

ECOVAST



European Council for the Village and Small Town
www.ecovast.org

ASSET

(Action to Strengthen Small European Towns)

Project Description

INTRODUCTION

The project was initiated at an ECOVAST Conference in Retz, Austria in November 2005. Since then the position of Small Towns in European policy has been highlighted at groupings of International NGOs of the Council of Europe, and at conferences and seminars involving ECOVAST and ASSET in Austria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK.

Research is in progress on the challenges facing Small Towns and the ways in which they are seeking and receiving support from national and regional agencies. In this work, Pam Moore is focusing particularly on the effects of the economic recession. She presented findings in Galway, Ireland in September 2009.

The Organising Group of ASSET partners has prepared the way for concerted action:

- * to gather and to support partners in proposals to the European Commission's INTERREG IV programme

- * to seek funding from international foundations

- * to influence policy throughout Europe in favour of Small Town

Milestones: Events at which papers on Small Towns have been presented:

- 1998 the "1st Small Town Symposium" in Murau, Styria - Small Towns as the Motors of Rural Development organised by ECOVAST, Austria.
- 2002 the "2nd Small Town Symposium" in Waidhofen, Lower Austria The main topic was electronic networks in rural small towns.
- 2005 the 3rd symposium was held in the wine town Retz, Lower Austria, proposed and organised by SEEDA (South East England Development Agency).
- 2006 visits and seminar in Makarska, Croatia, organised by ECOVAST Croatia.
- 2006 Interreg III NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME Small Towns Network Conference 4-5 September 2006 in Jyväskylä, Finland.
- 2006 European Rural University URE 2006 Mezotur, Hungary, organised by APURE.
- 2006 Conference "Rural Development in the Knowledge Based Society", Bratislava, Slovakia
- 2007 Third International Science Conference in BIAŁOWIEŻA, Poland. organised by ECOVAST Poland Section.
- 2007 Study visit, Energy Town, Güssing Austria, organised by ECOVAST Austria Section.
- 2007 study visit, Richmond market Town, Yorkshire, England, organised by ECOVAST UK section.
- 2007 Regional Studies Association Conference, Lisbon, Portugal.
- 2007 Field course, University of Gloucestershire, in Sardinia.
- 2007 ECOVAST conference, Samobor, Croatia - SMALL EUROPEAN TOWNS – THEIR ROLE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION.
- 2007 CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA, INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE COMPETITIVENESS and EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, organised by the BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
- 2008 Szolnok, Mezotur, Hungary visits to towns and presentations on Small towns, their hinterland and landscape, organised by APURE Hungary.
- 2008 Towns in Schleswig-Holstein, visits linked to ASSET Organising Group meeting in Hamburg.
- 2008 Rural Futures: Dreams, Dilemmas and Dangers, organised by the University of Plymouth, UK.
- 2008 ECOVAST conference in Wittstock, Germany.
- 2008 Small Towns Conference, Rioja, Spain, organised by the Government of La Rioja.
- 2009 FOURTH SMALL TOWNS' SYMPOSIUM, Grieskirchen, Austria.

- 2009 Forum on the topic "Saving Europe's Small Historic Towns and Villages and their Surrounding Landscapes", Taormina, Sicily, organised by Europa Nostra.
- 2009 Galway, Ireland, rural studies symposium.

Background

1. The small towns of Europe are a massive asset for the people, the heritage and the economies of the continent. They provide a focus of social, cultural and economic life in their sub-regions. They interact with the villages in their surrounding areas, and with larger towns and cities. They influence and react with their surrounding landscape (some with their seascape).

They vary greatly in their origin, age and character, and embody a local distinctiveness that is a vital part of the European heritage.

As well as the heritage of buildings and landscape, the people of the towns are themselves an asset. Asset-based community development recognises assets as five 'capitals' - (Natural capital and also human, social, manufactured and financial capital. *ASSET BASED TOOLS AND APPROACHES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL AREAS A Forum for the Future Report for Carnegie UK Trust Dr Rhys Evans <http://www.forumforthefuture.org.uk>)*

2. However, throughout Europe, small towns face severe problems, challenges and opportunities. Many have lost, or are losing, functions to the larger cities, as part of the processes of globalisation and centralisation. Loss of services and businesses within villages and small towns particularly affect the disadvantaged and those who are not able to drive cars (e.g. young, old, disabled). In some towns, commercial centres are losing vitality because of the creation of out-of-town shopping and service centres. In others that are a success in attracting shoppers and visitors, narrow streets and public spaces are often blighted by traffic or by excessive car parking.

3. There are good examples where the people of some small towns and villages have taken the initiative to assess their strengths and weaknesses and to promote a vision of a sustainable future, seeking assistance from municipalities, regions and agencies. Many other small communities lack the skills and capacity to take such action and need support from larger municipalities, regions, governments and NGOs.

4. In the face of these forces, there is a strong and widespread concern to revive the small towns, to protect and find new life for their remarkable heritage and to strengthen their economies. This effort falls within the broader context of policies within and beyond the European Union; and can call upon programmes of regional development, rural development, spatial planning and other sectoral activities.

