

REPORT of the PRESIDENT

The activities of ECOVAST National Sections in our European network have started this year with the hope that more members will be able to attend them – first of all there are preparations going on in UK Section for the ECOVAST General Assembly and Conference to be held in October 15-17 in the Isle of Wight, England; also a very important event is being prepared by the Russian Section in co-operation with their National Government institutions on the 'Culture of Wood – Wood in Culture' Conference from 24 - 28 September.

The Austrian Section has been involved in the new EU project related to the Danube Strategy, and the Croatian and Slovakian Sections have shown interest in joining this initiative. In my opinion it is a very interesting opportunity for a number of ECOVAST Sections attached to the Danube area geographically and also promoting possible interest in regional development (besides those already mentioned also Hungary, Romania, Macedonia are in the Region). Related to usual work and communication with our Secretariat through Pam Moore, I have participated in virtual discussions on ECOVAST -ning (<http://ecovastdiscussion.ning.com/>) on a number of themes which were put there mainly by our Vice-President Phil Turner. (NOTE: Because NING may make charges for this web resource, we may have to discontinue its use. Phil is also posting various news and events on a site operated by ECOVAST UK; please see <http://ecovast.webs.com/>)

One important idea – Sections should think more of ways of obtaining financial support for their activities through various international or national Calls for Project . Hopefully, ECOVAST International itself will be able to enable its members to more easily participate some events, the Annual Assembly in the first place.

The recent three day Conference on Rural Tourism in Croatia, together with one day of visits on the island of Losinj, went very well with a very Programme and 300 participants, some of whom were international. I had been invited to present ECOVAST International and speak about examples and experiences of the Croatian Section in the Plenary Part of the Conference. So ECOVAST was recognized by the organizers as having an important role in rural development in Croatia. I was also pleased to find there quite a few members of our Section, and to find that my input attracted interest among colleagues and even new members for our Section!

Tihana Stepinac Fabijanac

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

The first few months of 2010 have been busy for ECOVAST officers. The International Committee met in Vienna in January In March, ECOVAST was represented at a meeting of the DG Agri Rural Development Advisory Group, a seminar on Territorial Cohesion organized by DG Regio, and a meeting on CAP Reform facilitated by Europa Nostra, all in Brussels, and a preparatory meeting for a seminar on voluntary organizations and heritage, which will take place in the summer in Mechelen, Belgium. In April, Michael Dower represented ECOVAST in a further meeting on CAP Reform, in Brussels. This month, Vice-President Phil Turner and I have attended part of the Swedish Rural Parliament in Sunne, during which we were present at an informal meeting of the PREPARE Organising Group.

In my role as Secretary of the UK section, I have been involved in the preparation of the events for ECOVAST's Biennial Assembly, which will, this year take place on the Isle of Wight, UK. This is reported in more detail elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Pam Moore

NEWS FROM THE SECTIONS

AUSTRIA – At their Section Assembly earlier this year, Brigitte Macaria took over from Arthur Spiegel as General Secretary of ECOVAST Austria and as representative of the Austrian Section on the International Committee (to be confirmed by the Biennial Assembly). Arthur will remain as the representative on the Landscape Working group on the IC.

Brigitte Macaria has provided the following report: Following the invitation to participate in the EU-call "Strategy for the Danube Region", ECOVAST Austria, after contacting the "Foster Foundation", filled in their questionnaire for NGO's such as ECOVAST International. We hope that other sections will join in to complete the view. Some background information: The "Foster Foundation" is founded this year and is something like the young daughter of the "Esterhazy Foundation", located also in Eisenstadt /Burgenland (AT). <http://www.foster-europe.org>. We will keep you informed of further developments.

Concerning ECOVAST Austria's involvement in the TEN project, as associated partner attended the meeting on the project in Sopron April 22. 2010. We hope to negotiate a possible upgrading of our present state to become a real partner in the project. In our view, our two main fields of commitment and competence – landscape identification and characterization as well as small historic towns - could be covered by us. Neither matter is dealt with in the project.

Our pilot project "GrÜLE" (meaning trans-border landscape identification by schools) has been finished successfully. We now know that our "Guide to Good Practice – ECOVAST Landscape Identification" can very well be carried out by schools if guided by a person experienced in the method. For example, at least the pupils need a good introduction concerning the meaning of the "matrix of landscape identification". What pupils and their teachers obviously like are the excursions into the landscape, the discussions and the evaluations of the condensed key-items.

