

Nantes, France

A European Green Capital

Nantes has received the European Green Capital award for 2013. This award is a recognition of the city's progressive efforts and achievements in sustainable urban development. The European Green Capital award also aims to provide an incentive for cities to develop and share good practices in terms of environmental protection at the urban level, while at the same time engaging in friendly competition. Cities leading the way in environmentally friendly urban living can act as a role-model to inspire other cities.

145

ICLEI Case Studies

April 2012

Abstract

The European Green Capital competition offered a unique opportunity for Nantes to have its achievements and its commitment towards environmental protection recognized at European level. The decision to submit an application was taken in regards with Nantes' consistent and innovative sustainability strategies, its aim to increase the attractiveness of its international reputation and its long-term commitment to environmentally sustainable public policy.

The European Green Capital award and the resulting recognition is extremely important to the city of Nantes and its citizens, whose involvement and awareness of key issues and respective responses, made the achievements in Nantes possible; for example in the field of waste management and public transport utilization.

Through the sharing of sustainability best practices across Europe, the award is a great opportunity to develop cooperation between cities in terms of sustainable urban development. The winning city becomes a role model, which other cities can study, in order to replicate its achievements. Nantes was successful and won the award because of the city's consistent and comprehensive long term strategy dating back to 1989.

The European Green Capital Award

Over 75 percent of Europe's population live in urban areas and despite being highly developed, the cities of Europe face many environmental challenges. The European Commission has long recognized the important role that local authorities play in improving the environment including their commitment to sustainable urban development. The European Green Capital Award (EGC) has been conceived as an initiative to promote and reward these efforts. Since 2010, one European city is selected each year as the European Green Capital of the year. The European Green Capital award is highly prestigious and is based upon environmental and quality of life indicators. The award is given to a city that:

- Has a consistent record of achieving high environmental standards.
- Is committed to ongoing and ambitious goals for further environmental improvement and sustainable development.
- Can act as a role model to inspire other cities and promote best practices to all other European cities.



Population / Land area
~600,000 (2007)/ 523 km²

Municipal budget
€958 Million (2011)/
US\$ 1billion

Nantes joined ICLEI in 2008

This case study is part of a series of local sustainability case studies compiled as part of ICLEI's preparation for Rio+20.

Case Study

City context



Photo: © Patrick Garçon, Nantes Métropole

Ile de Nantes.

Nantes is an Atlantic port city on the estuary of the River Loire with 600,000 inhabitants (10 percent growth in the last decade). The city's dynamic economy stems from both traditionally established sectors (naval and aeronautic construction and services) and new innovative sectors (ICT, biotechnology, composites, and the creative and cultural industries). Thanks to its cultural vivacity, its excellent natural environment and its policies to encourage social cohesion, Nantes provides not only an excellent natural environment but also a high quality of life for its citizens.

A global strategy was designed to transform Nantes from a former industrial and port city (which it was until the 1980's), into an eco-metropolis. It sought improvements in quality of life, social cohesion, cultural renewal and it committed to addressing important challenges such as urban sprawl, GHG mitigation and the preservation of the environment. Nantes is currently engaged in a preparatory exercise for the urban agglomeration's future in 2030, called 'Nantes, my city tomorrow'.

Application to the European Green Capital Award

At the beginning of 2010, Nantes took the decision, following political endorsement, to participate in the second edition of the EGC award competition. Within the city administration one fulltime staff member was given the task to prepare the application. The application is based on Nantes achievements in reducing the city's environmental footprint and improving quality of life. All departments from Nantes and Nantes Métropole, whose relevance was reflected in EGC's indicators, received orders from the general management board to be part of the project and to provide the required support. Once the institutional capacity and framework was established, the preparation of the application began, which was divided into three stages:

First stage. This involved writing the application form for submission. This requires the provision of figures and indicators on the 13 chapters/criterias of the award. The challenge was making the city's existing figures and indicators consistent with those required by the jury. After several months of preparation culminating in April 2010, Nantes was selected as one of the 6 finalists.

Second stage. This involved the preparation of a more complete application which answered the questions raised by the jury after the first phase. Stage two also involved the completion of the application with details and explanations on how Nantes realized its achievements, such as documents, public policy, maps and sketches. It ended with the publication of a 200 page book presenting the complete application.

Key themes of EGC

1. Local contribution to global climate change
2. Local transport
3. Green urban Areas
4. Sustainable land use
5. Nature and biodiversity
6. Quality of local ambient air
7. Noise pollution
8. Waste production and management
9. Water consumption
10. Waste water treatment
11. Environmental management of the municipality
12. Other measures
13. Programme for dissemination of experience and best practice

Third stage. This involves the review by the jury in Brussels, during a 30 minute interaction with the expert panel. Finally, the EGC jury nominated Nantes as European Green Capital for 2013 (along with Vitoria-Gasteiz for 2012). The final conclusion was notably based upon environmental achievements in four fields: biodiversity, water, transport and climate change.

