

## Grant programmes for local communities to shape their surroundings into a place where they are happy to live,

Ekopolis Foundation

The Ekopolis Foundation introduced a systematic support tool, in the form of grant programmes, for local communities which wish to improve their urban and rural landscape. These subsidies were designed to turn national and political strategies into concrete actions. The Foundation established six types of subsidies: "Public spaces", "Green belt grants", "Greenways", "People for trees", "Living trails" and the "Tatra Fund". It provides financial and technical assistance as well as training, which enables the local population to invest in a long-term plan of maintenance and upkeep of its landscape. The project's main aims are to increase the aesthetic and environmental value of the landscapes, to motivate civic participation, and to preserve natural and cultural heritage, as well as providing people with the tools to interpret and create a link to their heritage. Some 142 projects have benefited from funding amounting to a total of €998 000. While the financial contribution was of great importance, there was also a strong focus on awareness-raising. The Ekopolis Foundation supplied organisations as well as the public with the means to shape their urban and rural landscape into an enjoyable place to live.



The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe conferred a special mention of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention for the 2nd Session of the Award 2010-2011 on the project's organisers, considering that it constitutes an exemplary project in view of its successful and unique results. It has helped to mobilise the local populations and provide them with financial resources to improve the quality of their own landscapes. Its effects have been extensive, with project sites all over the Slovak Republic contributing to sustainable territorial development. Public participation and awareness-raising are at the very core of the actions carried out, the local populations undertaking the long-term management of their landscapes to ensure they provide an environment in which the inhabitants are happy to live.