ECOVAST Austria contributed two articles to the ÖKL-Journal in German. The first regarding the "CENTROPE" Topic, (see separate article) the second on the borderline situation between CZ/AT. The third article viewing briefly all three new European regions in Central Europe : Centrope, Pannonia and the Danube Region.

CROATIA – Tihana Stepinac Fabijanac reports.....

The most important news is the creation of a new web page of the Croatian section www.ecovast.hr with all data on past projects of the Section as well as current activities (available only in Croatian language). Section President, Biserka Dumbovic Bilusic and members of the Section have been working on preparing materials for publishing the Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Small Historic Towns of Croatia held in Moscenice in October last year, which was organized in co-operation with the local heritage organization as well as ECOVAST International and which included the General Assembly.

A regional conference on Small Towns and Landscape is being organized in the North-West part of Croatia in Krapina, where local and regional examples of traditional architecture and landscape protection projects will be discussed (planned for the end of May). A number of other initiatives are in progress throughout the country, involving local members, civil society organizations and Government institutions.

Germany - The German Section held their Annual Assembly last month in Reichenbach, and a successful accompanying seminar. They are now starting to prepare for the Denkmal events in November in Leipzig, at which ECOVAST and Europa Nostra share a stand.

Hungary - Gabor Rajnai told the January IC that the Hungarian Section no longer organised their own events, but worked to try to influence government policy for rural areas. He explained the forum system in Hungary by which civil society could be involved at different levels.

Hungarian ECOVAST was also working to influence the National Tourism Strategy and the National Rural Development programme. Other examples of work included taking part in the EU 2020 consultation, and with LEADER Groups.

Russia – Olga Sevan has notified us of an important conference on the 'Culture of Wood – Wood in Culture' in September 2010 (see events – please contact Olga if you would like to attend).

Slovakia - At our last IC, a lengthy discussion took place about the proposal for an event in Poperad, Slovakia, and it was agreed this would be linked to an IC in Spring 2011 having as its theme "Village Renewal in the Landscape". The section are now analysing the results of their project on the development of small towns, and they hope to stage a conference on this in late Spring. Eva Kralova also advised that they are also involved in a lifelong learning project (under Leonardo programme).

UK – The UK section met in London in March, by kind invitation of the Commission for Rural Communities. We elected a new Chairman, Valerie Carter, and I was re elected as Secretary. I would like to record our warm thanks to the retiring Chairman, Michael Dower, who decided to stand down after many years in the role. As mentioned elsewhere, we are much occupied with the preparation for the IOW events, which will also mark the 20th anniversary of the UK Section. Discussions at the March meeting focused on this topic, as well as making the decision to merge for a trial period with the UK Section of the European Rural University, with whom we regularly collaborate. This will not compromise the independence of the parent bodies, and all accounts will remain separate, but we can share events to our mutual benefit.

Pam Moore

ASPECTS OF BIOENERGY IN EUROPE

1. Amount of renewable energy sought

The term "Bioenergy" means the energy acquired from biomass. Biomass is made up of organic substances in which the sun's energy is chemically bound. Such organic substances include particularly wood, agricultural crops and organic residues from industrial or communal waste. The conversion into usable energy takes place through incineration (solid fuels), gasification (biogas), fermentation (ethanol) and extraction from plant oils (biodiesel). Usable types of energy are heat, electricity and fuels for combustion engines.

Country	Share of RE ¹⁾ on final energy consumption		
	Share realised in 2006, %	Objective share 2020, %	Share to cover till 2020, %
1. EU 27	9.2	20	10.8
2. France	10.5	23	12.5
3. Germany	7.8	18	10.2
4. Latvia	31.4	40	8.6
5. Romania	17.0	24	7.0
6. Spain	8.7	20	11.3
7. UK	1.5	15	13.5

¹⁾ RE: Renewable Energies

Table 1: Share of renewable energy in final energy consumption in the EU and in selected European countries. Source: Eurostat - Internet Databank energy/yearly statistics, 2009. Luxembourg.

Bioenergy is currently the most important sector of renewable energies in Europe. Criteria for its use and provision are regulated at European level by the Renewable Energies Guideline (RL2009/28/EG). This guideline contains amongst other issues target values for the share of renewable energies to be reached by 2020 for the total consumption. Table 2 shows data for the EU as a whole and for selected countries. The share of renewable energy obtained in 2006 and then the target amount for 2020 are shown. As can be seen, there are considerable disparities between the member countries, not only with the current level but also in the target amount.