Activities, achievements and results

The origin of Nantes' achievements comes from its search for a global vision for the city and the efforts undertaken in urban sustainability which culminated in the EGC award. Components that emerged included: encouraging public action, notably through urban services; tools for sustainable development such as the adoption of Local Agenda 21 principles and the complete use and integration of inter-municipal management and the opportunities it offers for comprehensive action. These components were key in the EGC award process. Important results of this process (see link in 'Sources' for full details) further included:

Active governance. All these actions were implemented with the support and the participation of local stakeholders, notably through the 'Development Council' (proposed by the mayor Jean-Marc Ayrault to increase citizen involvement) which is composed of representatives from civil society, providing advice to Nantes through reports and proposals but also with the support of Ecopole. Furthermore, a strong network of local environmental NGOs, financially supported by Nantes Métropole were established.

The city authorities developed initiatives such as the 'Climate Workshop', where 150 households worked with Nantes Métropole in order to review and co-construct the future climate policy. Another program is the ongoing process under the 'Nantes 2030 my city tomorrow', a two year participatory process for the citizens of the 24 cities composing the Nantes agglomeration. Its goal is to establish a cohesive planning framework for the entire urban agglomeration with all the relevant actors, citizens, businesses, NGOs, academics, students, etc.

Sustainable development management. The first Local Agenda 21 was adopted in Nantes in 1997, making it one of the earliest Agenda 21 operations in France and Europe. It was used as a basis for the newer metropolitan Agenda 21, adopted in 2006 after the creation of the greater Nantes area and its 24 cities. It marked the way for the development scheme for the 24 cities of the agglomeration. The 21 actions for the 21st century were testimony of Nantes commitment towards sustainable development. As the first urban center to have integrated the inter-municipal planning and development framework dimension, it has been a great inspiration for other agglomerations in France, and recognized as such by the French comity 21 and it was awarded the 'urban bleu'. The French state also recognized it and used it to build the Local Agenda 21 National Guidelines. After this first period, Nantes Métropole is currently implementing the second generation of Agenda 21 principles which involves more than 100 actions, including the better integration of public policy at the global level. It is now intended as a common theme linking all action plans of the administration.



Governance and Climate Workshop, Nantes.

Photo: © Patrick Garçon, Nantes Métropole

Fight against climate change. The 2006 Agenda 21, compiled in association with local players, chose the fight against climate change as priority issue number one. The Climate Action Plan was approved by the council in 2007. The goals are based on an inventory of CO₂ emissions, prepared in 1990 and 2003, of the energy consumption of 4 major sectors: transport, residential, services and industry. The focus was on structural changes such as public transport, waste management systems, public project's carbon footprint and governance; particularly with regard to the achievements in the field of citizen involvement. The local government committed more than 20 fulltime staff to work directly in this field.

Involvement in networks and international action. The urban agglomeration is not only responsible and accountable for its local effects (in terms of waste, waste-water, transportation and quality of life) but it also has international responsibilities. Nantes is part of a global system and as such it needs to be involved at the European and international level, in terms of sustainable policy making. Through the European Green Capital award process, the city increased its involvement in city networks such as ICLEI and 'Eurocities'. In addition, Nantes has been participating in the United Nations climate negotiations, acting as a representative for cities and a 'climate spokesperson' for United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) whom work with ICLEI in climate negotiations.

Public transportation. A greater emphasis on public transportation was developed in Nantes which opposed an 'everything for cars' focus. It started in the 1980s with the re-introduction of the tramway as a mass public transportation system. Nantes was the first French city to do so and the idea gathered momentum. Nantes meanwhile offers a complete range of mobility options for its inhabitants, workers or visitors including bike rentals, car-sharing and a high quality bus service like the 'busway'. Through an intensive investment policy, Nantes has improved the quality of its urban transport. This has resulted in a sustainable transport system that is easy and efficient, and redirects citizen reliance away from motor cars.

Waste management. There was strong support for the development of a waste-district heating system. Nantes Métropole decided to maintain the public management of the waste collection system in Nantes in order to introduce competition between public and private management of urban services (also done for water management). Innovative experiments on recyclable waste collection in urban centers were developed including the 'Tri'Sac' system of door-to-door collection which uses colored bags for waste separation. The process allowed a recyclable collection without changing bins and trucks, thus saving space in the city center.

Water cycle. From drinking water to waste water management, a combination of four comprehensive plans called 'Neptune' have been implemented since 1990, in order to improve the fresh water quality of rivers and to reduce water pollution. Called the 'Venice of the West', Nantes has the River Loire, as one of its major amenity assets, which also has 7 tributaries. Much work has been undertaken to improve the quality of the water, focusing on waste water improvement for both individuals and collective treatment. There has also been investment in river protection measures, pollution control and the provision of walking paths.