5. However, no major European programme has focused on small towns, in their own right. They are, in this sense, a hidden asset. In some countries, government agencies or regional councils have focused on small towns, providing advice, finance and other support and encouraging networking and exchange of good practice between towns. Some national networks of small or market towns exist, such as Action for Market Towns in England, and others such as the Association of Croatian Towns, the association of towns in eastern Alentejo, Portugal and the Polish Union of Small Towns (Unia Miasteczek Polskich). Equivalent bodies to the Local Government Association (England and Wales) that exist in other member states will be important to such networks. At European level, there are some formal networks of towns with special interests, such as RECEVIN (wine towns) and Citta Slow.

6. However, there has been no significant effort, at European level, to link these different efforts and to gain the benefit of exchange of ideas and good practice between those agencies and organisations that wish to support the strengthening of small towns throughout Europe.

Addressing The Need

7. In an effort to fill that gap, ECOVAST and SEEDA joined with the Regional Council of Niederösterreich to sponsor, at Retz in Austria in November 2005, a European Conference on 'Small Rural Towns'. This three-day event attracted 85 delegates from 30 regions and 12 countries.

After intensive discussion, and description of initiatives in many countries, the Conference agreed that a project should be launched to promote co-operation, and exchange of good practice, between governmental and other agencies throughout Europe who offer support to small towns.

8. ECOVAST and APURE (l'association pour les Universités Rurales Européennes), The South East of England Regional Development Agency (SEEDA), Yorkshire Forward (Regional Development Agency, England) as main partners, with the support of The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) England) and MONTE, ACE - Desenvolvimento Alentejo Central, Portugal, have therefore taken the initiative in making progress on that project

Other interested parties include:

* COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

* Region of La Rioja Spain,

* The Town of Samobor and the Croatian Union of Towns and Municipalities (UNION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF TOWNS AND THE ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA)

In October 2007, at Samobor, Croatia an ECOVAST conference SMALL EUROPEAN TOWNS – THEIR ROLE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION, at which 72 people from 8 countries attended, consensus was reached on the Samobor Declaration (Annex E).

At Wittstock, Brandenburg, Germany in 2008 progress was made in a draft declaration, and ECOVAST has drafted a supporting Position Statement.

<http://ecovastdiscussion.ning.com/forum/topics/small-towns-draft-position>

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

9. We propose that the project should have the following Aims:

- a. To promote co-operation, and exchange of good practice, between governmental and other agencies throughout Europe who offer support to small towns
- b. To promote contact and exchange of good practice between individual small towns throughout Europe.
- c. To speak on behalf of small towns to influence the European Commission, Council of Europe, Committee of the Regions of the European Union and governments and The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.
- d. To facilitate, support and encourage the delivery of research to enable evidence-based policy approaches to strengthening the well-being of small towns.
- e. To develop policy formulation at European levels focused on small towns and their rural hinterlands.

IMPLEMENTATION

Scope and Definitions

10. We propose that, for this purpose, 'Europe' should be the whole of the European Continent, effectively those nations that are members of the Council of Europe.

11. By 'small towns', we start from considering those with a population between 2,500 and roughly 30,000, though this definition should be flexibly interpreted. In Austria the official definition of a small town has a 50,000 population limit. In remote areas there are populations of a few hundred that call themselves a small town. In sought-after tourist locations the resident population can be matched or exceeded by visitors, seasonally.

12. 'Agencies who offer support to small towns' (hereafter called "support agencies") may include arms of central or regional governments, regional development agencies, formal networks of small towns, and other public or non-governmental organisations.

Outcomes and Deliverables

13. Provisionally, we envisage that the project will embrace:

- * Reporting on the progress of an ASSET questionnaire that has elicited information from several states within and outside the EU, and preliminary analysis of the results covering the sub-national/regional support to small towns and the range of challenges faced. Partners of ASSET, members of ECOVAST and respondents will be invited to comment on the topics with the aim reaching consensus and a matrix of common understanding.

- * Gathering, and dissemination to the support agencies, of information about the support agencies themselves, their programmes of support to small towns, how these programmes are funded or managed, and what effect they appear to have in terms of the vitality of small towns.

- * Gathering, and dissemination to support agencies and to small towns and their networks, of information about good practice in development or revitalisation of small towns and in support systems, illustrated by case studies, including methods of capacity building and toolkits (including the SusSET INTERREG III Toolkit, and others such as the Market Towns Health Check – UK – and the City Check – Austria).

- * Focusing on specific projects with small towns – through interest groups working on topics such as walled towns, wine towns, market towns, historic charters, landed estates, industrial heritage, trade and renewable energy. Small towns and their surrounding landscapes are ideal for considering the future of renewable energy, demonstrating their capabilities in economic terms as sustainable settlements.

- * Involvement in research activities, beginning with literature review.

- * Exchanges between groups of small towns in different member states are envisaged together with peer assessment and mentoring. ASSET may also enable facilitation for training in capacity building of Municipalities, Local Authorities and Communities. This might be undertaken in co-operation with PREPARE, or other bodies, if funding becomes available.

 - <http://www.preparenetwork.org>

 - <http://www.preparenetwork.org/index.php?pno=0>

- * Facilitation of on-line exchange between all involved in the field of small town development

- * Holding of events to permit face-to-face exchange between those involved in small town development

- * Where necessary and appropriate, speaking on behalf of small towns to influence urban and rural policies of the European Union and governments, and play a strong role in developing a formal policy for European small rural towns and their hinterlands.