2. Significance of bioenergy

Table 2 shows the total production of renewable energy and the share of the most important types of energy for the EU and selected member states. Currently - and more than likely in the foreseeable future - energy from biomass provides the largest share by far in the EU. The main focus points for bioenergy use in the EU are (2007): Provision of heat (especially by wood and wood waste material), for transport with biofuels and to a lesser extent for electricity production. The development of bioenergy in Europe has caused some severe criticism. Starting points for this criticism are, in particular, the cultivation of energy crops on agricultural land and the lack of effective use of energy crops for fuels. Concerns about the cultivation of energy crops exist because: Competition for human nutrition, the increase in more intensive cultivation (with environmental problems) and a decrease in quality of natural areas.

Country	Production of final RE ¹⁾ 2007						
	Total production TWh ³⁾ (=100%)	Share of types of RE					
		Biomass ²⁾ TWh	%	Hydropower TWh	%	Wind Energy TWh	%
1. EU 27	1259.2	817	65%	310	25%	103	8%
2. France	199.3	135	68%	59	30%	4	
3. Germany	213.6	2%					
4. Latvia	14.5	151	71%	21	10%	40	
5. Romania	54.2	19%					
6. Spain	106.7	11.7	81%	2.7	19%	(0.05)	
7. UK	31.7	38	70%	16	30%	(0.01)	
		52	49%	28	26%	27	
		25%					
		21	66%	5	16%	5	
		16%					

1) RE: Renewable Energy 2) Biomass: Solid Biomass, Communal waste, Biogas, Biofuels. 3) TWh: Terra Watt hours.

Table 2: Production of renewable energy and the share of the most important types of energy in the EU and selected European countries. Source: Federal Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection/Germany, 2009: Data of renewable energies. Berlin.

This problem can be overcome by a consistent and controlled application of sustainable use. Furthermore, the use through energy crops can be limited to the proportion of the area which is not needed for food self-sufficiency. This is, after all, a considerable proportion of the agricultural area as on the one hand, in Europe appreciable surpluses of food are still being produced and on the other hand many areas are lying fallow or are only used sporadically (compare Table 4).

3. Economic aspects

There is no overall statement possible on the economic side of bioenergy to be made from the viewpoint of the enterprises which are producing it. This is determined above all by the organization and size of the enterprises and the price for energy to be gained. The following are two examples. Biofuel can be produced by a farm as rapeseed oil in small amounts using only farm labour and for its own use. Ethanol, as opposed to this, is produced as a rule in factories with large production capacity.

Types of Bio Energy	Turnover 2008		Employment 2007	
	Mrd. €	%	1000 persons	%
1. Solid Biomass	2.1	24%	31.3	32%
2. Biomass for electricity	3.2	36%	36.3	38%
3. Bio Fuels	3.5	40%	28.5	30%
4. Bio Energy total	8.8	100%	96,1	100%

Table 3: Achieved turnover and gross employment through various types of bioenergy in Germany during 2007/2008. Source: Federal Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection/Germany: a) Data of renewable energies, Berlin 2009; b) Research report "Gross employment 2007", Berlin 2008.

As an economic sector bioenergy has however, considerable significance. For Germany as an example, Table 3 reflects the turnover aimed for in 2008 as well as the gross employment in 2007. The largest shares of the turnover are allotted to biofuels and production of electricity. The turnover for solid fuels (wood, industrial waste) is slightly lower. The turnover per employee is, at 91.6 thousand Euros, high in comparison.

4. Perspective

The share of bioenergy of the final energy consumption should increase further in the EU. A limiting factor is, however, the available area. A prognosis of the available areas for the years

Country	Agricultural Area, 2007 Mill. ha (=100%)	Production potential of Biomass (-plants)					
		in 2010		in 2020		in 2050	
		Mill. ha	%	Mill. ha	%	Mill. ha	%
1. EU 27	179.68	26.4	15%	29.4	16%	38.5	21%
2. France	29.41	6.2	21%	5.9	20%	6.4	22%
3. Germany	16.95	3.5	21%	4.4	26%	6.5	38%
4. Latvia	1.84	0.6	33%	0.7	38%	0.8	43%
5. Romania	13.82	0.7	5%	0.9	7%	2.1	15%
6. Spain	25.27	4.3	17%	7.3	29%	14.4	57%
7. UK	14.90	-	-	0.18	1%	1.7	11%

Table 4: Prognosis for the available area for bioenergy in the EU and selected European countries. Source: a) Eurostat - Statistical Yearbook 2009, Luxembourg. b) Schmitz, P. et al., 2009: Potentials of Bioenergy. Frankfurt/M.

