

# Green Cities Magazine

June 2022

Nearly two out of three Europeans live in an urban environment. This means that cities are the places where emerging environmental challenges impact most on people's health and wellbeing. Cities are thus in a unique position to charter a sustainable future.

The European Green Deal affirms the Commission's commitment to tackling climate and environmental challenges. It is this generation's defining task. Cities have a key role in helping us succeed.

When I took over the role of Director-General for the Environment in 2020, I was impressed to see with the Green Capital Award, and its sister initiative for smaller cities, the European Green Leaf Award, that we have developed not only recognised reputable brands but powerful initiatives supporting cities on their path to greater environmental sustainability. The European Green Capital Award, now in its 12th year, publicly recognises cities that are rising to the challenge, actively creating a sustainable future for their citizens.

To date, [14 Green Capitals](#) and [13 Green Leaves](#) have been awarded the titles.

The French city of Grenoble holds this year's Green Capital title. Our Green Leaves this year are the Dutch city of Winterswijk and Valongo in Portugal.

These cities are places where urban decision-makers understand that when citizens say they want clean air, zero pollution, climate neutrality and resilience, green spaces, safe cycle paths and a well-run public transport system, they mean it, because it matters to them and to their families. They are places that have found the right balance between



**Florika Fink-Hooijer**  
Director-General of  
DG Environment

preserving and innovating, between respecting citizens' demands for their environment, and attracting investment to provide the prosperity and employment opportunities on which every modern city depends. What I particularly like about the Awards is that they mobilise and energise citizens. I am also inspired by highly committed Mayors who want to go the extra mile to make a difference for their cities and citizens by leading on the sustainable transition.

The ambition of the European Green Deal makes the awards more

pertinent than ever.

This year's Awards competition seeks to find the 2024 winners and the call for applications came to a close in April 2022. At a particularly difficult time for Europe, I was impressed to see that our cities are ever so motivated for a green transition! The applicant cities' resolve is an example for Europe as a whole.

There is no time to dither. We need to choose our future while we can. It is our own future we put at stake if we fail on the sustainable transition. And cities are indispensable partners on the path to success. You can count on our continued support!

I'm looking forward to further cooperation with cities across Europe!

## REPowerEU: the European Commission's Plan to quit Russian fossil fuels and accelerate the green transition

On 18 May 2022 the European Commission expressed itself: it is time to make Europe independent of Russian fossil fuels before 2030 considering the unjustified military aggression against Ukraine and accelerate the green transition.

Five actions constitute the Plan to reduce the energy imports already this year and fasten the development and the implementation of clean energy technologies: save energy, diversify supplies, quickly substitute fossil fuels by accelerating Europe's clean energy transition, smartly combine investments and reforms.



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An initiative of the European Commission

Finally, they complete the "[Fit for 55](#)" package proposed in July 2021 to "lower our gas consumption by 30% by 2030, with more than a third of such savings coming from meeting the EU energy efficiency target" and join the [European Green Deal](#) that plans to make Europe climate neutral by 2050.

Particularly relevant for cities is the strong focus on a [Solar Rooftops Initiative](#), with a commitment to make the installation of solar rooftops compulsory for:

- all new public and commercial buildings with useful floor area larger than 250 m<sup>2</sup> by 2026;
- all existing public and commercial buildings with useful floor area larger than 250 m<sup>2</sup> by 2027;
- all new residential buildings by 2029.

Moreover, cities will be concerned about a new definition for "[renewables go-to area](#)" - a specific location, whether on land or sea, which has been designated by a Member State as particularly suitable for the installation of plants for the production of energy from renewable sources, other than biomass combustion plants.

Learn more about the [REPowerEU Plan](#).

## Spotlight on Grenoble's Bivouac

The Bivouac at [La Bastille](#) is one of the highlights of Grenoble's year as the 2022 European Green Capital. The site was inaugurated on 2 May and will be available to visitors until 2 October. La Bastille, a well-known site for inhabitants and visitors, is a few minutes away from the city centre thanks to a cable car that reaches the mountain top.

The Bivouac is a camping site where families and groups of people will be able to experience a night in the wild, in tents or little cabins designed by architecture students.