These activities are expected to benefit small towns, local government, support agencies, governments, the European Union and the Council of Europe.

BENEFITS

ASSET PROJECT ACTIONS	Small Towns	Municipalities and local government	Support agencies (Regional, NGOs and Associations)	Government, EU and Council of Europe
Knowledge of the types of support available from agencies in many parts of Europe	x	x	x	
Awareness of the challenges faced by, and initiatives of, other Small Towns	x	x		
Tool kits for local vision and action	x	x	x	
Involvement in techniques of capacity building	x	x		
Advocacy – policy influence of ASSET	x	x	x	x
Opportunity to attend conferences and seminars of ASSET	x	x	x	
Learning through networking (including seminars / conferences) exchange visits, peer assessment, mentoring support and capacity building	x	x	x	
Benefit of higher profile for town in being a member of this network – individual towns and groups of towns as 'Exemplars'.	x	x		
Regular information by website and newsletter	x	x	x	x
Awareness of work packages and outcomes of INTERREG project	x	x	x	x
Free exchange of templates of experience of well-tested successful good practice (dissemination by web/open source [attributed] and publications)	x	x	x	
Feedback to local and regional authorities of experience from European level EU		x	x	
Evidence base to support policy formulation (Research)		x	x	x
Awareness of competitiveness of small towns in European economy	x	x	x	x
Influence on regional development programmes	x	x	x	
Formulation of rural small town policy for Europe	x	x	x	x

Method and Management

14. The Project has been initiated and sponsored by a group of support agencies, acting as project partners to take joint responsibility for the core funding of the project. Each partner is represented on the Organising Group of the Project. In addition to the core funding provided by the partners, funding will be sought from Foundations and from the European Union.

15. It is proposed that ECOVAST, as a European NGO with strong experience of networking and of project management, should provide the secretariat for the project, under the oversight of the Organising Group.

Actions and Timing

16. In the preparatory phase to 2008, meetings of the Organising Group of Partners have been held: in Brussels in September 2006; in Lisbon in March 2007; in Brussels in July 2007 and in St Veit an der Glan, Austria in September 2007.

In July 2008 the OG met in Hamburg, and in March 2009 the meeting was in Leeds, UK.

17. In 2008 there was intensive activity by ASSET to gather partners for a bid INTERREG IVC a pan-European project. The Lead Partner in Italy was unable to submit by the deadline. As a result several partners, under a Lead Partner in Malta, made a bid to INTERREG IVB, Mediterranean, under the acronym 'TOWNES'. ECOVAST (Croatia) and ASSET are non-financial partners in this project, if approved, and will join in events and seminars.

Other work by ASSET is envisaged to:

- * Preparation of a crisp but detailed database about who is doing what to support small towns throughout Europe.

- * Choice, from within that database, of further potential partners

- * Approach to those potential partners

- * Identification of potential sources of funds to match that provided by the partners

Through a questionnaire to contacts in a number of European countries, work is advanced in establishing a database of support agencies and regional contacts in the EU and beyond (e.g. the Accession states, Russia and Macedonia) to map and record existing networks, and to establish how to link and develop exchanges.

18. The ASSET Project is expected to continue until the end of 2011. If (as we expect) the exchanges and networking generated by the project prove to have a longer-term value, then a structure will be formed to sustain that activity beyond the project period. As the exchanges, networking and other benefits develop then we intend to initiate a review process to ensure that the lessons learned are addressed, either in a continuation of the programme or its integration into another programme or programmes. Also at that stage a succession strategy will be devised.

Finance

19. Beyond the preparatory phase.

ECOVAST has undertaken the preparatory phase (2004-2008), with financial support from SEEDA, Yorkshire Forward, APURE and CRC Contributing Partners joined the Organising Group on the basis of 2,000 euro a year for three years. Other partners contribute 'in kind'.

20. In Kind contributions

Monte, Portugal has assisted 'in kind' in the work of attracting potential partners for INTERREG, and in devising work programmes.

ECOVAST's contribution is made in kind (instead of 2000 euro for three years), in terms of staff-time (focused particularly on identification of potential sources of matching funds) and office support, as manager of the project. ECOVAST has undertaken research questionnaires and analysis; has provided speakers to make presentations at conferences and seminars; and has devoted time to meetings and contact with potential partners of INTERREG.

