

# Ideas in practice: Europe's Green Capitals

In our Ideas in Practice series, we look at a range of social issues, approaches to tackling these problems, and innovative projects and initiatives which have had an impact in these areas.

## The issue

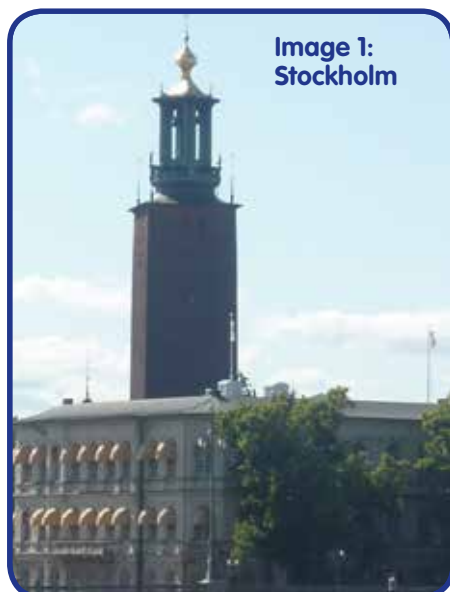
Organised by the European Commission, the European Green Capital Award rewards and promotes efforts by local authorities to improve the environment. The award enables cities to inspire each other and to share examples of good practice.

## Approaches

The key message of the award is that Europeans have a right to live in healthy urban areas. Cities should therefore strive to improve the quality of life of their citizens and reduce their impact on the global environment.

The European Green Capital Award recognises cities that:

- > have a consistent record of achieving high environmental standards
- > are committed to ongoing and ambitious goals for further



environmental improvement and sustainable development

- > can act as role models to inspire other cities and promote best practices to all other European cities

Cities bidding for the award are judged on ten different environmental criteria: climate change, local transport, public green areas, air quality, noise, waste, water consumption, wastewater, sustainable land use, biodiversity and environmental management.

The winning cities to date have been:

[Stockholm in 2010](#), [Hamburg in 2011](#), [Vitoria-Gastiez in 2012](#), [Nantes in 2013](#), [Copenhagen in 2014](#) and [Bristol in 2015](#). The Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, is the

European Green Capital for 2016, and the German city of Essen has been awarded the title for 2017.

## Putting it into practice

The following case studies provide examples of good practice from a selection of European Green Capitals. They describe the factors that were instrumental in winning the award, and report on the ways in which each city has made the most of its year to promote and advance its commitment to urban sustainability.

### Stockholm 2010

In 2010, Stockholm became the first European Green Capital. The Swedish city's bid won the award because of a number of factors



**Image 3: Stockholm**

demonstrating its commitment to sustainable development. These include measures towards reducing noise pollution, a protection plan setting new standards for cleaner water and an innovative integrated waste system.

During 2010 the city council organised a series of conferences, seminars and exhibitions to exchange experiences, present best practice, strengthen networks with others and create a platform for discussions and knowledge regarding continued collaboration. The first European Green Capital Conference attracted more than 350 delegates.

One of the strongest features of the year was a [professional study visits programme](#) in an effort to generate local and international environmental awareness and to strengthen networks with other European cities, organisations and research centres. The programme allowed visitors the opportunity to explore the solutions created by Stockholm in relation waste management, planning of new urban projects, combating climate change and ensuring an effective and sustainable transportation. Hammarby Sjöstad was the most popular study visit, with many people eager to see how Stockholm is tackling sustainable development and sustainable traffic solutions in this new eco-district.

One very clear example of Stockholm's commitment to sustainable development during

its year as European Green Capital was the opening of a [new tramway](#). The line opened in August 2010 and quickly [achieved](#) substantial environmental and economic impacts. Subsequent plans have been announced for a further extension of the line.

### Lessons and impact

Stockholm's commitment to sustainable development continued after its year as European Green Capital. Environmental policies have become even more prioritized and now are fully integrated into city development.

Stockholm's annual Budget is based on the four principles of social, ecological, economic and democratic sustainability. This includes a climate-smart Stockholm where priority is given to cyclists, pedestrians and public transport, where an efficient, climate-smart transport system is combined with an increased proportion of renewable energy, and where children are guaranteed a day-to-day life that is free from toxins. Stockholm has also set itself the ambitious target of becoming [fossil free by 2040](#).

The city's strategy is to continue to share good examples and learn from the successful accomplishments of other cities. The European Green Capital Award has given Stockholm

an even stronger position in this context. As the [evaluation report](#) concluded, the aim for Stockholm is to always be a green capital.

### Hamburg 2011

With a population of 1.8 million, Hamburg is Germany's second-largest city and Europe's busiest port. Hamburg was [awarded](#) the title of European Green Capital for 2011 in recognition of its ambitious climate protection targets, high environmental standards, and its achievements in encouraging cycling and public transport.

### Information and events

As well as a central pavilion in the city centre, ten information points were installed across Hamburg where visitors could learn more about the Green Capital's main themes, including nature conservation, renewable energy, sustainable consumption and sustainable urban planning. Green Explorers tours led visitors around nine stops highlighting some of Hamburg's environmental protection projects.

