

VITORIA-GASTEIZ

winner 2012



EUROPEAN
GREEN CAPITAL



An initiative of the
European Commission

Green cities - fit for life



MESSAGE FROM JAVIER MAROTO, MAYOR OF VITORIA-GASTEIZ



Vitoria-Gasteiz, capital of the Basque Country, in northern Spain, is one of Europe's cities with the largest proportion of green areas per inhabitant, approximately 45m² per person. A quiet and accessible city, but also one that is active, dynamic, vibrant, modern; a city that prides itself on over 10 million m² of parks and green areas that are available for walking, cycling, observing the deer or bird-watching. Such is Vitoria-Gasteiz, the European city with the highest commitment to the environment at present.

We have not reached this point by chance. The European Green Capital 2012 Award is the result of over 30 years of commitment to sustainability in our city. It is thanks to the environmental policies implemented during these years and thanks to the commitment of our citizens and their good practices in relation to recycling, mobility or water consumption, that Vitoria-Gasteiz has become an example for Europe.

In Vitoria-Gasteiz, our understanding of and respect for the environment has always been part of our identity. Our city has a 613 hectare Green Belt that will soon cover 960 hectares, a successful Sustainable Mobility Plan, a new bus network, a tram system, over 90km of bike lanes and an extensive network of parks and city

walks, a sustainable water management system and established recycling habits and policies.

Today we are an environmental benchmark. Three-quarters of Europeans live in cities. Our experience serves as a benchmark because most cities are a similar size to ours. Being the European Green Capital 2012 is an exciting challenge. It is a unique and historic opportunity for Vitoria-Gasteiz to boost and develop the future of our city. The environment is the future, it is quality of life, it is sustainability and it is about doing more with less. We shall do a good job, all together, and we shall enjoy it.

Javier Maroto
Mayor of Vitoria-Gasteiz



Photo Quintas fotografías

SHOWCASING THE CITY AND ITS INITIATIVES IN 2012



Throughout 2012, Vitoria-Gasteiz is opening its doors to showcase and share its environmental policies, projects and challenges with the rest of Europe.

The city has prepared an ambitious programme of activities, offering a platform for the exchange of good practices and for disseminating green ideas. The Vitoria-Gasteiz 2012 programme is divided into four themes:

- Involving society
- Showcasing the city and its initiatives
- Reflecting on the city: space and opportunities
- Disseminating the Green Capital idea and its values.



Photo: Quintas Fotografías

Permanent Exhibition: A permanent exhibition in Europa Congress Palace on Gasteiz Avenue presents the city's environmental record over recent years and the major plans and projects that have earned it the Green Capital Award, as well as future plans beyond 2012. There is a space to demonstrate environmental initiatives by groups of citizens in this dynamic and interactive exhibition, which also promotes visitors' participation.

Green factories: A programme of one-day guided tours is being held to enable people to explore the 'green heart' of the city by visiting the places where daily environmental processes are handled. These include waste treatment, water treatment and sewage plants, the Miñano Technology Park, the Ataria Wetlands Interpretation Centre, and the University of the Basque Country.

Ecotourism: Vitoria-Gasteiz is developing a plan of action to make it even more attractive as a destination for eco-tourists including a nature and cultural heritage programme to harness natural assets to create an outstanding sustainable tourism location.

Green Night: On 14th July 2012 there will be live music, exhibitions, plays, slow food and much more to celebrate around the city centre.

A MEDIUM-SIZED CITY



The medieval city of Vitoria-Gasteiz dates back to 1181. It is the capital of the historical territory of Alava, and home to 76% of its population and most of its industries and services. Vitoria-Gasteiz is a medium-sized city; the urban area has a population over 240,000.

From a town of just 50,000 people in 1950, the population of Vitoria-Gasteiz surged during the 1960s, as job opportunities in the strong mechanical and metallurgy industries attracted more and more people from all over Spain. Careful urban planning has, however, limited the environmental impact of this rapid growth.

congestion, long commuting distances, and pockets of poverty and social exclusion.

The municipality consists of three concentric circles. The city itself, at the heart, is surrounded by a large area of agricultural land and natural vegetation, with the mountains and forests forming the third ring.