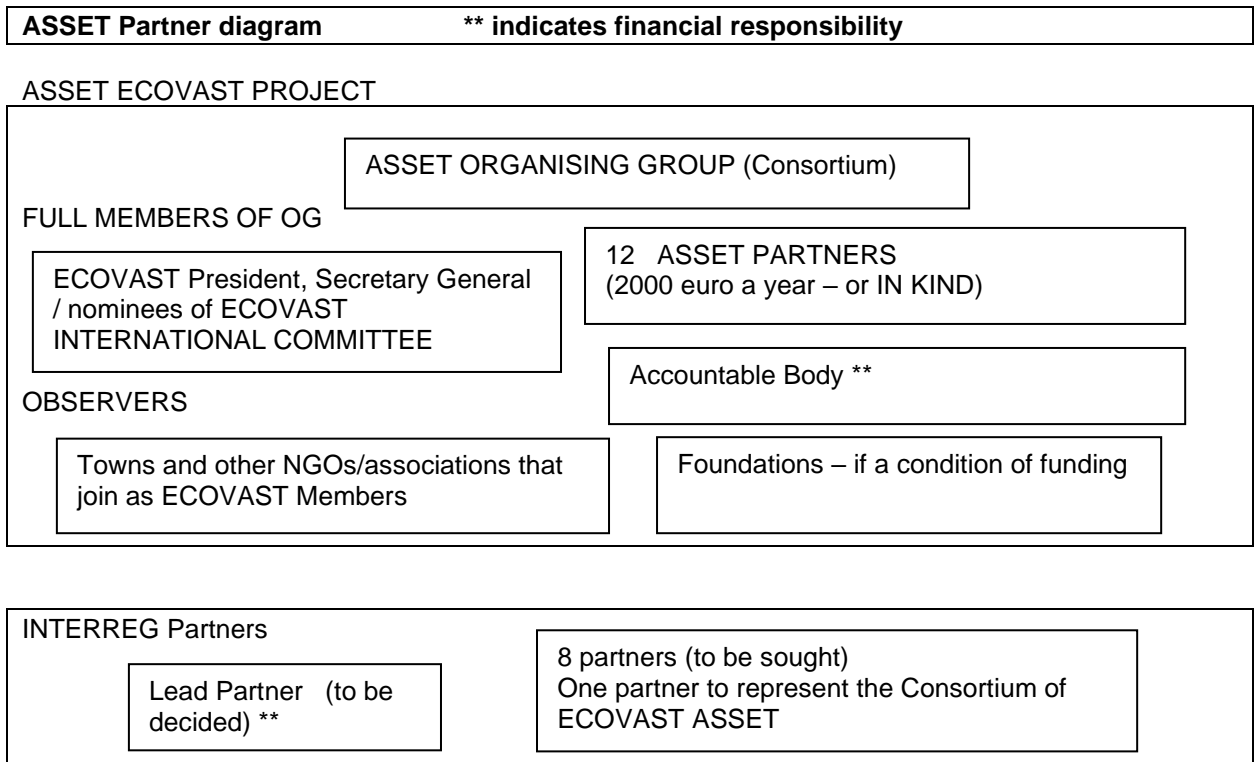
21. Because many small towns will not be able to afford an annual contribution of 2000 euro, they have the opportunity to join ECOVAST as a member organisation (annual subscription fee currently 70 euro) so that they may be kept informed of the progress and detail of the ASSET Project.

22. So that funding from European Union sources, such as INTERREG, and from International Foundations, can be received and monitored, an ACCOUNTABLE BODY is necessary. For receiving money from foundations and charitable trusts we are seeking an organisation that has experience of accountability for European Union funding, and could handle finances, effectively treasurer for the for the ASSET project as a whole. Those services will necessitate expenses to cover staff time and overheads. Although partners of the project, they would not contribute 2000 euro a year.

Proposal Development

26. It is proposed to develop this Proposal as the preparatory phase proceeds, leading to a full Business Plan and Action Plan/Timetable.

The following diagram indicates the structure of the interlinked partners.



27. Contributions IN KIND: Time that is devoted to any part of the overall ASSET project will be recorded, together with travel and accommodation and other expenses. Time and expenses that are not refunded from the resources of the project, or from the separate budgets of any EC funded activity, will be counted as an IN KIND contribution. An organisation (NGO or Association) may be accepted by the Organising Group as a partner of the main ASSET project on the basis of a contribution IN KIND, rather than a financial contribution. Specific rules for IN KIND contributions will apply to EC funded activities such as INTERREG, and the basis may differ in each Member State.

Annexes:

- A. Background paper on ECOVAST – its aim and achievements
- B. Background of APURE and other Partners
- C. Quotations that support and enhance ECOVAST's views.
- D. INTERREG IVC

Annex A

ECOVAST is the originating partner of ASSET, contributing services and activities IN KIND.

ECOVAST, the European Council for the Village and Small Town, was set up in 1984 to further the well-being of rural communities, and the safeguarding of the rural heritage, throughout Europe. Its formal aims are:

- to foster the economic, social and cultural vitality and the administrative identity of rural communities throughout Europe; and
- to safeguard, and to promote a renewal of these areas which is both innovative and adapted to the heritage of the architectural and natural environment (for example, the protection of sites and of landscapes).

ECOVAST's membership includes over 500 members in 20 countries across the whole of Europe. The membership is widely drawn, to include individuals, academic bodies, government and non-government organisations, from local to international level. ECOVAST can thus act as a bridge between decision-makers and those who are active at local level, between experts and practitioners. It operates mainly as a network, to assist mutual support among its membership in pursuit of their activity in rural areas. It has national sections in Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom and more are planned in other countries. These provide a focus for exchange and activity in each country, to benefit its rural communities and rural heritage.