2010, 2020 and 2050 can be seen in Table 4. Which parameters are incurred in the estimates? The starting basis is the agricultural area in 2007. The area is available for bioenergy arithmetically where food surpluses are produced and the area which is fallow. This area is

adjusted with the prognoses for future yield increases, the decline or increase in population and the consumption of food.

As a decline in population for the EU and further yield increases are to be expected, the area possible for bioenergy is increasing. This is especially the case for countries with an expected strong decline in population, as e.g. Germany and Spain. Due to this feasible prognosis it can be presumed that the share of bioenergy in the total energy supply in Europe will be increased.

Ralf Bokermann

ECOVAST BIENNIAL ASSEMBLY 2010

Plans are now well advanced for our Biennial Assembly and associated events, which will take place on the Isle of Wight, UK, from 15 – 17 October. On 15 October, there will be an excursion, which will showcase particular themes such as rural heritage tourism, landscape protection (more than half of the IOW is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), the LEADER method, and community empowerment (Village Design Statements). On the following day, we have an International Conference on the topic "Challenges of Effective Rural Development and Heritage". Finally, on Sunday 17 October, the ECOVAST Biennial assembly will take place, at the same venue as the conference, the Botanic Gardens, Ventnor. Full details are now available of all the events – please contact me by e mail – address at start of Newsletter.

This will be the first time in the 20 year history of the UK Section that we have hosted the Assembly, and we hope that many members will attend. For the conference, there will be simultaneous interpretation in English, German and French, and for the Assembly and excursion, we will seek to provide informal translations. The Isle of Wight is an idyllic location, primarily rural in character, with picturesque villages, many miles of coastline, and varied landscapes. It is situated a short distance from the south coast of England – the ferry takes about 20 minutes. One of its principal "industries" is tourism, so there is plenty of Bed and Breakfast accommodation available at a modest price.

Pam Moore

PROGRESS OF THE ASSET PROJECT (Action to Strengthen Small European Towns)

The ECOVAST project, Action to Strengthen Small European Towns, was founded following the 2005 ECOVAST Conference in Retz, Austria. With the funds that remain, we estimate that activity can continue until the end of 2011, unless we gather other paying partners, in which case it could be extended.

During the coming year we hope to participate in events organised by others - for example, a presentation to Action for Market Towns Convention in UK and the Irish Rural Studies Symposium in Cork.

We are waiting to hear from the Lead Partner in Malta whether the INTERREG IV MED bid has been successful. If so ASSET/ECOVAST and ASSET Croatia will be busy with that project, on Mediterranean towns, for 2/3 years as participants (non partners).

With regard to the actual ASSET initiative, Pam Moore will continue with the research area of the project, and Valerie Carter has commenced some complementary work. We intend to arrange two events, the first of which will be a seminar later in 2010 which will prepare for a larger scale event, a final conference / convention late in 2011 - perhaps with DG REGIO funding support - to influence politicians.

We will also continue to promote ASSET, small towns and their relationship with rural areas and villages, and their links with metropolitan areas / in city regions through EU mid term assessment and post 2013 programmes, European Rural Development Programme (CAP reform), DG Regio and other directorates and the Council of Europe. It is our aim to disseminate good practice through our research findings, and thus to influence on EU policy post 2013.

We hope that the Scottish SUSSET toolkit for small towns website will be developed - with additional examples of good practice (thanks to funding from a professional consultant) and a version of the toolkit could include other community led techniques - simplified and translated into other languages (if we can secure funding).

Phil Turner

Future Forum for Rural Development

From 20-22 January 2010 the annual conference on the future of rural regions took place in Berlin. It is one of the most important conferences in Germany concerned with the future of rural regions. This topic was discussed in 18 seminars and working groups. In the background of all the expert presentations was the question: How can rural areas deal with the decrease in population to be expected in Germany? The following are observations on a few from the many expert contributions:

1. Use of e-services: "E services" refer to the citizen's connection with administration and services by direct telephone contact or email. Such direct connections to the nearest rural centre are particularly recommended for inhabitants of small villages. Direct connection to the municipal administration, to shopping malls, but especially to health centres or doctors' surgeries are a possibility. For older village residents in particular, their care can be provided more easily so that they can remain where they are in small villages.

