

PRESS RELEASE

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Competition for the Capitals of Biodiversity in Europe: NGOs are looking for the best of class in urban biodiversity preservation.

Freiburg, September 30, 2009 - ICLEI's Major environmental protection organisations from six EU-member states are searching for the Capital of Biodiversity. Municipalities caring for biodiversity in France, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Spain can apply and all types of urbanisations, from small villages to large cities can join.

Seven European environmental protection organisations will implement the competition "Capital of Biodiversity" in five European countries, to find cities, towns and villages with the best performance in preserving biodiversity. They met in Madrid last week to prepare the kick-off of the competitions in 2010, the UN International Year of Biodiversity, in France, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain. From the smallest village to the largest cities, municipalities are invited to join. Fair competition is ensured by choosing the winner in different size classes according to the population of the municipality.

In each country, a competent non-governmental organisation will organise the competition. Municipalities will also be supported through a training programme, jointly organised by ICLEI and IUCN. Know-how and experiences in municipal biodiversity issues will be conveyed through a series of capacity-building workshops and brochures; an easy-to-apply set of indicators for biodiversity in municipalities will also be developed. Finally, the winners will be honoured and highlighted in national and international events and their performance will be communicated on a national and European level. If you are interested, contact your country partner and ask for more information on how to enter the competition. Other countries are welcome to come on board as well.

Municipalities compete in many fields from the economic performance to the diversity of the cultural life to the best quality of life. Within the competition "Capital of Biodiversity", the municipalities compete in biodiversity. They will have to showcase their performance in various biodiversity related fields, such as creating and supporting natural green spaces, river revitalisation or recuperation of other important habitats, involving nature and biodiversity in their planning processes and the communication with public regarding biodiversity.

The project is lead by Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V., a German NGO with more than 20 years experience in environmental competitions for municipalities. The competitions in the five countries will be implemented by NatureParif (France), Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency (Hungary), Fundación Biodiversidad (Spain) and the Regional Environmental Center (Slovakia). The Countdown 2010 Initiative of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and ICLEI-International Training Centre are international partners of the project.

An advisory board of experts from national and European municipality federations, environmental ministries, NGOs, a national museum of natural history, a university and the International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) advises and supports the project team.

Further information about the project can be found on <http://www.capital-biodiversity.eu>
The project is supported through LIFE+, a programme of the European Union.

Background:

Every day a huge number of animals and plants disappear from our planet forever. Worldwide, human activities have led to extinction rates that are 100 to 1000 times higher than the natural extinction rate. Europe is no exception. Already up to 25 percent of mammals, birds or butterflies are extinct in some European countries.

Between 30 and 50 percent of Europe's mammals, birds, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles and freshwater fish are threatened with extinction. Humankind depends completely on the services provided by biodiversity, ranging from fish, crops and cattle for food, to medicines, building materials, clothes, fuel, air and water purification, crop pollination - to name only a few.

Villages, towns and cities are important key players for preserving biodiversity and thereby providing healthy and livable surroundings for their citizens and for future generations. Throughout Europe, municipal politicians, technical staff and citizens can make the biggest difference when it comes to preserving biodiversity within and around their settlements. An unexpected high biodiversity can be found in many European cities, towns and villages.

This is because they are home to a variety of ecosystems, which provide manifold living spaces: gardens and parks, rivers and small forests, old buildings and walls, fallow land and much more. This diversity is not only important to protect threatened habitats; for a large part of the population it is also the first, or even the only contact to nature as they live far away from bigger natural habitats which are more commonly found in rural areas.

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