ECOVAST's policy approach for rural Europe is set out in our "Strategy for Rural Europe", published in 1994 and updated in 2006. : This has been translated into many European languages, and widely distributed. We have published policy documents on "Traditional Rural Buildings", and on "Agriculture and Forestry - sustaining their future in Europe", plus a Manual on creation of Heritage Trails and on "Landscape Identification: A Guide to Good Practice". We operate in three languages – English, German and French. ECOVAST has consultative status with the Council of Europe; and also with the European Commission, including a seat on the EC Advisory Committee on Rural Development. We have good working relations with many other European organisations, such as APURE (Association for European Rural Universities), Europa Nostra, Civilscape and R.E.D. We played an active part in the European Countryside Campaign 1987-88 and furthermore, contributed to the Council of Europe Campaign, 'Europe : a Common Heritage', in 1999-2000.

ECOVAST has active working groups on landscape and rural architecture. We organise conferences, seminars and other events, including training programmes in integrated rural development; and we send technical missions to advise on rural development and heritage protection. We take part in major practical projects, such as the Heritage Trails projects in Slovenia and Croatia part-funded by the European Commission. We are currently engaged on a major project relating to Small Towns, ASSET – Action to Strengthen Small European Towns. This is likely to continue to be our principal activity over the next few years. With Forum Synergies and other non-governmental organisations, ECOVAST launched the PREPARE programme – Partnership for Rural Europe – to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development. This programme has a strong focus on the countries of central Europe which are new member states of, or candidates to join, the European Union. ECOVAST is also a partner in CURE – the Convention for urban and Rural Europe.

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Annex B Other Founding Partners of ASSET

APURE – Association for the European Rural Universities - is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) whose members are individuals and organisations from 15 European countries and an American University.

APURE is directed by an International Administration Council presided by a Portuguese personality and has a changeable geographic representation.

APURE was established in Paris in 1988 ruled by the French statute of non profit making associations in order to contribute, within the framework of the principles defined by the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Men and of Citizens (1948), to develop the network of actors in the rural world, particularly through the sessions of the European Rural Universities (ERU).

Also created to improve the principles of Popular Education, APURE is a wide open, convivial and non-formal organisation that practices the exchange of practical knowledge issued from experience as the main handspike of the reinforcement of specific abilities to the development of the rural world.

"European Rural University is the college coming out from its walls to live the quotidian reality of the rural world.

The actors of the rural world that release themselves from their everyday life to apprehend it with scientific methods and instruments are the European Rural University.

The European Rural University valorises the exchanges and solitaries between the academic knowledge and "the knowledge of experience", the reflection and the practices."
<http://www.ure-ature.org/>

The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), as the Regional Development Agency for the South East, is responsible for the sustainable economic development and regeneration of the South East of England - the driving force of the UK's economy. Our aim is to create a prosperous, dynamic and inspirational region by helping businesses compete more effectively, training a highly skilled workforce, supporting and enabling our communities while safeguarding our natural resources and cherishing our rich cultural heritage.

In April 2004 SEEDA launched a new programme of £7 million to support small rural towns across the region. The new programme has been developed together with the regional South East Rural Towns Partnership and the Countryside Agency. Local authorities are key members of the South East Rural Towns Partnership and have also played a significant role. The new programme recognises the vital role that small towns play and this has been reflected in the Regional Economic Strategy which argued for region-wide support.

Small rural towns in past times have been the lifeblood for rural areas and still today provide a key focus for their surrounding hinterland of villages and hamlets. Small rural towns provide jobs and major services. They are already a focus for public transport routes and many have developed leisure facilities. However many have seen a real downturn in their retail position. New patterns of shopping and the influence of out-of-town shopping centres have all taken their toll.

Many towns are trying to find a new role. However they have significant assets that can lead any renaissance. There are significant opportunities for new business development, and an opportunity to become an outlet for local produce for their area. They could offer affordable and key-worker housing. Many are historic towns with an additional asset, with a display of a wide variety of different traditional vernacular architecture offering considerable potential for tourism

www.seeda.co.uk

http://www.seeda.co.uk/news_&_events/event_reports/2005_events/retz_conference/index.asp

Commission for Rural Communities, England UK

The Commission was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006. Our role is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage.

We have three key functions:

Rural advocate: the voice for rural people, businesses and communities

Expert adviser: giving evidence-based, objective advice to government and others

Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally

Our Purpose

Our Aspiration:

England's rural communities should be diverse, thriving and sustainable, where everyone is able to play a full part in society and where no-one is disadvantaged. We will speak up for rural people and communities, especially those experiencing disadvantage, and ensure that policies take full account of rural needs and circumstances, holding government and others to account for their delivery.

We want the Commission for Rural Communities to be widely recognized and accepted as:

- * an effective national voice and advocate for rural communities
- * a source of authoritative and expert advice on rural issues and concerns
- * a respected and fair rural watchdog

We'll achieve this by:

- * listening to rural communities and their representatives
- * establishing the facts and strengthening the rural evidence base
- * engaging Ministers across Government
- * influencing policies and decisions
- * challenging government and others at all levels to bring about real improvements
- * monitoring delivery and identifying and promoting good practice

We'll do this by:

- * working closely with a wide range of people and organisations locally, regionally, nationally and internationally
- * forming new partnerships and drawing on new areas of expertise
- * investing in and developing our staff
- * working innovatively and creatively, making full use of new technology and the experience of others
- * communicating openly and clearly

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk>

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/events/the2009planningconventionplanninginachangingclimate>

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/events/ourlatestrecessionreporttothesecretaryofstatemarketto>
[wns](#)

Yorkshire Forward, England, UK

Yorkshire Forward was set up by Government to promote sustainable economic development throughout the Yorkshire and Humber region. One of England's nine Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) we are a business led organisation that aims to help improve the region's relative economic performance and reduce social and economic disparities.