2. Preservation of schools in rural areas: During the last few decades, larger schools have been set up in central places instead of the former small village schools. With a decline in population, the minimum number of pupils for school centres is often not reached. A frequent consequence is the merger of schools, making students travel even further from home. To keep schools in rural regions, the reversion to smaller schools is increasing. It is better that teachers drive to the small schools than many pupils to the large centres over long distances. Trials have shown that small schools with better organisation can work just as successfully as larger units.

3. Rural development in the year 2020: Forecasting the future pattern of rural development shows, among others, the following tendencies: a) A strengthening or stabilisation of rural regions will not become easier but will more than likely be more difficult. One main reason is the loss of many rural jobs due to rationalisation or transferring these jobs abroad. It is very difficult, but not impossible, to strengthen the economic basis. b) A professional regional management has proved to be a considerable support for the promotion of rural regions. A financially guaranteed regional management is therefore a top priority. c) Funding through the EU is becoming more and more important, as national means are tending to become tighter. The current excessive bureaucratic nature of EU-funding applications has often resulted in intense criticism. Approximately 30% to 40% of the regional management's work is taken up with the bureaucratic processing of EU-funding applications. If this does not change, some regions will not be in the position to take part in funding. This would be contrary to what was intended in 1990 with the start of the Leader1- period for rural regions.

Ralf Bokermann

The future of the European Agricultural Policy (CAP) - Call for a public debate

A formal public consultation on the CAP post-2013 will be undertaken later this year when the Commission will publish a policy paper setting out different options for the future CAP.

Dacian Cioloș Member of the European Commission Responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development made a speech to the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee in Brussels, on 12 April 2010.

In launching the debate he said:

A website <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-debate> has already been set up for contributions from all those who wish to make them. An independent body will then produce a summary of these contributions in June.

- In mid-July I plan to organise a conclusive conference on the public debate. We will debate the main ideas to have emerged from this process. Consider yourselves already invited. I am convinced that we will find strong and innovative ideas.

- These ideas will help shape the European Commission's thoughts regarding the Communication on the CAP after 2013. This Communication, which is planned for the end of 2010, will propose different options for the future of European agriculture and its common agricultural policy.

We must involve citizens and civil society. We must give them the opportunity, time and space to make their voices heard so that then – in our future initiatives – we can take their opinions into account in a coherent fashion...I want the reactions and thoughts of farmers and professional bodies and also of environmental protection associations, consumers, and animal welfare groups. The reactions of all those who are working in the food-security sector, on sustainable development, on rural development – on all the issues relating to agriculture.

The questions on the future that we want for our agriculture and for our society are manifold. There are many aspects to analyse. I see this debate revolving around four strategic questions.

- 1. Why do we need a European Common Agricultural Policy?*
- 2. What are society's objectives for agriculture in all its diversity?*
- 3. Why should we reform the current CAP and how can we make it meet society's expectations?*
- 4. What tools do we need for tomorrow's CAP?*

Each of these strategic questions raises others:

- What tools would allow the European Union to respond to the challenges of the future given that the markets are more and more unstable and that expectations are growing?

- How can we make the European Union respond to the challenge of food security? In the coming decades, we will be facing changing and accelerated demand worldwide caused by growing populations, changing diets in emerging countries and risks caused by climate change.

- How can we ensure that consumers get safe, quality food at affordable prices? How can we maintain the quality and diversity of European products while responding to the expectations of the agri-food sector and regional and local markets?

- How can we ensure economic growth and green growth in rural areas? These regions can play an economic role and a role in terms of employment and the environment. We must free up this potential and find the appropriate tools for each of these regions – whether they are peri-urban, have a lot of productive potential, are disadvantaged, fragile or mountainous. Without a solid agricultural

sector in these regions, the risk of the economic and social fabric breaking down is enormous. How can we stimulate the rural economy? How could the CAP have an even greater impact on the Europe of 2020?

- What legacy do we want to leave future generations in terms of the environment – air, soil and water quality? Let us not forget that farmers – less than 5% of the EU's population – exploit 80% of its territory. How can we better manage natural resources while continuing production? How can we preserve and restore biodiversity in Europe?

