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Green Cities
An A-to-Z Guide

Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen made the short list of eight finalists for the title of European Green Capital. Wind turbines in Copenhagen Harbor contribute to the sector that produces nearly 25 percent of the country's electricity output.

Credit: iStockphoto

The year 2010 was established as the inaugural year for awarding the title of "European Green Capital," and eligible European Union countries were encouraged to enter their most environmentally conscious cities in a contest to select the awardees for both 2010 and 2011 simultaneously. The award serves to acknowledge work already being done at the municipal level to make environmental stewardship an integral part of urban planning and to provide an incentive for cities to intensify their efforts to improve the quality of life in the urban habitat. Thirty-five European cities vied for the title

European Green Capital, and after the first round of elimination, Copenhagen, Denmark, was on the short list of eight finalists.

Although Hamburg won the award for 2010 and Stockholm for 2011, it is notable that Copenhagen scored higher than both of these cities in the important category of water consumption (conservation of water through water metering and prevention of leakage during transport through water pipes). Ten criteria were used for ranking the cities; in addition to its superior showing in the water consumption category, Copenhagen tied with or had higher scores than at least one of the winning cities in three other categories: local mobility and passenger transportation, sustainable management of the local authority, and sustainable land use. Copenhagen's impressive showing as a finalist is not surprising, given its well-established record of implementing innovative projects that enrich life in the urban milieu for its 1.1 million inhabitants, while fulfilling its commitment to sustainable development. A prime example of the tenaciousness with which Copenhagen addresses the environmental problems that are endemic to urban environs is the rehabilitation of Copenhagen Harbor from a polluted receptacle for the wastewater discharged from sewers and industrial companies. The reclamation project resulted in such a remarkable improvement of water quality in the harbor that starting in 2002, Copenhagen residents have been able to enjoy the wholesome benefits of swimming in seawater. Successfully meeting the challenge of reclaiming the harbor as a public swimming area has spurred Copenhagen to set its sights even higher-the present goal is to make all seawaters in the greater metropolitan area safe for swimming by 2015.

Eco-Metropole of the World

In 2007, Copenhagen announced its vision of becoming the capital city with the best urban environment in the world-"the Eco-Metropole of the world"-by 2015. To meet this target, 14 new parks are in development. Already, eight of 10 residents have a park within 300 meters of their homes. The plan is that by 2015, nine of 10 residents will be within a 15-minute walk of a recreational area. Also in progress is the planting of 3,000 additional street trees. The streets of Copenhagen are already pedestrian friendly, with many streets closed to car traffic. As an example, the Str⊘get, a world-renowned shopping street in downtown Copenhagen, is a 1.1-kilometer stretch of pedestrian-only shopping streets and squares. Known as the "City of Cyclists," Copenhagen has made great strides in ending the glut of cars on the road. As of 2009, 55 percent of its population uses a bicycle for all trips, with commuters and students making 37 percent of their trips by bike. Moreover, the number of cyclists is bound to increase as the city continues to expand its vast network of bicycle routes and enlarges the fleet of public bicycles that are made available for use in downtown Copenhagen for a small returnable deposit.

In addition to being a Baltic seaport, Copenhagen has an abundance of canals and lakes, which have fueled its ambition to become a "Green and Blue Capital City," in which waterscapes are as abundant as park greenery and equally accessible. In this vein, the redemption of Amager Beach merits mentioning. Since its creation in the 1930s, Amager Beach had required almost annual additions of sand to keep it from disappearing into the shallow waters of the Baltic channel in which it lies, called

Øresund. To resolve the problem of the shallow waters washing away each year's sand addition, Amager Beach was moved deeper into Øresund by constructing an artificial island from 1.5 million cubic meters of raw material. In its new locale, Amager Beach is self-preserving because the waves are large enough to pull the sand both onto and away from the beach. The new and improved Amager Beach Park ("Amager Strandpark") is both an island and an activity-filled lagoon, and it is only seven minutes from the center of Copenhagen by subway and is also accessible by a bike trail from the center of the city.

A Green Tourist Destination

Although not as well known as the bronze sculpture of the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen Harbor, the Tivoli Gardens amusement park in the heart of Copenhagen (directly across from the central railroad station) attracts approximately 3 million visitors a year. Established in 1843, Tivoli is situated on approximately 15 acres and contains thrill rides, game arcades, restaurants, concert locales, a fairy-tale garden with 400,000 flowers, and 110,000 lamps. However, the energy demands of this attraction will be greatly reduced in 2010 when Tivoli becomes the first amusement park in the world to run on renewable energy. In the spring of 2009, Tivoli and DONG Energy (a leading energy company in northern Europe) announced the formation of a "climate partnership" with the goals of reducing Tivoli's energy consumption and ensuring that the energy consumed is provided by carbon dioxide-neutral production facilities. Tivoli will have its own wind turbine housed at a nearby high-efficiency multifuel power plant.

Another site attracting visitors to Copenhagen, the Bella Center-Scandinavia's largest convention center-recently had a 75-meter-high wind turbine constructed on its property that is capable of producing 1,600,000 kilowatt hours of energy a year. The Bella Center hosted a number of climate conferences in 2009 and is the site for the December 2009 United Nations Climate Change Summit (COP 15). The holding of COP 15 in an environmentally sustainable milieu will be the subject of a white book to be published in February 2010 to assure stakeholders that this historic summit in Copenhagen was planned and implemented in full compliance with BS8901, the new international standard for sustainable event management. A consortium composed of the City of Copenhagen, the Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Wonderful Copenhagen, Visit Denmark, and MCI Copenhagen have entered into a contract with MCI Sustainability Services to write the white book, which will be titled "Copenhagen Sustainable Meetings Protocol." The consortium anticipates that the book will enhance Copenhagen's reputation as a green city and propel it toward its goal of becoming the ecological metropolis par excellence.

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Further Readings

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