A regional approach to economic development allows local businesses and communities to formulate solutions that are appropriate for the particular circumstances and strengths of this region.

Yorkshire Forward supports the expansion and development of business in our region by encouraging public and private investment, and by connecting people to economic opportunity. We also work to improve levels of education, learning and skills, and do all that we can to enhance the region's environment and infrastructure.

<http://www.yorkshire-forward.com/www/index.asp>

Renaissance Market Towns Programme

The Renaissance Market Towns Programme (RMT) grew out of the lessons gained during the Market Towns Initiative and the experiences of the Urban Renaissance Programme. There was a clear need to move from a funding led to a strategy led approach as well as a desire to bring about a step change in aspirational thinking in market towns.

Launched in July 2002, RMT is a pioneering 10-year plan to support sustainable rural towns in Yorkshire and Humber. As one of Yorkshire Forward's flagship projects, RMT aims to ensure that the regions 'rural capitals' are places where people want and are able to live, work, invest and visit.

The objective of RMT is to generate sustainable development through a fully operational and sustainable "Town Team" whose role it is to drive the RMT process forward. Each team is comprised, primarily of local people with an interest in creating and delivering a vision for the renaissance of their town over the next 25 years. During the first year of the programme the teams develop an ambitious yet achievable town vision or charter that is translated into action plans for implementation. These plans incorporate a portfolio of prioritised projects with defined delivery mechanisms.

The first round of Renaissance Market Towns, launched in 2003, has successfully completed their town charters and are beginning to see projects take shape on the ground, whilst the second round of towns, from 2004, has completed their Master Plans and are working with their Lead Consultants to produce a Business Plan to take their visions forward.

Yorkshire Forward is continuing to work with these towns and is developing a Partnership Skills Programme to support the Town Teams in the early stages of RMT project delivery. The Partnership Skills programme will also build capacity and confidence within the teams enabling them to become self sufficient in delivering their visions.

Future towns will be selected based upon a clear and transparent framework created from information produced for the Regional Settlement Strategy overlaid with additional lifestyle data. This framework will be discussed with Local Authorities and Key Partners across the region to develop a prioritised list of towns.

<http://www.yorkshire-forward.com/improving-places/rural-areas/market-towns>

<http://www.integreatyorkshire.com/aug-2009-the-potential-of-rural-economies.htm>

For more detailed information on the Renaissance Market Towns Programme and the towns already involved please visit

www.rmtportal.com

MONTE, ACE, is a partner of ASSET and member of the Organising Group, offering to provide activity IN KIND.

Monte-Desenvolvimento Alentejo Central, Portugal, is a non-governmental organisation for development, founded in 1996, in Arraiolos village. It is a non-profit private entity with four local development associations as partners, which represent 679 entities, 16% of which are collective entities and the rest are single persons.

Its creation is the result of a bid for a development project for Central Alentejo region, from four local development associations:

ALIENDE – Associação para o Desenvolvimento Local;

A.D.I.M.- Associação de Defesa dos Interesses de Monsaraz;

A.D.M.C. – Associação de Desenvolvimento Montes Claros

and TRILHO – Associação para o Desenvolvimento Rural.

<http://www.monte-ace.pt>

Annex C

Quotations that support and enhance ECOVAST's views.

(i) from the resolution of the NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME Small Towns Network Conference 4-5 September 2006 in Jyväskylä, Finland.
<http://www.smalltownnetworks.com/library.asp>

*'Small towns are home to one-fifth (***) of Europe's population and many of its most creative businesses/service-providers as well as being a rich repository of our collective heritage and local history.'*

'In some areas, small towns have been absorbed by the city or overwhelmed by modern development, environmental dilapidation and have suffered from prolonged under-investment.'

'There is a serious policy gap at European and local levels. The confidence and wellbeing of small towns are being undermined by exclusion from Europe's existing cities' and rural development programmes. This is short-sighted and ultimately dysfunctional for communities of all kinds. In the long run, the performance of Europe's city-regions and deep rural areas alike is highly dependent on sustaining the constellation of small towns and the villages in their hinterlands, which underpin and anchor these regions.'

'Maintaining territorial cohesion via balanced regional development and creating opportunities for all of Europe's people are fundamental principles of the Union. Better ways of supporting small towns (throughout Europe) must be urgently identified.'

(***) Small towns could represent HALF
ESPON 1.4.1 *The Role of Small and Medium-Sized Towns (SMESTO) Final Report*
June 2006

ANNEX D INTERREG

Following several meetings in 2008 with potential partners of a Pan-European bid to INTERREG IVC, the working hypothesis of the scope of the aims of a bid was:

“Small towns have demand for energy and potential in their hinterland for production of renewable energy (e.g. Güssing).

The character of the landscape, its biodiversity and built heritage are key cultural elements in tourism and economic activity.

Adverse changes resulting from energy production (crops, timber, wind turbines, hydro, waste conversion, hydroelectricity brown coal and other mining) need to be addressed.