- Climate change is no longer a theoretical issue. Society expects solutions from the agricultural sector. Agriculture has already proved its ability to contribute significantly to the reduction of greenhouse gases, through a reduction of 20% between 1990 and 2007 as opposed to a reduction of 8% in other sectors. It can do even more. We must help it. We must rethink the link between research and agriculture.

- What future does Europe have on international markets? What are our strong points? How can we manage our competitive and offensive advantages better? How can we manage our qualitative requirements in a Community market that is increasingly opening up to imports from third countries and in the absence of international agreements on these matters? For example in the area of animal welfare.

Also available in FRENCH

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/debate/index_fr.htm

And GERMAN

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/debate/index_de.htm

ECOVAST speaks on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy...

ECOVAST, with other organizations represented on the European Commission's RURAL DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP, has been invited to a larger meeting of all the DG AGRI advisory groups. This will be on 3 June 2010, to consider CAP Reform.

At the 11 March RD Advisory Group meeting, ECOVAST's Secretary General made an INTERVENTION that may be seen at:

<http://ecovast.webs.com/apps/blog/>

ECOVAST believes that a policy should be sought which is more fairly balanced between agriculture and other aspects of rural development. The aim must be to establish a fully-fledged European Rural Development Policy, in which the CAP is simply one part. The engagement of civil society is essential.

Phil Turner

SURE – SUSTAINABLE URBAN RURAL EUROPE

In the last newsletter, Phil Turner reported on the seminar held last November near Gothenburg, Sweden, at which he and Pam represented ECOVAST. The aim of this event was to explore how citizens, through their civil organisations, may be effectively connected to the Sustainability agenda of the European Union, and what this implies for the links between urban and rural areas and for practical action and policy change. The discussion was wide-ranging, embracing (as

Phil reported) Peak Oil and energy security, population growth and food security, Climate Change and urban-rural relations.

The report on that seminar (which is available, through Pam Moore, to anyone who is interested) will form a key input to the second SURE event, a two-day Conference to be held at Krakow, Poland on 20 and 21 May. This will gather good practice from around Europe, propose how that good practice may be mainstreamed, and show why this implies for policy.

Michael Dower

PREPARE – PARTNERSHIP FOR RURAL EUROPE

ECOVAST is a member of this long-standing partnership, set up in 1999 to strengthen civil society in rural areas, notably in new EU member states and candidate countries, and to promote exchange in rural development. Since its formation, PREPARE has supported the creation of national rural networks in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Croatia, and has welcomed these networks into the partnership of the programme. It has also held annual Gatherings of people from 20 or more countries, and organised other events.

This year, PREPARE has welcomed a new Coordinator, Goran Soster who is based in Slovenia. The main focus of PREPARE's continuing work, which is mainly funded by the C.S. Mott Foundation, is on South East Europe, in order to encourage the strengthening of civil society in the rural areas of Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova. We are also building up contacts in Turkey, where a PREPARE Team went last year to support Foundations based in Turkey at a seminar in the north-eastern mountains of the country

The PREPARE Gathering this year will be held in early September (date to be fixed) in Macedonia, near Lake Ohrid, with travelling workshops in Macedonia and Albania.

Michael Dower

THE CENTROPE PROJECT

Whilst the interested user of the website www.centropa.org might gain information in different languages about curricula and illustrations of displaced persons, formerly living in Central Europe in the time of Nazi-Government, this multilingual possibility also exists under www.centrope.org, but concerns the geographical region *Centrope*, the much smaller area in the heart of Central Europe, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

Now, what is the difference between living, for example, in Nitra or Pistiany, in Zlin or in Znajmo compared to living in Veszprem or Szombathely? Well, the difference is, the first two small towns are not situated in *Centropa*, though situated in the Austria-Slovak- Hungarian border region, whereas the other four are part of this new Central European region.

How is it possible, that a prominently located and newly defined European region in the year of 2003 is thus unknown to its inhabitants?

Obviously something has not been promoted in the right way. As the official target is to make the region the economically strongest area in Central Europe, increasing the population from the present level of some 6 million people to more than 11 million – we wonder how this can be feasible? – and improving local collaboration, infrastructure, education, and culture, this target is obviously only in the heads of a few directly involved specific persons and planners.

