

Press release

For immediate release

Local authorities compete for biodiversity crowns as second round of European Capitals of Biodiversity is launched

Paris, France, 14 February 2011 - Municipalities in France, Spain, Slovakia and Hungary will once again have the chance to become the national “Capital of Biodiversity”. The 2011 edition of the competition was launched in Paris last week and will tie in with the UN’s International Year of Forests, by focusing on biodiversity-friendly management and use of all types of forests.

The winners in each country will be revealed in autumn when the four new capitals of biodiversity in Europe are announced. The competition rewards villages, towns and cities for innovation, commitment and excellence in preserving the wealth of nature. In addition, municipalities are provided with capacity building and management tools for local biodiversity preservation. In 2010, over 330 municipalities from small villages to large cities participated in the competitions by filling out a comprehensive questionnaire covering all aspects of local biodiversity preservation.

The winners in 2010 were ICLEI member Grande Synthe (France), Tata (Hungary), The Royal Site of San Ildefonso (Spain) and Želiezovce (Slovakia). The German winner is yet to be announced. Other ICLEI members to receive honours included the City of Miskolc, who finished first in the category for above 100,000 inhabitants in Hungary, and Vitoria-Gasteiz, who finished top of the category for above 30,000 inhabitants in Spain.

The competition aims to highlight the potential for local level actors to stop the loss of biodiversity both in Europe and throughout the world. There is a wide variety of biodiversity within many European cities, towns and villages. This is due to the range of habitats available: gardens and parks, rivers and small forests, old buildings and walls, fallow land and many others. For many people this is their first, or even their only, contact with nature because they live and work far from bigger natural habitats more commonplace in rural areas. Therefore, local authorities – from the smallest village to the largest city – are key players to conserving biodiversity, and increasing public awareness for the need to do so.

Local authorities are judged in different size classes and thematic categories including municipal green spaces, planning instruments, protection of species and ecosystems, agriculture and forestry, water management, organisation and cooperation, communication and environmental education.

The competitions are accompanied by a series of workshops in each country, with brochures printed to present strategies and best-practice examples from the participating municipalities.

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Background:

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organisations. ICLEI currently has 1,100 members worldwide and 200 in Europe. Founded in 1990, ICLEI provides technical consulting, training, and information services to build capacity, share knowledge, and support local government in the implementation of sustainable development at the local level.

The **European Capitals of Biodiversity** project is led by German Environmental Aid (Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V). The competitions in the five countries are implemented by Natureparif (France), Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency (Hungary), Fundación Biodiversidad (Spain), the Regional Environmental Center (Slovakia) and German Environmental Aid (Germany). IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and the ICLEI European Secretariat are international partners of the project. The project is supported through LIFE, a programme of the European Union.

More information:

Website: www.iclei-europe.org

Website: www.capital-biodiversity.eu

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