

# European Green Capital Awards: Role Models for a Sustainable Europe

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## Facts & Figures from the European Green Capitals

### Green Spaces

- In Nantes, 100% of the population lives within 300 metres of green spaces.
- Vitoria-Gasteiz residents have access to public open green space within 300 metres and there is 479 square metres of forest per capita (covering one-third of the municipal area). The city has 613 hectares of Green Belt as well as 210 organic farming plots.
- In Hamburg, 89% of the population lives within 300 metres of a park. Public parks, recreation areas and woodlands make up 16.8% of the municipal region and every week one million people use them for leisure and recreation.
- 95% of people in Stockholm lives less than 300 metres from a green area.

### Transport

- In Copenhagen, 35% of people cycled to their workplace or school in 2010.
- 80% of the Nantes bus fleet is powered by natural gas. 116,500 million public transport journeys were undertaken in Nantes in 2011, compared to 99,834 in 2005.
- Half of all journeys in Vitoria-Gasteiz are made on foot.
- 99% of Hamburg residents have access to public transport within 300 metres of their homes.

An initiative of the European Commission, the European Green Capital award is an annual prize that encourages cities across Europe to improve their quality of urban life by taking the environment into account in urban planning and management. One city is chosen by a jury from a large number of applicants every year. Entrants are required to demonstrate their commitment to achieving and maintaining high standards in 12 tasks, symbolised by the 12 stars in the EU flag: climate change, local transport, green urban areas incorporating sustainable land use, nature and biodiversity, quality of local ambient air, quality of the acoustic environment, waste production and management, water consumption, waste water treatment, eco-innovation and sustainable employment, environmental management of the local authority, and energy performance.

Since the launch of the Award in 2008, 56 different cities in 25 European countries have competed for the title. So far, five cities have been designated as European Green Capitals: Stockholm, Sweden, in 2010; Hamburg, Germany, in 2011; Vitoria-Gasteiz, in Spain's Basque region, in 2012; Nantes,

in Western France, which will be the 2013 European Green Capital; and the Danish capital, Copenhagen, which will be the 2014 title holder.

European Commissioner for the Environment Janez Potocnik is passionate about the European Green Capital Award as he sees it as a vehicle for sharing good practices between cities and as an enabler of environmental sustainability to ensure that current and future citizens can enjoy a good quality of life. He shares, "The annual European Green Capital Award encourages city authorities and their populations to improve how they manage their environment and make real efforts towards becoming more sustainable and reducing their carbon footprint. Cities who have entered the European Green Capital in the past but have not won tell us that the application process was very useful in that it forced them to compare themselves to their peers and focus to recognise their environmental achievements and plan future goals. In this way the Award is not just a trophy but rather a commitment and an incentive to do more."

Like the rest of the western world, Europe has changed hugely over the last 40 years with urban centres growing and rural life declining. Urban areas are the source of many of Europe's environmental challenges, which is not surprising given that three-quarters of Europeans now live in cities. In fact, the 2012 European Green Capital, Vitoria-Gasteiz, is one of more than 400 medium-sized cities in Europe, with between 100,000 and half a million inhabitants each. With urban populations set to grow even further, Europe will have to deal with increasing pressures on housing, transport, waste disposal, energy, water, and other limited resources in the coming decades.

"We all like to live and work in cities with clean air, easily accessible green spaces, well-managed waste and water systems, pedestrian and cycling facilities, and reliable public transport. We need to become even more innovative about how we plan and manage our cities so that we reduce our impact on the environment now and in the future for the next generations," observes Potocnik.



Potocnik shares, “The European Green Capital Award showcases local efforts to improve the urban environment and promotes sustainable growth. Through the Award, the European Commission encourages cities to exchange ideas and come up with creative solutions for sustainable living.” The Award has three objectives: reward cities that have a consistent record of achieving high environmental standards; encourage cities to commit to ongoing and ambitious goals for further environmental improvement and sustainable development; and provide a role model to inspire other cities and promote best practices and experiences in all other European cities.

While the European Green Capital Award provides inspiration and motivation by highlighting cities as role models, the European Union also has a wide range of directives and targets for Member States to improve their performance in protecting the environment and reducing carbon emissions. For example, Member States are working towards increasing energy efficiency by 20 percent, increasing the contribution of energy from renewables by

20 percent, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent, all by 2020.

Although there are legal requirements for waste handling, waste water management and drinking water, air quality, noise and other environmental and health pressures, all of these still have a lot of room for innovative ideas to better organise modern life and make cities where people can work, consume and enjoy recreational time in healthy conditions. The competition to become the European Green Capital in 2015 is currently underway. The winning city will be announced in June 2013.

As the following winning cities demonstrate, a lot of work and commitment goes into being appointed a European Green Capital. Cities across Europe aspire to become future European Green Capitals and are working hard towards achieving the prestigious title, as can be seen in the number and quality of entries the competition receives every October. It is hoped that the incentive and motivation that the European Commission provides through this competition, to encourage better sustainability planning and

environmental management by its cities, will continue to make a difference to the quality of life for its urban dwellers long into the future.

#### A Look at the Winning Cities Copenhagen

##### European Green Capital 2014

Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, has a population of 541,989. The city’s Green Business Model is an example of sustainable economic development that tackles environmental, economic, and social concerns, with good potential for replication across other cities.