Indeed there exists a cultural journal, called "K2-kultur in Centrope", reporting mainly about cultural events in Austria, yet giving also mention to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary on its cover. This approach results in brief summaries in the languages of the three neighbouring countries with English in addition, thus only partially engaging with the international interested reader.

The creation of a sustainable identity of Centrope

In Centrope in the last decade huge and successful economic large scale investments have taken place. We do not want to raise our voice against such developments, as economic security is essential to keep people in the region and is fundamental to the quality of life. The emergence and continuity of identity is based on so called "soft factors" (like beauty, content), that often are disregarded compared to the "hard factors" (like commerce, profit). However, so doing overlooks the fact that the "soft factors" are those which are determining our life.

Bearing this in mind, ECOVAST Austria has launched an initiative to help to create and secure identification between the local people and "their" region Centrope. This initiative is based on two main cultural aspects of excellence of this region: the variety and beauty of **landscape** and the asset of **Small Historic Towns**, these gems of Rural Europe, both strongly linked together. This initiative found support within the governments of our provinces Lower

Austria, Burgenland and Vienna (being Austria's capital and province at the same time). Also, both fields of research and practice are at the core of ECOVAST's work and commitment.

(One should be aware there is an EU programme valid only for bilateral co-operation).

So Centrope should be called something very different than an investment area. It is a prominent part of our continent, being full of history and landscapes with their rural villages and small historic towns. In the region of Centrope, even in our parents' time there has been war and was much affected by European history, when in 1989 the so called "iron curtain" came down, being a first step towards the European reunification.

Landscapes are formed by natural and cultural factors – including history - and the people's perception in addition, thus causing strong ties of identification. Emotional relationships like these are exactly what is still missing from Centrope.

Centrope, the geographical area

The Centrope region comprises the following administrative units: Three "Komitate" of West Hungary, the two Slovak districts Bratislava and Trnava, the Czech districts of West Moravia and Southern Bohemia and the three Austrian provinces Lower Austria, Burgenland and Vienna (the latter being capital and province at the same time). This means that some 6 million people should be well informed, and have acknowledged this new European idea of trans border development. Furthermore these 50.000 square kilometres of Centrope cannot be called trifling. The variety of landscapes and geography give the area a complex character. From lakes and a panoramic wine landscape to the rocky summits of the northern limestone Alps and ski resorts. Also valuable sections of the Danube valley and the Central European watershed between the North Sea and the Black Sea, and in addition a long stretch of Europe's "Green Belt" (along the former iron curtain). In the densely populated Centrope region there (still) exist big agricultural and "near to nature" areas, like the National Parks Danube Riverrine Forests, Thaya Valley and National Park Neusiedler Lake (the latter two extending across the national borders) or the World Heritage Cultural Landscape of the Wachau (a section of the Danube Valley) and many other areas under protection. Beside these there are a great number of "cherished" landscapes. Therefore at first sight it seems a "mission impossible" to merge a fragmented area like this to a regional unit with its own identity. But all these features, as mentioned above, contribute strongly to what once could be called "a regional identity", if promoted in the right way with the help of the local people. Identity comes from the people and cannot be ordered top down.

Centrope, its landscapes and small historic towns

Almost all **landscapes** at the borders of the four countries extend across the national borders, at least so far as their main natural factors (those are geology, climate, soil and geomorphology) are concerned. The exact number of the landscape units - identified in the sense of the European Landscape Convention and by the means of the ECOVAST-Method – is yet unknown, but can be roughly estimated as about 25. The identification, description by their character and documentation is the target of a project that ECOVAST Austria with its partners is ready to take

forward. The project is based on the proven ECOVAST-method of landscape identification that specifically is designed to involve interested (local) people. From all the sub-regions that amount to Centrope only Lower Austria currently has a "landscape register". For all the other sub-regions this task has to be done in a comparable way.

Small towns may have up to 50,000 inhabitants¹, in Central Europe are towns by law, and fulfill specific criteria², as have been identified in workshops. In this regard also see the Volume 1/2009, 4th Symposium on Small Towns, Grieskirchen, Upper Austria, published by the Austrian Board of Agricultural Technique and Rural Development, Vienna.

As there are some 70 historic small towns in Lower Austria alone, one can expect to identify some 150 in the whole Centrope region. But again, as with the landscapes, this has yet to be done, and is part of the core target of the Centrope project as planned by ECOVAST Austria. For this trans-national survey we can rely on our own experience of four symposia on small towns and several workshops on the same subject and the experience of our (academic) partners.