Photo: Quintas fotografias

Taking care of the landscape and the heritage

Throughout history, the city has evolved in harmony with its green forests and fields, and its blue rivers and lakes. Since time immemorial, the woods of Alava belonged to the public, with ancient rules governing the use of natural resources such as water and pasturage. More recently, Vitoria-Gasteiz's network of gardens, walkways and Green Belt parks and the forthcoming declaration of the Vitoria Mountains as a natural park have become the city's signature.

Population density is much lower outside the city's residential area, guaranteeing the survival of a natural, rural environment with limited human interference.

As a medium-sized city, it has so far avoided the problems associated with large urban areas, such as high levels of pollution, traffic

Vitoria-Gasteiz facts

- Capital city of the Basque country and of the province of Alava
- Founded in 1181
- Population: 240,580
- Area: 276.8 km²
- Population density: 864 hab/km²
- First provincial capital in Spain to adopt the Local Agenda 21 in 1998
- Rapid population growth and urban development since the 1960s

WHAT MAKES VITORIA-GASTEIZ SPECIAL



A city that's green inside and green outside

- The city has a high proportion of green public areas, so the entire population lives within 300m of an open green space.
- Public gardens cover 1,091 hectares, making up 32.67% of the urban area.
- A Green Belt of five large suburban parks with recreational areas surrounds the centre, linked by a network of 33km of pedestrian pathways and 90km of cycle routes, effectively bringing nature into the urban heart.
- With 45m² of open space per person, Vitoria-Gasteiz is one of the greenest cities in Spain.
- Many of the hundreds of green spaces in Vitoria-Gasteiz take the form of smallish urban gardens, open 24 hours a day. Together they form a biodiversity resource sustaining some 50,000 trees of 381 different species and 12,160 shrubs.
- The semi-natural Green Belt has been '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 100 best projects worldwide at its Third International Competition of Best Practices for Improving the Environment.

However, Vitoria-Gasteiz is not just green on the outside, it is also green at heart, combining a high level of leadership and consensus among political parties on sustainable development, a strong environmental movement, and the full support of citizens.

The awareness-raising campaign entitled Verde por fuera-Verde por dentro (green outside - green inside) generated a strong sense of civic pride and ownership and helped foster the city's 'green conscience'. The European Green Capital Award panel gave credit to the key role of citizens in promoting change.

With its award-winning urban design, green space and lively social and cultural life, coupled with first-class services, it is an ideal role model for the average, medium-sized city in which most urban Europeans live.

What impressed the experts

The panel of experts who evaluated the European Green Capital Award applications was particularly impressed by Vitoria-Gasteiz's outstanding performance on five of the indicators - climate change, transport, air quality, noise pollution and its communications programme.



Photo: Quintas fotografias

Extensive green spaces

Vitoria-Gasteiz municipality has 11,331 hectares of forest, most of it publicly owned. Native species, especially beech and oak, make up 91% of the trees. Two of these wooded areas are included in the Natura 2000 network: the eastern part of the Vitoria Mountains and the small oak forests on the La Llanada plains.

A city that relates to its environment

Because Vitoria-Gasteiz is at the crossroads of two biological climates – the Atlantic to the north and the Mediterranean to the south – a huge diversity of ecological environments coexist close to the city. Citizens have access to a range of natural habitats, from meadows and wetlands to beech forests and mountains.

Humanity has shaped the natural environment for millennia, yet a conscious effort to protect the biodiversity of the area means that many fragile ecosystems have been preserved. As a result, Vitoria-Gasteiz has a rich selection of flora and fauna. A third of Spain's endangered vertebrate species are found in the municipality. And while the area covers just 4% of the total Basque region, it is home to 40% of its vascular plants and 75% of terrestrial vertebrates. Four municipal areas are part of the Natura 2000 network, including the Zadorra River and the Salburua Wetlands.

An efficient ecosystem

The city has made real progress in recovering biodiversity, restoring many of the city's damaged ecological and landscape areas through the Green Belt project, the creation of the Bosques de Europa Botanical Gardens and the opening of the Ecological Gardens for citizens. Since 1996, more than 12,000 schoolchildren and hundreds of adults have joined the 'Adopt a tree and grow with it' campaign, planting over 40,000 trees and bushes.

