

ECOVAST

- ❑ ECOVAST is an International Non Government Organisation
- ❑ It is a membership organisation with 10 national sections
 - Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom and members from Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain
- ❑ It was set up to further the well-being of rural communities throughout Europe and safeguard rural heritage – through 2 formal aims:
 - to foster the economic, social and cultural vitality and administrative identity of rural communities
 - to safeguard and promote the sensitive and imaginative renewal of the built and natural environments of such communities throughout Europe
- ❑ Its key areas of work are small towns; landscape identification; rural buildings/heritage and rural tourism

BACKGROUND

We have been working with small towns for 30 years

- ▣ ECOVAST Austria held 2 symposiums
 - in Murau in 1998 and Waidhofen an der Ybbs in 2002
- ▣ In 2005 the ECOVAST Retz conference concluded
 - No specific policies for small towns
 - No specific evidence on small towns
- ▣ Action to Strengthen Small European Towns (ASSET)
 - A European study – how many are there across Europe
 - European Opinion Surveys
 - In-depth look at individual towns in Austria & United Kingdom
- ▣ **A specific Evidence base**
- ▣ A formal Position Paper in 2013
- ▣ **A Publication 'Importance of Small Towns' in 2014**

RELEVANCE OF SMALL TOWNS

- ▣ ECOVAST will focus their conclusions on small towns and discuss the results of their research and the implications to discuss:
 - **how important they are to the rural economy**
- ▣ And discuss how they could meet
 - the long term strategic objective for achieving a balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities including the creation and maintenance of employment and
 - How could the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 meet this strategic objective and who will gain and who will lose
- ▣ Towns, including small towns are an important element of Local Government

SMALL TOWNS

- ❑ Small towns are the backbone of the rural areas that surround them providing jobs, shops and services for their rural hinterlands of villages, hamlets and farmsteads
- ❑ They are places for people of all ages
- ❑ Small towns are distinctive and vividly demonstrate history and heritage in their buildings which are embedded in a variety of landscapes and retain traditions and customs
- ❑ There are thousands of small towns across Europe
 - 4,580 small towns with populations between 10,000 - 30,000
 - with 78 million people living in them
- ❑ **AND** very many very small towns of less than 10,000 population

WHAT IS A SMALL TOWN & CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- There is no formal agreement of what is a 'small town' – it varies from state to state
- A town is about **function** as well as **size**
- Small towns have faced many **challenges such as**
 - centralisation of services: out migration of young people: and all suffered from a major economic recession
- **BUT It is not all doom and gloom**
- There are many opportunities for small towns to use their considerable assets and resources to improve their economic situation
 - **they have a diverse heritage of history & architecture & customs & traditions**
 - **we identified 18 different types of activities with 86 town examples from 39 countries**
 - **these ideas could be replicated by other towns**

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

- ▣ We looked at 9 different ways that small towns had used their assets:
- ▣ Direct contributions to the economy; using new technology; markets for local food and drink; revising the economic role of the town sharing services; using tourism; developing local renewable energy; making use of their landscape assets; and working together
- ▣ The category of tourism had 9 sub-headings
- ▣ Using their distinctiveness and heritage; widening the choice away from 'honey-pots'; using festivals, pageants and carnivals; developing tourist trails; celebrating local industries and people associated with the town; developing niche markets; sporting activities; making visitors welcome; using research
- ▣ We highlighted examples from 86 individual towns from 39 countries

CONCLUSIONS 1

- ❑ Small towns have a lot to offer to meet the EU long term strategic objective for rural development
- ❑ There are thousands of them across Europe and serve a wide hinterland of villages and ECOVAST promotes the vital importance of them to the future well-being of Europe
- ❑ Small towns make a significant contribution to local, regional and national economies
- ❑ They are also highly distinctive reflecting their history and local architecture and particularly attractive to visitors and have real tourism potential
- ❑ Lots of ideas illustrated in ECOVAST Study could be replicated by other towns

CONCLUSIONS 2

- ❑ Small towns need specific policies to help them prosper
- ❑ They face several challenges BUT have many opportunities and where local people who live in them feel passionate about their future
- ❑ Small towns could have a much stronger voice if they worked together
- ❑ Local Authorities could play a critical role in making sure that the Rural Development Programmes in their area benefit small towns
 - ❑ using CLLD; Leader and Rural/Urban Partnerships
- ❑ And that they also develop local policies to promote and support them