agriculture and Rural Convention (ARC) on the future of the European Common Agricultural Policy for the new 7 year period starting in 2014. ECOVAST International and our National Sections have attended meetings and made responses on the new European Rural Development Programmes for 2014-2020.

Our National Sections

Our National Sections have their own elected committees and members, collect membership fees and are involved directly in rural work in their our countries. Examples of their varied work include:

- Tourism Trail of Byzantine monuments in SE Romania by ECOVAST Romania published in 2012
- ECOVAST Austria has set up an Austrian Landscape Register and has been working with the University of Vienna (Agriculture and Life Sciences) one of a range of partners involved in the Green Belt Project.
- ECOVAST Croatia is actively involved in research and scientific publishing
- ECOVAST Germany has been continually campaigning against the destruction of rural areas, buildings, communities and landscape caused by brown coal mining
- ECOVAST Russia is constantly involved in promoting the preservation of traditional wooden architecture through preparation of papers and speaking at both Russian and International events

Publicity

Our website is not only in English but also in French and German and kept regularly updated. ECOVAST Croatia and ECOVAST Russia also translate into their own languages. We also produce Newsletters normally three times a year. Our ASSET project pages can be accessed through the main page of our website.

Our thanks go to Brigitte Macaria ECOVAST Austria for the wooden medallion that appears on page 1. All photos are from ECOVAST.

Our website: www.ecovast.org which links into ECOVAST Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Russia and UK also www.dorfwiki.org/wiki.cgi? which have links to Strategy for Rural Europe; Small Towns and Energy