Green facts & figures

- All residents have access to public open and green space within 300m
- 613 hectares of Green Belt
- 479m² of forest per capita (covering one-third of the municipal area)
- 210 organic farming plots
- 130,000 trees in city streets
- Two tram lines and 90km of bicycle lanes
- Half of all journeys are made on foot
- 1st Environmental Action Plan adopted in 2002
- Just 9% water leakage



Photo: Quintas Fotografías

These advances have also helped to remedy other problems that plagued Vitoria-Gasteiz, such as the proliferation of illegal huts and vegetable gardens or the risk of flooding from the industrial estates to the north and south of the city. Instead, residents are now encouraged to take part in the organic gardening and community gardens initiatives, or in cultivating plots in the Urarte and Olarizu vegetable gardens within the Green Belt.

A green and blue belt

The Green Belt is a semi-natural green space partially recovered from degraded areas, such as gravel pits, burnt ground and drained wetlands. Their restoration, which started in the mid 1990s, continues today.



When completed, the Green Belt will be the natural lung of the future Vitoria-Gasteiz, linking city and countryside. This ring is formed by the parks: Salburua, Zabalzana, Armentia, Olarizu and Río Zadorra. More areas need to be integrated, connecting the belt directly to the surrounding mountains and forests.



Photo: Simoes&Sist

Water

Vitoria-Gasteiz is making major progress in urban water management and reducing consumption, mainly through controlling leaks (9% water leakage) and technological improvements, as well as boosting public awareness. Between 2001 and 2009, water consumption per capita fell by 20%. The city has also improved the quality of the urban waste water discharged into the Zadorra River after treatment at the Crispijana facility.

On the other hand, the city has to deal with overloaded sanitation systems during heavy rains. It has invested in improving water supply and quality, reducing losses, and has set up a citizens' water information office.

Waste

Recycling of sludge from the Crispijana waste-treatment plant will minimise the volume of material deposited in the Gardélegui landfill, as will channelling waste materials into energy-recovery systems or landscape restoration. Waste-management programmes have already achieved higher recycling levels than in most Spanish cities.

The climate change battle

Vitoria-Gasteiz has built a strong political consensus in support of a long-term, coherent set of policies and actions at local level. Several innovative actions aimed at tackling climate change include, for example, the installation of a power generator using the flow of effluent water from the sewage-treatment plant, and the reuse of treated water for non-drinking purposes.



Photo: Quintas fotografos



Photo: Sinesia

A plan for energy

Vitoria-Gasteiz is reducing its energy consumption by rationalising energy use and using more eco-efficient technologies such as district heating and micro-cogeneration, as well as greater energy efficiency in new and restored buildings. At the same time, it is promoting renewable energy sources such as solar power, geothermal systems, wind farms and biogas from urban waste. The city's Local Energy Plan has a budget of €76 million to promote sustainable energy use.

Aiming for carbon neutral

Two-thirds of emissions in Vitoria-Gasteiz come from energy consumption by industry and transport. The city council adopted a Climate Change Prevention Strategy in 2006, and agreed to cut emissions by 16% by 2012. In 2009, it signed up to the Covenant of Mayors and, in 2010, approved the Plan against Climate Change, promising more ambitious reductions.

The city's long-term aim is to become a carbon-neutral zone, with an interim goal of cutting emissions by half by 2050, through wide-ranging actions in different sectors and public education.

A breath of fresh air

Clean air is essential for a healthy environment. Vitoria-Gasteiz adopted an Air Quality Management Plan in 2003, and the installation of monitoring systems and an emissions database has made it possible to chart progress and record the impact of measures to control and improve air quality. Today, air-pollution indicators are already below target and are continuing to fall, reaching 284 days of good air quality each year.

Noise pollution

The city has taken steps to cut noise pollution over the past decade as part of its Noise Management Plan, setting up a noise-monitoring network in 17 locations in 2008. As a result, residents enjoy relatively low levels of exposure to noise.

In the near future, the city is implementing at least 10 new municipal projects for green development. Some are already in progress. They include:

- Ecological agricultural park
- Recovery of waste fuel
- Restoration of the medieval district
- Zero land-growth town development plan
- Mobilising solar energy potential

Transport

A long tradition of careful urban planning has made Vitoria-Gasteiz a compact and well-organised city. Despite a continuing population increase of over 7% since 2000, and expansion of the urban territory, planners have largely built up rather than out, successfully limiting sprawl in the environmentally sensitive areas to the south of the city. Some 81% of the population lives within 1,500m of the city centre, and 95% have access to basic services such as education, health and cultural facilities within 500m. Everything is within easy reach.