The competition for agricultural and forestry land posed by renewable energy and threats to locally sourced food and timber processes also requires to be examined in terms of local and regional self sufficiency – local markets for local products, to avoid excessive transportation energy and costs in the context of climate change.

These are sustainability considerations.

The involvement of local citizens is essential to policy formulation and the implementation process. Small towns and rural areas cannot be viewed in isolation from each other and from the dominant larger urban areas in spatial policy terms.

Support from regional agencies to small towns and rural areas is needed to enable the municipalities and civic society to engage in a vision for the future of energy autonomy and economic self-sufficiency.

Small towns are ideal venues to carry out new projects and experiences in renewable energies because they have a critical density of an urban area, within a rural setting that offers potential for sources of renewable energy to be harvested using traditional techniques from the landscape in close vicinity.

The ability of small rural towns to achieve and sustain competitiveness in economic terms may rely on retaining the entrepreneurial spirit of younger people. For that, key issues are rewarding jobs, affordable homes, social and retail facilities and transport choices within the local area of each town.

Policies and action aimed at restructuring small towns will be examined, with the aim of positioning them as the backbone of rural regions through enhancing the attractiveness of the rural territory in support of socio-economic development and through sustainable tourism by protecting cultural heritage and landscape.”

The proposal to INTERREG IVC was not put forward. However, several of the potential partners, including Malta as lead partner, submitted a proposal to INTERREG IVB Mediterranean – the TOWNES project: “Towns networking with small rural areas in the Med” (programme reference 1236093550).

Partners are:

Malta - Gharb Local Council, Gozo – Lead Partner

Malta - (Genista Research Foundation)

Spain - Puerto Lumbreras Local Council, Region of Murcia,

Spain - Diputación Provincial de Granada, Region of Andalucía

Spain - SODOVEGA SA, Region of Andalucía

Italy – ANDRI (Italian Association of Rural Districts), Lazio Region

Italy - The GAL (Local Action Group) “Molise Verso il 2000”

Italy - Local Action Group A.L.L.BA, Basilicata

Italy – University of Calabria

Greece – University of Patras, Anatoliki, Makedonia, Thraki

Greece – Efxini Poli, Attiki

Greece - National Technical University Of Athens (NTUA)

Greece - NATURE INNOVATIONS, Dytiki Ellada

Portugal – Social Development Institute (IDS) Lisbon
Portugal – Municipality of Arraiolos, Alentejo
Cyprus - Development Company Paphos Aphrodite Ltd

Non-Med EU Partner – ASSET
Non EU and Non-IPA Partner – ECOVAST Croatia.

The TOWNES project will target small towns and village clusters in rural territories by setting up and developing transnational strategies for institutional networks by:

- Coordinating actors,
- Elaborating common strategies,
- Setting up and developing common systems and operational tools,
- Promoting coherence and coordinating public policies,
- Disseminating technologies, processes, know-hows and innovative managements systems and
- Elaborating pilot projects and experimental equipment tools

The socioeconomic decline of rural territories is a worldwide phenomenon, but with stronger presence in developed countries. The gap between urban and rural areas, deepens more and more: rural areas characterized by poor infrastructure and access to services, are suffering from marginalization from the global economic scene and strong competition coming out from more innovative and performing areas. As a result, certain trends appear in these areas, with the most important of them being depopulation trends and incapability to build up a development perspective based on their own comparative advantages

Resting on the valuable resources that rural areas dispose (natural resources, cultural resources, landscape resources, agro-food, diffusion of craftsmanship of quality) the project will focus on strengthening the role of rural areas in the regional economies and improving their competitive position through the identification, evaluation and transfer of best practices in four main policy decision areas, linked to the diffusion of innovation and knowledge.

- (i) to improve the quality of life and income opportunities of rural population
- (ii) to regenerate values and ways of living that traditionally belong to these territories. New sustainable development perspectives for rural areas and territories will be explored, that aim at a more efficient and effective economic development, strengthening their competitive position and supporting local income, while keeping in track with sustainability principles. Emphasis will be placed on citizen engagement in policy decisions

Rural areas characterized by poor infrastructure and access to services, are suffering from marginalization from the global economic scene and strong competition coming out from more innovative and performing areas, consequently deepening the gap between urban and rural areas. As a result, certain trends appear in these areas, with the most important of them being depopulation trends and incapability to build up a development perspective based on their own comparative advantages e.g. natural resources, cultural heritage, landscape, traditional food, energy production. Moreover, they have to deal with certain risks emerging from: unsustainable use of local resources e.g. intensification of agricultural land, over-exploitation of water resources; poor access to infrastructure e.g. transport networks, telecommunication networks, energy networks; policy decisions deteriorating rural environment e.g. location of polluting activities in their territory.

The project TOWNES will target small towns and village clusters in rural territories by setting up and developing transnational strategies for institutional networks by:

Strengthening economic perspectives and improving competitiveness of rural communities.
Reducing regional disparities throughout Europe by strengthening innovation potential of rural areas.

Establishing a friendly cooperation framework among small towns

Reinforce local expertise in order to take advantage of ICTs which will be made accessible

Enrich rural regions' knowledge on successful practices

Improve the quality of life and economic attractiveness of rural areas

To promote sustainable tourist development paths

Structuring of a coherent destination image

The methodological approach will focus on the share and transfer of best practices within 4 macro-areas addressing innovation and knowledge aspects of rural areas: linkages with towns/urban areas; economic assets; service hubs for innovation and knowledge; governance/advocacy.