Ecomobility in action, Nantes.

Biodiversity. The aim of Nantes Métropole's policy on biodiversity is to make the metropolitan area of Nantes a refuge city for biodiversity. This will be achieved by nature conservation measures and by managing nature's co-existence with the urban space, by reducing waste, tackling urban sprawl, etc. The metropolitan area has also gained notoriety for its biodiversity conservation efforts, highlighted by the inclusion of the 'Ligerian Corridor' in the Natura 2000 network of sites recognized at European level. Combined with the work undertaken on water quality and milieu restoration, it is now possible to observe rare species inside the urban boundary.



Photo: © Patrick Garçon, Nantes Métropole

La petite Amazonie" a natura 2000 area located in the middle of the city

Lessons learned

Consensus among citizens. No strategy or long term action can be achieved without the involvement and consensus of citizens. This depends on the city's capacity to share its projects with citizens and garner their support and involvement. In Nantes, participative democracy and public participation was an essential part of the sustainable development policy which was vital to achieving the European Green Capital award.

Challenges with indicators. There is greater effort to merge indicators in Europe and in the world, but on several sustainability indicator packages there is a lack of consistency between local and European indicators. This needs to be addressed in order to improve sustainable policy making and ensure consistency.

Tools for public action. In order for cities to ensure improvements regarding environmental protection and sustainability performance, it is essential to be able to use tools for public action. Urban services are on the front line in the battle for the environment. They are the lever for cities to tackle those issues and cities must maintain their capacity in this field. Sufficient technical expertise and legal ability should not be transferred to the private sector.

Replication

Although some institutional elements of this case are specific to Europe, it provides an example and inspiration to other cities to realize the importance of mastering urban public services. Awards like the European Green Capital Award provide an incentive for cities to inspire each other and share best practices, while at the same time engaging in friendly competition and providing recognition of cities and its inhabitant's efforts. It can also act as a catalyst for implementing sustainable development and local agenda 21 principles into urban planning and development. However, to participate in such an award requires political backing and an adequate allocation of institutional and human capacity.

Key Contacts

Nantes Métropole.

Thomas Quéro
International networks,
sustainable development,
climate officer.
Nantes Métropole.
44923 Nantes cedex 9
Tel +33 / 2 40 99 52 71
E-mail: thomas.queo@nantesmetropole.fr

ICLEI European Secretariat

Leopoldring 3
79098 Freiburg
Germany
Tel: +49-761 / 36 89 2-0
Fax: +49-761 / 36 89 2-19
E-mail: iclei-europe@iclei.org
www.iclei-europe.org

ICLEI World Secretariat (WS)

Capacity Center
Kaiser-Friedrich Strasse 7
53111 Bonn Germany
Tel. +49-228 / 97 62 99-00
Fax +49-228 / 97 62 99-01
Email: capacity.center@iclei.org
www.iclei.org

Budget & finances

Over a long time period, the costs of all related actions have been relatively high. The grant for public transportation is €92 million annually and the consolidated cost of Neptune plans reach about €360 million. However, it is difficult to separate these costs and to fully assess the benefits they have added. More importantly, it is the consistency and the integration of all actions that has to be taken into account. The decisions were taken to ensure coherency in moving towards sustainable urban development.

The budget is considered as an investment into quality of life. The return of this investment is reflected in a rise of 10 percent of the urban population, while Europe's population numbers are remained relatively stagnant. Many companies have chosen Nantes to set up their operations, instead of other cities in France, including Paris. Their choice is based on what the city can offer their employees, in terms of environmental quality, livability, and cultural dynamism. Therefore, the investments in the environment are also an investment in greater economic and social resilience and development.

Sources

- <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/winning-cities/2013-nantes/nantes-application/index.html>

Acknowledgements

- This ICLEI case study is part of the Local Sustainability 2012 Case Study Series.
- Author: Thomas Quéro, Nantes Métropole.
- Editors: Shay Kelleher, Richard Simpson (ICLEI World Secretariat).

This case study compliments the publications prepared for the Rio+20 Conference and is part of the 'Local Sustainability 2012 Case Study Series: Showcasing progress in local sustainability'. This project is generously supported by the Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme. The case studies can be accessed online at www.iclei.org/casestudies



ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is an international association of local governments committed to sustainable development. ICLEI's mission is to build and serve a worldwide movement of local governments to achieve tangible improvements in global sustainability with special focus on environmental conditions through cumulative local actions.



The ICLEI Case Study series (iclei.org/casestudies) focuses on urban sustainability activities of ICLEI Members and local governments being part of ICLEI projects across the globe. ICLEI World Secretariat. Email: publications@iclei.org

© 2012 ICLEI e.V. All rights reserved.

April 2012