The aim of this project is to raise awareness on the environment and on climate change. It spotlights the treasures, as well as fragilities of our mountains. The project targets people who are unfamiliar with mountain areas – children, pupils, and young people – with the support of local social and cultural organisations.

The activities include the observation of the sky at night, the discovery of birds of prey, the initiation to sheep farming, hiking activities and many more.



## Lahti's Final Report

European Green Capital 2021 winner city of Lahti has published its final report. This all-inclusive document covers several topics, including how to make the most of the EU Green Capital title, an overview on local actions and events and the outcomes of the communication activities of the Finnish city.



In the report, 30% of activities were targeted at children and youth, which is particularly inspiring. Initiatives in schools included monthly environmental themes, workshops on local nature, and the creation of children's books on environmental themes. Thanks to the Award, Lahti was able to bring to kindergartens environmental educators, a development team for environmental education, and environmental theme days and projects. Lahti's attention to their youngest was a great effort in preparation of the [European Year of Youth 2022](#).

In the report, you may find out more about the many events that Lahti hosted throughout 2021. The [European Dialogue For Sustainable Cities](#) has gathered previous European Green Capitals and experts to discuss environmental solutions, the future winners of [European Green Capital Awards](#) were announced at a festive ceremony and the [Ecocity Forum](#) offered insight into the latest ideas in sustainable urban development.

In terms of visibility, 2021 was a successful year for Lahti both in terms of media coverage (2237 news articles in 56 countries) and of digital communication (117 million potential reach). All the details of the city's PR campaign are available in the report.

To download the full report and discover all about Lahti's many initiatives, [you may visit its website](#).



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Being awarded as the European Green Capital has boosted our city remarkably. The long-term determined work on environmental issues paid off and Lahti has been recognized as an international environmental city that is working hard for green transition, shares best practices and engages its citizens. The statistics show that the European Green Capital 2021 was noted also outside the EU with the 4,5 billion potential global media reach. We are very happy to continue the work within the 100 climate-neutral and smart cities mission.

**Elina Ojala**

Environmental Director  
City of Lahti

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To achieve anything important or significant, you need to do it together with a variety of stakeholders and partners. This was one of the goals we wanted to set for the execution of our year as the European Green Capital; to invite others to do it with us. Nothing gets done in a bubble and while bursting the bubble, we made sure we invited not only likeminded partners to collaborate with, but also the ones who challenged us to do better. During our year it was important to us to find a common story, that our partners could agree with and share with us. We created a shared vision of what it means to be a forerunner as a city, as a company, as a university, as an NGO, and most importantly as a citizen.

**Milla Bruneau**

Executive Director  
Lahti - European Green  
Capital 2021

I am very proud, that we managed to get everybody in Lahti to share their achievements and the year gave everybody a good reason to show and tell, to be proud of their own work as a sustainable actor – not only in their own boardrooms or weekly meetings, but to the public. Now it is time to make sure our message stays strong and uniform in the future as well.



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The European Green Capital year 2021 was special and memorable for the city of Lahti, despite the many challenges of the operating environment. Our communication reached different target groups and managed to inspire people. We are really proud of the ability and desire of our stakeholders to make this year with us.

**Saara Vauramo**  
Programme Director  
Lahti - European Green  
Capital 2021

## European Green Leaf 2022 Valongo wins the EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK Award for smaller municipalities

In March 2022 Valongo (Portugal) won the [EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK Award 2021 for smaller municipalities](#).



Valongo stood out from the crowd thanks to its awareness-raising activities that focused on involving local people and organisations, especially schools. Finally, the Portuguese city caught the jury's eye with its permanent infrastructure for an extensive variety of transport modes - including initiatives centred on walking, cycling, public transport, road safety, accessibility and cleaner vehicles - that were designed using a holistic, long-term approach.

A video was created to highlight the successes that Valongo has had. You can [watch it here](#).

Adina Vălean, European Commissioner for Transport, praised the award winners' and finalists' achievements at the hybrid ceremony in Brussels.

"These cities have taken concrete actions to tackle transport emissions, noise and congestion through innovative actions. With the new EU Urban Mobility Framework, we will support better planning of sustainable urban mobility, putting public transport, walking and cycling at the core of local authorities' efforts to improve people's everyday lives," said Commissioner Vălean.