- As a result, cars account for only 28.3% of travel in the city, as most people walk or use public transport. A free bicycle-lending service has been introduced, together with a modernised transport system including tramways and more efficient bus lines. Vitoria-Gasteiz is a diverse city, where businesses, housing and leisure facilities coexist side by side.
- In 2008, the city introduced a new tramline, followed a year later by revised bus routes, coupled with new parking regulations. As a result, journeys by public transport rocketed by 45%. All the vehicles are accessible to people with disabilities.
- The latest mobility survey revealed that nearly 50% of all journeys are on foot. As much as 25% of the city is reserved for pedestrians, with 33km of pathways within the city and 91km across the Green Belt.
- Vitoria-Gasteiz is actively promoting cycling, planning to invest €22 million in its Bicycle Master Plan. A public bike system was created in 2006 with a network of pick-up and drop-off points across the city. By 2011, there were 17 pick-up points offering 350 bicycles free of charge. The service has also taken into account the needs of people with disabilities by providing, for example, tandems for the sight impaired or tricycles for people with reduced mobility.
- The roll-out of electric vehicles is key to the city's strategy, supported by technological innovation, tax incentives and communications campaigns. Since 2008, the city council has participated in the European Civitas MODERN project, which funds sustainable mobility demonstration projects. With a €2.3 million budget, Vitoria-Gasteiz plans to develop a pilot scheme with four electric vehicles available on a car-sharing basis, and a control group of citizens who will evaluate the vehicles, the recharging points and management of the car-sharing scheme itself.
- The city won approval for its Sustainable Mobility Plan and active measures to promote eco-friendly modes of transport, including improvements to the public transport system, the proposed extension of the city's 'Superblock' with its very low speed zones (10 km/h), and better management of freight distribution.



Photo: Quintas Fotógrafos



The educational city

The city council has, for over a decade, been implementing an annual programme of education and awareness-raising activities for sustainable development. They reach out to the entire population, not just children, aiming to encourage action and prepare citizens to change their behaviour.

Training for green jobs

The Environmental Studies Centre was set up at the end of the 1980s with the initial task of providing postgraduate training for 'environmental technicians'. Gradually, a wider range of courses was introduced in more specialised training areas such as geographic information systems, remote sensing, environmental services to companies, and assessment and correction of environmental impact. As it has developed, the centre has formed close relationships with universities and research organisations and has started designing courses for people with lower-level qualifications, and refresher courses for the administration and private firms. Its aim is to promote environmental education, training and

research whilst, at the same time, providing practical and theoretical knowledge for the green jobs of the future.

An industrial city

Traditionally an industrial city, Vitoria-Gasteiz grew prosperous on the aeronautics, energy and machine tool industries, while more recently, services and new technologies play a greater role. Companies occupy more than 9.5 million m² of the municipality, and the Jundiz business park is one of the largest corporate estates in the north of the Iberian Peninsula.

Vitoria-Gasteiz has successfully involved the business sector in the drive towards a sustainable environment. Several multinational car companies have moved in and are developing electric vehicles – the first electric van on the market is being built in the city. It is also a major innovation centre, attracting a wide range of companies to its technology park and research centres. Some of them focus on green innovation, including CIC Energigune, dedicated to alternative energy research.

BEYOND 2012



Gaining the Award does not mean the end of a process for Vitoria-Gasteiz – not even a halt on the road towards sustainability. In fact, the green city of the future requires profound changes in traditional urban management models and policies, and in lifestyles and patterns of behaviour.

2012: Plans and projects

1. Plan for protection and restoration of sensitive natural resources
2. Flood prevention plan
3. Plan for improving biocapacity, biodiversity and urban landscape
4. Mobility and public space plan
5. Strategic waste plan
6. Urban pollution reduction plan
7. Plan to combat climate change
8. Plan to improve water cycle
9. Promote a sustainability culture
10. Plan for urban restoration and land improvement

Handing over the title

The European Commission has already announced the next winner of the European Green Capital Award. In 2013, the title will be passed to Nantes, France's sixth largest city with a metropolitan area of some 600,000 inhabitants.



Photo: Patrick Garçon



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European Commission

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European Green Capital Secretariat

The application process and the work of the evaluation panel and the jury are facilitated by the European Green Capital Secretariat, currently run by RPS Group, an environmental & communications consultancy based in Ireland. The secretariat also assists with PR activities related to the award scheme through the European Green Capital Award website, Facebook and Twitter pages, and through various communication channels such as brochures and press releases.



Publications Office