Copenhagen has placed public-private partnerships at the core of its approach to eco-innovation and sustainable employment. It works with companies, universities, and organisations in dedicated forums to develop and implement green growth.

1. European Green Capital 2014: Copenhagen, Denmark (Photo: M. Hjalms).

Copenhagen is a good model in terms of urban planning and design. It is also something of a transport pioneer, aiming to become the world's most practicable city for cyclists; its goal is to have 50 percent of people cycling to their place of work or education by 2015 (35 percent cycled to their workplace or school in 2010), helping the city reach an ambitious goal of being carbon dioxide neutral by 2025.

Like other European Green Capitals, Copenhagen communicates effectively with citizens to engage them to be part of the solution.

#### **Nantes** **European Green Capital 2013**

Situated on the Loire River, close to the Atlantic coast, Nantes is France's sixth largest city with a metropolitan area of some 600,000 inhabitants. Nantes was the first city in France to successfully reintroduce electric tramways. Over the past 20 years, Nantes has developed a sustainable transport policy with a focus on public transport and cycling; in 2010 less than 50 percent of all journeys were solo car journeys.

In 2007, Nantes adopted its Climate Action Plan with the objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent per person in 2020. Part of its success relies on the will and capacity of Nantes to mobilise all of its local stakeholders: inhabitants, businesses, associations, experts, and researchers. For example, 150 families participated in a Climate Citizens Workshop from June 2010 to 2011. The objective was to transpose the creativity of 150 households into action by 600,000 residents.

In 2013 Nantes will host the 10th International Ecocity Conference and the 5th World Forum on Human Rights focusing on Sustainable Development.

#### **Vitoria-Gasteiz** **European Green Capital 2012**

The medieval city of Vitoria-Gasteiz in

Northern Spain dates back to 1181. Vitoria-Gasteiz is a medium-sized city; the urban area has a population of over 240,000. The municipality consists of three concentric circles. The city itself, at its heart, is surrounded by a large area of agricultural land and natural vegetation, with the mountains and forests forming the third ring. A Green Belt of five large suburban parks with recreational areas surrounds the centre, linked by a network of 33 kilometres of pedestrian pathways and 90 kilometres of cycle routes, effectively bringing nature into the urban heart. It has two tram lines.

The semi-natural Green Belt has been a work in progress since the early 1990s, with significant effort and investment in reclaiming degraded areas, such as gravel pits and drained wetlands. In 2000, the United Nations chose the Green Belt as one of the world's 100 best projects at its Third International Competition of Best Practices for Improving the Environment.

#### **Hamburg** **European Green Capital 2011**

Hamburg was a highly visible European Green Capital, thanks to the green "train of ideas" it sent on tour across 18 European cities during 2011 to share ideas and create awareness of the city's green credentials.

Germany's second largest city Hamburg is home to 4.3 million inhabitants in the metropolitan region, 1.8 million of them in the city centre. As a major industrial centre, Hamburg confronts all the environmental challenges that face other European cities. Wise use of natural resources, coupled with an innovative policy for "Responsible Growth", has helped to make the city an example of environmental best practice. It has set itself ambitious targets for future development: for example, cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050, compared with the more modest European Union target of 20 percent by 2020. A significant partnership programme, called "Enterprise for Resource Protection", has already


completed about 1,000 projects with the aim of encouraging voluntary investment to increase energy and resource efficiency in the commercial sector.

Hamburg is impressively green in comparison to most cities of similar size, with over 16.7 percent of the urban area given to forests, recreation, and green spaces. Water covers a further eight percent, contributing significantly to the city's recreational opportunities. Waterfront terraces and walkways offer pleasant open-air environments for residents, while the River Elbe ferry lines serve the needs of both commuters and visitors.

#### **Stockholm** **European Green Capital 2010**

Clear and effective measures towards reducing noise pollution, a protection plan setting new standards for cleaner water, an innovative integrated waste system, and 95 percent of its population living less than 300 metres from green areas, are just some of the reasons why Sweden's capital city won the first-ever European Green Capital Award.

The City of Stockholm operates with a holistic vision, one that combines growth with sustainable development for the benefit of its almost 800,000 citizens. Transport emissions are relatively low, and all trains and inner city buses run on renewable fuels. Furthermore, green house gas emissions have been reduced by 25 percent since 1990, and the city council further has the ambitious target of becoming wholly independent of fossil fuels by 2050.

In its year as European Green Capital, Stockholm pursued its aim to inspire other cities towards achieving a more sustainable environment through international conferences, seminars and exhibitions. 

For more information, visit [www.europeangreencapital.eu](http://www.europeangreencapital.eu) and follow the Award on Twitter and Facebook.





2. European Green Capital 2010:  
Stockholm, Sweden. Hammarby Sjostad  
is one of Stockholm's successful carbon-  
neutral-oriented neighbourhoods  
(Photo: La Citta Vita).

3. European Green Capital 2013:  
Nantes, France. (Photo: Patrick Garcon).

4. European Green Capital 2012:  
Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain  
(Photo: Quintas Fotografos).

5. European Green Capital 2011:  
Hamburg, Germany  
(Photo: Michael Zapf).