The project TOWNES will focus on national dimensions however it will also target transnational dimensions to help small towns and rural villages to lower the gap and increase competition and sustainability. The project will focus the below:

To reinforce the cooperation among small towns in rural areas in the innovation policy
To establish a friendly cooperation framework among small towns in order to favor innovation in rural areas, sustain their socio - economic development, and bridge the gap in respect between rural areas and to richer and more developed areas
Enrich rural regions' knowledge on successful practices enhancing innovation diffusion and stock of knowledge.
To promote sustainable tourist development paths by building, managing and promoting their image as tourist destination.
To build a shared services network. This will be the first step to create local and regional "small pools of competences" for each type of product.

Annex E

Samobor Declaration

ECOVAST CONFERENCE, SAMOBOR, CROATIA 15 OCTOBER 2007

We, the 72 delegates from 8 countries (note 1) attending the FINAL PLENARY session on 15 October 2007 of the conference organised by ECOVAST CROATIA at Samobor, on the topic of **SMALL EUROPEAN TOWNS – THEIR ROLE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION;**

Noting that the Conference is positioned at the outset of the European Rural Development programme (ERDP 2007-2013), and

Aware of the prospect of a Health Check of the Common Agricultural Policy in 2008, which is also the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, but

Addressing ourselves to all the governments and peoples of the wider Europe;

Welcome the initiative by ECOVAST of the **ASSET** (Action to Strengthen Small European Towns) project;

Believe that there is a major gap in European Policy. Cities and **large towns** are well covered through the European Regional Development Fund, as are **rural areas** through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). However, **small towns and their hinterlands deserve more attention**. The small towns close to larger urban areas are similarly without a clear policy;

Support the initiative by the European Commission to improve understanding of, and to develop policies related to, the close relationships between towns and rural areas;
(Note 2)

Urge all European Governments, in shaping and developing their rural development programmes, to place a policy focus upon small towns, and their potential for sustainable development. We also urge the European Union to place greater funding emphasis on Pillar 2 to implement rural development;

Believe that towns should be seen as consumers of rural products and centres of support for rural businesses including the promotion of rural tourism. For small towns and their hinterlands, land management has a key role in local food production, other local products (crafts, arts, building materials) and in sourcing renewable energy;

Call for a full recognition, by the EU and by governments at all levels, of the key principle that the rural dwellers and people of small towns should be not only the main beneficiaries, but also the main shapers, of development policy and programmes which affect their areas. This principle reflects the great variation in the character, cultural diversity, distinctiveness, needs and resources of different rural areas throughout Europe. It recognises also the ability of local people to take the lead in efforts to improve their own lives, and to have a true sense of 'ownership' of these efforts;

Welcome the initiatives being taken in many European countries to sustain and regenerate the vitality of small towns and their rural hinterland. Small towns have a key role in the community life, in the protection of heritage and in the economy of the rural regions. They are set in the landscape and are motors for rural development. However, they face many threats to their continued well-being, such as loss of younger people, replacement of full-time residents by owners of second homes, and the challenges to survival of local facilities and independent local retailers;

Encourage the creation and activity of Town Partnerships, involving municipalities, enterprises and particularly civil society, to lead the process of sustaining and revitalizing small towns and to enable beneficiaries to draw upon European, national, regional and private funding;

Urge that the focus of policy for rural areas should be on sustainable development, seeking to achieve the social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being of the rural people and areas. Development can only be sustainable if it emanates from both men and women, of all ages and origins, who have or who seek the necessary experience, understanding and skills and who take responsibility at grassroots level. Development should be conceived through a process which is participative, taking into account local cultures, and which liberates and fosters the energy of all;

Emphasise the decisive importance of life-long learning for the real participation of rural people in their own development process. There is a widespread need for education, training and skills development; and for advisory services to help individuals, enterprises and communities to take initiatives and to strengthen civil society and local partnership.

Note 1

Participants:

ECOVAST members and guests, including students of the University of Gloucestershire MSc Course "European Rural Development"

Countries of origin

Austria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Serbia, Spain, and the United Kingdom,

Croatian small towns represented at the conference included:

1. Samobor
2. Otočac
3. Senj
4. Delnice
5. Stari Grad, otok Hvar
6. Ogulin
7. Crikvenica

ECOVAST Croatia members were from the towns of:

8. Petrinja
9. Kostajnica
10. Dubrovnik
11. Slatina
12. Zaprešić

Note 2

"In the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the so called **Pillar 2 on rural development** agreed in 2005 for the period 2007 - 2013, **urban-rural relations are mentioned** as an element of the rural development policy.

Under the...Axis 3 themes like *wider Rural Development i.e. renovation and development of villages, ensuring basic service and economic diversification* are addressed.

"Small and Medium Sized Towns (SMESTO) are not mentioned explicitly in the Pillar 2, although they could play a crucial role as potential nodes in a spatial strategy especially in rural areas far from metropolitan regions." *European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON 1.4.1 "The Role of Small and Medium-Sized Towns (SMESTO)" Final Report 2006)*