The other finalists for the [EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK Award 2021](#) for smaller municipalities are Alimos, Greece and Mijadas, Spain.



## European Green Leaf 2022 Wintersjik supports its citizens to take a small step for their house and a big step for the environment

How can you make your home more sustainable? The truth is, many residents do not know where to begin. Questions like "where does my house lose heat?" or "is this an energy-efficient appliance?" are important but hard to determine.

The EU Green Leaf 2022 city of Winterswijk is now helping its citizens answer these important questions about their homes and appliances.

The municipality has various instruments available for this such as:

- An infrared thermometer that detects energy leaks
- An energy display that shows how much electricity you are using
- A power meter to check devices
- A thermal imaging camera that shows the heat loss from your home



Considering that these tools are sometimes expensive and only needed occasionally, Winterswijk is allowing citizens to borrow them from the municipality. Citizens can take items at the sustainability centre and measure before and after they implement measures to see how effective they are. Finally, measuring is not only sensible but also very motivating.

In this way, Winterswijk helps its citizens make their homes more sustainable.

## European Diversity Month - Cologne, Gothenburg, Barcelona, Koprivnica, Ingelheim am Rhein, Antequera, Andalucía, Grădinari named the first European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity

As part of the commitment to foster more inclusive and fair societies in Europe within the [EU's Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025](#), the Commission has launched the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award.

The winners of the first annual European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity were announced on 28 April 2022. They represent Croatia, Germany, Romania, Spain and Sweden and have received awards for the following categories: local authorities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, local authorities with more than 50,000 inhabitants and a special Award for Roma inclusion.

Cologne, Germany is the gold-winner in the 'local authorities above 50,000 inhabitants' category for its [strategy to enhance diversity and inclusion](#) followed by Gothenburg, Sweden (silver) and Barcelona, Spain (bronze).

Koprivnica, Croatia is the gold-winner for 'local authorities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants' for its strategy to support people with disabilities, followed by Ingelheim am Rhein, Germany (silver) and Antequera, Spain (bronze).

Finally, Andalucía, Spain, is the gold-winner of the third, Roma-specific category for its Comprehensive Plan for the Inclusion of the Roma Community, followed by Gothenburg, Sweden (silver) and Grădinari, Romania (bronze).

The Capitals selection was based on their efforts to build fairer societies in terms of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and LGBTIQ+ identity. Other finalists included past EU Green Capital finalists Barcelona, Bistrița, Ghent, and the 2018 EU Green Leaf winner, the city of Leuven.

The Awards Ceremony acted as the launching point for the EU Diversity Month, which annually raises awareness about the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and across our societies throughout the month of May.



## Six projects received the Natura 2000 Award

The [European Natura 2000 Award](#) goes to projects that exhibit excellence in the management of Natura 2000 sites and conservation achievements. On 18 May 2022 six winners were announced at the Natura 2000 Award Ceremony by Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries.

**The prizes award five categories as follows:**

- [LIFE Falcon Eleonorae](#), Conservation on land
- [MedavesPesca](#), Marine conservation
- [New Horizons](#), Communication
- [LIFE Stop Cortaderia project](#), Socio-economic benefits
- [The CaveLife smartphone app](#), Cross-border cooperation



Furthermore, the Commissioner presented the [European Citizens' Award](#) to the finalist who received the highest number of public votes which was the [FLORA programme](#).

Members of the high-level Jury including the Director-General of DG Environment and high-level representatives of the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, environment NGOs and European landowners were also in attendance.

## Vitoria-Gasteiz celebrates 10 years since winning the European Green Capital 2012 Award

The Spanish EU Green Capital and former winner of the 2012 title is proud to celebrate its 10 years with a series of events and activities during the fall such as: citizen dialogue, summit about sustainable urban models, a street festival and the list continues.

According to Gasteiz Hoy, the local newspaper, "Mayor Gorka Urtaran has set a new goal for this anniversary: to initiate "the transition from the green city to the green economy".

Read the rest of the article [here](#).



Publications Office  
of the European Union

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022  
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ISBN 978-92-76-50182-4

doi:10.2779/035649

KH-08-22-093-EN-N

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