



# SOC Guide

## Thematic Networking of Twinned Towns



## Sustainable Open Cities

With the support of the "Europe for Citizens" programme 2007–2013  
of the European Union



Europe for Citizens  
Programme







## Introduction

The European Community has adopted the “Europe for Citizens” programme 2007-2013 in order to promote active European citizenship and involve common citizens and organisations of the civil society in the European integration process.

A specific area of the Programme deals with the creation of sustainable thematic networks among Municipalities, in relation to matters of common interest to the group of participants (for further information accede to: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/action1\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/action1_en.php)). This is a very important tool to promote in-depth debates and exchange of opinions and best practices, thus developing a sense of European identity based on common values, history and cultural background.

The *Sustainable Open Cities-SOC* project - promoted by the Municipality of Priverno jointly with Wallenhorst-D, Breclav-CZ, Stawiguda-PL, Andrychow-PL, Roccasecca-IT and Giuliano di Roma-IT – is the natural following of the previous project *Open Cities-Social tourism network for local sustainable development: European citizenship’s participation* (09/0041) implemented in 2009 always by Priverno.



## Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support system. In other words, sustainable tourism development is ecologically sustainable, economically viable as well as ethically and socially equitable; therefore, sustainable tourism integrates the natural, cultural and human environment and respects the fragile environmental balance that characterises many tourism destinations, above all in environmentally sensitive areas. In addition, it is characterised by a long term perspective.

To evaluate if tourism development accomplishes these goals, the following criteria have to be developed so as to identify and structure the different aspects the goals of sustainable tourism are referring to:

**Community well-being:** Sustainable tourism development supports and ensures the economic, social and cultural well-being of the communities in which tourism takes place;

**Protection of the natural and cultural environment:** Sustainable tourism allows the use of natural and cultural resources for gaining economic profit while at the same time guaranteeing that these resources are not destroyed. Additionally, tourism is expected to be a driving force for establishing or enhancing nature protection and the maintenance of cultural values;

**Product quality and tourist satisfaction:** the quality of tourism products offered by a region is a key factor for the economic success of tourism;

**Management and monitoring:** to guarantee that tourism is developed in a way which is feasible and fulfils the mentioned 3 criteria, adequate management and monitoring have to be established.

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What stated above is the fundamental premise of the *Sustainable Open Cities-SOC* project that the Municipality of Priverno, in synergy with Wallenhorst, Breclav, Stawiguda, Andrychow, Roccasecca and Giuliano di Roma, strongly wanted to propose in order to train and educate the citizenship to this new kind of active tourism and increase the know-how on its potentialities, unfortunately still little explored.



**SOC** is an intercultural pilot bottom-up initiative promoting active sustainable tourism for a low impact on the environment and the respect of local features through an info campaign on culture and traditions of the communities visited.

The info and awareness social campaign promoted a kind of sustainable tourism which leads to the management of all resources in such a way that economic and social needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, socio-economic development systems bringing to economic cohesion, social inclusion, increased opportunities. It involved **7 official Project Partners (Andrychow, Stawiguda, Breclav, Wallenhorst, Giuliano di Roma, Roccasecca and Priverno)** and many others that participated as Priverno friends to give added value to project results.

The target group that took part in the **SOC** project can be divided into two categories:

- *active target group;*
- *beneficiary target group.*

Specifically speaking, the “active target group” was composed by the coordination Team (local coordinators and experts with communication and relational skills) and by a selection of disadvantaged persons and some volunteers. This kind of group was vital for the good accomplishment of the **SOC** objectives, activities and final results, and jointly with Priverno and constantly under its supervision was responsible to guarantee, for the whole project lifecycle, local areas coordination and ensure proper management of local activities in line with the priorities defined in the planning phase. Moreover, this group provided tools for the quality control of activities, identified the citizens who attended the 3 international events (2 in Italy and 1 in Poland), assured coherence of activities, local sustainable tourism development and a wide regional, national and European dissemination of **SOC** progresses and obtained results through official channels such as the internet, newspapers, local meetings with neighbouring towns, associations, NGOs etc...

