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Valencia, Elsinore and Velenje will take the lead in 2024

On 27 October the European Green Capital 2022 Grenoble hosted the Awards Ceremony where the winners of the 2024 titles were announced: Valencia (Spain) will be Europe's Green Capital flanked by two smaller cities awarded the European Green Leaf titles: Elsinore (Denmark) and Velenje (Slovenia).

Grenoble put up a fantastic Awards show for its citizens and stakeholders. It was also a good occasion for the green city networks to meet and welcome their new members. Mayors could experience the green transformations going on in the city. Applicant cities for the European Green Capital Award were assessed on [twelve environmental indicators](#), while the European Green Leaf Award applicants were assessed on [six environmental topic areas](#). Five cities made it to the final run last July: three cities were shortlisted for the European Green Leaf Award—Bistrița in Romania, Elsinore in Denmark, and Velenje in Slovenia and two for the European Green Capital Award—Cagliari in Italy and Valencia in Spain.

Valencia achieved much in the field of sustainable tourism, climate neutrality, and a fair and inclusive green transition. These successes put the Spanish city on the [European Green Capitals map](#):



The city has many plans in place with a view to 2030, such as their [Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan \(SUMP\)](#), the [Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan \(SECAP\)](#), [Missions Valencia 2030](#) and the [Valencia 2030 Urban Strategy](#), all of which aim to make Valencia a resilient and carbon-neutral city by 2030.

Part of what makes Valencia successful in its initiatives is the emphasis on citizen participation. Missions Valencia 2030 grants citizens the opportunity to define main challenges that will be addressed by the City Council afterwards. The first mission is related to climate change and linked to the [Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission](#) of the EU. Discover more of Valencia's achievements in an article further below.

The Danish port city Elsinore earned its award as a European Green Leaf by its focus on the current energy crisis and accelerating the energy renovation of buildings and heat source conversion. In regard to the environmental indicators such as Climate Change and Energy Performance, Elsinore's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per citizen per year over 2008-2019 show a total decrease of 51% over the period.

The Slovenian city Velenje won the European Green Leaf Award thanks to its transformational work phasing out coal while opening up new employment opportunities in green job sectors and cleaning up heavy pollution from the past. Other initiatives include Velenje's [Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan \(SUMP\)](#) which focuses on cycling. Velenje has built 30 km of cycling routes that are being connected to a regional network. Finally, Velenje offers free public transportation.



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More time means more ambition: Why there is no European Green Leaf in 2023

The European Green Leaf Award is missing a winner for 2023 and it is for a good cause: the Award is aligning with the European Green Capital cycle.

In the past years, the European Green Leaf title had a much shorter preparation time than the European Green Capital title (14 months), as the cycles were a year apart. **In an effort to align the cycles in 2024**, the European Green Leaf had to forgo awarding a winning city in 2023. However, the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages.

During the last European Green Leaf Network meeting that took place last October, the Secretariat of the Awards proposed the present members to bring past winners into the spotlight throughout the year by showcasing the achievements of former winners.

2023 will therefore have more than two cities in the limelight with a focus on the legacy of the Awards for past winners.

Outcomes of the European Green Capital & European Green Leaf networking meeting in Grenoble

Representatives from past, present, and future European Green Capital and European Green Leaf finalist and winning cities gathered for a network meeting in Grenoble on 28 October 2022, right after the Awards Ceremony.

The meeting started with welcoming the new members and proceeded with a brainstorming about the upcoming year and the future of the Networks as follows:

- Many of the cities in the network agreed with the **urgency of a green transition** in cities under the [European Green Deal](#), the brand of the Award should be strengthened to gain more applicants.
- The concept of “sleeping cities” within the European Green Capital Network was also brought up and it was emphasised that those cities should become **more involved in the network**. The proliferation of European urban initiatives is supposed to give cities more choices and help them focus on priority areas.
- It was proposed that present European Green Leaf members could spotlight the **achievements of former and present European Green Leaf winner cities**. Communication activities would be dedicated to them in 2023 as there is no specific winner city.

One year as a European Green Leaf winner by Valongo, Portugal

“ I moved to the municipality of Valongo at the beginning of 2022 and was pleasantly surprised with the number of activities organised in the region that focused on the environment. In my line of work, I deal with environmental and sustainable matters, therefore it was great to see that the municipality of Valongo is aware and concerned with the emergent environmental issues and works together with the community to create a better and greener city.”

This is the testimony of one of the participants of [GreenFest Valongo](#), the largest sustainability event in Portugal. The event was hosted in July 2022 for the first time in Valongo as part of the city's European Green Leaf programme.

We owe it to the European Commission and to this prestigious Award that gave us the stage to show that, **even with few resources, it is possible to make a change**. That change does not depend on size or wealth but on will, resilience, and motivation. Certainly, in **Valongo there is no lack of will and initiative**.

Throughout this year we were able to implement several projects that act as an incentive for the involvement of local and European key players: we promoted native forests, carried out several reforestation actions to combat invasive species, promoted urban biodiversity and created more and better green spaces in urban settlements through parks and organic gardens, encouraged sustainable tourism while spotlighting the Valongo Mountains (which are a Protected Landscape Area and part of the [Natura 2000 Network](#)), cleaned rivers and streams, worked actively to promote the circular economy at a local level, involved the schools from all over the country in a unique way to talk about environmental and climate change issues and finally, we hosted several national events related to sustainability topics.

