

Press release

For immediate release

Green and glorious: European Capitals of Biodiversity lead the way towards 2020 targets

Brussels, Belgium, 24 November 2011 - ICLEI members Montpellier (France) and Hannover (Germany) were among the winners of the European Capitals of Biodiversity competition that received their award from European Commissioner for the Environment Janez Potočnik at ICLEI's Breakfast at Sustainability's event hosted by the Brussels Office of South Tyrol, Italy.

The other winners recognised were Szentes (Hungary), Kremnica (Slovakia) and Puebla de Sanabria (Spain). The Commissioner spoke at what was the tenth edition in the Breakfast at Sustainability's series and highlighted the importance of local authorities in biodiversity preservation. "We have to get European villages, towns and cities on board to be key actors for biodiversity management on the local level. Moreover they are the key players in bringing the message of the importance of biodiversity on our doorstep across to their citizens".

The Capitals of Biodiversity competition aims to sustain local biodiversity in Europe, with national competitions in France, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain seeking out the national biodiversity forerunners among local authorities. Furthermore, the organisers behind the initiative, including ICLEI, facilitated a broad exchange of know-how and best-practices at national level, as well as between the participating countries. 520 municipalities representing 40 million European citizens took part in the competitions in 2010 and 2011.

Isabelle Durant, vice-president of the European Parliament also emphasized the relevance of a rich urban biodiversity in her video message, stating that, "Safeguarding nature in the middle of our cities is a key factor for a lasting quality of life and requires citizens and politicians to work together, especially in the light of the diverse economical challenges cities are facing today."

Robert Spreter, Head of the Municipal Environmental Department of the project coordinator Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V. (German Environmental Aid), highlighted that the nine winners of the 2010 and 2011 competitions included municipalities of all sizes from small villages to big cities. "We need to get all kinds of municipalities on board. While smaller municipalities often manage large rural areas with many responsibilities for water bodies, agricultural land and forests, the bigger towns and cities decide how much biodiversity can be experienced by their citizens right where they live and work."

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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.

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 and the release of printed brochures to present strategies and best-practice examples from the participating municipalities.

More information:

Website: www.iclei-europe.org

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