On the other side there was the “beneficiary target group” composed by young people, tourism stakeholders, local authorities’ representatives, associations of local tourism operators, associations of Municipalities and citizens, the friend Municipalities of Morawica-PL, Obcina Brda-SL, Uherske Hradiste-CZ and Raca-SK that took part in **SOC** as added value, and all the citizenship as well who was encouraged to set up a permanent network (TEAM) among the Municipalities to transfer know-how, exchange best practices and develop concrete actions in the near future. This specific group, that not necessarily participated in a direct way to the planning, management and dissemination of **SOC**, but actively took part in the 3 international events, acquired know-how and skills on specific topics addressed during debates, round tables, seminars, training sessions, conferences and cultural visits and developed own opinions on key EU challenges for the future (e.g the link between sustainable tourism and community well-being, EU strategies for a sustainable tourism development, the role of sport to break down intercultural barriers and promote active citizenship and social cohesion and so on...).

The beneficiaries of the **SOC** project, as the “active target group” as well, can be considered persons more conscious and aware of the concept of sustainable tourism, of the resources they can accede to and of the future challenges to be faced, but most of all they were given voice and the opportunity to experiment good practices, innovative methodologies (e.g. brain storming sessions) and new forms of active civic participation to improve the sustainability of tourist destinations.

Participants and common citizens equally acceded the “Europe for Citizens” Program and the events planned by **SOC**, acquiring know-how on specific topics addressed during round tables, seminars, discussing and developing own opinions on key EU challenges for the future, to plan strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion and analyze the impact and consequences of the current economic situation in the reference territories.

After a careful debate at the end of *Open Cities* partners jointly chose and agreed it was extremely important to continue developing a thematic and long-lasting cooperation among towns, face same needs and try and solve the related problems: that’s why they jointly decided this time the Network had to focus on fostering active citizenship, civic participation in democratic life and a sense of ownership and identity to the EU too; but, as a consequence, they considered employment vital as well to give citizens the chance to participate in constructing a democratic, multicultural, world-oriented Europe based on common values (integration, tolerance, mutual understanding, solidarity, social well-

being, equal opportunities etc...) history, culture and encourage the respect of cultural and linguistic diversities.

The Municipality of Priverno has done its best to make the participants live this intercultural dialogue experience in a joyful and brotherhood spirit, conscious it is possible to create a more inclusive society able to foster a transnational approach within a local dimension and reach all folks in their daily lives.

Thanks to a deep consciousness raising of the meaning real values, local traditions, natural heritage have, and thanks to the exploring of new methodologies capable of promoting active interaction, discussions and dynamic civic participation in EU democratic life and on matters that affect peoples' daily lives, **SOC** members were able to interact and participate in constructing a tighter-knit Europe through their involvement as persons more conscious and aware of the resources they already had and of the future challenges to face.



## The Project Objectives

**SOC** promoted EU policies through important educational and cultural initiatives at local, national and EU level implementing specific actions aimed at developing integration of intercultural dialogue, social inclusion, active citizenship, foster EU values, support a transnational approach within a local dimension.

The main objective of the **SOC** project was the promotion of sustainability, competitiveness and enhancement of the local identity to produce a low impact on the environment, while at the same time encouraging the respect of local specificities through a focused info and awareness campaign on cultures and traditions of the communities visited.

Specifically speaking, the **SOC objectives** were the following:

- give citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing a tighter-knit Europe, which is democratic and world-oriented, united and enriched by its cultural diversity, thus developing citizenship of the European Union;
- develop a sense of European identity, based on common values, history and culture;
- foster a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens;
- enhance tolerance and mutual understanding between European citizens, respecting and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, while contributing to intercultural dialogue;
- active European Citizenship: participation and democracy in Europe: civic participation in democratic life of the EU.