2022 was definitely a rich and prestigious year for Valongo and allowed the city to leverage innovative initiatives, involve the community, and promote together a greener and more inclusive Valongo.

Last but not least, our efforts won't end at the end of this year. In the words of the Mayor of Valongo

“ We will continue to be green ambassadors and honour the European Green Leaf Award, which the European Commission presented to us in 2021”



A wonderful year as a European Green Leaf municipality—letter from the Mayor of Winterswijk, Netherlands

“ When we were preparing to take part in the European Green Leaf Award, we saw just how far ahead Winterswijk, and especially the people of Winterswijk, are in the field of sustainability. Our landscape is unique, we even give lessons on sustainability at primary schools and from our own sustainability centre, we tackle issues regarding energy, climate and sustainability together with residents, entrepreneurs and organisations which are distinctive, according to the acclaimed jury report.



Promoting sustainability

Having been European Green Leaf Award winners for almost a year now, our pride in our beautiful municipality has only grown. Together with you, the Winterswijk municipality looks back on a great year, in which we encouraged not only our own residents but also other municipalities throughout Europe to do more about sustainability. **We were able to explain all over Europe what we do in Winterswijk and why it makes us proud.**



A selection of our activities

We doubled the Green Leaf prize money with our own funds, expanded our international network and gave away hundreds of rainwater tanks and compost bins. All over Europe, we held presentations about the European Green Leaf Award, in as many as five languages! We invested almost 50,000 euros in residents' sustainability initiatives, and together with municipalities near Winterswijk in the Achterhoek region, we are the first UN [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\) region](#) in the Netherlands. The absolute highlight was our two-day international sustainability congress in October.

Promoting the Award requires time, money, and attention. It requires commitment from an inspired team and effort from all Winterswijkers, but in return, it gives back so much energy and inspiration!



Joris Bengevoord
Mayor of Winterswijk

Thank you for everyone's commitment, together we gave a fantastic showcase in Europe. It was an unforgettable experience. With the end of the Green Leaf year, our efforts do not end; the Winterswijk municipality continues to cooperate with our residents towards a sustainable municipality and therefore contribute to a sustainable world. The next step is for us to use the SDGs as building blocks for our budget. ”

I hope to greet you in Winterswijk soon.

Mayor Joris Bengevoord
European Green Leaf municipality of Winterswijk

Tallinn is gearing up to make the most of 2023 and accelerate the green transition

Tallinn was awarded the European Green Capital title in 2021 for its systemic approach to green governance and interlinked strategic goals ([Strategy Tallinn 2035](#)) that faithfully reflect the ambitions of the [European Green Deal](#) and the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#).



“ Tallinn is very proud to hold the title of European Green Capital 2023, especially because the idea of a European Green Capital was born in Tallinn in 2006 when 15 cities signed a memorandum for the title of European Green Capital in our city. We want every citizen of Tallinn as well as our guests to benefit from the European Green Capital year and the accompanying developments because our goal is a greener city with a better environment and urban space ”

- Mihhail Kõlvart, the Mayor of Tallinn.

During its European Green Capital year, Tallinn intends to initiate change and new sustainable activities, accelerate sustainable processes, eco-innovation and green growth, engage citizens and organisations in becoming more sustainable and bring the city closer to the people.

Tallinn, capital city of Estonia



Winterswijk, the Netherlands



Several flagship projects will focus on **nature and biodiversity** as follows:

- The [Pollinator Highway](#) – a vibrant 14 km long linear park is an excellent example of the co-existence between biodiversity and urbanisation. Built along an old railway dam, the corridor will become a species-rich natural environment, a green corridor and a safe space for walking or cycling.
- The restoration of [Pääsküla bog](#) – A bog is a means to offset carbon dioxide which is an asset in reaching Tallinn's target to become climate neutral by 2050. In view of this, the city plans to create many man made dams so that the level of water rises.
- The publishing of an online plant catalogue which rates 900 plants according to their value for pollinators. This is the first such tool in Estonia that will allow gardeners and city developers to make better choices for green spaces.

Tallinn is also known to be a hub of **information technology** and **eco-innovation**:

- **Think globally, test in Tallinn** – is the motto that encourages companies and local universities to test their smart and eco-friendly products and services in the city.
- Next autumn Tallinn will host the [Cleantech Forum Europe](#) and [Tallinn Green Expo](#).
- Prioritising green investments: environmentally-friendly buses and trams, solar panels for municipal buildings, implementation of nature-based solutions, etc.

Sustainability governance is at the heart of Tallinn's 2023 programme. The city strongly believes **the successful implementation of green transition requires a governance model that supports it**, and states that change must come from within the city's government.

In summary, Tallinn planned over 60 projects, events and initiatives, including 17 international events starting with a sustainability conference on 20 January and the Green Capital Opening Ceremony on 21 of January 2023. See you in Tallinn!



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