Throughout 2010, almost 2000 events took place, including an environmental economic summit, where 600 delegates discussed



**Image 4: Hamburg**

sustainable economic activity and a series of “green dialogues” on topics such as: energy efficient construction and renovation; smart buying; Hamburg’s climate protection plan; and urban greenery. A section of the Hamburg Film Festival was devoted to environmental films, and is now a regular feature of this annual event.

### The Train of Ideas

In April 2011, Hamburg launched its “Train of Ideas”. Each of its seven carriages looked at a different aspect of life in a green city such as mobility, energy, climate protection, nature, economy and consumption. The train travelled to a number of cities around Europe, including Warsaw, Malmö, Copenhagen, Brussels, Vienna, Barcelona and Marseilles. Visitors were able to see how cities can become more sustainable and environmentally friendly places where people enjoy a high quality of life.

### “Switching over without the pain of separation”

One of the campaigns during 2011 aimed to make it easier for citizens to switch from cars to bikes and public transport. The Hamburg Transport Association distributed 2,735 free tickets to friends and acquaintances of season ticket holders, and many visitors made use of the free advisory and “get involved” activities of Germany’s national bicycle club. During the year, Hamburg’s StadtRÄDER bike rental system was



Image 6: Bristol

also promoted, resulting in an 8% increase in the number of users.

### Lessons and impact

The Train of Ideas attracted over 70,000 visitors, by far exceeding its own target of 40,000. In Hamburg alone, the exhibition was visited by over 30,000 people, and its tour of European cities enhanced Hamburg’s credentials as an environmentally conscious and innovative city with a high quality of life. Such indicators are often crucial when investors are making location decisions.

Hamburg Transport Association HW increased the number of passengers transported in 2011 by 2.2 per cent, with passenger levels reaching 691 million. Future public transport plans include extending the U-Bahn and a €259 million bus modernisation programme, which will make the Hamburg bus system the most modern in Europe.

The [eco-Partnership](#) programme between the public and private sectors in Hamburg was launched in 2011. By the end of the year, 820 companies had committed to introduce more environmentally-friendly, resource-efficient measures to their businesses.

In 2011, the total number of users of the StadtRÄDER bike rental system virtually doubled to 131,000. The bike rental scheme gained more than

9,400 new customers during the two-week “Switching over without the pain of separation” campaign alone.

### Bristol 2015

After its third attempt, the city of Bristol was named European Green Capital for 2015. Its bid demonstrated a strong track record of high environmental standards, commitment to ongoing and ambitious goals for further sustainable development and investment plans concerning transport and energy efficiency.

Among the highlights of Bristol’s year as European Green Capital were six major art projects designed to help people see sustainable issues in a new light.

These included:

- > an installation at Temple Church made using materials from across the city that regenerated a derelict structure
- > a flotilla of abandoned boats in a wood to raise awareness of the impact humanity is having on our seas
- > a debate about the future of cities, bringing together academics, city planners, artists, writers, filmmakers, architects, politicians, journalists, poets,



Image 5: StadtRÄDER bikes, Hamburg



Image 7:  
Luke Jerram's  
"Withdrawn" in  
Leigh Woods,  
Bristol

## Europe's Green Capitals: 2016 and beyond

**Ljubljana**, the capital of Slovenia, is the [European Green Capital for 2016](#). In recent years, the city has taken measures to shift the focus of urban [traffic](#) from cars to pedestrians and cyclists, as well as focusing on public transport. Ljubljana has also demonstrated significant progress in [waste management](#). Its plans for 2016 feature a [calendar of events and activities](#) in cooperation with public bodies and private companies, primary schools and non-governmental organisations.

**Essen**, in the industrial heartland of north-western Germany, will be the [European Green Capital in 2017](#). The city has made strong [efforts](#) to overcome declining coal and steel industries, and to reinvent itself as an environmentally-friendly location, including investment in green infrastructure and measures to protect and enhance nature and biodiversity. This emphasis on transformation was a key factor in its successful [bid](#).

Seven cities are in the running for [European Green Capital in 2018](#).

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community leaders, businesses, scientists and think tanks

Also in 2015, Bristol began a trial of ["bio-buses"](#) powered by biomethane gas using human waste from more than 30,000 households. The Bio-Bus can seat up to 40 people, with space for one wheelchair. The Bio-Buses aim to improve urban air quality and produce fewer emissions than traditional diesel engines.

### Lessons and impact

The selection of Bristol as European Green Capital opened up a serious [debate](#) about the true value of the award, with some regarding it as a distraction from Bristol's serious environmental issues, such as [traffic congestion](#), while others regarded public funding of some European Green Capital [projects](#) as wasteful.

However, at the end of Bristol's year as European Green Capital, George Ferguson, Mayor of Bristol, argued that it was impossible to over-estimate the benefit it had brought to the city:

"We are now seen as a leader among environmental cities, with the

potential and commitment to do so much more and encourage others to join us in the process."

A key output from the year was the publication of the "Bristol Method", a knowledge-transfer programme aimed at helping people in other cities understand and apply the lessons that Bristol learned in becoming a more sustainable city.

[The Bristol Method](#) is made up of a series of modules, or chapters, each of which uses Bristol's experience to present a 'how to' guide on a particular topic. Topics include:

- > how to use partnerships to drive change
- > how to use grants to support grassroots change
- > how to prepare a winning bid for the European Green Capital
- > how to grow the green economy in a city
- > how to get more people riding bikes and walking
- > how to protect and enhance green spaces in a city

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