Map of Centrope



Regional governance in Centrope

¹ One should not take this limit in a strict mathematical way. Towns, slightly above this number can be accepted in the framework of small towns in certain cases.

² About the criteria for "Small Historic European Towns" (SHETs), see ECOVAST home page www.ecovast.org, the ASSET Project (Action to Strengthen Small European Towns).

Regional governance is lately seen as a very effective tool for sustainable development of rural regions in Europe. It is understood to be the optimal co-operation of civil society (the local people and NGOs) and the authorities at all levels (the local, regional, national and European level) in support of the rural regions and their population. Whether this "supreme" approach can be carried out fruitfully in the whole of Centrope in the near future must be proven by practice, but anyway it is a worthwhile goal to be taken seriously.

Valuable work has already been done by regional authorities and LEADER groups in carrying out their trans-border programmes.

To deal with the landscapes, the settings for peoples' everyday lives is an indispensable precondition in achieving regional identity - and that, is exactly , what Centrope is lacking so badly.

Which steps could realistically be taken to help in achieving this goal? Below listed there are five basic measurements (out of a possible many more):

- local and regional publicity information-events are basically necessary,
- place the idea in educational programs (e.g. schools and adult education, NGOs),
- place the idea in the programmes of the authorities at all levels (e.g. community signboards, the provincial programmes of spatial planning and conservation),
- create a good Centrope logo (e.g. school competitions) and
- indications – using the new logo? – on all town boards, for example, to begin with.

Final remarks

The idea of creating a new European province in Central Europe is to be welcomed. Great economic, mainly industrial goals, have been achieved in this region. However, in the heads and hearts of the local people this great idea has, until now, found no place, and without that Centrope will remain a soulless "psychological concept", a not really living entity.

ECOVAST Austria, its partners and supporters want to achieve a turn-around to improve this situation. Economic success is a good basis but it needs a little bit more. It seems worthwhile to undertake this endeavour and we profoundly believe the youth of this region to be one of the best and reliable partners for this purpose.

Arthur Spiegler and Brigitte Macaria

EVENTS NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL

June 8 – 12 2010 Europa Nostra Congress, Istanbul (further details at www.europanostra.org)

June 24 – 25 2010, Mansion House, Dublin, "A Climate for Change – Opportunities for Carbon-Efficient Farming" organised by Teagasc, see www.teagasc.ie/acclimateforchange/.

July 6 -7 2010, Mechelen, Belgium, Civil Society and Heritage 2010, 'European Conference on Voluntary Organisations Active in the Field of Heritage', see www.heritageorganisations.eu

August 31 2010, Cork, Ireland, Irish Rural Studies Symposium, see details at following site : www.ruralstudies.ie/?page_id=214

September 24-28, 2010 International Scientific Practical Conference "Culture of Wood - Wood in Culture", Rostov Velikij, Yaroslavl region, Russia. Organised by The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Russian Institute for Cultural Research, ECOVAST Russia and ICOMOS. For more information please contact Dr Olga Sevan, e mail ecovast@rambler.ru

September 16-17 2010 – Europa Nostra UK Annual meeting, The Hellenic Centre, London. Details from Dr Lester Borley, e mail lesterborley@waitrose.com

October 1 2010 – Ploiesti, Romania "Landscape – Urbanism- Tourism conference. This conference is organized under the aegis of the European Council- Congress of Local and Regional Powers, by the County Council Prahova and the European Association for implementation of the European Landscape Convention-RECEP ENELC, and in association with ECOVAST Romania. Further information from Magdalena Banu e mail banumagdalen@yahoo.com

October 15-17 2010 ECOVAST Biennial Assembly, Isle of Wight UK more details from Secretary General ECOVAST – pam.moore59@ntlworld.com

October 18-19 2010 - Scientific Conference "Living Landscape – The European Landscape Convention in Research Perspective" to celebrate 10th Anniversary of the European Landscape Convention, Florence. Details from e mail livinglandscape@uniscape.eu

November 18 – 20 Leipzig, Germany, Denkmal Fair – see /www.denkmal-leipzig.de/LeMMon/denkmal_web_eng.nsf/

May 13 – 14 2011 ERCA Conference, Berlin. Further details later.