



Workshop: Small Towns and Cultural Landscapes

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I will be introducing the ECOVAST Initiative on small towns – which should lead to a discussion with the group.

ECOVAST had a major initiative on small towns and has been working on it for several years. It was obvious that there were no specific European policies on ‘small towns’ and the current policies for ‘urban areas’ and ‘rural areas’ were not considered appropriate. We set out to find out evidence about small towns: how many were there in Europe (not just the European Union) and how many people lived in them. We surveyed town populations across 39 countries in Europe and found that there were 4,580 small towns with populations above 10,000 and below 30,000 with 78 million people living in them; and a further 1,201 small towns with populations above 30,000 but below 50,000 with another 45 million people living in them. It was not possible to discover how many very small towns there were as the evidence was fragmented – but the ‘rural’ population of our survey found 243 million living in places where the places were less than 10,000 inhabitants and many would function as small towns (our in-depth studies of small towns in England and Austria has demonstrated this). In other words they are a significant portion of European population. All of them serve a hinterland of villages and hamlets so their impact is critical to the well-being of rural areas. Small towns contain thousands of businesses and offer employment which contribute not only to the local economy and the regional but also the national economies of their countries. ECOVAST also studied the wide variety of initiatives undertaken by small towns to maintain their role and help them to continue to prosper. Small towns and their surrounding nearby landscapes reflect a varied history of architecture over the ages and are highly distinctive and together with their traditions and customs make a very considerable contribution to the ‘cultural heritage of Europe’. The Danube Basin covers a considerable portion of Europe and has been covered by our survey and study work and has many examples of towns carrying out initiatives in small towns. (copies of our publication ‘The Importance of Small Towns’ 2014 and ‘Supplement on Danube basin Towns’ 2015 will be available and a Form to be filled in by those who would like electronic copies.)

I hope that my introduction to the subject will encourage others in the workshop to explain some of their experiences of small towns in their countries.