Other additional **goals** have been:

- intercultural dialogue: integration of intercultural dialogue, methodological aspects;
- people's well-being in Europe: employment, social cohesion and sustainable development. Impact and consequences of the current economic situation;
- develop thematic and long-lasting cooperation between towns: encourage local authorities to create networks related to their involvement in development actions;
- combat poverty and social exclusion;
- promote European values (e.g. tolerance, mutual understanding, solidarity) and cultural and linguistic diversity;
- foster a transnational approach with a local dimension (able to reach European citizens in their everyday lives);
- make the Programme equally accessible to all.

In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives of the “Europe for Citizens” programme 2007-2013 and the priorities of the EUROPEAN YEAR for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010, **SOC** involved the 7 official partners and the friend Municipalities in a deep reflection focusing on specific themes, implementing the following activities:

- **info campaign** through 3 international events: Priverno-IT (March 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> 2011), Priverno-IT (August 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> 2011), Andrychow-PL (September 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> 2011);
- **2 local meetings** in each of the involved Countries, managed by local coordinators who were also responsible for selecting the participants to the 3 international events and for transferring the objectives, aims and challenges the Programme and **SOC** as well wanted to face.

**EVENT 1** took place in Priverno and promoted sustainable tourism development; it involved 100 local and international participants during the Culture Week in honour of the Patron St. Thomas Aquineas, with the remarkable “Wine and Food Fair” and the exhibition of typical regional products coming from all the invited Countries. The theme of the conference was “Sustainable tourism development” and debates, round tables, competitions for schools, seminars and cultural and entertaining events took place in order to transform the festival in honour of the Patron Saint in a large-scale cultural event able to valorise and promote the specificities of each territory. The target groups got aware of EU policies and of the concept of sustainable tourism and had the chance to exchange opinions also during brainstorming sessions.

**EVENT 2** took place another time in Priverno during the Medieval Festival, as it was considered an honour for Priverno to host 2 events during the Project lifecycle.

The theme of the workshop faced “The challenge of sustainability, competitiveness and enhancement of local identity” and was the perfect chance, for 100 local and international participants, to turn back time thanks to magical atmospheres evoking ancient

local traditions. Debates, round tables, reflections and a conference on “Sustainable economic development and better quality of life” rose participants’ consciousness about the vital importance to promote low environmental impact and respect of local features for improving local socio-economic well-being. Moreover, during event 2 there was the official launch of the **SOC** subsite inside <http://www.opencitiesproject.eu> parent site of the previous network, and of its characteristics.

**EVENT 3** in Andrychow was the ideal occasion to involve 140 participants and officialise **SOC** results. The main theme of this workshop was “Sustainable tourism for sustainable social inclusion” and this event was the perfect match of sport activities (e.g. swimming race) and cultural ones (e.g. tours, debates, round tables, concerts, wine and food tastings). Furthermore, it presented the **SOC** results and, last but not least, at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> event Project Partners manifested interest to settle future participative action plans and participate in a New Network involving also new partners. At present, the working TEAM composed by experts of EU policies is developing specific strategies that will allow the creation of a new active European network where the joint commitment is to define the necessary tools and methodologies for the construction of an ever closer and united Europe.

The **final aim** of **SOC** was to train, inform, compare unlike tourist realities and experiences to develop strategies, skills and best practices to improve the sustainability of tourist destinations; this goal was achieved through the implementation of the following methods used to involve the participants in **SOC** objectives and foster intercultural dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding as well:

- training sessions, seminars, round tables, conferences, workshops, brainstorming sessions which helped the exchange of experiences, open debates, ppt presentations, sport and cultural activities;
- info and awareness campaign through a website inside [opencitiesproject.eu](http://opencitiesproject.eu) parent site of the previous network Open Cities;
- official DVD;
- this official publication.

