

# Actualité en France

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## Nantes: European Green Capital 2013



France is well known for the remarkable architectural heritage of its towns and cities: Paris, of course, but also Lyon, Bordeaux, Aix-en-Provence and others. Some inevitably are less well known however, and need a little longer for the world to recognise what they have to offer. Nantes – European Green Capital 2013 – is one of them.

For several years now, the French and international press has been singing the praises of the delights and relaxed pace of life in Nantes, on France's Atlantic coast. As far back as 2004, *Time* magazine in the United States dubbed it "the most appealing city in Europe." On 21 October 2011, Jean-Marc Ayrault, former mayor of Nantes, accepted the Nantes European Green Capital 2013 award from the European Commission's panel of judges in Stockholm. The award recognises the dynamism of local players who are committed to making Nantes a sustainable city and a good place to live. Since 2010, Stockholm, Hamburg and Victoria-Gasteiz have received the award on the basis of 11 environmental evaluation criteria. Copenhagen will take over the reins from Nantes in 2014.

The internationally renowned former trading port which was forced to restructure its heavy industry in the 1970s has come a long way! So what is the secret of its transformation? "The long-term aspect of the public policies put into practice," according to Fabrice Roussel, vice-chairman of Nantes Métropole.

Nantes is located in the Loire estuary, at the heart of a fragile environment made up of 9,500 hectares of wetlands. A regional capital with 600,000 inhabitants, Nantes is home to four conservation areas as part of the "Natura 2000" programme, which brings together natural sites in Europe, both on land and in the sea, that have been identified for the rarity or fragility of their wild animal or plant species and their habitats. "It proves that economic development can go hand-in-hand with protecting the environment," noted the European Commission's panel of judges.

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As well as its exceptional natural site, the members of the panel were particularly impressed by the city's modern, ecological public transport system and its coherent, sustainable system for managing water and waste.

But the city is not resting on its laurels. The Nantes metropolitan area has launched some ambitious projects in relation to urban travel, tackling climate change and supporting biodiversity. What has made Nantes the success it is today? "It was all here already," comments Fabrice Roussel. Indeed, local inspiration came from citizens, associations and businesses. The French and international working groups in which Nantes Métropole is involved also fed into the city's thinking in relation to sustainable development.



A wide range of activities will be on offer in 2013, from public meetings to calls for projects, suggestion boxes and experimental programmes. All of these initiatives should encourage people who live in the city to take part in drawing up a sustainable development policy for their area. The proliferation of ideas and projects suggests that people of Nantes have taken the message on board.

The appeal of the area is undeniable: the city has gained 100,000 residents in the last 20 years and is preparing to welcome the same number again by 2030. "The people of Nantes want to stay here," notes Fabrice Roussel, "which partly explains the prospects for demographic growth."

Maxime Amieux

Further information:

- Nantes Métropole website: <http://www.nantesmetropole.fr/la-communaute-urbaine/capitale-verte-europe-2013/>
- European Green Capital award website: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/index_en.htm)
- Les Ekovores project website, by Les Faltazi: <http://www.lesekovores.com/>