



Chairmanship of the Czech Republic
Council of Europe
May – November 2017

Présidence de la République tchèque
Conseil de l'Europe
Mai – Novembre 2017



**COUNCIL OF EUROPE
EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**

***NINETEENTH COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEETING
OF THE WORKSHOPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION***

*Organised under the auspices of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers
of the Council of Europe*

“The implementation of the European Landscape Convention at local level: local democracy”

**Brno, Czech Republic,
5-6 September 2017
*Study visit, 7 September 2017***

WORKSHOP 3

ECOVAST Austria – “The Significance of Landscapes for the Local Level - with a special focus on the Green Belt”

Mr Arthur SPIEGLER

Vice-President of the European Council for the Village and Small Town (ECOVAST) Austria

Mrs Brigitte MACARIA

PhD, Secretary General, ECOVAST Austria

Headlines

- Identification of landscape (units) – how it is done
- The relations between landscapes and the local, respectively regional specifics
- How this connectivity is working
- The landscapes and Historic Small Towns – hosted by the Green Belt
- All this is the specific basis of the necessary Rural Development

Identification of landscapes – how it is done - > A short notice how this can be done:

There are at least two versions: The first is, a country or province can do it with universities and students at high cost. Secondly it can be done including lay people, if guided by a few experts at much lower costs. For this purpose ECOVAST has developed the hand out “A Guide to Good Practice – ECOVAST Landscape Identification”. In this way the landscapes have been identified through identifying their character. The method has been tested successfully in various European provinces and is well known to the European Landscape Commission (Strasbourg).

The relations between landscapes and the local, respectively regional specifics

Every landscape bears its own characteristic specifics, thus contributing, even determining, the local or regional specifics of hamlets, villages, market town and Historic Small Towns, beside their architectonic specifics and character. That is, why ECOVAST always regards landscapes and their settlements as an unbreakable unit. (As an example: the Austrian regional “Landscape Register” enlists some 50 different landscapes and almost as many distinctly different types of farmhouses). One of the most important differences between cities and Small Towns is that the second ones do not create their own hot climate in the summer (e.g. the “smog cap”) as the big cities do.

The basic of this connectivity and how it is working

First of all the people have to obtain and acknowledge the assets of their place (landscape, settlements, small towns and their surroundings), as mentioned above.

To acknowledge and strengthen this connectivity creates a specific added value of landscape to be implemented in praxis of carrying out sustainable rural development. To let rural development become sustainable, it has to encompass nature and culture and the “cultural landscape” as their result and added value. At this stage it is worthwhile to recollect the ideal short definition of landscape, being one of the basics of the European Landscape Convention:

“Landscape” means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction and/or human factors. “Cultural Landscape” can in some way be seen as the biggest work of human art. And it also can be seen as the synthesis of nature, culture and human perception.

Rural development and landscape matters must not be seen as being two different issues. In the contrary: they are closely linked. But they are permanent progressing, always changing, due to natural (e.g. climate change) or human influence (e.g. economy, globalisation, changes in society).

The great challenge is, to allow change, but at the same time to beware the essence and the main items of the landscapes character. Optimising this connectivity – to make this issue clear - is: the local territories and the people of the regions must be well aware what they possess in specifics and assets of their “homeland” (see below).

Despite the changes, caused from outside and the globalisation there are a lot of local specifics that constitute the treasures of the place, the landscape, the rural settlements and small towns with their surroundings.

Let me show this in the example of an Austrian Historic Small Town, and its small region:

The Historic Small Town, Retz – altitude 252 m, 4,125 inhabitants - is situated at the border of two distinctly different landscapes:

- the “Wood Quarter” (Waldviertel) to the west, well known for wide woods and fields, potatoes and poppies) and
- the “Wine Quarter”, to its east (Weinviertel, well known for wine and pumpkins), rich farmland including wine and pumpkin, rural tourism (the majority from Vienna and Austria),
- typical vernacular and historic architecture in the town and the landscapes and
- some local festivals, based on wine and pumpkins.

These are not all, but the most important assets. If you strive for sustainable rural development you must not bring these specifics and their interaction in danger. Of course also this place has to acknowledge the challenges of taking part in the utilisation of renewable energies. But this can be performed in a way that does not harm the local (and regional) character – or even add a new type of landscape character.

Summing up, this whole continuing process can be called “the evolving ecology of culture and nature”.

The Green Belt as a very specific area to show and implement all these issues

The Green Belt has a total length of some 12.400 km, starting at the Arctic Sea. But its width is undefined. Today many experts agree of some 10 to 20 km on both sides of the former “socialist borderline”. Its central European section extends over 2.400 km between Travemünde, at the Baltic Sea and Trieste at the Adriatic Sea. Along this stretch it is presenting itself as a “string of pearls” of some 50 very different landscapes of special beauty including some 90 Historic Small Towns, identified by ECOVAST. These represent a huge amount of natural and cultural assets that should be used and at the same time preserved in a sustainable way.

This Central European Section of the Green Belt is a most appropriate and huge area to exemplify and make good practice of the “Significance of Landscapes for the Local Level”. At the same time it is a gigantic treasure of culture and nature and their interaction that should be treated well, not at least because of the benefit for local and regional people and their guests.

All those precious local specifics, as already mentioned, be they of natural or cultural origin, are embedded in the surrounding landscape(s). They distinctly constitute the landscapes character, thus making clear the strong relations within the countryside. In this behalf the Green Belt provides a unique challenge of sustainable rural development with a strong focus on sustainable tourism, landscapes, agriculture, settlements and Historic Small Towns. They easily can act as ideal stations for tourism with a special brand. Working together along the Green Belt is just as important as cross border co-operation. By the way, this year has being proclaimed as the “Year of Sustainable Tourism”.

The Green Belt furthermore could be developed as a “Model of Energy Self Supplying Regions crossing Central Europe”.

The ECOVAST- approach is designed specifically to include the local people.

Landscape matters cannot be seen or dealt with independent of rural development, they are a most important part of it. Because of all these characteristics, the Green Belt is on the way of being nominated as UNESCO World Heritage Site - in the category of cultural landscape - as proposed by Germany (supported by the University of Freiburg and others). And, Brno is situated rather close to the Green Belt.

**ECOVAST Austria, Core team, Arthur Spiegler and Brigitte Macaria,
A-Vienna, July**