The good outcome of all **SOC** activities was due thanks to the perfect organisation and coordination of the Project Partners who were jointly involved during all the project life-cycle (planning, implementation and follow-up phases). This intercultural bottom up, direct and informal approach was able to stimulate the active involvement of the participants and helped to reach very good results.

Specifically speaking, the results achieved by the **SOC** project in relation to the objectives originally planned are many and can be summed up as follows:

- encouragement to support the integrity of local traditions and preservation of the identity and of the cultural and natural specificities of the territories (e.g. favouring small and medium local businesses that conserve a cultural heritage and traditional values);
- more awareness about the opportunities offered by the EC programmes for the support of local intercultural initiatives (in particular as for the Action 1-Active Citizens for Europe of the “Europe for Citizens” Programme 2007-2013);
- better knowledge about EU policies and laws related to sustainable tourism development and the promotion and enhancement of local features;
- valorisation of the social and environmental sustainability with the birth of future initiatives to wide the tourism offer and improve the quality of life and work;
- increased active citizens participation and involvement in the democratic civil life of the EU;
- improved know-how on sustainable tourism matters as a way to make a low impact on the natural environment and on local cultures, while at the same time helping generate income and employment opportunities for the locals;
- contribution to develop local socio-economic well-being for the local communities of the involved territories.

Other **additional results** have been:

- deep commitment of the participants to European integration;
- major awareness and know-how was created in tourists raising public understanding on the dynamics of sustainable and responsible tourism;
- support to local communities helping them to start, manage, promote responsible environmental tourism programs that can pave the way to future positive contributions to sustainable cooperation in favour of the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage and of the maintenance of the multicultural diversity.

Last but not least, other two important results were the valorisation of a constant intercultural dialogue among the participants in a brother like spirit in order to respect and promote European values (e.g. tolerance, solidarity, equal opportunities, social inclusion in particular in terms of economic growth favouring social development, mutual understanding) and the cultural and linguistic specificities, and the constitution of a permanent active network among the involved Project Partners, composed by local coordinators and experts, with the aim to transfer **know-how and best practices** and elaborate **cooperation strategies**, not only connected to sustainable tourism, to implement future initiatives.



## FUTURE ACTION PLANS

The **SOC** project had a strong impact at local and at Eu level also thanks to the involvement of some important social organisations (e.g. the National Association of Italian Municipalities-Regional branch of Lazio Region-ANCI Lazio), that have been partner of the Municipality of Priverno in several initiatives. The Municipality of Priverno and the Project Partners since the starting of the **SOC** project have been aware of the importance to pave the way to possible future developments of sustainable cooperation networks.

The Municipality of Priverno in particular - applicant also in the previous thematic network called *Open Cities* - strong of this past collected experience and know-how believed in the need to give continuity to its and the Partners' constant commitment in EU policies with this new project idea that wants to act as a sounding board to bring and diffuse new initiatives at EU level; in fact, at the end of Event 3 (in Andrychow) all Project Partners, jointly with Priverno, manifested interest in participating to the development of a new sustainable cooperation network. A specific well structured and permanent working Team among the involved Partners, composed by local coordinators and experts, is transferring know-how and best practices about **SOC** and elaborating specific cooperation strategies, not only connected to sustainable tourism, to implement future active initiatives where the joint commitment will be to define the necessary tools and methodologies for the construction of an ever closer and united Europe.

Following the indications provided by the European Commission each year, the Team will choose a common theme of particular interest and try to increase the number and quality of participants to the network.

## Project PARTNERS

PRIVERNO (ITALY)  
ROCCASECCA (ITALY)  
GIULIANO DI ROMA (ITALY)  
WALLENHORST (GERMANY)  
BRECLAV (CZECH REPUBLIC)  
STAWIGUDA (POLAND)  
ANDRYCHOW (POLAND)

## FRIEND Municipalities

MORAWICA (POLAND)  
OBCINA BRDA (SLOVAKIA)  
UHERSKE HRADISTE (CZECH REPUBLIC)  
RACA (SLOVENIA)

Promoted by



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