



PRESS RELEASE

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Green city awards go to Lahti, Limerick and Mechelen!

The Finnish city of Lahti is the winner of the European Commission's **European Green Capital Award for 2021**. The title of **European Green Leaf 2020** for smaller cities goes to the Irish city of Limerick and Belgian city of Mechelen. Karmenu Vella, the EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, awarded these prestigious titles at the official awards ceremony today in Oslo, Norway – the current European Green Capital.

Apart from the title, Lahti receives a €350k financial incentive from the European Commission to kick-start its European Green Capital year.

***Commissioner Vella** said: I congratulate Lahti for winning this tough competition at such a pivotal time for our planet. The European Green Capital 2021 title brings a lot of responsibility to be a strong role model for cities across Europe, as we all work together to preserve and restore our planet and tackle climate change. Lahti has the environmental credibility and passion to embrace that responsibility and be an inspiring international leader. I also congratulate Lille and Strasbourg, for getting this far in the competition – I wish you well in your continuous sustainable journey to make your cities fit for life."*

The awarding of the 2021 European Green Capital Award to Lahti was a unanimous decision by the international Jury.

The Jury said that green cities are healthier and happier places for people to grow, live and work in, and for visitors too. All finalists have shown that the green transition is affordable for all and results in more socially inclusive and connected cities. They also demonstrated that the behavioural changes required to be a sustainable city is becoming the norm for their citizens, businesses and decision makers. The winning cities are eager to demonstrate to all cities in Europe, frontrunners or not, that they can achieve meaningful and measurable progress in their journey to a sustainable development.

Lahti is particularly strong in the fields of air quality, waste, green growth and eco-innovation, as well as governance.

- The central theme and vision for Lahti's 2018 city strategy is "Bold Environmental City". It brings together several programmes and plans including those focusing on smart, clean and circular economy, mobility, environment, energy, urban regeneration and citizen science.
- As a pioneer in air quality the city set out an air quality plan in 1997, which has led to a major drop in emissions since. Engaging local businesses in air quality monitoring, and additional air quality regulations the city has established on its own particularly impressed the jury.

- The city has a clear vision for green growth and eco-innovation. The Lake Vesijärvi and the Grassroot projects, for example, promote the reuse and sharing of public spaces in the city, making these spaces available to rent. These kinds of provocative ideas can lead to exciting new projects with strong citizen involvement.
- In Lahti, 99% of people live within 300 metres of green urban areas. The city enables its inhabitants to enjoy nature in many different ways, offering leisure activities such as skiing, fishing and wild berry and mushroom picking.
- Lahti demonstrated a high-quality waste system, with a strong and impressive selection of treatment infrastructure servicing the city, including biogas gasification, a power plant and sorting plants. The city has co-located facilities which exchange energy and materials resources in a symbiotic relationship. This is an impressive example of industrial symbiosis.

Joint European Green Leaf 2020 winner, Limerick, was commended for its ongoing investments leading to improved air quality and noise levels in the city. Limerick is currently transforming itself into Ireland's first digital city, integrating several public services, creating smart homes and buildings, energy districts and smart neighbourhoods. The city is effectively managing its air quality thanks to the acquisition of particle and gas monitors. Limerick also encourages people to leave their cars at home by providing better cycling, walking and public transport infrastructure with the aim of reducing transport emissions. Limerick was also recognised for its development of noise maps and action plans, updated every five years, continuously monitoring the acoustic environment, analysing trends, and assessing the effectiveness of the actions undertaken.

Joint European Green Leaf 2020 winner, Mechelen, was recognised for its dedication to sustainable urban mobility, nature, biodiversity, sustainable land use, and waste and circular economy. Mechelen closely involves citizens in the creation and achievement of the city's environmental goals. City partners are also involved in smart city development through 'citylabs'. Mechelen's approach to biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use management is very coherent and well implemented, with clear objectives in the city's plans and strategies. The city provides a clear direction for strengthening its green/blue network. Mechelen was also a finalist in last year's competition, for the European Green Leaf 2019.

Background

The European Green Capital Award aims to recognise the environmental achievements of European cities and to inspire others to take positive action in making their cities fit for life.

Eleven other cities have won the European Green Capital Award to date: Stockholm (2010), Hamburg (2011), Vitoria-Gasteiz (2012), Nantes (2013), Copenhagen (2014), Bristol (2015), Ljubljana (2016), Essen (2017), Nijmegen (2018), Oslo (2019) and Lisbon (2020). The finalists for the European Green Capital 2021 were Lahti (Finland), Lille and Strasbourg (France).

European Green Leaf Awards are given to towns and cities with populations between 20,000 to 100,000 citizens, for their potential to act as a 'green ambassadors' for smaller cities.

Since its inauguration in 2015, seven other cities have won a European Green Leaf Award so far: Mollèt del Valles, Spain and Torres Vedras, Portugal (2015); Galway, Ireland (2017); Leuven, Belgium, and

Växjö, Sweden (2018); and Cornellà de Llobregat, Spain, and Horst aan de Maas, the Netherlands (2019).

The finalists for the European Green Leaf 2020 were Lappeenranta (Finland), Limerick (Ireland) and Mechelen (Belgium).

For more information:

Websites: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital>

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/europeangreenleaf/>

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EU Policy on Urban Environment: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/urban/index_en.htm